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Mats Lundberg
Kinh Settlers in Viet Nam’s Northern Highlands
Natural resources management in a cultural context

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Kinh Settlers in Viet Nam’s Northern Highlands

Natural Resources Management in a Cultural Context

Mats Lundberg

2004

Department of Water and Environmental Studies
Linköping University
Well my heart's in The Highlands with the horses and hounds
way up in the border country far from the towns
with the twang of the arrow and the snap of the bow
My heart's in The Highlands, can't see any other way to go

Bob Dylan 1997
# Table of Contents

## Acknowledgements

## I. The Study

- **Introduction** .......................................................................................................................... 11  
- **Pre-study** ................................................................................................................................. 12  
- **Other Research Projects in the Northern Highlands** ............................................................ 14  
- **Objectives of the Study** ........................................................................................................... 17  
- **Organisation of the Research** ................................................................................................. 18  
- **Methods** ................................................................................................................................ 19  
  
  - *The Interviews* .......................................................................................................................... 20  
- **Limitations of the Study** .......................................................................................................... 26  
- **The Outline of the Thesis** ......................................................................................................... 26  

## II. Viet Nam, an Elongated Country with a Long History

- **Introduction** .......................................................................................................................... 33  
- **Geography and Population** ................................................................................................... 33  
- **The Region** ........................................................................................................................... 34  
  
  - *Viet Nam’s North as Part of the Mountainous Mainland Southeast Asia* ......................... 34  
  - *Colonial Control of the North* ................................................................................................. 35  
  - *A Poor Region with a Great Ethnic Diversity* ....................................................................... 36  
- **Revolutions and Reforms: A Turbulent History** .................................................................. 38  
  
  - *Formation of an Empire and a Nation* .................................................................................. 39  
  - *Post Reunification Era* ........................................................................................................... 41  
  - *Agrarian Reforms* ................................................................................................................... 42  
  - *Doi Moi and the Market Reforms* ........................................................................................... 45  

## III. Migration

- **Migration: An Old Tradition in Viet Culture** ....................................................................... 49  
- **The Ethnic Minority People and Migration** ......................................................................... 50  
- **Migration in the 20th Century** ............................................................................................... 52  
- **The New Economic Zones Policy** ......................................................................................... 54  
  
  - *Doi Moi and Migration* ........................................................................................................... 56  
- **Agricultural Frontiers and Territorial Expansion** ................................................................. 57  
  
  - *Colonisation Projects as Geopolitical Tools* ........................................................................ 58  
  - *The Transmigrasi Project* ....................................................................................................... 59  
  - *Thailand: No Large-Scale Colonisation Schemes* ................................................................. 59  
  - *Migration Projects: Similarities and Discrepancies* ............................................................... 60  
- **Theoretical Causes of Migration** ........................................................................................... 62  
  
  - *Micro-level: Push or Pull* ....................................................................................................... 63  
  - *Macro-level Causes: Population Pressure and Geopolitical Strategies* ................. 63  

## IV. The Delta and the Highlands: Physical and Cultural Distances

- **Life in the Delta** ..................................................................................................................... 67  
  
  - *The Bamboo Fenced Village* ................................................................................................. 68  
  - *The Irrigation Culture* .......................................................................................................... 70  
  - *Agriculture, Handicraft and Trade* ....................................................................................... 71  
  - *Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Ancestors* ................................................................. 72
V. The Study Area and Its People ............................................................. 99
Ha Giang Province .................................................................................. 99
Ha Giang Township .................................................................................. 102
Commune, Village and Hamlet ................................................................. 102
The Two Communes of the Study ............................................................... 103
Phu Linh Commune ................................................................................. 103
Na Con Hamlet ........................................................................................ 104
Kim Thach Commune .............................................................................. 106
Ban Kho Hamlet ...................................................................................... 106
The Kinh Families and the Socio-Economic Situation .............................. 109
Subsistence, Production and Land Tenure ............................................... 109
Business and Employment ..................................................................... 115
Diversity and Economic Security ............................................................. 117
Social Relations and Networking ............................................................... 120
Marriage ................................................................................................. 121
Ceremonies as Part of Social Relations ................................................... 123
Subsistence and Economy: A Summary ................................................... 125

VI. Restructuring Livelihood: Natural Resources Use .................................. 129
Introduction ............................................................................................. 129
World View and the Impact on Natural Resources Use ............................ 130
Extracting a Livelihood from "Wilderness" .............................................. 131
From Cooperative to Individual Production .......................................... 135
Rearranging the Environment ................................................................. 138
Collective and Individual Agriculture: Different Socio-Economic Patterns ......................................................................................... 140
Restructuring the World View and Natural Resources Use .................... 145
The Cultural Dimensions ......................................................................... 145
Integrating "Knowledges" ....................................................................... 147
Balancing the Landscape ......................................................................... 150
Business and the Dependence on Urban Areas ....................................... 151

VII. Restructuring Livelihood: Social Patterns and Trans-Ethnic Grouping ................................................................. 155
Ceremonies as "Language" for Social Interaction ....................................... 155
The Ethnic Factor in the Mountainous North: Ascription and Asset ........................................ 160
Global, National and Local Level Classification of Minority Groups ........................................... 161
Ethnic Identities and Social Networking in the Resettlement Process ................................................ 163
Changing Social Patterns: The Significance of Ethnic Distance ......................................................... 170
Poly-Ethnic Society, a Stage Towards Trans-ethnic Grouping and Ethnic Integration ....................... 170
Changes on the ethnic stage .............................................................................................................. 173
Regional Experiences from Asian Mountainous Areas ........................................................................... 174
Northern Burma: Social Structure and the Importance of Land Use .................................................... 175
Northeast India: The Construction of a Past ............................................................................................ 178
Southwest China: Categorisation on the National and the Local Levels ................................................. 180
Yunnan, Burma and Thailand: Multi Ethnic Identities on the Personal Level ........................................ 182
Multi Layer Identities and Floating Boundaries ..................................................................................... 183
Interaction and Integration: Steps towards Capacity Building to Manage Natural Resources .............. 185
Gradually into a New Cultural Identity ................................................................................................. 186

VIII. Conclusions ...................................................................................................................................... 189
Adaptation to a New Physical Environment ......................................................................................... 189
Solving the Problem of Living Together ............................................................................................... 191
Inter-Ethnic Influences .......................................................................................................................... 192
Spearheads for the Government? ........................................................................................................... 194
National and Regional Impacts on the Local Level ............................................................................... 196

Appendix I. Rainfall and Temperature in the Ha Giang Province........................................................... 198
Appendix II. Annual Agricultural Cycle of Three Ethnic Groups ......................................................... 199
Appendix III. Wedding and Funeral Ceremonies .................................................................................... 202

IX. References ......................................................................................................................................... 209

Figures

Figure 1 Map of Northern Southeast Asia-Southern China Region and Northeast Frontier of India ......................................................................................................................... 28
Figure 2. Map of Viet Nam ...................................................................................................................... 29
Figure 3. Map of the Northern Region of Viet Nam .................................................................................. 30
Figure 4. Map of the Ha Giang Province ................................................................................................ 31
Figure 5. The Red River Delta landscape .................................................................................................. 79
Figure 6. Kinh woman with fields .......................................................................................................... 86
Figure 7. Na Con Hamlet ....................................................................................................................... 108
Figure 8. Ban Co Hamlet ....................................................................................................................... 108
Figure 9. Peddling .................................................................................................................................. 119
Figure 10. Wedding .................................................................................................................................. 123
Figure 11. Old Kinh woman ................................................................................................................. 132
Figure 12. Flow diagram ....................................................................................................................... 168
Figure 13. Kachin and Shan systems ...................................................................................................... 177
Figure 14. Kinh identities ....................................................................................................................... 184
Figure 15. Tày-Thái identities ............................................................................................................. 184
Figure 16. Identities of the ethnic groups in the study area ..................................................................... 185
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Needless to say, I am alone fully responsible for the content and shortcomings of this thesis.
I. The Study

Introduction

This study deals with the Kinh (or Viet) majority people\(^1\) who have migrated from the lowland Red River Delta to the mountainous areas of northern Viet Nam, and their adjustment to a new social and physical environment. Its aim is to analyse the social and cultural consequences for these migrants when settling in communities populated with people who belong to the national ethnic minorities (the Tày, the Giáy and the Ngan peoples)\(^2\).

Although still rather limited, an increasing number of research projects have been conducted by foreigners and Vietnamese researchers in rural villages of Viet Nam since the beginning of the 1990s (Kleinen 1999b: 22-25)\(^3\). The positive trend is to great extent related to the liberal reforms\(^4\), which *per se* have created new fields for research (e.g. *ibid.* 26-27, Liljeström *et al.* 1998 and Castella and Dang Ding Quang 2002); at the same time the reforms have made it easier for foreigners to carry out field studies in rural areas of Viet Nam. Most of the studies have in the north been concentrated to the Red River Delta area. While studies outside the delta have to quite a large extent come to be on the highlands, the ethnic minority peoples living there, and on the concern for dwindling resources due to the impact of the large Vietnamese society (e.g. studies carried out by the Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies CRES at Viet Nam National University, Hanoi, jointly with the East-West Center of Hawaii, USA). Especially inspiring for the studies have been the last decades of migration by Kinh people from the densely populated Red River Delta and coastal areas into the highlands, and the impact such migration has had on the culture and economy of the minority groups. The reverse has been studied to a much lesser extent; that is the Kinh settlers and their adaptation to a life in the mountain areas.

A visitor to the highlands is struck by the enormous differences from the Red River Delta in landscape, vegetation, and communication routes, along with the diversity of cultures. Some

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\(^1\) In general the number of ethnic groups in Viet Nam is given to 54. About 18 percent of the population belongs to the different ethnic minorities (Nguyen Van Thang 1994), the rest are ethnic Vietnamese, or *Kinh*.

\(^2\) Ethnic group and ethnicity will be discussed in length in Chapter VII, where ethnic consciousness is emphasised. It is argued that the most important criteria for defining an ethnic group is that a specific group of people should be considered by themselves and by others as a separate ethnic group.


\(^4\) These reforms are called *Doi Moi* in Viet Nam, which is translated as “restructuring” or “new economy”. The reforms implied among other changes a far reaching and market oriented reform (Salemink 2003: 40), see further in Chapter II.
of the questions that immediately come to one’s mind are: How have the Kinh people adapted to the life in the highlands? Have they adopted the minorities’ way of exploiting the natural resources? Have they continued using some of the farming techniques from the lowland? Have they established themselves as entrepreneurs and agents for a more market-oriented economy than the native one?

Departing from such immediate reflections based on differences in the physical environment and utilisation of natural resources, the study moves step-wise into the issues of cultural change for the migrants. Focus is on impacts in new interactive situations. The case is a special one in that it focuses on majority people’s adaptation to minorities5, and to a lesser extent vice versa. The Kinhs’ view of how a “civilised” landscape ought to look like and how to utilise the natural resources therein demonstrated to be a central theme when discussing restructuring of the migrants’ livelihood. This fact indicates the cultural dimension in the exploitation of the natural landscape and the reconstruction of the subsistence system. In the process of adaptation to a new social environment (as well as to a new physical one), social interactions between the Kinh and the ethnic minorities have proven to be important steps towards integration. One factor that turned out to be decisive in the integration process is the harmonising of life cycle ceremonies (especially weddings and funerals) between the Kinh and the minorities.

Pre-study

From September 23 to October 6, in 2000, I conducted a pre-study and planning trip to Ha Giang Province together with the vice-director of the National Institute of Ethnology (now renamed the National Institute of Anthropology, NIA). The primary aim with the visit was to discuss the research project with local authorities (i.e. People’s Committees6) at provincial, district, community and village levels, in order to find out the possibilities to locate the research project in Ha Giang Province. Another important aim was to find some villages or hamlets suitable for the study, and to hear the farmers’ opinion on having a researcher in the hamlet interviewing them. The importance of having a project accepted by the People’s Committees (PC) must be emphasised: Without the support from the local PCs it would be

5 The Kinh are numerically the majority people on the national level (83 percent of total population), while on the provincial level in Ha Giang, where the present study was conducted, the Kinh only constitute eleven percent of the total population. Hence, when referring to the Kinh in the study area as the majority people it is not a matter of numerically domination, but refers to a people who have the cultural and political domination on the national as well as on the provincial level. When referring to e.g. the Tày people as a minority group it refers to their position as a numerically minority on the national level.

6 Viet Nam is administratively divided into Provinces (counties), the Province is subdivided into Districts, and the District in turn is divided into Communes, and the Commune into Villages and/or Hamlets. There are people’s committees at the provincial, district, commune and village levels. The people’s committees are the local administrative bodies.
impossible to conduct any kind of research in the rural areas of Viet Nam. Special care was therefore taken in order to establish good relations based on exchange of knowledge due to a mutual interest in the integration process.

The reasons for choosing Ha Giang Province were threefold: 1) The province is located far from the Red River Delta in the mountainous extreme north, a significant area for studying adaptation by the lowlanders; 2) It has a great ethnic diversity, and has received Kinh migrants at different times during the 19th and especially in the 20th centuries; 3) I am already quite well acquainted with the province.

After the field visit we concluded that the situation in Ha Giang Province was particularly relevant for the study. We could notice that there was a demand for an increased understanding of how the Kinh have adapted to a life in the mountainous area, how this has influenced the ethnic minority groups living there, and how the minorities have influenced the Kinh in their turn. Out of this complex of issues I have selected one for a special focus, viz. the issue how the Kinh migrants have adapted to the role as newcomers in the highlands. Not least the Kinh migrants themselves were very positive to focusing the project in this way. The fact that the Kinh migrants of the study area arrived almost forty years ago (in 1966) means that enough time has pasted for making the social, cultural and technical influences between the ethnic groups fully visible.

On the first day after arriving in Ha Giang for conducting the pre-study, we held a meeting at the Provincial People’s Committee (PPC) office to plan the field visits. We had sent a letter to PPC in advance to tell about our plans to conduct a study in the province. The vice chairman of the PPC suggested some communes and villages that we could visit. When handing over the list with the names he explained that they were only his suggestions, and as I knew the province I could suggest other communes to visit instead, he said. I checked the names of the communes and found the spreading of them good and that there was not much to say about his proposals. However, the first day of the field visits it rained so heavily that the road was washed off and we had to change route. In consequence we could not visit two of the suggested communes. Instead we went to two others which we chose spontaneously. Hence, I had absolutely no feeling of being swayed by the provincial authority in the selection of the communes so that we should only study some, from the authority’s point of view, “ideal” communes. All together we visited seven villages/hamlets in two districts and in the Ha Giang Township.

Later in Sweden and before beginning the real field study I selected the two hamlets we visited in Ha Giang Township as the most suitable for the research. Here we had found out that the Kinh were in an overt minority situation among the ethnic minority people; the idea was to study two hamlets where the percentage and the number of Kinh migrants in
comparison with the minority people should differ as little as possible between the hamlets. We had also found out that the socio-economic situation in the two hamlets was different, at the same time as the environmental setting of the hamlets as well as the size of the hamlets (area and population) were more or less equal, and because of that suited well with the aim of the research. Further, in both hamlets agriculture included upland rainfed production (partly shifting cultivation) as well as lowland irrigated production. This gave the possibility to study differences between the minority people’s and the Kinhs’ agriculture choice (combinations of different agriculture modes as well as combination of agriculture with other subsistence activities). Also of interest was the fact that in one of the hamlets the migrants were much more dedicated to business activities (especially handicraft) than were the migrants in the other. Thus the two hamlets gave an opportunity to study different economic situations between the ethnic minority people and the Kinh, as well as between the Kinh in the two hamlets.

Other Research Projects in the Northern Highlands

Few studies have been conducted specifically on Kinh migrants in the northern highlands and their adaptation to new physical and social environments. However there are some studies that are touching on the subjects in one way or another, and which have a direct significance for the present study. One of them has been conducted by Andrew Hardy between 1994 – 98. His study was focused on the history of Kinh migration and government resettlement policy: “A History of Migration to Upland Areas in the 20th Century Viet Nam – Policy and Practice” (1998). Hardy’s study gives an important overview of internal migration in Viet Nam, and of the colonial power as well as of the different Vietnamese governments’ policies towards migration during the last century. But to a lesser extent it concerns adaptation and ethnic integration. The study covers basically four provinces in the north and two in the central region of the country. It is an important background material when conducting a study like the present one concerning how Kinh migrants are adapting to a life in the highlands. Another, and more recent study on internal migration in Viet Nam in more general and theoretical terms is the one realised by Dang Nguyen Anh and colleagues (2001). However the study, based on the 1997 Migration and Health Survey, is more concerned with rural–urban migration than the rural–rural one, as is the case in the present study.

One case study (or actually four cases) of Kinh migrants in the north is the one carried out by Rita Liljeström and here colleagues in 1993 and 1994 (Liljeström et al. 1998). The study was focused on Kinh forestry workers who had migrated to the Ha Tuyen Province in the 1980s (now Tuyen Quang and Ha Giang Provinces). The 1993-94-study was conducted as a follow-up of earlier field research carried out by Liljeström and colleagues in the same localities in 1987 (Liljeström et al. 1987). Their focus has mainly been on the socio-
economic situation of the forestry workers in the 1980s in comparison with the situation after the government’s implementation of the economic reforms in the beginning of the 1990s. Hence, the study covers a long period of adaptation among Kinh migrants in the highlands. Although the Kinh Liljeström et al. studied came to the highland for cutting forest and not primarily for farming, the study is interesting because the migrants came under the so called “New Economic Zones Programme”\(^7\), as did the migrants in the present study. Likewise, as the Kinh migrants in the present case, they settled in areas with a mixed ethnic composition. Further, the first study Liljeström and colleagues did is extraordinary because “In 1987, it was unique for a team of foreign social scientist to be allowed to conduct fieldwork in rural northern Vietnam, especially as economic conditions were at a very low point” (ibid. 2). Hence, the study of 1987 is in a sense a social science pioneer work in the communist and post-colonial Viet Nam.

A number of research projects particularly focused on natural resources management and socio-economic aspects (not least on the agrarian reforms and traditional land tenure and land use) in the highland areas of Viet Nam have been carried out the last ten years. In this field the joint team consisting of staff from the Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies (CRES) at Viet Nam National University, Hanoi, and their colleagues at the East-West Center Honolulu, Hawaii, USA, are noticeably dominant. From these research projects quite a substantial amount of reports and books have come out (e.g. Rambo 1995, Rambo et al. 1995; Donovan et al. 1997; Le Trong Cuc et al. 1999; Le Trung and Rambo 2001). Another long-term multi-disciplinary study focused on the highlands and natural resources use is the jointly French and Vietnamese Mountain Agrarian Systems Programme (SAM) (Castella and Dang Dinh Quang 2002). The programme involves Vietnam Agricultural Science Institute, Institut de Recherche pour le Développement, and International Rice Research Institute. The studies conducted are concentrated to a few areas within one province, Bac Kan.

However, there are others outside these groups of researchers who have been interested in the same areas, e.g. Pham Quang Hoan’s studies of Hmong minority people’s land use and social organisation (1992, 1994), and Nguyen Van Thang studies of Hmong and Dzao’s traditional forest management (1994), and Vuong XuanTinh and Hjedahl (1996) and Corlin’s (1998) studies of Hmong land use and land tenure\(^8\). The information from these studies have helped me drawing the general picture of the ethnic minorities in the northern highlands, as well as contributed with specific information (e.g. on land use and land tenure of particular ethnic minority groups).

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\(^7\) See further Chapter III section: The New Economic Zones policy.

\(^8\) Pham Quang Hoan, Nguyen Van Thang and Vuong XuanTinh are researchers at the National Institute of Anthropology (former Institute of Ethnology). P. Hjedahl and C. Corlin are researchers from Department of Social Anthropology at Göteborg University, Sweden.
Also worth mentioning is a research project that has been especially focused on one locality in the north and one in the Red River Delta. This project is called: “Comparative Study on the Delta Agriculture in the Old Native Land of Thái Binh Province and in the Mountainous Dien Bien District of Lai Chau Province”. Mainly two Vietnamese anthropologists from the National Institute of Anthropology in Ha Noi conducted the research. As the title reveals, it was a comparative study focused on Kinh agriculture in the delta homeland and its adaptation to highland conditions. The study is very much focused on implementation of agriculture techniques. Practically all information that has come out from this research project has been published in Vietnamese and only very brief reports are available in English. However, I have had personal contacts with the leader of the research project.

The situation in the highlands features a nationally very dominant ethnic group whose influence moves into an area with a population consisting of ethnic minority groups with distinctive land use systems. The situation is not unique in the world; e.g. the Brazilian Amazon rain forest has experienced an influx of people from the coastal area within or outside the government’s migration schemes, especially since the 1970s. As a difference from the Vietnamese case the colonisation of the Amazon is very well documented (e.g. Moran 1981; Denevan 1981; Ozorio de Almeida 1992). In the wake of the economic reforms, which the government launched at the end of the 1980s, Viet Nam opened up areas that had previously been closed for foreigners. Many Western researchers were very eager to get access to the northern mountainous areas for studying the ethnic minority groups there. This is understandable, because at that time the Vietnamese documentation of the minorities consisted mainly of old-fashioned ethnographic descriptions (e.g. Dang Nghiém Van et. al. 2000). Few in-dept analyses of the socio-economic and cultural situation in these remote areas had been published at that time. However, the strong focus of recent research on minority groups implies that cultural intercommunication and knowledge transfer between minorities and majority peoples has to a lesser extent been studied.

The management of natural resources in such a diverse ethnic and cultural setting is in itself a research field where a lot remains to be done. How the Kinh settlers have managed to adapt themselves to a very different physical (and social) environment to the one in lowland Delta homeland, and how local and “imported” knowledge has been used and transmitted between ethnic groups to form a new local knowledge, is an even less studied subject. It is important to find out how knowledge is used differently when forming subsistence systems. On the pre-study visit to Ha Giang we found that a gap of knowledge existed on immigration, ecological adaptation, economic transition, and cultural change in Viet Nam’s mountainous north. Hence, the concepts natural resources use, local knowledge, culture and ethnicity are central issues in the study.
Objectives of the Study

The intent of the study is to show how the cultural background shapes the perception of what constitutes nature and how natural resources should be used. New knowledge is accumulated locally, based on pooled experience. The study concerns how new knowledge on natural resources management is formed through a mixture of the migrants’ knowledge from the Red River Delta and the minorities’ knowledge of the local area. With a background in the delta area the Kinh brought the old knowledge of advanced wet rice production with them when migrating to the highlands. Some issues or questions that immediately appear are: To what extent has the minorities’ local knowledge and culture impregnated the Viet lifestyle, and vice versa, in the process of adaptation to a new environment? What impact has cultural background had on the economic and cultural situation in the two hamlets of the study; what role have they played when people needed access to land, to natural resources, and to local knowledge? And, in what direction do the changes lead?

The study takes into consideration changes during the almost four decades since the first migrating Kinh arrived in the research area. It is particularly concerned with how the influence from the local ethnic minority peoples (three Tày-Thái speaking groups), the eco-environment, and the recent national economic reforms have changed the lifestyle and value system of the migrants. The fact that the Kinh are numerically in a minority situation as less than twenty percent of the population in the two hamlets constitute ethnic Vietnamese (in contrast to 86 percent on the national level) has made it possible to study people who are from a national dominant culture in a very different environment than the one in the homeland of the Red River Delta, and their ways of adapting to this new environment. These issues lead to the discussion on ethnic identity, interethnic relations and social interactions, not only in a limited area in the highlands of Viet Nam, but also in a wider geographical context, i.e. the mountainous northern Southeast Asia and beyond. Thus the present study is an issue study more than a case study of two villages; a traditional village study would have required a far longer field period and broader in-dept studies of the two hamlets in general (Kleinen 1996b: 14).

When discussing adaptation to a foreign eco-environment it is easy to slip into what is considered “environmental determinism” (Anderson 1973: 185; Ellen 1982: 1-20), thus regarding the eco-environment as the single dominant factor when forming land use systems, and neglecting other vital factors such as the cultural background with an inherited view of what constitute a natural landscape and how it ought to be used. This is not to say that an environmental approach is substituted for its adversary “cultural determinism” (Hornborg 1998; Anderson ibid.); instead the eco-environment has been looked upon as a limiting factor, inhibiting certain subsistence activities, and in this way forming a frame for what is
possible (Ellen 1982: 4; Leach 1977: 28). Hence, socio-economic and cultural aspects, as well as eco-environmental ones are addressed in the study, in order to get as near a holistic view as possible.

The issues that are discussed in the thesis have bearing on the ongoing discussion in Vietnam on how to develop the mountainous northern region and how to incorporate its population into the mainstream of social and economic advancement that the country is experiencing since the implementation of the economic reforms (Doi Moi) (Henin 2002; Jamieson et al. 1998; Tran Thi Que 1998). The present study will help to shed light on how migrants representing the national ethnic majority group behave when settling in an area where they constitute a numerical minority in comparison with the local peoples, how they adapt to local conditions at the same time as influencing and changing the lifestyle of the local peoples. It will also give insight information on how new local knowledge develops out of these processes. In this way the study not only contributes to the academic debate about migration and ethnic issues in Southeast Asia, but also to policy making and planning of development projects concerned with the mountainous areas. One question in focus is why the ethnic minorities are lagging behind in those socio-economic developments that the majority of the population is experiencing, and why the minorities are not involved in the market economy to the same extent as the majority Kinh (e.g. van de Walle and Gunewardena 2001; Jamieson et al. 1998). Thus, the study will also contribute to the debate on the majority-minority situation and the unequal development in the mountainous areas.

**Organisation of the Research**

The present study has involved me as a doctoral student and a Vietnamese Masters student, Mr Cong Nguyen Thao, from the National Institute of Anthropology (NIA) at the National Centre for Social Sciences and Humanities in Ha Noi. Together we conducted the field research in the two hamlets selected in Ha Giang Township. The counterpart organisation in Vietnam has been NIA. Responsible part in Sweden has been the Department of Water and Environmental Studies, at the Institute of Tema Research, Linköping University, where the study links with ongoing research at the Environmental Policy and Society (EPOS). Mr. Thao has functioned both as a research cooperating partner and as an interpreter. Hence, the interviews have been conducted with the help of a Vietnamese anthropologist who translated from English to Vietnamese and vice versa.

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9 Another factor that is important for what is possible, or least practical, concerning land use and food production is population density (see e.g. Boserup 1993 [1965]), see further Chapter III, section: Pressure on Land and Migration.
The fieldwork has been carried out during three periods: the first one in January 2002, the second in April 2002, and the third one in January 2003. Each field period lasted between three and four weeks. The data collection was possible to realise during such a short time because of my earlier experience of and long time spent in Viet Nam, and especially in the Province of Ha Giang. My first visit to northern Viet Nam was in 1988 (for the research project “Agroforestry Alternative to Shifting Cultivation”, at ICRAF\textsuperscript{10}). From 1992 to 1994, I had an assignment as a provincial advisor in Ha Giang for the Viet Nam Sweden Forestry Cooperation Programme, a Sida\textsuperscript{11} financed programme. Since then I have spent shorter periods in the country as a consultant.\textsuperscript{12} Hence, I already had the basic knowledge about village life in the north, and about the ethnic minorities’ as well as of the Kinhs’ culture, when commencing the present study in January, 2002.

In order to be able to reach the study area a four-wheel-drive car with driver was rented in Ha Noi. During the field periods the small team consisting of the research cooperator \textit{cum. interpreter}, the driver, and me, stayed in Ha Giang Town in the nights and spent the days in the hamlets when not having meetings with the authorities in town. The reason why we had to arrange the work in this way was that, for one reason or another, the People’s Committee did not give us a permit to stay overnight in the hamlets. However, this did not cause any great problems for us as the two hamlets of the study were situated only about twenty minutes drive from Ha Giang Town.

**Methods**

The focus of the field study has been on data gathering in two hamlets in the Ha Giang Township in Ha Giang Province. Most of the data has been collected through interviews with Kinh as well as with people from the three ethnic minority groups of the two hamlets: the Tày, the Giáy and the Ngan. As the total number of Kinh families was only ten in one hamlet and seven in the other, all Kinh families were interviewed at least once, and all of them were considered as key informants. Others who have been interviewed are persons in decision-making positions, such as chairmen of the People’s Committees at commune, township, and provincial levels, and other government employees.

\textsuperscript{10} ICRAF stands for: the International Centre for Research in Agroforestry, situated in Nairobi, Kenya.
\textsuperscript{11} Sida stands for: the Swedish International Development cooperation Agency.
\textsuperscript{12} Including field visits to the northern mountainous area for training of Vietnamese Government staff in participatory field methods.
The Interviews

The general methodological approach in the study has been a qualitative one\textsuperscript{13}, and the principal interview technique has been what often is termed “semi-structured”. In general there are three different methods of organising interviews; they can either be structured, semi-structured, or unstructured (Fontana and Frey 1998: 48). The latter two may also be called non-standardised (Rudqvist 1991: 7-8). In \textit{structured} interviewing standardise questionnaires are used, and “… refers to a situation in which an interviewer asks each respondent a series of preestablished questions with a limited set of response categories” (Fontana and Frey 1998: 52). Hence, very little room is left for improvise and spontaneous follow-up questions. This method allows a large number of interviews and is especially useful in quantitative analyses. In \textit{semi-structured} interviewing no detailed questionnaires are used, but instead a number of subjects or main questions are guiding the interviewer (Patton 1980; Kwale 1996). This is the reason why the method sometimes also is called “interview guide approach” (Rudqvist 1991: 8). The interviewee is left to speak quite freely around these subjects, while the researcher follows up with new questions when necessary. When conducting semi-structured interviewing it is imperative that the interviewer keeps the interviewee on the track, i.e. the interviewed person has to stay within and only discuss the pre-structured subjects the interviewer is concerned with (Patton 1980).

The \textit{unstructured} (or informal conversational) interviewing is often used by anthropologists conducting long-term field research (Patton 1980; Fontana and Frey 1998: 52). The method is very flexible and built on spontaneous questions frequently asked in more informal milieus than when the interviewer sits in front of the interviewee at a table. The unstructured interview may occur when for example the researcher is with the interviewee in an agriculture field, walking along a road, in a forest, etc. In these special situations the researcher can take the opportunity to ask spontaneous questions, not necessarily on a subject concerning the situation the researcher and researched happen to be in at that moment (Fontana and Frey 1998: 56).

Although the semi-structured interview was the principal tool in present study, both unstructured (informal talks) and structured interviews were also employed. For example, when gathering the principal data on each family (number of family members, size of agriculture land, production, etc.) a quantitative questionnaire was used, i.e. a number of

\textsuperscript{13} “Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasize the value-laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasize the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, not processes. Inquiry is purported to be within a value-free framework” (Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 8). Or to put it somewhat simpler “Technically, a ‘qualitative observation’ identifies the presence or absence of something, in contrast to ‘quantitative observation’, which involves measuring the degree to which some feature is present” (Kirk and Miller 1986: 9).
equal questions were asked to each interviewee\textsuperscript{14}. When having meals with some of the families, or when together visiting their agriculture fields we took the opportunity to conduct also entirely unstructured interviews. In this way the interviews were varied from structured to semi-structured ones, and in some cases to informal conversations, depending on type of information gathered and place of interviewing. The flexibility to be able to combine different interview methods in one and the same study is often imperative for getting the right information; and as Fontana and Frey argue “… to pit one type of interviewing against another is a futile effort, a leftover from the paradigmatic quantitative/qualitative hostility of past generations” (1998: 72-73).

It is seldom (or never) possible for a researcher to walk into a village and just tell people that he/she wants to conduct a study there (Fetterman 1991: 93); even less so in Viet Nam where local authorities keep a close control of the villages. In northern Viet Nam, besides needing a recommendation letter from a cooperating institute or university and permits from provincial authorities, the field researcher has to secure cooperation all the way from the district or, as in the present case, from the township level, down to the village/hamlet level. So in an initial stage the researcher in Viet Nam has to spend time on building up a hierarchical contact system where the provincial authorities writes a recommendation letter, based on another one from the cooperating institute or university in Ha Noi (or in another place). The idea with the letter from the provincial level is to facilitate cooperation from the township authority, who sends a person with the researcher to the commune and village where the study is to be conducted; this procedure is for securing cooperation from the community authority (and to check that the researcher stays to what is stated in the letter with the research description). The procedure has to be repeated with new letters each time the researcher comes back for a new field period.

How important it is that the letters are correctly formulated is illustrated by our experience in one of the locations of the study area during the second field trip, in April 2002. The chairman of the Commune People’s Committee told us that we could not continue interviewing minority peoples because in the letter from the National Institute of Anthropology it explained that we were carrying out research on how the Kinh people had adjusted to live in the highlands, nothing about that we should interview the ethnic minority peoples. Hence we should stick to the Kinh or get another letter from the Institute in Ha Noi telling that we also were interested in the minority people, he told us. No explanation helped, but as we already had interviewed a number of minority people in the place, we decided that we should limit the interviews to only Kinh at that time, and get a letter with another research description when

\textsuperscript{14} However, as the number of Kinh families included in the study were so few, only seventeen, a quantitative analyse of the data was not feasible. Also, the purpose of the study was \textit{not} to measure the degree, or speed, of the cultural integration, but rather to find out how and why interaction and integration occur, i.e. a qualitative endeavour.
coming back. It must be pointed out that this was the only time we had problem with formal bureaucratic matters; the next time we came back to the commune there was no problem interviewing both Kinh and minority peoples.

Besides the researcher and the interpreter, present in the interviews were occasionally also one representative from the commune or the village authorities, and the representative from the Township People’s Committee mentioned above. The latter person, besides being a guarantee that we had permit from the Provincial as well as Township People’s Committees to work in the place, he assisted to initiate the contacts and arranging the formalities with the local authorities the first days. However, these persons were present at the interviews mainly the very first field days. When finding out that more or less the same subjects were discussed with all families, they seemed to lose interest and only came back occasionally and for shorter moments to the interviews.

Most researchers in rural areas in the developing world often find that his/her presence is an exiting event for the villagers; Viet Nam constitutes definitely no exception in this case. Adults and children follow the researcher through the village and hang in the doorway, or even get inside the house where the interview takes place. This is of course annoying and may impede the interview totally. In general such situation can be avoided by politely asking one representative of the commune or village authorities to explain for the villagers that they cannot hang around during the interviews. However, as in the case of the official persons following the researcher, in most cases the villagers lose interest after the first days the researcher is in the field. The situation might be somewhat different if there are relatives or close friends of the interviewee visiting or staying temporary in his/her house (e.g. a brother visiting from Ha Noi, which actually was the case a couple of times during the research in Ha Giang). Then it can be impolite to ask people to leave for the interview. Doubtlessly it is better to be alone with the interviewee, and especially when the visitor interferes with the interview it can be disturbing. However, sometimes when the visitors get involved the researcher finds himself listening to an exciting group discussion that might generate interesting points of view from different persons than only the interviewee. Nevertheless, in such cases the interview has to be conducted once again with the interviewee alone to get his proper answers correctly.

The sampling of interviewees has been easy concerning the Kinh families since all have been chosen. The minority families were selected at random following a combination of “judgement sampling” and “accidental sampling”. With judgement sampling is meant that the “…ethnographers rely on their judgement to select the most appropriate members of the subculture or unit to study, based on the research question” (Fetterman 1991: 93); and accidental sampling is “…when a person is sampled by accident because she or he happens to be available, …” (Deepa Narayan 1996, quoted from Carvalho and White 1997: 6).
In our case we explained to the chairman of the hamlet the day before beginning the interviews that we wanted to interview a certain number of families from one ethnic group and a certain number from another group, etc., and that we did not only want to talk to economically better off farmers but that the families should be spread socio-economically, as well as spatially in the hamlet. The fact that I had experience from visits to and interviews with a large number of farmers from different ethnic groups in different locations in the Ha Giang Province, since previously working in the area, helped when judging the economic standard of the families who were selected. For example, one marker of living standard is housing (size of the house, roofing, quality of the floor, etc.), but the markers may vary between ethnic groups; e.g. among the Kinh, who most often have their houses constructed on the ground\textsuperscript{15}, to have a concrete floor instead of one of mud is a sign of “wealth”.

The following day the ethnic minority families who were selected and available were interviewed. Sometimes when a family happens to be out, or explained that the members did not have time that particular day, we went to the next family on the list or picked one at random. Sometimes we would return another day to the family who had not been available a certain day (in some cases we also followed the same pattern with the Kinh families until all of them were interviewed).

The table below shows the statistics of interviewed persons in the two hamlets of the study. Of the 19 Kinh families interviewed two were in Ha Tay Province, the original home province of the 17 Kinh families in the study area. In addition to the interviews shown in the table, formal and informal interviews were held with a number of representatives for the Peoples’ Committees at provincial level as well as at the township level, and with communal schoolteachers.

\textsuperscript{15} In contrast to the Tày-Thái speaking peoples who traditionally build their houses on poles above the ground.
**Interview Statistics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total number of Kinh families</th>
<th>19</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Tày families</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Giáy families</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Ngan families</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of Dzao families</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of families interviewed</strong></td>
<td><strong>36</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of women interviewed</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of men interviewed</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of representatives of the commune authorities</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total number of persons interviewed</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Na Con hamlet about 22 percent of the minority families were interviewed, and in Ban Kho hamlet about 17 percent of them. As indicated in the table above, about 45 percent were women and 55 percent were men of the individual family members interviewed; a fairly good gender balance. The distribution of men and women in the interviewing was following the “accidental sampling” technique mentioned above: the person who happened to be at home was interviewed, being the husband or the wife. That meant that in most cases only one spouse took part in the interview. In some cases another family member, e.g. a child or grandparent was present during the interviews.

Each interview lasted between one and two hours. No tape recorder was used. Instead notes were taken. According to my experiences from Viet Nam, as well as from other parts of the world, a tape recorder sometimes creates an “invisible wall” between the interviewer and the interviewee, making the latter not speaking freely. The question of using a tape recorder or not has been discussed in publications on field methods (e.g. Bogdan and Taylor 1975). Bogdan and Taylor argue that in some cases people hesitate to speak freely if they have a tape recorder in front of them (1975: 64). The authors even recommend the researcher not taking notes when interviewing the first days in the field before gaining trust of the interviewees (ibid.). If using the method of taking notes and at the same time working with an interpreter, the researcher gets more time to write down the answers while the next question is translated to the interviewee than if the researcher works directly with the interviewee. This is probably one of few advantages of using an interpreter; another one being the role of the interpreter as a special informant, and introducer to the subjects of the study, if he/she comes from the same culture as the studied people.
After having finished the interviews with the individual farming families in January 2003, we held a meeting and group interview with persons representing the Peoples’ Committees and the Communist Party in each of the two communes. In Kim Thach Commune there were three persons representing the local authority participating in the group interview, and in Phi Linh Commune four persons participating. These interviews were held partly for crosschecking the key data collected during the research, and partly to get the local authorities’ points of view on some of the issues discussed with the farmers (a so called triangulation). As it was a matter of discussing special subjects in these meetings they actually constituted what is branded focus-group interviews (e.g. Denzin and Lincoln 1998: 53-55). Hence, a number of different interview techniques have been used, ranging from structured interviews to informal talks, from interviews with a single person to group interviews. Five of the Kinh families were interviewed twice, partly for crosschecking some of the information given earlier by the same family, and partly for crosschecking information that had been given by others.

Besides interviewing in the homes, agriculture fields in the uplands as well as in the lowlands were visited together with the farmers to have on-the-spot information about the agriculture production: crop-choice, land preparation, cultivation techniques, etc. As mentioned above, on these occasions unstructured informal interviews were held with the farmers.

The field study has in a sense not been a “traditional” anthropological one as we did not stay a long time in one hamlet, and hence cannot claim that we have used the participant observation method, common in sociological and anthropological fieldwork (e.g. Gubrium 1991). But, as mentioned above, during my time as a provincial adviser (1992-94) I spent quite some time in many communes and hamlets in different parts of the Ha Giang Province, and among many different ethnic minority peoples as well as among the Kinh, for carrying out Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA) together with a multi-disciplinary Vietnamese team. The PRA exercises not only enabled me to get a general view of each village we worked with, but also to participate in individual family interviews, as well as group interviews and group discussions. The aim of the PRA exercises, besides getting a picture of the general socio-economic situation of each village, was to get to know the problems the farmers were facing, especially in relation to agriculture and food production. Most often the communes and villages of the appraisals were ethnically mixed ones, a fact that helped me get a close-up view of the ethnic majority – minority situation, something that has served as a background in the present study. However, the time spent in the communes also produced many questions in my mind, questions of which the most important ones are mentioned above under the heading “Objectives of the Study”, and constitute the starting point as well as the focus of present study.
Limitations of the Study

The study has been limited to two hamlets. Strictly speaking it only represents two examples of how Kinh majority people have adapted to life in the highlands. There are other areas in northern Viet Nam with different ecological conditions, and with different ethnic constellations that are waiting to be studied. The integration between Kinh and local ethnic groups varies from place to place, and in order to get a holistic picture of the complex issues of migration, adaptation, and interactions between the ethnic groups in the north, studies of a number of hamlets/villages, or communes, are required. Further, the migrants of the present study were forced to leave their homeland to settle in Ha Giang\textsuperscript{16}. There are other Kinh in Ha Giang who migrated voluntarily, and case studies of these migrants may show a different picture of adaptation and interaction between majority and minority peoples.

The Outline of the Thesis

The thesis is arranged in such a way that chapters II – V give background information and primarily form the empirical part, and chapter VI – VIII forms the discussing part. The content of each chapter is briefly described below.

\textbf{Chapter II} is especially focused on some milestones in Viet Nam’s history that have a bearing on the present study: war, political changes, and agrarian and economic reforms. Also how the northern region fits (ecologically and economically, as well as socio-culturally) into the greater and international region of mountainous mainland Southeast Asia is described in the chapter.

\textbf{Chapter III} gives a broad outline of internal migration in Viet Nam, especially during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The chapter also takes into consideration how the different historical epochs, described in Chapter II, have triggered off migration and influenced the patterns of movement within the country. The government’s programme for sending Kinh people to the inland and mountain areas, the New Economic Zones (NEZ) programme, is presented (all the Kinh migrants in the study area came to the highlands through the NEZ programme).

\textbf{Chapter IV} begins with a brief presentation of traditional life in the Red River Delta. This is to get an idea of what kind of life the Kinh families concerned in the study left behind when they were forced to migrate to the Ha Giang Province. In the section that follows, a fictive journey from the delta to the highlands is made to give some flashes of how the geographical

\textsuperscript{16} In 1966 the government ordered a number of families to move from the Red River Delta to forced settlements in especially the highland areas of northern Viet Nam (see further Chapter III).
as well as cultural traits change along the road from the lowland to the hilly midlands, and further north into the mountainous inland. In the third section a brief picture of life in the highlands is presented, especially of the ethnic minority peoples’ land use and livelihood.

Chapter V contains a description of Ha Giang Province, as well as of the study area in general. The economy, land use, land tenure and the social system of the two hamlets studied are presented. Focus is especially on the Kinh families and their economy, on their social relations and networking within the hamlet as well as with relatives in the delta homeland.

Chapter VI is mainly concerned with one of the questions that was raised in the first pages of the thesis: To what extent have the minorities’ local knowledge and culture impregnated the Kinhs’ lifestyle, and vice versa, in the process of adaptation to a new environment? The perception of the landscape and how to utilise the natural resources therein is in focus, which has proved to be a centre point when discussing adaptation and formation of local knowledge. Cultural dimensions are considered crucial factors in the processes of adaptation; an adaptation to a new physical environment as well as to a new social one.

Chapter VII starts out chiefly from two of the other questions that were raised on the first pages of the thesis: What impact has cultural background had on the economic and cultural situation in the two hamlets of the study; what role have they played when people needed access to land, to natural resources, and to local knowledge? And in what direction do the changes lead? In order to understand the process of adaptation and integration the chapter zooms in on the role of social interaction, ethnic identification, and ethnic integration.

Chapter VIII holds a summary and a concluding discussion with the purpose to wrap up the essence of the thesis.

On the following pages, before Chapter II, four maps are presented. The first one showing the whole region of northern Southeast Asia, Southern China and the Northeast Frontier of India, and then zooming down on Viet Nam on the second one, and further down on the northern region of Viet Nam on the third one, and lastly on the fourth map showing the Ha Giang Province.
The shaded part shows the proximate extension of the mountain areas.
Figure 2. Map of Viet Nam
The study area is shaded.
--- indicates the border of the Ha Giang Province
--- indicates the route described in Chapter IV
Figure 4. *Map of the Ha Giang Province*
II. Viet Nam, an Elongated Country with a Long History

Introduction

Viet Nam has gone through several wars, large-scale political upheavals and economic transformations in its history, not at least since after the colonial time: war with USA, partition of the country into two under two different governments, and later reunification under the Ha Noi government, collectivisation and de-collectivisation of agriculture, etc. One Communist government today rules the whole of Viet Nam, and it is called a socialist republic. Although individual candidates outside the Communist party are allowed to run for elections, no other political party than the communist one is allowed. However, like China, the economy is market oriented, and profound economic reforms have been pursued since the end of the 1980s. The political sphere has been reformed to a much lesser extent. Nevertheless, a decentralisation of decision making from Ha Noi to the provinces and districts has taken place as part of the liberalisation reforms.

Geography and Population

Viet Nam, a long and narrow country in northern Southeast Asia, has China as its northern neighbour, Laos and Cambodia as its western and south-western ones. Its coastline of more than 3,400 kilometres is on the Gulf of Tonkin, South China Sea and the Gulf of Thailand. The total territory stretches over 329,500 km² (about the same size as Germany, or the state of New Mexico in USA). Two large rivers, Song Hong (the Red River) and Song Da, flow through the north, and one through the south, Mekong, forming delta lands with large-scale irrigated agricultural production. The by far most important crop is rice, followed by maize, pulses and others as secondary crops. Coastal plains in the central part of the country constitute the third most significant agricultural area. Mountainous areas, covering sixty percent of the total land area, are found especially in the northern and central regions of Viet Nam. Coffee and tea are grown as cash crops here. The Red River and the Mekong Deltas are the most densely populated parts of the country. The Red River Delta holds an average of over one thousand persons per square kilometre, while parts of the mountainous areas only have about forty persons per square kilometre.

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18 “A system of irrigated agriculture can be defined as a landscape to which is added physical structures that impound, divert, channel, or otherwise move water from a source to some desired location” (Coward 1980: 15).
The capital Ha Noi with a population of about 2 million and the larger city of Ho Chi Minh in the south with some 3.5 million inhabitants are the most dynamic areas concerning economic development.

The climate is tropical in the south and monsoonal in the north. The rainy season lasts from May to September. In the north the summer is hot and the winter humid and cool, when temperature may drop to as low as five-six degrees centigrade. In rare cases, as e.g. in January 2003, there can be snow in the extreme northern part. The typhoons that often hit the central region in the rainy season produce extensive flooding. Flooding also occurs in the deltas. Especially the in last two-three years flooding of the Mekong River Delta has taken a large death toll.

**The Region**

How the northern region of Viet Nam fits (ecologically and economically, as well as socio-culturally) into the greater and international region of mountainous mainland Southeast Asia will be described in this section, and then zooming back to Viet Nam’s northern highlands again.

For many people, perhaps, Viet Nam gives an impression of a flat lowland country, but as a matter of fact more than half of its territory is highland (Jamieson et al. 1998:2). The main part of the mountainous areas is found in the northern and central regions of the country, close to the Chinese and the Lao borders. In this way it forms an integral part of the mountainous mainland of South East Asia.

*Viet Nam’s North as Part of the Mountainous Mainland Southeast Asia*

Politically and legally Southeast Asia ends in the west where Maynmar (Burma) meets India and Bangladesh, and in the north where Viet Nam, Laos and Maynmar meet southern China. However, culturally and ecologically it does not end there, the Northeast Frontier of India and the Province of Yunnan in China are areas that have many common features with the northern and mountainous Southeast Asia, so much that they can be considered being part of one region (see Figure 1.)

The geography is characterised by rugged mountains and areas of difficult or impossible access, and an ethnic composition with great diversity. The topography hampers implementation of irrigation agriculture in large scale, which to a great extent confine the inhabitants to depend on upland cultivation (McKinnon and Michaud 2000: 1). These
characteristic features also create problems concerning rural development, marketing and general economic progress in the local communities. At the same time such a high ethnic diversity also means a high diversity in land use systems, which in its turn points at a great knowledge of local ecological conditions and natural resource management of specific areas; knowledge that are of utmost importance for food production. The combination of difficult access, a low production of wet rice, and the prejudices that the majority peoples in general have against the highland minority peoples has made these areas stand outside mainstream development efforts and economic development that the rest of Southeast Asia has experienced during the last decades. (Rambo 1997: 14; Liljeström et al. 1998: 236).

The Northern Mountain Region of Viet Nam constitutes the nine “real” highland provinces of Cao Bang, Lang Son, Bac Kan, Tuyen Quang, Ha Giang, Yen Bai, Lao Cai, Lai Chau, Son La, and seven more that are partly in the Northern Mountain Region: Quang Ninh, Thai Nguyen, Bac Giang, Phu Tho, Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, and Nghe An. To the north the region borders with China and to the west with Laos. It covers about 27 percent of Viet Nam’s total area, while it only holds less than ten percent of its population. This means an average population density of about 70 persons per square kilometre. A low figure in comparison with the national average of 195 persons per square kilometre, or especially in comparison with the Red River Delta that holds more than one thousand per square kilometre (Rambo 1997: 6; Nguyen Van Bich 1990: 118-19).

Colonial Control of the North
The mountainous north was one of the last areas that the French took control over in Indochina. Still at the end of the 19th Century the area was “wild” and not under anyone’s rule. Chinese as well as Vietnamese armies and paramilitary forces had been fighting to control opium trade, Chinese river pirates harassed the local communities by plundering and abducting women, etc. (Nelsson 1998; Rambo 1997:11). Not until the beginning of the 20th Century did the French manage to take full control over the north with help of the Foreign Legion, and the area came administratively under the Tonkin Protectorate (Nelsson 1998). However, local political and economic power continued to a large extent to be in the hands of local feudal chiefs, who often were from the Tày -Thái speaking groups or from the Muong minority group (a Viet related people). In practice the north was under indirect rule of the French (or under the “divide and rule” principle) (Rambo 1997:11). The feudal system, with landlords mustering taxes and corvées from the farmers seems mainly to have touched the “lowlanders of the highland”, i.e. Tày -Thái speaking people, Muong, and other peoples who resided in the valleys and subsisted to a great part on lowland agriculture, whereas the peoples living on higher elevations in more remote areas (Dzao, Hmong, etc.) seem to have been fairly untouched by any economic system exercised from any authority (this is at least partly the case even up to today).
During the anti-colonial struggle before World War II the northern mountains played a special role for the liberation forces, when its leader Ho Chi Minh resided there among the minority peoples. At that time the area was covered with forest and constituted a good hide-away place for the Liberation Front. From there the guerrilla forces could launch attacks on the colonial army with help of the ethnic minorities. Later when Ho Chi Minh became president of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam (the northern half of the country), he acknowledged the importance of the northern region and the minority peoples in the struggle for independence. The provinces Ha Giang, Lao Cai and Lai Chau were declared the Thái -Meo Autonomous Zone (Corlin 1998: 5). But also plans to resettle lowlanders in the area were drawn; one important aim with these plans was to secure the borders to China (De Koninck 2000:16)\textsuperscript{19}. However, since people had been resettled the region seems to have fallen into oblivion, and only played a marginal role in further development of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, as well as of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, formed after the reunification in 1975; after that date the Thái-Meo Autonomous Zone was also abolished (Corlin 1998: 5).

