

Lahu : narratives of inferiority : christianity and minority in ethnic power relations

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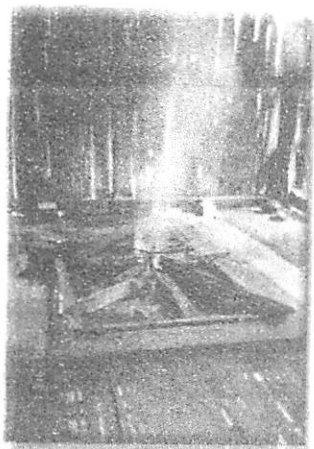


LAHU

NARRATIVES OF INFERIORITY :
CHRISTIANITY AND MINORITY
IN ETHNIC POWER RELATIONS



YOICHI NISHIMOTO



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Foreword

Marginality and Narratives of Ethnic Identity

Identity, for many people on the margins, is, to paraphrase Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that which we cannot *not* want. Ethnic identity stands for a community, a safe place, where there is no need to explain oneself to outsiders; it stands for “home”; more problematically, it can elicit a nostalgia for the good old days that never were, a nostalgia that elides exclusion, power relations and difference. Motifs of home, community and identity animate works by peoples in diaspora, peoples on the margins who may have no permanent home (Kondo 1996: 97). Identity, then, is the product of work, of struggle; it is inherently unstable, contextual; it has to be constantly reevaluated in relation to critical political priorities; and it is the product of interpretation, interpretation based on constant attention to history (Martin and Mohanty 1986: 210).

Ethnic identity is not a commodity that is formed naturally as a by-product of descent, culture, and genetic transmission (Miron: 1999: 80-81). Rather, *identity is relationally and situationally constructed and reconstructed across a shifting network of social relations through time*. The central point about understanding ethnic identity as relationally and situationally constructed is that there is no personal ethnic identity apart from a relationship to other identities. Furthermore, the processes of identity formation within the social context of ethnicity is inseparable from the broader social relations of power and material and ideological structures. A postmodern concept of ethnic identity embraces consciousness of other groups. It also calls for social action through a constant reflexive monitoring of the intentions,

motivations, and reasons that propel groups into action. The process or collective ethnic identity formation moves substantially beyond the notion of the autonomous modern self to embrace the recognition of *ethnicity as a contested cultural terrain* whose borders are constantly drawn and redrawn. This reboundarying assumes considerable degree of conflict over values and the shared sense of common purpose. Within this framework, conflict is elevated to a normative status.

Viewing ethnicity as a contested cultural terrain, Mr. Yoichi Nishimoto's *Lahu Narratives of Inferiority* concentrates on the narrative production of self and identity by a Christian Lahu group, a marginalized highland ethnic minority in northern Thailand. It explores how uniquely Christian Lahu narratives have been situationally constructed in their relations with the more powerful lowland Thai and other ethnic groups, as well as in relations to the long-term presence of Christianity among them. Within the socio-historical context of ethnic-power relations in which the Lahu have had to face with overwhelming power of the lowland majority groups and the Thai state, a peculiar form of narratives -- or what Nishimoto calls narratives of inferiority -- has been constructed. He then examines the narrative production as a work of collective memory and lived cultural experiences for the Christian Lahu. Analysis of the narratives reveals that derogatory self-definition are linguistic practice spurring memory, and behind them there exists a positive self-perception of the people too. These two contrasting discursive practices constitute the Lahu's ambivalent feeling in the processes of identity formation.

This study, to my mind, exemplifies a concept of culture rooted in lived experience (Turner and Bruner 1986) as

well as textual readings. It situates the study of narratives as crucial to the understanding of social experience, expression, and the construction of ethnic identity. More importantly, the relationship between narrative production and identity formation investigated in this study espouses a major current in the social and human sciences over the past two decades that the marginal peoples are not simply passive receptors of the globalizing forces. On the contrary, the many displaced and deterritorialized populations – such as the Lahu highlanders of northern Thailand – are engaged in the “production of locality” (Appadurai 1996: 178) as a structure of feeling, often in the face of the erosion, dispersal and implosion of their villages as coherent social formations. The production of narratives, the articulation of religious beliefs are ways in which the Lahu define and redefine their situation on the periphery of state power (Tsing 1993: 5) and engage their marginality by protesting, reinterpreting, and embellishing their exclusion.

The strength of this book lies in its attempt to represent garbled and reconstituted Lahu visions, and to offer them a space to speak within the powers of the present.

Yos Santasombat
Chiang Mai
November 9, 2000

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Preface

Northern Thailand has been characterized by its ethnic diversity, comprised both of lowland and highland populations. Historically, they lived in separate spheres and the low degrees of interference provided the basis for co-existence. However, recent history of modernization, globalization, and nation-state building changed this relationship. While these processes brought about *chao khao* a higher standard of life, it also changed their traditional ways of life and relations with lowland peoples.

Against these backgrounds, Rajabhat Chiang Rai University recently established the Center of Ethnic Studies. The Center is aimed to study changing social environments and problems in which many ethnic groups find themselves. The Center also try to provide solutions to the problems and to contribute to build better ethnic relations.

Yoichi Nishimoto's *Lahu Narratives of Inferiority: Christianity and Minority in Ethnic Power Relations* is an attempt to understand the minority's experience through the study of their narratives. The book provides us with an opportunity to hear otherwise rarely heard voices from the minority group. We believe that a better understanding of others is a basis for a better relationship with them. The Center for Inter-Ethnic Studies (CIES) Rajabhat Institute Chiang Rai is thus pleased to publish this book as its first work of publication.

Dr. Manop Pasitvilaitham
President
Rajabhat Institute Chiang Rai
Chiang Rai, November 2000

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Orthography and Proper Nouns

I have transcribed Lahu terms by the orthography used in *Lahu-English-Thai Dictionary* compiled by Paul Lewis (1986), but omitted their tone marks. Proper nouns including villagers' and village names are replaced by pseudonyms.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. The Problem

Lahu people, a highland dwelling ethnic minority in mainland Southeast Asia and southwest China, have historically practiced pioneer swidden agriculture and for many generations lived and moved in areas under the political, military and economic pressures of diverse valley dwelling peoples. But, due to the increasing scarcity of cultivatable land and the extension of stricter administrative controls of lowland governments to the hill areas, the higher degree of autonomy these people formerly enjoyed has been significantly restricted. As national borders have become a political reality, the Lahu, people without a country, have been even more marginalized.

Most Christian Lahu living in northern Thailand today were born in China or Burma. They suffered from incessant wars and fled into Thailand within the last several decades as virtual refugees. In Thailand, many Christian Lahu are still denied Thai citizenship, which along with their status as an ethnic minority, makes them vulnerable to exploitation by *Khon Muang*¹ and Central Thai. Lahu often only have access to less fertile highland fields and suffer poverty. Population pressure and governmental policy has put restrictions on their traditional swidden farming. Thai tend to view "hill tribes" (*chao khao*), including Lahu, as trouble-making outsiders within the Thai state, guilty of environmental destruction, poppy cultivation and drug trade, and as potential insurgents. Similar to past experience, Christian Lahu feel that they "are living in others' countries and are subject to other peoples"².

After several months' stay in a Lahu village, I realized that

there was a peculiar way in which Christian Lahu talked about themselves. This style of the expression is not confined to my field site but is shared by Christian Lahu communities in northern Thailand and Burma³. In fact, Christian Lahu frequently recount this style of narratives about themselves in such diverse media as everyday conversations, books, preaching, popular song, tape narration, proverbs⁴, and myths.

In this study, I will call this style of self-expression *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority*. A short example is the statement "The Lahu do not have wisdom" which I frequently heard villagers say in a very natural and apparently unselfconscious way. The distinctive property of this statement is the use of "the Lahu", a term referring to the Lahu people in general, and a negative nature (absence of wisdom) attached to it. One peculiarity of the *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority* comes from the fact that descriptive statements about "the Lahu people" are made by the Lahu themselves, rather than by outside observers, which shows that an abstract concept "the Lahu people" is objectified by the people themselves. Moreover, they talk about the Lahu frequently and in an apparently unselfconscious manner, implying that this style of narratives on self have existed for a long time.

This style of narrative on self probably has not emerged in isolation, but rather is the product of interactions with others, who serve as an object for comparison, and/or as a result of acceptance and internalization, through the interpretation, of the outsiders' view of the Lahu people. These Lahu narratives may well have emerged from their long-time unequal power relations with dominant valley dwelling peoples, and awareness of their powerlessness and deprivations compared to their powerful neighbors constitute main motifs (see Tapp

1989). The *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority* are self-authored expressions of their social experience generated from the history of ethnic power relations and are inevitably colored by their historical consciousness (see Bruner 1986).

This also has to do with such current problems as capitalist expansion, nation-state formation, and "development". Anthropologists, once criticized for a preoccupation with distant and small-scale societies in apparent isolation, are now studying local peoples' response, adaptation, and resistance to these global and national processes (Taussig 1980, Comaroff 1985, Scott 1985, to cite a few). In Thailand, Thai anthropologists have always been concerned with "development" (Anan 1994), which has led many of them to study "hill tribes" (*chao khao*) in the Thai national context and in their relations with the Bangkok government, which is considered as the agent of capitalist expansion and nation-state building (Thawit 1995, among others). Although this theoretical framework is useful in analyzing the present problems and dilemmas that highland ethnic minorities are facing, some of those now living in Thailand, including Christian Lahu people, were until recently highly mobile and were faced with such diverse powers as the Chinese, the Burman⁵, and the Shan⁶ in the past. Lahu narratives show that the people perceive their present predicaments as but another unequal power relation with and subjugation to lowland majority peoples, above all, to *Khon Muang*, and then to Central Thai. By analyzing the Lahu narratives as self-authored expression of their social experience, I hope we will better understand how the Lahu people experience capitalist expansion, nation-state formation, and "development" in their

conceptual framework of ethnic power relations between lowlanders and themselves. Or, we may get closer to "the natives' point of view", an old anthropological ideal.

While the Lahu narratives express, represent, and reflect their social experience, there are "inevitable gaps between reality, experience, and expressions" (Bruner 1986:7). The *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority* are stylized and patterned talk, and some of them are not so much as firm expressions of experience as discordant discourses in that they have significant distance from social realities to which they refer, seem to have their own independent lives, and manipulate and are manipulated by the speakers. Then, what social forces are operating there to make expressions become discordant discourses? Whose interests do the discourses serve?

Related to the above is a problem of long-term presence of Christianity among the people. As we will see later, there is uniquely Christian Lahu style of narrative. Analysis of the *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority* will help us understand the way in which Christianity has influenced and has been involved in the formation of social experience and historical consciousness of Christian Lahu. This will help us to understand the relationship between this world religion and the marginalized ethnic minority.

Finally, "expressions are constitutive and shaping" (Bruner 1986:7, Rosaldo 1986, 1993), for, like rituals, narratives are acts of talk in which the telling of a narrative has meaning beyond that of the linguistic content of that narrative. Therefore, when the Lahu repeatedly talk about their own people, how does this act shape and reshape their social experience and historical consciousness, while social

experience and historical consciousness shape the narratives?

This study will analyze the peculiar style of Lahu narratives which I call *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority* in order to understand a complex process, in which ethnic power relations, Christianity, act of talk, and Christian Lahu as human agency have been involved in the generation of social experience and historical consciousness of Christian Lahu.

2. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to attempt to answer three questions below:

- (1) What kind of social experience do the Christian Lahu's narratives about themselves represent? In what way has the social experience been shaped by the act of recounting narratives?
- (2) What kind of historical consciousness is reflected in the Christian Lahu's narratives about themselves? How do the Christian Lahu experience the past and the present, and anticipate the future? In what way has the historical consciousness been informed by the act of recounting narratives?
- (3) What kind of influences has Christianity had upon the formation of social experience and historical consciousness of the Christian Lahu in its long-term presence among the people? On the other hand, in what way have the Christian Lahu indigenized this world religion?

3. Approaches to Study People's Stories about Themselves

Stories told by people about themselves and their past are diverse, ranging from myth (performance of texts concerning the events allegedly happened in a distant past) to everyday

narratives (occurring in more natural settings). But they all are stories about self and act to give meaning to the world in which people find themselves.

Indigenous people's stories about their past may be used in studying oral history. The natives' stories are considered as garbled history, in which the "correct" elements must be discriminated from the "incorrect" with references to other more "reliable" sources.

Malinowski (1954) denies views of myth as a rhapsodic rendering of natural phenomena, explanations for problems of human existence, and garbled history. In part Malinowski attributes the deficiencies of such approaches to studying texts of myths deprived of their contexts. He claims that with holistic knowledge about social life of the people we study, it becomes clear that myths, or sacred stories of the past events, nonetheless have more relevance to their present life than their past. Myth is above all a social charter. Myth is a story of the first doing of some acts that are still enacted in ritual, validates some claims in social relations, and regulates moral deeds of a society. Malinowski emphasizes the pragmatic function of the myth which serves the interests of people and examines the issue of manipulation of myth. When the mythological principle cannot validate the claim or status of a new dominant group, it goes into adjustment. However, "the myths of justification still contain the antagonistic and logically irreconcilable facts and points of view, and only try to cover them by facile reconciliatory incident, obviously manufactured *ad hoc*" (Malinowski 1954:117). While myth certainly serves to the interests of the dominant group, it may not be fully subject to manipulation.

Although Malinowski places emphasis on the function of

myth as a social charter and denies other "intellectual" views of myth, these two different analytical approaches may not be mutually exclusive, as they simply focus on different aspects of the same issue. Malinowski discusses the retrospective adjustment of myth only to validate the interests of the dominant group, which is equated with the interests of the society itself. However, as every society comprises of various groups, the issue can be further elaborated to the problem of variants of the same myth, each of which serves to the interests of its recitors.

Leach (1964) explores the matter of manipulation of myth by groups of different interests. Leach's assumption is that "a conscious or unconscious wish to gain power is a very general motive in human affairs" (Leach 1964:10) and he uniquely uses the term "ritual" to refer to an aspect of actions which symbolically expresses social status of an actor in his pursuit of power. "Myth" denotes the "ritual" aspect of any story told by an individual, which serves to enhance his position in the society. Leach focuses on the "contradictions and inconsistency" (Leach 1964:265) among variants of the same tale rather than their commonality. His example shows that diverse stories about the genealogy told by Kachin agree in their general structure and in the main principles of seniority, but vary in the crucial details "according to the vested interests of the individual who is citing the story" (Leach 1964:276).

Levi-Strauss (1969) studies myth in search of a universal human thought in the mythological structure. Although a myth is a story of events alleged to have taken place in primeval time, "what gives the myth an operational value is that specific pattern described is timeless; it explains the present and the past as well as the future" (Levi-Strauss 1969:209). This

ambiguity of being both historical and ahistorical, or diachronic and synchronic, distinguishes the myth from other forms of language. Levi-Strauss breaks down the mythological story into "mythemes", the shortest possible meaningful sentences, and claims that there is a repeated pattern in relations among them. What makes the specific character of mythological time is the bundles of relations among mythemes, which, like an orchestra score, we perceive both horizontally (according to the unfolding of the story) and vertically (perceiving the complex of the relations as a whole). For Levi-Strauss, there is no preferred or authentic version of a myth, as "we define the myth as consisting of all its versions" (Levi-Strauss 1969:217). Levi-Strauss claims that "the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model capable of overcoming a contradiction" (Levi-Strauss 1969:229) and, as there emerges a new contradiction, a new myth is generated, but its structure remains broadly the same.

Levi-Strauss uses the largest possible analysis unit, that is, myths of human being (not a people, a group in a society, or an individual), and focuses on the similarity of all human myths. For him, although each myth differs in details, all can be reduced to a universal mythological structure on a very abstract level. His study of myth, on the other hand, lacks a perspective about conflicting interests and power relations among diverse social actors.

Tapp (1989) analyzes myths of the Hmong, an ethnic minority, and argues that Hmong ethnic identity as reflected in their myths has been generated from their historical relations with the Chinese, their powerful neighbor. The Hmong myths depict that the people once possessed their own writing system, king, and territory, which were all lost due to cunning and

persecution of the Chinese. Whether the events depicted by the myths are historically true or not is not the main issue. Underlying theme of more apparent problems (politics, economy, religion, literacy, messianism, and geomancy) is the concept of ethnic identity of being or not being Hmong. Tapp writes, "in order to explicate their own ethnic differences from the members of other majority and more dominant cultures, the Hmong have been forced more and more to *define their own ethnicity in terms of what is not*, hence, *absence* of writing, *absence* of territory, *absence* of kings and emperors" (Tapp 1989:176, emphasis is in original text). Although the myth and legends are not *true*, they are felt and experienced as significant by the Hmong and are thus very *real* to them. "What is important is how the present-day Hmong *experience* their past history, and explain their *current* situation ... We select our own histories, which are the significant events for us *now*, isolated from the mass of events which we have truly encountered, and they become 'real' to us" (Tapp 1989:175, emphasis is in original text).

Tapp's analysis of myth is a structuralist one, but is made on a less abstract level and for a smaller analytical unit (myths of an ethnic group) than Levi-Strauss' study. While Tapp persuasively elucidated that Hmong ethnic identity was defined by binary oppositions to the Chinese, the problem of the difference among the variants was not examined. This is because Tapp studied the Hmong as an homogeneous group in opposition to the Chinese rather than focusing on the diversity within the Hmong.

As I have reviewed above, approaches to study myth are diverse. However, many of these approaches are in fact not mutually exclusive, since they simply focus on different

aspects of myth. Each scholar adopts different levels of analytical units and focuses on either the similarity or the difference of myth variants. However, one may use many of these approaches eclectically to study myth from different angles. In the following, I will examine studies of people's narratives about themselves, of which telling myth is one kind.

Bruner's introduction to *The Anthropology of Experience* (1986) introduces Wilhelm Dilthey's main concepts; "reality" is everything that happens in the time flow, "experience" is people's experience of reality, and "expressions" are articulations, representations, and expressions of experience given by the people we study. "The anthropology of experience deals with how individuals actually experience their culture, that is, how events are received by consciousness" (Bruner 1986:4). In order to understand others' experience, anthropologists interpret its expressions, or "encapsulations of the experience of others" (Bruner 1986:5). Life is a temporal flow, and every experience emerges from one's reflection on memorized past, thereby highlighting some causes while discounting others. Experience is thus an interpretive process by human subject. As present experience always takes account of the past and anticipates the future, the past, the present, and the future are given a consistent meaning. Experience means not only cognition but also feelings and expectations, and is colored by people's historical consciousness.

Rosaldo (1986) studies Ilongot hunting narratives and argues that storytelling in a small-scale societies differs from writing books for unknown readers in modern society, because, in the former societies, the storyteller and listeners "share enormous knowledge about their cultural practices, their landscape, and their past experiences" (Rosaldo 1986:108).

Thus, the simplest form of Ilongot story is a sequence of place names, which makes sense to the native listeners. Rosaldo further claims that it is not only that experience informs the story, but also that the story shapes experience. "The stories these Ilongot men tell about themselves both reflect what actually happened and define the kinds of experiences they seek out on future hunts. ... the story informs the experience of hunting at least as much as the reverse" (Rosaldo 1986:134). Rosaldo's later work (1993) argues that Ilongot storytelling shapes the tempo of their everyday life.

Sometimes, natives' expressions and the social reality have a significant gap between them. Sekimoto (1994a:6) writes that recently anthropologists begun to encounter people in small-scale society often talking about their "cultures". This new type of narratives has not emerged in isolation from inside of the society, but rather as the internalization of, or as response to, the views which other societies have of them. Sekimoto views this new narrative as "a universal institution of modern time" (Sekimoto 1994a:10), which has been brought about by such modern processes as globalization and nation-state formation as well as the spread of the concept of "culture". As these spoken "cultures" are not material things but discourses, the anthropological study of the discourse of "cultures" becomes the anthropologists' "talking about people talking about their 'cultures'" (Sekimoto 1994a:18), or a twofold interpretative process.

Sekimoto's case study (1994b) is about Javanese shadow play, which was a local entertainment but has been made a cultural property of the modern Indonesian state. Sekimoto examines the elite's and villagers' discourses about the play. Although the two discourses are very different in their

contents, “they both are part of the same large current of constructing ‘tradition’ in the nation-state” (Sekimoto 1994b:92). The case further suggests that “there are gaps between representations of tradition and the social reality of the object that they represent” (Sekimoto 1994b:92). The discordant discourses of “tradition” may have been caused by social force of the nation-state building which has been operating on a larger scale.

4. Conceptual Framework

In this study, I assert that Christian *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority* have been generated from the long history of ethnic power relations as well as in relation to the long-term presence of Christianity among the people. The study also sees the narratives as an arena in which diverse social forces of such actors as dominant lowland peoples, the Christian church, and Christian Lahu as human agency interact with one another in the act of recounting narratives. In order to elucidate the complex process of the interaction, the study analyzes the Christian Lahu narratives from three major aspects as stated below.

First, the study will examine the aspect of *narratives as encapsulations of social experience and historical consciousness of people*. People reflect on memorized reality, highlight some causes while discount others, and give a consistent meaning to the past, the present, and the future. When they speak of the present, they at the same time take account of the past and anticipate the future. In this study, “social experience” means not only people’s cognition but also feelings and expectations of reality, while “historical consciousness” refers both to views, desires, and feelings about

history. Social experience is generated from reflections on reality by the consciousness, itself an interpretive process. The social experience of others becomes conveyable to us by the act of recounting narratives, and these narratives are inevitably colored with historical consciousness of the people.

On the other hand, *narratives as ritual acts of speech also shape and reshape social experience and historical consciousness of people*. Narrative is more than a means to convey meanings of its literal content, but also a kind of ritual acts working on people's perceptions and emotions. Narratives have a dialectical relationship to social experience and historical consciousness, for they are informing and being informed by each other.

Finally, there are "inevitable gaps between reality, experience, and expressions" (Bruner 1986:7). Narratives are not always firm expressions of social experience and historical consciousness of people. They sometimes are significantly distant from the reality to which they refer. Such discordant discourses look as if they had their own lives independent of what they speak of, and manipulate and are manipulated by the speakers. This study views *narratives as discourses more or less distant from what they refer to* and examine interactions of social forces of various actors operating behind the narratives and reality.

5. Scope of the Study

(1) Christian Lahu

The group under study is Christian Lahu. Unless otherwise noted, my usage of the term "Christian Lahu" will throughout this study refer to Black and Red Lahu who belong to the Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention (TLBC), the largest Lahu

church in Thailand⁷. The study aims to understand their social experience and historical consciousness. For this purpose, the study examines the common structure among various kinds of Christian Lahu narratives and differences from those of other peoples, particularly non-Christian Red Lahu⁸.

Another concern of this study is about implications and influences of long-term Christian presence among marginalized ethnic minorities. Although no reliable statistics are available, Lewis and Lewis (1984:197) assert that "one third of the total Lahu population in Thailand lives within Christian communities", with nearly all Black and Yellow Lahu, two major sub-groups, being Christians (these include members of other denominations than TLBC). Past studies on Christianity of ethnic minorities in northern Thailand in large part focused on Christian conversions as a strategy to cope with rapid socio-economic changes (Tapp 1989 for the Hmong, Kammerer 1990 for the Akha, and Hayami 1992 for the Kaxen conversion), while leaving the problem of indigenization of Christianity still to be explored (an exception is Kammerer 1996). This study is less concerned with conversion than Christianity as already well integrated in the ethnic culture.

(2) The Study Village

The minimum criterion for the choice of the field site was a Lahu Christian village. Having surveyed many places, I chose T village in Mae Ai District, Chiang Mai Province. After starting fieldwork, it proved that the village was populated by a mix of Black and Red Lahu, although on the previous field site survey, they had identified themselves as a Black Lahu village. I later came to understand that such Black Lahu identification to outsiders is common among Christian Lahu (see Bradley

1979:45), which was not problematic to the study. It also proved that all villagers, except children, had recently moved into Thailand fleeing wars in Burma. This is their distinct social memory and has significance in the formation of their present social experience and historical consciousness.

(3) The Object of Analysis

This study attempts to examine narratives of Christian Lahu about themselves. Narratives here refers not only to myths, legends, old stories, preaching, books, popular songs in more or less comprehensive and complete form, but also to more fragmented stories and short phrases used in everyday conversations.

6. Research Methods

This is an anthropological study based on documentary and field research. Fieldwork was conducted for ten months (from December 1996 to September 1997). After about a month's stay at the village pastor's house, I rented a bamboo house and lived alone. The fieldwork included learning Lahu language (Black Lahu dialect), observations, and formal and informal interviews. Central Thai language was used for the initial four months' period of the fieldwork. In the latter period of fieldwork, Lahu became the main language for communication, as villagers felt more comfortable in their mother tongue despite my limited comprehension. During the fieldwork, I kept field journals, photographed and tape-recorded various activities. Formal interviews were translated into Thai by an interpreter and tape-recorded, and some have been transcribed in Lahu. However, most important information for building my conceptual understanding of Christian Lahu life was acquired

from observations and casual conversations with villagers.

7. Book Outline

This book is divided into four parts. This “Introduction” states the problem, objectives, conceptual framework, scope, and method of the study.

The second part, Chapters 2 and 3, provides the reader with historical and social context from which Lahu narratives emerge. The context is described on two levels; the village context (Chapter 2) and the context of Christian Lahu in Northern Thailand (Chapter 3).

The third part, Chapters 4 and 5, analyzes the Lahu narratives about themselves. Chapter 4 defines a unique style of Lahu narratives found in diverse media as *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority* and states that their myth and everyday narratives have paralleled structure. Among various themes of the *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority*, the chapter focuses on the narratives concerning “wisdom” (*cu yi*) and argues that the dominant Christian Lahu discourse of “wisdom” is a product of the civilizing project by the Christian church. The chapter further describes the way in which ordinary Lahu villagers recount offstage narratives and contest mainstream discourse.

Chapter 5 analyzes another important theme of Lahu narratives about themselves; “the Lahu country”. The chapter shows that, while the expression “living in others’ countries” more firmly represents present social reality of Christian Lahu, “the Lahu country” implies the people’s feeling and view towards their history. I argue that their present social experience and historical consciousness have been informed by their long experience with Christianity, in which the

reconstruction of myth about an old Lahu prophet was crucial. The chapter further examines the transformation of Christian Lahu's historical consciousness with the device of the prophet story and mentions its implications to Lahu millenarianism and ethnic Christianity.

Finally, Chapter 6 concludes this study and briefly considers some theoretical issues for the study of narratives.

Chapter 2: The Study Village⁹

In this chapter, I will describe the village context from which the unique form of the Lahu narratives to be discussed in Chapter 4 and 5 emerges. The description will be given in seven sections; setting, immigration and citizenship, economic change, Lahu perception of ethnic world, education and literacy, and village Christianity.

1. T village: Setting

T village, the study village, is a Christian Lahu village, at an elevation of 674 meters, is located in Mae Ai District, Chiang Mai Province, Thailand. The village has good communication for a *chao khao* ("hill tribe") village, only 13 kilometers from Fang town, and 8 kilometers from Mae Ai where the district office stands. It is only four kilometers from the Chiang Mai–Thaton highway, and many motorcycles wait for customers at the nearest market town on the highway to take them to T village. During 15 minutes' ride from the market, a visitor to the village will see several houses of *Khon Muang* and many lychee and orange farms on both side of the road. Orchards of small-scale local business entrepreneurs largely occupy the area. The road is not paved but is usable by car and motorcycle even in rainy season.

An outsider visiting the village on weekdays may be surprised by the absence of villagers except the old and several middle-aged members. If he goes up a hill near the village and looks down, he will notice that the village is like an isolated island surrounded by the sea of orchards, almost all of which belong to *Khon Muang* and Central Thai. Villagers only have small plots of farm land and a large portion of their income

comes from wage labor.

The village is in the Burma-Thai border area approximately 20 kilometers from the national border on the Doi Pu Muen mountain. Between 1989-91, there was a Thai Army station near T village, and the village was under the army's supervision. The army troops built a school in the village and two soldier-cum-teachers taught basic Thai literacy to the villagers. The army troop and the villagers cooperated to build the present village church building in 1991. The purpose of these activities and the army station was to patrol and guard the border from Burmese, Shan, and Wa armies which were then fighting in the border area. Today the Thai government has stronger control over the state territory, and there are few fights among these ethnic armies on the side of the Thai territory. T village is no longer under the army's supervision and is now involved in a *mu ban* (Thai administrative unit comprising of several villages) with a *Khon Muang* headman. Yet, Thai military map of the area is still not available for general use for political and military reasons. There is still illegal traffics across the national border by highland peoples, who are skilled in walking in the jungle. People are still fleeing from wars in Burma and seeking residence in Thailand. Some T villagers go to the Burmese territory to visit relatives, hunt, and catch butterflies.

T village has 25 households and a population of 162 persons. All houses, except for one, are built of bamboo. Electricity is not available yet. There is not much difference in villagers' economic status. All households collect firewood for fuel and no households use gas stoves. Nine households possess motorcycles but no household has a car. Water pipeline system for domestic use was built in 1992 by the Lahu

Irrigation Project, an agricultural development project of the Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention (TLBC, see Chapter 3-(4)).

The village church is made of concrete blocks and corrugated iron roof and located at the highest part. The church and adjacent open space constitute the focal point of the village. Nominally all households are Christians, although there are also "Buddhist" and "animist" household members due to marriage of Lahu and non-Lahu outsiders to T villagers. Even among Christians, the level of faith of the individual differs, with some villagers going to church every Sunday, while others may never attend. On such occasions as performing rituals and welcoming visitors, villagers shake hands and say "*aw bon ui ja*". *Aw bon ui ja* is normally translated "thank you", but its literal meaning and implications are "How great the [God's] blessing is [to make us, for example, meet each other]!". These are typical Christian Lahu customs and frequent use of this expression may leave us an impression of exaggerated formality. Villagers are more formal, disciplined and orderly than people usually expects from *chao khao* (cf. Walker 1975b:151).

In terms of ethnic sub-grouping, the village is populated both by Black and Red Lahu. All Red Lahu are intermarried to Black Lahu (6 households), while there are more marriages within Black Lahu (17 households). There is a household of Wa husband married to a Yellow Lahu wife and a Yellow Lahu widower living alone¹⁰. Five out of six households that have Red Lahu family members are relatives (*aw vi aw nyi*).

No government school, medical care station, and development project are available in T village and the villagers use these services in nearby villages and towns. A Christian NGO has recently begun to support the village through its

livestock-rearing project.

2. Immigration and Citizenship Issues

I would like to introduce the life history of Ca Law, who is the village founder and the first village headman. His life history represents those of most villagers and will help in providing knowledge of villagers' background. Like Lahu myth depicts their defeat by the Chinese, the loss of their country, and wanderings (see Chapter 4 and 5), the villagers' past life in China and Burma are characterized by incessant flights from wars.

Ca Law is a Black Lahu man and allegedly 80 years old now. He was born in Na Ka village in Yunnan Province of China, "about half a day walk"¹¹ from the Burma-China border. His parents were farmers, they "were not poor, just had enough to live". Ca Law's parents, non-Christian in their childhood, later met Reverend William M. Young, an American Baptist missionary, and his followers (Karen workers), and converted to Christianity¹². William M. Young and his two sons, Harold and Vincent stayed at the mission station in Banna (Mong Lem), China. However, due to the Communist war with the Nationalist Chinese (*Kuomintang*: KMT), "it became 'troubled' (*sho sha*)", so Ca Law's family fled to Burma "in 1944". The family of 13 members walked for 12 days and arrived at Na Maw village. The Ca Law family lived in Na Maw village "for 16 years". They "were poor, because they did not have much land". "In 1952" or "at the age of about 28", he married a Christian Black Lahu girl from Na Maw village. Their first son was born there and eventually studied in Burmese school to the 5th grade. Ca Law had three children, two of whom still live with him and the third died at

the age of 5-6 years. Then "the Chinese made it 'troubled' again", implying the invasion of KMT troops into the Shan States of Burma during 1949-50 and fighting between the Burmese and the KMT armies in the following period¹³. Both Burmese and Chinese armies "came to collect various taxes": food, domestic animals, and labor. The family moved to Lu Ka village, an one-day walk from Na Maw village. But, a Shan insurgent army came to "collect taxes, took all our guns away, if any, and killed people"¹⁴. He and his family had then moved southward to a village near Mong Hsat. The family had a little paddy field there, and was "not rich, not poor, just had enough to live". However, a war between the Burmese and the Lahu commenced and it became "troubled" again¹⁵. Throughout these periods, male villagers of ethnic minority peoples were often conscripted as *ku li*, or porter, for the Burmese army. In 1974, the Ca Law family fled to Thailand. After having lived in a few places, the Ca Law family and two other families moved and established T village. No one occupied the land then, because they "came to the place where no *Khon Muang* wanted to farm or live". At that time, what is today the nearest market town was, paddy fields without fruit orchards. As one villager recalls, "Twenty years ago, even the nearest market town was 'forest' (*heh pui hk'aw*)", which is now hard to imagine. Ca Law's last station, T village, is not "troubled" by warfare, however, the problem was serious conflicts among the villagers (see below).

