

**TRANSFORMATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES' SOCIETY IN  
CENTRAL VIETNAM - LIVELIHOOD NEGOTIATION DURING THE  
TRANSITION FROM MORAL ECONOMY**

中部ベトナムの少数民族社会の変容  
— モラル・エコノミーからの移行期における生存のための交渉—

**March, 2016**

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**(Doctor's Course)**

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*For my son, Nguyen Khang Nguyen,  
who always shows trust, love and patience to his dad.*

## **ABSTRACT**

Upland area in Vietnam, generally defined as land above 600m altitude, accounts for approximately half of national terrestrial territory. In contrast to lowland and coastal area which are occupied almost entirely by Kinh people, the national ethnic majority, historically upland area was home exclusively to various ethnic minority groups. For this reason, ethnographically speaking, the upland was often associated with ethnic minorities while the lowland with Kinh people. The stereotypes of upland Vietnam as a separate ethnic realm are vigorously challenged by the economic and political transformation of this region during the last 40 years. Since the end of Second Indochina War in 1975, the state has emphasized on increasing authority on the upland via different development schemes to impose its centralized institutions and cultural vision on local population of ethnic minorities. Transition of national economy from centralized autarky to market model integrated into global trade has also transformed the upland area. Traditional resources such as land, forest and labor were no longer in sole control of local ethnic minorities but interwoven into commodity chains of national and international scales. In the meantime, a large number of Kinh lowlanders migrating to the upland to take advantage of its resourceful nature and space, leading to major alterations in ethnic composition.

The focus of this study is on 2 ethnic minorities, the Bru-Van Kieu and the Katu, in central region of Vietnam (hereafter, Central Vietnam). Traditionally, main economy of these ethnic minorities was shifting cultivation while their village-based society was described as classless and stateless. This dissertation aims to understand how above-mentioned external macro political and economic forces affect traditional social and political landscape of the ethnic minorities in Central Vietnam by

investigating the process by which local people response to and negotiate with various state, non-state and economic actors at local level. In particular, it explores local agencies that empower local population of ethnic minorities in the bargaining with state and market power to sustain traditional culture and livelihoods. It is believed that the ability of local people in exercising these agencies is an important factor defining the resulting shape of society.

Central to this dissertation are the findings from 3 case studies in the upland of Central Vietnam. The first case was set on Katup Village of the Bru-Van Kieu on the border area between Vietnam and Laos. Katup Village (Chapter 3) is portrayed as a traditional Bru-Van Kieu community with high degree of homogeneity and cohesion as a result of shared history and kinship background. The second case captures socio-economic settings in Katang Village (Chapter 4), another Bru-Van Kieu village on the border area. Unlike the first case, Katang Village is more heterogeneous because of not only its multiethnic composition and but also the diversity in family and personal background among the village's major ethnic group, the Bru-Van Kieu. The third case explores forestland allocation program in Thuong Quang Commune among Katu ethnic minority people (Chapter 5). The author argues in all three cases, via various official programs which can be categorized as state-territorialization such as banning of shifting cultivation, sedentarization and forest devolution, the state has continuously increased its presence and control of local villagers and resources. In addition, the effect of market economy galvanized pressure on the ethnic minorities to transit their stable subsistence cultivation to commercial crops. It is hypothesized that external institutional and market pressure would marginalize local ethnic minorities by denying their access to traditional resources while exposing them to exploitative nature of market economy. This in turn will prompt responses from local ethnic minorities. In Thuong Quang Commune,

by issuing land use certificate to ensure household's land ownership, a prerequisite for the engagement of the Katu people into rubber and acacia plantation the state gains more administrative control on Katu local population at household level. On the contrary, in Katup Village, community collective strength and cohesion help the Bru-Van Kieu from exposing to state and market force as individual household while the lack of these resources in Katang Village explains the difference in negotiation strategy among Katang Village's Bru-Van Kieu. In examination of local responses, the author employs the concept of moral economy and its interaction with external political and economic influences. While in Katup Village, "everyday resistance" is the main type of reactions from the Bru-Van Kieu, the case of Katang Village exhibits adaptation to official institution and market opportunities. Both case studies show that mainstream perception of ethnic minority people as under-developed, backward and superstitious was important in the official decision to exclude these groups from access to their traditional resources and consequently marginalization of these ethnic groups in development process. They also indicate that informal cross-border network of kinship and co-ethnic relations are vital for ethnic minority in the negotiation with external state and market actors.

All these 3 cases provide insights into how the society of ethnic minorities in the upland of Central Vietnam is transformed from the dynamic interaction between external political economic processes with internal local institutions. It is argued that local informal institutions, considered a form of cultural capital, plays an important role in local resistance and adaptation to external political and economic institutions to shape social relation and household livelihood. Reinvention of cultural capital allows local ethnic minority to connect to new natural and economic resource, enabling them to mitigate the negative impact from exposing to market economy and political marginalization from official authority formation. On the one hand, cultural

capital can instigate subtle resistance and opposition to official authority and market penetration to maintain economic equality and social bonding acting as safety net for the survival of members of ethnic community. On the other hand, it helps the ethnic minorities to tap into emerging institutional and market opportunities. It means that while the ethnic minorities in upland Central Vietnam are conservative trying to protect their traditional world when the changes are too drastic and imposed entirely by external factors, they also can be adaptive to new condition if adaption is constructed from their own cultural capital. By adapting to emerging institutional and economic condition, the traditional classless social structure might have transformed into patron-client system, an unprecedented event in the history of the ethnic minorities in upland Central Vietnam.

To conclude, the author argues that in the upland of Central Vietnam new social relations are formed from economic interactions with unprecedented references. In the absence of formal rules governing these new social relations, informal rules play an important role to coordinate collective action. The growth of the state's authority in region where traditional governance system used to dominate increased the friction between official rules and local rules. While the growth of state and market institution is inevitable, population of ethnic minorities, especially in border area still possess agencies to negotiate leading to the accommodation of traditional rules. Social and political outcome of this dynamics are, therefore, worth understanding because with the increasing integration of Vietnam into global economy and state control in upland area in decades to come, this understanding would be useful and informative for the formation of development policy concerning the well-being of ethnic minorities in Vietnam.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A privilege of finishing a dissertation is the chance for me to express my thanks for many individuals and institutions who contributed to making this dissertation into its complete form.

First and foremost, I am grateful to the women and men in Lao Bao Town and Thuong Quang Commune for their participation in my academic inquiry. In particular, I would like to thank the ethnic minority people in research sites who show their hospitality to welcome me to their social drink and patience in listening to and explaining in details various aspect of their daily life. I am indebted to Mr. Hoan, a Bru-Van Kieu man in Lao Town, who escorted and introduced me around to people and culture of his ethnic group while acting as a translator whenever possible.

This intellectual growth has benefited from unfailing support and encouragement from my graduate advisors at Okayama University. First and foremost, my heartfelt thank goes to Prof. Kim Doo-Chul who has been a great supervisor throughout my postgraduate education. Prof. Kim's clarity of thinking helped me conceptualize this project. Without his encouragement and patience both in and out academic life, it would be impossible for achievement in my pursuit of Doctoral Degree. I am also indebted to Assoc. Prof. Fumikazu Ubukata who has helped me in many ways, big and small. It is no exaggeration to say that there are many things one learns from observing Assoc. Prof. Ubukata, his generosity and strength. My thanks are due to his also for the valuable comments and suggestions on various stages of my duration in Okayama University. I also would like send my sincere thanks to Prof. Fumikazu Ichiminami whose valuable comments help me improve the dissertation. Another academic member of the department, Assistant Prof. Yasuko Honda, has always supported me by giving comments and encouragement at various stages of my pursuit for knowledge. I feel sincerely

indebted to Assistant Prof. Yasuko Honda. My feeling of indebtedness extends to Ms. Nahoko Koeda for her assistance in every administrative procedures required to be fulfilled. I was able to focus on academic inquiry thanks largely to the industrial work of Ms. Nahoko Koeda. I also want to thank all of my friends from inside or outside the Graduate School of Environmental Science who have supported me during my time at Okayama University, especially friends from Department of Rural Environmental Management. Despite of differences in nationalities, language and life history this small community has never failed to amaze me for the support and encouragement from every member.

The completion of this project could have been unthinkable without the unbounded love, support, and patience from every member of my family. Without their encouragement, my journey into academic world would never be possible.



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## ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CPC</b>	Commune People's Committee
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development, UK
<b>DPC</b>	District People's Committee
<b>FLA</b>	Forest land allocation
<b>GSO</b>	General Statistics Office of Vietnam
<b>NEZ</b>	New Economic Zone
<b>NTFP</b>	Non-timber Forest Product
<b>NVA</b>	North Vietnamese Army
<b>OECD</b>	The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PAM</b>	World Food Program
<b>PPC</b>	Provincial People's Committee
<b>VGAC</b>	Vietnam's General Assembly Office

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

Creation legend of Vietnam, as a nation, tells a story about Lạc Long Quân, the Dragon Lord of Lạc” and his wife, Âu Cơ, a fairy from northern upland area, gave birth to a gave birth to a pouch filled with one hundred eggs, which soon hatched into one hundred beautiful children. As the children grew up, Lạc Long Quân always finds his heart longing for the coasts while Âu Cơ constantly miss her upland home. The couple decided to divide their children, of whom fifty will live with Lạc Long Quân along the coasts. The other fifty follow Âu Cơ to dwell in the upland. Upon depart, they made a promise that despite the distance and separation, they must look after each other and always be there to lend a hand should one be in need. The children of Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ are believed to be the ancestors of Vietnam. Today, Vietnamese people call themselves “the children of the Dragon and the Fairy” referring to Lạc Long Quân’s lineage from the world of the Dragons and Âu Cơ’s fairy origin from the upland. Therefore, whichever part of the country one hails from, he belongs to one origin. Just as Lạc Long Quân and Âu Cơ promised to each other, all Vietnamese should love, honor and protect one another. The legend is popular Vietnam because it is taught to every school child about the origin and brotherhood relationship of different ethnic groups living in lowland or upland Vietnam. By the same token, mainstream national media often describes the country as an united and ethnically tolerated community in which all peoples, despites of differences in culture and locations, share a common ancestral root; therefore, would share difficulties or successes in togetherness. Although the legend is beautiful, ethnic harmony at national level remains as a wish than reality.

