Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology

Kinship, Cosmology and Support

Toward a Holistic Approach of Childcare in the
Akha Community of South-Western China

Ruijing Wang

LIT

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The book explores the socio-cosmic support received by Akha parents in raising healthy children in twenty-first-century China. Akha life is heavily influenced by the national political environment and economic development, but the core of their tradition continues to define many aspects of life, including those related to child-care and social support. Their cosmological world is perceived as a reservoir of threats and blessings; numerous non-human actors bestow or withdraw favours and support according to humans' proper or improper behaviours. These rituals, linked to kinship and a communal system of big men, often activate an entire village to take care of a sick child. By highlighting the cosmological dimension of childcare practices, this book innovatively bridges the fields of religious studies and support studies, thereby broadening our definitions of insecurity, support, and care.

Chapter 2 gives an overall account of the specific Akha villages under study. Chapter 3 explores the topic of cosmology with a focus on Akha definitions of health-threatening insecurity and support. Chapter 4 illustrates the social structure by exploring the kinship system and the big man system. The social and religious systems outlined in chapters 3 and 4 come together in the definition of children and childcare practices, as explored in chapters 5 and 6. Chapter 5 explores the way in which a child is embedded in the social world, even as it belongs to the cosmo-logical world. Chapter 6 focuses on unwanted children and corresponding ideas and practices of ritual infanticide. Chapter 7 explores the plural medical resources (including ritual healing) on which the Akha draw to provide syncretic medical care to children. Chapter 8 rounds up with a case study of the medical care provided to a sick infant. This case illustrates how elements discussed in previous chapters work together in the provision of care.

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Cover Photo: Hat attached with a bundle of accessories that protect infants from hostile spirits (Photo: Ruijing Wang, 2013).

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my paternal grandparents, who both passed away during my stay in Germany.

Note on Transliteration

The research on which this book is based was conducted primarily in the Yunnan dialect of Chinese, with some use of Akha – a tonal language of the Sino-Tibetan family spoken by groups in Yunnan, eastern Myanmar, northern Laos, and northern Thailand. Akha terms appear in italics with no other markings; Chinese terms are rendered in pinyin from Mandarin (Putonghua) and accompanied by characters. In cases of possible confusion, Chinese terms are also indicated with the abbreviation 'Ch.'.

In the bibliography, Chinese titles are rendered in characters followed by the English translation only. For readers unfamiliar with Chinese names, it should be pointed out that a person is usually addressed by the compound form of his or her family name followed by personal name. In the bibliographic entries of English-language publications, therefore, it is becoming increasingly common to list (as I have here) an author of a Chinese work in the Chinese style; no comma separates the family name from the personal name or initial, and the names of subsequent authors are left in the order of the Chinese form (family name followed by personal name). In other words, the order of the Chinese names of authors of Chinese sources are never 'reversed'. This is meant to facilitate the reader's subsequent location of sources.

The Akha had no writing system before Christian missionaries, scholars, and governments started developing various methods for writing their language in the 1950s. The orthography utilised to record Akha terms in this book follows the most recent script developed in December 2008 by Akha scholars from China, Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos, which is gradually becoming popularised in these countries (Yang and Yu 2010). The three tables below address the consonants, vowels, and tone markers of this system.

Consonants

b [b]	p [ph]	m [m]	f [f]	w [w]	
d [d]	t [th]	n [n]	l [l]		
g [g]	k [k]	ng [ŋ]	h [x]	kh [kh]	gh [gh]
j [tɕ]	c [ts]	ny [ny]	x [ɕ]	y [j]	
dz [dz]	ts [tsh]		s [s]	z [z]	
by [bj]	py [pj]	my [mj]			

Vowels

a [a]	o [o]	e [ɣ]	i [i]	u [u]	oi [y]
ae [Q]	aw [ɔ]	ei [e]	ee [ɯ]	oe [Ø]	
an [a`]	m [m^]	am [am^]			
ai [ai]	ao [ao]	iu [iu]	iao [iao]	ua [ua]	

Tones

There are six tones in the spoken Akha language: middle, low falling, high rising, tight middle, tight low falling, and tight high rising. No word ends with a consonant in the spoken Akha language. Consonants appearing at the end of Akha words are tone markers.

Tones	Symbol	Examples
Middle	Unmarked	ma
Low falling	q	maq
High rising	r	mar
Tight middle	v	mav
Tight low falling	vq	mavq
Tight high rising	vr	mavr

Chapter 1
Introduction

'The research is to be on social support, explored from the angle of child-care'. Bearing this main idea in mind, I headed to my field site – the Akha village called Hakaq, where I had previously conducted some three months of fieldwork for my Masters project – once again for doctoral research in the summer of 2012. As soon as I stepped on Hakaq soil, I saw old friends and felt at home.

In Hakaq, I lived in a hut-studio newly built especially for me, but ate my everyday meals with a host family, partly because food formed a part of my research. My host family had a three-year-old daughter, so their child-care practices opened my research. During the first three months, I mainly followed this girl and tried to record everything that happened to her on a daily basis through 'repeated and aggregated observations of children in their routine "behavior settings"' (LeVine 2007: 253): who took care of her, how she was treated, what she ate and wore, where she slept, where she visited and how, who and what she played with, how often she was punished and for what reasons, etc. Meanwhile, whenever and wherever I encountered other children, I recorded what was happening to them too. And, it was parents and grandparents who consented to my presence and research.[1] In three months of intensive observation, I began to sense the differences between the Akha pattern of childcare and the Han pattern with which I had grown up, giving real weight to my reading of Beatrice Whiting's (1963) *Six Cultures*.

Often, I felt worried for the safety of small children playing or peeing on the edge of a fully open balcony. I was concerned that children's bare feet might be scratched when they walked on a bamboo floor or a stony road. I lost my calm when the grandmother of my host family asked the three-year-old granddaughter to fetch a big knife for her. When I saw a grandfather offering his cigarette lighter as a toy to his infant grandson, who then directly

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[1] In order to protect my interlocutors' privacy I use pseudonyms throughout the text for both children and adults.

put the lighter into his mouth and bit it, I could not stop myself from snatching back the cigarette lighter. I was also shocked when a four-year-old boy happily picked up and played with a dead rat from the roadside, while the adults around him showed little concern. I was confused and somehow astonished by these activities: why were they allowed to happen? I found myself in the same position as Charles Stafford who was struck that in Taiwan 'very young children were allowed to play with firecrackers' and by 'the extent to which children are allowed to wander around next to motor-cycles' (1995: 21). I felt the same as he had felt some twenty years previously: 'there seems to be a lack of concern about child safety' (ibid.).

Plate 1. A girl is biting a fruit in one hand while grasping a rat in the other hand (Hakaq).

My confusion reached a peak one sunny day in the winter of 2012. The grandparents of my host family caught two rats eating grain in a big gourd and throttled them. They casually offered the dead rats to their two grand-daughters – the three-year-old whom I had followed intensely and her five-year-old cousin (the child of the grandparents' youngest daughter who visited them from time to time). The two girls were playing with three other

small children from neighbouring households, and they were eating a kind of common guava fruit as they were playing. They cheered when they saw the dead rats. Each girl joyfully grasped one rat and proudly showed it off to her peers. It was quite inconceivable for me to see them having a fruit in one hand while holding a dead rat in the other. 'Doesn't a dead rat carry harmful bacteria that cause disease?' I asked myself. Apparently, this question had not arisen for the grandparents or the children, and they did not associate the rat with disease. In fact, the grandparents would later tell me that they would grill the rats for the two little girls because rat meat strengthened their health. On another occasion, their youngest daughter, the mother of the five-year-old girl, confirmed to me that her daughter used to be physically weak, but after taking up the regular eating of rats, she had become fit and strong and rarely fell ill.

Akha parents and grandparents did not share my concerns, but they were concerned about their children's health. In their daily practices, there were many traceable indications of ideas and practices related to child health and safety. For instance, all infants wore a tiny red drug bag (Ch. *yaobao*, 药包) to protect them from malevolent ghosts. Similarly, at a funeral, small children were not allowed to come close to the host household, because ghosts love taking them away or bringing sickness or misfortune to them. Healing rituals, involving almost the entire village, were performed for the sake of children's health. A young man emphatically told me that ritual is not superstition, but rather a method of curing sickness. Much can happen with a child's souls, causing discomfort or illness. Once the little girl of my host family ate spicy food at her neighbour's house; when the little girl began to cry from the spice, the neighbour offered her a boiled egg and tied a thread around her wrist to appease her frightened souls. On another occasion, this little girl kept crying for a chance to visit the county town with me, but her family did not allow her to go. I thought they did not want to trouble me with the girl's care, or perhaps that they did not trust my childcare skills, so I repeatedly assured them that it was my pleasure to take her with me and promised to take good care of her. Eventually the girl joined my trip, but when we returned her grandfather immediately tied a thread around her wrist and gave her a boiled egg. He explained to me that he needed to call back the little girl's souls from the county town, lest she fall sick if her souls remained there. That had not been the only peril of the trip to town: another villager later explained that the girl's family had been reluctant to allow her short journey because there are hostile supernatural beings hidden in crowds who damage children's health.

Throughout my research, I kept recording data about the basic needs of children as I had planned from the beginning. Over time, I became aware

that the Akha did not place equal emphasis on these basic needs. Hence, I carried out a survey asking a simple question: what concerns you most about children? The answers varied according to the age and gender of children, but for small children, parents and grandparents held the same concern. They were concerned about the children's health. One grandmother told me that, 'Before, we Akha were most worried about giving birth to abnormal *tsawrpaeq* children, but now we are most concerned about their health'. The concern of the physical survival and health of children is identified by Robert Levine (1977: 20) as the first universal goal of child-rearing which parents strive to fulfil, and the most fundamental priority and prerequisite to any other goals. Therefore, I decided to narrow my research focus on children's survival and health. Those stories of threats to children's health and the corresponding childcare practices formed the starting point of my research. That is, I focused my attention on insecurities over health. This meant too that I had to consider Akha ideas of souls and of the hostile supernatural entities that threaten life.

In this book, I aim to examine questions of social support by focusing on the topic of childcare, mainly the care given to children from gestation through pre-school (0-6 years). More generally, it is an exploration of how uncertainties and insecurities concerning children's survival and health are overcome by the Akha, an ethnic minority population living along China's mountainous south-west frontier. The basic question here is: how does a transnational ethnic group like the Akha, on the Chinese periphery, practise health care for their small children in the twenty-first century? Specifically, the research intends to answer the following questions: what uncertainties and insecurities are posed to children in the Akha community in terms of survival and health? Who helps them cope with these problems and how? What are the ideas and thoughts behind these practices? Are these ideas and practices concerning childcare influenced by the state, and what role does the state play regarding children and childcare?

Plate 2. A grandfather is tying a thread around his terrified granddaughter's right wrist in order to call her souls back (Kekaq).

Children, Childcare, and Cosmology

Children and childhood have been long researched in anthropology since the beginning of the twentieth century – the 'century of the child' as Swedish reformer Ellen Key proclaimed it in 1909 (Montgomery 2009: 1). In the earliest days of anthropology, the child was drawn parallel to the savage and viewed as representative of remotely ancient culture (Wake 1878; Tylor 1913 [1871]; Lubbock 1978 [1870]). Such an explicit evolutionary framework was rejected by American anthropologists, particularly Franz Boas, who preferred studying child development to chart the environmental impact on human physiology among immigrants to America (Boas 1974 [1911]). With Boas's encouragement, his famous student Margaret Mead (1928) began her studies on children and young people of Samoa, and found out that behaviour in adolescence was caused by cultural conditioning rather than biological changes. Though receiving a great deal of criticism concerning both her methodology and interpretation, Mead's work 'placed children on the anthropological agenda and Mead remains one of the first anthropologists to take children, as children seriously. She was also one of the most significant members … of the Culture and Personality school of

anthropology, which was concerned with how the child became a cultural being' (Montgomery 2009: 23). Subsequent anthropological research continued to emphasise the role of culture in child-rearing and children's development. Among the most remarkable studies undertaken was the 'Six Cultures' study initiated by John Whiting and his wife Beatrice, which provided ample evidence that there are no natural or universal ways in which young children act and that their lives are defined as much by culture and environment as by biology (Whiting 1963). Robert LeVine, one of the Six Cultures researchers, has remained at the forefront of cross-cultural research on child-rearing practices and child socialisation. The work of LeVine and his collaborators has continued to demonstrate the impact of cultural beliefs on child-rearing and looked at the interplay between cultural, biological, and environmental factors (LeVine 1977; LeVine and New 2008). Following their path, many other anthropologists have worked on infant socialisation and different caregiving patterns (e.g. Small 1988; Barr 1990; Seymour 1999; Hewlett and Lamb 2005).

British anthropologists have placed much less importance on psychology and cross-cultural comparative surveys than have their North American counterparts. Following Bronislaw Malinowski, the ethnographic, holistic studies of small-scale societies undertaken by British anthropologists rejected Edward Tylor's proposition that human societies developed through stages that were parallel to those of individual development. In Tylor's schema, primitive societies exhibited the developmental characteristics of children. Instead, the British anthropologists acknowledged children's role in the family, in kinship, or in political systems (Montgomery 2009: 35). Malinowski's insistence on the importance of describing all aspects of life encouraged his followers to take children's lives into account in their works (e.g. Firth 1936; Fortes 1949; Richards 1956). Moreover, compared with American anthropology, developmental psychology has played little part in British ethnographers' views of children. For his part, Malinowski (1984 [1922]) found it very difficult to apply Freudianism, ideas such as the Oedipus complex, to non-Western cultures that had different ideas about kinship. In general, as Audrey Richards (1970) pointed out, most British anthropologists, especially in the period when Radcliffe-Brown's theories of structural functionalism dominated, had more concern for social institutions such as age-sets or kinship systems than for psychological interpretations of child-rearing or how children became adults.

A noticeable shift in studies of childhood occurred in 1973 when Charlotte Hardman published a 'ground-breaking article' in which she claimed that children should be studied in their own right, as they are the best informants about their own lives and the creators of an autonomous

subculture that they pass on to other children without adult intervention (Hardman 1973). Her point has been taken as axiomatic by later anthropologists (e.g La Fontaine 1986; James and Prout 1997), who have developed a child-centred anthropology in which children are used as informants and central participants in ethnography. Child-centred anthropologists reject the previous idea that children were incomplete or incompetent, as they argued that 'childhood must be understood as a culturally constructed social phenomenon which changes over time and place and that it should not necessarily be seen as a time of universal dependence and powerlessness' (Montgomery 2009: 43), and that children's voices and agency must be addressed (ibid.: 44). This new pattern of child study was carried out worldwide, on topics such as dying children in America (Bluebond-Langner 1978), children's friendship in British schools (James 1993), children's daily lives at home in Norway (Gullestad 1984), and playground injuries and sickness in Denmark (Christensen 1999). Overall, child-centred anthropology shifts the emphasis of child studies from socialisation, and how parents raise their children, to how children themselves perceive their lives, surroundings, parents, and upbringing (Montgomery 2009: 45).

My research followed more in the classical British pattern of child studies. Although I observed children as a central aspect of the research, the young age-range in which I was interested made it pragmatically unfeasible to take them as full informants. Moreover, my interest in the care of children meant that I emphasised the actions and perceptions of adults. Yet there is further reason to hold adult perceptions of 'children' in focus as an important component of the care with which they are provided. To discuss childcare, one should also ask: what is a child?

The French historian Philippe Ariès (1962) maintained that childhood is socially constructed and that it changes depending on the historical and cultural setting. Indeed, there is no universally-agreed age at which children become adults. Instead, the transition to adulthood appears to correlate with perceived social maturity. Based on numerous ethnographies drawn from across the world, Heather Montgomery (2009) has recognised several common factors used to define the 'child', such as age, gender[2], an unprivileged place in the wider social and political system, and a subordinate position in the kinship system. She further summarised five common visions of children: 1) children are viewed as socially incompetent or subordinate, lacking some vital component of full adulthood; 2) children are seen as equals,

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[2] Boys and girls may have childhoods of very different lengths. Among the Akwe-Shavante of Amazonia, for example, a girl of about six is already considered to behave like a woman, albeit small, weak, and underdeveloped, while a boy of the same age gives the impression of still being a child.

assumed to have complete knowledge of all human languages and cultures (see also Gottlieb 1998); 3) children are viewed as a means of forming families and giving status to their parents; 4) children are seen as an economic investment; 5) illegitimate children and those who threaten the survival of the family are unwanted, and children who are considered 'nonhuman' might not receive care because they are not socially recognised persons.

Montgomery noticed questions of personhood, childhood, and the special relation between children and spirits, but David Lancy has explored this issue in more depth. Lancy (2014) has amassed over 200 cases of infancy from ethnographic and archaeological accounts all over the world, and concluded that 'babies aren't persons' for most societies (66). In most cultures, there is a delayed recognition of the infant's personhood or humanity. He distinguishes three cultural models of infancy: the 'not yet ripe', the 'unconnected', and the 'two world'. The 'not yet ripe' model denies infant's personhood because of 'the patent deficiencies of the infant as a social being' (ibid.: 79) in terms of physical softness, speech, self-loco-motion, acquisition of social knowledge and skill, intelligence, etc. The 'unconnected' model emphasises 'the view that an infant, because it is kept in seclusion or largely hidden in the voluminous layers of its mother's clothing is still in a womb-like state. To become fully human, the infant must exit from this metaphorical womb and enjoy a second birth where it is joined to its father, his clan and extended family' (ibid.: 80). Of greatest statistical occurrence, according to Lancy, is the 'two world' model (ibid.: 81). This model holds that infants are part-human and part-spirit beings who are suspended between the human world and the other world of spirits, ghosts, ancestors, and gods. They could be as pure and innocent as little angels, as evil as little devils, or as naughty as tricksters, having no intention of becoming fully human. The infants' essence as part-human and part-spirit underscores their vulnerability, hence largely determining the actions, especially ritual activities, to be taken by their caregivers. For instance, illness in infants is usually considered, in societies holding the two-world model, to be caused by the separation of the body from the soul or by the invasion of evil spirits; accordingly, caregivers often turn to supernatural forces for the corresponding remedies.

From his cross-cultural review Lancy concluded, moreover, that 'most societies subscribe to some version of the idea that the infant is not just a really pathetic human being, it is *not* a human being' (2014: 78; emphasis in the original). Normally, an infant's personhood is considered to be delayed; after surviving a certain period of time (which varies from place to place) infants achieve personhood and become human. But the personhood of some

infants is rejected altogether, and they are simply considered inhuman: hippopotamuses and bird-twins among the Nuer (Evans-Pritchard 1956), snake children in Mali (Dettwyler 1994), and 'faulty' children in the Songye (Devleiger 1995). Such nonhuman infants usually encompass the categories of twins and those with congenital birth defects or physical deformities. The ambiguous and anomalous nature of these babies 'challenges the tentative and fragile symbolic boundaries between human and nonhuman, natural and supernatural, normal and abominable. Such infants may fall out of category, and they can be viewed with caution or with revulsion as a source of pollution, disorder, and danger' (Scheper-Hughes 1993: 375). For all these reasons, Lancy (2014) has revealed that children and childcare should be considered in a cosmological context, where invisible supernatural beings such as spirits, ancestors, ghosts, gods, and souls exist and act.

Nonetheless, none of the above perspectives excludes the others. Studies of childhood in Han Chinese communities prove that various elements of 'childhood' may be combined. For instance, the Chinese believe that small children have unstable souls and become ill when their souls are frightened away, and thus rituals to cope with this frailty are frequently performed (Stafford 1995: 18). Children are thought of as social, but still need to gain full personhood through learning (ibid.: 26). Meanwhile, children, particularly sons, are considered a resource of security, and kind of investment, by their parents for the care the grown sons may provide when the parents are old (Wolf 1970). Moreover, the training of a child is a process of adult interaction through which one could find the dynamics of the family. In addition, in a context of lower birthrates, children are also cherished as little emperors within their families (Jing 2000). When looked at from different angles, childhood appears differently. My research, stressing cosmology and kinship, will mainly examine children's position in the kinship system and cosmological world, but it by no means implies that this is the whole picture of Akha childhood.

Taking care of children is far from an exclusively family business. As Jane Ritchie and James Ritchie have stated, 'there are very few cultures in the world where a woman's role is specialized for child minding and little else. That is a peculiar Western aberration and recent at that' (1979: 57). Rather, it often takes a village to raise a child, involving parents, grandparents, older siblings, peers, neighbours, and co-villagers (Lancy 2008). In the twenty-first century, this village model of childcare is unrealistic among many societies such as North America and western Europe, where nonparental intervention might be considered dangerous or illegal (ibid.: 148). However, in a multi-village community, like that of the Akha, where co-

villagers are tightly bonded through the kinship system, the village model is still valid (Jones 1986). Thus, when examining childcare ideas and practices, I jump out of the scope of family, opting to pay major attention to the collective contribution from the entire village.

It is also noteworthy that childcare is embedded with a broader and continuously changing context (Wolf 1970). Merely through the study of children's diet in China, Jing (2000) recognised three different forms of cultural authority – modern science, popular religion, and market – in a community that has undergone rapid social and economic change since the early 1980s. Jing also put a particularly heavy emphasis on the intervention of the state in childcare through population policy. As the Akha are officially an ethnic minority group in China, my research stresses the political context that helps maintain their current childcare pattern. I will discuss this issue in the final conclusion.

Insecurity

In approaching children's health care, I choose to start with answering a basic question: what is the insecurity that threatens children's survival and health? Insecurity 'usually refers to a condition of being unsafe, or being in a state of danger' (Witsenburg and Zaal 2012: 3). There are two dimensions of insecurity – being insecure or feeling insecure. The state or degree of 'being insecure' can be established by analysing facts and statistics, and by calculating the chance of being robbed, violated, wounded or killed. 'Feeling insecure', however, is a subjective perception about threats, about feeling unsafe, uncertain, or less protected (ibid.). Perhaps that is why Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann argued that 'insecurity concerns not only the material aspects of life, it also, perhaps in a more fundamental way, has to do with people's feelings of trust and existential security. These cannot be reduced to a material basis' (2007: 26). In my research, I focus on the second dimension of insecurity. I discuss how and when the Akha 'feel insecure' and not whether or not they 'are insecure', and strive to explore the Akha's definition of insecurity by examining what they perceive as dangers and threats to people's health.

Security studies have mainly recognised globally shared threats to human security, such as violent conflicts, war, natural disasters, famine, terrorism, and plague (Peluso and Watts 2001; Martin and Taylor 2014). Some of these studies are quite sophisticated, like that by Juatta Weldes, Mark Laffey, and Hugh Gusterson (1999), exploring insecurity as a cultural production. Nevertheless, even these sophisticated studies focus on insecurity at the level of the state. It is indisputable that the overall intra- or international political environments shape people's living conditions, but in

my peaceful field site (see chapter 2), it is less important to take these big problems into account. Therefore, I put my feet down on the ground of insecurities concerning people's basic needs, particularly health.

In taking health as a focal point of insecurity, I specify and extend the work of Franz and Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (2007). The Benda-Beckmanns have acknowledged the possibility of supernatural threats, but their treatment of this possibility is brief and limited to a consideration of the temporal dimensions of insecurity. That is, because 'uncertainty and in-security are notions that link the present with the past and the future', the Benda-Beckmanns argued that one needs to understand how people 'deal with the future, how the future is conceptualized, and the extent to which the future is problematized' (ibid.: 25). At the very end of their discussion of time and insecurity, they paid attention, though limited, to the threats from evil forces like witchcraft. From this perspective, the supernatural's relation to security and insecurity is rather reduced to the individual level, placed into the framework of fate and destiny, and rendered as something that must be transformed in the effort to conquer the future (ibid.: 42). This limited attention and problematic framework hindered them from giving credit to immediate insecurities originating from the cosmological world that endanger people's health.

Health-threatening insecurities from the cosmological world have been demonstrated in numerous ethnographies. They have been documented from the perspective of both medical anthropology and the anthropology of religion, which overlap in their concern for exploring the causation of illness and death. The rationale for this overlapping interest can be traced at least to the 1920s. Professor Grafton Elliot Smith, in his preface to William Rivers' book *Medicine, Magic and Religion*, asserted that 'the fundamental aim of primitive religion was to safeguard life… Primitive medicine sought to achieve the same end… Hence in the beginning religion and medicine were parts of the same discipline' (Rivers 2001 [1924]: vii). In this book Rivers, the founding ancestor of medical anthropology, found three chief causes for illness: human agency (e.g. sorcerer's magic), supernatural agency (such as soul loss caused by spirits), and natural causes (e.g. a snake-bite) (see pages 7–22). Of these three causes, Rivers concluded that the first two categories (human and supernatural causes of illness) were very widely spread.

Overall, Rivers' work uncovered how tightly medicine, magic, and religion are entangled with one another. Forrest Clements (1932) accepted his general scheme of classification but found it too broad for practical application; he proposed five categories instead: 1) sorcery; 2) breach of *tapu* (taboo); 3) disease-object intrusion; 4) spirit intrusion; 5) soul loss. By giving an extension table showing tribes or regions of the world and the

distribution among them of these five categories, Clements concluded that the belief in sorcery and soul loss is diffused worldwide, among backward as well as among developed peoples. Furthermore, he found that the belief in illness caused by a breach of *tapu* is not limited to New Zealand (from whence the term originated) but is found broadly scattered across parts of Africa and the west coast of South America; the belief in disease-object intrusion is almost universal in America and the part of Siberia adjoining Alaska, in western Europe, Australia and adjacent islands; the belief in spirit intrusion seems to be continuous for Europe, Africa, all southern Asia, and most of Oceania, but more sporadic in the New World. In other words, Clements demonstrated that supernatural forces are universally believed to pose threats to people's health.

There have been many subsequent attempts to distinguish supernatural from other causes of illness. Some have focused on modelling a single system, such as the work by Ethel Nurge (1958), who distinguished the supernatural and natural causes of illness among the Guinhangdan of the Philippines. Others have attempted broader classificatory systems. For example, in his examination of non-Western disease aetiologies, George Foster (1976) made a rough distinction between personalistic and naturalistic causes. A personalistic aetiology, he wrote, was characterised by the belief that all misfortune or disease is correlated to the supernatural; within such an aetiology, illness, religion, and magic are indeed inseparable. Naturalistic aetiology, however, is restricted to disease that is caused by equilibrium loss (777–81). Victor King clarified it further by pointing out the naturalistic aetiology is associated with an impersonal, accidental, non-purposeful intervention, such as bodily humours and qualities of hot and cold (King 1999: 219). Nonetheless, as Foster realised and Victor King clarified, the distinction is rough rather than clear-cut, not least because the same illness may be ascribed to both natural and supernatural circumstances. But, the natural and supernatural may also be conceived as related in ways that make it difficult to distinguish one from the other. For example, as King wrote with reference to South East Asia, 'natural conditions are often considered to be embedded in a supernatural context. In other words, it is believed that the world is inhabited by spiritual entities which, if displeased, angered, or neglected in some way, might visit retribution on the offender. This might be in the form of illness, or in extremis death' (King 1999: 219).

If, as it seems, the 'supernatural' can rarely be distinguished with clarity from the 'natural', it is more accurate to use the more inclusive and comprehensive term 'cosmological' to refer to spirit-caused illness. Cosmology is stressed here because, according to David Palmer, 'Central to any culture is its cosmology, that is, its view of the structure of the universe, of

the different basic elements of the universe, how these elements are connected with one another, and the place of humanity in this universe. Associated with cosmology are systems of classification, which divide everything in the universe into separate categories' (Palmer 2011: 97). In this book, I generally accept Palmer's idea. But I specifically define cosmology as a culturally constructed, ordered *universe* among which natural, supernatural, and human worlds are interwoven and interdependent on one another. In this sense, the "cosmological" is much more inclusive by indicating the inter-embeddedness between the supernatural and the natural. Hence, I call those dangers, threats, and harm originating from the cosmological world 'cosmological insecurities'.

The Akha, across their many homes in the highlands of South East Asia, have also perceived their cosmological world as a source of illness causation. In his ethnographic notes on Akha in Myanmar (then Burma), Paul Lewis (1969) concluded that the Akha took spirits and soul loss as the main causes of sickness, and demonstrated how they performed a set of rituals and ceremonial activities to keep sickness away from people and the village. Jim Goodman (1996) confirmed that spirits are blamed for major illness among the Akha in Thailand, but drew a more complicated picture of 'the world of spirits' by distinguishing the 'benevolent spirits for protection and blessings' and the malevolent ones posing dangers to human beings. Akin to their Burmese counterparts, the Akha in Thailand also have a number of proven effective ritual treatments against harmful spirits (Mansfield 2000). The same ideas are also found among the Akha communities in China (Zhang and Zhang 2011); in Yunnan, such ideas are more or less shared by the Akha's neighbouring ethnic groups, such as the Dai (He 2006), Kemu (Zhang 2006), Mang (Dao 2006), Yi (Wang 2006), and Lahu (Ma 2013). That is to say, it is practically impossible to overlook these cosmological insecurities caused by nonhuman actors when doing research on their health care.

To conclude, cosmological insecurity is universally perceived and these culturally constructed ideas continually exist. It is not new to medical anthropologists, but surprisingly ignored in the realm of social support studies. The major task for this research is to bring these cosmological elements into the discussion of social support, bridging these two fields, so as to broaden the definitions of insecurity and support.

Support: From Society to Cosmology

The concept of social support has attracted increasing attention since the 1970s, and researchers' interests are predominantly placed on the preventative, therapeutic, and buffering effects of support for people under

stress (see detailed discussion in Yuen-Tsang [1997]). Four approaches to conceptualising social support have been developed: functional, structural, subjective, and interactional. The functional approach, the most common in the 1970s and 1980s, delineated social support as 'any action or behaviour that functions to assist the focal person in meeting his personal goals or in dealing with the demands of any particular situation' (Tolsdorf 1976: 410). The latest important work following this path is the Benda-Beckmanns' (2007) study on Ambonese networks of care and support. Those taking the structural approach prefer to identify the direct and indirect linkages among family, friends, and peers, and see these social networks as indicators of social resources that potentially serve support functions in times of crisis. Nonetheless, social networks do not equate with social support; rather, they are the structure of support networks (Yuen-Tsang 1997: 8). The subjective approach stresses the individual's experience of supportive relationships and interactions, and conceptualises social support as 'the individual's cognitive appraisal of his or her social environment and the level of confidence he or she has that when support is needed it will be available, sufficient to meet the need, and offered in a way that is perceived as beneficial' (Tracy 1990). The interactional approach regards social support as a complex, ongoing, transactional process between the person and his/her social network in a changing ecological context (Sarason, Sarason and Pierce 1990). The focus of the interactional approach is on the dynamic interactions among people involved in the entire support process, and not merely on the structure and content of support (Yuen-Tsang 1997: 9). On the basis of these four approaches, Nan Lin, Mary Dumin, and Mary Woefel (1986) proposed a synthetic definition of social support which addresses 'the perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks, and confiding partners' (ibid.: 18).

In this book, I intend to present the process of child health care during which the supportive structure, the content, the interaction, and the perception of social support are all involved. Specifically, both normative and empirical functional supports are explored, among which the normative functions are more related to the supportive social structure. Most sociological researchers using a structural approach have focused on examining a focal individual's social network (e.g. Tolsdorf 1976; Barrera 1981; Hirsch 1981; Vaux and Harrison 1985) which forms a support network of the persons concerned. A few sociologists prefer to view networks as astronauts view the universe, examining 'whole networks' rather than 'personal networks', to describe the comprehensive structure of role relationships in a social system by focusing on all persons rather than a particular one (Wellman 1988: 26). This method has attracted an increasing number of

followers in recent decades (e.g. Kirke 1996; Keating et al. 2007; Carrington 2011; Scott 2011). Despite their wider view, whole networks theory also builds its base on individuals; as Radcliffe-Brown (1977 [1940]) noted mockingly some decades ago, such a base limits research to the domain of social relations and never quite encompasses social structures. That is to say, a personal network – like a whole network – changes from time to time as individual members join or leave: both show a lack of continuity. As the purpose of this book is to describe a relatively constant structural form of Akha community, these common structural approaches are not suitable. Hence, I return to classical anthropological works on social structure which emphasise the systems of kinship and 'big men' (see chapter 5). Under such collective structural frameworks, however, personal interactions are also examined.

Studying support at the individual level brings with it other diffi-culties. For example, Angelina Yuen-Tsang has criticised previous studies for showing a 'lack of consideration for the cultural dimension of social support' (Yuen-Tsang 1997: 15). As she has argued,

> Social support is by no means an objective entity. Efforts to identify the 'objective' qualities or types of support do not indicate whether or why a given behavior will be perceived as supportive by either the provider or the recipient. Givers and receivers of support may differ in their perception of the meaning of the act intended to be supportive, as a result of the differences in social circumstances and individual needs. These subjective interpretations are influenced by the standards and norms which the individuals concerned use to evaluate social support. Therefore, it is essential that we should attempt to understand the interpretive frameworks within which such assessments are made, and within which the meaning of support is determined. These frameworks constitute the cultural context of social support (ibid.: 15–16).

Yuen-Tsang's emphasis on subjectivity and the cultural dimensions of social support is actually not new within the cluster of studies focused on health. Health studies has considered subjectivity to the point that Markus Schlecker (2013: 5) has described the field as 'subjectivities of suffering studies'. As early as 1980, culture was considered an important element by Arthur Kleinman, who put patients and healers in their cultural context to underscore how illness is a cultural construction. From the 1990s, this study cluster shifted its focus to experiences of violence and suffering and the constitution of sufferers' subjectivities (e.g. Kleinman 1997). As Schlecker has summarised, these changes have not only shifted methodologically from individual case studies to ethnographies of local community, but also shifted

questions about support away from an interest in diagnosis, treatments, and healing to one in the lived worlds of sufferers. Explorations of support 'are not as dominated by the purposive action framework as they are in the social security studies cluster' by giving a strong interest in subjectivity and somatic experience (Schlecker 2013: 5). Along this research track, Markus Schlecker and Friederike Fleischer (2013) have further shifted focus from individual to community and argued that the fundamental aspiration of support is to perpetuate communal solidarity, sociality, and human together-ness.

Yet the stress on subjectivity and culture is significant to the broader field of support studies. As noted above, the field still is limited in scope to considering the 'social' level, completely overlooking the 'cosmological' elements. When cultural context is taken into more serious consideration, it becomes clear that cosmological elements such as gods, spirits, and ancestors are often considered to help shape social life (Traube 1986; de Coppet 1995; Århem 2015), and are perceived frequently as a source of favour, protection, and blessing for healthy children and abundant crops and livestock (Kammerer and Tannenbaum 1996). In other words, cosmological elements contribute (and withhold) support.

As indicated above, I tend to use 'cosmological' to refer to the supernatural world. In my use, 'cosmological beings' refers to gods, spirits, ghosts, ancestors, evils, sorcerers, and witches, whether they are visible or invisible. Cosmological beings are integral participants in human social life, as presented in the above section on children and insecurity. Among the Lahu in South East Asia, for instance, the supreme creator of the universe is viewed as the ultimate source of blessing – the divine favour – which is mainly associated with prosperity, fertility, and security (Du 1996). I argue here that if people perceive the blessing of a cosmological being as a kind of favour that improves their prosperity, fertility, and security, it should be counted as a type of 'support'. Such support is not 'social', but because of its divine origin, a form of 'cosmological support'. All in all, I strive to transcend the limits of the 'social' society, and step into the whole world composed of human and nonhuman beings, to examine the supportive roles played by the cosmological beings in the process of giving health care to children, as understood by the Akha themselves.

To achieve the ultimate aim of redefining 'social support' as 'socio-cosmic support', I propose a holistic approach. Holism in anthropology was often used as 'the discernment of wholes and the relatedness of their parts' (Kroeber 1962 : 79), and referred to the scope of the material or the approach taken (Peterson 1990: 180). By 'holistic', I refer to a dual-dimen-sional approach. One dimension concerns the scope of the material, that is,

broadening it from society to cosmology, in the sense of equating the cosmic and the holistic as happens in Indian anthropology (Malik 1997: 2). The other dimension lies in focusing on structural relatedness among cosmological ideas and the integrated human world, particularly in terms of insecurity, support and children, ritual life, and the social structure of the kinship and big man systems.

A Final Note on Perspective

There are three methodological points in need of clarification. First, this research, taking an interior angle, explores how the Akha define children, insecurities, and support, and illustrates Akha childcare practices, which are predominantly guided by their traditions. One should bear in mind that Akha life nowadays is shaped by many forces, such as the natural environment, traditions and customs, ethnic neighbourhood, market, and state, any of which could be chosen as an angle from which to explore their childcare practices and support model. My interest primarily lies in Akha religious traditions, which continue to define their lives in the twenty-first century.

Second, the research follows the path of collectivism rather than individualism. In particular, the fundamental unit of research is not the individual, but instead the household, lineage, or even the entire village. This is because my focus is on social structure rather than personal social networks.

Lastly, the research emphasises the totality of native health care to children, and thus strives towards a holistic approach as discussed. By taking this holistic approach, I stress the fact that the Akha pattern of giving health care to children is an integral part of the whole system, linking to both its cosmological and social structures. Only by being placed back into the system where it is embedded can this pattern be fully understood.

In this book, I mainly argue that the perceived insecurities and support given by cosmological beings, as nonhuman actors, should be taken into account. That is to say, insecurity also refers to the threats posed by nonhuman agents, as long attested by a goodly number of ethnographies. Correspondingly, to cope with threats, cosmological beings are also believed to provide their support through various rituals or ritualised activities – I call these 'ritual care'. Of course, in the visible everyday world, one can observe that families, kin, and big men take care of children. But, the believed presence of invisible nonhuman actors is also materialised by villagers through ritual items and offerings. Thus, they finally form a socio-cosmic support network.

Chapter 2 gives an overall account of the specific Akha villages under study. I want to make it clear that the Akha are not an isolated community;

instead, their life is heavily influenced by the political environment and
economic development. However, despite changes taking place, the core of
their tradition continues strongly. Social structure and religious life, which
shape their pattern of taking care of children and giving support to one
another, remain in strong continuity with the past.

In chapter 3, I turn to the topic of cosmology with a focus on Akha
definitions of health-threatening insecurity and support. Such definitions
provide a starting place for understanding their perceptions of sickness and
its resolution. Chapter 4 balances the previous chapter by again turning to
the human world; here, I illustrate the social structure by exploring two
systems, the kinship system and the big man system, which interweave and
form a social support network. Differing from the sociological structural
approach with an egocentric focus, I follow the focus of classical studies of
social structure (as developed by E.E. Evans-Pritchard and A.R. Radcliffe-
Brown) on persistent social groups and categories of social roles. What
interests me is the collective social support network available to a group's
members rather than to the personal supportive network surrounding a
particular person.

The social and religious systems outlined in chapters 3 and 4 come
together in the definition of children and childcare practices, as explored in
chapters 5 and 6. The Akha consider children to be creatures of both social
and cosmological worlds. Chapter 5 explores the way in which a child is
embedded in the social world, even as it belongs to the cosmological world.
Chapter 6 focuses on unwanted children, called *tsawrpaeq*, and cor-
responding ideas and practices of ritual infanticide.

Chapter 7 explores the plural medical resources, including bio-
medicine, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), herbs, and ritual healing that
the Akha can access. This makes it possible for them to develop a syncretic
pattern in the medical care they provide to children, among which ritual
healing plays a large role. Chapter 8 rounds up with a case study of the
medical care provided to a sick infant. This case illustrates how elements
discussed in previous chapters work together in the provision of children's
health care. Ritual healing actually is a total social fact representing the
kinship system, the big man system, cosmology, ideas about children, and
other social-economic factors. Through describing healing rituals, I want to
show in practice how these elements are activated to form a steady
supportive net.

Chapter 2
Where Everything Began: Back to Hakaq

In the summer of 2012, departing from Kunming, I spent eight hours in a bus heading south to Pu'er City, followed by another six hours in a smaller bus running to Menglian the following day. In Menglian, the county seat[3], I was received by old Akha friends. From there, we travelled together by tractor along a section of asphalt road in the lowlands, climbed up into the mountain areas along a newly built stone road, then turned off onto a rough dirt track. The track zigzagged on to Hakaq, the Akha village where I was going to stay for the coming year.

The whole route between Menglian and Hakaq is about 23 kilometres, and takes one hour to reach by motorcycle or two hours by tractor. It would seem a reasonable distance for a rural setting, but the route remains inconvenient for villagers and their visitors. The problem is the dirt track, which is very dusty in the dry season and so muddy in the rainy season that the village is hardly accessible. As I took this trip at other times over the year's course, I sometimes heard villagers making complaints about their village cadre on the unfavourable situation. The local government had offered to renovate the dirt road in conjunction with a development pro- gramme in tea cultivation, but Hakaq's village cadre had refused to join the programme. He suspected there would be no profit in tea cultivation. Outraged, the official in charge of the programme left Hakaq's dirt road in place, while the other mountain villages that participated in his programme all received a new gravel road leading to the outside world. And so, I arrived at Hakaq covered in road dust.

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[3] The full name of Menglian County is Menglian Dai, Lahu and Wa Autonomous County.

Plate 3. Menglian County in dry season.

Surrounded by woods and bamboo, half the village stood on a relatively plain summit, while the other half lay downhill. It was still morning, and the whole village was bathed in bright sunshine. Clouds flew around the foot of the mountains, covering the lowland villages.

Hakaq separated from the nearby and so-called Old Village in 1966. It is a medium size village by Akha standards, with twenty-nine households and a resident population of over one hundred people. In 2003, it was moved to its current location due to a water shortage; also many disasters and deaths had happened at the previous site. This village had been offered at least two chances by the local government to move down the hill, but the traditionally-minded elders had rejected the proposals. There were two reasons: they feared the epidemic diseases which historically spread in the valley, and they did not wish to be far away from their mountain plots. It would be inconvenient for them to go back and forth every day to work the land. And so, the village was relocated to a hillside not far from its previous site.

Plate 4. Hakaq village in mountains.

Plate 5. Kekaq village, along the main road leading to the county town.

Returning

This trip was not my first to the village. Between 2008 and 2010, I had conducted short-term field research for a total of 100 days in Hakaq for my Master's degree. Then, I had focused on the topic of twin infanticide. I chose to go back to Hakaq for doctoral research on Akha childcare practices in part because I saw it as an extension of my previous research. My choice of field site was also pragmatic. I had maintained friendly contact with Hakaq villagers in the intervening years, and this spared me the considerable trouble, time, and energy involved in searching for a new field site that would be acceptable to myself, the villagers, and the local authorities.

In 2008, I had encountered little difficulty in entering the Hakaq village. My entry was smoothed because a senior media worker who had made a documentary of the village introduced me to the local officials and villagers. But also, villagers had already met many outsiders before my arrival. They were well disposed to photographers, tourists, professors accompanied by students, and others interested in minority ethnic cultures. Hence, I received a warm, polite welcome from them. A few days later, I received an Akha name from a respectful old lady, which greatly enhanced my popularity among villagers. As time went by, my personal background was unveiled and surprisingly helped me to be accepted more by villagers.

I come from another region in Yunnan. My identity as Yunnanese, despite the regional difference, and possession of a Yunnan dialect brought us closer together. My ethnic identity – as Han Chinese – was not seen as a source of tension. Villagers happily told me that the Han had been counted traditionally as elder brothers of the Akha. Sometimes, they claimed me for themselves: my physical appearance is similar, and one old man insisted that my face, figure, gait, and gestures are exactly like those of an Akha girl. As an unmarried woman, I was also viewed as a potential wife. Villagers, especially the elders, loved asking me jokingly to marry a local man. When I visited other villages, I was always accompanied by a male guide, and – if he was unmarried – he was always asked if I were his wife or girlfriend. My status as a young woman, who came to the village alone and was far away from parents and hometown, also attracted much sympathy, particularly from the elders.

I never hid my identity as a student who was coming to do research about Akha traditions, or to learn Akha *li*, and people welcomed this. They felt flattered because it implied that their Akha *li* is so good that a student from Beijing, or on the second visit, a PhD candidate from Germany, would come to learn it. Those knowledgeable seniors who were my main informants were extremely glad to take part in my interviews on Akha traditions because, to their disappointment, nowadays Akha young men show

little interest in learning them. Overall, I was almost accepted as a member of the community. I say 'almost' because I never lost my Han Chinese identity, even in the closest moments of family and community life. This was not a bad thing. There are many ritual and festival occasions when Akha women or villagers from certain lineages are obliged to be absent, but I, as an outsider, could attend. Such privileges meant that I was able to observe and take part in most of their social and ritual life.

During my stay, I learned some Akha, but the language I used most, especially in interviews, was the Yunnan dialect of Chinese. All villagers speak Akha, a tonal language of the Sino-Tibetan family spoken by groups in Yunnan, eastern Myanmar, northern Laos, and northern Thailand. Since the 1950s, various scripts for writing Akha have been developed by missionaries, linguists, and state agencies. In recent centuries, the Akha of Menglian have maintained close ties with their ethnic Wa, Lahu, and Dai neighbours, thus most elderly people in and around Hakaq are able to speak these languages, albeit imperfectly. Younger people also know these languages, yet far less well.

Akha who have several years of schooling or have frequent interactions with Han are able to speak Chinese too, normally in the Yunnan dialect. Han-Chinese school education was introduced into the region by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the 1950s, and since then the number of people who have received formal education and trained to speak Chinese has been increasing gradually. Rising interactions with Han cadres and vendors has also increased the use of Chinese, regardless of formal education. Overall, it can be ascertained that most men of all ages, and a few older women speak the Yunnan dialect. Those who could not speak the Yunnan dialect, and with whom I could only communicate in Akha, were most old women, pre-school age children, and in-married wives from Myanmar. From time to time, when Yunnan dialect was not sufficient, I was assisted in translation by some school-educated young people.

Over the year of my stay, many villagers were willing to teach me words and sentences in Akha that we considered necessary for my daily life. Eventually I could manage a simple conversation, which was taken by villagers as evidence of my smartness as well as a compliment to their culture. Besides, I also took some short courses in the most recent Akha scripts in Xishuangbanna and Honghe, to properly record names in genealogies and to gain access to publications in Akha.

Hakaq was the core site of my field research. Counting my time there in 2008, I spent thirteen and one half months there. Beyond Hakaq, I conducted fieldwork among a cluster of surrounding Akha villages (see Map 3). Of these, Kekaq was the most important. Like Hakaq, it was formed after a

split from the Old Village, which itself had been founded in 1903 by three households. By the 1960s, the Old Village had over one hundred households, which began to split off to form six new villages (the Hadoka villages). The four segment villages other than Hakaq and Kekaq are marked by the un-labelled black dots. Kekaq served as an important point of comparison because of its common origins with and relatively different natural and social environments from Hakaq; I stayed there for one month. I also visited many other Akha, Wa, and Dai villages in the neighbourhood when needed, even on the other side of the state border.

Methods

In Hakaq, I participated in the daily and ritual life of households, particularly those with small children, to observe their childcare practices. I started in-depth work by accompanying my host family from morning to night: having meals with them; going to the fields along with whoever was taking care of their child; weeding; harvesting rice, corn, coffee, and cotton; and always recording the interactions between the child and adults. The same pattern was also applied in other households with children. Sometimes, when I was alone, I would walk through the entire village, recording all the children that I encountered and events around them. Such times of solo observation tended to blur into times of social incorporation. Sometimes, I was taken as a babysitter by villagers who needed a helping hand! Then, I felt like a full participant.

My observations were critical, but interviewing was also a key method for collecting data. Normally I conducted formal interviews with elderly people knowledgeable about Akha traditions, invisible supernatural beings, kinship systems, and ideas about children. At first, I asked many villagers for traditional knowledge, regardless of their personal backgrounds, and the answer I received mostly was 'I don't know, you should ask the elders'. Ultimately, I realised that knowledge varies among villagers and only some of the elders possess broad and profound knowledge of Akha traditions. Normally, there is at least one knowledgeable elder in each Akha village and that person is a key to the whole village's ritual life. Fortunately, in Hakaq there were several such seniors, and I interviewed them extensively. Besides, I also informally interviewed youngsters for their personal experiences and opinions about Akha traditions and general social life. This often took place on the way to and from the fields, over occasional chats or encounters, when we were working together in the fields, or having food at the table. Except for some shy persons, most villagers were willing to share their ideas and experiences. At the final stage, I interviewed several local officials about

government projects and the overall political environment that might affect the lives of local people.

I also carried out a semi-structured household survey in both Hakaq and Kekaq, concerning household structure and economic life. I found that the head of the household and the elders had complete knowledge of household structure; it was they who could provide substantial information about all household members in personal details and concerning their interrelations. As for economic life, it was the younger generation, mostly the sons, who were in charge and hence became my informants on that particular topic. Certainly, there were a few exceptions, but this was true in most cases. Therefore, I had to split each survey into two parts and interview different members of the same household. Because their land was mountainous, they said, they had no precise measures of the size of their holdings. Nor did they have strong measures of input and output, and they were not in the habit of recording their incomes or consumption and expenditures. Eventually, the answers to my survey somehow depended on their personal memories, and the survey became a highly qualitative instrument instead of the structured quantitative one I had planned.

I rounded out my research with time at the local library, where I photocopied all the historical materials about Menglian that were available there. By chance, I met a local scholar working at the Culture Bureau who provided me with some additional historical and ethnographic works on the local ethnic groups, particularly Dai. As there were few works about the Akha in Menglian, I also surveyed those devoted to the regions of Xishuangbanna and Honghe where Akha or Hani have gathered and collected a good number of historical investigation materials. I have mainly used these materials to describe briefly the historical background of the Akha and Menglian.

Who Are the Akha?

The Akha are a transnational ethnic group spread throughout Yunnan and the South East Asian countries of Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos (see Map 1). In total, they comprise a population of about 650,000 (Yang L. 2010). The Akha are known to anthropologists of South East Asia primarily from studies conducted in Myanmar and Thailand. In these two countries, the Akha are the ethnic group 'about whom the most scholarly research has been done' (Kammerer 2000: 37). In China, the Akha, also known as the Yani or Aini, are classified as a branch of the Hani nationality (*minzu*, 民族). The Hani were first recognised by the authorities as an official nationality during the nationwide ethnic identification project undertaken between 1950

and 1954. The Hani nationality (*hanizu*, 哈尼族) has seventeen branches, of which Akha is one. Taken together, the Hani form the second largest minority from a total population of 1,630,000 in Yunnan.[4] Throughout China, the Akha group is mostly settled in Xishuangbanna Prefecture (pop. 215,434)[5], and in the counties of Lancang (49,715)[6] and Menglian (9,585)[7] in Pu'er Prefecture.

Many scholars have recorded the Akha oral history of centuries of migration from Tibet to South East Asian countries (Lewis 1969; Goodman 1997; Kammerer 2000; Yang L. 2010). It is said that the Akha originally came from an ancestral homeland in the Tibetan massif, but left this mountainous region by the second century BCE, moving southwards to current Sichuan and then Yunnan. During the process, travellers split up and headed in different directions. They prospered for centuries in Yunnan and even built a kingdom. However, the kingdom was overturned by the Dai, and the Akha again split as they fled. Over the centuries, the Akha had been vulnerable to neighbouring powerful groups and always moved south. During the great turmoil in Yunnan during the end of the nineteenth century, some Akha moved farther south to Myanmar and Laos; the Akha from Myanmar later flowed into Thailand in the first decade of the twentieth century (Grunfeld 1982: 18–23).

The group name 'Akha' was taken as an insult by many international scholars (Kammerer 2000), as well as by Chinese scholars and officials (Yang Z. 2010), who concluded that it meant 'slave' and had been given to the group by its powerful neighbour, the Dai. It is for this reason, so it is said, that PRC officials replaced 'Akha' with 'Aini', meaning 'young brother', in the early 1950s.[8] A young Akha scholar (Zhang 2013) has since performed a linguistic analysis of the Dai language and rejected the idea that 'Akha' means 'slave'. In his review of the historical Dai literature, Zhang found no use of 'Kaq' or 'Aq kaq' to refer to neighbouring groups. Instead, the Akha were referred to as Bulin, Nalin, Jizoq, Moda, or

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[4] Sixth National Population Census of the PRC 2010, issued by Yunnan Provincial Statistics Bureau. http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/tjgb/rkpcgb/dfrkpcgb/201202/t20120228_30408.html.

[5] Sixth National Population Census of the PRC 2010, issued by Xishuangbanna Prefecture Statistics Bureau.

[6] Sixth National Population Census of the PRC 2010, issued by Lancang County Statistics Bureau.

[7] Sixth National Population Census of the PRC 2010, issued by Menglian County Statistics Bureau.

[8] Instruction of State Council on dealing with group titles, place names, monuments, and couplets of discriminating or insulting ethnic minorities (政务院关于处理带有歧视或侮辱少数民族性质的称谓、地名、碑碣、匾联的指示), 16 May 1951. http://www.seac.gov.cn/art/2011/8/12/art_58_133769.html. Last access was September 2013.

Hhaxixaerghenma, while the Dai people living in Xishuangbanna called the Akha 'Gawr' (highlanders). Zhang concluded that 'Aq kaq' must have been a self-taken title rather than an insulting title given by the Dai.

Map 1. The regional distribution of the Akha population among Yunnan, China and Southeast Asian countries.

If the name derives from the Akha language, its meaning is still unclear. The term may mean 'remote' or 'far away', and refer to the group's origins in the remote north (Yang Z. 2010: 34). Other scholars have preferred another

meaning of 'kaq' – 'middle' or 'central' – because it implies that the Akha were politically independent and geographically inhabited the middle (Wang and Huang 2010). So far, there is no fixed explanation of 'Akha', although a trend that erases the inferior features of the Akha and glosses the group with past glories is gradually coming into view.

What is known is that the Akha language is a tonal language in the Lolo/Yi branch of the Tibeto-Burmese group of the Sino-Tibetan family (Li 1986; Yang L. 2010). Christian missionaries, academic scholars, and governments have developed various methods for writing the language since the 1950s.[9] Also, it is known that traditionally, the Akha have been hill people, favouring remote locations above plains and valleys. They practise dry-rice agriculture, following a method of slash-and-burn cultivation. Their society is united by a patrilineal descent system and an asymmetric alliance system (Lewis 1969). The Akha practise spirit cults, conducting rituals addressed to ancestral, agricultural, and territorial spirits (Kammerer 2003). And, their villages are usually interspersed with those of other ethnic groups, such as Hmong, Lahu, and Lisu.

Beyond these common features, the Akha display much internal diversity in terms of subgroups, dress, location, agriculture, and response to governmental intervention. Thailand's Akha population has the fewest number of major subgroups (Ulo, Lomi, and Pamee); Laos has more (Goodman 1997: 12–35). China's Akha consist of many subgroups, including the Jeghoe and Jejaw (Yang L. 2010; Yang Z. 2010), and the Wuvqqyul, Wuvqzanq, Gaqsee, and Lailqe (Zhao 2009: 176). Women's dress serves as one of the more easily visible points of differentiation: for example, Ulo women in Thailand wear pointed headdresses, skirts, and leggings, while Awo women in Laos wear trousers and long coats. In China, most Akha women wear headdresses (which vary in different subgroups) with a short jacket, short skirt, and leggings (Zhao 2009).

Other aspects of the Akha's diversity have been summarised by Goodman (1997: 12–35). Goodman has noted, in particular, recent elements of differentiation. For example, while the Akha have been traditionally highlanders neighbouring other highland groups like the Lahu, Bulang, Yi,

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[9] By 1957, the PRC government created a system of Hani script which was popularised among Hani branches other than the Akha. By 1981, the Akha in Xishuangbanna reedited the script system and started using it via broadcasting. On 30 December 2008, 36 Akha scholars from China, Thailand, Myanmar, and Laos were invited to Jinghong City to reach an agreement on an international popular Hani/Akha script. Since then, the transnational Akha have had recourse to a unified writing system. This new script is gradually becoming popularised throughout the region (Yang and Yu 2010). However, in China, the new script is not officially recognised on account of the Hani script's sole official identity. In this book, the Akha language is written in the new script.

Yao, or Jinuo, some Akha have moved to the lowlands since the 1980s. In China, many Akha villages have relocated to the plains neighbouring with Dai or Han. The Akha agricultural systems vary too, thanks to the presence or absence of government interventions. For example, living in poor and isolated areas, Laos's Akha have received little governmental attention, and they still practise slash-and-burn agriculture. Thailand's Akha, on the other hand, have been subjected to a fairly aggressive government assimilation programme; with their traditional slash-and-burn agricultural system under stress, many have opted to pursue cash crops such as tomatoes, cabbages, ginger, and coffee. In China, the Akha's slash-and-burn system is officially banned; it is sometimes tolerated in remote areas, but most Akha have abandoned it anyway and engaged with cash crops like rubber, tea, and sugar cane. Varied locations, economic developments, and developing tourism unavoidably bring more differences to living conditions, especially through housing and infrastructure.

Despite the differences among settlements in various parts of the Akha world, a common Akha identity persists. Although some scholars equate this identity with the group's common language, history, and social order (see Goodman 1997: 39), most do not. Lewis (1982), based on his long-term study of the Akha in both Myanmar and Thailand, identified three basic themes as determinant in the configuration of Akha identity: the rice theme for the staff of life, the God theme for power, and the 'holy' theme for purity. Lewis's proposition has been rarely discussed among Akha experts; rather, most of them have opted to equate 'zaŋ' with Akha ethnic identity (Kammerer 1990; Tooker 1992). The 'Akha zaŋ' as understood by foreign anthropologists, encompasses 'religion, way of life, customs, etiquette, and ceremonies' and 'traditions as handed down by the fathers' (Alting Von Geusau 1983: 249). It can also refer more broadly to the 'Akha Way' (Lewis 1984: 203; Kammerer 2003), as 'way of life, way of doing things, customs or traditions' (Tooker 1992: 803). Knowledge of Akha zaŋ is orally transmitted (Kammerer 2003: 43).

The 'Akha way' can be very broad. For Alting von Geusau, for example, knowledge of the Akha zaŋ includes the whole of Akha life at all levels: when, where, and how forest has to be cleared and burned; how people should relate to family, lineage, and clan in matters concerning marriage; penal and judiciary rules; proper daily behaviour; the whole elaborated system of etiquette; and calendric and non-calendric ceremonial and ritual behaviour. The 'way' is totalising too, in that it stipulates no clear-cut dividing line between ritual and non-ritual behaviour, or between the sacred and profane. Through the Akha way, human events are linked to cosmic processes and cycles in a meticulous articulation of harmony

between the human microcosmos and ecological and macrocosmic processes. Errors in the observation of the way bring hazards, while the series of taboos and etiquette entailed by the way are expected to prevent major catastrophes.