After the establishment of the village, brothers and sisters, relatives, acquaintances, and even non-acquaintances (but through Lahu relation) of the founding families began to settle in T village. During 1981-2 and 1984 there were large waves of settlers. In 1981-2, five Black Lahu families came to the village

through acquaintance of Ca Law. In 1984 Ca Law called his younger brother Yaw Ta, who then became village pastor. As Yaw Ta has a Red Lahu wife, her two brothers' families also settled. In 1990, Ca Law's son in law, Daw Nui, then the village headman, and Ca Hti called the present village pastor, Ya Shehn, and his family to the village, to replace Yaw Ta who was involved in drug trade. Although many households moved out for various reasons, new families also came in. The village population has maintained between 20-30 households. The last family to move in was the Ca Mvuh's in 1995, who had escaped the conscription of their eldest son by a Shan insurgent army. They had no acquaintance but found T village populated by Lahu and moved in.

Ca Law's life story is a typical one representing almost all lives of T villagers except children. Villagers of eldest generation were born in China and fled the civil war to Burma around 1949 when the Communists finally seized power. Others of younger generation were born in Burma. In Burma, both generations suffered warfare, violence, murders, and various "taxes" imposed upon them by diverse ethnic armies, among which tyranny of Shan armies and forced porter labor by the Burmese army are distinct memories to T villagers. Many male Lahu villagers were recruited by these armies, regardless if they were the Burmese, KMT, Lahu, Wa, or Shan. Villagers describe these days as "*sho sha ja*" or troubled, difficult, and unpeaceful, denoting incessant warfare. They had to wander and move many times within Burma to escape fires until they finally immigrated to Thailand. While their lives in Burma are described as endless warfare and dreadful malaria due to poor medical situation, Thailand was imagined, before immigration (and to a lesser extent still today), as a land of

“freedom” and “*prachatipatai*”, or democracy. All villagers except children are newcomers to Thailand within the last 25 years virtually as refugees. In the past, they have suffered from wars, mostly not of their own making, and their lives are impacted by incidents beyond their control. Today, in the Thai territory, they desire an undisturbed, peaceful and secure life. For this, they need Thai citizenship, because its absence means disadvantages in many aspects of life and makes them vulnerable to exploitations by Thai people.

Although the citizenship status in Thailand is complex with diverse categories, T villagers only have three levels of status pertinent to them. T villager usually recognize their citizenship status by the colors of ID cards: (1) “white cards” or proper Thai citizenship card (*bat prachachon*) which endows civil rights entitled to Thai citizen; (2) “blue cards” or identification cards for highlanders in Thailand (*bat pracum tua bukkhon bon phuen thi sung*) which does not endow the holders with proper civil rights, such as voting and land ownership; and, (3) “no cards” which indicates illegal residence in the Thai nation.

Table 1: Citizenship Status of T Villagers Age 15 and above (persons)

1. Proper citizenship or “white card”	30 (33%)
2. Partial citizenship or “blue card”	44 (48%)
3. None	17 (19%)
Total:	91

The Thai government conducted surveys many times and registered *chao khao* population in order to grant citizenship since 1969. One such survey was conducted in T village in 1990 and many villagers were issued “white cards” in June

1990. Some villagers say that money had to be given to the village headman, who probably then took his portion and gave the rest to the upper ladder of the bureaucratic hierarchy. More reserved villagers said that they had to spend a great deal of money "for transport and food expenses" [to village leaders and civil servants]. I also heard complaints about collection of money by the village headman and his unjust handling of cases for those whom he did not favor. Granting citizenship is subject to many provisions, for which documents, proof, and certificates from *mu ban* headman and other government officers are required. Usually, district officers handle the cases very slowly, which villagers understand as intentional and a request for money. Thus, "making cards" or applying for citizenship costs a lot of money. The acquisition of cards is more dependent on the arbitrariness of civil servants and connection than legality.

Without citizenship, villagers face many problems including limited educational opportunities, limitation on areas of residence and mobility, and lower wages. As ethnic minorities who do not speak fluent Thai and are without knowledge of laws, absence of the "white card" make Lahu villagers vulnerable to persecutions by civil servants, whose arbitrary handling of villagers leave Lahu with few means to resist. Once out of the village, the villagers are timid and afraid of inspections by various police units (district police, highway police, and Border Patrol Police) who often "ask for money". Moreover, some villagers are anxious that they, without proper citizenship, will be repatriated to Burma in the future.

As the administrative control of the Thai government extended to the peripheral area, the importance of citizenship increased. Villagers complain that the "price" of citizenship

has much increased. As villagers' lives have more relations to the outside society and are subject to market and the state, they find it increasingly necessary to acquire ID cards. Citizenship may be the focal point of various problems which ethnic minorities in Thailand face. In a symbolic case I witnessed, a girl, who holds blue ID card, was not allowed by her parents to marry a Lahu man with no ID cards.

Both in Burma and Thailand, Lahu villagers have been subject to the lowlanders' authority and have been impacted by incidents not of their own making. The villagers are thus very aware that they lack territory and autonomy, as they say, "The Lahu have no country, are living in others' countries" (*Lahu mvuh mi ma caw, shu mvuh mi cheh ve*).

3. From Swidden Farming to Wage Labor

T Villagers recall that, before they came to Thailand, forests in Burma provided subsistence with plentiful flora and fauna. The forest was relatively unpopulated with ample land for hunting, gathering, and swidden cultivation. The Burma-Thai border delineation was unrestricted, so that people could cross without trouble. In Thailand, they only have access to less fertile highland fields, as they are newcomers, and can no longer move for new fields to open due to resource scarcity and stricter government control.

When villagers came to T village allegedly "twenty years ago", the village and even the nearest market town was in the "forest" (*heh pui hk'aw*). Although the village economy has never been totally self-sufficient, communication was difficult and the dependence on outside market was less. Resource competition was not yet fierce, and they had more control over their lives.

The main road from Chiang Mai to Mae Ai was built in 1975 and subsequent development of the area made the *Khon Muang* farmers sell their farms near the road and move to the inner area nearer to T village. Moreover, development projects for *chao khao* engineered by the Thai government (though not directly in T village but stationed in nearby villages) increased exchanges with and influence of Thai people.

Since 1987 changes in foreign exchange had brought about a rush of foreign investments to Thailand, which in turn caused a drastic change in Thai economy characterized by speculative land investments and a construction boom which has expanded even to the country's rural areas (Suehiro 1993:138-148). Agribusiness expanded and, for the first time, outsiders came to buy land. In 1988 villagers began to sell their farms. An important reason for the land sales was to procure funds to acquire Thai citizenship. Farm owners built unpaved roads from the nearest market town to their orchards which allowed T village to gain better access to the main road.

Daw Nui, then the village headman, actively worked as intra-village agent for the land sales and, as some villagers argue, "ate significant portions" from both sides of the transactions. Some villagers suggest that Daw Nui used the influence of Thai people to settle troubles over the land rights between him and other villagers. He then sold a large portion of lands owned by T villagers. One villager recalls that non-Christian Red Lahu in the nearest village came to take over their lands, which also accelerated the land sales. But, at that time, villagers generally did not perceive land as a commodity with market value, but rather felt it as the source of subsistence available to anyone who wants to cultivate. The forestry office has not yet put restrictions on swidden farming in the T village

area, and, as one villager recalls, “Even if we sold the land under use, we thought we could go a little farther and we could find land”. Buyers are two *Khon Muang* “*paw le*” (“patrons” or small-scale local entrepreneurs) and an agribusiness firm whose branch is in Fang. Many of the land purchased by the outsiders were converted to lychee and orange farms, although some land is simply left unused. Development of orchards near T village later caused competition over water between fruit orchard owners and Lahu villagers and danger from the use of insecticide.

For several years after the land sales, the villagers still conducted traditional swidden farming. Occasionally some villagers went to work in the nearby farms owned by the land buyers, but income from wage work still occupied a relatively small portion of subsistence. There were few other wage labor opportunities, as villagers “had no proper ID cards and did not know ‘their languages’ (*shu hkaw*)”, namely, Northern and Central Thai.

In 1992 the forestry office started to warn the villagers against “causing deforestation”. Land was losing its fertility, too. However, it was not until 1994 that the forestry office began to exercise really strict control against swidden farming, which turned many villagers to wage labor. Many of them went to work in the reforestation projects as wage labor. The year 1994 also saw many Shans having escaped the ethnic wars in Burma and starting to live and work in the orchards near T village. Because these Shans possess no ID cards, they became very cheap labor. Many Lahu villagers started go to work in factories in Lamphun and Lampang provinces and orchards in Thaton and Chaiprakan districts to get better wage. ID cards have become even more in demand as they assure better wages

and freedom to move. However, even with proper ID cards, Lahu wages are suppressed at a lower level than Thais only because they are *chao khao*.

Once they began to receive more cash income from wage labor, some households purchased motorcycles. For the monthly installments, they need regular cash income, which is different from crop produce that does not always generate cash and is one lump sum a few times a year. Some households stopped farming "for a few years until finishing the payments". Most households which do not have houses in the village belong to this category (see below). Purchase of motorcycles has broadened the villagers' mobility. Some villagers seek wage labor in distant places and come back to the village on Sunday, while others leave the village, sometimes for months.

Table 2: Occupation of T Villagers¹⁶(persons)

	Individual laborer	Household
Farming only	9 (11.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Farming and wage labor (70.8%)	47 (54.7%)	17
Wage labor only (29.2%)	28 (33.7%)	7
Total:	84	24

Table 2 shows occupations of T villagers according to individual laborer and households. While no household lives only by means of agriculture, seven households are engaged exclusively in wage labor. Of these seven households, six are paying installments for their motorcycles, four are usually living in or near the workplace and only occasionally come back to the village. Nine individual laborers who are only

engaged in farming are old people or women who have to take care of their children and grandchildren. The largest portion of the village labor (54.7%) are working in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Younger family members, who know more Thai language and are better exposed to Thai society, tend to work as wage labor in the cities and only help farming in busy seasons and in the interval periods of wage labor when they come back to live with their parents before they find a new job. Now there are only four households which still possess some extent of farms, however, they cannot fully secure their subsistence. Moreover, control of the forestry office became stricter.

T villagers mainly grow rice (highland variety non-glutinous rice and black and red glutinous rice), maize, and soybeans. Although many villagers still grow Lahu variety highland rice without chemical input in their small plot of farms and land borrowed from *Khon Muang*, most households consume the rice grown within several months. Lahu variety rice is consumed on occasions such as harvest and New Year celebrations, and after childbirth. For the rest of a year, villagers have to buy industrial variety rice from the market and complain about the taste and the danger of chemical input.

All black glutinous rice and a part of red glutinous rice are grown for sale to *Khon Muang*, and several household also grow lychee as a cash crop. But the income from the sales of these products was in 1997 evaluated at less than 30,000 baht/household, at most. Other seasonal sources for cash income are sales of grass for making brooms, rare butterflies found in the deep forest, and bamboo shoots. Some households may earn "a few thousand baht" by sales of butterflies a year, dependent on one's skill. An adult male may earn 70 to over

hundred baht a day by the sale of grass for making brooms and bamboo shoots. Rearing livestock is not very active, as there is no field for grazing cattle and water buffaloes. Average possession of pigs is 0.72 per household (including piglets).

Villagers purchase much meat from market. When villagers say that they have no “dish” (*aw chi*), it means they do not have meat in dishes. Poverty, according to villagers’ conception, means absence of “dish” or meat, as depicted in a Lahu proverb (*chaw maw hkaw*), “we don’t have a ‘dish’ and eat only chili” (*aw chi ma caw, a hpe ti leh ca ve*). Due to absence of rearing livestock and lack of provision of food from the forest as in the past, poverty, or absence of “dish”, is now equated more to absence of cash.

In economic terms, there is not much difference among the village households. There are no households that possess large farms to produce enough rice to consume the whole year, and all families have to depend on wage labor for subsistence. Even relatively rich families do not use their wealth to pursue political leadership or to become *paw le* in the village. All households struggle for subsistence rather than to accumulate wealth. Villagers perceive that they all are equally poor and define their poverty in comparison with Thai.

4. Emic Conception of Ethnic World

Lahu villagers perceive the world as comprised more of territories of various ethnic groups than of modern states. They classify peoples into *Man K’a Lu* (Burman), *Pi Chaw* (Shan), *Heh Pa* (Chinese), *Htai Chaw* (Central Thai), *Hpa Isa Chaw* (Northeastern Thai), *Ka La* (white westerners), *Kao Li* (Korean), and *Ja Pa* (Japanese), while countries are categorized into *Man mvuh mi/Man mi gui*¹⁷ (Burma), *Heh Pa*

mvuh mi/Heh Pa mi gui (China), *Htai mvuh mi/ Htai mi gui* (Thailand), *Ka La mvuh mi/Ka La mi gui* (Western countries), *Kao Li mvuh mi/Kao Li mi gui* (Korea), *Ja Pa mvuh mi/Ja Pa mi gui* (Japan), and, sometimes, *Pi Chaw mvuh mi/Pi Chaw mi gui* (Shan State). As their classification system indicates, although Lahu villagers are aware of the existence of modern states, they perceive the composition of the world mostly in terms of ethnic relations. They sometimes express disgust for such lowland ethnic groups as the Burman, *Khon Muang*, and Central Thai. For instance, they speak of Thai district officers, as, "the Thai are liars", when the officers did not grant Thai citizenship to the Lahu villagers. Lahu villagers understand their predicaments more in term of their conceptual framework of ethnic power relations than by concepts such as capitalist expansion and nation-state formation. Diverse current problems discussed above, such as poverty, exploitation by Thai people due to the absence of citizenship, and restrictions on swidden farming, are understood as persecutions by, and their increasing subordination, to the lowlanders.

The increasingly effective control by the Thai government may be leading Lahu villagers to perceive the world in terms of modern states with definite territory and boundary. At this moment, however, territories of the ethnic groups in the Lahu conception have only vague boundaries like "galactic polity" (Tambiah 1976). Throughout their history, Lahu have been a weak ethnic minority living and moving in areas under the political and military pressures of such powerful lowlanders as the Chinese, the Shan, and the Burman. Villagers, thus, perceive their migration into Thailand not in terms of the change in citizenship (from Burmese to Thai), but rather another subjugation to other lowland peoples, above all, to

Khon Muang, then to lesser extent to Central Thai. Although villagers no longer suffer from warfare in Thailand, they only have access to less fertile highland fields, while increasingly scarcer resource and stricter Thai governmental control have restricted their mobility and swidden agriculture. Lahu feel that relatively high freedom and autonomy that they formerly enjoyed has been significantly eroded and that there is now increasingly little escape.

For T villagers, important ethnic neighbors are *Khon Muang*, Burman, Shan, non-Christian Red Lahu, and Central Thai, in order of importance. There are also westerners, Koreans, and Japanese who have significance in their ethnic world.

Khon Muang are the ethnic group that the villagers encounter most frequently in everyday life and have much influence on the Lahu villagers' life. *Khon Muang*'s political power is represented by civil officers at the district office, district policemen, and paramilitary members, whose persecutions the villagers have few means to resist. The villagers know that they are under administrative control of Mae Ai district office, but have less understanding that the authority of *Khon Muang* is actually that of the Bangkok central government. When villagers work for wage labor, most employers are *Khon Muang*, who, however, give lower wages than to Thai workers. Vendors at the market often sell goods at higher price. Lahu villagers often express dislike for *Khon Muang*, who may well be figured as oppressors.

To the extent of my knowledge, in T village there are four women who are or have been *mia naw-i* or mistress of non-Lahu outsiders, as the villagers so recognize. One girl (age 17) was a daughter of an ex-village headman and is married to an

over 60 years old wealthy *paw le* who owns large orchards. Another (age 21), though not her first marriage, had a *Khon Muang* husband who is an official village headman of another *mu ban*. The third was a "wife" (age 15) of a paramilitary member (*A.S.*) at the district office, however, she "does not seem to go to see her husband any more", according to a villager. The last is a school girl (age 16) learning in the sixth grade at primary school, who also had been married to another paramilitary member "without a wife yet". However, she is said to have been already divorced. The third and forth women married these paramilitary members on the same day, through mediation of an intra-village faction leader, as the other faction members say. Such uneven sexual relations reflect ethnic power relations as one villager once complained that because of the absence of education Lahu were "oppressed" by *Khon Muang*.

During their lives in Burma, the most important ethnic neighbor was the Burman, as the Lahu were in subordinated position to them. Tyranny of the Burman is associated with its army, whose members "killed people, stole everything, and conscripted the villagers as porters" as many villagers recall today. Although the villagers are now residents of Thailand, they are still concerned about Burma affairs. Villagers visit/receive their relatives to/from Burma, follow the news on BBC Burmese program, and exchange other information and rumors related to Burma in their tea time conversations. One of their concerns is the democracy movement in Burma and the Lahu army fighting the Burmese army. Villagers do not think that they have changed their memberships from one state to another by the migration, but feel that they have always been "the ruled" (*aw ce*), regardless of who is "the ruler" (*jaw maw*).

In relation to the Shan and non-Christian Red Lahu, the Lahu villagers feel to be superior. Today, Shan workers in the nearby farms are an object of contempt, in contrast to Lahu myth which describes the Shan as the dominant and civilized majority group. They possess no ID cards and work for extremely low wages which no Lahu would. The Shan workers do not have their own village and live on the farm. A Lahu young man who went to see Shan girls in the farm joked that he would not marry them under any circumstances because they do not have ID cards.

In general, non-Christian Red Lahu (referred to as *Lahu Nyi*, with the implication of "heathen") have been serving as an object of contrast, by which Christian Lahu define their religious identity (see Chapter 3-(2)). This is also the case in T village and may be observed more clearly than elsewhere, because the nearest non-Christian Red Lahu village is notorious for prostitution, AIDS, and narcotic drugs. This picture of the non-Christian Red Lahu village provides Christian Lahu villagers with justification for their religion, because T villagers attribute these problems of the neighbor village to their "not knowing the true God nor good from bad".

In contrast to the picture of *Khon Muang*, Burman, and Thai as "oppressor", such geographically more distant foreigners as westerners, Koreans, and Japanese may be thought of as a kind of "savior". Villagers feel that, while the geographically close ethnic neighbors (*Khon Muang*, Burman, and Central Thai) only take advantage of them, these "rich" foreigners are so kind to teach them about the true God and/or help in various development projects.

5. Education and Literacy

There is no Thai government school in the village and children go to a government school on the main road (distant 4 km) and learn together with *Khon Muang* children. A pick-up truck, hired by the school, takes the children to/from the school. Yet, despite the church's emphasis on the importance of education, few children finish the primary and compulsory education, dropping out to help the parents work in the fields, to work for wage labor, or to get married.

Junior high schools are available in Fang and Mae Ai. Today only one child, daughter of the village pastor, is learning in the third grade at the junior high school (M3) in Fang. Schooling, transport, and dormitory fees as well as the loss of labor is heavy burdens.

Table 3: Education Level of T Villagers Age 15 and above¹⁸

	Burmese	Thai	Total
1. No education			34(37%)
2. Drop-out during the primary school education	32	15	47(52%)
3. Between primary and junior-high graduation	4	2	6 (7%)
4. Between junior-high and high school graduation	2	none	2 (2%)
5. 'College' level		none	none
6. University education		none	none
7. Unknown			2 (2%)
Total:			91

Because almost all villagers, except children, are immigrants from Burma in the past few decades and no education facility is available in the village now, adult literacy

in Thai is very low. However, in Burma, few people finished the Burmese primary education. T villagers are also poorly literate in Burmese.

During interviews, some villagers answered "no education" even if they have studied a few years in primary school (Thus, the actual number of "no education" villagers is probably less than shown in Table 3). They said, for example, that they were "mountain/forest people" and have never learned at school. For the non-attendance at school, they gave such reasons as poverty and need of labor in the field. As I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4, Lahu villagers attribute their predicaments to their lack of "wisdom" (*cu yi*). While the Christian church repeatedly emphasize the necessity of education, and while the Lahu villagers themselves say, "you have to have pains on the waist, if you have no education" (*li ma shi k'o caw na ja*), they tend to rely on outsiders "with wisdom" (*cu yi caw pa*) for giving solutions to the problems they face.

Besides the governmental education, Christian Lahu church has been concerned with the promotion of Lahu literacy. While non-Christian Lahu are generally not literate in Lahu, Christian Lahu use romanized script developed by missionaries in the beginning of this century¹⁹. Lahu writing is taught at the Sunday School of the village, but the Sunday School has been closed since last year in T village, because "children are not interested", according to the village pastor. Lahu is not a privileged or practical language in Thai society, and literature in Lahu is limited. Many people, including the village pastor, are more literate in Burmese or Thai than in Lahu. It is difficult to determine the proportion of those literate in Lahu amongst the entire Christian Lahu population, because it is up to the definition of literacy. Although not many

villagers are able to write well, many can manage to read Lahu script.

Experience in formal education in Burmese, Thai or Lahu systems is valued in the Christian Lahu society. T village lacks any real economic and political leadership, thus the role of the village pastor, whose major qualification is higher education, is important. The pastor couple, called “teacher”, behave like people with wisdom and advisors to villagers.

6. Intra-Village Factionalism²⁰

Scholars often point out a tendency of the Lahu to split into sub-groups, and even into smaller groups, due to factionalism (Hanks *et al.* 1965:35, Walker 1974a, Bradley 1983:54). The Lahu themselves and their legends also speak of the splitting tendency and lack of cooperation and organization as one of the negative characters of the people (see Chapter 4 and 5). Although it is difficult to trace historical process, in which this character has been developed, I sometimes felt that the diverging tendency observed by many scholars was confirmed during my research.

T village has serious intra-village factionalism and it seems even more severe than other Lahu villages. Besides the absence of farms, “disharmony” (*ma caw ma haw da*) is often cited to characterize the village both by outsider-Lahu and the villagers themselves. The village has two factions, whose conflicts may have originated from competition over village headmanship. In the last three years, the village headman changed three times and there was a seven months’ period of inoccupation of the position.

Table 4: Recent Changes of the Village Headman in T Village

Eh Suh	January 1995	to March 1996
Ca Hti	March 1996	to January 1997
Ca Shaw	January 1997	to March 1997
[absence]	March 1997	to October 1997
Maw Hk'eh	October 1997	to present

It is difficult to decide how long such intra-village factionalism has been a problem in the village. But, the villagers agree that severe conflicts emerged after the village election in March 1996. There had originally been conflicts between two candidates for headmanship, Eh Suh and Ca Hti, but has changed to conflict between groups of Eh Suh and the village pastor after Ca Hti moved away from the village in May 1997.

This intra-village conflict involved the outside authority, as Eh Suh's and the village pastor's factions asked for patronage from different *Khon Muang* official leaders of *mu ban* A and B, respectively. Officially the village belongs to *mu ban* B, but the headman of *mu ban* A sometimes provides wage labor opportunities to villagers and has a mistress in the village.

During my field research, the village was visited at least three times by paramilitary members and district policemen (*tamruat phuton*) for investigation of illegal drugs, guns, or sales of bamboo shoots which was prohibited by the district office in 1997. The policemen mostly arrive on Sunday without wearing uniforms "in order not to frighten the villagers" (explanation by the policemen), but such visits made the villagers feel insecure and uneasy. The most serious case was on the 23rd of December 1996 when paramilitary members arrested and took away the wife of Ca Hti for the possession of illegal drugs. Members of the village pastor's faction argued

that the Ca Hti's wife was framed by Eh Suh, who had put opium grains in Ca Hti's house area and called paramilitary members, with whom he had a close relationship.

Soon after the arrest of his wife, Ca Hti resigned from the headman's position and Ca Shaw was elected as the new headman. However, he resigned from the position in March 1997, probably because he was drawn to Eh Suh's faction. Most members of the Eh Suh faction refused to make contributions to the pastor's salary. At that time, the village pastor's sermon repeatedly stressed the importance of doing God given tasks, that is, evangelism, paying the tithes, and supporting the pastor. Many of the members of the other faction did not attend the church services. Soon after Ca Hti's wife was released from the jail in April 1997, the family sold the land and moved out of the village.

Members of the village pastor's faction have been making attempts to discuss the problem of the villagers' contribution to the pastor's salary, but a meeting could not be held for most of the members of the other faction and many of the wage laborers did not attend. But, finally on the 14th of September, a meeting was held including some participants from Eh Suh faction and it was decided to withdraw money from the tithes savings to make up the unpaid part of the salaries of the village pastor.

In the evening of the 6th of October 1977, a meeting was held by the village pastor's faction to elect new village headman without inviting or informing the rivalry faction. Maw Hk'eh became the new village headman. The village pastor's family has already decided to move out of the village in order to have better chances to acquire Thai citizenship. Yet, the intra-village factionalism and poorly paid salary must be at

least a partial reason for the planned move. Sometimes, villagers say that they feel like they are living in two villages in one place. This was once cited as an excuse by the present village headman not able to handle a theft case, as he feared the revenge of the other faction.

As we will see in Chapters 4 and 5, “disharmony” (*ma haw da*) is used to characterize the Lahu people and cited as a major reason for their inability to prosper by both outsiders and themselves. The intra-village factionalism not only makes T villagers feel uneasy and insecure, but also reproduces their negative self-definition.

7. Village Christianity

The village church belongs to the Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention (TLBC), which, since 1993 constitutes the 18th District of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), a nationwide Protestant church organization in Thailand. Although close relationships are maintained between the Lahu church and the CCT at the executive level, exchanges at the village level are usually within the Lahu Christian community.

In the village church organization, the most important positions are the village pastor (*ceu cao sa la* or simply, *sa la*, literally “teacher”, age ca. 45 in this village) and the pastor’s wife (*sa la ma*, literally “female teacher” or “wife of the teacher”, age ca. 45). Sa La plays the central role in all ritual practices except the Women’s Society prayer which is led by Sa La Ma (see below). These two are have the highest education level in the village (Burmese 9th and 10th grades) and are graduates of the Lahu Bible Institute in Chiang Mai City. Outside the church services and other ritual practices, Sa La and Sa La Ma conduct themselves as persons with

knowledge and wisdom. Besides the two “teachers”, there is another graduate of the Lahu Bible Institute, called “Sa La Eh” or “little teacher” by the villagers (age ca. 28). As his title shows, he is not shown as much respect by the villagers as Sa La and Sa La Ma, because of his lack of intelligence and formal governmental education, and a poor family background, including many marriages and divorces of his mother (considered not ethical among Christian Lahu) and drug addiction of his real and classificatory brothers. Sa La Eh has been living in Maehongson since September 1997 as an evangelist and pastor for non-Christians and new converts²¹.

The village church is comprised of: (1) the Church Committee, (2) the Woman’s Society, and (3) the Youth Group as in accordance with the TLBC policies. Each group should have the chairman, treasurer, accountant, and other titles, but these positions are not fully occupied, and the groups are often led by a few leaders because of the small village population, absence of many church members for wage labor, and the intra-village factionalism.

For the salary of Sa La, 22 households are to pay 50 baht, 5 liters rice, and salt and chilies equivalent to 5 baht monthly²². Sa La had been promised a monthly salary of 1000 baht and 20 liters rice this year, however, the promise is now hardly fulfilled as four to six households in the rivalry faction refuse or neglect to pay their portions. The villagers are also told to pay the tithes, because, as Sa La teaches, the tenth of their income belongs to God which are to be use for the church activities, including evangelism. This year 4000 baht was paid to support Sa La Eh’s evangelical work in Maehongson. In addition, there are various other fees for the church members to pay for TLBC, the Women’s Society, and the Youth Group,

but all are poorly paid²³.

As good Christians, villagers do not work and go to church on Sunday. Some girls put make up on for the day, and some wear traditional Lahu costume. Church services are given four times:

Table 5: Sunday Church Services in T Village

about 7:00	Morning prayer
about 9:00	Women's Society prayer
about 11:30	Daytime prayer
about 16:00	Youth Group prayer

A church committee member cleans the church, sets up a steel table with tablecloth and flowers to be used as pulpit, and bang a gong to let the villagers know that it is time to go to church. Villagers then go slowly to church and the services start about 30 minutes after the gong.

Morning prayer is given by Sa La and every one can attend. Yet, there are usually less than ten attendants. The service is comprised of prayer, hymn, Bible reading, and a sermon by Sa La. It takes about 30 minutes.

Women's Society church service is only for women and is led by Sa La Ma. A weekly representative from members leads the procedures, because the women's society church service is "aimed to make every member able to pray". The service is comprised of prayer, hymn chorus, and a sermon. It normally takes less than an hour.

Daytime prayer is the main service and there are normally 35-40 people attending this service. If necessary, the Chairman of the Church Committee and other villagers make announcements such as decisions of meetings and reminders of

church membership fees. The daytime service is led by Sa La. The service is comprised of Bible reading, prayer led by Sa La, hymn chorus by the village chorus group, prayer by volunteers, and a sermon. It takes an hour to one and half-hour.

“Youth” of the Youth Group means “spiritually youth, not physically” and everyone can attend the Youth Group service, as its aim is to make “spiritual children” able to pray like grown-ups. This service is thus like practice for “children”, presided by a shy teenage member who changes weekly. The usual service procedure is: singing children’s songs on guitar led by Sa La; prayer (every one); singing folk styled hymn song (every one); prayer (every one); hymn; prayer; chorus by chorus group while collecting offering money; dedicating the offering to God; Bible reading; sermon; singing solo on guitar; telling stories with morals; singing solo on guitar; announcements, if any; appointing persons for each role next week; prayer; and, final hymn. Almost all parts are to be done by nominated members, yet it often happens that the nominated is absent or they just stay silent, as they cannot do the task, until other adults do it for them. There is a book named “sermon outline” (*Bon Ma Hk’a*) in which verses of Bible and related sermons are outlined for the week. Preaching is given according to this book, or more often nominated preachers just read the pages aloud, yet not fluently, as they are not very literate in Lahu.

Preaching by Sa La is the main activity of Sunday church services. Usually Sa La picks up the problems of the villagers, cite the related parts from the Bible as parable, and preach. During my stay in the village, Sa La repeatedly preached about the importance of “doing God’s work” (evangelism, supporting village pastor, paying the tithes), and prohibition of drinking

and using narcotic drugs. If pastors of other villages or Chiang Mai City visit the village, they are invited to the daytime service as preachers.

In addition to the above activities, anyone can host a prayer assembly at home, normally in the evening. This "Prayer at Home" (*a hk'aw hon law ve*) is held in such occasions as naming the babies about a month after birth and long and frequent sickness of a family member. Sa La is invited to read the Bible and preach and guests sing hymn. Usually a small amount of money is given to Sa La as reward and tea and sweets or supper is served to guests. Other important irregular rituals include burial and the ceremony to dedicate a newly built house to God. Sa La also leads such annual festivals as the New Year, Christmas, and harvest. Agricultural rituals are poorly performed in the village.

The village has access to material benefits due to being Christian. TLBC runs a dormitory for Lahu children to go to school in town and provides scholarships. A hill water pipe system was built in 1992 by the support of the Lahu Irrigation Project, an agricultural development project section of TLBC. Through a relationship with the church, the Heifer Project International (HPI) helped the village in a livestock project by providing two pigs to be reared and bred by the villagers in 1997.

The village church and adjacent open space stand on the top and constitute the focal point of the village. But the small church made of concrete blocks with corrugated iron roof is far from being a coercive architecture like European churches. An old wheel frame is used for the church bell. Many parts of the church walls are left unclosed, which fails to create a sacred space.

While I was observing church services in the village, a term “imperfect ritual” occurred to me, because they are less orderly than Japanese and European services I have attended. During church services, small children without pants are left to cry and walk and run around. Villagers go to church very slowly and the time for opening the service is flexible. Guest preachers wear a suit with sandals. As I have noted above, the village church organizations have a formal and rational structure, but it also depends on personal leadership. Various fees and the tithes are poorly paid. While T villagers seem more disciplined and orderly than we usually expect from a “hill tribe”, if we view Christianity as an institution to impose rational discipline of modern industrial society on people²⁴, the “imperfect ritual” and gaps between the church policies and reality may reflect a compromised point between pre-industrial and industrial epistemology of Christian Lahu villagers.