Ethnic minorities account for less than 15 percent of national population. Most of these groups live in remote rural and upland area far away from centers of population and politics in the lowland. Despite of development in the last few decades, the ethnic minority people often find themselves left out of the endowment of recent economic successes and remain the poorest among all social groups in Vietnam, especially those in upland area (Epprecht et al, 2009). Upland Vietnam, generally defined as land above 600m altitude, accounts for approximately half of national terrestrial territory. In contrast to lowland and coastal area which are occupied almost entirely by Kinh people, the national ethnic majority, historically upland area was home exclusively to various ethnic minority groups. For this reason, ethnographically speaking, the upland was often associated with ethnic minorities while the lowland with Kinh people. The stereotypes of upland Vietnam as a separate ethnic realm are vigorously challenged by the economic and political transformation of this region during the last 40 years. Since the end of Second Indochina War<sup>1</sup> in 1975, the state has emphasized on increasing authority on the upland via different development schemes to impose its centralized institutions and cultural vision on local population of ethnic minorities. Transition of national economy from centralized autarky to market model integrated into global trade has also transformed the upland area. Traditional resources such as land, forest and labor were no longer in sole control of local ethnic minorities but interwoven into commodity chains of national and international scales. In the meantime, a large number of Kinh lowlanders migrating to the upland to take advantage of its resourceful nature and space, leading to major alterations in ethnic composition.

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<sup>1</sup> The Second Indochina War, from 1954 to 1975, is usually referred as The War against the American in Vietnamese literature.

## **1.2 Research objectives**

The study aims to examine the dynamic between state-making project and transformation of ethnic minorities' society in Central Vietnam. Initially, the author investigates how ethnic minorities in Vietnam are contextualized in mainstream perspective during development process. Development is analyzed from the perspective of institutional development that is the state's increasing presence in mountainous area by constructing infrastructure, communication system, establishment of administrative system and implementation of various policies to control of population and resources; and economic development that is exposure of local resource and culture to domestic and international market, especially since integration of Vietnam into global economy from the early 1990s. The dissertation would examine how above-mentioned macro external political and economic processes affect social landscape of the ethnic minorities in Central Vietnam with focus on change in social relations and traditional governance system. The next major inquiry is on local responses to the impact brought about external factors to local socio-economic settings and how these responses shape the contemporary society of ethnic minorities in this upland area. An important task of the dissertation is to identify what local specifics and agencies are employed by the local ethnic minorities in dealing with market imperatives and state's influences. Via this approach, it is the intention of the author to assess how local institution - formal and informal - have supported or inhibited the negotiation of household livelihood.

## **1.3 Review of literature and concepts**

The topic of ethnic minorities who face the onset of the increasing official power of a post-socialist state, such as Vietnam, has attracted various scholars. Déry (2000) viewed the advance of Kinh pioneers as the main tool for introducing and consolidating the presence of the state in marginal areas like the Central Highland.



Evans (2000) used the term ‘internal colonialism’, which referred to the state-orchestrated resettlement of Kinh migrants from heavily populated lowland basins to peripheral territories, to describe the demographic policy, embedded in economic and political purposes, that the Vietnam’s socialist government has thoroughly used since 1975. A large number of studies were based in the Central Highland (DeKoninck, 2000; Agergaard, 2010; Agergaard et al., 2009; D’haeze et al., 2005; Hardy, 2000) where the immigration of lowlanders and integration of local resources into the international coffee market has marginalized local ethnic minorities, such as the Ede and Jarai. Another major contribution comes from the works of Jamieson et al., (1998) and Scott (2000) among the Hmong, Dao, and Tay minorities in northern mountains. In their view, the crises facing ethnic minorities in this area—that is, the undermined livelihoods diminished traditional knowledge and decreased relevance of local languages and culture—are the direct result of far-reaching socialist and post-socialist development programs. The above list of studies, far from complete, is only a mere reflection of scholars’ attention to the topic of ethnic minorities in the nation-state project championed by the Vietnamese government. Nonetheless, they tend to suggest that both the natural and human geography of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, especially in the uplands, are heading towards an unsustainable downward spiral in which marginalization and vulnerability is inescapable.

It is natural to ask about the reactions of ethnic minorities against the overwhelming adversaries that result from the expansion of state influence, market penetration, and the immigration of an ethnic majority. Existing literature suggests that the reality ranges confrontational resistance to fluid adaptation. On one extreme, the reaction can be riotous, as was the case of minorities in the Central Highland, well-examined by Saleminck (2003). He argued that, by converting to Christianity,

the ethnic minorities in the Central Highland tried to reassert their own social boundaries, detached from the control of the state. He interpreted the uprising in the Central Highland in the early 2000s as an attempt to regain autonomous space and to determine local and private power within the village and family. On the other extreme, the Cham people in the Mekong Delta provide a case in which local agents smoothly adapted to the modern political and market reality (Taylor, 2006). By reinventing 'economic space through local and extralocal trading practices that draw upon and also sustain their distinct cultural competencies and institutions', the Muslim Cham in this region became active agents in the market economy while successfully maintaining their cultural agency (Taylor, 2006). In the unequal power struggle between the state and ethnic minorities, there are also cases of intermediation and negotiation. Schoenberger and Turner (2008) explored the cross-border trading networks and practices among uplanders in north-west Vietnam. They revealed that the ability of ethnic minorities to negotiate a sustained livelihood with different state and non-state actors is shaped by diverse and intertwined socio-political factors—including cultural capital, financial capital, social capital and physical capital—in combination with spatiality and ethnicity. Sikor (2001), in his study in the northern upland region, demonstrated that the Black Tai ethnic group was on equal terms with the modern state authority and the market in reshaping its socio-economic conditions through fluid integration between its local and state agencies.

The Central Vietnam area in general, and the Bru-Van Kieu ethnic minority in particular, attracted intense cultural and ethnological study from local Vietnamese scholars such as Manh (2001) and Hong (1984, 1998, 2002), but little attention was given to political economy. An exception to this is McElwee's (2008) deep analysis of the interaction between Kinh immigrants and the ethnic minorities in Annamite

Cordillera,<sup>2</sup> including the Bru-Van Kieu, Katu, and Pacoh people. She argued that the reality was far from what the government expected when they resettled Kinh lowlanders among the minorities in the upland area. That is, instead of mutual understanding and integration, the indigenous minorities and Kinh immigrants still stereotype and distrust each other.

The following session would review several concepts that will be useful to guide the discussion on the relation between state and ethnic minorities.

### **1.3.1 State territorialisation**

As Vandergeest and Peluso describe, “all modern states divide their territories into complex and overlapping political and economic zones, rearrange people and resources within these units, and create regulations delineating how and by whom these areas can be used” (1995). In other words, territorialization is about excluding or including people within particular geographic boundaries, and about controlling what people do and their access to natural resources within those boundaries. The resultant territoriality – the relation that men entertain with constructed space– is therefore the object of permanent interaction and contest. From this perspective, the modern state needs to reaffirm its own territoriality by establishing tighter control over people’s activities as well as movement, which in turn means establishing landmarks. This is particularly relevant with reference to agriculture and agriculturalists who tend to occupy so much of the territory over which the state purports to rule. “A state mainly concerned with appropriation and control will find sedentary agriculture preferable to pastoralism or shifting agriculture” (Scott 1998). As Scott points out, central “planners” have had to cope with “... local cultivation practices, which were regarded as deplorable customs for which modern, scientific

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<sup>2</sup> Annamite Cordillera, or "Trường Sơn" in Vietnamese, is mountainous range separating Laos and Vietnam, which extends nearly 1,100km.

farming were the corrective” (Scott 1998). This has been particularly true with shifting cultivation, which “... is an exceptionally complex and hence quite illegible form of agriculture from the perspective of a sovereign state and its extension agents” (Scott 1993). With regard to agricultural land use, this will lead to the state “consolidating the power of central institutions and diminishing the autonomy of cultivators and their communities' vis-à-vis those institutions” (Scott 1998).

### **1.3.2 Marginalization**

Social scientists usually use the term marginalization to describe the invisible and abstract power relationship between different actors in the society (Arnold, 1995). Marginalization is a social construction process rather a natural process. In other words, the issue is complex because a conclusion that one social group is marginalized or not can only be made within a specifically defined context. Ethnic minorities in Vietnam in general are marginalized in the context that they are denied of participation in the official decision making process regarding the use of resource in their traditional geography that leads deterioration in economic well-being (Friederichsena and Neefb, 2010). In mainstream culture, ethnic minorities in Vietnam are socially constructed as backward and superstitious by the dominant majority. By asserting that ethnic groups are inheritance of these under-developed characteristics, ethnic majority group who dominate official authority deems traditional method of resource management by ethnic minority inefficient and invalid. This leads to the eviction and exclusion of the ethnic minorities from their traditional area of resource use. Because social structure of these groups were arranged to manage resource and nature, the coerced withdrawal from use of traditional resource threatens the stability of the ethnic minorities' society (Friederichsena and Neefb, 2010).