Nonetheless, Akha *zaŋ* is not a set of rigid rules. As Alting von Geusau also recognised, it remains flexible so that the Akha can adapt to majority cultural norms and other outside pressures (1983: 249–50). To Akha, the most important thing about Akha *zaŋ* is that it entails practise rather than belief. One cannot believe or not believe it. One can only carry or not carry it. Just as they carry rice in baskets on their backs, the Akha carry the burden of the ancestors. That is why it is a way of doing things (Tooker 1992: 803). Therefore, a Chinese man could become an Akha by doing things in the Akha way. For example, he could move into an Akha village, build an Akha-style house with an Akha ancestral shrine, take on an Akha genealogy, speak the Akha language, and wear Akha clothes. In reverse, an Akha man could also give up his Akha identity by doing things in a Christian way or regain his identity by following the Akha way (ibid.: 799–800).

Among the Akha community in Menglian, Akha *zaŋ* is called Akha *ghanr* or, in Chinese, Akha *li* (*akali*, 阿卡礼). The Akha consider that each ethnic group has its own way of life: there is also Lahu *li*, Wa *li*, Dai *li*, or Han *li*. Each is a special ethnic way or *minzu li* (民族礼). In Chinese, *li* (礼) can be glossed most simply as 'ritual system'; it is a word with multiple layers of meanings, mainly including ceremonies, traditional customs, rules of behaviour, and etiquette, which is roughly equivalent to *zaŋ* and *ghanr*. Because Chinese was my major language of research, I use *li* instead of *zaŋ* and *ghanr* for general discussion, and to reflect on particular instances when my informants used it.

Location

Menglian Dai, Lahu and Wa Autonomous County is one of the main areas of Akha settlement. The county is officially described as economically poorly developed (*qiong*, 穷), mountainous (*shan*, 山), and a remote frontier (*bian*, 边) inhabited by dozens of minorities (*shao* [*minzu*], 少) (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 67). The county lies between latitudes 22° 05' and 22° 32' N, and longitudes 99° 09' and 99° 46' E, spanning approximately 1,894 square kilometres. As with much of the province and other areas within Zomia[10], mountainous terrain dominates Menglian's administrative

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[10] 'From north to south, [Zomia] includes southern and western Sichuan, all of Guizhou and Yunnan, western and northern Guangxi, western Guangdong, most of northern Burma with an

area, covering 98 per cent of the total. Mountain ranges in the southern end of the Hengduan system form the border between Myanmar and China, where Menglian is positioned. The mountains extend from north to south, while two basins (*bazi*, 坝子) are respectively located in the west and east. Rolling hills characterise the adjacent parts between mountains and basins. Elevations range from 497 to 2,603 metres: the relative height of mountain peaks to river valleys can be as much as 2,100 metres. These two basins, occupying more than 10,000 Mu (6,670 hectares) of paddy field each, are the major rice-cultivating areas of the Dai. The region of vast rolling hills, stretching roughly 1,300,000 Mu, is mainly cultivated by highlanders like the Lahu, Wa, and Akha with upland rice as well as cash crops like tea, coffee, and sugar cane (Writing Group 1986: 2).

Located in the far south-west corner of the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau, Menglian is remote but by no means a closed or isolated place. Historically, Yunnan has served as a nucleus for cross-regional trade in Eurasian communications, connecting China, mainland South East Asia, India, and beyond through the south-west portion of the Silk Road (Yang 2009). Menglian itself was a significant passage for trade leading to Myanmar (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee of Pu'er City 2012: 917). In the early twenty-first century, Menglian remains a main border trading port at the provincial level (ibid.: 672), although the revenues are apparently small.

Menglian's location on the frontier shapes trade relations more than political ones. Unlike China's more famous frontier of Xinjiang, which remains in a tense relationship with the central government, Yunnan has few problems with PRC governance because it was successfully incorporated into the central Chinese empire, and ethnic groups accepted a Chinese identity, as early as the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) (Yang 2009: 285). Nor is the international border contested, as rivers and mountains form a natural borderline between China and Myanmar. Menglian does border Wa State, which is an unrecognised state in Myanmar and a subsumed region under the official Wa Second Special Region of the Northern Shan State. But compared with the warring zone of Kokang, the First Special Region of Shan State, which causes refugees to flee to western Yunnan from time to time, the Wa State appears warless and thus provides a peaceful world for cross-border communication.

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adjacent segment of extreme [north] eastern India, the north and west of Thailand, practically all of Laos above the Mekong Valley, northern and central Vietnam along the Annam Cordillera, and the north and eastern fringes of Cambodia' (Scott 2010: 14).

Map 2. The location of Menglian.

The mountainous landscape and tropical climate makes Menglian 'the emerald embedded in the Yunnan frontier'. In 1957, forests covered 65 per cent of the region, and even in the 2000s about 50 per cent of the region was covered with forests.[11] The tropical environment supports an unusually full spectrum of species and vegetation types, making it ideal for hunting and gathering, but increasing exploitation of arable land in the mountains and a developing logging industry have sharply reduced the forest coverage. In

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[11] See Local Chronicles Compilation Committee (1999: 37) and http://www.114huoche.com/zhengfu/PuEr-MengLian. Last access in May 2018.

recent decades, projects of converting farmland to forests, and of planting fast-growing forests and water forests have been launched by the local government so as to protect the threatened ecological environment. Even with the challenges it faces, the forest remains a natural treasury, containing abundant woods, herbs, wild fruits, mammals, and birds which enrich the inhabitants' kitchens and provide the materials needed in house building, handicrafts, and ritual performance.

Despite rich natural resources and its historic role in cross-border trade, Menglian is officially classified as one of 592 state poverty counties demanding fiscal support from the central government. The local officials ascribe the poverty to their remoteness, poorly developed society, lack of industry, and weak agriculture. Only since 2000, under the policy and fiscal support of central government, the local government has initiated a series of development projects to promote economic growth and infrastructural development in rural areas, village by village. On the one hand, cash crops such as sugar cane, tea, coffee, and rubber have been promoted to increase income and revenue. Tertiary industry (i.e. the service sector) has also arisen, especially tourism, thanks to the multi-ethnic landscape. On the other hand, the Supporting Poverty Office (*fupin bangongshi*, 扶贫办公室) was founded to manage support rebuilding houses, reforming field lands, training unskilled labour, and similar projects. In the field of social welfare, people have been granted pensions, medical insurance, low-income subsidies, agricultural subsidies, and subsidies for parents with only one child or two girls.[12] Along with the level of subsidy increasing, most peasants receive cash benefits of 1,000 to 5,000 RMB ($159–795 USD) each year. However, up to the end of 2008, there were still over 49,000 highlanders in poverty with individual net incomes of less than 1,196 RMB ($190 USD) (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 191).

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[12] The PRC's birth control policy, at the time of research, takes into consideration the preference for sons held by the majority of the population. All rural-registered couples are granted permission to have two children, partly in recognition of the labour to be provided by children as they grow up. Those who have only one child or two girls receive subsidies as a reward and compensation of the potential economic loss they will experience from the lack of male children.
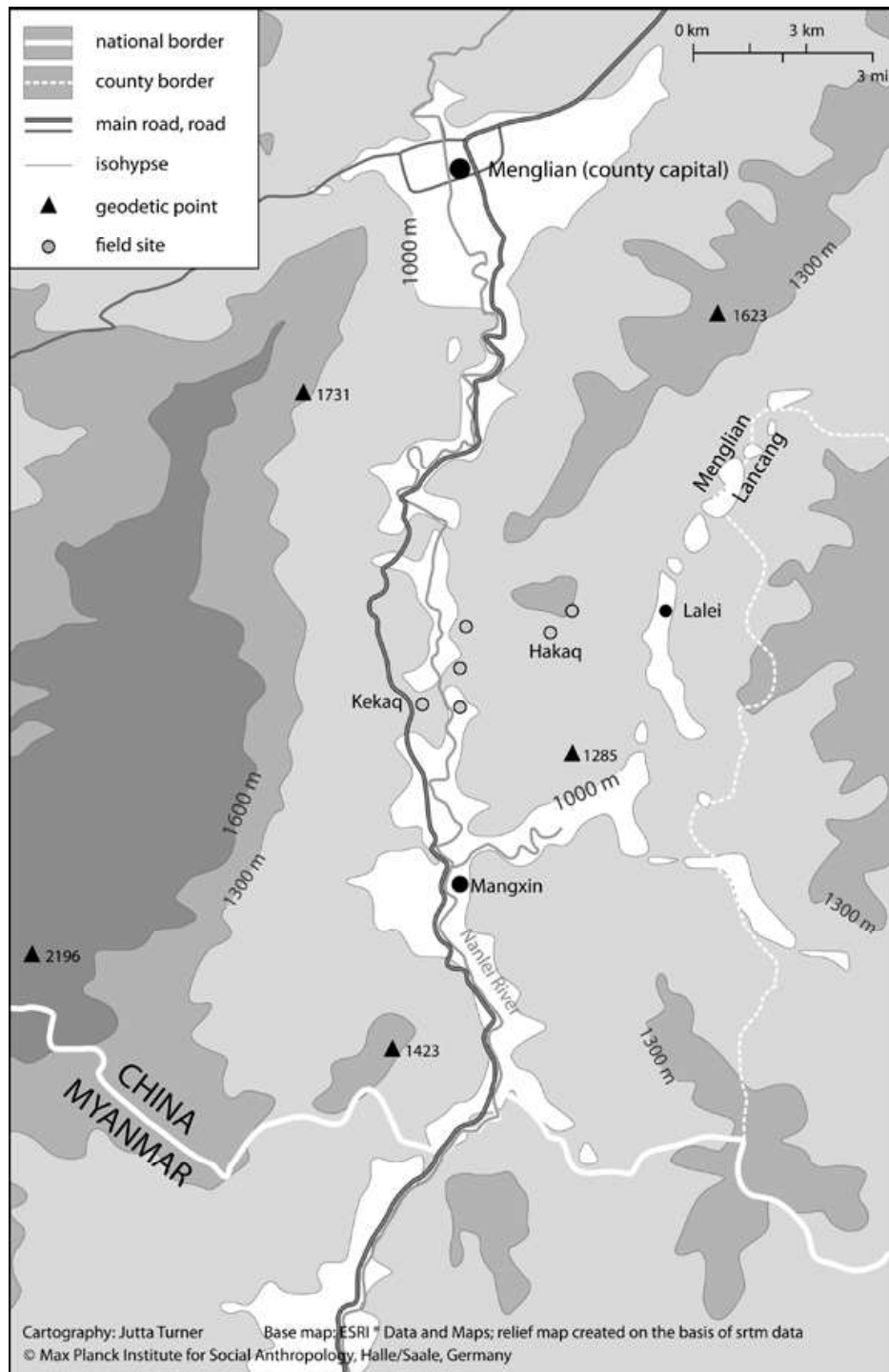
Map 3. The field sites.

In multi-ethnic Menglian, the Dai people occupy the lowland basins while Lahu, Wa, and Akha people are scattered through the highlands. From the official full name of Menglian Dai, Lahu and Wa Autonomous County, it is easy to tell that the Dai, Lahu, and Wa have been the major ethnic groups. As mentioned above, the Wa are recorded as the group to have been longest settled in the region, followed by the Dai who formed marital bonds with the

Wa in order to stay and later became the dominant group for eight centuries. The Lahu entered Menglian from Lancang County in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 57). The Akha joined them in the late nineteenth century, becoming the fourth largest ethnic group in the region. A small number of Lisu, Jingpo, Yi, Hui, Bai, and representatives from ten other ethnic groups are also found in Menglian (Menglian Dai, Lahu, and Wa Autonomous County Statistical Bureau 2008: 101).The local ethnic groups have neighboured with one another for hundreds of years while maintaining distinctive cultures and traditions, in terms of houses, costumes, languages, music, dance, food, religions, festivals, kinship systems, agricultural skills and so forth. They are all transnational groups, maintaining close relationships with their counterparts living in Myanmar through trade, private visits, ritual events, inter-marriage, and labour exchange.

The Han were a minority group in Menglian before the foundation of the PRC. Since the 1950s, the Han population has rapidly increased. As of 2010, the Han had become the second largest ethnic group and accounted for roughly 21 per cent of the total population in Menglian (see Chart 1 in the Appendix).

Akha Life: Public Spaces Matter

Like many other Akha villages, Hakaq has four indispensable public spaces scattered among the woods around the village or a short distance away: the village gates, the playground, the divine water source, and the public cemetery. There are two sets of village gates – one standing uphill, the other downhill from the village. They are not only the boundary dividing the human world and the spirit world, but also the barrier that keeps spirits outside. Traditionally the village gates were made of trees and were supposed to be renewed annually, but in recent years, as the woods have decreased in acreage, villagers have opted to build concrete gates instead. The 'playground' is on the right hand side of the main road. It is not meant for children but as a meeting place for youth, and is equipped with a wooden bench and a huge eye-catching swing. Few people come here because public dating has died out, but its ritual function for the Swing Festival and New Year continues. Since a concrete foundation was poured around the playground, villagers also use it to dry grains in the sun. Like the village gates, the swing was traditionally built from four tall trees and renewed annually during the Swing Festival. Again, owing to the same reason of shrinking woods, villagers constructed a steel swing in 2013. Villagers, old and young, were all very proud of these adaptations. The third public space, the divine water source, is hidden in woods on the downhill side of the

village. Water drawn from here is considered pure water (*ganjingshui*, 干净水), and serves purifying functions in most ceremonies and rituals. The fourth public place, the public cemetery, lies several hundred metres away from the village; it is only open to those who died a good death, and not to those who had horrific deaths such as drowning, being bitten by a tiger, or shot by a gun. People who suffered horrific deaths are buried in the wild (see chapter 3).

In recent decades, along with various state-run projects improving infrastructure, new public spaces have been developed. For example, the road connecting the two village gates was paved, and officially called a 'civilisation road' (*wenminglu*, 文明路). Of course, cadres at the level of the administrative village once complained to me that the road was 'not civilised' at all because no one cleans up the buffalo dung dropped on it. Indeed, villagers did wait for the dung to disappear naturally unless they were informed in advance that a group of important visitors was coming. Buffalo dung seemed not to bother them at all; even I took it for granted as a feature of the main road. Walking along it in the morning, I often encountered villagers chatting in groups, children joyfully chasing one another, buffalo slowly being herded, dogs fighting, and chickens flying. It was a place full of social life. I found a walk along this road in the morning or evening to be a good way to meet and greet others, have a chat, and learn the latest news. Dung on the paved road seemed a minor issue; all the many side roads, wide or narrow, that connected single households were made of dirt. They were dusty in the dry season and muddy in the rainy season, and it was difficult to keep one's feet clean when going along them.

A single two-room bungalow stands in the middle of the village, adjoining the main road via a small square. This is a state-sponsored public meeting room built in 2008, officially called the 'culture room' (*wenhuashi*, 文化室). All government-related affairs take place in the culture room: meetings of candidates for governmental subsidies, voting for village cadres, calculating collective finances, and so on. As night fell, this was also the favourite gathering place for youths and women. Middle-aged women liked doing needlework here, and the square in front of the culture room was the young wives' dancing floor. Children played among them or tried dancing with them. Some young men might come, too, chatting to one another while watching the dance show. Compared to the traditional playground next to the huge swing, the culture room and the square has become the actual playground for villagers. Besides, villagers also use the square for drying grains in the sun, and some temporarily store grains in the culture room during the rainy days. My living hut was located right behind the culture room, enabling me to observe most public events taking place there.

Plate 6. A Dai mobile vendor often drove to the village to sell non-staple food and drinks. Here, in front of the Culture Room and village square (Hakaq).

Besides the main road and the meeting room, a public toilet and a water storage tank were also built in 2008. Piped running water was made available to each household. For half the year, this greatly liberated villagers from the labour of carrying water, but in the dry season, the tank could not fill regularly enough to meet everyone's needs and villagers had to fetch water from a well about 500 metres away. In the recent relocation, Akha villages which moved to the lowlands were spared such problems of water scarcity, and this partly justified their choice of relocation.

Some of the new projects must be seen as necessary components of the village's relocation, rather than as new development initiatives. The village's new location had been a cornfield until 2003, and had no real infrastructure. Hakaq was equipped with electricity in January 2009. Before 2009, city visitors often mistakenly assumed that Hakaq's inhabitants were used to living in an isolated primitive place. Yet in its previous site prior to its relocation, the village had been electrically equipped since 1976. Villagers in the new Hakaq were, to the contrary, used to watching TV programmes and movies. During the years without electricity, those who had cell phones visited neighbouring villages to charge their phones. Once

electricity came into use, rich villagers immediately purchased television sets and DVD players. Nowadays, most households own cell phones, televisions, DVD players, refrigerators, and milling machines; some also bought washing machines, and in one case, an illiterate young man even bought a computer for watching videos. Many people like to sit at home watching TV, making daily social interactions less frequent than before.

Private Houses in Disputes

Compared with other Akha villages where old thatched huts have been replaced by new brick houses through state projects, Hakaq villagers still live in traditional-style houses. Nonetheless, it was not completely their decision to keep these old houses. Before they moved to the current site, most households lived in wooden, thatched, or tiled Akha-style houses that were built in the 1990s by a Han artisan, although some rich families had Akha-style brick houses or a brick house combining both Akha and Dai styles. When they moved to the current site, they disassembled these houses and kept most of the materials. Upon relocation, they constructed thatched bamboo huts, which took only a day to build. Such transitional shelters are typically built by new villages or households. Normally, permanent houses are then (re)built over a series of years. As rebuilding began, some families in Hakaq began to change the style of their house, using more brick and adapting other, more Han-like styles.

However, it so happened that a couple from Kunming accidently drove into the village in 2006. They were passionate about protecting tribal culture, and the wife claimed to have an Akha background. In 2010, they wrote a letter, circulated publicly, to raise funds for constructing a museum in the village.[13] They described how fascinated they were by this tranquil village full of thatched huts. They felt like they were intruding on a 'remote', 'isolated', 'primitive tribe', and took it that these huts had lasted 'for a thousand years'. They stayed in the village afterwards, and soon encountered the state project of supporting the poor by changing thatched huts to brick houses in Han style. Having been traumatised by vanishing huts in other Akha villages, the couple scolded and discouraged rich villagers who were willingly building brick houses in Han style and persuaded the local government to prevent others in Hakaq from building Han brick houses. As a result, they successfully made Hakaq villagers rebuild wooden or brick-walled and tiled houses in a traditional style, just like what they had in the

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[13] As will be seen in subsequent chapters, this couple's interest in Akha life had a great influence on several policy issues. However, I have chosen to maintain their anonymity. A copy of their letter reached me through personal networks.

1990s. Villagers, especially those who wanted to build a new brick house or who preferred a non-traditional style, reluctantly accepted the result because they had no opportunity to make their voices heard.

The upshot was that in Hakaq I was able to learn about the Akha-style house by actually living in it, touching it, photographing, and measuring it. There were two types of houses: *ymma* (big house) and *ymzaq* (small house). The big house is the main house of a household, and signifies a single household. The big house (see Appendix), built on the ground or two metres above the ground, is mainly divided into two halves by a wall in the middle, establishing the female room and the male room, each with a fireplace in the middle against the wall. The wall is marked by the 'centre pillar' on the one side which, is thus taken as the head of the house. This is where the sleeping place is; it too is divided into male and female sections. The opposite side is taken as the foot of the house, where the wall leaves a door-sized exit connecting both rooms. Each room respectively leads to an extended compartment. Each compartment has an exit to the outside. A fully open balcony adjoins the male compartment.

The big house is where the head couple and children live and most family activities take place. By the 'head couple', I here refer to the oldest generation of a household. The small house, located near the big house, is simply a single-room sleeping hut for sexually active sons or for married couples of younger generations. To take a four-generation household as an example: the couple in the first generation (i.e. great grandparents) live in the big house; couples from the second and third generations (grandparents and parents, respectively) each have a small house to sleep in; unmarried men might sleep in a single small house or in the male compartment of the big house; unmarried women normally stay in the female compartment of the big house; and small children can sleep wherever they prefer. Except for sleeping, household members conduct all other activities in the big house, such as cooking, dining, watching television, hosting guests, and rituals.

Big houses in Hakaq are all built nearly two metres above the ground. People live above while they keep chickens, buffalo, pigs, thatch, milling machines, and various agricultural tools on the ground. The staircases leading to the inside of the houses are made of wooden boards. Each stair is as high as 20 centimetres, which is a challenge to small children. I often witnessed toddlers or even infants struggling to crawl up and down. Climbing up the stairs, then stepping into the male compartment (the entrance for all guests), I often noted that the male compartment was used for many purposes: bundles of clothes hung from ropes; packages of grain were piled in the corners; bamboo benches, small stools, plastic bottles, and roots or fruits were scattered here and there, but I found little in the sense of a fixed

order or organisation to most of the compartments. Entering an Akha house through the unlocked door of the male room, it always took some time to adapt to the dim light. There are no windows in the traditional form of the main house, but villagers now often replace several tiles with glass so that sunlight leaks in. Through the streaks of sunshine, I would see dust floating up and down in the air. Order came into focus only with regards to the organisation of eating and sleeping: kitchen utensils were placed on a long shelf against a side wall. Because people cook over fires inside the room, pots and gourds are smoked dark, covered by dust and ashes. The sleeping place is simply made of hard board, covered by a layer of thin bamboo matting. During the daytime, villagers normally roll up the bamboo mats and blankets, and open them when going to bed.

To me as well as to local governmental officials, the Akha house displayed a lack of order, but to villagers, it was well structured and carefully organised. In their view, the order issues from the division between the house's male and female sides. For example, the female side is a private space to outsiders and a sacred space for ritual events, while the male side is a secular public space for guests; only the head couple of a household are allowed to sleep in the place next to the dividing wall; the balcony must be built on the male side of the house; only households owning certain ritual authorities are qualified to build balconies on both sides; there must be at least seven stairs for each staircase and each one is taken to symbolise a type of metal; and so on. Nonetheless, through a household survey, I learned that among individual villagers, not everybody was happy with this traditional way of dividing space.

Many villagers had their own ideas for house design, but had been unable to realise them, so they said, because of the movement to protect Akha culture that had been initiated by the Kunming couple. For example, a retired schoolteacher told me that he would prefer a hotel-like version of the big house where the couple could sleep together in one bedroom instead of in the separate male and female sections. A young man in his thirties told me that he had planned to build a Dai-style brick building which could combine a big house and a small house into a single, multi-storeyed building. His house would have kept a basic female-male division, but his plan was blocked by the couple from Kunming. Many times, he expressed his eagerness to have a pretty house like Dai people, and repeatedly insisted, 'We should change gradually'.

Making a Living in Hakaq

Changes have indeed taken place among the community, particularly regarding the subsistence lifestyle. Inhabiting the low hillsides of a mountainous area with rich natural resources, Hakaq villagers developed a mixed agricultural subsistence in which they combined farming, gardening, raising livestock, hunting, fishing, gathering, hand-crafting, and trading, leading to a relatively self-sufficient lifestyle in terms of food. Specifically, the villagers cultivate paddy rice and upland rice to meet their own needs and engage with cash crops such as peanuts, pearl barley, corn, sugar cane, coffee, and tea. They remain self-sufficient in food, growing a total of seventy or more kinds of cereal, vegetables, roots, and fruits, in quantities far exceeding their needs. They raise domestic livestock, chickens, ducks, pigs, and buffalo for food and rituals, as well as sale. They go hunting, fishing, and gathering to collect whatever is edible: honey, honeybees, ant eggs, wild olives, birds, wild mice, wild dogs, and so on, to encompass some forty species in all. They remain largely self-sufficient in other respects too. They manage to make nearly everything they need for family life, from building houses to making chopsticks. Normally, men are in charge of building big houses, small houses, and warehouses; weaving bamboo baskets and mats; and making wooden or bamboo containers, brooms, and tobacco pipes. Women are responsible for all stages of making clothing, hats, and shoulder bags: cultivating cotton, making thread and cloth, dyeing them with indigo, sewing, and embroidering and adorning them. They purchase what they are unable to make – like salt and iron knives – things of which they run short – like meat and clothes – and market products which they enjoy – like beer, milk, and cake.

The great amount of diverse work keeps Hakaq villagers busy all the time. The general daily routine, similar for both men and women, is to get up at sunrise, do housework, pay visits, do laundry, have breakfast, feed pigs and chickens, then pack some cooked rice and around ten o'clock in the morning go out to the fields or to their buffalo pastures. People working in the fields prefer to have a break around one o'clock in the afternoon in the small huts built in the middle of the field; there they cook a soup to eat with their rice, and then take a nap. After the break, they continue to work in the fields until sunset. Those tending buffalo usually come back home around four o'clock in the afternoon, feed the chickens and pigs, and do a bit of housework. After having supper around nine o'clock in the evening, they either stay at home watching television, go to the meeting room to chat in groups, visit friends or relatives for fun, or, for men, go hunting in the forest. Sometime around eleven o'clock at night, they sleep. Thus, between ten o'clock in the morning and four o'clock in the afternoon, the entire village is

very quiet; I hardly encountered any villagers at home during these hours –
mostly elders who were caring for small children. Even in the agricultural
slack days, they do not like to stay at home. During the dry season (from
November to May), women like to catch fish, crabs, or shrimps in streams or
rivers, while men prefer hunting in the forest. During the rainy slack season
(from June to October), villagers mainly engage with cultivating vegetables
on small pieces of land and collecting edible plants, both of which they sell
at market. They sell vegetables on a weekly basis or even less frequently.
One day of selling brings in 200–500 RMB ($32–79 USD), most of which is
immediately spent on fruit, biscuits, oil, milk, or eggs. Festivals and ritual
events spare them from agricultural activities, but not from many other tasks.
Women, particularly, seem never to drop their needlework.

In Hakaq, labour (*gong*, 工) is valuable. The value of labour, as one
gong, is reckoned in terms of the amount of work that can be done by one
person in one day. Villagers maintain a labour exchange system for agri-
cultural and other activities. For instance, if Household A plans to harvest
corn, which roughly requires 20 *gong*, they borrow the necessary *gong* from
other households. Normally, other households willing lend one or two *gong*
at a time. Household A then owes labours to each of the lending households.
When these households need labour in the future, they ask Household A to
pay them back. The returned labour need only be the same quantity, but the
form is flexible. That is, B could ask A to pay back the labour by planting
paddy rice or cutting bamboo. This flexibility makes labour exchange more
favourable than labour purchase. It was very difficult to find labour through
payment. Villagers partly ascribed the difficulty to the high local commodity
prices, complaining that even 100 RMB ($16 USD) are very quickly spent.
By comparison, exchange labour is much more economical than selling
labour, thus it has become their best option.

Hakaq's villagers are nearly self-sufficient, but, like the rest of the
population in this economically poor county, they are often short of cash.
Since the project of Developing China's West started in 2000 (Yeung and
Shen 2004), the central and local governments initiated many favourable
projects to increase the incomes of the rural populations. For example, the
central government has abolished agricultural taxes since 2006 to ease the
burden on peasants. Yunnan's local government initiated a project of 'devel-
oping frontier areas and enriching people' (*xingbian fumin*, 兴边富民) in
2005.

In Hakaq, these initiatives have been relatively successful. The village
is considered by its fellow villages to be the richest of the six sub-villages
divided from the Old Village. The gradual adoption of cash crops such as
corn, sugar cane, tea, coffee, and rubber trees has become the most

significant way for villagers to make money. Also, because they could easily rent or buy land from their Wa neighbours – the oldest group to settle in Menglian who thus own a great amount of land – Hakaq households that have worked hard gained more access to cash than they had ten years ago and, by the time of my fieldwork, could afford motorbikes, refrigerators, mobile phones, TV sets, DVD players, and a range of other consumer items previously inaccessible due to their high price. Of these, the most expensive items have been hand tractors with trailers, which cost a bit under 10,000 RMB (about $1,500 USD).

Plate 7. Akha women carrying their grandchildren to pasture buffalo (Hakaq).

The expansion of cash-crop cultivation has not brought every household a comfortable life. Financial situations vary, as does the personal capacity to manage money. In general, households with more active labourers and more land cultivate more cash crops and thus make more money. The annual income of the richest household in Hakaq was over 100,000 RMB ($15,914 USD), but that of the poorest one was less than 10,000 RMB ($1,591 USD). For the majority, their annual income merely met the demands of consumption, hence little was saved. Besides, after building houses in 2008, most households were trapped in debt, which made their financial situation worse.

For certain households, things could be even worse. Despite the majority in Hakaq being hardworking peasants, there also existed a dozen or so lazy men. These men, mostly young, avoided farming during the busy season, which forced the brunt of the hardest household labour onto their elderly parents. Sometimes, such households were forced to drop the cultivation of cash crops due to their lack of labour. In worse scenarios, lazy men were also in charge of their household's money because it was they who drove the motorbike or tractor to the county town to sell the crops. Sometimes such men were absent from home for months and then returned, as if from nowhere, after the harvest to take charge of selling the crops. As the first recipients of the money, they often squandered it in a short time on food, drinks, gambling, and drugs, bringing home only a few coins to the family. The elders often complained to me about these careless sons. Thanks to their mixed agricultural subsistence, even households with lazy men had sufficient food, and state pensions guaranteed that the elders had some cash to buy necessities like oil and salt. They had little money to purchase pork, beer, or snacks from mobile vendors, but they had a sufficient and varied diet. Cash, seen to be most accessible to those households with responsible sons or husbands, was critical for enjoying a comfortable life.

Carrying the Akha *Li* on the Back

As discussed in the last section, the Akha *li* refers to the traditions defining the Akha way of life. In Hakaq, the Akha *li* worked continuously and actively, but it also changed to adapt to the changing natural and social environments.

On the one hand, it could be observed easily that Hakaq villagers had being living according to the Akha *li*. In the first place, they had built the new village according to the Akha *li* in terms of ritually selecting the village site, building the village gates and the playground, and choosing the divine water source and the site for the public cemetery. Secondly, they had constructed the *community* under the instruction of the Akha *li*; they had founded the relocated village on three exogamous lineages, and established the village office of big men. Thirdly, they continued to use the Akha calendar to celebrate Akha festivals and to calculate birthdays and auspicious days for ritual events. Fourthly, they had frequently engaged with ritual practices to purify individuals, houses, households, or the entire village, as well as to cure illness. Fifthly, their daily life was ordered to a great extent by the Akha *li*. In addition to the structure of houses discussed above, I observed that married men could not keep their hair long or call their wives by their personal names; pregnant women had to wear traditional Akha dress every day during the late months of pregnancy; children were

forbidden to call parents by their personal names; and all villagers stopped work in the fields for one day if a house burned down.

Nevertheless, they had kept adapting the Akha *li* in response to natural and social changes. As the forest shrank, they began to construct concrete village gates and steel swings, instead of wooden ones. They also simplified ritual traditions by giving up the ancestral altar after settling at the current site. Among the big men, the position called *dzoema* was abolished. The *dzoema* had been in charge of managing the village, but this work was taken over by village cadres. Some of the *dzoema*'s ritual duties were taken over by the *pudzu aqdaq* (village father; see chapter 4). And since 2012, children have even been born in hospitals in the county town instead of at home.

These changes follow others. For example, during the 1990s, children were only allowed to pay their first visit to the county town at the age of 13. By the time of my fieldwork, as all villagers visit the county town frequently, children above the age of one, or even younger, are allowed this travel. Villagers have also learned the solar calendar, and started celebrating children's birthdays. Also since the 1990s, more and more children have been sent to school. And, for the two decades preceding my research, a good number of girls have left definitively for the cities once they reach their teens. With only male youth left in the villages, the public dating system has vanished.

Other changes were visibly underway at the time of my fieldwork. For example, married women had worn a headdress and Akha short skirt every day. After some new wives arrived from Myanmar in 2009, they gradually stopped wearing the heavy headdress in daily life and started wearing trousers. The village office tried to stop this rule-breaking conduct, but they failed even though the culture-protecting couple from Kunming were also greatly upset by this change. The couple is even said to have claimed that the rule-breaking wives should be publicly exiled from the Akha mountain. Instead, the local community learned to tolerate their alternate dress. In 2012, the *tsawrpaeq* system – the greatest *li* of all – was abolished under the combined effort of the Kunming couple, some Akha elites, and the local government. Villagers were forced to accept deformed infants who had traditionally been unwanted.

Hakaq was considered a relatively conservative village by other Akha on account of its slow speed of change. A young Akha wife from Myanmar, for example, complained several times that the Akha *li* in Hakaq was very troublesome and over-elaborate. By comparison, the life of her natal village had rapidly changed, so they had less *li* to follow. I also heard similar complaints from other villagers, sometimes even from big men. Nonetheless, after complaining, they mostly chose to adhere to the Akha *li*, particularly

concerning rituals and ceremonies. Meanwhile, discussions took place on topics of necessary adaptations to the changing surroundings. Nowadays, their autonomous flexibility over the Akha *li* has been affected by outside interference (e.g. the Kunming couple and the local government) in the name of protecting Akha culture. However, the interference was limited to visible aspects such as houses, costumes and deformed children, which are easily noticed by outsiders. As to the Akha cosmology and corresponding religious thoughts and practices, the Hakaq villagers maintain wide autonomy in these fields.

The Maintained Harmony within the Village

The village life of Hakaq appeared harmonious. During the first months of my stay, I was really impressed by the fact that I had encountered some family quarrels but rarely encountered public conflicts among fellow villagers. As time went by, the superficial harmony continued, but I learned more stories about their actual opinions of one another. While chatting with me, some villagers said they suspected the village cadre of cheating with public finances; the village cadre accused some men of using or selling drugs; a man complained of being treated unfairly in a dispute with another patrilineal fellow by the latter's blood brothers. Many villagers criticised a family for spoiling their four-year-old son so much that the boy had become naughtier and naughtier, often hitting other children or even adults. Some families tried to prevent their children from playing with the naughty boy, so as not to be beaten by him, but the children themselves often played together anyway. I also learned that a middle-aged woman refused to talk with a widow because she suspected her husband was having an affair with the widow; a young woman had also stopped talking to the same widow because the widow had accused the woman's husband of attempted sexual attacks. The worst case was of a teenage girl who was threatened with gang rape when she followed her relatives to a wedding in an Akha village in Myanmar. Her angry mother accused the relatives of failing to protect the girl; in turn, they protested that the girl had not actually been hurt. It seems the rape was not concluded because the girl was menstruating.

To my surprise, despite all these unpleasant experiences, villagers were inclined not to intensify conflicts. Instead, they hid them inside and maintained a peaceful relationship with one another on the surface. I was shocked to discover that the widow's adult son worked with and joked with the man who had sexually attacked his mother, and that the father of the nearly-raped girl still exchanged his labour with the careless relatives. As for women not talking with one another, sometimes they joined the same chatting group on the roadside, but avoided talking directly to each other. It

remained a mystery to me how they could manage their emotions so well. Often, when hidden conflicts reached a breaking point, a group of households would decide to move to another site and build a new village, but even these splits were managed peacefully. However, no such splits occurred during my stay.

Probably, the superficial harmony of the village is successfully maintained because of the high level of interdependence among households. Hakaq's villagers depend on one another economically for labour exchange. The density of kin relations and obligations is also important to acknowledge. After all, Hakaq is a community with multiple patrilines where households link to one another through either patrilineage or intermarriage. The Akha *li* prescribes numerous ritual obligations to help each other. As one young man put it, when weddings and funerals take place, every household must put aside past clashes and go to help the host. In a word, this is a community where villagers are so interdependent that they tend to bury conflicts deep.

Chapter 3
Cosmological Insecurities and Support

Nowadays the Akha in Menglian generally still perceive health-threatening danger as coming from the cosmological world around them. When a person is alive, the attachment of the souls to the body secures the individual's health. After death, the main soul of one who died well becomes an ancestor, blessing its offspring, while the soul of one who died horrifically turns into a vicious ghost, wandering in the wild. Above all the ancestors stands the Supreme God Aqpoeq Miqyaer, the creator of the Akha *li*. The *yasanq* (spirits or gods of every being) are omnipresent. Once wronged by people, a *yasanq* will cause pain and illness which can be healed only by ritual sacrifice. Humans live in villages and cultivate good land, but their invisible cosmological counterparts and brothers, *naevq*, are scattered in stony or muddy lands which humans are unable to reach. If humans do wrong to *naevq*, or *naevq* come to human territory, harm will come to human lives and property. Thus, Akha people carefully maintain the boundary between humans and *naevq* by using various items and rituals. There also exist two hostile beings called *piser* and *lapya* who enchant people, especially the vulnerable, and cause deaths.[14] This cosmological world is the source of both the insecurities and securities of the Akha people.

In contemporary China, the Akha cosmology and its corresponding practices have rarely been disturbed by the state, except during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976. The state becomes concerned only when ethnic cosmology is seen as superstition rather than ethnic custom. To the present day, it still plays a remarkable role in the local community.

Souls: Without which People Cannot Survive

It is one of the fundamental beliefs in the Akha community that beings have souls (*savqlavr sulavr*). Human, animals, and plants all have souls. Humans possess souls as soon as they are born. There is no chance at all for newborn

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[14] The Appendix contains a diagram of human and nonhuman cosmological actors.

babies to survive if they do not have souls. Thus, Akha villagers always welcome every newborn by repeating the same sentence, '*savqlavr sulavr ta baq dey*'. The phrase means 'souls, do not go away to the other world, please hastily come back!' or 'souls are not scared away'. This is a good wish, asking the souls of newborns to stay with the owner. Aqbawr Gu (Grandpa Gu)[15], one of the most knowledgeable and respectful elders from Kekaq, with capacities both as a healer and a blacksmith, explained further:

> *Savqlavr* is the authentic soul, like the air we breathe. *Savq* is the air, so if souls go away, it is as if half of our breath is left in the other world. Don't humans die if they stop breathing? *Savqlavr* is the breath. *Sulavr* is the human head. *Sulavr baq* means the human head dies. *Su* is *xi*, death, but you cannot say *xi* … you need to replace it with *su*. *Sulavr* also refers to human flesh. The human head is the same as the human flesh.

It is indisputable for the Akha that humans have plural souls, but people hold different opinions on how many souls a person has. Aqbawr Pu, a *pima* in his fifties, told me during a ritual break that a person has five souls. Aqbawr Bu, also a *pima* and a student of Aqbawr Pu, claimed that he had no idea how many souls humans have. What he knows is that humans have several souls, and men have more souls than women do, because men are bold while women are timid. Aqbawr Gu held a similar idea but provided a more accurate and detailed answer on another occasion, 'A woman has twelve souls, but a man has one hundred souls. Women are so timid that they only have twelve souls. If she loses all of them, she will die. A man has one hundred souls'. Another old man, sitting alongside, chipped in, 'A man has one thousand souls!' Aqbawr Gu did not react to this interruption, but kept on saying, 'Men fight. You beat me, I beat you. Aren't they powerful? They are so bold that they can scold, fight, and kill others. A woman does not have many souls, thus she cannot go fighting or killing, otherwise her souls would be scared away, and she would die if all twelve souls were scared away'. They all agreed that humans stay alive as long as there is one soul within them, and that humans die when all their souls depart.

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[15] All names are fictive but in an Akha manner of addressing people in daily life. This means I have formed names with the respective address (grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt, etc.) followed by what should be a personal name. However, in cases when husbands and wives are mentioned in close proximity, I have usually given them the same personal name, as if it were a family name, to underscore the relation between them. When references are further apart, the same personal name should not be taken as an indication of relatedness. The prefix *aq-* is a modal particle, meaningless in itself but to a certain extent indispensable for addressing others because it helps soften the tone. Here, for example, it softens 'grandfather' to 'grandpa'.

Souls are most often described as being located within the body, but it is also possible for them to stay around the body. Aqbawr Pu is the only informant who gave me a precise answer concerning the location of souls. According to him, each person has five souls; one each is located in the front, back, left, and right sides of the body, and the top of the head. As a person dies, the four souls around the body vanish, but the soul on the top of the head remains and joins the group of ancestors. Hence, the soul on the top of the head is considered the most important. Nonetheless, Aqbawr Bu had once described how souls 'get out of a person', which implies souls inhabiting a person. Aqbawr Gu's interpretation of *savqlavr sulavr*, recorded above, goes even further by equating souls with a breathing human body.

Souls of living people seem powerless. They are considered incapable of doing good or bad to other beings, and they are unable to protect themselves. Rather, they often turn out to be victims of other supernatural beings. Gods, spirits, and even ancestors often imprison them, block their throats, and cover their eyes, so as to ask for sacrifices from the human world. Souls are very timid, easily scared away from their owners by fearful beings, accidents, or events such as thunder, fights, and attacks. Souls are also childish, always attracted to nice things and places. Once attracted, they forget to accompany their owners, and rather stay by what has fascinated them, wander around in the fields, hide underground, or stay in the water, and eventually get lost. The loss of a soul always causes pain and sickness to its owner. Thanks to the easy virtue of souls, people can easily hold onto them by offering nice things, for example, a boiled egg. Even if souls have already gone away, it is still possible to call them back via sacrificing rituals at different levels.

Children's souls are considered weaker than those of adults. They are too vulnerable to resist any frightening or attractive distractions. Hence, Akha people pay great attention to keep souls along with their children, especially during short or long journeys, to other villages, to hospital, or to the county town. If children, along with their parents, visit relatives in another village, they always receive many boiled eggs before they go back home. Parents would feed their children an egg at the moment of leaving, so as to call the children's souls back with them. When crossing a river on the way, picking a pebble from the river is a very efficacious way to keep souls of children with their owners. When passing by a market, buying a small gift, such as a mirror, is sufficient to lure souls back home. Traditionally, Akha children were hardly ever brought to markets in town until the age of 13. When they reached 13, their parents would take them to town and buy a valuable gift for them. After coming back home, parents were required to kill a chicken to call their souls back. Due to the socioeconomic develop-

ment in the local society, villagers as well as their children have started to visit markets more frequently than before. Nowadays, villagers have lowered the age limit to one year, while still performing the same ritual of calling souls back. Similarly, if children go to hospital for health problems, a ritual of calling souls back is also necessary. Otherwise, their souls might stay in the street or hospital.

As Aqbawr Gu mentioned above, souls can be scared away by something horrible, such as fighting or killing. He further explained that, 'You will know if your souls go away when you are dreaming. If you are scared somewhere and you dream of that place at night, it means your souls stay there. Souls will run away when they are terribly frightened, but they still stay with you when only slightly scared'. Aqbawr Bu posed a simpler version of soul-loss: 'you lose a soul each time you are scared'. No-one offered me a clear-cut way to measure fear levels, but I found that the seriousness of the situation could be distinguished through its treatment. In cases where souls might be frightened away, it may suffice to warn them in advance. For example, during the Swing Festival, villagers play on a swing over ten metres high. As they sit or stand on the swing, they shout aloud, 'souls come back (*savqlavr sulavr wo la ley*)' before swinging. That is because the swing is so high that souls might be afraid, so it is better to call them in advance.

When something terrible really occurs, the minimum form of treatment is to give the victim a boiled egg in his or her right palm, then for any elder who is present to tie a thread around the victim's right wrist. The colour of thread could be dark blue, black, or white, taking into some account the probable reason for soul-loss, the seriousness of the sickness, and climate and season. The boiled egg is a lure to attract souls back; the thread pulls back and re-ties the souls to their owner.

Offering an egg and tying a thread is a common response to many situations in everyday life. In one case, a five-year-old girl was playing with her peers when she accidently fell down from a rubbish tank. She cried, so her grandfather believed that her souls were scared. He immediately tied a thread around her wrist. In another case, a three-year-old girl witnessed horrible domestic violence. The girl's drunken father beat her mother, and the little girl was terrified. She slept with her grandmother that night, and screamed with bad dreams. When I met her in her grandmother's arms the next morning, her eyes were still full of panic. With great sympathy for her, I took her into my arms. Her grandmother put a boiled egg in her right hand, and tied a thread around her wrist as she uttered, 'Dad fighting with mom frightens the little girl. Souls, do not be scared away! Grandma is here, grandpa is also here. Souls, do not be scared away!'

I, personally, also experienced the same treatment after being attacked by a dog when I was doing a household survey in Kekaq. It occurred when I inadvertently walked into a storeroom to take photos without knowing that behind the piled packs lived a bitch who had recently delivered several puppies. Sensing my invasion, she abruptly jumped out and bit my leg twice. The unexpected attack and pain horrified me; I could not stop screaming. Instinctively, I stepped backwards and shook off the dog. Villagers heard my screaming and rushed out to find me standing in the middle of the yard, tears in eyes. They gathered around me and when they learned what had happened, explained to me that female dogs turn very aggressive when they have newborn puppies. Still in shock, I aimlessly walked into the main house of the compound. Very soon, the grandmother of the resident family came over and, to my surprise, put an egg in my hand and then tied a thread around my wrist. I sat on a stool, tightly grasping the egg, but could not stop the tears falling.

Like the Akha, the Han people, of whom I am one, also have a concept of souls and the idea that souls can be scared away. I later found that I had written unintentionally in that day's field notes: '[I] have unstable, terrified souls (*jinghui weiding*, 惊魂未定)' and '[feel like] my souls are flying away [from me] (*hui fei le*, 魂飞了)'. After the grandmother's initial effort to call my souls back with a string tying, the villagers of Kekaq came to give me various medical treatments. Aqbawr Gu cleaned the wound with herbs. Aqbawr Mo, the former village head, suggested I take a rabies vaccine. I refused, claiming that the bite was not serious. I only felt terrified, I said in Chinese, and my souls had flown away. Hearing the last sentence, Aqbawr Gu stood up right away and said, 'We must [also] tie a thread on you'. He asked his wife to bring an egg and a thread, required me to hold the egg in my right hand, then tied the thread around my wrist while uttering, 'The girl is bitten by a dog today. She is scared. Souls, please all come back!' This second string was meant to double the protective power of the one I had already been given.

On some occasions, tying a thread is necessary as long as soul-loss occurs, no matter what the cause. A young man lost his silver bracelet in the river while he was fishing. He tried to find it but failed. After going back home, he told his mother this bad news. His mother immediately gave him an egg and tied a thread around his wrist. Later he explained to me, any golden or silver products are talismans and able to protect the owner. When a silver bracelet is lost in a river, it is the same as if its owner had drowned in the same water; his souls had possibly gone with the bracelet. It would not have been so serious if the bracelet had been lost in a field or a forest, but

because drowning is culturally classified as a horrific death, it was especially critical to recall any souls that had gone with the lost bracelet.

If something worse happens, then a ritual called *lakuku* (calling souls back) is necessary. The ritual is a specialised one utilising soul-calling chants, normally conducted by an elder. I encountered several such cases in the field. In the first case, a three-year-old girl, who suddenly behaved abnormally on a rainy day, was believed to be enchanted by a hostile being called *lapya*. Fortunately, Aqbawr Gu successfully drove the *lapya* out of the girl. After the healing, Aqbawr Gu was invited to throw a *lakuku* for her. During the ritual, he explained to me that the souls of the girl were scared away as *lapya* invaded her body, thus it was necessary to call them back. In the second case, a teenage girl had a long-lasting fear of thunder, and she was also too timid to stay at home alone on windy days. Once, it thundered when she was on the way to the fields, and she was so scared that she instantly fell down on her knees and started crying. Hence, her parents invited an elder to perform *lakuku* to call her souls back. In the last case, a young Akha driver in his thirties had parked his truck in the street at midnight. A drunken Dai teenage boy came speeding along on a motorbike and hit the back of his truck, dying immediately. In this respect, the village elders held a *lakuku* for the Akha driver. He told me that actually, he did not feel scared, but the elders insisted that his souls were scared even though his person was not.

In the worst cases, villagers tend to invite *pima* to perform a sacrificing ritual, which includes a session of calling back souls. Villagers believe that a *pima* ritual is the most powerful of all. In one case, a middle-aged man had suffered a genetic disease, and the hospital failed to heal him. Thus, he invited Aqbawr Pu to perform a ritual called *wohee* (washing the household), to which was added a rite of calling souls back. This was a severe situation because the man's souls had hidden underground, which is not 'our place'. Aqbawr Pu tried to call them back from the underworld by using a chicken with ruffled feathers, nine pieces of shell, his jacket, and other offerings including sticky rice, alcohol, and a pig. In another case, a man in his late thirties was told by a *nyirpaq* that his souls were scared somewhere far away, and his life thus would become small (*mingxiao*, 命小) if he kept travelling far. Hence, he needed to call his souls back. He invited Aqbawr Pu to perform the necessary ritual.

On the Way to Becoming an Ancestor: *Nmxi* and *Xaxi*

As a person dies, his or her souls vanish, except the one at the top of the head. The soul on the top of the head remains forever, and generally has one of two outcomes according to the owner's death. Culturally, deaths (and the

dead) are classified as *nmxi* (good death) of *xaxi* (horrific death). This binary classification of death is shared by a wider population, for instance, other branches of the Hani, such as the Lami (Wang 2011: 91) and the Guozuo (Shi 2011: 229) in Honghe Prefecture, the Mang also in Honghe Prefecture (Yang 2004: 273), and the Dai in Yuxi City (Liu 2006: 43). A good death normally is a natural death occurring in the village, while a horrific death generally happens as an accident outside the village. Horrific deaths include drowning, being killed by a tiger, falling from a tree, being shot, burned, or killed in a traffic accident. The death of parents who had begotten *tanqpanq* (twins and deformed infants) is also horrific, whether its proximate cause is natural or accidental. People who die a good death are buried in the public cemetery, and their souls join the community of ancestors (*aqpaeaqpiq*). Anyone who dies a horrific death is buried in the wild, and his or her soul turns into a vicious ghost.

A horrific death itself can be mediated by a purifying ritual. In most cases, a person who dies a horrific death is allowed to be buried in the public cemetery following the ritual. Only those who drown or are killed by tigers cannot be buried in the cemetery under any condition. Yet even when purifying rituals are conducted, the souls from all horrific deaths are disqualified from accessing the community of ancestors. This is confirmed by the fact that no one who died a horrific death is included in the list of ancestors.

In the case of a good death, the soul should join the community of ancestors during his or her funeral. Yet there are many roads leading to the ancestors' settlement, and it is difficult for the soul to find the right way on its own. Some souls might take the wrong route and lose their way. Thus, a *pima*, or whoever is invited to officiate at the funeral, utters directions to the soul for hours on end, to ensure that the soul successfully reaches the ancestors' settlement.

Over the course of one year, the soul changes its shape to that of a snake, bear, muntjac, or wild pig[16]. The soul is supposed to change into each animal in turn. As one year passes, only if it successfully completes all the changes, is it able to join the community of ancestors, otherwise it cannot reach the ancestors' settlement. Accordingly, a man is forbidden to hunt big game or beat snakes for one year after the death of one of his parents, due to the possibility that these animals might be his parents' souls. If he happens to shoot an animal which is the soul of his parent, the animal will turn back to human form – an irreparable mistake. However, as Aqbawr Bu said, people sometimes break the rule. He gave me an example: somebody was

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[16] A muntjac is a small deer found in South East Asia.

hunting a muntjac; after shooting the animal, he turned his head in order to not see it because he was afraid that the muntjac might turn into one of his parents.

In the eleventh month after death, that is, one month before the soul finally arrives at the ancestors' settlement, the family of the dead invites a *pima* to ritually call the soul back. As Aqbawr Bu stated,

> [The ritual aims] to call our dead parents back to visit their grandchildren, to protect this family, to take care of the family, to guard the family. If we do not call it back, it will not know our family, will not accept our sons. After the ritual is done, it goes to the place where ancestors live. Calling souls back here, is to call the dead to come back to visit their family, to see their sons, daughters, and grandchildren. Meanwhile, it is to tell them where their family is. In future, even if they return to the place of the ancestors, they can come back and visit us when they miss us. It is fine to call them back within three years. If we fail to do it when three years have passed, the dead will be upset, thinking their sons and daughters do not care about them, then they will go to another family. Then, they will do harm to us instead of blessing us. We will have many pains and sickness.

Aqbawr Pu also stressed that it is essential to call this soul back, otherwise the family cannot last long: its living family members will suffer from pain and diseases, and the family economy will hardly prosper. As the soul successfully goes through its challenges, or rather, as long as the family members of the dead fulfil their ritual tasks without making any mistakes, the soul can eventually become a member of the ancestors. As such, the soul becomes very powerful in protecting and blessing its respective offspring. To stress the benevolence of souls that have been well tended, villagers, old and young, repeatedly told me that it is even fine to sleep in the public cemetery, which is quiet and warm. The soul, after becoming an ancestor, enjoys offerings from its offspring at every festival or ceremonial occasion.

Souls of those who have died horrific deaths that are not purified, or cannot be purified, become *xaxi*. The soul of one who died horrifically is unable to reach the ancestors' place. Specifically, there is a checkpoint managed by Tanqpanq (a mythological figure) midway to the ancestors' settlement.[17] Tanqpanq is in charge of checking every dead soul to see if it is clean and pure. Those released by a horrific death are impure, and turned

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[17] Tanqpanq here, in the name of Tanqpanq Aqma (see below), and with respect to certain other mythological figures not discussed in this book are somewhat connected with each other, but they are not clearly connected to the term's other meaning relating to twins and deformed infants.

back from the checkpoint. Because it will not become an ancestor who will bestow blessings, its family will also not call it home. Its name is excluded from the lineage; it is disqualified to enjoy sacrifices. Such a soul becomes a wandering, wild ghost. On the one hand, it is in a miserable situation because it receives no offerings. It always feels hungry, often begging for food from people passing by. It is quite easy to please, and can be satisfied with a cigarette end, a few drops of alcohol, or a lump of meat. On the other hand, it also turns into a vicious ghost, frightening people, for instance, who go to fetch firewood, hunting, or working in the fields. Actually, frightening people is the ghost's way to beg for food.

There is no way to restore a soul's claim to a place among the ancestors if it has died a horrific death. But it is possible to make the ghost less troublesome for the living. This is done through a ritual conducted by an elder or *pima* during burial. A person who died a horrific death is normally buried without a coffin. If no purifying ritual is conducted to bring him into the cemetery, then the dead is also buried near the site of his death. For example, someone who drowns in a river is buried by the riverside. However, it is preferable to bury the dead in a place where people hardly go, in order to reduce the chance of encountering the ghost. At burial, a ritual is performed to shut the mouth of the soul, so that its ghost cannot make noises to frighten people. If a ghost is still able to make noises, the ritual was not properly or completely performed. In this case, the elders or *pima* have to redo the ritual to double the controlling power. Only if the ritual is properly done will the vicious ghost shut up. Once, a middle-aged man told me a story about horrific death. He started the story by stating, 'There really are ghosts in the world!' Then, he continued:

> In our *minzu*, if we do not perform ritual in a proper way, ghosts will one hundred per cent call out. Some people are even scared to death. When I was a child, villagers from another Akha village went hunting for a wild pig. One man was carrying his gun on his shoulder when it accidentally discharged and shot another man behind him. The second man did not die immediately, but died halfway back home. It was a rainy day. His fellows wrapped his body with an oilcloth, and buried him on the roadside. That night, the whole village could not sleep. The ghost came into the village, screaming. He wandered here and there, causing all the village dogs to bark. He also made loud noises with the oilcloth around his body.

He concluded, 'They did not perform the ritual in a proper way!'

Proper burial rituals can only make ghosts silent; they cannot be made harmless. Ghosts whose mouths have been shut can still frighten people and cause sickness, but in a quiet way. Generally, ghosts like scaring people at

nightfall or at night during the full moon and the new moon. They also choose their victims. They spare bold and very timid people, and prefer to frighten those who are half in fear of them. Sometimes, ghosts like to frighten one person while sparing the rest in a group. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I encountered a case where an eighty-six-year-old man encountered a vicious ghost when he was cutting wild bamboo in the forest. He blacked out. After regaining consciousness, he hurriedly threw some tobacco to the ghost, then walked back home, still feeling faint. Later on, he suffered an acute fever. His daughter recalled, 'He was nearly dying at noon'. Fortunately, he was knowledgeable in herbal medicine and knew well what medicine he needed. He instructed his son to find some herbs and ate them. He became better in the evening, but was still weak. His family, with the support of the entire village, also conducted many healing rituals to save his life in the following two days. Eventually, he made it through the difficult phrase and recovered.

The Supreme God Aqpoeq Miqyaer: The Creator of the Akha *Li*

As described above, the soul of a person who died a good death is supposed to pass Tanqpanq's checkpoint, and then return to the ancestors' settlement. If the soul keeps going beyond the ancestors' settlement, it will eventually reach the highest location of all, where the Supreme God Aqpoeq Miqyaer lives. Almost everybody believes that Aqpoeq Miqyaer lives in the highest place, normally the upper sky. That is why villagers always describe Aqpoeq Miqyaer as Old Sky (Laotian, 老天) or the Lord of the Old Sky (Laotianye, 老天爷) when talking to me in Chinese. Yet, Aqbawr Bu also admitted, 'We all say that he is living in the sky, but actually we have no idea where exactly he is'.

Aqpoeq Miqyaer is a person: 'Great-grandpa Miye'.[18] Villagers, especially elders, know a lot about him. For instance, Aqpoeq Miqyaer's birthday is the Day of the Goat, as rendered by the twelve animal signs of the Akha zodiac.[19] To show respect to Aqpoeq Miqyaer, it is forbidden to cut firewood

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[18] *Aqpoeq* means 'great-grandfather'. In everyday forms of address, however, the distinction of great-grandfathers from grandfathers is rarely important, and *aqpoeq* and *aqbawr* are used interchangeably.

[19] The twelve signs of the Akha zodiac are Ho (rat), Nyoq (buffalo), Khaqlaq (tiger), Tanqla (donkey), Lanq (dragon), Xaer (flying ant), Manq (horse), Yawr (sheep), Myovq (monkey), Za (chicken), Keeq (dog), and Zavq (pig). Each year and each day is marked by these animal signs. People thus recognise two personal signs: that of the birth year and of the birth day. The animal sign of the birth day sets the basis for naming and calculating auspicious days for a household. In other words, if a man was born on Rat Day, then his birthday is Rat Day. Certain activities are then recommended or forbidden to him and his family members on each

on Goat Day. Any rule-beakers will carry a penalty of one bottle of corn wine to the village elders. Aqpoeq Miqyaer had two wives and seven sons. Some elders claimed that the Akha are the offspring of Aqpoeq Miqyaer's oldest son. Yet in everyday life, villagers always went further and simply said that they were the children of Aqpoeq Miqyaer.