8. Summary

Almost all T villagers, except children, fled the incessant wars in Burma and moved into Thailand within the last 25 years as virtual refugees. Absence of proper Thai citizenship and status as ethnic minorities make them vulnerable to exploitation by Thai people. Their access to land is limited to less fertile highland fields, and strict control by the Thai government makes their traditional swidden farming difficult and insufficient for subsistence. Extension of market economy and agribusiness brought about land sales boom to the village and the villagers depend increasingly on wage labor.

Lahu villagers perceive these problems not in terms of “development”, extension of market system, and Thai state formation, but in their conceptual framework of ethnic power

relations. They perceive their predicaments as another subjugation to powerful lowlanders, above all to *Khon Muang* rather than to Central Thai. Awareness of the loss of autonomy and subordination to other peoples reinforces their feeling that they do not have their own country. The village Christianity serves to impose orders and discipline of modern industrial society on the villagers, but has met only partial success.

Chapter 3: Christian Lahu

This chapter introduces another socio-historical context, the context of Christian Lahu in northern Thailand, from which Lahu narratives emerge. These narratives are examined in the following chapters. This chapter first introduces the Lahu people in general and then discusses history and present condition of Christian Lahu. The chapter also briefly discusses implications of Christianity to the Lahu people.

1. The Lahu People: Introduction and History of Migration

Since many good introductions of the Lahu people are already available (Bradley 1979, Walker 1975a, 1983, 1995), I will here provide only information that is necessary and useful to understand the following chapters.

The Lahu call themselves “Lahu”, but their ethnic neighbors, such as the Shan and the Thai, refer them as *Mussur* or *Museur*, a term which comes from Burmese via Shan and means “hunter” (Lewis and Lewis 1984:172).

“Lahu belongs to the central Loloish branch of the Tibet-Burmese family of languages” (Walker 1983:231). Within the Lahu, there are diverse dialects and sub-dialects. Among the many dialects, *Lahu Na* (Black Lahu) is considered the standard language and serves as the *lingua franca* in the hills (Lewis and Lewis 1984:172, Bradley 1979:34). Most Christian Lahu literature is written in *Lahu Na* sub-dialect, while non-Christian Lahu are generally illiterate in Lahu of any dialect.

The bulk of the Lahu population is found in the highland area of mainland Southeast Asia and southwest China. Lahu people live in China, Burma, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Lahu refugees from Laos have a community in California,

USA.

Table 6: Estimated Lahu Population (person)

China	411,476 (Chinese government 1990 census cited in Xiao 1997:23)
Burma	150,000 (Walker 1995:7)
Thailand	85,845 (Thailand 1998)
Laos	16,000 (Chazee 1999:133-134)
Vietnam	5,400 (Dang et al. 2000:248)
USA	more than 1,500 (Cooper 1996:19)
Taiwan	300 (McCoy 1972:133)
Total: ca.670521	

“The Lahu people are essentially an upland-dwelling minority folk, wedded to a life of farming, tending livestock, gathering and hunting ... For centuries the major technology practiced by Lahu mountain farmer has been, predominantly, that of swidden (slash-and-burn) agriculture, with the farmers cultivating mostly dry rice, buckwheat, millets, maize and chilies in various combinations” (Walker 1995:4-5). Lahu farmers have been very mobile for a long time, but due to growing population pressures, the increasing scarcity of new lands, and the central governments’ stricter policies of settlement, Lahu traditional swidden agriculture has been significantly restricted and many Lahu are turning to rotation farming, wage labor, and other means of subsistence.

The religious practices of Lahu people differ from one subgroup to another, but most Lahu, including many Christians, believe “the existence of a great number of spirits (*ne*), associated with natural phenomena or with deceased human beings” (Walker 1995:14). The majority of Lahu believe in a

supreme and creating divinity, called *G'ui sha*, and the existence of this belief, both in the god-like figure and diverse spirits, leads such scholars as Young to call the Lahu "theistic animists" (Young 1962:10). Christian Lahu reinterpreted *G'ui sha* as the Christian God.

Some scholars infer that the Lahu original homeland is in Tibet based on the linguistic affiliations and the people's own legends of their migration from the north. Walker (1995:11) suggests that from the 5th to 10th centuries the Lahu consolidated as a distinct ethno-linguistic group. "Then, from the 10th century, they began a large-scale southerly migration, [and] [e]ventually most Lahu came under the jurisdiction of Tai feudal overlords, recognized by the Chinese government as ... 'native chiefs'" (Walker 1995:11-12). "During the Ming dynasty [1368-1644], the Imperial authorities began a process of replacing native leaders by Han officials [*gaituguiliu*], a policy continued under Qing dynasty [1644-1911], at which time the Lahu first began to feel it" (Walker 1995:12).

Since the early 18th century when Mahayana Buddhism had been introduced from Dali, Lahu had formed autonomous polities, under which religious leaders of high rank politically and religiously govern many villages. But these Lahu polities gradually lost their autonomy after the Qing government began implementing *gaituguiliu* policy in Lahu settlement areas in 1725. (Kataoka 1998:147-148) "In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, frequently led by messianic 'priest-chiefs', they gained some notoriety as rebels against imperial Chinese rule. ... The imperial government then tried to administer the Lahu areas indirectly, through indigenous headmen who were supposed to 'show a spirit of submissiveness'. But some Lahu continued their armed

insurrections, forcing the authorities to intervene more directly in local government" (Walker 1983:229). Chinese pacification measures included a number of military expeditions to the frontier areas, which were intensified after the British annexation of upper Burma in 1886 made the border more vulnerable. The superior weaponry and organization of the Chinese eventually defeated the Lahu rebels armed with crossbows and poisoned arrows. By the end of the 19th century, most Lahu came under Chinese control, but some had fled to Burma and Laos. (Katatoka 1998:147-149, Walker 1983:229)

In Burma, Lahu were well established in Kengtung in the Shan States by the 1830s, where they forged "links with lowland chiefs by helping to defend the Keng Tung [*sic.*] valley, and provid[ed] the local princes with rice and porters in the hills. But they remained fiercely independent, and occasionally plundered their Shan neighbors instead of helping them" (Walker 1983:229). Lahu migration into Burma continued throughout the first half of this century, but in Burma again they were caught up in political turmoil not of their own making. During World War II, many Christian Lahu worked as guerrillas and intelligence agents for the Allies (Walker 1983:229, McCoy 1972:305). After the war, Lahu in China suffered again from the civil war between Nationalist Chinese (*Kuomintang*: KMT) and the Communists, especially after the final communist victory in China in 1949. In the period around 1949, a large number of Lahu fled into Burma (Lewis and Lewis 1981: tape 4). At this time, KMT forces fled into the Shan States, and began fighting with the Burmese army, while during the same period Shan liberation armies began a rebellion against the Rangoon government. Many Lahu

were recruited by these armies and villagers were coerced to provide forced labor and pay "taxes".

In Laos, Lahu in Nam Tha province had been under Pathet Lao's control and a part of them fled into Thailand during the Indochina War. Fifty households of Lahu refugees from Laos then moved to California in 1981 (Pathiphat 1991:4).

Although the Lahu presence in Thailand predates the political turmoil in this century (Scott and Hardiman 1900:577, McCarthy 1994[1900]:130, McGilvary 1912:341, Bock 1985 [1884]:317-20, Hallett 1988[1890]:159-61), a large number of Lahu migrated into Thailand after the 1950s, especially after 1962 when Ne Win seized power and initiated military dictatorship in 1962 (Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 4, Sombat 1997:67). "Thailand's relative political stability and peace, together with the availability (until recently) of uncultivated land in the northern hills, have attracted many Lahu immigrants from Burma and Laos" (Walker 1975a:114). Still today, despite stricter Thai government controls in the border areas, Lahu continue to flee Burmese military tyranny and move into Thailand.

Throughout their history, the southward migration of the Lahu people has been the result not only of political pressures and unrest, but also because they, as pioneering swiddeners, needed new lands for agriculture. For several hundred years, the Lahu "have been living and moving around in an area where several major civilizations abut on one another" (Walker 1995:12). And, as the majority peoples such as the Chinese, the Shan, the Burman, and *Khon Muang* (backed by Central Thai) expanded and intensified their controls, the Lahu's former relatively high autonomy, under only nominal subjugation in tributary relationship, has been reduced. Moreover, increasing

scarcity of new land and stricter control of lowland governments has restricted swidden cultivation. As the autonomy, mobility, and traditional way of life that they formerly enjoyed have been eroded, the Lahu people, people without a country, are now more subject to the domination of lowlanders. In the meanwhile, "in 1953, the Chinese Communist administration set up a Lahu autonomous county in Lan-ts'ang (the old Chen-pien) district ... Lahu have an important voice in the administration of this county, although the government is by no means entirely in their hands" (Walker 1975a: 113). This led some Lahu in other countries to understand that there is an independent "Lahu country" (*Lahu mvuh mi*) in China.

2. Sub-group Identity among Christian Lahu

The Lahu boast a number of sub-divisions under the general identity of "Lahu". Bradley lists over 40 sub-group names (1979:39-41), and a Lahu pastor writes that there are 16 sub-groups within the Lahu people (Yo han 1976:2). Walker (1974a) attempted to determine how so many sub-divisions had developed and to construct a general criterion for differentiation, but met only partial success. The problem becomes more complex, when one considers the fact that self- and outsiders' identifications often differ and new divisions may be born (cf. Hanks 1965). Manipulation of more than two identities has long been a topic of discussion among anthropologists (cf. Leach 1964) and the emic classification system has been shown to undergo transformation along with changes in political and social contexts (Ayabe 1996). Because it seems difficult to make any generalization, especially in the complex Lahu case, I will focus on only one aspect of the

issue, that is, present sub-group classifications among Christian Lahu. The issue then becomes how Christian Lahu view other Lahu sub-groups and how they define themselves by contrast to the other sub-groups. This examination will reveal Christian Lahu's views of other non-Christian Lahu sub-groups and show how Christian Lahu identify themselves in their conceptual hierarchy among diverse Lahu sub-groups.

Despite the complexity of the problem, it suffices for the discussion here to say that Christian Lahu in Thailand today classify the Lahu people generally into four sub-groups: *Lahu Na* (Black Lahu); *Lahu Nyi* (Red Lahu); *Lahu Shi* (Yellow Lahu); and, *Lahu Sheh Leh* (called "Lahu Shehle" by scholars)²⁵. It is only when they must respond to an inquiry, or encounter some other necessity, that villagers refer further to sub-sub-groups or divisions under the above four major sub-groups.

Christian Lahu sometimes identify themselves as *Lahu Na* (or *Musue Dam* in Thai) to outsiders (Bradley 1979:45). This becomes more frequent when they present themselves to the outsider as a unit or a group. In such case, *Lahu Na* becomes a formal banner for Christian Lahu. Many Christian Lahu, who as individuals identify themselves as *Lahu Nyi*, wear *Lahu Na* costumes in official ceremonies.

But when individually asked, villagers give such various identifications as *Lahu Na*, *Lahu Meun Neu*, *Lahu Nyi*, and *Lahu Ku Lao*, not limited to the general four sub-groups above and referring further divisions. On the other hand, when I ask them about other villagers' identifications, their answers are generally limited within the four major sub-groups plus *Lahu Meun Neu*. But, in such cases, *Lahu Na* and *Lahu Meun Neu* are used as mutually interchangeable terms²⁶.

Christian Lahu consider *Lahu Na* or *Lahu Meun Neu* (in this case the two term denote the same group) as authentic Christian Lahu and *Lahu Na* dialect is used as standard language. In the TLBC, *Lahu Nyi* is a minority. It is usually considered that *Lahu Nyi* are relatively new converts and less developed than *Lahu Na*. The term *Lahu Nyi* itself is frequently used both by *Lahu Na* and *Lahu Nyi* Christians as a pejorative pronoun for the “heathen” and there are negative discourses on *Lahu Nyi*, both Christian and non-Christian, although the current Chairman of the TLBC is a *Lahu Nyi* man.

Such images of *Lahu Nyi* have to do with the fact that the majority of the *Lahu Nyi* practice what is generally understood as their “traditional religion”²⁷, for which they are considered by Christian Lahu as backward. Christian Lahu say that they “had once been like them” [i.e., practicing traditional religion, for not knowing the true God yet], but that they were uplifted by the encounter with Christianity. In this sense, *Lahu Nyi* has served for Lahu Christians as an object of contrast, by which Christian Lahu form their identity, defining what they are by what they are not. Christian Lahu often speak of *Lahu Nyi* as people who “do not know the true God nor the good from the bad yet”.

However, *Lahu Sheh Leh*, among whom there are few Christians, are considered even lower than *Lahu Nyi*. Once a Lahu evangelist said, “They [*Lahu Sheh Leh*] are the most backward and dirty (of the Lahu)”. Geographically, Maehongson, where many non-Christian *Lahu Nyi* and *Lahu Sheh Leh* are living, has been a target area for evangelical projects of TLBC and is often described as “wilderness” (*heh pui hk'aw*) as opposed to the civilization of the city.

3. Christian History among the Lahu People²⁸

The nineteenth century American church theology assumed that the Second Coming of Christ was contingent upon giving every continent and culture a chance to hear the gospel. Thus, behind the rapid growth of the mission stations in Asia lay the conception of the mission as preparing the world for the coming of Christ, a millenarian thought. (Hawley 1991: 21-36)

Millenarian aspiration was held by the potential recipients of the gospel, too. Since the late nineteenth century, Lahu society had been suffering from political and military pressures and changes. In the process of centralization, "Chinese leaders in Yunnan attacked Lahu settlements to bring them closer into the Han family. ... British colonialists in Burma did the same thing as they sought to eliminate the local Lahu leaders in the Shan States" (Hawley 1991:156).

Such pressures and crisis provided a background for the emergence of many prophecies about the coming of a savior. An article by Reverend C. B. Antisdell reports that many Lahu prophet-leaders had appeared, claiming themselves to be God, and some of them raised a considerable following before the Lahu's encounter with Christianity (Antisdell 1911:35). The same article also relates that Lahu "[t]radition says God wrote his precepts on rice cakes and gave them to the people, but they became very hungry and ate the rice cakes" (Antisdell 1911:34), and that the Lahu "expect a return of lost brethren [of the ninety-nine families], who will not only bring back the lost writings, but will restore them to political supremacy" (Antisdell 1911:34).

Reverend William M. Young was the first American Baptist missionary to evangelize the Lahu in Burma and China. After seven years of frustrating work with Shan people, he

moved to Kengtung in 1901 and “soon contacted with the Lahu, a highland group that had fought the British, Burmese, and Chinese for freedom from lowland domination throughout the nineteenth century” (Hawley 1991:152). The first Lahu was baptized in 1904 and a mass movement to conversion followed shortly after that. A church chronicle depicts that the Lahu enthusiasm for the new religion was greatly increased by the conversion of an influential Lahu priest (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:410, Walker 1974b:701). Young was a pioneering evangelist, believing the spread of evangelical Christianity to be the major goal of the mission. He organized groups of Christians by holding mass meetings in towns as well as by touring extensively in remote areas. Young reported 5,465 baptisms during 1904 and 1906 (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:411)²⁹ and, between 1904-1910, he “was responsible for remarkable 9,600 Lahu and Wa baptisms in Kengtung and Yunnan” (Hawley 1991:156-57), figures well reflecting the Lahu’s enthusiastic response to the new messianic religion. Even in the mission society, Young’s work was viewed as controversial, for many other missionaries were critical about the superficiality of the new converts’ understanding in Christianity and laid more stress on educational work (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:411, Hawley 1991:158-60). Some scholars suggest that Young manipulated his charisma and image as savior in the natives’ eyes for the benefit of his evangelical work (McCoy 1972:302-03, Hawley 1991:165-66). In 1916, William M. Young left Kengtung to work in China. New mission stations were opened in Banna (Mong Lem, in 1920) and Mong Mong (in 1927). Although William M. Young left Burma for retirement in 1932 and died in 1936, his two sons, Vincent and Harold, both born and reared in Burma,

assisted by many Karen workers, continued to convert Lahu and Wa before World War II. (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:413-14)

Meanwhile, other missionaries worked to establish stronger institutional base of the Lahu church. With the assistance of Karen pastors, Antisdel (1906-12 in Kengtung) and H. H. Tilbe had for the first time codified a written Lahu language and its deficiencies were later gradually corrected and improved. They also established schools, taught classes, and translated Christian books into Lahu. Karen and Lahu evangelists were instructed to focus on educational works. Although Antisdel left the field in 1912, Karen workers such as Ba Te and Po Tun did much translation and made Lahu readers and hymnbooks available before 1919. (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:413-14, Yo han 1976:13-14, Hawley 1991:58-59)

J. H. Telford took over the Kengtung field in 1916. In 1920, Young's original Kengtung mission had been divided into lowland and highland missions, and Telford later opened the Pangwai mission station as a center for the work among highland peoples. (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:413, Yo han 1976:17, Hawley 1991:160) He "developed the central boarding school for the Kengtung Lahu-Wa field, and promoted the twenty village schools. For some years he taught a Bible class for evangelistic workers, to build up the local leader-ship" (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:414). He sent Lahu students to study at higher level education in such subjects as agriculture, weaving, nursing, and the Bible (Yo han 1976:22). Telford revised the partial translation by Ba Te and Po Tun and made the complete Lahu New Testament available in 1932. He also made a new hymnbook and translated the Psalms of the Old Testament (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:414, Yo han

1976:21-22). Before World War II, there were 68 churches in the Pangwai field (Yo han 1976:23-24), but “[i]n 1942 when the war came to Burma, all missionaries were evacuated, and funds from abroad were completely cut off” (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:414). “During World War II many Christian Lahu, influenced by their missionaries, fought as guerrillas against Japanese and Thai troops occupying Keng Tung [*sic.*]” (Walker 1983:229).

In the post-war period, Vincent Young went to Banna and began rehabilitation of the large field in China. However, after 1949 when the Communists seized power in China, all Western missionaries had to leave China and the mission stations were lost. (Aung Din and Sowards 1963: 415) After evacuated from China in about 1949, Vincent Young went to Kengtung where he supervised the rebuilding of the church, hospital, and residence destroyed by World War II. Although, in 1954 when he went to furlough, he was refused re-entry visa and could not return to Burma, he kept contact with the mission work by airmail. (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:416) Harold Young also could not live in Burma, as the newly independent government became suspicious of his relations with minority dissidents. He moved to Chiang Mai, Thailand, where he became curator of Chiang Mai Zoo and worked for the CIA. His two sons, Gordon and William (Billy), organized a Lahu intelligence unit and collected information on Chinese troop movements in Yunnan’s border areas. (McCoy 1972:305) In the meanwhile, the mission work in Kengtung had to face many difficulties, as KMT troops fled into the Shan State while Shan insurgents began fighting with the Rangoon government. (Ai Lun and Sowards 1963:364, Aung Din and Sowards 1963:415-16)

Reverend and Mrs. Paul and Elaine Lewis arrived in

Pangwai in December 1947 and worked on rebuilding the mission station (Yo han 1976: 25-26). In May 1949, they opened the Pangwai Bible School with two and a half years' curriculum, which initially nine students attended (Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 2). The school had been closed in 1962, as Lewis had gone to work with Akha people, but was later re-opened with a Lahu headman in 1965. The Lewis' also produced a body of Lahu literature such as the Bible School textbooks and other books about religion, development, literacy, and health care. They opened the Christian Book Store in Kengtung and raised funds for higher education of hill people students. Lewis re-organized the church system, which had formerly been heavily based on personal relationships, into more formally organized and indigenized Pangwai Baptist Conference of Churches composed of seven (later eight?) ethnic groups. (Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 3) From 1957 to 1959, Paul Lewis, with the assistance of two Lahu pastors and a committee of 16 Lahu men, had worked on new translation of the New Testament, which was published in 1962 by the Bible Society and is still used today by Christian Lahu. Elaine Lewis edited a new Lahu hymnbook, which was published in 1959 and is also still used today. The Lewis' did not do much touring due partly to their injuries sustained in the airplane crash, dangerous political situation, and the governmental watch on foreign missionaries, but also to their emphasis on education and literacy in order to improve the quality of Lahu Christians.

Throughout the history of the mission work, medical service provided by the missionaries themselves and missionary doctors has played an important role. Western medicine served to prove the effectiveness of the new religion

while discounting the old one by giving potential converts the opportunity to better cope with sickness and the natural environment beyond human control. Yo han (1976) names many medical workers who came to the Kengtung and Pangwai fields and worked with the above missionaries³⁰.

Church histories convey that there were discords between Pangwai and Kengtung groups about the leadership of the church and Lahu orthography. But the later may well be an expression of the former. In 1957, the Lahu church finally split into the Pangwai and Kengtung churches, to which 180 and 50 village churches belong, respectively, as per 1976³¹. (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:416-17, Yo han 1976:28-29)

Since the 1950s, Christian Lahu have been moving into Thailand fleeing the political unrest in the Shan State. Some came to Thailand to work with Harold Young who had retired from the mission work and was living in Chiang Mai (Wutilert 1965:31, Walker 1975b:151-54, A dul 1995:1). After 1962 when Ne Win succeeded and initiated military led socialism, many Christian Lahu began to emigrate to Thailand in waves (Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 4). Paul and Elaine Lewis had left Burma in April 1966, shortly before all foreign missionaries were evacuated from the country (Lewis and Lewis 1981: tape 5). The Lahu church in Burma is now literally indigenized. The Old Testament in Lahu was produced by E naw Pun, a Lahu pastor, after the western missionaries left Burma.

4. Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention: A Lahu Christian Church

As of October 1997, the Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention (TLBC) claims 6,974 baptized and 6,700 non-baptized members and constitutes the largest Christian Lahu

denomination in Thailand³². “[M]ost of Thailand’s present Lahu Christians are recent arrivals in the kingdom [Thailand] from Burma and, as such, represent the grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren of Lahu converted by American Baptist missionaries in Burma at the beginning of this century” (Walker 1992:61). In the following, I will briefly describe history and activities of TLBC.

Although several Christian Lahu villages had existed in Thailand for a long time, it was only after 1960 that a large number of Christian Lahu moved into Thailand. Initially Christian Lahu in Thailand did not have their own church organization and the village churches belonged to the Karen Baptist Convention. However, due to absence of authority and difference in culture and language, Christian Lahu wanted to establish their own church and invited Paul and Elaine Lewis to Thailand in 1968. In 1969, they had formed an association within the Karen church (Lahu-Akha-Lisu Association of Churches: L-A-L). In 1971, L-A-L made up the first executive committee and withdrew from the Karen church to make itself an independent church organization. The Board of International Ministries (BIM) provided a large part of funds required by the fledgling organization. (Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 3, 5, and 6, Pathiphat 1991:21-24, A dul 1995:1-2) The Lahu church changed its name to Lahu Baptist Churches in Thailand (LBCT) in 1975, and took the Lahu name *Htai Mvuh Mi La Hu I Ka Tu Ve Aw Mo* (*Htai-Lim*) in 1976. (Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 5, Pathiphat 1991:25-26)³³ In 1975, they also prepared the constitution of the new church, which was approved in the annual meeting in 1976. (Pathiphat 1991:24-26, A dul 1995:2-4)

The LBCT constitution defines the purposes of the Lahu

church in five aspects: (1) spiritual, (2) educational, (3) agricultural, (4) medical, and (5) cultural. The spiritual purpose is to spread Christianity and to promote good quality of Christians. The educational purpose is not only to provide the members with education, but also to promote consciousness of being Thai citizens among church members. The agricultural purpose is to promote permanent farming to replace swidden agriculture, to support proper pricing of agricultural products, and the sale of handicrafts. Besides providing health care and sanitation, the medical purpose includes family planning. The cultural purpose aims to make Lahu people respect Thai national culture, and, at the same time, to promote preservation of Lahu culture and literacy. (Pathiphat 1991:26-27) As shown above, the constitution defines the orientation of the church generally in accordance with the framework of Thai national development policies. But, church activities such as promoting Christianity and Lahu identity and literacy inevitably go against the Thai government's policies. Although the extension of governmental services to remote areas later took over responsibilities of the Lahu church for building village schools, teaching Thai language, medical care, and promoting permanent farming, the general orientation of the church as stated in the constitution has not changed until today. I will review TLBC's activities according to the above five areas.

Spiritual work includes evangelism, Bible training, radio broadcasts, and the Lahu Bible Institute. (A dul 1995:6-11)

Before 1971, TLBC provided evangelists with 250 baht monthly salary to travel to non-Christian Lahu villages, but this effort was not very successful. Since 1971 evangelists started to take their families to the target villages and live with non-Christian villagers. When they have built rapport, they seek

opportunities to talk about religion. When villagers are sick, evangelists give medicine and pray for their recovery. In 1990, a popular non-Christian Red Lahu priest, Ca Nu, together with his 192 followers were baptized and converted to Christianity. TLBC then planned to use this opportunity and let the former non-Christian priest, still influential to non-Christian Red Lahu, travel as an evangelist. However, the project was abandoned after about a year, due to discord between the leader of the TLBC evangelical team and Ca Nu. As of 1995, there are six evangelists working in non-Christian villages, supported by ABMS (Australia Baptist Missionary Society), the Women's Society, and village churches of the TLBC. (Pathiphat 1991:28,39, A dul 1995:7-8)

TLBC has been providing Bible training courses, usually one week each year, for pastors, evangelists, and villagers. They also produce many textbooks for Sunday Bible School in villages. Since 1972 TLBC has been producing Christian radio broadcast programs in Lahu which can be heard in northern Thailand and neighboring countries.

Between 1970 and 1971, Paul and Elaine Lewis taught Bible courses for six months a year and produced 16 graduates. Between 1971 and 1989, the church had no Bible school, but in 1990 TLBC opened the Lahu Bible Institute with financial aid from Sweden and the US. It is now increasingly necessary for individuals to finish the four years' program of the Institute in order to become a pastor or an evangelist.

Between 1970 and 1977, TLBC was active in building village schools, but with the expansion of the Thai government services, the responsibility of the church decreased and many of the schools were transferred to the government's administration. Today the major educational activities of the

TLBC are running dormitories and providing scholarship for pupils and students, with the financial aid from foreign Christian organizations.

Agricultural work is comprised of a livestock project, agricultural training, and irrigation project. Originally, agricultural work had aimed to help Lahu farmers, who had recently immigrated from Burma, to purchase land and paddy fields as well as to promote permanent farming. Later, emphasis has shifted to the irrigation and livestock projects. The livestock project itself is not a part of TLBC, but is instead the product of a Christian NGO, Heifer Project International (HPI), with good relation with TLBC.

The church histories convey that many of the agricultural projects (project farm, loan fund, cattle rearing) failed in the initial period. Today, the main project of HPI is to help villagers rear hybrid pigs. Between 1983-87, TLBC organized agricultural training at the TLBC Training Center and about 500 persons participated. As of 1995, TLBC built watercourses and irrigation systems in 57 villages (41 Christian and 16 non-Christian).

In contrast to its emphasis during the initial period, medical work is no longer an active part of TLBC efforts and TLBC has no responsible department. Between 1970-80, the church had programs such as a medicine box program³⁴, training of village medical workers, and family planning led by Paul and Elaine Lewis, Winnie Dodge, and Na Sa Lo, a Lahu nurse. Later, the Thai government built roads and set up a medical service network in remote areas and the Health Project for Tribal People, an NGO, was established to work for health care of highland peoples. These have taken over much of the church's responsibilities. (Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 6, Pathiphat

1991:31-32, A dul 1995:23, personal communication with A dul Nama, Chairman of TLBC, in January 1998)

Although the Thai government has been against minority groups developing and using their own written languages, TLBC has been concerned with promoting Lahu literacy. The church has produced various literatures including magazines, Thai language instruction books, and textbooks for the Bible Institute, Sunday School and Bible Study, and other Christian books.

The handicraft business started in an informal form, as Elaine Lewis and Marlene Mann, a wife of a missionary working with Karen people, began to sell Lahu and Karen handicrafts in order for Lahu and Karen to acquire cash income. They sold the goods at their homes in Chiang Mai and outside when they found potential foreign customers. Later the business expanded and became complicated to a point that they rented a house to open Thai Tribal Crafts, made regulations, began systematic accounting, and made the business operate under a foundation, the Christian Service Foundation (Baptist). The venture was quite successful, and in 1985 Thai Tribal Crafts bought the land and house it currently occupies for two million baht, of which 1,5 million was provided through financial aid from Sweden. Today, Thai Tribal Crafts has customers in Chiang Mai, Bangkok, and abroad. Although the business is not a part of TLBC, but belongs to Christian Service Foundation (Baptist), Thai Tribal Crafts has been operated mainly by Lahu Christians, especially after all Karens, except one group, withdrew from the business. In his book of TLBC history, A dul, the present Chairman of TLBC, calls it "TLBC shop (*Htai-Lim Lan*)" (A dul 1995:19-22, Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 6).

Besides the departments responsible for spiritual, educational, and cultural work, TLBC has the Women's Society, Youth Group, and area associations (*hke*). The Women's Society and Youth Group are engaged in various activities such as providing financial support to evangelists, organizing Bible study meetings, and exchanges with equivalent groups of other churches. The seven regional associations, or *hke*³⁵, have a Women's Society and Youth Group and have generally the same structure and activities as TLBC, except for agricultural work.

In 1988, Paul and Elaine Lewis left Thailand and now an Australian missionary couple is working with TLBC. As of the 1993 annual general meeting, TLBC has formally become the 18th District of the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), a nation-wide Protestant organization. Today Lahu leaders mainly administrate the Lahu church, but the church still depends heavily on financial support from foreign Christian organizations. There have been rumors and cases of misappropriation of church money by pastors and workers (see Pathiphat 1991:45). Among the church leaders, there is considerable competition over power, and factionalism according to sub-groups and personal loyalties (see Pathiphat 1991:44-45, Adul 1995:28). Pathiphat, himself a Yellow Lahu Christian and a son of the first General Secretary of the Lahu church, writes that the use of Black Lahu dialect as standard language makes church members of other sub-groups ashamed of their non-Black Lahu accents and hesitant to speak in meetings (Pathiphat 1991:44-45). Yellow Lahu church leaders have been for many years attempting to establish a writing system in their own dialect. This was not merely a controversy about language but rather an expression of more deeply rooted

competition over power among the church leaders. In 1996 when the second General Secretary of the church died before the expiration of his office term, the conflicts between the groups became explicit and disagreement over the next leader was so fierce that, in that year, the annual general meeting of all church members was not held for the first time of the church history. Even after A dul Nama had been elected as the new General Secretary³⁶, the other faction would not approve him and March of 1997 saw two annual general meetings organized separately by the two factions. In September 1997, the faction mainly made of Yellow Lahu split off and established their own church organization named Thailand Lahu Christian Convention (TLCC).

In its over 25 year history, TLBC has assisted Christian Lahu to better adapt to the modern Thai society. In the initial period, the church provided fundamental education and medical services instead of the Thai government which could not always meet the needs of people in remote areas. Even after these services were taken over by the government, the Lahu church has played an important role in development of the Lahu people in such fields as higher education and promotion of permanent agriculture. Thai Tribal Crafts has been providing Lahu handicraft producers more sales opportunities and more power in cash economy. While many non-Christian Lahu still do not have a centralized and rational organization beyond their village clusters, TLBC has provided Christian Lahu with large social networks which are not limited to Lahu society but relate them to Thai and foreign Christian organizations (Kataoka 1994).

Although the general orientation of the Lahu church has accorded with that of the Thai state development policies, some

activities of the Lahu church necessarily go against the Thai governmental policies, as they are Christian, a religious minority within the Buddhist state. Their coping strategy has been one of building networks with both Thai and foreign churches. Another TLBC policy contradictory to the Thai state policies is to promote their ethnic culture (Kataoka 1994). At first glance, the church policies to preserve Lahu culture and promote Lahu literacy have met with limited success, as many Lahu children seem to become assimilated to Thai during their attendance in the government school, and they are not interested in learning Lahu writing. But, at a more fundamental level, the Lahu church has played an important role in the promotion of Lahu ethnic consciousness under the banner of "Christian Lahu", for their religion is not only concerned with theological teachings but also with the ethnic history of the Lahu people (see Chapter 5-(8)).

5. Lahu Christianity

As early missionaries quickly recognized, while it was very difficult to convert individual Lahu, if missionaries were able to win the support of the village headman and elders of the village, Lahu would convert themselves in body (Telford 1937:95, McGilvary 1912:324, 344). Christian and non-Christian Lahu usually live separately, or "they are wholly animistic in religious belief and practice or wholly Christian" (Telford 1937:95). Each Christian Lahu village has a church³⁷, a Lahu village pastor, a village Church Committee, a women's society, and a youth group. Although Christian Lahu villages sometimes have visits from Thai and foreign Christians, they are much less frequent than visits between Christian Lahu. In this sense, each Christian Lahu village constitutes a small

ethnic-cum-religious community.