### **1.3.3 Local responses**

In development process, local people are marginalized from their livelihoods opportunities, and from space to construct their cultural identity and so on. Though considered powerless, they rarely accept external forces passively. "The oppressed are not passive victims who uncritically accept the ideological justifications promulgated by the privileged, but that they oppression in many covert and subtle ways" (Agarwal, 1994). Bryant and Bailey (1997) contend that normally poor people have solutions to maintain their livelihood opportunities, but they always try to avoid any retaliatory action of powerful actors that might exacerbate their difficulty. They therefore often apply strategy of adaptation or measures that aim to minimize any adverse effects on them. For instance, they adapt to enclosure or environmental degradation by extending the time spent pursuing livelihood needs, or to utilize diverse 'coping' strategies including the modification of economic practices, the storage of crops from good seasons, the sale of livestock or the request of assistance from neighbors and relatives. In some cases, local people adapt by taking advantage of new economic opportunities generated by the capitalistic market that is called to be a 'partial reversal'. However, the strategy of economic reversal may lead to the degradation of local resources and the increasing of their plight. This practice can be observed clearly in many parts of the Third World. For instance, when cash crops were introduced to Central Highlands of Vietnam, many ethnic households engaged in intensive cash crop production. But the result shows that many of them become poorer and even landless because they are not able to cope with fluctuating price. At the same time, the depletion of local resources such as soil erosion, deforestation, and so on becomes more and more serious. When resources are exhausted, and the local people feel that they have no livelihood alternatives, they may decide to migrate to other areas (to deeper forest, or to urban for wage labors, etc.).

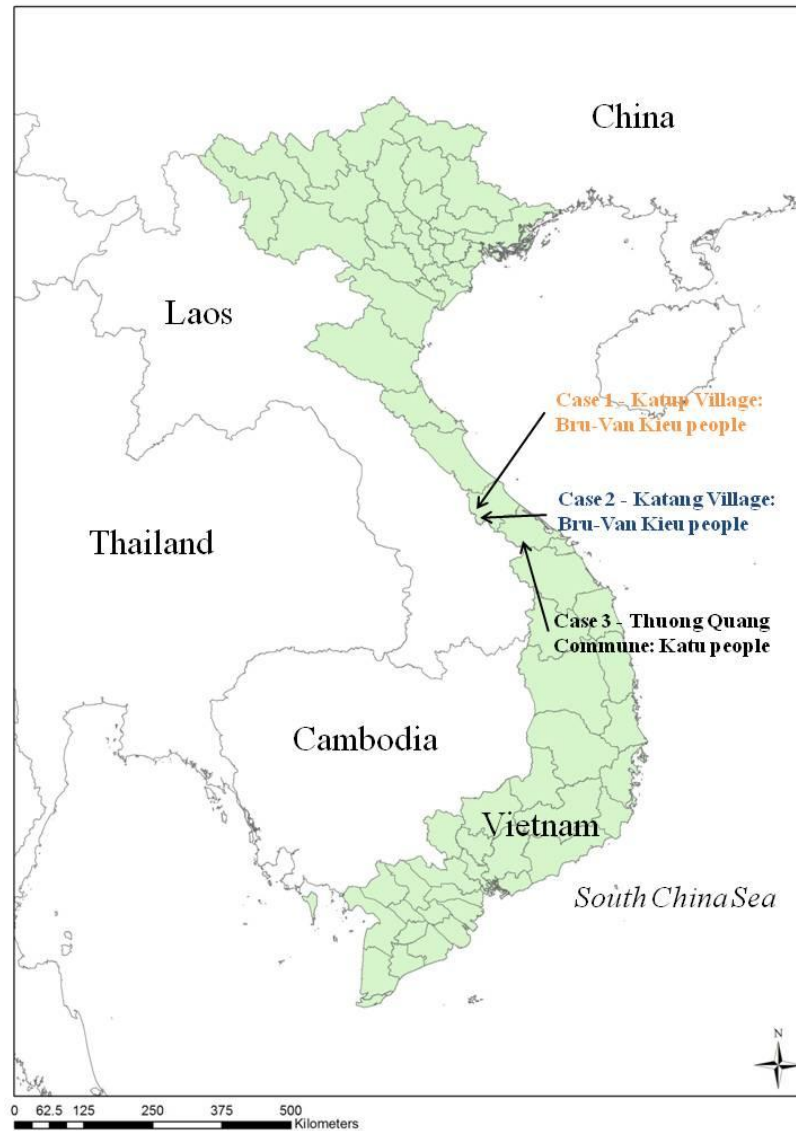
However, local people do not always choose strategies of adaptation in the environmental changes. In several cases, they fight against those who wish to dominate and marginalize them. This local resistance also expresses into two forms. One form is organized collectively such as colonial peasant rebellions, contemporary peasant movements, and protest demonstrations. The second form is called ‘everyday forms of resistance’ by Scott (1985). Scott (1985) uses the term ‘everyday forms of peasant resistance’ to describe the struggle between the peasantry and those who seek to extract labor, food, taxes, rents, and interest from them. When the poor are dominated and seriously suppressed, they react not only through overtly contested movements but also through the individual covert acts and behaviors. Though their reactions are varied, all can be seen as efforts to resist the economic and ritual marginalization they have to suffer (Scott 1985).

#### **1.4 Justification of site selection**

The Katu and Bru-Van Kieu ethnic groups were chosen for this study for the reason that they represent a large proportion of ethnic minorities in Central Vietnam whose distribution concurs with area influenced by institutional and economic development.

For the Bru-Van Kieu people, Katup Village and Katang Village in the border area with Laos were chosen (Figure 1.1). Katup Village is homogeneous community of Bru-Van Kieu with shared history and landscape. The rationale for choice of this site is to understand how a traditional ethnic minority community interacts with macro processes. The Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village come from different family and experience background. It is expected that it would provide a comparative analysis to the case of Katup Village. For Katu people, the chosen site is further south in Thuong Quang Commune. Unlike the cases of Bru-Van Kieu, this site is

deeper in Vietnam territory. Without the border in view, it is expected to provide an evaluation of the roles of the border in the interplay between ethnic minorities, the state and market. Further information is included in chapters illustrating empirical survey.



**Figure 1.1 Selection of research sites**

## **1.5 Dissertation structure**

This dissertation is structured into six chapters. The following session describes in brief the content of each chapter.

**Chapter 1** describes research context of the ethnic minorities in Vietnam during development process. This is followed by identifying research objectives and justification of research site selection. An important part of **Chapter 1** briefly summarizes findings from relevant literature regarding to the theme of research in the context of contemporary Vietnam, followed by a short review on the main concepts which would be useful to analyze different topics in the dissertation. **Chapter 2** provides the background on geography and ethnography of study area. It would describe historical context of the research area and targeted ethnic minority group.

Central to this dissertation are the findings from 3 case studies in the upland of Central Vietnam. The first case was set on Katup Village of the Bru-Van Kieu on the border area between Vietnam and Laos. Katup Village (**Chapter 3**) is portrayed as a traditional Bru-Van Kieu community with high degree of homogeneity and cohesion as a result of shared history and kinship background. The second case captures socio-economic settings in Katang Village (**Chapter 4**), another Bru-Van Kieu village on the border area. Unlike the first case, Katang Village is more heterogeneous because of not only its multiethnic composition and but also the diversity in family and personal background among the village's major ethnic group, the Bru-Van Kieu. The third case explores forestland allocation program in Thuong Quang Commune among Katu ethnic minority people (**Chapter 5**). The author argues in all three cases, via various official programs which can be categorized as state-territorialization such as banning of shifting cultivation, sedentarization and forest devolution, the state has continuously increased its presence and control of local villagers and resources. In addition, the effect of market economy galvanized pressure on the ethnic minorities to transit their stable subsistence cultivation to commercial crops. It is hypothesized that external institutional and market pressure



would marginalize local ethnic minorities by denying them access to traditional resources while exposing them to exploitative nature of market economy. This in turn will prompt responses from local ethnic minorities. In Thuong Quang Commune, by issuing land use certificate to ensure household's land ownership, a prerequisite for the engagement of the Katu people into rubber and acacia plantation the state gains more administrative control on Katu local population at household level. On the contrary, in Katup Village, community collective strength and cohesion help the Bru-Van Kieu from exposing to state and market force as individual household while the lack of these resources in Katang Village explains the difference in negotiation strategy among Katang Village's Bru-Van Kieu. In examination of local responses, the author employs the concept of moral economy and its interaction with external political and economic influences. While in Katup Village, everyday resistance is the main type of reactions from the Bru-Van Kieu, the case of Katang Village exhibits adaptation to official institution and market opportunities. Both case studies show that mainstream perception of ethnic minority people as under-developed, backward and superstitious was important in the official decision to exclude these groups from access to their traditional resources and consequently marginalization of these ethnic groups in development process. They also indicate that informal cross-border network of kinship and co-ethnic relations is vital for ethnic minority in the negotiation with external state and market actors.

**Chapter 6** conceptualizes main findings of the dissertation by summarize main concepts with regard to findings from three case studies. In combination these cases provide some insights on how the society of ethnic minorities in the upland of Central Vietnam is transformed from the dynamic interaction between external political economic processes with internal local institutions. It is argued that local informal institutions, considered a form of cultural capital, plays an important role in

local resistance and adaptation to external political and economic institutions to shape social relation and household livelihood. Reinvention of cultural capital allows local ethnic minority to connect to new natural and economic resource, enabling them to mitigate the negative impact from exposing to market economy and political marginalization from official authority formation.