A Poor Region with a Great Ethnic Diversity

The Northern Mountainous Region of Viet Nam is a poor area, in comparison with the lowland and costal areas of Viet Nam, and in comparison with other developing countries. For example, in 1994 the paddy production\textsuperscript{20} per capita and year was only 239 kg, while in the Red River Delta it was 328 kg, still under the recommended minimum level of 350 kg/capita/year (Rambo 1997: 14).

This “forgotten region” has received more attention the last ten years or so than earlier; for example the government has focused on expanding extension activities for farmers, implemented tax reduction for the ethnic minorities, channelled money to health projects, etc., and an increasing number of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as well as international organisations such as United Nation’s International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and United Nations’s Development Projects (UNDP), have invested in the highlands (Jamieson et al. 1998:5). However, despite these efforts to reduce poverty, the people of the area lag far behind the general improvement of living standard that the inhabitants of the lowland, especially that of the larger cities, have experienced since the introduction of the economic reforms at the end of the 1980s. Not only has the region been left outside mainstream development, its economic value and importance for the rest of the country has been neglected. For example all three large rivers of the north, including Song Hong (or the Red River), flow through the mountainous areas giving the lowland water for

\textsuperscript{19} In the next chapter the colonisation of the northern mountainous area and migration in Viet Nam will be discussed further.

\textsuperscript{20} This includes paddy rice production and other grain production (e.g. maize) converted into paddy equivalent.
irrigation as well as containing an untapped potential for delivering hydro-power to the cities and towns downstream.

Among the Kinh in general the region is perceived as a remote, dangerous, sparsely populated and backward part of the country, and with a population that more or less have stagnated in development (Schliesinger 1997: 23; Salemink 2000: 126-29; Khong Dien 2002: 87). At the same time, the area has been painted as some kind of promised land among the Kinh in the overcrowded Red River Delta (Khong Dien 2002: 87), which during the last decades has triggered an increasing number of so called spontaneous migrations from the delta to the northern highlands. Similar reputation has made the central highlands a receiver of migrants (including some from the northern highlands) (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001:33). The idea that there is plenty of land in the north springs from the relatively low population density there (at least in comparison with the delta land). However, when considering the access to arable land and irrigation potential, the region is as crowded as the delta land is (Jamieson et al. 1998:9). Nevertheless, among the Kinh in the study area in the Ha Giang Province, who were forced to migrate to the highlands, the north is not considered as a promised land.

Although Viet Nam holds 54 officially recognised ethnic groups21 within its borders, 86 percent of the total population of 76 million belongs to the ethnic majority group, Viet or Kinh (General Statistic Office 2001:3). The other part of the population consists of so-called ethnic minority groups, in size ranging from about a few hundred individuals (as in the case of e.g. the Pu Peo) to one million (as in the case of the Tày). Minority peoples are mainly found in the central highlands and in the mountainous north. The latter region is not only characterised by its mixture of culture and ethnic groups, but also by its closeness to China, and a history of migration: in earlier times from China, more recently from the Vietnamese lowland (Khong Dien 2002: 82). The population growth is a consequence of immigration from the lowland since the fall of the French Indochina Colonial Empire in 1954, and a high natural birth rate. The large-scale immigration from the lowland began in the 1960s, when forced migration took place, and continues up to today with more of spontaneous nature (Jamieson et al.1998: 10)

Of Viet Nam’s 54 different ethnic groups 31 are found in the northern region (Rambo 1997: 6; Nguyen Van Bich 1990: 118-19). As Rambo points out, the regional “Ethnolinguistic maps are psychedelic nightmares, with multiple-color tiny spots spattered seemingly at random rather than broad areas inhabited by a single group, …”. (1997:8).

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21 The Vietnamese official classification of ethnic groups, in some cases, tends to lump together peoples who actually are so distinctive that it is doubtful if they should be considered forming one and the same ethnic group (Donovan et al. 1997:6-7; Dang Nghiem Van et al. 2000: 2)
The landscape is highly varied, from gently rolling hills to sharp limestone formations. Three larger rivers flow through the region: Song Hong, Song Lo, and Song Da. Along these rivers and along the smaller tributaries there is some flat land with a potential for irrigation. However, paddy rice cultivation is confined to these valleys and in general the possibility for intensive wet rice cultivation is very low in comparison with for example the Red River Delta (Rambo 1997: 14). The combination of mountains and ethnic diversity has created an image of the highlands region as a place where “primitive” ethnic minority peoples are carrying out “nomadic” shifting cultivation, isolated from the rest of the country (Salemink 2000: 126; Le Trong Cuc 1995: 105; Liljeström et al. 1998: 236). However, in fact most people live in the valley bottoms and to a varying extent depend on wet rice production. Although shifting cultivation is still practised in the mountainous areas of Viet Nam, it is often combined with other upland agriculture, fruit orchards and home garden production, as well as with irrigated rice production when possible (Rambo 1995; Ireson and Ireson 1996: 6-8).

**Revolutions and Reforms: A Turbulent History**

War has always been a part of the Vietnamese history, especially since the uprising against the French colonial power, and up to the 1980’s war with Cambodia and China; wars that have changed the map as well as politics and economy of the country. War has also been a decisive factor forming migration in Viet Nam (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 23). During the war against the French farmers had to escape their villages. Some served in the French forces and others went to the anti-colonial forces, the Viet Minh guerrilla (Hardy 1998: 160-68). When the partition of the country took place, many people moved from the North to the South. During the war with USA, in the South a high number of Vietnamese fled to areas in the countryside that were controlled by the guerrilla FNL, areas that at least for some time constituted safe havens for the fleeing population. In the North, people were moved out from the cities to rural areas when the US Air Force began bombing urban areas with strategic industries, and other infrastructure. The social, economic and political impact of these wars is of course profound. However, the economic reforms initiated at the end of the 1980s may have had an impact on the life of the Vietnamese people as great and durable as the wars have had.

The Vietnamese history is long, and here only a very short summary can be given of how the rice producing empire in the Red River Delta more than twenty centuries ago began expanding and slowly developed into the modern Viet Nam of today. Nevertheless, this brief background is for understanding the paths of the events in the study area. Especially important is to have knowledge about the cultural background of the Viet people, and how the agrarian reforms have changed the economy during the different historical phases of the 19th and the 20th centuries.
Formation of an Empire and a Nation

It is in general considered that the cradle of the Viet culture stood in the Red River Delta (Luttrel 2001:60). According to Viet mythology about 2,500 years ago a dragon god (Lac Long Quan) married a fairy (Au Co), which resulted in one hundred offspring. After some time the dragon considered such a marriage impossible so he told his wife that they had to go separated ways. Fifty of the children followed their mother to the hilly hinterland and fifty followed their father to the coast (i.e. the Red River Delta). One of the sons who followed his father is the founder of Van Lang, the Hung Kingdom. This son of a fairy and a dragon is considered as the forefather of the whole nation and was followed by altogether 17 Hung kings (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997:28-29; Nguyen Khac Vien 1987:16; Jamieson 1993:7) 22. Where myth ends and history begins is unclear. However traces of the capital of the Hung Kingdom can be found near the present town of Viet Tri in the western and upper part of the Red River Delta Area (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997: 29).

The Hung Kingdom expanded to cover areas outside the Red River Plain reaching the hilly hinterland of northern Viet Nam and the northern parts of Central Viet Nam. Other dynasties and rulers followed the Hung. In year 111 BC the expanding Han dynasty of China conquered Northern Viet Nam, and the Vietnamese came under Chinese rule for one thousand years (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997:30; Nguyen Khac Vien 1987:21; Jamieson 1991:6). Chinese culture and religion began impregnating the Vietnamese society; Taoism, Buddhism and especially Confucianism mingled with Vietnamese old traditions (Salemink 2003: 24-25; Le Thi 1999: 35-36), Chinese words were adopted into the language, etc. (Jamieson 1993:11). Although many old Vietnamese customs continued, inevitably such a long lasting occupation meant thorough changes in the Vietnamese society (Nguyen Khac Vien 1987: 25).

Throughout the long period from the end of the Chinese occupation of northern Viet Nam (938 AD) 23 until the French began conquering Viet Nam in the mid 19th century, several Vietnamese emperors ruled the country, from the Ngo Dynasty in the 10th century to Nguyen Dynasty in the 19th century (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997:30). Quite late in history, about three hundred years ago, did the Viet people begin colonising the extreme south of the country in search of agriculture land, and the Viet culture had reached the same southward expansion it has today (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 23).

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22 There are several and slightly different versions of this legend. One says that the fairy came from the north, i.e. China, that the dragon represents the water and the mountains, and that their union represents the union between all people of Viet Nam (Salemink 2003: 23).

23 During a short lap of history, 1407 to 1428, Viet Nam once again came under Chinese rule, but this time under the Ming Dynasty (Jamieson 1993:10).
During the French colonial period, which began 1884 in Northern (Tonkin) and Central Viet Nam (Annam), the Red River Delta changed considerably: plantations were established by French settlers, the urban areas expanded (especially Ha Noi and Hai Phong), railways were constructed, etc. (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997:31). Already 1867 had Southern Viet Nam (Cochin China) been connected to the French protectorates of the two kingdoms Laos and Cambodia. Saigon was a few years later linked to Ha Noi via a railway line.

World War Two and the Japanese occupation of Viet Nam weakened drastically the French colonial power. In 1941 a resistant movement, Viet Minh (Front for the Independence of Viet Nam) was formed by several anti-colonial and nationalistic groupings under the leadership of Ho Chi Minh, the founder of the Vietnamese Communist Party (Kolko 1987: 30).

However, from then on and up to just after World War II: "A process of polarization took place as the Communist Party increasingly gained consolidated control of the revolutionary movement against French colonial rule" (Jamieson 1991: 18). Officially Viet Nam became independent from the French after the designated “1945 Revolution” was effectuated in September 2 the same year. Nevertheless, not until the revolutionary and nationalistic forces defeated the French at Dien Bien Phu (a fortress in the north-western part of the country close to the Lao border) in 1954, the colonial power totally lost its grip on Indochina. Soon, Viet Nam was divided into two states: the North and the South (De Koninck 1996:246). The South became the Republic of Viet Nam in1955 with strong support from the USA (McCoy 1972: 150). The North became the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, which chose the socialist path supported by several of the communist countries of the world, especially the Soviet Union. In the South, a resistance movement of different fractions was formed, the National Liberation Front (FNL), to fight the US-backed government there. FNL grew strong on the countryside, where it had gained a wide support from the peasants (Kolko 1987: 553).

With support from the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam the FNL forces launched heavy military activities in attempts to overthrow the Government of the Republic of South Viet Nam. To support its ally, the South Vietnamese Government, United States sent troops to Viet Nam, and the so-called Viet Nam War (or the Third Indochina War) began²⁴. It lasted until 1975 when the joint forces of the North Viet Nam Army and FNL defeated the joint forces of South Viet Nam and the USA (also Australia, Thailand and South Korea sent limited number of troops to support USA and the South Viet Nam Army). (Kolko 1987; Nguyen Khac Vien 1987: 325-55; Salemink 2003: 28-29)

²⁴ What in general is called the Vietnam War actually in some respect was a continuation of the French colonial war in Indochina (McCoy 1972), and because of that sometimes it is also called the Third Indochina War. The Vietnamese in general refer to it as the American War.
Post Reunification Era

The South Viet Nam Army’s capitulation and the liberation of Saigon in 1975 meant that the partition of Viet Nam into two states soon was to cease. The new National Assembly ratified the reunification of Viet Nam in July 1976 (BNCW1999:6). Ha Noi became the capital of the newly named Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, and Saigon was renamed Ho Chi Minh City.

However, peace was not durable. The take-over of the pro-China Khmer Rouge communists in Cambodia in 1975 meant that Viet Nam had an anti-Vietnamese regime as its southern neighbour. Suffice to say here, that after several border incidents and killing of ethnic Vietnamese living in Cambodia, the Vietnamese invaded Cambodia in 1978. The Khmer Rouge were pushed into the western and northern part of the country, and a pro-Vietnamese government was installed in the capital Phnom Penh. China, the old foe of Viet Nam and close ally of the Khmer Rouge, retaliated by invading some of the Vietnamese provinces bordering to China in the north in 1979 (Salemink 2003: 39; BNCW1999:10-11). Especially the provincial capital of Lao Cai was severely hit, and the town was left as a mound of sand by the Chinese troops. Also the neighbouring province of Ha Giang (where the area of the present study is located) was invaded. But the well trained and war action experienced Vietnamese soldiers forced the Chinese troops back several kilometres into Chinese territory. The Vietnamese occupants stayed in Cambodia until 1989.

When the war broke out the Vietnamese army cleared the border to China from people living there, and consequently whole villages were forced to move. Mostly ethnic minority people, and especially the Hmong, were affected by these measures. The situation with displaced people settling in other communes has caused deforestation and land tenure problems in e.g. parts of the Ha Giang Province (Khong Dien 2002: 89). Some of the Hmong and Dzao people in Ha Giang Province who were forced to leave their homes never moved back to the border areas again (personal communication with Hmong and Dzao people in the Ha Giang Province).

Other impacts of the war with China were at the international level. Viet Nam, who already had good relations with the Soviet Union, boosted these relations, and as a consequence the Sino-Vietnamese relations soured. Viet Nam became increasingly dependent on economic support from the Soviet Union and did so up to the end of the 1980s. Viet Nam’s centralised economy as well as its agrarian collectivisation programme had earlier been inspired by the Soviet Union one. But at the beginning of the 1990s, when the impact from the perestroika had drastically changed the Soviet Union’s politics and economy, the support to Viet Nam plunged. This forced the Vietnamese Government to increase relations with countries outside the Soviet Block. However, already at the 6th Party Congress in 1986 had the Vietnamese Government launched its own version of perestroika, Doi Moi (restructuring or new economy,
see below) and announced far reaching and market oriented economic reforms (Salemink 2003: 40). These reforms should in the near future drastically change the agricultural production and land tenure in Viet Nam; changes that also reached the northernmost areas of the country. (CIA, The World Factbook 2001; World Almanac and Book of Facts 2003; Nguyen Van Bich 1990).

Agrarian Reforms

As peasants’ way of exploiting natural resources in a cultural context is a central theme in the thesis, land will be one of the foci (including land tenure and land reforms). Struggle for and control over land is an essential ingredient in Viet Nam’s history. Most uprisings against Chinese and Vietnamese rulers have sprung from the importance of controlling land (Luttrell 2001:59). The control of land also includes the irrigation systems and consequently also control of water and water flow.

An irrigation system requires a great deal of labour input. Because of that the output from each rice field, being under the cooperative system or cropped by the individual family, is depending on collective efforts of the community. This fact has made the Kinh having a more collective view of land ownership than many of the ethnic minority peoples in the north who depend on shifting cultivation and other upland cultivation. For example, the traditional land tenure systems of the Hmong and the Dzao are more individual, where in practise only the forestland is recognised as communal land (Vuong Xuan Tinh and Hjemdahl 1996: 13-14). However, the individual family’s right to land is more a matter of user’s right than real ownership right (Corlin 1998: 10-11). Among the Tày minority people who live in the two hamlets of the study, the upland fields have been cropped and controlled by the individual family by tradition since long time back. This was the case even during the time of cooperative production, when only the lowland fields were under collective tilling. The importance of the view of land use for the ethnic identity will be further discussed in Chapters VI and VII.

When the French had left Indochina and the northern half of Viet Nam had become the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam in 1954, collectivisation of the agricultural production and of agricultural land had already been initiated by the Ha Noi government through a land reform programme started in 1953 (Pingali and Vo-Tong Xuan 1992:701). Initially the rural population was divided into peasants and landlords depending on how much land a family owned and how much time was dedicated to agriculture. Land was then expropriated from the families who had been classified as landlords and distributed to families classified as peasants. More than two million farming families got land through this programme (ibid.). However, a collectivisation programme was soon launched and the land that had been distributed to the individual families was step by step transferred to collective ownership within a cooperative system. In the first stage of collectivisation (1958-1960) a kind of low-
level cooperatives were formed where the farmers continued to own their plot of land, but were encouraged to participate in work-exchange teams within a collective production system (Pingali and Vo-Tong Xuan 1992:701; Tran Thi Que 1998: 31-32). From 1961 to 1970 the low-level cooperatives were changed to high-level cooperatives and a point system was introduced among the cooperative members. In 1971 20,000 low-level cooperatives had been upgraded to high-level cooperatives. At the first stage the output from the collective production was used as measurement within the point system for paying the members. This system led to a fall in quality, as it was only focused on quantity, and was later changed to a system where each person got paid per working hour instead (Pingali and Vo-Tong Xuan 1992:702).

In the beginning of the 1980s a change in the agricultural production took place in Viet Nam in general; a step away from the collective production was taken when an individual contract system was introduced (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 30). The farming families were now allowed to crop the land independently and sell some of the output on the market. The change to the contract system meant a significant growth of agricultural output. From 1982 to 1987 the annual rate of rice output growth was given to 2.8 percent. However, still it was not a privatisation of the production or of agricultural land as the family had to fill a yearly production target and part of the output had to be sold to the state at a fixed price. (Pingali and Vo-Tong Xuan 1992:706-07).

It took until 1986 before changes in scale were coming when the government designed the renovation programme of Doi Moi (Jamieson 1991: 1), where the centrally planned economy was to be abandoned (White et al. 2001: 193). Instead the economy should now be more directed towards private and local initiatives: “The reforms of the state management of the economy aim at abolishing state subsidies and to place the responsibility for and control of the economic activities with the individual enterprise, both in the state and in the non-state sectors” (Nguyen Van Bich 1990:129). The reforms meant profound changes within the agriculture sector with the introduction of new land tenure and a total change of the mode of production. The cooperatives were in practise dissolved at the beginning of the 1990s; officially they continued to exist but in most of them the cooperative committees were changed to be more of an advisory body than an executive one. All production was now in the hands of the individual families who could sell the output where they got the best price (de Vylder 1993).

A slowdown of growth in agricultural output at the end of the 1980s triggered the quick change from the contract system to a more “capitalistic” system where the “Farming households would be considered as the basic economic unit” (Tran Thi Que 1998: 36). Up to the year 1988, responsibility for distributing land to the individual families had been in the hands of the local party officials and the agricultural officers, which meant that a lot was left
for personal partiality in the allocation of land. Moreover, the farmer could be displaced from his piece of land by the communal authority, as there was no contract stating secure holding to it. In 1988 the Central Committee of the Communist Party passed a resolution which stated that assignment to agricultural land should be on 10, 15 or 20-year terms, and that the contracts should be renewable and assigned to the family, not to the individual farmer. (Pingali and Vo-Tong Xuan 1992:707). This resolution was a real step forward for the farming family who now felt it could invest in the land on a long term planning base. One old Kinh man explained to us about the results of the de-collectivisation: “It is much better now because we like to take care of our own land, not produce with others. After the land was given to us the production increased immediately.”

A further step forward for the farming family in the security of land holding came in 1993. According to the Vietnamese Constitution all land belongs to the state, but after some changes in the land reform in 1993 (Resolution 05-NQ/HNT W) the agricultural family has full user’s right to the plot of land that has been allocated to it (Fagerström 1995: 2). Full user’s right includes the right to inherit, mortgage, and transfer and lease the right to some other farmer in need of more land. The main difference from owning the land is that now it is not possible to sell it (only possible to transfer the right to use the land); the state is still the supreme owner, or as the Land Law of 1988 stipulates: “Land belongs to the public under the sole management of the state. The state entrusts land to organizations and individuals for long term use. Beneficiaries of land may sell the fruits of their investment in entrusted land.” (Liljeström et al. 1998: xxvi). It is now the Peoples’ Committee of the District who has the responsibility to allocate forest and agricultural land to the families. User’s right is now given for a period up to 20 years for agricultural land with annual crops (e.g. paddy rice), and for land with perennial crops (e.g. fruit trees and forestland) for 50 years. The distribution followed somewhat complicated rules, depending on size of the family, age of the family members, working capacity, management skill, etc. The system still gives plenty of room for subjective judgements on how much land a certain family needs and is capable to cultivate, but it is not possible anymore for an individual party officer to negate a farmer renovation of his or hers land holding contract.

The shifting cultivation fields in the mountain areas were not influenced by the land reform until forest areas were parcelled and distributed to the farming families who wished to have a plot of forest. An old Kinh man told us: “During the time of collective production all land belonged to the collective, but we had shifting cultivation individually in the forest”. Because of the parcelling of forested areas, the shifting cultivation was affected indirectly by the land reform as the rotation between cropping and fallow was hampered. A middle-aged man confirms that the land reform has minimised the possibilities to carry out a real shifting cultivation with fallow long enough: “After introduction of Doi Moi each family got its own forestry plot, and it’s not possible to carry out shifting cultivation any more. But during the
collective time all forest belonged to everybody” (and then it was possible for each family to circulate the fields all over the forested areas). In addition to the individual parcelling of the forestland as a hindrance to rotating the shifting cultivation fields, the fact that part of the earlier communally managed forest is set aside as protected forest has also contributed to the difficulties to rotate the fields, which has resulted in shorter fallow periods and a shift towards more permanent cropping systems.

However, permanent upland fields have in general stayed under the control of the individual family and have not been affected by any of the land reforms (neither by the collectivisation of land nor by the de-collectivisation).

**Doi Moi and the Market Reforms**

When Viet Nam was under a centrally planned economy trade with all agricultural and industrial goods was strictly controlled by the government, particularly in the north. After the economic reforms (*Doi Moi*) had been implemented, the market was liberated through the Resolution No 10 which stipulates: “Cooperatives and production collectives are authorized to use and sell [their input and output] freely in the most profitable market those products turned out by them after they have paid taxes to the state and have fulfilled their contract with state economic organizations” (Tran Thi Que 1998: 39). This liberation of prices and general economic reformation boosted the economy of the country, which experienced a growth rate per annum of around eight percent during the 1990s. The percentage of the population considered as “absolute poor” decreased from 52 percent to 35 percent in 1998. However, the growing wealth has been distributed very unequally across the population. The rural poor, who constitute 90 percent of the country’s absolute poor, have in many areas lagged far behind the urban population in living standard. (Quan Xuan Dinh1999: 373-74).

During the time of collective production the cooperative functioned as a social security system, as all families were guaranteed at least enough food for keeping the family on an acceptable nutritional level. Moreover, up to 1989 health, education and all other social services were free of charge and provided by the government. When *Doi Moi* was introduced and a privatisation of businesses took place the government’s economic resources plummeted and cutting in public services was necessary. At the same time the average Vietnamese family experienced a raise in living standard and in cash income. To tackle the problem of shrinking economic resources in the treasury the government introduced fees on health service and education in 1989 (Quan Xuan Dinh1999: 374). For the people who have not been able to take part of the economic boom that *Doi Moi* implied (mainly the absolute poor of the rural population) the meshes on the social security net have grown larger and larger, and the risk of falling in between has increased considerably. The dissolving of the cooperatives has for a few families meant that they have difficulty to keep the nutritional standard at an acceptable level and that they have lost a buffer against malnutrition. As a consequence the responsibility
for social security has fallen back into the hands of the individual family or other relatives, a
similar situation as before the communist take-over in the north. A transition of the provision
of social services from the state to the private sector is a fact today (ibid.).

Despite the fact that social security is not provided by the government to the same extent as
before, in general people in the area of the study are positive to the economic reforms. Especi-
ally they point at advantages in the agriculture production and marketing sector. The
answer a Kinh woman in her thirties gave us on the question of how the reforms had affected
her life is representative for many of the people in the two hamlets: “It is better with Doi Moi.
During collective farming there was always a shortage of food. Now we always have some extra. We feel more independent now”. Another Kinh woman, a few years older than the one
above, said: “I feel more comfortable now. During the collective farming time we could not
make our own plans, what crop to plant, when, and so on”. The feeling of being independent
and having the possibility to take their own decisions regarding what crop to plant and when
to plant is pointed out by most of the farmers as the greatest advantages of the reforms. The
privatisation of agricultural production has increased output from the fields and as a result
also food security has improved. One Kinh man in Ban Kho (in his forties) explains that “We
get higher yields now and people have more food. They [the farmers] spend more time taking
care of agriculture production now”.

However, a couple of farmers had also experienced some negative effects of the reforms. A
Kinh woman thought that: “It is better with Doi Moi, but there are also some bad things with
it. Most important is that now we compete over water”. The reforms have interfered with the
old tradition of collective actions for taking care of the irrigation systems. Today the task of
getting irrigation water out into the fields is more a responsibility of the individual family
than of the whole collective of villagers (Henin 2002: 19)25.

The possibility to grow wet rice for feeding a large population was probably the most
important factor when the first Viet kingdoms developed and expanded (Le Ba Thao 1997:
323). For being able to extend rice production access to especially two important natural
resources was necessary: alluvial land and water. The main area of the first Viet kingdom was
the Red River Delta where these resources were found (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997: 29). When
later expanding southwards the Kinh largely followed the lowland where rice production was
possible without having to cultivate hilly lands or slopes; this expansion was chiefly carried
out by peasants supported by soldiers (De Koninck 2000: 10). Hence, there were especially
three important “ingredients” needed for establishing the Viet presence in the newly
conquered areas: land for cultivating, peasants to do the cultivation, and water to irrigate the

25 The impact of the economic reforms on the people in the study area will be discussed further in Chapter V
and VI.
cultivation. In this way the Viet culture was rooted also in the southern areas, and the Mekong delta with its potential for large-scale wet rice production became a vital part of the early kingdoms (Le Ba Thao 1997: 502).

Although the Kinh had advanced westwards into the mountainous hinterland bordering China, Laos and Cambodia, before and during the French colonial time (Salemink 2003: 26), the organised settling of Kinh people in large numbers did not occur in these areas until the Red River Delta was considered overpopulated (in the 1960s), and the Mekong River delta after 1976 (Jamieson 1998: 10). The politics of settling and exploiting marginal areas (e.g. rain forests and mountainous areas with fragile ecosystems) with much less potential for intensive agriculture when the high yielding areas already are considered fully exploited and overcrowded is not unique for Viet Nam. This strategy is used by many other governments, especially in the developing world, e.g. in Indonesia and Thailand as examples from Southeast Asia, or in Brazil as an example outside Asia. (e.g. Davis 1977; Ozorio de Almeida 1992; Kilvert 1998; Goldstein 1987).

The kind of natural resources that were of prime importance for wet rice production, alluvial land and water apt for domestication in irrigation systems, are scarce in the mountainous inland (Jamieson et al. 1998: 9). Still the region is often perceived as a land with high potentials concerning natural resources and possibilities to develop agriculture (Le Ba Thao 1997: 376-380; Khong Dien 2002: 87). Migration and colonisation of mountainous inland areas in Viet Nam will be discussed further in the next chapter.
III. Migration

… a great deal of Vietnam’s history and culture is about movement, migration, travel, and change, as revealed by much of its popular art and literature. Salemink 2003: 22

Migration: An Old Tradition in Viet Culture

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, Viet culture is first of all a lowland irrigated rice culture, and the first Viet Kingdoms ended where the highlands took over from the delta land. The Viet people preferred to cultivate lowland paddy fields, and in this way they were depending on the abundance of water flowing in the delta land; and they preferred to stay away from the malaria-ridden mountains (Luttrell 2001:61). Remembering what for example an old Kinh migrant couple in Ha Giang told us about their feelings for the area when arriving there in 1966: “Here was only forest and wilderness. We were so afraid to get lost”, it is easy to imagine that since the time of the early kingdoms, the Kinh have conceived the mountainous inland as a wild and untamed country with strange peoples (see also Khong Dien 2002: 31; Hardy 1998: 197).

As was stated in the preceding chapter, the early Viet kingdoms increased mainly southwards through agricultural expansion by Kinh peasants supported by soldiers when necessary. The early migration was spontaneous, but later movements were controlled by different regimes throughout the history; peasants migrating became part of the governments’ geo-political strategy (Khong Dien 2002: 70-72). However, for the feudal kings and lords the southward movement not only became an instrument for expanding their territories and to defend what was conquered, but it also meant an expansion of wet rice agriculture and the Kinh culture in general (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 23). This was a colonisation of the land of other cultures, especially the Khmer and the Cham26 kingdoms.

Hence, the tradition of migration is very old among Kinh peasants. The early movements were mainly following the lowland areas as the peasants were seeking land suitable for wet rice production (De Koninck 1996:241, 243; Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 2001.; Khong Dien 2002: 70). It took a long time in history before agriculture land became so scarce in the lowland that the mountainous inland attracted Viet settlers. Extended parts of Viet Nam were still forestland, and as late as in the 19th century fifty eight percent of country was covered by

26 The first Cham capital fell in the hands of the Viet in 982 C.E (the Common Era), and the second one built further south at Vijaya fell in 1471 (De Koninck 1996:243).
forest, most of it in the highlands. The deltas and other lowland areas were to large extent already cleared from forest and turned into agriculture land (Kelly et al. 2001:37). During the 19th and the 20th Centuries the main migration route was from the north to the south (Khong Dien 2002: 77); it was not until later in the 20th century that the real highland in the north and central parts of the country became the scene of large-scale colonisation by Kinh settlers.

The Ethnic Minority People and Migration

Concerning the history of migration among the ethnic minority groups in the northern mountainous areas, the situation is different from the Viet people’s history. Many of the minority peoples have migrated from the southern areas of China (mainly from the province of Yunnan) at different times in history, but a few groups have been living in Viet Nam since time immemorial (Khong Dien 2002: 88). Of the groups belonging to the first category, and living in the area of the present study, are for example the Dzao and the Giay, and of the ones belonging to the latter we find the Tay and the Ngan (Dang Nghiem Van 2000: 121, 142; Khong Dien 2002: 52-53). The causes for migration vary among the minority peoples as they vary among the Kinh. However, one factor that is especially important is the agricultural practice per se. As pointed out, many of the ethnic groups in the mountain areas, and especially the ones living at higher elevations, traditionally practice shifting cultivation. Shifting cultivation entails either a sedentary life in combination with rotational cultivation, or a combination of “semi-nomadic” cultivation and more or less frequently moving of settlements (Conklin 1957; Khong Dien 2002: 91-92). Although moving within a relatively short range, for the latter category of the shifting cultivators migration is part of the natural resources management strategy (Fox et al. 2000: 522).

In the northern mountainous region the different ethnic groups live very scattered, often in ethnically mixed communes and villages, in such a way that it would be impossible to draw a map delineating a certain area inhabited by a certain ethnic group (Rambo 1997: 8). Only three percent of all communes in the region are mono-ethnic ones, the majority has three or more ethnic groups living within its border; for example the Tay people live spread out in 1,385 different communes in the region, often together with other ethnic groups (Khong Dien 2002: 30-31). Khong Dien, referring to a Vietnamese study, points at this fact and draws the conclusion that territory cannot be a criterion when defining ethnic groups in the north, instead other criteria must be used, such as “… language, cultural, and ethnic consciousness ” (ibid. 6).

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27 See further Chapter IV, section Shifting Cultivation.
The fact that in the northern mountain region each ethnic group does not have its defined territory, but instead in general live in ethnically mixed communes and villages, have had certain implications when the Kinh migrants have settled in the highlands. When the communes and villages already are multi-ethnic communities, and do not constitute single ethnic territories, it is always easier for one more ethnic group to be integrated into the community. And if land rights are vested in cooperative membership and not in ethnic belonging, as was the case when the Kinh arrived in the 1960s, the risk for disputes over land is less; such was the case in the area of the present study in the Ha Giang Province. Here some disputes over land emerged later when land was allotted to the individual families according to the land reform under *Doi Moi*, at the end of the 1980s\(^{28}\).

It must be emphasised that this situation depicted above stands for the highlands of northern Viet Nam, while in the other main target area of immigration, the Central Highlands the situation is different. Here the ethnic minority groups do not live as scattered as in the north, instead each ethnic group live more separated from the other, and often within its own defined area (Salemink 2000: 139, 139; Rambo 1997: 9). This situation has caused more problems to integrate the Kinh settlers into the local communes and villages than in the north. Conflicts between the minorities and the Kinh have occurred. It is reported that in some areas the original inhabitants sold their land to the immigrants, or even fled from them, to settle further into the highlands on marginal lands (Hardy 1998: 356; Economist 2002: 44).

During the armed conflict in 1979 between China and Viet Nam the people who lived in the northern border zone were forced to leave their villages. Especially the minority people dwelling in the high and remote areas close to the border were affected by these measures. Migration during the war took a peculiar shape, as there was a mixture of long distant movement in the form of inter-provincial and of intra-provincial migration, as well as of short distance movement within the same district. In addition it was impossible to find a clear pattern in these movements (Khong Dien 2002: 89). However, the migration due to the war was of fairly short character, and there were only a few of the groups who left the border zone who did not return to the home place some years after the war was over (*ibid.*).

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\(^{28}\) See further Chapter V section: Subsistence, Production and Land Tenure.
Migration in the 20th Century

In the 20th Century there have mainly been six important factors or historical events impacting on the evolvement of internal migration in Viet Nam. Firstly there were four historical milestones that influence on type of migration and also swayed its direction: the first one was the French occupation and subsequent colonial era; the second one was the 1945 revolution when the revolutionary government declared independence from the French colonial power; and the third was the total collapse of the colonial power 1954; and lastly the war against United States 1962-1975 and the subsequent reunification of the country. In addition there have been especially two economic and political decisions that changed pattern of migration, the launching of the New Economic Zones Programme at the beginning of the 1960s, and more recently the implementation of the general economic reforms, or Doi Moi.

The French colonial administration tried to stimulate migration from the Red River Delta to the plantations in the south and also to the inland of the north (Hardy 2000b: 298; Kelly et al. 2001:246). However, not a very high number of people left the delta for settling in other parts of the country during this epoch. According to information dating back to the 1930s about seven million people lived in the rural Red River Delta at that time, and only 1.2 million in the northern highlands, a much larger area. For example, in 1938 there were only 1,200 Kinh people residing in the whole of Ha Giang Province (the province of the study). Many Vietnamese migrated to the French plantations in the south of Viet Nam, to Cambodia, or to other colonies such as the New Caledonia, but most of them returned back to the delta when the contract period was over (Hardy 1998: 136-38). Despite the fact that a low number of peasants from the delta resettled in other areas of the country during the French colonial epoch, labour migration was common within the country. Dang Nguyen Anh points out that this migration “… took three forms: rural to urban migration of landless people; low cost labour movement between rural villages and the colonial plantation/mining zones operated by French; and farming labor’s circular movement between rural areas during transplanting and harvesting season in search of temporary employment” (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 24). Due to high population density in the Red River Delta, about two-thirds of the peasants in Northern Viet Nam were moving around in search for temporary jobs during the season (ibid.).

For the colonial administration the provinces in the northern mountainous areas were more interesting as a frontier area to be protected against China than as a place for establishing plantations and resettling of colonists. Therefore it was mostly soldiers who moved to the region, for example to the province of the present study Ha Giang. The remoteness and the health situation did not exactly attract settlers in large quantities to the real highland provinces during the French colonial time (Hardy 1998: 118).
During the time following the 1945 revolution, many Vietnamese escaped urban areas controlled by the French and settled in the so-called “liberated zones” in the midlands and mountainous areas controlled by the revolutionary forces (Khong Dien 2002: 78). One result of this migration was new settlements constructed by the migrants, temporary ones as well as permanent towns (ibid.). This migration to the liberated zones initiated a new phase in the Vietnamese migration history because now movement was not a consequence of job seeking and economic interests, but a consequence of war; and more migration due to war activities was to come.

The fall of the French colonial empire in Indochina in 1954 signalled a step up in state organised migration to the mountain areas. And according to Hardy, “… under the French many policies were published and little in practised was realised, under the DRV [Democratic Republic of Viet Nam, 1954-1976] few were published and much was realised. In the first half of the century we learnt more about migration from colonial policy; in the second half we learn more about migration from its practice” (Hardy 1998: 171). When Viet Nam was divided into the South and the North, the migration changed direction once again, as people moved back from the refuge places in the mountains to urban centres in the lowland coastal areas. At the same time Vietnamese who had been working for the French moved to the southern part of the countries (Khong Dien 2002: 78-79).

The impact on population movement from the war with USA was immense. Especially affected was South Vietnam, where two million rural people moved to urban areas between1965 and 1967. And in1972 it was reported that 4.8 million farmers had left their villages fleeing from war to settle in towns and cities in search of job opportunities; viz. one third of the whole population of South Viet Nam had migrated to urban areas. In North Viet Nam the war had made people move in the other direction, i.e. from the cities and urban areas of the lowland to the midlands and mountainous areas to get away from urban centres and industrial areas which were targets for the American bomb planes (Khong Dien 2002: 78-79).

After 1976 (the year of the reunification of South and North Viet Nam) and up to 1980 the main part of the lowland-upland migration changed direction and went from the north to the south, a migration route that had been interrupted by years of war. Many people now returned to live and work in state farms and cooperatives in the south (Khong Dien 2002: 81-82; Hardy 1998: 325). At the time of the reunification a movement of people from rural areas to urban centres in search of earning an income began and is continued up to today (Locke et al. 2000: 24).

Thus, during the 20th century internal migration in Viet Nam has changed character and direction several times as a consequence of large-scale political upheavals and war. However,
not only such drastic historical events as war have contributed to changes in migration pattern, also some of the politico-economic decisions from the central government have had a considerable influence on migration. In the latter half of the 20th century there are especially two such decisions of special importance, the establishment of the New Economic Zones Programme, and the economic liberalisation reforms, or Doi Moi (presented in preceding chapter).

The New Economic Zones Policy

During the first two years of the 1960s the Congress and the Party Central Committee began focusing interests on migration and redistribution of the labour in the country. In July 1961 the Central Committee’s resolution on agricultural development asserted: “Regarding clearing of land by the people, it is necessary to make full use of fallow land and wastelands along rivers and sea coasts. The clearance of small and nearby plots of land should be combined with the organization of lowland people to clear land in the mountainous regions, relying on the organizational strength of agricultural cooperatives as well as State’s positive support and aid” (quoted from Khong Dien 2002: 81; emphasis added).

The resolution was the first step of what later should be the “… mobilization of people in the plains to participate in economic development in the mountainous regions, to expand the total land area under cultivation, and to build new economic zones” (Khong Dien ibid.; emphasise added). The first years the programme was simply called “clearing of land”, but from 1971 and onwards it was designated New Economic Zones (NEZ) programme (De Koninck 1996: 248; Hardy 1998: 206). As a result of the implementation of the NEZ programme the main direction of migration in Viet Nam came to be from the lowland to the northern uplands (Hardy 1998: 325). The target of land clearing was set to 450,000 hectares for the first five years, and as many as one million Kinh people may had moved from the Red River Delta to the highlands in the period 1961-1975 (Khong Dien 81; Hardy 1998: 205).29

The migrants who moved to the upland areas in this period were to a large extent dependent on the cooperatives to get access to agriculture land and for producing food (Khong Dien 2002: 82). In this way the government had almost a total control over migration. However, the government did not only control migration, it also ordered migration from the Red River Delta to the highlands; the delta was at that time considered to be an overcrowded area. All Kinh migrants in the area of the present study came to the highlands under the policy of forced migration.

29 In contrast De Koninck writes that only during the period 1961 to 1966 one million people had moved to the northern highlands (2000: 15). However, Hardy points out that it is difficult to get accurate figures for the migration to the highlands in the years of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s (1998: 205).
One idea behind the state controlled migration to the New Economic Zones was to introduce wet rice cultivation and “modern” agriculture among the minority groups in the highlands (Salemink 2000: 127, 129). But the Kinh settlers could not implement wet rice agriculture to the same extent as in the lowlands due to the shortage of suitable land. Many of the Kinh had to begin cultivate the slopes, practising shifting cultivation or other upland agriculture, in sharp contrast to the perception of themselves as lowland irrigation rice farmers. In fact, the extent of shifting cultivation land increased due to immigrating Kinh at the same time as the government spent considerable economic resources in trying to stop the minorities’ shifting cultivation through the Sedentarisation and Fixed Cultivation Programme (SFCP) (Ministry of Forestry 1995; Lundberg 1996: 24).

Both NEZ and SFCP were parts of an extremely bureaucratic system; e.g. from 1984 to 1989 there were five different offices taking care of the responsibility of sedentarisation of people in the highlands. The NEZ and the SFCP are overlapping and have been under the same state body periodically, e.g. the Committee for Sedentarisation was during a period under the Committee for Uplands Economy and New Economic Zones within the Ministry of Forestry (Hardy 1998: 405-406).

SFCP was formed to give aid and advise to what was termed “nomadic” shifting cultivating minorities in the mountainous areas (Salemink 2000:128). The aim is to make shifting cultivators settle in permanent villages and switch over to permanent agriculture; for realising the idea new villages have been constructed by the authorities. However, the project did not aim only at sedentarising shifting cultivators, it also “… was implemented in combination with socio-economic development and the consolidation of national defence and security efforts” (Khong Dien 2002: 93-94). Hence, the sedentarisation seems to have been more of a tool for local development and national security projects than a goal in itself. In spite of the different activities to stop shifting cultivation, this agriculture practice has instead increased during the 1990s due to problems to find acceptable alternatives, and to the migration of Kinh up to the highlands (Ministry of Forestry 1995).

The migrants who came through the NEZ programme in general came in larger groups than only one family. These migrants did not adapt to the local cultures to the same extent as the ones who came in smaller groups. However, the idea was not to adapt to the local culture but to help the minorities in the highland to “catch up with the Viet culture” (Hardy 1998: 300; Salemink 2000: 136). Nevertheless, many migrants faced hardships, and it is reported that in the 1980s half of the migrants within the NEZ programme had returned back to their respective home provinces in the delta due to lack of both physical and social infrastructure (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 27).
Before 1975, when Viet Nam still was divided, the Ha Noi Government could only implement its NEZ policy in the northern part of the country. After the reunification of the country also the central highlands became a target area for massive immigration (Hardy 2000a: 25); which in practice implied a vast expansion of the NEZ programme and spreading of the Kinh culture. However, the population expansion to the highlands not only impacted on the local culture and economy, but also on the physical environment, and has caused changes in the landscape (Rambo 1997: 18). As agriculture has grown out from the Red River Delta during a long time, the deforested area has also grown into the hilly and mountainous inland, and in 1983 only 24 percent of Viet Nam remained covered by forest, from have being covered by 58 percent a hundred years earlier (Kelly et al. 2001:38). For the Kinh a landscape without forest became a marker of civilisation and of the wet rice culture (see further discussion in Chapter IV and VI).

The economic and social impact of the sedentarisation project and the New Economic Zones programme vary from area to area; in some places it is clearly visible that the minorities to a high extent have changed their agricultural methods, while in others the minorities have influenced the Kinh settlers to change their agriculture instead. And when visiting the People’s Committee of Ha Giang Province in January 2002, we were told that when facing reality with great shortage of lowland for wet rice production it was not possible to forbid shifting cultivation totally in the province. “For practical reasons shifting cultivation must be permitted to some extent, so that people can survive”, was the position now.

Doi Moi and Migration

If migration had been controlled by the government earlier, with the introduction of Doi Moi at the end of the 1980s migration was now getting out of the hands of the government. The more liberal policy towards agricultural production, trade and especially labour mobility, made spontaneous resettlement increase. Realising this “A 1998 conference on internal migration recommended that the policy distinction between organised and free migration be abolished” (Hardy 2000a: 27). However, the fact that the state had to a great extent lost control of migration within the country was of course a setback for a government who earlier had held the grip on almost all internal migration. But, the new situation had to be accepted as part of the general liberalisation that is going on (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 31-33). One result of the liberalisation is that labour movement from rural to urban areas has increased, especially to the larger cities. However, still a fairly low percentage of the population live in urban areas in comparison with many other countries: in 1976 the figure was 20.6 percent, and in 1999 the figure had increased to 23.5 percent; with the increase mainly concentrated to the largest cities. Today there are only two regions that are gaining population due to migration, the central highlands and the Southeast (ibid. 26-27, 32-33).
Hardy argues that types of migrants have changed since the reforms of Doi Moi were introduced “… it is clear that increasing numbers of migrants in the 1980s and 1990s were people with the capital and determination of growing rich” (Hardy 1998: 363). This may have been the case of many migrants, but there have also been a number of people who belong to the category of “losers” in the reform programme, people who have fallen in between the meshes of the social security net, people who have migrated for survival. For example in 1993 I meet a family who had settled in a commune in Ha Giang Province because some misfortunes had stroke them; the husband had become unemployed from a state factory that had closed down. Later the husband had also fallen ill. They had left the home province to settle down as farmers in Ha Giang. It was one of the absolutely poorest families I ever met in Viet Nam. Their child looked dirty and sick, the house was of the very poorest kind with earth floor and a leaking palm leaf roof. While the next neighbour had a nice and newly built two-story house with two motorbikes parked outside. This was a picture of the good and the bad side of the reform programme. There are some families like the one I visited who have taken a chance by migrating to the northern highlands and tried to eke out a living from the land when the factories have closed down and no other jobs are available near home.

One Kinh migrant’s expression that “to go was miserable, to stay was miserable” (Hardy 1998: 206), in a few words reflects the dilemma a farming family when facing the fact that there is not enough land for all in the home area. As pointed out before, the Kinh family is strongly attached to its village and to its agricultural field, but so are most farmers of the world. One reason why it was miserable to leave, a reason perhaps more important than the attachment to the village and the plains as such, is the attachment to the ancestors’ land and to the ancestors’ graves, and the worshiping ceremonies that the family members were performing for the ancestors. To leave all these very vital parts of life behind may not have been easy despite the fact that the family may have faced food shortage if it had stayed. The decision to leave or to stay is taken by more Kinh farmers today than in many years. However, the Kinh in the study area never got the possibility to choose because their out-migration from the delta land was ordered by the government.

**Agricultural Frontiers and Territorial Expansion**

De Koninck (1996, 2000) argues that peasants have been used by the governments throughout the history in Southeast Asia to expand the territories of the states (some of the peasants actually being soldiers turned-into-peasants). By moving into marginal areas and opening up new agricultural land, the peasants contribute to the “taming” of both forests and the ethnic minority people who happen to live in the area (De Koninck1996: 232-33). The settling of peasants from the same ethnic group as the rulers also helps to spread the
language, agricultural techniques and the culture in general into the territory of the people the expanding state wants to subjugate. In this way the state cements its presence in the newly conquered territory.

**Colonisation Projects as Geopolitical Tools**

Today the immediate and principal goal of large-scale colonisation projects is in general twofold: to alleviate population pressure due to land scarcity in the out-migration area, and to increase food production in the in-migration area. A third goal can be added: to secure frontier zones close to international borders (De Koninck 2000: 10). In this way migration schemes become highly geopolitical issues. This kind of colonisation is today not only found in northern Southeast Asia but in other areas of the world as well, for example in the Amazon rain forests of South America and the “Transmigrasi” project in Indonesia (De Koninck 2000:9). Here a great influx of poor farmers, within or outside state controlled settlement schemes, especially during the last three decades of the 20th Century, have changed ethnic compositions and geography. One migration and colonisation scheme that drew a lot of attention in the 1970s and the 1980s was the one in connection to the large scale road project Trans-Amazon in Brazil, chiefly because of its magnitude and the threat to the world’s largest rainforest and its indigenous inhabitants (Davis 1977).

The Trans-Amazon project in Brazil as well as the Transmigrasi project in Indonesia have been criticised and discussed internationally to a large extent, and so has migration to the highlands in northern Thailand. As a result a substantial amount of reports, books and academic theses have been published about these projects, spreading over several decades (e.g. Davis 1977; Ozorio de Almeida 1992; Kilvert 1998; Kunstadter et al. 1978), while the migration to the highlands in northern Viet Nam has quite recently attracted some international attention30 (in reality not much until the 1990s).

From this point of view the migration to northern Viet Nam has been a rather “silent” one. But also because of the fact that the Kinh have in general moved into the minorities’ communities, and there they have either constructed separate hamlets in the communes, or as in the Ha Giang case, mixed their settlements with the minorities’ in one and the same hamlet.

30 One reason why not much has been written about the migration to the northern parts of the country before Doi Moi was the fact that it was difficult for foreigners to get permission to carry out studies in the remoter areas of the country. The first time I visited Viet Nam in 1988 it was e.g. not possible for foreigners to travel to what today constitute the northern districts of the Ha Giang Province (at that time part of the Ha Tuyen Province).
The Transmigrasi Project

The Indonesian Transmigrasi is a migration project of magnitude. With a background in the Dutch colonial era the project has survived into present days. Initially it had three basic goals: “(a) to lighten population growth and pressure on the heavily populated island of Java; (b) to establish settlers on islands and in regions in need of manpower; (c) to increase the supply of rice to Java itself, as well as to the commercial plantation areas of Sumatra” (De Koninck 1996: 237). Today the project goals are basically the same, but also peasants from the likewise overcrowded islands of Bali, Lombok and Madura are subjects for the migration scheme (Uhlig 1988). Between 1950 and 1990 about 2.3 million families had been settled, of which half were outside the government’s control (i.e. spontaneous migrants) (ibid. 238). People who migrated officially within the Transmigrasi Programme were fully supported by the government; for example they had access to developed infrastructure, schools and health services, while the spontaneous settlers had to rely on themselves and could enjoy little of these facilities (Sunderlin and Resosudarmo 1999: 162).

The government of Indonesia has made large-scale investments in the construction of roads and other infrastructure to facilitate migration to the islands. The improvement of the infrastructure has attracted regular migrants as well as spontaneous ones. It is reported that up to 1993 some 55,000 kilometres of road and 69 kilometres of bridges had been built on the islands that were targeted for the settling of migrants (ibid.). However, as in the case of many large-scale migration projects (not least the Trans-Amazon Project), concerning fulfilment of its primarily goal, alleviation of population pressure on agricultural land in the out-migration area, the results are meagre. The number of people who have left Java within the Transmigrasi Project is only a small fraction of the population increase on the island during the same time as the project has been running (De Koninck 1996: 238). The project, like many other migration schemes, besides the official goals contains the plans to securing marginal areas of the country (the outer islands) and the spreading of the dominant culture of the ethnic majority people. This has created an infected situation between the local peoples who live on the islands of the in-migration areas and the immigrants, and violence has erupted for example on Borneo and in West Papua (Kilvert 1998).

Thailand: No Large-Scale Colonisation Schemes

Thailand is another country in Southeast Asia that also has had a great internal migration the last half-century or so. The direction of the movements has to a large extent been to the national capital Bangkok, i.e. a rural-urban migration (Goldstein 1987: 922, 925). In attempts at reducing the influx of people to the Greater Bangkok area the Thai Government has spent vast financial resources on developing regional centres to attract migrants to settle in provincial capitals instead of the national one. However, this policy has had quite limited effect on hampering the flow of migrants to Bangkok (Goldstein 1987: 922, 925).
The government in Thailand never invested large amount of money in large-scale colonisation schemes, such as the one in Indonesia, neither has it had the ambition to control migration the same way as the government in Viet Nam has had (De Koninck 2000: 9, 1996: 235; Goldstein 1987: 923). The vast majority of resettlement has been outside the government’s control (Scholz 1988). However, there have been some government planned and directed migration projects. The most notable ones were the self-help land settlement scheme and the cooperative land settlement, which by 1979/80 had resulted in almost 590,000 hectares of forestland being cleared for agriculture (Uhlig 1988)\(^3\)

Nevertheless a lot has been invested in roads and transport infrastructure in general the last three or four decades, which has facilitated not only travelling within the country, but also migration (Goldstein 1987: 925). One of the areas that were opened up through the new infrastructure was the northern highlands, and like in Viet Nam there has also been a movement of lowlanders to the northern highlands (Scholz 1988).

In contrast to the uncontrolled and spontaneous migration to the north, a government-controlled programme to sedentarise the so-called “nomadic”, or “mobile”, hill tribes (i.e. the ethnic minority peoples) of the northern highlands has been going on for many years (De Koninck 1996: 235). However, the sedentarisation of the minority peoples has facilitated migrants from the dominant ethnic group (the Thai) to open up new frontiers in highland areas; a sedentarised life has meant that the ethnic minorities have been cut off from great parts of the former shifting cultivation land, which has made it easier for the Thai to grab land for settling and for cultivating (ibid.).