As the first Lahu Christian in Burma was baptized in 1904, Christianity has nearly a century history among Christian Lahu and the religion seems well integrated in their culture and everyday life. We find no spirit propitiation that they practiced before their conversion to Christianity (Telford 1937) and use of magical means are discouraged and less³⁸. Frequent use of the phrase "*aw bon ui ja*" (literally meaning, "How great the God's blessing is", but usually translated "thank you") and handshake may leave us with an impression of exaggerated formality. Christian Lahu villagers seem more disciplined and orderly than we usually expect from *chao khao*³⁹. Walker describes Christian Lahu of Huai Tadt village; "The people here are better educated and more familiar with the world outside the mountains than is common in hill villages. The village itself seems cleaner and the people healthier than in many a hill community. ... [Although] neighbouring non-Christian Lahu are not always prepared to accept these Huai Tadt people as 'real' Lahu ... it would be wrong to infer that the Huai Tadt residents wish to disguise their Lahu heritage because they are insecure converts to an alien religion. On the contrary, ... they are also conscious and proud of being Lahu" (Walker 1975b:151). For Christian Lahu, there is hardly an inconsistency between the "Lahu tradition" and "the new religions of foreign origin" like outside observers often expect from Christian highlanders.

On the other hand, however, Christianity of the Lahu people is colored with ethnicity and seems to work less to develop universal brotherhood as Christians than to promote a group consciousness as Lahu-cum-Christian. Many sermons of Lahu pastors address the problems and sufferings of the Lahu

people, and "we" (*nga hui*) used in those sermons nearly always denotes the Lahu people. Even when villagers do not directly talk about problems of the Lahu people, many of their conversations are based on their communal understanding that the people are poor and have suffered throughout history. Christian Lahu often compare themselves to the people of Israel in Old Testament and talk about their loss of country, wandering, diaspora, and subjugation to other peoples. Christian Lahu are interested in those aspects of this world religion which would explain and give possible solutions to their plight as an oppressed ethnic minority.

One of these aspects of Christianity which often interest the oppressed people is millenarianism. "Christianity, in its early days in Burma and Yunnan, was seen by Lahu as a revivalist cult, and the pioneer missionary as a messianic-type figure" (Walker 1983:236), which caused Lahu mass-conversion. Though no longer so radical or apparent, millenarian aspiration has survived as an important undercurrent in the Lahu Christianity. Salvation both in the other and this world is a concern of Christian Lahu. Lahu pastors preach about how to behave as good Christians in order to enter heaven. Christian Lahu associate the popular Christian idea of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ with the liberation of the Lahu people from the present plight, and speak of AD 2000 as a possible time of Salvation.

Lahu traditionally had beliefs both in a great number of spirits (*ne*) and one supreme and creating divinity called *G'ui sha*. As many of these spirits are associated with localities and natural phenomena, these, on a more fundamental level, signify those aspects of nature which are beyond human control. Villagers say that there are by far more evil spirits in Burma

than in Thailand, implying more wilderness. The concept of association of spirits with power of nature beyond human control is useful to understand what Christianity means to Christian Lahu. Christian Lahu mention that non-Christian Lahu have to sacrifice many pigs and chickens to propitiate spirits, but without effect, while being Christian costs much less because they have only to pray for God. Beyond its economic meaning, such a statement implies power relations among various supernatural beings as well as between them and humans. Christian Lahu reinterpreted *G'ui sha* to be the Christian God, and say that they do not have to fear evil spirits because their *G'ui sha* is more powerful than spirits. Christian Lahu firmly believe in the existence of spirits, and one of the important reason to be Christian, as self-described, is the religion's ability to cope with the malicious spirits.

Christian Lahu have pejorative views on non-Christian Lahu groups. Christian Lahu say that they themselves "were once like them [non-Christian Lahu]", not knowing the true God and conducting wrong religious practices. Christian Lahu, however, think that they finally met the true God after a long wandering and were uplifted by the encounter with Christianity. They have a developmental view about history, in which non-Christian Lahu groups are put in more backward positions, while such people as westerners, Koreans, and Japanese are thought to be more developed than Christian Lahu. Outside observers often mention access to various material benefits provided by the church network as the main reason for the Christian conversion by marginalized peoples. Yet, it is not the material benefits *per se* that can explain the conversion, but we rather have to examine how their recipients interpret these material benefits. In the case of Christian Lahu,

who have for many generations had to face overwhelming powers of "oppressor" lowland peoples with non-Christian religious traditions, the material benefits are perceived as support from merciful "savior" foreigners, and higher degree of education, "development", and medical situation enabled by the various church projects, in turn, justifies the effectiveness of Christianity in coping with natural forces and in adapting to modern society.

Telford, whose work refers primarily to the *Lahu Na* people of the former Shan State of Kengtung, says that large Lahu villages usually have three religious specialists: "1. Pawku-Priest. 2. Mawpa-Seer. 3. Shepa-Doctor or Healer"⁴⁰(Telford 1937:170-71). In Christian Lahu villages, these religious specialists were replaced by the village pastor (*sa la*) and his wife (*sa la ma*), who have to have higher education and Lahu literacy. Among the Christian Lahu, traditional qualifications of religious specialists, such as supernatural power and skill in oral tradition (Telford 1937:170-171, Kya-Leh 1994:5), have been in large part replaced by such modern qualifications as formal education and literacy. Another feature found among Christian Lahu society is the existence of a group of literate intellectuals who constitute a powerful and rich social stratum.

Pre-Christian Lahu rituals have already been replaced by Christian ones, which are not strange nor interesting, and even boring for a cultural anthropologist. Christian Lahu go to church on Sundays to pray, sing hymns, and listen to Bible readings and a sermon. Church services are held three (for women, four) times on Sunday. Lahu Christianity stresses literacy in Lahu and children are taught Lahu reading and writing at Sunday School.

The most important annual rituals are New Year

celebrations, Christmas, and the harvest festival, and the days of the first two ceremonies are regulated by the Western calendar. (Among non-Christian Lahu groups, the New Year celebrations roughly coincide with the Chinese New Year [Walker 1983:235]). Besides the harvest festival, agricultural rites tied to each stage of rice cultivation seem more poorly performed by Christians than non-Christians. At the important stages of life, such as birth (naming of the newborn), wedding, and death, rites are held by pastors who pray, read the Bible, and sermon while guests sing hymns. Christian children usually get baptized in their teens, and baptism by immersion performed by Baptist denomination may be counted as a puberty rite (Walker 1983:236). In case of extended sickness, villagers begin to feel uncomfortable for their past behavior and host an assembly of prayer at their house. By holding the prayer assembly, they want to borrow powers from Father God and Jesus Christ, who are thought more powerful than all other supernatural beings. Belief in Christianity does not deny the existence of evil spirits, as the evil spirits have come to stand for demons. Lucifer, the fallen angel in the Bible, is thought to be the "boss" of these evil spirits.

Christianity has been well integrated in the culture of Christian Lahu and there are little remnants of their pre-Christian religious practices. On the other hand, Lahu Christianity is colored with ethnicity. Christian Lahu appropriate those aspects of this world religion which have relevance to their sufferings. Long-time presence of Christian among the people has given Christian Lahu society more rationality and formality. Christianity here is an important coping strategy of the marginalized ethnic minority in their power relations with nature and the lowlanders.

6. Summary

Lahu, a highland dwelling ethnic minority, have for a long time faced overwhelming powers of powerful lowlanders. Lahu have historically practiced shifting cultivation and have moved southward in search of new fields in addition to fleeing political pressures and turmoil. However, recent scarcity of new fields and the stricter control of lowland governments have significantly restricted the higher degree of autonomy and freedom of movement that the Lahu formerly enjoyed.

In the late nineteenth century, Lahu society was suffering from political and military pressures from the lowland governments. Longing for a savior provided a ground for the Lahu mass-conversion when the American Baptist mission first contacted Lahu in Burma. However, in the era that followed, the church has built a steady footing among Lahu through its civilizing project in such fields as education, development, and medical care.

Christian Lahu living in Thailand are newcomers in the last several decades. Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention has been playing an important role for Christian Lahu to better adapt to the modern Thai society. On the other hand, such church policies as promotion of Lahu culture and literacy necessarily go against the Thai national policy.

Christianity has been well integrated in the culture of Christian Lahu, and in Christian Lahu's conception, there is hardly an inconsistency between what outside observers tend to view as "Lahu tradition" and "the new religion of foreign origin". On the other hand, Lahu Christianity is highly concerned with ethnicity, and Christian Lahu are interested in those aspects of this world religion which would explain their

predicaments as an oppressed ethnic minority. Millenarian aspiration has survived as an undercurrent of Lahu Christianity, while extensive Christian history has given the society more rationality and formality.

Chapter 4: Narratives of “Wisdom”

“Be Like Others”

Now let’s listen together to a story called “Be Like Others”.

Dear brothers and sisters of Lahu people,

When we look at our people,

most of us stay behind others in every aspect.

In every aspect, we cannot prosper like others.

When we think why it’s like this,

the eventual cause of every thing is “wisdom”.

Because most of us Lahu people did not seek “wisdom”,
we cannot be like others.

Because we do not have “wisdom”,

when we go to the city and work there,

all we get is low-ranked hard work.

And the pay we get is very low.

Therefore, when we only get very small salary and cannot
live on it,

some of us may go to do wrong things.

Also in the area of health care,

because we haven’t learned “wisdom”

and do not know how to live hygienically,

various sickness can occur.

Dear brothers and sisters of Lahu people,

In order for us Lahu people to prosper like others in every
aspect

and be healthy, now look with your eyes wide open and
let’s seek “wisdom”.⁴¹

1. Lahu Narratives of Their Own People's Inferiority

Although the introduction of electricity and television in some villages is changing life-style of Lahu people, one of the Lahu customs which villagers consider as such is "visiting" (*gui da ve*), or to visit one another's house. If villagers have free time from work, they visit each other during daytime too, but the main hour is after dinner when they sit around the hearth, drink tea, and enjoy conversations for hours before they go to bed. Talking and gossiping are major entertainment for Lahu villagers. I often joined the circles, as these were good source of news and information.

One of the features of Lahu narratives I became aware of after several months' village stay is that they frequently talk about "the Lahu people". Villagers speak of "the Lahu people" in conversations both with me and among themselves. Sometimes they make somewhat formal explanations about the Lahu people for me as an outsider and a researcher. I was told, for example, "The Lahu traditionally liked to worship God. That is why we, when living in Burma, used to go to church three day a week". But, I also heard them talk about "the Lahu people" in quite informal situations and when they were less conscious of my existence. In one case, a group of villagers were gossiping about mistakes made by someone and at the end of the conversation a villager made the critical remark, "The Lahu don't have wisdom". One distinct property of these narratives on self is that the noun "the Lahu (people)", which denotes their ethnicity in general, is used. Sometimes "we" (*nga hui*) is used instead of "the Lahu people", but this "we" always denotes the Lahu people as an ethnic group. This implies that an abstract concept of "the Lahu people" is externalized and objectified by Lahu villagers.

In recent years, as a result of global spread of a concept of “culture”, anthropologists began to encounter indigenous peoples talking about their “cultures”. Such “told cultures” often differ from their “lived cultures”. The discourses about their objectified “culture” are often tied with concrete objects representing their “tradition”, such as dance, arts, theater, crafts, costumes, customs, and ceremonies. (Sekimoto 1994a, 1994b) But, the Lahu narratives at issue here are of another kind. They are not concerned with “the Lahu culture” nor tied to a certain objects representing their “tradition”. They are abstract statements on what they believe are the natures and attributes of their people⁴².

Many statements are repeatedly used to talk about the Lahu people and I have found some patterns. The following are examples from my field site:

- (1) The Lahu don't have wisdom. (*Lahu cu yi ma caw*)
- (2) The Lahu don't have thoughts. (*Lahu daw hk'a ma caw*)
- (3) The Lahu don't have education (*Lahu li ma shi*)
- (4) The Lahu don't have a country, live in others' countries (*Lahu mvuh mi ma caw, shu mvuh mi cheh ve*)
- (5) Lahu food is bad. (*Lahu aw chi ma da*)
- (6) Lahu houses are bad. (*Lahu yeh ma da*)
- (7) The Lahu are liars. (*Lahu he pui ja*)
- (8) The Lahu can't be in harmony (*Lahu ma haw da pui*)
- (9) The Lahu are wild rats, the Lahu are monkeys (*Lahu fa, Lahu maw*)
- (10) The Lahu live only in the forest. (*Lahu heh pui hk'aw ti chieh ve*)
- (11) The Lahu [eat] chilies, the Shan [eat] fermented soybean cakes. (*Lahu a hpe, Pi Chaw naw hk'eh*)⁴³

If we translate these narratives into English, these statements either have "the Lahu (people)" as subject or as possessive. But in the original language, there are two kinds of possessives. For example, "*Lahu yeh ma da*", literally "Lahu houses not good", can be interpreted in two ways; "Lahu houses are bad" and "As for the Lahu, houses are bad". In order to denote the first English meaning more clearly, Lahu can say, "Houses of the Lahu are bad" (*Lahu ve yeh ma da*). But, in the narratives on self I am talking about now, they never use this form. This means, by "Lahu houses not good" (*Lahu yeh ma da*) they are always saying, "As for the Lahu, houses are bad". While the statement "Lahu houses are bad" focuses more on "houses" than on "the Lahu", the first form of the statement says something more about the Lahu people. What is more at issue in the latter statement is, for example, the poverty of the Lahu people, which is the cause of their "bad houses". In other words, the statement as it is actually expressed is more of a general statement on the nature of the Lahu people, poverty in this case, than on their houses. I use the term "nature" here to refer to aspects of Lahu-ness that villagers seem to take for granted as that the Lahu people were poor in the past, are poor now, and also will be poor in the future. It is spoken as if it were an unchangeable part of the nature of the people. The Lahu narratives of their own people are statements about some general nature of the people.

Moreover, in such narratives, "the Lahu people" have negative natures and are always portrayed negatively. Many statements are negative sentences, denying such positive attributes as "intelligence" and "sovereignty". Even if the statements do not assume negative forms, they talk about what

may generally be considered as negative characteristics like “living in the forest”, implying savageness. What the speakers are so aware of is the existence of other peoples who are better than themselves. The others are not always referred to directly, but are always implied in the statements. Concrete objects of comparison may differ depending on the situation in which such narratives emerge; they may be *Khon Muang*, the Burman, the westerner, the Japanese, the Korean, or the Shan as in statement 11 above. In the Lahu discourse about their own people, “the Lahu people” are always defined negatively and as inferior to other peoples. All positive attributes are assumed to belong to others.

One possible explanation is that such narratives on self are the product of interaction between the villagers and me, an anthropological researcher, or that my existence made them reflect on their ethnicity and talk about it. Although my existence may have triggered their narratives on self, they also talk about “the Lahu people” in cases in which they are less conscious of my existence. Even when I am absent, I think they still talk about “the Lahu people”, though less frequently, for these narratives have an established form and are patterned and stylized statements about their people. As I read more books written by Lahu authors, listened to Lahu popular songs, and read and heard Lahu old stories, I realized that all these expressions about the Lahu people by Lahu authors have the same motifs and natures as their narratives on self in everyday life. Once I heard a village girl sing a song, when she was washing her clothes on a sunny day and apparently unaware of my existence; “The Lahu don’t hear the parents’ voices...” (*Lahu ya te hpa aw pa aw e hkaw ma na*). My presence may trigger Lahu villagers to talk about “the Lahu people”, however

the established narrative patterns are not necessarily changed by an outsider such as myself.

This style of talk about self is not confined to my study village but is shared by the whole Christian Lahu community in northern Thailand and Burma⁴⁴. Although non-Christian Red Lahu also speak in the same manner, the narrative of their own people's inferiority are more frequently heard from Christian Lahu. In fact, Christian Lahu have diverse media of this narrative of their own people's inferiority, ranging from myth, old stories, preaching, tape narration, books, popular songs in more or less comprehensive and complete form to more fragmented statements, short phrases, and proverbs⁴⁵ used in everyday conversations. Due to the shared motifs and natures in all these diverse forms of expression about self as well as the apparent unselfconscious manner in which Lahu villagers talk about "the Lahu people", I infer that the discourse about the inferiority of their own people is not a recent phenomenon and has existed for decades, at least. Such natural and patterned narratives may well be a reflection of well internalized and naturalized self-consciousness of a minority people.

I will call this peculiar style of narratives *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority*. In the following, I will first analyze Lahu myth as a most comprehensive and complete form of these narratives in order to examine social experience of Lahu people as an ethnic minority group. After that, I will focus on "wisdom" (*cu yi*), one of the most frequently heard topic and uniquely Christian Lahu discourse to study influences and implications of the long-term presence of Christianity among the Lahu people.

2. Myths of Loss and Stories of Return

The Lahu have many myths and, despite innumerable different versions, they are concerned with where the people came from and why they are as they are so at present. The Lahu myths explain such diverse matters as the creation of the world, the origins of things on the earth, and reasons why the Lahu are poor, why the Lahu farm swidden fields, why the Lahu have no king, why the Lahu have no independent country, and why the Lahu have no scripts today.

Lahu mythology shares some motifs and features with those of the Karen, the Hmong, the Akha, and other ethnic minorities in mainland Southeast Asia. Karen mythology depicts that long ago all peoples are brothers and the Karen was the eldest one, while the White was the youngest. One day *Ywa* (a god-like figure in Karen mythology) gave a Golden Book of wisdom to the peoples, but, for laziness and thoughtlessness, the Karen lost the Book. That is why today White people have wisdom and are developed, while the Karen are not. (Hayami 1992:46-50) The Karen wait for a return of the White brother who is to bring back the lost Golden Book. By the return of the younger brother with the lost Golden Book, some Karens seem to expect to be brought about other good things still "in store for them, including perhaps the kingdom of the Karen" (Stern 1968:312). Such millenarian aspiration for sovereignty is an undercurrent in the Karen separatist movements in Burma (Rajah 1990:115).

Hmong mythology depicts that long ago the Hmong had a form of writing, which, however, was lost during the Hmong crossing waters in their flight from the oppressive Chinese. The myths often include a moral lesson or conclusion that the Hmong are only clever in the heart, not in books. The Hmong also have myths of the loss of the Hmong king and territory

due to cunning and persecution of the Chinese. But the Hmong king is, one day, to reappear. Most messianic movements of the Hmong, which have occurred throughout their history, started with the leaders claiming themselves to be an incarnation of the lost Hmong king and for discovery of the lost Hmong writing. Literacy has a highly political implication; while the lack of literacy is closely associated with the loss of political power, its acquisition means the restoration of political power. (Tapp 1989)

Describing Akha myth, Kammerer (1990:283) writes, “long ago the creator gave an Akha book written on buffalo skin, but on the way home the man got hungry and ate the book ... In another variant, the book is written on a rice cake, which, like the buffalo skin, is consumed. Although in the version reported by [Paul] Lewis the loss of literacy is associated with the loss of ‘right to rule’, no mention is made of the anticipated return of either one. ... Akha were content with their excellent memories, said to result from their having ingested the written word. ... [Akha] conclude their myth with an expression of satisfaction with their present cleverness rather than anticipation of future literacy and future king.”

These stories are concerned with wisdom/knowledge and political power. A community of the myths is that they are ethnic minority peoples’ stories about the *loss* of writing and other good things. Moreover, some of these groups also have myths or prophecies about the *return* of what they allegedly lost long ago.

3. Myth and Social Experience

I have already mentioned that *Lahu narratives of their own people’s inferiority* have diverse forms of expression, but they

all share the same motifs and nature. Although the stories of the myths are projected in the past, telling myths is an act performed in the present. Introducing the concept of a *real history* for the analysis of Hmong myths, Tapp argues that the veracity of historical facts depicted in the myth is not a main issue, but “[w]hat is important is how the present-day Hmong *experience* their past history, and explain their *current* situation of the deprivation of power, literacy, and territory” (1989:175, emphasis is in original text). Following Tapp, we may say that those Lahu myths which have significance to their present are ones which share common theme with the Lahu everyday narratives on their inferiority. Among so many Lahu myths, those which are especially significant to their present social experience may be: (1) stories of the loss of writing, (2) stories of the loss of “the Lahu country”, (3) stories of the loss of right to rule, and (4) stories of the people’s wandering and scattering. As I am to discuss in more detail below, the first two have much reference to their discourse about “wisdom” (*cu yi*) and “the Lahu country” (*Lahu mvuh mi*), while the latter two seem to serve as culturally specific background knowledge for these narratives. All four myths are eventually concerned with prosperity and decline of the Lahu people and present us a picture of their ethnic consciousness.

4. Important Themes in Lahu Mythology

I will here review briefly the myths (2), (3) and (4) for the preparation to discuss more extensively about the myth (1) and its equivalent in the everyday narratives in the following sections.

(a) Story of the Loss of Right to Rule

Long ago *G'ui sha* called the peoples and said that He would give the seal of the ruler (*cu yi*)⁴⁶. *G'ui sha* said, "Early tomorrow morning, everybody, look under your chair! The people who are to be the master will find the seal of the ruler under their chair." Next morning, all peoples looked under their chair and found the seal of the ruler under the chair of the Lahu. Therefore, the Lahu was the master of all peoples. Then all peoples were servants of the Lahu master. The Shan were cunning, men did not work as servants and let girls wear coarsely woven clothes and work as servants. When a Shan girl served food and drinks for the Lahu master, he nudged her round breast with his elbow and she cried hard. Whatever the Lahu master brought to her, the Shan girl did not want nor would she listen to him. Finally, the Lahu master asked, "What do you want?" and the Shan girl answered, "Give me the seal". Because the Lahu master gave away the seal, the Lahu was no longer master. Until today it has been said that the Lahu master gave away the seal of the ruler conferred by *G'ui sha* in exchange for touching the breast of the Shan girl. Since that day the Shan have been master. That is why today the Lahu are servants of others. (abridged translation of the story in Kya-Leh 1994:6-7)

(b) Story of the Loss of "the Lahu Country"

Long ago there was a Lahu country. It was called *Mvuh Meh Mi Meh* and was in China. The Chinese ruler was called *Po U Lu*. The Chinese came to take the country by force. The Lahu and Chinese fought and the Lahu won. The Chinese escaped, escaped very far, into a big mountain, into a cave. The Lahu could not attack them. The Chinese lived in the cave for as long as three years and six months⁴⁷. The Lahu waited for as long as three years and six months, but the Chinese did not come out. The Lahu could not wait any more. Wondering whether the Chinese were already dead, the Lahu could not guard any more. The Lahu had nine⁴⁸ baskets of quivers for arrows (*hka hpui*)

and nine winnow baskets of crossbow triggers (*hka le*). The Lahu set up seven traps, thinking that if the Chinese came out, they would be killed by the traps. Then the Lahu went searching food in the forest. The Lahu went hunting, went catching fish. In the meanwhile, seven Lahu girls came and eavesdropped on and looked at the Chinese in secret. The Chinese were making Jew's harps (*a hta*) and gourd pipes (*naw*). The Chinese played the gourd pipes very beautifully. The Chinese played the Jew's harps very beautifully. The Lahu girls were infatuated. The Chinese said, "Here, we'll give you" and the seven Lahu girls went to take the harps and pipes. The first girl went and was killed by a trap. The second went and was killed by a trap. The third went and was killed by a trap. Finally, the seven girls were all killed. Then the Chinese could come out. The Chinese went into the residence of king *Po U Lu*, into *Mvuh Meh Mi Meh*, into the town, which was probably as big as an *amphue*⁴⁹ today. The Chinese took the Lahu's nine baskets of quivers for arrows and nine winnow baskets of crossbow triggers, assembled crossbows, and shot and expelled the Lahu. As the Chinese shot and expelled the Lahu, the Lahu lost the country. The Lahu don't have and won't get it. The Lahu fled faraway. The Chinese took this country. That is why today the Lahu have no country. The Lahu do not have a country...⁵⁰ (abridged translation of the story told by an elder in the study village in July 1997)

(c) Stories of the Wandering and Scattering of the Lahu People

Stories told by Yo han in his booklet (1976) depict similar stories of Lahu loss of mastership and country. He continues:

Therefore, the Lahu, without a ruler nor a country any more, are now fleeing and wandering around. (Yo han 1976:5).

The Lahu fled southward and built a new country. They prospered and had several rulers again. But, again, when the Lahu were attacked and defeated by the Chinese, they fled further southward and arrived in an area called *Mvuh Meh Mi Meh*.

Because the area *Mvuh Meh Mi Meh* had fertile land, by farming the Lahu had enough food and became better-off. The Chinese did not come to disturb the Lahu any more. However, the Lahu themselves could not live in harmony and split up. It is said, due to conflicts over distribution of sambar deer and porcupine flesh, the elder brother and the younger sister groups split up⁵¹. After splitting up like this, the Lahu moved southward and scattered to live diverse places in Burma, Thailand, and Laos. (Yo han 1976:3)

5. Myth of the Loss of Writing

The following is a Christian Lahu version:

Long ago, *G'ui sha* called, "All peoples, come to me. I will give letters to you all." Because *G'ui sha* said so, all peoples went to Him. But the Chinese did not go. When *G'ui sha* gave letters to the peoples, He wrote them on rice cakes for the Lahu. He wrote on dried skins for the Akha. He wrote on palm leaves for the Shan. Because *G'ui sha* wrote on rice cakes, the Lahu said, "If we leave them like that, they will soon disappear. If we eat them and store them in the belly, they will not disappear. We will remember in the heart" and so they ate them up. That is why the Lahu do not have letters. But, note that some of the stories, which [pre-Christian] priests (*paw hku*) recalled in their heart and told out, accord with what the Bible says. Because *G'ui sha* wrote on dried skins for the Akha, they do not have letters,

either. That is because they grilled and ate them. Because the Chinese did not go when *G'ui sha* gave letters [to other peoples], they went to ask *G'ui sha* for letters in a later day. *G'ui sha* said, "Early tomorrow morning, I will send a crow to you." The next morning a white crow came to the Chinese living place. The crow landed on the rice threshing floor where rice straws had been burnt and *G'ui sha* let the Chinese write after the way the crow scratched the rice straws. That is why today Chinese letters are like figures of a crow's scratch. Because the Lahu and the Akha do not have letters, they borrow the letters of the White people and use them. (Kya-Leh 1994:5)

The Lahu myths are concerned about their own inferiority, powerlessness, and backwardness, which may well be a reflection of their negative self-consciousness as an ethnic minority group. Their inferiority, powerlessness, and backwardness are always told in comparison with such hill dwelling majority groups as the Chinese and the Shan. The Lahu, as an ethnic minority, are well aware of the existence of powerful majority neighbors, for the myths depict ethnic relations, particularly rivalry between the Lahu and the majority groups boasting high "civilization". The Lahu sense of inferiority, powerlessness, and backwardness is due to their lack of good things which their powerful valley dwelling neighbors possess, such as writing, right to rule, countries and wet rice farming system. In this sense, like the Hmong, the Lahu "define their own ethnic identity by contrast with that of the Chinese [and the Shan in the Lahu case] through a series of negatives: the *absence* of writing, the *absence* of rulers, the *absence* of land, or states" (Tapp 1989:126, emphasis is in original text). Lahu ethnic identity colored with their negative consciousness has been elaborated through a long history, in

which the Lahu have always been faced with powerful valley dwellers.

However, Lahu ethnic consciousness is not one-sided, but, like the Karen, they "define themselves vis-a-vis the valley dwellers with a mixture of admiration and distrust, pride and inferiority" (Hayami 1992:49). Despite their present deprivations, the Lahu feel themselves potentially equal to the majority groups if what they lost long ago are brought back. Moreover, the myths structurally leave room for the Lahu to hope for a possible *return* of the good things that they allegedly lost long ago.

G'ui sha, the creator god and the highest being in Lahu mythology, often shows more favor to the Lahu than to other peoples. For example, in the myth of loss of right to rule, *G'ui sha* conferred the seal of the master to the Lahu and let them rule other peoples. In another story, in which *G'ui sha* let the Lahu and the Shan choose land, the priority was given to the Lahu. Although the Lahu chose first, they took the highland, leaving the plains in the hands of the Shan⁵². Many stories depict that the Lahu were long ago in better condition, for example, possessing the right to rule and their own country, or, at least, the blessings of *G'ui sha*. The Lahu lost all the good things with which *G'ui sha* endowed them due to thoughtlessness, carelessness, stupidity, and lack of "wisdom". Although *G'ui sha* favored the Lahu, the other peoples (the Chinese and the Shan) were cunning and aggressive, and took the good things from the Lahu. The Lahu are described as thoughtless, careless, and a little foolish but never evil-minded. They are brave hunters, but so good-natured and simple minded as to be easily cheated and deprived of their weapons. The Lahu in myths are so characterized as to make the Lahu

themselves feel that, although they are not able to see or hear him, *G'ui sha* is still on their side.

In the Lahu myths, ethnic minorities and majority groups are contrasted and are attributed opposing natures. The Lahu define their present predicaments by the absence of good things which the majority groups possess. But, in deeper analogy, the absence is not perceived as eternal. Literacy and right to rule are described as if they were transferable goods. That the Lahu once possessed these good things endorses their hope that they have potential to regain them. Due to thoughtlessness and carelessness in the very beginnings of the world, the Lahu lost these good things. They have regretful feelings for the loss, but the loss is seen as restorable as far as thoughtfulness and carelessness are perceived to be rather trivial, innocent, and adjustable deficiencies. The attribution of present predicaments to initial thoughtlessness and carelessness, as well as a pride in their own morality, leads to an argument, which is, in fact, popular among Christian Lahu, that if they "seek wisdom" or study well and have "wisdom", one day the Lahu people will regain the lost good things and prosper again as they once did. (Kya-Leh 1994:20-21)

In the Lahu myths, natures of ethnic minority and majority groups are characterized by a series of contrasts. The Lahu are thoughtless and careless but innocent and moral, while the Chinese and the Shan have "wisdom" but are aggressive and cunning. These majority groups always "bend the wisdom" (*cu yi k'aw-eh ve*) or use tricks in order to take all the good things that the Lahu were originally entitled to. The myths are stories projected in the primeval time and, with its ahistorical nature (Levi-Strauss 1969), the morality of the Lahu and evil of the others are described as their inherent and changeless natures.

Thus, there is another possibility to explain the Lahu present deprivations, namely, blaming the cunning and aggression of the majority groups, while justifying themselves for their innocence. The attribution of Lahu's present plight to the evil of their majority neighbors, rather than their own thoughtlessness, eventually leads to rebellious thoughts against the existing political structure, for the restoration of the lost good things is, in this case, not up to their endeavors to "seek wisdom" but to the expulsion of the evil others.

In any case, the Lahu myths have a millenarian nature. Regardless of whether they decide that the eventual cause of their present subordination is their own initial thoughtlessness or the evil of their majority neighbors, the myths leave room for them to expect a possible return of the good things taken away from them long ago. All the Lahu myths related above describe the decline of the people, but are, at a more fundamental level, concerned with their possible prosperity in the future. The Lahu may seek a moral lesson and conclusion from the myths in order to find a way to improve their condition.

I think that all the Lahu villagers in my field site are aware of their inferiority to other peoples and, in this sense, are more or less concerned about possible prosperity of the people. There are two ideal alternatives for villagers: (1) giving a good education to their children, or (2) fighting the Burmese army for political power and autonomy. These are ideal-types and actually most villagers are located somewhere between these two poles. But, we may see inclinations of the villagers to either of these poles. In my field site, the two alternative directions of life are represented by that of the village pastor, who tries hard to give a good education to his children and

repeatedly tell the villagers to keep the Thai law, and that of one villager, who repeats, "the Burman are bad" and are working for the Lahu independence movement.

But, before we explore this issue further, I will briefly examine the difference between variants of the *same* myths of the loss of writing. The structure of the myth has in itself room allowing for different interpretations and manipulation. The different interpretations of the myth inform, and, at the same time, reflect the different ideals to which Lahu lives are directed.

6. Differences among Variants

When we turn our eyes from the constant structure among different versions of the *same* myths to the differences among the variants, we may find some parts of the story particularly vulnerable to manipulation and different interpretations. Manipulation and different interpretations are enabled by omitting or adding the parts and/or shifting the stress from/on the parts (see Leach 1964). In the Lahu myth of the loss of writing, the part which depicts the hungry Lahu eating up the rice cake on which *G'ui sha* conferred letters provides a good example:

Because *G'ui sha* wrote on rice cakes, the Lahu said, "If we leave them like that, they will soon disappear. If we eat them and store them in the belly, they will not disappear. We will remember in the heart" and so they ate them up. (Kya-Leh 1994:5)

One day in my field site, Sa La Ma (the village pastor's wife) and I were reading this story. While she finished reading the above part and sighed for the stupidity of the Lahu, I was

rather impressed by a humor of the excuse made by the Lahu. I thought that a stupid man could not have such a sense of humor.

