

throne were iron candle stands, called *ta[~] ngaweh[~]*, on which beeswax candles were burned during temple rituals ¹⁶.

In the far right corner of the room, also on the rear platform, was an altar identical to the house spirit altars (*cf.* Walker 1977e) found in every dwelling house: a small wooden shelf atop a single long pole (fig. 4). This altar was for *G'ui_~ fu_~*, the spirit protector of the village. On the altar were two small porcelain bowls of Chinese design which held, respectively, offerings of rice and of water placed in them by the *to bo pa_~* on merit days. Also on the shelf was a woven bamboo basket (fig. 5a) called a *hpeu_~ k'o_~*, another offering to the spirit.

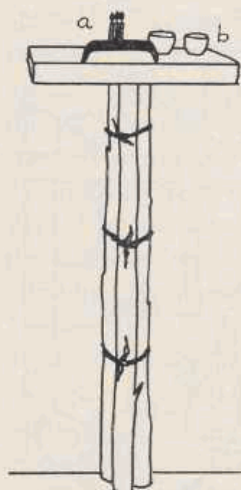


Fig. 4

Detail of the altar to *G'ui_~ fu_~* inside the temple

a) beeswax candles on iron stand

b) porcelain cups for rice and water

¹⁶ The lighting of beeswax candles precedes many Lahu ritual observances. Indeed, so important is the use of these candles to the Lahu that they habitually label themselves *peh[~] tu[~] pa_~* or "beeswax burners" (*peh[~]* from *peh[~] haw_~* "beeswax," *tu[~]* from *tu[~] ve_~* "to light," *pa_~*, the male suffix). The reason for the use of such candles varies from informant to informant and according to the rite in question. But there seems to be agreement that candles "please" benevolent supernatural beings, especially *G'ui_~ sha_~*, who may then listen to one's prayers. Thus one informant said:

*G'ui_~ sha_~ hta_~ ca ve k'o_~, peh[~] g'a tu[~] ve yo_~.
Ma[~] tu[~] k'o_~, G'ui_~ sha_~ ma ha_~ la[~].*

If one looks to *G'ui_~ sha_~* [for a boon] one should light beeswax candles. If one does not light beeswax candles, *G'ui_~ sha_~* will not receive [one's prayers and offerings].

At the same time, there appears to be a belief that lighted beeswax candles strike fear into malicious spirits. Thus the following comment:

*Nē[~] hpaw[~] hta_~ ca ve k'o_~, peh[~] mā tu[~] ve yo_~.
Tu[~] k'o_~, nē[~] yaw[~] kaw[~] ve yo_~. Yaw[~] mā ha_~ la[~].*

If one looks to the spirits' side, one does not light beeswax candles. If one lights them, the spirits are afraid, and will not accept [one's prayers and offerings].

Generally, then, when Lahu Nyi ritual specialists make offerings to *G'ui_~ sha_~* or other benevolent supernaturals they light beeswax candles. When they seek boons from the spirits they do not light such candles. But when they wish to exorcise malicious spirits, they use lighted candles to help frighten the spirits away.