**Migration Projects: Similarities and Discrepancies**

Since Viet Nam’s history differs from most other countries in Southeast Asia, its migration pattern also differs. This is especially a consequence of the long and devastating wars (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 5). Nevertheless, there are also similarities with migration patterns and migration projects in other countries; for example the national migration scheme in Indonesia has some features in common with the case in Viet Nam. Most obvious is the fact that it is initiated and controlled, or at least supervised, by the government. The ambitions of the governments have been to lightening pressure on agriculture land in the out-migration areas. Further, the ambition has also been to secure marginal and international border areas, which includes an expansion of national dominant culture to these areas. The reasons behind the initiation of large-scale migration schemes in general are also present in the Vietnamese case: as already mentioned land shortage in the delta, an aspiration by the governments to increase

\(^3\) According to Uhlig, up to 1980, 700,000 hectares of land was officially cleared within the Thai government’s control, while between four and five million hectares were cleared by spontaneous settlers outside the government’s control (1988).
food production in the highlands, an idea of spreading the national and dominant culture to marginal areas, and to secure national border zones.

One special feature that makes the New Economic Zones Programme (NEZ) different from many other ambitious migration programmes is the fact that high-level economic inputs in infrastructure are practically absent in the Vietnamese case (e.g. the road to the two communes in Ha Giang was constructed many years after the migrants had settled). No villages were pre-constructed, only temporary shelters built by the local people. Another discrepancy is the fact that the government in a desperately poor and war-ridden country ordered the migrants to leave the overcrowded delta land to impede what was considered as a rising food crisis, while in Indonesia the migration was (and still is) voluntary. But, as indicated, today the situation has changed in Viet Nam so that migration is more of a voluntarily and spontaneous nature (Hardy 2000a: 27).32

In Thailand, although not ordered or even controlled by the central government, internal migration has similarities with the one in Viet Nam. In Thailand, as well as in Viet Nam, there has also been a movement of majority people from lowland to highland, and in both countries there has been a government programme, implemented since many years, for settling “nomadic” shifting cultivating minority peoples. Further, road constructions and improvement of transport infrastructure has not been a direct part of the programmes, but nevertheless has contributed to increased spontaneous migration in both countries (Goldstein 1987: 925; Hardy 2000: 27). As mentioned, the different Thai governments have interfered in internal migration by trying to stop the flow of migrants to Bangkok and change the direction to other areas.

It is a general trend that the governing idea behind policy and implementation of migration projects is control and domination: control of peoples’ movement within the national territory, and domination of all ethnic groups who live within the territory. Looking in the mirror: “It is not entirely coincidental that official interest in colonisation schemes has coincided with the role of military governments concerned with geopolitical considerations and the security of exposed political frontiers” (Hennesy 1981 quoted from De Koninck 2000:10). And, as we have seen, migration in Viet Nam has often been a result of war and military activities (Salemink 2003: 22, 28; Hutton 2000: 258).

32It must be pointed out that voluntary or not voluntary in the case of migration not always are clearly distinguishable concepts (Ogden 1988: 4). There is, of course, a difference between forced resettlement and “spontaneous” migration. But, how much voluntariness is there for example in the case where a poor peasant in the draught ridden north-eastern Brazil is facing two options, to stay and see his family starving, or following the advice of the government officer to move away and clear a piece of land in the jungle, 2000 kilometres from home?
After the French had been defeated and the colonial power fell in Indochina at the beginning of the 1950s it was of crucial importance for the government in Ha Noi to safeguard marginal areas close to the international borders, especially the border to China. An important instrument in this task was the colonisation of the mountainous north by Kinh farmers (Hardy 1998: 166; De Koninck 1996: 248). The government’s ordering of migration from the delta to the highlands in the 1960s was certainly an example of a high-levelled control of a country’s population move (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 13). In this sense the migration to the study area of Ha Giang Province was successful, and possibly the government had the idea that by just settling people from the ethnic majority group in the highlands they had in some way strengthened the control over a marginal area close to a thousand year old enemy, i.e. China.

The Government of Viet Nam has obviously had the ambition to control migration flows and the spreading of its population in the national territory. “The goal of this policy has been to encounter the great disparities between manpower and natural resources; to reduce population pressure in densely populated provinces and urban centres; and to strengthen national defence and security” (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 27). However, if many governments strive to control the internal flow of its population in one way or another, migration is often controlled by governments only at an initial stage; after some time the trend is not seldom uncontrolled migration (ibid. 13-14). So has, for example, the situation developed in the Indonesian migration project. And in the Thai case the vast majority of the migrants in the north have settled in new places entirely outside the government’s control (Goldstein 1987: 923, 925).

**Theoretical Causes of Migration**

Theories dealing with migration have in general either been concerned with the individual level or with the large-scale structural level. That is, migration is explained by either the individual migrant’s rational economic calculations and strive to improve his/her life, or by external factors on the national, or even on the international level, where the individual plays a minute role in the formation of migration patterns.

For many individuals and families in Southeast Asia internal migration has become a means to find a piece of land to cultivate, a seasonal job, or another source of income (Locke *et al.* 2000). The kind of causality found behind internal migration varies from country to country, from one area to another, and from one time in history to another, but one factor that commonly is present is the population pressure on agricultural land, and search for new land (De Koninck 1996, 2000; Locke *et al.* 2000: 9).
Micro-level: Push or Pull

One theory focusing on the individual migrant (the “push and pull” theory) tries to explain migration in terms of two forces that are in action, one that pushes people from the out-migration area (e.g. land shortage, unemployment, environmental problems), and a second one that pulls people to the in-migration area (e.g. access to agriculture land, or employment opportunities) (Jackson 1986: 7). Push factors, generally, are “real” or manifested in the sense that harsh or deteriorating living conditions are directly felt and easily distinguished. Pull factors, on the other hand, can be real or imagined in the sense that they depend on information about some distant region about which the potential migrant may not have first-hand knowledge. Sometimes such information is false, e.g. the widely searched for “el Dorado”.

The theory has been criticised for mainly being concerned with individual economic factors that influence a person to decide whether to move or not to move, while macro level patterns of factors causing people to migrate is overlooked. (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 10-12; Locke et al. 2000: 28-29). One such macro factor could be when a government orders out-migration from an area considered to be overcrowded, like in the case of the migration in the present study.

Macro-level Causes: Population Pressure and Geopolitical Strategies

Most governments in the region strive to control and plan migration within their borders (Salemink 2000: 129). Dang Nguyen Anh writes: “Many contemporary migration policies in developing countries have specified how their population should be distributed within the country. Only 7 per cent of national governments consider their own national redistribution as satisfactory, and as many as 45 per cent thought that a major change in patterns is necessary” (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 13). Thus, it seems that the general thought among governments in the developing world is that it is possible through controlled migration to make better use of the natural resources and in this way boost food production. However, there are also other goals with migration projects.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, De Koninck points at the historical fact that peasants have been used by the governments in Southeast Asia since long time for expanding national territories; by settling peasants from their own culture and opening up new agricultural land the peasants contribute to the “taming” of marginal areas, at the same time as supporting the government to subjugate the local peoples in the conquered area (De Koninck 1996, 2000). Hence, the peasants have been used by the central governments as spearheads for spreading the culture of the dominant ethnic group, including new agricultural techniques, into

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33 The theory was formed by Ravenstein in the 1880s. Although being over hundred years old the theory still remains, albeit in modified forms, and is frequently used in the discourse on migration today (e.g. Ogden 1988: 17-18; Jackson 1986: 13-15; Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 7).
De Koninck argues that the same kind of politics is continued today where it is practised for example in form of colonisation projects such as the New Economic Zones programme (De Koninck 1996 and 2000). Thus, safeguarding of marginal areas and control of land and the flow of people are some of the absolutely most important goals when a government plans internal migration and colonisation programmes according to these arguments.

Since the communist take over in the north after the French had left and in the south after the reunification in 1975, up to the end of the 1980s migration was largely controlled by the state. Spontaneous resettlement of people from the lowland to the highland occurred but only on a small scale (Hardy 2000a: 24). A general policy of the Vietnamese government has been to hamper the rural-urban migration and instead promoted rural resettlement; the New Economic Zones programme is one important effort in this policy. As Viet Nam still has a comparatively low level of urbanisation with less than a quarter of its population living in urban areas (in 1999), it is quite safe to argue that to a certain extent this policy has worked (Dang Nguyen Anh 2001: 25, 27). However, the present trend of an increasing rural-urban migration is changing this situation.

Some of the governments in developing countries have seen implementation of large-scale resettlement and colonisation projects as an alternative to economic restructuring and far-reaching land reforms, e.g. in Indonesia and in Brazil (Ozorio de Almeida 1992: 4). In northern Viet Nam the situation was different; here the communist take over in the North, after the fall of the French colonial power, had meant a total collectivisation of land, and the government had implemented a sweeping land reform beginning in the 1950s (Pingali and Vo-Tong Xuan 1992: 701). However, despite these thorough reforms the farmers in the Red River Delta did experience an acute land shortage in the 1960s, and the government saw the only solution being forced migration.

When population pressure reaches such a high level, as it did in the delta, according to Boserup (1993 [1965]) firstly there exist the possibility for the farmers to leave the home area and open up new agriculture land somewhere else. However, the areas in Viet Nam that were considered having free land were situated very far from the Red River Delta, in the mountainous hinterland. The fact that Viet Nam quite recently had ended a war against the French and presently was at war with the Americans, had impoverished the country. The farmers were desperately poor and could hardly even afford a bus ticket to the highland provinces in the north. The other possibility according to Boserup (1993), if migration is no option, is to intensify agriculture through improved technology and in this way boost production. However, that was not a solution in Viet Nam at that time, because the wet rice technology in use already was a very intensified and labour demanding mode of production, and further intensification would have required high level capital investments in form of
motor driven water pumps, high yielding crop varieties, fertilizers, etc. During the war, these technologies were out of financial reach. Instead the government ordered out-migration from the delta. The farmers who left got the bus ticket paid and some economic support during the first months in the new settlement area, which made migration possible.

As noted, alleviation of the pressure on agriculture land in the out-migration area often is high on the agenda when governments plan large-scale migration projects. As also noted, the alleviation of the pressure on arable land is negligible in a long perspective, and in general, as the number of out-migrating persons only constitutes a small portion of the population increment (De Koninck 1996: 238). And as a matter of fact, in the homeland of the Kinh migrants in the Ha Giang case, viz. the Ha Tay Province in the Red River Delta, the population density is higher now than when the families were forced to leave for the highlands in the 1960s, but nevertheless the living standard has improved considerably and is still improving. This fact indicates that the improvement of the economy and the living standard in the delta had little to do with the out-migration as such, but more with other factors such as higher output from agricultural production for example. Hence, population pressure is something relative. Today the agricultural land in combination with an improved technology and an expansion of business and trade can support more people per hectare than it could in the 1960s. In practice, the objectives of the migration project in the 1960s, which offered a temporary relief in the delta, then became centred on the opening up of new land and spreading of new agricultural technique into the New Economic Zones, rather than being on the delta and the results the out-migration might have created there.

Discussion on internal migration in Vietnam in general assumes that the individual person at least to a certain extent makes his/her own decision whether to migrate or not, and that forced migration means that the conditions in the home place have become so difficult that out-migration seems to be the only option (e.g. Dang Nguyen Anh 2001; Locke et al. 2000)34. However, forced migration in the Ha Giang case literally meant that the families were forced by the central government to move to the highlands. Practically, there were no options for the farmer in the Red River Delta when the Vietnamese Government in the 1960s implemented its policy of forced migration to reduce population pressure on land in the delta. A male person who had at least one younger brother had to leave the delta to settle in the mountainous inland35. It was only a question of pressure to leave and not much of seeing the in-migration area as a promised land from the migrants’ point of view. Instead there were

34 For example Jackson, when discussing different reasons for out-migration, considers forced migration being “… moves of necessity for the protection of life and liberty of individuals” (1987: 7), and gives the Vietnamese boat people (refugees who fled the country via the sea in small boats when the war with USA ended) as an example.

35 However if a younger brother with his family volunteered to move instead of the elder brother the government accepted it.
geopolitical and economic factors on the national level behind the decision taken by the central government when ordering the out-migration; the important factors being the ones stated above: safeguarding marginal areas of the national territory, and spreading of the national dominant culture (perhaps the most important component being the spreading of new agricultural techniques). However, another important factor for ordering the out-migration was certainly the lack of land in the delta and the (perceived) risk of acute food shortage in the 1960s.

Thus, in the case of the Kinh people moving to the highlands in the 1960s it was not a matter of attraction, or “pull”, to migrate, only push. As a matter of fact, the “uncivilised” mountainous areas were, at that time, perceived as particularly unattractive to most people in the delta. The attraction of the mountainous inland on settlers came later when the government lightened its control over internal migration, and the highlands got the reputation of being some kind of “promised land” for the ones who were searching agriculture land (Khong Dien 2002: 87).
IV. The Delta and the Highlands: Physical and Cultural Distances

Contrary to the popular belief that nature always remains the same – a belief that has led to static theories of environmentalism and to their equally static rejections – nature changes profoundly whenever man, in response to simple or complex historical causes, profoundly changes his technical equipment, his social organisation, and his world outlook.

Karl A. Wittfogel 1978 [1957]: 11

In the first part of this chapter an outline of the traditional life in the Red River Delta will be drawn to get an idea of what kind of life the Kinh families concerned left behind when leaving for the Ha Giang Province. In the second section a fictive journey from the delta to the highlands will be made, and in this way give some flashes of how the geographical as well as cultural traits change along the road from the lowland to the hilly midlands, and further north into the real highlands. This is the same road as the Kinh migrants of the present study travelled almost forty years ago when they had to leave their homeland to settle in Ha Giang. In the third section a brief picture of life in the highlands, especially of the ethnic minority peoples’ land use and livelihood will be presented.

Life in the Delta

Imagine a flat land stretching practically from horizon to horizon patched with rectangular shaped rice fields of irregular sizes, their limits marked by low and narrow dykes of earth, and with footpaths running on top of them. Less frequently larger dykes cut through the landscape. On top of the larger dykes are sometimes roads passable by cars constructed along rows of high trees. The fields are glittering from irrigation water where the bright green rice seedlings stand in almost perfect lines. If the transplanting season is not yet over one can see women, with broad white conical hats, bending over the water and pressing down the small plants with a steady pace into the rich alluvial soil hidden under the water surface. Here and there the fabric of fields, canals and dykes is broken by bamboo stands and groves of trees. Behind the trees and bamboos one can be sure to find a village. In the delta a large village or commune (xa in Vietnamese) not only constitutes a clustering of houses, but a social, cultural and economic unit. In the delta the Vietnamese word xa is either translated to English as “village” or “commune” while in the highlands it is most often translated as “commune”. A
xa is made up of several smaller villages or hamlets (thon or xom in Vietnamese) with each one having its proper name (Kleinen 1999a: 7; Rambo et al. 1993).

Often texts on Viet Nam points out the village and the family as the heart of the Kinh culture; or that the traditional Vietnamese society is resting on three pillars: the family, the village and the nation (Le Thi 1999: 38). At the same time as the village and the nation are both in some respect conceived as large families, the family is conceived as a small village or a small nation (Jamieson 1993:28). The centre of social life is the family and the village: the family belongs to the village and the village belongs to the families (Phan Huy Le et al. 1997: 35).

The Bamboo Fenced Village
A bamboo hedge, often thorny, surrounded the traditional Vietnamese village in the delta. The hedge served both as a protection against intruders, and as a marker of the village as a separate social and economic unit with its own paddy fields encompassing it (Hardy 1998: 372; Phan Huy Le et al. 1997: 35). The number of families living in such a village could vary from a hundred to several thousands. The traditional village had two entrances with gates that were closed at night (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997: 63).

The closed bamboo fenced village has almost become a concept or a symbol of the old conservative Vietnamese rural society, especially in the north (Hardy 1998: 372). However, the image of the isolated traditional village, immune to changes, has been challenged by research lately; it is argued that the villages were “… more open and flexible than is suggested in the French and Vietnamese literature until know” (Kleinen 1999a: 190). One reason that this image has not been questioned earlier can be the fact that it has been impossible for foreigners to carry out field research in the north since independence from French colonial rule in1954 and up until the liberal reforms came into full effect at the end of the 1980s or beginning of the 1990s (Kleinen 1999b: 4). The communist government saw the fenced village as a symbol of the old Mandarin society and slowly the bamboo fences disappeared; today it is nearly impossible to find a village that is enclosed by such intact bamboo fence (Hardy 1998: 373-74).

Nevertheless, the image of the enclosed village with its rice fields is still a symbol of the Viet culture for many Kinh, something that for example is reflected in the following lines written by a young Kinh man: “Normally, a village was surrounded by a hedge of bamboo with tightly packed and thorny stems which formed an effective defence against thieves. The villagers took care of this green wall, and stiff penalties (fines) were provided against those who dared to cut without permission a bamboo, or even a simple shot. The hedge also came to smaller villages, while in the delta the xa is a more compact unit and in this way fits better into the perception we have of how a classical village should look like.
symbolize the village as a body, a corporate entity. It showed outsiders its sacred boundary and the sign of its individuality and its independence, as well. For centuries, the landscape of a peaceful village surrounded by a wall of thick bamboo which lay closed by a green paddy is imprinted in each Viet people’s mind” (Nguyen Cong Thao 2002: 2).

The families in the village live close to each other with only small home gardens separating one from the other. The houses could be constructed with earthen walls and floor, and with thatched roofs, or as in other cases with brick walls, concrete floors and tiled roofs, or different combinations of these building styles. During the last decade houses made of bricks with two or even three stores have to a great extent replaced the former and poorer versions. Outside most houses there is a garden, a fishpond, and a stable for the buffalo if the family can afford to have one (Cruz et al. 1993:83). The large and well developed home gardens constitute a perfect model of an agro-forestry system where multipurpose trees are grown together with minor food crops, and when there is a fishpond with ducks swimming around, the model is completed. Even a simpler home garden has enough trees and plants to supply the owner with food, fruit, firewood, and shade from the burning summer sun (Rambo et al. 1993: 22; Karyono et al. 1996: 96-99). Entering the traditional single storey house, on the wall right in front of the entrance, the visitor can be sure to find a small altar, made for worshipping the ancestors. Placed where it is to make people bow their heads in veneration for past generations when crossing the threshold. In present days the visitor can also be sure to find a display cabinet in the room, with drinking glasses, pictures, some ornaments, and maybe a bottle of imported whiskey to show that the family does not belong to the poorest. The main entrance leads directly into the living room and normally the bedroom is placed on the left side. The kitchen is a separate small building to avoid smoke entering the living quarter.

The social organisation among the Kinh is of the patrilineal category, which means that kinsmen are reckoned only on the father’s lineage and personal inheritance in general goes through that lineage37 (Diep Dinh Hoa et al. 1993: 58). Families related to each other through such patrilineage often live together in a cluster of houses forming a small village or a hamlet within the larger village/commune (Kleinen 1999a: 7). In some cases the lineage has its own temple to worship its own ancestors in. The lineage is exogamous, while the village is endogamous38, which means that the individual man has to search for a spouse outside his lineage but inside his village.

37 In a matrilineal society it is the mother’s lineage that plays the same role.

38 Exogamy is: “The practice of marrying out of a given social group or category. The converse of exogamy is endogamy or the obligation to marry within specific social limits” (Seymour-Smith 1986: 107).
Despite the fact that today there are far less villages found with a complete bamboo hedge surrounding it than in the pre-independence time, the concept of the fenced village is still present (Hardy 1998: 372). It symbolises the lowland wet rice culture in the densely populated delta where the villages are constructed close to each other, and each family lives close to its neighbour, in sharp contrast to the traditional highland village spread out in the landscape and where the family houses stand more dispersed. Even though the traditional village was enclosed and in a sense formed a kind of its own small world it was part of the larger Viet national community, its culture and its trade; it was not as isolated and resistant to change as sometimes described in books and reports (Kleinen 1999b: 1-2).

**The Irrigation Culture**

Water plays a crucial role in the delta, or actually more correctly the water flow and the irrigation systems. The smallest production unit is the family, but the irrigation system was, and still is, the joining force of the villagers. The construction and maintenance of the system demand a well-organised labour force of villagers, and in this way the irrigation system works as the cement that keeps social life together (Le Ba Thao 1997: 323 – 31).

Outside each village lies the paddy land cultivated by its inhabitants. Today all land officially belongs to the state, but after the land reform changed in 1993 the families have full user rights to the land allocated to them. The transfer of land tenure from one system to another within the *Doi Moi* reforms has gone rather smooth among the ethnic Vietnamese (or the Kinh). The cooperatives did in some respect resemble the old traditional village (Corlin *et al.* 1989: 5). In the old Vietnamese society the paddy land was cultivated by the individual family, and divided between sons after the father deceased (Luong 1992: 75). But even if the plots were cultivated individually it was necessary to form communal work teams to repair and maintain the irrigation systems (Corlin *et al.* 1989: 5). Hence the cooperative with its labour brigades (*to* or *doi* in Vietnamese), which was formed later by the socialist government, was not a totally alien element in the Vietnamese village. The difference was that the work teams in the old village were formed for special and limited tasks, while the brigades carried out most of the agriculture work. However, the ongoing land reform is actually a step back to the old village production system where each family takes responsibility for its own production and controls a piece of land that can be inherited by the next generation; a system that has its roots long time back in history.

Already at the first century BCE (Before Common Era) permanent agriculture and irrigation systems began replacing shifting cultivation according to a Vietnamese historian (Nguyen Khac Vien 1987: 23), and the first Viet kingdoms were slowly turning into what Wittfogel (1957) would call “a hydraulic state”, i.e. political system where the state or the emperor strived for full control of all land and irrigation water.
Agriculture, Handicraft and Trade

The traditional economy in the delta was based on agriculture, handicraft and trade (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997: 46), and to a great extent still is today. However, even among families heavily engaged in trading and handicraft, agriculture has always constituted a secure subsistence base. Even today the vast majority of the villagers in the delta are part time or full time farmers (ibid.).

The average family in the delta raises some pigs, chickens, a few dogs (for eating), and if they are fairly well off economically also a buffalo for ploughing and harrowing, otherwise several families share one buffalo (Rydström 1998: 33). A report from a study of a village in the lower delta gives the average area one family cultivates to about 3 mau (or 0.1 ha) (Kleinen 1999a: 143). While another study conducted in the upper north-western corner of the delta at the end of the 1980s found that a family there only cultivates about half of that area (Luong 1992: 210). Annually two rice crops, one in spring and one in autumn, are harvested from the one and the same field, with secondary crops (maize, pulses, and others) grown in between the rice crop periods. The winter or spring rice is irrigated (lua chiem), while the summer or autumn rice is rain fed (lua mua).

The preparation of the field for the spring rice is initiated the first month of the lunar calendar39 (i.e. at the end of January or beginning of February) by ploughing and harrowing. The male family members in general perform this work. In the first month of the lunar calendar the rice seedlings are prepared, and at the end of the first month or beginning of the second month the transplanting take place, which is a task carried out by the females. Harvesting, which is done on the fifth month, is carried out by women and men together, and so is the weeding (Luong 1992: 54; Rydström 1998: 33). The preparation for the autumn rice begins on the sixth month and the rice is harvested on the tenth month. Transplanting is the most laborious work in the agricultural year, and also the busiest time for the farming family, and especially for the women. If then the husband is practising handicraft or other businesses somewhere outside the home place the women get heavily loaded with work (Rydström 1998: 34).

The occasional or permanent shortage of rice made many of the farmers develop handicraft as an important supplement to agriculture production. However, the tradesmen did not dare to

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39 Chu Van Khanh et al. write, “The traditional calendar used by most Vietnamese (and used in Korea, Japan, and Mongolia as well) originated in ancient China more than four thousand years ago. Though likely developed as a means of scheduling agricultural activities, in time the calendar became a foundation of a complex astronomically based system used to regulate many aspects of social life, from cuisine and medicine to the timing of significant events such as building a house or holding a wedding. Commonly referred to as the lunar calendar, this East Asia system is more accurately a lunisolar calendar based on perceived movements of the sun, the earth, and the moon” (2003: 110-11).
give up agricultural production totally and dedicate full time to handicraft (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997: 41). A foreign businessman reported already in the 18th century that the Tonquinese (Vietnamese) were skilled tradesmen and he had seen a great variety of them from smiths and carpenters to lacquer-ware makers and bell-founders (ibid. 1997: 42).

The products that came out from the different workshops were traded at local markets or in the larger urban centres in the delta, most notably in Thang Long40. Another foreign businessman wrote the following when visiting the city at the beginning of the 19th century: “Every different commodity sold in this city is appointed to a particular street, and these streets again allotted to one, two or more villages; the inhabitants whereof are only privileged to keep shops in them” (Samuel Baron 1811 quoted from Pham Huy Le et al. 1997). That is, villages were (and to a great extent still are) often specialist in one or a few handicraft products. In the local markets trading was organised so that certain days certain markets were open, and in this way the business circulated between different areas, or sub-districts (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997: 44-45; Luong 1992: 54).

Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism and Ancestors

In the villages of the delta there are pagodas for worshipping Buddha, temples of literature to praise Confucius, communal houses to worship the village guardian spirit, there are altars in practically every home to worship the ancestors, etc. (Salemink 2003: 21). For a foreign visitor all these shrines and different worshippings may cause confusion, as if the villager cannot make up his/her mind regarding religious life.

As mentioned in Chapter II 41, the Vietnamese society has been influenced by the Chinese culture and religious philosophies, i.e. Taoism42, Buddhism, and especially by Confucian thinking, since the time of the Chinese occupation (1st Century BC – 10th Century AD) (Jamieson 1993: 11; Pham Huy Le et al. 1997: 68; Izikowitz 1969: 138), at the same time as keeping some of the old Vietnamese traditions (Le Thi 1999: 35-36). In this way many Kinh families do not confine to one specific religion, but often several as a kind of general life philosophy. The villager in the Red River Delta “do not follow just one belief, but they always choose to lead a worldly and harmonic religious life, adapting it to specific circumstances, for the sake not only of any individual, but of the whole community as well” (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997: 69). So if asking a person in the northern region of Viet Nam what religion he or she belongs to, one is most likely to get the answer “none”.

40 Thang Long is the old name of Ha Noi (meaning the Rising Dragon).

41 Section: Formation of an Empire and a Nation.

42 Tao is sometimes spelled Dao (e.g. in Girardot et al. 2001 or in Lopez 1996).
When Buddhism began spreading in China in the first and second centuries (CE) Confucianism was after seven hundred years as the dominating philosophy losing ground. The peasants had experienced it as “an oppressive weapon in the hands of the rich” (Gosling 2001: 75), while both Taoism and the “foreign” philosophy of Buddhism were more attractive for common people. Likewise, in Viet Nam Buddhism and Taoism became more accepted than Confucianism among the rural population, but only after the two religions had been “Vietnamised” by mixing in old Vietnamese traditional beliefs (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997: 68; Le Thi 1999: 36).

Taoism is not a religion confined to any divinity that has created the world. The creative as well as the destructive forces are seen as a natural process based on the balance between yin and yang, where the yin represents the feminine forces and yang the masculine ones (Schipper 2000:2, Griffiths 1994: 251). Yin and yang are commonly referred to among Confucians as well as among Taoists and other Asian religious beliefs. According to this philosophy, the balance reflects an effort to harmonise between opposite phenomena in the world, not only explicit feminine and masculine ones but also e.g. hot and cold, dark and light, etc. A strive for a balance between these forces is constantly present in the daily life in Viet Nam (Chu Van Khanh et al. 2003: 111-12; Jamieson 1993: 16).

In contrast to Confucianism and Taoism, Buddhism does not originate from China but came from India via China to Viet Nam. It is a philosophy for purification and development of the individual mind rather than for giving instruction for practical life, and in this perspective it is an introspective philosophy; or as Griffiths (1994: 251) puts it: “While the genius of India has always been for metaphysical thought, the genius of China is for practical life”. When Confucianism was losing ground in China in the first and second centuries CE, no competition arose between Taoists and Buddhist. On the contrary, the Taoists helped introduce Buddhist teaching (Gosling 2001: 75). “There were no membership requirements to worship at a particular temple; anybody could pray, worship or make a vow, at any temple of any faith” (Tapp 1993: 293).

However, whatever religion, or religions, a person in the north is confined to at the moment the altar for worshipping the ancestors and paying tribute to deceased family members is always present in the home of most Vietnamese families.

The Family, the Lineage and the Hierarchy

In the traditional Viet family a strictly hierarchical order existed where younger members respected and obeyed the older, and the female members respected and obeyed the male members (Jamieson 1993: 16-18; Luong 1992: 61; Liljeström et al. 1998: 53). In this order the basic relation was that between children and their parents. The children were taught to always obey and honour their parents. The second most important relation in the order was
the one between brothers. The younger brothers should respect the older brothers, and the older teach and take care of the younger ones. In the same way the wife should respect and obey her husband: “A woman was supposed to be submissive to her father when young, to her husband when married, and to her oldest son when widowed” (Jamieson 1993: 18).

This subordination of the woman to her husband, his family and his patrilineage in the traditional society is well manifested in for example the nuptial ceremony and marriage customs. Most weddings are performed in June because the best time for wedding is “when the spring rice is harvested and people are content”, as a Kinh man once told me. According to Kinh informants in Ha Giang, and as well reported from case studies in the delta, when a young Kinh couple want to marry an intermediary is frequently used for bringing the parents of the groom in contact with those of the bride; sometimes also a fortune-teller is consulted to find out if the couple fits together (Kleinen 1999a: 175). The groom’s parents at the first encounter with the bride’s parents bring gifts in form of goods such as chickens, rice and liquor. The old custom of the groom’s parents paying a bride price to the bride’s parents as compensation for the loss of a labour force is still in use. However, in the delta the price is more often paid in cash today than in form of goods as before (ibid.). The groom’s family also pay the bride’s family to hold the wedding ceremony. After the party the groom brings the bride to his parent’s home. There the couple worship in front of the ancestors’ altar, telling the ancestors that she is a new member of the family. Then the girl is introduced to the lineage members who are present at the wedding. After that, all have a meal together. At the meal a male relative of the girl (normally an uncle) announces that the girl now belongs to the groom’s family. From then on she has to stay with the husband’s lineage and fulfil her obligations toward it, at the same time she continues having some ritual obligations toward her father’s lineage (Luong 1992: 61).

This social order with its hierarchical structure was to a great extent vested in Confucian values. The nuclear family was in the centre, but the social and moral duties extend far beyond the nuclear family, they include the whole patrilineage (ho), which actually was considered to constitute a large extended family (hô43). A child was taught that it had everything in life to thank the parents and the whole lineage for. There was no room for individual selfish acting because each person had a great responsibility towards the lineage members. It was as if a person had a constant debt to the parents and other relatives, and this debt also included the deceased lineage members (Jamieson 1993:22-23). When being acquainted with this situation it is easier to understand why ancestor worshipping is a central theme in the Viet (Kinh) culture. Knowing that it was the oldest brother who had the responsibility for the family ancestor ceremonies, and that it was him who was forced to migrate to the highlands in 1966, it is also easier to understand the frustration this altering of

43 Ho stands for lineage or family name, and hô (or hô gia dinh) for extended family (Kleinen 1999a: 202).
the social order created. When the person who had the main responsibility to perform the rituals was not present, there was a risk that the good relations with the ancestors deteriorated.

How important it is in the Vietnamese society to continue the relations with the deceased members of the family or the lineage, is, for example, manifested in the tradition of a second obsequy. Normally three years after a deceased person has been buried the second obsequy takes place, because the Kinh consider that the soul has left the body definitely at that time and the bones should be reburied. The practise of double burials springs from the belief that the body consists of one transcendental part and one more “down-to-earth” part; the flesh then represents the former part and the bones the latter (Seymour-Smith 1986: 201). The Kinh believe that the soul is dwelling in the flesh and when the corpse has mulched so that only the bones are left the soul is released, and a place for a new grave should be found where the bones could be put. The new grave is then considered to be the permanent home of the soul. The hope is that the soul will be happy with the new place because then (s)he will visit her/his family and the ancestors altar now and then. And because of that the selection of the site for the new grave is crucial (personal communication with Kinh people in the Ha Giang Province).

In pre-colonial times a large number of ceremonies, rituals and festivals were held at family, lineage and village levels every year (Jamieson 1993: 24). The family life cycle ceremonies, especially weddings and funerals, could be very costly for the not so wealthy families (Luong 1992: 182). After independence from the French in 1954 many of the traditional ceremonies and rituals were labelled as “backward” and banned by the communist government (Kleinen 1999a: 163; Endres 1999: 197), others were simplified with the aim of cutting expenses for the poorer families (Luon 1992: 182). However, from the beginning of the 1980s the Vietnamese society has experienced a renaissance of the old rituals and ceremonies (Kleinen 1999a: 171; Endres 1999: 205). Many of the banned ones are in vigour again, and the ones that had been changed are today performed in their original length again.

However, religious believes are not only manifested in rituals and ceremonies, but in something much wider that so, viz. in the way people perceive the world they live in, including the physical environment and the perception of how to utilise it.

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44 The two terms *ceremony* and *ritual* where in general used synonymously before, but are today more often distinguished, where a ceremony is considered as an act that mainly is performed publicly under rules established by a whole community, and involves several persons; while a ritual is considered as an act performed mostly by only one person, and in general not publicly (Seymour-Smith 1986: 34). A ceremony may contain a shorter ritual as part of it (see e.g. in Appendix II about the funeral ceremonies of the Tay and the Ngan peoples).
The Concept of Nature

The influence from China and its religious philosophies has also had a bearing on the perception of what constitutes nature and consequently also on natural resources management.

In classical Confucianism “…Heaven has a dimension of Nature or Natural Law…” (Xinzhong Yao 1998:175). To strive for a harmony between Heaven and human beings is equal to cooperation between human beings and the physical environment. In this way Heaven and nature is merging into one and the same. According to this philosophy the laws of nature should be followed and the environment protected. With this thinking as a starting point Confucianism developed a sort of early “environmentalism” (ibid.). However, classical Confucianism, according to some scholars, was more focused on the individual person’s relation to himself and to other human beings rather than to the man-nature relation. Later, with the Neo-Confucianism (from the 10th Century BCE) came the idea with the individual person and his relation to cosmos (Taylor 1998:43). What runs through Confucian thinking is the idea of the universe and all living material as “one organic whole” (Tu Weiming 1998:105), or “a single body”; however, “humankind bears a special position in the order of all things” (Taylor 1998:55). This special position gives mankind a permit to manipulate nature.

Nevertheless, to control the “Mandate of Heaven” (nature) is not the same as exploiting it. Confucianism distinguishes clearly between exploiting nature and using it in a positive way (Taylor 1998:45), or as Xinzhong puts it: “To secure harmony between ourselves and nature we should make use of natural laws for our own ends. We are the architects of our own fate” (Xinzhong Yao 2000:176).

Even though Buddhism and Taoism may have had less direct influence than Confucianism on the perception of nature and the use of natural resources in the Viet culture they are not unessential in the general life philosophy, and hence also important in the view of how to utilise nature. In an essay Eckel raises the question if there really is a Buddhist philosophy of nature. He came to the conclusion that “If the intention of the question is to identify a simple, unified vision of the sanctity of the natural world, the answer must be no.” (Eckel 1997: 340). For the Buddhist pure nature is the same as wilderness, and in some way a hindrance for developing the humanity (Lancaster 1997:10). From which follows that nature manipulated by humans is preferred before wilderness, and in this respect Buddhism has a similar view on nature as for example Confucians have45. It must be pointed out that this does not mean that practitioners of Buddhism do not have ecological concerns. On the contrary, there have been

45 Eckel refers to a study made by Kellert of Japanese Buddhists’ perception of nature where one informant puts it this way: “a Japanese love of ‘seminature’, somewhat domesticated and tame”. All informants in the study referred to a culturally transformed nature when asked questions about how they perceived nature (Eckel 1997: 34).
and still are many projects concerned with the environment that are conducted by Buddhist organisations.

It seems as if in general Buddhists have been more interested in modern ecological issues than Taoists have, which may be a consequence of the fact that Buddhism is much more spread in the world, and because of that more open for information on environmental problems (Girardot et al. 2001: xi; xxxvii; lii). However, for the Taoists “… ‘nature’ is not something outside of us to be dealt with after the fashion of a mechanic repairing a car, but is both a mental attitude to be carefully cultivated and the true condition of one’s body, which contains the infinite dimensions of cosmic reality within itself. Ultimately, nature is to be constructed and visualized time and again. The terrain of our most authentic ecological concern, therefore, is first and foremost the landscape of the religious imagination” (ibid. lii). Hence, the Taoism sees the human body, the landscape that surrounds us, and the whole cosmos as one complex whole that must be in harmony to follow the order of life; a view that does not stand far from the other Eastern philosophies (Tu Weiming 1998:105).

Also the Viet culture, with an explicit influence from Chinese philosophies and especially Confucianism, sees harmony with nature as a central theme. According to Jamieson (1991:7) the Vietnamese appreciate nature, granted that it is changed and manipulated according to a specific Viet cultural model; a cultural model based on irrigated rice production in the lowland (Le Thi 1999: 38). From this model raises not only a dichotomy between lowland and upland culture, but also a dichotomy between ways to using nature, or between ways to domesticate natural habitats for sustaining ones livelihood. To live in the lowland, and construct irrigation canals and produce wet rice is the principal base to build a strong civilisation according to this thinking (Salemink 2003: 43, 2000: 129); the higher up a people dwell and the more the land use system differs from this model the less civilised it is (ibid.136). Hence, the Hmong people, who live on the highest altitudes and who traditionally depend on upland agriculture to one hundred percent, are perceived as representing the lowest culture because they have not converted “wilderness” into a “domesticated nature” and have no understanding how to produce for the market (Rambo 1997: 25; van de Walle and Gunewardena 2001: 178). If they do not even produce upland rice as staples, but instead depend on maize due to the altitude, as some subgroups of the Hmong in Viet Nam do, they represent the very lowest of culture.

This social and cultural hierarchy will be dealt with further below where a portrayal of life in the highlands will be presented. But instead of going straight to the highlands a fictive overland journey will be made on the three hundred kilometres long road from the national capital Ha Noi to the provincial capital of Ha Giang. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the idea is to get a brief view of the differences in landscape and living conditions between the Red River Delta and the mountainous north, and to follow the same route as the
Kinh people of the study area when they migrated in 1966. It is not so difficult to imagine the despair the families must have felt when waking up the last morning in their home village, entering the bus to see the delta homeland disappearing in the rear window, knowing that they could probably never return for living there.

A Journey from the Delta to the Highlands

The Delta

Leaving Ha Noi and heading north today one crosses the Red River via the large and modern Thang Long Bridge, constructed at the beginning of the 1990s. At certain daylight when the river shows a reddish colour it is easy to understand why it got its name. Immediately after crossing the river farming villages emerge and rice fields begin spreading out. However, in the midst of the fields stands a newly constructed industrial area as a reminder of the closeness to a large city with more than a million people. In the month of January the fields are either empty, or full of secondary crops such as groundnuts, beans, maize, and vegetables. Some farmers are also growing cut flowers for export (a quite recent phenomenon). In the small nurseries are light green rice seedlings waiting to be transplanted into the fields as soon as the secondary crops are harvested and water let into the irrigation canals. If passing here a week later all fields would have been bright green with newly transplanted rice. If instead passing here in April (or in the fifth month of the Lunar calendar), the fields would have been demonstrating a range of colours from dark green to dark yellow, depending on stage of ripeness and variety of the rice. The further one gets from the delta and closer to the highland the later the rice ripens; when the farmers in the delta are harvesting, the rice in the mountains is still green in some places. January is the time of the year when watermelons are available, and a few kilometres further north on a stretch of the road they are sold in stands just at the roadside.

There is no doubt that the delta is the land of the Kinh people, apparently not a single one of the persons spotted along the road belongs to any of the country’s 53 officially recognised ethnic minority peoples. And the latest census tells us that total population of the Ha Noi Province to ninety-nine percent consist of Kinh people. Among the rest, foreigners are the most numerous together with the Tày people, who constitute about five thousand individuals; this in contrast to the 2.6 million Kinh who live in the province (General Statistic Office 2001: 22).

The Tam Dao Mountain Range can be spotted far on the right hand side after heading north-west on National Road No. 2. The range, which forms the north-eastern limit of the Red River Delta, cut the delta land off from the hilly midlands further north.
Figure 5. The Red River Delta landscape

Photo showing the flat landscape of the Red River Delta

The Midlands

When leaving the Ha Noi Province one enters Vinh Phuc, one of the two provinces that have to be passed before entering the Ha Giang Province. Part of the Vinh Phuc Province that Highway No. 2 runs through is situated in the south of the province, and the landscape is still flat and consists mainly of large rice fields. Despite the fact that this area is situated in the most northern edge of the Kinh people’s historical homeland the proportion of Kinh and ethnic minorities are almost the same as in Ha Noi, or more exactly ninety-six percent constitute Kinh and four percent ethnic minorities (General Statistic Office 2001:40).

Travelling along Highway No. 2 one enters Phu Tho Province via a bridge where the Lo River flows into the Red River. Entering Phu Tho Province also means to enter the hilly midlands. The first rolling hills are spotted just north of the provincial capital Viet Tri, about 70 kilometres from Ha Noi.

This is not only the northern edge of the Kinh ancestor land, but also close to the spot were the cradle of the Viet culture stood according to the legend. Here did the fairy Au Co, who married a dragon 2,500 years ago, lay one hundred eggs and in this way gave birth to the one

See Chapter II, section: Formation of an Empire and a Nation.
hundred children, of which fifty followed their mother to the hinterland and fifty their father to the costal area, one of them being the founder of the first Viet Kingdom, Van Lang (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997:28-29; Nguyen Khac Vien 1987:16; Jamieson 1993:7). On the hill above the place where the eggs supposed to have hatched have three important temples and some other monuments have been constructed in honour of the Hung kings. The lowest temple, Den Ha, is constructed 225 steps above the foot of the hill; the second one Den Trung, 168 steps further up, and the highest temple, Den Thuong, another 102 steps higher up. A festival is organised on the 10th of the third month of the Lunar calendar every year to celebrate the Hun Kings of Van Lang. This festival is the greatest ceremonal gathering of the Kinh people. Here where the cradle of the Viet culture stood, they come together once a year to get the feeling of being one people with a common origin, like one huge family (Jamieson 1993:28; Salemink 2003: 24).

The fact that this is a region where the ethnic composition is much more diverse, is revealed in the statistics of the Phu Tho Province reveal. The percentage of Kinh has decreased from ninety-nine in the delta to eighty-five (and significant for the midlands is that these figures are close to the nation’s average) (General Statistic Office 2001: 21).

In the 1970s and the 80s the hills that formed the landscape typical for Phu Tho Province were barren and red from the exposed soil due to over-cropping. Today the soil is restored and the hills are covered with trees, bamboo grows and crops of a great diversity forming genuine agroforestry systems. One important cash crop in the north is tea, and the tea plants form long and low hedges winding along the hillsides. Another crop that is exported from the area is the tuber cassava. Cassava is mainly produced for pig feed, but also serves as an emergency food in slack seasons among the poorer families in the north. The tuber is cut in thin slices and dried in the sun on the roads and outside the houses. The vital staple rice is mainly produced in the flat lowland; terraced hillsides are rarely seen, instead the hills are more often covered with the agroforestry systems mentioned above. Although the river is mainly out of sight, since entering Phu Tho Province, the road is running along the Lo River.

The Highlands
In the Tuyen Quang Province the sceneries are basically the same as in Phu Tho along the first part of the road, but when getting closer to the provincial capital the valley, where Highway No. 2 is running, widens and rice fields are extending on both sides. The capital of the Tuyen Quang Province, which has the same name as the province, is situated on the Lo River about 150 kilometres from Ha Noi, or half the distance between Ha Noi and Ha Giang. The town has nearly 60,000 inhabitants (Viet Nam n.d.: 13). Due to the fact that the Lo River flows through a low and wide valley, some years the area around the provincial capital is exposed to severe flooding. However, the flood deposits fertile silt making the surroundings of the provincial capital an area suitable for wet rice production, and consequently the
landscape is covered with rice fields. Despite the flat scenery around Tuyen Quang Town, this is what is considered as the mountainous north, and only a few kilometres north of the town the landscape is changing from flat and hilly to steep limestone formations and mountains.

In the province ethnic minority people are spotted frequently along the road distinguished by their special clothing. Most of them are Dzao and Tày people dressed in black and red, or indigo and black respectively. One may also catch a glimpse of Sán Chay and Nung peoples, which both are Tày-Thái speaking and quite numerous in the province. All over the North Eastern Region the Kinh people constitute less than half of the total population; in the Tuyen Quang Province they make up forty-eight percent (General Statistic Office 2001: 36). And for example the houses built on poles and with thatched roofs in traditional Tày style, are becoming more numerous in the small farming villages along the road in pace with the increasing percentage of ethnic minority people. However, the villages and commune centres along the road are in general constructed in pure Kinh style.

Further north the mountains are getting more spectacular in shape. Sometimes they resemble some kind of prehistoric animals, and when partly covered with fog (as they often are in the winter) one can easily imagine how the tales of the dragons were born. As a matter of fact, further north and a couple of kilometres on the left side there is a mountain called “the Sleeping Dragon”, named so because viewed from the road it has the features of a resting dragon with head, body and tail. When the landscape changes from hilly to steeper mountains land use also change, and here and there lowland wet rice is combined with upland cultivation. Smoke from burning shifting cultivation fields might be spotted on the slopes in the dryer season.

After passing the district capital of Ham Yen, about forty kilometres north of Tuyen Quang Town, the road runs closer to the Lo River, and along stretches of the road the river is flowing just a few meters on the right hand side. Here the road, which earlier has been quite wide, is getting narrow and more winding. Outside Ham Yen the first real forest covered hills and mountainsides are spotted. Further on one enters a great orange producing area, an area that continues all the way up to Ha Giang. Oranges constitute an important cash crop in the area, and in January they are sold in bulk at the roadside. Down on the Lo River, just at the border crossing between the Tuyen Quang and the Ha Giang provinces, small boats with simple dredges onboard can frequently be spotted on the river. The people on the riverboats are gold prospectors; the sandy Lo River is carrying gold from the mountains further north. Sometimes one can also spot bundles of tree trunks and bamboo stems that are rafted all the way down to the Bai Bang Pulp and Paper Mill in Phu Tho Province, some 120 kilometres south.

Entering Ha Giang Province is to enter the province with the second highest percentage of ethnic minorities in the whole country (Cao Bang is the province with the highest percentage).
A reminder of this is the people dressed in different traditional clothes in different colours, walking along the road. Whole villages built up only with the traditional Tày -Thái houses on pillar, with thatched roofs, and beautifully distributed behind the rice fields are part of the scenery in the area. High and steep mountains are forming the backdrop on both sides. Houses built directly on the ground is often a sign that here are Kinh people dwelling, but also the Hmong build their houses on the ground.

The first real town one enters in the Ha Giang Province is the district capital of Bac Quang, about 50 kilometres south of the provincial capital. Here the valley of the Lo River is relatively wide in comparison with its width further north, and irrigated rice fields are covering quite large areas around the town. In Bac Quang District lives the tiny ethnic group of Pà Thén. Of all 5,500 Pà Thén individuals living in Viet Nam 3,000 are found in the Bac Quang District (Khong Dien 2002: 53).

The further north the road winds the narrower the Lo River Valley becomes (as well as the road), and the steeper the mountains on both sides. The last kilometres before reaching the provincial capital of Ha Giang the road runs just above and along the meandering Lo River. Ha Giang Town is constructed on both sides of the Lo River, surrounded by very steep mountains, and when entering the provincial capital from the south it looks as if one of the peaks points up in the middle of the town. The provincial capital is situated only twenty kilometres from the Chinese Province of Yunnan.

It is difficult to imagine exactly how the individual Kinh migrants felt when stepping off the bus in the Ha Giang Town for the first time thirty-seven years ago after a long and dusty journey, and seeing the very steep and dark mountains surrounding the town. The landscape around the town cannot be more different than the flat land of the Red River Delta. One of the migrants, a Kinh woman, trying to recall the first moment in Ha Giang told us: “I don’t remember so much, put I remember having a strange feeling coming from the delta”. From hereon the migrants had to walk or ride on horseback on a narrow path in the forest leading to the village, some fifteen kilometres away, where they were supposed to spend the rest of their lives.

Life in the Highlands

The Kinhs’ view of themselves as a lowland people with a well-developed civilisation is largely coupled to the production of paddy rice and the skill of building irrigation systems (Jamieson 1991: 7; Le Ba Thao 1997: 323 - 31). A skill that the mountain dwelling ethnic minorities are considered not having; instead they are generally perceived as living from shifting cultivation and other upland non-irrigated agriculture (Rambo 1997: 27-28; Hardy 1998: 11-12). The traditional hierarchical socio-economic model that is built on dwelling
altitude and land use system of the ethnic groups was briefly described on preceding pages in this chapter: the higher up a people live and the more the land use system differs from the lowland irrigation system, the less developed the ethnic group is considered to be (Rambo 1997: 8, 28; van de Walle and Gunewardena 2001: 178).

According to this view the Hmong who are people living on the highest altitudes are considered to be on the lowest step on the socio-economic ladder. Just above them are, for example, the Dzao and the Pà Thén people, who traditionally dwell on somewhat lower altitudes. These groups, who all three speak languages that belong to the Hmong-Dzao (or Meo-Yao) linguistic family (Khong Dien 2002: 53), are strongly associated with shifting cultivation as the means of food production. Further down other ethnic groups reside (e.g. the Tày -Thái speaking Giây47), and in the valleys the ones who enjoy the highest prestige from the Kinhs’ point of view (Salemink 2000: 129), in the Ha Giang Province especially the Tày (Liljeström et al. 1998: 3-6, 253).

As the term *shifting cultivation* is used frequently in the study a short description of this agricultural method (or actually methods) will be given in the section below. The different modes of producing rice in the mountainous areas will shortly be described, from the cultivation in the lowland irrigated fields to the shifting-cultivation fields in the uplands.

**Shifting Cultivation**

It is difficult to find any agricultural system that is so different from irrigated wet-rice agriculture as shifting cultivation. The fields are rotated between cropping and fallow described below, and because of this rotation the land tenure has to be entirely different from the land tenure of the wet-rice systems, with fields that are attached to one and the same family and one and the same spot during a long sequence of years.

Agricultural systems in which the slash-and-burn technique is used for clearing the land and the plot is cropped during a shorter period than it is laid fallow, are often called *shifting cultivation* (Conklin 1957)48. The term shifting cultivation and its synonyms49 may include a wide range of different agricultural systems in different environments. Often shifting

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47 Notice that in the area of the present study there are Giây people residing in the valleys together with e.g. the Tay.

48 In his classical work on Hanunoo agriculture in the Philippines Conklin defines shifting cultivation as "any agricultural system in which fields are cleared by firing and are cropped discontinuously (implying periods of fallowing which always average longer than periods of cropping" (1957).

49 Swidden agriculture, shifting-field agriculture, field forest rotation and migratory agriculture are some of the terms that are used synonymously with shifting cultivation (Ruthenberg 1980). Slash-and-burn is now often used as a term describing the technique of clearing a plot in a forest for different purposes (agriculture, grazing, construction, etc.).
cultivation is considered to be a type of agriculture that always is carried out in forested areas, and implying cutting of trees, however shifting cultivation can also be found in savannahs and grassland areas (Ruthenberg 1980). The typical trait of shifting cultivation is the alternating between cropping and fallow. If fallow period is short enough in comparison with the cropping period, the system may be called “fallow system” instead of a real shifting cultivation (ibid.). The fallow period has several purposes: restoring of vegetation for nutrients accumulation, minimising weed competition, production of fuel wood, serving as hunting ground, etc.