The book by Kya-Leh, which is the source of the above myth, has morals (*tawn tu*) attached to the story (1994:6). After writing, "Because they ate up, the Lahu and Akha do not have letters", Kya-Leh warns against the Lahu traditional religion and thoughtlessness. Citing Colossians 2:21-23 of the New Testament, Kya-Leh impeaches the traditional Lahu belief as only "human commands and teachings", not those of God (Colossians 2:22). Further, he cites Hebrews 12:15-17 and compares the Lahu to "Essau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights".

In another variant I collected in my field site, the Lahu also became very hungry and grilled the rice cakes and ate them, saying, "I will remember by heart". The story continues:

That is why the Lahu, regardless of *Lahu Nyi* or not, or of what Lahu, said, "I will remember by heart", and, even when they prayed, used only memory. The Lahu had become like this and *G'ui sha* was not pleased. Because *G'ui sha* was not pleased, the Lahu sought a blessing again... (story told by an elder in the study village in July 1997)

This storyteller also spoke negatively of the hungry Lahu eating up the letters and chanting prayers by improvisation, which is said to have dissatisfied *G'ui sha*.

The above two Christian versions describe the stupidity and arrogance of the Lahu who ate up the divine letters and chanted prayers in their own human way, because, for Christian Lahu, the absolute Truth is written in the Bible. On the other hand, however, their denial of prayer by improvisation makes us infer

an extent to which the pre-Christian Lahu were prosperous in oral tradition. Still today, among non-Christian Red Lahu, who are generally not literate in Lahu, religious priests chant sacred words in poetic style and by improvisation. They also have an unwritten set of "teachings of the elders" (*chaw maw hkaw*), to which their customs and law, which regulate their everyday lives, are centered. For Christian and non-Christian Lahu, truth and wisdom are kept in different forms; written in the book for the former, while memorized and improvised in the heart by the latter.

In the following example from a Thai source with an interesting comment of the recorder, we see that the myth is used by non-Christian Lahu to talk back to a *Khon Muang* or Central Thai, the Lahu's "oppressor" neighbors in Thailand.

Once again, *G'ui sha* called the ancestors of all peoples to Him in order to give precepts concerning letters and knowledge. All other peoples went up [to *G'ui sha*] before the Lahu. *G'ui sha* gave diverse knowledge and culture to them by writing on paper made of mulberry. The ancestor of the Lahu were the last one who went up [to *G'ui sha*] like in the previous times. *G'ui sha* saw the Lahu ready to receive letters and knowledge, yet the paper made of mulberry had just been used up. *G'ui sha* therefore grabbed rice cakes (pounded sticky rice with sesame) and wrote letters and knowledge on them and gave to the Lahu. During the trip back to the village, the Lahu got hungry and forgot himself, and ate them up.

Using this parable story for an excuse, the Lahu tend to say that they do not have to learn letters and knowledge and that they know them without learning because letters and knowledge are in their belly. For example, they can speak Northern Thai without learning, while *Khon Muang* have to learn Lahu to be able to speak it. This parable may refer to the subject of formal

education, too. We can observe that, in Lahu villages with schools, there are few children who really want to study (except Lahu who are Christian). (Tribal Research Center 1976:4)

Here, at least in its face value, the Lahu are defined as clever in the heart and even cleverer than *Khon Muang*. The same myth of the loss of writing presents a positive picture of the Lahu people by avoiding accepting the authority of wisdom in written form. Like the Akha version of the myth, it suggests that the Lahu might themselves have chosen to eat the divine letters to become clever in oral tradition. The Lahu here seem more content with what they have.

Returning to the Christian version, it is interesting that the speakers seem aware of the power of the Lahu oral tradition. Although the myth generally reflects a negative self-definition due to the absence of writing, it also suggests how successful the Lahu prayers by improvisation once were. If the story were only concerned with Lahu inferiority, it could have simply omitted the part describing the prayers by improvisation, for the omission would not change the general development of the story. It looks as if the narrator is conscious of their own oral tradition, which, however, must be denied by and subjugated to the authority of wisdom in writing, as we may see in the comment in Kya-Leh's version: "But, note that some of the stories, which [pre-Christian] priests (*paw hku*) recalled in the heart and told out, accord with what the Bible says" (Kya-Leh 1994:5).

Actually, I still think that the main theme of the Lahu myth of the loss of writing is the consciousness of their own inferiority. At least in the increasing marginalization of the Lahu people today, few really believe that the Lahu were

superior to *Khon Muang* in wisdom. Even the above non-Christian Lahu speaker arguing for their cleverness in the heart may simply have used the myth to talk back to civil servants who stressed the importance of education. However, what I want to note here is that, within the general framework of the myth which is directed to talk about the Lahu inferiority, there is still room for manipulation and different interpretation in order to present more positive picture of the Lahu people. The more positive self-definition of the people is enabled by avoiding accepting the values of other peoples, many of which, such as the superiority of wisdom in written form, are highly valued in modern societies.

7. Everyday Narratives of "Wisdom"

One of the expressions which I often heard among Christian Lahu, both in my field site and other Christian communities outside the village, is *cu yi caw ve*, which may be translated "[He/She] has wisdom". This expression is, however, much less frequently heard from non-Christian Red Lahu. While *caw ve* can be translated in English "to have", we cannot find a single English word to cover wide meanings of *cu yi*. The Lahu-English-Thai Dictionary by Reverend Paul Lewis, who has long worked with the Lahu people, gives three English words, "wisdom", "intelligence" and "education" (Lewis 1986:94), and another possible translation is "knowledge"⁵³. However, when Lahu speak of *cu yi*, it more often implies all of the above four meanings at the same time than any particular one of them. *Cu yi* seems to denote a condition in which "wisdom", "intelligence", "education", and "knowledge" are inseparably dissolved.

A similar expression is *li shi ve*, which is also broadly

translated “[He/She] has wisdom”. But this translation makes one oversee its etymological meaning and an important implication of the phrase, because *li* and *shi ve* means “letter (s)/book(s)” and “to know”, respectively, so that the literal translation will be “[He/She] knows letters/books” or “[He/She] is literate”.

Still another expression which may be translated “[He/She] has wisdom” is *daw hk’a can ve*. Again according to Lewis, *daw hk’a* is “thoughts, ideas, opinion, plan” (Lewis 1986:107). *Daw hk’a pi pa*, literally “thoughts giver” means “adviser”.

In the study village, I was mainly addressed as *a ca* which is borrowed from a Thai word *acan*, meaning a university teacher. As I was afraid to be kept at a distance from villagers by such form of address, I several times mentioned my wish to be called by my Lahu name rather than *a ca*, yet without much success. An explanation of Sa La (the village pastor) was that, for the Lahu, a person with a degree is *a ca*. On one afternoon, I was talking with villagers in an outside place near a house. Then the house owner’s wife brought me a small low wooden chair and a glass of water. When I asked her why she did it and why only for me, her answer was, “You are *sa la lon* (‘great teacher’)”. When then I said that I was not *sa la* (“teacher”) but a student, because I do not teach”, her reply was, “You ‘know letters/books’ (*li shi ve*). We don’t know.” That was why I must be treated well.

However, the above expressions are used much more frequently in negative forms. They are also used for explaining great many matters ranging from one’s bad behavior, mistakes, poverty to the problems of the Lahu people in general. For example, an incident when a village youth had bought a motorcycle but failed to pay installment and lost ownership is

attributed to his thoughtlessness (*daw hk'a ma caw*). The existence of many problems in the village is, according to Sa La Ma, because of the villagers "not knowing letters/books" and lack of *cu yi*. That the Lahu people do not prosper and do not have their own country, while the other peoples have countries, was once attributed by a group of the villagers to the Lahu's lack of *cu yi*. Their frequent usage, wide coverage, and capacity to allow reductionist reasoning characterize the Lahu expressions concerning *cu yi*.

Another feature of typical Christian Lahu discourse about *cu yi* is that the above expressions are most frequently heard from people in the middle social stratum. By "stratum" I do not mean strictly defined class in Marxist terms, but rather a classification I use for convenience. In Christian Lahu society, there is a group of people who are well educated, work for the Lahu church and related institutions with a stable salary, and live in Chiang Mai City. They and their families may be seen as belonging to the high social stratum. Village pastors, and some others living in villages, who are better educated, are literate, and have stronger faith in Christianity, form the middle social stratum. The others belong to the low stratum. People in the middle stratum speak most frequently about *cu yi* and seem to believe what they say about *cu yi*.

When I heard these above expressions about *cu yi*, I wondered if the Lahu did not clarify the difference between "knowledge" as obtained from books and schools and "wisdom" as acquired from long life experience, two different concepts in English. This may have to do with long Christian presence among the Lahu people.

In 1911, Antidel, an American Baptist missionary, referred to the Lahu myth of the loss of writing as well as many

millenarian leaders who had appeared to claim themselves to be God and made prophecies of the return of the lost writing and political supremacy to the Lahu (1911:34-35). It is, therefore, reasonable to think that when William M. Young, the first American Baptist missionary to contact Lahu in Burma, appeared and taught Christianity in 1901, Lahu had already had the myth of *loss* of writing and traditions of *return* prophecies. The Christian mission in the initial period, intentionally or unintentionally, benefited from the Lahu myth and prophecies.

In the era which followed, while the two sons of William M. Young still gave priority of the mission work to evangelism, other missionaries including Paul and Elaine Lewis stressed educational and literacy work. The missionaries developed romanized Lahu script, established schools, and offered medical services in the mountain area in a time when the central government service could not always meet the people's needs. The church also provided a large, centralized, and rational organization to the Lahu who had traditionally few contacts beyond the village level. Behind these missionary works lay their philosophy to improve the Lahu standard of living, train future indigenous leaders, and help them to be able to support themselves in the future. The underlying goal was the "development" or "civilization"⁵⁴ of the Lahu people.

Today, Christian Lahu in Thailand, most of whom are immigrants from Burma, form the Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention (TLBC), an indigenous church organization, which, in turn, belongs to the Church of Christ in Thailand (CCT), the nation-wide Protestant organization. TLBC spreads Christianity to non-Christian Lahu, runs dormitories to provide children with access to better education, and oversees development projects including the building of irrigation

systems in hill areas. Although the church still depends heavily on financial aid from abroad, native Lahu now have the initiative in management. The church provides Christian Lahu with organization, social network, and material benefits, which non-Christian Lahu generally lack. The church provides many means for its members to better adapt to modern Thai society.

Now nearly a hundred years have passed since the Lahu first encountered Christianity and the religion seems to have already been internalized in the culture of Christian Lahu. In their view, the Lahu had had to for a long time wander until they finally met the true God. Many Christian Lahu understand the advent of Christianity as the fulfillment of a prophecy of the coming of a savior and, in their conceptions, there is hardly any inconsistency between the Lahu tradition and Christianity as the new religion of foreign origin. But the *return* of good things is still to come. Mainstream discourse among Christian Lahu tells the people to "let their children study well" for the Lahu people to prosper and restore "the Lahu country" (Kya-Leh 1994:20-21).

Christianity also brought about significant changes in values and social structure. For example, in the course of civilizing project engineered by the church, which included development of formal education and Lahu literacy, a class of literate and educated elite Lahu has been formed in Christian Lahu society. Such a phenomenon is not found among non-Christian Lahu. At the village level, the religious leader of Christian Lahu is village pastor (*ceu cao sa la*), a position whose minimum requirements may be defined as Lahu literacy for reading the Bible in Lahu, higher experience of formal education, either in government schools or Bible institutes, and musical ability for teaching hymns⁵⁵. Moreover, in Thailand

today, people who have not finished Lahu or Thai Bible institutes find it increasingly difficult to become pastors. On the other hand, qualifications of religious priest of non-Christian Red Lahu (*to bo*) are ethical rightness, skill in chanting poetic payers, and knowledge of "teachings of the ancestors" (*chaw maw hkaw*) to which their customs are centered. Non-Christian Red Lahu shamans (*ta la* and *ka shaw ma*) are people who were chosen by *G'ui sha* and have to observe moral and dietal precepts. While the Christian pastors need to have qualifications which are valued in modern societies such as literacy and formal education, non-Christian Red Lahu religious leaders are required to have traditional qualifications and skills in oral tradition. There are young Christian village pastors, but it is very difficult for a young man to become non-Christian Red Lahu priest.

In addition to the changes in social structure within villages, civilizing project by the church has brought about changes in relationships among diverse sub-groups of the Lahu. Christian Lahu often talk pejoratively about non-Christian Lahu, such as, "They do not know the true God yet, do not have *cu yi* nor know 'letters/books'." Although there are now many Christians among Red Lahu, "Red Lahu" is frequently used as pronoun for "heathen". Worse than Red Lahu is Lahu Shehle, who are said to be "the most dirty and backward" of the Lahu. As a response, many revitalization and reconstruction movements of "tradition" have emerged from non-Christian Lahu groups. (see Sombat 1997)

Interestingly, the above phrase "they ... do not have *cu yi* nor know 'letters/books'" (*cu yi ma caw, li ma shi*) may be substituted by simply saying, "They do 'not know letters/books'", because, for Christian Lahu, "not knowing

letters/books” always means “not knowing *cu yi*”. In my field site, when the villagers talk about *cu yi*, it implicitly assumes a higher level of education, probably from college level upward, while “knowing letters/books” implies some level of education enough to be literate, generally from elementary or junior-high school graduation upward. Therefore, while there are many people knowing some “letters/books” but do not have *cu yi*, people with *cu yi* always know “letters/books”. In other words, “knowing letters/books” is a prerequisite to be a man with *cu yi*. I have never heard them say, for instance, “Although he has no education and, as a result, does not know letters/books, the man has *cu yi* from his life experience” (to translate in Lahu: *Yaw li ma shi ve htaw, cu yi caw ve*).

Again, Antisdell reported in 1911 that before the Lahu’s encounter with Christianity there had been a series of prophets who predicted the return of the lost writing as well as political supremacy (Antisdell 1911:34-35). It is reasonable to infer that the Lahu had been well aware of their lack of literacy and political power and that some kind of *loss* myths, at least the myth of the loss of writing, had already been formed before they came into contact with Christianity. Then, the civilizing project of the church, which laid stress on formal education and literacy, have served to strengthen and reproduce their already existed negative definition of the Lahu people in terms of absence of *cu yi*. This civilizing project helped Christian Lahu better adapt to modern society, while their traditional customs and religious beliefs centered to oral tradition has been discounted. Like the Karen, “willingness to listen to or adopt leaders and practices from the outside” (Hayami 1992:50) is observed both among Christian and non-Christian Lahu. But a typically Christian Lahu attitude is that, while they see the non-

Christian Lahu as lower and less developed than themselves, Christian Lahu more easily accept the authority of such "savior" outsiders as westerners, Koreans, and Japanese. Then they talk about themselves saying, "The Lahu do not know letters/books, do not have *cu yi*".

That such narratives about their lack of *cu yi* are most frequently heard from the Lahu in the middle social stratum I attribute to the fact that while this group are less wealthy, educated, adapted and exposed to outside societies than people in the high stratum, they are by comparison more literate, educated, and disciplined by government and/or church educational institutes than those who are in the low stratum. They are more conscious of *cu yi*, but are considered both by others and themselves to "know letters/books" but not to have *cu yi*.

Among the Christian Lahu, "wisdom" and "knowledge", the two different concepts in English, are not clearly differentiated. They value "knowledge" from modern education, and generally equate it with "wisdom". A man of "wisdom" must have education. However, this is not a static ethnic character but rather a product of their long-term experience with Christianity, which has strengthened their initial negative consciousness in terms of the absence of writing.

Interestingly, however, their conceptions and discourses about *cu yi* have some distance from reality, as the Lahu, in fact, have extensive knowledge in such areas as herbal medicine and agriculture. When villagers are sick and injured, first-aid is made by their traditional treatments (herbal medicine, massage, and pinch curing [*sha tguh ve/suh tguh ve*]⁵⁶) as well as taking paracetamol pills, if available. These

traditional treatments are, however, not valued nor spoken of in the Christian Lahu mainstream discourse. Also in the area of agriculture, many villagers still conduct their traditional swidden farming without chemical inputs despite the strict restrictions by the government and lack of access to cultivatable land. During many months of the year when villagers have to buy and consume industrial variety rice, they complain of its bad quality and the danger of chemical inputs. In both above cases, advantages of these traditional methods (though not miraculous) are not valued, but often the continued use of these methods itself symbolizes Lahu's backwardness and poverty. Unlike the cases of Thai and Karen farmers, Lahu traditional knowledge and methods are not yet discovered or (re)defined by themselves nor outsiders as "indigenous knowledge"⁵⁷. To date, a concept of "wisdom" in non-written form cannot find its place in the formal mainstream Christian Lahu discourses.

8. Offstage Narratives of Ordinary Villagers

Although in the Christian Lahu dominant narratives *cu yi* in forms other than writing has been marginalized there is still room left for "resistance" (Scott 1985). Villagers, however, do not resist the dominant discourse head on, but rather use an indirect strategy. As I lived in the village and my comprehension of Lahu improved, the villagers came to my house "for visiting" (*gui la ve*) and to talk over tea. Often there were not many people and, in the absence of the village pastor and others in higher position, our conversation became more casual and like intimate talks. On such occasions, villagers sometimes talked with implications which went against their formal mainstream discourse of *cu yi*. Resistance is made

offstage.

One method of resistance is putting stress on *cu yi* “in the heart” as opposed to one “in books”. Once a villager said that he knew many languages, although he did not “know letters/books”. Lahu language differentiates spoken languages (*aw hkaw*) and written ones (*li*) and the multilingualism stressed in the offstage narratives denote the ability to speak many languages. This method may be more effective than it seems, because it is observed that well-educated Lahu immigrants from Burma sometimes have difficulty in mastering Central and Northern Thai languages, while poorly literate people are quick to learn to speak various languages⁵⁸.

Another strategy is to define *cu yi* as inherently wicked. Like the Chinese and the Shan in the Lahu myths, the offstage discourse often says that people with *cu yi* use sophism. They say, for example, “Actually they do not mean what they say. They just pretend and say so, because they have *cu yi*, don’t they?”. The people with *cu yi* are described to “have a curved mind” (*nyi ma k’aw ve*), while people without *cu yi* are implied to “have a straight mind” (*nyi ma hte ve*). Behind such expressions of villagers, there exists their feeling and perception of the world as absurd and incomprehensible. While ordinary Lahu villagers have to work hard with only a small return barely to sustain their living and often suffer from natural disasters and fluctuations of market prices, people with *cu yi* are “salary eaters” (*ha pa hpfu h ca pa*) who do not have to use their physical labor and receive a higher and stable income. Villagers sometimes speak in a manner which says that work done by using *cu yi*, like pastors’ work, is light work and that they also like to do such work only if they “knew letters/books”. Mainstream Christian Lahu narratives repeat

that the eventual cause of all problems is the absence of *cu yi* and tells people to "seek wisdom". But villagers do not really understand nor accept this explanation, even though they themselves parrot this discourse. Mixed with envy, villagers see people with *cu yi*, who earn much money without doing hard work, as inherently evil and wicked.

The third form of resistance stresses ability to work in the field and typical expressions are "[they] cannot work [in the field]" (*kan ma te pui ve*), "[they] cannot go to the forest" (*heh pui hk'aw ma k'ai pui ve*), and "[they] fear evil spirits" (*hpi kaw ve*). Village life is full of such hard work as farming, gathering food from the field and forest, cutting and carrying banana trees for feeding pigs, and gathering and cutting wood for fuel, labor done by all family members. Children over the age of ten or so are expected to contribute to family labor, but students often fail to fulfill this expectation and are said to "spend money instead of earning it" because of high educational fees. Often people with better education are less able to work in the field for they spend much time in study. In the offstage narratives, students and educated people are criticized that "they cannot go to the forest". In this context, the "forest" (*heh pui hk'aw*) denotes an area comprising both of highland farms and jungles. As the Lahu themselves talk that "the Lahu only live in the forest" (*Lahu heh pui hk'aw ti cheh ve*) and that "the Lahu are wild rats, the Lahu are monkeys" (*Lahu fa, Lahu maw*), the "forest" symbolizes wildness and savageness, opposed to the civilization of the "city" (*meu hk'aw/ven hk'aw*). However, behind such apparently negative self-definition as savage, the Lahu are also proud of their good skills in working in the "forest". The "forest" is full of dangers, uncertainty, and evil spirits. One has to be experienced and

brave to be able to "go to the forest". When they ambiguously define themselves as savage but skilled in working in the forest, villagers regard the "forest" as their territory. When they criticize Lahu who are educated but unable to work in the field, the implication is that they are distant from the original Lahu place.

In analyzing the myths, I have argued that Lahu define themselves ambiguously as thoughtless but innocent in contrast to the Chinese and the Shan who are wise but evil-minded. While Lahu are aware of their inferiority, they are, at the same time, proud of their morality. In the offstage discourse, the Lahu in the low social stratum use similar logic. They distance themselves from people with *cu yi* and define themselves in contrast to the latter. They themselves are clever "in the heart", tied to their original territory, and simple-minded, while the people with *cu yi* are good at written tradition, distant from their original home, and use *cu yi* for sophism.

As we can see from the fact that most village children drop out before finishing elementary education, the mainstream discourse, which stresses the importance of *cu yi* for development of the people, has only limited success. The villagers' excuses are that they have no money to let their children go to school and that their children are foolish and not worth the expense of schooling. However, once offstage, people conduct resistance to the mainstream discourse in a low voice. Although unequal in their powers, the contest of dominant Christian Lahu discourse triggered by the church's civilizing project and the offstage narratives by ordinary villagers is reproducing their ambiguous ethnic consciousness comprised both of pride and inferiority.

9. Summary

Lahu people, both Christian and non-Christian, have a peculiar form of narratives which negatively speak of the nature of their own people. These *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority*, are not a static ethnic character but have been formed in a long history of ethnic power relations, in which the Lahu have always had to face overwhelming powers of majority lowland peoples. The *Lahu narratives of inferiority* show that an abstract concept "the Lahu people" is objectified, and lowlanders' negative views on the Lahu people are internalized (through interpretations) by the people themselves. The consciousness of their weakness and deprivation in comparison with these powerful ethnic neighbors is the main motif of Lahu ethnic identity reflected in their narratives on self. However, despite the apparently negative self-definition, the Lahu also perceive themselves as moral and good-minded in contrast to the wickedness of powerful majority peoples. These two contradicting self-definitions constitute an ambivalent feeling of Lahu social experience.

One of the *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority* is concerned with "wisdom", which is more frequently heard among Christians than non-Christians. According to Lahu myth, their present predicaments are the result of initial thoughtlessness of their ancestors as well as persecution by the evil lowlanders. Then, the long-time civilizing project of the Christian church, which stressed formal education and literacy, have reproduced and strengthened Christian Lahu's negative self-definition in terms of absence of "wisdom" in written form. Today, in the Christian Lahu conception, "knowledge" (gained from books and education) has become equated with "wisdom" (acquired from long experience of life), and

dominant narratives tell people to “seek wisdom” in order for the Lahu people to prosper again. Although “wisdom” in non-written form has already been marginalized in the Christian Lahu mainstream discourse, ordinary people recount offstage narratives, in which they stress values other than “wisdom” in written form, values which they feel are originally Lahu. Lahu ambivalent feeling comprised both of negative and positive self-definitions is thus reproduced by the contest of Christian Lahu mainstream discourse and offstage resistance.

Chapter 5: Narratives of “the Lahu Country”

Why do we Lahu people, generation after generation, live only on the mountains and not on fertile plains?

Is it because we chose the deer on the day *G'ui sha* let us choose a deer or a horse?⁵⁹

Is it because we chose fire on the day *G'ui sha* let us choose fire or water?⁶⁰

They say, this is why we came to live on the mountains.

Are the tales true?

Today we are people without a country.

Because today we don't have a country, we cannot do without “wisdom”,

If we don't have money, we don't see a way to be comfortable in our life.

We really need to live “in harmony”.

Those who have opportunity to “seek wisdom”, “seek wisdom” well!

Those who can earn money, earn money!

Be “in harmony” and help each other!

Make the Lahu people prosper!

Why do we Lahu people, generation after generation, live only on the mountains and not on fertile plains?

They say, we live on the mountains, because we were afraid of malaria.⁶¹

When we think well, this is quite a wrong idea.

They attacked and expelled our ancestors, who therefore took their wives and children and split into the mountains.

It's hard living on the mountains.
Today we are people without a country.

(a Lahu popular song, singer and title unknown)⁶³

1. Narratives of “the Lahu Country”

One day in the study village, Eh Suh Ma, the wife of the leader of the rivalry faction to which I was closer, came to my house “for visiting” (*gui la ve*). This was her first “visiting” and she probably had an intention to sound out my position and, if possible, to draw me, an outsider in the village, closer to their faction. This is why she repeatedly referred to the “disharmony” in her nearly two hours’ talk. I wrote in my field journal (19th July 1997):

Eh Suh Ma talked mainly about the fact that the Lahu were everywhere and also in this village “*ma caw ma haw da*” [in disharmony]. She said, “Long ago there had been ‘*Lahu mvuh mi*’ [‘the Lahu country’] in China, but the Lahu were deceived and the Chinese took away the ‘*mvuh mi*’ [country]. Since then, the Lahu have lived in ‘others’ countries’ (‘*shu mvuh mi cheh ve*’) and do not have ‘*cu yi ma yi*’ [wisdom].” She said that this was the “fulfillment” of what was predicted in the Bible. Fulfillment of the prediction that “*ne hai sa tan*” [devils] will thrive as the time comes closer to the year 2000. Referring to Ca Ye who had told me that the Lahu would gain “*Lahu mvuh mi*” in 2000. I asked her if she thought this to be true, but she did not. “The Lahu still lack *cu yi* and ‘*ma haw da*’ [in disharmony] and will not unite and acquire a ‘*mvuh mi*’.” She said that the Lahu were the same everywhere and were “*ma caw ma haw da*”.

Interestingly, Eh Suh Ma did not directly mention the intra-village conflicts, the main issue of her talk, but talked indirectly by using such key terms from Lahu myths as “wisdom”, “(dis)harmony”, and “the Lahu country”. Because the above conversation, which is made mostly of key words

from Lahu myth, make sense to insiders, these key terms are culturally specific expressions, like place names for Ilongot people (Rosaldo 1980, 1986). These are cultural idioms referring to their shared cultural background and social memory. In everyday conversations, however, "the Lahu country" is sometimes not so explicitly expressed, but nonetheless is very often implied behind literal expressions. Other times, for example, when a conversation touched upon China by chance, villagers said that there had been "the Lahu country" but had been attacked and destroyed by the Chinese. When villagers, implicitly or explicitly, refer to "the Lahu country", references are made to the whole mythological stories of the Lahu's loss of their own country. As I discussed in the previous chapter, the myth conveys that the people were once powerful and had their own country, but due to absence of "wisdom" and "harmony" as well as cunning and persecution by other peoples, "the Lahu country" was destroyed. By means of the cultural idiom of "the Lahu country", the villagers instantly recall this collective memory. Only after I spent several months in the village and read books of Lahu old stories, in which Lahu myth of the loss of "the Lahu country" was written in more complete form than fragmented statements in everyday narratives, I began to understand implications behind the villagers' conversations, religious preaching, lyrics of some Lahu popular songs, and various other expressions. "The Lahu country" is one of the most important Christian Lahu cultural idioms, and when we understand its implications and villagers' feelings behind it, whole conversations of villagers begin to make a new sense.

But "the Lahu country" is not only concerned with the past but also with the future. As my conversation with Eh Suh Ma

shows, “the Lahu country” is hoped to be restored in the future. In the villagers’ everyday narratives there are two issues with reference to which “the Lahu country” is talked about and implied. One is the Lahu independence movement being fought in Burma, and the other is a popular Christian belief of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The Lahu independence movement originates from a non-Christian Red Lahu priest, Maw Na To bo, who had gained a large number of followers and begun to claim supernatural power, since 1950s. His army, supported by the Burmese government, had first fought Shan insurgent groups, but later turned to rebel against the Burmese. With his aging and following death around 1980 the originally highly religious movement has gradually been politically institutionalized by his son, Hpa ya Ca Ui, who now lives in Thailand and still leads the movement. Although the initiative of the movement has been held by non-Christian Red Lahu, some Christian Lahu have joined the movement. (see Lewis 1970:88, Walker 1974b, Lewis and Lewis 1984:197, Smith 1999, Lintner 1999, Sombat 1997)

There was one villager in my field site working for the independence movement and other workers and sympathizers often came to the village. The workers talked about the movement as a fight for “*prachatipatai*” (Thai term for “democracy”) and consider it as a part of the large anti-military government movements in Burma led by both Burman activists and other ethnic groups. The Lahu Party, the political unit of the Lahu independence movement, is said to be preparing a web page on the internet and a constitution of the anticipated Lahu autonomous state. I was told that they had a map which showed the division of the ethnic states after the establishment

of democracy in Burma, though they would not show me the article. The map is said to be written by Aung San Suu Kyi, and that, when democracy is established in Burma, the Lahu will also acquire their autonomous state with its capital in Mong Hsat. They understand the international politics in which diverse countries have been taking advantage of ethnic minority groups in the area as support from the sympathetic foreigners. They often say, "We fight because the Burman are bad", and attribute Lahu's present suffering to the evil others rather than their own deficiencies.

However, when I asked other villagers not involved in the movement, many of them expressed doubts about the success of the Lahu independence movement. But, interestingly, villagers do not seem completely indifferent. Because many Lahu still can go back and forth between Thailand and Burma, news and rumors of the recent fights and development of the movement are continuously exchanged among Lahu in Thailand. Some people also follow Burma politics on BBC radio news. Those who are working for the independence movement are described, positively or ironically, as people working for "building the Lahu country". A pastor from another village once encouraged an army leader, "Do well, for the people to prosper". Such an expression implicitly refers to an old prophet, legend, or "teaching of the ancestors" (*chaw maw hkaw*), which says that if the Lahu keep the *G'ui sha's* teachings, "seek wisdom", and live "in harmony", one day they will prosper again and be able to govern a very small territory. Most villagers, at least the older generation, seem more or less concerned with a possible prosperity of the Lahu people in the future, which is, in turn, symbolically expressed as a restoration of the lost Lahu country. "The Lahu country" is a

dominant symbol in Christian Lahu narratives, in which their yearning for the allegedly glorious past, awareness of the present plight, and hope for the future are stuffed in a condensed form.

In addition, the expression "the Lahu country" is blended with a Christian idea of Salvation by the establishment of the Kingdom of God in this world. One Sunday morning, Sa La Eh came to my house for "visiting" and talked about his supernatural experience. My field journal of the 20th of July 1997 reads:

After the [morning] church service, Sa La Eh came to my house and talked with me for more than two hours. He said that he had a supernatural experience [in June]. One evening when he finished his regular evening prayer, he heard God's voice, which said, "Now I will show you what the Second Coming of Jesus Christ will be like." He only heard the voice but did not see God's face. Then emerged three white clouds, which finally united into one. ... Sa La Eh said [to me] that the Second Coming of Jesus Christ was written in the Matthew, the Revelation, etc. in the Bible. When Jesus will come again is not known and beyond human prediction. Even Jesus and the Holy Spirit do not know. God only knows. ... I asked if it was AD 2000, but he did not know. ... Sa La Eh also saw something in the cloud, and there was a figure of Lahu people. But he did not say that this was the sign of the restoration of the Lahu country. But, probably because he thought of it, he cited a "teaching of the elders" (*chaw maw hkaw*) which said that one day the Lahu would gain a country as small as an eye of a chicken.

As recommended by me, Sa La Eh made a testament about the vision given by God, at the Youth Group's church service in the afternoon of the same day. In the testament, he

interpreted that the three white clouds were symbols of the Trinity, or Father God, the Holy Spirit, and the Son of God (Jesus Christ) and that, when Jesus Christ came to this world again, the three would be one. He said that a thought had occurred to him that there are only three years left before AD 2000, although the Bible only said “maybe [in 2000]” (“*heh*”). Then he told the church members to prepare for the Day

Villagers who attended the church service did not seem to be impressed by the testament. But, what is interesting is that when Sa La Eh saw the vision of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, he also saw the figures of some Lahu in the vision, and this made him think of a “teaching of elders” (*chaw maw hkaw*) predicting the restoration of “the Lahu country”. Sa La Eh was one of many who expressed doubt about the success of the Lahu independent movement, saying, “It seems hard, the Burman are of a large number, too.” But, his testament shows that he himself still thought of a possible restoration of “the Lahu country”. Although the seriousness differs from one person to another, Christian Lahu seem to have more or less anticipation for the coming of salvation by a supernatural intervention, which is very often associated with the restoration of “the Lahu country”. If the millennium is to establish the perfect state of the world, the perfect world cannot lack “the Lahu country”.