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## **CHAPTER 2**

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **2.1 Ethnic minorities in the upland of Central Vietnam**

In Central Vietnam, ethnic minorities live in the mountainous area on the eastern slope of the Annam Cordillera. Different from the lowland centers of population and politics in the eastern coast, the dominant geographic feature of this area is forest with lower population density. The focus of this study is the southernmost upland area of northern central Vietnam where until 1975 was still under contestation between opposing political entities in the Second Indochina War. During this period the main residents of this area were different ethnic minority groups in Mon-Khmer language family including the Pacoh, Bru-Van Kieu, Taoih and Katu. Because of the conflict no political entities<sup>3</sup> were able to establish a functioning civilian governance system.

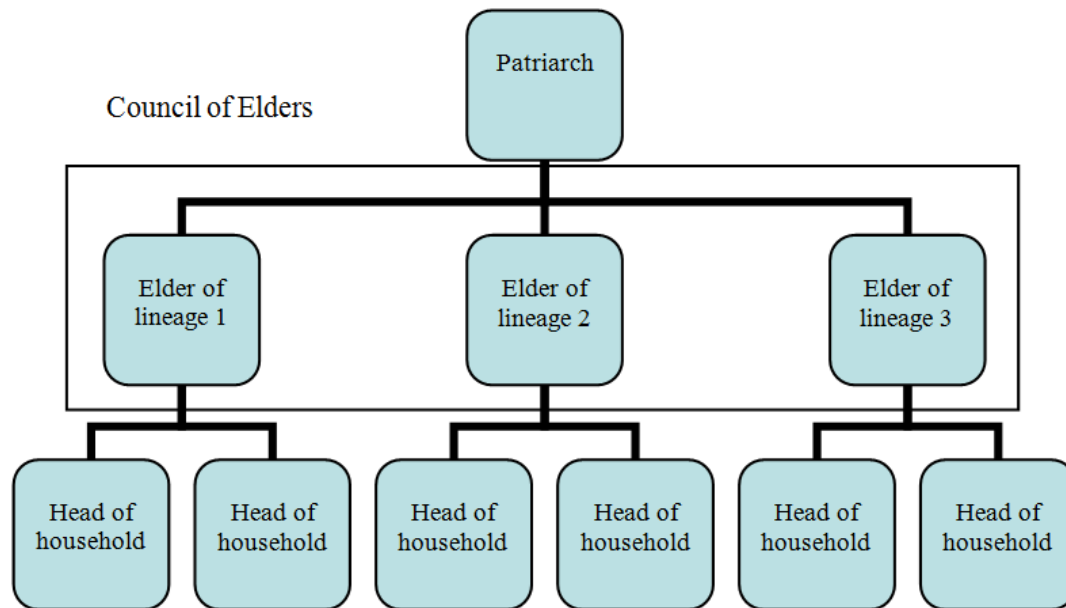
The Bru-Van Kieu group is one of 54 officially-recognized ethnic minorities, numbered at around 74,500 as of 2009 (GSO, 2010). They live along the border with Laos in Quang Binh and Quang Tri provinces in the northern central and in small number in Dak Lak Province of the Central Highland (Michaud, 2006). The Katu is also an ethnic minority group with geographic distribution further to the south in Thua Thien Hue and Quang Nam provinces. Their population, at 61,600, accounts for less than 1 percent of national population (GSO, 2010).

#### **2.2 Traditional society of the Katu and Bru-Van Kieu**

This section describes Katu and Bru-Van Kieu society in their traditional form and in isolation from the general population. It is difficult to estimate at exactly what time the these ethnic minorities started to converge with the population of the

dominant group, the Kinh, and the influence of the ruling political entity; however, it would be safe to surmise that, before French colonialism, most of the ethnic minorities' villages were still in a primordial form and isolated from the 'civilized' world of the Kinh people. They organize a patriarchal society where the eldest male is usually the head of the family. Inheritance is exclusively the right of the male members. Married couples live with the husband's family, and their children bear the paternal name. A man is permitted to marry as many wives as he can afford.

Ethnic minorities in the upland of Central Vietnam generally did not have a socio-political structure beyond the village level; that is to say, the village is the most fundamental social organization. Each village consists of one or more lineages. Within each lineage, authority rests with the eldest male member (Manh, 2001). A council of elders, consisting of the heads of each lineage, often gathered to discuss matters that concern multiple families. The council of elders makes decisions concerning war, relocating the village, great hunting parties, settling conflicts between families, the appropriate sanctions for serious violations of tribal custom, and tradition. When the village deals with outsiders, such as inter-village conflicts, the patriarch, who is usually the wealthiest or most powerful member of the council of elders, usually represents the village in settling the issue.



**Figure 2.1 Traditional social structure of Central Vietnam's ethnic minority village**

In the many cases in which one lineage formed the village, the patriarch was the head of that lineage. In this homogeneous political landscape, the patriarch was a chief, not a ruler. He and his family had to work for their food like other villagers. The ethnic minorities practiced a subsistence economy, primarily based on dry rice cultivated by the slash-and-burn technique. In short, this technique involves cutting down and burning all vegetation within a forested area. The resulting ashes serve as fertilizer, which helps the field sustain a crop for three to four years. Crop grown by this method depended solely on rainfall for irrigation. When the field no longer supports crops, the farmer finds another tract of forestland and starts a new cycle of slash-and-burn, allowing the old fields to rehabilitate back to forest. Their diet is supplemented by the cultivation of corn and beans, and meat from hunting and fishing. Several authors have claimed that this tribal group has traditionally bartered their goods, either among themselves or with the Kinh merchants traveling to their

village or to a nearby market town (Hong, 1984; Schrock et al., 1966). Land is the common property of the village and allotted to families for the cultivation of crops. The responsibility of deciding how to allocate land rests on the authority of the council of elders and the village patriarch. Since these ethnic minorities follow animism, several successive losses of crop or multiple deaths would lead the patriarch to believe that the village is haunted by an evil spirit, which could result in a decision to move the entire village to a new location.

### **2.3 Presence of the state's ruling force in the Bru-Van Kieu region**

The following session describes the encounter between dominating political entities in different historical period with the Bru-Van Kieu. Similar reconstruction for the Katu is difficult because of the lack of written record on this group<sup>3</sup>.

#### **2.3.1 Pre-colonial period (1620-1885)**

Written account on contemporary history of Central Vietnam socio-politics just before the French arrived can be found exclusively in official record of *Phủ Biên Tạp Lục*<sup>4</sup> and *Đại Nam Thực Lục Tiền Biên*<sup>5</sup>. In *Phủ Biên*, Le Quy Don indicated that

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<sup>3</sup> Historically the Vietnamese lowlanders greatly feared the Katu because of their frequent raids on villages, not only for material wealth but also human blood for their ritual sacrifices. During era of Nguyen Dynasty, the court organizes ceremonial presentations of buffalo and other gifts to Katu chiefs in the hope that to end the "blood raids". During colonial period only Vietnamese traders, woodcutters, and those in search of precious oils in the forest came into contact with Katu people. The area of Katu people became hideouts from socialist guerilla armed forces during the Second Indochina War, thus it became target for constant artillery shelling and raid from army of southern Vietnam state. The Katu dislocate from this battleground to deeper mountain of Annamite Cordillera to avoid involment (Hickey, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> "Phu Bien Tap Luc", hereafter, "Phu Bien" is compilation of miscellaneous records when the southern borderland was conquered. The record included noted various governing activities of Nguyen lords in frontier area. It was originally written in Chinese-based characters by Le Quy Don and translated into modern Vietnamese writing by various authors. In this paper, version of translated by Le Xuan Giao 1972 was used.

<sup>5</sup> "Dai Nam Thuc Luc Tien Bien", hereafter, "Tien Bien" is the chronicle of Nguyen Dynasty premier period



lords of the Nguyen<sup>6</sup> recognized the existence of several tribal groups on the western upland. Official at this time grouped various ethnic groups in western upland region together in a collective term "*mọi*" meaning "barbaric" and "savages" to distinguish with lowland Vietnamese or Kinh people. On a trip to western upland of Thuan Hoa<sup>7</sup> he noted the follows:

*"...take half a day Khe Thau to Vien Kieu country, from Vien Kieu to....from Mai Hoa commune to the upstream of the river, to the left is area of Toi-oi people who are not registered taxpayers, to the right is area of Bahy savages, keeping going from here will approach villages of different barbaric groups..."*  
(Le Quy Don, 1776, p.34)

According to Li (1998) Vien Kieu country, mentioned by Le Quy Don in Phu Bien, was the region just west of modern Khe Sanh town. There is the possibility that modern Bru-Van Kieu people are descendants of ethnic community living in Vien Kieu<sup>8</sup> country described by Le Quy Don in 18th century. More importantly, it was noted that these "barbaric savages" were not registered individually in official record system for taxation purpose. The most significant integration residents of Vien Kieu country and Kinh lowlanders was the exchange of goods (Don, 1776; Hong, 1984) where Kinh lowlanders traded salt, fish sauce, dried fish, iron wares, copper pots, silver hairpins and bracelets for rice, chicken, oxen, hemp, wax, rattan and cotton cloth woven by uplanders. Li (1998) suggests that ethnic minority people in Khe Sanh in the 18th century also paid taxes to the Nguyen lords who

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<sup>6</sup> The Nguyen includes nine Nguyen Lords who governed Cochinchina from 1558 to 1776 and Nguyen Kings, directly descendants of Nguyen Lords, who governed Vietnam from 1802 to 1945.