Conklin has divided shifting cultivation into two main types: integral and partial. With integral Conklin means that the shifting cultivation has been practised for generations by the people in question and that the shifting cultivation is integrated into the culture of this people (Conklin 1957). In the partial shifting cultivation on the other hand the farmer is not a shifting cultivator by tradition. Instead the farmer has had to take up this form of agriculture for one or another reason (ibid.). One example is the case in the two hamlets of the study area where Kinh had to begin practicing shifting cultivation for surviving the first period in the new settlement area50, while the shifting cultivation of the ethnic minorities can be classified as integral, because they have practised it in the mountains since hundreds of years, and it constitute an integrated part of their subsistence system (Le Trong Cuc 1995: 104; Bui Minh Dao and Vuong Xuan Tinh 2000: 10).

The Hmong people of northern Viet Nam are often said to be practising what is called nomadic shifting cultivation51 (the word nomadic has a pejorative undertone in Viet Nam: nomadic as opposed to settled and civilised52) (Salemink 2000: 128; Le Trong Cuc 1995: 105). Nomadic shifting cultivation implies that the people move settlement now and then and constantly open up new land to crop, and in this way destroy a lot of forest. In contrast to nomadic shifting cultivation stands the established one (Conklin 1957). Here the settlements are permanent and fields are rotated between cropping and fallow within walking distance from the settlement (Salemink 2000: 127)). Because of the use of this technique, this type is

50 See further Chapter V, section: Subsistence, Production and Land Tenure.

51 It is doubtful if there is enough land even in the remote highlands close to the Chinese border (where the Hmong are supposed to carry out this type of shifting cultivation) that is possible to use for pioneer shifting cultivation.

52 According to Macmillan Dictionary of Anthropology the term nomad is “…used in anthropology to refer to the lifestyle not only of PASTORAL NOMADS but also of other social types characterized by the lack of a permanent residence or settlement.” Further: “Groups who alternate periods of nomadism and population dispersal with periods of population concentration and more extended residence in a single location are called semi-nomadic.” “… “Shifting agriculturalists are also sometimes called semi-nomadic because their residence in a single location is for a limited period of time, after which they abandon the site and move on” (Seymour-Smith 1986: 209). Hence at the most it could be right to call some of the shifting cultivating peoples in the highlands of Viet Nam semi-nomadic, but I doubt that more than a very small fraction of the shifting cultivators live this way, the vast majority live in permanent settlements (Salemink 2000: 127).
often called rotational shifting cultivation. Established, or rotational, shifting cultivation is the far most common one in Viet Nam (Le Trong Cuc 1995: 105; Bui Minh Dao and Vuong Xuan Tinh 2000: 10), and it is the type that is used in the area of the present study.

**Rice Production**

Rice is the staple crop for almost all ethnic groups of northern Viet Nam, with the only possible exception of a few Hmong minority subgroups who live at such high altitudes that rice cannot grow, instead for them maize is the staple. There are basically two modes of cultivating rice in Viet Nam: as wet-rice in irrigation systems (either in the lowland or on hillside terraces), and as dry-rice (or hill rice) in the uplands (Bui Minh Dao and Vuong Xuan Tinh 2000: 11). The irrigation system gives a high yield per area unit, but demands great labour input (especially at the initial stage when the irrigation canals and other infrastructure has to be built), while the upland rice system gives low yields per area unit, but instead requires less labour input (Conklin 1957).

Like in the Red River Delta, in the northern highlands, wet rice production gives two crops per annum, one in spring and one in autumn. The seeds can be either broadcasted directly in the field, which is the traditional way of some minority peoples (e.g. the Tày), or seedlings can be grown in nurseries and then transplanted into the flooded fields when the seedlings reach height of about 15-30 centimetres. The latter technique, which is the Kinh style, is the far most common one, and has been adopted by many of the ethnic minorities today. The transplanting technique gives a quicker and higher yield, but is more labour demanding. Harvesting is easier as the seedlings are planted in strait rows, whereas when broadcasting the plants are scattered at random, and because of that are more difficult to cut.

The fields in the lowland wet rice systems are formed as low terraces where the flow of water is maintained by help of gravity: water is led from a stream, a dam or other source into the highest laying field/terrace and then is let running to the lower laying fields, which sometimes lie only twenty or thirty centimetres below. It is possible to regulate the water level in each field by opening or closing sluices in the irrigation canals. In more advanced irrigation systems fuel or electric driven pumps are used for leading the water into the canals, but are not used in the study area. In the two hamlets of the study buffaloes are in general used for ploughing and harrowing, and only once in one of the hamlets was a pedestrian tractor used for doing the work during the time of the study. In January 2002 the machine was hired by some of the farmers for the first time ever.

Upland rice is produced in shifting cultivation fields or in semi-permanent fields, where it is sown by the technique of broadcasting the seeds directly on the soil in the same manner as in the wet rice fields described above. The upland rice is sometimes cultivated together with
other crops, either spatially or sequentially. Upland rice is considered to taste different from the rice produced in irrigation fields. When asking people in the Ha Giang Province which of the two tasted best, in general the answer, among the minorities as well as among the Kinh, was that upland rice tastes best. Despite being regarded as very tasty, the upland rice is much less traded. The reason for this is the low yield it gives (only one crop per annum), and because of that it is not available in the same quantity as wet-rice. This confines upland rice to being a product for internal family consumption or local village consumption rather than being a significant cash crop.

Besides rice there are a number of different crops grown in the highlands. Among these perhaps maize is the most important. Maize is either grown in the lowland fields between the rice cropping periods, or in the upland fields. Beans and other vegetables are also cropped in the lowland and in the upland fields, whereas cassava mostly is found in the upland fields.

**Figure 6. Kinh woman with fields**

Photo of a young Kinh woman in Ha Giang Province watching the lowland rice fields from her upland field

**Intensification and Rationality**

In contrast with the perception common among the Kinh of intensive irrigated, permanent rice farming representing the highest form of civilisation, and shifting cultivation the lowest, Boserup (1965) presents a less value-laden explanation of the different degrees of intensity of land use practice. A less labour demanding system gives a high labour productivity but low area productivity. However, as long as sufficient land is available low intensity farming is rational, and as well often a sign of good adaptation (also ecological) to prevailing circumstances, among them population pressure. As population grows, more intensive land use techniques are likely to be practiced at the same time as a larger population allows division of labour, markets to merge and provide a tax-base (as well as a need) for
investments in public goods such as roads and common infrastructure (e.g. irrigation systems). In this sense, intensive agricultural systems can be said to represent a higher form of civilisation. However, in terms of rational behaviour and environmental adaptation, it seems difficult to place one above the other. Boserup (ibid.) also noticed that people leaving an area with intensive land use (i.e. “high culture”) and move to a less densely populated area, tend to adopt less intensive land use practices because they could satisfy their livelihood requirements by less effort (less investment and less labour input). Whether this also represents “cultural degradation” is, of course, disputable.

Livelihood Systems

In order to get a glimpse of the different livelihood systems among the people of Viet Nam’s northern mountains, below a brief description is given of three of the ethnic groups found in Ha Giang Province. The three groups traditionally dwell at different altitudes. The ethnic groups who are more dependent on irrigated rice production than on shifting cultivation inhabit the lower altitudes. The largest group in Ha Giang at these altitudes is the Tày. At the higher and medium elevations the traditional shifting cultivating peoples reside; here the largest groups are the Hmong and the Dzao respectively (Le Trong Cuc 1995)

The Hmong: The “Real Highlanders”

According to one theory both the Hmong and the Dzao peoples should have a shared origin in the Man people of southern China (Cooper 1984; Khong Dien 2002: 50-51). However, there are other theories claiming that the origin of the Hmong is further north, i.e. in north-western China/Central Asia area (ibid.). The first Hmong group arrived in Viet Nam some 300 years ago (Le Trung Cuc 1995:106; Khong Dien ibid.). The reason for leaving China according to some sources was that the Hmong (as well as the Dzao) were persecuted by the southward expanding Han Chinese (Cooper 1984; Tapp 1986). Today the Hmong are spread out in five countries, China, Maynmar (Burma), Thailand, Laos and Viet Nam. The 1999 census tells us that there are almost 800,000 Hmong living in Viet Nam, divided into six sub-groups (General Statistic Office 2001: 21; Khong Dien ibid.).

Traditionally the Hmong reside on the altitudes between 800 and 1,700 metres above sea level, and their settlement pattern varies depending on the physical environment they live in and the land use system they practice (Pham Quang Hoan 1994: 1). In the real high areas of north-eastern Ha Giang Province, close to the Chinese border, the agricultural conditions are very harsh with temperatures that in the winter may drop below zero. As a consequence it is not possible to grow rice more than in some of the lower valleys, instead maize is the staple (at these altitudes almost all dwellers are Hmong).
The social organisation of the Hmong rests on a base of patrilineal clans (Pham Quang Hoan 1995: 17, 23, 1992: 7; Cooper 1984: 33). Each Hmong is born into his/her father's clan (Tapp 1986). These clans are exogamous, which means that a woman is married into another clan than the one she is born into (Cooper 1984). The marriage pattern creates a flow of women between the clans. The clans are mobile: after some time in one village a clan may move to settle in another village. Traditionally it is the clan (or part of clan living in one village\(^{53}\)) who controls land and it is the clan leader who has the highest prestige, not the village leader (Pham Quang Hoan 1995). A clan can still keep control over the land in the village it has left as long as the dead members of the group are buried in that village; when the deceased are buried in the new village it is a sign that the clan has settled there and will not move back (ibid. 17). However, a clan may be spread out in two or more villages. Then a member of the clan has the right to cultivate the land of the group in another village than the home village. This is actually a form of risk spreading: to have plots of agricultural land in different areas may save at least the crops in one field in case of a drought or floods in one area (Cooper 1984: 51). At the same time a village may contain more than one clan. Hence, traditionally the village as a land managing unit does not exist in the Hmong society. The land "belongs" to the clan who distributes it to be managed by each family under customary rights, even if the member family lives in some other village than the one where the plot is located (Pham Quang Hoan 1995: 17). When the plot is used for certain time and lain fallow the land goes back to be controlled by the clan.

The traditional Hmong village (Joal or Jol) consists of only seven to twelve households, but today it is common with larger villages (Corlin 1998: 9; Tapp 1986). In the lower areas where paddy rice is cropped, and if the villages are sedentary the number of households can be thirty or more. This, however, is not a large village in comparison with the villages of some of the other minority peoples in northern Vietnam. The size of the Hmong villages reflects an adaptation to the physical environment and to the social environment as well. The transfer from a life with shifting cultivation in the real highlands to a sedentary life at lower altitudes has enabled the formation of larger villages among some Hmong groups. The Hmong village does not play that important role as a political, social and economic centralised unit as the Kinh village in the delta does (Corlin 1998: 9). And, as noticed, the land is not fixed to the village, but to the clan instead.

A special trait of the Hmongs’ shifting cultivation systems is that a plough is used (a very rare phenomenon). And according to Pham Quang Hoan, thanks to the use of the plough the Hmong are in some cases able to crop a plot 5-10 years before moving to another spot. Then

\(^{53}\) Then actually constituting a kinship group (Corlin 1998:9; Pham Quang Hoan 1995). Each clan is considered stemming from one ancestor in remote times (Corlin ibid. 8).
the land is laid fallow for 3-5 years (Pham Quang Hoan 1992; Le Trung Cuc 1995:106). This is of course not a real shifting cultivation system according to Conklin's definition, but what Ruthenberg defines as a fallow system54. The shifting cultivation land (or land for fallow systems) is under usufruct rights while paddy land is under individual long-term control of the household (Nguyen Van Thang 1994).

The Dzao: A People on the Medium Altitude
Besides living in Viet Nam, the Dzao are also found in China, Laos, Maynmar and Thailand55. The first Dzao may have arrived in northern Viet Nam from southern China as early as in the 11th century (Khong Dien 2002: 52). In Viet Nam they make up thirty sub-groups, in total including some 600 000 individuals (Khong Dien ibid.; General Statistic Office 2001: 21).

As most ethnic groups in northern Viet Nam the Dzao social organisation is also based on patrilineal kinship. According to Nguyen Van Thang the largest unit within the social organisation is, what he calls, the kin groups; the relationship among the Dzao kin groups is looser than among the Hmong clans. Further, the kin groups are divided into lineages and each lineage is divided into branches. Relationship among the members of one branch is closer than among the members of the kin group or the lineage (Nguyen Van Thang 1994).

The Dzao live in quite large villages or in scattered small hamlets as many traditional shifting cultivating peoples do (Dang Nghiem Van et al. 2000: 184). The style of houses varies depending on altitude, at higher altitudes they construct houses of mud and on the ground, in the same style as the Hmong people; on lower altitudes they build wood houses on piles or mud houses on piles (Pham Tien Dung 1999: 73-74). Despite the fact that the Dzao are associated with the medium to high altitudes, today many of them are found in the lower valleys, living in ethnically mixed villages. A typical example of such an ethnically mixed commune is Tan Tao in the southern part of Ha Giang Province where I had the opportunity to work a week in June-July 1994. Here the Dzao lived alone for three generations subsisting on a combination of shifting cultivation on the hill slopes and small paddy fields in the valley bottom. Later other ethnic groups (e.g. Kinh, Nung) moved in and formed separated hamlets within the commune.

The Dzao families of Tan Tao alternate upland cropping between the hills on one side of the village and the hills on the other side. In this way they are able to crop the land three to four

54 Boserup calls shifting cultivation long fallow system, and what Ruthenberg calls fallow system she calls short fallow system (Boserup 1993).

55 Another spelling of Dzao is common in Viet Nam, i.e. Dao, which should be pronounced according to the English spelling Dzao (or Zao), because of that in English texts the name is spelled Dzao more frequently nowadays. In Thailand and in Laos the Dzao are known under the name Yao.
years before leaving it fallow (personal interviews with Dzao families in 1994). It is reported that the Dzao of Vietnam when practising shifting cultivation often lay the land fallow for 10 - 15 years (Nguyen Van Thang 1994; Pham Tien Dung et al. 1999: 73). A rotational shifting cultivation system (*Dinh cu Du canh* in Vietnamese) with a cycle of 3 - 5 years of cultivating and 10 - 15 years of fallow can be as sustainable as a permanent agricultural system. In the shifting cultivation fields the Dzao mix different crops, either at one and the same time or in sequential systems; one advantage with these systems is the ability to protect the soil from erosion. Other measures which the Dzao take to minimise soil erosion are the growing of hedges and grass strips, and the building of simple earth banks (Nguyen Van Thang 1994).

Like the Hmong, the Dzao have two types of land tenure: one with usufruct rights (shifting cultivation land) and one with individual long-term rights (paddy land). Some Dzao groups in the highlands also cultivate very small patches of land in between the rocks, as the Hmong do; these small patches of land are also under individual long-term rights (Nguyen Van Thang 1994).

**The Tày: A Valley People**

The Tày are the most numerous people in the Ha Giang Province and are typical representatives for the people of the mountainous north who reside in the valleys or at the foothills and who are depending on irrigated rice production to a greater extent than many other minority groups. The Tày of Viet Nam belongs to the larger group of the Tày-Thái speaking peoples. However the names Tày and Thái, as well as the name Tai that sometimes is used synonymously may cause confusion (Keys 1996; Ireson and Ireson 1996: 4). Below an attempt is made at sorting out the terms and shed some light on the background of these peoples.

In Viet Nam the Thái and the Tày are in all national studies on ethnic minorities considered as two distinct groups (e.g. Dang Nghiém Van et al. 2000: 121-26; Khong Dien 2002: 53; Schliesinger 1997: 57, 60). The origin and “cultural birthplace” of the Tai peoples is somewhat disputed, with one theory pointing at southern China, others that they have a common origin with the Mon and the Khmer civilizations further south (Keyes 1996: 138-39). Anyhow, the Tai-speaking peoples are spread over a large geographical area reaching from Thailand in the south to southern China in the north, and from north-eastern India in the west to northern Viet Nam in the east (Keyes 1995: 136). According to Keyes the name Tai should be used for peoples who speak the different languages that belong to the Tai linguistic family (i.e. what in Viet Nam is named Tày-Thái languages) and are spread out in the geographical area mentioned above, while the name Thai should be employed when referring to people who are citizens of the country of Thailand (*ibid.*) In contrast, in Viet Nam the name Thai is

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56 Giáy, Nung, Lao, Lu, Cao Lan are some other Tày-Thái speaking peoples in Viet Nam (Khong Dien 2002: 9).
used for what is considered as a separate ethnic group within the Tày-Thái speaking linguistic family. The names Tai and Thai are pronounced the same in Thailand according to Keyes (ibid.), while in Viet Nam the name Thai is pronounced with an aspiration, but the name Tày is not.

The history of the formation of the people who today is considered as the Tai indicates that other groups than Tai speaking have been assimilated into them, and that there are many different Tai languages (there may be as many as a hundred) (Keyes 1995: 147). Thus the peoples (first grouped under the name Lao by the Siamese and later in the modern state of Thailand under the name Thai), today regarded as one people actually are several peoples: “While the Siamese elite sought to ‘forget’ the differences between Tai-speaking peoples living within the border of Siam in the process of constructing a new genealogy for the Thai nation, Western scholars, missionaries, and colonial officials were beginning to discover that there were many different types of Tai” (ibid. 145).

The Tày of Viet Nam has been residing in the country for a very long time (Khong Dien 2002: 53). In Phu Ling commune in the study area the Tày have according to themselves been living in the area for at least 500 years, referring to a five hundred year old Tày temple as evidence. Some of the Tày supposed to have merged into the Kinh culture of the Red River Delta, others have stayed in the mountains of the north (ibid.). The Tày is one of few minority groups in Viet Nam who have its own script. The writing is based on Chinese characters (Dang Nghiêm Van et al. 2000: 125). This fact indicates that the theory of a Tày origin in China may be the most plausible one.

The social organisation of the Tày is built on exogamous patrilineages, and the smallest social unit is the nuclear family. So far the system is similar to the Kinh one. However, there are some matrilineal traits in the system as traditionally the married couple live with the bride’s parents, not temporary as among some other ethnic groups in the north, but permanently (Dang Nghiêm Van et al. 2000: 124).

The Tày village (ban in the Tày language) is quite large and may contain up to one hundred families, although in general they are smaller. A village often constitute several hamlets. The Tày prefer to settle on a flat piece of land close to a mountain or hill with the wet rice fields in front of the house (Bui Minh Dao and Vuong Xuan Tinh 2000: 48). Each hamlet has its own land where the limits are well-defined following natural features such as water streams or ravines. Traditionally the Tày had two types of land regarding property rights: common land controlled by the village or by the lineage (parts of the lowland and all forest land), and private lowland controlled by the family and inherited by the sons (ibid.).
The Tày family in the northern highlands traditionally have a land use system comprising both upland agriculture and lowland wet-rice cultivation, where the upland fields are cropped under shifting cultivation or under short fallow systems (Rambo 1995; Ireson and Ireson 1996: 5-9). This combination of upland and lowland agriculture, and the extraction of wild forest products is what Rambo calls composite swidden systems. These systems are neither new inventions nor old archaic systems that have survived because people stubbornly stick to old traditions, they are old practical solutions for surviving in an area where the topography and the ecology put limits to lowland irrigation agriculture. In the hamlet of Rambo’s study (in Hoa Binh Province), the composite swidden system had been practised by the Tày as far back in history as any villager could remember (Rambo 1995: 69). As the upland agriculture of this kind is an old and integrated part of the ethnic minorities’ culture in the mountainous north (especially among the Tày -Thai speaking minorities), it should undoubtedly be called integral shifting cultivation according to Conklin’s classification given above.

Natural Resources Use and Religious Philosophies

The ethnic groups in the north have all to different degrees been influenced by the Chinese religions and life philosophies. With the mountainous northern region geographically “squeezed” in between two powerful cultures, the Chinese one in the north and the Viet culture in the south (who also carries strong influences from China), it is not surprising that the minorities have adopted some Chinese (as well as Viet) customs and religions.

Like the Kinh the ethnic minorities of the north also have intermingled Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism with old traditional beliefs (Dang Nghiern Van et al. 2000: 124,181, 190; Tribal Research Institute 1987: 19, 24); beliefs that include worshipping of different spirits ranging from the one who protects the door of the Hmong family, to the spirit who controls the whole community life of the Tày (Bui Minh Dao and Vuong Xuan Tinh 2000: 49). And there are other spirits who play an important role in connection with the natural resources use. Below an outline will be drawn of how the patterns of land use and settlement may look like in an area of the northern highlands today.

Above the commonly accepted model of land use in the highlands based on ethnic groups and dwelling altitude was described. According to the model, the Hmong live on the highest elevations surviving only on shifting cultivation, the Dzao and some other ethnic groups live on the slopes at the middle elevations, also depending on shifting cultivation but in combination with other upland agriculture, and most of the Tày -Thai speaking peoples would be found further down in the valleys subsisting mainly on wet rice agriculture (Rambo 1997: 25; van de Walle and Gunewardena 2001: 178). However, this model only partly reflects the reality today.
It is correct that the Hmong people are the only ones who dwell in the highest and most remote areas of northern Viet Nam, for example in the north-eastern part of the Ha Giang Province. Here in the highland districts of Quan Ba, Dong Van, Yen Minh and Meo Vac they carry out a form of permanent (or semi-permanent) agriculture on extremely small plots in between limestone rocks, sometimes on very steep slopes (Bui Minh Dao and Vuong Xuan Tinh 2000: 49; and my own observations). However, in Hoang Su Phi District in the south-western part of the province one finds the Hmong living at lower altitudes where their subsistence is partly based on irrigated rice on terraced hillsides (Bui Minh Dao and Vuong Xuan Tinh *ibid.*; Vuong Xuan Tinh and Hjemdahl 1997: 14; and my own observations). Only these two examples, indicating how great the variations of the Hmongs’ subsistence system can be, illustrate well that the stereotyped picture of them as solely being shifting cultivators is not a correct one. Their land use mirrors an elaborated adaptation to different ecological conditions. In the real high areas of north-eastern Ha Giang where shifting cultivation is not possible to practice due to the thin vegetation cover and the topography with sharp limestone rocks and steep slopes they have developed a very special permanent agriculture. Whereas in the lower areas of the province, where a landscape with gentle rolling hills permits the construction of terraces, the Hmong are more dependent on irrigated rice for their subsistence (Vuong Xuan Tinh and Hjemdahl 1997: 14, 15).

As mentioned above, the Tày’s land use systems reveal that they are not only lowland wet rice producers, but that their subsistence is a combination of both upland (including shifting cultivation) and lowland agriculture, and of the extraction of wild forest products (Rambo 1995; Bui Minh Dao and Vuong Xuan Tinh, 2000).

Despite the fact that in the mountainous north it is more likely to find Hmong and Dzao villages in the higher areas and Tày villages in the valleys, today many villages that are found in the valleys are not only populated by the Tày -Thái speaking minorities and/or the Kinh. Instead the possibility to find a mixture of ethnic groups (including both ”highlanders” and ”lowlanders”) in such villages is very likely. As a result, mixed villages are getting more common, and the land use systems of the different ethnic groups are more similar in one and the same area.

Above 57 it was stated that the Kinh had their view of nature and of natural resources use influenced by Confucian thinking. Perhaps this is a natural consequence of the fact that the Kinh culture was developed in the delta lowland, and based on a conversion of the natural landscape to an entirely cultural one based on irrigation canals and artificial water flow. A

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57 Section: The Concept of Nature.
few lines from the Chinese philosopher Xunzi\textsuperscript{58} mirrors the view of nature that seem to be dominant in Confucianism:

\begin{quote}
Instead of regarding Heaven as great and admiring it,  
Why not foster it as a thing and regulate it?  
Instead of obeying Heaven and singing praises to it,  
Why not control the Mandate of Heaven and use it?  
\textit{(Xunzi, quoted from Xinzhoug Yao 2000:176)}
\end{quote}

To “foster it as a thing and regulate it” can be interpreted as implying that the “wild” nature must be turned into a “domesticated” one. However, the concept of nature as something domesticated is more difficult to maintain in the mountainous areas where people are depending on shifting cultivation, rainfall and utilisation of forests. Here one would expect that Taoism with its philosophy of letting nature be kept more in its original stage than changed drastically should be better accepted than Confucianism\textsuperscript{59}, and indeed it is reported from Thailand as well as from Viet Nam that the Yao (Dzao) people are especially influenced by Taoism (Tribal Research Institute 1987: 24; Dang Nghiem Van \textit{et al.} 2000:190).

Often the highland people declare the forest above their village as a \textit{sacred forest}, it is then kept intact for protecting water sources (Schleisinger 1998: 72; Bui Minh Dao and Vuong Xuan Tinh 2000: 12), perhaps a sign of influence from Taoism, or that a Taostic philosophy fitted best with the ecological circumstances. Strikingly, the T\^{a}y who traditionally have been dependant on wet rice production (in combination with shifting cultivation) more than the Dzao have, are reported to be equally influenced by Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism (Dang Nghiem Van \textit{et al.} 2000:190). And, as noticed above, the Kinh in the north are leaning more towards Confucianism in their view of nature and how to use it.

\textsuperscript{58} Xunzi was a Confucian who lived in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} century BCE (Xinzhoug Yao 2000:176)

\textsuperscript{59} Joseph Needham argues that one can trace the different Chinese dynasties and their proclivity for either Confucian philosophy or Tao philosophy by the manipulation of the rivers (especially the Yellow River) when Confucian thinking was in the forefront the rivers were regulated strictly, while during periods of Taoism the rivers were flowing practically freely (Needham 1971: 234-35). This implies that the superstructure (religion and philosophy) determines the material base of society (control over the irrigation system/intensity of land-use). A different interpretation is that the base has a greater influence on the superstructure than vice-versa. In that case, Confucian ideology (strict regulation of rivers) reflected periods of high population pressure, whereas in periods of low population pressure (e.g. due to plague or war) the need to strictly regulate the irrigation system was less strongly felt and, hence, the more relaxed Taoist thinking dominated. To my mind, the latter interpretation seems more plausible. It is, however, only a hypothesis and the final answer to the direction of causality will have to await further research.
Agriculture in the delta, as described, is depending on an advanced and old engineering system with canals, dykes, sluices, etc. Here the water flow is the crucial component. All agriculture is depending on water, but there is a difference between agriculture depending on direct rainfall and the one depending on indirect rainfall. The irrigated agriculture in general is depending more on the rainfall far from the spot were the fields are located than on the rainfall in the immediate area. Heavy rainfall in a mountainous area fills a river much more than the same amount of rain close to the mouth of the river. The water in an irrigated system is led off from the river and let running through the irrigation canals and further out into the fields. In this way, the water that in the mountains is running wild in streams and rapids is turned into a docile stream; nature has been domesticated. In contrast, the farmer who cultivates the uplands is depending on direct rainfall on the spot, and on water running directly on the ground without much possibility to sway its direction. It is a wild and untamed stream. The upland farmer is in this way left much more to the freak of nature than his fellow citizen who lives from irrigated agriculture.

As noticed, the subsistence systems of the ethnic minorities in the highlands in general constitute a combination of upland and lowland agriculture, of shifting cultivation, permanent upland cultivation, irrigated rice production, etc. These subsistence systems are then partly dependent on artificial water flows for irrigation. However, the irrigation systems in the highlands are not nearly that advanced technically as in the delta. For example, in the study area the water that is used for irrigation is led from small streams and creeks, and collected in tiny dams made of mud, from where it is led out to the fields. Fields that in comparison with the ones in the delta only constitute a fraction in size.

Three Regions with Different Conditions for Livelihood

Travelling through the changing landscape as in the journey from the Ha Noi to the hinterland close to the Chinese border gives a picture of the great differences between the three regions: the flatland of the delta, the hilly midlands and the highlands. But it is not only the scenery that is changing from one region to the other, the conditions for subsistence and the way of using the natural resources change from region to region, and even from one area to another within one and the same region.

When examining the socio-economic conditions in the regions and in the five provinces passed on the road from Ha Noi to Ha Giang (Ha Noi, Vinh Phuc, Phu Tho, Tuyen Quang, Ha Giang) the patterns are quite clear: in the highlands people are much poorer than in the Red

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According to Le Ba Thao (1997) there were 5,000 kilometres of dykes in the Red River Delta in the beginning of the 1990s.
River Delta region as well as in the hilly midlands. If, for example, using data on educational level as one indicator of living standard, it proves that in the Red River Delta as a whole the proportion of children over five years of age who has not attended school at all is about one of eighteen (in Ha Noi Province alone it is one of twenty five). In Phu Tho and Vinh Phuc Provinces in the hilly midlands the figures are nearly the same as in the delta. The statistics from Tuyen Quang Province (the mountainous region) shows that one of ten children over the age of five years has never attended school, and when getting to the northernmost province of Viet Nam, viz. Ha Giang, the figures are one of three. As a whole, in the delta almost twenty five percent of the children over five have finished upper secondary school, while in Tuyen Quang and Ha Giang Provinces the figures are about fifteen and eight percent respectively. Also in the statistics over children who have finished upper secondary school the two provinces in the midlands that were passed on the journey, i.e. Pho Tho and Vinh Phuc, are not far behind the delta. An examination of the data for higher education reveals that in Ha Giang there are only 2,886 persons with a university degree (i.e. just over half a percentage of the population over five years old), while in Ha Noi we find 353,898 persons with university degrees (or 14 percent of the population over five). (General Statistic Office 2001: 304).

Other indicators of poverty could be the percentage of minority people. As for example a study by van de Walle and Gunewardena (2001) has shown, the ethnic minorities in general are poorer than the Kinh (the study does not include the ethnic Chinese living in Viet Nam among these minorities)\textsuperscript{61}. Some of several indicators the researchers have used are area of cropped land per household (irrigated, non-irrigated, forest land, etc.), plus quality of the land. The study reveals that for example the Kinh in average have about 60 percent of their land irrigated, while the minority people in average only have fourteen percent of their land irrigated. Literacy rate is another indicator used in the study. Here the study shows that only three percent of the households were illiterate among the Kinh, while among the minority peoples’ households twelve percent were illiterate. (van de Walle and Gunewardena 2001: 185-86). Although there are great disparities between different ethnic minority groups, all indicators point at a great gap between the Kinh and the minority peoples in access to agriculture land, education and living standard in general. This fact indicates that hand in hand with the gap between majority and minority people there is a gap between lowland and highland areas as well (Henin 2002: 3-4, 6).

Thus, one can quite safely state that provinces with a high percentage of minority people are poorer than provinces with a high percentage of Kinh. As the mountainous provinces have a much higher percentage of minority peoples than the lowland provinces one can also quite safely state that the highland provinces are poorer than the lowland provinces. And as

\textsuperscript{61} van de Walle and Gunewardena have used the 1992-1993 Viet Nam Living Standard Measurement Survey in their study (2001: 183).
Jamieson et al. (1998: 4) write “According to virtually all development indicators (e.g. per capita income, life expectancy, educational levels, food security), people in the uplands are much worse off than their lowland compatriots”. It should be noticed that all people living in the highlands are included in the observations made by Jamieson and his colleagues. Hence, the Kinh living in the highland provinces are poorer than their relatives in the delta. However, to state that all people living in the mountainous areas of northern Viet Nam are equally poor is to generalise too much; there are great differences within highland areas, and between different sectors in the highlands (ibid.).

The trend in the delta is increasing agricultural output and improving food security. This is for example visible in the fact that Viet Nam in year 2000 became the second largest rice exporter in the world (Salemink 2003: 44-45). The living standard has improved considerably in the Red River Delta area the last ten years or so. However, a similar improvement of living standard has not occurred in the highland provinces. Instead “… the gap between the two appears to be widening in both relative and absolute terms” (Jamieson et al. 1998: 4). Jamieson and his colleagues point out that this great difference between highland and lowland is not a problem confined to Viet Nam, it is found all the way to Burma in the west and Tibet and Yunnan in the north (ibid.).

If the gap in living standard continues to widen like today it is likely that the northern part of Viet Nam in the future will be divided into two main regions, one with the ”haves” and one with the “have-nots”. Unless, of course, if settlement programmes, development and dissemination of appropriate agricultural technologies, and investments in infrastructure allow these peripheries to “catch-up”.
V. The Study Area and Its People

In this chapter a brief description of Ha Giang Province and of the study area is presented. The economy, land use, land tenure and the social system of the two hamlets studied will be in special focus.

Ha Giang Province

Ha Giang is the northernmost province in Viet Nam. Its border to China is 274 kilometres long. Concerning landscape and ethnic diversity perhaps it is pertinent to call the province a small copy of the whole Northern Mountainous Region, with only a fraction of the land consisting of flat river basins suitable for wet rice production. Most of the area is either hilly or mountainous, where wet rice production only can be carried out with great efforts of terracing, if possible at all. In other places steep limestone formations with only small pockets of soil suitable for agriculture are found. However, in many of the communities the subsistence is based on a mixture of small paddy fields in the valley bottoms, permanent or semi-permanent agriculture, and/or shifting cultivation on the hills, combined with animal husbandry on small scale, a home garden, a fishpond, and in same cases hunting and collecting of forestry products.

Only a few years back main parts of communication routes consisted of dirt roads and tracks, and access to many communities was only possible by foot or on horseback. This fact drastically limited the possibilities to commercialise agriculture, and as a consequence most production was (and to a large extent still is) aimed at the household or the local community. However, in the last four-five years the transport situation has improved remarkably, and now all district capitals are reached on paved roads, and most communes are accessible by vehicles nowadays. (Ha Giang People’s Committee 2002; personal communication with staff at People’s Committee of Ha Giang Province; and my own observations).

The province has a population of 602,525 people living on 7,884 km² according to the latest census made in 1999 (General Statistic Office 2001: 31). That makes the population density about 76 persons per square kilometre, far less than half the national average of 195/pers./km², but almost the same as the average of the whole mountainous northern region of 70 per km² (Rambo 1997: 5). The ethnic diversity is great as there are over twenty different ethnic groups in such a small population. The Kinh people only constitute twelve percent, or

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62 For data on average rainfall and mean temperature in the province see Appendix I.
73,000, of the total population. The largest ethnic group is the Hmong (184,000) followed by the Tày (153,000). Within the administration structure, both at province and district levels, Kinh and Tày are the most represented ethnic groups, while the greatest number of Hmong is found in the most remote areas and highest elevations close to the Chinese border.

The Province can roughly and tentatively be divided into three main ecological zones: The first zone includes most parts of the three lowland districts of Vi Xuyen, Bac Quang and partly Bac Me (and also part of Ha Giang Township) along the Son Lo and Son Gam rivers. Along the two rivers agriculture in this zone is dominated by paddy rice. Upland rice is grown on the hill slopes, often together with cassava and maize. Water availability for irrigation is a problem in many areas. Access to roads is in general good, and so are possibilities to commercialise products. Some of the most common ethnic groups seen here are the Tày and Kinh, but the ethnic diversity is great.

The second zone is situated in the western part of the province. It embraces two highland districts: Hoan Su Phi and Xin Man. The terrain is not so rocky here as in the north-eastern zone, and the possibility for terraced paddy cultivation is greater; mountainsides are also terraced in some areas. Parts of the zone only have footpaths or horse tracks; there is one good road crossing the two districts. Here the dominating ethnic groups are Nung, Tày and Dzao.

The third zone comprises the highland districts in the north-eastern part of the province: Quan Ba, Yen Minh, Dong Van and Meo Vac. This is a remote area until recently with poor roads and partly only accessible on horseback. Limestone rock is the dominating feature of the landscape. Agriculture is to a great extent carried out in very small fields between the rocks, often on very steep land. It is not unusual for fields to cover only a few square meters. Water availability is a problem, and soils with low capacity to hold water are the most common. Maize is the main crop, with paddy rice in some of the lower valleys. The climate is colder here than in the lowland zone and temperature may drop down to zero degrees centigrade some nights in the winter. The Hmong who constitute the largest ethnic group of the Ha Giang Province are found in the highest number in this very poor highland zone.

Ha Giang is one of the poorest provinces in Viet Nam, and with a population officially made up of 22 different ethnic groups it is also one of the most culturally mixed provinces, and when it comes to natural sceneries one of the most beautiful ones as well. Situated on the cross-route between the huge province of Yunnan in China and the Red River delta land, Ha

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63 Notice that this is only a rough and informal division of the province into three zones for an easier understanding of the physical features of the landscape, and as well a broad understanding of the socio-economic situation.

64 It was reported during our visit to Ha Giang in January 2003 that all these four highland districts were covered with snow during several days due to unusual cold winds sweeping down from the inland of China.
Giang has been an outpost of Viet culture and power close to the giant northern neighbour for centuries. Its location has made its history turbulent. The area has been under Chinese, as well as French rule, and during World War II also occupied by the Japanese. As late as in 1979 the Chinese invaded parts of the northern provinces of Lao Cai, Ha Giang and four others as retaliation for Viet Nam’s invasion of Cambodia (Chau Thi Hai 2000: 238)\(^65\). During the invasion Chinese artillery shelled a village just on the northern outskirts of Ha Giang Town.

As was mentioned in Chapter II, the Chinese invasion impacted negatively on the minority peoples (especially the Hmong and the Dzao) living close to the border zone, as they were forced to abandon their villages for security reasons (Khong Dien 2002: 89). However, neither the government nor any local authorities assisted them to find a place to settle or a way to subsist; this has been confirmed by Hmong people in the Tuyen Quang Province, Ham Yen District (Corlin 1998: 6), as well as by Hmong in the Ha Giang Province (personal communication with Hmong in Vi Xuyen District).

Ha Giang Province (or the Third Military Territory as it was called by the French) became a part of Tuyen Quang Province in 1842, during the Nguyen Dynasty, and in 1889 a few years after the French conquered the area, Ha Giang was declared the capital of the new province with the same name (Doling 2000:98). The French were more interested in the area for using it as a military outpost rather than for settling farmers and businessmen. However, the people of the north have not passively accepted invaders. Several uprisings against the French occurred as protests against corvées and taxes imposed by the colonial power; e.g. the Hmong revolt in 1912, and the Dzao revolts in 1901 and in 1913-1915 (ibid. 100). In the 1960s Ha Giang and Tuyen Quang were united into one large province named Ha Tuyen. But only a couple of decades later Ha Tuyen was split into two provinces again.

The provincial capital Ha Giang Town is situated on the Lo River, a tributary of the Red River, where it meets Mien River, and about twenty kilometres from the Chinese border. It seems as if Ha Giang never became an attractive area for settlement during the colonial period, probably mostly because of its remote location and extremely high rate of malaria incidence. Andrew Hardy, referring to colonial documentations from the 1930s, picturing it as “… one of the least healthy places in Indochina: the ‘town of fever and death’” (Hardy 1998:118). Malaria is still a problem in Ha Giang, but a hospital in the town, health centres in the districts, and health posts with nurses in the commune centres has changed the health situation to the better.

The town has increased and the last 6-7 years it has experienced what can be called a small construction boom. Coming back to visit the town in October 2000, after not being their for

\(^{65}\) In total 330 villages were destroyed by the Chinese invaders, plus schools, hospitals and some 80,000 hectares of crops (Chau Thi Hai 2000: 238).
six years, I found it changed. New buildings had mushroomed; many new private houses, a
couple of new and private hotels, as well as quite a number of restaurants and coffee shops
had altered the picture. Although tourists and other foreign visitors are not streaming through
the town in the same numbers as in the neighbouring provincial capital of Lao Cay, which is
connected to Ha Noi by railway and where one of the main crossing points to China is
located, more foreigners were seen in Ha Giang Town than before. Especially notable are the
growing number of Chinese businessmen as well as Chinese government officials that enter
through the border cross point at Thanh Thuy.

**Ha Giang Township**

Ha Giang Township, covering 169 km², in practice is a small district of Ha Giang Province,
with its own administration and People’s Committee. The town itself holds a population of
about 28,000 persons (Le Ba Thao 1997: 391), and the whole township 37,000, distributed in
four communes in (and around) the town and four on the countryside. The average annual
income in the town is 5.25 million dong or 350 USD\(^6^6\) (personal communication with staff at
the People’s Committee of Ha Giang Township).

**Commune, Village and Hamlet**

In Northern Viet Nam a cluster of small villages or hamlets (*thon* in Vietnamese) forms a
large village or commune (*xa*) \(^6^7\). It has its political division with a People’s Committee for
the whole commune, and a representative in each hamlet. As the hamlets often lie close to
each other a newcomer may have problems to distinguish where one hamlet ends and the
other takes over. During the time of collective farming and before the land reforms the hamlet
was divided into work brigades (*doi*) forming a cluster of households living around or along
an area with lowland rice fields. Today this division of the hamlet is not so common.
However, the area of an old brigade is not always coinciding exactly with the area of what is
called a hamlet today. The division is confusing and so can also the names be. For example,
when we visited the area during the pre-study tour in October 2000, Ban Kho hamlet was
presented as Hoa Binh hamlet. But when returning in January 2002, to my surprise the
Chairman of the Commune People’s Committee called it Ban Kho. On my question why it
was called Hoa Binh last time we were there his answer was: “That was the old name of the
brigade [of an old cooperative] that embraced almost the same area and the same households.
People still use the name sometimes”. Hence, today Ban Kho is actually only a part of an old
cooperative. Nowadays the former cooperative area is split into three hamlets (*thon*), of which
one is called Ban Kho.

\(^{6^6}\) That is, under the one US dollar per day, which is the commonly used extreme poverty line.

\(^{6^7}\) There are two terms for hamlet in Vietnamese *thon* or *xom*, in Ha Giang the term *thon* is used more often.
Because of their multiethnic compositions there are no traditional heads of the hamlets in Na Con or in Ban Kho. In contrast to for example a single ethnic Hmong village (or hamlet) where there are both a head of the village people’s committee and a traditional village chief (often the oldest of the male members).

The Two Communes of the Study

Both communes where the study was carried out are situated about twelve kilometres from Ha Giang Town, and some sixteen kilometres from each other by road. In practice they are closer but in different valleys with steep mountainsides between, so the cross cut by foot is laborious. Leaving Ha Giang Town by car one starts immediately to climb up to the junction where the road divides to the left and southeast for Kim Thach Commune and to the right and south for Phu Linh Commune. Turning right, one soon reaches a crest where deep down on the right hand side the view is splendid, overlooking the very long and narrow valley winding towards Phu Linh. Rice fields chequer the valley bottom; houses are seen here and there, mostly in small clusters and built in minority style on stilts and with thatched roofs, and on the mountainsides some small upland fields can be spotted. Surprisingly large areas are still covered with forest. When comparing the small area of flat lowland with the dominating steep and often rocky land, it is easy to understand the difficulties the population have to eke out more from their land than just enough for the family’s subsistence. Adding that restricted access to water for irrigation is a limiting factor for harvesting more than one crop per year on large extent of the land, the picture of an agriculture production with restricted possibilities for commercialisation comes clearer.

On the same meandering road, but turning left instead towards Kim Thach, the sceneries as well as the ecological situation are similar, with the possible exception that in Kim Thach the access to water is somewhat greater. The restriction on irrigation water in the two communes is not a consequence of low rainfall as such but due to the fact that it is difficult to “tame” streams and dam water in such a mountainous area as is the case here.

During the colonial time Phu Linh, Kim Thach and a third commune, located further southeast passing Kim Thach formed one large commune, but was split up into the present three after independence.

Phu Linh Commune

Phu Linh commune stretches along a narrow valley bottom surrounded by steep mountains. It consists of thirteen hamlets. The total population of the commune numbers 4,748 (of these are 441 Kinh) distributed among 916 households, and seven ethnic groups: Tây, Giáy, Dzao,
Hmong, Muong, Chinese and Kinh. The largest groups are the Tày with 2,647 followed by
the Giáy with 1,257 individuals. The Dzao either live alone in two mono-ethnic hamlets, one
about two kilometres and the other five kilometres from the commune centre, or as a few do,
in ethnically mixed hamlets. The commune is connected to an electric power line. There is a
small post office, a primary school, and a health post with a nurse in the commune centre, as
well as some small stores, or rather kiosks, offering a limited choice of products. As was
mentioned earlier, the remnants of a 500 years old Tày temple indicates that the area
probably has been populated by Tày -Thái speaking people since a very long time back in
history.

The total land area of Phu Linh Commune covers some 43.5 km², but the agricultural
potential is low as the population only has access to 720 hectares (or 7.2 km²) of agriculture
land, of which 485 hectares give two crops of rice per year.

**Na Con Hamlet**

Na Con hamlet lies close to Phu Linh commune centre and close to the main road leading
from Ha Giang Town, but does not reach all the way out to the road. A small branch river to
the much larger Lo River flows through the commune, where it takes a U-turn into Na Con
hamlet and out again. The population consists of a total number of 275 persons, distributed
among 56 households (or families). The Kinh make up ten households with a total number
of 71 individuals, or about a quarter of the total number of inhabitants of the hamlet. Besides
Kinh there are two other ethnic groups residing Na Con: Tày (four households or 19
individuals) and Giáy the largest group with 185 individuals in 42 households, both speak
languages belonging to the Tày -Thái linguistic family. The chairman of the hamlet informed
us that Na Con was larger before when two other hamlets were included and it was divided
according to work brigades. At that time Na Con was called Coc Phuong. It was split into two
hamlets sometime in 1977-78.

68 The temple was destroyed during the war with the Americans. Today a wood house has been constructed
around the altar and the most precious of the remnants, a traditional old Tay bronze drum. We were informed
that when the commune will get financial means the temple will be rebuilt in stone as it was originally.

69 The Vietnamese farmers use “sao” and “mau” for measuring agriculture and forestland. In addition in the
northern region a local measurement, “bo ma”, is used. Besides these national units, the Vietnamese sometimes
also use the international units: hectares and square kilometres. To avoid confusion all measurement units of
land areas have been converted to the metric system: square metres (m²), hectares (ha) and square kilometres
(km²). The Vietnamese measurements have been converted as follow: 1 bo ma = 120m², 1 sao = 360m², 1 mau
= 3,600m²; or: 1 bo ma = 0.012 ha, 1 sao = 0.036 ha, 1 mau = 0.36 ha.

70 In the two hamlets of present study all Kinh households either formed nuclear families or three-generation
extended families; no one had household members outside the three-generation family. Hence, the term family
will be used referring to a household as well as a family.
Most of the houses in Na Con are distributed in a U-shaped manner with the lowland agricultural fields in the middle and forest plots on the higher elevations behind the settlements. Some of the houses are found on a wing pointing to the right on top of this U. The houses situated close to the river belong to the minority families, while most of the houses further away from the river belong to the Kinh families.

Some of the minority people in Na Con (as well as in Ban Kho) have built their houses in Kinh style, i.e. on the ground and not on stilts, as the Tày -Thái speaking peoples’ tradition would have them do. But many other of the minority people have not copied the Kinh architecture. The influence from the Kinh regarding the housing issue has not been so strong as one can notice in other areas of the province. It is worth mentioned that I can not remember having seen more than two or three Kinh families in Ha Giang Province living in houses constructed in the minority style on stilts; almost all have had houses constructed directly on the ground with the floor either made of concrete or of mud depending on their economic status.

Only about twenty percent of the agriculture land in Na Con that belong to the Kinh families is irrigated two-crop land, which means that the potential for a surplus production of rice and marketing is very low for these inhabitants. The minority people have better access to water. According to information from the People’s Committee of the Commune, land was distributed in relation to settlement area, i.e. agriculture land was given close to the house, which meant that the Kinh who settled much later in history were confined to land further away from the water sources.

Concerning the land situation, Na Con hamlet in Phu Linh Commune has 26 hectares of lowland agriculture, 42 percent (or 11 hectares) of this land is irrigated. The average lowland agriculture area per family is about 0.45 hectares for Na Con. The access to irrigated land is 0.20 hectare per family. The average area of cultivated lowland per person is only 0.09 hectare, a figure far lower then the minimum of 0.2 needed to meet food need (Jamieson et al. 1998: 10).

To get a complete picture of the agricultural situation also upland agriculture areas should be included. However, as measurements on the upland fields are far from exact and many fields are changing from cropping to fallow and back to cropping again, the figures are much less reliable than the ones for the lowland. The variation between families in land tenure in the uplands is much greater than in the lowlands; some families have no upland fields at all while others have quite large areas. Jamieson and his colleagues report that in the mountainous north one hectare of upland fallow systems only yields about ten percent of what the same area yields in the Red River Delta irrigation systems (ibid.). The total upland area cultivated in Na Con is given to 5.2 hectares (less than 0.02 per person), a much smaller area than
cultivated in Ban Kho. Although data on upland cultivation in general is much less reliable than the ones on lowland cultivation, the figure gives an indication that in Na Con upland agriculture is practiced to a much lesser extent than in Ban Kho. At least partly, this is a reflection of the circumstance that the Kinh in Na Con dedicate much more time to business (especially joinery) than do their ethnic fellows in Ban Kho (see discussion below).

Kim Thach Commune

Like Phu Linh, Kim Thach Commune is found along a narrow and winding valley. The total population of the commune numbers 2,147 individuals living in 440 households. The people in the commune represent nine ethnic groups: Tày, Dzano, Kinh, Hmong, Giáy, Thái, Chinese, Ngan and Nung. The Tày is the most numerous with 675 individuals, followed by Dzano (510 individuals). The smallest group is the Thái who is represented only by one person. The Kinh make up 20 families or 107 persons. Kim Thach has recently been connected to an electric power supply line. Apart from a couple of small stores and a small sawmill, there are no small-scale businesses visual in the commune centre (some itinerant business is going on spontaneously when a businessman arrives from outside). Like in Phu Linh there is a primary school and a health post situated in the centre.

Of the total land area of 30.5 km² agriculture land covers some 400 hectares (4 km²), of which 275 hectares are irrigated land and gives two crops per year.

Ban Kho Hamlet

Ban Kho hamlet⁷¹ is situated partly along the main road leading from Ha Giang Town, and partly behind a hill, which in practice rises in the middle of the hamlet area. Ban Kho, like Na Con is surrounded by high and steep mountains. The commune centre constitutes part of the hamlet and some areas beyond the centre. Like in Na Con the houses are a mixture of Kinh styled ones and minority styled, and are also distributed in part in the same U-shaped manner around the lowland fields. The population belongs to three different ethnic groups: Tày (only one family) and Ngan⁷² (both groups speaking languages belonging to the Tày -Thái linguistic family), and Kinh. The total population in Ban Kho is given to 217 persons, living in 43 households. Kinh constitute 37 individuals (i.e. about 17 percent of total population) living in seven households, the Ngan make up 35 households, and there is only one Tày household in the hamlet.

⁷¹ Ban means village in the Tay language (Dang Nghiem Van et. al. 2000: 121).

⁷² According to Dang Nghiem Van et. al. (2000: 121) and Khong Dien (2002:16), the Ngan is either a local subgroup of Tay, or another name for the Tay. However, as all Ngan themselves and all other people of Ban Kho hamlet consider the Ngan and the Tay as separate groups with different languages we will also do so here. Please see a discussion in Chapter VIII.
Despite the fact that no river flows through the hamlet, access to water is greater than in Na Con. This is due to the fact that there are a number of small streams spread out in the hamlet that with the help of small dams made of mud and stones makes irrigation more evenly distributed than in Na Con hamlet.

The Kinh families live more dispersed in Ban Kho than in Na Con hamlet. This may be a consequence of the fact that when agriculture land was distributed to the individual families under the land reform at the end of the 1980s, until 1998 it was decided that each family should have at least one part of the land close to water for irrigation.