2. “Living in Others’ Countries”

During my stay in the village I sometimes went with the villagers to markets, hospital, and banks in towns. In contrast to their liveliness in the village, the villagers, once in town, are silent and reserved, and do not show clear response to *Khon Muang* vendors, receptionist, and clerks. Not sure whether the

Lahu villagers understood what they said, *Khon Muang* speak, in Northern Thai, louder and in simpler form which appears as if they were speaking with children or weak-minded people. Sometimes, Lahu children, who are in Thai school, accompany their parents, but they dare not to speak and cannot help much.

The town is perceived by Lahu villagers as territory of *Khon Muang*. Once out of the village, villagers seem afraid and timid. For them the town is certainly a world where the stronger prey upon the weaker. When shopping, the Lahu villagers have to pay more for the same goods than *Khon Muang*, because they speak poor Northern Thai, are timid, and lack bargaining power. They also meet impolite reception.

Moreover, if they do not have proper Thai citizenship, their moves are limited within the prefecture of their residence. Buses between towns are checked by Border Patrol Police and Highway Police, who, according to villagers, often ask for money. Sometimes regardless of what is stated in the law, absence of proper Thai citizenship and knowledge about law makes villagers vulnerable to arbitrary handling of civil servants. Some villagers are also anxious about possible forced repatriation to Burma where incessant civil wars are still fought.

Back in the village, the villagers thank me, saying, "Thank you very much. If you didn't go with us, we knew nothing. For we 'don't know letters/books' nor 'their language(s)' (*shu hkaw*)". In the previous chapter I argued that the expression "knowing letters/books" in Christian Lahu usage denotes knowledge acquired from formal education, which is, in turn, equated to wisdom of life in general. In the case here, "not knowing letters/books" also suggests that the villagers have not gone through Thai education and do not know how systems in

the town work. "Letters/Books" in this case imply knowledge required to live in modern society. "Not knowing letters/books", Lahu villagers depend heavily on mouth to mouth information and rumors, which, it seems to me, are fragmented and not always reliable.

Shu hkaw, literally "others' voices", means spoken languages of dominant ethnic groups. In the present context, in most cases, it denotes Northern Thai, since the powerful majority neighbor that Lahu villagers most frequently encounter in everyday life is *Khon Muang*. Both *Khon Muang* and Lahu believe that residents within the territory of the Thai state should in principle be able to speak Central Thai, but if not, then should at least be able to speak Northern Thai. Thus, for example, as a result of rapid expansion of administrative control of the Thai government in the last decades, a Lahu who cannot speak Northern Thai nor Central Thai is now difficult to become village headman.

For many T villagers, their small village is the place where they can be more at ease. However, because the village also belongs to an administrative unit of the Thai state, civil servants and policemen come to the village and exercise their power, sometimes arbitrarily. Even at home, villagers feel insecure and vulnerable. Such feelings constitute an undertone when they say, "The Lahu don't have a country".

As I went to church service and listened to Sa La preach, I found a phrase often used by him. In his preaching of the daytime prayer on the 20th of July 1997, the village pastor cited the lost paradise story of Adam and Eve from the Old Testament. Parable for villagers was that humans became sinful because Adam and Eve ate the fruit forbidden by God, similarly the Lahu in Thailand are wrong if they do things

prohibited by Thai laws:

... Today we live in Thailand, are people of Thailand. In Thailand there are laws and rules made by the King of Thailand. Do not trade bullets, do not trade guns, do not keep stimulant drugs in your possession, do not trade heroin, if we use which, we get delirious. It is stated; Do not! When we do these things, government officials will arrest, examine, and put us in jail. You are wrong, because you do things which are prohibited. We must know this. ... (my emphasis)

Sa La's preaching nominally says that they live in Thailand, are people of Thailand, and have to adhere to Thai laws, but this simple expression has many implications, as Thai people would not say such a thing so frequently and in a tone like Sa La's. Sa La's emphasis that they are people of Thailand reveals that they actually do not feel themselves as proper Thai citizens. The narrative keeps in mind the Thai criticism against highlanders as being opium growers, environmental destroyers, and potential insurgents. One implication of the preaching is that the Lahu, for some reason, happen to live in Thailand and should not be a problem to the owner of the country.

That such ideas are not the pastor's personal ones but more widely shared in Christian Lahu society is apparent when we see another example taken from a health promotion tape made by a Chiang Mai based NGO run by highlanders:

... Listen to an instructive story again. What does "development" mean? "Development" means prosperity of "economy" and "society". "Economy" is a way to become rich. "Society" means living in groups. If there is a country whose economy is developed, the country is called "developed country". In

developed countries, people have a fair standard of living. We Lahu people have come to live in others' countries and have relations with other peoples. Regardless of Thailand, Burma, Laos, or China, they are developing. When they are developing, our people also must understand the countries' law and, in order not to be a problem, you must not cut trees, grow opium, live by prostitution, and use, inhale, inject, and trade addictive drugs. That is all with the instructive story. Listen to a song again... (Narration before a song titled "Ha G'aw Ja" ["Very Poor"] in the health promotion cassette tape "Naw Shi Peu La?" ["Do You Already Know?"] made by the Health Project for Tribal People. My emphasis)

In the later narrative, the ideas implicit in Sa La's preaching are more apparently expressed. The tape narration keeps in mind not only Lahu living in Thailand but also those in Burma, Laos and China. The speaker is aware that the Lahu people scatter and live separately in various countries governed by lowlander peoples. While these "other peoples" are said to be developing, Lahu living in these states are described as if remaining always the same. The tape narration finally tells Lahu listeners at least not to be a problem to these developing peoples.

Such narratives express Christian Lahu social experience and feelings that they do not have their own country and are "living in others' countries" (*shu mvuh mi cheh ve*). *Shu mvuh mi*, literally "others' country/-ies", always denotes countries governed by such "oppressor" lowland majority groups as the Burman, Chinese, and Thai⁶⁴. What is implied by the expression is that Lahu are unwelcomed residents in countries of these powerful majority peoples. Similar to Lahu myth depicting the loss of the Lahu country and wandering, it is here

also implied that the Lahu now have to live where they are without alternatives. They are also aware of accusation of being troublemakers to these countries, as many of their traditional ways of life are now prohibited by the central governments. "Living in others' countries" presents their feeling of being only second-rate residents or sub-squatters in other peoples' countries. The above two narratives, which belong to Christian Lahu formal mainstream discourse, tell Lahu people that they are powerless and of a small number, and thus, should submit to the owners of these countries in which they find themselves today.

While the expression "living in others' countries" more firmly represents their present social experience, the term "the Lahu country" expresses Lahu's yearning of the past and the future. However, the two expressions are two sides of the same coin, generated from the same social reality. Lahu feel that they lack their own government and have to subjugate to other peoples. The more they are aware of their present predicaments, the more they have longing for their past and future. The two expressions are concerned with territory and autonomy of the people.

3. "The Lahu Country": Myth and Social Experience

(1) Problem of Historical Truth

It is considered problematic to confuse myth with history, because *myth* implies untruth, while *history* should be a record of what has actually happened in the past. Myth is sometimes used as garbled sources of oral history but, in order to reconstruct a *history*, scholars have to distinguish the "correct" from the "incorrect" elements of the stories. However, in practice, the line between *myth* and *history* is not always

apparent and one sometimes takes a *myth* for *history* (Leach 1990). Often we regard some things as actually happening in the past only because they are endowed with authority by one or other means which are not scientific.

In addition to the problem of historical veracity on the side of scholars, there is also a similar problem on the side of storytellers. When I heard Lahu villagers talk, I sometimes could not decide whether the speakers believed what they were saying, or whether they thought they were telling a *myth* (imaginary story) or *history* (story of events that actually happened in the past).

Once an old woman came to my house without business but just "for visiting", as is the Lahu custom. When our talk, for some reason that I cannot remember, touched upon China, the old woman said, "In China, they say there was the Lahu country. It is called *Mvuh Meh Mi Meh*. Sa La Da ye la has been there. ... One day when the Lahu restore their own country there, all Lahu, regardless of those living in Burma, Laos, or Thailand, will have to go back to live there again. Then Lahu women who are married to westerners, *Khon Muang*, and other foreigners will have to divorce their foreign husbands and go back there." When I asked when the day would come, the old woman answered, "I don't know. The elders told us so. My father and mother were good storytellers, too."

Another time, Sa La and I were looking over a Burma map which I had bought from Tachilek on the Thai-Burmese border, a man of about 30 came in and, having found us working over a map, asked where "*Mvuh Sheh Mi Sheh*", the place where they said was "the Lahu country". Sa La, as the man of "wisdom" in the village, taught him that "the Lahu country"

was in China, not in Burma.

Still another time, when Sa La Ma and I were reading the story of the Lahu's loss of writing which I discussed in the previous chapter. As soon as we finished reading the part in which the hungry Lahu ate up the divine letters, Sa La Ma sighed over the stupidity of her people, "Aias, how foolish the Lahu are! "

In each case, though vague, I found their serious responses strange, because I thought stories such as ones about the lost "Lahu country" and divine writing, merely imaginary tales. In retrospect, I understand that my feeling of strangeness was due to their mixture of *myth* and *history*. The first two villagers connected the "imaginary" stories to the places which "objectively" exist on the map ("*Mvuh Sheh Mi Sheh*" is thought to exist somewhere in Yunnan Province of China) and the third one read a tale as if it were a true story. Does the mixing of imaginary tales with historical facts indicate ignorance and self-deception of the villagers?

(2) Veracity of "the Lahu Country"

Before answering the above question, I would like to examine historical veracity of "the Lahu country".

Scott and Hardiman (1900), which has been frequently cited among scholars of ethnic groups in mainland Southeast Asia, has a section for the Lahu people. Examining the origin of the people, the authors first cite a story told by a Lahu chief, "The La'hu [*sic.*] Chief of Mong Hka furnished the following 'history'" (Scott and Hardiman 1900:576, parenthesis on "history" is in original), and continues, "This does not take us very far" (Scott and Hardiman 1900:577). Apparently they found the story as mixture of *myth* and *history*. Yet, they

continue their examination further to crosscheck the place names told by the Lahu chief with names in Shan, Chinese and Burmese. They then conclude, "Doubtless, however, the La'hu [*sic.*] first home was much farther north" (Scott and Hardiman 1900:577). The authors infer Lahu's migration to the present resident areas due to the political pressure of the Chinese and the Shan, but with a qualification, "Whether this version is correct or not cannot be proved" (Scott and Hardiman 1900:577).

Scott and Hardiman write about the "La'hu [*sic.*] country" (Scott and Hardiman 1900:577-79). Their methodology to examine *history* of "the Lahu country" is similar to that used to study the origin of the Lahu; cross-checking the Lahu place names mentioned in oral stories to the place names in other languages and checking events told by Lahu against the existing written documents in Chinese and Shan. After the examination, they conclude that the Lahu once had an independent country with thirty-six chiefs and "[f]or a time they were very prosperous and multiplied exceedingly, so that they very soon colonized the whole country north of Mong Lem, and extended so far east as the Me-khong" (Scott and Hardiman 1900:578). For a long time, the Lahu maintained independence despite the pressures from the Burmese and the Shan. Yet, finally in 1887, the Lahu country surrendered to the Chinese force and was subjugated under the Yunnan administration. "[A]s a race holding a country of their own the La'hu [*sic.*] seem to have come to an end. They are as much wanderers as the Jews or the Hui-hui" (Scott and Hardiman 1900:579).

Despite its title "Review of the Gospel of St. Marc in Musso", Seidenfaden (1930) is rather an introduction of the

Lahu people on the occasion of publishing part of the Bible in Lahu language. After inferring the origin of the Lahu in "the eastern marches of the Tibetan borderland" (Seidenfaden 1930:85), Seidenfaden writes, "That the Musso are an ancient race is proved by the Chinese chronicles, which mention that in 796 AD they were subdued by a King of Nan-Chao" (Seidenfaden 1930:85). He continues, "they formed an independent kingdom with Li-Kiang as capital and in 1548 and 1561 they beat back Tibetan invasions. ... However, as so many other aboriginal tribes of southern and south western China, they had to bow down to fate in the form of the relentless Chinese pressure, partly military, partly pacific, and the last independent Musso sovereign, a queen, even called in the Chinese and handed over the power to them" (Seidenfaden 1930:85). Seidenfaden (1930:85) further describes the fall of "sort of confederation of their own" attacked both by the Burmese and the Chinese and the following migration of Lahu people into the Shan States and Siam.

Descriptions of Lahu history in the following era including LeBar *et al.* (1964) and Shrock *et al.* (1970) are for the most part based on the above two records. Walker, however, points out that Seidenfaden (1930) "mistaken Musso, a variant spelling of Mussur, for Moso, which is another name for the Na-hsi people of northwestern Yunnan" and denies that the Lahu have a recorded history dating back to the eighth century. (Walker 1974b:265)

Having examined the above works, historical existence of "the Lahu country" became more probable. However, "the Lahu country" may not have been like a modern nation-state. The above records convey that "the Lahu country" had been in tributary relation with and under nominal overlordship of the

Shan and Chinese powers. These powers later extended their control, attacked "the Lahu country", and forced Lahu people to move southward. It may well be that a higher degree of autonomy due to indirect subjugation is now recalled by the Lahu as former glorious independence and has been elaborated into the symbol of "the Lahu country".

(3) Approaches to Study Myth

Let us briefly examine different approaches and strategies to study myth by historians and cultural anthropologists. We see that the above historical studies try to select the "correct" sources from the "incorrect" events in order to construct a reliable *history*. Stories told by the indigenous people are handled as garbled history which require an examination and interpretation. Thus the native stories ("myth", "legends", "traditions", etc.) are constantly cross-checked with landscape and written records of other literate peoples. Once the examination proved its veracity, "the Lahu country" is presented with such "evidences" as the name of its capital, location, time of its existence in calendar years, and written historical records. Historians use such conscious and unconscious strategies to construct *history* endowed with authority of objectivity. They work towards defining true *history*, which, once defined, leads the readers to give little attention to the process of its construction.

For cultural anthropologists, who are not much concerned with the problem of veracity or whether an event actually happened in the past or not, there are generally two approaches to study stories told by indigenous people. One is structural analysis like the works of Levi-Strauss, while the other may be called processual analysis, as opposed to structural, like

Leach's study of manipulation of myth by diverse groups of different interests (Leach 1964). While the former focuses on what is common among diverse versions of myth or constant structure, the latter examines the uniqueness of a story and the differences among variants of a *same* story. For structuralists, different versions can be reduced to the same fundamental structure, regardless of what social contexts from which the variants emerged. Processual analysts, on the other hand, handle the texts within their contexts and analyze the process in which a unique version and different variants emerge.

Tapp's approach to study Hmong stories of the loss of sovereignty, a Hmong emperor, and literacy belongs to the structural approach (Tapp 1989). Tapp introduces legends told by villagers in his research site as well as other versions from written records. He observes that "the main outline of the story remain very consistent" (Tapp 1989:137) and abstracts the basic common structure and elaborates his analysis on it. Tapp argues that, for the Hmong, an underlying theme of the Hmong people is Hmong ethnic identity, or whether being or not being Hmong, and that their myths have functioned to define Hmong ethnic identity through binary oppositions to the Chinese. Although the myth and legends are not *true* from the point of historical veracity, they are felt and experienced significant by the Hmong, or, in other words, are very *real* to them. Tapp writes, "What is, here, the main concern, is how what actually happened is *experienced* today, and to what extent such 'recollections' of the past influence present and future behaviour. What is important is how the present-day Hmong *experience* their past history, and explain their *current* situation of the deprivation of power, literacy, and territory. ... We select our own histories, which are the significant events for us *now*,

isolated from the mass of events which we have truly encountered, and they become 'real' to us" (Tapp 1989:175, emphasis is in original text).

Tapp focuses on the Hmong as a unity in opposition to the Chinese rather than paying attention to the diversity of interest groups within the Hmong. This leads him to examine the similarity of variants of the myths rather than their differences.

I already reviewed Leach's classic work on the Highland Burma in Chapter 1 (Leach 1964). I therefore merely add that one of the uniqueness of his work is that Leach sets the large Kachin Hill Area as the unit of analysis. Diverse peoples in the area, though differing in such cultural traits as language, clothes, and life-styles, all understand the "ritual" language, in which actions for pursuit of power were performed by people (s) of different interest. In other words, different peoples according to usual ethnic categorization live in one political system with a single "ritual" language.

(4) *Real Stories for Villagers*

I have noted above that, listening to Lahu villagers tell stories, I was often unable to judge whether they themselves believed what they were saying. When they talk about "the Lahu country", it seems they do not believe the stories fully, but not that they do not believe them at all. They talk and tell stories with a typical Lahu quotative final particle "*ce*" or "they say", which implies that the stories are hearsay and that they did not witness the events themselves. Yet, more importantly, they seem to have never asked themselves whether the stories they are now telling are historically true or not. As Nithi writes, the problem of veracity belongs to modern intellectuals with positivist thought, and the concern about the historical

truth/untruth itself is a new phenomenon of modern time (Nithi 1997). What is important to villagers is whether the stories are *real* to their experience or not. Stories are made of what is more *real* and what is less *real*, and the difference is a matter of degree. Villagers are not interested to draw a definite line between truth and untruth. Lahu villagers continuously tell stories of the loss of power, own country, and writing, because the stories are *real* to what they have experienced and are currently experiencing in their lives. The *reality* of the stories makes the storytellers appear to believe what they are telling.

Moreover, if such valuable things as sovereignty and knowledge had been once in possession and were *lost*, as the stories tell, it casts a hope for their *return* in the future. The experienced past, present predicaments, and hope for the future have relevance to one another. Christian Lahu's vague hope for the future is constantly reproduced and reshaped by various means among which act of recounting narratives is one. When I asked about the veracity of the stories, for example, veracity of a Lahu cultural hero named *A Sha Fu Cu* (see the following sections), some more educated people answer negatively. But, again, ordinary villagers are usually not concerned about the problem of historical truth/untruth and they seem unprepared for such a question. The act of recounting narratives for villagers may somewhat resemble our act of reading novels. We know too well that the stories are not *true*, but we are sometimes moved to tears, because we feel the imaginary stories that we are reading describing very *real* ways humans live their lives. We are moved, because the stories are *real* to our experience and, at the same time, learn to perceive that our lives are how the novels depict. What is important is not the veracity of the stories, but their forms or the way in which they

depict human life. The latter, not the former, is the true source of *reality*.

In the same vein, for the formation of the villagers' conceptions of their life and the world, or their social experience, the veracity of the events told by the stories is less important than the story form. By telling and listening to the stories, they feel and learn to feel that their lives and the world are like those depicted in the stories.

In the following sections, I will examine how social experience of Christian Lahu is, and has been, shaped by the act of recounting narratives. To be noted here again is that the "narratives" in my usage includes not only telling myth in more complete forms but also more fragmented statements and short phrases used in everyday conversations, in which villagers speak by means of their cultural idioms, such as "wisdom", "disharmony" and "the Lahu country". I will examine how the *form*, rather than the *contents*, of the stories told by Lahu villagers have shaped, and have been shaped by, their social experience through the act of recounting narratives. As a case study, I will take up the story of an old Lahu cultural hero called *A Sha Fu Cu*, as this story is only retained by Christian Lahu and will be useful in examining the formation of present social experience and historical consciousness of Christian Lahu in comparison with non-Christian Red Lahu.

4. *A Sha Fu Cu* Story and Construction of History

Lahu church histories convey that there was an old Lahu prophet called *A Sha Fu Cu* who had predicted the coming of Christianity to the people. *Burma Baptist Chronicle Book II* writes about the prophecy:

Lahus, like Karens, had old traditions and prophecies which prepared them for the coming of the Gospel. One popular prophet, A Teh Pu Cu [*sic.*] taught:... "We many not see God, no matter how we search for Him now. But, when the time is fulfilled, God will search for us and will enter our homes. There is a sign and when it appears, we will know that God is coming. The sign is that while people on white horses will bring us the Scriptures of God..."

Rev. [William M.] Young was a white man, and wore the white cotton clothing common to Westerners in Burma in those days. He brought the Bible, the Scriptures of God. Thus the Lahus saw the fulfillment of their prophecies, and were inclined to accept the new religion. (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:409)

Yo han, a Lahu pastor, describes the prophecy of *A Sha Fu Cu* as follows:

We humans must not seek God. Even if we seek God, we may not see Him. ... We humans do not have to seek the true God. One day the true God Himself will come to us humans. There will be a sign that a white man riding a white horse will bring the "silver and gold book" (*li hpu htan hpu*)⁶⁵ and come to your doors. When the time arrives, you ought to accept and listen to God's words. (Yo han 1976:5)⁶⁶

I heard the name of *A Sha Fu Cu* for the first time on 22nd December 1996 in the initial period of my fieldwork. I was staying at Sa La's house. After dinner, Sa La began to teach me Lahu pronunciation and, probably in need of an exercise material, he took out a booklet from their bedroom. The booklet has an English subtitle "An Illustration of Ah Sha Fu Cu". Sa La explained that the person portrayed in the booklet is the first Lahu Christian, which, as I recognized later, was a

simplified explanation due to the language difficulties between us. Sa La started reading the booklet aloud with his finger pointing where he was reading for me, but as he forwarded from page three to four, he began to read the story for other villagers sitting there rather than teaching Lahu to me.

Not long after that day, I found more on *A Sha Fu Cu* in various books including the two cited above. Other information includes a description in *The Hilltribes of Northern Thailand* by Gordon Young, a grandson of William M. Young yet himself not a missionary:

These Thailand Lahu [non-Christian Black and Red Lahu] also follow teachings promulgated by a Lahu religious leader, who died about 1890 in Mong Ka, southern Yunnan. Called "Ah Sha Fu Cu", (Yunnanese meaning "Ah Sha, Lord of the Temple") this man called his people to his death bed telling them to "burn the beeswax candles and joss-sticks, that the day might soon come when the Lahu people will receive their enlightenment [*sic.*] from God". Those Lahu in Burma who became Christians considered the "enlightenment" [*sic.*] to have been the coming of Christian missionaries. Others continue to await the enlightenment [*sic.*] and burn candles and joss-sticks to this day. The animistic Lahu today calls himself "peh tu pa" or "beeswax burner" and the religious attachment to this practice stems from ideas instilled by Ah Sha Fu Cu. They have carried this practice a step further, so that the aroma of the joss-sticks is thought to please the good spirits which protect them. (Young 1962:11)

Excited by a possibility of contested interpretations of the same story by different Lahu groups, I asked both Christian Lahu and non-Christian Red Lahu about *A Sha Fu Cu*. However, while most Christian Lahu knew him and understood

that he was the prophet who had predicted the Lahu's encounter with Christianity, only a limited number of non-Christian Red Lahu knew him. Even though some non-Christian Red Lahu knew him, their knowledge was uncertain and fragmented. One non-Christian Red Lahu village priest understood that *A Sha Fu Cu* was a younger brother of *A Te Fu Cu* and the two were army officers⁶⁷. This personal experience was confirmed later when I found the following description in the review article of the Young's above book by Anthony Walker.

... there are many Lahu Nyi [Red Lahu] in north Thailand who seem never to have heard the name of Ah Sha Fu Cu. The people who do retain a semi-mythological account of this religious leader are the Lahu Na [Black Lahu] Christians, who see him as a kind of Lahu "John the Baptist", precursor and foreteller of the coming Christianity, a point which Young also notes (p 11). (Walker 1975c:361)

Walker also points to Young's amateurish handling of ethnographic data and suggests that the descriptions of Red Lahu, Yellow Lahu, and Lahu Shehleh groups are biased by his dependence on information given by Black Lahu people (mostly Christian) among whom he grew up. (Walker 1975c:361)

Thus, what we really face is not different interpretations of the same prophecy, but the fact that *A Sha Fu Cu* is rather a mythological cultural hero, who is popular among Christian Lahu, but is poorly known to non-Christian Red Lahu.

We are not very sure about the historical facts of *A Sha Fu Cu*; what kind of person he was and what prophecy he really gave, or even whether a prophet named *A Sha Fu Cu* has ever

existed. Depending on the works of Chinese scholars and missionary archives, Kataoka writes that although he does not have enough grounds to conclude whether A Sha Fu Cu or A Te Fu Cu really existed or is fictitious, "it seems certain that in 1980 a prophecy of the advent of the true God was made by a religious leader of high rank" (Kataoka 1998:149f). As Lahu had been suffering political and military pressures throughout the 19th century and rebelled, frequently led by messianic 'priest-chiefs' (Walker 1983:229, Kataoka 1998, Scott and Hardiman 1900:576-79, Hawley 1991:156), it is probable that, when the Lahu in Burma first encountered Christianity, there had already been a tradition of prophecies which predicted the coming of a savior⁶⁸ (Antisdell 1911:34-35). If *A Sha Fu Cu* has really existed, he may well be one of these prophets. In the prophecies, the savior was sometimes described as the lost "brethren of the ninety-nine"⁶⁹ families⁷⁰ (Antisdell 1911:34) and in other times, probably, a "white man" (*chaw hpu*)⁷¹. It is not necessarily the case that the prophecy of the coming of the true God kept among Lahu before William M. Young came to Kengtung city was same as the *A Sha Fu Cu* story presented by the present-day Christian Lahu.

Rather than to regard that "old traditions and prophecies ... prepared them [Lahu people] for the coming of the Gospel" (Aung Din and Sowards 1963:409), we should assume that, after their initial encounter with Christianity and mass-conversion, Christian Lahu, in their long history, have reinterpreted and elaborated the stories of the prophecies into the present *A Sha Fu Cu* story. By this I do not mean that the story is untruth or a fabrication, but would like to say, following Tapp (1989) with his concept of *real history* and Bruner (1986:7), that "[e]very telling is an arbitrary imposition

of meaning on the flow of memory, in that we highlight some causes and discount others; that is, every telling is interpretive". In the same vein and like all other histories, in search of more *real* history to their social experience of deprivations of power and autonomy, Christian Lahu have, consciously or unconsciously, isolated significant elements and parts from the diverse versions of prophet stories and elaborated them to the present *A Sha Fu Cu* story through their retrospective recount of Lahu history. What is here the main issue is not the veracity of the prophecy, but how their past history is experienced by Christian Lahu today.

Moreover, as every storytelling is inevitably so, the *A Sha Fu Cu* story is also vested with the interests of its recitors. Functionally, the story serves to bridge the pre-Christian and Christian histories of Christian Lahu people. Today, there are many variants of the story, but the different versions have a common pattern which describes the Lahu's encounter with Christianity as the fulfillment of the old Lahu prophecy, thereby describing the advent of Christianity as if it were a prescribed historical event. Such historical understanding endorses the view of Christian Lahu that they are uplifted by the encounter with Christianity and higher than other non-Christian Lahu groups. As I have already noted, in the conception of Christian Lahu, there is hardly an inconsistency between what outside observers, including non-Christian Lahu groups, tend to view as the "true Lahu tradition" and the new religion of foreign origin. (see Walker 1975b:151) The *A Sha Fu Cu* story serves to justify the Christian God as the true God to Christian Lahu.

However, the reconstruction of the *A Sha Fu Cu* story by Christian Lahu has further implications, since the whole

Christian Lahu mythological universe seems to have gone into transformation by the elaboration of the prophet story. Today, the mythological order of Christian Lahu has interesting differences from that of non-Christian Red Lahu. I will examine this subject in the following sections.

5. *A Sha Fu Cu* Story and Historical Consciousness

Lahu originally had no word for "history", but today use "*ra sa van*" of Burmese origin (Lewis 1986:293). But among non-Christian Red Lahu in Thailand, this word is hardly heard and it seems that, except those who are exposed to Thai society and use the Thai term *prawattisat*, they do not usually speak about history. Thus, the avid interest in Lahu history by Christian Lahu, especially by those who are in the higher stratum, contrasts with the apparent disinterest of non-Christian Red Lahu⁷².

The formation of *A Sha Fu Cu* story in the present form in the Christian Lahu mythological universe has relevance to their views on history. This may become clear when we examine the way in which Christian Lahu presents their *history*.

A booklet with an English subtitle "Lahu Baptist Chronicle" by a Lahu pastor in Burma provides us with an outline of Christian Lahu history (Yo han 1976). Again, here, we will examine the history not as an objective record of the past events, but as the representation of people's historical views which are incessantly reinterpreted and reconstructed.

At the beginning, Yo han writes about the origin and subgroup divisions of the people. Then he continues to write what seems to us *myth*: Long ago when living in China, the Lahu were a majority group and were the master (*jaw maw*) that ruled all other peoples. But due to their absence of

“wisdom” and the craft of the Shan and the Chinese, the Lahu lost the Seal of Master to the hand of the Shan, and the Lahu country was attacked and destroyed by the Chinese. Having lost the ruler and country, the Lahu people started wandering southwards. The Lahu moved to live in a place named *Naw Law Naw Shehn* and prospered again. However, the Chinese attacked them again and they fled further southward and arrived at *Mvuh Meh Mi Meh*. The land was fertile and the Lahu prospered again by farming. The Chinese did not attack them any more, but the Lahu themselves could not live “in harmony” and split to live separated in Burma, Thailand, and Laos. The Lahu were originally a people who were willing to worship *G’ui sha*, but, because they did not know how to seek *G’ui sha* and how to worship Him, they worshiped idols and spirits like other peoples did. Later, among the Lahu emerged many religious priests (*paw hku*) who taught how to worship *G’ui sha*. *A Sha Fu Cu* is the greatest *paw hku* who held this title since 1870. In childhood, he lived in a rich Shan’s house and “sought wisdom” [studied] and, when he had grown up, the rich Shan found him very wise and let him go out to teach hill peoples. After he became *paw hku*, he predicted many future events and taught people what to do. The greatest of his teaching was the prophecy of the coming of the true *G’ui sha* ..., then Yo han continues to describe the prophecy of the coming of a white savior which I translated in the previous section (Chapter 5-4).

After the story of *A Sha Fu Cu*, Yo han then writes what seems to us normal church *history*, which reviews the work of various missionaries, Lahu mass-conversion, development of Lahu orthography, educational and medical works, Bible translation, and church growth.

This "chronicle" leaves us with a strange impression, because it is comprised of what seems to us *myth* (imaginary stories) in the first part and what seems to us *history* (a record of the past events) in the later part. This is not confined to the above book, but we find the same kind of mixture of *myth* and *history* in a Master of Divinity thesis about the Lahu Baptist church history in Thailand by a Lahu student (Pathiphat 1991).

This strange mixture of *myth* and *history* is a product of articulation of Lahu old stories and their Christian history, which is an attempt to blend and organize the Lahu tradition and the new religion of foreign origin in a consistent and comprehensive order. Self-authored histories by the Christian Lahu have a common pattern; original prosperity, the loss of power, wandering and splitting, seeking the true God, the prophecy by *A Sha Fu Cu*, encounter with the true God or Christianity, and church growth (see also Kya-Leh 1994). *Myth* usually refers to events allegedly taken place in a distant past, but here *myths* are arranged in a historical order and connected with church *history* which is made of events with definite calendar years not very distant from the present. The *A Sha Fu Cu* story stood on the articulation point between Lahu *myth* and church *history* and, therefore, needed elaboration.

Such historical sense, which enables Christian Lahu to articulate Lahu tradition and the new religion, is not confined to written histories by those who have education and are well exposed to outside societies. As I will show below, a poorly educated elder in my field site once told stories in a similar manner. Since the original text is too long to reproduce here, I will present it in a summarized form.