However, Aqpoeq Miqyaer is by no means merely an ordinary 'grandfather'. As Supreme God, he creates lives and the Akha *li*. As the founder of the Akha cosmos and society, Aqpoeq Miqyaer plays such a critical role that he has been considered one of the three basic themes determining the distinctive quality of Akha culture (Lewis 1982). His cult is a nice example of the founder's cults spread throughout mainland South East Asia (Lehman 2003). Aqpoeq Miqyaer created the living beings which eventually developed into humans and *naevq*. According to an Akha myth, Aqpoeq Miqyaer put some living beings into a gourd and threw the gourd to the earth. A mouse bit through the gourd and freed these living beings, which were six males and six females. They were not human yet, but rather gorillas, as Aqbawr Pu said. When ten generations passed, these gorillas finally evolved into humans and *naevq*.

Aqpoeq Miqyaer also created the way of life, the Akha *li*. A myth nicely describes how the ancestor of the Akha gained *li* from Aqpoeq Miqyaer: once upon a time, Aqpoeq Miqyaer was distributing *li* among ethnic groups. The ancestor, Akha, at first was unwilling to go, but eventually he decided to take part. Aqpoeq Miqyaer gave him a light package of *li*, but Akha did not want it; instead, he chose to carry the heaviest package of *li*. At last, he carried a full bamboo basket of *li* back home. Hence, today the Akha people have the most abundant rules and rituals of all the neighbouring ethnic groups.

Elders also stressed that Aqpoeq Miqyaer himself was the first to perform rituals. As Aqbawr Bu stated, 'Aqpoeq Miqyaer is the boss. Our land is his; we ourselves are created by him. We only do what he has done, and we do not do whatever he has not done. Even our crops are what he has planted'. When uttering chants on ritual occasions, *pima* always started with reciting, 'We are doing rituals, Aqpoeq Miqyaer, please help us, please watch us …. There is nothing Aqpoeq Miqyaer has not done. He has taught us everything. Now we are doing rituals by following him!' The importance of Aqpoeq Miqyaer also lies in the ritual effect; in other words, Aqpoeq

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Rat Day. Also, in a family of five, members might have birthdays on Rat Day, Buffalo Day, Tiger Day, Horse Day, and Dragon Day. Certain events, such as wedding, funeral, sacrificing ritual, healing ritual, building a house, or planting a tree, must be undertaken on the other seven days in each twelve-day cycle. If the family plants a tree on one of the birthdays, it will cause sickness or pain.

Miqyaer makes the final decision to bring a ritual into effect. 'The thing will be the way Aqpoeq Miqyaer wants', Aqbawr Pu emphasised, 'When you call souls back, actually Aqpoeq Miqyaer calls them back!'

Aqbawr Bu supported this idea by recounting the following myth:

Aqpoeq Miqyaer has seven sons: one is a ritual expert, one is a businessman, one is a handicrafter ... I do not know their professions exactly because we have taken the way of doing rituals; we only know how to do rituals. The oldest son, Deman[20], specialised in learning rituals from his father. After receiving all the knowledge of doing rituals, Deman slept with his father's second wife. Aqpoeq Miqyaer scolded him, thus Deman led a group of followers and left his father. He ran away in the same manner as we nowadays move out of a village and build our own village.

As days passed by, Aqpoeq Miqyaer's first wife, that is Deman's mother, passed away. Aqpoeq Miqyaer thought that Deman was always his son whatever had happened, therefore he asked Deman to come back, telling the son that his mother had died and they were supposed to hold a funeral for her. He also told his son that they should not fight or part from each other. Nonetheless, Deman refused to go back, rather, he angrily stated that he did not care about the mother's death, let the dead mother rot wherever she died. He also claimed that the place where he was living was a good place, with affluent grains and plenty of animals, so he was not willing to return at all.

Having no choice, Aqpoeq Miqyaer had to accept the decision and gently told Deman, 'Do whatever you should; do not do what you should not'. In particular, he tried teaching his son that, as he had moved out of the previous village and built his own village in a new place, he should not plant cotton for three years; he should not travel for one year; he should not stay outside for longer than one month until three months had passed; and he should not carry a bamboo basket on his back when fetching water for three days. Instead, he should hold the bamboo basket in his hands. He also should not carry firewood in a bamboo basket. However, Deman refused to follow all these instructions, and intentionally did everything he should not do.

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[20] In this story, Deman is considered the ancestor of the Akha. However, he is not meant to correlate with the ancestor in the preceding myth. Similarly, neither is to be equated with Human in the subsequent myth, nor are the figures related in any other way. Only the myth about Human is included in the *tsawrtseevq* (see chapter 4).

As a result, Deman fell sick, and so did other people and animals. These sick people and animals were suffering and moaning. Eventually, Aqpoeq Miqyaer learned the miserable situation in his son's place. Hence, he came and taught Deman to do rituals with pigs and chickens, rituals of washing the household and village, rituals of calling souls back, etc. Deman learned these rituals and performed them, and afterwards, the sick recovered. From that moment, Deman trusted his father and became obedient in carrying on rituals. Since then, we have kept performing rituals. We will not discard them.

Apparently, Aqpoeq Miqyaer created a set of rules of founding a new village concerning agricultural cultivation, travelling, carrying water and firewood, and so on. People and their domestic animals will suffer from sickness if they violate the rules. Performing rituals, which were created by Aqpoeq Miqyaer, is the only way to restore the proper order. The myth, on the one hand, confirms that Aqpoeq Miqyaer is the creator of the Akha *li*, and on the other hand, implies that Aqpoeq Miqyaer might punish violators of the Akha *li*. Regarding the second point, for instance, Aqbawr Pu once pointed out that an offender against the exogamous rule tends to end up childless, or his children are unable to grow up, and this is the punishment from Aqpoeq Miqyaer. On another occasion, on the way to another village for a ritual, a married man in his thirties was talking with me about loyalty to one's wife. He calmly stated, 'If a man has an affair with other women in another village, his wife cannot see it, but Aqpoeq Miqyaer sees that. Better not to do it, Aqpoeq Miqyaer knows that, and you do not know what is going to happen'. A married couple is not advised to have sex more than once a night, otherwise they will beget twins. Aqbawr Bu explained, 'We do not want to have twins ourselves, it is Aqpoeq Miqyaer who arranges that'. Aqpoeq Miqyaer also determines the births of disabled infants. Villagers generally attribute inexplicable bad things to Aqpoeq Miqyaer's intervention.

Hosts, Spirits, and Gods: *Yasanq* of Good and Evil

Yasanq refers to spirits or souls. Everything has *yasanq*. Natural beings, such as the sun, moon, sky, earth, tree, and water, have spirits, as do artificial beings, such as playgrounds, houses, hoes, bowls, and pots. Humans have spirits, and so do their invisible counterpart *naevq*, which will be explored in the following section. According to the *pima* Aqbawr Bu, the human *yasanq* is actually the soul, *savqlavr sulavr*. Similarly, souls of the dead – that is of ancestors – are also viewed as *yasanq* protecting their offspring. Sometimes *yasanq* is equated with *naevq*: for example, Ymsanq Jisanq, 'the gods of house and warehouse', are also named Ymnaevq Jinaevq, 'the ghosts of house and warehouse'. Besides, *yasanq* is also used to refer to gods in

charge of specialised areas or groups, such as Muyemusanq, the god of the sky; Mitsa Misanq, the god of the earth; and Ghesanq, the god of birth. Some gods are *yasanq*, but known by their proper names: Dzanmi, the god of the household and household land; Ghenhoq, the god of nameless infants; Kapi, the god of Akha *pima*. It seems that all kinds of supernatural beings – souls, ancestors, *naevq* – are all included in the category of *yasanq*. As Aqbawr Bu explained:

> To us, what is needed in ritual events is *yasanq*. The supreme God Aqpoeq Miqyaer does not count as a real *yasanq*, but if we address him during rituals, then he is *yasanq*. If we do not need him now, he is not *yasanq*. If we pray to ancestors, that is the souls after a human's death, then ancestors become *yasanq*. Whichever ancestor we address is *yasanq* at that moment. And of course, if we perform a ritual to *naevq*, then *naevq* is *yasanq*, *yasanq* is *naevq*. In other words, no matter whether it is Aqpoeq Miqyaer, souls or *naevq*, as we need them and use them in ritual events, they are *yasanq*!

This interpretation implies that *yasanq* actually means gods, while other supernatural beings are merely temporary ones as needed. Having already discussed other supernatural beings, here I discuss *yasanq* in this ultimate sense as gods. Gods are invisible and omnipresent, existing wherever the Akha reach. Among all the gods, sixty-one are listed in *naevqtseevq*.[21] Eighteen are considered gods in charge and qualified to enjoy sacrifice. Those that receive sacrifice are able to harm people; the others are excluded from sacrifice because they are harmless. Whenever a *pima* utters *naevqtseevq*, he actually addresses these gods for two main purposes: one is to ask for blessing and protection, the other is to ask them to stop causing harm and remove sickness. In other words, gods are both benevolent and maleficent.

On the one hand, gods manage and protect their respective objects. The god of the water source is in charge of water supply. Every year villagers sacrifice a chicken and a pig to the god, begging for his blessing. Villagers believe that the water will be exhausted if there is no god managing it. During family rituals or ceremonies, participants are supposed to throw some rice, meat, or alcohol on the floor – a gesture of offering – to the god of the household before eating, in order to have their protection. *Pima*, the officiator at rituals, always offers rice, meat, tea, and alcohol to the gods of *pima* before performing, so as to gain their help and assistance. Aqbawr Bu emphasised, 'They will not help us if we do not let them eat and drink first'.

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[21] *Naevqtseevq* literally means the genealogy of *naevq*, but it contains the cosmological myths of the Akha.

On the other hand, gods become unfriendly and bring sickness to people if the latter do not behave properly. At home, there exist Ymsanq Jisanq, who stay with the family every day. These are gods of house and warehouse, different from ancestors. They never show their existence until people behave badly, intentionally break a table or smash bowls, or improperly perform rituals. Together, Aqbawr Bu and Aqbawr Wu, a blacksmith, told me that

> if you make mistakes at home, Ymsanq Jisanq will cause you sickness. You cannot smash stuff at home... because the family property is also able to punish you. Sometimes you do not have pain or sickness, but inexplicably feel uncomfortable. You go to hospital and take a medical injection, but it does not work. Then you should turn to the god of the household, think about what have you done wrong, and perform rituals. Otherwise your sickness will not be cured.

The same rule works when one is in the field, managed by Mitsa Misanq, the god of earth. Aqbawr Bu explained, 'The god will come out, turn into a tiger, and frighten people as people fail to behave properly. For example, when you go hunting in the mountains, if you misbehave, the god reacts right away to scare you.... Then we could utter certain chants to appease it'. There are rules of regulating one's behaviour outside: it is forbidden to bring firewood and banana leafs together, or firewood and water together when a person spends the night in the mountains or the fields; and one should carry firewood on one's shoulder instead of dragging it on the ground. Once the rules are violated, the god of earth is activated, and will frighten or hurt the rule-breaker. For example, if a man plants a tree on an improper day (like his birthday) or at an improper location, he will get a headache or waist pain. Aqbawr Bu said,

> We do not know where they are. We cannot see them. When we plant trees, we might plant trees in their palms or feet. You will have a pain in your waist if you plant a tree in the god's waist, or a pain in your feet if you hurt his feet. You will have a headache if you hurt his head, or a stomach-ache if you hurt his stomach. That is why, when we build a hut, or plant a post, we always keep our shadow away from the hole. If you plant the post into the hole while your shadow covers it, you will feel uncomfortable.

Medicine is unable to completely kill the pain caused by gods. It can only temporarily repress it, while remain ineffective on the root of pain. Rather, one should ask a *pima* or *nyirpaq* for a ritual diagnosis.[22] Based on the diagnosis, one might need to remove the tree, or sacrifice several livestock

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[22] *Pima* and *nyirpaq* are ritual specialists. *Nyirpaq* have less specialised training while *pima* undergo a staged apprenticeship before becoming a master (see chapter 4).

according to the god's need. Afterwards, the pain will go away. Aqbawr Bu explained, 'This is *yasanq* acting. They are asking for chicken, pigs, and dogs. They will not let a person recover unless you kill these livestock for them'. He went on to describe a case involving his father:

> Once my father had an acute pain in his waist. It was so painful that he could not stop screaming. I asked a *nyirpaq* to seek the cause of pain. The *nyirpaq* saw the causation through an egg: it was *yasanq* asking for two chickens. We carried out the sacrificing ritual in the field right away. When we went back home after the ritual, we found that my father had recovered immediately. It worked really fast!

He cited another case of his sister-in-law who had suffered terrible back osteoarthritis. She was suffering and biomedicine did not help. They turned to a ritual diagnosis and a *nyirpaq* found that they had planted a tree improperly in a field and offended the god of earth, who asked for a dog. After a dog was sacrificed in the field to the god of earth, the pain went away.

Plate 8. A powerful *nyirpaq* (left) along with two assistants is performing healing ritual for a child (Kekaq).

Naevq: **Brothers in Another World**

Naevq is the invisible counterpart of humans. The word *naevq* is both singular and plural. As a singular, it refers to a member of this nonhuman species; as a plural, it refers to the entire group. *Naevq*, together with humans, built the fundamental framework of the Akha cosmological world. Thus, the best-known myth of family dividing between the original Human and Naevq is the very starting point to understand the Akha living pattern.

As Aqbawr Pu and other elders told me, after Aqpoeq Miqyaer sent six males and six females from the sky to the earth, it took ten generations for them to evolve into humans. During the tenth generation, all living beings were living together. Tiger shared one sty with buffalo; eagle cohabited with chicken in the same nest. Human and Naevq were brothers, sharing one mother called Tanqpanq Aqma, who had two breasts on the front side and seven breasts on the back. Naevq was the ruler of everything. In particular, Naevq owned *naevqtseevq*, which defines and regulates the lives of all living beings in the world, for instance, how to educate children, how to deal with fights, how to hold a wedding or funeral, how to perform rituals, and so on. Only when *pima* chants *naevqtseevq* can a ritual be done properly. The master *pima*, who held the full knowledge of *naevqtseevq*, was from Naevq. He had students from both groups of Human and Naevq, called *piza*. Overall, Naevq, with *naevqtseevq* in hand, was in charge of everything, especially doing rituals, curing sickness, etc. Human fell sick; Naevq healed him. Thence, Human had completely depended on Naevq. This life went on in such a way for fourteen generations.

One day, Tanqpanq Aqma was sick and dying. Naevq said to Human, 'The front with two breasts is my mother; the back with seven breasts is your mother'. Human did not agree, as he also wanted the mother with two breasts. They had a fight then reached an agreement: whomever the mother's front two breasts pointed to as she died would have the mother with two breasts, and whomever the mother's back seven breasts pointed to as she died would have the mother with seven breasts. As Tanqpanq Aqma died, her front two breasts turned to the direction of Naevq. Human saw that, and he did not want the mother's back with seven breasts, so he threw a handful of silver to distract Naevq. As Naevq was busy picking up the silver, Human turned the mother's body and made her front side point to himself. Therefore, the mother with two breasts was identified as Human's mother. From then on, Human and his offspring had two breasts, while Naevq and his descendants had seven breasts.

Then, Human and Naevq fought to bury the mother. Both children were longing to bury her, so they both went out to search for animals for the funeral. Naevq was looking for Naevq's animals, while Human was

searching for Human's animals. At last, Naevq brought back animals from
the mountain, such as tigers, leopards, and muntjac, but Human brought back
domestic animals like buffalo, pigs, and chickens. They tied these animals
with rope. Human intentionally dressed up in colours and visited these
animals. Wild animals, which had never seen Human before, were
frightened. They broke the rope and all ran away. By contrast, the domestic
animals had encountered Naevq on a daily basis, so they were totally fine
with Naevq's appearance, and did not run away. Losing his sacrificial
animals, Naevq had to hand the task of burying the mother to Human.

Nevertheless, a funeral was the most complicated ritual of all, and
could only be performed by the master *pima*, that is, a *naevq*. As a student of
the master *pima*, Human lacked the knowledge of *naevqtseevq*, which was
the core of the sacrificing ritual. Hence, Naevq was curious: how could
Human perform the ritual without the knowledge? On the eve of the funeral,
the master *naevq pima* summoned his *naevq* students, teaching the latter how
to perform rituals step by step, how to utter *naevqtseevq* word by word. The
master also asked his *naevq* students to be present at the funeral and watch
how things went on. Human was a smart person, so he hid himself outside
the bamboo house and eavesdropped on them. He heard everything, his ears
were filled with words, and his pockets were filled with words. At last he
had to pack the rest of *naevqtseevq* with his clothes and took all of them
back home.

The following day, the *naevq* students were shocked when Human
managed to do things in the proper way, exactly as he had learned from his
master the night before. After the funeral, one of the students reported to the
master, 'Who knows from whom Human learnt all the *naevqtseevq*, every
sentence he uttered was right … [but] when [he turned to] slaughter a
buffalo, the knife was covered [over] by leaves. Human could not find the
knife, he complained Naevq must have stolen it. Ohhhh, that was not nice!'
Since then, Human, after successfully gaining *naevqtseevq*, took the position
of master *pima* and was capable of officiating at rituals alone. Nowadays,
villagers call *pima*'s ritual performance of *naevqtseevq* '*naevqtor*' (lit.
uttering *naevq*'s words).

The conflicts between Human and Naevq increased. One day, Human
was working in the fields while Naevq stayed at home, and a spindle was
missing. Human came back and blamed Naevq for stealing the spindle. On
another day, a piece of meat was missing, and Human blamed Naevq again.
Once, Naevq was working in the fields while Human stayed at home, then a
cucumber in the field went missing. Human again blamed Naevq. Actually,
Human deliberately stole all these things and blamed Naevq. From then on,

no matter what went missing, Human always blamed Naevq by saying, 'It must have been stolen by Naevq!'

Eventually Human and Naevq could not live together any longer, so all their troubles were put on the table. One night Naevq had a secret discussion with his group about the clashes with Human; they finally decided that they would claim all the good land in the next morning. But once again, Human overheard them and anticipated the action. The next morning as the cock was crowing, Human stepped on the balcony, clapped his hands three times, and shouted aloud, 'Today, we expel Naevq!' Naevq's group was timid and easily scared by Human's shouting. They ran in fear to the rocky and muddy lands. Thence, Human took the chance and claimed all the fertile land. He declared:

> The ant house is the head of Naevq. *Cisa* [a tree] and *mece* [a plant] are roads of Naevq. The muddy land is Naevq's territory. Vines are resting places of Naevq. From now on, Naevq is forbidden to come to Human's territory, but Human is free to visit Naevq's place. Wherever Human puts his feet, Naevq has to move away from that place.

They fixed the deal by cutting a white chicken, which symbolises separation, into two halves, one for each side.

While the *naevq* were leaving, Human saw them through a tightly woven bamboo dustpan, thus from then on humans could neither see *naevq* nor hear them. Dogs saw their departure through a loosely woven bamboo dustpan, therefore they were able to see, hear, and smell *naevq* from then on. Since then, humans have remained visible to *naevq*, while *naevq* became invisible to humans. Humans started planting wooden gates to block *naevq* from entering their settlements. Additionally, they made some bamboo plates called *dalaer*, and attached them to the village gates to warn *naevq* that the inside is human territory and that they are not welcome to enter. If they attempt to intrude, the bamboo plates will keep them out anyway. Humans also hanged wooden swords and knives above the village gates and neighbouring trees to admonish *naevq* that if they ever dare intrude, humans will kill them with swords and knives. In this way, humans and *naevq* were separated by the gates and *dalaer*, and inhabit their respective lands. As elders have often stressed, 'Humans live with humans, *naevq* live with *naevq*'. The division also took place among other animals: tiger separated from buffalo and started attacking buffalo; eagle parted from chicken and began catching chicken. Eventually, the pattern of the divided but paired worlds between humans and *naevq* was formed.

Though living separately, *naevq* share some common features with their brother humans, especially in terms of social organisation. They have

their settlements and families as human beings do. They marry, have children, become aged, and might die. They have souls, their own ancestors, and gods. They still perform rituals according to their needs. Basically, their world is a copy of the human world. Even so, *naevq* possess some distinct characteristics resulting from the family division with humans. First, they physically share a similar body to humans but with seven breasts. Aqpiq Nu (Grandma Nu), a female *nyirpaq* around 50 years old who claimed that she was able to see *naevq*, described *naevq* as having inward eyes and sharp teeth. Secondly, they are always hungry. Their rocky and muddy land is not arable, and their only food source is a very small portion of offerings given by humans in ritual events. Fortunately, they are easily satisfied with several drops of alcohol or a few pieces of meat. Thirdly, they are afraid of humans. As Aqbawr Bu described, a human cutting a tree could scare *naevq* enough to scream out all day. If he hears human sounds, *naevq* will shout aloud, 'Human is coming, human is coming. Run! Run!' Fourthly, they would do harm to humans and cause sickness if humans mistreated them, for instance, *naevq* will take revenge if humans mess up their land by cutting trees or trampling. Thus, villagers have paid much attention to behaving properly on *naevq*'s places. They normally do not plant trees on muddy places or ant houses, nor put things on top of ant houses. Elders warned, 'You plant trees on ant houses, ants climb up around the trunk. If you sweep ants away from the trunk, you will become sick'. Since *naevq* and their world are invisible, sometimes humans might unintentionally wrong them. Although it was a deal that 'Human is free to visit Naevq's place', it is better for humans to behave well and properly.

The division between humans and *naevq* is equally maintained by the other rule that 'Naevq is forbidden to come to Human's territory'. No one knows whether *naevq* stop themselves from entering the human world, and that is why humans put much effort into shielding their settlements from *naevq*. When building a new village, the primary step is to build the village gates and to attach to them bamboo plates. The demarcation of the human world is renewed with the annual reconstruction of the village gates. Every April, when the festival of Closing the Gates (*guanmenjie*, 关门节) takes place, villagers build new gates in front of the old ones, so that over time the village is marked off by a series of gates. If a village has a concrete gate, it is renewed only with the addition of new bamboo plates. In August, on the Day of Expelling Naevq (*ganguijie*, 赶鬼节), villagers collectively shout out, and run here and there in the village, chasing *naevq* away.[23] On that day, they

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[23] The festival is kept by only one village related to Hakaq, while Hakaq and the others have discarded it.

also hang wooden swords, knives, or even arrows on top of the village gates and neighbouring trees in order to reinforce the division. After the Day of Expelling Naevq, follows the festival of Opening the Gates (*kaimenjie*, 开门节). The period between the festivals of Closing and Opening the Gates (i.e. April-August) is considered the ceremonial time of *naevq*, while the rest of the year is the ceremonial time of humans. The day of Closing the Gates in the human world is the day of Opening the Gates in the *naevq* world; correspondingly, the day of Opening the Gates in the human world is the day of Closing the Gates in the *naevq* world. During the ceremonial time for each, *naevq* and humans become ritually active, especially conducting rituals for good purposes, such as marriages, housewarmings, and those for longevity.

During the *naevq* ceremonial period, Akha refrain from all but the most critical rituals (such as healing or funerals), Akha youth are forbidden to visit other villages to find girls, and parents are forbidden from building small houses for their grown-up sons. The *naevq* are ritually active during this period, holding weddings and other rituals for their own wellbeing, especially in the last month of Closing the Gates, between June and July. During the months of June and July, villagers become quiet when they are working outside. They stop calling to each other loudly while working in the fields, they stop singing on the way to the fields, and they are quiet when cutting trees or moving large stones. They do not want to upset *naevq*. Aqbawr Bu gave me an example,

> In June or July, if you go to the mountain to remove a large stone and the stone rolls down to the foot of the mountain, as it is rolling, the stone might hit *naevq* and make their children cry. If you hear *naevq* crying [it means that you have disturbed them], [so] you have to host a ritual of purifying your family. Otherwise, your family might have some problems.

Therefore, building new villages gates before *naevq* become active strengthens the blocking function of the gates and protects villagers from potential threats.

Besides the village gates, bamboo plates, and wooden swords, certain animals and plants are identified as effective in separating humans and *naevq*. For example, the blood of dogs and pigs is supposed to ward off *naevq* because they fear it. Since dogs are able to see *naevq*, their blood is considered more powerful than the blood of pigs. A bamboo plate, large or small, greased with pig blood is an essential tool for warding off *naevq* in various ritual events. White chickens, a symbol of separation as presented in the myth, are repeatedly applied in rituals of separating human and *naevq*, and in social matters like divorce. For this reason, villagers never serve guests, especially their affines, with white chicken. Some local plants, such

as *me, laohe, laojm, laociao, laguni, xaoga,* and *kuka*, which can easily be found around Akha settlements, are able to fence out bad things. *Me* was a plant used when humans separated from *naevq*. Nowadays, villagers often make a three-line symbolical barrier with *me*, called *megu*, and step over it if they encounter *naevq* or other hostile beings in the wild.

    Megu is believed to be able to stop even the most powerful *naevq* from following a person. Once I saw how a *megu* was constructed in situ. It happened that a villager's sow had delivered two piglets. This was a bad event (see chapter 6) because a pig should birth at least three piglets. Following tradition, his co-villagers killed the sow and both piglets; they threw away the piglets in the wild, then grilled the sow outside the village gate. After eating up almost the whole pig, villagers gradually went back home. As I was leaving, I noticed that a middle-aged man made a *megu* by placing three pieces of *me* on the ground; he stepped over it, then passed through the village gate which stood on the roadside and went home. Both *megu* and the village gate could stop badness following him back. By making the *megu*, he doubled his protection.

Plate 9. After a ritual feast of removing badness from the village, a man made a *megu* (green leaves on the ground), stepped over it, and passed through the village gate. The village gates function to block *naevq* from entering the human world; the attached stacks of bamboo plates (*dalaer*) further protect the village (Hakaq).

Bad Things and Good Things

In the myth recounted above that explains the separation between the brothers Human and Naevq, there is a running theme concerning the division of things, as property, as good and bad. Human took everything good and left the bad to Naevq. By playing tricks, Human seized the mother with two breasts, grabbed the *naevqtseevq* in the ritual area, and occupied fertile land. Meanwhile, Human blamed Naevq for all bad things that happened, for example, the missing knife, meat, and cucumber. The division of things into good and bad continues in the ongoing relations between humans and *naevq*. As Aqbawr Bu explained, 'We cannot see *naevq*, but we blame them for everything. If something goes missing, we blame *naevq*; if bad things happen, we blame *naevq*. And we also throw bad things to *naevq* …. We want good things, and they take the bad ones'. In this way, the connections between good and human, bad and *naevq* are built up. In everyday life, these associations are expressed further in rituals which throw off the ill effects of three types of bad events to *naevq*.

As outlined by Aqbawr Bu, the Akha have distinguished three types of bad things or events. These are *paeq, dao*, and *hae*. *Paeq* refers to any physical abnormality of people, livestock, or crops, and includes the birth of twins, deformed infants (e.g. with harelip or six fingers), and eggs with two yolks. Inter-species mating, such as between a dog and a pig, or a pig and a buffalo, also falls within *paeq*. *Dao* refers to the intrusion of wild insects, birds, and animals (such as green snakes, turtledoves, pheasants, pangolins, weasels, or wild dogs) into a village or house; and to villagers coming across snakes mating. *Hae* includes all bad events that have ever happened in one's family: for example, sickness, a strange and unaccountable bloody dead bird lying on the balcony, an inexplicable bee attack on a particular person, a dog urinating on a man, and so on. These three types are not necessarily mutually exclusive; often, *paeq* and *dao* fall into the category of *hae* as they occur in one's family. The emergent extent of these bad things or events varies case by case. Some events, for instance, a dog urinating on a man, or a man coming across two snakes mating, demand an immediate and individual ritual, preferably on the same day. Otherwise, the victim might have health trouble which cannot be completely cured by medical treatments, or suffer economically from livestock losses. As for most other events, it is fine to accumulate several cases together and cope with them at one time.

Without exception, Akha villagers invite *pima* or other ritual experts to ritually throw away all these bad things or events to *naevq*. No matter whether they are old or young, they strictly follow the tradition and hold the required rituals. The basic routine of these rituals has two steps, first to summon *naevq* to one's home or village and give them offerings as well as

the bad things or events, regardless of whether or not *naevq* willingly take them. The second step is to send off the *naevq* to carry home all the bad things. To ensure their leaving, ritual experts make roads of *cisa* and *mece*, leading the *naevq* in the right direction. These roads are lined by tools, animals, and plants which function to separate humans and *naevq* to ensure that the *naevq* do not return with the evil to the human world.

Despite all these myths, thoughts, and practices dividing humans and *naevq*, there is also a myth that connects them through marriage. According to Aqbawr Pu, the master *pima*, when the Supreme God distributed wives among the ethnic groups, every group gained a wife except Akha. Since Akha was good at singing, the Supreme God suggested that he go to the mountains and sing there. Akha followed his advice and went to the mountains. He heard nothing on the first two days, but started hearing a few sounds on the third and fourth days. He said to himself, '*tsawrhaq maq e, naevq ya naevq*' ('[Perhaps] it is not human, it is *naevq*'). Eventually, Akha found a wild woman making the sound, and took her back home as his wife on the seventh day. Aqbawr Pu concluded, 'An Akha wife is a wild [wo]man (*yasa tsawrhaq*), a *naevq* woman (*naevq zamiza*), not a domestic woman'. As he explained, the wild woman had created the costume for Akha women, such as pleated skirts and sharp headdresses, which remain unchanged until now.

This myth shows some of the possibility for extending the application and meaning of the term *naevq*. In the origin myth presented above, the family division between Human and Naevq provides a relatively clear picture of *naevq*, their territory, and their life. But in ordinary life, villagers make the meaning of the term very complicated and confusing. In this short myth about the first Akha wife, the term is equated with the wild. Other daily uses and explanations of the term *naevq* mix it with several super-natural beings and use undistinguished concepts in the Akha and Chinese languages.[24]

Firstly, villagers widely use the Chinese *gui* (鬼, ghost) to refer to the dead (*nmxi* and *xaxi*)[25], the Supreme God (Aqpoeq Miqyaer), and *naevq*. Aqzawr Zu (Uncle Zu), a forty-year-old man who is a student *pima*, once told me some ghost stories in Chinese. He started with the best-known myth

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[24] The same informants who used terms indiscriminately in the examples below had used them with precise distinction in other accounts. Therefore, the mixing noted here should not be seen as a problem of using Chinese as such.

[25] The Chinese term *gui* means ghost, but it is not necessarily a malicious ghost. The Han Chinese believe that everyone becomes *gui* after death. This is in contrast to the widely shared concept among local minorities of *pipa gui* which refers to a being that is still alive and harmful.

of the family division between Human and Naevq, as recounted above, but his version was of Human and Gui. He concluded that the village gates separate the two. 'Nonetheless', he insisted, 'when someone dies in the village, the ghost will come back to search for his or her belongings'. He then cited some cases when, during funerals, the dead came back to fetch their belongings. Such occurrences are normally considered to be undertaken by *nmxi*, but here the distinction was covered over by the continued use of *gui*. Aqzawr Zu continued to tell me, then, of a case of *gui* doing harm to villagers. Normally, harm is done by *xaxi*, but again Aqzawr Zu used *gui*. Overall, his stories of ghosts fluidly passed from *naevq*, to *nmxi*, to *xaxi*.

On another occasion, when I was chatting with the *nyirpaq* Aqpiq Nu and the blacksmith Aqbawr Gu, Aqpiq Nu told me that as she is performing rituals, she is actually travelling to *naevq*'s place where the Supreme God Aqpoeq Miqyaer lives. We spoke in Chinese, mixed with Akha. Aqbawr Gu chipped in, 'He is the king of *gui*. She is going to the place of the king of *gui* to visit *naevq*'. I was very surprised by such a strange combination of *naevq*, Aqpoeq Miqyaer, and *gui*, which completely blurred the image of supernatural beings I thought I had acquired. According to many accounts, as cited above, Aqpoeq Miqyaer lives in the upper sky while *naevq* occupy rocky and muddy land invisible to human eyes. But in this account, they were described as sharing the same space, *naevq mihan* (*naevq*'s world). Besides, Aqpoeq Miqyaer becomes the king of *gui* (*naevq*), which increases the ambiguity of the image of *naevq*.

If the blending of supernatural beings is sometimes facilitated by the transposition of linguistic and cultural categories between Han Chinese and Akha, other times the blending can be seen as specific to Akha cosmology itself. As indicated below, the term *yasanq* is also always identical with *naevq*. During one interview, for example, the *pima* Aqbawr Bu told me,

> For ghosts (*gui*) listed in *naevqtseevq*, we must make offerings to some of them; we have to. While for others, it is not necessary, since they are harmless, it is fine not to make offerings to them. If we perform rituals in an improper manner, *naevq* will harm us. If a ritual is not properly done, Ymnaevq Jinaevq, your *apeiapi* (ancestors), will also harm you.

In previous interviews, Aqbawr Bu had told me that the beings listed in *naevqtseevq* are *yasanq*, and that Ymnaevq Jinaevq are gods of house and warehouse, and that they are different from ancestors. Thus, he had a clear idea that these supernatural beings are different from one another, but the distinctions were not always necessary to emphasise. Overall, it sufficed to stress that all supernatural beings fall into the same category: *naevq* or *gui*.

This is so because all supernatural beings make up *naevq mihan*, or rather, they make up the counterpart to *tsawrhaq mihan* (the human world).

Cross-Ethnic Hostile Beings: *Piser* and *Lapya*

Piser and *lapya* are the best-known hostile beings among villagers, old or young, male or female, which threaten people's lives, sometimes causing death. Unlike those supernatural beings mentioned above, these two beings do not belong to Akha cosmology. No Akha rituals are addressed to them, and no offering is made for them. In Han Chinese (and therefore in official documents) both of them are given the same name, *pipa gui* (琵琶鬼), which comes from the Dai language. The fear of *pipa gui*, as a general term for malicious ghosts that cause illness, is shared by the main ethnic groups in Menglian, though in a variety of forms and specific terms (e.g. *pusi gui* among the Lahu). However, researched cases of *pipa gui* all come from the Dai community, among whom *pipa gui* are considered the most evil ghosts (Wang 1998; Zhao 2010; Liu 2013). I include them in this chapter due to their nonhumanity and danger to Akha.

Piser

Piser refer to people whose souls are able to come out of their body through the forehead. Once out, the souls transform into visible animals, wander around, and harm people – especially the vulnerable – when they are sleeping. Most people say that *piser* are able to change into any animal they wish, such as tigers, buffalo, dogs, pigs, cats, and rats, but their animal-figures never have tails. Aqliq Zi[26], a young man in his early thirties, described his experience of encountering two *piser* transformed into birds when he was hunting: 'The *piser* birds, without tails, walked on the trunks of trees. They were yellow, wearing something neither feather nor skin; it looked quite slippery. They would fly. Other birds were twittering in a mess'. Aqbawr Pu, however, told me that nowadays *piser* are able to create a tail when transforming. He claimed that he had encountered many *piser* in his life, and what he had seen to be common to *piser* pigs and dogs is that they can turn their heads back over their bodies to look at people.

      The Akha believe that *piser* are widely found among the local ethnic groups, including the Akha, Lahu, Wa, Dai, and Han. It is held that the Lahu are the group from which most *piser* come because *piser* are indispensable in founding a Lahu village. It is said therefore that there is at least one *piser* in every Lahu village. The Han are also believed to have many *piser* among

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[26] *Aqli* means boy or son; *aqliq* is used to address both younger men and young boys.

them. Contrary to the above-mentioned research on *pipa gui*, which could be taken to indicate a prevalence of *piser* among the Dai as well, Akha villagers told me that the Dai (like the Wa) have only a very few *piser*.

Akha elders in Menglian claimed that there are no *piser* from the Akha group in Menglian. There was one, they clarified, but he had been chased away a long time ago. They further explained that some *piser* do come from other branches of the Akha. Mostly, I was told, they come from two of the three branches, Jojao and Jobulan. These two branches inhabit the neighbouring county, Lancang, and the Wa State in Myanmar. Of these, there were stories. For example, Aqmee Ke, a respectful lady in her late fifties, claimed she had encountered *piser* in the Wa State many times, and once her uncle had a fight (which he won) with a *piser* who kept changing shape. Aqbawr Bu also confirmed that Akha living in Lancang have *piser*. By contrast, no *piser* comes from the third branch, Joghoe, to which the Menglian Akha belong. Furthermore, they told me that they never take wives from Jojao or Jobulan because women from these two groups are possibly *piser*, and whoever marries a *piser* woman will eventually become a *piser* as well.

Piser eat dead animals, corpses, blood, and the weak, such as infants and the sick. Sometimes they wait in a group by the roadside to kill weak or sick passers-by, and share the dead body. Or, they might dig out a buried corpse and eat it. Aqbawr Gu had heard of such a case from a Lahu friend, which happened not far from the friend's village at nightfall. The Lahu man was with two companions when they came across six *piser* sitting together on the ground, each with a portion of meat from a corpse in front of him. When they passed by, the *piser* lowered their heads to avoid meeting the men's eyes. Realising that it was *piser* distributing meat, the Lahu men went quickly on.

To protect the dead from being taken by *piser*, Akha villagers always sprinkle chilli powder over a tomb after a burial. *Piser* are afraid of chilli, and it is said, as Aqliq Zi told me, 'At the moment of sprinkling chilli powder, whoever sneezes is a *piser*'. He laughed, 'We normally try our best not to sneeze at that moment'. Days later, I was visiting Aqliq Zi's house when his mother was cooking vegetables with chilli. The smell was so strong that I could not stop sneezing. He immediately made fun of me by saying, 'You are a *piser*'. His family all laughed aloud.

Women delivering babies are also in danger from *piser* because *piser* like to drink blood and to eat newborn babies. Aqmee Ke (Aunt Ke) recalled that before the only *piser* in a local Akha village was chased away, infants in that village had hardly ever survived. The *piser* ate all the babies. Lahu people are said to give great significance to defending their wives and babies

from *piser*, and these stories highly impress the Akha. Akha elders often liked sharing one story with me. Aqbawr Bu said, 'Lahu have many *piser*. When they have newborn babies, they guard the baby with a gun, in case *piser* disguised as animals enter the house from the roof'. Aqbawr Pu also provided a similar story, 'Lahu people, when a buffalo is delivering a calf, always make a fire by the side, and stay there over night to protect their cattle from *piser*. If they do not guard them, there is no chance to raise the newborn'. The Akha do not observe as many protective measures as the Lahu since they do not have *piser* in the village, but they do take some measures to protect their vulnerable members from *piser* coming from nearby Lahu villages. Taking shellac as the best 'medicine' to protect against *piser*, Akha parents or grandparents always make bracelets and tiny medicine bags out of shellac for newborn babies. Adults in poor health also wear medicine bags with shellac. Once, a middle-aged woman emphasised that they rarely bring their young children to markets because there might be *piser* in the crowds. Besides, anyone having a bleeding wound also attracts *piser*. *Piser* will come to drink the blood when the victim is sleeping. Aqbawr Pu stressed, once eaten by *piser*, the victim will certainly die.

The Akha have also developed some ways to detect *piser*. Aqliq Zi told me two ways, one is to catch two green grasshoppers and put them in your bag: a *piser* will ask you immediately, 'What do you have in your bag?' The other is to place a piece of firewood into the fireplace in a vertical manner. A *piser* will feel uncomfortable and run away. His uncle Aqbawr Pu later demonstrated this second mode of detecting a *piser*, and told me of a third method. The demonstration came as I tried to help Aqbawr Pu to make a fire. There are some rules for laying firewood, but I did not know them. The Akha have an iron tripod in the middle of their fireplace. Normally, one should place firewood in from the bottom of the tripod, so that it is in the core of the fire. I put the wood in from the top. Aqbawr Pu called attention to this vertical form of placement; I might scare *piser* away if there were any at home, he said. He continued,

> If you want to test who is *piser*, you can cut the top leaf of a thatch, put it in between the index finger and middle finger of your right hand, then you point your right hand to a person. If the person shakes as though they are scared, then he or she is a *piser*. However, some *piser* are too powerful to shake, but they will turn back to look at you within one minute.

Piser fear strong people, and are even too afraid to come close to them, let alone harm them. Aqbawr Bu repeatedly stressed to me, 'If you find out a person is a *piser*, do not be afraid of him or her. He or she cannot defeat you. But if you are scared, he or she will eat you'. This idea was supported by

Aqliq Zi's experience on two different occasions. In the first case, he and other villagers went to the county town to get their raw cotton roughly machined. I was with them, too. In front of the workshop stood a large number of Dai women selling vegetables. As we passed by, Aqliq Zi suddenly stared ferociously at one small, aged Dai woman, as if he were about to beat her up. It was so rude that I felt upset, and later I challenged him for his behaviour. He explained that the woman was a *piser*, so he had to behave in a strong and powerful manner in order to scare her. In the second case, Aqliq Zi told me stories of his other encounters with *piser*. In these too, he stressed the importance of not demonstrating fear:

> You know, I often go hunting in the mountains. Once I met a wildcat, which is not supposed to show up in the daytime. I also heard footsteps. I thought I had disturbed the god of mountains. Actually, it was not the god, it was *piser*. A Han couple lived alone in that mountain; they are *piser*. *Piser* normally live alone. They cannot live with others. I wanted to grill some birds, but I forgot to bring salt and chilli with me, so I visited them to ask for some. The woman turned her face back when handing me salt and chilli.[27] She did not look at me. *Piser* usually dare not stare at people, nor live with others. One time, I also saw some people chatting around a fire somewhere, but when I rode my motorbike past the place, there was nothing. Elders have told me that *piser* emit light. As for the sound of steps, I checked the place from where the sound came. There was a human footprint. The wildcat was possibly transformed by *piser*. They wanted to attack me. Luckily, I approached them and they were scared. You know, if people take the initiative, *piser* will be frightened. What good fortune that I took the lead, otherwise I would have been eaten by them.

Nobody knows if a person is born being *piser* or turns *piser* at a certain life stage. Certainly, it is not an inherited condition. But *piser* are able to change their spouses into *piser*, and once one becomes a *piser*, it is impossible to drive the transformed soul out of the body. One must stay a *piser* forever. When *piser* are sleeping, their souls come out. The sleeping body of a *piser* will not wake up until the soul comes back. *Piser* will die if their soul is shot while in animal form. As Aqbawr Bu explained,

> If I shoot [the *piser*], it does not die at that moment. Instead, the soul will go back home, go back to the body. Then the *piser* dies, and a bullet wound will appear in his or her body. The family dare not say

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[27] It is not clear why a *piser* would not have been afraid to have chilli in her own house.

> it, but we know [that this person was] a *piser*. We will let it go since
> he or she dies.

Aqliq Zi also heard that no matter how badly a *piser* is injured, he or she will
not die until the soul goes back to the body.

Aqliq Zi told me of yet further encounters with *piser*. He came across
the Han *piser* couple once again six months after the first encounter. This
time, he said, he saw the Han *piser* couple, but changed into the form of two
birds. A third time, at the end of May 2013, he went hunting again, and was
followed by these same two birds. He was annoyed and shot one as it was
stealing owl eggs. He heard a huge sound as the bird fell to the ground; he
even felt the earth shaking. However, when he looked, he found nothing
there. He kept moving, and the other bird kept following him. Aqliq Zi
recounted that he had thought, 'Perhaps it wants to change into something to
bite me'. His father and sister-in-law, who were sitting aside as Aqliq Zi told
this story, disagreed. They thought the bird was following Aqliq Zi to collect
his saliva in order to heal the injured bird. The father turned to Aqliq Zi, and
told him that he should have come back home as soon as shot the bird. It was
important too, that he not leave any part of his own body behind, such as
saliva, hair, or a nail, with which the bird might be healed. That way, he
could be sure that the *piser* would die soon, but if it could heal, it would
remain alive. Aqliq Zi regretfully said, 'I spat many times on the way, it
seems the *piser* will not die'. To me, he added, 'I originally did not believe
these things, but I have encountered it, now it is impossible not to believe it'.

Lapya

Like *piser*, most *lapya* are known to come from the Lahu and Han groups.
As with *piser*, *lapya* are found in the Jojao and Jobulan branches of the
Akha. Compared with *piser*, the soul of a *lapya* is invisible. It invades a
person's body through the fingers and toes, takes up residence, and drinks its
victim's blood. After two days or so, the victim's finger and toes will curl
up. Meanwhile, the victim behaves like another person, speaks whatever
language the *lapya* speaks, and falls sick. Eventually, the victim dies. Since
lapya are capable of attacking even the strongest man, they are considered
more threatening than *piser*. Fortunately, the *lapya* soul may be driven out of
the victim by healers who have the right knowledge and medicine.
Accordingly, *lapya* fear all healers, and are scared to look straight at them.

In both researched villages, cases of *lapya* invasion were reported to
me. In the first village, Aqliq Zi told me of one case that had happened to
Aqzawr Te:

> Aqzawr Te was invaded by *lapya* during my sister's wedding
> banquet. There were many guests; you did not know who was *lapya*

and who was not. Aqzawr Te drank some alcohol, played cards with a Wa girl, then his mind lost control. He started speaking the Wa language. You know, if you are invaded by a *lapya*, you will speak whatever language the *lapya* speaks. If I ask your name, you will also tell me the name of the *lapya*.... Later he went back home, speechless. People talked to him, he did not talk back.... The *lapya* was eventually scared out of Aqzawr Te's body. Regaining his mind, the first sentence he spoke was, 'Hit it! Hit it! It is gone! It is gone! It is running away! It is running away'. Then the soul really turned into two eagles flying away. Later he described to us that the *lapya* had being sitting on the lintel of his house, blocking his throat with a stick, hence he was unable to talk. [When the *lapya* was driven out of his body, it did not leave immediately but sat on the lintel of his house and blocked his throat with a stick, hence he was unable to talk. When the *lapya* finally was scared and dropped its stick, Aqzawr Te had cried out 'hit it'. Then the *lapya* turned into two eagles flying away].

When I shifted research focus to the second village (Kekaq) in July 2013, villagers were eager to describe a recent event of a *lapya* invading a three-year-old girl. The girl's parents had taken her to a clinic, but they had forgotten to bring the small medicine bag which protects children from *piser* and *lapya*. The girl's aunt, who had been introduced to me as Aqtsuq Po[28], recounted the events after the girl's return from the clinic:

That evening, everything was fine. I gave her a shower and sent her back home. On the following day, I heard that the girl had suddenly lost consciousness that night, her lips had become black. The news really frightened me. In the afternoon, she had a severe fever, her body became very hot. In the evening she was still able to speak to her mother in the Akha language, 'Mom, I do not know what happened to me'. She stayed with her mother only, refusing her grandmother's hugs. She refused to sleep, and kept her eyes open. It seemed like she was not sleepy at all. The next morning, my mother-in-law came to me and said, 'Come to visit the little girl. You may not have the chance to see her again'. I was frightened, and ran to her home right away. When I saw her, I opened my arms to her, but she did not come to me.

Aqbawr Nu, the girl's grandfather, was staying in another region at the time. His wife called him at three o'clock in the morning, informing him that his beloved granddaughter was dying. He rushed home as soon as possible.

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[28] *Aqtsuq* means sister-in-law; it is the form of address used for the wife of elder brothers.

Usually the girl was very close to him, however, on that day, the girl could not recognise him, but asked who he was. The girl behaved in a totally different manner. Aqtsuq Po continued,

> That morning, it rained heavily. Her parents brought her out, she refused to take an umbrella or oilcloth, [and was] just walking in rain. We asked her in the Lahu language if she wanted to drink alcohol. She replied, 'Yes', and took the cup of alcohol. My uncle knocked down the cup and stopped her. Then we asked her if she wanted a cigarette, she took it, and smoked it. At last, she spoke in the Akha language again, saying 'You do not have to do this'. It was really strange! She spoke like an adult.

Aqzawr De (Uncle De), a middle-age man, chipped in,

> It was a test for her. We asked the same questions in the Akha, Lahu, Wa, Han, and Dai languages, to check in which language she replied, so as to tell from which group the *lapya* was from. We have different healing methods for *lapya* from different ethnic backgrounds.

Aqbawr Gu described the event from his perspective. After being invaded by *lapya*, the girl dared not look at him because he is a healer. He compared, 'Look at her now, everything is normal. She looks at me in a normal way'. He was invited to expel the *lapya* from the girl. Aqbawr Gu uttered a certain incantation, the girl felt very uncomfortable, and rushed alone into the sugarcane field at the side of the village. Villagers, under his supervision, shot their hunting guns three times around the girl, in order to scare the *lapya* away. If the *lapya* speaks his or her own name, it will be easy for healers to drive him out. Aqbawr Gu explained, 'If the *lapya* speaks its name, I will address it directly when uttering the incantation. Then no matter where the body of the *lapya* is, in the human world or *naevq* world, it hears me, and realises that we know it'. Because the lapya did not speak his name, Aqbawr Gu had to engage with other treatments.

He continued his treatment with the preparation of some medicine, and then put it and a lot of chilli into the fireplace. Above these, he placed a large steamer. They put the girl into the steamer. She did not suffer from the heat or the strong smell of chilli, but other men in the room could not bear the strong smell. Aqbawr Gu realised that the *lapya* was a very powerful one. Then, he took the medicine out from the fireplace, soaked it in boiling water while uttering incantations, fed it to the girl, and then showered her with the leftover water. Then she fell asleep. When she awoke, she had recovered.

After the event, people were still shaken. The girl's grandfather, Aqbawr Hu, explained why: 'We have to be very careful regarding *lapya*.

People, children or adults, will die two or three days after being attacked by them'. In this case, the *lapya* was expelled and the girl recovered. But, not all attacks can be resolved. According to Aqbawr Gu, a man from a neighbouring Akha village had died of *lapya* last year. His co-villagers clearly knew that this man was attacked by a *lapya* but failed to expel it. Aqbawr Gu also stressed, 'This is the first time that a *lapya* has come to our village. We have to chase it away, otherwise in the future it will come back again and eat more people. If you completely defeat it at the beginning, the *lapya* dare not come again'. It seemed that his expulsion had been completely successful, but the danger was not passed. If nothing else, the girl would remain vulnerable. As Aqbawr Gu explained, if a person is attacked by *lapya* three times, even if he is cured through incantation all three times, his or her brain will be partly damaged, and he will become less smart than before.

There are so many cases of *lapya* invading people that Aqliq Ci, a young man in his early thirties, insisted, 'This is something really existing; it is not whether you choose to believe or not'. His brother, the father of the recently-attacked girl, repeated the same idea. He told me that he does not believe in ghosts, but has no doubt about the existence of *piser* and *lapya*.

Yet *piser* and *lapya* are the only supernatural beings recognised by the Akha that have attracted any government intervention. In the government's view, these beings do not exist except in efforts of locals to slander one another. Most famously, a 1984 episode in which a *pipa gui* family was chased out of a Dai village was reported to the authorities by a retired police officer (Luo 2000: 112–13). The two leaders of the chasing-out and the destruction of the family's property were charged and jailed for defamation. Two years later, the Menglian County People's Congress passed a decision forbidding Dai and Lahu from slandering others as *pipa gui*. The decision also banned all practices related to the identification and expulsion of *pipa gui* on the grounds that ideas and practices concerning *pipa gui* were superstitions (*mixin*, 迷信) which go directly against the Constitution.

In 1990, this decision was included in the Autonomous Regulations of Menglian Dai, Lahu and Wa Autonomous County. Similar regulations are found in other regions of Yunnan Province, including Lancang Lahu Autonomous County (Lancang County), Dehong Dai Jingpo Autonomous Prefecture, and Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture (Xishuangbanna Prefecture). Clearly, the prohibition of beliefs and practices related to *pipa gui* has not stopped their manifestation, nor has it addressed the widely shared fear of *pipa gui* among the southern peoples of Yunnan Province.

Cases involving *piser* and *lapya* around the region continue to reach the courts and regional awareness. For example, in 2012, a *pipa gui* was chased out of a Dai village in Xishuangbanna. A woman was believed to

have caused her godson's sickness, and was identified as *pipa gui* by a local ritual expert. Her co-villagers were so frightened that they chased her and her family away, and destroyed their house and belongings. The chased-out family reported their tribulation to police, who reported further to the local government. The local government immediately arranged a working team to be stationed at the village for 14 days and persuaded villagers to permit the woman and her family to move back. The woman successfully moved back, but villagers rarely made contact with her. At the same time, the ritual expert, an old man in his sixties, was sentenced to four years in prison by the local court for utilising superstition to undermine law.[29]

Plate 10. Hats attached with a bundle of accessories that protect infants from hostile spirits. The small drug bag is specifically meant to ward off *piser* and *lapya* (Hakaq).

When they 'feel insecure', the Akha, like most peoples across the world, often turn to cosmological nonhuman beings, including souls, ancestors, *xaxi*, the Supreme God, other gods, *naevq*, *piser*, and *lapya*. Among these

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[29] http://newspaper.jcrb.com/html/2013-08/01/content_137795.htm. Last access was 30 April 2018.

nonhuman beings, the soul plays a decisive role in one's survival and wellbeing. Keeping souls with human beings becomes very crucial for health. Ghosts of those who died horrific deaths, *piser*, and *lapya* are three kinds of hostile beings that do harm to people, especially vulnerable children. To protect children from soul loss and evil beings, Akha grandparents and parents provide intense daily and ritual care from the moment of birth. Ancestors, the Supreme God, other gods, and *naevq* are sources of both blessing and sickness. Akha villagers have to make sacrifices to them in order to gain their blessing or eliminate sickness. In return for sacrifice, the beings provide cosmological support to Akha people.

Yet it can be seen that this cosmological world creates insecurities, even as it provides support. Neither the diversity of nonhuman beings recognised by the Akha, nor the kinds of support and insecurity that adhere to Akha cosmology is strange to the anthropology of religion. And yet, these exactly are elements overlooked in the domain of support studies, no matter how much they stress subjectivity or culture. For this reason, Angelina Yuen-Tsang's (1997) emphasis on the cultural dimension of social support should not be an ending point for support studies, but a starting point. According to Philippe Descola (2013: 119–22), all cultures deal with a relationship between interiority and physicality to produce one of four kinds of ontology: animism, totemism, naturalism, or analogism. Current support studies could be said to perceive only naturalism, as they focus only on interactions among human beings. When applied to cultures holding other ontological models, such as an animist-dominant society like the Akha, this framework becomes problematic because it excludes recognition of the role played by active nonhuman spirits. Despite the invisibility of nonhuman beings, their existences and influences remain real to Akha emotions and practices. In the midst of social transformation and state intervention, the Akha people still hold, at least partly, their traditions of animist cosmology. Among the Akha, propose we must thus seek a holistic cosmological definition of support rather than a merely 'social' one.

Chapter 4
Social Healers and Social Support Networks

To deal with the health-threatening cosmological nonhuman actors presented in the last chapter, Akha villagers mainly rely on their kinship system and the big man system, since members of both systems play the role of healers. I use the term 'big man' somewhat differently from its original use in Melanesian ethnography. In Melanesian contexts, a big man is an individual male who has acquired power through his own merits in various fields. It may be his skill and efforts as a gardener, bravura in battle, oratorical gifts, or magical powers that garner recognition (Godelier 1996). Or, it may be his political leadership (van Bakel, Hagesteign and van De Velde 1986). In the Akha context, the word 'big' (*ma*) not only refers to size, but a state of being important, superior. In this chapter, I broadly use 'big man', regardless of gender, to refer to two types of person: those who are predestined to have magical power – such as priests, shamans, and blacksmiths – and those who are selected to enjoy leadership in collective affairs because of their own abilities, knowledge, religious purity, or old age (for example, the village father, the village mediator, and the elders). These big men – social role groups rather than individuals – directly or indirectly depend on one another to cope cooperatively with collective affairs. The two systems of kinship and big men are tightly interwoven in the Akha community, forming a stable network to support its members by contributing their ritual power or profane help to those who need it.

Kinship: The Genealogical Patronymic Linkage System

The Akha are a patrilineal descent group, marked by the so-called genealogical patronymic linkage system. Through the linkage system and countless genealogies, Akha people, mainly men, can trace back to a known ancestor, and know the genealogical connections to that ancestor and to one another.

  With regard to the Akha, 'lineage' refers to patrilineal descent groups, regardless of generation. By certain generations, these lineages proliferate

and fissure, developing into three descent categories at different levels. These are called *aqguq, paqzaq*, and *paerzaq*; *paqzaq* is the exogamous unit. Like other ethnic groups across South East Asia, the Akha have an asymmetrical alliance system through which the divided exogamous units reconnect with and depend on one another.

The linkage system is a dominant characteristic among Tibeto-Burman speaking patrilineal groups. As Lo Ch'ang-p'ei noted, 'According to this tradition of the Tibeto-Burman people, which is of great antiquity, generally the names of the father and the son overlap; that is, the last one or two syllables of the father's name are transmitted to the name of the son and become its first one or two syllables; and this is done continuously from generation to generation' (1945: 349). This can take various forms, among which, the following two are well-demonstrated in the Akha case:

       1) AB—BC—CD—DE—EF
       MqMavq—MavqGhanr—GhanrNeiq—NeiqZawvq—ZawvqZev
       2) AB C—C DE—DE F—F GH—GH I
       SmrMirOr—OrToeqLoe—ToeqLoeDzm—DzmMawqYaer—
       MawqYawrCav

From some Akha elders in Menglian, I recorded the genealogy that appears in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 offers an ideal example of the linkage system, where names with overlapped syllables continue from generation to generation without rupture. In the first through eleventh generations, and in the thirty-ninth through sixty-sixth generations, two syllable names transform by one syllable each generation as presented in the first form. In the twelfth through thirty-eighth generations, the transformation is of three syllable names by taking the second form. In the Akha language, such a genealogy is called *tsawrtseevq* (genealogy of human beings), and it is juxtaposed to *naevqtseevq* (genealogy of *naevq*). In fact, a *tsawrtseevq* also includes many names of nonhuman beings, as the first to twentieth generations are considered to be the names of gods or ghosts. Since these early generations are neither helpful to explain the current kinship system nor hit the ultimate target of this chapter – the supportive network – I leave them aside from further discussion. I include them in Table 1 only to give a complete genealogy. To explain the organising rules of the linkage system, I mainly depend on Table 2, which covers several genealogical branches of the Menglian Akha.