<sup>7</sup> Thuan Hoa is a historical term indicating a geographic area including modern Quang Tri Province and Thua Thien Hue Province

<sup>8</sup> In local dialect, the pronunciations of "Vien Kieu" and "Van Kieu" are of minimal difference.

administered control over the southern part of the country. These taxpayer-uplanders corresponding to group called "*mọi thuộc*" (dependent mọi) or "*mọi buôn*" (trading mọi) found the need to tie themselves with official taxation system because of their livelihood as traders with the coast. It is highly possible that the Bru-Van Kieu further west of Khe Sanh, out of reach of the state's power, were "*mọi hoang*" (wild mọi) or "*mọi cao*" (high mọi) in comparison to "*mọi thuộc*" or "*mọi buôn*" (Li, 1998). The presence of official taxation system was possible in Khe Sanh in the 18th century because the Nguyen had controlled Cam Lo and Ai Lao Pass since the 1620s by establishing large military camp and outposts (Don, 1776). This series of army outposts was to forewarn the invasion from Ai Lao (Laos) and Lục Hoàn tribe people, forefathers of various ethnic groups in an area now part of modern Savanakheth Province of Laos. The relation between Nguyen Lords and their western neighbors in Indochina peninsula, although described by court record as a tributary system where the formers held the power, was in fact more neutral because the Nguyen until the mid-18th century had to focus their effort on southward push while constantly on guard from their traditional northern nemesis, the Trinh and Le in what is now Hanoi (Li, 1998). Frequently mentioned in *Tiền Biên* is that Nguyen lords preferred reconciliation rather than retaliation with Ai Lao even after the later made several invasions westward up to Cam Lo gave its resonance to the thinking that conquering the territory and population of the Thuan Hoa western mountainous area was not a political and military priority of the Nguyen (Li, 1998). In fact before French colonialism the western mountainous flank of what is now Quang Tri Province was under contested influence from different Laotian tribes, Siamese Kingdom and the Nguyen (Stuart-Fox, 1995). Li (1998) also pointed that even though Kinh people started to push their population to Thuan Hoa hinterland, intermarriage between Kinh lowlanders and local ethnic minorities was limited reflecting Vietnamese

prejudices on barbaric and savage culture of tribal minority peoples. In summary, before European colonialism Bru-Van Kieu region was comfortably not a pressing concern of the Nguyen, the dominating official political and military power at that time, because the latter found more urgency on their quest to the south and defense to the north. Apart from a small population engaged in trading with lowlanders, most tribal peoples in the mountainous west of Quang Tri Province preferred to keep a social distance from Vietnamese migrants. Being out of easy reach of political centre of Vietnamese, Laotian and Thais people helped ethnic minorities in the western mountain of modern Quang Tri Province in general and the Bru-Van Kieu in particular retain their unique culture and autonomy.

### **2.3.2 French Colonial period (1885-1954)**

The western mountains of Quang Tri Province, then, part of French Annam Protectorate, played an important role in French administration for its connection with Laos, another French colony. After pacification of the area, the French upgraded original earth road prone to frequent dysfunction during rainy season to asphalt in 1904 called "Colonial Route 9" connecting Cam Lo district and Laos (Stuart-Fox, 1995). Although several French colonialists set up coffee plantation on the basalt soil in Khe Sanh valley they did not come into heavy association with local Bru-Van Kieu people because they all preferred to bring Kinh lowlanders to work as plantation culies (Oanh et al., 1993). The French administration requested Bru-Van Kieu villages to pay a small tax, according to Schrock et al (1966), however, it is unclear via which instrument and to what extent the French could impose implementation of this policy. By the mid-20th century, a few of Bru-Van Kieu people living in the vicinity of French coffee plantation "work periodically but not steadily for cash" (Hickey, 1967). They, for the first time in Van-Kieu history,

encounter with international commodity chain as Khe Sanh coffee was famous in Indochina in early 1960s (Hickey, 2002). For the majority of Bru-Van Kieu population to the west of Khe Sanh, influence of lowlanders and the French was limited. When Vietnamese nationalist found a footing in western forested mountain to mount their resistance against the French, thus, invited retaliation from the latter and together increase hostility in the area, most of Bru-Van Kieu apart from those residing in Khe Sanh opted to evade to deeper forest and mountain where they felt safe to avoid conflict (Oanh et al., 1993). Trading with lowlanders remained the main significant encounter between Bru-Van Kieu people in Huong Hoa District with outside world (Hickey, 1993).

### **2.3.3 The Second Indochina War (1954-1975)**

Different governments of the southern Republic of Vietnam attempted to substitute state law for tribal customary rules to integrate upland communities into official power (Schrock et al., 1966). This effort in the country of Bru-Van Kieu people in western Quang Tri had little chance to be implemented because of the area had never been in full control of southern governments for its close proximity to, hence heavy influence from the state of northern Democratic Republic of Vietnam<sup>9</sup>. Communist infiltration and insurgency starts as soon as 1959 along National Route 9 (Su and Hoc, 2010). During the Second Indochina War, forested mountain of Annamite Cordillera is hardly a safe haven for anyone as the American military relentlessly raid both eastern and western side of the range by sky and ground forces to refute an increasingly fluid network of crucial trails transporting men, supply and weapon from the northern socialist to their comrades in the south in the struggle against southern capitalists and their allies (Pholsena, 2008). With little space left

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<sup>9</sup> Precursor of modern Socialist Republic of Vietnam

untouched by the war, most Bru-Van Kieu in Huong Hoa district had no option for evasion but reluctantly allying with different political and military entities made of lowlanders. In 1965, the government of Republic of Vietnam resettled many Bru-Van Kieu people from their remote area to a three-mile strip on each side of National Route 9 in Khe Sanh to pre-emptive prevent their assistance to pro-socialist forces (Schrock et al., 1966). It is estimated that ten thousand of Bru-Van Kieu were concentrating around Khe Sanh valley when different US military camps started occupying this location in the early 1960s. Among them around 1,000 men were under payroll of American military (Clarke and William, 2007). The Bru-Van Kieu in western Quang Tri at this time have limited options, according to McElwee (2008).

*"...they were on the horns of a dilemma. If they farmed close to the settlement, there was insufficient land and the communists harassed them for being pro-government; if they farmed out where land was plentiful the government suspected them of supporting the Viet Cong."*

At the same time Bru-Van Kieu people to the west of Khe Sanh valley were under the influence of the NVA. A memoir of Nguyet (2009), a NVA veteran, described vividly the support from Bru-Van Kieu people in late 1960s to his unit during their offense on American military position. In fact, Nguyet's memoir is one of many published and unpublished accounts from war veterans devoted part of their content to illustrated allegiance of Bru-Van Kieu in the Second Indochina War. What can be concluded is that Bru-Van Kieu people were reluctantly dragged into the conflicts of other dominant ethnic and political groups when their neutral and evasive tactic to avoid direct confrontation was no longer an option. After the war,

Bru-Van Kieu people in Khe Sanh came back to their former village. The Bru-Van Kieu who found asylum in Laos also returned to their home village. For both pro-socialist and pro-capitalist Van Kieu, they all had to start almost from scratch after years of dislocation, in war-contaminated farming land and amidst unchanged attitude from Kinh majority.

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## **CHAPTER 3**

### **NEGOTIATING STATE-MAKING IN VIETNAM BORDERLAND – CASE STUDY OF AN ETHNIC MINORITY GROUP IN CENTRAL VIETNAM**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

In post-socialist Vietnam, the blueprint of most of official development policies in mountainous area is based on the understanding of social and economic structure of Kinh people, the dominant ethnicity in the nation's population and politics. Mountainous area, which accounts for nearly three quarters of the country surface, is home to different ethnic minorities whose livelihood and social organization are different from those of Kinh people. As a result, ethnic minorities do not usually benefit directly from official development policies that are purposely creating a social and economic homogeneity for convenient governance from official point of view. This state-making process is sometimes considered to be an assimilation of ethnic minorities into the mainstream majority (McElwee, 2008). The paper targets the one of those ethnic minorities, the Bru-Van Kieu in Central Vietnam, who have experienced drastic changes in their socio-economic conditions during the last 40 years. Their traditional living environment has transformed from a landscape dominated by seemingly impassable forest which was dwelling area for scattering villages of ethnic minorities people practicing shifting cultivation into a multi-ethnic congregation settlement engaging in cash cropping and trading. More significantly, the sense of remoteness that once characterized this upland area due to the distance from lowland population centres and subsequently, the minimal territorial and demographic control from central government, has disappeared. Nowadays, the modern town is an integral part of the official governing system, well-connected to central political centres by a network of communication systems through local



representatives of state authority. The physical transformation in living environment of Bru-Van Kieu people is not an exception within contemporary Vietnamese society, where the nation-state project is characterized by the efforts of a post-colonial socialist state to increase its penetration to, and control over, population and territory in its previously remote frontiers. This process, however, has paid little regard to the pre-existing socio-economic conditions of the indigenous, mainly imposes external institutions on them (Michaud and Forsyth, 2010).

This paper aims to describe changes in the socio-political condition of the Bru-Van Kieu people living in the border areas between Vietnam and Laos, in the context of increasing state territorialization. The authors elaborate the mechanisms by which the state territorialization via official development policies has re-shaped the livelihood and traditional governance systems of ethnic minority in the border areas, including Katup Village. This is followed by a discussion on the response of the Bru-Van Kieu people in Katup Village to the socio-political changes brought about by official development policies. It is argued that state territorialization, exercised by official developing policies, has the tendency to marginalize socially and politically local ethnic minority people by excluding them from indigenous social and economic geography and the use of natural resource. At the receiving end of these official policies, the local ethnic minority people are not passively tolerating but able to initiate the use of both traditional cultural resources and newly arising institutional and market tools to mitigate the impact from the process of official institutionalization of resources.