In Ban Kho the lowland agriculture area covers 17.2 hectares, of which 52 percent, or nine hectares are irrigated two-crop land. This leaves the population in Ban Kho with a somewhat higher potential for paddy rice production than the one in Na Con hamlet. The average lowland agriculture area per family is about 0.4 hectares. The figure of the families’ access to irrigated land is about the same in Ban Kho (0.21ha/fam.) as in Na Con (0.20 ha/fam.), or 0.08 hectare per person (also far below minimum of 0.2 ha/person minimum required for food production). However, the area of upland cultivation was told to be 22 hectares, a much higher figure than in Na Con. The difference is at least partly a result of the fact that the business activities are higher among the Kinh in Na Con than in Ban Kho, which leaves less time for agriculture activities (see discussion below).

Please notice that all data above are only average figures, a closer look at the land tenure among the Kinh families in Na Con and Ban Kho is found further down in this chapter. These cases will illustrate the high degree of variability between the Kinh families, between the Kinh and the minority families, and the variability between the two hamlets of the study.

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73 See section: “Subsistence, Production and Land Tenure”. 

Figure 7. *Na Con Hamlet*

![Photo showing part of Na Con Hamlet](image)

Figure 8. *Ban Kho Hamlet*

![Photo showing part of Ban Kho Hamlet](image)
The Kinh Families and the Socio-Economic Situation

There are a total number of 17 Kinh families living in the two hamlets (seven in Ban Kho and ten in Na Con). All have been interviewed, and all are considered as key informants.

Almost all Kinh in the hamlets came from the Ha Tay Province in the Red River Delta, just a few kilometres southwest of Ha Noi, in 1966, or are descendants from these migrants. The exception is one, where in Ban Kho the wife in one of the families originally came from Nghe An Province in the southern part of Northern Viet Nam. One of the wives in Ban Kho and one in Na Con came originally from Ha Tay Province but settled first with their parents in other areas of Ha Giang Province, then when getting married they moved to their respective husband’s home places, Na Con and Ban Kho.

None of the families have migrated by their own free will to the highlands. Instead they have been forced by the government to move under the New Economic Zones Programme. As mentioned in Chapter III, according to a government policy, in vigour in the 1960s, a male person with one or more younger brothers was forced to migrate to the mountainous northern or central parts of the country. By implementing such a harsh policy, the government thought it would be able to solve the problem of acute land shortage in the delta area.

Some families went back to Ha Tay after a short period in Ha Giang, but were immediately ordered to move back to Ha Giang again, or facing the possibility to being sent to the central highlands instead, which was even a less attractive alternative for many of them. However, an old Kinh woman told us that sixteen families came to Na Con in 1966, but eight left after a short time. The reason for this was, according to her, that the minority people let their buffaloes wander freely in the fields, which made rational rice production impossible. She said that the families who left went to other provinces, some even as far as the Central highlands because of this dispute. Other Kinh families, of the ones who came to Phu Linh and Kim Thach Communes, have migrated to other communes in the Ha Giang Province after the liberalisation in the wake of Doi Moi.

Subsistence, Production and Land Tenure

As already mentioned, subsistence in the two hamlets is based on agriculture. Agriculture forms both an economic and a cultural fundament. Agricultural production in Na Con, as well as in Ban Kho hamlet, is of two main types: upland and lowland. The upland agriculture

74 When visiting the hamlet first time during the pre-study in October 2000, the number of Kinh families given for Na Con was twelve, but two were said to be working temporarily in other districts of the province during agricultural low season. However, when coming back fourteen months later the hamlet authority informed that the two families had decided not to move back to Phu Linh Commune at all.
is practised on the forest plots as real shifting cultivation, short fallow system, or as permanent agriculture. The most common crops in the uplands are hill rice, cassava and maize. The lowland agriculture is mainly based on rice production on two crop irrigated land, or one crop rain fed land, with other crops (maize, sweet potato, groundnut, pulses) grown between the rice cropping periods. Rice production on irrigated land gives one harvest in May (spring rice) and one in October (autumn rice). The harvest time comes about a month later in the highlands than in the delta land due to climatic differences. Before the Kinh settled in the two hamlets rice was in general broadcasted in the Tày traditional way, in the lowland fields as well as in the uplands. Today the lowland rice is first cultivated as seedlings in nurseries, and then transplanted into the large fields, in the traditional Viet style. The latter technique also includes planting in strait rows, which is aided by stretching a string along every fifth row or so of rice plants.

The annual cycle of agricultural production of a Kinh family is presented in the table below. The case is a family of four persons living in Na Con hamlet. Please notice that the farmers in Viet Nam use the lunar calendar, which means that the twelve months of the year are not synchronised with the ones of the Western solar calendar. Hence, each of the twelve numbers represents one month of the lunar calendar.

### The annual agriculture cycle of the Kinh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month (Lunar calendar)</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First rice crop</strong> (irrigated land, part of lowland fields)</td>
<td>1. Ploughing, harrowing,&lt;br&gt;2. Prepare seedlings&lt;br&gt;Transplanting, manure&lt;br&gt;Weeding, fertilizing&lt;br&gt;5. Harvesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second rice crop</strong> (non irrigated, 100 % of lowland fields)</td>
<td>6. Ploughing, harrowing,&lt;br&gt;transplanting (after 20 days)&lt;br&gt;7. Weeding&lt;br&gt;8-9 Fertilizing&lt;br&gt;10. Harvesting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other lowland crops</strong> (part of lowland fields), maize, groundnut, and others</td>
<td>11. Planting/sowing&lt;br&gt;12. Fertilizing, weeding&lt;br&gt;1-2 (following year). Harvesting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Please notice that other crops than rice are harvested the first and second month of the following year.)

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75 What in Viet Nam is referred to as the lunar calendar actually is a lunisolar calendar (see Chapter IV, section: Agriculture, Handicraft and Trade).
Even if yields have increased since the 1960s due to a combination of better transplanting techniques, new and better rice varieties, and the land reform, the output is still low in general and in comparison with the Red River Delta area\textsuperscript{76}. Ecological conditions, as for example the limited access to water for irrigation, are partly to be blamed for the low agricultural output. But also the fact that good agriculture land is very limited in general in both communes concerned.

In the 1960s, when the Kinh arrived in the area, all agriculture land in the lowland was under the cooperative land tenure system, and all agriculture production was done in a collective way. One of the men who came to Na Con at that time tells the following: “From the beginning there were four brigades here, one with only Kinh, and the other three with Tày and Giáy. In 1972 the cooperative was restructured so there was more mixed brigades and distributed according to availability of water”. He claims that the production increased ten times after the land reform. This statement is of course exaggerated. However, with the de-collectivisation at the end of the 1980s, and according to the families in both hamlets, production increased considerably as the individual family could take its own decision regarding crop species, planting time, marketing, etc.

There is a unanimous positive attitude among the families towards the land reform and the adjacent dissolution of the cooperatives. However, some of the interviewed persons pointed at a couple of problems in connection with the reforms. One woman who had been among the migrants in 1966 told us that: “During the time of the cooperative, irrigation was made by the collective. Now it is difficult to manage alone. That’s why the yields are so low today. But what is good is that our children can go for work in other provinces if they like, it was not so before. Transports where not so good before and the market was controlled by the government. Now it is better. I myself appreciate the Doi Moi very much”. Dissatisfaction with the inputs of collective actions in the village daily life after the implementation of the economic reforms are reported from other villages in the northern mountainous areas of Viet Nam (e.g. by Henin 2002: 19, and Liljeström \textit{et al.} 1998: 168).

As all lowland, outside housing areas and home gardens, was under collective tenure when the Kinh arrived, it was easier for the immigrants to get into the system. There was no individual land tenure problem as each family just became a member of the cooperative, and hence automatically had access to agriculture land, and part of the output according to the size of the family and amount of labour input. In the uplands the situation was different. The forest

\textsuperscript{76} In Trang Son Commune in Ha Tay Province (where the Kinh migrants originate from) the average yearly output of rice on two-crop land was given to ten metric tonnes per hectare. While e.g. one family in Ban Kho said they harvested about one tonne on their lowland field of 0.22 hectare (i.e. 4.5 tonnes per ha). Hence, these cases indicate that the output from rice cultivation may not be more than half of that in the delta.
was a common property under the auspices of the commune, while the production was in the hands of each individual family. Gathering of fuel wood and timber, and hunting as well as cropping, were activities that each family had the right to carry out individually in the forest. Upland agriculture followed the traditional shifting cultivation pattern where the individual member of the community has the right to slash and burn a piece of forest for opening up a new field. This could be done wherever land was free and fallow had been long enough since last time the plot had been cropped. If all upland agriculture at that time could be classified as real shifting cultivation according to the categorisation discussed in Chapter IV is not possible to say, but that shifting cultivation was more common than today has testimonies from Kinh and been confirmed by minority families interviewed.

A Tày woman married to a Kinh gives a short description of how shifting cultivation was practised in earlier times: “After two-three years we opened up a new field and we didn’t come back to the same spot. Little by little it became forest. When in fallow anyone from the hamlet could clear it again, it did not belong to us [the family members] anymore”. In what the people in the two hamlets call the “collective time”, upland agriculture was more important for the family’s subsistence than it is today.

The reason for the changes in agricultural production can partly be found in the land reform, which conveyed the responsibility of the land, agriculture as well as forest land, to the individual family, and partly in the fact that new seed varieties have increased yields (especially the increase in rice output). When agricultural production was a collective task, the families got paid (mainly in kind) for how much they worked and in accordance with how much labour force the family had. This system disfavoured families with small children, who were not considered to be part of the labour force yet, and hence did not classify for receiving part of the cooperative output. Same Tày woman as above explains: “Families with little labour force got less from collective farming, so they had to have upland fields”. So the smaller the family, the more upland cultivation? “Yes, exactly. At that time it was not forbidden to cultivate in the forest”. Another informant confirms the importance of shifting cultivation at that time: “We also opened up shifting cultivation fields in the forest by help from the Dzao. We worked together in the collective farming, but we had problems with irrigation and low yields. So we had to depend on shifting cultivation and cassava production”.

Then with the Doi Moi at the end of the 1980s and the adjacent land reform, “Land was distributed to each family and collective production ended in 1988. It is much better now because we like to take care of our own land, not produce with others. After the land was given to us the production increased immediately”, says an old Kinh man in Na Con hamlet. Although it may give the impression that the land reform came suddenly in Viet Nam, and in the wake of the peristrojka in the former Soviet Union, the reality is that a first step had
already been taken in 1978. According to one informant: “(in) 1978 there was some
distribution of land to the individual families but production was still controlled by the
collective. In 1986-87 all agricultural land was handed over to the families”.\footnote{77}

During the cooperative time in Ban Kho hamlet there was some discordance between Kinh
and the ethnic minorities concerning labour input. A Kinh man in Ban Kho explained for us
that: “Thanks to Doi Moi we have no more conflicts with the minorities here. During
collective farming, we got paid according to how much we worked, and as we Kinh had more
experience of that kind of agriculture we worked harder. Then the others were offended. Now
we decide ourselves how much we want to work”.

In Na Con hamlet the land reform created some conflicts, and according to a Kinh woman:
“Doi Moi has given farmers a more independent life. I didn’t work during the time of
collective farming, but I heard from my parents. When they divided the land, the minorities
said they should have the best land as they had been here much longer than the Kinh. …. In
this way my parents lost all their best land to Tày families. They got so angry that they left to
settle in another district in the province”. One explanation to the fact that the Kinh has inferior
land regarding access to water and irrigation was given by the People’s Committee in Phu
Linh Commune: “In the de-collectivisation process land was distributed according to resident
area, which meant that the Kinh who had settled in the hamlet much later than the minority
people got land away from the water sources. That is why we now try to upgrade and expand
the irrigation systems.”

The demise of the forest legacy from collective to individual level also hampered the
possibilities to practice shifting cultivation in a rational way, which has directed the upland
cultivation towards semi-permanent or even permanent systems. Now the forest area is
divided either into family plots or fully protected areas\footnote{78}, and there is just not enough land to
rotate fields between cropping and fallow in an adequate way (Liljeström \textit{et al}. 1998: 139,
244). A Kinh man in Ban Kho explains: “After introduction of Doi Moi each family got its
own forest plot, and it’s not possible to carry out shifting cultivation any more. But during
the collective time all forest belonged to everybody. Now the government wants us to plant
trees on the forest plot”.

\footnote{77}{The certificate for agriculture land (the so called Red Book) is issued for the individual family on a twenty-
year-base.}

\footnote{78}{Each family has responsibility to protect its forest plot, and according to the land reform decree they are only
permitted to extract firewood and cut down a few small trees for timber, which means that theoretically it is
impossible to practice shifting cultivation, however it is carried out in some “semi-legal” mode. The forest land-
tenure certificate is issued for 50 years.}
Today access to agriculture and forestland varies considerably among the Kinh families in the study area, and between the Kinh and the ethnic minorities as well. In Na Con the ten Kinh families have family holdings in the lowland that vary from 0.16 to 0.36 hectare. The three largest holdings belong to three of the four oldest families, where the family heads’ age range from 57 to 75 years. The percentage of irrigated land varies even more within the group, with one family on one extreme having no irrigated land at all and the one on the other extreme having hundred percent of the land irrigated. The percentage of land irrigated does not follow any visible pattern; one family that only has ten percent of its land irrigated has one of the smallest landholdings, and constitute the only family in Na Con who said they were merely farmers and had no business whatsoever. Hence, they did not compensate the small agriculture area with other sources of income, such as carpentry or joinery, for example.

Among the minority families that we interviewed in Na Con (ten families) the lowland holdings varied as much as the ones among the Kinh. The family with the smallest area had only 0.14 hectares of lowland. The reason for this was to be found in the fact that land was distributed according to the size of the family, and when this family got its piece of land they did not have any children at all. Now with three daughters they compensated the small lowland area by having half a hectare of upland agriculture. The percentage of irrigated land is high among nine of these minority families, ranging from seventy to one hundred percent (with three families saying that they had all their lowland irrigated), the average being as high as 90 percent.

All minority families who we interviewed had upland fields, while this was the case for only one couple of the Kinh in Na Con. One exception among the ethnic minorities was a Giáy family that recently had moved out to the main road to open up a store; they had only fifty percent of their land irrigated and had no upland fields at all. The reason for this situation was, according to the wife, that the business took so much time that agriculture work had become a second priority. That is also the reason why most Kinh families had no upland agriculture: too much time was dedicated to other activities, especially the carpentry/joinery business, for being able to work with upland agriculture.

The percentage of families having a forest plot was about the same among the Kinh as among the minority families: seven of ten among the Kinh, and six of ten among the minorities.

The land tenure situation among the seven Kinh families in Ban Kho is somewhat different. Besides a widow living alone and without agriculture land (her children had taken over the land), the size of the land holdings are much more evenly distributed among the Kinh families in Ban Kho than among the ones in Na Con. Among the other six families, five had 0.22 hectare each, and one had 0.45 hectares. The family with the largest land holding had one third of the land irrigated, of the others one said they had 70 percent irrigated and the rest had
half of their land under irrigation. Land holdings among the minority families vary somewhat more than among the Kinh, from 0.22 hectare to 0.58 hectares. One family said that a quarter of its land was irrigated, the other four said that they had half of their land irrigated. The situation in the uplands was similar to the situation in Na Con with only two Kinh families having upland fields, while four of five ethnic minority families had fields in the upland. Only three of the seven Kinh families had a forest plot, and three of the five minority families had one.

**Business and Employment**

Besides agricultural production, other income activities are carried out among the Kinh in the two hamlets. Regarding small-scale business and employment, the level is much lower in Ban Kho than in Na Con hamlet. In Na Con carpentry and joinery\(^{79}\) are the main activities of this kind, *cum* weaving of palm leaf mats, distillation of alcohol and tofu (bean curd) production. The carpentry and joinery work is either done as a small-scale enterprise at home or in Ha Giang Town, or as employees in the workshops in the town. The main product is furniture, but a few of the Kinh also work as carpenters (i.e. with house construction materials). The mats that are produced in Na Con are sold to construction firms in the town to be used for making moulds for concrete fundaments. The marketing of the other two products, tofu and alcohol, is done in the local communes. Some families also run small stores in the communes.

When comparing the Kinh settlers in the two hamlets what strikes the beholder is especially the joinery skill in Na Con, a skill that give a good share of the cash income, which in turn makes agriculture not so fundamental in purely monetary terms; instead agriculture forms a subsistence base and constitutes a guarantee for the families’ food supply. It also constitutes a cultural frame (the wet rice culture of the delta). Of the ten Kinh families living in Na Con eight families have at least one family member working as carpenter/joiner (i.e. husband and/or a son). Three of the families have their own carpentry/joinery workshop, two in the town and the other in their homes in the hamlet. The other carpenters/joiners work as employees in the town or take temporary jobs in the agricultural slack season. The wife of one of the joiners says she takes job as day labourer in agricultural high season, and another wife distillates alcohol and makes tofu for selling. The wife in one of the other three Kinh families tells us that her husband is a retired tailor, but she makes some money by weaving mats, and selling ducks and chickens. It was actually only among two of the Kinh families that activities outside agricultural production were low. One of these families answered that they were only farmers; in the other the wife was distilling alcohol for peddling.

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\(^{79}\) With *carpentry* is here meant the production of material for constructions, and the activity to construct buildings (in general family houses), while the term *joinery* refers to the production of furniture.
One reason why none of the Kinh families in Na Con run stores is that the hamlet does not reach the main road and the Kinh had their houses far from the road, while Ban Kho lies partly along the highway, which makes the store-keeping business more profitable. The other reason is that the carpentry/joinery business, together with agriculture work, leaves little time for maintaining a store. Among the Kinh in Ban Kho there are two families who own stores, the only business not directly related to agriculture and animal production. The same families who run stores also produce alcohol from cassava, and tofu from beans to sell in their own stores. Two families informed us that they sold pigs, varying in number from four to seventeen per year. One woman who lived with her daughter and daughter’s husband (from the Ngan minority group) informed that her son-in-law had learnt some joinery by observing how the Kinh in Na Con had made furniture, and was now testing his skill by making some furniture for his own house. Later at the next visit to Ban Kho in April we had the possibility to see the result, a nicely made sofa and two armchairs. When asked if he would not like to continue the handicraft as a business, his answer was that he was not sure if he should try to put up a small-scale workshop at home or not. This is the only case in the two hamlets where a person from a minority group carries out joinery work. However, in general the “business spirit” seems to be low in Ban Kho, which is expressed in the following way by a middle-aged Kinh man: “I think the government should give us jobs. No idea to start business like carpentry because the demand is very low in the commune”. Other informants as well told us that there is no demand in the commune. A 73-year-old Kinh man expressed that he personally thinks: “… that the commercial level is low here. I have to go to Ha Giang to buy most things. I walk to the town. Before I went by horse. I have no bike, none of the children have bike”.

However, in Ban Kho there is a small group of Ngan men who have been trained by elder Ngan in house constructing. The group comes together and take a contract when there is job to do in the commune, but these men are not skilled carpenters in the same way as the joiners.

Because many Kinh men dedicate a great part of their time at the joinery and carpentry business, the women have to spend more time taking care of the agricultural fields than earlier. According to informants, traditionally the Kinh husband and wife shared the agricultural work more than they do today. That the ethnic minorities are to a much lesser extent involved in business is manifested in for example the fact that the minority husband in general is more active in agricultural work than the Kinh husband is (see Appendix II). Hence, the diversification of the Kinh economy has accentuated the sexual division of labour, so that in many families the husband takes care of the handicraft and only assists the wife to certain extent with the agricultural work (some men do not carry out any agricultural work at all), while the wife takes care of most agricultural work and the petty trading of alcohol, tofu, etc.
**Diversity and Economic Security**

Even if agriculture forms the subsistence base and is the activity that all families in the study area are involved in, many families are dedicating a lot of time to other income generating activities as well. In general these none-agricultural activities are carried out for supplying the family with cash. As was pointed out, there are more business activities going on in Na Con than in Ban Kho hamlet. However, this does not mean that all families in Ban Kho confine all their work to agriculture and subsistence production. The following excerpts from interviews with some of the families in the two hamlets highlight the problem.

A Kinh man in Na Con, who was a carpenter with most of his customers in the commune, answered two of our questions as follow:

*What is your main problem right now?*

“People are coming from far away and sell construction material cheap. They can compete because they are rich.”

*Have you ever thought of opening up a business in Ha Giang Town?*

“Yes, but too risky to take a loan. If I don’t get enough customers I will not even be able to pay interest. When I have job here I earn 30,000 dong per day.” (Less than 2 USD)

A Kinh woman in Na Con answered our question regarding investment in business activities:

*Why don’t you take a loan to start up some business?*

“I borrowed three million from a bank to buy cows but they died so I can’t take new loans. The bank wants me to pay one million per year now. I want my son and daughter to open up business in Ha Giang when they finish their training in Ha Tay. I also want to send the youngest son to Ha Tay to learn joinery. But I like farming and I want to continue with it. I want to live here and not move to Ha Tay. Easier to have business here.”

The following interviews with two families in Ban Kho hamlet highlight how agriculture production is combined with other activities and how these activities put constraints on the agricultural work.

First the voice of a Kinh who together with his wife runs a small store in the hamlet besides the agricultural production:

*How much land do you have, what do you produce, and what animals do you have?*

“We have one and a third mau [approximately 0.5 ha] lowland, mainly rice but also some maize and groundnuts. One third is irrigated two-crop land. We have a three-mau forest plot. We have no shifting cultivation now. Not possible because of the land reform and prohibition by the government. We also have a fishpond for the family’s consumption.”
Do you produce anything for the market?
“We don’t sell anything of agriculture products, instead we have to buy. But we raise sixteen to seventeen pigs per year to sell. We also produce alcohol that we sell. We make about five litres per day.”

How much do you get for one litre?
“One to two thousand dong.” (Approximately 10 cents US)

What is the turn around of the shop?
“It’s a small shop so only about a million per year.” (Approximately 70 USD)

Have you thought of expanding your business?
“I can’t expand because the market is very limited. I would like to send my children to higher education, but I’m afraid we don’t have financial possibilities.”

A Kinh couple answered our questions as follows:

Do you produce anything for the market?
“We sell two to three hundred kilos of rice per year for paying taxes. We have a motorbike for transportation. But maize is not enough so we buy from other people for animal feed.”

Where do you sell it?
“In Ha Giang.”

Do you take any employments?
“No.”

Other cash income activities?
“We have a small shop at the roadside. We buy products in Ha Giang and sell them in the shop, most is for children. We also produce alcohol and tofu.”

What is the profit?
“We make five litres alcohol per day and the profit is four thousand dong. I [the wife] sell tofu every morning at ten. Most customers are Tày and Ngan. We employ Ngan people to help with the agricultural work. We pay them fourteen thousand per day.” (Less than one USD)

The extracts above from interviews show the economic reality Kinh migrants have to face in the adaptation to the life in the highlands. The answers reveal a struggle to diversify subsistence in such a way that it enables at least a low level of commercialisation of the agricultural production (rice, tofu, alcohol, and also pig raising). As illustrated in the interviews, sometimes the economic diversification also includes small shops, and carpentry or joinery business.

At the same time as economic diversification is a form of risk spreading, it also contains risk taking. The woman who had borrowed money from the bank for buying cows exemplified the potential risk of taking a loan; when the cows died she was left with a large dept and no profit to pay back the loan. That such misfortunes occur make people think twice before taking loans for initiating or expanding businesses. In Ha Tày Province in the Red River Delta, the
original place of the Kinh migrants, the economy is also diversified in the way that it is based partly on agriculture and partly on business, especially furniture production. However, in the Ha Tay Province, with the huge market nearby that the capital Ha Noi constitutes, the possibility to commercialise agricultural products and handicraft is far greater than in the study area. The diversification of the economy is dependant on a system of social and economic networks with relatives in Ha Giang and in the delta, and with other Kinh as well as with the minority peoples in Ha Giang. Both these groups of relations (with relatives and with non-relatives) contain economic as well as social interactions, which will be described in the section below.

**Figure 9. Peddling**

Peddling in Ban Kho hamlet.
Social Relations and Networking

The social relations and networks\(^{80}\) of the Kinh migrants in the study area indicate that there are primarily two driving forces in action. One is the striving to keep contacts with the relatives (the living ones as well as the deceased ones) in the homeland of the delta. The other is the interaction with the local minority people to reach ethnic integration. Almost all informants pointed at the importance of nuptial and obsequial ceremonies in the process of interaction and integration between the Kinh and the other ethnic groups. A typical answer was the one given by a Kinh woman in Na Con hamlet: “I have friends who are Tày and Giáy. When there is a wedding or other ceremony we go there and they visit our ceremonies”.

Below the wedding and funeral ceremonies will be discussed, and in Chapter VII they will be examined further in the context of ethnic integration.

The social relations and networking that occur among the people of the study area mainly go on in three directions: Between the Kinh within the hamlets, between the Kinh and the other ethnic groups in the hamlets, and between the Kinh in the hamlets and the Kinh in the places of origin in Ha Tay Province. Some networking is present in the relations with the other Kinh in the communes, and with people in Ha Giang Town. The latter relations are mainly of economic nature.

The ties between the Kinh in Na Con and the Ha Tay homeland are stronger and contacts are more frequent than between the Kinh in Ban Kho and Ha Tay. Of the ten Kinh families in Na Con five said that they visit Ha Tay at least once a year. One said that they visited at special occasions (weddings, funerals or other important ceremonies), the other families visited rarely. Regarding visits from relatives in Ha Tay, one said that they received visits three to four times per year, one said once every year, while three said sometimes or at special occasions. The other families received visits by their relatives less frequently. In Ban Kho only two said they visited the old homeland every year (both families complained that it was very costly to buy the bus ticket), two families visited every second year, and two every fourth year. Of the other two, one said that they had not visited Ha Tay in twenty years and the other family said not in many years. The visits by relatives in Ha Tay to Ban Kho were also less frequent than in Na Con: “once in ten years”, “sometimes”, “seldom, and when they do they go back quickly”, were some of the answers. One reason for the differences in frequency of contacts with the old homeland is economic. The Kinh in Ban Kho is less

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\(^{80}\) One definition of a social network has been made by Whitten and Wolfe in 1974: “… relevant series of linkages existing between individuals which may form a basis for the mobilization of people for specific purposes, under specific conditions” (quoted from Seymour-Smith 1986: 208). Another and shorter definition was made by Dang Nguyen Anh: a “… set of interpersonal ties or links among a defined set of people” (2001: 180). According to Anh social networks are “… used by people to achieved specific ends because implicit in each link is a recognized set of right and responsibilities governed by the norms and values of the society” (ibid.).
involved in cash income activities and are poorer than their ethnic fellow men in Na Con, and hence have less possibility to pay the return ticket to Ha Tay.

The contacts the Kinh in Na Con maintain with the Kinh in the homeland are of two kinds: one that has a socio-economic character, and another that has a more socio-cultural character. The first kind of contacts is when the Kinh in Na Con send their sons to the relatives for training in joinery, and the daughters for training in sewing skills (less frequently); and the second one consists of visits to the homeland for taking part in, and even taking responsibility for, ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and ancestor worshiping. The socio-economic contacts also include loans given by the relatives in Ha Tay. A Kinh woman also informed us that “Sometimes during agricultural low season relatives come from Ha Tay to work as carpenters or joiners here. In that way they earn a little extra”. This points at a shortage of skilled joiners and carpenters in Ha Giang.

In contrast to the Kinh in Na Con the ones in Ban Kho only visit their relatives in the homeland now and then. Many of them complain that they cannot afford to travel to Ha Tay more than once in several years. This situation has increased intra-hamlet contacts instead.

The cash that moves in and out of the two hamlets, and between hamlets, flows in two directions: one horizontal and one vertical. The latter one mainly as loans from Kinh in the homeland to their relatives in Na Con and to a lesser extent to Ban Kho, and the pay-back to Ha Tay. Loans are also given horizontally within the hamlets, that is, between Kinh as well as between Kinh and the minorities. Cash also flows into the hamlets and within the hamlets due to the ongoing small-scale businesses, such as carpentry and alcohol production, and from employment outside the commune. All cash flow is greater to and from Na Con hamlet than to and from Ban Kho hamlet, including loans taken from relatives in Ha Tay. The cash flow net is well entangled with the social relations and obligations, and other network activities.

Marriage

In the two hamlets of the study there are two ongoing phenomena that are of special significance regarding the Kinh migrants’ adaptation to new social situations and influences between the different ethnic groups; one is the frequency of ethnic intermarriages, and the second one is the changes in the wedding ceremonies as such.

The interethnic marriages may take the form of a Kinh man taking a spouse from another ethnic group (the family is then considered to be a Kinh family), or a Kinh woman marries a

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81 It is actually the oldest brother who is responsible for the family’s ceremonies, but as pointed out it was the oldest brother who was forced to emigrate from the homeland in the 60s, which altered the continuation of old ceremonial traditions.
man from one of the ethnic minority groups (then the family is considered to be a family of the specific ethnic group the man comes from), and lastly a man from one ethnic minority group marries a woman from another ethnic minority group. Marriage between different ethnic minority people is more common than between Kinh and minority people in the study area. Of the interethnic marriages the ones between different Tày -Thái speaking people are the most common. This is natural as cultural differences are much less accentuated among the Tày -Thái speaking peoples than among the other ethnic groups. However, concerning integration between Kinh and the other groups, an old Kinh woman in Ban Kho told us that “Ngan are the best to assimilate into Kinh culture. Ngan like to marry Kinh. There are many mixed marriages now”.

The social organisation of the four ethnic groups concerned in this study are of the patrilineal category, which means that kinsmen are reckoned only on the father’s lineage. Hence, it is the husband’s ethnic affiliation that decides what ethnic group the whole family belongs to. This implies that if a family constitute a mixed couple (e.g. the husband Kinh, the wife Tày) the family is still referred to as a “Kinh family”.

As the Kinh in the area only constitutes a small ethnic group, the possibility to find a marriage partner within the same ethnic group is limited, even though one of the informants denies such a problem (see below). Kinh as well as the three Tày -Thái speaking groups in the two hamlets (Tày, Giáy and Ngan) have their social organisation traditionally built on exogamous patrilineages, which means that they have to search a spouse outside their own lineage. All ten Kinh families in Na Con belong to one of three lineages, i.e. they carry one of following surnames: Phi, Nguyen or Do. That is, the choice is very limited, but as one man says “We are not allowed to marry within our own lineage, but there is no problem as there are many Kinh in the commune. We also marry people from other ethnic groups. This is no problem as all speak Viet nowadays”. However, one Tày man in Na Con contradicts this statement: “They [the Kinh] can get married within the same lineage as long as they are not close relatives”. On our question if cousins (i.e. first cousins) can marry the answer is that they have to be more distant kinsmen than so. It is possible that what the Tày man says is true, and that the Kinh man does not want to admit that the Kinh in Na Con marry within the lineages. If this is so, it is a clear indication that great changes from the old and traditional social organisation pattern is occurring.

The reason that there are more Kinh men in Na Con married to women from the ethnic minorities than in Ban Kho is probably this limitation of choice of spouse within the same ethnic group. In Kim Thach Commune, and in Ban Kho hamlet, the situation is different where the Kinh migrated from different communes and different villages in Ha Tày Province, thus they originate from many different lineages.
Figure 10. Wedding

Wedding in Na Con hamlet. The groom returns to his parents’ home with the bride.

Ceremonies as Part of Social Relations
When studying Kachin and Shan peoples in the northern highlands of Burma in the 1940s, Leach noticed that ceremonies (or rituals) function as a communication media between different ethnic groups: “The people may speak different languages, wear different kinds of clothes, live in different kinds of houses, but they understand one another’s ritual. Ritual acts are ways of ‘saying things’ about social status, and the ‘language’ in which these things are said is common to the whole Kachin Hills Area” (1977:279). And indeed, the people of Na Con and Ban Kho hamlets repeatedly emphasise the importance of ceremonies; “We attend wedding and funeral ceremonies of the minorities whenever invited” is a common answer when asking the Kinh about their social relation to the other ethnic groups in respective hamlet. The Kinh often add that they also invited people from the other ethnic groups to attend their weddings and funerals.

82 Leach uses the term ritual as having the same meaning as the term ceremony. However, as noted in Chapter IV (footnote 30) today the two terms are often distinguished.

83 For descriptions of the two most important life cycle ceremonies, funeral and wedding, please see Appendix II.
When investigating the opinion on differences between the ethnic groups, one Dzao man (living in Kim Thach Commune but not in Ban Kho hamlet) answered: “I don’t find much difference between the groups in this place, only difference in ceremonies”. The differences and importance of trying to harmonise ceremonies (especially the life cycle ceremonies such as weddings and funerals) apparently is a very important threshold in the integration between the ethnic groups. For example, an old Kinh woman did tell us “When we visit minorities we learn from them, but they also have changed their ceremonies, for example wedding, so they are like ours. I think that the minorities should adopt the Kinh ceremonies at funeral and only mourn 24 hours, not three to four days. They could change that ceremony to Kinh style as they have done with the wedding ceremony”\(^{84}\). A 57-year-old Kinh man is on the same line when saying “We learn about each other’s ceremonies by visiting each other. According to Kinh customs a dead person has to be buried within 24 hours, while the Tày traditionally wait three days. But the minorities have changed so they also bury their dead within 24 hours nowadays. The wedding ceremony is also in a process of change to be Kinh style”. However, the change of the minorities’ funerals to be more in Kinh style is not by all the ethnic minorities considered as a rational step forward; e.g. as expressed by a Tày man in Na Con “The Kinh dig up the corpses after three years, clean the bones and make new graves, we don’t do that. I don’t think it is a good custom. They should give it up”. And when asked if he thought that it is good to shorten ceremonies, as the Kinh like the ethnic minorities to do, his answer was: “It depends. If you have money you can have long ceremonies. Now we normally have two days and two nights of ceremonies, but even that is long according to the Kinh.”

From the Kinhs’ point of view the ceremonies of the other ethnic groups are too expensive, both in monetary terms and in terms of lost working hours. One middle-aged Kinh man in Ban Kho says: “I speak Tày and Ngan. I go to parties and ceremonies they have. If you visit a wedding you have to pay 20,000 dong [just over one USD] according to customs. But if you visit many weddings it will be impossible. At the same time you can’t refuse visit weddings” (because it would be considered as impolite). Some of the people interviewed thought that the high cost for the ethnic minorities’ ceremonies was the reason why in general the minorities were poorer than the Kinh. A Tày man married to a Kinh woman expressed this idea to us in the following way: “Kinh has higher living standard because we have too many costly ceremonies, they don’t.” Our follow-up question: “Why don’t you change the ceremonies”, got the following answer: “We can’t change quickly because they are handed down by old generations. But we are changing slowly. I hope that the next generation has changed completely”. The differences in how the Kinh think regarding economic rationalisation of ceremonies is unfolded by a Kinh man in Ban Kho when answering our question on what he

\(^{84}\) According to a decree from the beginning of the 1970s the government stipulates that a person should be buried within twenty four hours from the moment of death, if no special circumstances prevail, e.g. the mourning relatives have a long distance to travel to the deceased person’s home (Kleinen 1999a: 180).
thought of the other ethnic groups’ ceremonies: “They are getting shorter, and that’s good as it makes them cheaper. Before when we visited their ceremonies, we gave different gifts than they did. We gave money in an envelop, they gave a chicken or something else. Now they also give money, which means that they get some of the expenses for the ceremony back”. This statement proves how the large majority society and the market economy have influenced the ceremonies (Endres 1999).

Parallel with learning from each other’s agriculture experience (shifting cultivation and wet rice cultivation respectively), ceremonies form an important bridge that links the ethnic groups together socially. In order to develop the social interactions and ethnic integration, the people in the two hamlets strive to harmonise the ceremonies, especially wedding and mortuary ones. Most visible of changes is the shortening of the minorities’ funerals so that they instead of lasting up to one week now last three to four days, or even only 48 hours in some cases. Nevertheless, there are some differences between the ethnic minorities’ way of performing their ceremonies and the Kinhs’ way of doing it. The most noticeable is perhaps the practising of double obsequies among the Kinhs.

The ceremonies as cultural and social bridges in the interaction and integration process will be discussed further in Chapter VII.

Subsistence and Economy: A Summary

The Kinh migrants of the study came from the delta land where the view of the flat and open landscape, dominated by large rice fields, continues without being broken by any forests or mountains. The water is regulated by dams and sluices, and flows tranquilly through dykes and canals. It is a domesticated landscape with domesticated water.

When arriving in the mountains of the North the Kinh migrants felt like coming to another and frightening world. Their first impression of the land they had come to live in was isolation; they thought that they had come to a wild and primitive place surrounded by a dark and dangerous forest, full of wild animals (Hardy 1998: 197). The families lived too far from each other according to the informants, and due to the lush vegetation sometimes they could not even see the next neighbour’s house, which for the Kinh accustomed to live in the crowded delta land was a sign of total isolation. Further, the impression of the agriculture practice of the ethnic minorities in the area was backwardness and lack of rationality (Le Trong Cuc 1995: 117; Salemink 2000: 126-29). The ethnic minorities practiced shifting cultivation in the forest and sowed rice in the lowland instead of transplanting it, etc. Initially the immigrants had to learn from the ethnic minorities how to find food in the forest, and how to practice shifting cultivation. Later the Kinh improved the lowland rice production by
showing the minority people how to improve the seedlings, and transplant the rice instead of broadcasting it. This method made the rice grow faster and increased output.

Slowly the Kinh experienced the importance of the forest and learned how to utilise it. At the same time extensive parts of the forests around the two hamlets had been cut down. When asked what they thought about the landscape around the commune today, they said that it was better now since it is more open. Some expressed that it looked more civilized. At the same time they said that no more forest should be cut.

Today the upland cultivation is implemented more as short fallow, semi-permanent or even permanent cropping systems rather than what is defined as real shifting cultivation according to e.g. Conklin (1957) or Ruthenberg (1980). For the Kinh the upland agriculture has decreased in importance as a food supplier, while for the minority families it continuous to be important. One may think that logically the Kinh families should have compensated the low amount of upland fields with more lowland and irrigated fields. But that is not the case. Instead an expansion of businesses (especially joinery) has been a way of compensating the decreased upland agriculture, and especially so in Na Con hamlet.

It has been pointed out that the land tenure is skewed in the hamlets of the present study. This injustice can, at least partly, be blamed on the system of distributing land in accordance with size of family and amount of labour force in the family. This system favours the families that have children old enough to be considered as full or half labour forces, and disfavours families who had young children at the moment the land reform was implemented. Then, when these children grow up and need their own agriculture land the parents only have enough land to maintain themselves. There is no land left to give to the children who want to form their own families. An old Kinh woman explained that “The land title is for twenty years but when a son gets married there is no land for him. If a son gets married and there is no land to give, the new family goes for shifting cultivation, animal raising, or collect herbs in the forest to sell. Even when a father dies, their is not enough land as most have more than one son”. However, there were cases of the contrary; if a married couple had children at the age to be considered labour force when land was distributed within the Doi Moi process, and if later when the children grow up and get married they move out from the hamlet or even from the commune, the parents have an excess of land in comparison with the family size.

Agriculture is the most significant subsistence activity, but other activities that support the families’ economy are also practiced. The base of the Kinh families’ economy in Na Con hamlet constitutes a combination of agriculture and carpentry/joinery, where the joinery

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85 We were informed that when land was distributed children under a certain age were considered as no labour force at all, others between certain ages were considered as half a labour force, and children older than them as full labour force.
business is so important that the Kinh there can be called farmer-joiners. Only two of the ten families are not involved in carpentry or joinery at all. Other side-income activities are the production and peddling of alcohol and tofu. The families that have their own joinery business are either having their own workshop at home or in Ha Giang Town, or they work as employees in the town. The joinery handicraft skill is something that the Kinh families have taken with them from the homeland in the delta. As all Kinh in Na Con hamlet originate from a commune in Ha Tay Province where joinery is an old tradition, they send their sons to the homeland for training among relatives. Despite the fact that joinery is the most significant cash income activity, other small-scale businesses are common, such as production of tofu and alcohol, and peddling of these products. The latter is in general the women’s business, they both produce and sell these products.

In Ban Kho hamlet the “commercial level is low” (as one Kinh man puts it) in comparison with Na Con hamlet. Besides a small-scale production of alcohol and tofu, and two stores (or kiosks), not much more of cash income activities are carried out among the Kinh families. As a consequence the economy is more subsistence oriented, and agriculture is playing a more important role than in it does in Na Con. The low cash inflow has made the Kinh families in Ban Kho poorer than their counterparts in Na Con. However, in both hamlets the Kinh try to diversify the economy by mixing agricultural subsistence production with a smaller amount produced for the market, and as mentioned keeping stores or practicing peddling. The migrants’ economy is built on social and economic networks that include other Kinh in Ha Giang as well as minority people, and extend all the way to the relatives in the Red River Delta. To maintain and extend these linkages, the partaking in each other’s life crisis ceremonies (especially wedding and funerals) is crucial. Ceremonies have been described above and are discussed further in Chapter VII in connection with a discussion on ethnic integration.
VI. Restructuring Livelihood: Natural Resources Use

Real societies exist in time and space. The demographic, ecological, economic and external political situation does not build up into a fixed environment, but into a constantly changing environment. Every real society is a process in time. Leach 1977 (1957): 5

Few would now dissent from the view that nature, and the extent to which it exists as a discrete idea at all, varies between different populations, according to different levels of discourse, and over time. Ellen 1996: 3

Introduction

As the idea with this study is to show how the socio-economic and cultural patterns change when people move to a new physical and social environment, the following two chapters focus on cultural and social traits that have a bearing on natural resources use and subsistence.

In the present chapter the concern is mainly with one of the questions that was raised in the first pages of the thesis: To what extent have the minorities’ local knowledge and culture impregnated the Kinhs’ lifestyle, and vice versa, in the process of adaptation to a new environment? In that process the perception of the landscape and how to utilise the natural resources therein proves to be at the centre when discussing adaptation and formation of local knowledge. This points at the cultural dimension in the use of natural resources and construction of subsistence systems. The knowledge of how to make a living out of the local environment has two sides, the technical and more flexible one, and the socio-cultural and more conservative one. However, the sides are intertwined and interdependent.

When the Kinh arrived in the highlands they could rather easily learn new food production, for example, how to cultivate cassava in the forest fields. Technically there were no great obstacles. However, from a cultural perspective it was with reluctance that the Kinh began cropping cassava for other purpose than animal feed; in the Kinh culture cassava is mainly produced for feeding the pigs, and not for human consumption. Despite this fact, poor families often have to subsist on cassava as a staple food during a few months of the year due

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86 The high population density and the shortage of agricultural land for rice production in the delta have made it difficult to reserve land for producing less valuable crops such as cassava. As a consequence, a substantial part of the cassava consumed in the delta is produced in the midland and highland areas where it is dried and transported to the lowland (personal communication with district and commune staff at the People’s Committees in the Ha Tuyen Province in 1988). Notice that the area of the present study is too far located for a profitable exporting of cassava to the delta.
to shortage of the “real” food, rice (Chinh and Hanh 2001)\textsuperscript{87}. The Kinh have had the technical knowledge of how to cultivate cassava since long time back, but not the cultural acceptance of it as a food crop.

It is this interface between the technical and the cultural aspects of natural resources use and agricultural production that is the main focus of the present chapter. The purely technical aspects seldom constitute a great hindrance to learn something new when livelihood changes (e.g., as mentioned above, a new cropping technique can be mastered in a fairly short time). Instead it is the cultural traditions that more frequently hamper a quick process of adaptation to a new livelihood.

The present study shows that new insights and new ideas became available in the area through the Kinh migrants, who in their turn adopted ideas and much of the local knowledge of the ethnic minorities living there. In the process the interplay between the cultural and the technical aspects decides what changes are possible and acceptable within the cultural norms of respective group. The process could be described as an integration of skill and knowledge at two levels, first as one between the delta and the highland cultures, secondly as one between the different ethnic groups within the highland area.

**World View and the Impact on Natural Resources Use**

As afore mentioned\textsuperscript{88}, the Kinh peoples’ way of perceiving nature is closely affiliated to Confucian thinking, that is, as a landscape manipulated by man rather than an untouched and pristine “wilderness” (Tu Weiming 1998:105). This means that the Kinh traditionally have a view that nature is coupled to a transformed landscape, a landscape that facilitates agricultural production, which implies a transition from “wilderness” to “civilisation”, or as Persoon puts it: “In peasants views in general as well as in perceptions of governmental officials wilderness and wildness are often closely connected. People living in an undomesticated nature are almost by definition ‘wild’, and uncivilized people” (Persoon 1997: 2). The present study is concerned with how these stereotyped concepts are changed when context is shifted and they are put under pressure. As one outflow of the analysis, the study will address what impact such changes may have on the utilisation of natural resources and formation of subsistence systems.

\textsuperscript{87} When interviewing farmers in the Ha Giang Province for the Vietnam-Sweden Forestry Cooperation Programme, in 1992-94, several times I came across poor families who very reluctantly admitted that they had to eat cassava for an emergency due to food scarcity in the lean months of the year, in general January-March. They felt embarrassed for not being able to eat rice twelve months per year.

\textsuperscript{88} See Chapter IV section: The Concept of Nature.
The hypothesis is that the changes in contexts through new land use, new technology and new social set-up, will also impact on worldview and life outlook. In order to address this issue the key features in delta and highland worldviews must be located. After that their change potential can be addressed. By key features is meant how conventions for natural resources are shaped by a long history of land use patterns, as well as by collectivisation and more recent changes related to de-collectivisation and market reforms.

*Extracting a Livelihood from “Wilderness”*

When leaving their home in the delta and arriving in the mountains of the North, the Kinh migrants felt like coming to another and scaring world. Their first impression of the land they had come to live in is best illustrated by the following excerpts from interviews. An old woman in Na Khon says: “This place was so quiet, and so different from the delta homeland”. A man, who was about fourteen when arriving with his parents, gives a prompt answer to our question how it was here then: “Terrible. We wanted to go home immediately”. Another woman, only a child in 1966, relates how it was when she and her parents arrived: “All was covered with forest, no road. We arrived by bus in Ha Giang Town and then started walking until the local people met us by horses. No Kinh had been here before. Language was the most difficult. We lived in the forest and I was so scared. We ate cassava left over in the forest fields”. The fact that the area was covered with forest is coming back in almost all interviews as one of the very first comments on the first impression of the new land. Forest is perceived as something negative: “Here [where their house is constructed now] was only forest and wilderness. We were so afraid to get lost. Where the commune office is now we couldn’t see anything [because of the vegetation], not like now. We had a feeling of being locked in. The thunderstorms and the lightning were so frightening, but the Tày and the Dzao were accustomed to it”, related by an old couple in their 70s. Some other voices: “Only forest when we came here. No road” (a 74-year-old woman); “The road was narrow, all covered with forest and there were not many people. It was deserted. I don’t remember so much, but I remember having a strange feeling coming from the delta” (a 47-year-old woman, only ten at that time).

The combination of bad roads, consisting mainly of horse tracks, a dense forest, and a sparsely populated area, gave the migrants an impression of arriving in a wild and untamed country. A man in his seventies tells us how it was in Phu Linh Commune at that time: “Empty, no people here. The road was very bad at that time. The local authorities had built small shelters for us. We felt lonely and homesick as the families lived far from each other, not like in the homeland. There was no electricity. My wife cried sometimes”. Other Kinh families expressed the same feelings over their new homeland as a land of wilderness: “The country was very wild and I felt very homesick the first time”(a 75-year-old man); “When we came, there were very bad roads here and wild pigs destroyed the crops” (a 57-year-old man).
One day when we after interviewing an old Kinh couple were continuing the conversation outside their house, the wife told us that they could not even use the hoes they brought from the delta. She explains that the soil is so different here that the Kinh hoe, made for the heavy alluvial soil in the delta, is no good in the highland soil. She brings two hoes of the local model, puts them on the ground and asks if I can take a picture of them together with herself showing the traditional Tày knife she carries on her back in the same fashion as the Tày women do (see photo below).

Figure 11. Old Kinh woman

![Old Kinh woman](image)

Kinh woman with a Tày knife on her back. On the ground, broad hoes of the local kind. Notice the typical Kinh house, built directly on the ground.

According to the inhabitants of Na Con hamlet the forest has changed from covering extensive areas to being almost cleared, and back to cover fairly large areas again. A Tày woman recalls when she was a young girl: “At that time there were many big trees. In 1975 the Department of Forest cut down a lot of trees. Then we planted new trees. But in 1983 the army came and cut down again. They needed wood for building a camp”. According to another informant this behaviour by the army had a negative impact on peoples’ moral regarding forest protection. Now they thought that they as well could cut freely in the forest. A Tày man confirms this information: “After the war with China [in 1979] we cut down a lot of trees. Now there are more trees”. However, after the land reform at the end of the 1980s,
when the responsibility for protecting the forest went into the hands of the individual family, the forest has recovered to great extent in areas where it is forbidden to practice agriculture. According to informants, today it is not a dense forest with large trees like it was when the migrants arrived in 1966. But not like it was some twenty years ago either when the forest had been thinned drastically, according to the same informants.

The following answers from both Kinh and some persons belonging to the ethnic minorities reveal some of the differences in the view of the benefit of trees and forest, and the perception of what a landscape ought to look like. First, an old Kinh couple’s answer being asked the following: *Why didn’t you like the forest? (When arriving in Ha Giang).* “We were so afraid that we made plans to go back to Ha Tay. There we lived close together and could get help from neighbours. We could see the neighbour’s house. Here we were isolated”. Their answer can be compared with the answer a 40-year-old Tày woman who answers the question: *When you were young did you go to the forest alone to collect wood or fruit for example?* “Yes it was normal for me to walk in the forest to collect firewood and plants. When the Kinh came they needed help from us to collect firewood, they didn’t know how”.

When migrating to Ha Giang Province the Kinh brought with them a perception of forests founded in an area without forest. The words from a Kinh woman in Na Con hamlet recalling when she arrived in Ha Giang with her parents clearly illustrates this perception: “All was covered with forest here then. We had to walk from the town, as there was no road. I was afraid of the forest. I was so young then and so afraid of wild animals, tigers and others”. Several of the informants told us that they cried when having the first meal after arriving in Ha Giang, and wished they could have been able to go back to the delta homeland immediately. Later they learned from the minority people how to use the forest. But the first reaction, to cut down as much trees as possible around the house, was a typical one for people coming from areas with little forests. The forest was perceived as a symbol of wilderness and “non-civilization”. A 70-year-old Kinh woman tells us the following: “We cut down a lot of forest the first time here, and now we have to walk two kilometres to get firewood”. When the migrants had learned the positive aspects of the forest, they had taken the first step to change their idea of what constitute “wilderness” and “civilisation”. This change is more evident among the Kinh who belong to the second generation of migrants. A woman, 37 years old, tells us that to make some extra money she extracts firewood from the forest and sell it to merchants coming from the town.

These comments illustrate the fact that where a people have their roots and cultural background plays a significant role when restructuring livelihood in a new environment. If, for example, a group of people conceive a forest as an area for food procurement (as part of the total subsistence system) or just wilderness is determined by the peoples’ cultural background: “Nature and culture can never be looked at separately for reasons of scientific
analysis without losing those essentials that characterize a culture. Configurations of natural phenomena in a social perspective indicate how societies perform in a geographical region over a certain time” (Seeland 1997:1). In this way nature is always a kind of cultural landscape, because the spectator has his/hers view filtered through “cultural glasses”, and mentally divides the landscape into patches of different land uses (ibid.). In northern Viet Nam, where the social and cultural situation is very complex because of the great number of ethnic groups and a variety of land use patterns, there are also different ideas of what constitutes nature, and how to utilise the landscape and its natural resources in a rational way (Corlin 1995: 6; Rambo 1997: 28).