Before exploring the linking rules, I want to clarify further the naming system. In a two syllable name, the first syllable is the father's given name – thus, a patronym. The second syllable is the individual's given name; he is addressed by this name in daily life. To take NyiXav of the forty-seventh generation as an example: Nyi was the name of his father, but he was called

Xav in daily life. NyiXav together was his full name, used particularly in ritual events.[30] When a lineage is rendered, the names are given in full, overlapping as well as connecting with one another, making the genealogy traceable in linear fashion.[31]

There are four rules, or generalisations, to be made about Akha genealogies. The first is that each son bears his father's name as patronym and maintains his own genealogy. The five genealogies recorded in Table 2 thus belong respectively to the last men recorded by each: XuqDzanr, TsanrTsar, LaqTsor, CeDzoq, and LaMee. Each man appears as his father's son, but his genealogy does not record the presence of his brothers. By tracing along their genealogies, two men can identify their closest shared ancestor, this helps them to identify each other's respective social position, find the proper way to address each other, and correspondingly behave in a proper manner. If two men at the sixty-third generation, XawrCe and LaMee, met each other, coming from different regions and having no connections before meeting, they would recite their genealogies until they discovered that they shared the common ancestor DziqZeq. Then they could treat each other as brothers. A man should at least remember his own genealogy, but only a few knowledgeable elders or ritual specialists learn the genealogies of many people for ritual purposes. Women's names are not included in this linkage system, but they would keep their fathers' genealogies in mind. When meeting with young men, they could compare their genealogies to see if they are marriageable.

A second rule is that while normally a genealogy only includes men's names, women's names occasionally appear. A woman's name is substituted for her husband's in a genealogy if he suffered a horrific (i.e. impure) death. For example, such a rupture between the male generations occurred in the case of HoqTsaw—LoqSmr—BaeqGei. According to Akha elders, HoqTsaw's son TsawGha died in war, which is traditionally considered a horrific death and thus should be excluded from the genealogy. TsawGha's wife, LoqSmr, took his position in the genealogy at her own death; during her funeral, her body was dressed in a male costume. TsawGha's name was required to be thoroughly removed from the list; hence his son GhaBaeq was also erased because Gha, the first syllable of his full name, originally

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[30] Other sources would render the full name Nyixav, but I have maintained internal capitalisation to emphasise the genealogical connections. This is particularly important to do in this chapter, as elsewhere I have used only a personal name with a respectful term of address.

[31] Other ethnic groups in Menglian have similar naming systems without stable family names. This is quite different from the Han naming system which maintains a family name through the male line over several generations. Akha names are recorded as they are given; the state authority does not require them to take a stable family name.

referred to TsawGha and would imply the father's existence. However, the existence of GhaBaeq can still be detected from the recorded name of his own son BaeqGei. If there had been no horrific death, this section of genealogy would have been recorded as HoqTsaw—TsawGha—GhaBaeq—BaeqGei.

Table 1. An example of the lineage of human beings (*tsawrdziq*)

Gen.	Name	Gen.	Name	Gen.	Name
1	MqMavq	23	TsawrMawqOer	45	ByanLaeq
2	MavqGhanr	24	MawqOerDzoeq	46	LaeqNyi
3	GhanrNaevq	25	DzoeqTanqPanq	47	NyiXav
4	NaevqZawvq	26	TanqPanqManr	48	XavZir
5	Zawvqzev	27	ManrHanqTan	49	ZirTser
6	ZevTor	28	HanqTanJeiq	50	TserKmr
7	TorMa	29	JeiqLeiNyawr	51	KmrKanq
8	MaYawr	30	NyawrCirLavq	52	XavTsawr
9	YawrDaevq	31	LavqTanrBoeq	53	TsawrDziq
10	DaevqBae	32	TanrBoeqSoev	54	DziqXov
11	BaeSmr	33	BoeqSoevLaev	55	XovCe
12	SmrMirOr	34	LaevLmrBor	56	CeXawq
13	OrToeqLoe	35	BorManqPov	57	XawqHanr
14	ToeqLoeDzm	36	ManqPovTir	58	HanrSi
15	DzmMawqYaer	37	TirXarByev	59	SiDuq
16	MawqYaerCav	38	ByevMaDzan	60	DuqGaw
17	CavTiqSiq	39	DzanrJeq	61	GawNir
18	TiqSiqLir	40	JeqGhoeq	62	NirSoe
19	LirPawqBaev	41	GhoeqJaer	63	SoeDzanr
20	PawqBaevUv	42	JaerZae	64	DzanrSar
21	UvNyoqZaq	43	ZaeJovq	65	SarTsanr
22	NyoqZaqTsawr	44	JovqByan	66	TsanrTsar

Thirdly, genealogies are sometimes interrupted by names beginning with 'Pi' or 'Ghoe'. These are substituted for the patronym as blessings or wishes for a child's health. They are given especially in cases where a child is in poor health, or when a family's other children have not thrived. These syllables come respectively from *pima* and from the term of address for maternal uncle (*aqghoe*). Both the *pima* and maternal uncle have the power to bless or heal children. For example, JeevKaw had several children who

died in infancy, thus he asked his children's *aqghoe* for his name to bless the children's health and longevity. His son was thus named GhoePar.

Fourthly, the linkage system rejects the names of impure couples (i.e. those who beget unwanted twins or deformed infants). Children born to such a couple after the unwanted infants are named after the animal signs of their own birthdays. This practice is manifest, for example, in the case of XaerPanr who is named for his birthday on the Day of the Xaer. Similarly, because PanrJan begat twins, his son was not named JanTsor, but LaqTsor – after his birth on the Day of the Khaqlaq.

Because it includes blessing sources while excluding impure deaths, the linkage system is not a perfect rendering of descent relations. However, these exceptions only account for a very small part of the whole linkage system, and do not fundamentally change the basic principles of descent. Therefore, in the following, I pursue an exploration of Akha patrilines through these genealogies. I begin with a recent fluorescence in expressions of belonging to the LaeqNyi *guq* among Menglian Akha.

According to oral history, the Akha had once built their own kingdom in present-day Mojiang, a county now under the jurisdiction of Pu'er Prefecture. This kingdom fell apart because of Dai invasion and internal disorder. After defeat by Dai troops, the Akha divided into two parts and fled in two different directions, one heading eastwards to Jinghong, while the other, led by ByanLaeq of the forty-fifth generation (see Table 1), went southwards and then scattered around South East Asia over the following centuries.

During the Spring Festival in 2013, hundreds of descendants of LaeqNyi of the forty-sixth generation were invited from China, Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar to a housewarming ceremony in the city of Tachilek on the border between Myanmar and Thailand. There, they showed respect to their common ancestor LaeqNyi and had the opportunity to trace their common and divergent histories. Following this 'reunion' of LaeqNyi's *guq*, it became quickly and increasingly popular among Menglian Akha to render their relations to LaeqNyi. It was thus that I began to investigate the significant rules and principles regarding the linkage system through the figure of LaeqNyi.

Guq, or *aqguq*, is a maximal genealogical unit. The LaeqNyi *guq* incorporates all men and women descended from LaeqNyi. That is why LaeqNyi *guq* is also referred to as LaeqNyi *zaq* (LaeqNyi's children). *Guq* are not restricted to a particular degree of relation or generation; the term is applied to the group that results from tracing descent through any particular ancestor. Once, Aqbawr Gu told me that 'grandfather' LaeqNyi had seven sons, and that he himself was descended from the son called NyiXav.

NyiXav had several sons, too, Aqbawr Gu claimed descent from the one called XavZir; and thenceforth until he named his own father. Aqbawr Gu's genealogy implies that the LaeqNyi *guq* is composed by seven branches which respectively contain a good number of sub-branches and even smaller subgroups. Menglian Akha only account for a very small section of the whole LaeqNyi *guq*. However, in this reckoning system, Aqbawr Gu might equally claim descent from LaeqNyi's son NyiXav. The NyiXav *guq*, to which he would claim belonging, would exclude the descendants of NyiXav's six brothers. Following the same rule, if Aqbawr Gu traces his genealogy back to XavZir and marks the corporation of XavZir's descendants as XavZir *guq*, the descendants of XavZir's brothers will be excluded from this corporation. The closer the ancestor to whom one traces back, the smaller the scale of an *aqguq*. In contrast, the further one traces back, the larger the scale of an *aqguq*.

Table 2. A part of the lineage of LaeqNyi *guq*

No.	Name				
46	LaeqNyi				
47	NyiXav				
48	XavZir				
49	ZirTser				
50	TserKmr				
51		KmrKanq			
52	XavHoq	XavTsawr			
53	HoqTsaw	TsawrDziq			
54	LoqSmr	DziqXov		DziqZeq	
55	BaeqGei	XovCe	XovGhan	ZeqHawq	ZeqByan
56	GeiNyaq	CeXawq	GhanJeev	HawqPyor	ByanNeq
57	NyaqMee	XawqHanr	JeevKaw	PyorQanr	NeqLaq
58	MeeSsiq	HanrSi	GhoePar	QanrDeq	LaqPor
59	SsiqTsaq	SiDuq	LaqMyanr	DeqYar	PorGan
60	TsaqPanr	DuqGaw	TsaqZawr	GhoeNyor	GanXawr
61	PanrXyanr	GawNir	ZawrTer	NyorNeq	XawrJeevr
62	XyanrTer	NirSoe	XaerPanr	NeqXawr	JeevrLa
63	TerXuq	SoeDzanr	PanrJan	XawrCe	LaMee
64	XuqDzanr	DzanrSar	LaqTsor	CeDzoq	
65		SarTsanr			
66		TsanrTsar			

For Menglian Akha, descendants of XovCe, XovGhan, ZeqHawq, and ZeqByan at the fifty-fifth generation are the latest segments to split off and respectively establish their own corporations identified as *aqguq*. That is, in this researched region, these four corporations are regarded as the minimal unit of *aqguq* by Akha themselves. In other words, ancestors prior to XovCe, XovGhan, ZeqHawq, and ZeqByan could be freely picked up as the apical ancestor traced back by their descendants, forming a corporation at the *aqguq* level. For instance, TsanrSar at the sixty-sixth generation belongs to XovCe *guq*, and he can also claim membership of XavTsawr *guq* if XavTsawr at the fifty-second generation is considered as the apical ancestor of the genealogy. 'A is XavHoq *guq*' means A is a member of the group of descendants of XavHoq, and 'B is XovCe *guq*' indicates that B is one of the descendants of XovCe, meanwhile both A and B belong to the major unit LaeqNyi *guq*. Female members of an *aqguq* are specifically mentioned as LaeqNyi Ma or XovCe Ma rather than LaeqNyi *guq* or XovCe *guq*. 'Ma' indicates that the name refers to a 'woman'; 'LaeqNyi Ma' reveals that the natal group of a certain woman is LaeqNyi *guq*. Nonetheless, XovCe's descendants take 'XovCe' as their surname, while XovGhan's descendants consider 'XovGhan' as their surname; the same happens to ZeqHawq and ZeqByan. That is to say, when you ask the sixtieth generation a question, such as, 'what is your surname?', DuqGaw would tell you 'XovCe', while TsaqZawr would say 'XovGhan'. They would not refer to anyone prior to XovCe or XovGhan.

Table 3. A part of the lineage of XovCe *guq*

No.	Name				
55	XovCe				
56	CeXawq				
57	XawqHanr				
58	HanrSi			**HanrJeevr**	
59	**SiDuq**	SiYiq		JeevrSawr	
60	DuqGaw	**GoHmq**	**YiqDzaev**	SawrLoq	
61	GawNir	ZavqSoe	DzaevSo	LoqBulaq	LoqTsanr
62	NirSoe	SoeGawq	SoGeer	BulaqJovq	TsanrGhoeq
63	SoeDzanr	GawqXov	GeerLaeq	JovqKe	GhoeqJevr
64	DzanrSar	XovDzanr	LaeqZanq	KeSsiq	JevrSsoq
65	SarTsanr	DzanrSar	ZanqBaq		
66	TsanrTsar	SarLmr	BaqGha		

A second unit of patrilineal kin is called *paqzaq*. It is subordinate to *aqguq*, and denotes an exogamous patrilineal unit. Within the XovCe *guq*, for example, I encountered four groups of *paqzaq* during fieldwork: SiDuq, GoHmq, YiqDzaev, and HanrJeevr (see Table 3). Most members of these four *paqzaq* simply say 'We are XovCe *guq*' without indicating their paqzaq names, although I kept asking. *Paqzaq* is also called *aqyeevqaqnyiq*, literally 'elder sisters and brothers (*aqyeevq*) and younger sisters and brothers (*aqnyiq*)', as reckoned within the patrilineal system. In daily usage, *aqyeevq* is also the term of address for elder in-laws, while *aqnyiq* is used to address younger in-laws. The compound *aqyeevqaqnyiq*, however, refers to a cluster of agnatic kindred beyond the sibling group who share marital and ritual taboos; in-laws are not included in this group.

People who belong to the same *paqzaq* are forbidden to marry. However, they are free to have sexual intercourse, as long as they are not blood brothers and sisters sharing at least one parent. Once, a young man in his early thirties told me that he had sex with daughters of his father's brother and father's father's brother's son.[32] He saw no problem with sleeping with these 'sisters'; he simply kept it clear in his mind that they were unmarriageable. Such sexual relations are also tolerated by the community as long as the couple do not marry. Thus the borders of the *paqzaq* demarcate the boundaries of marriageable partners, but it should not be equated with an incest taboo.

Another way to define a *paqzaq* is as a patrilineal descent-based group tracing an unbroken chain of seven generations. An illustration of this principle is given in Figure 1. If an individual (A1) has two sons, of whom one has one son and the other two sons, then three lineages develop: B, C, and D. Descendants belonging to these three lineages through seven generations (i.e. up to and including individuals B7, C7, and D7) are classified as belonging to one *paqzaq*. They cannot marry each other. As agnatic kindred, all members of the *paqzaq* are strictly forbidden to consume the sacred parts of sacrificed animals during one another's ritual and ceremonial events, especially buffalos sacrificed in funerals. After seven generations, this *paqzaq* can be dissolved. When D7, the youngest male of the seventh generation in this *paqzaq* dies, a buffalo will be slaughtered during his funeral; rituals will be performed by ritual specialists; and certain parts of the buffalo will be cut into pieces and distributed to members of lineages B

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[32] Since kinship terms are highly culture-specific, only terms of the most basic kin types that have cross-cultural validity are used in rigorous kinship analysis (Shih 2010). I follow this approach by combining nine basic kin types: mother, father, sister, brother, wife, husband, daughter, son, and children. These are abbreviated as M, F, Z, B, W, H, D, S, and C. They may be modified in some instances as elder (E) or younger (Y).

and C. This ritual is called *paqba* (dividing *paqzaq*), and after it lineage D will separate from lineages B and C to establish its own *paqzaq*.

If the ritual is done at the funeral of B8, the putative youngest male of the eighth generation among lineages B and C, then these two lineages also divide into two individual exogamous *paqzaq*. This means that a *paqzaq* does not automatically split into two segments when it lasts seven generations, rather, its members have to perform the *paqba* ritual to divide it. Since the decision to divide a *paqzaq* is left to its members who might or might not strictly adhere to the rule, *paqzaq* divisions take place at various points in the generational chain. Some *paqzaq* split as early as the fourth or fifth generation, while some do not segment until the tenth generation. In an extreme case, a lineage called LaeqCe *guq* has actually lasted for more than twenty generations without dividing. As a result, the whole *aqguq* equates one *paqzaq*, becoming one exogamous unit.

A *paqba* ritual held at a funeral is recognised as the proper way to divide *paqzaq*. But, weddings are another occasion when a *paqba* ritual could be conducted. This is usually the case when a *paqzaq* that has lasted fewer than seven generations will divide; often because an otherwise forbidden marriage is underway. Such an example would be if B6F (a female member of the sixth generation in lineage B) and C6 were to fall in love and want to marry (see Figure 1). Their marriage would be forbidden and unacceptable according to tradition, and would certainly be rejected by their parents and elders. However, the marriage would be tolerated if the woman was already pregnant (because birth as well as abortion out of wedlock is strictly prohibited in Akha tradition) or if the couple threatened suicide. Another example could be given with the case of a wife married in to lineage B at the seventh generation (B7W). If she were to be widowed and re-married, for example, C7, then fission between lineage B and lineage C would be unavoidable. That is because, no matter which lineage B7W comes from, as soon as she marries into lineage BC, she is culturally entitled to membership similar to B6F; hence she becomes unmarriageable by the rule of exogamy to the male co-members of lineage BC. In either case, the senior lineal members will have to accept the marriage and divide the lineage into two separate alliance groups during the ceremonial wedding. That is to say, in the case of marriage between B6F and C6, lineage B descended from the founding ancestor B3 separates from lineage C descended from the founding ancestor C3, each lineage becoming an individual *paqzaq*, opening the floor for marriage to each other from then on. Both examples can be found in real life.
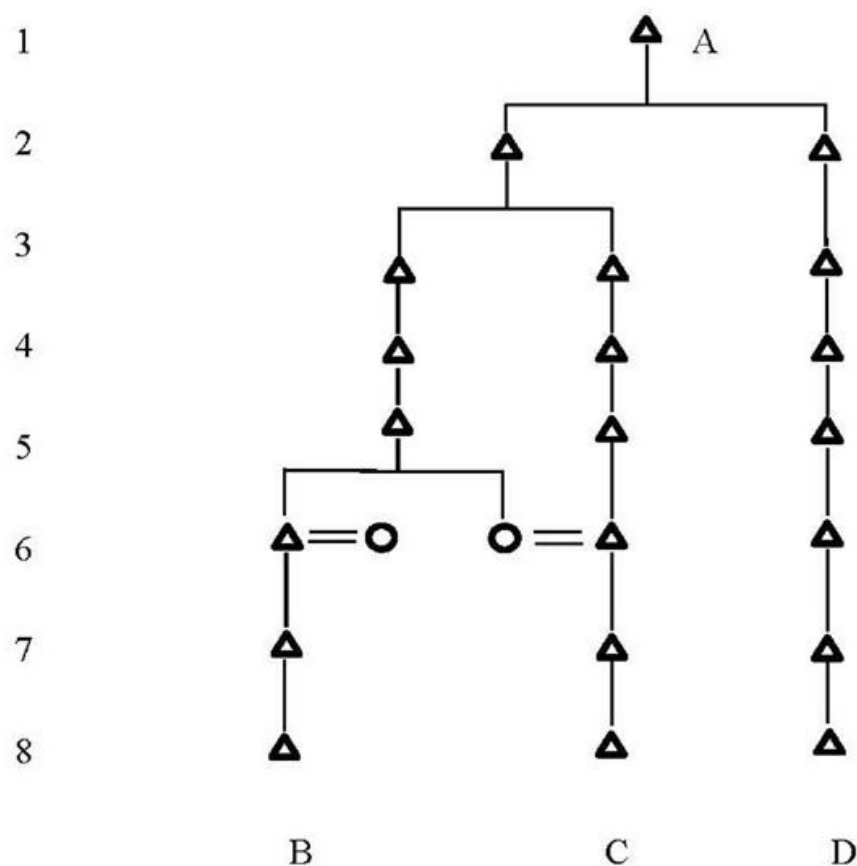
Figure 1. *Paqzaq* and the fission of *paqzaq*.

The third patrilineal unit is called *paerzaq*. It refers to one or several house-
holds whose heads share the same father. As described in chapter 2, there are
two types of houses in an Akha village, the main (big) house and the small
house. The main house is where the head couple of a household live, while a
small house is offered to married or unmarried sons. When a married son
intends to live independently from his parents and unmarried brothers, he,
his wife, and children move out and set up a single household living in a
newly-built big house. Thus the household is better understood as an eco-
nomic unit than as a patrilineal unit, though it refers to patrilineal kin living
together under a main house and its attached small houses. In contrast, a
paerzaq unites parents and other brothers, even when they live separately. In
practice, the application of the term is flexible and may vary.

        For example, Figure 2 shows the relations between three households.
The two men of the first generation are brothers. As long as they are alive,
the people in all three quadrilaterals would belong to the same *paerzaq*.
When one of the two oldest men dies, there will be two *paerzaq*. Then,

households 1 and 2 will be considered one *paerzaq* because their heads are blood brothers, sharing one father; while household 3 will form a second *paerzaq*.
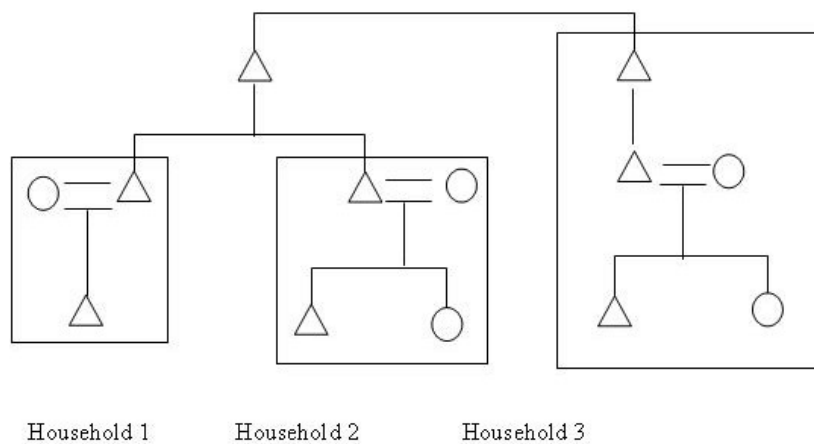

Figure 2. Illustration of *paerzaq*.

The scale of a *paerzaq* varies, from a single household to several households. As indicated above, a *paerzaq* may refer to the immediate household in which its head lives (e.g. household 3), or all households built by the head's sons (households 1 and 2), or all households built by a head, his brothers, and their sons (households 1, 2, and 3). To simplify the analysis, I name these three levels of *paerzaq* respectively as single *paerzaq*, extended *paerzaq*, and combined *paerzaq*. In the researched village, the *paerzaq* at different levels is the fundamental unit for organising ritual and ceremonial events. This situation always involves alliance networks, which will be introduced in the following section, followed by a discussion of the *paerzaq*'s fundamental role in ritual and ceremonial events.

Principles of Marriage and Alliance Networks

Before taking up the role of the *paerzaq*, let us return to a discussion of the marriages and alliances created through the *paqzaq*. As indicated above, the *paqzaq* is an exogamous descent group. This main principle is supplemented by several specific limitations, which further narrow the scope of marital options. In Figure 3, the father's brother's daughter (FBD) is unmarriageable because she shares membership in the same *paqzaq* as Ego. In principle, all female members of Ego's *paqzaq* are not marriageable. Other women related

through maternal lines, including that father's sister's daughter (FZD), the mother's sister's daughter (MZD), the mother's brother's daughter (MBD), and father's mother's brother's son's daughter (FMBSD), are also unmarriageable. This is because they are 'too close', as an old man explained. In reality, there are a few cases when men marry such women. Traditionally, these kinds of marriages are considered 'improper' (*buhe*, 不合)[33]; and it is said that their children will be born 'improperly', die young, and end the family. This idea is confirmed by villagers who cite a case of a man who married his FZD: their sons have suffered in various ways. One died as a child, one remains single, and one has only daughters.

FZD   FBD   Ego*   MZD   MBD   FMBSD
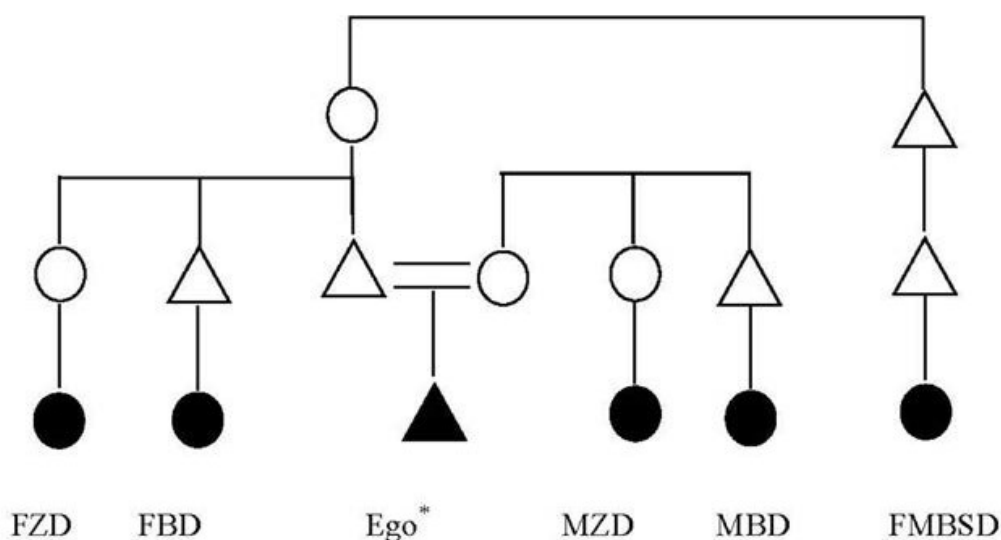
* For figures of this chapter, my using of 'Ego' is merely a way to indicate a putative research object. It does not mean that this is an egocentric study in methodological sense.

Figure 3. Unmarriageable females to Ego.

As mentioned in the last section, too, marriages within a *paqzaq* prompt lineage division. For instance, a descendant of SiYiq married his FFFBSSSD (within fourth generation)[34], leading to a cleavage between lineage SiDuq and lineage SiYiq. Though this marriage was tolerated, it was considered 'not good' (*maqmeer*). Furthermore, it was said that any marriages that would take place across the next three generations established of lineage

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[33] People prefer to describe such marriages with the Chinese *buhe*, but they could be understood as *maqmeer* in Akha. They are not described as *paeq*, *dao*, or *he*.
[34] Father's Father's Father's Brother's Son's Son's Son's Daughter.

SiDuq and lineage SiYiq would also be 'not good': their children would suffer diseases and even death. Only from the fourth marriage onwards did the inter-marriages between these two lineages become 'good' (*meer*), and everything related to children could go well. Most intra-*paqzaq* marriages happen in the fourth or fifth generations of the *paqzaq*. When we combine this information with the judgment that marriages would be 'not good' for another three generations, we can conclude that the interval of seven generations – the culturally recognised range of one *paqzaq* – is the borderline of a good marriage among patrilineal fellows.

Marriages draw out five recognised groups of alliance: two groups of wife-takers and three groups of wife-givers. The wife-takers are called *mimaq* and *midzeiq*; the wife-givers are called *jmghoe*, *maghoe*, and *pighoe*. In these groups, the *paerzaq* becomes important. The *mimaq*, in relation to Ego's single *paerzaq* (i.e. the immediate household of a senior male; see Figure 4) is the 'single *paerzaq* of daughters'. It broadly refers to the single *paerzaq* of men who take as wives Ego's sisters, daughters, and grand-daughters. The *midzeiq* is the 'single *paerzaq* of nieces' and refers to the single *paerzaq* of men who take sisters, daughters, and granddaughters from among Ego's patrilineal *paqzaq*. Ego has the same number of *mimaq* as he has sisters, daughters, and granddaughters, and the same with *midzeiq*. Linking via individuals, the bonds formed through marriage between Ego with his *mimaq* and *midzeiq* connect their *paerzaq* for three generations. In other words, Ego has three *mimaq* crossing three generations, from sister to granddaughter, and so does his blood brother B. Their sons (i.e. ES and BS) would have their respective *mimaq* crossing three generations, too. Looking latitudinally, Ego and B share one *mimaq* through their common sister. Looking longitudinally, ES shares his *mimaq* of two generations with Ego, as his daughter is granddaughter to Ego, and his sister is daughter to Ego. As for *midzeiq*, all the *mimaq* of ES are *midzeiq* to B, and in reverse, all the *mimaq* of BS are *midzeiq* to Ego. Apparently, to Ego, *mimaq* is socially closer than *midzeiq*, while the number of *midzeiq* might be much bigger than that of *mimaq*.
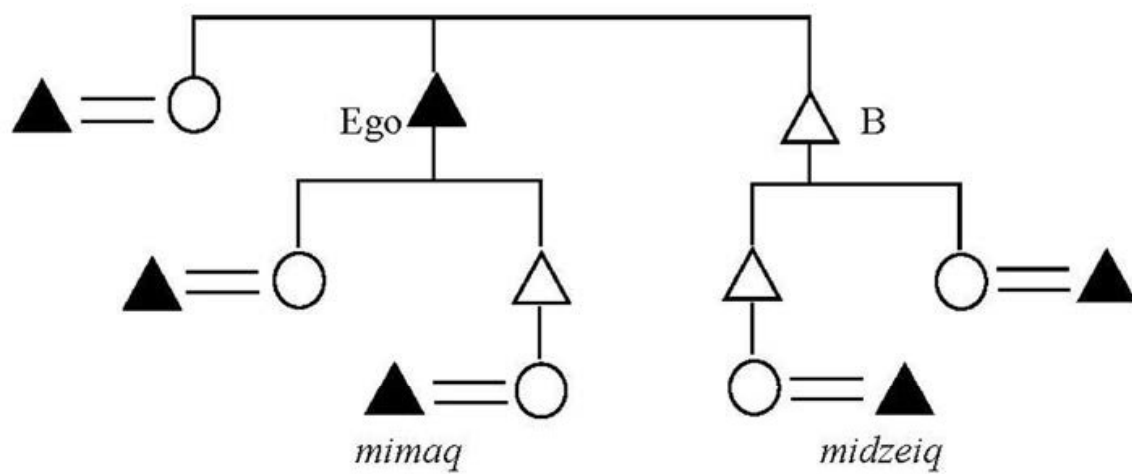
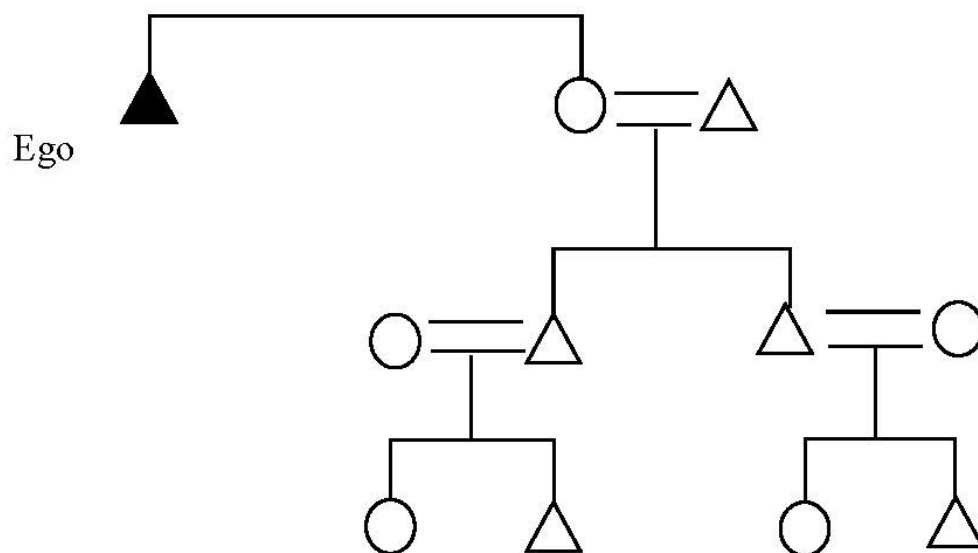Figure 4. Wife-takers: *mimaq* and *midzeiq*.

Figure 5. A case of *mimaq*: an extended *paerzaq*.

As mentioned before, *mimaq* refer to *paerzaq* rather than individuals. To take Ego's sister as an example, after being married, the household in which her husband lives becomes *mimaq* to her natal family. If the couple separates from the original household and builds their own independent household, they automatically carry the title of *mimaq* with them. So far, *mimaq* remains a single *paerzaq*. When their household develops into two or three genera-tions living in several divided households (i.e. an extended *paerzaq*) *mimaq* refers to the whole extended *paerzaq*, including the parents, the children, and grandchildren (see Figure 5). The same rule is followed by *midzeiq*. Both *mimaq* and *midzeiq* carry significant ritual obligations to Ego's *paerzaq*. They are obliged to participate in most ritual events held by Ego's *paerzaq* and to contribute their ritual power or other materials. It is noteworthy that not every single member of these two groups is required to be present, rather, normally one male member, regardless of his age, is picked as a rep-resentative of each group.

Juxtaposed to the two categories of wife-takers, there are three recog-nised categories of wife-givers, called *jmghoe*, *maghoe*, and *pighoe* (see Figure 6). To Ego, his wife's natal family is his *jmghoe*, his mother's natal family is his *maghoe*, and his grandmother's natal family is his *pighoe*. The natal family refers to the *paerzaq* crossing at least three generations, from parents to children to grandchildren. Like *mimaq* and *midzeiq*, *jmghoe*, *maghoe*, and *pighoe* are also collective nouns that expansively refer to the wider groups of *paerzaq*, *paqzaq*, and *aqguq*. For instance, Ego marries a woman from a particular *paerzaq*, which hence becomes his *jmghoe*; expansively, other patrilineal members of the *paqzaq* and the *aqguq* of his wife's natal family can also be identified as Ego's *jmghoe*. As a result, their children should address all these male members as '*aqghoe*', except those in the older generation whom they should call 'grandfather'. Following the same rule, Ego himself would address as '*aqghoe*' all male members of the *aqguq* of his *maghoe* and *pighoe*. Looking at the generations, obviously these three categories are connected by the patrilineal line: Ego's *maghoe* is *jmghoe* to his father, and Ego's *pighoe* is *maghoe* to his father and *jmghoe* to his grandfather. Among these three categories, apparently *jmghoe* and *maghoe* are socially closer to Ego than *pighoe* which is closer to his father and grandfather, but all of them have crucial ritual obligations to Ego's *paerzaq*.

As *mimaq* and *midzeiq*, the *jmghoe*, *maghoe*, and *pighoe* are obliged to play a role in most ritual affairs held by Ego's *paerzaq*. In particular, *maghoe* have great blessing and healing power over Ego himself. As mentioned above, children's health can be guaranteed by taking Ghoe as the first syllable of their names. Besides, a sleeveless garment provided by

maghoe's *paerzaq* can cure a child's sickness. Certainly, their ritual importance varies based on their respective closeness to Ego's *paerzaq*. This is demonstrated through the distribution of the ribs from a sacrificed pig at ritual feasts. *Mimaq*, *jmghoe*, and *maghoe* are each entitled to two ribs, while *midzeiq* and *pighoe* are each entitled to only one.
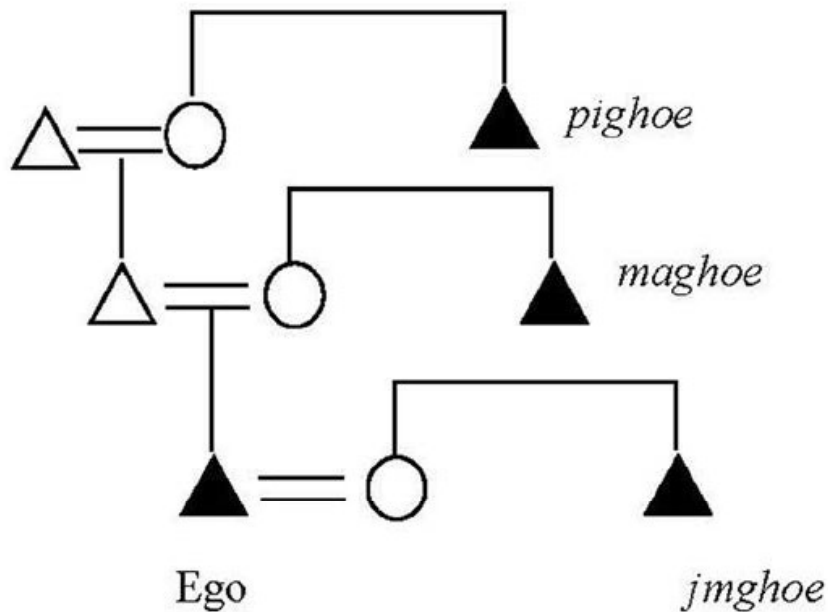

Figure 6. Wife-givers: *jmghoe*, *maghoe*, *pighoe*.

Normally, wife-givers' ritual services to Ego's *paerzaq* last at least three generations. For instance, the *jmghoe* of Ego's grandfather assist the *paerzaq* as *jmghoe*; once the grandfather passes away, they become *maghoe* to the *paerzaq* and take corresponding duties as a *maghoe*. After the father's death, they become *pighoe* to Ego's *paerzaq* and still play an indispensable but less important role in ritual affairs. In reality, they would provide ritual services for a longer time to wider groups. For example, Ego's *pighoe* only have ritual obligations to Ego's *paerzaq* through Ego's generation; they do not have to serve Ego's descendants. Nonetheless, if Ego's grandson holds a ritual and the grandson's *pighoe* (i.e. Ego's *jmghoe*) is unable to take part, he may turn to Ego's *pighoe*. Then, Ego's *pighoe* will be asked to participate in the ritual as Ego's grandson's *pighoe*. Or, when the immediate *paerzaq* of Ego's *jmghoe* is not available for rituals, then any other male members from the *paqzaq* or even the *aqguq* to which the *jmghoe paerzaq* belongs could be

asked to play the role of *jmghoe*. In other words, these wife-giving lineages are somehow locked to the wife-taking *paerzaq* in a relationship of perpetual affinity continuously across generations (see also Keesing 1975: 89). Taken together, these five categories of affinity form a steady and strong network around Ego's *paerzaq* (See Figure 7).
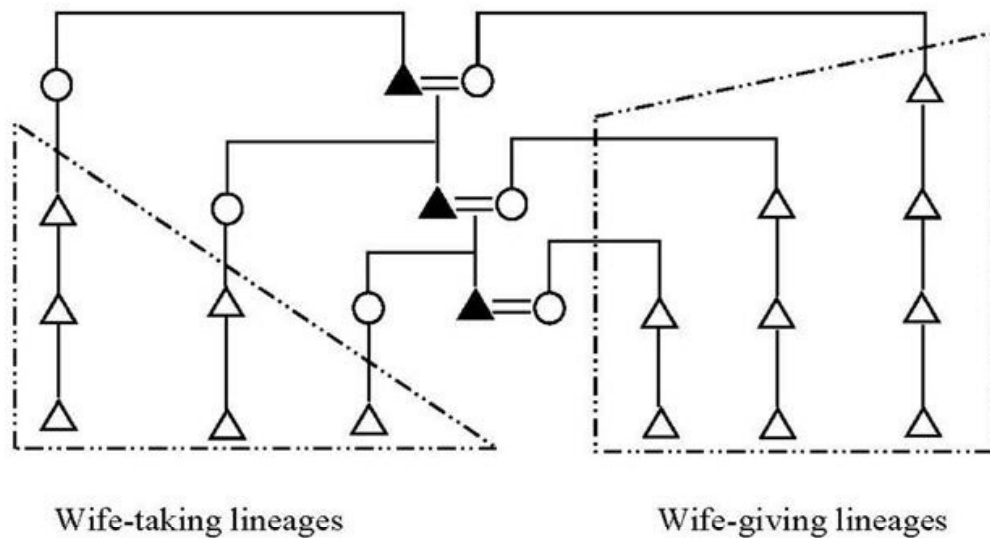

Figure 7. A simplified version of Ego's lineage alliance network.

The Big Man System

Along with the various groups of kin, several kinds of big men form a stable network to support Akha villagers. Below, I consider how elders, the village mediator and village father, ritual specialists, and blacksmiths contribute ritual power or profane help to those who need it.

Elders (Tsawrmaw)

For the Akha, the category of 'elders' (*tsawrmaw*) normally describes relatively aged people, both male and female. Generally, these people are over fifty years old, but if the average age of a village is low, then people aged over forty-four are counted as elders; in contrast, if a community has many older people, then people in their fifties or sixties will not consider themselves to be elders in a show of respect for those in their seventies or eighties. In the community, the elderly are respected as elders. Importantly, elders are not due respect simply because of their age, but because they have grandchildren (see chapter 5).

The elders are considered collectively to be carriers of tradition. This remains so despite the fact that in reality, the traditional knowledge of individual elders varies and, in some extreme cases, elderly individuals know very little about it. *Tsawrmaw* pass on the Akha *li* in both the words and practices of the ancestors as, what is called in Chinese, 'inviolable old custom' (*laoguiju*, 老规矩). Villagers repeatedly told me, 'The elders' sayings should be followed; the elders' *li* should not be violated. What they say is what the ancestors said, what they do is what the ancestors did'. The elders do not possess general power over others; rather, they have authority in traditional-ritual related issues. The younger generations might squander the family income and leave little money to their old parents, and they might speak harshly to the older generation in daily life, but in ritual and collective affairs they accept their own lack of traditional knowledge and cede the leading role to the elders. That is why, when I interviewed younger people about Akha traditions, no matter how much knowledge they held, they would always say, 'I do not know, you would do better to ask the elders'. In turn, knowledgeable seniors would also say, 'My knowledge is actually all taught by the elders, I depend on them!'

It is expected that the elders should always be informed about village affairs. In practice, they are not in charge of any collective affairs, but they are informed about what is going on in the community. The elders are also obliged to take part in all ritual events, including village-purifying rituals, household-purifying rituals, healing rituals, weddings, and funerals and so on. The elders can lead some rituals. Certain knowledgeable elders can, for example, call souls back and officiate at simple funerals.

Sometimes, an elder replaces the village father in his role at a ritual. This is because the elders are considered 'pure people' (*ganjingren*, 干净人). Even though one may have become contaminated several times in life (e.g. by shooting a dog or being bitten by a snake), growing old is a way to obtain purity.[35] The village father is the purest man in the whole village. Thus when he is unavailable to fulfil his role in rituals, an elder is sought to take his place.

Most often, the elders have no special role in rituals, but it is important that they be present to witness the event and to provide their blessing. In rituals led by a *pima*, for example, the elders sit and listen while the *pima* chants, even for many hours. They have no other task or role, but their presence assists the *pima*. For their assistance, the attending elders are offered cash and meat by the officiating *pima*. This is a sign of respect and

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[35] One exception is that people who beget twins are contaminated for the rest of their lives. Such a person is never considered 'pure' and is marginalised in ritual affairs, even if he or she is the oldest person present.

gratitude, but also a request for the elders' benediction. When the *pima* gives money and meat to the elders, they say something nice in return, wishing the *pima* success in performing rituals. With the elders' benediction, the *pima* gains strength (*yaoli*, 要力) and becomes powerful in ritual. At weddings, the bride usually displays her silver jewellery, one item at a time, to the elderly people present. The display tells the public how much property she brings to the marriage. The witness of the elders is meant to avoid the emergence of future disputes over her contribution.

The blessings of the elders are sought on many occasions. The elders normally give blessings by tying a thread around the receivers' wrists while uttering a benediction, sprinkling corn wine while uttering a benediction, or merely uttering a benediction. Tying a thread around one's wrist is to assure recipients' health and security. It is an act that takes place on most ritual occasions. The benediction is attached to the thread, and favours the recipient. It is also common for elderly people to utter benedictions in daily life. After purchasing a motorbike, villagers always invite several elders home and ask for their benediction. Then the elders sprinkle several drops of corn wine on the floor and utter a benediction for the security of the new motorbike owner. Another example is, once a man bought a large rice pot for making corn wine; he also invited an elder home for his blessing. The elder sprinkled drops of corn wine in front of the rice pot and uttered a benediction for the perfect quality and quantity of the wine that would be produced by the pot.

The Village Mediator: **Tsawrkaq**

The *tsawrkaq*, literally 'the middleman who goes between humans and *naevq*', is believed to have existed in the Akha community since the remote period when humans and *naevq* lived alongside each other. The first and greatest *tsawrkaq* in the world, called Tsawrkaq Momizali, was the assistant to the Supreme God and dealt with various affairs, sacred and secular. It became a tradition to require the *tsawrkaq*'s presence in collective ritual and secular affairs. Therefore, nowadays the *tsawrkaq* is an indispensable figure in every Akha village. He is a middleman, also viewed as the village mediator (*tiaojie*, 调解). He does not work alone, but has a group of several assistants, drawn from among the village's married middle-aged men. One is taken as the associate village mediator. These men are the backbone of the operating system for village affairs.

Normally, the *tsawrkaq* is selected by the elders. He should hold encyclopaedic knowledge of the Akha *li*. As one villager told me, 'He knows everything'. Besides, he is a man with capability and eloquence, he can reconcile people in conflict, and he is morally capable of giving impartial

judgement in the settlement of disputes. It is said that only the *tsawrkaq*'s participation can guarantee that an issue will be resolved successfully, be it intra-village or inter-village. As a mediator, his main job is to talk to the villagers concerned. In return, in the distribution of meat, he partakes in the chops of a sacrificed pig (because his function is to 'speak' at ritual events).

The *tsawrkaq* performs the same range of functions ascribed to Tsawrkaq Momizali. On the one hand, as a mediator of conflicts, he is often called upon to help mediate matters within or between villages, such as arbitrating marital matters. On the other hand, he acts as a director of religious tasks. For instance, he and his group of assistants instruct the younger generation in how to prepare ritual items, invite guests, direct the ritual process, even cut sacrificed pigs into pieces in the required way. Overall, he is in charge of almost everything, including settling disputes, organising collective festivals and ceremonies, and directing rituals. Yet the *tsawrkaq* never intervenes in disputes unless he is invited to play a role, and he is obliged to resolve problems under the direction of Akha *li* rather than his own will. He always works together with the *pima*, and more importantly, always consults the elders. In other words, he never works alone, and even when he is the main leader, he takes the opinion of the elders into consideration.

The cooperation between *tsawrkaq* and the elder (*tsawrmaw*) makes them a set of coordinators. Both of them are required to work with each other and make decisions together, rather than working dictatorially. This is made apparent in the division of the main ritual place in an Akha house into two parts named '*tsawrmaw*'s place' and '*tsawrkaq*'s place'. At ritual meals, *tsawrkaq* and *tsawrmaw* are both invited to the host's house and seated in their respective 'places'. Villagers always said, 'We need *tsawrmaw* to help us deal with problems, but that is inadequate. Problems cannot be solved without *tsawrkaq*. That is why we invite them both'. In reality, *tsawrkaq* usually consults with his assistants about village affairs first; next, he informs the elders of their decision, and the latter generally accept the decision and then give their permission to carry it out. Though the elders do not make the decisions, their permission is absolutely indispensable to the village mediator.

The Village Father: Pudzu Aqdaq

Pudzu aqdaq literally means 'the father who builds the village'. Villagers call the person who holds this role more simply, 'the village father' (*zhaifu*, 寨父). When building a village, the elders normally pick the purest man to be *pudzu aqdaq*. His wife is called *pudzu aqmaq* (village mother).

The purity of the village father is critical in his selection. Within the Akha community, meeting three standards qualifies a man as pure. First, he must be physically complete and normal. This means that he should have been born a physically complete person in a normal single birth. He should have had no congenital deformities or injuries during the birth that could damage his physical completeness in later life. And, at the time of his selection, he should also be physically normal, without permanent scars or injuries. A man loses his physical completeness (and purity) when he is left with a scar from a gun or knife wound, is disfigured after a car accident, or has an ear piercing or tattoo. Secondly, a pure man is of normal mind; people having mental disorders are classified as impure. Lastly, a pure man is ritually pure. He has never been bitten by snakes, attacked someone with gun or knife, or shot a dog; and his bride was not pregnant before the wedding.

Here a picture of a perfectly pure man has emerged. He is a normal person physically and mentally; he observes Akha traditions and behaves properly in a religious sense. However, this image is not realistic because nobody could be that perfect. Perhaps most Akha men are physically and mentally normal, but in daily life, nobody can protect himself from all possible injuries. Accordingly, the Akha do not attempt to select an absolutely pure man as their village father; they choose only someone who can be considered the most pure.

The purity of the village father represents the good fortune of the whole village. He must maintain his purity so that the village can be prosperous and free of disasters. Once selected, the village father cannot be removed easily because, as I was told, 'If the village father is removable, the village will be unstable'. Even if he suffers some loss of purity, such as a snake-bite, the village father continues to hold office to keep the village stable. When the whole village moves to another place, however, he will be displaced by another pure man. In the case that he has not suffered a loss of purity, the village father will continue to hold his post in the new location.

As the purest man, the village father is in charge of all rituals and ceremonies at the village level. He leads other male villagers in building the village gates and swing each year, and officiates at the ceremony in which pigs and chickens are sacrificed to the spirit of the divine water source. In addition, he takes part in every other ritual and ceremony held in the village as the representative of the whole village as the *yawpu* (lit. good village). At festivals, his wife should lead the women in fetching the pure water (*ganjingshui*, 干净水) needed to make ceremonial rice cakes.

Though the village father is obliged to attend all rituals in the village as *yawpu*, sometimes he cannot fulfil this responsibility. He cannot play this role at rituals hosted by his *paqzaq* fellows. And he cannot do so when he is

temporarily impure, such as when his daughter-in-law becomes pregnant. On these occasions, the role is taken up by the deputy village father. This man, called *tsawrxawr*, (lit. the pure man) or (in Chinese) *ganjingren* (干净人), is also selected by the elders; he should be the second purest man in the village. The *tsawrxawr* is usually an elder and from a different *paqzaq* than that of the village father (see chapter 6). If neither the village father nor his deputy is available, a temporary pure elder of the village is chosen to function as the *yawpu*.

Ritual Specialists: **Nyirpaq** *and* **Boermawq**

In previous chapters, I have distinguished between *pima* and *nyirpaq* as two types of ritual specialist. Here, a more detailed explanation is in order. *Pi* means ritual specialist. *Pima* means 'the master of ritual specialists', the only one who possesses sufficient knowledge to officiate at a funeral – the most complicated ritual event. Other ritual specialists are ranked according to their level of ritual power. From low to high, the hierarchy would be *nyirpaq, boermawq, piza, pima*. The *nyirpaq* is something like a shaman; a *boermawq* is a beginner ritual specialist; and *piza* means 'the apprentice of a ritual specialist'. Often enough, *pima* is used instead of *pi* to refer to all ritual specialists; sometimes, as in the preceding chapters of this book, it signals a major distinction between *pima nyirpaq*; and, *boermawq* may be used to refer to *boermawq, piza*, and *pima,* in distinction from *nyirpaq*. Here, I also use the term *pima* and *boermawq* in their broad senses, unless noted otherwise.

Unlike the village father or *tsawrkaq*, ritual specialists may be shared by several villages. They are indispensable to the well-being of the whole Akha community. This is especially true of the master *pima*. If there is no *pima* in a village, or if another one is preferred, villagers may freely invite specialists from other villages or even other regions.

Nyirpaq, equated with shaman, is the least powerful ritual specialist. *Nyirpaq* can be either a man or a woman, and it is usually the latter. The person who becomes a *nyirpaq* is destined for this role because she has the ability to see through the spiritual world. The *nyirpaq* finds out the spiritual cause of sickness. Hence, she or he is regarded as 'the dog of the Supreme God'. Generally, he or she makes a diagnosis in two ways: by touching the patient's hand, or by uttering chants learned from the Supreme God in dreams. On both occasions, *nyirpaq* always closes his or her eyes, just as in sleep or dream. The *nyirpaq*'s soul goes to the world of spirits and speaks aloud whatever it sees there. Normally, *nyirpaq* can diagnose but not heal. Yet sometimes, a powerful *nyirpaq* is able to heal minor problems.

To be *boermawq* is also predestined by the Supreme God. Once selected, one suffers intermittent sickness which is ultimately cured through initiation. During initiation, the candidate gains two basic items of ritual equipment: a shoulder bag made by a pure woman and an iron knife made by a blacksmith from iron provided by the candidate's maternal uncle. Afterwards, he becomes a *boermawq* – a beginner ritual specialist. People, *boermawq* himself included, are forbidden to touch the shoulder bag and knife on non-ritual occasions; otherwise they will wrong the spirits. Only when ritual is performed may *boermawq* wear his shoulder bag and tie the knife around his waist. Once he has donned the shoulder bag, others are absolutely prohibited from touching him, while he himself must maintain certain abstinences for the duration of the ritual.

When *boermawq* dies, his son inherits his ritual equipment and somehow becomes a ritual specialist, even if he is not personally pre-destined. Both predestination and inheritance merely qualify a man to become a ritual specialist, but he still has to learn professional knowledge (i.e. *naevqtseevq*) from the master *pima* before he is considered even a relatively independent *boermawq*.[36] Everything about nature, culture, society, and men is explained by the cosmological history contained in *naevqtseevq*. *Naevqtseevq* begins with an account of the birth of sky and earth, then details how animals come into being, how humans live and reproduce themselves generation by generation, how a village is built, and how people have organised their social lives up to the present day. It can be considered a whole picture of the Akha cosmology in which everything is in order.

In chapter 3, I recounted the Akha's best-known myth which describes how humans defeated the *naevq* and took *naevqtseevq* from them. Once in possession of *naevqtseevq*, humans began to control ritual power for them-selves. As the story continues, it is the human *boermawq* who came to be in charge of rituals and utter chants to the spirits according to *naevqtseevq*. In a ritual performance, it is the *boermawq* who recites *naevqtseevq* in the form called *naevqtor*.

In general, the master *pima* has full knowledge of *naevqtseevq*, while the knowledge of other ritual specialists varies individually. Those who have inherited the *boermawq* identity might have little knowledge of *naevqtseevq*. Regardless of their level of knowledge, all *boermawq* are qualified to be officiants, but sometimes they need the master *pima*'s assistance in reciting *naevqtseevq*.

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[36] The sons of *piza* and *pima* may also qualify to become ritual specialists. It is unclear whether female *nyirpaq* may pass on the qualification.

A *boermawq*, especially a master *pima*, is a powerful ritual specialist who is capable of diagnosing illness, curing sickness, calling souls back, officiating at funerals, and so on. Like other big men, he does not proactively enforce a ritual on others; rather, he remains at home waiting for visits.

Once asked to perform a ritual, *pima* cannot refuse the request. If a ritual specialist is really unavailable, he may ask his visitor to return in a few days or he may arrange for one of his apprentices to officiate at the ritual. Like the village father, a *pima* cannot officiate at a ritual hosted by his *paqzaq* fellows. Hence, in such situations, he always arranges for an apprentice from a different *paqzaq* to play the role of officiant, while he himself assists the apprentice by reciting *naevqtseevq*.

After a ritual is concluded, the host normally pays the *pima* a small amount of money and certain pieces of meat from every sacrificed animal. The meat is called *pixa* (*pima*'s meat). Since he receives certain assistance from the elders and *tsawrkaq*, the *pima* shares the meat and money with these helpers. If an apprentice *piza* officiates at a ritual and receives payment, he should make a report to his master and present him with about half of the payment. Apprentices and other helpers to the officiant of a ritual who belong to the same *paqzaq* as the host or that of the host's wife-takers are excluded from partaking of *pixa* or money.

Blacksmiths: Baji

Baji refers to a kind of blacksmith who is able to make small iron items. Similar to the village father and *tsawrkaq*, *baji* is an indispensable figure to each village. Like *boermawq* and *nyirpaq*, *baji* is also predestined by the Supreme God, and a *baji* candidate usually suffers health problems which can be cured only through initiation. During initiation, he gains two items of ritual equipment, a small bellows made from a pure tree (*ganjingshu*, 干净树) and a hammer. After his death, his ritual equipment is inherited by his son. Nonetheless, even after initiation, not every candidate chooses to become a *baji*, and only a few of them are apprenticed to a master blacksmith, learning how to make small hoes, spears, knives, or other iron items. In a village, there normally exists only one official *baji* who knows how to make iron items, but there are likely to be several candidates who have gone through initiation in order to regain health.

A *baji* normally makes or repairs small hoes for villagers, spears and knives for ritual specialists, and iron bracelets for the sick. The small hoe is a significant tool for agricultural production, thus villagers heavily rely on blacksmiths. Spears and knives made by *baji* are ritual necessities for *boermawq* and *nyirpaq*; these tools cannot be purchased from the market. Because rituals cannot be done properly without these tools, *boermawq* and

nyirpaq acknowledge *baji* as bigger (ma, 大) than themselves. If making spears and knives is an indirect way to display *baji*'s presence in ritual life, then making iron bracelets for the sick directly includes *baji* in the process of certain healing rituals. Overall, he is a figure of importance in both secular and ritual life.

A *baji* himself is dangerously powerful, and a light blow from him causes serious damage. One *baji* recalled a childhood memory in which a master *pima* saw his destiny; the *pima* warned him not to beat other children because it might cause life-long pain. Besides, a *baji*'s equipment threatens life. For this reason, *baji*'s iron-making equipment is his exclusive property, and others would suffer medically incurable sickness if they took it away or even touched it. The *baji* has a small hut where he makes iron items, and everything in this hut remains untouchable to others. The hut is fenced, but otherwise open. It has no walls, doors, or locks; *baji* shows little care over this place, but everyone knows that it is a dangerous place and keeps some distance from it. The fence around the hut demarcates a taboo zone within which nobody is allowed to urinate or defecate.

The Collective Support Network in Hakaq

An Akha village must be founded by at least three exogamous patrilineal *paqzaq*. This is because most rituals, such as weddings, funerals, healing rituals, cannot be properly accomplished without the participation of three *paqzaq*. In Hakaq, there are four lineages at the level of *aqguq*, namely XovCe, XovGhan, ZeqHaw, and XavHoq. Each *aqguq* has one exogamous *paqzaq*. Since these four *aqguq* nicely overlap with four *paqzaq*, and in daily life they refer to one another as *aqguq*, I will not make a distinction between *aqguq* and *paqzaq*; rather, I name them simply as lineage XovCe or lineage XovGhan. In Hakaq, lineage XovCe is the largest lineage; it is composed of eight combined *paerzaq*, eighteen households in all. Lineage XovGhan is the second largest lineage, and is composed of four combined *paerzaq*, eight households in all. Lineage ZeqHaw has two households of one extended *paerzaq*. Lineage XavHoq has only one household of a single *paerzaq*.

Table 4. The structure of patrilineal units of Hakaq

	Aqguq	*Paqzaq*	*Paerzaq*	Household
XovCe	1	1	8	18
XovGhan	1	1	4	8
ZeqHaw	1	1	1	2
XavHoq	1	1	1	1

These lineages all intermarry with one another, forming a tightly interwoven social network. For instance, the head of lineage XavHoq, Aqbawr Zu, married a woman from *paerzaq* Aqbawr De of lineage XovCe, then became *mimaq* to this *paerzaq*, meanwhile becoming *midzeiq* to the other *paerzaq* of lineage XovCe. This means that when a ritual takes place in the households of lineage XovCe, Aqbawr Zu (as the head of lineage XavHoq) has to attend in the role of *mimaq* or *midzeiq*. In exchange, the *paerzaq* Aqbawr Du becomes *jmghoe* to Aqbawr Zu, and the whole lineage XovCe become *aqghoe* to Aqbawr Zu's children.
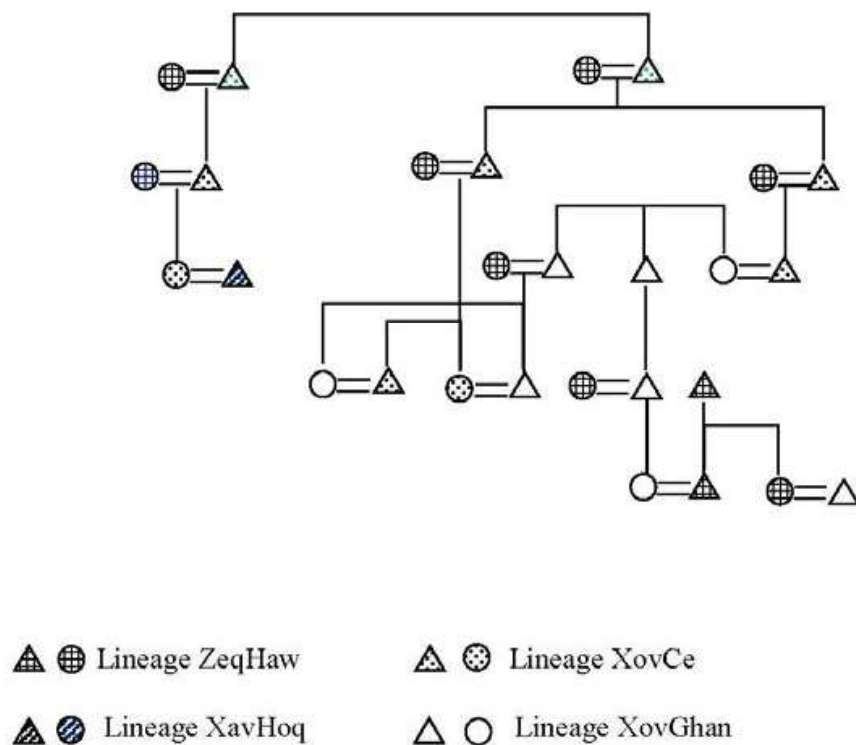
Figure 8. An example of intermarriages among four lineages.