## **3.2 Everyday resistance and state-territorialization**

### **3.2.1 Moral economy and everyday forms of peasant resistance**

Scott (1976, 1985) examined political resistance to state development and market mechanism using the concept of peasant 'moral economy'. This concept centers around the principle that peasant communities share a set of normative attitudes concerning the social relations and social behaviors that sustain local economy. As a result they have a tendency to oppose to state authorities, or market forces that are breaching local rules respecting existing social arrangements shaping their subsistence needs. Writing on Vietnam (1976), Scott argues that the market threatens the survival of peasant's subsistence economy and traditional social relations defining the operation of this economy. He argues that peasants, being risk-averse prioritizing in survival, tend to resist the market to protect subsistence needs and moral relationships rather than seeking profits. Also on Vietnam, Kerkvliet (2005) illustrates how unequal terms in benefit sharing in agriculture cooperatives to everyday peasant resistance. By "everyday resistance", he demonstrates individual covert acts and behaviors such as foot-dragging, non-compliance, petty theft to upset agricultural productivity in order to force more powerful state and market actors into re-negotiation.

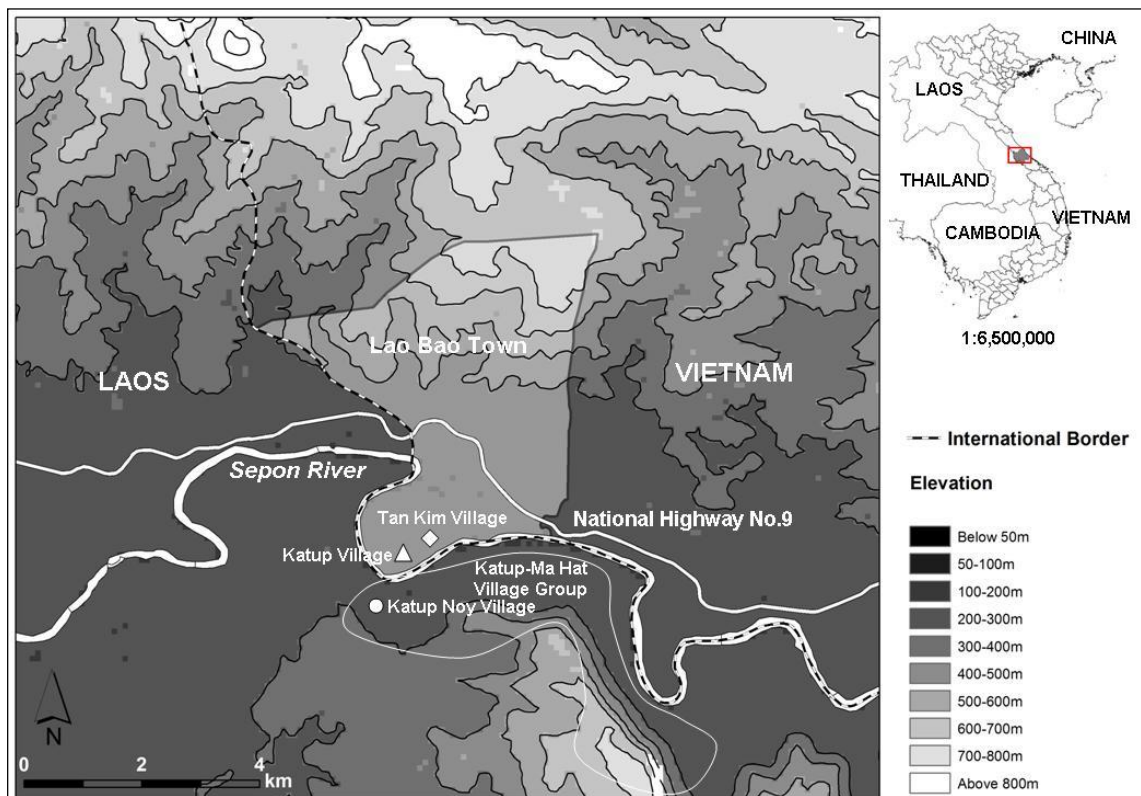
### **3.2.2 State-territorialization as a state-making strategy**

Internal territorialization became a key strategy employed by the Vietnamese state to strengthen its control over rural population and natural resources. It aims to control rural people and resources, and categorize territory into zones of inclusion or exclusion of accession right for different social groups (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995). In other words, internal-territorialization defines the relation between the state and society regarding the use of resource and space. In addition to internal territorialization, state-territorialization includes sovereign territorialization. Arguably the main difference between internal territorialization and external

territorialization is the issue of how to control the people. While by internal territorialization, (e.g the creation of local administration and resource exclusion) the state aims to control people via different method of land-based administration, sovereign territorialization is more about controlling territory by mean of border demarcation. In this essence, state-territorialization can be considered as a strategy of state-building. As a concept, state-making is defined as principally about strengthening the relationship between the state and society, and developing effective ways to mediate this relationship (DFID 2009). A state-making perspective emphasizes that functioning institutions depend not only on their technical design, but on the social context within which they operate. “Formal institutions need to be rooted in society otherwise they risk becoming mere shells or being captured by private or patrimonial interests” (OECD 2008). While sovereign territorialization is a technical process defining the boundary of the state, state-making in the border area is an institutional process can be understood as creating an agreeable and functional set of rules to govern the relationship between the state and borderlanders.

### **3.3 The Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village**

The study site is Katup Village in Lao Bao Town, Huong Hoa District, Quang Tri Province, Vietnam. Katup Village is virtually located on the borderline between Laos and Vietnam.



**Figure 3.1 The relative location of Katup Village**

### 3.3.1 History of Katup Village

The elders in Katup Village do not remember how long they have been settled in their current location. What they did remember, and kept recalling, is that their parents and grandparents lived along the Sepon River (Figure 3.1) since, in their language, the ‘time of the French’. At the heat of war in the late 1960s and the early 1970s, they crossed the river to hide in caves deep in Laos’s territory. As early as 1974, the Bru-Van Kieu returned to Katup Village’s former location by the river. During the resettlement process, while most of households farmed on Vietnam land, a proportion of households started clearing land for agricultural use on Laos’s territory. In the late 1970s, following a border demarcation agreement between the Vietnamese and Laotian governments, the river was reaffirmed as the political

border.<sup>10</sup> Katup villagers on both sides of the river were officially asked to choose their nationality and then to resettle to their chosen state's territory. Most of the families chose their nationality based on the location of their farming land. That is, families who had the majority of their farming land in Laos or Vietnam chose to become Laotian or Vietnamese, respectively, as their nationality. Some families moved, in order to re-unite with their immediate families. In reality, Katup villagers did not fully comprehend the significance of the border demarcation and their selection of a nationality at that time. Elders still recall that their life did not change immediately after the border was demarcated, and they quickly forgot that they were then of different nationalities. It was only years later, when border guards increased their presence in that area and started constructing physical representations such as border markers and outposts along the border while constantly lecturing locals about the political border and national sovereignty, that the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village began to realize an institutional barrier was forming between them and their brothers in Laos. Nowadays, in the area of the traditional Katup Village, there are two different villages by the name Katup, both official: Katup Village on the Vietnam side and Katup Noy<sup>11</sup> on the Laos side.

Although existing as two separate political entities at the moment, the two villages are still connected by rich patrilineal kinship and marriages. Reciprocal exchange and mutual help are still popular in this small Bru-Van Kieu community. Heavy duties, such as clearing forest for agriculture land or constructing a house for one household, led to the mobilization of collective effort from several households, especially among the closed-knitted patrilineal line. Villagers from both sides of the

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<sup>10</sup> In this part of borderland, Sepon River has been political border since French colonialism. Because of war, little enforcement of political border was exercised until the end of Second Indochina War (Vuong et al., 2007, Su and Hoc, 2010)

<sup>11</sup> Meaning 'Small Katup'.

Sepon River will attend a family's marriage and funeral rituals. Gathering of relatives from both side of the border to drink at the end of day is a popular social event. Despite the fact that Laotian authorities also call the Bru-Van Kieu community just opposite Katup Village 'Katup - Ma Hat Village Group'<sup>12</sup> (Figure 3.1), the Laotian Bru-Van Kieu, who originate from Katup Village, still address their village using the old name, Katup, in everyday conversations.

### **3.3.2 Household economy of the Bru-Van Kieu**

Swidden farming still plays an important role among Katup villagers. All of the households that responded indicated that swidden farming occupies a large proportion of their working time, and provides an important food source and income (Table 3.1). Lao Bao Town is in a basin encompassed by hilly and mountainous terrain to the north and the Sepon River curving around the southwest, leaving a narrow and nearly flat basin in the middle (Figure 3.1). Most of the swidden plots used by the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village are in the northern, mountainous terrain, adjacent to those of neighbouring communes. Swidden farming among Katup villagers produces two main types of crops: staple-food crops and cash crops. For their staple foods, Bru-van Kieu peoples plant sweet potatoes, corn, beans, and local varieties of corn and dry rice. Cash crops are gradually becoming a major component in the swidden lands of Katup villagers. In the past, chili, peppers, and mangoes were the main crops, but they became unprofitable and were recently replaced by cassava, bananas, and bollywood.<sup>13</sup> Among the interviewed households in Katup Village, swidden plots ranged from 0.5 ha to 2.5 ha (Table 3.1). The official

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<sup>12</sup> The Katup-Ma Hat Village Group, consisting of four villages stretching nearly seven km along the Sepon River, has its administrative centre in Katup Noy Village, on the Laos side of the Sepon River, just opposite Katup Village. For the remainder of this article, the term Katup Village only refers to the Bru-Van Kieu village on Vietnam side of the border, unless otherwise stated.