The ideal landscape, from the Kinhs’ viewpoint, without “wild” forest, stands in contrast to the forested landscape in the highlands ideal for shifting cultivation. However, the landscape in the Red River Delta is not only manipulated by man, as a matter of fact it is entirely transformed by man (Le Ba Thao 1997: 323-31). Coming from such an environment the Kinh perceived the landscape in Ha Giang as wild and untamed, although in reality it was also manipulated by man; the upland forest had partly been cleared for shifting cultivation, the valley bottoms were patched with wet rice fields, and there were settlement areas cleared from forest.

The common view of the socio-economic situation in the Vietnamese highlands (mentioned in Chapter IV) has been that there are two categories of people living there: minorities with a “traditional” way of life (including shifting cultivation) and Viet people with a “modern” way of life (including irrigated rice cultivation), and that the different ethnic groups are exploiting different ecological niches at different altitudes (e.g. Liljeström et al. 1998: 3-6, Rambo 1997: 8, 28). However, that reality is more complex than so has been illustrated by for example Rambo (1995), Fatoux (2000) and Salemink (2000), as well as by the present study. The stereotyped picture of the socio-economic situation in the highlands, prevailing during decades, has been altered by the social, cultural and ecological changes during the last decades (Salemink 2000: 142-43). Immigrating Kinh have introduced new wet rice production methods, shifting cultivation peoples have moved down from the high areas and incorporated wet rice production in their subsistence system, Kinh have had to begin practising shifting cultivation or other upland agriculture to survive, the government’s agricultural extensionists have introduced new seed varieties, the market economy has been introduced in the wake of Doi Moi, etc. And nowadays shifting cultivation is getting difficult to carry out due to the land reform and the shrinking forest (Liljeström et al. 1998: 139, 244). These facts have not only meant a total transfer of the economy of many ethnic minority peoples, but also cultural alterations and ecological changes (Salemink 2000: 142-43).
From Cooperative to Individual Production

When farmers are migrating from one area to another, access to agriculture land is of prime importance. When other peoples already inhabit the new settlement area since long time back in history, it may be difficult for the migrants to get access to land without upsetting the local land tenure system. However, when the Kinh migrants arrived in Ha Giang, in 1966, the whole northern Viet Nam was in what people consider the “collective period”, i.e. most agriculture production was carried out under the cooperative system (Pingali and Vo-Tong Xuan 1992:701; Tran Thi Que 1998: 31-32). This meant that in the two hamlets of the present study all lowland was under collective tenure. Home gardens, which were permitted to cultivate by the individual family, was an exception. When the migrants settled in the two hamlets they were not facing a new land tenure situation (at least not in the lowland areas), instead it was similar to the one in the delta homeland.

The land tenure situation as such did not create any great tensions between the ethnic minority people and the migrants, according to the informants, instead there were some disagreements over the labour input in the cooperative. As a Kinh man told us: “During collective farming, we got paid according to how much we worked, and as we Kinh had more experience of that kind of agriculture we worked harder. Then the others were offended”. From the local minority peoples’ point of view the Kinh came and upset the “order of the day” in agricultural production by working harder (or more hours) in the cooperative fields than the minorities did. The minority people also had upland fields under individual cropping system and needed to use part of their labour input in those fields. The division of agricultural production into the two modes: the lowland and collective one, and the upland and individual one, did not exist in the Red River Delta (basically the only area that was cropped individually in the delta was the home garden).

If lowland agriculture and collective production was something the Kinh migrants were familiar with, they were much less familiar with upland cultivation and utilisation of forest areas. Any of the inhabitants of the commune could use forestland for shifting cultivation, extracting edible plants, collecting firewood, etc. without a special permission since the uplands were under community tenure, i.e. the property of all commune members. Because the collective lowland farming did not give an output large enough for all to rely on, also the uplands became increasingly important for food production. As one of the informants told us: “We worked together in the collective farming, but we had problems with irrigation and low yields. So we had to depend on shifting cultivation and cassava production”. During the collective period, upland cultivation played a more significant role for subsistence than today after the implementation of the land reform. This is a result of the increased output from the lowland fields since the privatisation of the agricultural production there, and the problem of

89 See Chapter V, section: Subsistence, Production and Land Tenure.
rotating the shifting cultivation fields since parcelling of forestland into individual family plots.

A woman from the Giây ethnic group answered in the following way our questions on the issue of how the Kinh migrants survived the first months in Ha Giang:

*How did they manage agriculture?* “First we worked together in the cooperative.”

*And the upland agriculture?* “They learned from the Tày.”

*Did you really have time to help them?* “Step by step they learned from us.”

According to the informants, collective agricultural production ended in the area in 1988 when *Doi Moi* and the land reforms were implemented there. This meant great changes for all the farming families, the ethnic minorities as well as the Kinh. Now there were no more problems with how much labour input each family should contribute. All informants agreed that the reforms had given much more freedom regarding agricultural production and business opportunities. One Kinh woman described here positive feelings for the reforms with very few, but expressive words: “Before *Doi Moi* life was more difficult here, for example chicken were stolen because people were so poor. May not the same happen again”. A man belonging to the Ngan minority group explains, also in a few words, his positive feelings towards the reforms: “We get higher yields now and people have more food. They [the farmers] spend more time taking care of agriculture production now”.

However, there were some disputes over the land allotment, and especially regarding irrigated land. It was mentioned in Chapter V that some of the Kinh felt like being disregarded when the collective lowland was redistributed to the individual families. Hence, the disputes over labour input during the collective period shifted to disputes over land when the *Doi Moi* reforms were implemented. In the words of a Kinh woman: “After de-collectivisation the minorities grabbed the best land and started cultivating it. We protested to the local authorities, but it did not help”. As also pointed out in Chapter V, an officer at the People’s Committee in the Phu Linh Commune explained that the Kinh have less irrigation land because they “…settled in the hamlet much later than the minority people and got land away from the water sources”. The officer also added: “That is why we now try to upgrade and expand the irrigation systems”. Nevertheless, these improvements had not yet been implemented according to informants in the hamlet.

The upland cultivation and its individual land tenure and usufruct rights has been a specific problem within the land reform. Neither the cooperative nor the individual land tenure, implemented since the introduction of the *Doi Moi* reforms, fit well into such a system (e.g. Do Dinh Sam 1994; Salemink 2000: 132, 142). As control of land in the former case was

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90 Section: Subsistence, Production and Land Tenure
strictly in the hands of the cooperative, and now in the latter strictly in the hands of the individual family (who is the sole tenure holder of its land), the alternating between common property and individual usufruct right (i.e. between fallow and cropping) does not work properly in any of the systems. This situation is due to the fact that the agrarian reform was to a great extent engineered with the lowland and permanent rice cultivation land use in mind. As a result the reforms fit better in these production systems than in the upland systems (Do Dinh Sam 1994; Salemink 2000: 132, 142). However, as was mentioned in Chapter V91, one problem that has emerged in the study area as a result of the individual parcelling of irrigated lowland since the implementation of the land reform, is that it is apparently somewhat unclear who is responsible for maintaining the irrigation systems. Hand in hand with the implementation of the individual land tenure, responsibility for the irrigation systems has shifted from being a matter for the work brigades in the cooperative, to being more of a family matter (Henin 2002: 19). Informants told us that there is competition over water now, and that the shovelling of water from field to field often has to be conducted by the individual family. Hence, it seems as if individual land tenure produces less control of irrigation systems and water, and the collective land tenure enforces not only control of land but also control of the irrigation systems and water.

It has been pointed out several times that the transfer of forestland from being a common property at community level to one at the individual level, or declared protected land, has made shifting cultivation and other fallow systems difficult to practice. The individual plots are now in general too small to support a system where most of the land is laid fallow at any moment in time (Liljeström et al. 1998: 139, 244). This is one of the reasons why the Kinh in Na Con cultivate much less upland fields than the minority people do. Another reason is that most of the Kinh there have chosen the carpentry/joinery business as a complementary source of income, which leaves less time for agricultural activities (see further in the last section of the present chapter).

As one Kinh man said: “No idea to start business like carpentry [in Ban Kho] because the demand is very low in the commune”. If there is a real lack of economic incentives or if there are other reasons behind the low level of business activities in Ban Kho was not clear. Anyhow, the socio-economic situation has meant that the living standard among the Kinh in Ban Kho are lower than among the Kinh in Na Con.

Topography and limited access to irrigation water in the highlands have made the land use situation very different from the one in the Red River Delta. And, as pointed out, this fact has also made the land tenure situation deferring from the one in the delta. If the Kinh migrants in Ha Giang had stayed in the delta they would have experienced the land reform differently. In

91 Section: Subsistence, Production and Land Tenure.
the delta most agriculture land is irrigated and there are no uplands. The division of land between uplands and lowlands, between forestland and agriculture land, and between irrigated and non-irrigated land, has complicated the picture in the mountainous areas. It is more difficult to redistribute land to farming families in a fair way if only a small part of the total agricultural area is irrigated, and if access to irrigation water is a problem, at the same time as distance to the housing area has to be taken into consideration. The present situation concerning resident area and access to water put the Kinh migrants in a disadvantageous position (especially the Kinh in Na Con hamlet), which has been stated is a consequence of the fact that they arrived in the area long time after the minority peoples, who already had settled on the best spots regarding access to water.

Rearranging the Environment

Agricultural production is undoubtedly to a great deal about how to rearrange the physical environment in order to make the desired crops grow there (Coward 1996: 15). The manipulation of the environment includes efforts to economise with water so it serves plant growing in an optimal way. The water shall moisture the soil, not wash it away. However, “Flowing automatically, water appears unevenly in the landscape, gathering either below the surface as ground water, or above the surface in separate cavities (holes, ponds, lakes), or continuous beds (streams, rivers). Such formations are of minor significance in an agricultural area enjoying ample precipitation, but they become immensely important in the water-deficient landscape” (Wittfogel 1978: 15). In northern Viet Nam there are no real dry areas, but part of the year92 the rainfall is not sufficient to grow wet rice without irrigation systems leading off river water to the fields. And as Tiep (2001: 226) writes, it “… has been affirmed by Vietnamese farmers, ‘first is water, second manure, third industriousness, fourth variety’. Many research papers suggest that together with many other factors (especially high-yield varieties) water contributes 16-35 percent to rice productivity”. In the mountainous areas in this season, the possibilities to capture and dam such unevenly distributed water from streams and small rivers is crucial for being able to harvest a second rice crop during the year (Dau Quoc Anh et al. 2000: 19). The collecting of the water for irrigation in the highlands is in general made in small dams, often constructed of mud. These irrigation systems are of course not nearly as large and as advanced as in the delta.

Both the farmers in the highlands and in the delta strive to use the environment so that the flow of energy supports their agriculture in a most advantageous way. Upland agriculture is based on regenerating energy by restoring vegetation cover (in shifting cultivation or other systems based on fallow) (Fox et al. 2000), or based on other use of woody perennials such as trees and shrubs (in agroforestry and multi-cropping systems) (Dau Quoc Anh et al. 2000). In

92 From November to March the monthly average precipitation in Ha Giang Province only reaches 41 millimetres. This low figure can be compared with an average of 317 millimetres for the other seven months of the year (Source: Ha Giang People’s Committee 2002).
contrast, lowland rice production is based on swaying and domesticating water for fertilising and watering the crops (Le Ba Thao 1997: 323 - 31; Phan Hue Le et al. 1997: 38).

Water use in upland cultivation is different. As there is high humidity in the air even during the season with low rainfall, other agriculture than wet rice is possible to practice without any artificial irrigation. In the mountainous north, upland cultivation is to a great extent utilisation of trees as fertilisers when slashed and burned for shifting cultivation, or as combined fertilisers and soil protectors in permanent agroforestry systems, and when let grow “wild” on the ridges for impeding heavy rains washing off the soil on sloping land (Bui Minh Dao and Vuong Xuan Tinh 2000: 12; Dau Quoc Anh et al. 2000: 10, 18). The forest is also “harvested” directly through the gathering of fruit, medical plants, firewood, etc. (Ireson and Ireson 1996).

As a result of these diverse production and extraction, there are different levels of manipulation of the natural landscape in the highlands, reaching from the valley bottoms with wet rice that constitute an almost entirely transformed landscape, to the forest on the ridges that more or less constitute a natural vegetation. These different levels of manipulation of the landscape are similar to the division of ecosystems into three levels according to the degree of human interference as Ellen (1982: 124-25) has suggested: pristine, partially altered and artificial ecosystems. The pristine ecosystem is then “untouched nature”, partially altered is the part of nature used for hunting, gathering and extensive agriculture (e.g. shifting cultivation), and finally the artificial system the one where intensive agriculture has reshaped the landscape profoundly (e.g. irrigated agriculture) (ibid.). As Ingold points out, referring to Godelier’s similar division as Ellen’s93, somewhere between the level where human beings only to certain extent has interfered in the ecosystem (i.e. partly altered) and the completely changed system (i.e. artificial) we find the “… distinction between the wild and the domestic” (Ingold 2000: 79). A distinction that for the migrating Kinh became an important dichotomy between upland and lowland, between a hilly forested landscape and a flat one without trees.

As an outcome of the manipulation of the natural landscape in the way described above, land use is much more diversified in the mountainous north than in the delta. One reason for the diversification is the vertical change in the landscape which impedes practising of certain subsistence activities in certain areas, another is the motley ethnic mosaic (Rambo 1997). However, people have travelled between the different areas in the highlands with an increasing pace as a result of improved roads and transport facilities the last decade or so. Hand in hand with the increased mobility of people, ideas and knowledge have also moved...

93 “Godelier goes on to distinguish five ‘kinds of materiality’, depending upon the manner and extent to which human beings are implicated in their formation” (Ingold 2000: 79); i.e. Godelier is more focused on the material humans are extracting from nature than Ellen is when dividing mankind’s activities and change of ecosystems into three levels.
and been integrated between different ethnic groups, and as was noticed earlier in the chapter, with the result that now it is not always possible to attribute one land use system to one specific ethnic group.

It was certainly with great reluctance the Kinh migrants in Ha Giang went out the first time and began clearing land for shifting cultivation on the forested hills surrounding their new homes. However, soon they faced the reality, the landscape they had perceived as wild and untamed could also be used for food procurement and food production. In the words of one of the migrants relating the first time in Ha Giang: “We began with shifting cultivation in the forest. We cropped cassava and maize. We had cropped cassava in Ha Tay, but the local people showed us how to clear a plot and how to burn it. They also taught us to leave leaves to mulch on the ground as fertilizers. We use the products from shifting cultivation field for animal feed and as emergency food”. The last statement not only confirms what was said on the first page of the present chapter, that for the Kinh cassava is primarily animal feed and only an emergency food for humans, but also that upland cultivation is not a “real” agriculture and does not produce “real” food, viz. wet rice.

Migrating from the delta land with its large-scale irrigation system to the highlands, the agriculture production in the highlands must have given the Kinh migrants an impression of being practiced at a very small-scale, and the agricultural work carried out very individually (especially in the upland fields). There were great socio-economic and cultural dissimilarities between the mountainous north and the “hydraulic civilisation” of the Red River Delta that the Kinh migrants had left behind.

Collective and Individual Agriculture: Different Socio-Economic Patterns

The large infrastructure in irrigated agricultural systems undoubtedly demand great labour input. In the feudal time peasants paid their tribute to the system in form of corvees, and in the 20th Century, for example, in form of labour input in the cooperative work brigades as in Viet Nam (Wittfogel 1978: 25, Tran Thi Que 1998: 32). Pointing at this fact, and at the fact that the labour has to be well coordinated, it has been argued that a “hydraulic civilisation” goes hand in hand with a despotic and centralised regime (Hauser-Schäublin 2003: 153).

One theory, commonly referred to, that attempts to explain how these “hydraulic civilisations” are merging is Wittfogel’s work “Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power” from 1957 (1978). Wittfogel maintains that strong and centralised governance is imperative for the development of a “hydraulic civilisation”. According to the theory this centralised power structure leads to what he has branded “Oriental despotism”; a type of political system where the rulers exercise total power over the subjects, and no room is left for a democratic development. However, the theory has been contested by several researchers, e.g. by Geertz in 1980, and by Lansing in 1987. The adversaries claim that irrigation
agriculture can be consistent with a weaker, less despotic and more democratic regime (Hauser-Schäublin 2003: 153-54).

Without getting into a discussion on whether irrigation agriculture has to be under despotism or not, it can be asserted that what is imperative for such a great endeavour as the construction and maintenance of a large-scale irrigation system is the ability to organise the farmers into work forces for construction and maintenance of the system, etc. (Coward 1980:15-17), and that the coordination of these work forces requires some kind of coordinating authority, being under a despotic, democratic or any other regime. However, such an authority is most likely to be found at the local level (e.g. at the district and the commune level, or even down at village level) and not at the national level (Coward 1980: 23; Phan Hue Le et al. 1997: 37). Of course other forms of agriculture production than the irrigated one may require that the farmers gather and work together, but then in general only occasionally and for short periods, for example at harvest time (Coward 1980: 15). In contrast, irrigated agriculture requests teamwork more or less constantly, not only for construction and maintenance of the irrigation canals, or for pumping or shovelling water between the fields, it also involves protection against seasonal inundations; a task which obliges the construction of large dykes (Wittfogel 1978: 24).

Thus, the Viet people in the delta, like in many other “hydraulic civilisations”, have during centuries oscillated between the effort to lead water off from rivers into the fields, and the struggle to protect the fields from unwanted flooding. This combination of advanced engineering and coordination of the labour force were important ingredients when the early Viet society in the delta developed into a densely populated hydraulic state (Nguyen Khac Vien 1987: 23). They are also important ingredients for shaping the culture, the social relations and the worldview in general among the Kinh.

As one outcome of this worldview, an irrigated paddy field is conceived as civilisation, while non-planted trees (i.e. a forest) is a sign of the “wilderness” described above; or as several informants relating the first impression of the new settlement area as only “forest and wilderness”. In this view a forest is not conceived as having much value as a resource base until it is transformed into a domesticated resource, i.e. transformed to paddy land or perhaps to a home garden (Corlin et. al. 1989: 9; Persoon 1997: 7). Hence, the Kinh appreciate nature when it is changed and manipulated according to the specific Vietnamese cultural model prescribing that man has to civilise it (Salemink 2000: 136). This is a fundamental difference from many mountain dwelling minorities’ perception. For them, and especially for the ethnic groups who depend on shifting cultivation for their subsistence, the forest as such is a resource (ibid. 133). When an area is not cropped it is in fallow, but still used for hunting, gathering of edible plants, collecting firewood, etc.
As has been pointed out in Chapter IV94, there are few agricultural systems being further apart than shifting cultivation and irrigated rice cultivation. In the latter, the fields are fixed and with clear borders between the different family plots. The irrigation water flows through the fields, strictly controlled by the farmers. In contrast, in shifting cultivation the fields are “floating” around instead, shifting from fallow to cropping and back to fallow again, and even shifting from one user to another. Shifting cultivation, as well as other upland farming, are entirely dependent on freely running rainwater. Actually it is a semi-domesticated nature the farmer is using in shifting cultivation (Ellen 1982: 128). And as this agriculture frequently is carried out in forested areas it is among the lowlanders often perceived as a not really civilised occupation (Persoon 1997: 7; Salemink 2000: 127). The Vietnamese Government separates agriculture land from forestland when making inventories of the national resources and when planning land reforms. This implies that, in their view, agriculture is not practiced in forests95.

In any agricultural system access to land is important. In general if the system is based on permanent cultivation, people who control land also hold the political and economic power (Phan Huy Le et al. 1997: 38). However, if the system is based on irrigation, control of the water flow may be as important as control of land per se (Phan Huy Le et al. ibid.; Wittfogel 1978). In shifting cultivation (or other upland fallow systems) control of water is not possible and land is often a common property, i.e. land is controlled by the community as a whole or by certain kin groups (or clans) (Corlin 1998: 10; Pham Quang Hoan 1995). In this system each individual family has usufruct right to a plot as long as it is cropped, afterwards and in general it falls back to be controlled by the community as a whole, or by the kin group (Nguyen Van Thang 1994; Corlin 1998: 10-11).

The settlement pattern, natural resources management, and land tenure among the people living at the high altitudes, and who solely subsist on upland cultivation, have formed special socio-economic patterns. For example, as reported on the traditional lifestyle of the Hmong, agriculture work is in general carried out at family level, land is controlled by the local kinship groups, and the individual family cultivate land under usufruct rights for a limited time (Corlin 1998: 9-10). When land is under extensive shifting cultivation, as it is among many of the Hmong groups, large areas must be accessible for fallowing long time enough for regenerating vegetation96, as described in Chapter IV97. Such a system does not encourage

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94 Section: Shifting Cultivation.

95 In fact all land in Viet Nam that is classified as forestland is not clad with trees and used for forestry activities. Instead great parts are under agricultural production (shifting cultivation, permanent agriculture, agroforestry, etc.), or even constitute barren hills (Fagerström 1995).

96 This is the proceedings if it concerns rotational shifting cultivation; if the group in question is practising pioneer shifting cultivation the proceedings are somewhat different as the farmers never come back to the same spot again.
formation of large villages or densely populated settlements; one village may only constitute something between seven and twelve households (Tapp 1986). At these high altitudes livelihood, and the whole lifestyle, is far apart from the one in the delta.

At some lower altitudes the livelihood system of the three minority groups in the two hamlets (Tày, Ngan, Giáy) of the study area could misleadingly be interpreted as if it was in a kind of evolutionary stage between the shifting cultivation of the real highland areas as described above, and the livelihood of the wet rice cultivating Kinh in the delta. The combination of shifting cultivation and other upland agriculture, cum. irrigation in the lowland contributes to this image. However, for example the Tày people in other areas in northern Viet Nam are reported to have used a similar system since time immemorial (e.g. Rambo 1995; Ireson and Ireson 1996). And, as mentioned, the Tày in one of the hamlets of the present study maintain that they have a five hundred year long history in the area, as evidence referring to a temple in Phu Linh Commune where some very old and traditional Tày bronze drums are found. The Tày have been settled farmers in the valleys of the highlands of northern Vietnam for a long time (Ireson and Ireson 1996: 6). Due to the settled life they have been able to develop fairly large villages (often together with other Tày-Thai speaking peoples); some of the villages in the Ha Giang Province may contain up to a hundred households; although far from that large are the two hamlets of the present study.

The Tày subsistence is, as mentioned in Chapter IV, by Rambo branded “composite swidden agroecosystem”. The system includes rotational shifting cultivation (or swidden cultivation) and permanent wet rice agriculture. And as Rambo (1995: 69) points out: “The swidden component is neither a survival from an earlier purely swidden-based system nor is it a recent innovation adopted in response to increased population density and consequent shortage of paddy land. Instead, it is a stable adaptation that has persisted for generations, perhaps even centuries, in the mountain and valley zone of the highlands of northwestern Vietnam”. Whether this should be interpreted as a sign of permanency or “evolutionary stage” is a matter of taste. It all depends on with which speed one expects evolution to take place, and also whether one views evolution as an either constant process or happening more abruptly, i.e. as spurts of transition between more stable systems. However, in the study area in Ha Giang, shifting cultivation has been replaced to a great extent by systems of short fallow, semi permanent and even permanent cultivation in the upland areas. This pattern

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97 Section: Shifting Cultivation.

98 In contrast, the Hmong, who live at lower levels and dedicate part of their agricultural efforts on irrigated fields (often terraced hill sides), tend to live in larger villages, with thirty up to eighty households (Tapp 1986, Pham Quang Hoan 1994).

99 Section: The Tày: A Valley People.

100 The permanent systems include multi-cropping (i.e. a spatial distribution of a variety of crops in the same field) and rotational cropping (i.e. the crops are shifting from season to season on one and the same spot).
follows the common trend in shifting cultivating areas in many parts of the world, which experience an increasing population pressure, with constantly shorter fallow periods and eventually permanent or semi permanent cropping (Boserup 1993). Nevertheless, the upland cultivation continues to be a very important component in the total subsistence system of the minorities in the study area.

At the same time as one can state that the physical environment and the landscape a people live in shape their culture, it is also quite safe to state that the culture shapes the landscape (Schmithusen 1997: vii; Seeland 1997: 1-2). As already indicated\textsuperscript{101}, Confucianism has impacted on the Kinh peoples’ view on nature and man’s role therein. It was also indicated that according to this philosophy man has the right to utilise and restructure nature so that it serves human ends (Xinzhong Yao 2000:176). The landscape in the Red River Delta with its irrigation canals, sluices, dykes, etc. is a typical example of how man can dominate nature, to be able to utilise almost every square metre of the land in an optimal way. This situation constitutes a sharp contrast to the situation among the highland peoples. There, at the higher altitudes the landscape has been kept, although not in a pristine stage, though in a far less manipulated stage than in the delta, or for that matter also less than in the valleys of the mountainous areas. As mentioned, the Dzao minority people are more inclined towards Taoism than the lowland Kinh. To rely only on upland agriculture is to rely on unpredictable weather conditions, especially unevenly distributed rainfall over the year, and as well on nature’s ability to regenerate vegetation in the fallow areas. And not as under an irrigation system, where all regeneration of natural vegetation is oppressed and the water flow is steered into the fields by humans. The situation in the delta does not exactly coincide with the Taoism philosophy of nature, which instead advocates temperance with human activities that may conflict with nature. The general position of this philosophy is that if humans refrain from manipulating too much with nature, things will be in its right stage as is expressed in the book “Tao Te Ching”\textsuperscript{102} (Schipper 2000:2; Teiser 1996: 8-9; Yi-fu Tuan 1985: 62).

Among the people who practice composite agriculture, for example the Tày, one would expect their view on natural resources use and changes of the landscape to be of a split kind, i.e. one view of the uplands and another one of the lowlands. And indeed the Tày are influenced by both Confucianism and Taoism (as well as by Buddhism), but so are also the Kinh (Dang Ngiem Van et. al. 2000: 124). However, the fact that the minorities as well as the Kinh are not confined to one religion is indicating flexibility in the world outlook and in the view of nature and how to utilise it. For example, both the Kinh and the minority peoples of

\textsuperscript{101} See Chapter IV section: The Concept of Nature.

the study area have proved an adjustment in their respective view on what constitutes a nice landscape (as will be illustrated further down in the chapter).

**Restructuring the World View and Natural Resources Use**

The new ecological and economic conditions made the Kinh adapt under new circumstances. Chapter V 103 shows how this took place in such a way that they keep using some of their inherent knowledge from the delta that proved to be useful in Ha Giang, at the same time as they adopted part of the highland knowledge that also proved to be useful. The reshaping of a cultural relationship to existing natural resources turned out to be a gradual process. Adopting and practising this knowledge may in some cases only be temporary; for example when some of the Kinh in Na Con hamlet experienced decreasing yields in the shifting cultivation fields they ceased practising shifting cultivation, while the minorities continue despite the low yields. This section accounts for the process of value change both in a delta and a highland tradition.

**The Cultural Dimensions**

There are cultural dimensions to take into account. One is the fact that ethnic minorities in the two hamlets have practised shifting cultivation by tradition as an integrated part of the total subsistence system for a very long time. They accept the lower yield from the shifting cultivation (in comparison with the wet rice production) and just continue with it. Another is a space-time dimension: Kinh do not practice any upland cultivation on the forest plots if they consider its position too far from the homestead. A “rational” calculating of time consumption in comparison with output, a calculation that the ethnic minorities do not make, at least not according to the Kinh. A third dimension, apart from values ascribed to livelihood levels and time investment, is the perception of natural resources to manage. The major difference in outlook on water resource management, connected to wet rice production and rainfed upland production, means that the Kinh have a strong (and among most families the only) focus on wet rice in agricultural production, while for the minorities the upland is as important as the lowland irrigated agriculture, which implies that they spend a substantial part of their time also cultivating the uplands 104. In an attempt to illustrate these three cultural dimensions, below three cases are given, one from a minority person’s point of view and two from the Kinhs’ points of view.

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103 Section: The Kinh Families and the Socio-Economic Situation.

104 It must be emphasised that the home gardens, often mentioned as one important component in agrarian systems in Viet Nam (e.g. Karyono et al. 1996: 96-101), are not so developed in the study area, neither among the minorities nor among the Kinh, which is a consequence of water scarcity according to informants.
The first example shows how the shifting cultivation practice connects to low production levels with livelihood conceptualisation. The combination of upland and wet rice production is old among the Tày, consequently it was developed during the time when the population density was much lower than it is today. Hence, access to lowland for irrigation was greater, but nevertheless the Tày did not change to purely lowland farming (neither did they confine the land use only to upland cultivation). This points to the fact that the combination of upland and lowland cultivation constitutes a sustainable system in the area, and that for the Tày sustainable production is more important than to maximise output by producing only in lowland irrigated fields (Rambo 1996: 75). One Tày farmer in the study area showed us with pride his upland cultivation field with a variety of crops; a fairly large area with lush maize stands, smaller areas with other crops, and some patches with a variety of different crops, but only a few of each, like small experiment fields. He explained that they had to have one family member more or less constantly at the spot for keeping vigilance over the field during the season, partly for protection against marauding birds and trampling buffaloes, and partly for the risk of human theft. A simple shelter had been built against sun and rain for the family member who at the moment had the task to protect the field.

The second example concerns the Kinhs’ view on location of time, labour input and economic output from upland cultivation. The following statement made by one elderly Kinh illustrates the position: “We also tried shifting cultivation [the first years in Ha Giang] but did not get any good yields. Instead we began other activities to get cash income, such as joinery, weaving of mats, and alcohol production. You see, for example … [my neighbour], who is Tày, even today carries out shifting cultivation instead of dedicating time to cash income activities. This is because they [the minorities] don’t have the skill for such activities. Some Kinh also practice shifting cultivation because they lack the skill for other activities and because they have the forest plot close to the house. But look at … [my neighbour] he has his plot far from the house and his mother has to walk far to work there. They have to have someone there all the time to protect the crop from buffaloes”. We should not forget that when the Kinh migrants arrived in the area in 1966, production was at large for self subsistence and the market undeveloped, while in contrast the Kinh had experience of a diversified and commercialised economy with them from the delta.

The third example illustrates the concern among the Kinh for irrigation, maintenance of the systems, and shortage of wet rice land. An old Kinh woman told us the following: “We don’t have enough [irrigated] rice land for everybody. Now we compete over water. Sometimes we have to go out into the field and shovel water to irrigate”. Her words not only tells us that there is a shortage of irrigated land, but also unveil the opinion that the earlier collective actions for taking care of irrigation is not being carried out to the same extent now. Instead of
being a task for the cooperative work brigades, in the highlands irrigation is now more of a family matters than a task for large work groups (Henin 2002: 19).105

The three cases above illustrates the Kinh migrants’ and the minorities’ different view on how to manage resources, how to allocate time on different subsistence activities, and how to use the knowledge and the skill acquired in different areas under different ecological and social conditions.

**Integrating “Knowledges”**

Important parts of the cultural background of a certain people are the knowledge and the skill learned and developed in the ancestral homeland. Perception and knowledge of the world around us is in general founded in a specific environment (physical as well as socio-cultural), and in a limited geographical area, which may include anything from a village and its neighbourhood to a much wider area (Turnbull 1993/94: 1). Hence, the idea of how to use the natural resources in a specific physical environment is constructed locally and it is often attached to an ethnic group’s identity with that specific environment (Hornborg 1993: 131). The identity, based on direct experiences in the area, is central when forming the subsistence system. This kind of knowledge is in first hand developed for solving local problems. From this viewpoint all knowledge is in a sense local knowledge (Turnbull 1993/94)106. However, knowledge may be developed locally but in some cases brought by people to other areas and used there more or less successfully under other ecological or cultural conditions.

Different kinds of “knowledges” (local, “imported”, “foreign”, “scientific”) have been integrated into one another in the study area of Ha Giang. How has this been possible and how has it impacted on the people and the land use pattern? There had been a movement of people in the area long before the Kinh migrants arrived there. Different ethnic groups have moved southward from the nearby Chinese Province of Yunnan, others have moved in from closer localities. Some of the people who traditionally dwell on high altitudes have moved to lower altitudes (e.g. Hmong and Dzao), while some have moved in the other direction (e.g. Kinh and Tày on government assignments to the remote highland districts). So perhaps the most pertinent would be to consider both a “horizontal” and a “vertical” movement of people into and within the area.

105 Henin reports from a village in Lang Son Province in northern Viet Nam that “Farming families have thus become responsible for providing themselves with access to water. They usually do so by building irrigation ditches and canals to bring water from streams to their fields. These individual networks, unplanned on the community scale, amount to a significant decrease in arable land in the village” (2002: 19).

106 There are a wide range of different terms often used synonymously with local knowledge, such as indigenous knowledge, rural people’s knowledge, indigenous technical knowledge, traditional environmental knowledge, etc. (Sillitoe 1998: 223 n.).
In addition, different government projects have caused people to move out into the rural areas (horizontally as well as up to the higher altitudes), albeit often only temporarily. Naturally, this development has promoted an exchange of ideas and adoption of knowledge based on experiences in different kinds of eco-environments. Despite the fact that some of the ethnic groups came to the area from China, one cannot say that it is a long distance move as the border to the Province of Yunnan only lies some thirty kilometres away. In addition, the ethnic groups who made the move to Ha Giang were different “highland people”, hence they moved from one highland area to another, and from one socio-cultural situation to another, but to a quite similar one. However, since it concerns external influences and a flow of ideas in different directions from and within a rather limited geographical area, it would not be relevant to consider the process some kind of “internationalisation” or “globalisation”.

However, with the expansion of the French colonial power in the 19th Century into Viet Nam’s most northern part, also the mountainous areas had been reached by the European culture; perhaps one can say that a kind of “early globalisation” had taken place. But in the extreme north it seems as if the influence from the French was mostly visible in form of military presence, and then especially in urban centres and provincial capitals, e.g. in Lao Cay (in the neighbouring province to Ha Giang), an important military point in the protection of the border to China (Nelsson 1998). As was pointed out in Chapter III107, few Vietnamese migrants settled in the northern highlands during the colonial epoch.

The collectivisation of agriculture land and production initiated in the 1950s, and masterminded in the capital Ha Noi, meant that the influence from the Kinh majority people had reached the northernmost corner of the country. However, with the forced migration in the 1960s the contacts with and the impact from the delta culture increased in Ha Giang as Kinh people settled even in such remote and small places as the two communes where the present study was carried out. New ideas of how to use the natural resources penetrated all the way out to these remote villages.

Local knowledge is often considered as something perfectly adapted to a certain eco-environment and to a certain ethnic group in a kind of static position, as if changes in the physical and social environment do not occur (Turnbull 1994; Warner 1991; Nygren 1999; Dau Quoc Anh et al. 2000). However, as Paul Sillitoe points out, local knowledge may be an adequate tool for managing local resources, but it is not always good at coping with quick changes, and “…we need to guard against any romantic tendency to idealise it” (Sillitoe 1998: 227). Adopting other people’s knowledge and incorporate it into one’s own locally developed knowledge can be one way to handle rapidly upcoming changes due to external factors, e.g. population pressure as a consequence of in-migration. That local knowledge in this way is

107 Section: Migration During the Colonial Era.
changed by “importing” parts of other people’s knowledge is nothing unique for Viet Nam, there are numerous cases in other parts of the world.

One example that illustrates the flow and adopting of knowledge is a case study carried out in 1996 by Nygren who studied local knowledge among different communities in a humid tropical forest area in south-eastern Nicaragua. The area she studied had a very heterogeneous population consisting of peasant smallholders, land speculators, squatters, forest extractors, ambulatory traders, timber dealers and healers. In such environment it is not possible to consider “… local knowledges as internally uncontested systems arising from communal commitment to consensus …” (Nygren 1999: 277). Shifting cultivation was mingled with modern agribusiness, traditional perception of nature mixed with “modern” one, etc. (ibid. 270). Nygren points at the tendency among researchers to see local knowledge systems as isolated phenomena: “… anthropologists have been happy to highlight the ‘indigenous point of view’ and to see the local people as producers of endogenous knowledge regarding natural resource management, cosmological theories and medical cures; however less attention has been paid to the contested and hybrid character of such knowledges. The concept that local people produce ‘shared knowledge’, which serves as a ‘cultural totem’ about ‘how we know’ …, includes an implicit assumption of people living in closed communities and having unique ways of knowing” (ibid. 268).

When knowledge, developed in one area, is taken to another area where it is integrated with knowledge developed by the local people, a new amalgamate of knowledge emerges, as is the case in the study area. However, the emerging of new local knowledge is not a straightforward process, but a matter of transformation and adaptation during a long period, sometimes during generations. The changes not only contain technical adaptation, it my also imply changes in people’s general world outlook and stance on nature and its utilisation. In this process of change the cultural background has a clear implication on how people behave in a new environment (Lawi 1999). One area where this is especially explicit is in the view of how to use natural resources. Lawi studied a people in northern Tanzania, their local ecological knowledge, and changes in the perception of landscape use since the 1920s. Part of his conclusion was that: “Quite often, … , people found new knowledge (including mythical aspects) from outside the local context relevant and practical advantageous. Sometimes this realization came right away, and sometimes it occurred after a period of scepticism and resistance, but the key element was local interpretation of new packages and integration of suitable elements into the existing body of ideas, skills, and attitudes” (ibid.).

Both the Kinh migrants and the minority peoples in the Ha Giang case have in a similar way, from each other’s knowledge systems, picked “suitable elements” and incorporated them into their respective systems. In this way the knowledge systems have been changed. Although still deferring (in ceremonies, in agriculture, in handicraft business, etc.) the knowledge
systems of the ethnic minorities and the Kinh are slowly becoming similar. During this process land use and agriculture have been a central theme.

**Balancing the Landscape**

The socio-economic interactions between the majority (Kinh) and the minority peoples have implied a taking and giving, or borrowing and lending of knowledge between the ethnic groups. Behind the integration of knowledge there are ecological and economic changes, changes for the Kinh who have left one environment for another, but also now ongoing changes due to such factors as population increase, the government’s reforms, improved roads and easier access to other parts of the province, expanding market, etc. In these changes it would be difficult to single out what is “imported” knowledge and what is “real” local knowledge. The Tày-Thai speaking ethnic groups who reside in the two hamlets of the study have been living in the area long before the Kinh migrants arrived, as aforementioned the about 500-year-old Tày temple pointing at a very long history of Tày-Thai speaking peoples in the province.

The specific knowledge that the Kinh migrants found necessary to learn from the minority people was how to use the forest: the mode of collecting edible plants, to hunt, and how to slash and burn for shifting cultivation, but also what rice species grow best in the highland climate, etc. However, some of this knowledge that has been accumulated and developed during the years is now on its way to be outdated. For example hunting skills has declined in importance as the number of wild animals has decreased drastically, and real shifting cultivation\textsuperscript{108} is difficult to practise to the same extent as before. During the collective farming era, not only was agriculture land common property, the forest was also considered to be the property of all hamlet members. As was pointed out in Chapter V\textsuperscript{109}, this made it possible to rotate the fields over a much larger area than today when each family has its own plot, and the rest of the forest is protected land. In this way the land reform has been much more efficient to reduce shifting cultivation practises than the long-running programme specially aimed at eradicating shifting cultivation, the Sedentarisation and Fixed Cultivation Programme.

Changes of the landscape have been in process since the Kinh arrived as migrants in the 1960s (and before). Undoubtedly the direction of changes has been towards a landscape increasingly more manipulated by man, and hence towards a landscape that should come closer to what the Kinh perceive as a more “civilised” one. Indeed, on the question if the landscape is better now in comparison with the time of their arrival in the area an old Kinh

\textsuperscript{108} That is, with fallow time long enough for being classified as shifting cultivation and not as a short fallow system (see Chapter IV, section “Shifting Cultivation”).

\textsuperscript{109} Section: Subsistence, Production and Land Tenure
couple answers: “Now the landscape is better when we can see each other. It is more open”. On the adjacent question if they would like to cut down more forest, their answer is: “We had to cut down to make roads, fields and to build houses and now it looks more human. But I don’t think we should cut more now”. A 47-year-old Kinh woman confirms this standpoint when answering our question: Do you think that the landscape look nicer now than when you came here? “I prefer it as it is now”.

If listening to the voices of some ethnic minority people and their standpoints on the issue of changes in the landscape we find them not so positive as the Kinh, especially not towards the modification of the forest. A middle-aged Ngan man says: “Time passes and roads have been better, more and better houses, but less forest. Large areas have been lost due to shifting cultivation and timber trading”. Another Ngan man of the same age gives his view: “Fewer trees and more people. Better road. Life is better. What I don’t like is that the forest disappears. And now we have to go far to get material for constructing houses. Birds and wild animals are rare now”. When asking him about the importance of hunting, we got the following answer: “Not as a food supplier or for cash income, but for pleasure, for enjoying life”.

An old Giáy woman was of the opinion that “We want to have more forest. We plant trees. If you plant one tree it takes ten years before you can harvest, but if you plant maize in the upland field you can harvest the same year. Anyhow, we need timber and firewood so we plant trees”.

The Kinh families perceive the landscape as now being nicer and that there is a balance between forest areas, human settlement areas and agriculture areas, or between wilderness and civilisation, while the minority peoples do not see all changes as positive. One reason that many of the ethnic minorities are concerned about the conversion of the forest and the fact that large trees are getting rare is the lack of timber for house constructions. The framework of the Tày-Thai speaking peoples’ traditional houses are made of thick timber, which requires a supply of large trees; something that is difficult to achieve in the area today.

Business and the Dependence on Urban Areas
The move to the highlands implied for the Kinh from Trang Son Commune in the delta (i.e. the ones who settled in Na Con hamlet) that they had to change from an economy based mainly on surplus production and commerce (irrigated rice production and furniture making), to one based practically on a purely subsistence agriculture. This was the situation at least in an initial stage in the new settlement area. Later the Kinh diversified their economy by including small-scale business. Slowly the Kinh in Na Con hamlet could establish the carpentry/joinery business; they had found an economic niche in furniture making. As the clientele is found partly in the neighbourhood and partly in Ha Giang Town one of the four
Kinh who have established workshops has done so in the town. Eight men (fathers and/or sons) in the ten Kinh families work permanently or temporary as carpenters/joiners for contractors, five of them in the town, the others in the hamlet.

Ban Kho hamlet constitutes a contrast to Na Con concerning business among the Kinh. Here such activities are mainly limited to peddling of alcohol and tofu, and petty trading in a few tiny stores. As a result the Kinh in Ban Kho are more dependant on agriculture than those in Na Con. One Kinh man explained that there was “No idea to start business like carpentry (here in Ban Kho hamlet) because the demand is very low in the commune”. If there is a real lack of economic incentives or if there are other reasons behind the low level of business activities in Ban Kho was not clear (the distance to Ha Giang Town is nearly the same from both hamlets). Anyhow, the socio-economic situation has meant that the living standard among the Kinh in Ban Kho are lower than among the Kinh in Na Con.

The business activities in Na Con have helped the Kinh to diversify the economy in a way that includes both on-farm and off-farm activities. The off-farm activities are increasingly important for the total economy of the family, especially for cash generating. But agriculture is still an important component for subsistence. A Kinh man expressed the concern for keeping agriculture production at a high level despite the fact that the handicraft gives significant contribution to the economy: “My son works as carpenter which gives more than the agriculture work, but we must keep the agriculture to get rice. Carpentry and weaving (of mats) give some cash for paying electricity and other expenses”.

The expansion of the off-farm activities implies a decrease in on-farm activities, which is manifested especially in the upland farming. The fact that the male members of the family are the ones who work with carpentry and joinery has connoted that the workload on the women has increased. One Kinh man indicates the situation by a few words: “My wife alone takes care of agricultural work and the animals even in harvest times. I’m a professional carpenter”. This situation makes it difficult to keep agricultural production at the same level as before among the Kinh involved in the carpentry/joinery business, which is expressed in a few words by a Tày man: “They (the Kinh) spend less time in the field as they are carpenters”. It is also later confirmed in a meeting with members of the Peoples’ Committee in Phu Ling Commune who answered as follows on our question why the women are getting a greater workload nowadays: “Because eighty percent of the men’s time goes to do business and carpentry. In the past, during the cooperative time, women and men shared equally the work in the field”. The possibility to balance the family economy between subsistence and cash generating activities has naturally grown considerably since the introduction of the Doi Moi reforms and the opening up the market for private initiatives at the end of the 1980s. In the two hamlets of the study, and especially in Na Con, the minority people are in general less involved in
business activities than the Kinh are. Instead they are to a higher level dependant on agriculture and subsistence economy. However, these facts do not imply that the minority people stand totally outside the market economy. Some minority families are involved in cash generating activities, such as weaving mats, and the selling of farm products (often for paying farmhands in peak seasons).

The conversion of the rural economy described above, where markets and urban areas are growing in importance, is nothing confined to Viet Nam. On the contrary, it is a trend observed all over Southeast Asia (Rigg 1998: 498). Rigg argues that “Livelihood in southeast Asia were perhaps never quite as simple as the rural/urban-agriculture/industry division would leave us to believe. But today, the defining characteristic of a large segment of the population in the region is the multiple and diverse occupations that they embrace.” … “Indeed, for a significant number of households, nonfarm activities represent their major source of income” (1998: 500). Today in the study area an economic situation similar to the one referred to by Rigg is only found among the Kinh population in Na Con hamlet. In a sense one can say that the Kinh there have taken a step back to their cultural roots in the delta, when they have had the opportunity to divide economic activities between irrigated rice production and carpentry/joinery business, and being much less dependant on upland and shifting cultivation than they were the first time in the new settlement area. This is a contrast to the minorities who to a great extent still stick to the old socio-economic pattern of upland-lowland/rainfed-irrigated subsistence system.

Hence, the cultural pattern of the Kinh migrants has been altered considerably due to the resettlement as described earlier, and then “restored” to some extent, partly by help of the Doi Moi market reforms. However, changes have occurred at the level of the social order and ethnic identification for both the migrants and the minority peoples. The process of adaptation to a life in the highlands has created social interactions and integration. In the social interactions the life cycle ceremonies have played an important role as an instrument for integration between the ethnic groups (especially the wedding and funeral ceremonies). These issues will be discussed in the next chapter.
VII. Restructuring Livelihood: Social Patterns and Trans-Ethnic Grouping

To speak of an ethnic group in total isolation is as absurd as to speak of the sound from one clapping hand.

Eriksen 1993: 9

Dominant ethnic groups, …, are likely to overlook to which extent they have been culturally influenced by those whom they dominate.

Yinger 1985: 155

In the preceding chapters it was stressed that cultural background is important in peoples’ perception of how to utilize natural resources. I shall in this chapter discuss and try to answer two of the questions that were raised in Chapter I: What impact has cultural background had on the economic and cultural situation in the two hamlets of the study; what role have they played when people needed access to land, to natural resources, and to local knowledge? And in what direction do the changes lead? In order to understand the process of adaptation and integration the focus of the chapter is on the role of social interaction, ethnic identification, and ethnic integration, especially as a means of capacity building in managing natural resources.

Ceremonies as “Language” for Social Interaction

The people in the study area speak different languages, but the understanding of each other’s languages is widely spread. However, in a wider social context language is only one means to communicate. There is a number of other ways to “speak”, for example through rituals or ceremonies (Harrell 1995: 98). These different ways to communicate are often performed to emphasize intra-ethnic togetherness (ibid.). They may also be tools for generating inter-ethnic relations, as in the Ha Giang case. Indeed, the importance of ceremonies as a bridge between the different ethnic groups, and as a denominator of social togetherness, is stressed many times in the interviews; e.g. as the Kinh women in Na Con said: “I have friends who are Tày and Giáy. When there is a wedding or other ceremony we go there, and they visit our ceremonies”, and a Kinh man in Ban Kho: “I speak Tày and Ngan. I go to parties and ceremonies they have”.

When Edmund Leach carried out his classical field study in the Kachin Hills Area of Burma (today Myanmar) in the 1940s, he found that ritual/ceremony was one way to communicate in the area: “The people may speak different languages, wear different kinds of clothes, live in different kinds of houses, but they understand one another’s ritual. Ritual acts are ways of
As pointed out on previous pages the ceremonies (especially wedding and funeral ceremonies) of the minorities in the Ha Giang case are slowly changing to be similar to the ones of the Kinh; e.g. to shortening funerals from lasting several days to only 24 hours, or instead of a chicken as a gift in a wedding people give money so that the financier of the wedding gets some of the expenditure in return. As indicated above there is no real language barrier in the study area in Ha Giang as all people speak Viet and most Kinh speak at least one minority language. The communication through ceremonies is more of finding a common social “language”, and this is also what Leach emphasises when saying: “Ritual acts are ways of ‘saying things’ about social status,...” (1977: 279). To hold, for example, a funeral ceremony that is time consuming and expensive, as it tends to be among the Tày-Thái speaking groups of Ha Giang, is a way of telling people that you can afford it, which in its turn gives social prestige in the community. At the same time the Kinh, who is the majority people of the country and in general the ones with a higher living standard, have shorter ceremonies than the minorities. That must be confusing for some of the minority people, and that may also be the reason why it takes time to shortening their ceremonies (long ceremonies are still considered as bringing high prestige to the performer). As one Tày man said: “Kinh has higher living standard [than us] because we have too many costly ceremonies, they don’t”. However, another Tày man’s answer to our question “Do you think it is good if you shorten your ceremonies as the Kinh like you to do?” was: “It depends. If you have money you can have long ceremonies. Now we normally have two days and two nights of ceremonies, but even that is long according to the Kinh.”

In Viet Nam during the past half century ceremonies and rituals have been adjusted, changed, and even banned (Kleinen 1999a: 163; Endres 1999: 197-200). Most of these changes have been imposed from above, and most notably by the central government in Ha Noi since the liberation from the French colonial power. However, also the colonial authority interfered in village ceremonies and stipulated changes. The colonial as well as post-colonial government strived to forbid or change “wasteful and superstitious ceremonies”, as they were called (Endres 1999: n. 201). Although these decisions seem to be highly authoritarian the aims were not only to exercise power but to alleviate the pressure many poor families were under in their obligations to perform expensive ceremonies and rituals (Luong 1992: 182), “… which in many cases had led to the financial ruin of a whole family” (Endres 1999: n. 201). However, the expenses may not only be a problem for the one who holds the ceremony. Also guests can feel like they have to spend too much if they are obliged to visit many life cycle ceremonies for example. As the Kinh man in one of the hamlets of the present study explained about the
dilemma he found in balancing the value of social duties for maintaining good relations with the neighbours and what he could afford to pay: “If you visit a wedding you have to pay 20,000 dong\textsuperscript{111} according to custom. But if you want to visit many weddings it will be impossible. At the same time you can’t refuse visit weddings”.

From the beginning of the 1950s, the communist government in Ha Noi divided the ceremonies and festivals into “harmful” ones, which were based on ”superstition” according to the government, and the ones who were secular and “historically” based (Endres 1999: 201). The first ones were considered waste of resources while the latter ones were considered good for building a patriotic spirit. For example, the yearly festival to celebrate the Hung kings belonged to the latter category\textsuperscript{112}; a practise that was believed to help enforcing the Viet cultural identity (Jamieson 1993:28; Endres 1999: 204-205).

In the beginning of the 1980s, and especially some years later in the wake of the Doi Moi reforms, there was a revival of the old ceremonies and rituals in Viet Nam as the government became more liberal in its view on old traditions (Endres 1999: 197; Kleinen 1999a: 171, 205). However, the influence from Doi Moi has been twofold, the reforms have made it possible to practice old folk traditions again, which had been banned for decades, or to restructure ceremonies that had been drastically changed by order from the government. On the other hand the influence from the reforms has changed many ceremonies so that they are now more rational from a strictly monetary economic perspective (e.g. by shortening the time of the ceremonies). The Kinh migrants in the study area in Ha Giang are now trying to convince the ethnic minority people that also they ought to rationalise the ceremonies.