As *jmghoe*, the *paerzaq* Aqbawr Du is also supposed to ritually support Aqbawr Zu. In lineage ZeqHaw, one man is married to a woman from *paerzaq* Aqzawr Ju of lineage XovGhan, thus building a bond of *mimaq-jmghoe* between two immediate *paerzaq*, and also becoming *midzeiq* to the other *paerzaq* of lineage XovGhan. Both lineages XovCe and XovGhan have taken many wives from lineage ZeqHaw, but from different *paqzaq* of this lineage living in other villages. Although Hakaq's ZeqHaw are not the immediate wife-givers, they are respected anyway as *aqghoe*, and are asked

to play the role of *pighoe* or *maghoe* in ritual events by both lineages. Intermarriages frequently take place among various *paerzaq* of the two major lineages (XovCe and XovGhan) entangling their affinal relationship. Figure 8 above offers a glimpse of intermarriages among the four lineages. Almost every single *paerzaq* links to another through patrilineal or marital bonds, and hence carries certain secular and ritual obligations to the other.

Through the big man system, the interdependence among lineages is strengthened. As shown in Table 5, the elders from all lineages are obliged to contribute their blessing power to every ritual event. The village father is from lineage XovCe, and is supposed to take part in ritual events held in the other three lineages. The *tsawrxawr*, who belongs to lineage XovGhan, takes his place as representative of the village in the XovCe rituals. The prime *tsawrkaq* is from lineage XovGhan, the associate *tsawrkaq* is from lineage XovCe, and several assistants of their assistants come from these lineages. Relations overlap tightly between these big men and the main ritual specialists. The master *pima* is the prime *tsawrkaq*'s blood brother, and the *piza* is their FBS.

Among the beginner ritual specialists (*boermawq*), one is from lineage XovCe. He is the son of the master *pima*'s blood sister. Another is from lineage XovGhan; he is the youngest blood brother of the master *pima*. The last is from lineage ZeqHaw; he inherited the identity from his father. These three men have all gone through initiation, and thus qualify to officiate at rituals, but they have little knowledge of *naevqtseevq*, and therefore always need the master *pima*'s assistance. Because a *pima* cannot officiate at rituals for his own *paqzaq*, villagers depend on *pima* from other lineages. The *baji* is from lineage XovCe, and is also the associate *tsawrkaq* of the village. All villagers depend on him for iron items.

Table 5. The number of big men from each lineage

	XovCe	XovGhan	ZeqHaw	XavHoq
Male elders	7	2	1	1
Female elders	6	2	1	1
Village father	1			
Tsawrxawr		1		
Primary *tsawrxawr*		1		
Associate *tsawrxawr*	1			
Master *pima*		1		
Piza		1		
Boermawq	1	1	1	
Baji	1			

Conclusion

The Akha community is drawn together via two systems – a socio-cosmic support network and a collective support network. Religious specialists are able to make contact and communication with cosmological nonhuman beings. With roles assigned partly according to marital alliance, other big men assist ritual specialists; their help and that offered by nonhuman beings help the ritual specialists successfully fulfil their tasks. The participation of all these figures, human and nonhuman, bestows a social and cosmological nature onto the supportive network thus formed.

What makes the network more special is its collective nature. The kinship system connects every lineage via patrilineal bonds and marital alliance, and the big man system makes them interdependent on one another. Unlike a network that is based on individuals, the basic unit of this support network is in the form of a collective entity (e.g. *paerzaq*) or of certain social roles. The structure of support available to any one individual does not change because of a single person's actions; it thus maintains its stability and continuity. Angelina Yuen-Tsang (1997) pointed out that social networks do not equate with social support because a network is only a resource of potential support; its members may or may not provide it. However, the Akha collective network undoubtedly overcomes this difficulty through the secular and ritual obligations that adhere to particular roles and groups. Groups are obliged to be helpful to other groups. Offering support is a group task instead of a personal duty. When support is required, any man within the group can be chosen to make contributions on behalf of the whole group. Specific individuals do not matter in this network.

Chapter 5
Children and Childcare

Only after the exploration of the Akha cosmology and its kinship system, can one grasp their children's position in this socio-cosmic world and their corresponding childcare practices relating to children's health.

According to the Akha *li*, children under the age of fifteen are half-human and half-*naevq*. This essence of children requires parents to perform special rituals and provide daily care to them, particularly ritual care. This idea is enhanced by the belief that children's survival and health are decided by the gods and goddesses of birth and children. Ritual performance is the only way to please these gods and goddesses and to maintain children's wellbeing. Despite the cosmological elements in making children, the biological link between children and their parents and lineages from both sides is also recognised. As wife-givers, maternal uncles (along with their families and lineages) possess strong blessing and healing power over their sisters' children, which they transmit through the provision of a name, clothes, bracelets, and other items. Grandparents, from both paternal and maternal sides, have general blessing power over their grandchildren, especially regarding their health. Grandchildren are put in a higher position in terms of ritual importance than grandparents or elders, because they, especially the males, carry on genealogies and give special social status to their grandparents. Hence, grandchildren have blessing power over grandparents, too. This mutual blessing relationship between children and elders is represented by numerous blessing rituals and other ceremonial and daily practices. In a word, in the framework of the kinship system, children are blessed by certain relatives, but also bless them reciprocally.

Children in Cosmology: The Creatures of Two Worlds

Akha children are creatures of two worlds, the human world and the ghost world, thus childcare practices involve interaction between these two worlds, at both everyday and ritual levels. That children possess cosmological features, and that their survival and health depend on cosmological beings, is by

no means a unique phenomenon to Akha society. At the very least, several other ethnic groups in South East Asia, such as the Lahu (Ma 2013), Yi (Mueggler 2001), Miao (Mansfield 2000), and Hmong (Liamputtong 2009) hold similar beliefs.

Plate 11. Children playing on the main road (Hakaq).

The term 'child' (*zaq*), in the Akha community, refers to people under the age of fifteen. Before this age, people are half-human and half-*naevq*; they have not yet 'become a person' (*chengren*, 成人). In practice, the age boundary can be as low as ten or thirteen, depending on situational context and whether age is rendered according to the child's birthdate or the years during which he has lived.[37] Because the word *zaq* also means small or junior, its translation as 'child', is even more flexible than suggested by the various age-based boundaries. Villagers extensively use *zaq* to refer to anyone of a younger generation, regardless of age. Thus in this chapter, the

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[37] There are two Akha ways of counting age, *hoq* and *mya*. A baby born on 1 December 2010 will be one *mya* on 1 December 2011. However, because he has experienced two years, 2010 and 2011, he is also two *hoq*. Rendering age by *hoq* is more common among villagers, and I have followed their lead unless otherwise noted.

definition of 'children' or 'grandchildren' is not limited to a fixed age group unless it is noted.

According to Aqbawr Pu, the *pima* master, Akha ascribe their relatively high child mortality to children's essence as half-human and half-*naevq*. There is no statistical data on child mortality[38], but Akha believe that gods take away children's lives at will. If a child dies before the age of thirteen, that is before having completed a full cycle of the Akha zodiac, the Akha consider it to have been destiny, as arranged by the gods. Aqbawr Pu once recalled how one of his brothers[39], his uncle's son, passed away at the age of thirteen. This boy had often sung some songs saying that he would go back when he reached the age of thirteen, and this indeed happened. Aqbawr Pu emphasised that this was his brother's destiny, controlled by the Supreme God.

Meanwhile, since children are half-human and half-*naevq*, humans have to fight with *naevq* for their children's lives. The first step is to give their children names before the *naevq* do. Hence, paternal grandparents always think of names for their future grandchildren as soon as they learn of the pregnancy. When a child is born, grandparents, mostly grandmothers, immediately give the baby a name, claiming the child as theirs. If they fail to do so, *naevq* will name the child and take it away, that is, the child will die. Here a name equals an identity: infants named by humans are accepted as human children. If Akha refuse to name an infant, they basically refuse to take it as a human. This is what happens with the abnormal births of twins and deformed infants who were traditionally killed at birth (see chapter 6). Nor are aborted foetuses or stillbirths named; and even a live birth that dies before being named is not given a name subsequently. All such infants are excluded from the village cemetery. Generally, they are buried in the wilderness. By contrast, named infants, no matter how long they have lived, all qualify for a proper funeral.

The second step concerns parents, who should never scold their children as *naevqzaq* (ghost children). In contrast, Han Chinese parents in Taiwan often call their children the similar, but not fully equivalent, 'little ghosts' (*xiaogui*, 小鬼) (Stafford 1995: 54). Aqbawr Pu repeatedly high-lighted this taboo,

> We must not say that any child under fifteen is like a *naevq*. It is forbidden to say anything related to *naevq*. We definitely cannot say that. Unreasonable people might say it does not matter. However, parents should never scold their own children saying, 'Are you a

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[38] That is, the data that do exist cannot be correlated with ethnic identity.

[39] According to the Akha kinship system, FBS is thought of as a brother. There is no other word for 'cousin' (see chapter 3).

naevq child? Are you as foxy as *naevq*?' Do not do it! We Akha
parents absolutely do not scold our children like this!

As Aqbawr Pu explained, such scoldings will make *naevq* think that parents
do not want their children, and they will take the children away. Adults are
not endangered by comparison with *naevq* in the same way. By contrast,
Akha husbands normally scold their wives using the terms *naevq zamiza*
(*naevq* woman) or *yasa tsawrhaq* (wild [wo]man), because in a myth Akha's
first wife came from the wild and was considered *naevq*. Aqbawr Pu was
pretty sure about this, 'Only Akha scold their wives in this way, other ethnic
groups do not. Wherever Akha come from, they all scold wives like this! I
know it!'

But children are vulnerable in ways that adults are not. Similarly, one
should never scold children under age of thirteen with bad words, such as
'dumb', 'stupid', or 'insane', lest they develop accordingly. A child who is
often told she is stupid will become a stupid person. Here too, it is the *naevq*
at fault: 'words are followed by *naevq*' (*do maenmr naevq cawr*), to quote an
Akha saying; they are able to hear when humans scold a child. *The naevq*
take the scolds seriously and make things happen exactly the way the human
says. Thus, a simple scolding becomes a curse, which may well come true.

Though all agree that it is better not to scold children, it is sometimes
necessary. Children deserve a lesson when they behave improperly,
upsetting adults, and adults need to give vent to their anger. So the Akha
scold their children with a very limited vocabulary. Akha people, no matter
whether old or young, parents or not, mostly scold children with the one
word, '*zaq*!' If they are annoyed, upset, or disgusted by a child or an adult
from a younger generation, they say, '*ah zaq ah*' (child); or if they are
strongly annoyed, '*ahmamamama zaq ah*' (you child), or '*tsawrhaq zaq ah*'
(human child). Other remonstrations for small children are *ma lya* (not well-
behaved) or, in Chinese, *ma tinghua* (不听话, not listening to words, dis-
obedient). These words, first have nothing to do with *naevq* or other non-
human beings, and second, do not involve any aspect of human nature;
rather, the focus stays at the level of practice, which implies that a child is a
good human child, except when he or she has done something wrong.

The Akha aversion to scolding runs deep. As I observed, villagers
react strongly to scolding, even if they are not the targets. Once, I was in a
house where a man in his thirties was watching a Chinese movie. As the
story developed around a mother and her grown-up son, the mother scolded
her son, calling him 'not promising' (*meichuxi*, 没出息). The Akha viewer
was immediately outraged: he spat on the ground (a sign of disgust) and
angrily turned to me, 'How could a mother scold her son like this? It is her
son! Only Han people have such a malicious mouth!' I was a bit offended by

such generalised criticism, but also shocked by the strength of his reaction. After all, he was merely watching a TV soap opera and he was not the target of the scolding.

The Gods and Goddesses of Birth and Children

In the Akha cosmological system, there are two pairs of deities who oversee pregnancy, birth, and children, Zaqghen Zaqsan and Ghesanq Gheje. These two gods and two goddesses take care of children from their conception until the age of fifteen. Foetuses and infants who die nameless (e.g. abortions, stillbirths, and *tsawrpaeq*) are under the control of Ghenhoq. In this section, I focus mainly on the four deities who take care of children.

Zaqghen Zaqsan, the goddesses of pregnancy and children, make pregnancy happen by putting children into women's bellies. The Akha know that children are a result of copulation, and that infertility can arise from medical conditions in either a male or female. Nevertheless, people believe that a couple will not have children if Zaqghen Zaqsan do not give them. Consequently, couples suffering from sterility often ask for ritual assistance.

When I was doing fieldwork, a couple that had been married for ten years was in the process of discovering the cause for their childlessness. They had seen biomedical doctors and had been told that the wife had endometrial hyperplasia. Since it was known that some women with endometrial hyperplasia still have children, one of my informants suspected that the husband might also have some physical problems. I do not know whether the couple eventually pursued any further biomedical treatment, but what they did do after receiving the doctor's diagnosis was to turn to a *nyirpaq*. The *nyirpaq* made a ritual diagnosis by appealing to the goddesses Zaqghen Zaqsan and sacrificed animals to them as required. When I left the field, the couple was still waiting for the goddess to give them a child.

When a woman gives birth, Zaqghen Zaqsan stay around and take care of the new mother and baby. Because of their presence, the woman's mother and other members of her natal family are forbidden to come and stay with her. If they do, the woman will be unable to deliver the child smoothly, or she will suffer more pain and the baby will cry more. This rule is strictly observed, even as women are now required to give birth in hospitals. For example, in one case a labouring woman was told by the doctor that there was a bone in her cervix, and her amniotic fluid was so high that the baby might choke. Thus the doctor proposed a Caesarean section. During this process, the woman's husband's family was with her, waiting outside the delivery room, while her natal family members did not show up at all. The woman's own mother was actually very worried about, but was afraid that if she visited her presence would cause more suffering to her daughter. Thus

she continued to observe the rule and only visited her daughter on the day after the birth.

Zaqghen Zaqsan continue to protect children after birth. Aqbawr Pu claimed that because of their protection, children will not be injured even if they fall off of a balcony, which is normally two metres off the ground. 'Nothing will happen!' he said. 'Try it if you do not believe it! Nothing will happen if children fall off! [But] just imagine what will happen to our old men if they fall off of the balcony? [The children are not hurt] because Zaqghen Zaqsan are protecting them!' Indeed, while I was in the field a one-year-old did fall to the ground from an unfenced balcony and received only a bump on the head. He had been unattended because his grandfather was busy cooking inside the house. In this case, the grandfather built a bamboo fence around the balcony to guard the little boy from future falls. But it most cases, adults paid little attention to toddlers playing on unfenced balconies, even if they were standing right at the edge. Many times, I became very anxious in seeing small kids playing or peeing at the edge of a fully open balcony. I was always worried by what I saw as dangerous situations, but Akha adults expressed no concern. They just replied casually when I reported the event to them, 'Oh, let it be'.

Due to the protection and care from the goddesses, Akha parents are forbidden to call their children's real names in the first year, to teach them to walk, or to sing them traditional lullabies. These tasks are generally taken up by grandparents. The deities are upset when the parents undertake such tasks, but they do not mind if grandparents train infants to walk or put them to sleep. Somehow, I was not satisfied with the explanation of why parents should not do these things, but the only answer I received was that the goddesses would be upset. I kept asking why they would be unhappy and what would happen, but villagers just burst into laughter and replied, 'Upset is upset'. Though they failed to give me a 'sensible' answer, in practice they did strictly follow these rules – even young parents who had been educated in school, travelled to big cities, and worked there for years.

Ghesanq Gheje, the gods of children and youth, are a pair of gods in charge of children's wellbeing. They look after newborns to fifteen-year-olds, but especially children under the age of ten. Children's health depends on the favour of these gods. Aqbawr Pu firmly stated, 'Nothing will happen to children unless Ghesanq Gheje do harm to them!' I was confused: 'They are the gods of children, so why would they harm children?' He insisted, 'It is impossible for them not to harm children!' Being aware that I was unlikely to get a direct answer to the question 'why?', as it had occurred many times before, I had to switch the focus to 'How do they harm children?' Using this question, I collected massive amounts of data.

Ghesanq Gheje can claim children's lives if they think parents are raising them in an improper way. More often, Ghesanq Gheje cause various sicknesses in children. Some, like *ghedm*, may be fatal. This is a serious disease that makes children moan, and when it becomes fatal, it also involves nosebleeds. Other illnesses manifest with various levels of severity. *Ghemula* refers to pains in the body shared by both children and mothers. *Ghewawdzaw* involves needle-like pain. *Gheke* is a trachea problem; *ghepije* refers to diarrhoea and breathing troubles. *Ghelaba* results when the souls of a woman are scared away during her pregnancy or labour.

Generally, if parents notice their children often feeling uncomfortable, having no appetite, and becoming thinner and weaker, they turn to ritual experts for a diagnosis. During fieldwork, I recorded six cases of sickness attributed to Ghesanq Gheje. Three of the afflicted children were girls and three were boys. Organised according to age, two were one-year-old infants, one was a two-year-old toddler, two were three-year-old toddlers, and one was a fifteen-year-old teenager. Their problems varied: the teenage girl had a belly pain which could not be identified in hospital, while the smaller children mainly suffered from long-lasting colds and diarrhoea. However, these diverse symptoms were discovered to originate in the imprisonment of their souls by Ghesanq Gheje, or by the covering of their eyes or blocking of their throats – all by Ghesanq Gheje.

Although they cause sickness, Ghesanq Gheje are healers. They withdraw harm from children when they are satisfied with the animal sacrifices made to them. On this point, Aqbawr Pu gave me a very clear answer, 'Only Ghesanq Gheje can heal sick children, even if they have problems with the inner organs, like heart, liver or lung. If they do not care about you, you will not be cured'. I curiously asked, 'How about going to a hospital to buy some Western medicine? Does it help?' His answer did not change:

> Western medicine is useless except for diminishing inflammation. For children, injections and medicine do not help if Ghesanq Gheje do not take care of them. For example, sometimes a child has an incomplete heart, which is determined by Ghesanq Gheje. Preterm infants, those who are born at the seventh or eighth month, always have this problem, an incomplete heart. But you have to protect them well, hold proper rituals for them, and their hearts will gradually grow completely. If you properly perform rituals, which work on Ghesanq Gheje, their hearts will be fine. The rituals are for Ghesanq Gheje, called *ghesanghen*. We sacrifice pigs and chickens to them. If we do not do this, children will hardly ever survive.

He kept citing two examples to me: 'Aqzawr Be's daughter had a daughter who was born at the seventh month. The little girl had a poor trachea and a

weak heart. As a *pima*, I could tell that in that situation, the family should make a sacrifice to Ghesanq Gheje, then the girl's trachea and heart would develop well'. Aqzawr Be told me that the girl had died at around eight months but he did not mention if they had held a ritual for her. Yet other cases testified to the efficacy of the ritual. Aqbawr Pu continued:

> Aqzawr Ju's sister was also born at the seventh month. The elders all said that she was too tiny to survive. Thirteen days after her birth, her family asked a *nyirpaq*, also a relative, for a diagnosis, and it turned out to be caused by Ghesanq Gheje. At that time, we were in the cooperatives, and all ritual performances were forbidden. However, Aqbawr Ge, a *pima* master, was working at the village office. He was also a barefoot doctor. He secretly performed the ritual for her. It was done secretly, so that the girl survived and grew up. Now she is married to a man in Jinggu.

The direct link between children's health and Ghesanq Gheje was confirmed by the six recorded cases during my fieldwork, among which none was challenged by villagers in terms of causation of sickness or effect of healing ritual. Despite the diverse personal backgrounds of the six children's families, most of them showed full or at least partial trust in the traditions. In the following, I give a relatively brief analysis from case to case, in order to show that elements such as political position, education, and occupation hardly challenge the Akha tradition.

The first case concerns the grandson of a local cadre, AqZawr Wu. AqZawr Wu is the political head of the village. AqZawr Wu has been the leader of the production team – the natural village – for decades. He did not have a school education, but he and his father were the only two Communist Party members in the village. As a cadre, he always described the Akha tradition as superstition or superstitious activities to me. However, he had not spoken any ill of these so-called superstitions, and in practice, he too followed the Akha *li*. For instance, once one of his dogs mated with one of his pigs, which is traditionally considered as *paeq* ('bad, not good'), and both animals were required to be destroyed. He, following the rule, asked villagers to slaughter the dog and the pig right away. On another occasion, another one of his dogs peed on his son's feet, which is also *paeq*, and brings bad luck to the victim. He immediately visited a *pima* and asked for a purifying ritual in which the dog was slaughtered. Concerning his beloved grandson's health, he held the same loyalty and trust in Akha tradition. When the three-year-old boy seemed sicker and sicker, AqZawr Wu asked a *pima* for a ritual healing.

Plate 12. A *pima* is performing a healing ritual for a two-year old boy (Hakaq).

The second example concerns Aqzawr Ka, a retired primary-school teacher, who hosted a healing ritual for his two-year-old grandson. Aqzawr Ka, in his early sixties, was one of the richest men in the village because he had regular salary as a school teacher and enjoyed a pension after retirement. Compared to his co-villagers, he often dressed in a fashionable way, with leather shoes and suits, and sometimes wore sunglasses when going out. In many ways, he did not know, disliked, or simply avoided following tradition. He disliked the traditional house design, which divides couples into separate rooms, and said that he had been 'forced' to build such a house. As an old man, he attended most ritual events, but still, he seemed to lack knowledge of religious practice. For instance, I always presented a bottle of wine to elders I interviewed; most of them sprinkled several drops of wine on the fireplace and told the household god and ancestors that I had kindly brought wine to them, and asked them to bless me back. I was told that it is essential for a host to do so when guests present wine. However, when I gave wine to Aqzawr Ka, he took it and simply said, 'Thank you'. Concerning the health of family members, he insisted that children should be sent to hospital and take biomedicine if they suffered from coughs, belly pain, and other minor complaints. He himself sought hospital treatments. Yet despite his many

doubts concerning the traditions, he held some partial belief in the efficacy of ritual diagnosis and healings. He believed strongly, for example, that a small rite performed on the road was in order if a child suddenly cried and sweated a lot. He had also been amazed to witness how a *pima*'s small rite healed his grandson's scabies. Regarding the sacrificing ritual to Ghesanq Gheje, he confirmed that this ritual too had been effective and healed his grandson.

Compared with the two cases discussed above, the household heads from the other four families were all ordinary peasants. They followed the Akha *li* in every respect. Yet even these families might have been expected to prefer a more 'modern' form of medical treatment. In the three remaining cases of young children who had been taken ill, the fathers were quite young, still in their twenties, and had all been formally educated for some ten years each. All three men enjoyed modern products, such as motorbikes, smart-phones, popular songs, refrigerators, and washing machines, in other facets of their life. Two shared working experience as construction workers in big cities (Guangdong and Beijing), and had very vague knowledge of Ghesanq Gheje or other gods. The third was very different: a curious learner of the Akha tradition, and probably the most knowledgeable young man I met in the region. Though each of these men might have turned away from Akha tradition, they had hardly questioned the healing rituals for their children, let alone challenged them. As one man concluded, 'I do what others do!'

The only possible sign of disbelief in the healing rituals was a manifest disinterest from one of the afflicted. The teenage girl re-told me her story on the day of the ritual: she had a belly pain and went to hospital several times but doctors failed to find the cause. Then her family asked Aqbawr Pu for his diagnosis; he said something which the girl did not understand. At last, the healing ritual to Ghesanq Gheje was to be performed for her. It was a school day, so she and her twelve-year-old brother had asked for the day off. Her brother looked very happy to participate in the event, and actively helped adults preparing food. By contrast, the girl showed indifference to everything, merely following every step of the ritual. After it was done, she immediately took off her Akha costume. When I asked her how she felt, she said 'nothing'. Apparently, she had little interest in the event, but still, she behaved cooperatively.

Plate 13. A boy is tying a thread around his maternal grandfather's right wrist for the latter's health (Hmkaq).

Children in the Kinship System: The Blessed and the Blessing of Offspring

Despite the idea that the goddesses of birth give a couple children, villagers hold sufficient physiological knowledge of reproduction, which is that a man has sexual intercourse with a woman so that a baby can be produced. Hence, after a child is born in wedlock and is accepted as a human child, he or she is placed within the kinship network. In this section, I explore the status of children in the kinship framework, in which they are blessed by both paternal and maternal relatives, but also bless them in return. This duality increases the attendance of children at ritual events relating to people's health, and deepens the religious colouring of childcare practices in the Akha community.

A Newborn's First Social Visits

In mid-December 2012, Aqliq Du's wife Aqtsuq Du gave birth to a baby girl at home.[40] On the first day after the newborn's navel scar had formed (i.e. around the age of ten days), Aqtsuq Du (M) took the child to visit their *aqghoe* (maternal uncle) in the same village and to ask for blessing. Aqliq Du (F) belonged to XovCe lineage; their *aqghoe*, called Aqzawr Zu (FMBS), belonged to XovGhan lineage. Aqzawr Zu's wife Aqmee Zu (FMBSW) slaughtered a chicken for the sake of the newborn girl and then tied thread around the girl's wrist and uttered a benediction. When Aqtsuq Du and her baby were ready to leave after the ritual feast, Aqmee Zu (FMBSW) packed up for them a raw chicken leg, a cooked chicken wing, and a lump of salt. Aqtsuq Du tied the baby onto her back with a large piece of cloth. Then Aqmee Zu (FMBSW) fed the baby girl with two grains of rice and a little bit of salt; put a boiled egg on her palm (then immediately transferred it into Aqtsuq Du's palm since the baby was unable to hold it); and briefly covered the baby from behind with her own Akha jacket (i.e. she ritually dressed the baby in the jacket). As she was performing these rites, Aqmee Zu uttered, 'Little girl, today you come to my home, do not cry. May you grow up each day as much as an egg! May you grow up each day as big as a jacket!' (*Tinan yawu heeq, tinan pehm gheheeq-aer*!). Then Aqtsuq Du carried her baby home.

On the following day, Aqliq Du's father Aqbawr Ku (FF), holding the newborn girl tightly in his arms, headed to the home of Aqbawr Ru (FFFB), the youngest uncle of Aqbawr Ku (FF) and the family standing in the highest rank of XovCe lineage. As he entered the house, Aqbawr Ku (FF) spoke to his granddaughter, 'Here we have arrived at the home of great-grandfather!' Aqbawr Ru's daughter-in-law Aqtsuq Fei (FFFBSW) took the baby in her arms; Aqbawr Ku (FF) sat down and had a short chat with Aqbawr Ru (FFFB). Soon, Aqbawr Ku (FF) finished the conversation and stood up, ready to leave. With the help of Aqtsuq Fei (FFFBSW), he managed to carry the baby on his back. Then, Aqtsuq Fei (FFFBSW) performed the same rite that Aqmee Zu (FMBSW) had conducted the previous day. She fed the baby with rice and salt, gave her a boiled egg, and put a jacket over her while uttering the same benediction. After the rite was done, Aqbawr Ku (FF) went back home; he told me that the egg would be shared by the baby and her mother.

These two ritual events were indispensable to Akha newborns. Aqbawr Pu, one of the most knowledgeable men on Akha tradition, tried ex-

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[40] The mother did not reach hospital, as according to law, before the baby arrived. The mother and baby then had to go to hospital after the birth in order to receive the birth certificate.

plaining it to me, 'When I visit *aqghoe*, it is only one family. I should also visit my patrilineal grandfather's family, to make it a pair'. Though he failed to explain clearly why newborns have to visit these two particular families, he insisted that this is for the benefit of infants. I conjecture that the visits to both sides are necessary because a child is produced by these two lineages: the mother is from the lineage of her maternal uncle, and the father is from the lineage of the patrilineal great-grandfather. Visiting these two families is meant to officially build the social connection between the newborn and two families, or even two lineages, and to gain blessing power from both sides.

Children's Prosperity Lies with the Maternal Uncle[41]

The fact that the first visit is paid to the maternal uncle nicely corresponds to an Akha proverb: *Zaqniq hheev, aqghoe yoe me. Deya mee, wuju lao haevq.* That is, 'Children's wellbeing lies with the maternal uncle. The rice field's productivity depends on the water source'. The proverb can be explained indirectly with reference to the relative big-ness of the maternal uncle. As villagers, old or young, male or female, often mentioned, the maternal uncle is 'bigger'. That is, wife-givers are bigger than wife-takers because the wife-takers depend on the wife they receive for reproduction. The maternal uncle's lineage offers a seed – a woman – to a man so that he is able to produce children. Woman is taken as the seed of the human species because man cannot reproduce without her. To make a child, woman contributes flesh while man contributes blood (this is also why members of a patrilineal lineage share the same type of blood). An old man of XovCe lineage with a wife from XovGhan lineage had thirteen children in total; his wife-givers of XovGhan lineage often proudly claimed, 'That is [from] our seed!' As they saw it, the family had flourished because the seed they had given was good. As the seed-giver, the maternal uncle thus possesses the most powerful blessing to his sister's children, especially their survival and health. There are mainly two ways – naming and providing a sleeveless garment (*paehanladadm*) – for wife-givers to bless the children of their daughters or sisters.

Naming as blessing is to give a child a name with the first syllable Ghoe. As mentioned above, a child's name is usually given by its paternal grandparents. So too, the normal way to form a child's name is to take the last syllable of the father's name as the child's first name syllable (see chapter 3). However, sometimes the child's name incorporates 'maternal uncle' (*ghoe*) instead as a form of blessing. The name can be given as a

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[41] In this section, 'maternal uncle' refers to the individual, and by extension, to the family and lineage of the individual maternal uncle.

proactive blessing in the initial naming ritual. For example, this was the case for a woman in her late fifties whom I knew as Aqmee Ke. Her true name, the one used for ritual occasions, was GhoeKe. She had received the Ghoe name because her parents worried about her survival after the deaths of many of their older children; in total, the couple had given birth to twelve children, but only four survived.

Or, the name Ghoe may be given later if a child's name is changed. The name of a child can be changed up to three times before he or she reaches the age of thirteen. New names are chosen when infants cry a lot (because they do not like their names). For example, one of Aqbawr Pu's grandsons had been crying on and on when he was several months old. Aqbawr Pu discerned that the baby did not like his name; after he changed it [not to Ghoe, but to another personal name] the baby stopped crying. Or, the name may be changed if a baby suffers poor health. Then the child is re-named with Ghoe, and the maternal uncle's blessing is invoked to make the child healthier and stronger.

The maternal uncle's blessing is also transmitted through the giving of a sleeveless garment. Such a garment, provided by the family of the maternal uncle, is taken to be efficacious in healing the sick and bringing good fortune to recipients. Aqbawr Pu once determinedly told me, 'Small children who are sick will surely recover as soon as they wear a sleeveless garment from the family of their maternal uncle! This is for sure!' There are two possible colours for these sleeveless garments: white and red. The white one is given together with an iron bracelet; the red with a silver bracelet. When children (and sometimes adults) consult *pima* or *nyirpaq* for a diagnosis of health problems which cannot be explained by medical doctors, they may be advised to ask for a white or red garment from their maternal uncle as treatment. Ritual experts normally suggest a white garment the first time; if the problem is not resolved, they will suggest a red garment the second time. Aqbawr Su, a knowledgeable old man in his sixties, estimated that some people are in need of the ritual twice in their lives, but very few ask for it three times. In any case, the ritual cannot be performed more than three times during a person's life.

The wearing of garments is called *paehanladadm* (Ch. *tao yifu chuan*, 讨衣服穿). It is a long-standing traditional healing ritual in the Akha community. An old man in his sixties still remembered asking for a white garment from his maternal uncle's family when he was a child. Nowadays, this treatment is maintained and used widely. During my fieldwork, ten cases were reported to me as 'recent', having occurred within the preceding two years. Of these, eight involved small children under five, and two involved adults. A number of cases which had happened long ago were also reported,

of which most were related to children. I myself witnessed one case of ritual diagnosis and two cases of wearing garments, all of small children.[42] I will explore the concrete steps of the healing ritual of wearing a garment in chapter 8.

The popularity of wearing garments is nicely displayed in the family stories of Aqbawr Gu and Aqpiq Nu. Aqbawr Gu had three sons all in their twenties; Aqpiq Nu had a daughter and a son. The eldest son of Aqbawr Gu married the daughter of Aqpiq Nu. The two elders, Aqbawr Gu and Aqpiq Nu claimed that they had never asked for a garment from maternal uncles because of good health, but their children all asked for garments when they were small. Particularly, Aqbawr Gu's eldest son asked for garments twice: the first one was white, the second one was red; and so did the two children of Aqpiq Nu. The third generation, the daughter of Aqbawr Gu's eldest son and Aqpiq Nu's daughter, a five-year-old girl, also asked for garments twice. In this case, Aqpiq Nu was the wife-giver, thus she gave her granddaughter a white garment with iron bracelet and a red one with a silver object. According to them, the girl fell sick, and Aqpiq Nu, as a ritual expert *nyirpaq*, saw that the girl wanted a white garment from the maternal family, thus she hosted the ritual for her. However, the girl did not recover as expected. Aqpiq Nu had to diagnose her again, and found out that the girl was unsatisfied with the iron bracelet; she wanted a silver object. Hence, Aqpiq Nu hosted a second ritual for her, giving her a red garment and a silver coin. Afterwards, the girl recovered. Aqbawr Gu's family members all confirmed that the girl not only recovered from the previous sickness, but also became physically too strong to catch even a cold after that.

The popularity of wearing garments as healing also transcends the boundaries of religion and ethnicity. For example, there was a reported case in which the son of an Akha man married to a Christian Akha woman asking for a white garment from his maternal uncle. The boy's mother was a Myanmar Akha woman who, along with her patrilineal family members, had converted to Christianity. Because the family had learned Christianity from members of another ethnic group, the Lahu, Hakaq villagers jokingly called the woman with the nickname 'Moseq', which means 'Lahu'. It was considered that she and her patrilineal members had carried the Lahu *li*. Nevertheless, according to Aqbawr Pu, when the woman's son was in poor health and asked for a white garment from his maternal uncle (who had also

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[42] The case of ritual diagnosis was made for an infant girl suffering from diarrhoea; her family asked Aqbawr Pu to diagnose her. I observed how he touched her hand and addressed the cosmological beings. After some time passed, Aqbawr Pu suggested the parents ask for a white garment for the infant from her maternal uncle to cure the sickness. I do not know if the request was made or honoured.

converted to Christianity and the Lahu *li*), the uncle's family hosted the required healing ritual, put a white garment on the boy, and gave him an iron bracelet, all in accordance with the Akha *li*.

Plate 14. A white sleeveless garment is made for curing children's illness (Myanmar).

In another case, a two-year-old boy, living with his parents in neighbouring Lancang County was a thin, sickly child. His father was an Akha man from Hakaq, and his mother was a Han from Lancang. The boy's parents took him to the hospital, but doctors found nothing wrong with him. Hence, his patrilineal grandmother brought him back to the Akha village and asked Aqbawr Pu for a diagnosis. Aqbawr Pu advised the family to ask for a white garment from his maternal uncle. His maternal uncle was Han Chinese and lacked knowledge of the Akha tradition. Nevertheless, under the request and supervision of the boy's patrilineal grandparents, the maternal uncle cooperatively managed to prepare a white garment and an iron bracelet according to the Akha *li*, and successfully performed the required ritual for him. Afterwards, the boy became fit and strong.

Due to their strong blessing and healing power over children, maternal uncles, their families and lineages, become one of the most important support providers to children in terms of survival and physical health.

Children as Blessing Source

On many occasions, and especially those related to ritual when several big men gather together to discuss traditions and ritual details, one topic was frequently discussed: who was bigger? The 'bigger' person stands in a higher position according to his ritual importance. It is important to underscore that bigness is about status rather than power. Normally the *pima* is considered bigger than *nyirpaq* because he deals with big problems and officiates at funerals. The blacksmith is bigger than both *pima* and *nyirpaq* because he makes their ritual equipment, iron knife and spear, without which the ritual experts cannot fulfil their jobs. Elders in general are bigger than all of them, since it is elders who raise them up and pass traditional knowledge down. People kept telling me that elders are the biggest of all because everyone else depends on them (see chapter 4). And yet, grandchildren are widely taken as bigger than their grandparents or great-grandparents. So that eventually, it seems that children might even stand at the top of the ritual hierarchy. They do not, because the bigness of children is circumscribed within the kinship system and only ever refers to the relationship of grandchildren to grandparents. Still, the chain of relations above suggests that in many cases the 'smaller' becomes 'bigger'.

In other words, the hierarchical feature of these relationships is not fixed. As explored throughout this book, most relationships are interdependent and the relative importance of one person to another, role to another, or group to another, shifts along with ritual events for different purposes. This is particularly evident in the relation between children and elders. Or rather, in that between grandchildren and grandparents. The reciprocal relationship between them is like two sides of a coin: sometimes the side of higher status of grandchildren is highlighted, while sometimes the other side, of higher status of grandparents, is highlighted. Generally as elders, (great-)grandparents own blessing power over younger generations (as explored in chapter 4), thus they surely have power to bless their own grandchildren. Therefore, in this section, my focus is mainly on the special status of grandchildren.

I was quite surprised to be told by several elders that grandchildren are bigger than grandparents, and wondered why this was. The immediate answer came in the form of an example: grandchildren can hit grandparents, but grandparents cannot hit back. As a granddaughter who had been hit by my grandfather when I was a child, this answer was not at all self-evident.

So I asked, 'Why not?' A grandfather of a one-year-old boy answered, 'They are too small to be hit. They can do nothing but cry if they are hit. Poor things, aren't they?' This was true, but I was unsatisfied with the answer because it hardly included older or grown-up grandchildren. The *pima* Aqbawr Bu gave me a brief answer that began to explain 'bigness' as a matter of ritual status, 'Grandchildren may hit grandpa, but grandpa cannot hit them back. If he hits back, the grandchildren will fall sick. Children are like our president, [i.e.] they are bigger than us!'

Aqbawr Cu, one of the most knowledgeable elders as well as a grandfather, introduced me to the rules of hitting children:

> A grandfather must not hit his grandchildren, definitely not. It is fine to scold them, no matter whether they listen or not, but one dare not hit them. However, people like Aqbawr Tu, who has a hot temper, do not care about this rule. He hits his grandchildren when they disobey him. As for grandmothers, it is okay to slightly hit grandchildren, but not too much. A father had better not hit his children: Abuzaq (his three-year-old granddaughter) is never hit by her father. Sometimes it is fine to hit children gently, but not too heavily. There is no rule for mothers. Abuzaq is always being hit by her mother.

According to my observation of Aqbawr Cu's family, his granddaughter was very often hit by her grandmother and mother, but never by Aqbawr Cu himself or by her father (who was often absent). Sometimes Aqbawr Cu threatened to hit her when she misbehaved, but he had never put it into practice. In contrast, the granddaughter often hit at her grandmother and mother – the two main childcare givers in this family – when her needs were not met. Because the grandfather did not spend much time with his granddaughter, I had not observed any situation when the granddaughter hit him.

After Aqbawr Cu's explanation, I wanted to talk with Aqbawr Tu. But, because of his frequent absence from the village, I did not find a chance to ask him whether it was true that he ignored this rule. His two grandchildren boarded at school, thus I rarely saw them being hit by their grandfather, let alone what happened to them afterwards.

Though I did not observe any immediate evidence that grandfathers hitting grandchildren can cause them sickness, I was told of some cases that seemed to provide evidence. For instance, a young father in his late thirties told me that once he hit his teenage daughter lightly with the back of his hand when he was upset; his daughter fell down and lost consciousness right away. He panicked and ran to his father for help. When he learned what he had done, his father made some herbal medicine for the girl, and told the father that one must not hit children with the back of the hand. Though he hardly understood why, the young father bore the rule in mind thereafter.

Amazed by this story, I mentioned it to different elders. Aqbawr Pu, the master *pima*, explained why such a light touch had the result of a coma. Sometimes, he said, before being placed in the coffin, a corpse might suddenly sit up on its own; the only resolution here is to knock it with the back of the hand, then the corpse will lie down. Therefore, people must not hit others with the back of the hand, because it is a move only to be used in that situation.

Hitting and illness were also linked to blacksmiths. It is said that the blacksmith is too powerful to hit others. Even if a blacksmith hits a person gently, the victim will be terribly injured. Aqbawr Wu, a blacksmith in his fifties, mentioned that when he was young, a master *pima* read his destiny and warned him not to hit others. Aqliq Zi, a young man in his early thirties, told me that he also had the destiny of a blacksmith; people he had beaten when he was a child had really serious problems. When he was a naughty boy, he used to beat his sisters on the head or back, and his sisters suffered headaches or backaches to the present.

In discussions concerning the rule of not hitting children, the physical vulnerability of children is acknowledged ('they are too small'). However, this cannot explain why grandchildren are only spared from grandfather's hitting but not that of others. When taken together with other examples, these cases appear to operate with a similar logic: it is improper hitting, even the slightest, that causes big health problems. Hitting is improper if it occurs between improper subjects (such as grandfather to grandchildren or blacksmith to others), or through improper ways of hitting people (e.g. with the back of the hand). It is improper for a grandfather to hit a grandchild because the latter is put in a higher ritual status along the patriline than the former; it is improper for blacksmith to hit others because his magic power so greatly threatens ordinary people's health that he should exercise self-restraint; and it is improper to hit people with the back of the hand because this is a special move only for the dead.

Food privilege in family ritual events is another sign that grandchilddren are bigger than grandfathers. I spent the Akha New Year of 2013 at the home of Aqbawr Cu, helping his wife Aqpiq Cu and daughter-in-law Aqmee Mi make rice cake. While making the rice cake, Aqpiq Cu gave a piece to the granddaughter. Aqmee Mi laughed instantly and turned to me, 'She is the biggest of all! Elders should eat rice cake first. Since she is the biggest, she eats it before the elders'. I thought the granddaughter was the only one eating rice cake before the elders, thus felt disappointed by the fact that I was unable to enjoy the hot rice cake. To my surprise, after the granddaughter ate up the small piece of cake, Aqpiq Cu also passed me a piece. Happily taking it, I still did not understand, 'Should not elders eat the cake before me?'

Aqmee Mi explained, 'Abuzaq already had it, you can freely have it now'. Afterwards, Aqpiq Cu told me that at the time when they still kept the ancestors' niche[43], they had offered four pieces of rice cake first to the ancestors, then the head of household – normally the grandfather – would eat rice cake before everybody else. The order of eating rice cake was: grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, and then children from old to young. Since the ancestors' niche had disappeared, she said, the granddaughter took the privilege of eating rice cake first at festivals. I was not quite convinced by this explanation. More clearly, the significance of the story lay in the fact that the granddaughter was considered the biggest of the family and privileged to eat ritual food before others.

Finally, I gained a more convincing answer to this question while chatting with *nyirpaq* Aqpiq Nu, Aqbawr Gu, and his wife Aqpiq Gu. Aqpiq Nu told me that her grandson – the son of her daughter – was very naughty even when he was still in his mother's belly. When her daughter was pregnant, Aqpiq Nu felt very uncomfortable. She did not feel like working or eating, but she was not falling sick. Elders found that her problem was actually caused by her daughter's unborn baby, a condition which they called *ghaepaghaema manr* (lit. grandson and granddaughter causing discomfort). Hence, her son-in-law, together with his granddaughter and Aqbawr Gu – a representative of the elders – visited Aqpiq Nu and performed a ritual for her by offering a chicken and tying a thread around her wrist. She recovered immediately.

I could not follow the story, so asked them, 'What does *ghaepaghaema manr* mean?' Aqbawr Gu briefly answered, 'Causing discomfort!' His wife chipped in, 'Grandchildren are the biggest, aren't they?' Then, Aqbawr Gu explained to me patiently,

> The thing is like this. In our family, I am the first generation, my son is the second generation, my grandson is the third generation, and then the generations go on and on. This is *ghaepaghaema manr*. Grandparents become physically uncomfortable as one more generation comes, don't they? Grandparents feel uncomfortable. They recover as soon as they are tied with threads. Why? Because we have *tseevq* (genealogy), my father is the first *tseevq* (generation), I am the second *tseevq*, my son is the third *tseevq*, my grandson is the fourth *tseevq*.

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[43] Traditionally, every Akha household has a niche for ancestors. During festivals and ritual events, the head of the household should make offerings to the ancestors. Households in Hakaq village had kept the niche until they moved to the village's new site. The elders of the village made the decision to give it up, and the villagers followed this decision. In neighbouring villages, some maintain the niche while others have abandoned it.

Months later, I heard a similar answer from Pima Aqbawr Pu. 'Children are bigger than the elders because they are offspring. They are your shadow!' Combining all these bits of information, it is clear that grandchildren are put in a higher social status because they are the ones who carry on their genealogy. They stand for the continuity of families. Yet, the presence of grandchildren also means that grandparents are ageing, dwindling in strength and energy. Grandchildren cause grandparents physical discomfort because they remind the latter about their [impending] decrepitude. The ritual of grandchildren tying threads around grandparents' wrists is actually to pass strength and energy from the younger generation to the older one, rejuvenating them. Their youth becomes a source of blessing. It is noteworthy that although the Akha have a patrilineal society, here 'grandparents' refers to both maternal and paternal sides without difference; in other words, grandchildren's power for causing discomfort or healing reaches to both sides. As Aqpiq Nu stated, this time it was she (the maternal grandmother) rather than Aqpiq Gu (the paternal grandmother) who suffered *ghaepaghaema manr*, but next time it might be Aqpiq Gu.

Grandchildren's power to cause discomfort is exclusively limited to their grandparents from both sides, but their blessing power goes further. Their blessing power even transcends the patrilineal kinship framework. For instance, grandchildren bless elders from the same lineage as well as other lineages sharing the same village, as Aqbawr Bu, a *pima*, told me in Chinese, 'The children (*xiaohai*, 小孩) in the village are all my grandchildren (*sunzi*, 孙子)'. In other words, children in general also possess blessing power over all elders. Though the grandchildren under discussion include both male and female, grandsons play a leading role in most events.

Although it was difficult to reach satisfactory explanations for many aspects of children's purported 'bigness', the belief in their capacity to bless elders was easy to document. During field research, three old men in their eighties suffered health problems; their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, one after another, made sacrifice and tied threads on them for their wellbeing and longevity. I describe the three cases below.
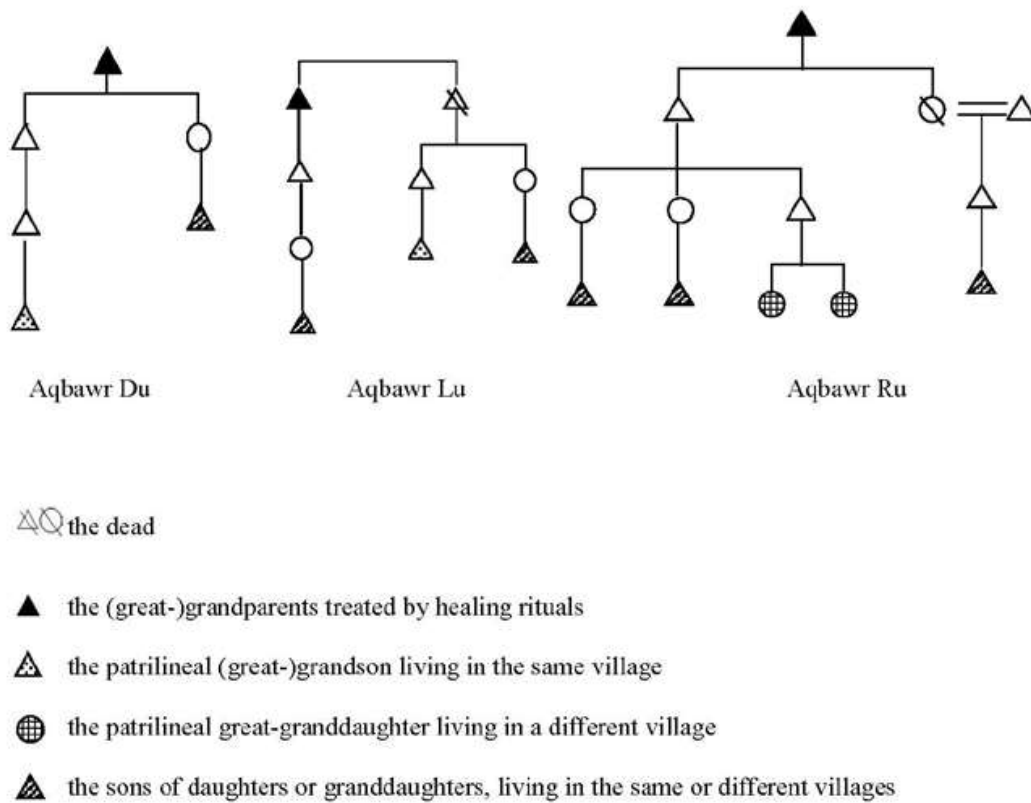
Figure 9. Grandparents treated by healing ritruals.

Aqbawr Du, an eighty-six year old and very respectful man from XovCe lineage, suddenly had a terrible fever and became very sick, which was interpreted by Aqbawr Cu as a ghost attack. He took herbal medicine on the first day. On the second day, one of his married daughters from another village, bringing her son, came to tie a thread on him. On the third day, one of his grandsons living in the county town came to visit, sacrificed a pig, and tied a thread on him. Or rather, Aqbawr Cu's grandson's own son, a four-year-old boy, was put in the position of the leading officiant that was supposed to slaughter the pig, tie the first thread on Aqbawr Du, and feed Aqbawr Du with offerings. The great-grandson was too small to really fulfil the job, but he was guided by his father through some of the motions. He was required to symbolically hold the knife for a second before his father slaughtered the pig. And, he had the assistance of his father in tying the thread and feeding his great-grandfather. Meanwhile, since this was a blessing ritual 'officiated' by a child from within the patriline[44], children from every household in the

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[44] The actual age of the officiant is not as important as his relative age, as in the example of a 'child' (i.e. grandson) in his thirties that follows.

village, according to tradition, came to contribute their offerings, threads, and blessing power. They stood in a line in front of Aqbawr Du, each taking a turn to tie threads around his wrist while uttering a blessing. They were all male, apart from one girl who had no brothers.

In the second case, Aqbawr Lu, an eighty-year-old man from XovGhan lineage, was attacked by a sudden pain all over his body. He was too sick to swallow even a mouthful of rice. He and his wife lived with his only son and the son's family. At first, his family fed him Western medicine and also herbs. On the second day, Aqliq Zi, a grandson of Aqbawr Lu's late eldest brother (thus also counted as a grandson of Aqbawr Lu) sacrificed a pig for him and tied a thread on his wrist. According to the same rule followed in the case of Aqbawr Du, other children from the village who were counted as grandchildren or great-grandchildren also came and contributed their blessing power, from a one-year-old infant to men in their thirties, both girls (if they had no brothers) and boys were included. Aqbawr Lu claimed he felt better on the following day. Two days later, a daughter of Aqbawr Lu's late eldest brother visited Aqbawr Lu with her son and performed a similar blessing ritual for him, differing from those described above only in that other village grandchildren did not participate because the officiant was not of the same patrilineal line.[45] Six months later, Aqbawr Lu's one-year-old great-grandson (the child of his son's daughter) again performed a blessing ritual. As with the example of the four-year-old above, other adult relatives conducted the actual work of the ritual, but the child was considered to preside over it. Some time later, a healing ritual was held and the old man finally got well.

In the third case, Aqbawr Ru, an eighty-year-old man from XovCe lineage, had suffered chronic pain all over the body. His oldest son, Aqzawr Xu, living in a neighbouring village, together with his two patrilineal granddaughters, came to tie thread on him for his wellbeing. Aqzawr Xu was accompanied by his son-in-law Aqxyanr Yi and Aqxyanr Yi's seven-year-old son.[46] Aqzawr Xu and Aqxyanr Yi, counting as two households, each carried a piglet for ritual sacrifice. The elder granddaughter, ten years old, and the grandson each took the position of leading officiant for their households. Both behaved properly, following the adults' instructions. Not

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[45] As with tying threads, blessing rituals may be held many times to enhance the power of the blessing. That subsequent blessing rituals are held in quick succession in these examples should not be taken, therefore, as an indicator that the first ritual was ineffective. Moreover, the blessing rituals conducted by grandchildren primarily convey good wishes for their grandparents' health and longevity; they are distinct in this way from healing rituals.

[46] Aqxyanr is a form of address for the husband of one's father's sister or (as in this case) of one's own sister.

all children have such an easy time in their role. A week later, another daughter of Aqzawr Xu, who was living in another county with her husband and their three-year-old son, visited Aqbawr Ru, sacrificed a chicken, and tied thread on him. They were all nicely dressed, and the woman proudly told me that they owned a car and a decent house. Their son obviously felt strange about what was going on; he was afraid and started crying as he was instructed to put the ritual bowl on the table in front of Aqbawr Ru. His mother had to take him into her arms but still kept performing on behalf of him. Six months later, Aqbawr Pu, the *pima* master and husband of Aqbawr Ru's late daughter appeared with his own thirteen-year-old grandson. As in the other cases, the boy was the officiant.[47] Aqbawr Pu undertook the sacrifice of a piglet to Aqbawr Ru; the boy tied a thread around Aqbawr Ru's wrist to bless his health.

These cases nicely uncover three rules. First, children or grand-children of sons and daughters have equal blessing power over elders. Second, even though both boys and girls are considered to possess blessing power, boys are preferred as the leading officiants at a blessing ritual. A girl takes the position of leading officiant only if she has no brother.[48]

The third rule is that the scale of a blessing ritual is defined by both the kinship principle and the village principle: that is, children or grand-children of daughters, no matter where they live, initiate a blessing ritual limited to the concerned family only. Children or grandchildren of sons living in another Akha village follow the same rule. These blessing rituals can only call on several elders' attendance at most. By contrast, when children or grandchildren of sons who are living in the same village as the elders initiate a blessing ritual, children of the whole village are obliged to participate and contribute their power.[49]

It should be noted that all of the children mentioned as officiants in the healing rituals above did not live with the afflicted elders. As Akha elders generally live in an extended family, which mostly covers three generations, the question arises, what do grandchildren who live with their grandparents do? Do they also have blessing power?

In fact, grandchildren inside the family have a tighter ritual relationship with their grandparents in terms of health than do grandchildren who do not live with them. This is expressed, through the *ghesanghen* ritual

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[47] See chapter 8 for a description of the specific ways in which a *pima* officiates at a ritual.

[48] I recorded no cases in which there was no invocation of a patrilineal tie. For example, I recorded no cases in which a daughter brought her own daughter as officiant.

[49] Children and grandchildren who have moved out of their natal village (e.g. to a nearby town or city), but have not moved to another Akha village, are still considered as living in their natal village.

performed for Ghesanq Gheje and as a healing ritual for sick children. The ritual is one of the occasions on which the grandparent's 'life tree' can be ritually trimmed. This life tree, as explained to me during one *ghesanghen* by Aqzawr Su, a knowledgeable man in his late forties, is gained only after one has grandchildren. The tree grows in the spiritual land (*naevq mihan*; see chapter 3), and an elder's life will be short if the life tree is not in kept in good condition. It must be kept free of afflictions by insects or weeds. For the sake of the elders' longevity, their life trees should be taken care of via rituals. Thus, during a *ghesanghen* ritual in which a *pima* is asked to ritually heal a sick child, the child is also required to trim the life trees of his elders. During the chanting process, the *pima* symbolically kills insects inside the trunk with a small knife, mows the weeds around them with a small sickle, and ploughs the surrounding garden where they grow with a small hoe. Among the six cases of *ghesanghen* I recorded, five were undertaken within an extended family household, and three of those five included a rite of trimming life trees for grandparents.

The importance of grandchildren to elders' health and power is fundamental. It is noteworthy that elders only gain the life trees which concern their own health when they have grandchildren. In other words, having grandchildren is a qualification to access a new life stage and to enjoy more ritual care. Furthermore, the existence of grandchildren grants elders the power to bless others. Elders have general blessing power over other people, but the blessing power they possess comes from the fact that they have grandchildren. In other words, only elders who have grandchildren have blessing power to give others. That is why in daily life, only elders with grandchildren are qualified to say '*geeqlanq heeq*' ('May you be blessed') or '*aka geeqlanq heeq lei luv*' ('May you have good fortune') to others. There are old people who do not yet have grandchildren. Such people are not considered 'elders' and they generally do not say things that convey blessing because they have gained no qualification yet, thus have no blessings to give others. It is critical too, that blessings should flow from those who have more to those who have fewer: in a four-generation family, for example, both grandfather and great-grandfather are qualified to bless others. But the grandfather should not say '*geeqlanq heeq*' to others in the presence of the great-grandfather; the older man is more blessed on account of having both grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and thus it is for him to offer blessings. Clearly, having grandchildren is a significant mark in one's life course, decisively promoting one's position as a blessing source. In a word, grandchildren's existence determines the social and ritual status of their grandparents. Perhaps this is another reason that grandchildren are ranked higher than grandparents.

To conclude, in the Akha community, grandchildren ritually stand on a higher rank than grandparents. This can be seen first in that their existence entitles their grandparents to bless others and enjoy special ritual care; second, they are a powerful source to bless their grandparents; and third, they are able to threaten their grandparents' health. In return, grandparents, as elders with grandchildren, are able to bless everybody, including their own grandchildren. Eventually, there is a reciprocal relationship of ritual care shaped between grandchildren and grandparents. It is noteworthy here that children as status-givers are found in many societies, but mainly in that they grant full womanhood to mothers (Johnson 2000; Salomon 2002), or adulthood to their parents (Bodenhorn 1988; Carsten 1991). Akha children go further to give a full elderhood to their grandparents.