After telling the story of the loss of "the Lahu country" which I translated in the previous chapter (Chapter 4-4(b)), the

elder attributes the loss to Lahu's absence of thoughts. His story continues:

... That is why the Lahu have no country. That is why the Lahu live in the "forest". *G'ui sha* reproved the Lahu, "The Lahu have no honor. Today, the Lahu have become servants of others. Today, I bring you Lahu letters. I have already given [letters] to the Shan. The Shan brought mulberry paper, thus I gave on mulberry paper. I gave all people. Westerners ground rice and brought it. I have already given [letters] to westerners on ground rice." But the Lahu had nothing. The Lahu pounded rice cake and, eating the rice cakes, went to ask *G'ui sha* to write the letters down on [the remaining rice cakes]. The Lahu gave the palm of the hand and said, "Here." But *G'ui sha* said, "No, the letters would disappear." and wrote the "silver & gold book" (*li hpu htan hpu*) on rice cakes. On the way home, the Lahu got very hungry. The Lahu grilled and munched the rice cake. Saying, "I will remember by heart", the Lahu munched them, poor thing! That is why the Lahu, regardless of *Lahu Nyi* or not, or of what Lahu, said, "I will remember by heart", and, even when they prayed, used only memory. The Lahu had become like this and *G'ui sha* was not pleased. Because *G'ui sha* was not pleased, the Lahu sought a blessing again. Then emerged a man called *A Te Fu Cu*. *A Te Fu Cu* sought a blessing every day, every year. *A Te Fu Cu* hollowed out a staff and sought a blessing. But he did not find a blessing. He threw the staff away, hollowed out a new one. and sought a blessing again, but in vain. When he had done this many times and gathered the staffs together in heaps and tied into knots, there were nine⁷³ knots of staffs. But he still could not find a blessing. No blessing. Never mind. *G'ui sha* gives it again. *A Te Fu Cu* said, "Blessing is not to be found no matter how we seek it. One day *G'ui sha* will give us a blessing. When it emerges in the middle of clouds in the southern country and come up to us, the 'silver & gold book

will be brought back to us. When an airplane emerges in the middle of clouds and comes to us, we will be given the book. We will receive enlightenment from *G'ui sha*. We will see *G'ui sha*'s face and eyes and we will hear *G'ui sha*'s voice too." *A Te Fu Cu* said, "If mountains block it will break them through, if rivers block it will break them through and will build ways for cars to come up and bring the 'silver & gold book' to us. When the day comes, make candles and incense of the nine knots of staffs of *A Te Fu Cu*, burn the candles and incense, and wait. On the day when the 'silver & gold book' arrives, we shall exchange them." Today, it is becoming fulfilled. It really is. The Lahu have no country but it is coming true. Thus today, if the Lahu receive enlightenment from *G'ui sha*, obey *G'ui sha*'s words, and seek a blessing, there will be as small a Lahu country as a leaf of gooseberry. It is said so. That is the teachings of the ancestors, teachings of the Lahu, teachings of *A Te Fu Cu*. They taught this. Thus, on the day the Lahu receive enlightenment from *G'ui sha*, ..if we obey *G'ui sha*'s words, "seek wisdom", we will have a country to govern for as short a time as daybreak. The time in which the Lahu will be the ruler will be like daybreak. If we receive enlightenment from *G'ui sha* today, the day is coming nearer and nearer. The day is arriving gradually, I don't know if it will come true when the time fulfills 2000 years. If it fulfills 2000 years, it will come. I don't know... (abridged translation of the story told by an elder in the study village in July 1997)

This oral story perhaps does not leave us a strange impression like the written church histories above, because the story is not a mixture of *myth* and *history*, but comprised solely of *myths*. However, the story differs from the kind of myths that are familiar to us.

Tribal Research Center (1976) records five non-Christian

Red Lahu myths. (1) "The Origin of the Lahu" explains that, when the Lahu were born from the gourd to the earth, mice bit the gourd and helped the Lahu come out, for which mice now receive the rewards to eat rice produced by the Lahu. (2) "Lahu and Axe" relates that *G'ui sha* let the Lahu and *Khon Muang* choose an axe or a plough. Lahu were given priority and chose the axe, which is suited for farming in mountains. (3) "Shifting Fields" describes that, when *G'ui sha* gave seeds of fertility, *Khon Muang* received them in a tightly woven basket, while the Lahu in a loosely woven one. During the trip back home, seeds of fertility were kept in the basket of *Khon Muang*, which is why they can eat enough rice every year today. Places on which many seeds of fertility dropped from the Lahu's basket became fertile land, places on which less seeds of fertility dropped from the Lahu's basket became less fertile land. (4) "Lahu and Transformation of *G'ui sha*" depicts that one day *G'ui sha* transformed Himself to a poor man and invited different peoples working in the fields to abandon their work and travel with Him. While other peoples, including the Lahu, refused, the Chinese and Yunnanese Chinese went with *G'ui sha*. *G'ui sha* gave the two peoples blessing so as not to have to work hard in the field but earn much money, while the other peoples stay as before, having to work hard but poor. (5) "Lahu and Letters and Knowledge" is a story of loss of writing which I translated in the previous chapter (Chapter 4-6). These stories refer to events in a time before the world was as it is today, which, in turn, constitute direct explanations of the present condition. There is only the present and "long ago" and nothing between.

Compared with the non-Christian Red Lahu myth, Christian Lahu myths more resemble *history* in several points. Christian

Lahu myths are made of more events than those of non-Christian Red Lahu and the events are put in a linear fashion from the past through the present to the future. The sequence of the events is organized in a way that a former event constitutes the cause of a later event, and all events are ordered in causal relations. Moreover, this sequence of events describes progress. Unlike the non-Christian Red Lahu myths, in which events projected into a distant past constitute direct causes of the present condition, Christian Lahu myths describe gradual improvement from the past to the present and then to the future (except for the original grace). Christian Lahu myths speak about the people's destiny as if it were already prescribed in a large historical scheme. In Christian Lahu myths, time is conceived as linear flow from the past through the present to the future, and it is by this notion of linear time that the Christian Lahu myth could come to assume the history-like nature.

We do not know much about the pre-Christian mythology of present day Christian Lahu. Based on available records written not so long after the Lahu's encounter with Christianity (Antisdell 1911, Telford 1937), we can only infer that their pre-Christian mythology may have resembled less the present Christian Lahu mythology than that of non-Christian Red Lahu. However, if we figure what the present Christian Lahu mythology would be without the prophet story, we will see that the *A Sha Fu Cu* story is the key element to make the mythology assume history-like properties. After nearly a century history of Christian Lahu, their mythology went through transformation and became history-like mythology, for which the formation of the prophet story was crucial.

Today, although there are innumerable different versions

with permutations and omission of elements, the general picture depicted by Christian Lahu myth is constant; original grace represented by mastership and "the Lahu country", fall from the grace due to the Lahu's absence of "wisdom" and "disharmony" as well as cunning and persecution of evil others, wandering and splitting of the Lahu people, seeking the true God, prophecy of *A Sha Fu Cu*, coming of the Christianity as fulfillment of the prophecy and the uplift from the former ignorant and savage status. Moreover, the stories continue to tell that, if the Lahu "seek wisdom" and live "in harmony", one day the Lahu people will be able to prosper and restore "the Lahu country". (Kya-Leh 1994)⁷⁴ Interestingly, self-authored histories of Christian Lahu present generally the same historical picture as their myth. For Christian Lahu, *history* became like *myth* and *myth* became like *history*. Both in their history-like mythology and mythological history, the *A Sha Fu Cu* story is the turning point at which the gradual development of the people towards the eventual glory in the end of time starts.

Whether the *A Sha Fu Cu* story is believed as truth by the Christian Lahu or not is not the main issue here. For example, when I asked if *A Sha Fu Cu* had once really existed, more educated villagers such as Sa La and Sa La Ma answered that it was merely a tale. But, even though they do not believe the veracity of the story, they have generally the same historical view as the Christian Lahu history-like myths present. They believe that the Christian God is the true one and the Lahu had had to wander before they could finally meet him.

The act of recounting narratives, for both the storyteller and listener, represents interaction between the cosmology involved in the stories told and that of human subject. In such

cosmological interaction, order and structure of the stories are more important than their contents. Even though the storytellers and listeners do not believe the veracity of the tales, as long as they participate in the act of recounting narratives and feel that the stories are *real*, they are perceiving that the world is how the stories depict, and, at the same time, continuously elaborate new more *real* stories through the act of recounting narratives, in which they isolate some elements from innumerable events and make them up to stories more meaningful to their present social experience.

Today, nearly a hundred years have passed since the Lahu first came into contact with Christianity and the religion has already been internalized in the culture of Christian Lahu. Both in the written and oral stories, or history-like myths and mythological histories, the arrival of Christianity to the people is described as the fulfillment of the great Lahu prophecy and the beginning of their progress towards glory in the future. It is mainly by the reconstruction and elaboration of the *A Sha Fu Cu* story that the Christian Lahu mythological order went under transformation. With a device of the prophet's story, old Lahu mythology, which may well have been a gathering of many ordinary myths depicting events in a distant past, has been connected with Lahu Christian history, and the whole picture has come to present a large historical scheme, in which gradual development of the people to the future grace is depicted as if they were already prescribed.

6. History and the Notion of Time

Today, Christian and non-Christian Red Lahu have contrasting calendar systems. For non-Christian Red Lahu, cycles of life are twelve days, twelve months, and twelve years,

and each of these twelve units is given animal names as in Chinese twelve years system. Many newborns are given names according to the time of their birth in the day (e.g. "Ca Ha" means Mr. Evening) or after the animal attached to the day of the birth (e.g. "Ca Fa" means Mr. Rat). "Twice a [lunar] month, at the new and full moon [non-Christian] Black and Red Lahu rest and honor G'ui-sha [*sic.*]" (Walker 1983:236). Notion of years is also cyclical, referring to specific years by animals, for example, Tiger Year and Dragon Year, and, except those who are well exposed to modern Thai society, villagers normally do not use the Buddhist era or the Western calendar.

As for the annual ritual practices, "The New Year celebrations, coinciding roughly with the Chinese New Year among most Lahu groups, constitute the most important annual ritual event in all but Christian communities. ... Other ceremonies are associated with phases of the agricultural year: most important is the 'eating the new rice', observed at first harvest by all Lahu, including Christians" (Walker 1983:235). Needless to say, the Chinese New Year and agricultural ceremonies are not tied to definite days on the Western nor Thai calendars but to the lunar cycle and seasonal rhythm. "Each stage of rice cultivation - from staking, clearing, burning, to harvesting and 'thanks-giving' - had its associated ritual" (Sanit 1974:232). One day during the initial period of my fieldwork, I made an excursion to a non-Christian Red Lahu village, where I, using Thai, tried to collect Lahu vocabulary. Talking with a young man (primary school education, age ca. 20), I found that they had no word for "week (*athit*)" and that the names of months were "only known by the elders" or those who are in charge of ritual practices. Many villagers, like this young man, live with little concern for

written calendar system, and the monopoly of time regulation by one or a small number of people enables them to decide more flexibly the days of ritual practices. In one case I heard a village priest postponed a *shin nyi* or Sabbath, because he wanted to eat pork on that day⁷⁵.

Christian Lahu use the Western calendar and usually do not know the animal names of the day, month, and year. In their language, week days are expressed by increasing distance from Sunday (*shin nyi*), like "one day after holy day" (*shin peu te nyi* or Monday), "two days after holy day" (*shin peu nyi nyi* or Tuesday), and so on. Each month is given English-based name; *Ja na va ri*, *Fe ba ra ri*, *Ma chi*..., but they are also called "the first month", "the second month", "the third month" (*ha pa te ma*, *ha pa nyi ma*, *ha pa sheh ma*) in casual conversations. Years are counted by the Western calendar without cyclical notion and increase its absolute number each year. When I interviewed about their life histories, some villagers recalled the past events with AD rather than with reference to other indices, such as their age and animals attached to the years. However, like non-Christian Red Lahu, adult people usually do not know their birthday and year. Interestingly, when I asked about their age, they sometimes answer, "The Lahu do not know years" (*Lahu aw hk'aw ma shi*) and "The Lahu do not know the calendar" (*Lahu ha pa li ma shi*). Even those who are not familiar to the Western calendar year are aware of its authority. Many children are named after the characters in the Bible, but there are also ones given names with animals of the day of their birth⁷⁶.

Important annual celebrations are those of the New Year, Christmas, and "the eating the new rice" or harvest. The first two ceremonies are performed in a period around the 25th of

December and one starting from the 1st of January, thus tied to the definite days on the Western calendar. But the day of the harvest festival (performed only one day) differs from village to village. In 1997, most Christian villages had the harvest festival on Saturdays, or if not possible, on Fridays. Sometimes such VIPs as pastors with the title of Reverend were invited from Chiang Mai to open the ceremony and preach. Unlike the non-Christian Red Lahu calendar, the Western calendar used by Christians has similar rhythm and tempo as Buddhist one used by Thai people. But, on occasions such as Christmas and a few days after the New Year, Christian Lahu rest and their children do not go to school, although the days are not school holidays. In a sense, adoption of the Western calendar regulates the life of Christian Lahu in the same tempo as that of Thai, yet, at the same time, maintains their ethnic distinction from the majority group by the different annual festivals. Besides the above three annual celebrations, many Lahu churches have small celebration at the daytime church services on Sundays nearest the Thai Mother's and Father's days, which are birthdays of the Thai queen and king, respectively. Agricultural rituals other than the harvest festival do not seem to be actively performed by Christian Lahu.

From the above comparison, we may abstract some features of Christian Lahu time notion and regulation, which are different from those of non-Christian Red Lahu. Life of Christian Lahu is regulated more by the Western calendar which is written. The fact it is written means that all those who are a little literate have access to it and this allows little flexibility and arbitrary time regulation by leaders. Use of the Western calendar with its little flexibility leads them to perceive time as absolute and externally defined. Time of

Christian Lahu is less humanly perceived because its regulation is more defined by impersonal calendar than human physical condition and natural and seasonal rhythm. Such time notion as absolute and externally defined provides a basis for the Christian Lahu large historical scheme, in which the people's whole history is prescribed like destiny.

While years are twelve years' cycle for the non-Christian Red Lahu, the Western calendar used by Christian Lahu shows the passing of time by the increase of figure in AD and presents a notion of time as linear flow to the future. As time fulfills twelve months, the figure in AD increases by one, which involves a conception that each year has the same length and is a homogenous unit. As Sekimoto argues, the Western calendar with its linear and externally measurable time notion provides a basis for the idea of progress. The idea of progress, or getting better as times passes, itself a relative notion based on comparison of one time unit with another, needs a standard scale which give order to time. The Western calendar can meet this requirement. (Sekimoto 1986:57-58) Adoption of the Western calendar and the regulation of time by it have imposed on Christian Lahu a notion of time as a linear flow, thereby directing their perspective more to the future.

I have suggested above that the regulation and notion of time among the present-day Christian Lahu is a product of their long experience with Christianity, for the religion is not only theological teachings but also an institution imposing values and standards of Western modern industrial society (Comaroff 1985). Besides the adoption of the Western calendar, exposure to formal education promoted and provided by the church, annual cerebation according to the days defined by the Western calendar, literacy which enables one to read written

calendar and keep records with dates, as well as the act of telling history-like stories all have served to impose the notion of time as inhuman, standard, and externally defined.

Naturally, however, Christian Lahu notion of time is not so standardized and impersonal as that of English industrial workers described by Thompson (1967). Most Lahu villagers are still conducting farming and, on working days, their lives are mainly regulated by their physical conditions and working rhythm tied to nature. Even those who work for wage labor retain some control over their labor, as they often change their jobs and quit if they find the work too hard for the wage or when it rains. Despite that, the general current is, though slowly, moving towards more standardized, absolute, and externally regulated time notion.

7. Transformation of Millenarianism⁷⁷

As a dictionary of sociology defines "millenarianism" as "a religious movement which prophecies [*sic.*] the coming of the millennium and a cataclysmic end of the world as we know it; or, more formally, which anticipates imminent, total, ultimate, this-worldly, collective salvation" (Marshall ed. 1994:333), we generally understand it as a radical religious movement which often becomes rebellious to the existing political order. Yet, another introductory text writes, "For the most part they [millennial movements] tend to fade away when the promised millennium fails to materialise but sometimes they grow into important religious traditions. Christianity was a millennial movement in its early phase and within the Christian tradition a millennial undercurrent has survived throughout its history" (Hamilton 1995:87). Worsley, in his classic study of millenarian movements in Melanesia, made an "important

distinction between movements which expect the millennium to occur in the near future and those which regard the millennium as a remote event" (Worsley 1968:22). While most of the former type movements are "'activist' movements, in which the people busy themselves with preparations for the Day, most of those which regard the millennium as a remote event are usually passive in character: people resign themselves to their present lot and look for salvation in the next world" (Worsley 1968:22). The second category may well include Christian groups, like Christian Lahu, which vaguely anticipate salvation in this world in the future by the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. In this study, I will use this classification of 'activist'-near future versus passive-remote event millenarianism.

Many scholars point out the frequent appearances of the messianic movements in the Lahu history (Young 1962:10-11, Bradley 1979:5, Lewis and Lewis 1984:197, Walker 1983:236). To quote Paul Lewis, "Throughout Lahu history there have been several messianic movements" (Lewis and Lewis 1984:197). "One reason messianic movements appear constantly through Lahu history is because of their frustration and disorganization. They are anxious for a 'savior' who will take them back to the 'good old days'" (Lewis 1970:88). "This in turn might lead to conflict with those in authority and the ultimate defeat of the movement, resulting in even more frustration, paving the way for yet another messiah figure to arise in the future" (Lewis and Lewis 1984:197). What is common to these scholars of Lahu millenarianism is their preoccupation with "near-future" messianic movements, which is attributed to the politico-economic pressures from lowlanders and the Lahu's lack of organization. As the grounds for the

messianic movements, they also point to the Lahu social structure (Walker 1974b) and ethnic character (Lewis and Lewis 1984, among others), both of which are static concepts deprived of socio-historical contexts. It may be true that “[a]ll Lahu ... are deeply concerned with and constantly striving for blessing” (Lewis and Lewis 1984:171) and that the messianic movements may be one of its expressions. However, this “desire for blessing” (Lewis and Lewis 1984:171) itself may not be changeless, but is continuously reproduced and reshaped in their history.

Interestingly, history of Lahu Christianity has repeated that of the mainstream Christianity. “Christianity, in its early days in Burma and Yunnan, was seen by Lahu as a revivalist cult, and the pioneer missionary as a messianic-type figure” (Walker 1983:236), which caused Lahu mass-conversion. But, in the era that followed, there are no records of Christian Lahu mounting a “near-future” radical millenarian movement. Although there also are Christian members, the initiative of the ongoing Lahu independence movement in Burma has been held by non-Christian Red Lahu. What we find among the Christian Lahu in general is “passive” and not necessarily rebellious millenarian aspiration fused with some Christian ideas. Their originally radical millenarianism has transformed itself to and survived as a less apparent and “passive” millenarian aspiration.

Although grace in the other world should be guaranteed for those who are good Christians, Christian Lahu nonetheless are not indifferent to the return of grace in this world, and are anxious for knowing when the Day will come. In their linear and developmental historical scheme, the concern is about the distance between the present and the Day. And the Day is perceived as “coming nearer and nearer” (*aw pa aw pa ne la*

cheh ve) and “arriving gradually” (*aw meu meu ga la cheh ve*).

For inferring the distance between the Day and the present, they refer to generally two uncertain indices. First, the year AD 2000 is an uncertain index, as the villagers always refer to it with a qualification of “maybe/probably” (*heh*) and/or “approximately” (*a la hk'e*). But this popular belief, based on an interpretative reading of the Bible is shared widely and there are probably very few villagers who are totally indifferent to the year. The argument is that, because it was 2000 years from the Creation to Abraham and from it to the coming of Jesus Christ, it must be in (about) AD 2000 that something will ever happen⁷⁸. This leads some of them to seek hidden meanings behind numbers. When Sa La Eh saw a supernatural vision, in which “three” white clouds appeared and finally gathered together to one “three” times, he interpreted the “three” clouds symbolizing the Trinity and thought of the fact that there were only “three” years before it reached the year 2000.

Second, villagers believe that various catastrophes will occur as time becomes close to the end of the world. One day Sa La Ma and I were transcribing the tape in which an elder in my field site told stories that, when it fulfilled 2000 years, the Lahu would (maybe) restore “the Lahu country”. I referred also to the vision seen by Sa La Eh, and asked Sa La Ma if she believed the stories. She answered in a low tone that in the Bible there was no mention of the year 2000 and that she did not know if the Lahu would restore “the Lahu country”, but that the various incidents now occurring in the world all coincided with what was written in the Bible. The Bible is read as a book of prophecies. I took notes as Sa La Ma gave examples:

- + earthquakes and people die
- + advent of incurable disease (=AIDS [as she interprets])
- + countries fight each other
- + famine
- + flood and people die
- + adultery thrives (human customs ruin)

([written in] Revelation to John)

Although Sa La Ma seems to have been cautious not to mix up more orthodox Christian thoughts with the popular beliefs of AD 2000 as well as the restoration of "the Lahu country", she nonetheless shares fundamental conceptions of history with other villagers. They all feel that there may be the end of the world and then the perfect state of the world will be established by supernatural intervention. There is no longer time after the salvation, just like there was no time before the past grace depicted in the myth. As an oppressed ethnic minority, Christian Lahu perceive the present condition negatively and tend to think that this is the time of the catastrophes before the coming of the Day as predicted in the Bible. In my field site, the intra-village conflicts were sometimes associated with the discords of people, which are, according to the villagers, one of the omens of coming of the Day.

Moreover, a mixture of an ethnic idea and a Christian one is found in their perception of salvation. Both in Lahu and more orthodox Christianity, the perfect state had once been there in the very initial time of the world, but it was lost, due to their faults and deficiencies. Both Lahu and non-Lahu Christians perceive the present world as incomplete, and anticipate the perfect state either in the other world or by establishment of the

Kingdom of God in this world. However, as a weak ethnic minority “living in others’ countries”, Christian Lahu hope for their own country and self-government in the perfect world to come. Because the Bible, the source of “wisdom” or a key to power, has already been brought about by the contact with Christianity, what is to come next is the restoration of the lost “Lahu country”. For Christian Lahu, “the Lahu country” has come to symbolize the perfect state of the world.

As I noted above, Christian Lahu’s radical millenarianism has been transformed into a “passive” millenarian aspiration. For the transformation, various factors may have played a role. The civilizing project of the church, with its stress on the formal education and literacy, has discounted the Lahu traditional authority built on oral tradition. With the loss of authority of Lahu oral tradition and emphasis on “wisdom” in written form, Christian Lahu have been led to attribute their present predicaments more to their lack of “wisdom” than to cunning and persecution of evil others. Christian Lahu mainstream narratives say that they had to “seek wisdom”, rather than to expel the evil others, in order for the people to prosper again. (Kya-Leh 1994:20-21, see also the lyrics of the song cited at the beginning of this chapter)

Equally important is a Christian idea of salvation in the other world, because, with such an idea, “people resign themselves to their present lot and look for salvation in the next world” (Worsley 1968:22). In my field site, Sa La repeatedly tells importance of the preparation for the world after death at Sunday church service. Once he preached that, although some villagers did not have a Thai ID “card” (*ba*), which often invited persecution of Border Patrol Police, but if they were good Christians, it is as if they were holding an admission

“card” (*ba*) to heaven. To be a good Christian, they have to do “God’s work”, or evangelism, paying the tithes, and supporting the pastor, all of which are not rebellious to the existing political order.

A related millenarian idea is that of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which is shared widely by Christian Lahu including the more educated ones. The preparation for the Day is the same, that is, being good Christian. Despite the teaching of the bliss in the other world, Christian Lahu are still anxious for the this-worldly salvation, and the two aspirations coexist.

Finally, the transformation of the time notion and historical view, which I discussed in the last two sections, are important factors. My argument is that, although Christian Lahu anticipate future grace and seem very anxious to know when the Day will come, they, at the same time, fear that their expectations will finally fail to materialize.

I have already discussed that there had been a series of prophecies about the *return* of the lost good things, when Lahu people in Burma first met Christianity, and this led to the Lahu mass-conversion. Today, Christian Lahu have reinterpret and elaborated the story into the *A Sha Fu Cu* story to justify their Christian God as the true One. Along with the new prophet story, a new historical view has been formed and Christian Lahu today perceive that, by the encounter with Christianity, the Bible or the true source of “wisdom” was brought back to them, and that what is to be brought back next is the other good thing, political power or “the Lahu country”. Christian Lahu now interpret the arrival of Christianity to the people as the fulfillment of an old Lahu prophecy, but the encounter did not bring back all the good things and actually is only a partial fulfillment of prophecies.

Rather than interpreting their encounter with Christianity as the failure of an establishment of the perfect state of the world, Christian Lahu postponed the time of the *return* of the other good thing to the future. Today mainstream Christian Lahu narratives tell the people to "seek wisdom" and live "in harmony" so that one day they will prosper again. The date of the Day is not known, but its advent may have to do with the human actions in "seeking wisdom" and being "in harmony". The time is said to be "coming nearer and nearer". To infer the time of the Day, they cast an interpretive eye on such uncertain indices as AD 2000 and the catastrophes. But, the uncertainty of the indices leaves room for later reinterpretation to avoid their final negation. The prophecy cannot be negated but the Day will be postponed, if their initial expectation fails to be fulfilled.

The adjournment of the Day to more remote future is only possible by the view of history as gradual development. Christian Lahu's developmental view of history thus functions to sustain their hope for the future. While their initial aspiration for the *return* of political power was not (fully) realized but postponed to the future, the Christian Lahu expectation that the Day is coming "nearer and nearer" is supported by their views that they were uplifted by the encounter with "the true God", are more developed than non-Christian Lahu groups, and are improving or approaching prosperity.

In a sense, Christian Lahu millenarian aspiration presents an interesting world-view. Like radical "near-future" millenarianism, they also expect a "total, ultimate, this-worldly, collective salvation" (Marshall ed. 1994:333). But, at the same time, the date of the Day is not felt imminent but seems to have been postponed to an uncertain time in the

future. Despite the Christian Lahu apparent expectation for the Day, their fundamental psychology is operating less to define the exact time of the Day than to avoid its total failure by leaving room for later reinterpretation and adjournment. Christian Lahu are living between their hope for the future and fear of its negation.

In this section, I have discussed that during the long Christian history among the Lahu people, Christian agencies, including formal education and its millenarian ideas, have functioned to transform the Christian Lahu's initially radical millenarianism to more passive one. This was achieved by the Christian stress on their own deficiency as the cause of their present suffering as well as the establishment of a new historical conception among the Christian Lahu, in which the time of the perfection is not to come abruptly but only gradually. Their hope for future is always reproduced, in which their historical view and time notion help to avoid its final negation and postpone its fulfillment to a more remote future. Their present plight is experienced as "living in others' countries" or their subjugation and absence of autonomy. The ideal state is therefore symbolized by "the Lahu country", or, in lesser cases, by "God's country" (*G'ui sha mvuh mi*), in which they will no longer have to live under oppressions of other peoples.

8. Universal and Ethnic Christianity

During an interview by Herbert Swanson, Reverend Paul Lewis rather disappointedly talked about Christian Lahu's enthusiasm for the Old Testament mythology. He is the translator of the Bible Society version of the Lahu New Testament, but he himself did not want to translate the Old

Testament to Lahu. He thought that the Lahu would read its "sub-Christian" elements in their messianic conceptual framework. For Lewis, the significance of Christianity was, above all, "God's love". (Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 3, 6, passim.) The translation of Lahu Old Testament was later done by E naw Pun, a Lahu pastor in Burma.

Gustav Mensching classifies religions in two general types: ethnic religions (*Volksreligionen*) and universal religions (*Universalreligionen*)⁷⁹. Although their apparent difference lies in whether they are only for one group of people or extend over many peoples, this difference in the extent of territory comes from their difference of fundamental structure. The bearer of an ethnic religion is always a vital community, which constitutes also a religious community. Individuals are still embedded in community and have not discovered their selves. Ethnic religions have relevance only to one people and their gods do not have universality. The good and bad are not absolute but relative, either valuable or harmful to the prosperity and continuity of the people. On the other hand, a universal religion has followers beyond one people. Individuals who have become conscious about self and existential problems are now the subjects of universal religions. While both ethnic and universal religions aim to cope with human suffering, the former is concerned with communal suffering and the latter with individual one. (Mensching 1959:65-77) These are, of course, ideal-types and in fact every religion has natures of both these two types in different degrees.

Christianity originated from early Judaism with the Hebrew Bible, which was a book concerning not only with the religious matters but also with history of the Jews. God (*Yahweh*) is the Creator of all that exists in the world and the Lord of history.

Judaism was based on a sacred covenant between the people of Israel and *Yahweh*, who promised future glory to the people for their observance of the Divine Law. *Yahweh* was in its nature an ethnic god and Judaism is highly colored with the Jews' longing for future grace and restoration of the Kingdom of Israel. (Yates, Jr. 1982, Muramatsu 1965)

But, with the advent of Jesus Christ, Judaism gradually augmented from the religion of the people of Israel to one of more universal nature. Requirements for the Salvation came to be thought of as faith rather than observance of the Law and ethnic origin. Paul, who believed that the proclamation of the Good News was universal and not limited to the Jews, devoted himself missions among the Gentiles and carried forward transformation from the Jewish ethnic religion to a universal religion. (Bumstead 1982, Muramatsu 1965)

Like Judaism for the Jews, the religion of Christian Lahu is concerned not only with the religious matters but also with history and destiny of the people. Christian Lahu in general, including many well educated people, are concerned with their people's plight and have anticipation for future grace. Like the Jews, Christian Lahu perceive the people's history as a prescribed set comprised of the periods of initial grace, fall from the grace, wandering in the wilderness, advent of Messiah, and the return of grace, which is, in turn, symbolized and expressed by the restoration of "the Lahu country". If *A Sha Fu Cu* was "a kind of Lahu 'John the Baptist', precursor and foreteller of the coming Christianity" (Walker 1975c:361), William M. Young must be the Messiah who came to tell the Good News to the people. Since the arrival of the gospel to the Lahu people, historical time of Christian Lahu began to flow towards the promised glory in the future. Christian Lahu

mainstream discourse now tells people to “seek wisdom” and live “in harmony” in order for the Lahu people to prosper (see Kya-Leh 1994:20-21, the lyrics of a popular song cited at the beginning of this chapter). Christian Lahu view Christianity through their lens of ethnic consciousness and they are especially interested in those aspects of this universal religion that would explain and give possible solutions to their suffering as an oppressed ethnic minority. Lahu Christianity is more concerned with destiny and a possible prosperity of the people than with God’s love and universal brotherhood. Similar to *Yahweh*, *G’ui sha* is the Lord of history. By elaborating the story of *A Sha Fu Cu* and organizing their own mythology as parallel to that of the Jews, Christian Lahu have reduced this universal religion more to the ethnic religion of Christian Lahu.

When I asked what they say “*sasana*” (Thai term for “religion”) in Lahu, more educated villagers answered “*o k’o pui ve aw li*”, literally, “customs for bowing head in respect”. This term is used in the Lahu Bible as the word for “religion” (*G’ui sha ve li hpu* 1989), but villagers rarely use this term in casual conversations. They usually say, for example, “We are Christians” (*Nga hui bon ya yo*) and “They are heathens” (*Yaw hui law ki ya yo*), but do not use expressions in which “religion” is more externalized and objectified, such as “Our religion is Christianity”. When they wanted to ask about my “religion”, they usually said, “*Naw a ma aw li yeh le?*” or “What customs do you use?”⁸⁰ Matisoff’s dictionary translates “*aw li*” as “customs; traditions; habit; rule; law; method; way” (Matisoff 1988:215). In fact, “*aw li*” is a general term and has wide coverage, for example, “country’s customs” (*mvuh mi ve aw li*) means “laws” while “Lahu customs” (*Lahu aw li*) denotes “Lahu cultural customs”. In other words, under the

general term "*aw li*" there exist smaller "*aw li*" in areas of law, culture, and religion. However, regardless of which area the respective "*aw li*" is concerned with, when villagers use the term "*aw li*", they assume a sort of a set of rules that people do not usually cast reflective eyes upon and conduct rather automatically according to. "Religion" for Christian Lahu is thus a part of general "customs" which they cannot do without⁸¹. We may see that what Mensching calls "ethnic religion" is what we usually consider as customs and conventions of traditional societies.

After nearly a century of Christian presence among Christian Lahu, this world religion has had deep influence upon the ethnic minority group in such areas as social structure, education, formality and discipline. The Christian agencies have also brought about transformations of mythology, notions of time and history, and millenarianism of Christian Lahu. However, the weak ethnic group as human agency also has transformed the world religion. Christian Lahu have viewed and accepted this universal religion based on their main concern about the people's well being and prosperity. They have indigenized Christianity through appropriating this universal religion principally as their ethnic religion.

9. Invention of New Narratives of "the Lahu Country"

As I stayed longer with Lahu villagers and my comprehension of their language, conception, and feelings improved, I understood what villagers meant by the cultural idiom of "the Lahu country" and became able to use the idiom myself.

One evening I was at the house of a poor villager. As the family was not very reserved towards to me, unlike some

educated people, I was in a close relationship with them. I also often bought meat for them to cook and eat together for they seldom had money to buy it. I could always enjoy conversation with the housewife and one of her sons called Shaw Lu. In one of my friendly conversations with the housewife or Shaw Lu's mother, I invented a new narrative of "the Lahu country". My field journal on 27th July 1997 reads:

It was about nine. When I began to think of getting up [I was taking a rest] and going home if it stopped raining, Shaw Lu's mother began to talk about [their lives in] Burma. As she had said a moment ago, "We will miss you, Ja Pa [me], when you go home next year", she was probably in a mood for telling stories of their past.