<sup>13</sup> Bollywood is common name of *Litsea glutinosa*, a rainforest tree species.

demarcation of swidden land for Katup villagers ended in 2011, resulting in more than half of the population receiving a Red Book,<sup>14</sup> while the other half already had their land demarcated.<sup>15</sup> Agriculture intensification techniques, such as using machinery or fertilizer, are not popular for staple crops, and as a result, soil fertility depletes within two to three years of harvesting. The lack of machinery and fertilizers is a result of the Bru-Van Kieu's inexperience with intensification technology, lack of financial investment, and the steep terrain that makes machinery hard to use and the land susceptible to erosion. Among the interviewed households, the majority planted both staple and food crops, while only a small number cultivated a single staple crop, due to the small size of their swidden land. The results also indicate that there has been a gradual shift to cash crops, in which cassava<sup>16</sup> is dominant.

Several families in Katup Village rear chickens and ducks at a small scale, primarily for household consumption. Pigs and cattle are rarely seen in Katup. The sandy tract of soil along the Sepon River is narrow, but suitable for cultivating sweet potatoes and corn in the dry season when the water level is low. The Bru-Van Kieu do not pay special attention to the plants in their garden. Most home gardens are characterized by poorly nurtured fruit plants, such as papayas, oranges, and bananas.

Collecting NTFPs plays an important role in the Katup household economy. When it is not raining, the Bru-Van Kieu people go into the forest to collect bamboo sprouts, wild jackfruit, and young banana flowers.<sup>17</sup> The task usually falls on the

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<sup>14</sup> Popular name for Land Use Right Certificate. This official certificate, awarded to household, does not recognize a well-demarcated land plot as household's property but only the right to use the land for certain duration.

<sup>15</sup> Delay in official issuance of Red Book for Katup villagers is only a matter of technical issue.

<sup>16</sup> Industrial cassava local-type KM49 is suitable for nutrient-poor soil.

<sup>17</sup> Wild bananas are a popular product among Kinh buyers. A bitter banana, full of hard seeds, is submerged in rice-wine to enhance its flavour for domestic use. Banana flowers appeal to Kinh housewives, because they can be used in making a variety of dishes.

shoulders of the household's female members, such as the grandmothers, housewives, or daughters.<sup>18</sup> Another significant source of NTFPs is firewood, usually the by-product of the process of clearing and burning a forest to prepare it for agricultural use. The adult males in a family transport burnt tree trunks from swidden farm to home, axe them to firewood, arrange the firewood in bundles and then them to restaurant in Lao Bao Town. Most of the collected products are of commercial value. The female members of a family sell these products, with the exception of firewood, at local markets. On average, each interviewed family earns approximately US \$80 a month from selling NTFPs. A small number of households earn an additional US \$100 comes from timber sales. This task, performed by adult men, involves a small group of close-knit relatives extracting valuable timber from the forest and selling it to local Kinh intermediates or carpenters.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Girls no younger than 12 to 13 years old also engage in collecting NTFPs. However, the gender dimensions and child labour involved in these tasks are not discussed in this paper.

<sup>19</sup> A group of three to four male kinsmen venture into Bru-Van Kieu territory, and even Bru-Makong territory in Laos, to purchase processed timber. The timber is already harvested, dried, and sawn to fit the capacity of a normal motorbike. While the job of collecting timber among the Laotian Bru is less risky because the sparse Laotian law enforcement cannot control daily activities in the forest, the occasional transport of timber into Vietnam is more risky because of the presence of forest rangers and police at multiple checkpoints along the road. Therefore, the men usually use a cheap and expendable motorbike for the task. If they encountering Laotian law enforcement, they will throw away both their motorbike and timber and run away. Although the job is high-risk and becoming more difficult, it brings more profit than other livelihood activities. After transporting timber from Laos, they sell it to intermediaries in Lao Bao Town, who in turn will transport it to lowland urban markets. If successful, each member of the group may see a profit of two-to-three million VND (US \$100–150) from each timber-smuggling trip to Laos.



**Table 3.1 Household economy, selected descriptions**

<b>ID</b>	<b>No. of household members</b>	<b>No. of labourers</b>	<b>Main livelihood</b>	<b>Paddy land (ha)</b>	<b>Swidden land (ha)</b>	<b>Swidden land in Laos (ha)</b>	<b>NTFPs collection</b>
<b>1</b>	7	2	②③	x	0.7	0.5	✓
<b>2</b>	6	2	②③	x	1.2	0.5	✓
<b>3</b>	7	3	①②③	0.2	2.1	0.5	✓
<b>4</b>	7	4	②③	x	1.5	2.0	✓
<b>5</b>	11	4	①②③	1.0	1.0	0.5	✓
<b>6</b>	3	2	②③	x	0.7	x	✓
<b>7</b>	5	2	①②③	0.1	0.9	1.0	✓
<b>8</b>	4	2	②③	x	1.1	1.0	✓
<b>9</b>	3	2	②③	x	2.1	x	✓
<b>10</b>	4	2	②③	x	1.2	1.0	✓
<b>11</b>	5	1	②③	x	0.5	1.0	x
<b>12</b>	6	2	②③	x	x	1.5	✓
<b>13</b>	8	4	①②③	0.5	2.5	x	✓

① Dry rice

② Swidden farming

③ NTFPs collection

x: household does not practice this livelihood.

✓: household practices this livelihood.

Source: field survey, March and July 2013.

### **3.4 State territorialization since 1975**

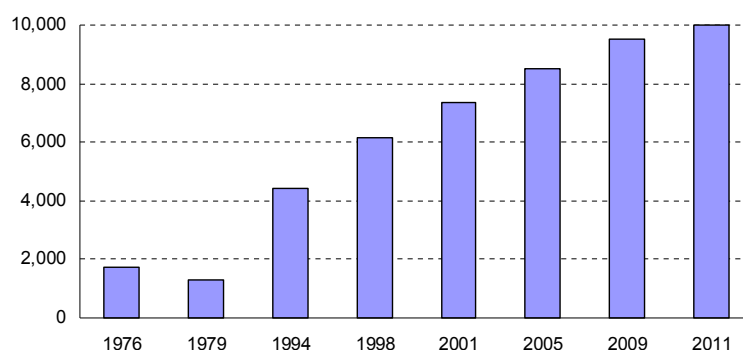
#### **3.4.1 Official institutionalization of natural resources and exclusion of local people from their traditional space and resource**

The migration of Kinh people from the lowlands changes not only the general population of Lao Bao Town but also the local political economy, removing the Bru-Van Kieu people from their traditional role as the exclusive residents and resources users. After national unification in 1975, the state saw replicating the

collective agriculture model to the southern and upland regions as imperative, because this model, dominant in the northern Vietnam lowlands since the late 1950s, was regarded as the fundamental pinnacle of socialist ideology pursued by the state (Pingali and Xuan, 1992). The official boundary divisions did not consider the traditional culture and production space of the Bru-Van Kieu people. On the contrary, the new boundary had significant implications for the Bru-Van Kieu people, because their residential and agricultural spaces were, for the first time in history, charted into and administered by national administrative system. Following this official administrative division, their traditional land became the territory of a different administrative unit, and of its new, 'legal' users. Official institutions did not recognize the traditional land system of Bru-Van Kieu people; hence, they did not see the institutionalization of land in Lao Bao Town in 1975 as an act that took a factor of production away from the Bru-Van Kieu people in order to grant it to Kinh immigrants. Common official discourses described the land in Lao Bao as 'unused', 'unoccupied', and 'barren', and allocating the land to new immigrants was a logical and legal action to prevent the land from being wasted (Su and Hoc, 2010). Official demarcation occurred not only within commune but also between communes, districts, and eventually nations. What the Bru-Van Kieu considered as their rightful and traditional land, cleared by their forefathers and endowed to them by inheritance for generations - considerations that were strictly observed among fellow Bru-Van Kieu people - was, on the contrary, viewed by official authorities as an environment lacking a pre-existing social arrangement. Officials conceptualized the Bru-Van Kieu territory merely as a new unit to be integrated into the large, national physical geography that was subject to official political will and unquestionably outside of the Bru-Van Kieu's political power.

### 3.4.2 Fragmentation of traditional social geography

International border and its official enforcement threaten to fragmentize a traditional fluid and continuous social and economic landscape of the Bru-Van Kieu. Upon border demarcation, the Bru-Van Kieu were requested by the authorities to sedentise their settlement, either on Vietnam territory or on Laotian territory. Mobilization across their traditional social landscape is now restricted by a political border which only increasing with more presence of state's law enforcement in the form of Border patrol, to control the flow of people, and Customs, to control the flow of material. Since economic reform, foreign trading with Laos through Lao Bao Town has increased significantly. Along with this is an increase in the presence of official law enforcement. In the past, to visit a relative opposite of the river, the Bru-Van Kieu have to pass physical barriers such as river, mountain and the distance between villages. Nowadays, those physical barriers might not be as challenging as in the past with the improvement in infrastructure such as road and bridges, they have to overcome political barriers.



**Figure 3.2 Population of Lao Bao Town, 1976–2011<sup>20</sup>**

(Source: Huong Hoa District Statistical Year-books for 1991–1995, 1995–1998, 1997–2001, 2005, 2011)

<sup>20</sup> The population decreased in 1979 when a group of Kinh households could not adapt to the natural and social conditions of Lao Bao Town and returned to their original commune.