Conclusion

Children are created by both human world and spirit world: they are half-human and half-*naevq*. This view of children defines the Akha mode of childcare practices, which often refers to the spirit world. Akha villagers have to fight with *naevq* for children's survival through naming rituals and by avoiding scolding children with *naevq*-related words or any other bad terms. Moreover, children are given by the goddesses of birth, and their wellbeing relies on the favour of these goddesses and that of the gods of children. These gods and goddesses, on the one hand, protect children from danger, such as falling down from a balcony, while on the other hand, cause their illnesses, which can only be cured through healing rituals. The link between children's health and the favour of the deities is widely acknowledged by Akha villagers, and hardly challenged even by cadres, retired teachers, or school-educated youth. Thus, to Akha children, the spirit world is a source of insecurity as well as a source of support.

The status of children's health and wellbeing is further illustrated by putting them into the kinship framework. Both paternal and maternal lines are important. First, because children come from the 'seed' given by a maternal uncle, they greatly depend on the latter for continued wellbeing. When a child's health is jeopardised, the maternal uncle may help by giving a new name, a special garment, and iron bracelets or silver objects. The blessing power from a maternal uncle is always a steady source of support to children. The patrilineal line's support of children is most visible in the relations between patrilineal grandparents and grandchildren. However, relations between grandchildren and grandparents show how the importance of lineage is actually overcome in questions of blessing and illness, health and healing. Grandparents possess blessing power over grandchildren, and vice versa. Grandchildren are considered the 'biggest' people of all, standing

on a higher rank than even their grandparents, partly because they are the latest generation to carry on their genealogy, but also because they give their grandparents the social and ritual status of full elderhood. Therefore, these two generations form a relationship of mutual support.

Chapter 6
Unwanted Children and Infanticide

In the preceding chapter, I discussed the situation of children who are recognised as human beings, but only half-way so. Children are socially accepted by the local community as half-human and half-*naevq*. But some children, the unwanted ones, are viewed as complete *naevq*. The category of unwanted children has traditionally included twins and deformed infants; these types of children are called *tsawrpaeq*. As the ultimate form of impure being to the Akha mind, *tsawrpaeq* were obliged to be killed and buried at unfrequented sites outside the village, in places belonging to 'the territory of *naevq*'.

In this chapter, I consider the reasons, meanings, and corresponding infanticide practices around these children. The *tsawrpaeq* system was officially abolished by Akha elites and the local government in 2012, and at the time of my fieldwork was an issue that divided social opinion.[50] Here, I explore two basic questions: what is *tsawrpaeq*, and why is it unwanted? To answer these questions, I first examine the core topic – *tsawrpaeq* infanticide – by going over previous studies, historical records, and Akha folklore. These sources provide some answer concerning the material or practical reasons for killing *tsawrpaeq* children, but mostly refer to great cosmological meanings. Thus, by placing *tsawrpaeq* in the Akha cosmology system, I further explore the holistic reason for *tsawrpaeq* infanticide. I argue that although *tsawrpaeq* infanticide has been recognised as an illegal activity, and somehow as a method of selecting population, it is also a way for the Akha to restore cosmological order. Killing *tsawrpaeq* keeps the human world separate from the *naevq* world. Thus my discussion of why the *tsawrpaeq* are unwanted echoes the argument made in the previous chapter:

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[50] One of the landmark events leading to the full abolishment of the *tsawrpaeq* system occurred in June 2012, with the birth of an Akha infant with partial simple syndactyly (webbed toes) in a hospital in Menglian. His family decided to break with tradition and keep their *tsawrpaeq* child. They had the strong support of local government, which was engaged already in a campaign to abolish this tradition. The family's co-villagers at first fell into great panic with the appearance of a *tsawrpaeq*, but then gradually split into several groups holding different attitudes.

cosmological meanings must be taken into consideration when scrutinising children and childcare practices.

Infanticide in Akha Society

The phenomenon of infanticide in Akha society has been noticed by many Akha experts (e.g. Lewis 1969; Grunfeld 1982; Tooker 1992; Mansfield 2000), but few of them have analysed it systematically. Rather, they have typically provided some summary explanations emphasising the practical aspects of infanticide. The first explanation, particularly relevant to twin infanticide, is that twins place an enormous burden on a mother who has to go on working in the fields to survive (Grunfeld 1982: 56). This explanation was confirmed by an old man from Hakaq who told me a similar story that took place, he said, before the Akha *li* had been created. He said,

> There was once a couple who had twin babies. It was quite difficult for them to raise the children. The mother did not have enough milk to feed them, and she became slow in farm work because of the distraction of taking care of the twins. Thus, the couple turned to the elders and asked what they should do to cope with the problem. Having no solution to offer, the elders suggested they should kill the children if they did not want them. The couple followed this advice.

This explanation is echoed in Gary Granzberg's investigation on cases of twin infanticide among 70 societies, through which he suggested a materialistic hypothesis that killing twins is meant to relieve the mother's burden of simultaneously raising two children (Granzberg 1973). Nonetheless, such a materialistic explanation fails to answer why both children must be killed (Leis 1965), and it does not explain the infanticide of single deformed infants in Akha society.

On this problem, Helen Ball and Catherine Hill (1996) have suggested a demographic explanation after examining ethnographic reports for 150 societies summarising reasons for infanticide. With respect to societies which killed twin infants, they coded the reasons for killing singleton infants into three main categories: the infants had lowered-viability; it was a mode of population control; or conception had occurred under inappropriate circumstances. Their results showed that there was no significant difference between the distribution of peoples who kill twins and those who kill lowered-viability or defective infants. They argued that any infants, singleton or twin, would be killed if they fell into one of these categories. That is, they argued that twins and deformed infants are killed because they are lowered-viability infants.

To a certain extent, their argument resembles what I have heard from Akha informants. A Hani native scholar told me that twins and deformed

infants were unwanted by not only Akha, but also other branches of Hani. He carefully added that in the past infanticide was a way of selecting population. An Akha young man from Hakaq stated that he had encountered many deformed people with extra fingers or harelips from the Dai or Wa groups, but had only heard of two cases in the Akha group. He proudly ascribed this to the Akha's concerns to bear and rear children of good quality.

The Akha definition of deformed infants or children of good quality, however, does not equate with Ball and Hill's definition. For instance, Ball and Hill mentioned low birth-weight, congenital malformations, and lethal defects as indicators of lowered viability. But the Akha kill infants with visible deformations such as extra fingers or harelips while sparing those who have invisible but lethal defects. In other words, Akha have a different standard for distinguishing unwanted from wanted children which may be based on 'quality', but is not based on lower viability.

Besides the practical explanations given for Akha practices of infanticide, there are also cosmological explanations. For example, Grunfeld (1982: 57) pointed out that Akha consider the birth of twins or deformed children to be against the natural order. In the natural order, single births characterise human life and multiple births belong to animal life. Twins borne to a human mother endanger the proper order as much as the single offspring of a bitch or sow. (Twin births in these two species are also un-natural; a litter of puppies or piglets should number at least three). He also mentioned that this is part of the larger beliefs by which the Akha make sense of the world. The human world of the Akha village must be kept separate at all costs from the forest world of animals and spirits.

These cosmological reasons seem most apt for explaining infanticide among the Akha. Such an account has been provided in a recent Chinese-language publication by an ethnic Akha scholar (Yang Z. 2010: 255). Yang explained that the births of twins and deformed infants are caused by ghosts (*gui*, 鬼), and should be sent back to the world of ghosts. It is for this reason that they are suffocated at birth and their parents are chased away as ghosts. The correlation between twins or deformed infants and ghosts, or a religious vision, is confirmed by a nationwide social and historical investigation among ethnic groups carried out by the newly-founded PRC in the middle of twentieth century. For instance, it was recorded that the Hani considered the birth of twins or deformed infants the greatest calamity in the community. In Xishuangbanna Prefecture, the village where an abnormal birth took place often moved to another site and built a new village. They also needed to build a new swing on a new playground, to build new village gates, and to appoint a new village head. The house where the abnormal children were

born was destroyed, furniture was burnt, and property was distributed. The abnormal children were killed immediately, and their parents were chased away from the village for a certain period. They became impure forever, and were excluded from all ritual events and ceremonies in the village. The father was also excluded from his family genealogy (Song and Dong 1982: 132). In Lancang County, twins or deformed infants were discarded in the wild, and their parents had to live in the jungle for a month. The parents were not allowed to come home until a *pima* ritually sent away all ghosts (Second Subgroup 1951: 4).

Akha infanticide thus holds wide- and far-reaching effects. It envisions not only the killing of newborns, but also the social abstinence and ritual death of their parents, and the possible destruction (or at least redistribution) of property, livestock, and villages. The kinship system and the big man system are all activated by the birth of an abnormal child. The entire community is affected. This explanation is widely confirmed (albeit to different extents) by many Akha experts despite their varying knowledge of *tsawrpaeq* infanticide (e.g. Lewis 1969; Tooker 1992; Mansfield 2000).

Even though state-run social and historical investigations among China's ethnic groups have revealed the complexity of *tsawrpaeq* infanticide in Akha society, the government has concluded that infanticide is simply a tradition that breaks state law. The practice was outlawed several times with little effect, partial enforcement, and less effort to understand why it continued. The Xishuangbanna Prefecture People's Congress passed a resolution in 1965 protecting people's life, property and infants, and prohibiting killing twins and deformed infants.[51] The Menglian County People's Congress passed a resolution prohibiting maltreatment of twin infants among the Hani community in 1986 (Standing Committee Office 2001). The governmental regulations of Xishuangbanna, Menglian and Lancang, where most Akha settle, all include a specific clause prohibiting killing twins or deformed infants by defining it as an illegal activity. Nonetheless, these resolutions had little effect as cases of killing *tsawrpaeq* did not cease until 2012.

Why have the local Akha, including those in Hakaq, persisted in observing infanticide when they have long known that it is against the state law? I would say that it is because infanticide constitutes the greatest *li* of Akha tradition. To them, killing *tsawrpaeq* restores the basic classification of the world, purifies it of dangerous contamination, and restores the cosmological order. In the next section, I will discuss the cosmological meanings of *tsawrpaeq*.

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[51] 'Decisions of Protecting People's Life, Property and Infants, and Prohibiting Killing Twins and Deformed Infants' (1965 年西双版纳傣族自治州第二届人大第二次会议通过了《关于维护人民生命财产，保护婴儿，禁止杀害双胞胎和生理缺陷婴儿的决定》)。

'Not Good Person': *Tsawrpaeq*

Linguistically, *tsawr* means 'human' or 'person'. As for *paeq*, villagers always told me that it meant the same as *maqmeer*, that is, 'not good'. Literally, *tsawrpaeq* might thus be translated as 'not good person'. *Paeq*, as *maqmeer*, can be used as a verb and as a noun. As a verb, it means something 'not good' happens to a person, a pig, a dog, or a field of corn. As a noun, it is the event of a person, pig, dog, or corn becoming 'not good'. Theoretically, this is one part of Akha classification system in which everything falls into two categories, good (*meer*) and not good (*maqmeer*). As a part of *maqmeer*, *paeq* is passively defined regarding persons, live-stock, and crops.

Among persons, the term is applied directly as *tsawrpaeq* and refers to an abnormal birth. It refers to the birth of twins, multiple births, and deformed infants. Deformities are normally visible, such as a harelip, too few or too many digits, a missing ear, and other similar disfigurements.[52] A normal birth should be single and whole. As an Akha senior man stated, 'There is and should be only one [whole] child in a mother's womb at any one time'. The *tsawrpaeq* are ritually named *tanqpanq*, and without exception, they were obliged to be killed.

With regard to livestock, *paeq* is recognised in several forms. A hen lays egg with two yolks; a sow delivers a single or twinned birth; a buffalo begets twins; a dog mates with a pig or a pig mates with a buffalo; a pig or buffalo breaks into the big house. In all such cases, all the involved animals are supposed to be ritually slaughtered. The adult animals are consumed in a feast based on kinship principles, and the newborns are killed and discarded.

Cases of *paeq* that occur in crops evidence a similar logic. Two seedheads develop on one shoot (especially with regards to *proso* [millet]); two eggplant fruits grow from the same node; two or more tassels grow from the apex of a maize stem, and so forth. These abnormal plants should be re-moved and discarded.

Among all the various forms of *paeq*, those in crops cause the least and lightest effects to individual or collective life. *Paeq* in livestock is of middling concern. *Tsawrpaeq* is the biggest and worst thing that could ever happen in the community. As the master *pima* Aqbawr Pu once stated, 'It is the biggest one of all Akha *li*!' The apprentice *pima,* namely *piza* Aqbawr Bu, also emphasised, 'We have the greatest fear of *tsawrpaeq*. We show our most care to avoid that'. In daily life, *tsawrpaeq* is a taboo topic, better not mentioned at all, especially at home, or in the presence of a married couple who plan to have children. It is believed that what you speak about makes

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[52] Birthmarks are not considered a deformity.

things happen, thus talking about *tsawrpaeq* might bring about its appearance. For example, if a young married couple hear or say something about *tsawrpaeq*, they might give birth to *tsawrpaeq*. For those who are unable to have children, like the elders and children, it is acceptable to approach the topic.

During my first trip in the field, I repeatedly asked Aqbawr Pu about the customs related to twins. At the time, I did not know that it was a taboo to talk about it at home, but I noticed his reluctance and reserved answers. It was only later that Aqbawr Bu, the cousin of the master *pima* and a talkative and easy-going person by nature, explained to me:

> The master *pima* has a daughter-in-law who will have one more child in the future. It is improper to talk about or even mention *tsawrpaeq* at his home. It is fine to talk about it at my home. I do not have a daughter-in-law; there is nobody in my house who is going to have a baby. We can freely talk about whatever you like here!

Even so, every time after an interview, Aqbawr Bu sprinkled corn wine on the fireplace for the spirits, apologising that we had spoken of *tsawrpaeq*. We had spoken, he explained, because I, a student, was longing to do research on Akha culture, and he beseeched the spirits not to bring danger to us. I was also required to repeat what he had done. So contaminating are *tsawrpaeq*, that most learning about them among ritual specialists does not take place indoors. When a *piza* takes lessons in *tsawrpaeq*-related rituals from the master, they are required to do it outdoors, some place next to the village gates.

The danger posed by all cases of *paeq* is enough that they ought to be physically destroyed, regardless of the economic loss presented. Aqbawr Bu made it very clear,

> If a pig, dog, or chicken becomes *paeq*, we do not keep it any longer. No matter how big the pig is, it is surely unwanted. You had better not to take it as a loss, since you have no idea what will happen in the future. Perhaps at first *paeq* appears only in crops, but if you keep them to avoid material loss, then it would spread to livestock, even to persons. Therefore, we remove *paeq* in crops as soon as we find it, otherwise it would spread around, which could not be good.

More importantly, *paeq* should be symbolically discarded by purifying rituals. In the case of *tsawrpaeq*, this means burying the dead newborn in the territory of *naevq*. But how does *naevq* relate to *tsawrpaeq*? To answer this question, we need to go back to the best-known myth in the Akha community, that is, the family division between Human and Naevq.

From the myth of family division between Human and Naevq, one idea stands out: Human takes everything good and leaves everything 'not-

good' to Naevq. This idea could be found pervasively in Akha life, especially concerning *paeq*. As mentioned previously, everything *paeq* must be destroyed and ritually thrown away in the wild. By inference, *paeq*, the not-good, belongs to *naevq*. Hence, humans dump *paeq* (and return it to *naevq*) by performing rituals which entice the *naevq* to carry *paeq* back to their territory. Thence, the cosmological classification is restored as long as humans part with the 'not-good'.

The severity of the danger posed by *tsawrpaeq* might be explained as an extreme case of disorder in the cosmological order set by the family division between Human and Naevq. It might be noted that *tsawrpaeq* shares physical abnormality with *naevq*; the *naevq* have seven breasts. Both are slightly or greatly different from humans. The common abnormality implies that *tsawrpaeq* actually belong to *naevq* and should stay in the territory of *naevq*. *Tsawrpaeq* in the human world causes chaos and contamination, eventually danger. To get rid of the not-goodness and guarantee human well-being, *tsawrpaeq* is required to go back to *naevq* land through various rituals at different levels. Before a deeper illustration of these rituals involved in the *tsawrpaeq* system, the essence of *paeq* – that is *maqxawr* (being impure) – is given precedence for illustration.

'Pure Man': Maintaining Individual and Communal Purity

Maq is 'not, no', and *xawr* means 'clean, pure', so *maqxawr* is 'unclean, impure'. *Paeq* is not only *maqmeer* (not good), but also *maqxawr* (impure). Aqbawr Bu once illustrated, '*Maqmeer* is *maqxawr*; being not-good equals being impure'. *Tsawrpaeq*, the worst thing, thus occupies the apex of epidemical impurity, opposite to *tsawrxawr*, namely 'pure human'. The *tsawrxawr* meets three criteria: 1) He or she is a physically complete person; 2) He or she is a mentally normal person; 3) He or she keeps purity by not offending the Akha *li*. In reality, such perfection is impossible. Thus the Akha pick from among those people who are relatively pure to officiate at rituals and ceremonies (see chapter 3). Additionally, they have little anxiety over the selection of not fully pure individuals to fulfil roles that require purity because much purity can be restored through purifying rituals. No ritual, however, is strong enough to purify *tsawrpaeq* because they are born impure.

Akha people place remarkable importance on keeping one's purity. As a young man puts it, being a pure man is a life ideal. The point is repeatedly confirmed by other elders: 'We are longing to live purely in the village. If an impure baby is born, we do not want it. If impure livestock or crops appear, we do not keep them, either'. In daily life, once not-good things happen to a person, a ritual always follows. At the least, the person is given a ritual

shower. The source of *paeq* might also be destroyed and other rituals undertaken. For example, once a dog urinated on a young man's feet (an act that is among the verbal forms of *paeq*); the dog was killed right away, and a *pima* was invited to perform a simple ritual to purify the man. In another case, a man saw two snakes mating in the mountains. His witness was also *paeq*, and he held a purifying ritual for himself.

Concepts of purity are also operative in relation to death and the afterlife. As mentioned in chapter 3, a death is classified as *nmxi* (good death) or *xaxi* (horrific death). The public graveyard is accessible only to those who die a good (i.e. pure) death. As a not-good and impure death, those who have suffered *xaxi* are barred from the public graveyard unless a certain ritual is performed to restore their purity before the funeral. On the way to the settlement of past ancestors, the souls of the dead face a test of purity, which is conducted by Tanqpanq. Whoever fails the test will be blocked from the world of ancestors.

Purity also matters in terms of building a house. The main pillar of a house is made of a ritually pure tree. When chopping the pure tree and making a pillar from it, if not-good events happen in the village (e.g. somebody dies or *tsawrpaeq* appears), then the tree is contaminated and must be discarded. That is because a pure pillar is a sort of omen for a harmonious family and auspicious life. In reverse, an impure pillar brings disaster to a household. Apart from the pure materials, the time in which a house is built is also important, especially when a father builds a small house for his grown-up sons. Houses should not be built between Closing the Gates in the middle of April and Opening the Gates in August (the ceremonial time of *naevq*). A house is sure to be pure only if it has been built during the time for human ceremonies.

Purity not only matters to individuals and households, but also affects communal prosperity. As discussed in chapter 4, the village father and his assistants must be pure to ensure that the village is prosperous and free of disasters. Each Akha village also has a holy (i.e. pure) water source, which is an essential public space. Nowadays, there is piped running water in most Akha villages, but a divine water source is still maintained. Every April, the bamboo or wooden water pipe is renewed and animals are sacrificed by *pudzu aqdaq* to the spirit of the water source. Bad events, such as the birth of *tsawrpaeq*, or child abortion out of wedlock, always bring contamination to the water, making it impure. Thus, an immediate purifying ritual is demanded to restore the purity of the water source. And in case of *tsawrpaeq*, the couple concerned, a source of pollution, are forbidden to carry water from this place for one year, lest they pollute the water.

Since *tsawrpaeq* can easily destroy the purity which has great influence on private and public life, it is a significant job for Akha to maintain a pure pregnancy by limiting exchange and contact with others. Lack of contact facilitates a normal birth. Generally, pregnant women only wear plain clothes and take off all the silver accessories they have worn before. Although protective, silver accessories might have been touched by impure persons and might thereby contaminate the foetus if the expectant mother continues to wear them. Besides, if a woman delivers an abnormal child, any of her belongings that have been used to wrap or decorate her body during delivery become polluted and are supposed to be discarded. Since silver is one of the most important properties for a family, it is better to remove it from the pregnant woman in advance of the delivery. In daily life, the husband of a pregnant woman should not beat snakes and should stop hunting because he will become temporarily impure if he is bitten by snakes or mistakenly shoots a dog or a person, and his impurity may influence his wife and the foetus. The husband and the woman's father-in-law should avoid participating in any rituals. If they fall sick, a pregnant woman and her husband should be taken care of through ritual only by pure senior members. An expecting family ought not to purchase buffalo, sows, or seeds because these might be impure. Most importantly, they should never talk about *tsawrpaeq*. Even a ritual specialist in training avoids knowledge about *tsawrpaeq* if he wants to have (more) children. All of these prohibitions focus on protecting pregnant women from possible sources of pollution and contamination.

Birth of *Tsawrpaeq*

According to the Akha *li*, the birth of *tsawrpaeq* is the determining element of the system, no matter where the woman gives birth, or what happens to the newborn. In the studied village, women had normally delivered children at home until the law changed in 2012; in early 2013 a woman from the village gave birth to a baby in hospital for the first time. Sometimes women have babies on the way to the field or in the field because they keep on working until they go into labour. However, wherever a *tsawrpaeq* is born, at home, on the way, in a field, or in hospital nowadays, it brings the same influence on individual and collective life. Even if it is born outside the village it still contaminates it.

Normally, the birth of an infant has one of roughly four outcomes: first, the child is alive and healthy; second, the child is alive but weak and survives thanks to medical treatment; third, the child is alive but very weak, dying a short time later; lastly, it is a stillbirth: the child is already dead when it is born. A *tsawrpaeq* born alive, vulnerable, or dead is equally terrible and dangerous, and causes the same pollution to the community.

The villagers in Hakaq remembered two cases of *tsawrpaeq* born dead or dying. In both cases, the *tsawrpaeq* were twins. In the first case, the twins were born in poor health, and only one of them survived. In the second case, one twin was stillborn and the other died soon after birth. However, the deaths were not considered enough of an end. The surviving infant in the first case was still rejected by the community, and the parents of the dead twins in the second case also had to hold purifying rituals. Apparently, the natural death of a newborn *tsawrpaeq* does not cleanse the contamination brought by its appearance. The pollution it has caused remains and spreads until purifying rituals are performed.

Interestingly, as a patrilineal community, Akha people distinguish *tsawrpaeq* born to Akha women based on the ethnic identity of the father. Because women should follow the *li* of their husbands, an Akha woman who marries a non-Akha man (such as a Han or Lahu) who does not observe customs related to *tsawrpaeq* may keep any twins or other deformed children born to her. By contrast, even a non-Akha woman who marries an Akha man should follow the Akha *li*. In reality, ambiguity arises around cases of *tsawrpaeq*. In one case, an Akha woman married to a Han man gave birth to (and kept) twin girls. Later, the couple divorced, and the woman returned to the Akha village with one of her daughters, while her ex-husband kept the other. She fell in love with a young man and became pregnant, but they decided that she should have an abortion. Abortion out of wedlock was a seriously bad event, causing contamination to the community but also damaging the fertility of the woman's birth family. Thus when the abortion was found out, the village office insisted that she and her boyfriend marry, but the day before the wedding her history of giving birth to twins was revealed. A dispute erupted between her lineage and that of her boyfriend. Her patrilineal relatives argued that the birth did not count as *tsawrpaeq* because the father was Han, and that the woman was still marriageable. However, her boyfriend's family refused to take her out of fear. The wedding was called off. But the story did not end there: the village office soon found another Han man to marry her, and then sent the woman and her daughter to him and away from the village.

In principle, too, it is the parents who have the right to decide whether to keep or kill *tsawrpaeq*. As Aqbawr Bu repeatedly emphasised, it is the parents' child or children, and certainly it is the parents who must make a decision. Nobody would tell them what to do, nobody would force them to kill their child or children, and definitely nobody would break into their house and kill their child or children. The parents' decision will be fully respected, but with conditions. Parents who decide to keep the *tsawrpaeq* should immediately leave by the village gates with the child or children,

leave the Akha village and their kin groups, and move to settlements inhabited by other ethnic groups who have no problems with *tsawrpaeq*. From then on, the parents cut the bond with their relatives, becoming non-Akha people. In other words, they have to give up the Akha identity in order to save their child or children.

Because the Akha know that killing people is against state law, parents of *tsawrpaeq* find themselves trapped in a difficult situation. They can violate neither the Akha *li* nor the state law, but they have to break one of them. According to Aqbawr Bu, most parents choose to honour the Akha *li*. 'Killing is not allowed in law. It is severe. But they (the parents) know that they cannot transgress the ancestor's *li*. We never ask them to kill, but they will do it themselves'. If the killing is found out by police, it is the parents (not the community) who take full responsibility. If the newborn dies a natural death, then the decision making will be much easier for parents.

In practice, parents of *tsawrpaeq* do make decisions on their own, which vary in many ways. Some couples adhere to the Akha *li*. In the early 1990s, a couple who begat twins in Hakaq ritually killed both infants. As late as 2011 in a neighbouring village a couple put their newborn deformed baby to death on the way home from hospital. Meanwhile, there are also some couples who keep their children. In 2007, a couple from an Akha village in Myanmar gave birth to a pair of twin boys. They wanted to keep their children, thus immediately left the village and joined a Lahu hamlet. Before leaving, they paid 2,000 RMB to the village office for the ritual cost of purifying the village. After they left, their house was immediately destroyed. Other couples seek halfway solutions between the *li* and the law. Some try to hide the truth from co-villagers. For example, more than twenty years ago in neighbouring Lancang County, an Akha couple gave birth to twins, one boy and one girl. They decided to kill the boy but to keep the girl, and managed to bribe the midwife not to tell their co-villagers. Decades later, after the girl married a non-Akha man, the event was revealed. Since the boy was dead, and the girl was married out (i.e. socially dead in the Akha community), the village office stopped further investigation, but required the parents to ritually purify themselves to restore their right to be buried in the public cemetery. In another case more than ten years ago, the husband took his heavily pregnant wife to town to see a doctor. When they came back to the village, people found that the woman's belly was flat, but they had no infant with them. Later, an investigation was carried out by the village office, and it was revealed that the woman had delivered twins and that the couple had discarded them right away. They had to hold all the rituals demanded.

Another way to handle the situation is to give the child away to non-Akha. My informants knew, for example, that three decades previously, a

webbed-toed baby girl was born in one of the six Hadoka villages. One of the father's elder sisters, a governmental official who had married a Han man, kept the girl and raised her; the girl now is married to a Han husband from another region. Meanwhile, the parents of the girl and the village held all the rituals required to restore purity at every level. In this case, as an Akha woman, the elder sister knew exactly the consequences of the birth of a deformed child. As a governmental official, she also knew clearly the results of infanticide. As a Han wife, she and her husband had no cultural problems to accept the child. As a sister of the child's father, she was personally willing to offer her support to her brother and niece. The result satisfied everybody. For the village, the child is put outside the community and all the demanded rituals were performed. For the parents, their daughter was saved, and it was possible to keep in touch with her since she grew up in their sister's family. Moreover, co-villagers were impressed that the couple had the courage to spare the child. Once, a young man from the village who was studying in college mentioned the case and said, 'Somehow I really admire them. People are looked down upon if they have this kind of child, but they did not care. They even did not fear the child, and kept her'. However, when I reached the girl's birth family during my household survey, they were completely silent on the matter of *tsawrpaeq*. I pretended to know nothing of their story and asked, as if accidently, for their opinions on *tsawrpaeq*. The brother of the saved girl gave me a very short and clear-cut answer, 'I have never heard of such a thing'. Apparently, the family refuses to mention it, let alone take it as a proud success. The family's neighbours too provided only brief bits of information about the event.

Behavioural Abstinence and Purifying Rituals

Once *tsawrpaeq* appears, it contaminates the parents, the family, the village, and the neighbouring Akha communities. All these polluted people are obliged to go through purifying rituals for the individual and collective well-being. Once the parents decide to kill the newborn *tsawrpaeq*, they should immediately inform the elders and invite the latter to advise on how to cope with the crisis. Traditionally, under the supervision of ritual experts, the parents are supposed to ritually suffocate the newborn, go out to the mountain, and find a remote and cliffy site to bury the corpse.

With news of *tsawrpaeq*, co-villagers fall into a great panic, immediately shunning the concerned family lest they become contaminated. All production comes to a halt until the newborn *tsawrpaeq* is buried. Everybody stays at home, and undertakes no activity except cooking. No water is collected from the divine water source. They wait for instructions. Villagers must contribute their help to resolve the crisis if needed, for example, by

demolishing the house where the *tsawrpaeq* was born, or by building a new hut for the parents. They help too, to discard all property in the house, and to slaughter or redistribute the parents' livestock among relatives. Elders officiate over a ritual to remove the source of contamination before it pervades the village and causes disasters. Other purifying rituals are also held right away. Through the ritual *dzoema mupi lawhawxawr* (*dzoema* and elders purify the divine water source) the *dzoema* and *pima* ritually wash the village's divine water source. As the position of *dzoema* no longer exists, it is the *pudzu aqdaq* who officiates at this ritual. The costs of this ritual and *puhee* (washing the village), which takes place later, are covered by the *tsawrpaeq*'s parents, even if they flee the village with their new child or children.

The contamination of *tsawrpaeq* is so far-reaching that other Akha villages also take certain precautions. Generally, when something 'not-good' happens (even a fire) in an Akha village, neighbouring Akha villages should be informed immediately. Work ceases there too. To avoid similar 'not-goodness' happening to themselves, it is better to remain inactive. A normal 'not-good' event only prevents neighbouring villagers from working outside their own village: in the fields or collecting and chopping wood in the forest. Because the village gates are strongly protective, it is still allowed to do work at home, such as weaving baskets, sewing clothes, embroidering, and so forth. However, if the worst event – the birth of *tsawrpaeq* – takes place, all work ceases for one day and one night, as soon as a village receives the news. Villages further away stop working for one night.

The elders inform the parents to observe a set of behavioural abstinence for one year. In particular, they are prohibited from sex, the man cannot shave his head or wear a hat, and the woman cannot wash or dress her head. They are forbidden to initiate talk with others, to visit other homes or other Akha villages, to exchange labour with co-villagers, and to borrow or lend with co-villagers. They are excluded from the public water source and places for collecting firewood. They should go to the field together, but not walk with others. If they encounter others on the roads, they should make way by standing lower down.

Kin and social relations remain strained for periods of time ranging from about one month to one year. For example, a middle-aged man recalled what had happened after his FBS begat twins nearly twenty years previously. At the time, he and his pregnant wife had a separate small house for sleeping. After the birth of twins to his FBS, his mother urgently asked the man and his wife to move back to the main house because something 'not-good' had happened. Villagers neither talked to his FBS nor visited him for a year. Meanwhile, for one month villagers stopped hanging around in the

playground where boys woo girls. For one month, contacts are even cut off between the concerned village and all other Akha villages. People from the village of the *tsawrpaeq* are prohibited from visiting other Akha villages, and from talking to Akha if they meet elsewhere. Other Akha similarly avoid all visits, talk, or exchanges with the affected village; they do not invite people from the concerned village to ritual events, and young men stop visiting in search of wives.

One month after the *tsawrpaeq*'s appearance, a *pima* officiates at *puhee*. This ritual washes all the 'not-goodness' away from the village. The family and household of the *tsawrpaeq*, however, remain contaminated. A full year after the birth of *tsawrpaeq*, a ritual called *wohee* (washing the household) is thus required. This ritual, officiated by a *pima*, is supposed to purify the whole household, washing everything 'not-good' away. If it is not held, the household's crops and livestock kept may suffer. In reality, the timing of the ritual's observance varies greatly according to each family's financial situation.

Plate 15. A *pima* is performing *wohee*, the purifying ritual for a household (Jakaq).

Yet *wohee* still does not restore the parents' purity. In many ways, the parents will remain impure forever, and suffer certain consequences. They are banned from any ritual performances for the rest of their lives. On such occasions as communal festivals, weddings, funerals, and household rituals, it is fine to invite them to eat. Even so, they are disqualified from sitting in the elders' reserved seats even if they are old. And their ritual service is definitely unwanted. Generally in these events the elders always tie a thread around the right wrists of the host and his family for blessing. But the parents of *tsawrpaeq*, no matter how old they are, are disqualified from doing so, even to their own children or grandchildren, in case they pass down the impurity.

In order to regain a small amount of personal purity, sooner or later, based on the couple's will and financial situation, a *pima* is invited to officiate at an animal-consuming ritual called *tanqpanqyawrdza*. If this ritual is not held, the couple will stay in absolute impurity forever. At death, they will have no coffin and no access to the public graveyard. In other words, their social existence will be completely erased unless the ritual is performed. However, the ritual may not be held until the couple encounters a more immediate need for purity. For example, one man who begat twins decades earlier had not asked the *pima* for a purifying ritual until 2009 because of his poor financial situation. In 2009, he planned to build a new house, but he did not want to live there while he himself remained impure because he worried that his impurity might contaminate the new house. Therefore, he paid a visit to *pima*, asking for the purifying ritual. After being ritually washed, he freely carried out his building plans.

Conclusion

To conclude, compared with normal children as discussed in the previous chapter, the personhood of *tsawrpaeq* children is completely rejected. They are not considered human, and are therefore unwanted and the victims of infanticide. The beliefs, practices, and purification rituals of the *tsawrpaeq* system are part of a larger classification system that divides the human world from the *naevq* world. Any mixture between these two worlds is regarded as bringing disorder, contamination, and danger. But *tsawrpaeq* is the worst of all, thus has to be destroyed, so as to restore the cosmological order. Regardless of many other possible explanations for this form of infanticide, the ultimate reason that *tsawrpaeq* children are supposed to be killed lies within Akha cosmology. Together with the preceding chapter on normal children, this chapter thus presents a perfect case of David Lancy's (2014) 'two world' model. Without taking into account Akha cosmology and the place of

tsawrpaeq within it, it is barely possible to draw a whole picture of the Akha's model of childcare.

Chapter 7
Plural Medical Resources and Syncretic Medical Care

The medical care provided to children is an important component of child-care generally. Indeed, as discussed in previous chapters, the rituals directed towards the health and well-being of children is one of the more prominent elements of ordinary Akha life. Nonetheless, ritual healing is by no means the only medical resource on which they can draw.

The Akha relied on herbs and ritual healing to deal with their health problems until the foundation of the PRC, at which point biomedicine and traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) were gradually introduced.[53] Nowadays, the local medical environment obviously appears pluralistic, as Charles Leslie (1976) first applied the notion of medical pluralism in a systematic way to Asian countries (see also Baer 2011: 406). In this chapter, I therefore explore the plural medical resources, including biomedicine, TCM, herbs, and ritual healing that the Akha can access. This plurality of resources makes it possible for the Akha to pursue a syncretic pattern in the provision of medical care to children.

A Brief History of Local Medical Resources

The health and medical resources of southern Yunnan came to the fore of political attention in about the fourteenth century. From the fourteenth century onwards, Yunnan became notorious within the Chinese empire because of *zhang* (瘴) (Yang B. 2010: 165). This dreadful disease, affecting tropical and subtropical regions, is equated with malaria in modern medical terms but its symptoms and local aetiologies have only ever partially over-lapped with malaria (Bello 2005). For Chinese military units and Han immigrants, the outbreaks had devastating consequences (Bello 2005; Yang B. 2010). Within the dark depictions of festering Yunnan, however, little is said about some regions (including Menglian) or the fate of their ethnic

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[53] TCM was present in Pu'er City before the establishment of the PRC, but not in Menglian. Menglian's difficult landscape prevented further access.

populations (Yang Z. 2010: 297). Some accounts would seem to imply that the native groups were more immune to malaria than incoming Han, but local scholars claim that they were not spared, and that Menglian was a well-known malarial region (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 384). The local perspective is buttressed by the experience of the 1950s, when many non-Han communities, especially those of the Dai people living in the lowlands, were vulnerable to bouts of malaria (ibid.: 384). Certainly the folklore of some highlanders, including that of the Akha, alleges that they escaped to the hills from the lowlands partly because they were incapable of curing various epidemic diseases. Such folklore, of course, carries with it the implication that living in the highlands is more salubrious than living in the lowlands (Scott 2010: 159).

Whether because of, or despite, the recorded epidemics in Yunnan, herbal medicine has developed and flourished in the region. Menglian abounds with curative herbs; more than 1,000 kinds of herbs have been documented as growing there (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 396). Not only in Menglian, but in the whole of Pu'er Prefecture (to which Menglian administratively belongs), most of the population relied on indigenous herbalism to cure sickness (ibid.: 383; Local Chronicles Compilation Committee of Pu'er City 2012: 704).[54] Herbalists have four main treatments. The first is to feed patients herbs; the second one is to wash wounds with herbal water or apply crushed herbs to injured body parts; the third is to perform massage, scraping, cupping, bloodletting, or acupuncture for both internal or external sickness; and the last is a treatment combining healing rituals with these three therapies. This fourth treatment offered by herbalists is *shenyao liangjie* (神药两解) (curing the sick simultaneously through gods and herbs) (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee of Pu'er City 2012: 704).

According to published chorographies, the ritual healings included in *shenyao liangjie* are either viewed as 'witchcraft' (*wu*, 巫) (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 383), or as 'feudal superstitious activities for psychologically comforting the sick' (*fengjian mixin huodong shi bingzhe oude xinli anwei*, 封建迷信活动使病者偶得心理安慰). However, the curative function of the other treatments practised by herbalists is recognised (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee of Pu'er City 2012: 704). Indeed, though healing rituals can be used in a united way with other herbal treatments, the inner logics of healing rituals and herbalism differ. Therefore, in the following sections and chapters, I distinguish healing rituals from herbalism as an independent resource of medical care.

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[54] The prefecture's capital was called Pu'er from 1729 until after the foundation of the PRC, when it was renamed Simao. The name Pu'er was restored in 2007.

In contrast to natively developed herbalism, TCM and biomedicine were introduced into the Pu'er region by Han doctors, foreign missionaries, local individuals, and government agencies. Classically-trained doctors from Han-dominated areas of China are recorded as entering the Pu'er region from 1729; the kinds of medical services are among those now identified as TCM.[55] A health survey carried out in Pu'er region around 1947 recorded 216 individuals offering what could be identified as TCM, but none was found in Menglian (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee of Pu'er City 2012: 705). Local scholars in Menglian confirmed this finding, and further clarified that there were no TCM doctors in the county until 1963 when the first TCM doctor was officially appointed to the Menglian Minzu Hospital (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee: 381).

Biomedicine, or so-called Western medicine, was first brought to Pu'er by a British missionary in 1915. Afterwards, several missionaries from France and the United States provided biomedical treatments to their followers. Beginning in 1926, several enterprising individuals opened private biomedical clinics, first prescribing medicines imported from Myanmar and then from the rapidly flourishing local pharmacies. In 1934, the first biomedical hospital was built, funded by the local elites, and then in 1937, the local government began to support biomedical hospitals in the Pu'er region (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee of Pu'er City 2012: 707–08). Remote Menglian, however, was little influenced by the expansion of biomedical treatments until after 1949. The only exposure to biomedicine came from a few foreign missionaries and military doctors (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 382).

From 1950, a peripatetic biomedical team, founded by the Yunnan Provincial Health Department and Lancang County People's Government, frequently visited Menglian for epidemic prevention and curative work. In 1953, the specialised Menglian Health Medical Team of five staff was officially established by Lancang government, which was the beginning of the permanent medical institution in Menglian region. In 1954, the Menglian County People's Government was established, and within it was a Health Section in charge of health-related work. The government's Health Section stressed the leading role of 'Western doctors and Western medicine'

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[55] Both TCM and local herbalism make use of herbs, yet within different theoretical frameworks. TCM is constructed by theories like yin-yang (阴阳) and five elements (*wuxing*, 五行) that connect humans and the cosmos. By contrast, local herbalism seems to be without such a theoretical system. The well-known herbalists with whom I spoke presented me with their knowledge about the use and storage of herbs, and their practices of healing the sick, but none did so by invoking an overarching theoretical framework. If such a framework does exist, it is presumably very different from TCM.

(*xiyixiyao*, 西医西药). At this time too, the existing Medical Team was renamed the Menglian Autonomous District People's Government Clinic. In 1956, the Clinic was expanded to become the Menglian Minorities Hospital, and renamed in 1984 as the Menglian People's Hospital. Also in 1956, two stations for preventing epidemics and providing maternal and infant health care were set up. The Epidemic Prevention Station was responsible for vaccination, curing malaria, and leading disease-prevention work in both rural and urban areas. The Maternal and Infant Health Station was mainly in charge of providing maternal and infant care, popularising prenatal examination, new delivery techniques, administering birth control (pills, diaphragms, and abortions), examining gynaecological diseases, training midwives, and so on.

The hospital and two stations were located in the county town, but from 1956 to 1965, the nationalised medical services were spreading to other administrative centres. Over the course of a decade, clinics (*weishengsuo*, 卫生所) were set up in the governmental sites of seven townships (*xiang*, 乡), and a medical network loosely combining rural and urban areas was formed. In 1966, at the township level, there were a total of 21 (poorly-equipped) health rooms (*baojianshi*, 保健室) with 46 medical staff trained by Menglian Minorities Hospital (Peng 2000: 80-81).

With the onset of the Cultural Revolution, Menglian's townships were replaced with people's communes in 1969. This administrative change meant a series of other changes. The Township Health Room became the Brigade Health Room. In 1970, the rural cooperative medical care system was set up, and the Brigade Health Room became the Cooperative Medical Station, with a medical staff of 'barefoot doctors'. Barefoot doctors were not professionally trained at medical schools. Rather, they were local peasants who received some medical training, a combination of biomedicine and TCM, in courses that lasted 15 days to 3 years and equipped them with the necessary knowledge to treat common minor illnesses. These 'doctors' continued to pursue the same daily activities as their peasant co-villagers, but provided medical treatment on demand. This arrangement was very convenient and economical for their co-villagers to pursue medical treat-ments (Yang N. 2010). After this reform, there were a total of 33 medical stations and 67 barefoot doctors across the county and a marked improve-ment in the quality of medical service.

In 1984, subsequent administrative changes turned the communes back into towns and townships. The Cooperative Medical Stations changed back into Town or Township Health Rooms, and the 'barefoot doctors' were renamed 'countryside doctors', though their training, living conditions, and practice remained as before. Up to 1990, there existed 39 health rooms in

total and 73 countryside doctors. Of these, 49 had been trained by the county health agency and gained certificates, while the others had received less formal forms of education. Since 2006, the New Rural Cooperative Medical System (NRCMS) has been implemented in Menglian. NRCMS is a medical security system for the rural population established by raising funds through multiple channels. It has been organised, led, and supported by the state since 2002, with a target of solving poverty problems caused by serious illnesses. The rural population is highly encouraged to join in. In Menglian, there was a take-up rate of 93.86 per cent as of 2010.[56]

Although the nationalised medical system based on biomedicine continues to develop, it has been considered insufficient to serve the population. The number of medical staff remains small and undertrained – with as little as six months of medical training. Due to its remoteness, poverty, and hardly accessible mountainous landscape, Menglian remains short, too, of medical equipment and medicine. In such conditions, the local government drew on other medical resources, such as TCM and indigenous herbalism, to serve the population's medical needs.

TCM was long present in Pu'er, and some regions of the prefecture saw the development of a TCM infrastructure after the nationwide upsurge in TCM after 1954. But Menglian had no tradition of TCM prior to the PRC's establishment, and it was too remote to join in the new trend (Peng 2000: 84). Thus TCM did not officially enter Menglian until 1963 when the first TCM doctor came to work.

In the 1970s, Pu'er prefectural government developed a syncretic form of medical treatment combining biomedicine and TCM. In the course of a decade, the prefectural health agency held 14 workshops and some other trainings of 3–9 months, through which 319 biomedical doctors, including some from Menglian, were instructed in fundamental theories and therapies of TCM (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee of Pu'er City 2012: 714; Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 381). Although Menglian medical institutions began to apply this syncretic treatment, it was not as prominent as elsewhere, even in the surrounding Pu'er Prefecture. Biomedicine, although insufficient, continued to be preferred in Menglian. By 1990, there were a total of only 11 TCM-trained medical staff in

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[56] This information comes from a document that was called 'Report on Implementation' that I downloaded from the Menglian County Government Website. At the time of publication it is no longer accessible via the official website now, but can still be found online, for example, at http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_4cca39a40100qoqj.html. The full name of this report is 'Making an All-Out Effort to Promote Menglian's Socioeconomic Development'; it was addressed by the Chief Secretary of the County Committee, Wu Chaowu, at the Twelfth Plenary (extended) Session of the Tenth County Committee of Menglian of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on 10 January 2011.

Menglian, but 184 biomedical staff (including countryside doctors and those in town) (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 382–83).

Thus in Menglian, the more important medical resource was not TCM, but indigenous herbalism, which continued to flourish. On the one hand, as mentioned before, herbalism was one of the two main historic medical resources popular throughout the Menglian population. On the other hand, indigenous herbalism was supported and encouraged by the local government from the very beginning of the PRC. In part, government support for herbalism was given to address malaria outbreaks. In 1949, 49 Dai died in an outbreak; in 1952, 19,350 malaria cases were reported out of a total population of 41,052 (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 384). The Menglian Health Medical Team formed in 1953 had too few staff (with too few resources) to resolve the endemic outbreaks. Therefore, in the same year, the local government held a conference with indigenous herbalists, acknowledged the curative properties of herbalism, and further called on herbalists to cooperatively contribute their power to cure malaria. Since then, because of the high incidence of epidemics, the local government has applied herbalism among the countywide population many times in preventing or curing epidemics and other common diseases, such as malaria, flu, measles, pertussis, and dysentery, etc. For example, the local government trained 315 herbalists from various ethnic groups and directed them to join in the fight against malaria in 1959 (ibid.: 383–84). Besides, some native herbalists were absorbed into formal medical institutions, while a biomedical doctor learned herbalism. During the Cultural Revolution, biomedicine played a leading role in the Menglian Minorities Hospital, but in the medical stations scattered in rural areas, where local herbalists from every ethnic group were recruited as barefoot doctors, herbalism was the chief form of treatment (ibid.: 381). In 1978, 10 of the 67 barefoot doctors in Menglian were herbalists, while 16 offered herbal as well as biomedical treatments (ibid.: 384). As the reform of family-contract responsibility system that broke the communes and granted peasants the right of managing their land and related agricultural activities took place in the 1980s, some herbalists (attracted by the potential economic gains evoked by the reform) turned to devote themselves fully to agricultural production (Yang N. 2010). Nonetheless, they remain active in curing the sick.

For most of the PRC-period, the local authority has paid little attention to the healing rituals of Menglian's various ethnic groups. The local authority did conduct ethnographic surveys, and among their accumulated information on ethnic origins, social patterns, customs, and religions, it was noticed that sickness was attributed mainly to supernatural powers and treated by healing rituals (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999:

54–62). Such beliefs and practices were described as 'feudal superstitions' and related to 'the economic and cultural backwardness' (*jingji wenhua luohou*, 经济文化落后) in this frontier land (Standing Committee Office 2001: 230). Government officials assumed that because Menglian was a dreadful place with a high incidence of diverse epidemics and a shortage of biomedical equipment, the local ethnic groups had no choice but to rely on gods or ghosts for healing the sick (Writing Group 1986: 79). They also thought that these activities had decreased along with scientific developments (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee 1999: 59). Among all the ethnic activities, the local authority had tried to abolish only four as superstitious activities against state law: head-hunting among the Wa (ibid.: 62), chasing out *pipa gui* among the Dai, slandering people as *pusi gui* (evil ghosts that cause sickness, like *piser*) in Lahu, and twin infanticide among the Hani (i.e. Akha) (Standing Committee Office 2001: 230). They simply ignored or tolerated the rest. In other words, healing rituals have remained untouched by the local government – with the partial exception of the Cultural Revolution when all traditional ethnic activities were forbidden and were undertaken in secret, if at all.

Overall, through its decades-long fight against prevailing epidemics, the Menglian medical environment appears to have been plural and syncretic. It is a plural system composed of biomedicine, TCM, herbalism, and healing rituals though they respectively have varied influence among the public. There are no clear-cut boundaries among these medical resources, and to a certain extent they are synthesised via healing cooperation and formal or informal training workshops. I have thus outlined the wide medical environment in which the Akha live. In the following section, I will explore their pattern of utilising these medical resources.

The Akha Pattern of Medical Choices

I have heard about, observed, and sometimes experienced medical treatment of these four kinds in Akha villages during fieldwork. It was like a pool full of medical materials, and Akha villagers drew on different treatments according to situations and needs. Based on the actual importance to villagers' lives, I here elaborate these resources in order below.

TCM: Rarely Used

It was very easy to find a TCM pharmacy near the most active market in the county town. In this market, people wearing the colourful costumes of many ethnic groups gathered to sell vegetables and buy domestic appliances. Many times, I accompanied Akha villagers as they passed by the pharmacy on the

way to the market, but we never stepped in. To my eyes, they never showed interest in that pharmacy. I also found barely a trace of villagers using TCM. Only once, as far I could tell, was TCM invoked in a story told by an informant. Before my arrival to Menglian in 2012, a young man from Hakaq broke his arm in a traffic accident. He was immediately sent to Menglian People's Hospital by his elder brother and brother-in-law, where biomedical doctors told them that an expensive surgery was required; the doctors could not promise that the surgery would work out perfectly due to potential complications. The injured man was then taken to a TCM clinic for bonesetting, but the doctor there claimed also to be unable to heal the injury. Finally, the young man was taken home, and his father, a herbalist, reset the broken bone and cured the injury with herbs over several days. As he told me the story, the brother of this young man showed great pride in his father and herbalism, while he despised TCM for its incapacity to deal with the injury. Villagers rarely sought treatment from TCM and rare encounters, like this one, tended to confirm their belief that TCM was not as helpful to them as herbalism.

Nationalised Biomedicine: Widely Accepted, Selectively Used

As the leading section of nationalised medical institutions, biomedicine – called Western medicine in Chinese – obviously has penetrated into the Akha community more deeply and widely than TCM in many ways. Before discussing how biomedicine works on Akha people, I will firstly sketch the biomedical institutions available to Hakaq village. Hakaq administratively belongs to the Haidong Administrative Village, which is composed of 16 natural villages (*zirancun*, 自然村)[57], with a total population of 1,989 (as of 2013). Haidong is equipped with two nationalised clinics, each staffed by one countryside doctor. Dr Aqwo is in charge of health care matters in nine natural villages, including five Wa villages and four Akha villages (Hakaq included), and the other doctor is responsible for the remaining villages. Aqwo, originally from a Wa village neighbouring Hakaq, is a fifty-year-old man who speaks fluent Akha. He graduated from middle school and then, after some time, took up work as a countryside doctor from the age of twenty-two. He maintains a very close relationship with Hakaq villagers, who respectfully call him 'Aqbawr' (grandfather). Generally, his work covers prenatal examination, immunisation, and curing common sicknesses, such as cold, fever, cough, and diarrhoea. His clinic is located in the same place as the Haidong Villagers' Committee (*cunweihui*, 村委会), but the nine

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[57] A natural village is a settlement that is organised and developed spontaneously by several households or lineages. It is different from an administrative village which normally incorporates several natural villages.

villages for which he is responsible are scattered over the mountains. With the exception of immunisation services, patients must travel to Dr Aqwo. It normally takes Hakaq villagers half an hour by motorbike to reach the clinic. To deliver the immunisations required by the state, Dr Aqwo takes his own motorbike from one settlement to another. As for prenatal examination or common sickness, he serves the public at the clinic. Overall, Dr Aqwo and his clinic are the most immediate biomedical resources for Hakaq villagers.

Dr Aqwo's work is directly monitored by the Mangxin Town Health Institution (*zhen weishengyuan*, 镇卫生院). The institution provides services of maternal care, birth control, immunisation, and treatment for common diseases. Besides, it also takes charge of reimbursing medical costs to the rural population under the framework of NRCMS. In other words, it is a personal choice to apply for medical care here, but residents have to come to the institution for the benefits of NRCMS. During my time in the field, I rarely encountered villagers who went to the Mangxin Town Health Institution for medical care. Rather, they prefer medical institutions in the county town, such as the People's Hospital or the Maternal and Infant Health Station; this is so even though the Town Health Institution can be reached by motorbike in half an hour and the county town requires one hour of travel. For serious diseases, villagers have sometimes gone to hospitals in Lancang County, Pu'er City, or Jinghong City, where biomedical resources are considered to be better than those in Menglian.

Normally, Akha villagers encounter two types of biomedical care: one is what they are obliged to take, such as contraceptives, prenatal examinations, and immunisations; the other consists of the general biomedical services which they access by choice. The PRC's birth control policy has been gradually implemented in Menglian since the 1980s.[58] At that time, Akha women of childbearing age were required to use contraceptives, including birth control pills, IUDs, contraceptive injections, abortion, and even sterilisation. In other words, compared to men, Akha women have experienced more biomedical technologies. For example, as Aqmee Ke, a fifty-nine-year-old mother of five children recalled, after giving birth to her fourth child in 1984, she started taking birth control pills under the government programme 'Birth Control Propaganda Month' widely run by local governments of Pu'er (Health Bureau of Pu'er 2012: 404–05). Her pills lasted some years, and when they ran out, she went to the hospital for a contraceptive injection. However, the injection did not work; she got pregnant then gave birth to her last child in 1988. Also in 1988, her husband's aunt, Aqpiq Mu,

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[58] The well-known One Child Policy is only a part of the whole birth control policy of the PRC, even among the registered urban population. Among rural and ethnic populations, the full policy varies even more in its components.

was required to be sterilised because she already had thirteen children. In the hospital, doctors found her pregnant with a fourteenth child; they aborted the foetus and performed the sterilisation. Other women reported similar experiences of taking contraceptives or undergoing abortions and sterilisations as a result of the first wave of the birth control campaign in the 1980s–90s.

Since the 1990s, women have been exposed to yet more biomedical technologies concerning reproduction and birth. At the time of my fieldwork, young wives had many biomedical technologies working on their bodies. They were obliged to take prenatal examinations in the country clinic or county hospital. When the foetus is found to be malformed, it is aborted. There were three pregnant women in the researched village during my stay, and their husbands sent them to the country clinic or hospital for prenatal checks from time to time. Of the three, one underwent an abortion because the baby was found to have hydrocephalus. Six to eight months after childbirth, women are required to have an IUD fitted in hospital.

Akha women used to give birth at home with midwives' assistance, but since 2012 they have been obliged to deliver in hospital for the sake of reducing maternal mortality. Aqtsuq Mei, a seventeen-year-old from Hakaq, and Aqtsuq Nei, a twenty-four-year-old from Kekaq village, were respectively the first women in their villages to deliver in hospital. Both had medical interventions during the delivery: Aqtsuq Mei was given oxytocin and an episiotomy, while Aqtsuq Nei underwent a caesarean section because the baby was too big to come out naturally. Though hospital delivery has been accepted, villagers remain confident in their own herbs and skills in childbirth. Aqliq Ci, a twenty-seven-year-old married man, gave full credit to home birth, drawing on births with which he was familiar:

> The Akha always delivered children in the village before, but none died in labour. One mother had foetal malposition: she drank herbs, the position was corrected, then the baby was smoothly born. Another had pain for eight or nine days, but she still had a natural delivery. They do not have to experience a caesarean section as they do when delivering children in hospital, and cases of difficult birth or postpartum haemorrhage have never happened.

Aqbawr Bu, a fifty-year-old *pima* and the father-in-law of Aqtsuq Mei, agreed with Aqliq Ci's opinion, and added, 'Now according to the regulation, we have to give birth at hospital, otherwise the newborn is disqualified to officially register with the police station. However, we can manage a secure home birth!' Yet, four months later when Aqtsuq Mei was sent to hospital for delivery, Aqbawr Bu also gave credit to the hospital by stating, 'It is fine to have a delivery at hospital. No matter what happens,

they know how to cope with it. As for home birth, we also have herbs, don't we? But the hospital has more advanced technologies'.

Immunisation is mandatory for children under seven. It is also mandatory for the mobile population (migrants) under thirty-five (i.e. nine Akha women from Myanmar married to Hakaq men). These projects are usually free. Children usually are required to take the first dose of Hepatitis B vaccine (HepB) in the first week after birth. In the following three years, especially the first year, they should take several compulsory vaccines, including for Tuberculosis (BCG), Polio (OPV), Diphtheria-Pertussis-Tetanus (DPT), Measles (MV), Measles-Rubella (MR), and Meningococcal serogroup A Vaccine. The vaccination information of each child is recorded in a booklet named Yunnan Vaccination Record, which is an indispensable document to enter nursery, kindergarten, and school. Dr Aqwo has fulfilled the vaccination work carefully, giving and recording shots. On the tenth of every month, he takes his medicine box, and travels around the nine villages on motorbike for immunisation and vaccination. The first time I met him was on the balcony at the home of Aqzawr Wu – the political village head of Hakaq – where he was vaccinating infants under the age of one. Families with infants came over, sat around him, and were injected in turn. Months later, he appeared at a Wa village neighbouring Hakaq to vaccinate small children, and a young Akha wife walked there with her baby on her back for the shots. I met Dr Aqwo again in the beginning of December 2012, again on Aqzawr Wu's balcony, which was crowded with elders, young wives, husbands, and small children. He was busy giving shots of OPV and MV to small children and young wives originally from Myanmar – a mobile population without permanent residence permits. Villagers behaved very cooperatively, taking injections without challenge while nicely chatting with him. Vaccination was clearly taken for granted and I never heard negative opinions about it.