Shaw Lu's mother had been in Meh Keh [village] and came to Thailand more than twenty years ago. They [her family] were in Santondu for eight months, but, because the village was in a protected forest area and could not be farmed, as well as because Ca Law invited the family to come here [T village] by telling them that there were fields to farm although not paddy, they came to T [village]. They came to Thailand because the Lahu and the Burman had started fighting and the Burman began to conscript them as *ku li* [porters]. Women could be taken away [from their villages], if men were not available (Shaw Lu's mother herself was not conscripted), and were forced to work for 12-3 days with poor food. When they couldn't carry goods, they were beaten and some of them died. When dogs barked and let the villagers know that there were people coming to the village, Lahu villagers hurried to hide in the "forest" (*heh pui hk'aw*). Burman did not go in the forest. I said to her, "*Heh pui hk'aw* is 'the Lahu country', isn't it?" and she, laughing, said "Yes, yes." She said that the Lahu were living in the "forest" and had big ears. When Burman were

coming to a village, they sent men to tell it to nearby villages. The messengers did not go on a [normal] "way" but went through the "forest". ... Besides Lahu, there were many other minority peoples living in Mong Hsat. In Burma, it was not easy to find food. Regardless of meat or other foods, everything was plentiful in the forest and there were fewer people. They had paddy fields and they "farmed a year and could eat two years" (*te hk'aw te leh nyi hk'aw g'a ca ve*). Yet, there were many sick people (with malaria), especially in rainy seasons like now, because there were many mosquitoes and people became sick from malaria. ... Shaw Lu's mother named her five dead children (although it is probable that not all of them died from malaria). When they came to Thailand, they had no money and could not buy land. They therefore use the land that *Khon Muang* did not occupy (used those land which others' did not want to use).

In their memories, Burma is often described by its dreadful malaria and fertile nature which enabled them to "farm a year and eat two years". Shaw Lu's mother's story belongs to the *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority*. When she said, "the Lahu were living in 'the forest' and had big ears", the Lahu people were described as wild animals in the forest. Partly this may be an adoption and internalization of the lowlanders' view of the Lahu people, but, behind its apparently negative self-definition, there is also an implication that the Lahu can do very well in jungle.

When I joked that the "forest" was "the Lahu country", she was pleased, because the joke suggested that the Lahu are anxious for their own territory like those of "civilized" peoples, but, at the same time, are aware of their inferiority, small number, and backwardness. They feel that all that is left for

such a weak minority group is mountain areas which other peoples cannot, and do not want to, go to.

The second example is an invention of a new narrative of “the Lahu country” by Sa La. This is partly a product of his interactions with me, an outsider, who had often asked him about the Lahu independence movement. Probably too directly, I once asked Sa La, who always followed Burma affairs on the BBC radio news, if he wanted “the Lahu country”. After a pause, Sa La answered, “Such conducts [rebellion] only belong to those who do not have ‘wisdom’”. In a later day, I asked again if he wanted to go back if democracy is established in Burma. Although he had sometimes spoken of the rich nature in Burma and complained about the poor environment and danger of abused fertilizers in Thailand, Sa La answered that he and his family would not go back because of the poor medical situation there and that his daughters are now in Thai schools.

Walker (1995:9) writes, “Lahu households most often comprise a small family group: husband, wife and unmarried children, who share a single, hearth, the focal point of every Lahu house”. Lahu families cook their food, eat, and take rest around the hearth. As the villagers themselves so perceived, one of the Lahu customs is to visit one another’s house, drink tea, and enjoy conversations sitting around the hearth (*gui da ve*). But, the introduction of electricity is changing the situation. In villages with electricity, the hearth as the focal point has been replaced by television, around which people sit without many words to one another. Installment of gas stoves, though not many yet, is further making the hearth more associated with backwardness.

One day, Sa La pointed at the hearth and said, “Here, this is

‘the Lahu country’”. The hearth was a small square territory divided from the outer space with four sides of woods. The joke was both comical and pathetic, implying not only their longing for sovereignty but also their awareness of their powerlessness as a small numbered ethnic minority.

As the new narratives show, the expression “the Lahu country” is colored with an ambivalent feeling of Christian Lahu. They are too well aware of their backwardness and powerlessness, which, however, produce and reproduce their longing for blessing and prosperity rather than negate it. Christian Lahu live with such an ambivalent and contradicting feeling made of consciousness of harsh reality and hope for the future.

10. Summary

“The Lahu country” is one of the most important Christian Lahu cultural idioms, for diverse senses and feelings of the people are stuffed in it in a condensed form. While another expression “living in others’ countries” firmly expresses Lahu social experience of their predicaments as an ethnic minority, the idiom “the Lahu country” is charged with their historical consciousness, representing their yearning for the past and hope for the future.

For Christian Lahu villagers who continuously talk about “the Lahu country”, the main issue is not whether “the Lahu country” really existed in the past, but whether the stories are *real* or significant to their social experience. Even though the storytellers and listeners do not believe the contents of the tales, as long as they participate in the act of storytelling and feel the stories *real*, they are learning to perceive the world as the stories depict and, at the same time, continuously elaborate

new more *real* stories through the act of recounting narratives.

Story of *A Sha Fu Cu*, a Lahu cultural hero who allegedly predicted the coming of Christianity to the Lahu people, is popular among Christian Lahu, but poorly known to non-Christian Red Lahu. There may not have been a prophecy as depicted by the present *A Sha Fu Cu* story, but rather the *A Sha Fu Cu* story has been reconstructed and elaborated into the present form in their retrospective narration of a Lahu history. Functionally, the *A Sha Fu Cu* story serves as a bridge between pre-Christian and Christian histories, and justifies the new religion by describing its arrival as if it were a historical necessity. In the Christian Lahu conception, there is hardly an inconsistency between what outside observers tend to view as "the true Lahu tradition" and "the new religion of foreign origin".

The formation of the prophet story has further implications. Today, Christian Lahu perceive time as a linear flow from the past through the present to the future. The whole history is perceived as a prescribed scheme comprised of the glorious past, present plight, and the future grace. Salvation at the end of time is thought as "coming nearer and nearer". Such notions of time and history are a marked contrast to the more cyclical notion of time and apparent indifference to history of non-Christian Red Lahu. Besides the adoption of the Western calendar, formal education, literacy, new annual rituals, the act of telling history-like myths have contributed to the formation of current Christian Lahu notions of time and history.

In their historical consciousness, the cultural idiom of "the Lahu country" is fused with millenarian aspiration and associated with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. However, millenarianism found among Christian Lahu is generally of

“passive” nature, anticipating that the millennium is an uncertain time in the future. The originally radical millenarian aspiration, which saw Christianity as a revivalist cult and caused mass-conversion, has transformed to “passive” millenarianism. Along with the church’s civilizing project and Christian idea of Salvation in a more remote future, the changes in the people’s notions of history and time have contributed to the transformation of Lahu millenarianism. Despite a good awareness of harsh reality, or more correctly, because of it, Christian Lahu anticipate future grace, which is symbolically expressed by the restoration of “the Lahu country”, and the hope is continuously reproduced. Christian Lahu, who are concerned less with God’s love and universal amity than with the ethnic history and destiny, have indigenized Christianity through appropriating this universal religion principally as their ethnic religion.

Chapter 6: Conclusion : Considerations for the Study of Narratives

During the fieldwork I became interested in the Christian Lahu's peculiar form of narratives, which I call in this study *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority*. Among them, the study focused on their cultural idioms of "wisdom" (*cu yi*) and "the Lahu country" (*Lahu mvuh mi*), since these expressions are highly colored with Christian Lahu's feelings and yearnings toward history. I liked to hear villagers talk and tell stories and wanted to understand their feelings about the past and present predicaments. I wanted to understand what kind of experience it is to be an ethnic minority who does not have a country. "Social experience" and "historical consciousness", two main concepts used in this study, denote nothing other than the people's cognition, perception, desire, and feelings about history. In the Christian Lahu case, distinct social experience is concerned with their present plight as a marginalized ethnic minority living in other peoples' countries, and is colored by their yearning for the allegedly glorious past and hope for the future. As the social experience is generated in history, the two concepts "social experience" and "historical consciousness" are, in fact, inseparable.

In the following, I will note some theoretical considerations for the study of narratives as the conclusion of this study.

First, narrative, though not a material thing, has its own form, or *a group of people has some patterned and stylized narratives*. In the Lahu case examined in this study, distinct properties of their narratives are that they speak negatively of what they believe to be the nature of the Lahu people. This style of Lahu narrative shows that an abstract concept "the

Lahu people” is externalized and objectified by the Lahu themselves. Lahu speakers assume that peoples have their inherent natures and speak of Lahu natures negatively. I named this style of narrative *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority*. It may be interesting to compare these Lahu narratives to those of Thai people, who often speak of the nature, character, and culture of the Thai people positively (e.g. “The Thai are kindhearted, have a good heart, and help one another [*Khon Thai cai di, mi namcai, chuai kan*]”). However, the main issue here is not the veracity of literal contents of these narratives, but the way in which people talk about themselves. The sociology of religion is not concerned with the truth/untruth of theological teachings of a religion, but rather studies its social meanings and functions as an institution. Sociological study of narrative views the existence of a unique style of narrative as social and historical phenomena. Study of narrative of a group of people should thus first define the form, properties, patterns, and styles of their narrative.

Second, *narrative has its social and historical contexts*, or unique properties of narrative are formed through the long-time social and historical experience of reality by the group of speakers. The three properties of the Lahu narrative discussed in this thesis, namely, the use of the abstract concept “the Lahu people”, reference to what they believe to be the inherent natures of the people, and negative definition of these ethnic natures, show that the Lahu people have for a long time been conscious of the existence of more powerful ethnic majority peoples, and that their negative definition of their own people's natures is made by binary opposition to these lowlanders. Lahu define the nature of their own people in terms of the negation of positive properties of powerful majority peoples. The

peculiar style of *Lahu narratives of their own people's inferiority* is a product of long history of ethnic power relations, in which Lahu have had to face overwhelming powers of the lowlanders. Moreover, in the Christian Lahu case, civilizing project of the Christian church, which served to impose values, standards, and discipline of Western modern industrial society, has reproduced and strengthened the Lahu negative ethnic consciousness, especially, one defined in terms of the absence of "wisdom". For the case of Thai positive narrative mentioned above, we may have to examine such socio-historical contexts as modernization, "development", and tourism, which make Thai people aware of the views on themselves by people of developed countries and reflect on their own people. The apparently positive self-definition of the Thai people, however, may be their attempt to redefine their ethnicity-cum-nationality which is in crisis due to increasing pressures from globalization. In any case, narrative may not simply say only one thing, but rather is dense with diverse meanings, implications, and feelings of people, which are often contradictory to one another.

Third, narrative may be multi-dimensionally studied by using different approaches. This study used three approaches. The first approach views narrative as a reflection of social experience of the group of people. In other words, social experience of the speakers generates, shapes, and reshapes their unique form of narrative. In this case, narrative is a firm expression of people's feeling and cognition, like the Lahu expression "living in others' country/-ies".

On the other hand, narrative also generates, shapes, and reshapes people's social experience by being recounted. Narrative is more than a means to convey meanings of its

linguistic content, but also a kind of ritual act that works on people's perceptions and emotions. Act of recounting narratives shapes and reshapes people's values, world-view, and feeling, which, in turn, influence and inform their behavior. A case from this study shows that the act of telling history-like myths, including the story of an old Lahu prophet, has contributed to transformations in Christian Lahu's notions of time and history and millenarianism.

The above two approaches, in combination, assume that people's *narrative and social experience are in dialectical relationship*, shaping and shaped by each other. The act of recounting narratives is an arena in which stories told and people as human subject interact with each other. Here, the contents of the stories may be less important than their *forms*. As long as storytellers and listeners participate in the act of recounting narratives and feel the stories *real*, they are perceiving, and learning to perceive, that the world is how the stories depict, while, the participants are, at the same time, continuously elaborating new more *real* stories by isolating some elements from innumerable events and making them into stories more meaningful and significant to their social experience.

The third approach gives attentions to the *inevitable gap between narrative and reality*. Narrative is not a material thing but a discourse which is more or less distant from the object to which it refers. For instance, Christian Lahu mainstream narratives of "wisdom" show that Christian Lahu equate "knowledge" (gained from books and formal education) to "wisdom" (acquired from long experience in life) and hardly value "wisdom" in non-written form. Behind this discordant discourse of "wisdom", a civilizing project engineered by the

Christian church has been operating on a larger scale and led the Christian Lahu to fail to appreciate their "indigenous knowledge".

In summary, this study views that Lahu social experience has been generated from the interactions among the history of ethnic power relations, the Christian church as an institution imposing values and standards of modern industrial society, and Christian Lahu as human subject. Although Lahu life is increasingly subject to the expanding powers of market and the state, at this moment, they still perceive these processes in their conceptual framework of ethnic power relations and understand their predicaments as growing subjugation to the powerful lowlanders. Analysis of people's self-authored narratives helps us to get closer to the "natives' point of view", an old anthropological ideal.

Narratives are diverse in kind. Some narratives are firm expressions of people's social experience (e.g. Lahu expression of "living in others' countries"), and others are highly colored by their historical consciousness (e.g. Lahu cultural idiom of "the Lahu country"). Still others are discordant discourse which have significant distance from the social reality that they speak of (e.g. Christian Lahu mainstream discourse of "wisdom"). Despite these differences, every telling, more or less, contains people's feelings, especially their expectations towards history. Levi-Strauss (1969) points out a "timeless" nature of myth, having relevance both to the past, the present, and the future at the same time. This property may be shared by all expressions of words, although we find it in more intensive form in myth. Bruner (1986) and Tapp (1989) also suggest that telling, which explicitly refers to the past, nonetheless takes account of and influence the present and the

future. It is probably because of this mythologically “timeless” nature that we sense poetics in narratives of others.

Notes

¹ The group which constitutes majority population of northern Thailand call themselves "*Khon Muang*", and are referred to "Northern Thai" and "*Yuan*" by others. In this study, "Central Thai" is to denote the Siamese people mostly living in the central area of Thailand, while by "Thai" I refer to Thai citizens, including *Khon Muang* and Central Thai.

² An expression often heard from Christian Lahu.

³ Although I have not yet been to Burma, I found the same style of narratives in Lahu language publications, tapes of Lahu popular music, and speech by Lahu people originating in Burma.

⁴ *Chaw maw hkaw* (literally, words of elders/ancestors) sometimes include many kinds of stories, such as myths, histories, old stories, proverbs, idioms, and customary teachings.

⁵ By "Burman" I refer to the majority ethnic people in Burma, while the "Burmese" is used in this study to denote the population comprised of various ethnic peoples living in the country which its current military government calls the "Union of Myanmar".

⁶ "Shan" in this study denotes people who called themselves "*Tai*". They are called "*Pi Chaw*" by Lahu and "*Thai Yai*" by Central Thai.

⁷ Although this study only focuses on Black and Red Lahu members of TLBC, the Lahu church actually comprises also Yellow Lahu, Lahu Shehle, and Wa members.

⁸ By "non-Christian Red Lahu" I refer to those Red Lahu who have religious beliefs and practices promulgated by a popular religious leader, Maw Na To bo. Although outside observers usually call them "animist", the term "animist" in fact has some problems to describe their religious beliefs and practices.

⁹ Data of the study village are as per November 1997.

¹⁰ However, this Wa man identifies himself as Black Lahu, although all villagers regard him as Wa.

¹¹ Quotation marks in the description of Ca Law's life history denote words given by Ca Law.

¹² William Marcus Young was the first Baptist missionary in contact with Lahu people in Burma. He arrived in Kengtung in 1901 and moved to China for opening new fields for evangelism in 1916. In 1920, he

opened a mission station in Banna. He himself could not speak Lahu but spoke Shan, which was translated by his followers. In the initial period of the Baptist work in Burma and China, many Karens, who had longer Christian history, helped foreign missionaries to work with hill peoples. See Chapter 3-(3).

¹³ Communist seized power in China in October 1949. Battle between the Communist and Nationalist Chinese caused a large number of ethnic minority people to risk their lives and flee to Burma. Vincent Young's family and his followers also fled back to Kengtung during this period. Ethnic minority people suffered from the war between the Communist and Nationalist Chinese and many were recruited by KMT. (see Ai Lun and Sowards 1963:362-365, Aung Din and Sowards 1963: 415-16, Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 4).

¹⁴ There have been many Shan insurgent armies since 1958 and I cannot determine which of them came to "collect taxes" during this period.

¹⁵ The Lahu army, organized by Maw Na To bo and his son Hpa ya Ca Ui, began fighting against the Burmese army in 1973. See Lintner 1999, Smith 1999: 347-49, Sombat 1997.

¹⁶ Table 2 excludes the village pastor's household which is financially supported by the village church members and sometimes receives financial remittance from a relative living in the United States. Individual labors include all villagers except students and small children.

¹⁷ *Mvuh mi* means "country/nation", while *mi gui* is "land/ground" (see Lewis 1986: 227, 232). Thus *Man mvuh mi* means "Burman country" and *Man mi gui* "Burman's land". This shows that they perceive a country less as nation-state with definite boundaries but more as a people's territory over which they can exercise power.

¹⁸ According to the village pastor, Burmese and Thai educational systems are different as follows:

Burmese system:

1-4 grades	"primary" school education
5-8 grades	"middle school" education
9-10 grades	"high school" education
i i - i 2 grades	"college" education

13-14 grades	"university" education.
Thai system:	
<i>P.1-P.6</i>	"primary school" education (compulsory)
<i>M.1-M.3</i>	"junior high school" education
<i>M.4-M.6</i>	"high school" education
4 years	"university" education

Table 2 was not made with the standards according to one's absolute years in education, but to his relative education levels. In such a little simplified comparison, accomplishment of 10 year-education in Burma becomes equivalent to the high school graduation in Thailand, but this accords more with the villagers perception. According to the village pastor, the Burmese 11-12 grades are resembled to the vocational education in Thailand (*BWC* and *BWS*) after finishing *M3* grade.

¹⁹ Beside this Lahu orthography developed by American Baptist missionaries, there also are orthographies developed by Italian Catholic priests and by Chinese linguists working for the Chinese state. These latter two are used at the Lahu Catholic church and in China, respectively.

²⁰ Since I was closer to the group presently led by the village pastor than the other, the following description may well have some "bias".

²¹ Christian Lahu perceive Mahongson, where there is less Lahu Christians than other areas, as "forest" (*heh pui hk'aw*) or savage and backward. It is often observed that *sa la* in lower rank go to work as evangelist there.

²² According to the TLBC regulation, the village pastor's salary is to be paid from the tithes collected. The village, however, allocates 22 household contributions to the pastor's salary, because many households do not or only partially pay the tithes.

²³ For example, TLBC annual membership fees 50 baht for those who have been baptized, TLBC area 4 annual contribution 50 baht/household, the Women's Society membership fee 65 baht/person, and the Youth Group's membership fee 24 baht/person.

²⁴ See Weber (1920), Thompson (1967), and Comaroff (1985).

²⁵ *Lahu Sheh Leh*, however, call themselves "*Lahu Na*".

²⁶ Actually, *Lahu Meun Neu* and *Lahu Na* are not always

interchangeable. Although a detailed analysis of their usage cannot be carried out here, I would like to note that *Meun Neu* is used by non-Christian Red Lahu to refer to Christian and, less frequently, by Christian Lahu themselves. If one says, "He became *Meun Neu*", it means that the man became Christian. *Meun Neu* is, however, not used to refer to *Lahu Nyi* Christians. But when we ask one's affiliation of sub-group, *Meun Neu* and *Lahu Na* are one and the same. Again, it is only the case in Northern Thailand, and in other areas the classification system is different.

²⁷ Although many non-Christian Red Lahu themselves regard their religion as traditional and authentic (*chaw maw te co-e ve Lahu aw li teh teh*), their "traditional religion" actually underwent transformations many times (Sombat 1997:97-106).

²⁸ Walker (1992:61) writes that "it was probably in Thailand that the first Lahu were baptized as Christians (in 1881 two Lahu living in the hills west of Chiang Rai were baptized by pioneer Presbyterian missionary Daniel McGilvary ...)". At the end of nineteenth century, American Presbyterian Mission was actively working in northern Thailand, while American Baptist missionaries were opening the Burma field. However, today the majority of Christian Lahu in Thailand is immigrants from Burma since 1950s and belongs to the Baptist church.

²⁹ This figure probably includes Wa converts, as William M. Young worked both with Lahu and Wa.

³⁰ Dr. Robert Harper 1907-1915, Dr. Max D. Miles 1925-31, Dr. L.T. Ah Pon (a Shan) 1930-32, Rev. Rainey 1932-33, Dr. Richard Bucker 1934-40, Dr. Keith Dahlberg 1957-67, Miss Margaret B. Smith, period unknown, Dr. Aung Thaike (a Chin) 1962-unknown. (Yo han 1976)

³¹ The two churches were reunited later.

³² Personal communication with A dul Nama, Chairman of TLBC in November 1997.

³³ While Pathiphat (1991:25) writes "Lahu Baptist Convention in Thailand", Paul Lewis (Lewis and Lewis 1981:tape 5) stresses that it was "Churches, not Congress nor Convention". It is not known when "LBCT" was changed to the present name "Thailand Lahu Baptist Convention (TLBC)".

³⁴ This program provided villages with a medicine box, and representatives of the villagers, who took training courses in Chiang Mai, administrated the use of the medicines.

³⁵ Lahu churches in Maehongson and Maesot areas are similar associations but are not called *hke* but simply "Maehongson" and "Maesot" areas. Beside the two, Wa Baptist churches joined TLBC in 1997 and constitute an association within TLBC.

³⁶ The title of General Secretary was changed to "Chairman" (*Pra htan*) in September 1997.

³⁷ Some Christian villages have more than two churches each belonging to different denominations of Christianity.

³⁸ On the other hand, non-Christian Red Lahu uses many magical means. To give a few examples, blowing spells (*sha meu ve*) is a common practice of first-aid of injuries. Spells are also used for love magic and other purposes. Sacred beeswax candles made by religious priests and shamans (*peh yi*) are believed to have power of curing.

³⁹ A *khong muang* student also once expressed the same impression to the author.

⁴⁰ Walker (1975a:118-119) cited this "Shepa" as "medicine man (*sheh-hpa*)" with a footnote "*Sheh-hpa*: Lahu for 'expert', 'master', 'owner', cognate to the Burmese *hsa-ya*". Telford's description (1937:196-197), however, shows that this "Shepa" is more like a sucking curer who magically "bite out" (*geu ba ve*) small objects from the patient's body. The objects are thought to have been put into his body by the sorcery of his enemy. This curer is called "*she*" or "*she pa*" in Lahu, without an implication of "expert", "master", or "owner".

⁴¹ Narration before the song titled "*Shu Hk'e Hpeh Pi O*" [Be Like Others] in a health promotion cassette tape "*Naw Shi Peu La?*" [Do You Already Know?] of the Health Project of Tribal People, a Chiang Mai based NGO run by highlanders.

⁴² This does not mean the Lahu villagers are free from recent movements of objectification and reconstruction of authentic "cultures". The Thai state has been eager to establish "national culture" and, in the process of Thai state formation, local peoples have also become aware of and attempted to construct their own (local) "cultures". The Lahu also

have become more conscious about "the Lahu culture". There are now many discourses on their "culture" which do not necessarily accord with their "lived culture", such as arguments for preserving "the Lahu tradition".

⁴³ I also heard other similar versions, including "The Lahu [eat] chilies, the Shan [eat] fermented soybean cakes, the Chinese [eat] soybean curd, the Burman [eat] pork" (*Lahu a hpe, Pi Chaw naw hk'eh, Heh Pa naw ba, Man K'a Lu a lu*).

⁴⁴ This is judged from the same style of narratives found in Lahu publications, lyrics of Lahu popular songs, and Lahu visitors from Burma, although I have not visited Lahu community in Burma yet.

⁴⁵ "*Chaw maw hkaw*" - literally, "words of the elders/ancestors", refer not only to short proverbs but also to myth, legends, histories, old prophetic oracles, and idioms. For example, the statement 11 cited above is a Lahu *chaw maw hkaw* and is often spoken in an abbreviated form without reference to the Shan: "The Lahu only eat chilies" (*Lahu a hpe ti leh ve*). Some other statements cited above may also have their longer equivalents in *chaw maw hkaw*.

⁴⁶ The village pastor's wife translated this *cu yi* as the seal of the ruler. Another villager explained that *cu yi* is like the stars on the shoulder strap of a high-ranked army officer. Many other villagers did not know what *cu yi* exactly is. However, villagers are agreed that *cu yi* is basically a thing which endows its holder an ability and legitimacy to rule others. This *cu yi*, first syllable with a low, falling tone and the second with a tone rising from mid-high to high, is a different word from *cu yi* ("wisdom") which has a high falling tone with the first syllable and a low, level tone for the second.

⁴⁷ This denotes "a very long time".

⁴⁸ "Nine" in Lahu legends denotes a large number.

⁴⁹ Thai administrative unit usually translated "District".

⁵⁰ It is interesting that the Lahu myths attribute their "loss" of right to rule and "the Lahu country" to the trick of a Shan girl and stupidity of Lahu women. This may well reflect Lahu's gender perspective, although the issue cannot be examined here

⁵¹ Originally "*aw u hpa ya*" and "*aw nu ma ya*". According to Paul

Lewis, "aw u hpa" is "a girl's older male relative (he is the protector of his: aw u ma)" (1986:72).

⁵² Kya-Leh 1994:7-8. A different but similar story which explain why the Lahu conduct swidden agriculture, while *Khon Muang* wet rice farming, see Tribal Research Center 1976:2.

⁵³ But *cu yi* was not used to imply knowledge in specialized fields such as knowledge in electronic technique or in foreign language. Rather, *cu yi* seems to mean broad range of "knowledge" as implied by the English expression "a man of knowledge".

⁵⁴ Harrell defines that "[a] civilizing project ... is a kind of interaction between peoples, in which one group, the civilizing center, interacts with other groups (the peripheral peoples) in terms of a particular kind of inequality. In this interaction, the inequality between the civilizing center and the peripheral peoples has its ideological basis in the center's claim to a superior degree of civilization, along with a commitment to raise the peripheral peoples' civilization to the level of the center, or at least closer to that level." (Harrell 1994:4). My use of the terms "civilization" and "civilizing project" in this book follow his definition.

⁵⁵ These are rather "official" and minimum requirements, and, in reality, kinship and family background are often important factors for even a Bible Institute graduate to find a pastor's position and receive respects from villagers. See Sa La Eh's case mentioned in Chapter 2.

⁵⁶ A Lahu traditional curing method. "to twist skin on neck and chest when felt person has aw shi taw ve ["when they feel run down with no appetite"]" (Lewis 1986:69, 296).

⁵⁷ In the Karen case, Karen traditional knowledge is rediscovered and redefined to be used as an important counter-discourse in their fight with Thai national policies concerning resource management. (Hayami 1998)

⁵⁸ Multilingualism in spoken languages is sometimes used in the mainstream discourse to add another ability to stress the *cu yi* of an well-educated and literate person with high position. But it is an extra qualification, for without multilingualism such people would still be regarded as person with *cu yi* for their *cu yi* in written form.

⁵⁹ Lahu legends relate that long ago *G'ui sha* let the Lahu and the Shan choose a deer and a horse. The Lahu were given priority and chose the

deer. This is why the Lahu went deep into the mountains and hunt for deer. (Kya-Leh 1994:7)

⁶⁰ Lahu legends relate that long ago *G'ui sha* let the Lahu and the Shan choose fire or water, which stood for mountain and plain areas. The Lahu were given priority and chose the fire. This is why the mountains became Lahu's territories. (Kya-Leh 1994:7)

⁶¹ On cool highlands, there are few mosquitoes that carry malaria.

⁶² Lahu legends relate that the Lahu once had a country but other peoples attacked and destroyed it.

⁶³ Christian Lahu have developed American folk style songs in Lahu, singing about Christian teachings and Lahu lives. Cassette tapes are sold by private vendors on occasions such as at the annual meeting of Lahu churches.

⁶⁴ Countries of such "savior" foreigners as westerners, Koreans, and Japanese are usually referred to as *aw ba mvuh mi*, literally, "outside countries".

⁶⁵ A Lahu-English-Thai dictionary by Paul Lewis translates *li hpu htan hpu* to "silver & gold book" which, he explains, is "to be brought by white bro. according to A te fu cu [*sic.*]" (Lewis 1986:207). However, all my Christian Lahu informants translate *li hpu htan hpu* to "the [Christian] Bible" without room for other interpretation.

⁶⁶ For other similar versions, see Kya-Leh (1994:32), Ba Thein and Yoko (1996:20) and Hawley (1991:164). Based on Hsiu-Li Tscng "The Sacred Mission: An American Missionary Family in the Lahu and the Wa Districts of Yunnan, China", MA thesis, Baylor University, 1987, Hawley describes the prophecy: "In 1903 a Lahu To Bo, or messianic leader, fled Chinese attacks in Yunnan, China. The Lahu who followed this To Bo believed that he would save the people from continuing Chinese attack. After arriving in Kengtung, the Lahu leader followed a mythical white horse to Young's mission. Seeing the horse halt at Young's door he prophesied that Rev. Young would be the new messianic leader of the Lahu."

⁶⁷ *A Sha Fu Cu* and *A Te Fu Cu* are understood differently and sometimes confused even by Christian Lahu who know the story well. Some say that they are one and the same, while others say that they are

brothers. But almost all my Christian Lahu informants knew the story and that *A Sha Fu Cu* or *A Te Fu Cu* had predicted the coming of Christianity to the people. In this study, I will call the prophet *A Sha Fu Cu*, unless I quote others who use *A Te Fu Cu*.

⁶⁸ Based on writings and personal letters of William M. Young, Kataoka (1998) introduces diverse versions of prophecy about the advent of the true God told by Lahu.

⁶⁹ "Ninety-nine" in Lahu legends denotes a large number.

⁷⁰ In one of my visits to non-Christian Red Lahu villages, a villager said, probably for expressing their welcome, that my visit accorded with their legend which said that one day their lost brethren would come back to them.

⁷¹ *Hpu* means "white/silver" and "holy/sacred". Thus, in principle, *chaw hpu* does not necessarily denote "white person" or Caucasian but can simply mean "holly/sacred person". In poetical expressions, often in couplets, *hpu* serves to add rhythm for listenability rather than to denote literal meanings. Christian Lahu today, however, understand that *chaw hpu* is a white westerner.

⁷² For example, TLBC published a booklet "Htai-Lim 25 Hk'aw Ju Bi Li" (TLBC 25 Years Jubilee) and TLBC related Christians once planned to organize a conference on the Lahu history.

⁷³ "Nine" in Lahu legends denotes a large number.

⁷⁴ There is also a song among Christian Lahu, which one villager said is like "the Lahu national anthem": "Long ago our country was very beautiful/Our Lahu king was *Po U Lu*/We miss our country/As we did not have "wisdom", the Chinese took it/Oh, dear brothers and sisters/If we let our sons and daughters learn "wisdom"/Our country *Mvuh Meh Mi Meh*/One day we will regain it".

⁷⁵ Non-Christian Red Lahu refrain from eating meat on *shin nyi*.

⁷⁶ Among both Christian and non-Christian Red Lahu, there are people who have only Thai, Shan, Karen, or Burman names, which is not regarded as strange by Lahu villagers.

⁷⁷ Millenarianism is also called messianism, chiliasm, etc. to denote broadly the same phenomena but stressing different aspects of it. In this chapter, I will use the term "millenarianism", unless I quote and refer to

other scholars who use other terms.

⁷⁸ E naw Pun 1995: 4-5. Some villagers say it was 2000 years from the Creation to the Flood and Noah's Ark.

⁷⁹ Mensching also uses the term "world religions" (*Weltreligionen*) generally as the same meanings as the term "universal religions" denotes.

⁸⁰ Non-Christian Red Lahu do not usually use this expression. It seems that they do not have a way to ask someone's "religion" other than by questioning, "Are you Christian/Buddhist/etc.?"

⁸¹ Thus, they do not really understood my answer that I had no religion ("Nga aw li te chi ma yeh ve" or I do not use any [religious] customs), as they take it for granted that people *use* some or other [religious] customs.

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After several months' stay in a Christian Lahu village in northern Thailand, the author realized that there was a peculiar way in which villagers talked about "the Lahu people". This unique style of narratives, or *Lahu narratives of inferiority* speak negatively about the natures of their own people. Through the study of *Lahu narratives of inferiority*, the author reveals Christian Lahu's experience as an oppressed ethnic minority, and how the Christian church contributed to form their social experience.

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