The reason for changing the ceremonies and making them more rational from the Kinhs’ point of view is expressed in the following way by a Kinh man in Ban Kho hamlet: “Before, when we visited their [the minorities’] wedding ceremonies, we gave different gifts than they did. We gave money in an envelope, they gave a chicken or something else. Now they also give money, which means that they get some of the expenses for the ceremony back”. Also the Dzao people have been influenced by the Kinhs’ ideas of “rationalising” ceremonies. Excerpts from an interview with a Dzao man in Kim Thach Commune give a hint of the thoughts around the question of differences between the ethnic groups and their ceremonies: “What differences are there between the ethnic groups of the commune?” I don’t find much difference between the groups in this place, only difference in ceremonies.” What do you think of the Kinh ceremonies? “They spend less time on ceremonies, and it is better as they are less expensive then.” Do you have any special Dzao ceremonies? “The boy’s initiation

\textsuperscript{111} Equal to approximately 1.25 USD. This can be compared to the 14,000 dong (less than one USD) paid for one day of work in agriculture (see Chapter V, section: Diversity and Economic Security.

\textsuperscript{112} The Hung Kings festival and the background is shortly described in Chapter II and in Chapter IV.
rite. When they are 12-15 years old they go through it. They learn how to worship, to hunt and other things. It took one week before but now it is shorter, and cheaper”.

It has been stressed several times that the Kinh as well as the minorities see wedding and funeral ceremonies as the most important ones in the process of interaction between the ethnic groups. In general the wedding ceremonies are longer, more complicated and more expensive among the ethnic minority groups than among the Kinh.\textsuperscript{113} The wedding and its preparation involves much more of visits and gift giving by the parents, e.g. among the Kinh in the study area the boy’s parents only bring gifts (or dowry payment) once to the girl’s parents, while among the Tày and the Ngan they do so several times; among the Giáy the girl’s parents bring gifts to the boy’s parents instead. Worth noticing is that the informer tells us that among the Kinh in the delta the boy’s parents bring gifts to the girl’s parents several times like the minority peoples in Ha Giang do. This practise may be a result of the higher living standard in the delta, as the gift giving contains cash, which, according to informants, is a more “rational” way of supporting the ceremonies, and also a more “modern” way of doing it, while the main part of gifts among the minorities consists of food and drinks, a more direct support to the wedding ceremony as such.

The gift giving in connection with weddings is seen as a compensation paid by the parents of the “receiving” family in the matrimony, i.e. if the boy’s parents give gifts to the girl’s parents in practise it is a compensation for the loss of a family member, and consequently also of a labour force (as the girl will live with the boy’s parents she will help here parents-in-law with household and agricultural work) (Kleinen 1999a: 175). Above it was mentioned that among the Giáy the custom is that the girl’s parents give gifts to the boy’s parents. The reason for this custom is simply that the Giáy practice \textit{temporary matrilocal postmarital residence}\textsuperscript{114}, which means that the newlywed live for a limited time with the girl’s parents, in the case of Giáy of the Ban Co Hamlet up to seven years, depending on the economic situation of the girl’s parents. In contrast to the Giáy ethnic group the other groups in Ban Co and Na Khon Hamlets practice \textit{temporary patrilocal postmarital residence}, which means that the newlywed couple settle to live for some years with the boy’s parents. Hence, instead the boy’s parents have to compensate the girl’s family for their loss of labour force.

Like the wedding ceremonies,\textsuperscript{115} the mortuary ceremonies are shorter among the Kinh than among the minorities (with the exception of young people of the Tày ethnic group who are

\textsuperscript{113} For brief descriptions of wedding and funeral ceremonies of the different ethnic groups please see Appendix II.

\textsuperscript{114} Matrilocality should not be confounded with matrilineal kinship systems, matrilocality may be practised among patrilineal societies as well as among matrilineal ones.

\textsuperscript{115} See Chapter V, section: Ceremonies as Part of Social Relations.
buried within 24 hours). The Kinh say that they want to entomb a deceased family member as quick as possible to make grief shorter. However, as indicated in, the length of funerals have been cut among the minorities so they are now coming closer to the Kinhs’ in duration. It was also noticed that the gifts given by Kinh families in the community to the family of the deceased person seem to be of about the same amount and value as among the minority peoples. This may reflect the fact that the minorities are influenced by the Kinh’s way of performing the ceremonies. Still there are some differences between the ethnic groups, and one of the most striking is the fact that the Kinh practising double obsequies. However, this is a practise that the minorities have difficult to adopt, or even accept. Another discrepancy, also in funeral ceremonies, is the practice among the Ngan, by others than the family members, to put a live pig in front of the coffin before the entombment. This is an act of showing respect for the deceased person, and of all ethnic groups in the study area it is only Ngan who practice it.

However, for the Kinh who live in the two hamlets of the present study, the cost for holding ceremonies is not only confined to expenditures in the northern highlands. As mentioned, the oldest brother in a family has the responsibility to organise family ceremonies, and it was the oldest brother who had to leave the delta homeland in 1966. Hence, several of the male Kinh in Ha Giang have to travel all the way to the Ha Tay Province in the delta to carry out the duties. As one Kinh man told us: “I visit my relatives there every year, when there is a funeral or wedding ceremony. But it costs a lot to go there”.

One of the first closer social contacts the Kinh experienced with the minorities was when they were invited to their weddings and funerals. In this way the ceremonies became like gates leading into the others’ social life. The first time after the Kinh had settled in the area, and before they and the minorities picked up each other’s languages, there were communication problems at the linguistic level. According to the testimony of a Kinh woman, “No Kinh had been here before. Language was the most difficult”116. However, the “language” of ritual could be understood. Despite the fact that the ceremonies differed between the ethnic groups it was easy to understand such important thing as a life cycle ceremony. At the same time the visits to these social events must have given good opportunities to learn the spoken language of the other ethnic groups.

Then, when the Kinh began comparing their own ceremonies with the minorities’, and found that according to their point of view the latter ones were too costly and too time consuming, they wanted to harmonise ceremonies in order to have all more like the Kinh ones. The ceremonies that work as cultural markers of the different ethnic groups are slowly changing and functioning as bridges for social interactions between the Kinh and the minorities.

116 See Chapter VI, section: Extracting a Livelihood from “Wilderness".
The Ethnic Factor in the Mountainous North: Ascription and Asset

There have been many attempts made at defining what *ethnicity* is and what an *ethnic group* is (e.g. Yinger 1985: 157-59; Eriksen 1993: 3-6; Eller 1999: 8-16; De Vos 1995: 18)\(^\text{117}\). As a matter of fact, as Eriksen says, all who have ventured into the problem of defining or describing what *ethnicity* is have come to the conclusion that it “… has something to do with *classification of people and group relations.*” (Eriksen 1993: 4), (emphasis in original). Anthropologists often maintain that ethnicity “… refers to aspects of the relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive.” (*ibid.*). Here Eriksen follows Barth who in 1969 cited some criteria for defining an ethnic group; one of the criteria is that it “has a membership which identifies itself, and is identified by others, as constituting a category distinguishable from other categories of the same order (Barth 1969: 11). It is imperative to remember that according to this definition the group of people concerned should not only be considered by themselves as a separate ethnic group, but to be regarded as such also by others. This criterion for identifying an ethnic group is in the present study considered being the most significant one.

In the northern highlands ethnic categorisations are of two kinds. The first one is *descriptive* and *static*. This is to a great extent the large society’s “cataloguing” in attempts at getting order in the “chaos” of multiple ethnic and linguistic groups living within the state’s borders. The result will often end up in the governments’ official recognition of ethnic groups, e.g. Viet Nam’s Government who recognises 54 ethnic groups within its borders (General Statistic Office 2001:3), or China’s Government who recognises 56 within its borders (Harrel 1995: 103). This classification may at least to some degree be constructed on the reality as perceived not only at the national level but at the local level as well. However, frequently it also diverges from self-ascription and local classifications (*ibid.* 98, 103).

Over half a century has passed since Leach showed that ethnic groups are not static formations, that they may have permeable and blurry boundaries, and that people can change ethnic identity (Eller 1999: 15; Eriksen 1993: 9). Despite this fact the static approach is still commonly found in studies of culture and ethnic groups around the world (Toyota 2003: 302; Rambo 1997: 8). One region where this is common is in the northern Southeast Asia where we find it in for example atlas-styled publications on ethnic minorities (e.g. Dang Nghiem

\(^{117}\) For example De Vos has defined an *ethnic group* as “… a self-perceived inclusion of those who hold in common a set of traditions not shared by others with whom they are in contact. Such traditions typically include “folk” religious beliefs and practices, language, a sense of historical continuity, and common ancestry or place of origin. The group’s actual history often trails off into legend or mythology, …”, (1995: 18) (emphasis in original). It can be questioned for being too unspecified.

The other categorisation occurs on the local level and concerns *self-ascription* and *ethnic identification*. It is connected with individual behaviour and interactions (Barth 1969: 10). Ethnicity is then typically communication of group membership (or social identity) as an expression of competence, local knowledge and institutional capacity (Ingold 2000: 317). Two main forms for such communication are language and ritual/ceremony (Leach 1977: 279; Harrel 1995: 98). However, the ethnic categorisation of this kind is not static, and, as mentioned, the categories are not exactly the same as in the official classification made at the national level. One group of people may be classified as a local subgroup in the official classification while locally it is considered as a separate ethnic group, and some groups are not recognised at all.

In the process of restructuring livelihoods new social patterns take shape, and new trans-ethnic groupings are discernable. The changes have to do with interactions between the different ethnic groups, and especially between ethnic majority people and minority people. Natural resources use, ceremonies, and other behaviour are modified from both majority and minority peoples’ point of view. The driver behind this is the opportunity to build capacity, capacity to adapt to a changed social as well as ecological situation; for the migrants this meant adaptation to a totally new physical environment (as well as to a new social and cultural one). For the local people it meant adaptation to changes as results of the in-migration of Kinh. In the 1990s and beyond, for the minorities as well as for the Kinh, there have been adaptations to changes in the wake of the economic reforms; changes visible in e.g. improved transport facilities and opening of new markets.

It must be emphasised that trans-ethnic grouping, mentioned above, is not the same as the merging of a new ethnic group. There are other ways of categorising people than into ethnic groups (Eller 1999: 12); more loosely knitted forms of clusters of people may exist around what can be called “gravity points”. A gravity point can be something that various ethnic groups have in common such as e.g. a geographical area, which does not necessarily refer to a delimited territory of one or the other group, but often to a larger and less defined area (Saikia 2001: 85-86; Barth 1969: 14-15).

**Global, National and Local Level Classification of Minority Groups**

When discussing ethnic groups the concept of what constitute an ethnic minority group lies very close. A non-academic institution’s way of dealing with the problem is found in the “Operational Directives” of the World Bank. Here the Bank points at especially five features that single out people who can be considered as *ethnic minorities*: a) A close attachment to ancestral territories and to natural resources in these areas; b) Self-identification and
identification by others as members of a distinctive cultural group; c) An indigenous language, often different from the national language; d) Presence of customary social and political institutions; e) Primarily subsistence-oriented production, (The World Bank 1991). De Vos’ definition of an ethnic group is close to part of the definition above, and also he puts the historical connection to a territory in the fore. The last point, that the indigenous people should be “primarily subsistence-oriented”, may be questionable in these days; the market economy has reached most corners of the world today, and the amount of people who are primarily subsistence oriented are shrinking with a fast pace. We saw that the inhabitants of Ban Kho hamlet (minorities as well as Kinh) were less involved in the market economy than the inhabitants of Ban Co Hamlet, but that does not mean that they stand outside the monetary and market economy. What is stated under b: that a group of people have to be identified as a separate ethnic group by themselves and by others before they will be recognised as such officially, is something that also was quoted from Eriksen above in his definition of ethnicity.

Another attempt at defining the term ethnic minority has been made by Eriksen: “An ethnic minority can be defined as a group which is numerically inferior to the rest of the population in a society, which is politically non-dominant and which is being reproduced as an ethnic category” (1993: 121). Eriksen stresses that these two concepts only exist in relation to each other; hence, there is no minority if there is no majority, and vice versa (ibid.). However, the minority-majority situation on a national level may be the opposite to the one on a local level; i.e. an ethnic group that is only a small fraction of the total national population can be the majority group on the local level. That is the situation of the Tày ethnic group on the provincial level in Ha Giang. Here the Tày constitute 28 percent of the population (the second largest group after the Hmong), while on the national level the Tày only make up less than two percent of the population. Although the Tày fulfil all criteria to be recognised as an ethnic minority group on the national level, in reality on the provincial level the situation is different. In Ha Giang Province the Tày together with Kinh are the dominant ethnic group within the provincial political and administration structure. Here the socio-cultural hierarchy is clearly manifested, with the lowlander Kinh and the Tày being over-represented in administration, while the largest ethnic group in the province, the Hmong, is hardly represented at all. In this way one may say that the Tày form an “elite” among the minorities in the province. These facts prove that the question of the majority-minority situation not always is a matter of only the size of the ethnic groups, but also that the socio-cultural aspects might play a crucial role.

Despite the facts on the local level, the Tày is without doubt regarded as a separate ethnic minority group in the literature on the minority peoples on the national level (e.g. Dang Nghiêm Van et al. 2000; Khong Dien 2002: 53).
Ethnic Identities and Social Networking in the Resettlement Process

The ethnic identification is significant when migrating into a new area, where it often grows stronger, and it has played an important role in the resettlement process, and especially during the first period in Ha Giang. The Kinh arrived in the highlands with a worldview developed in the delta during centuries. However, all customs, knowledge and skill were not old or unaltered; as was mentioned earlier in the chapter, many of the traditional ceremonies and rituals had been changed, first by the colonial government, and later by the post-colonial communist government in Ha Noi (Kleinen 1999a: 163; Endres 1999: 197). Also the collective agriculture production and land tenure system of the cooperatives were of very recent date, to a great deal cast in the Soviet Union mould (Nguyen Van Bich 1990). Hence, the influence from the migrants on the local people in the resettlement area came from a blend of old Viet traditions and more novel ideas introduced by the French and later by the communist government in the 1950s and the 60s.

As pointed out, the Kinh had a perception of the highland areas as a wild and untamed country and its local inhabitants as primitive and backwards when moving from the delta. Due to these prejudices the boundaries between the majority and the minority peoples were more accentuated in the initial period after the arrival of the migrants in Ha Giang. However, the integration between the Dzao and the Tày-Thái speaking peoples was also less developed at that time. As most Dzao still remained at the higher elevations and away from the communal centres, there was less interactions between the two groups than there is today.

The ethnic identification of the local people is not seldom accentuated when other peoples settle in an area. However, in some cases, as e.g. can be discerned in Ha Giang, the old ethnic identification is decreasing in importance over the generations, and a new local one may be formed. As this new identification is coupled to the geographical area, and the utilisation of the natural resources and transforming of the landscape, it is a requirement for being able to form new local knowledge across ethnic boundaries. But, when people are faced to eke out a living in a different physical environment than the one they are accustomed to, they are in general so flexible that they can change subsistence pattern quite drastically without altering the cultural pattern, which means that culture is more conservative to changes than the economic systems as such. Or as Barth puts it: “… we must expect to find that one ethnic group, spread over a territory with varying ecological circumstances, will exhibit regional diversity of overt institutionalized behaviour which do not reflect differences in cultural orientation” (Barth 1969: 12).

The case of three Tày-Thái speaking peoples in the study area (the Tày, Giáy and the Ngan) constitutes one example of the intricate problem of drawing a line between what an ethnic group is and what a subgroup is. In, for example, the publication “Ethnic minorities in Viet Nam” the Tày and Giáy are treated as separated ethnic groups, while Ngan is considered to be
a “small local group” of the Tày (Dang Nghiem Van et al. 2000: 121, 142), and so also by Khong Dien (2002: 53). In reality, when we talked to people from the three groups, we could not discover the reason why the Giáy was officially separated from the Tày while Ngan was not. According to informants, the language differs between all three groups, but not more than we can talk about different dialects of the same language. What people in general referred to as the dividing factor was differences in some ceremonies, but these differences existed both among the Ngan and the Giáy in comparison with the Tày. When we asked if Ngan and Giáy where separate ethnic groups the informants did not hesitate to answer yes, but when asked why they were regarded as separated ethnic groups they looked somewhat puzzled and after a few second of hesitation answered: “I don’t know, it is actually only some differences in the ceremonies and some words in the languages.” All informants answered very uniformly to these questions. From this answer emerges another question: Who decides what should be considered an ethnic group and what is a subgroup of one and the same ethnic group, the members of that specific group, the neighbouring groups, or others?

In Viet Nam the Thái and the Tày are considered in all national studies on ethnic categorisation and description as two separated groups (e.g. Dang Nghiem Van et al. 2000; Khong Dien 2002: 53). The two groups are as noticed part of the Tày-Thái speaking linguistic family, and they have a common history. However, the Tai (as e.g. Keyes calls them with a common name) origin and “cultural birthplace” is somewhat disputed, with one theory pointing at southern China, others that they have a common origin with the Mon and the Khmer civilizations further south (Keyes 1996: 138-39). Anyhow, the Tai-speaking peoples are spread over a large geographical area reaching from Thailand in the south to southern China in the north, and from north-eastern India in the west to northern Viet Nam in the east (Keyes 1995: 136; Ireson and Ireson 1996: 4).

This wide geographical dispersion points at some complex cultural situation of the Tai-speaking peoples. Sometimes the name Tai is used (as e.g. by Leach in his Burma study), sometimes Tày (as e.g. in the area of present study in Viet Nam), or (as in the case of Izikowitz’ study in Laos the name Thai). Are these different names of the same ethnic group or are they names for different ethnic groups? According to Keyes the name Tai should be used for peoples who speak the different languages that belong to the Tai linguistic family (i.e. what is called Tày-Thái languages in Viet Nam) and are spread out in the geographical area mentioned above, while the name Thai should be employed when referring to people who are citizens of Thailand (ibid.) In contrast, in Viet Nam the name Thái is used for what is considered as a separate ethnic group within the Tày-Thái speaking linguistic family. Hence,

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118 The interviews confirm that the three Tày-Thái speaking peoples of the studied hamlets could communicate with each other in their own dialect/ language without any great difficulties.

119 Giáy, Nung, Lao, Lu, Cao Lan are some other Tày-Thái speaking peoples in Viet Nam (Khong Dien 2002: 9).
the Thái and the Tày are considered as two ethnic groups in Viet Nam. Further, the names Tai and Thai are pronounced the same in Thailand according to Keyes (ibid.), while in Viet Nam the name Thái is pronounced with an aspiration, but the name Tày is not.

The history of the formation of the people who today is considered as the Tai reveals that other groups than Tai speaking have been assimilated into them, and that there are many different Tai languages (there may be as many as a hundred) (Keyes 1995: 147). The peoples who were first grouped under the name Lao by the Siamese, and later in the modern state of Thailand under the name Thai, and who today are regarded as one people, actually constitute many peoples: “While the Siamese elite sought to ‘forget’ the differences between Tai-speaking peoples living within the border of Siam in the process of constructing a new genealogy for the Thai nation, Western scholars, missionaries, and colonial officials were beginning to discover that there were many different types of Tai” (ibid. 145).

What constitutes the glue keeping an otherwise quite dispersed population under one ethnic label could be a common origin (mythological or real), and/or a common language, as well as e.g. a common religion and/or a territory, etc. (Barth 1969: 15; Yinger 1985: 159; Saikia 2001). Such a factor as the reference to a common origin and a common territory may give the impression that the ethnic group is homogenous and have existed since “times immemorial”. For example, as the case above describes, the grouping of peoples under the label of Thai may give that impression. However, Keyes argues that “Both ‘Tai’ and ‘Thai’, … , are inventions of quite recent vintage, a century old at most. They are products of a process of restructuring of communities under the hegemonic authority of modern nation-states” (Keyes 1995: 143). Hence, the government has decided that there is one people named Thai, who in reality constitute a product where several peoples have been incorporated under one label. However, on the local level these peoples are not always recognising themselves as the same people as the ones in other areas of the country.

These examples points at the fact that ethnicity and ethnic groups often are something abstract and not simple to define, and that ethnicity is not a static situation. As Eller puts it “… the cultural world is not so neat: groups exist with vague and permeable boundaries, social ‘identity’ is flexible and negotiable, and even the most ‘primitive’ and ‘isolated’ of tribes can be in contact with other societies, not least European/colonial society” (Eller 1999: 15). An individual case from one of the hamlets in the study area in Ha Giang illustrates how versatile ethnicity can be. A man in his mid 30s told us that before he was a Giáy because his father was a Giáy. As all peoples in the study area have a social organisation based on patrilineal descent, the offspring automatically become members of the father’s ethnic group regardless of the mother’s ethnic background. However, when the man’s father died he changed to now regarding himself being a Tày, because his stepmother (his father had remarried) was a Tày. Without any constraints he had been accepted as a Tày person. It was also more convenient
for him to be a Tày as he lived with his stepmother. He was now mentally a Tày, which was confirmed by the Tày symbols he had carved into the beams holding the roof of his house.

However, to be recognised as a distinctive ethnic group on a national level may not always be something granted even though being recognised as such by ones neighbours. The Giáy, who are found in the study area, have officially been accepted as a separate ethnic group at the national level, while Ngan, who also are found in our study area, has not. In the three early large national works on classification of ethnic minorities in Viet Nam, the first one published in 1959, the second one in 1973 and the third one in 1979, Giáy is regarded as a separate ethnic group under the Tày-Thái linguistic family, but Ngan is hardly mentioned (only in one of the publications and then as a local subgroup of the Tày) (Schliesinger 1997). Neither has Schliesinger himself referred to Ngan in his own classification of what he calls the “hill tribes of Viet Nam” (ibid. 1998). In a more recent publication on ethnic groups in Viet Nam written by Khong Dien, Ngan is given as another name for Tày (Khong Dien 2002: 16, 53). However, on the local level the Ngan is classified as a separate ethnic group by the provincial authorities.

In Ha Giang Province children of ethnic minorities have priority to study at the upper secondary school in Ha Giang Town. Also which groups are classified as minority groups differs somewhat from the classification on the national level; in Ha Giang the Tày is not considered as a minority group by the authorities regarding preference to school. This is understandable as they constitute the second largest ethnic group in the province (and together with the Kinh they are dominant in politics and administration), but what is striking is the fact that the Ngan in contrast is considered as a separate ethnic minority group and because of that enjoys the benefit of having preference to the upper secondary school in the town. The implication of this policy on the two hamlets of the present study have meant that there are more children from Ban Kho that attend the upper secondary school in Ha Giang Town than children from Na Con; a consequence of the fact that there is a high percentage of Tày and Giáy in Na Con hamlet but no Ngan. Hence, in the case of wanting ones children to attend school in the town it is an asset to be an ethnic minority, but in the case of seeking employment in the local provincial administration it is better to be an ethnic majority (i.e. a Kinh or a Tày).

A third generation of immigrants is now growing up in the two hamlets of the study, i.e. the grandchildren of the first migrants, children who have the mountains of Ha Giang as their homeland. Further changes in attitudes are bound, and the differences between the ethnic groups will probably shrink in the coming years. One indicator is the wide knowledge of each other’s languages. Viet is of course the lingua franca, and practically all speak it in the area (we met few persons belonging to any of the ethnic minority groups who were not good at speaking Viet), but surprisingly many Kinh said they could speak one or more of the minority
languages. According to the answers from the informants, the level of language skill varied from “a little” to “fluently”. Of the seven Kinh families living in Ban Kho six said they could speak one or more minority languages; three could speak Tày and Ngan, one could speak Tày, Giày and Ngan, one Tày, Ngan and Dzao, and one could speak only Tày. In Na Con the percentage of Kinh who spoke one or more minority languages was somewhat lower: six out of ten. Only one of them said he (and his son) could speak two languages (Tày and Giày), one could speak Giày and the other four Tày. The ethnically mixed couples we interviewed in both hamlets could speak at least one more language besides Viet.

Hence, it is overt that not only the minorities in the two hamlets are the ones who changed lifestyle, also the Kinh have changed, the words from two Kinh men confirm the fact. First a man in Na Con: “We have learned some customs of the Tày and the Giày, for example funerals. There is no difference between the three groups. We are all mountain people now. Marriage between ethnic groups is good, it is good to mix. We have a great understanding of each other’s culture”. That the identity as lowlander slowly is changing also among some persons of the first generation migrants is indicated by the words of a 74-year-old man in Ban Kho: “My relatives there [in the delta land] say that I should move back, but everything is strange for me there now, no space and very noisy. In contrast here there are nice views and space, the climate is better here also. We also speak [Viet] little different from how they speak in the delta now. Language has changed there but not here”. These statements also show us that the Kinh of the old generation, although more conservative in general in their view on integration between the Kinh and the other ethnic groups of the area, are alienating themselves from the old lifestyle to also be more of a “mountain people”. The question is, what will come out of this transition. It is significant what one of the men we interviewed in Ha Tày said (with a pejorative undertone) about his relatives in Ha Giang: “… they have adopted the minorities lifestyle …”, i.e. in the eyes of the people in the delta the ones who left are not lowlanders anymore. But, what are they, or what will they be? It has been suggested that there may be a development toward a clustering of the ethnic groups of the two hamlets into one “mountain people”.

When the Kinh arrived in Ha Giang they did not only find an entirely different landscape and eco-environment, also social life and subsistence systems of the local people differed considerably from the ones in the delta. The migrants found that two things had to be done before they had a possibility to build up a capacity to cope with the new circumstances. First they had to learn from the local people how to eke out a living from the land in the highland eco-environment. Secondly they had to find out how much of their knowledge about agriculture and other economic activities from the delta land were useful and applicable in the new settlement area.
To be able to learn from the local people the Kinh had to communicate, logically directly through verbal communication, but also through social interactions, which then, as mentioned in the beginning of the chapter, functioned as a means of communication on another level than the purely verbal one. As has been described, social interactions can be expressed for example in form of participation in one another’s social events such as life cycle ceremonies, or for instance in intermarriage between Kinh and ethnic minority people. In this way the learning about each other’s land use and food producing techniques become an integrated whole with the social activities, making them inseparable (Ingold 2000: 318). Once the social interactions were initiated, they were expanded to form more developed social networks. The more economic components of these networks contain loans in form of cash, credit in the shops, labour exchange or hiring of day-labour at harvest time, gifts at weddings and funerals, etc.

The diagram below shows the flow of cash, services and gifts between the inhabitants of the two hamlets of the study.

**Figure 12. Flow diagram**

![Flow diagram](image)

The diagram not only illustrates exchange of goods and money, but also exchange of knowledge and skill, as well as social contacts. Cash is used by people when buying from each other’s shops, when peddling, and when giving loans. Knowledge is “flowing” from the delta to the Kinh in the two hamlets when their children are trained in handicraft. The knowledge about advanced wet rice production the Kinh brought with them from the delta has been “exchanged” for the minority people’s knowledge about
shifting cultivation and upland farming. Also labour is exchanged (especially during high peak agricultural season) between the Kinh and the minorities, as well as between the different minorities.

Whitten and Wolfe’s (1974) definition of a social network as a “…relevant series of linkages existing between individuals which may form a basis for the mobilization of people for specific purposes, under specific conditions” (quoted from Seymour-Smith 1986: 208)\textsuperscript{120} is clearly pointing at the individual and specific purpose character of a social network. In reality social networking contains components that directly aim at building up social relations \textit{per se}; the economic contacts and exchange between the Kinh and the minorities in the two hamlets in Ha Giang were based on social relations in the form of participation in each other’s social events, intermarriage, etc. And when an individual acts within the obligation he/she has, for instance towards the lineage, it may as well be for gaining personal advantages as for expressing solidarity with the lineage members.

In the two hamlets of the study the networking between the ethnic minority people and the Kinh is a combination of economic and social relations, as described above in the diagram. The contact the Kinh migrants still have with the family and lineage members in the delta is also a combination of economic and social relations. Here the commitment towards the relatives play an important role, such as e.g. the elder brother’s obligation to take responsibility for the life cycle ceremonies, while in the highlands no such formally stated obligations exist between the Kinh and the other ethnic groups. However, as the Kinh successively get more integrated with the minority people through social interactions, intermarriage and economic ties\textsuperscript{121}, at the same time as the contacts with the delta homeland certainly will decrease when the third generation of Kinh grows up in Ha Giang, the social network will increasingly contain obligations towards other people than Kinh. These obligations may have similar character as the one towards the lineage and the family in the delta today. Hence, the difference between the economic networking and the purely social activities might fade.

Ethnic belonging may in some cases be an asset, e.g. as described above in the case of access to school in Ha Giang Town, in others only an ascription, or cultural marker. When, for example, the Kinh in Ha Giang want to send their sons to relatives in the delta for an

\textsuperscript{120} According to Seymour-Smith “…the study of networks is that of interpersonal relationships and the manner in which these are arranged to form a pattern which we may term a social network” (Seymour-Smith 1986: 208). Dang Nguyen Anh (2001: 180) defines a social network as a “… set of interpersonal ties or links among a defined set of people”.

\textsuperscript{121} Marriage, as we have seen, is in reality a way of knitting social as well as economic ties; it creates social as well as economic obligations between the bride’s and the groom’s parents.
apprenticeship period within the joinery business, the ethnic belonging is an asset, while in the hamlet in Ha Giang to be a Kinh is more an ascription, not a special advantage.

**Changing Social Patterns: The Significance of Ethnic Distance**

... ethnicity is not the only way to affiliate, organize, or categorize human beings. Eller 1999: 12

When people migrate to a new area they have the choice of social isolation and separated settlement (“cultural islands”), or integration into the local culture and the local lifestyle. As has been shown, in the Ha Giang case the migrants have not isolated themselves. First of all it would have been difficult for merely practical reasons; the population of the Kinh is very small in both hamlets, and the total land area of the hamlets is not large enough to find a corner in which to isolate oneself. Secondly, the local population had already built temporary houses when the migrants arrived, and they showed the migrants how to get food from the forest. Thus the social contacts and dependence started already upon arrival in the new land. Thirdly, the lowland (Kinhs’ “cultural landmark”) was under collective tilling, i.e. to get access to lowland agricultural produce, mainly paddy rice, cooperation with the local population was necessary.

**Poly-Ethnic Society, a Stage Towards Trans-ethnic Grouping and Ethnic Integration**

The Kinh took the very first step toward integration when they accepted that they had to learn how to slash and burn in the forest to be able to produce enough food for survival. It might be possible to say that at the same time they also took a step away from being lowlanders. After years in the highland they have become “highlanders”; as was pointed out the relatives in the homeland of Ha Tày express that the ones who migrated in the 1960s are “like minorities now”. They are not real Kinh anymore in the eyes of the relatives. Thus, using the term “highlanders” or “mountain people” is a trans-ethnic grouping of peoples under one label. When the people in the study area themselves express that ethnic belonging is not so important anymore because “we are all mountain people now” (as some actually literally expressed), it also becomes a self-ascribed category. Such identification is not a real ethnic one, but formation of a group of people around a gravity point. This constellation of people becomes a cultural category, including several ethnic groups who have something in common, but where each group maintain some kind of boundary between them. There can still be cultural differences at the same time as there are social reasons for keeping the ethnic groups under one descriptive label (Barth 1969: 16-19). To belong to the ones ascribed that label becomes an asset in the process of economic and social interactions, and eventually into integration.
Maybe it would be relevant to say that the present situation in the study area is in a stage between what Barth (1969) and Izikowitz (1969) call a “poly-ethnic society” and trans-ethnic grouping around a gravity point. A poly-ethnic society constitute several ethnic groups living side by side in a geographical area, and where some kind of interdependence between the groups exists, not seldom a hierarchical one. Izikowitz, referring to his field research in Laos, writes: “… the boundaries which separate different neighbouring ethnic groups are made apparent by the social and cultural difference between them” (Izikowitz 1969: 141). These differences can be gathered mainly under three categories according to Izikowitz, firstly in the way of expressing one self (this could be the language, ceremonies, etc), secondly in the value systems, which refers to world view and social structure; and lastly a self-identification as a separate group: “… one does not consider oneself to belong to the neighbouring group” (ibid. 142). These are the introspective categories, and the negative way to look upon other groups, i.e. the excluding way of perceiving others. In Izikowitz’z opinion there is also an “outward-looking” categorisation, i.e. the way of interacting with other groups (ibid.). When the interactions become frequent and important, not only economically but also socially, a trans-ethnic grouping, as described above, may occur.

Izikowitz reports that at the time of his field study (in the 1930s and in the 1960s) there were very few marriages between the different ethnic groups in Laos (1969: 140). Then the Thai tribes (as Izikowitz prefers to call the different Tày-Thái -speaking peoples) were the dominant people in the area of his study (ibid. 139). And historically they were the lowlanders of the highland (as in the Vietnamese case). In Laos as well as in Burma they had managed to assimilate different hill tribes into their culture (Leach 1977:40; Izikowitz 1969: 138). Hence, although the Thai here tends to sharply separate themselves from “hill tribes”, there were cases of changes in ethnic identity, and a number of different mountain peoples becoming Thai in Laos as well as in Burma.

In the previous chapter it was stressed that wet rice cultivation is a cultural marker of the Kinh, and that the construction and maintenance of the irrigation systems work as a social organiser of the villages in the Red River Delta homeland. The cradle of the Viet culture stood in this “land of water”, where the Red River is branching out and spreading its water over an extensive area, today feeding parts of it into the agriculture land through the irrigation systems. The agriculture land is intentionally flooded by humans, but also unintentionally by nature when seawater is pressing in due to heavy winds and even typhoons that sweep in from the South China Sea. As mentioned in preceding chapter, the dykes are constructed for impeding this surplus water from destroying the crops and the land. As the necessity of preventing the unwanted flooding stimulated the development of an advanced water engineering skill early in the history (Phan Huy Le et al. 1997: 30-31; Le Ba Thao 1997: 323 -24), one might say that the Viet culture is a culture that has grown out from an abundance of water. An abundance of water in a flat landscape to a great extent changed by
humans; the view one has when looking out over the fields in the delta is the one of a highly “artificial” landscape.

If a profusion of water in the delta in combination with advanced irrigation engineering forms a marker of the Viet culture the situation in the highlands is different, primarily because the landscape is different, and access to suitable land and water for irrigation is limited. Here, the problem instead is the scarcity, or more precisely the difficulty to domesticate water for agricultural use. This difficulty is due to the fact that the landscape, which to a large extent is made up by steep mountains, impedes wet rice production. Because of this one might say that the upland agriculture cum small-scale wet rice cultivation is the cultural marker of the Tay-Thai speaking peoples in the study area. Earlier it has been mentioned that the difference is one of an entirely domesticated nature and totally altered landscape on the one side (the delta)\textsuperscript{122}, and of a semi-domesticated nature and only partly altered landscape on the other (the highland). It has also been suggested that the differences between the two modes of land use could be expressed as one inclining towards Confucian philosophy (i.e. an entirely transformed landscape) and the other inclining towards Taoist philosophy of nature (i.e. an untouched or slightly altered landscape)\textsuperscript{123}.

The cultural distances between Kinh and the ethnic minority groups in the study area are to a great deal manifested in these differences in the traditional land use systems and in the use of water, as well as in e.g. the life-cycle ceremonies. As repeatedly pointed out, the Kinh have used the ceremonies as a “social language” and an embarkation for social contacts and interactions with the ethnic minority people in the new settlement area. At the same time as the ceremonies have been a means to communicate social togetherness they have also been used for transferring part of the Kinh culture to the other ethnic groups in the hamlets; the Kinh are still striving to make the minority peoples’ ceremonies more like their own, and in this way making the minority peoples’ culture coming closer to the Kinh culture. The ceremonies are turned into an institution of high social importance in the integration process.

The problem of domesticating water in the mountainous area with its steep topography is the principal hindrance for developing the irrigation systems. But, as mentioned, it is also a fact that the land reform with an individualisation of lowland cropping has had an impact on the maintenance of the irrigation systems. According to an informant the organising of the maintenance workgroups functioned better during the time of cooperative production. Nevertheless, with the lack of domesticable water as a factor limiting wet rice production, especially in Na Con, the identity of the Kinh migrants as lowlander and wet rice cultivators is slowly fading. In this perspective they may come closer to the minorities’ lifestyle, which

\textsuperscript{122} See Chapter VI, section: The Landscape

\textsuperscript{123} See Chapter IV section: Natural Resources Use and Religious Philosophies
is most obvious among the second-generation migrants. As a Kinh woman of the second generation migrants in Ban Kho told us when visiting her upland field: “I’m a Tày now”, referring to the upland cropping and her lifestyle in general in the highlands. Perhaps a first sign of a changing cultural identity. And, as cited above, the relatives in the delta homeland consider the ones who moved to Ha Giang to be “like minorities” now, after living such a long time in the highlands.

However, as the Kinh increasingly gets more dependent on joinery and other cash income activities, and the Tày and the Giáy still dedicate themselves more to subsistence agriculture and less to cash income and market oriented production, it is possible that the differences between the minorities and the Kinh in Na Con will endure longer than in Ban Kho. Here the lowland fields of the Kinh are irrigated to a higher percentage (52%) than in Na Con (42%), and could be one factor indicating that the identity of the Kinh there as wet rice cultivators is stronger. However, the opposite occur: the integration into the local lifestyle is more apparent in Ban Kho (this is especially evident when contrasting the first generation of migrants in Ban Kho with the first generation in Na Con). One decisive factor is the production, which to a lesser extent is aimed at the market than the one in Na Con. As was pointed out in preceding chapter, the Kinh in Ban Kho maintain that there is no demand in the commune as a whole for commercialising production on a larger scale. Correct or not, in contrast to Na Con no traditions of handicraft skill that is possible to commercialise has been brought from the homeland in Ha Tày Province to Ban Kho.

Although changes are evident, the identity with the lowland and irrigation is still quite strong among some of the Kinh in the two hamlets. When asking one of the informants, a Kinh woman in Na Con, why the family did not sell their plot of land and spend all time on the joinery business instead (the husband was a joiner), something that would have given them a higher income, the answer was prompt: “Never, I like to work with agriculture”. The cultural identity as farmers and rice producers is still strong. It is reported that the Kinh, who have been artisans since long time back in history have been reluctant to entirely give up agriculture to dedicate all time to handicraft production. This reluctance to give up agriculture is based on a food strategy aiming at securing a constant supply of rice for the family (Pham Huy Le et al. 1997: 41). Parallel with this strong identity as farmers there is also the identity among the men in Na Con as skilled journeymen. One case that illustrates this is the answer we got from one of the joiners when we were asking questions about agriculture: “Ask my wife, she takes care of the agriculture”, and with pride added, “I’m a joiner”.

Changes on the ethnic stage
As was shown in Chapter VI124, the Kinh consider rice as the real food, and only eat e.g. cassava reluctantly and as an emergency food. The Kinh know how to cultivate the tuber for

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124 Section: Introduction.
pig feed, but lack the cultural acceptance of it as a food crop. They are rice producers and rice eaters in the first hand (Chinh and Hanh 2001).

Concerning ethnic integration, the first generation migrants seems to be more resistant than the second one. For example the second generation is more positive to intermarriage than their parents are. This position was unfolded by a Kinh man in Na Cor125 of the first generation migrants, while discussing the marriage pattern among the Kinh: “We also marry people from other ethnic groups. This is no problem as all speak Viet nowadays. But better to marry a Kinh, especially if from Ha Tay. It is easier with a Kinh wife. I don’t have to teach here how to cook Viet food”. When we interviewed a Kinh woman from the second generation in Ban Kho she said “Ngan are the best to assimilate into Kinh culture. Ngan like to marry Kinh. There are many mixed marriages now.” On the following question: One day when your daughter will get married and if there are four men who wants to marry here, one Dzao, one Tày, one Ngan and one Kinh, who do you prefer? The answer was: “It is her decision. But the Dzao are so different from us, otherwise it doesn’t matter”. When asking a Dzao man: If your daughters would like to marry a man from another ethnic group, would you mind that? We got the following answer: “No, it is up to them”. A Giáy man, 65 years old, confirms that ethnic intermarriages are getting more common: “My both sons are married to Tày women, one daughter with a Kinh and the other daughter with a Giáy”, i.e. of his four children only one was married within the father’s ethnic group.

As has been informed, in mixed marriages it is always the man’s ethnic belonging that decides what ethnic group the whole family belongs to. Thus, at the family level ethnicity is not negotiable. This fact shows that ethnicity still plays an important role in the community and that the patrilineal social order still is dominant. Cultural differences are manifested in the following words of a Kinh woman married to a Giáy man: “Actually it should be better if my daughters marry a Kinh. My husband is not good at dealing with problems, so I have to do that”. She expects the husband to be the one who solves the problems the family faces, but she does not think a man from one of the minority groups is capable to do that in a proper way. However, the statement also reveals that social changes might follow with ethnically mixed marriages; in this case, changes in the husband’s and the wife’s respective role within the family.

**Regional Experiences from Asian Mountainous Areas**

It has been shown that in the daily life social patterns are formed, patterns that are manifested in form of interactions between people and between ethnic groups. However the interactions

125 See also Chapter V, section: Ceremonies as Part of Social Relations
between ethnic groups, and the dynamics that generate ethnic identity and form certain social patterns, is not something confined to northern Viet Nam; it is found throughout the greater region of northern Southeast Asia and beyond. Below some cases from the region will be presented to illustrate this fact.

First an examination of the importance of changes in land use systems and maintenance of social structure in the formation of ethnic groups (or clusters of different ethnic groups) in a mountainous area of colonial Burma in the 1940s, presented in a classical anthropological study. Then some more recent studies from other parts of the highland areas of Asia (the Northeast Frontier of India, Southwest China, and the border zone of Thailand, Burma and Yunnan) will be added, which helps to broaden the perspective on ethnic identity, and the grouping of people with different cultural backgrounds under one ethnic label. The studies are interesting for the Ha Giang case because there are similarities in the geographical and demographic setting, and also because they are focused on how different ethnic groups are interacting and integrating.

**Northern Burma: Social Structure and the Importance of Land Use**

Leach (1977) argues that in the Kachin Hills Area of Burma the culture was subordinated to social structure, i.e. what cultural background an ethnic group had did not play a crucial role when different ethnic groups were forming new ethnic constellations, instead the way to find a common social structure was more important. And here the rituals (or ceremonies) were of paramount importance as an instrument for social communication.

A brief presentation with focus on the subsistence systems, and the ethnicity and ethnic mobility within the Kachin and Shan systems will be made, for a comparison with the study area in Ha Giang. Leach focuses a great deal on the political systems of the peoples he studied. However, the intention here is not to compare Kachin and Shan political systems of the 1940s with that of Viet Nam’s mountainous north of today, as these systems are entirely different.

The Kachin Hills Area resembles the mountainous northern Viet Nam in many respects: It is an area with a very heterogeneous population, to distinguish what is a separate ethnic group and what is a subgroup is often difficult, many languages are spoken, there are several distinct land use systems in practice at different altitudes, etc. If briefly summarising Leach’s description of the situation in the area, or “… a crude level of generalisation … “ (Leach 1977: 1), it may look as follows: The study focuses mainly on what are considered as two ethnic groups, the Kachin and the Shan. “Shans occupy the river valleys where they cultivate rice in irrigated fields; they are a relatively sophisticated people with a culture somewhat resembling that of the Burmese. The Kachins on the other hand occupy the hills where they cultivate rice mainly by slash and burn techniques of shifting cultivation” (*ibid.*). Leach
rejects the traditional anthropological approach dominant at the time of his field study, which saw societies as they were at the time of the study and not changing at all (Eller 1999: 14-15), “… the presentation is one of stable equilibrium; the authors write as if … ‘the societies in study’ are, now and for ever” (Leach 1977: 7). In contrast to this traditional approach Leach has difficulties to find any equilibrium among his research subjects in Burma. Instead he shows how “… Kachin communities oscillate between two polar types [of political-economic-social systems] – gumlao ‘democracy’ on the one hand, Shan ‘autocracy’ on the other” (ibid. 9). However, most Kachin communities are having a system in between those two extremes called gumsa. And it is the latter communities that oscillate and change, and consequently they are in an unstable situation, according to Leach. If the economic circumstances so permit, a Kachin community may move towards the Shan system and eventually they “become Shan” (see Figure 13).

The Kachin communities126 which have a gumlao system are politically egalitarian and do not obey to any paramount leaders, the lineages are not ranked, and the brothers have equal status regarding rituals; the village constitute an independent political unit. While the Shan community is a stratified feudal organised society, with the nobility at the top, the ordinary farmers form the largest group in the middle, and at the bottom we find the others, fishermen, butchers, liquor dealers, pig keepers, etc. Both Shan and Kachin societies are socially organised according to patrilineages. Shan are Buddhists while Kachin are not. Shan occupy most of the lowland areas suitable for wet rice cultivation in the Kachin Hills Area of Burma, while where the land is more suitable for shifting cultivation the Kachin dwells. However, as mentioned most of the Kachin people are living in gumsa organised communities who may vary so that some of the communities are on their way to become gumlao organised communities, swinging towards egalitarianism and shifting cultivation as the subsistence base; others may swing towards feudalism and wet rice cultivation, and eventually give up the Kachin system entirely and become Shan (Leach 1977: 56-57, 203, 214-15).

In the diagram below the oscillating between the two systems of gumla and gumlao and further to the Shan system is shown as Leach describes it in his study.

126 A Kachin community comprises several villages; e.g. a community of some 500 people may include nine villages and six dialect groups (Leach 1977: 66). In this way a community in the Kachin Hills Area is similar to a commune in the mountainous northern Viet Nam, i.e. a cluster of villages or hamlets where several languages or dialects are spoken (ibid. 68).
The Kachin do not actually form one homogeneous ethnic group in the real sense of the term. But, as a Kachin community “… despite its multiple linguistic factions, usually managed to act as if it were a culturally homogeneous entity” (Leach 1977: 66), in practise it could be recognised as a separate ethnic group as long as the Kachin themselves and others do so. As emphasised at the beginning of this chapter, the most important criteria for a group of people to be recognised as a distinctive ethnic group is that it is considered so by themselves and others, which is the case regarding the Kachin.

The Kachin and Shan127 constitute two cases of how peoples with different backgrounds and who speak different languages, can merge over time and identify themselves as being one ethnic group, and then later change towards a new ethnic identification. How is this possible? One key factor is what the combination of land tenure, agricultural systems and settlement pattern look like; “Shan settlements are almost invariably associated with a level stretch of ground irrigated for wet-rice cultivation. The houses vary a deal in type of construction and pattern of grouping, but the settlements are permanent. A Shan cultivator is tied to his land; he cannot readily switch his allegiance from one territorial chief to another as can Kachin” (Leach 1977: 213). Hence, the Kachin are not as tied to one place and one piece of land as are the Shan. Instead their society is organised around kinship ties where the patrilineages and clanship play a crucial role, while in the Shan society “it is the land holding itself which forms the element of structural continuity” (ibid. 214). It seems as if the ultimate decisive factor for the Kachin in the “oscillating” gumsa system to become a Shan, is the changes of the land use and land tenure system over time, from being mainly dependent on shifting

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127 The Shan is a Tai speaking people, and are related to a lot of different peoples in northern Southeast Asia and southern China, among others the Tày-Thai speaking peoples in Viet Nam (Keyes 1996: 145).
cultivation and a “loosely knitted” land holding system, to gradually being more dependant on wet rice cultivation and an adjacent feudal styled land tenure system: “The transition from Kachin-type organisation to Shan-type organisation involves the substitution of a straight landlord-tenant relationship for a relation based either on common lineage or affinal dependence” (ibid. 288). When moving from a gumsa to a gumlao system the proceeding is of course the contrary. However, the step into the gumlao system is not irreversible, while changing to be a Shan apparently is.

Leach’s study illustrates how land use and land tenure are important factors in the formation of political, economic and social systems. It also illustrates that boundaries between ethnic groups are not impermeable, and that people can fluctuate between different groups (Eller 1999: 15).

In the area of Leach’s study there exist a social hierarchy based on land use, where one extreme, the Shan lowland wet rice producers, represents the more organised and “civilised” society (a feudal one) with centralised power and permanent cultivation. The other extreme, the hill farming Kachin, represents the more egalitarian society with decentralised power and a shifting cultivating type of land tenure. However, the majority of the societies in the area have a governance and land use systems in between these two extremes. To quite a large extent the pattern is similar in the area of the present study, especially concerning land use and agricultural systems. Here, what is conceived (by the national majority people) as the most “advanced” system is represented by the Kinh and their cultural background in lowland wet rice production; and the “less advanced” represented by the Hmong and the Dzao, and their traditional livelihood system based on upland agriculture and shifting cultivation. While most people in the area (especially the Tày-Thái speaking ones), like in Burma, live from a combination of lowland wet rice and upland cultivation.

However, other factors than land use and land tenure might play a crucial role for keeping people together under one label; one such factor is the idea of a common past, which then is used as a gravity point, or a “gluing metaphor”, being an artificial construction or not (Saikia 2001:73).

**Northeast India: The Construction of a Past**

To be able to refer to a common historical past and a common ancestral homeland can be a decisive factor when a group of people officially wants to be recognised as a separate ethnic group by the central government. However, if such historical and geographical common background is a fact or a fiction is not imperative. But what is imperative is that the members of the group believe it is true, and that they can convince others that it is so (Eller 999: 15; De Vos 1995: 18). One case that clearly illustrates such a situation is taken from the highlands of the Northeast Frontier of India, more specifically from the state of Assam, and a study carried
out by Yasmin Saikia. The study demonstrates how “… a conglomerate of heterogeneous people who came from different backgrounds, religious affiliations, places, etc.”(Saikia 2001: 77), in the Upper Assam region forms an identity not based on real ethnic background or a fixed territory, but on a sense of some common historical past in one specific valley of the Brahmaputra River. At the same time as claiming this geographical/historical background the people also claims to be of Tai descent with the roots in Southeast Asia, particularly in Thailand. From the 1960s and onwards their identity (or ethnic ascription) was labelled Tai-Ahom (ibid. 74, 81).

The Northeast Frontier in India is a mountainous area inhabited to a great extent by so-called hill tribes of non-Indian descent. Instead the majority of the peoples in the area have a cultural background founded in Southeast Asia and southwest China. Bordering on Burma (or Mayanmar) in the east, and on China (Tibet) in the north, it is easy to understand why Assam has a large population of Tibeto-Burman and Austro-Asiatic128 speaking minority peoples (Hvenekilde 2001:174). Languages belonging to these two linguistic families are widely spoken in Southern China, Tibet and Southeast Asia (Dang Nghiem Van et al. 2000: 121).

During the British colonial period the subjects of Upper Assam were divided into two groups, one was the ‘savage hill people’ and the other the Assamese peasants that were branded Ahom, later to become Tai-Ahom (Saikia 2001: 78, 81). The British had implicitly created a dichotomy between lowlanders and highlanders in the area. Later, the post-colonial Indian Government officially divided all Assamese into ‘plains’ and ‘hills’ people. The Hindus were labelled plains people and considered “… to be of the civilized and advanced mainstream” (ibid.78). And as the Tai-Ahom were lowlanders they were included among the “civilised” Hindus. However, the people belonging to the Tai-Ahom group were not content with this categorisation as it excluded them from the economic and political privileges the hills people possessed129. Then the Tai-Ahom initiated a political struggle to be accepted as a separate community in Upper Assam. In this struggle they sought support from Thailand as they claimed having a historical background in the Tai culture. (ibid. 78, 80, 81).

Besides this affiliation of group identity to a specific geographical area, along a stretch of the Brahmaputra River, also the wet rice production functions as a “marker of identity” for the Tai-Ahom (ibid. 85-86). Hence, they are lowlanders in a highland area, and they are wet rice producers. In this sense the Tai-Ahom are similar to the Tày (or Tai) peoples in the greater region of northern Southeast Asia (e.g. in Ha Giang, Viet Nam) and southwest China.