As for general biomedical treatment, villagers hold various attitudes toward it according to their personal experiences and preferences. Most villagers draw on biomedicine to cure common illnesses such as colds, fever, and diarrhoea, as well as more serious problems, such as gynaecological diseases, liver diseases, kidney stones, and osteoarthritis. Even the best-known herbalists and ritual healers in Hakaq, Aqbawr Pu and Aqbawr Bu, keep pain and fever-reducing medicines such as paracetamol and compound aminopyrine phenacetin tablets at home. Such medicines are administered to people of both genders and of all ages. Only one family expressed an explicit distrust in biomedicine, which they said they had learned from Abu.[59] As

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[59] Abu is a form of address that means 'girl'; here it is used to refer to the wife of the Kunming couple mentioned in chapter 2.

part of her activism to protect Akha traditions, Abu had promoted herbalism. She had told this family not to send their baby girl to hospital for biomedical treatment, and rather, feeding her with herbs is the best treatment. The family had accepted the advice. They fed their daughter only with herbal tea when she was ill, and then hosted healing rituals.

Yet because of the distance to available nationalised biomedical institutions and the cost, villagers' application of biomedicine is limited. It is too far to walk, and transportation options are limited. There is no public transportation in the mountains. As mentioned above, it normally takes half an hour by motorbike to travel to the countryside doctor's clinic or the Mangxin Town Health Institution, and it takes one hour to reach the People's Hospital in the county town. Motorbike is convenient, but as it is mostly men who own and drive motorbikes, women, children, and the elders must wait for such a man to be free enough from agricultural or ritual activities to drive them. When men are busy, or when the road is in a terrible state due to endless rain, the sick must turn to other resources. From time to time, villagers with tractors might drive to the county town. Villagers without motorbikes can catch a ride, but the schedules of tractors are mostly decided by owners and do not follow other villagers' needs. Certainly, it is possible to rent a tractor as needed, but it costs 150 RMB (around $24 USD) to go to the county town. For ordinary villagers, this is considered too expensive to seek treatment for ailments such as colds or fever, but it is not out of the question for bigger events. I was told, for example, of a man who tried to rent a tractor for his pregnant wife when she was due for delivery. Rich villagers may enjoy more choices. Aqzawr Ka, a rich retired teacher, is able to ride to the county town whenever he needs biomedical treatment because he can call on his nephew who owns a car.

Money not only matters when choosing transportation, which indirectly limits villagers' medical options, but also directly affects villagers' medical choices. Once, a middle-age woman suffering a swollen neck had to turn to the herbalist Aqbawr Pu. In fact, she had already seen biomedical doctors from whom she learned 'something was wrong with her thyroid or lymph node'. She had taken the medicine they prescribed, but it did not work and she had no money for further treatments. Therefore, she asked Aqbawr Pu for some herbs. Aqbawr Pu told me that he had heard of the illness described by the woman, but he had never before encountered it. All he could do, he said, was to try.

The NRCMS is not always helpful to villagers. As some villagers complained, NRCMS does not cover every medical cost (only 70 per cent) unless people are hospitalised. Besides, medicines provided by the cooperative hospitals of NRCMS tend to be more expensive than those prescribed

by the non-cooperative clinics. Despite the financial subsidies offered by the state, biomedicines are not necessarily cheap. In other words, when encountering small problems such as colds, fever, or diarrhoea, it is not cost-efficient to use nationalised biomedicine. By contrast, NRCMS is considered very helpful for serious health problems. For instance, in 2012, the father and wife of Aqzawr Te, the fifty-year-old blacksmith in Hakaq, both suffered major illness and were hospitalised in Pu'er City, which cost them 18,000 RMB (roughly $2,867 USD) in total. Aqzawr Te felt very grateful to NRCMS because it reimbursed him 80 per cent of the total cost. He said he would have died if he had needed to pay the full cost on his own.

Regarding efficacy, no villagers have completely discredited or given full credit to biomedical treatments except in one situation. Aqbawr Pu, a *pima* master, confidently claimed that biomedicine is useless for children unless they are taken care of by the gods of children. Strictly, Aqbawr Pu did not completely distrust biomedicine for children; at least he acknowledged that biomedicine is able to diminish inflammation. In other words, villagers share a general opinion that biomedicine is useful but not always useful. Whenever biomedical treatment is proved ineffective, they turn to other medical resources, mostly herbalism and healing rituals. In reverse, if herbalism and healing rituals do not work well, they will turn back to biomedicine.

Indigenous Herbs: Pervasively Used in Conjunction with Biomedicine

Compared with biomedicine, herbs are much more accessible and cheap. First of all, herbs can be easily found in the villagers' living environment: gardens, yards, fields, roads leading to fields, woods, and forests are all places known well for the herbs they contain. As soon as they are in need of certain herbs, they know where to find them. Secondly, most villagers, old or young, male or female, have certain knowledge of plants for medical use – just as they know about a certain range of folk treatments, such as bloodletting or scraping – which are sufficient to cope with minor ailments. Thirdly, nearly all the household heads know how to use herbs, but several elders in particular are publicly recognised as good herbalists. In the wider neighbourhood, there is at least one very knowledgeable herbalist at each Akha village. These knowledgeable herbalists are capable of curing larger problems, including injuries, broken bones, infertility, stomach troubles, liver disease, and venereal disease. Fourthly, even herbs that are not self-collected are very cheap. Family members, friends, and neighbours usually give a small portion of herbs for the asking. Fifthly, even treatments from local herbalists are perceived as affordable. When they seek treatment for a

serious illness, villagers present the herbalist with a bottle of homemade corn wine, then make subsequent payments with other items according to widely recognised customs. The most expensive treatment I encountered was when Aqbawr Pu, the *pima* and a herbalist, charged an Akha man from another village 600 RMB (under $96 USD), a small pig, and a homemade Akha male jacket, for curing his life-threatening liver disease which the hospital had failed to cure.[60]

My personal medical experience might serve a good example to illustrate the convenience of using herbs. During my stay in Hakaq village I, like many villagers, especially the elders, women and children, had no motorbike, and was anyway unable to ride one. Although I had enough money to rent a driver and a motorbike, it was not easy to find one available. Hence, my chances of choosing biomedicine or TCM were greatly limited, and thus I came to make use of the herbal environment too. Since I had little knowledge of herbs, villagers around me became my immediate healers. During my first trip in 2008, I was surprised when an eight-year-old girl told me that a small fruit we had seen where they fetch water helps with digestion. I happened to have digestion problems, thus I picked some fruit and ate them. They worked really well. From 2012 to 2013, I had more opportunities to learn herbs from villagers. When I suffered diarrhoea at the beginning of field research, a young man in his early thirties went two hundred metres away from the village and found some small green berries, which healed me immediately. When I suffered a terrible headache caused by pesticide, Aqbawr Pu helped me to find a piece of plant in his garden. After chewing the plant for some time, the headache disappeared. Once I badly sprained an ankle and had to drag my foot at every step; an old woman noticed and instantly punctured my ankle with a needle to let blood come out. It was very painful, but I could step normally afterwards. During the Swing Festival, a teenage boy taught me that the vine used as the chains of the swing is a medicine; if a person spends too much time on the swing to fall asleep at night, he or she should chew a piece of the vine which helps sleeping. At the last stage of field research, Aqbawr Gu even treated my dog-bite wound with herbs.

Nonetheless, these successful treatments do not necessarily mean herbs are a panacea, or herbalists are all-powerful in healing. Rather, herbs are the most accessible and affordable immediate medical resource for the Akha, and most times, the efficacy of herbs can be trusted. Thus, villagers

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[60] It is practically impossible to render a total cash value for this treatment. The small pig might cost 300–400 RMB, but the jacket has no price because normally it would not have been for sale. I know of one case when an old man sold his jacket to a tourist at the price of 7,000 RMB, but it is unusual to sell a jacket at all.

are likely to draw on the herbal resources around them. In particular, there are many experienced herbalists specialised in curing injuries caused by hunting guns, knives, falls, traffic accidents, and so on. I have witnessed several cases where herbalists, after merely listening to visitors' description of how a person is injured and what the symptoms are, prescribed some herbs. As for major ailments of internal organs, patients normally go to hospital in the first place; if biomedicine does not help, they, or their families, turn to a preferred herbalist with the diagnostic results made by biomedical doctors. According to the biomedical diagnostic results, the herbalist would judge if they can cure the disease. Aqbawr Pu is such a herbalist, often receiving visitors coming for herbs. He once successfully cured a man's liver disease, but he has a clear idea of his limits. I encountered a man, the husband of a woman suffering advanced cancer of the uterus, who visited Aqbawr Pu for a prescription. Aqbawr Pu told him that if the woman had uterine fibroids then he could cure her, but that he was unable to cure uterus cancer. If she had cancer, he would only be able to alleviate her symptoms for, at most, several months. He urged the man to continue to take his wife to hospital, so that they could remove the uterus if necessary. Additionally, Aqbawr Pu said it was unnecessary to see other herbalists: no herbs can cure uterine cancer. The man kept begging, so Aqbawr Pu did give him some herbs. Weeks later, the man called Aqbawr Pu again for more herbs. After drinking the herbs, he said, his wife stopped feeling pain, thus they believed that Aqbawr Pu could heal her. Aqbawr Pu again clarified that his herbs only kill the pain but by no means cure the cancer. Sometimes, the order of drawing on medical resources goes the other way, from herbs to biomedicine. Once a young man suffered an acute disease; his fingers could not bend. His co-villager as well as herbalist Aqbawr Gu fed him with herbs, and urged him to go to hospital as soon as possible. Apparently, both ordinary villagers and herbalists freely slide between biomedicine and herbs, applying whatever helpful in healing the sick.

Ritual Healing: Widely Conducted in Private and as a Communal Treatment

If both biomedicine and herbs are proved ineffective, villagers will eventually turn to ritualised treatments or healing rituals, implying that the sickness might be caused by cosmological forces. It may be that a god has been violated or a ghost is hungry. Or it may be that certain kin are causing illness for others, as when grandchildren cause discomfort to grandparents. Illnesses with such causes can only be cured ritually. Sometimes, ritual precautions

and treatments are taken before illness appears, or before trying biomedicine or herbs, because the Akha know that some cosmological beings are likely to cause sickness to certain people in certain situations.

Ritualised precautions and treatments (discussed in greater detail below) involve attempts to protect people from harmful cosmological beings. For example, a man might throw a piece of cigarette to the ground as he passes a place where a hungry ghost is considered to be wandering around. Grandparents or parents make infants wear a small red bag filled with drugs to protect them from malicious ghosts (*piser* or *lapya*); an elder ties a thread around a grandchild's wrist whenever soul loss takes place. Throwing a small amount of ordinary food to ghosts is a frequent way to avoid illness or to cure illness caused by encountering ghosts. Items used as ritualised precautions and treatments include very cheap homemade stuff (a string of thread, a piece of cloth, shellac bracelet, a small drug bag), or something bought (a shell, a tiger claw, a silver button or coin). These items are usually made into accessories such as hats, necklaces, bracelets, and waistbands to protect wearers from different types of cosmological harm.

Significantly, ritualised precautions and treatments are usually conducted privately and at an everyday level. In other words, an individual person or family draws on common cosmological and customary knowledge, judges the potential or encountered threats, and deals with them independently. They also freely apply these ritualised treatments whenever and wherever needed. It is observable that most ritualised treatments are applied on the elderly, children, and grown-ups in poor health; such people are vulnerable to cosmological attacks. Children, particularly, due to frequent soul loss and attack from the gods of children, experience intensive ritual health care in the first three years, which pervasively penetrates their everyday life. Because of their lack of necessary knowledge of protecting themselves from cosmological harm, it is the duty of their parents and grandparents to provide ritual care to them.

In contrast, healing rituals refer to the systemic rituals collectively conducted in a community to protect people from cosmological harm or to cure mostly long-lasting illness caused by cosmological forces. In general, healing rituals include the newborn ritual; ritual of calling souls back; sacrificing rituals to the gods of children, household or fields; purifying ritual of the household; and asking for a garment from a maternal uncle. In contrast to ritualised precautions and treatments, healing rituals are not conducted at will, but obey several structuring elements. Firstly, they can only be performed on auspicious days. Secondly, a place must be chosen to host the ritual. According to the illness, families might host these rituals at home, in the open air, inside or outside the village gate, or in a field. Some-

times they need travel to another village where a maternal uncle lives, or to another location within their neighbourhood, in another county, or even in another country (i.e. Myanmar). Thirdly, villagers themselves are unable to perform healing rituals; rather, they have to rely on ritual specialists and certain knowledgeable elders who have mastered the special knowledge required for the rituals. Fourthly, some healing rituals are constrained in terms of frequency. For example, a man is only allowed to ask for a garment from a maternal uncle a maximum of three times in his life[61], a childless couple would ultimately turn to rituals to cure their sterility after they have visited herbalists or doctors and tried other culinary methods, and a household can only host household purifying rituals a maximum of three times. Therefore, villagers take great caution in choosing the right moment to host such rituals. Apparently, though sickness seems to be a private issue, healing rituals always involve collective cooperation to different extents, from several elders to all households in a village.

Finally it should be noted that healing rituals are costly in both material and effort. They require people to sacrifice animals, such as chickens, ducks, pigs, dogs, and goats. Depending in the particular ritual, hosts and their helpers may need to collect various plants from the woods, prepare food offerings and feasts, serve participants, and clean up. Also, hosts must pay the officiants in cash as well as with meat and silver coins. And, finally, they must return the labour that helpers offered them when the helpers conduct their own ritual affairs. These healing rituals are usually performed with great caution, as any mistake will cause further problems which require another ritual to correct them.

Generally, there are three types of healers, along with their apprentices and assistants, who play roles in the healing rituals. The first type refers to ritual specialists, including *pima*, *nyirpaq*, and the blacksmith. *Pima* and *nyirpaq* are immediate ritual healers, who make ritual diagnoses and perform healing rituals. Of the two, the *pima* is considered the primary ritual healer of an Akha community, and is expected to take care of most healing rituals. The *nyirpaq* is less powerful than *pima*, and is often preferred for diagnoses rather than healing. Only a few powerful *nyirpaq* are able to officiate at a healing ritual. The blacksmith contributes his power to healing rituals in an indirect manner by making iron items.

In Hakaq, there are five qualified *pima* in total, among whom Aqbawr Pu is the master, Aqbawr Bu is a senior apprentice, and there are three junior apprentices. Aqbawr Pu and Aqbawr Bu officiate in most ritual matters.

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[61] As discussed previously, the 'maternal uncle' refers to a collective family unit more commonly than to a single individual. One may ask for the garment from different individual 'uncles', but can only ask a total of three times.

There is no qualified *nyirpaq* in Hakaq, but there are two female *nyirpaq* assistants. In the wider neighbourhood, nearly every Akha village has at least one *pima* or one *nyirpaq*. Some of them enjoy a widely recognised good reputation, such as Aqbawr Pu, who is often visited for diagnosis or invited for healing rituals by Akha people from Menglian, Lancang, and even Myanmar.

Importantly, before a healing ritual is undertaken, a diagnosis must be given. Normally, there are three ways to ask for a diagnosis. The first way is to visit a *pima* or a *nyirpaq*'s home in the early morning. In such a case, healers apply their ritual equipment directly to search for the sickness causation. The second way is to invite the *nyirpaq* to one's home to give an overnight diagnosing ritual. The third way occurs when a *pima* or *nyirpaq* is invited to perform another ritual in a village; on this occasion, villagers could invite him or her to drop by the villager's home and perform a quick diagnosis. In reality, it is basically a personal choice to choose a preferred *pima* or *nyirpaq* through any of these ways. For instance, some villagers in Hakaq like visiting their co-villager Aqbawr Pu for diagnosis, some are inclined to invite a *nyirpaq* from another village to do a diagnosing ritual, while some prefer the third way. Normally, ritual healers should not reject any visitors or invitations connected to a ritual purpose. According to the sickness causation, they would make a prescription composed of a ritual or a series of rituals for the sick, such as a sacrificing ritual to the god of household, earth, or birth – the gods who most often cause sickness.

The second type of healers are ordinary people who occupy a social position, permanently or temporarily, which is culturally considered as possessing healing or blessing power such as the village father (i.e. symbol of the perfect village), the elders, children, and the wife-givers (*pighoe, maghoe, jmghoe*) and wife-takers (*mimaq, midzeiq*) from the hosting family. Despite not being religious specialists, these people (less so children) are obliged to participate in healing rituals at which *pima* and *nyirpaq* officiate. As the village father is not always available, and wife-givers and wife-takers tend to live in other villages, co-villagers may be called on to take their roles. Maternal uncles, with their strong blessing power, are independent officiants specialised in healing their sister's children. These categories of people, particularly the elders and children, may officiate certain small-scale healing rituals, independently of the *pima* and *nyirpaq*. The elders, for example, may officiate the rituals of *lakuku* (calling souls back) or *hadahada cidzeq* (carrying a woven bamboo tray filled with food to the outside of the village gate and throwing it to *naevq*). Children, under the supervision of parents, can also initiate healing rituals for their sick grandparents and great-grandparents.

Plate 16. Villagers, including big men and affines, hold ritual bowls in a ritual feast (Hakaq).

Behind the first and second types of visible healers stand their respective ancestors or protecting gods who are always addressed and summoned on ritual occasions. The ancestors and gods therefore form the third category of healers, the cosmological healers. More properly speaking, the cosmological healers are the ultimate healers in Akha communities because it is they who withdraw harm.

There is, in fact, no clear-cut boundary between ritualised precautions or treatments and healing rituals. Some ritualised treatments are included in healing rituals: for example, tying a thread around the wrist is an indispensable step in every healing ritual. Ultimately, they both work to spare people from cosmological harm. Their efficacy can be nicely represented through the case of Aqbawr Lu.

In early December 2012, Aqbawr Lu, an old man in his eighties, suffered an acute illness. He felt pain all over his body, and he had vomiting and diarrhoea. His family first bought him some biomedicine which cost 200 RMB (more than 20 euros), but it did not work. Then his son Aqbawr Bu made him some herbal tea, which did not make much difference. The next morning, Aqbawr Bu asked Aqbawr Pu, the master *pima*, for a diagnosis.

After performing a small rite by reading a broken raw egg, Aqbawr Pu attributed Aqbawr Lu's disease to an improperly planted tree in their paddy field, which was a violation to the god of earth. As Aqbawr Pu pronounced the cause of disease, Aqbawr Lu felt the pain released. Aqbawr Bu was a bit confused because he had done nothing in the field, so he immediately summoned his two sons and asked them if they had planted something there. His eldest son confessed that he had recently built a drainage pipe of wood and bamboo in the paddy field. The cause was confirmed, and a healing ritual was arranged for the following day. That night, one of Aqbawr Lu's grandsons performed a blessing ritual of the kind that grandchildren may do for grandparents, which involved killing a pig. During the ritual, Aqbawr Lu was too sick to even swallow a mouthful of food offering. On the third day, Aqbawr Lu felt a bit better and was able to have food. Aqbawr Bu kept feeding herbal tea to him. After breakfast, Aqbawr Bu, the *pima* Aqbawr Pu, an elder man from another lineage, Aqbawr Bu's eldest son, and I went to the paddy field to perform the ritual healing. Aqbawr Bu removed the drainage pipe, then Aqbawr Pu sacrificed two chickens to the god of earth. We went back home to find Aqbawr Lu outside the house. When I asked him how he felt, he said that he felt no pain at all. He looked healthy again, and was able to walk around and chat with people.

Aqbawr Lu's case shows a family's mixed response to an acute illness. Biomedical treatment was tried, but quickly abandoned when it showed little result. In contrast, herbal tea continued to be offered to the old man, even though it too had no immediate effect, as two forms of ritual healing were invoked. As the diagnosis and healing ritual by the *pima* were undertaken, family members (and specifically a grandson) organised other rituals.

A healing ritual has no effect if it is invoked for a sickness that has not been caused by cosmological forces. For example, one woman told me that two years prior to our meeting she had suffered a terrible pain in her belly after surgery related to a vermiform appendix. Her family invited Aqbawr Pu to perform a sacrificing ritual, but the ritual did not work (*buguanyong*, 不管用). The pain continued, and she became unable to eat, drink, or defecate. Four months after the ritual, she had a piece of large intestine removed surgically in Lancang hospital. Afterwards, she recovered and became fit again.

To draw a conclusion from these two cases, it seems that pain caused by a violated god can only be removed by pleasing this god, and a surgery-caused problem can be resolved only by more surgery. Perhaps this is the reason that villagers remain open to multiple medical resources. In other words, none of these available medical resources is a panacea; rather, they

all have certain efficacy as well as limits. Hence, Akha make use of them in a syncretic manner. Additionally, ritual healings, because they are deeply rooted in a world entangled with a specific village organisation, kinship system, natural environment, and cosmological image do not vanish nor even lose vitality.

Ritualised Precautions and Treatments

Having thus taken a glimpse into Akha healing rituals, let us return to the widely used ritualised precautions and treatments. Some of these are independent methods applied in everyday life, and some are important steps in healing rituals. These activities and items are all material representations of the links between cosmologically caused sickness and remedies. Looked at more closely, they reveal how closely Akha cosmology is knotted into daily practices.

Tying a Thread

Tying a thread (*shuanxian*, 拴线) is to tie a length of cotton thread around a person's right wrist, or sometimes the left ankle and waist. Its purpose is, first, to tie a person's souls to the body so as to maintain the person's health; second, the thread warns ghosts that a person is a member of the human world whom they should not harm. Ultimately, to tie a thread is to protect a person from the cosmological beings who cause illness and pain. It could be done in everyday life, for example when a grandfather ties a thread on a granddaughter who is frightened by falling down from somewhere high. It also unexceptionally takes place in ritual or ceremonial events: a *pima* ties threads on the members of a family that is hosting rituals, and the elders tie threads onto a newly-wed couple during their wedding. While tying a thread, preferably one should utter some benediction upon the recipients, such as, 'May your souls not be scared away', 'May you live long', or 'May you have no illness or pain'. Here, the thread is also a material representation of the oral benediction.

Plate 17. A four-year-old boy wears a waistband which is supposed to cure his diarrhea (Hakaq).

Differences in the colour, thickness, and placement of the thread vary with several considerations. Normally, Akha tie a thread only around the right wrist, while Wa people in the same neighbourhood use both wrists. Tying the ankles is more rare. Only if a man is really sick, and hosts a ritual to send the illness away, will a thread be tied around his right wrist and left ankle. If a child suffers diarrhoea or breathing problems, a long braided thread will be tied around her waist. The thread may be dark blue or black, white, or colourful, and its selection reflects the purpose of the healing rituals, age of the patient, season, and other considerations. People mostly use dark blue or black threads to protect the receiver both in daily life (e.g. a frightened child), and in ritual events (e.g. a child in a healing ritual). White thread is used on certain ritual occasions: a healing ritual performed at home to send away (*songdiu*, 送丢) a sick old man's illness; a ritual of calling souls back performed at the village gate for children or other non-elderly adults; or any healing rituals held between Closing the Gates and Opening the Gates. Colourful braided threads appear in two situations: one is in the form of a bracelet which is strung with a shell, a silver button, or nine pieces of shell; the other is in the form of a long waistband attached by a shell or silver

button. Shell is thought to be the mouth of the Supreme God, calling one's souls back; a silver button is a talisman, carrying good wishes for health and fortune. Thus thread strung with or connected by shells or silver buttons is considered to possess a double blessing power.

Not everybody is qualified to tie a thread onto someone else. Based on age, the elderly may tie a thread on others in daily and ritual occasions. Based on kinship, elderly parents and grandparents are free to tie a thread on their offspring in daily and ritual occasions. Grandchildren, no matter how old they are, can tie a thread on their grandparents in certain rituals. Based on ritual status, ritual officiants at whatever age are all qualified to tie threads on others. Based on religious purity, only pure people are preferred to fulfil this job. In reverse, not everybody likes to have a thread tied on them. Normally, people accept a thread tied by proper persons in a proper situation, but pregnant women are very cautious about having threads tied on them. They only accept a thread tied by clean elders to cure illness. Their caution lies in the fear that frequent tying of thread by undistinguished people might activate hostile cosmological forces, causing miscarriage.

Thread-tying on infants carries further proscriptions. Guests to view a mother and new child are only welcome after the naming ceremony. But then, some guests must tie threads, while others must not. Han and Lahu guests who appear within thirteen days of the ceremony must tie a thread around the newborn's wrists to protect him from bad influences. Dai and Wa guests must not do so. According to Akha folklore, once upon a time the Akha were family with Lahu and Han, but the Dai and Wa were brothers and shared another mother.

Other Protective Accessories

From the outward appearance, particularly the accessories of an Akha villager, one can easily tell his or her state of health. In general, infants, without exception, wear similar handmade hats with a tiny red drug bag attached, a shellac bracelet which protects them from hostile beings, and a bunch of dark-blue threads around the right wrist to tie their souls to their bodies. As time goes by, weak children receive more accessories from grandparents or ritual specialists in ritual events, such as necklaces with silver products, an iron bracelet, or sometimes a slim belt braided from colourful threads with a small shell or silver button attached. Sometimes children in good health also receive such gifts from grandparents because they carry good wishes for their continuing health. As they grow up, adults who experience healing rituals always receive a bunch of threads around their wrists: sometimes, they receive threads stringing several pieces of shell together or a silver bracelet. Sickly adults continue to wear a tiny red drug bag against hostile

beings. In old age, villagers wear nearly nothing except threads around their wrists. People wear these accessories for their health rather than beauty. Akha villagers, especially women, do also enjoy wearing colourful accessories for beauty, but I will leave those untreated.

The drug bag is a tiny bag of roughly four square centimetres, made of red cotton cloth. It is filled with various drugs against *piser* and *lapya*, among which shellac is indispensable. Generally, this drug bag is made by (great-)grandparents for their newborn (great-)grandchildren. Infants are supposed to wear this tiny bag in the first year, and then their family may remove it at will. As long as they are wearing this drug bag, infants and sickly adults are secure to travel around.

The shellac bracelet is made by a father for his newborn children during the naming ceremony. Shellac is defined as a medicine (*yao*, 药). It is collected from the woods and is meant to protect infants from *piser* and *lapya*.

Every newborn infant wears a hat with a cluster of decorations attached, of which half are for health, half for beauty. Here I list only the protecting items, which are all defined as medicine (*yao*, 药). One of the items is a wild botanical hard shell with sharp hooks, called *pisermaqdo*, literally meaning '*piser* does not bite'. It is said that the vicious *piser* will not come to bite and drink the blood of one who possesses this shell. Other protective items include a piece of porcupine quill; a piece of pangolin scale; a pangolin claw; and the seeds of several herbs. These items protect infants from bad cosmological forces. Normally a family might not have all of these items, thus they often collect them from relatives. Sometimes relatives, hearing the baby is born, voluntarily contribute these items. Sometimes, they also buy the wild animal parts from mobile vendors.

The iron bracelet is only offered to children or sickly adults who ask for a white garment from the maternal uncles' families. It must be made by the blacksmiths living in the same village as the maternal uncles. For small children, it might be too heavy to wear as a bracelet, thus sometimes it is strung and hung around children's necks.

Silver products normally include buttons, coins, bracelets, or necklaces with varied silver content. Some items have high silver content, being considered 'real silver', usually inherited from previous generations as heirlooms. Some have little silver content, mostly bought in the market and known as 'fake silver'. Fake silver items, mostly bracelets or necklaces, are bought for small children the first time they visit a market with their parents. Real silver items, mostly buttons or coins, are provided by the maternal uncles' families to sickly ones during healing rituals. Sometimes, maternal grandparents would present a real silver button or coin to their daughter's

children on non-ritual occasions, with wishes of good health and good fortune.

As noted above, the waistband is one type of tying thread, preventing or curing diarrhoea and breathing problems. Here I mention it again to stress its significant role in the sphere of medical care. Compared to other threads having general protecting power whatever the problem, the waistband specifically addresses health problems in the belly, such as belly pain, diarrhoea, or breathing problems, particularly of children. If children suffer diarrhoea, their grandparents from both sides equally could make a waistband for them, symbolically 'blocking' (*du*, 堵) it. It can be also used as a precaution to guard children against diarrhoea. If the problem is confirmed as relating to Ghesanq Gheje through ritual diagnosis, families of the children are meant to host a healing ritual where the sick children will have a waistband tied round them by the ritual officiant *pima*. Meanwhile, *pima* and other participants – the elders – would also tie a thread round the children's wrists. Since diarrhoea is a frequently occurring illness in small children, such waistbands are widely used among the Akha community.

Conclusion

The pluralistic medical environment in Menglian is composed of bio-medicine, TCM, herbalism, and ritual healing. The environment represents three overlapping sectors in health care systems as identified by Noel Chrisman and Arthur Kleinman (1983). Their model includes, as Baer summarised (2011: 409), the popular sector consisting of health care conducted by sick persons themselves, their families, social networks, and communities; the folk sector encompassing healers of various sorts who function informally and often on a quasi-legal or sometimes an illegal basis (such as herbalists, bonesetters, midwives, mediums and magicians – or in the Akha case, *pima* and *nyirpaq*); the professional sector encompassing the practitioners and bureaucracies of both biomedicine and professionalised heterodox medical systems such as TCM.

In the official discourse, and also in practice throughout Menglian, most of these medical resources are not in conflict with one another. Instead, the local medical institutions have created a syncretic way of using them, in which biomedicine plays a leading role but wide latitude is granted to TCM and herbalism. Officially, ritual healing is problematic; a form of backward superstition that should have been replaced by scientific biomedicine.

Biomedicine is officially called 'Western medicine' and is equated with advanced scientific knowledge. The local government has taken for granted that along with the development of medical institutions, superstitious activities have vanished – a victory of science over superstition. This idea

appears to be evidenced by the frequent and recorded use of biomedicine among local ethnic groups. Ritual healings seem not to exist any longer. But, ritual healings do take place; they are just invisible to the local authority. Because Akha villages are scattered in the mountains, most governmental institutions are not exposed to the daily practices within them; villagers do not report such practices. Though ritual healings consume a certain amount of domestic animals and cash, they are not meant to destroy property or life, and thus rarely violate the state law, making it easy for local government to continue to ignore their presence.

In practice, the Akha largely ignore TCM but combine biomedicine, herbalism, and ritual healings with great flexibility. Although they make use of biomedical technologies, the so-called Western scientific knowledge behind it remains unknown to the Akha. Biomedicine is merely another medical choice at a technological level, having certain efficacy, and it by no means resolves every health problem due to its own limitation and the local medical conditions. TCM, though having a different theoretical background, greatly makes use of herbs, which resembles herbalism. Similar to theories of biomedicine, the theories behind TCM remain unknown to the Akha, while its usage of herbs brings nothing new to the local scene. Rather, the highly developed indigenous herbalism takes superiority over TCM, playing an equally primary role as biomedicine among the local communities. As medical resources, whatever their respective popularity, biomedicine, TCM, and herbalism are shared among local ethnic groups as mere technologies, hardly affecting the groups' core social structures, cosmological images, or religious beliefs.

By contrast, the Akha *li* of ritual healings equals the Akha identity, profoundly entangled with their cosmological image, village organisation, kinship system, natural surroundings, life course, space division, and household economy. Villagers have varied levels of traditional knowledge because of age and personal interests, but at the dimension of practice, the whole community takes part in ritual healings. To practise this Akha *li* of curing sickness is actually to reproduce Akha identity. Therefore, ritual healings are still full of vitality nowadays. Besides, failure in cases of biomedicine or herbs and successful cases of ritual healings both strengthen villagers' trust in ritual healings.

Chapter 8
How to Heal a Sick Infant

Here comes a story of healing a sick infant called Ali. This case is a total social fact showing the way that the elements discussed in previous chapters – the medical resources, the cosmological nonhuman actors, the kinship system, the big man system, and children – are entangled together in childcare practices. Moreover, it reveals how Akha practices are influenced by the group's location on an international border, surrounding mountainous landscape, agricultural activities, and local authorities.

A Sketch of Ali's Family and his Birth

It was a dry, windy, sunny winter in Menglian in 2012. Highland Hakaq villagers were accustomed to experiencing chilly mornings, hot days, and cold evenings during this period. From December 2012 onwards, there was an observable trend that Hakaq villagers of all ages had fallen sick with symptoms of cold, fever, vomiting, and diarrhoea. Ali, a one-year-old boy, was one of the victims suffering a long-lasting cold.

Ali was born in January 2012 into a three-generation family of seven persons, and belonged to the XovCe lineage (see Figure 10). Ali's grandfather, Aqbawr Su, was forty-nine years old, and had gained no education from school. He was a very active person in all ritual events, one of the main assistants of *tsawrkaq* (the village mediator), and hence possessed a great deal of traditional knowledge. With an outgoing personality, he was always very keen to teach me about the Akha *li*. Aqbawr Su was the primary childcare-giver in this family, I often saw him at home with the grandchildren. Aqpiq Su was the same age as Aqbawr Su, and was originally from an Akha village in Myanmar, two hours away by motorbike. She usually worked in the vegetable gardens scattered among their mountain crop fields. When Aqbawr Su was occupied by some errands, she would stay at home with the grandchildren, making her the second-most important provider of childcare in the family. The grandparents had three children: one son and two married-out daughters. They were living with their son, Aqdaq Ta, the father of Ali.

Aqdaq Ta was twenty-seven years old, and had graduated from middle school. He used to work in Jiangsu Province and Beijing as a home renovation worker. His parents had called him home because he was the only son and was expected to settle down and support his parents. He came back and got married in 2011. His wife Aqmaq Ta, the mother of Ali, was eighteen years old when I met her. She had no formal education, and came from an Akha village in Myanmar, three hours away by motorbike. Aqdaq Ta and Aqmaq Ta were the main workers in the family, and responsible for physically demanding agricultural work in the fields. I rarely saw them at home during the daytime. Before and after working in the fields, they spent time with their little boy. The sixth member of this family was Aqdaq Ta's sister's daughter, a four-year-old girl, who had been living with her grandparents from the age of six months because of her mother's failed marriage with her father – a Han Chinese man. Usually she stayed at home with Ali, cared for by either grandparent. The seventh, but temporary, member of the household was a boy called Apa, around ten years old; he was one of the grandchildren of Aqpiq Su's sister in Myanmar. He had arrived recently to help pasture buffalo, and after fulfilling his job every afternoon, he was also a reliable person to take care of the two small children. Before he came, one of the grandparents had to pasture buffalo while carrying Ali on their back.
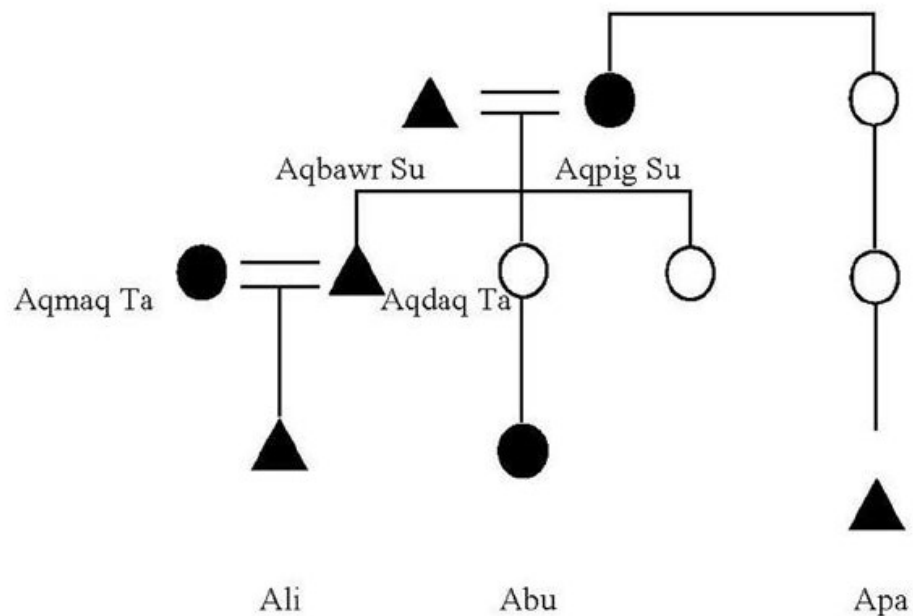
Figure 10. Ali's family.

The memories of Ali's birth, not quite one year before, were still fresh at the time of my research. His birth occurred just before mothers became obliged to give birth in hospitals, and I was told how Ali had been born at home in his parents' small house, a thatched hut. Ali's mother felt pain in the early morning, around four or five o'clock, and delivered him in the afternoon, around three o'clock. She had followed Akha custom, kneeling instead of lying down while giving birth. Two or three experienced elder women were called on to assist her, one of whom was picked as the primary midwife, *zaqci aqmaq* (lit. the mother who carries the baby). During labour, Aqmaq Ta could not stop screaming, 'It is deadly painful!'

After the baby was born, *zaqci aqmaq* wrapped him with a cloth and carried him to the big house. The new mother followed. Sitting at the female side of the big house, under the supervision of *zaqci aqmaq*, the new mother fed the newborn a little bit of yolk from a boiled egg, then ate the rest of the egg herself. Afterwards, she was allowed to breastfeed him. Meanwhile, the father, also under the supervision of *zaqci aqmaq*, dressed up in Akha costume with turban. At the top of the turban, he inserted three pieces of chicken feather – a sign of the birth of a boy. Then he slaughtered a cock, and prepared a ritual meal for the naming ceremony. During the ceremony, *zaqci aqmaq* gave the newborn a name, tying threads around his wrist while saying, 'Souls are not scared away'. After the feast, the father buried the placenta next to the main pole of the main house. Different lineages bury their children's placentas at different locations under the main house, but this is where XovCe members commonly bury theirs. He was supposed to water the placenta with boiling water for the following thirteen days to prevent it from becoming mouldy or rotten.

Early the following morning, a purifying ritual was held for the newborn. Outside the big house, *zaqci aqmaq* symbolically washed the faces, hands, and feet of the new mother and of the newborn baby with pure water. Indoors, the father slaughtered a hen which had laid eggs, and prepared a ritual meal for two or three elder women. Before the meal, the father made a shellac bracelet and put it on the baby to protect him from *piser* and *lapya*. After the meal, the grandmother started making a hat for the newborn. The hat was simple and plain. It was made of homemade cloth dyed a dark blue with indigo; there was no ornament. Meanwhile, the father made a bed for the new mother and baby. The bed was placed at the female side of the big house, where both mother and baby would sleep for the following five or six months.

After these rites were done, the young mother finally enjoyed a moment of peace. This was her first child, and being still so young herself, she did not know how to take care of him. She breastfed him now and then,

but otherwise it was her mother-in-law that mainly took care of the baby. In the following days, the grandmother gradually put adornments on the hat. As other hats for Akha newborns in Hakaq, in the centre front of the hat were threaded two fake ancient copper coins, and on top of the hat, a cluster of accessories was attached to protect him from *piser* and *lapya*. On the thirteenth day after childbirth, the mother carried the baby on her back to the rice field, symbolically worked there for a moment, then carried him back home. Then, after his navel scar was shaped, the mother took him to the maternal uncle and to the great grandfather to ask for eggs as well as blessings. Otherwise, mother and baby rested at home. Normally, new mothers rest at home for a month after childbirth, then return to work in the fields. Ali's mother had rested for three months, and her husband still mocked her for staying at home for 'half a year'. After the mother was able to perform agricultural activities, the grandparents became the primary care givers to the infant. They stayed at home with Ali and his cousin, or they went to pasture buffalo with the infant on their backs.

Plate 18. The family's big house with open balcony. After Ali fell, the balcony was fenced (Hakaq).

When Ali was five or six months old, the grandmother made him a new embroidered hat to replace the first plain hat. This new hat tells the gender of the infant. Normally, an embroidered hat is for a boy, while a hat made of spliced, colourful cloths is for a girl. Like the first hat, this hat's background was also of dark blue homemade cloth with embroidery on the front. A large part of the accessories, composed of a colourful woollen ball, a bundle of colourful chicken feathers, several bundles of colourful woollen-wrapped cotton strips, and a yellowish shell of an insect, were primarily decorative. But the cluster of accessories from the first hat (to protect him) was also placed on top of the new hat: a tiny red drug bag, a piece of *gace* (a brownish seed), and a piece of shellac. When he was nine months old, Ali started sleeping with the grandmother instead of his parents. When Ali was ten months old, his mother weaned him – a decision made by his father. The father told the family that if they did not wean Ali, he would suffer a lot of pain, sickness, and roundworms. The grandfather disagreed with this idea because his wife had never intentionally weaned their children and they had developed well; nonetheless, he respected his son's decision to avoid potential conflicts.

From my arrival in the village in September, I had often seen the grandfather at home during the daytime, taking care of his two grandchildren. Like other Akha infants, Ali often wore the embroidered hat made by his grandmother. Sometimes, he wore instead a red cap or a striped hat bought by his father. His left instead of right wrist was tied with dark blue threads, which were meant to tie his souls to him. He wore a shellac bracelet around his left wrist as well, against *piser* and *lapya*. Ali also wore a colourful thread braid around his waist, which was meant to cure his diarrhoea.

Ali's Sickness

On 2 December, I saw Ali with his grandmother at home, and learned that he had caught a cold. His father was harvesting corn in the fields, and the grandfather and mother had gone to the mother's natal family for her brother's wedding. Two days later, I met Ali and his grandmother at a ritual event; he was there to contribute his blessing power by tying a thread on an elderly man on behalf of his family. During the process, he kept crying without tears and looked very uncomfortable. On 7 December, I encountered the grandfather with Ali on his back, standing on the main road. Ali had a runny nose. The grandfather told me that Ali had caught a cold. They had bought biomedicine from the county town and fed it to him, but he still felt a bit uncomfortable. Over the following days, I met them here and there, and noticed that Ali's runny nose had cleared up, and that he looked fine. On 20 December, I met them again on the main road: the grandfather told me Ali

would recover soon, he felt more comfortable already. I asked him if they had given Ali any more medicine, but was told they had not.

On 23 December, I met the grandfather at his relative's healing ritual, where he was assisting with the ritual process while taking care of Ali. He excitedly informed me that Ali had been given a title – *pima*, *nyirpaq*, or *baji* – by the Supreme God, and that was why he was often sick. The sickness could be completely cured only after initiation. However, he emphasised, people know that Ali carries a title but they are forbidden to say it. Nobody but a *nyirpaq* or *pima* is qualified to religiously diagnose the sick and to announce the corresponding results and therapies. While listening to him, I noticed Ali had a terrible runny nose, and realised that he might have caught a cold again. Distracted by the runny nose, I showed concern about Ali's health. Optimistically, the grandfather stated the boy would recover soon. As usual, I asked him if they gave him any medicine, and once again the answer was no. Then the grandfather quickly dragged the topic back to his grandson's predestined title, insisting, 'He [was] born with a title'. Aqbawr Su kept telling me that on this very evening his eldest brother had invited a *nyirpaq* from another Akha village to perform a ritual for the brother's sickly wife. Aqbawr Su intended to ask the *nyirpaq* to diagnose Ali.

Early the following morning, the grandfather did invite the *nyirpaq* home to diagnose his grandson. I did not witness the process, so the grandfather had to describe it for me on another occasion. He told me that the *nyirpaq* held Ali's hand, closed her eyes, and uttered some chants. She reported that Ali's soul was imprisoned by Ghesanq Gheje, his eyes were covered, and his throat was blocked. Though Ali was able to see and talk in this world, his soul could not see and talk in the other world. That was why he often felt uncomfortable and cried a lot at night. The gods of children agreed to release Ali's soul, but in return, demanded two pigs and two chickens. In the end, the *nyirpaq* made a prescription composed of three healing rituals. The first one, called *dzanmija*, was a small sacrificing rite to Dzanmi, the god of the household and household land, which could be done by the grandfather. The second one, called *ghesanghen*, is a sacrificing ritual to the gods of children, which should be performed by a *pima*. The last ritual, *paehanladadm*, required a visit to Ali's mother's natal family where they should ask for a white garment.

On the afternoon of 30 December, I met the grandfather on the main road, and he told me Ali had diarrhoea. Somehow I was speechless. Ali had had a cold for a long time and had still not recovered. Each time we met, the grandfather always told me that Ali felt uncomfortable. I always asked if he had taken medicine, and the answer had almost always been no. Now he had diarrhoea, and I could tell he was also suffering from a cough. Feeling sorry

for this poor boy, I could not stop asking, 'Why don't you give him some medicine?' This time the answer was, 'They didn't buy any, but Ali has drunk herbal tea'. In fact, the answer was more complicated and had at least three reasons.

Firstly, it could be seen that the family was occupied with intense agricultural and ritual activities. Only the father could ride a motorbike and travel freely, so biomedicine could be bought only when he was available. The young mother, neither being able to ride a motorbike, nor having sufficient knowledge of herbs, was absent in the process of giving medical care to her son. The grandparents could find some herbs for Ali, but they had hardly any spare time. Everyone was just too busy this December. The young couple was totally occupied by harvesting corn and coffee, collecting firewood, and digging shallow trenches for planting sugar cane. The grandmother had to look after her gardens on a daily basis, and pasture buffalo when needed. The grandfather had mainly pastured buffalo while caring for Ali until 8 December, when the boy Apa came to take over this task. After Apa's arrival, the grandfather could stay at home taking care of housework and grandchildren. Nonetheless, ritual events had gradually increased this month, and he was often asked to assist the hosts or the ritual specialists. With such a high demand for labour, the family could hardly spare themselves to focus on a child's sickness.

Secondly, besides the pragmatic reason, I sensed an attitude of indifference towards most ailments that hinders an engagement with secular medicine – whether herbal, biomedical, or TCM. All of these treatments locate healing properties in the treatment or medicine without the invocation of spirits (which is why I refer to them as secular). The low frequency of medical treatments for the sick, children or adults, is not only found in Ali's case, but also shared among other villagers. It was equally so in my host family where I had the opportunity to observe medical practices and attitudes at a close distance. My host family had a three-year-old girl, who frequently suffered from coughing, runny nose, and fever. In October, she had a fever for three days, but her mother, a woman in her early twenties, did not give medicine because they did not have any at home. When I suggested that her uncle – the only one who could ride to the county town – should take her to see a doctor, he gave me a surprised glance and calmly said, 'There is no rush, she will get better eventually' (*zheme tuozhezuozhe jiuhuihao*, 这么拖着拖着就会好). In December, she had a fever again, crying for 'grandmother' and 'mother' overnight. I asked her mother about medicine, but she replied that she did not want to give medicine to her daughter, because when she herself was a child, she never took medicine when she had a cold or fever, but automatically recovered anyway. As for her daughter,

this rule still applies: 'Sickness will go by itself' (*bing ziji huihao*, 病自己会好). I recorded this girl's sickness five times, but only encountered twice that her grandparents gave her biomedicine or herbs. Most times, the family left her to be cured by time. They showed the same attitude when adults fell sick; they would not engage with medical treatment until the sickness was unbearable.

Last but by no means least, in the opinion of the grandfather, they were trying to cure Ali's sickness through healing rituals. He reminded me that he had already asked for a ritual diagnosis for Ali, and that the ritual had uncovered the cosmological causation.[62] It was only necessary to conduct the prescribed series of healing rituals. It would be unfair to judge them as unconcerned about Ali's health by the standard of the frequency of applying secular medical treatments. They were concerned, and had put their major focus on discovering and treating the cosmological causation of his sickness; this too had resulted in the less frequent application of secular medical treatments.

A five-day festival began on 30 December, during which villagers stopped all agricultural activities. It meant that the family could spare themselves from work to focus on Ali's health. However, they were also obliged to perform required ceremonies at home. As a result, they could not send Ali to hospital until 3 January 2013. The grandfather told me that Ali had been suffering a cough, diarrhoea, and runny nose, so in order to make the poor little boy feel comfortable (*haozai*, 好在), he decided to send him to hospital for biomedical treatment. The father and grandmother took Ali to the hospital in the county town. As the head of the household, the grandfather has to stay at home during festivals. The mother was not sent because she does not speak or read Chinese. And so, it was clear who should accompany the boy: the father can ride a motorbike and is able to communicate with the medical staff, and the grandmother is more experienced in taking care of Ali. Ali spent seven days in the hospital and had intravenous injections in his forehead. On 9 January, I saw Ali again crawling on the main road and his grandfather standing alongside. I asked the grandfather if Ali's cold was cured, and his answer was yes. When Ali had arrived home, he had tied a thread around Ali's wrist so as to call his souls back from the hospital. A few days later, when I asked the same question, his answer had changed, 'Ali feels better after seeing the *nyirpaq*, but he will not be completely cured if Ghesanq Gheje are unsatisfied with the sacrifice'. Nothing was mentioned about the effect of the hospital stay.

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[62] They also had reason to suspect that Ali's illness had a cosmological causation. He also cried loudly at night, but always stopped crying as the cock crowed, and this was considered abnormal.

Overall, the cold had stayed with Ali for over a month with inter-mittent symptoms of runny nose and coughing, and sometimes he addi-tionally had diarrhoea. His family had administered biomedicine and herbs a few times, and eventually took him to hospital. Finally, they were certain that cosmological powers were responsible for his sickness. In this case, Ghesanq Gheje was responsible; they had imprisoned Ali's soul and demanded sacrifice. Ali would be cured of this illness if they were satisfied with the sacrifice. Yet, the root cause of illness would remain: because the boy had been selected by the Supreme God to be a ritual specialist, he would continue to fall sick from time to time. He would only be cured completely by undertaking the ritual of initiation, but this would only be performed when he became so sick he might die.

Next, focusing only on the immediate causation of sickness, I will demonstrate the healing rituals suggested by the *nyirpaq*. I did not witness the first ritual that was performed, *dzanmija*, but only learned that it had already been performed by the grandfather. Fortunately, I experienced the other two rituals, *ghesanghen* and *paehanladadm*, and thus I will focus on these two.

The Day before *Ghesanghen*

By the middle of January, the family finally finished harvesting coffee beans and entered a relatively relaxed period. Early on the morning of 18 January, the grandfather paid a visit to Aqbawr Pu, presented him with a bottle of homemade corn wine, and asked for a healing ritual (*ghesanghen*) the following day. His knowledge was sufficient to calculate that the nineteenth would be an auspicious day. Aqbawr Pu was not available to officiate at the ritual. He had already planned to host a dinner party for local government officials in the following days and was supposed to invite his guests in person on the nineteenth. He asked his senior apprentice Aqbawr Bu to officiate at the ritual. Aqbawr Bu had planned to work in the fields, but since his schedule was more flexible than Aqbawr Pu's, he accepted the arrange-ment. The grandfather was also happy with the plan.

I visited the family in the morning at half past nine o'clock when they were having breakfast in the dim, windowless wooden big house. Ali had just defecated, so his mother stripped him, his father carried a mug of warm water and both parents cleaned his rear and legs, then his mother wrapped him in a towel. During the process, Ali was always moaning, sometimes crying a bit. With his nose still running, he sat in his mother's arms, eating rice and meat from her fingers. It seemed that he still had a cold and diarrhoea. This conjecture was confirmed by the fact that his nose was running all day; he frequently defecated and cried a lot. The grandfather con-

cluded, 'Ali has diarrhoea today. He feels uncomfortable, always cries. He is uncomfortable for ten days and comfortable for two days'.

An empty paper box labelled 'Five Vitamins and Calcium Gluconate Oral Solution' was discarded in the fireplace, with a handwritten note instructing it should be taken, 'three times a day, one third dose each time'. The father said biomedical doctors in hospital had prescribed this oral solution for Ali. After breakfast, the father dosed Ali according to the instructions, then left to do shopping in the county town for the ritual to be held the following day. The grandfather and the mother stayed at home with the children. As noted, they were supposed to give Ali the oral solution three times a day, but during the day, I found neither the grandfather nor the mother doing so. The grandfather kept chatting with me, played with his grandchildren, carried water, and made corn wine for the ritual event. The mother did some housework, played with her son, cleaned him whenever he defecated, and rushed in and out, making a papaya salad for us. In short, neither of them had many errands to do, but neither thought to administer the medicine.

In the evening, the grandfather informed nearly all the households in the village that his family was about to hold a ritual, and asked for their assistance. Generally, youngsters, especially paternal relatives of his family, are asked for secular services such as cutting meat, cooking dishes, serving tables, and preparing all the items demanded in ritual. All these tasks are normally supervised and instructed by several elders. Besides, according to the kinship principle, villagers belonging to different lineages from the host also play significant ritual roles in the event. There are four exogamous lineages in the village, namely XovCe, XovGhan, ZeqHaw, and XavHoq, and Ali's family belongs to XovCe lineage. People from the other three lineages would mainly fulfil their ritual task by holding ritual bowls during the ritual meal for the host family. Ideally, there are seven ritual bowls, held by seven people, representing seven sources of healing power. These seven positions are *pima*, *yawpu*, *jmghoe*, *maghoe*, *pighoe*, *mimaq*, and *midzeiq*.

The officiating *pima* is required to come from a different lineage from the host. In this case, the invited *pima,* Aqbawr Bu belonged to the XovGhan lineage. As with the *pima*, *yawpu* should be someone belonging to a different lineage from the host. In this village, because the official village father belongs to XovCe, the same as the host, a man from another lineage was chosen to temporarily take the position. *Jmghoe* refers to the wife-giver of the host himself, *maghoe* is the wife-giver of the host's father, and *pighoe* is the wife-giver of the host's grandfather. *Mimaq* refers to the family taking the host's daughter as wife; *midzeiq* refers to all the families which take wives from the host's paternal relatives. These five affinal representatives

should come from different lineages from the host. It is noteworthy that despite one family giving a wife to the host family, all members of the lineage to which the family belongs are counted in the group of wife-giver. In other words, if a family of the XovGhan lineage gives a wife to the host, then all male members of this lineage are qualified to hold the ritual bowl of *jmghoe*. The same rule works for *maghoe* and *pighoe*, too. Of all ritual affairs, only weddings and funerals demand the presence of the real wife-givers (i.e. the core family providing the wife). As for other ritual events, any male members from the same lineage as the core wife-giver are acceptable. The practical reason behind this lies in the fact that real wife-givers might be scattered across different villages, which will increase the inconvenience and cost to each party if they were all invited for a small-scale ritual. Overall, these seven people are obliged to hold ritual bowls during the ritual meal, and to collect healing and blessing power from respective ancestors. Basically, the healing ritual is a communal event demanding a number of co-villagers' assistance.

The coming ritual event also implied that all villagers should stop performing agricultural activities for a day, even if they were not obliged to participate in the ritual. This is a rule of the Akha *li*. However, roughly two-thirds of the total households had started frantically harvesting sugar cane on 17 January, and were fighting for labour and money.[63] Ali's family had not planted sugar cane; thus, they were free from the harvest, which was why they managed to host a ritual in this busy season. Some villagers were reluctant to stop harvesting sugar cane the following day. A young wife belonging to the XovGhan lineage told me that if a ritual took place, she would surely go to the fields for harvest, but only in the morning. Her mother-in-law added, 'We even harvested sugar cane during the funeral of my son's grandmother'. A young man belonging to the XovCe lineage who passed by and heard the discussion, spoke critically, 'It is you XovGhan people that

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[63] In Hakaq harvesting sugar cane involves labour exchange and cash payment. Normally, the local sugar plant informs peasants when they should start the harvest. After receiving such information, the village collectively works out the harvest timetable, usually according to the field location. Fields furthest from the village are harvested first. All households that have cultivated sugar cane have to help one another harvest, while households that have no sugar cane may or may not take part in the harvest. After the cane is cut, it is tied together in bundles of sixteen sugar canes with bamboo strips. Labour is measured by the numbers of bundles cut and tied. Households usually record two sets of numbers of cane bundles; one set is the number of cane bundles that they have harvested for other households, the other is the number of cane bundles that other households have harvested for them. After the harvest season is over, they gather and calculate the balance of labour still owed. During the season of 2012–13, the labour of harvesting one bundle was equal to 60 cents (RMB). Households work as hard as they can in the hopes of being owed more than they owe; in this way, they are paid money on top of the labour they receive for their own harvest.

start working during the ritual period!' Later, when the old woman's son came back and heard of the argument, he said to me, 'These people are messing up the rules! How come one harvests sugar cane during rituals?' Although he disagreed with the rule-breaking, he did not stop his family members from harvesting.

The Healing Ritual of *Ghesanghen*

Dawn broke as many motorbikes whizzed past, waking me up. It was villagers rushing to the fields to harvest sugar cane. I stepped into Ali's house around eight o'clock, and found the grandfather chatting with Aqbawr Bu in the male side of the big house. The grandfather's second elder brother was also there; he carried his one-year-old granddaughter on his back. The grandfather had already slaughtered a pig for hosting Aqbawr Bu. On the balcony, Ali's father and three other young men were depilating the pig with scalding water. Gradually, another four men came to help. Two were known to me: the grandfather's eldest brother (who served as the associate village mediator) and their father (i.e. Ali's great-grandfather). These helpers were all from families with no sugar cane to harvest, and except for one, they were the host's paternal relatives. Under the supervision of the seniors, including the associate village mediator, Aqbawr Bu, and the grandfather, the young men cut the pig into proper pieces and prepared an opening meal for the ritual event.

During the process, the boy Apa was taking care of Ali. The mother was busy preparing vegetables. In the beginning, I saw Ali in Apa's arms playing with a bright yellow toy car; the granddaughter was playing with a bamboo box by the side of the fireplace. The grandmother spared some time to peel an apple and shared it between Apa and the two small children. Later Apa was dispatched on some errands; Ali then was left alone in the dark corner playing on his own. A young man preparing the meal passed by, noticed Ali and greeted him, then lifted him up from the darkness and delivered him to the grandfather. The granddaughter saw her grandfather taking Ali into his arms, and instantly rushed to him, fighting for attention. The grandfather was annoyed, slightly scolded her, '*hee zaq ah*' (you child). When the young men started cutting the pig, the grandfather went to monitor them, leaving Ali on the floor. Ali crawled to a small bamboo woven table in the middle of the room, grasped it, and stood up unsteadily. A senior man sitting opposite him saw it, and moved his body to support Ali. Aqbawr Bu, sitting next to the table, also noticed the scene, offered his arm to hold Ali while chatting with others. The grandfather turned back, took Ali in his arms, and kept instructing the youth how to cut a pig into proper pieces. The boy Apa came back, and noticing how busy his grandfather was, proactively

offered his help. The grandfather hence asked him to carry Ali on his back and to take both children outside.

With the girl by the hand and Ali on his back, Apa took them to play on the main road outside the house. The morning was chilly. Ali was dressed warmly. Today he wore an eye-catching hat which was newly made by his grandmother. His first birthday party had been held on 10 January[64], and the new hat had been given to him then. The new hat had the same embroidered images as the old one, but two half-circles of fake silver buttons were now stitched onto the front, and in the very front, a golden coin with an image of Chairman Mao was pinned. An oversized pink cloth flower stood on top of the hat, overshadowing other colourful woollen braids, feathers, and a cluster of golden-green insects. The drugs against *piser* and *lapya* were removed, which implied that Ali was stronger than before. However, he still wore the shellac bracelet, implying that he was not strong enough to resist harm. As on the day before, Ali had a runny nose and a cough.

The opening meal was prepared and three tables were served in the big house. Two tables were placed in the male side; the third one was in the female side. Aqbawr Bu and six male elders seated themselves around the first and main table, which is called 'the elders' place' (*tsawrmaw jodu*). The grandfather and four seniors – the village mediator and his assistants – were seated around the second table, namely 'the village mediator's place' (*tsawrkaq jodu*). The third table was taken by four old women; this is the 'female elders' place' (*apitsawrmaw jodu*). These three tables are indispensable in *pima*-officiated ritual events, having equal ritual importance. The first two tables are explained by general ritual procedure; that is, ritual events are managed by the elders and the active presence of the village mediator is critical to ritual success. The third table might seem unusual, but it is not: it is considered 'not good' to merely have men participating at rituals, but 'good' to include both males and females; thus a table is reserved for female elders too. Only if these three tables are gathered, could the event run perfectly.

In front of the first table where Aqbawr Bu and the male elders were seated, the grandmother clearly explained to them that they were holding the ritual today because Ali was sick and *nyirpaq* had made the prescription. Then, the officiant, Aqbawr Bu, addressed the four kinds of spirits concerned while sprinkling corn wine, explaining what ritual would be performed and why, and asking for the spirits' help. The spirits addressed included the protecting god of the family (Ymnaevq Jinaevq), ancestors of the host (Paepi Jonma), the gods of children (Ghesanq Gheje), and ancestors of

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[64] Celebrating children's birthdays is a new custom in Hakaq since 2000.

the affines (Aqghoe Ghemee). Meanwhile, Aqbawr Bu also summoned all the souls of the powerful but deceased master *pima* whom he had known to assist in the ritual performance. He emphasised that though invisible, these being were all present to be helpful. Afterwards, they started eating.

As the others were eating, the grandmother took Ali back, fed him rice, and made him sleep by carrying him on her back. Meanwhile, villagers who went harvesting sugar cane in the early morning came back to the village one after another. Despite the previous night's debate on working on a ritual day, members of all four lineages had gone to the fields. Being familiar with the general procedure of a ritual, they knew that the breakfast was held to host the *pima* and that the formal ritual would take place afterwards; thus, they could spend several hours in the fields before their presence was required. I do not know how they managed to come back just as breakfast began, during which paternal relatives were expected to appear; perhaps somebody called them. Most villagers had cell phones, and this made most communication easy and fast. One after another, some paternal relatives came directly to Ali's family, firstly ate breakfast, then contributed their help. Other villagers came after having breakfast at home. At least one member from each household in the village (save six) showed up. For paternal relatives, some households contributed two or three helpers to the event.

After the breakfast and a short rest, Aqbawr Bu slaughtered two pigs for sacrifice with the assistance of four or five young men; other helpers killed two chickens and prepared nine bowls containing different offerings such as rice, wine, tea, water, and herbs. All these items were placed in the sacred part of the house, where Aqbawr Bu had taken a seat after killing the pigs. When all the offerings were in place, he began the main part of the ritual, uttering the chants called *naevqdziq*. Once again, he summoned all the spirits together and served the offerings to them. The spirits had to take these offerings and make the sick better. Aqbawr Bu specifically addressed Ghesanq Gheje, asking for the release of Ali's soul with the offering of two pigs and two chickens. Symbolically, the *pima* took apart the prison made by Ghesanq Gheje and freed Ali's soul. Additionally, he completely removed the cloth covering the soul's eyes, and dredged the blocked throat. It took nearly two hours for Aqbawr Bu to finish the chants. During this time, Aqbawr Bu was not alone. Several elders sat with him during the whole process, implying that the *pima* actually relies on the elders. Though most of the young men left, two remained playing cards on the balcony.

After the chanting was done, Aqbawr Bu went outside to pour out a small packet of food to the wild ghosts of horrific deaths. The packet contained rice, tea, tobacco, salt, chilli, corn wine, and vegetables. He explained

that when he summoned all the spirits, the wild ghosts heard and came as well. Compared to gods who were invited home and enjoyed the food offerings at the beginning, these ghosts were not welcome inside, thus they stayed outside the house waiting for food. As he was pouring the food offering outside, Aqbawr Bu addressed the wild ghosts and asked them not to do harm to the host family.

Then, Aqbawr Bu and the three old men present each tied a thread around the right wrists of Ali and all his family members. These threads were for healing and blessing. The wrists of the granddaughter and the boy Apa were not tied because they do not formally belong to the household, despite living together. At the beginning of the thread-tying, Ali behaved well, but when he noticed the food offerings still next to Aqbawr Bu's seat, he started crying for food: 'Eat! Eat!' The grandfather, holding Ali on his lap, was aware of Ali's target, smiled, and explained to the old man by his side, 'The little boy wants to eat the offerings!' As the food offerings were not for people to eat, the grandfather simply ignored Ali's crying, and asked the grandmother to take him to the other elders to have the threads tied. Ali kept crying a bit until the last old man had done his job, then he was transferred from the grandmother to the mother, but the crying did not stop. The father was slightly unhappy, and told his wife, 'He is hungry! Feed him quickly!' The young wife did so. After half an hour, I found Ali sleeping on his grandmother's back.

While Aqbawr Bu and the elders were taking a rest, the youngsters were called back to cut and cook the sacrificed animals and prepare a ritual meal. Before cutting pigs into pieces, three men cooperatively took out the livers of two pigs and put them on a cutting board. Aqbawr Bu and the elders approached these livers and checked them, trying to tell the host's fortune. This is a common way of telling fortune in the Akha community, conducted in every ritual sacrifice of pigs. The elders all kept repeating, 'good, good', implying everything was going well in this family. Nonetheless, on another ritual occasion, Aqbawr Bu had told me that sometimes a liver shows inauspicious signals, but he always only says 'good'. Afterwards, some of the elders went back home, leaving the youngsters busy with cutting and cooking. Aqbawr Bu, as the officiant, had to stay with the family until all the rituals were done.

During the break, Aqbawr Bu talked to me about his worries concerning the transmission of rituals:

> In future, when Aqbawr Bu passes away, these rituals could be simply discarded! We do not have successors; I will be alone then. Alone, it is fine to cope with normal rituals, but there is no way to do funerals. In funerals, one cannot take a rest for three days and three

nights, one person cannot stand for that long by any means. It would be much better if I had a successor; I would be very happy. Nonetheless, nowadays our apprentices do not like doing rituals.

More and more villagers came to offer a hand preparing the ritual meal; some came also to make a ritual contribution. The cooked meat and corn wine was served at the same three tables: one for male elders, one for female elders, and one for the village mediator.

With the food yet untouched on the tables, the main sequences of the ritual began. The table for male elders was the main space for following the ritual procedure. Here were seated Aqbawr Bu, three old men in their eighties (the invited elders), and the five men of various ages who had been selected to hold the ritual bowls. The men at the first table should have worn their Akha turbans, but for convenience, they all wore a hat or cap. One, a teenage boy, had even borrowed a cap on the spot from another young man. When they were seated, the associate village mediator instructed some young men to bring ritual bowls and place them in the proper places.

As described in earlier chapters, there are seven roles (*pima*, *yawpu*, *jmghoe*, *maghoe*, *pighoe*, *mimaq*, and *midzeiq*) entitled to ritual bowls. The bowl designated to each role is filled with particular pieces of meat. The *pima*, in this case Aqbawr Bu, receives four ritual bowls; in addition to one containing meat, he also receives one each with rice, corn wine, and tea. A young man from the XovGhan lineage was picked as *yawpu*. An old man from the XovGhan lineage took the bowl of *jmghoe*; he was actually one of the real *jmghoe* to the host family, living in the same village. A teenage boy and his uncle belonging to the ZeqHaw lineage respectively took the bowls of *maghoe* and *pighoe*, due to the fact that the grandmother and the great-grandmother of the host came from the ZeqHaw lineage. An old man in his sixties from the XavHoq lineage took the bowl of *midzeiq* because his wife is from the XovCe lineage. Since the grandfather's daughters were married to Han-Chinese men, the position of *mimaq* was open. As a result, six instead of seven ritual bowls were served.

When everything was ready, Aqbawr Bu first took a small portion of food from his four ritual bowls and made offerings to the ancestors by placing them on the table. Then he consumed the contents of three bowls containing rice, corn wine, and tea. These three empty bowls were taken away immediately; only the bowl of meat was left in front of him. After a few minutes of chatting and drinking corn wine (from a bowl he had begun before the start of the ritual), he led the others in the blessing of the meat. Each man held his bowl with both hands, and Aqbawr Bu addressed the ancestors represented by the six bowls. Once again, he explained the purpose of performing the ritual, and asked for the ancestors' generous help and

blessing. He spoke for roughly ten minutes. Afterwards, all these bowls were collected and sent to the host. The grandfather put all the meat together in a big bowl, and shared it with his son. They ate the meat as well as the blessing power from these six groups. The three young men who had held the ritual bowls walked away from the table to make space for other elders.

The great-grandfather of Ali sat down, joined the elders, and started eating from the cooked meat, food, and wine that had been placed on the table before the blessing and consumption of the ritual bowls took place. Elder women and the village mediator also began to eat. While the elders and mediator were eating, some of the youngsters were serving the table, the rest were waiting outside for their turn.

As they ate, all the elders, male and female, who had not tied a thread around Ali's wrist, fulfilled their task by tying a thread and saying a blessing for Ali and his family members. Ali was fine as he was carried around the first table, having threads tied by the male elders. He started crying a bit at the second round when seven female elders tied threads around his wrist. His grandmother carried him in her arms and, ignoring his crying and resistance, presented him to each old woman in turn. Finally, the thread-tying was done; the grandmother left Ali on the floor, and he quickly crawled away. Ali's aunt, an elder sister of his mother, who was also married in this village, kept an eye on him. Soon, the father found Ali, took him from the floor, held his arms, and tried making him walk a bit. Once, the father had told me that parents are not allowed to train children to walk in their first year and he had followed this rule. Now his son was older than one year, and he was free to train him. Ali's aunt also brought her two sons. The elder son Aju, who was four years old, played with the granddaughter outside. The younger one was an eleven-month-old infant but still wearing his first plain hat which was supposed to be replaced by an embroidered hat when he was five or six months old. The infant was passed between the young men waiting on the balcony. They talked to him, played with him, tickled him, slapped his rear, and also attempted mockingly to offer him a lit cigarette. Soon, Ali was brought to play with the other baby, but he had no interest. Ali crawled away, finding a cigarette end on the floor. A man passing by noticed, and gently took away the cigarette. Losing the item, Ali did not cry, but kept crawling here and there. Men around him, old or young, kept an eye on him from time to time.

Finally, when Aqbawr Bu had finished the meal and taken enough rest, he was ready to leave. The two infants blocked the door; they were playing with a big plastic bottle and a cup. A man simply put them and the toys aside, clearing the way for Aqbawr Bu. The babies did not react, but kept crawling and playing on their own. The grandfather had a discussion

with a senior fellow on how many elders he should present with meat. It is a rule that after every ritual event, the host should present a piece of meat to the elders to show his appreciation and respect. He named 11 elders, basically covering all the elders in the village. Aqbawr Bu received a big portion of meat, which he was to share with his master Aqbawr Pu and with other elders who are neither from the same lineage as the host nor a wife-taker of the host. This was to acknowledge that, firstly, Aqbawr Bu the apprentice depends on the master *pima* Aqbawr Pu because the latter had taught him the knowledge of rituals, and, secondly, all *pima* depend on the elders because they are the tradition carriers, teaching them traditional knowledge.

The next morning, the grandfather again invited Aqbawr Bu and the elders for a meal. Seeing me, the grandparents happily informed me that Ali felt much better after the ritual. Because Ali had slept with the grandmother for a long time, they knew the difference well. The grandfather told me, 'Before, Ali cried three or four times every night, but last night he did not cry even once'. The grandmother also confirmed this, 'Ali is better now. He does not cry except when he pees or shits. Before, he always cried when he woke up'. The main purpose of the meal was to give the required monetary payment to Aqbawr Bu. Four paternal relatives helped prepare the meal, and ten elders came. The grandfather gave Aqbawr Bu 15 RMB (around $2.50 USD), and gave the elders 5 RMB (less than $1 USD). As with the meat he took away at the end of the ritual, Aqbawr Bu was expected to share the cash payment with Aqbawr Pu. At this point, the healing ritual was over.

Ritually healing a sick infant is a communal event rather than a family business. First of all, both *nyirpaq* and *pima*, the main performers in the process of diagnosis and healing, are involved. They are ritual specialists normally shared by the whole Akha community in the region. Second, the village office, composed by the village father, the elders, and the village mediator, is activated for the ritual. Third, representatives of five kinds of affines, coming from different lineages from the host, work together for the infant's health. In other words, villagers from different lineages, age-sets, positions – virtually the whole village – are all integrated in the healing ritual, on the one hand, working for the infant's immediate wellbeing, and on the other hand, strengthening the reciprocal bonds between themselves. Additionally, ritual healing is also teamwork, absorbing the effort of invisible spirits, ancestors, and gods. These spiritual beings are considered the ultimate originators of sickness and correspondingly the key healers. All in all, by employing these human or nonhuman entities as healers, the healing ritual activates the Akha's social community and the cosmological world.

The Ritual of *Paehanladadm*

On 10 March, I happened to see Ali and his father on their balcony. I was passing by on the main road; Ali was eating rice from his father's hand. We chatted, and I learned that they would visit Ali's mother's natal family in Myanmar later that day to receive a white garment. Aju, the elder son of Ali's mother's sister would also go for a white garment. He too had been diagnosed by a *nyirpaq* as requiring such a ritual.[65] A fourteen-year-old boy from the ZeqHaw lineage had been asked to go with the family. Excitedly, I rushed into the family's house, found the grandfather, and asked for more details. He told me that Ali felt better after the *ghesanghen* ritual, but that he would not be cured completely until he wore the white garment provided by his maternal grandparents. Aju's father, a man in his early thirties, was there too. He stated his opinion: 'Aju felt uncomfortable, and the hospital did not work. We need to rely on our ethnic *li* (*minzu li*, 民族礼)'.

Since the two children shared the same maternal grandparents, the two households had decided to go together. The visit needed to occur during auspicious days. The 10 March was an auspicious day for Aju, and 12 March was auspicious for Ali. Hence, they planned to be away for three days. Ali's father showed some regret about the day in between: 'Tomorrow is not an auspicious day for Ali; we have to do it the day after. Otherwise, [we could have] one event today, the other tomorrow, [and] it [would] take only two days then'. The accompanying teenage boy was chosen to be the middleman (*tsawrkaq*). Ali's father emphasised, 'It is impossible to make the visit if only we go! We are XovCe, so we should take a man from XovGhan or ZeqHaw, to help do the rituals'.

In all, they planned a trip for eight persons travelling by two motorbikes. The two families each had one motorbike and one driver. Ali's father would ride a motorbike, carrying his wife, Ali, and the teenage boy; Aju's uncle would ride the other one, carrying Aju, Aju's father, and Ali's grandfather. When I told them that I wanted to join the trip, they agreed. One problem arose: I needed to find a driver and a motorbike. It was the season of harvesting sugar cane, so most labourers and motorbikes were occupied. There were several young men with motorbikes available, but they were unwilling to go even if I paid them. I was confused and asked Ali's father, 'Why can I not find a driver, when I am offering to pay?' He replied, 'Who needs money!? It is like labour exchange (*huangong*, 换工). I help you once, you help me once!' I felt hopeless. Luckily, the two families helped me find a sixteen-year-old boy, Agu, from the ZeqHaw lineage who could drive, though he had no motorbike of his own. Agu had no sugar cane to harvest,

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[65] In Aju's case, the *ghesanghen* ritual was not organised.

and he was quite happy to take three days off work. I managed to borrow an unlicensed motorbike from the son of my host family. Agu was also to re-place the other teenage boy as middleman because one man from a different lineage was enough to complete the ritual.

Finally, the group was formed with nine persons and three motorbikes. The group would take a shortcut among mountains, to save time and simplify the procedure of crossing the border. This is the most common way for villagers to travel to Myanmar, and few of them have the special passport for border populations. The local police acquiesced in this. Once I ran across two policemen in Hakaq, and was told that they know well that border villagers often take shortcuts to visit relatives or friends in Myanmar; they would set mobile security posts from time to time, especially during festivals when transnational visits increase. Villagers also know about the security checks, and respond by simply making a U-turn home or paying a fine. Fortunately, March is not a festival season, so the probability of coming across a mobile security post was sharply reduced. I faced greater risks than local villagers in taking this unofficial route into Myanmar. As a non-border-zone resident, if I were caught I would face serious problems for my illegal entry into Myanmar. I agreed to the route with the plan to pretend to be a local resident: I looked enough like them, spoke the local dialect, and the villagers would surely cover for me.

In the late afternoon, the nine-person group set off to Ali's maternal grandparents' village, Menkaq, in Myanmar. The two families each brought along a chicken and a bottle of corn wine for ritual purposes. Both Ali and Aju wore their Akha hats; they looked fit and happy. Ali's mother was fully dressed with her Akha costume – it is a rule for married women to dress up during rituals or ceremonies. By contrast, all the men wore Han clothes as usual.

Before leaving, Ali's grandfather offered a cup of corn wine to Agu and me. One offering was to be made to the god of the village gate for each lineage. We sprinkled the corn wine on the ground, and then the grandfather made the same motion on behalf of Ali's and Aju's families. They explained to me, 'We depend on the village when we go out for ritual events'; they asked the god, 'Please bless us away from bad things'. On the way to Menkaq, we waded across a small river. Ali's grandfather and Aju's father each picked up a pebble from the river, to keep Ali's and Aju's souls along with their bodies instead of being scared away by the river. Then we passed by a market in a small town, where Aju's father bought the little boy a mirror to make his souls happy and willing to go along with the body. It took us nearly three hours to arrive at Menkaq. Before entering the village, Ali's grandfather asked Agu to sprinkle the corn wine again. Ali's father did not

stay very long, but returned to Hakaq the same night. The grandfather explained that a young couple is not allowed to stay together overnight at the wife's natal family: his son had merely brought them there, and would come to fetch them two days later.

Plate 19. Crossing a boundary river between China and Myanmar, the adults picked up pebbles to keep the children's souls (Mangxin).

Late in the evening of 11 March, a meal was made for Ali's maternal grandparents. It was regarded as an offering from Ali for the sake of his maternal grandparents' health. His paternal grandfather Aqbawr Su explained to me that sometimes grandparents fall sick after the *paehanladadm* ritual because their power becomes reduced or exhausted from healing their grandchildren. Thus, to avoid hurting them, grandchildren always perform a small ritual in advance to bless their health and augment their power. For this purpose, the chicken brought by Ali's family was slaughtered, cooked, and put into a ritual bowl.[66] The ritual bowl was served at the table; it was filled with a chicken leg, a whole chicken liver, three lumps of chicken meat, and a little bit of soup. The maternal grandparents were seated at the table, accompanied

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[66] The chicken from Aju's chicken was also to be slaughtered and cooked, but I do not cover the details of the ritual performed for Aju in this chapter.

by three male elders from different lineages in the village. Holding Ali in one arm, Aqbawr Su used his free hand to hold a thread across the ritual bowl in order to absorb the blessing power, then tied the thread around the maternal grandparents' wrists. Since Ali was too little to fulfil the job, Aqbawr Su did everything on his behalf. Afterwards, he tore small pieces of meat from the ritual bowl, put it in Ali's hands, and made him offer the meat to the maternal grandparents. They happily took the meat with both hands and ate it.

Seeing one side of the table full of food, Ali could not stop crying, '*Dza! Dza!*' ('Eat!') His maternal grandparents tried to appease him by telling him, 'You can eat soon! You can eat soon!' When Aqbawr Su was tying the thread around the wrist of Ali's maternal grandfather, Ali was distracted and became quiet, but soon he again pointed at the table, saying '*Dza! Dza!*' His grandparents from both sides laughed, sharing the happiness that Ali could speak the word '*dza*'. Ali started crying, the grandfather found a piece of grapefruit skin nearby, and gave it to him. Ali threw it away, and kept crying for food. Aqbawr Su looked around and found a bamboo cup, knocked it against the floor, and made some sounds. Ali was distracted, stopped crying, and quietly played with it. After Aqbawr Su tied the thread around the maternal grandmother's wrist, Ali's focus moved back to the food, and he kept repeating '*dza*'. He calmed down when he saw his grandfather take several pieces of meat from the ritual bowl and put them in his hand, but before he realised, his grandfather made him offer the food to his maternal grandfather. As Aqbawr Su was taking meat again for the maternal grandmother, Ali stared intently at his hand and cried more urgently, '*Bidza! Bidza! Bidza!*' ('Let me eat!') Everyone burst out laughing, as his maternal grandfather comforted him, '*Bidza ma! Bidza ma!*' ('I will let you eat!'). After offering food to his maternal grandmother, Ali pushed Aqbawr Su's hand to get some meat for him. Aqbawr Su did not feed him; instead, he stood up and passed Ali to one of the maternal uncles who held him and walked into the female side of the house. Disappointed, Ali cried very loudly. His maternal grandmother also stood up and asked her daughter to feed Ali. Aqbawr Su sat down at the table, asking me to join them, too. This was a table for male elders, but it was acceptable to take in an outside guest, despite my gender. The elders started eating; after them, it was the young men's turn to have food.

On the morning of 12 March, Ali's maternal grandmother started sewing a white sleeveless garment. I was surprised that she had not already sewn the garment, but Aqbawr Su explained that it should be sewn on the same day as the ritual. Around noon, the garment was ready and a meal was prepared. The maternal grandparents, maternal uncle, and two male elders

from different lineages sat around the serving table in the male side of the house. On the table were placed a set of ritual bowls for Ali, including a bowl of rice, a bowl of chicken, a cup of corn wine, and a cup of tea. Aqbawr Su, holding Ali in his arms, squatted in between the maternal grand-parents.

As he had done the night before, Ali struggled for food from the very beginning of the ritual. The maternal grandfather lifted the folded garment above the ritual bowls to absorb their blessing power, then put it on Ali with the maternal grandmother's help. When putting on the white garment, Ali kept crying and twisting his body. Various elders tried to appease him, reassuring, 'It will be over soon'. After dressing Ali, the maternal grand-father immediately tied a thread around his wrist. At that moment, Ali stopped crying. From behind, Aqbawr Su instructed him to say, 'Please give me blessing, maternal grandfather'. Ali was unable to speak, but Aqbawr Su repeated this sentence several times, asking for blessing on Ali's behalf. Then other threads were tied onto his right wrist, first by the maternal grand-mother, then by the other elders and the maternal uncle. Ali cried for food during every break between tying threads, but in the immediate tying, he calmed down. He maintained this on-and-off mode until the procedure was completed.

Here came the happy moment for Ali, when he was fed food from the ritual bowls. He was happy to swallow whatever was offered to him, and even grinned when tasting the corn wine. This ritual step was conducted smoothly; all the elders cheered for Ali, praising him as a good boy. Ali obviously was not satisfied with the tiny portion, and kept pointing at the table, asking for more. When the maternal grandfather offered him the ritual bowl of meat, Ali grasped the chicken leg and contentedly enjoyed it. Then Ali's maternal grandmother and mother took him to the female side of the house and fed him with rice too. The male elders ate their meal, and then the others ate after them.

After the meal, we were invited to Ali's mother's eldest sister's husband's family, which belongs to a different lineage from Ali's maternal grandparents. This family slaughtered a chicken and made a meal for the middleman Agu. Though the meal was for Agu, several male elders were also invited. People knew well how many steps the whole ritual event includes and how many meals they will have, thus they only eat a small por-tion for each meal to avoid stomach problems.

We returned to Hakaq in the late afternoon. Ali's father had arrived to take his family home. Before leaving, we received several boiled eggs. Outside the village gate, both Ali and Aju, wearing the white garments, were fed one egg each to call their souls to them, so that they would not stay there.

The grandfather, Agu, and I sprinkled corn wine to the god of the village gate. We passed the market again. This time Ali's father bought a mirror to attract his souls back. Once again when crossing the river Aju's father and Ali's grandfather each picked up a pebble to avoid the boys' souls being frightened away.

Plate 20. After the healing rituals, the maternal grandmother took a photograph of the two boys in their white garments (Myanmar).

The following day, I visited Ali's family. The grandfather and father both told me that there should be an iron bracelet along with the white garment, but that the maternal grandparents had not offered one. Apparently, they had been too busy to make the necessary arrangements, but it also seemed they did not consider it essential for the ritual. The grandfather stressed, 'Here in our village, there is no way to not to give it! But they said it is fine not to give it. Rituals in one place differ from rituals in another place'. He also mentioned that here one should wipe the white garment with a piece of meat from the ritual bowl, but that they had been instructed to do otherwise. He also shared a happy story with me; that day, a village woman saw Ali and surprisingly said, 'Ah, little boy, how come you look fitter after the visit?'

The grandfather was quite pleased by this and proudly told me, 'The ritual works well. It is not helpful to only take medicine or injection. He would stay sick if he did not wear the white garment'. Meanwhile he complained it was troublesome because the maternal grandparents' village is so far away.

This healing ritual once again reveals that it is a collective job to heal a sick infant, and it has gone further to show how two villages work together for an infant's health. It is not just an affair to be conducted by a child's maternal and paternal relatives. Rather, Hakaq village supported the ritual in the form of a middleman from another lineage. In Menkaq, several elders from different lineages were also asked to be present. Their participation makes the healing a form of teamwork between two villages.

The ritual also reveals the reciprocal blessing relationship between grandchildren and grandparents. What is interesting here is that both sides of the relationship are activated in the same ritual. The sick infant was required to empower his maternal grandparents so that the latter could be powerful enough to heal him. In other words, the infant could be seen as an indirect healer to himself.

Most importantly, the ritual strongly emphasises the healing power from maternal relatives to the infant. The ritual of *ghesanghen* sheds light on all kinds of affinities that are helpful in healing, but here, the ritual of *paehanladadm* indicates that the close maternal relatives of the patient are the most powerful healers among all affines. Besides, the cosmological world was repeatedly represented through the practices of keeping souls along with their owners.

Conclusion

Akha villagers in Menglian draw on both the human and spirit worlds to heal a sick child. Cosmological powers are the core causation of sickness, and healing rituals play a primary role during the healing process. These healing rituals unveil that the Akha, in order to get rid of sickness, not only rely on ritual specialists like *nyirpaq* and *pima*, but also include ordinary people in the process of ritual healing. The ordinary people here refer to anybody who occupies a social position, permanently or temporarily, which is considered to possess healing or blessing power. These include the village father, the elders and children, wife-givers (*pighoe, maghoe, jmghoe*) and wife-takers (*mimaq, midzeiq*). These ordinary people are obliged to serve as healers in various rituals. It is by no means a personal choice to include all these entities in a healing ritual; rather, it is the Akha *li* – a whole package of rules in practice (Tooker 1992) – which requires all these entities to take part in the rituals and fulfil their respective obligations.

The *li* is strictly obeyed by Akha people lest their wellbeing and properties be damaged. Properly carrying out the Akha *li* in the case of ritual healing means that all people required to be present have to contribute their power in both secular and religious terms. Their personal unwillingness, quarrels, and conflicts with the host in daily life are ignored, forgotten, and veiled in the ritual event. This attitude is shared across the community because they are interdependent on one another for the performance of numerous rituals and ceremonies. Thus, ritual specialists and ordinary people all together are making a social support network for the sick. Additionally, behind these visible healers stand their respective ancestors who are always addressed and summoned on ritual occasions. These dead and invisible beings are regarded as the main sources of healing power, without whom the sickness could not be cured. Then the support network develops into a socio-cosmic support network.

In principle, this socio-cosmic support network is a fixed structure. Seven people in the positions of *pima*, *yawpu*, *jmghoe*, *maghoe*, *pighoe*, *mimaq*, and *midzeiq* are indispensable at most rituals; one has to take a companion from another lineage when visiting another village for a ritual event. However, it is also a flexible structure that can respond to immediate constraints. For instance, the position of *mimaq* could be left open in the case of daughterless families; the position of *yawpu* or wife-givers can be temporarily taken by a man from another lineage; the companion taken to another village can be any male, of any age, as long as he is from a different lineage.

When the Akha *li*, which is behind the socio-cosmic support network, poses seemingly unbearable constraints, villagers seek an appropriate compromise. As Aqbawr Pu once claimed, 'We do what is convenient; the Akha *li* itself will change' (*women shenme fangbian zuo shenme, li ziji huibian ne*; 我们什么方便做什么，礼自己会变呢). At harvest time, for example, they work only until the formal ritual begins and then cease their activities. When two villages with different interpretations of the *li* meet, yet more flexibility and diversity is tolerated within the Akha way. Though the way must be followed, it can be slightly adjusted according to immediate situations.

Chapter 9
Conclusion

The study was designed to explore the Akha mode of social support by examining their health care pattern in relation to children. In the book, I have pointed out that the Akha in Menglian are currently in a peaceful political and social environment where they rarely encounter problems like war, famine, plague, or frequent natural disasters. Inhabiting low hillsides of a mountainous area with rich natural resources, the Akha villagers I studied had developed a mixed agricultural subsistence, combining farming, gardening, the raising of livestock, hunting, fishing, gathering, hand-crafting, and trading, leading to a relatively self-sufficient lifestyle in terms of food. Due to rapid socioeconomic development and increasing financial support from state-run projects in recent decades, they have gradually switched their traditional slash-and-burn agriculture to cultivating cash crops like tea, coffee, and sugar cane. Consequently, most households had more cash in hand than before and could afford to buy modern products such as motorbikes, refrigerators, mobile phones, television sets, and other consumer goods. Some Akha villages have even moved down into the valley for the convenience of cultivating cash crops.

In such relatively pleasant surroundings, they mainly sense uncertainties and insecurities from the cosmological world which particularly threaten the health of vulnerable children. Thus, I argue that the perceived cosmological insecurities should be taken into consideration in the field of childcare. Concerning children's health, Menglian Akha developed a syncretic way of using the plural medical resources of biomedicine, TCM, herbalism, and healing rituals. In contrast to the local medical institutions, which stressed the leading role of biomedicine, the Akha population held steady loyalty to herbalism and healing rituals. In particular, healing rituals are equated with the Akha identity, profoundly entangled with their cosmological image, village organisation, kinship system, natural surroundings, life course, space division, and household economy. Villagers have varied levels of traditional knowledge because of age and personal interests, but at the

dimension of practice, the whole community takes part in these ritual healings, regardless of their personal backgrounds.

Indeed, the cosmology even defines what a child is, and helps shape the corresponding childcare practices. To protect their children from malevolent cosmological beings, Akha have developed a pattern of ritual care given by kin groups and big men in the community. Nonetheless, in most cases, the cosmological beings themselves are the very healers of sick children. Therefore, I argue that they should also be counted as support givers, and what they give is cosmological support. Because the Akha are an ethnic minority in the PRC, their ritual care practices are tolerated by the state due to the ambiguity between the fields of religion, superstition, and ethnic customs. In the following, I discuss these points in more detail.

Cosmology and Human Life

Against 'sociocentric assumptions' of support (Descola 2013: 124), I argue that cosmology should be taken into account when scrutinising insecurities and support in the field of children and childcare. To prove this argument, I have explained how the human world is merely one integrated part of Akha cosmology. For the Akha, the human world is paired with the nonhuman world. The nonhuman world may be further divided roughly into the god-spirit world, the *naevq* world, and the world of vicious wandering ghosts, although the boundaries between them are quite blurred. The human world refers to human villages bounded by village gates and their cultivated lands. The cosmological invisible counterparts of humans – *naevq* – are scattered in stony or muddy lands that humans are unable to reach. When humans do wrong to *naevq* or *naevq* come into human territory, harm can come to human lives and property. Thus, Akha people maintain the boundary between humans and *naevq* through various items and rituals. In the god-spirit world, the Supreme God Aqpoeq Miqyaer stands in the highest point of the sky; he is the creator of all living beings in the world and of the Akha *li. Yasanq*, the spirits or gods of everything, are omnipresent. They spread inside or outside the human villages. The world of vicious wandering ghosts refers to randomly fragmented space across the entire cosmology, wherever vicious ghosts haunt: such haunted spots could be in human villages, the remote wild, at a crossroads or riverside, in a market, or elsewhere.

To a certain extent, the human world overlaps spatially with the nonhuman world. Inside the village, humans share space with the gods of households, ancestors, and numerous other *yasanq*. As soon as they step out of the village gates – the materialised boundary between the human world and the *naevq* world – humans expose themselves to a great number of cosmological beings. The *yasanq* of lands, trees, birds, or flowers are every-

where; *naevq* inhabit remote rocky and muddy lands; vicious ghosts wander along riversides and crossroads; *piser* and *lapya* hide themselves in crowded places, markets, and hospitals. Beyond all of these, Aqpoeq Miqyaer is always high in the sky, keeping an eye on human behaviours. Wherever people go, they are not alone. Temporally, the human world follows a reversed calendar compared to the *naevq* world particularly for the cere-monial period. They have also developed a series of festivals when they officially communicate with the cosmological beings. Besides, humans can always address the cosmological beings through various rites and rituals.

In such a cosmological image, the human world maintains continuous interaction with all other cosmological beings. Indeed, the human and nonhuman worlds are integrated, even in each individual. That is, the human self possesses a feature of the supernatural: souls. When a person is alive, the attachment of his or her souls to the body secures the individual's health. When their souls are frightened away or attached by spirits, they fall ill. After death, the soul of the dead from a good death becomes an ancestor, blessing its offspring and joining the god-spirit world, while the soul released by a horrific death turns into a vicious ghost, wandering in the wild.

Based on the Akha *li*, certain human behaviours invoke benevolent or malevolent reactions from the nonhuman world. For instance, once wronged by people, *yasanq* will cause pain and illness which can only be healed by ritual sacrifice. Aqpoeq Miqyaer and the ancestors also punish people by bringing misfortune and illness when the latter behave improperly. Boundary-crossing behaviours between the human world and the *naevq* world cause contamination and danger to the human world. Besides, there also exist hostile *piser* and *lapya* enchanting people, especially the vulnerable, and causing deaths. These cosmological nonhuman actors, whether gods, spirits, or ghosts, potentially threaten human survival and health for various reasons. On the other hand, the god-spirit world of gods, spirits, and ancestors is also perceived by the Akha as a source of favour, blessing, and support. Taken together, the misfortunes and blessings ex-perienced from nonhuman actors generate insecurities and support to Akha people.

In short, the Akha social world is deeply embedded in its cosmo-logical image, continually maintaining interactions with cosmological beings on a daily basis. Therefore, one has to consider those invisible nonhuman actors and their influence on human life when examining the visible human world.

Children, Ritual Care, and Support Givers

Compared to adults, Akha children have closer connections with the cosmo-
logical beings because their personhood is not fully developed, and they are
more vulnerable. In the extreme cases of *tsawrpaeq* children, namely twins
or deformed infants, their personhood is completely rejected by Akha *li*.
They are counted as *naevq*, not human at all. Their birth implies that *naevq*
are intruding on the human world, causing such abnormality. In other words,
the event is a result of cosmological disorder, bringing pressing contam-
ination and danger to the human world, from immediate family to neigh-
bouring Akha villages. As for normal children, until they are thirteen years
old, they are viewed as half-human and half-*naevq*, creatures of both human
and spirit worlds. The essence of children greatly defines even the most
fundamental practices of childcare among the Akha. Killing *tsawrpaeq* at
birth; giving normal children names at birth before the *naevq* can do so; and
never scolding children as '*naevq* children' all maintain the boundaries and
balance between the human and nonhuman worlds.

From conception, Akha people depend on the particular protection of
two pairs of deities, Zaqghen Zaqsan and Ghesanq Gheje, to take care of the
named children. The goddesses Zaqghen Zaqsan make pregnancy happen by
putting children into women's bellies. They are present when women deliver
children, take care of these women, and protect children after their birth.
Because of their protection, the natal family of the woman delivering a baby
is forbidden to come and stay with her on that day. Furthermore, Akha
parents are forbidden to call their children by their real names in the first
year, teach them to walk, or sing them traditional lullabies. Otherwise, the
goddesses will become upset. Ghesanq Gheje are a pair of gods in charge of
children's health. They can claim children's lives if they think parents are
raising children in an improper way. Mostly, they cause various sicknesses
to children. Although they cause sickness, Ghesanq Gheje are also healers,
who can simply withdraw harm from children when they are satisfied with
the animal sacrifices made to them. In other words, these gods and god-
desses, on the one hand, protect children from danger, such as falling down
from a balcony, while on the other hand, cause their illnesses which can only
be cured through healing rituals.

To protect humans from threats or to ask for blessings from the
cosmological beings, Akha villagers mainly rely on kin groups and big men
to provide ritual care. The first layer of ritual care refers to the widely used
ritualised precautions and treatments, such as a thread tied on one's wrist, a
tiny drug bag, a shellac bracelet, or a silver product, which are a material
representation of the links between cosmological illness and its remedy. The
second layer of ritual care refers to the ritual process through which kin

groups and big men contribute their support. Through patrilineal linkage systems, Akha people can track their genealogical connections to one another. Their lineages proliferate and fissure over generations, developing into three descent categories at different levels, called *aqguq*, *paqzaq* and *paerzaq*, among which *paqzaq* is the exogamous unit. Through the asymmetrical alliance system, the divided exogamous units reconnect with and depend on one another. Five recognised groups of alliance have developed, including two groups of wife-takers called *mimaq* and *midzeiq*, and three groups of wife-givers called *jmghoe*, *maghoe*, and *pighoe*. These five groups, though their ritual importance varies based on their respective closeness to Ego's *paerzaq*, are all obliged to play a role in most ritual affairs held by Ego's *paerzaq*. Thanks to the big man system, the inter-dependence among lineages is further strengthened. Eventually, these two systems weave the Akha community into a collective support network, in which all are obliged to be helpful.

In the case of children's health, the maternal uncle and the grand-parents particularly possess special blessing power to keep children safe. Children, coming from the seed given by the maternal uncle, greatly depend on him for their own wellbeing. When their health is jeopardised, the maternal uncle may help them survive or recover by giving them new names, special garments, iron bracelets, or silver products. The blessing power from the maternal uncle is always a steady source of support to children. Similarly, the elders possess blessing power over children; children in return also hold blessing power over the elders, especially between grandchildren and grandparents. Among the Akha community, grandchildren are con-sidered the biggest of all, even standing on a higher rank than grandparents, partly because they are the latest generation to carry on the genealogy, and partly because they give the social and ritual status of full elderhood to their grandparents. Therefore, these two generations form a relationship of mutual support.

The case study of healing a sick infant (chapter 8) demonstrated in concrete terms the working model of this collective support network and the significant roles played by big men. It has revealed that despite living in a plural medical environment, present-day Akha view the cosmological powers as the core causation of sickness, and healing rituals play a primary role during the whole healing process. These healing rituals unveil how the Akha, in order to get rid of sickness, include both ritual specialists and ordinary people in the process of ritual healing. These people are obliged to serve as essential healers in any ritual events. It can be said that it 'takes a village', or even several villages, to heal a sick child. Additionally, behind the visible healers in the Akha community stand ancestors and gods, whose

help is essential to curing sickness. As the process of a ritual healing unfolds, a network interwoven from social organisation, kinship system, and religious ideas is brought to the fore, and the bonds between the involved parties become stronger. Next, the support network develops into a socio-cosmic support network.

This socio-cosmic support network is a fixed structure in the manner that seven people in the positions of *pima*, *yawpu*, *jmghoe*, *maghoe*, *pighoe*, *mimaq*, and *midzeiq* are indispensable. However, the possibilities for substitution that the kinship system engenders mean that it is flexible enough to be invoked quickly and effectively. When the Akha *li*, which is behind the socio-cosmic support network, would appear to pose too much constraint (such as during intense points in the agricultural cycle) villagers manage to find compromises. So too differences of interpretation of the *li* between different villages are greeted by the Akha with tolerance and flexibility when they need to cooperate.

Ethnic Religion in the Socialist State: 'A Zone of Indifference'

As I have repeatedly emphasised, the Akha in Menglian have not been an isolated community, neither in the past nor at present. Nowadays, they face a demonstrably pluralistic medical environment, in which biomedicine, TCM, herbalism, and ritual healing are available to them. The Akha avail themselves to all these forms of treatment. Nonetheless, they prefer herbalism and ritual healing. They see biomedicine as having limited efficacy at the technological level. They consider that TCM brings nothing new to them because it uses herbs – like local herbalism. Like other ethnic minorities in the region, the Akha consider these three types of medical resource as mere technologies. They are incapable of solving many illnesses whose causes are understood in terms of social structure, cosmological image, and religious beliefs. By contrast, the ritual healings prescribed by the Akha *li* address such illnesses. To invoke the Akha *li* in curing sickness serves also to reproduce Akha identity at multiple levels. Therefore, ritual healings are still full of vitality nowadays, and successful cases of ritual healings further strengthen villagers' trust in the latter. Yet, logically, the question might appear: how is it possible for the Akha to steadily maintain their beliefs and ritual practices under the secularised governance of the PRC?

To answer this question, it is first necessary to note that the relations between state and religion are not uniform across China. According to André Laliberté (2011: 191–208), for example, three modes of relations can be identified: 1) symbiotic, 'when the state sponsors religious activities and religious actors offer their support to the state via public rituals'; 2) adversarial, 'when police forces harass religious associations they fear, or

when religious movements express dissent'; and 3) indifferent. For the most part, the Akha's traditional practices fall within a 'zone of indifference' for the state. That is, 'the state gives up the pretense of regulating religion and religious institutions desist from involvment in politics' (ibid.: 208). International scholars have been attracted to studying religion among minority groups whose religious practices are attached to issues of international political importance; such is the case with Buddhism among the Tibetans (Goldstein and Kapstein 1998), Islam among the Uyghurs (Gladney 2003) or Hui (Gladney 2004), and some other groups practising China's five official religious, such as the Daoist Zhuang, Buddhist Dai, and Christian Miao and Lisu (Wickeri and Tam 2011: 54–56). Yet concerning the daily religious practices of many minorities like the Akha, Chinese scholars have recorded massive amounts of information, but rarely engage with relations between these religions and the state.The state seems absent. Nevertheless, Laliberté insightfully points out that the state is rather intentionally offering a zone of indifference. As he wrote, 'For other groups that do not fit within one of the five official associations, the government's attitude is ambiguous, evolving, and varies vis-à-vis different types of groups … popular religious practices remain stigmatized as superstitions, but are also tolerated, if not encouraged, by local authorities as expressions of the national folklore or as intangible "cultural heritage"' (Laliberté 2011: 204). This is very much the case among ethnic religious practices, too, which are tolerated as expressions of ethnic customs and habits (*minzu fengsu xiguan*, 民族风俗习惯).

From examining official documents and historical experiences, it becomes clear that the ambiguity and complexity of the Akha cosmology makes it difficult to categorise in official discourse. That is, the Akha system of cosmology falls into a vague domain comprised of the overlap between so-called primitive religion (*yuanshi zongjiao*, 原始宗教), feudal superstition (*fengjian mixin*, 封建迷信), and ethnic customs and habits. The state holds distinct attitudes and policies to each category, but not to whole complexes that incorporate some qualities of each. Briefly, in principle the state claims to respect and protect the freedom of religion, but outlaws all supersititous activities. Meanwhile, the state claims to properly respect and follow those ethnic customs and habits which it sees as good, and reform those customs and habits which act against people's production, social life, and health.[67] Consequently, the state itself is incapable of providing a clear fixed framework to deal with ethnic cosmologies.

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[67] The information is cited from an official document, 'On Fundamental Ideas and Polices of Religious Problems during Socialist Period in China' (关于我国社会主义时期宗教问题的基本观点和基本政策), issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1982.

Since the foundation of the PRC, the central state has recognised five officially recognised religions – Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, Catholic and Protestant Christianitiy – but paid most attention to religious issues in Tibet and Xinjiang.[68] Only at the level of local government was the category of 'primitive religion' placed side by side with these five official religions (Local Chronicles Compilation Committee of Pu'er City 2012: 874–906). The above cited text, *The Simao Prefecture Chorography*, also reveals that historically the majority of the non-Han population of Simao practised primitive religion. Here primitive religion is defined as an ancient polytheism which has no formal scripture, regulations, temples or churches, or organisation, but deeply affects people's thoughts and constrains their practices. Primitive religion is also viewed as a combination of animism and ancestor worship. The noteworthy discourse clearly stated in the chorography is the awareness that primitive religion always overlaps with superstitious activities and ethnic customs and habits, and that sometimes feudal supersitious activities are mixed with religious elements (ibid.: 875). Overall, the local official discourse itself has presented much ambiguity and complexity in the very basic definition of the so-called primitive religion practiced by minority populations.

From many angles, the Akha *li* and the practices that accompany it would appear to be a form of 'primitive religion', or worse, 'feudal super-stition'. Normally, 'feudal superstition' in official Chinese discourse refers to the activities of wizards, witches, shamans, and other similar professions. Such activities are considered holdovers from feudal society, when practitioners would pretend that they were able to communicate with gods and ghosts, raise up heresy, and fool people; in their aims to get money, they were considered to do harm to people. To the state, these activities undermine the social order, delude the public, and damage people's physical health, hence are strictly forbidden and punishable under criminal law.[69]

Accordingly, sometimes the state does intervene in ethnic religious practices. For example, it forbids Dai or Lahu villagers to chase away *pipa gui*. As discussed in chapter 3, some such chasings do gain the attention of police and the local government, and the destruction of property that accompanies such events are punished. The Akha people in Menglian, by claiming

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[68] 'Respecting and Protecting the Freedom of Religious Beliefs among Ethnic Minorities' (尊重和保护少数民族宗教信仰). http://www.minzu56.net/zc/9131.html. Last accessed in July 2014.

[69] 'What Is the Relationship between Religion and Superstition?' (宗教与迷信是什么关系), News of the Communist Party of China (中国共产党新闻网). http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64107/65708/66067/66080/4468788.html. Last accessed in July 2014.

they have no *piser* or *lapya* (i.e. no *pipa gui*) in their communities, and by meanwhile taking themselves as the victims of these two evil beings, avoid conflicts with the state. Their self-protective measures against *piser*, and their exorcisms of *lapya* from victims, can be considered to be within the range of healing practices and either remain invisible or are tolerated by the local authority as harmless or protective.

The state gives yet broader berth to the Akha cosmological system and its corresponding practices when they are seen as examples of ethnic customs and habits. Since the early 1980s, the state officially admited its 'mistakes' in the treatment of religion since 1957, and especially during the Cultural Revolution. In the first decade or so after the PRC's formation, most minority practices and beliefs had been considered ethnic customs and habits, but this changed. With the onset of the Cultural Revolution, nearly all ethnic customs and habits were classified as religious superstition and forcibly forbidden. This experience remained vivid in the minds of middle-aged Akha people who remembered being forbidden to perform funerals, sacrificing rituals, and in extreme circumstances, being banned from wearing their handmade pleated short skirts. All of these were viewed as super-stitions. In 1982, the state issued a new position on religion, in which it was illustrated that many traditional rituals, ceremonies, and festivals of ethnic groups, despite being coloured by religion, had become a (venerable) part of ethnic customs and habits.[70] For the sake of ethnic solidarity, and to moblise all social forces for economic development (see Yang 2011: 212), local cadres were instructed to show respect for ethnic customs and habits. Local cadres were, nevertheless, still instructed to reform detrimental customs which do harm to the public's production, life, and health. In other words, as long as ethnic customs and habits appear harmless, they are tolerated by the national policy. With respect to the Akha cosmology, the one detrimental custom which has drawn state attention is the infanticide of twins and deformed infants. Like the chasing out of *pipa gui*, infanticide is forbidden in the Autonomous Regulations of Menglian Dai, Lahu and Wa Autonomous County.

The position of Akha cosmology continually slides between classification as 'superstition' and as an example of 'ethnic customs and habits' in the official discourse as the political environment changes. Since the early 1980s, the state's relative tolerance has given rise to a tide of religious revival (Laliberté 2011: 197–200). Even in this overall favourable political environment, official documents in Menglian still severely criticise

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[70] 'Fundamental Ideas and Fundamental Policies of Religious Problems during the Socialist Period' (关于我国社会主义时期宗教问题的基本观点和基本政策), issued in March 1982. http://www.sara.gov.cn/xxgk/zcfg/zc/497.htm. Last accessed in July 2014.

the presence of feudal supersitions among ethnic minorities. Specifically *pipa gui* among the Dai, *piser* among the Lahu, and infanticide in Hani (Akha), are considered examples of practices prohibited by the Consitution of the PRC as 'religious activities that impair public order, health or education' (ibid.). However, they are not called 'superstition', but 'old ugly customs' (*chengui louxi*, 陈规陋习) directly against the Constitution.[71] Up to 2012–13, during the process of dealing with the Akha tradition of infanticide, for example, the local officials cautiously used terms like 'ritual system' (*li*, 礼), 'old customs' (*jiusu*, 旧俗 or *jiuxi*, 旧习) or 'not-good customs against the state law' (*yu falv xiang dichu de buliang xisu*, 与法律相抵触的不良习俗); the worst term, 'old ugly customs' was only used once, while the word 'superstition' was not mentioned at all.[72] It would seem that the Akha belief system has been definitively categorised as 'ethnic customs and habits'. If so, this means that the Akha will remain free to practise the *li*: ethnic customs and habits, according to the 1990 Autonomous Regulations of Menglian Dai, Lahu and Wa Autonomous County, are left for ethnic groups to decide to maintain or reform on their own, unless they undermine the state law.

Up to the present moment, the state's indifference is intentional. As is widely held in China, this attitude of indifference originates even from Marxism-Leninism, according to which the state should not impose its views on religious believers. Such an imposition is considered unnecessary because, as religious beliefs are the expression of unequal social relations, they should simply wither away once the conditions for their existence have been removed (see Laliberté 2011: 203). Indeed, many local cadres seem to have held this perspective for a long time. Perhaps, they have thought, ritual healing will diminish as the region's economic and cultural backwardness is remedied and the shortage of biomedical equipment is met. Therefore, the Akha can enjoy some religious freedom in most aspects of their daily life within this zone of indifference.

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[71] 'Decision Prohibiting the Chasing of *Pipa Gui* and Harming of Twin Infants' (关于严禁撵'琵琶鬼'和残害双胎婴儿的决定), issued at the Second Meeting of the Seventh People's Congress in Menglian Dai Lahu Wa Autonomous County (孟连傣族拉祜族佤族自治县第七届人民代表大会第二次会议) on 29 March 1986.

[72] Zhang Xinli, 'Breaking up with the Old Custom along with Heartache: Stories of Changing Customs among Hani-Aini people in Menglian' (张新立，2013，在心灵阵痛中与旧俗决裂:孟连哈尼族僾尼群众移风易俗见闻).　http://www.pe0879.com/Html/Page/201306/06/1c5947a7-2933-473c-ae10- ba2d08d1b174.shtml. Last accessed in August 2014.

Appendix
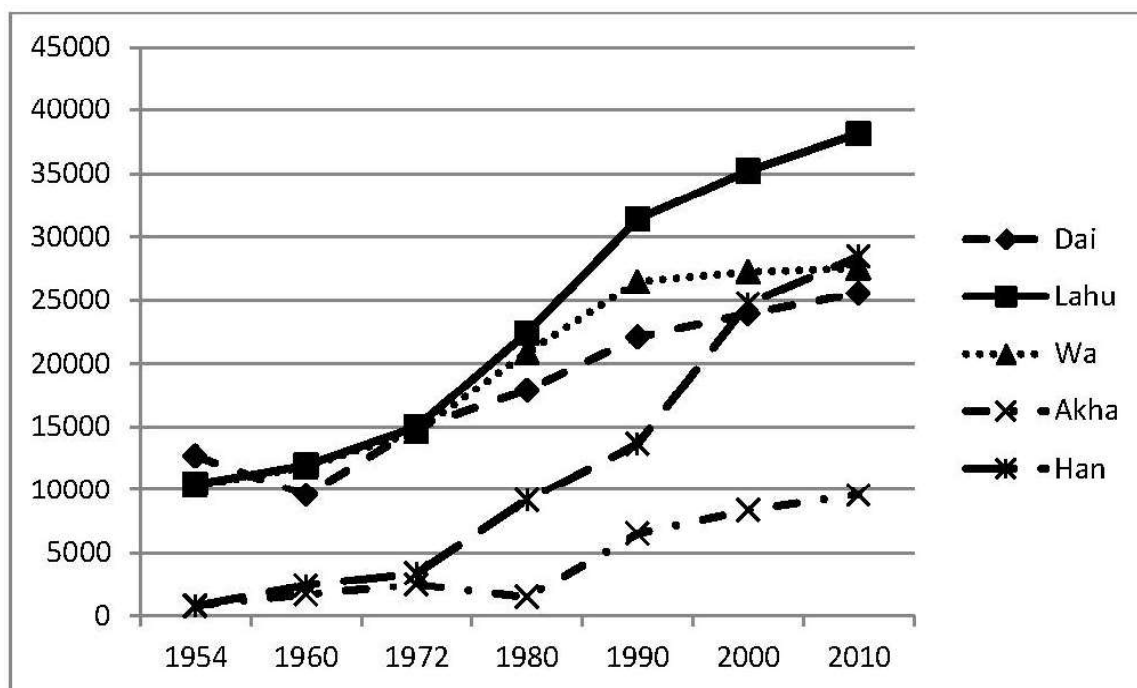
Chart 1. The demography of Menglian majority groups. *

* The data is cited from The Official Bulletin of the Sixth National Census of Menglian County (2010), issued by the Sixth National Census Office of Menglian and the Menglian County Statistical Bureau, 2011.05.19; Menglian Dai, Lahu, and Wa Autonomous County Statistical Bureau (孟连傣族拉祜族佤族自治县统计局) (ed.). 2008. *Statistical Yearbook of Menglian Dai, Lahu, and Wa Autonomous County*; Menglian Dai, Lahu, and Wa Autonomous County Statistical Bureau, The Fifth Population Census Office of Menglian Dai, Lahu, and Wa Autonomous County (孟连傣族拉祜族佤族自治县统计局，孟连傣族拉祜族佤族自治县第五次人口普查办公室) (eds.). 2002. *The Fifth Population Census Information of Menglian Dai, Lahu, and Wa Autonomous County* (孟连傣族拉祜族佤族自治县第五次人口普查资料). Simao: Fanhua Printing Limited Company; The Population Census Office of Menglian Dai, Lahu, and Wa Autonomous County (孟连傣族拉祜族佤族自治县人口普查办公室) (ed.). 1991. *The Census of Menglian Dai, Lahu, and Wa Autonomous County, Yunnan Province in 1990* (云南省孟连傣族拉祜族佤族自治县1990年人口普查资料).
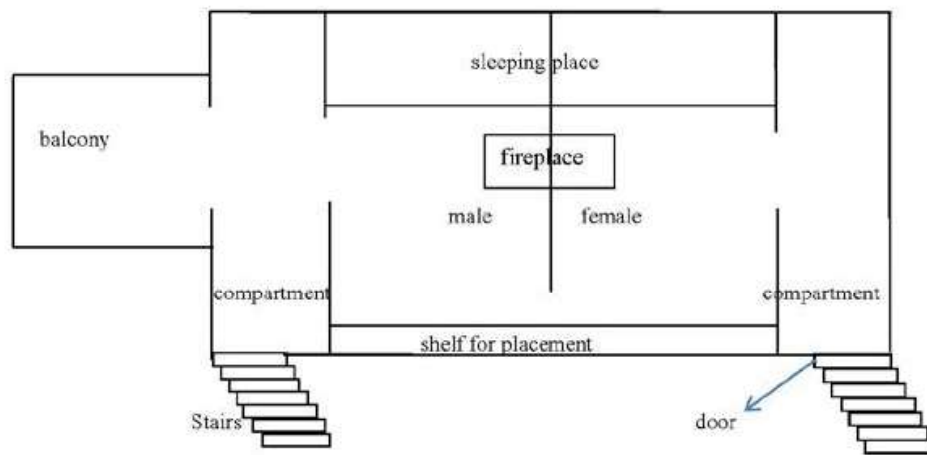
Diagram 1. A diagrammatic sketch of a big house.
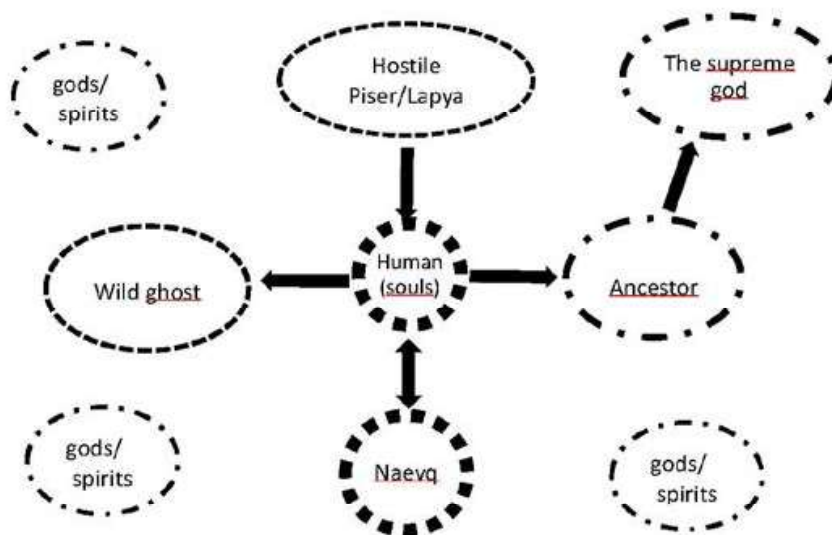
Diagram 2. The distribution of human and nonhuman actors in cosmology.

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"... anthropology needs a broader vision. It needs to shake off its strong association with the primitive and the exotic and become genuinely global in its comparisons. From this perspective, more sustained attention to Eurasia and a renewed focus on its underlying unity might launch the transformation of our parochial scholarly traditions into a mature cosmopolitan science."
– Chris Hann, in his Preface to this series

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Toward a Holistic Approach of Childcare in the Akha Community of South-Western China

Despite living in a state that honours science and debases 'superstition', and despite making substantial use of the multiple medical resources available to them, Akha villagers in Yunnan still put their greatest trust for health and wellbeing into healing rituals, especially when it comes to their children. The book delves into these apparent contradictions. What is this Akha way of childcare that continues in twenty-first-century China?

It is generally believed that children fall sick from soul loss or attack by spirits. Accordingly, parents frequently invite ritual experts to perform sacrificial rituals for the diagnosis and healing of their children. Relatives (kin and affines), big men, ancestors and spirits all play indispensable roles in these protective rituals. As the process of a healing ritual unfolds, a network of social organisation, kinship, and cosmology is woven.

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