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128 For example the Tày-Thái speaking peoples in Viet Nam belongs to this large linguistic family (Dang Nghiem Van et al. 2000: 121).

129 The “hills tribes” in the Northeast Frontier enjoy several benefits from the Indian Government, such as tax reduction and special rights to agriculture land (personal communication with staff from Ministry of Agriculture in Shillong, Northeast Frontier, in 1988).
In the Indian case the British colonial regime, as well as the post-colonial one, divided the people in the northeast into lowlanders, considered belonging to the “civilised mainstream”, and the less civilised shifting cultivating highlanders. Similar to the case in the study area in Viet Nam, the Indian case also shows that sometimes it can be an advantage to be considered belonging to the ethnic minorities, and not to the “mainstream” majority peoples (e.g. as preference to school in the town).

The identity as Tai-Ahom, with a claimed historical past on the banks of Brahmaputra River in the Upper Assam, is neither a pure fiction nor a real historical fact but “… builds on certain concrete things that are considered the symbols of heritage” (Saikia 2001: 82). Saikia describes the character of the Tai-Ahom identity as “… like the river, is fluid, defying strict categorization, being neither and end product of ‘imagination’ nor a fixed ‘national reality’” (ibid. 73).

**Southwest China: Categorisation on the National and the Local Levels**

As mentioned, the two levels where ethnic classification takes place, at the national official one and at the local self-ascribing one, do not have to coincide. To the contrary, a group of people who consider themselves a distinct ethnic group, and are considered so by the neighbouring groups, may not even appear in the government’s official classification. One such case is illustrated below from Lianshan in China. The case also illustrates that a group of people with blurry cultural boundaries may still be recognised as a distinct ethnic group at least on the local level.

Lianshan is a mountainous region in southwest China “squeezed” in between the provinces of Tibet, Sichuan and Yunnan. The area is to the main part inhabited by ethnic groups that are neither of Tibetan nor of Chinese descent, but constitute a mosaic of different cultures. Harrell sees ethnicity in areas such as Lianshan where there are a great number of ethnic groups and without clear boundaries between them, as a “system of communications” (Harrell 1995: 111). According to him, the categorisation of ethnic groups works through the expression of two languages, one is the “metalanguage” of the official classification at the national level, the other the “practical language” of ethnic identity at the local level (ibid. 98, 111). A number of the ethnic groups in the area do not coincide with the official classification. Harrell concludes that “… state projects of nation building, involving multiethnic populations in a single nation, always do some sort of violence to the arrangements of cooperation or hostility worked out in local communities. But the two realms of discourse are not separate. Local communities and their leaders may work within or against the system established by the state” (ibid. 112).
One of the cases that Harrell use for illustrating how indistinct ethnicity can be in a multiethnic situation, is the Prmi people. The Prmi are spread out in a far larger area than Lianshan, i.e. also in Yunnan and Sichuan. And they are officially classified with different people in different areas, e.g. in Yunnan they are considered belonging to a people called Pumi, while in Sichuan they are classified with the Tibetans. “Ethnic boundaries [of the Prmi], in terms of language, customs, social structure, and religion, have been fuzzy and permeable” (Harrell 1995: 107). Intermarriage between the Prmi and others is common. However, on Harrell’s question to some Prmi persons if they could think of marry a Miao (Hmong) he just received laughter. In other words for the Prmi it was inconceivable to marry a Hmong (ibid. 107-08). This reaction draws attention to the answer we got from the Kinh woman in Ha Giang\textsuperscript{130} when asked if she could accept that her daughter would take her husband from any ethnic group in the commune: “It is her decision. But the Dzao are so different from us, otherwise it doesn’t matter”. It should be noticed that the Dzao and the Hmong are culturally close and speak languages belonging to the same linguistic family (Dang Nghiem Van \textit{et al.} 2000: 175-190)\textsuperscript{131}. It seems as if people from various ethnic groups, in Viet Nam as well as in China, consider the Dzao and the Hmong culturally so far from the other groups that they do not constitute potential marriage partners.

The Prmi do not distinguish themselves from neighbouring ethnic groups through an own language (their language varies greatly from one location to another), and it is absolutely no requisite to speak Prmi to be considered as a Prmi (Harrell 1995: 108). As a matter of fact there are few ethnic markers that single out the Prmi from their neighbours. One of them is religion. The Prmi actually practice two, Tibetan Buddhism and Hangui (an indigenous religion of the region), which their neighbours do not (ibid. 110). It is obvious that Prmi is an indistinct category, that the Prmi is not recognised by the central government as a separate ethnic group, and that they have been lumped together with other groups depending on in which region the subgroup dwells. However, Harrell argues that “… the classification of some Prmi as Zang [Tibetans] and others as Pumi has caused little strife or resentment; what it has caused is opportunistic manipulation of the system by those who are caught in it” (Harrell 1995:112).

Here we have an example of how a central government strives to lump ethnic groups together and in this way give an impression of a nation ethnically composed as homogeneous as possible (Rambo 1997: 6-7). While on the local level there may be a finer scale of classifying

\textsuperscript{130} See above, section: “Changes on the Ethnic Stage”.

\textsuperscript{131} Besides the small group Pà Thén the Dzao and the Hmong are the only ones in Viet Nam who speak languages belonging to this linguistic family: Hmong-Dao or Hmong Yao (Dang Nghiem Van \textit{et al.} 2000: 175-195; Khong Dien 2002: 172).
ethnic groups. In the study area in Viet Nam, the Ngan constitutes another example of how the national level of classifying differs from the local one\textsuperscript{132}.

**Yunnan, Burma and Thailand: Multi Ethnic Identities on the Personal Level**

At the personal level there can be changes of ethnic identity, and manipulations of a specific social situation where the most advantageous ethnic belonging is used for the moment, in discordance with the categorisation enforced by the government. The study, briefly presented below, shows that it can be possible for individuals to have multiple ethnic identities.

A study, carried out by Mika Toyota in 1994-98, focuses on how individual people in the border areas of southern Yunnan (of China), Burma and Thailand change ethnic identity depending on in which country and in what social/cultural environment the person happens to be at the moment. The special focus is on what Toyota calls “trans-localized identity” (Toyota: 301). Toyota’s point of departure is that all people live with “… a variety of potentially contradictory identities” (ibid. 302). And in the situation of transnational mobility, as in the case of the people in the study, multiple ethnic identities become a prerequisite for survival.

The persons who Toyota studied moved around in the borders zones and were in need of both flexible citizenship and flexible ethnic identities. During the research he could meet one and the same person in different countries, and when in China claiming to be an Akha\textsuperscript{133}, in Thailand to be a Yunnan Chinese and in Burma to be a Shan\textsuperscript{134} (ibid. 308). Some of the subjects of his study were considered illegal immigrants by the national authorities. To be branded an illegal immigrant means to be socially excluded from the society, which “… leaves no alternative then but to search out alternative routes towards ‘social space’ and survival” (ibid. 311).

Toyota shows how an Akha minority person carrying out business, in search for a “social space”, proclaim to be a Chinese when in Thailand, because it separates him from being categorised as belonging to one of the so-called “hill-tribes” (or highland ethnic minorities). However when the same person is in Yunnan, it is more convenient to be an Akha (i.e. a member of a “hill tribe”) than belonging to the Han Chinese majority people. The switching from one to another identity helps to connect to business networks and to avoid stigmata. However, it is not a matter of only “creating” identities, because “Culture and identity no longer operate within a normative dichotomy of ‘genuine’ and ‘invented’, rather they are

\textsuperscript{132} See section: Ethnic Identities and Social Networking in the Resettlement Process, in the present chapter.

\textsuperscript{133} The Akha is a minority group (or “hill tribe”) who is spread out from Yunnan to Laos, Thailand, Burma and Viet Nam. In China they are officially classified as a subgroup of the Hani minority group (Henin 1996: 181).

\textsuperscript{134} The Shan is a Tai-speaking people, and one of the subjects of Leach’s study in Burma in the 1940s.
products of multiple interpretation and strategic interactions among people using a variety of resources” (ibid. 316). Thus, the mobile persons of the study form a kind of own “ethnic category” with floating boundaries to the other ethnic groups living in the area, but with one geographical “gravity point”, *viz.* the border zone of Thailand, Burma, and Yunnan.

Toyota’s study might constitute an extreme case as it deals with individuals who are exceptionally mobile and constantly shifting from one country to another. Nevertheless, it demonstrates how manipulable ethnicity can be. It also shows us that there is nothing contradictory in the fact that one individual has various ethnic identities at one and the same time. In this way the person gains several advantages when moving around in areas with such a heterogeneous population.

**Multi Layer Identities and Floating Boundaries**

…expression of ethnic identity can be inconsistent, contradictory, multi-layered and fluid. Toyota 2003: 307

The most central outcomes of the studies presented above can be summarised as: The individual can identify himself/herself with various groupings of people at one and the same time, or shift between ethnic groups; and an ethnic group is not a static formation, but a rather nebulous thing with blurry boundaries. Further, a group of people might be considered as a separate ethnic group at the local level but not so at the national level; and lastly, various ethnic groups might be clustered around a gravity point, or around a “gluing metaphor” such as a perceived common past (Saikia 2001:73), and in this way forming larger and more loosely joined constellations of people than is the case with an ethnic group.

When examining how these situations apply to the present study, it is obvious that there are similarities with the Ha Giang cases. At the individual level, most of the Kinh migrants, although born in the highlands or have lived there almost forty years, still keep a foothold in the delta through the contacts with the relatives there. The contacts are maintained through both social and economic networks. The Kinh migrants still identify themselves with the Viet culture and participate in important social events such as life cycle ceremonies and ancestral worshipping, when they can afford the bus ticket to the delta. At the same time they are increasingly integrated into the lifestyle of the highlands. Even old informers of the first generation migrants have confirmed that they feel somewhat like strangers when visiting the delta. As the old Kinh migrant expressed it “…everything is strange for me there now [in the delta], no space and very noisy” … “We also speak [Viet] little different from how they speak in the delta now. Language has changed there but not here”. The feeling of being mountain people is one identification. The cultural, geographical and historical/mythological
background as Viet people from the delta (i.e. ethnic Kinh) constitutes another identification, and the national identity as citizen of Viet Nam a third one.

**Figure 14. Kinh identities**

![Diagram illustrating Kinh identities]

The diagram above illustrates the different identities one individual Kinh might have when living in the delta land. First he/she belongs to the Kinh ethnically, which means that he/she culturally is Kinh, or Viet, and sharing the common history of other Kinh. At the same time a Kinh person might feel togetherness with other lowland and wet rice producing peoples. Lastly, he/she is a citizen of Viet Nam, a marker that is shared with other ethnic groups living within the national borders.

**Figure 15. Tày-Thái identities**

![Diagram illustrating Tày-Thái identities]

The diagram above illustrates the different identities one individual Tày-Thái speaking person might have (in this case a Giáy). The person is a Giáy, which means that he/she belongs to the larger group of Tày-Tây speaking peoples, at the same time as being part of the highland dwelling peoples (mountain people). The Giáy of Viet Nam are of course also citizens of the Vietnamese nation, which means a fourth identification. The example could as well have shown a person belonging to one of the other two minority groups in the two hamlets, i.e. the Tày or the Ngan. However, as people might switch from one
of the Tày-Thái speaking groups to another, there can be individual cases of vagueness regarding ethnic affiliation within the larger Tày-Thái grouping.

The two diagrams above show how individual persons can be affiliated to an ethnic group and identify themselves with other groupings of people at the same time. As also shown, the ethnic group is in general part of other larger constellations of peoples such as “we the mountain people” or “we the citizens of Vietnam”. Thus, the Kinh in the study area overlap for instance the Giây as an ethnic group. Not only because both are citizens of Vietnam, but also to certain extent because both live in the highlands. The situation today in the study area, including all four ethnic groups, could be presented as in the diagram below.

**Figure 16. Identities of the ethnic groups in the study area**

Notice that this diagram shows a more overlapping situation of the ethnic groups in the study area than figures 14 and 15 do. The fact that the circle representing Kinh partly is outside the circle representing the Mountain People is a way of illustrating that the Kinh in the study area still keep a foot in the delta land through social and cultural obligations, etc.

**Interaction and Integration: Steps towards Capacity Building to Manage Natural Resources**

What often occurs when representatives of the national dominant ethnic group moves into an area inhabited by one or several smaller ethnic groups who have distinct cultural backgrounds than the one of the dominant one, is a change where the smaller ethnic group has to adjust to the dominant group and may loose its cultural characteristics (e.g. Brown 1996; Salemink 2000). However, more often there is a two-way process where the larger and nationally dominant ethnic group is influenced by the smaller group(s) (Yinger 1985: 155).
Culturally, the result of the immigration to the two hamlets in Ha Giang is not confined to a situation where a number of different ethnic groups live side by side in some kind of semi-isolation, or in what has been called “poly-ethnic society” above (Barth 1969, Izikowitz 1969). Instead, social as well as economic interactions have been going on during the years that have past since the migrants arrived in 1966; an interaction that indeed also has accelerated for each generation. These interactions occur on different levels. It has been mentioned\textsuperscript{135} that economic interactions are going on, e.g. in form of money lending, between the different ethnic groups, and between the Kinh families within one hamlet, as well as between the Kinh in one hamlet and the relatives in the delta homeland. The importance of ceremonies for ethnic interaction and ethnic rapprochement have also been discussed, as well as the importance for the Kinh migrants to travel to the former homeland in the delta to participate in ceremonies such as ancestor worshipping, weddings and funerals.

There are two categories of social and economic interactions: one that creates new relations and potential new ethnic constellations in the future (or other forms of clustering of peoples), and one that hampers or delays such constellations. The first one is the one between the different ethnic groups, and the other, which exists for maintaining an old social order, is the one that helps to keep the connections between the Kinh and their roots in the delta. The latter one pulls to keep the old traditions and the old culture intact, while the former category is the one that pulls towards adaptation and integration into a life in the highlands. The latter one is more evident among the old generation of migrants, while the former is more evident among the second generation of migrants.

\textit{Gradually into a New Cultural Identity}

In this chapter the importance of ethnic identity, ethnic interactions and changes in the social structure in the two hamlets of the study have been highlighted. It was noticed in the preceding chapter that new local knowledge was formed parallel with other changes, especially in connection with natural resources use. The different “knowledges” that are forming new local knowledge have each one been developed in its specific cultural contexts. The ethnic and ecological circumstances reflect the limits cultural background set on the one hand, and local ecological conditions on the other, when forming a subsistence system. It is obvious that the subsistence systems and practically the whole livelihood of the Kinh was changed quite drastically when they had to migrate to Ha Giang. But life has also changed for the ethnic minorities (albeit not so drastically as for the Kinh because the ethnic minority peoples have stayed in their homeland and not been forced to settle in a new area).

\textsuperscript{135} Chapter V, section: Social Relations and Networking.
Instead of discussing ethnic change as an independent phenomenon, it has been pointed out that there are other ways of grouping people than under the label “ethnic group”. One such grouping is the one around a “gravity point”, which e.g. can be a common geographical area and a common dwelling place. Although still in an incipient stage, such a grouping, “we the mountain people”, is emerging in the study area. Concerning integration between the Kinh and the minority peoples, it was noticed that there are differences between the generations of the migrants, where the integration and interactions between the Kinh and the minority people is more overt among the Kinh of the second generation than among the ones of the first generation. This integration is manifested in for example a higher acceptance of interethnic marriages.

When comparing the situation in Ha Giang with the one shown in a study conducted in the highlands of Burma in the 1940s, it was clear that there were some similarities between Burma and northern Viet Nam; in Burma different ethnic groups with different cultural background had merged into new ethnic formations in new settlement areas where the ecological conditions and subsistence systems were different from the previous ones. And as said above, in the study area in Ha Giang an incipient trend towards similar formations (“we the mountain people”) was noticed. It was also noticed that in Burma as well as in Viet Nam the harmonising of ceremonies played a decisive role for keeping social interactions alive. In this way the ceremonies become a tool and an arena for individual interactions between people with different ethnic backgrounds, and as an outcome also integration between the ethnic groups.

With cases from different parts of mountainous South Asia and Southeast Asia the importance of individual ethnic identity as well as the importance of group identity was illustrated. It was pointed out that an ethnic group often is permeable and a fairly blurry thing. At one time it may be advantageous to be a member of one ethnic group for certain reasons while at another time it might be better to belong to another ethnic group. One example of such case was the Giây man in the present study, who after his father’s death changed to identify himself with the Tày instead because his stepmother was a Tày. Also the possibility of one person having various ethnic identities at one and the same time was discussed. The Kinh migrants still keep one foot in the delta where they identify themselves with the Viet culture, while in Ha Giang they tend to identify themselves with the common grouping of “we the mountain people”. This oscillating between two identities is important when building up the social and economic networks with the minority peoples in the highland, and at the same time keeping the social and economic ties with the relatives in the delta. In the diagrams above it has been shown that a person can be affiliated to different groupings of people, and identify him/her self with all of these groupings, depending on e.g. national, occupational, or cultural belonging (Cherni 2002: 70).
Other changes occur at the group level. One such case is the ethnic group of Ngan who gets advantages by being recognised as a minority group at the local level (i.e. the provincial level) instead of being a subgroup of the Tày (i.e. as at the national level). In the Ha Giang Province the Ngan is considered as a separate ethnic group. The status as a minority group gives the Ngan children the right of precedence to the upper secondary school in Ha Giang Town. If the Ngan also on the provincial level had been lumped together with the Tày ethnic group, they would have been classified as a majority people like the Tày are in the province.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn from what has been discussed in the present chapter is that on the individual as well as on the group level, people do manipulate ethnicity and group membership for gaining economic and social advantages. It is easy to agree with Eller when he says that “… the cultural world is not so neat: groups exist with vague and permeable boundaries, social ‘identity’ is flexible and negotiable, …” (Eller 1999: 15).
VIII. Conclusions

The way of using the natural resources in a specific area and how different peoples have managed to live together in that area have been the main subjects of this study. The study has focused on how migrating majority people have adapted to life in the highlands, with the particular aim of analysing the social and cultural consequences for these migrants when settling in communities populated with people who belong to the national ethnic minorities.

The focal point has been on impacts in new interactive situations, where traditional customs and knowledge of the migrants has met with the ones of the ethnic minorities living in the area since many generations. In this new interactive situation the physical environment has been considered both as a limiting factor and as ground for new ideas when the Kinh migrants tried to implement their traditional knowledge from the delta, and the multi ethnic situation a source for forming new local knowledge. Hence, the study concerns adaptation to both a new physical environment and a new socio-cultural one.

Adaptation to a New Physical Environment

For the Kinh one crucial part of the adaptation process has been the one to the entirely different eco-environment that the highland areas constitute in comparison with the Red River Delta. It was stated that the Viet culture has grown out from a subsistence production in an abundance of water in a flat, and by mankind completely transformed landscape, viz. the delta with its advanced irrigation systems. With such a cultural background the Kinh saw the rugged mountainous areas of the north as a wild and uncivilised place to live in. It was argued that this view was based on the Confucian way of perceiving nature as something that humans should domesticate and civilise. This view was the starting point when analysing the importance of culture in the formation of the livelihood in a new settlement area. It was also stated that the Kinh drastically had to change the idea of land use and agriculture, from being centred on lowland wet rice production to a more diversified system, including both upland and lowland agriculture, shifting cultivation and irrigation agriculture.

When the Kinh arrived in the new settlement area they had to change their subsistence quite drastically from lowland rice production to collecting food in the forested upland areas, and to learn how to practice shifting cultivation. With help of the Kinh, and in line with the New Economic Zones programme, the minorities’ lowland wet rice production was modified to give a higher output. However, despite this development both the Kinh and the minorities were still dependent on the upland production as an important supplement to the wet rice production, and some families continue to be so up to the present time.

The Kinh had to overcome the idea of forest as a sign of wilderness when the lowland could not give a sufficient output for feeding the family. If a people have the view that a forested
and hilly landscape merely constitute wilderness, and that only flat lowland without trees is suitable for agricultural production, it is difficult to build up a subsistence based on agriculture in the highlands. However, during the first year in the new settlement area the Kinh learned how to use the forest in the upland for food production.

As the years passed the features of the landscape changed, and great parts of the hills were deforested. Although parts were replanted the landscape had changed to a more open one, with more agricultural land than before. The features of the landscape were coming somewhat closer to the ideal picture the Kinh had with them from the delta. Perhaps one can say that the landscape was approaching the migrants: “Now the landscape is better when we can see each other. It is more open”, as one old Kinh couple expressed it. At the same time the ideal picture had changed among the Kinh as they now appreciate the landscape as it is and would have difficulties to get accustomed to live in the delta again. The words from the old Kinh man in Ban Kho revealed a changed attitude: “My relatives there [in the delta land] say that I should move back, but everything is strange for me there now, no space and very noisy. In contrast here there are nice views and space, the climate is better here also”.

The facts mentioned above show that the influence on the subsistence systems has not been a one-way flow. That is, not only has the Kinh changed the minorities’ agriculture system, but also the minorities’ systems have had an impact on the Kinhs’ system so that it now is more adapted to the conditions in the highlands.

According to some theories it is likely that people who migrate from a densely populated area with intensive agriculture system (e.g. irrigated rice production) to a sparsely populated area adopt a more extensive agriculture system (e.g. shifting cultivation) when arriving in the new settlement area (see Boserup 1993 [1965] for a theoretical discussion, and e.g. Netting 1973 for a case study). A similar development occurred when the Kinh arrived in the mountainous north. They began cropping the forested hills using shifting cultivation methods. However, the process was more complicated than a straightforward change from an intensive agriculture to an extensive one. Although much lower than in the delta, the population pressure was high in the mountainous areas in comparison with access to arable land, and in the valley bottoms an intensive agricultural system was already in operation when the migrants arrived. A system that was not possible to expand further due to the dissected terrain. Thus, the migrants divided their efforts into the labour intensive wet rice production they were accustomed to from the delta, and the new upland agriculture.

One can always argue that in a situation as the one the Kinh migrants found themselves in when arriving in the highlands, with no option to return home, it was a question of adapting to the local physical conditions or succumb. However, to adapt to a life in a new area is not only a matter of producing enough food for surviving, it is also a question of adapting to other
people already dwelling in the area, which implies social and cultural adjustments as well. And the latter might be a more difficult process, which may last a whole generation or more. In the northern highlands of Viet Nam, a socio-cultural adjustment means to adjust oneself to live in a multi-ethnic environment. Concerning adaptation to new ecological circumstances, Barth (1969: 20) argues that “… a group’s adaptation to a niche in nature is affected by its absolute size, while a group’s adaptation to a niche constituted by another ethnic group is affected by its relative size”. However, the last statement may as well apply for an adaptation to a new socio-cultural environment. To simplify, the smaller the group who moves in (in comparison with the group(s) already living in the area) the lesser the possibility of social and cultural domination of the local group(s), and the greater the demand for interactions and integration between the different ethnic groups.

Solving the Problem of Living Together
It has been argued that culture forms the background when taking decisions on how to adapt to a new environment. In this process a kind of new cultural identity is slowly emerging. Scale and pace of changes in cultural identity depend on which generation one focuses on. The first generation, the ones who migrated with their families from the delta, has a stronger identity than the members of the second generation, who were either very young when arriving in the north or were born after arriving. This is manifested in the interviews where the first generation immigrants often point out differences between themselves and the ethnic minority peoples, while the second generation immigrants often point out similarities instead. For example, as was mentioned, one Kinh woman spontaneously expressed “I’m actually a Tày”, referring to the fact that she lived like the minority peoples. Others said that nowadays it was not so much difference between the ethnic groups “We are all mountain people”. A brother to one of the Kinh migrants, who we talked to in his home in Ha Tay Province southwest of Ha Noi, told us that according to his view all Kinh who migrated to the north in 1966 are “like minority people now”. These statements may hint at an incipient trend towards ethnic change, or just at a clustering of several ethnic groups around something they have in common, which was called a “gravity point”. In the present case the gravity point is the geographical highland area.

In connection with this discussion it was noted that an ethnic group is not a static formation, but something that is quite blurry and vague, and that the boundaries between different ethnic groups often are permeable. Individuals may shift ethnic identities and move between ethnic groups (one case in the study areas illustrated this kind of ethnic change). It was also noted that various ethnic groups might be clustered around such a gravity point as mentioned above.

In the integration process, a first and very important step for social contacts between the Kinh and the minority peoples in the study area, was the participation in each other’s ceremonies (especially important were the nuptial and the obsequial ceremonies). All Kinh interviewed
stressed the importance of the ceremonies for making social contacts with the ethnic minority peoples. By, for example, inviting a neighbour Kinh family to participate in their son’s wedding ceremony, an ethnic minority family has opened up a door for social interactions.

To take part in each other’s ceremonies is a way to act out social relations, and when people help and bring gifts to funerals and weddings they form inter-ethnic networks. In this way the ceremonies work both as tools for initiating the relations and as arenas for knitting networks. The economic gains are manifested in for example inter-ethnic loans, exchange of labour at harvest time, or hiring of labour for the same purpose.

Parallel with the process of integration there are social and economic contacts going on between the Kinh in Ha Giang and their relatives in the Red River Delta. Most of the Kinh of the first generation, if they have the economic means to finance it, travel to the delta homeland at least ones a year to maintain contacts with family members and with the ancestors through special ceremonies. Some of the second generation migrants send their children to relatives in the delta to be trained as journeymen, especially as joiners. Another channel of socio-economic contacts between the delta and the highlands constitute the loans given by some of the Kinh in the delta to their relatives in Ha Giang.

One may say that the Kinh in Ha Giang uphold one foot in the homeland through the abovementioned contacts, and that these contacts are part of the ethnic identity of being a Kinh. It has been argued that this identity goes on at the same time as the cultural identification with the mountainous region and the life there is growing stronger, particularly among the second and third generations of migrants.

**Inter-Ethnic Influences**

If examining the influences between the minority peoples and the Kinh, and the changes these influences have generated, tentatively one can divide them into socio-cultural level influences and the ones on the more “technical” level\(^\text{136}\). Among the more technical ones we find for example agriculture changes. It has already been stated that the Kinh had to learn shifting cultivation and how to extract food out of the forest shortly after arriving in the new settlement area. Likewise it has been stated that the Kinh helped to improve the lowland rice production through new transplanting techniques. Regarding agricultural tools, it has been mentioned that for example the hoe the Kinh brought from the delta was useless in the highlands. The larger and wider hoe the minority peoples used was much more suitable for the softer soils in the area.

\(^{136}\) Some changes might be found at both levels; e.g. to learn how to grow cassava in the upland areas is a technical adaptation to the local physical environment, while accepting to eat cassava is a cultural change.
Concerning other economic activities than agriculture the carpentry and the joinery businesses are the most important ones for generating cash. Here the Kinh are active in the carpentry and joinery business. Although there was one minority person who had been influenced by the Kinh and was making furniture, the minority people are mainly involved only in the construction business (i.e. carpentry); perhaps an incipient competition from the minority people in that specific Kinh business.

As the special Tày styled house is the dominant one in the study area, there are also mostly Tày-Thái speaking people involved in building the dwelling houses in the two communes. However, there are some minority people who have been influenced by the Kinh architecture and have built their houses on the ground and not on poles like the traditional Tày culture stipulates. Here, as in other areas of the Ha Giang Province, the trend is that when a minority family has improved its economy and wants to build a new house they construct it in the Kinh fashion on the ground. In contrast, it is rare to see a Kinh family who have chosen the Tày architecture and built the house on poles instead of directly on the ground.\(^{137}\)

On the social and cultural level the changes of the Kinhs’ perception of the landscape has already been mentioned. Here it is quite obvious that in a process where the forested area has decreased and the landscape is more open, the Kinh see it as an improvement in comparison with the time of their arrival in the 1960s. Naturally it is also a long process where the Kinh have got habituated to the forested mountainous landscape and now feel at home in it. The ethnic minority people have also changed their idea of how a landscape ought to look like and now seem to appreciate a more open one. As the landscape look today it might constitute a “compromise” between the minorities’ and the Kinhs’ ideal picture.

Above the importance of life cycle ceremonies in the cultural integration process was pointed out. In this process the Kinh have strived to make the minority peoples’ ceremonies coming closer to the Kinh ones, especially by making the former shorter. When asking some ethnic minority persons about the issue they confirmed that there are changes going on and that the minorities’ ceremonies have been shortened. However, the compromises seem to have a limit. According to informants from the minority groups, the custom of double obsequies was something the ethnic minorities would never adopt from the Kinh.

That the performance of ceremonies can be a means of social communication was argued with reference to a case study in Burma. Here, were people who lived in the same community, but of different origin, and speaking different languages, use ceremonies for social communications. In the area of the present study the different ethnic groups have no problem

\(^{137}\) As mentioned earlier, few Kinh have adopted the Tày way of building the houses, and no one in the study area. One reason for the tendency of a Vietnamisation of the architecture in the highlands could be the dwindling timber resources, which makes it easier to use bricks and concrete when one can afford it.
to communicate verbally as all speak Viet, and in addition most Kinh migrants can speak one or several minority languages. According to Kinh informants, verbal communication was a problem when they arrived in the area. Hence, regarding languages there has been a two-way influence during the years: the minority peoples have learned Viet and the Kinh have picked up the Tày-Thái languages. Nevertheless, the performance of ceremonies has been and still is a mode of social interaction and communication between the different ethnic groups in the study area.

One specific social issue that often changes when livelihood changes is the sexual division of labour. However, for the Kinh in the study area the migration and settling in the highlands did not change the gender situation to the same extent as when the economic circumstances changed due to Doi Moi. Then the possibilities to market products increased considerably, and it became profitable to expand for example the furniture production. And as this was exclusively the men’s work, now the women had to take care of the agriculture work alone in the families who were engaged in the joinery business; a subsistence activity that earlier was a concern for the whole family now became a responsibility for only part of the family. Also the expansion of petty trading contributed to the women’s workload, as that was a female business.

Spearheads for the Government?
It has been mentioned that according to some standpoints the poor farmers who are sent out by their governments to colonise marginal areas are expected to play the role of “spearheads” for the government, i.e. as disseminators of the dominant culture and protectors of international border areas (De Koninck 1996, 2000). The spearheading for the government could then be considered as one important goal for migration schemes; others being the lightening of pressure on agriculture land, and boosting agricultural production. It is possible that the Vietnamese Government, when ordering the Kinh to go to the highlands, had the idea that the migrants also should function as spearheads for the Viet culture up in the Ha Giang Province. The Kinh came under the New Economic Zones Programme (albeit it was then not yet named so, but only called “clearing of land”), which implies that the idea was to bring new agriculture techniques to the highlands, and in this sense they have to a certain extent worked as agricultural spearheads, as they have improved wet rice cultivation in the area.

Then, how has the migration of the Kinh in the Ha Giang case served the government’s intentions whatever they may have been? According to De Koninck (1996) migration in Viet Nam have had the mandate of redistributing people with the aim of lightening population pressure in such densely populated areas as the Red River Delta, and of settling Viet majority people in marginal areas for “taming” (sic) the ethnic minorities living there, and in border areas also for national security reasons. Another mandate has been to boost agriculture production with the aim to increase export.
In the Ha Tay Province in the delta, the original place of the Kinh migrants in the study area, the population is higher now than when the migrants left in the 1960s. On our question how they survive if the area of agricultural land has decreased in comparison to population, one relative to the Kinh in Ha Giang gave us the following answer: “Yields are higher now, with rice from the Mekong Delta, and commercialisation.” Hence, the increasing output from agriculture (a result of improved rice varieties) in combination with business activities, such as joinery, has made it possible to feed a population of two or three times the one of 1966 on a smaller agricultural area. This may lead to the conclusion that the migration was in vain. However, in a short perspective the out-migration may have had a positive effect in the delta. One can only speculate if it had been possible to feed all the families of that time until the new rice varieties and the new agricultural techniques arrived to the delta area many years later. But, the fast raising living standard in the delta today shows that in the long perspective the out-migration have not had much impact on the livelihood.

The ordering of migration from the delta to the highlands in the 1960s was certainly an example of a government high-levelled control of a country’s population move. The migration to Ha Giang was definitely a settling of a marginal area of the country, and possibly the government had the idea that by just settling people from the ethnic majority group in the highlands they had in some way strengthened the control over a marginal area close to a thousand year old enemy. In this sense the migration to the study area of Ha Giang Province was successful, but if it could be called a “taming” of the minority peoples living there is very doubtful. The first months, or even the first year, it was rather a “taming” of the Kinh who had to learn how to survive by exploiting the forest and practising shifting cultivation, activities far from the lowland wet rice production of the homeland. The cases studied shows more of adaptation and learning than an explicit dissemination of the Kinh culture, because the migrants faced the reality when they found out that their way of utilising nature and extracting a living out of it did not fit in the highlands.

Concerning national security, the settling of the Kinh in Ha Giang may have had some implication for increasing the population in the mountainous frontier zone close to the border to China. However, the majority of the ethnic minorities in the area are Tày - Thái speaking groups who have been living there since centuries, and hence constitute a small security risk. The “problem area” for the Vietnamese government regarding securing international borders has rather been the more remote districts of the province further northeast, where especially the Hmong people reside. Here the Hmong and other minority peoples have crossed the border for petty trading and for visiting relatives on the other side during many years. This created problems for the Hmong who lived just at the border when the war broke out between Viet Nam and China in 1979.
Due to ecological constraints mentioned earlier, the possibilities that the area of the study should play any significant role in exporting agrarian products is slim, and it is difficult to imagine that this was ever the ambition when the government ordered the families to migrate in the 1960s.

Hence, the spearheading for the government was quite limited in the case of the present study. However, this does not imply that Kinh in other parts of the province have not played a significant role as spearheads in the process of Vietnamisation of the highlands. The impact of the Kinh lifestyle is clearly present in Ha Giang Town and in the valley along the Lo River southwards, and then especially in the small towns along the road towards Ha Noi, for example in Vi Xuyen and Bac Quang. But the further one gets from these areas, into the highland districts in the west and northeast, the less visible is the impact from the Kinh culture. This implies that the Kinh who have migrated to the northern highlands to a great extent are fairly urbanised (Konh Dien 2002).

In sum, one can say that in the two hamlets of the present study the influences between the different ethnic minority groups and the Kinh concerning both social/cultural issues and the more technical ones have been, and still are, an interactive process where it would be difficult to point out one or the other part as the overt dominating one. However, communication is improving at a fast pace in Viet Nam and the large Viet society, which now is opening up for the world, is pressing on even in such a relatively remote area as the one of the present study.

**National and Regional Impacts on the Local Level**

The discussion in the thesis has to a great extent been focused on the very local level, a couple of hamlets in Ha Giang Province. It constitutes an issue study of adaptation into a new environment. But people in the study area do not live in isolation; they are influenced by national events as well as by international ones. Today migration from the lowland is not the only agent of change in the highlands.

The land reform and the more overall economic reforms (*Doi Moi*), which stipulate that the farmers may sell their products wherever they get the best price, have had a great and direct impact on daily life in the study area. The land reform is crucial because now the individual family can manage its own plot of agriculture land as well as the production and labour input. So are the market reforms because they have encouraged the farmers to open up small stores along the road in the commune centres, and have also increased trade with the town.

The reforms that Viet Nam has experienced since the end of the 1980s were announced just before the great political and economic upheavals in the world in the beginning of 1990s. Most notabel was probably the fall of the Soviet Union, which put pressure on countries that
were dependant on trade with the Soviet Block to make profound economic changes. One of these countries was Viet Nam. The reforms did not only imply a shift of the economy from a central planned one to a market orientated one, but also an opening up of the country in general. This also meant increasing contacts with the world outside the Soviet Block. One crucial step in the improvement of international relations with its neighbours was when Viet Nam became a member of ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations) in 2001. The organisation now comprises all countries in Southeast Asia (with the only exception of the newly independent state of East Timor). When Viet Nam becomes a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO)\textsuperscript{138}, it will undoubtedly increase international relations, also outside the Southeast Asian Region.

The opening up of the country to the neighbours and the world has also meant that communication routes have improved, e.g. today there are daily flights to Bangkok, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Europe, as well as improved roads and cross routes to China. Although quite a comprehensive and unofficial petty trading had been going with China since long time back in the remote areas of the Ha Giang Province\textsuperscript{139}, the official opening of the border at the beginning of the 1990s was an important factor in boosting trade and interactions with the giant northern neighbour. The impact of the relaxed relation with China is clearly visible in Ha Giang Town, where one can see much more Chinese visitors today.

The reforms under \textit{Doi Moi} have meant that people can move more freely and settle almost wherever they like. As a result, spontaneous internal migration increased at the end of the 1980s. Hence, it may be safe to draw the conclusion that with or without the forced migration in the 1960s the mountainous north would have been affected by migration sooner or later, and the social and economic changes visible today would probably have been present anyhow. These changes do not only affect the economy and livelihood of the minority, it certainly also affect the life of the Kinh who have settled for such a long time in one of the most remote areas of the country.

One direction of the changes will probably be that the importance of activities for livelihood other than agriculture will increase (e.g. wage labour and business), which in turn increases the rural-urban connections, especially the ones with the Ha Giang Town. A trend of a rural population increasingly dependent on urban areas for the subsistence is reported from other parts of Southeast Asia as well (Rigg 1998).

\textsuperscript{138} Viet Nam now has status as observer in the organisation, but has applied for full membership. The status of the application was as follow in May 2003: “Viet Nam reported progress, on 12 May 2003, in its membership negotiations, but several delegations said much more needs to be done, and the working group chairperson told members that “success will depend on a quantum jump” in efforts if Viet Nam is to meet its goal of joining by 2005” (WWW.WTO.ORG).

\textsuperscript{139} The existence of this trade was confirmed by people living in the Ha Giang Province along the border to China.
Appendix I. Rainfall and Temperature in the Ha Giang Province

The average rainfall per month (in millimetres)

January 26.7; Feb: 41.3; March 49.8; April: 107.9; May: 292.6; June: 334.2; July: 639.9; Aug: 310.4; Sep: 166.1; Oct: 364.0; Nov: 24.8; and in Dec: 62.1.

The yearly rainfall was in 1995: 2,380, in 1999: 2,717, and in year 2000: 2,419.

The average temperature (in centigrade Celsius)

Monthly
Jan: 17.4; Feb: 15.7; March: 20.6; April: 24.6; May: 26.4; June: 27.0; July: 28.2
August: 28.0; Sep: 26.2; Oct: 24.7; Nov: 19.9; and in Dec: 17.8

Yearly
The average temperature was in 1995: 22.7 °C, 1999: 23.1 °C, and in year 2000: 23 °C.

(Source: Ha Giang People’s Committee 2002).
Appendix II. Annual Agricultural Cycle of Three Ethnic Groups

**Kinh annual agricultural cycle**

Na Con Village  
**Informant:** Husband, 57 years old  
**Size of household:** Husband, wife and two children

Please notice that farmers in Vietnam use the lunar calendar\(^{140}\), which means that the twelve months of the year are not synchronised with the ones of the Western solar calendar; e.g. the first month of the lunar year in 2003 began on the first of February according to the solar calendar.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Labour division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Lunar calendar)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First rice crop</strong> (30 % of land, irrigated)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ploughing, harrowing,</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Prepare seedlings</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transplanting, manuring</td>
<td>Wife, labour exchange*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Weeding, fertilizing</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second rice crop</strong> (100 % of land, non irrigated)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ploughing, harrowing, transplanting (after 20 days)</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8-9</td>
<td>Fertilizing</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other lowland crops</strong> (30% of land), maize, groundnut, and others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Planting/sowing</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Fertilizing, weeding</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 (following year).</td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Families assist each other by exchanging labour.

Manure = natural fertilizer  
Fertilizer = chemical fertilizer

\(^{140}\) See Chapter IV, section: Agriculture, Handicraft and Trade
# Tày annual agricultural cycle

**Na Con Village**

**Informant:** Husband, 42 years old

**Size of household:** Husband, wife and two children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Labour division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Lunar calendar)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First rice crop (70-80 % of land, irrigated)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ploughing, harrowing, Transplanting</td>
<td>Husband, wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2.</td>
<td>Manuring</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4.</td>
<td>Fertilizing</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Husband, wife, children, labour exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second rice crop (100 % of land, non-irrigated)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Ploughing, harrowing, Transplanting</td>
<td>Husband, wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manuring</td>
<td>Husband, labour exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Manuring and fertilizing</td>
<td>Whole family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Weeding</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Whole family, labour exchange</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other lowland crops (50% of land), maize, sweet potato, groundnut, tomato</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Planting/sowing</td>
<td>Wife, husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Fertilizing, weeding</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 (the following year)</td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Upland, Cassava and maize</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Sowing, weeding</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3.</td>
<td>Weeding, fertilizing (maize)</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6.</td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Families help each other by exchanging of labour
  Manure = natural fertilizer
  Fertilizer = chemical fertilizer
Ngan annual agricultural cycle
Ban Kho Village
Informant: Husband, 44 years old
Size of household: Husband, wife and four children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Labour division</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Lunar calendar)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First rice crop (50 % of land and irrigated)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Harrowing</td>
<td>Husband, wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Transplanting</td>
<td>Wife, labour exchange*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4.</td>
<td>Manuring, fertilizing</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Husband, wife, children, labour exchange, hiring labour**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second rice crop (100 % of land)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Harrowing, Transplanting</td>
<td>Husband, wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9.</td>
<td>Fertilizing, weeding</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other lowland crops: sweet potato, groundnut</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Ploughing</td>
<td>Husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planting</td>
<td>Wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Manuring, fertilizing, weeding</td>
<td>Wife, children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 (the following year)</td>
<td>Harvesting</td>
<td>Husband, wife, children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Families help each other by exchanging of labour
**Other village members are paid in cash and sometimes also in food to give a hand at harvest time

Manure = natural fertilizer
Fertilizer = chemical fertilizer
Appendix III. Wedding and Funeral Ceremonies

Wedding
Ethnic group: Kinh
Village: Na Con
Informant: Kinh man, 65 years old

When the boy and the girl announce to their parents that they are planning to get married, the boy’s parents visit the girl’s parents with gifts: 2 chickens, 5 kg of sticky rice, 5 litre of home maid rice liquor. A fortune-teller is consulted to see if the couple fits together. Then the boy’s father and uncle visit the girl’s family to discuss a suitable day for the wedding. Only one visit is made (not as the Kinh in the delta who make several visits). The boy’s parents pay the girl’s parents to hold a party in the girl’s home (the cost is about one million dong), but there is also a party at the same time in the boy’s home. Size of the parties depends on the parents’ economy. After the party is over the groom brings the bride to his parent’s home. There the couple worship in front of the ancestors’ altar, telling the ancestors that she is a new member of the family. Then the girl is introduced to the lineage members who are present at the wedding. After that, all have a meal together. At the meal a male relative of the girl (normally an uncle) announces that the girl now belongs to the boy’s family.

At a wedding there are both a man and a woman in the kitchen cooking, otherwise the men never cook among the Kinh, according to the informant.

In Na Con the villagers have an agreement that each family pays 20,000dong* at the wedding, regardless of which ethnic group they come from.

*1 US dollar is about 15,000 dong.
**Wedding**

Ethnic group: Tày
Village: Na Con
Informant: Tay man, 42 years old

When the girl and the boy have been together some time the boy’s parents ask for a visit to the girl’s parents. A fortune-teller is consulted to decide which day suits best for the visit. Then they send gifts to the girl’s house: 2-5 kg rice, 2 chickens, 2 bottle of liquor, and a message that they want the couple to continue the relation. A match-maker (a trustful and respected member of the village) visits the girl’s family to give the message. If they accept, all four parents have a meal together in the girl’s house. The boy’s parents ask the fortune-teller to decide a proper day for a second visit. If the fortune-teller has chosen a day a match-maker visits the girl’s parents together with a young person, and hands over the gifts: 2 chickens, 12 kg rice, 12 litre liquor and 12 kg pork, tea, and areca leaves with beetle nuts. The next day the match-maker has a meal with the girl’s parents. They discuss, and if they agree the girl’s parents send a message to the boy’s parents that our daughter is yours and the boy’s parents send a message to the girl’s parents that they should accept their son.

The match-maker discusses with the girl’s parents to set a day for the wedding and they also agree about the cost of the wedding. The girl’s parents pay at least 50 litres of liquor, 50 kg sticky rice, 50 kg living pig and 1 million dong. When agreed, the match-maker looks for a good day for wedding. At the wedding there are separated parties, one in the girl’s parents house and one in the boy’s parents house. Then the girl goes over to the boy’s parents house with her family, the match-maker, and friends. And the boy’s parents give a minimum of 10 sticky rice cakes as a last gift.

The next morning the couple visit the girl’s parents. After this visit they move to live in the boy’s parents’ house for about 2-3 years (temporary patrilocality). The time depends on the parents’ economy, and how big the family is; they have their own house waiting, which was constructed before the wedding. The girl has the responsibility to help the parents-in-law as long as she stays in their house. If the boy is the only child, the couple may continue to live patrilocally.
**Wedding**
Ethnic group: Giáy
Village: Na Con
Informant: Giáy woman, 43 years old

Among the Giáy ethnic group, the boy’s parents send two persons from the family to visit the girl’s family to announce that the girl and the boy are planning to get married. The boy’s parents bring with them gifts for the girl’s parents, 12 kilo of sticky rice, 12 kg of pork, 12 litre of liquor, and areca leaves.

After the wedding the couple live with the girl’s parents. The girl’s parents organise the wedding party. Because the couple will live with the girl’s parents during some years after the wedding, it is considered that they get benefits from the marriage and therefore have to pay for the wedding ceremony and the party. Normally the couple move to their own house after seven years. However, depending on the parent’s economy they may move earlier.

**Wedding**
Ethnic group: Ngan
Village: Ban Kho
Informant: three Ngan men, all just over forty years old

When the parents get to know that there is a relation, the boy’s parents ask the girl’s parents if the couple are allowed to keep the relation. The boy’s parents give a chicken and a duck if they accept their relation.

After one or two months the boy’s parents visit the girl’s parents again. They bring areca leaf that all chew together. They also give 20 litre of home made rice liquor, 20 kg of living pig, and 20 kg of sticky rice. All eat together and the boy’s parents inform the whole village that the girl will be their daughter-in-law, and that she is not free anymore.

Notice that the parents give twenty of each gift to make gift giving equal (a special agreement between the Ngan of Ban Kho). This is a way of reducing differences between poor and rich families. Now the boy’s parents consult a fortune-teller to find out the best day for the wedding. Then the boy’s parents visit the girl’s parents a third time to announce the day of the wedding. They bring a gift consisting of two chickens.

After that the boy’s uncle and aunt visit the girl’s parents to announce that they will bring the bride with them. They bring gifts with them, consisting of 40 kg of sticky rice, 20 sticky rice-cakes, 40 litres of home made rice liquor, 20 packets of cigarettes and 40 kg of living pig. Now they take the bride to the wedding.
The groom’s father announces loudly in front of the ancestor’s altar that a wedding will be held in this house, while the couple kneels in front of the altar. This ceremony is the same among the Tay and the Ngan in Kim Thach Commune. The next morning the newly married visit the wife’s parents, and bring two bottles of liquor and two chickens as gifts. They eat lunch together.

The couple live with the groom’s parents a long time if the parents are economically well off, if not, they only live there a short time and then construct their own house (temporary patrilocality). In general the oldest son with his family live in his parent’s house as long as the parents live. In general the younger brothers live in their own houses.

**Funeral**

Ethnic group: *Kinh*

Village: Na Con

Informant: Kinh man, 65 years old

When someone among the Kinh dies, relatives who live in the same area visit the family of the dead. They discuss the ceremony and inform the head of the village about it. In the afternoon, or evening, other people than relatives visit the house of the deceased with gifts. Next day friends and relatives support the funeral by giving gifts for the meal. Each person or family gives 2 kg of rice and 10,000 dong in cash.

Musicians are invited to play and sing, and they perform a play in the house of the deceased, normally in the evening. According to Kinh customs the dead must be buried within 24 hours. The Kinh say that the quicker the deceased is buried the shorter the grief will be. Young men (about 10 of them) carry the coffin to the grave.

At the funeral the deceased’s children wear white cloths, grand children yellow and if there is a fourth generation they wear red close.

Normally, after three years the Kinh rebury their dead. The Kinh consider that the soul has left the body definitely at that time and the bones should be reburied. However, often the second obsequies is postponed because another family member dies (e.g. the spouse) before the reburying has been carried out. According to Kinh rules, family members are put in the same grave, and the grave can not be opened for a rebury if all corpses have not been in the ground at least three years. In that way it may take many years before the dead is reburyed. When reburyed, the remnants are put in a new grave in another area of the village. The new grave is considered the deceased person’s permanent home from where his/her soul now and then visits the family and the ancestors altar.
Notice: All the Kinh graves are on family land. That is why the graves stand close in the middle of the rice fields in the crowded Red River Delta region. In contrast, a minority group uses a common cemetery for the whole village.

**Funeral**

Ethnic group: Tày
Village: Na Con
Informant: Tay man, 42 years old

When someone dies among the Tay (in the study area) the family sends for a “spiritual man”** who prays for the dead. Other families in the village are called to help the family of the deceased. Each family brings 3 kg of rice, 10,000 dong in cash, and some firewood. The village headman divides villagers into work groups, e.g. men who dig the grave, women who cook, etc. The spiritual man holds a ritual before putting the dead in the coffin. A buffalo is slaughtered if the family is wealthy and can afford it.

When the dead has been placed in the coffin the spiritual man prays. The older the dead person was, the longer the body stays in the house before being buried. If the dead is under twenty years old a short ceremony is held, lasting only 24 hours. Before taking the coffin to the cemetery it is lifted over the family members who kneel on the floor. The oldest son walks backwards facing the coffin when it is brought to the cemetery, which takes 10-15 minutes. At the cemetery, the spiritual man performs a ritual for the spirits of that specific cemetery and tells them that a new deceased is coming. After the burial, and when the people have gone home, the spiritual man prays for the soul of the dead to come back from the cemetery and stay at the altar of the family. In earlier times it took 3-4 days for the whole funeral ceremony, today it takes only one day and two nights.

** The term was translated from Vietnamese to English as “spiritual man”.

**Funeral**

Ethnic group: Ngan
Village: Ban Kho
Informant: three Ngan men, all just over forty years old

When someone dies among the Ngan a spiritual-man is contracted, he slaughters a chicken, prepares a bowl of rice and one boiled egg, and place it at the feet of the dead. One member of the family shoots three shots with a rifle to tell the community that someone has deceased. He shoots three times simply because only one shot just means that someone is hunting, two shots is for calling other community members in case of a robbery.
Then the villagers go to the village chief to ask for help. He announces the village members that someone has died. After that he orders people to carry out different work in connection with the funeral ceremony. The villagers go to the house of the dead, each person or each family bring gifts that consist of 30 kg of firewood, two kg of rice and 20,000 dong in cash. The family of the deceased prepares the coffin. A son or other male relative brings the coffin and places the dead therein. The spiritual-man decides when the coffin should be closed and the time for the burial. Sometimes it has to be done so quickly that all family members do not have time to see the deceased a last time. Other village members place a living pig in front of the coffin to show respect. A special musical group plays for the dead.

Before leaving for the burial the oldest son stays at the head of the coffin a moment. A group of appointed men carries the coffin to the cemetery. On the way people throw colourful papers mixed with rice to protect the dead from the evil. At the cemetery the spiritual man prays for ten minutes, then he cleans the ground with a tree branch. Family members carry out the burying. After that, all leave except the spiritual-man who prays that the dead should not abound the relatives. After that he announces that the ceremony is over.

Nowadays, the whole funeral ceremony takes between one and three days.
IX. References