The river is no longer simply a physical barrier, because to pass it they need the permission from authorities which is subject to changes. Within Bru-Van Kieu area, socio-economic conditions gradually differentiate between Vietnam side and Laos side as a result of different general development state between the two countries. This differentiation threatens the homogeneity of Bru-Van Kieu society.

### **3.5 The impact of state territorialization on the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village**

#### **3.5.1 Loss of the traditional subsistence agricultural system**

During the period of collective farming, from 1975 through the early 1990s, the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village were encouraged to join the ‘Tan Kim 2’,<sup>21</sup> a production unit that already consisted of a portion of the households in Tan Kim Village, newly established by immigrants from Trieu Phong Commune. The Tan Kim 2 production unit appropriated the flat area along the Sepon River—which happened to be part of the landholdings of several Bru-Van Kieu households—in order to make space for a residential area for new arrivals and for collective farming land. The Bru-Van Kieu faced competition over land not only from the production unit but also from individual Kinh households. Collective farming did not provide enough food for the immigrant population, and as a result individual immigrant households sought extra swidden land on which to plant their own household crops (Su and Hoc, 2010). Most of the time they crashed into tracts of land that appeared forested and unused, but were in fact already under the traditional ownership of Bru-Van Kieu households. In such interethnic land disputes, indigenous and immigrant claimants often negotiated a solution acceptable to both parties, frequently in the form of material compensation from Kinh household to the

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<sup>21</sup> Tan Kim 2 was one of seven newly established village-production units in Lao Bao in 1975: Duy Tan, Cao Viet, An Ha, Tan Kim 1, Tan Kim 2, Xuan Phuoc, and Vinh Hoa (See: Su and Hoc, 2010).

Bru-Van Kieu household in exchange for land. Nonetheless, if the plot of land in dispute was outside Lao Bao territory, the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village would have faced the possibility of losing their traditional land, because the Kinh claimant would use the official land division between production units and communes as leverage to argue that the Bru-Van Kieu villagers did not have the right to use the land in another administrative unit where they were not officially registered as residents.

Nowadays, Bru-Van Kieu households' landholdings are merely remnants of their traditional area. Although there were no statistics on land holdings among the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village before 1975, a transnational comparison of current landholdings may suggest that the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village suffered a huge loss in access to agricultural land. The Laotian Bru-Van Kieu who were interviewed<sup>22</sup> estimated that each of their households in Katup Noy Village, across the Sepon River, had on average seven to eight hectares of swidden land. Traditionally, indigenous Bru-Van Kieu need a large landholding if they are to sustain their shifting cultivation practice. By dividing the uncharted territory into small administrative units, the official authority confined the production space of the Bru-Van Kieu people. For the first time, traditional, shifting cultivation became unlawful because it would, by its expansive nature, violate the political boundaries drawn by the state. While establishing official boundaries 'unintentionally' reduced the land that was accessible to the Bru-Van Kieu and created institutional barriers that reduced traditional production space, the immigration of the Kinh people put further pressure on land. Together, these factors resulted in a sharp decrease in landholding among indigenous households, which was necessary for the viability of their traditional subsistence farming.

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<sup>22</sup> The authors also conducted interviews among five Laotian Bru-Van Kieu households in Katup Noy Village.

### **3.5.2 The decreasing role of the traditional governance system**

An important function of the traditional governance system in the Bru-Van Kieu society was the management of land as a common pool resource and the maintenance of fairly equal land allocation among clans and households in the village. In the process of expanding its power to the periphery, the state institutionalized land resources and replaced the traditional governance system for allocating land. As a result, the traditional governance system gradually diminished. Trung (2003), in his study in Dak Lak Province of the Central Highland, indicated that legally protected changes in land relations from communal land to private ownership relegated the influence of the informal decision-making system. He pointed out that the polan, a traditional decision maker who allocated land and forest resources and sanctioned violations of land-related religious prescriptions, became a symbolic figure in charge of celebrating the worship of the land spirit when the land was officially allocated to individual households. Another study, also among the Katu people—another ethnic minority sharing various cultural and political similarities to the Bru-Van Kieu people—in the mountainous area of Central Vietnam, has shown that the indigenous local governance system was fighting a losing battle against the rising and increasingly powerful official ruling system (Anh and Kim, 2013).

In Katup Village, official institutions had heavily challenged the traditional political system since 1975; nonetheless at that time the Bru-Van Kieu still unconditionally respected and observed the decision-making role of the patriarch, the symbol of the traditional governance system. Starting in the mid-1990s, when Lao Bao Town became the focal point in the development plan for Quang Tri Province, the power struggle between the traditional and official systems began to shift further

in favour of the latter. At this time, the official institution departed from its early administrative role over land and people at the village level to a more penetrating involvement at the household level, through rural development schemes such as poverty eradication, family planning, mandatory primary education, and healthcare.

**Table 3.2 Current power divisions in Katup Village**

	<b>Headman</b>	<b>Patriarch</b>
Status	Official/customary	Customary
Assignment	Nominated by the commune authority and later agreed upon by the villagers	Automatically obtained status of the patriarch (già làng) because of his age
Tenure	Five-year term (maximum two terms)	Begins when the last patriarch dies, and remains as long as he is conscious
Official reward	Monthly allowance	None
Criteria	Acquired a high-school degree, or at least attended high-school in the official education system	Good understanding of ritual
Function	Frequently reports to the commune authority about village business Facilitates the implementation of state policies at the village level A bridge between the official authority and villagers	Ritual works Peace-keeper among the households

Source: field survey, July 2013.

Ferguson (2006) argued that implementing development projects is a basis for extending the power of the state and a tool for building governmental presence from a distance. The evidence of increasing state power at the village level can be found in the emergence and rise of the village headman, an officially appointed position. In

the late 1990s, an elder<sup>23</sup> was chosen by Lao Bao Town People's Committee, the main official authority, as the first village headman to watch over official programs. This marked the start of the official presence of a state representative at the village level, even though subtle influences have been in place since 1975.

In the context of increasing interaction with official institutions, the village headman becomes a stronger figure in village politics while the patriarch becomes weaker. The official system does not deal with Katup Village as a collective entity, but rather as individual households. Each household and member was provided with a set of different official certificates,<sup>24</sup> which is required when that household works with the official authorities. Applying for these certificates is time-consuming and troublesome, even for Vietnamese Kinh. The position of the village headman therefore became important, because he is able to assist his villagers in acquiring these documents by understanding how the procedure works and by translating between his native language and the official Vietnamese language, the former of which is spoken by very few officials. Table 3.2 illustrates the power division between the village headman and the patriarch. At first, a village headman may only be a bridge between the official authorities and villagers. Gradually, as the daily activities of each Bru-Van Kieu household became interwoven into official schemes and programs, the village headman becomes the real leader, replacing the patriarch. All of the Katup villagers agree that, nowadays, the village headman is more important than the patriarch. The significance of the latter is confined to ritual works and to maintaining 'harmony' (hòa thuận) between member households in the village.

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<sup>23</sup> This male elder fought in a local guerrilla-army that was heavily connected to the pro-socialist provisional district government during the war; hence, he had vast experience with official business. Lao Bao Town People's Committee must have seen this elder as an ideal messenger between the state authority and the villagers.

<sup>24</sup> The household registration book, personal identity card (for individuals 16 years and older), health insurance card, land-use-rights certificate (Red Book), birth certificate, and the marriage certificate.



The fact that the patriarch's role is diminishing in the community, where his role represents power, indicates the descent of the traditional governance system, in contrast to the rise of state influence.

In summary, the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village are being denied the full of their traditional social and economic life. When coercively included into political economy system of the ethnic majority, they are marginalized.

### **3.6 Local Responses**

This final session investigates how the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village respond to the unfavourable socio-economic and political changes that were brought about by the state development policies. The long-term adaptation of an ethnic minority to a new political reality is dependent on both macro factors, such as the national agenda, and local specifics, such as their location, languages, history, and cultural proximity to lowland majorities (Michaud and Forsyth, 2011). It is, therefore, the authors' intention to determine the local specifics affecting the Bru-Van Kieu people's responses to external normalizing factors.

#### **3.6.1 Preservation of village culture**

Polygamy was an essential part of traditional Bru-Van Kieu society, since the high demand for males in the extended farming system implies that an additional wife offers additional labour and the possibility of more male offspring. The modern economy of the Bru-Van Kieu has significantly transformed from traditional shifting cultivation. Furthermore, the practice of polygamy is prohibited by official law. Despite all of these modern obstacles, the Bru-Van Kieu males in Katup Village still practice polygamy, although admittedly in smaller numbers.<sup>25</sup> The Bru-Van Kieu

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<sup>25</sup> There are four polygamous households in Katup Village.

widely have accepted polygamy as an unquestionably traditional social norm, despite knowing that the practice is against official rules. Mr. Mung, the headman of Katup Village, is the local representative of the state, as well as a member of the village community. Mr. Mung's daily behavior reflects his dilemma of political dualism. Mr. Mung has not reported polygamy cases in his village to the commune authority, although this task is seemingly his duty as for the representative of the official bureaucratic system. On the contrary, he helped to legalize the children of a second spouse.<sup>26</sup> To some extent, we can consider the village headman in Katup Village as the locus at which state power and village tradition merge and clash. His dualism, between the position of a state representative and a Bru-Van Kieu, between performing his official duty and his obligation to tradition, further solidifies the concept that the border area is the sphere at which official power and local, traditional institutions are merge and contested. Another aspect of traditional Bru-Van Kieu society, which is still frequently practiced in the present, is labour-exchange. The intensive assignments that a family may engage in - such as collecting firewood, preparing land, harvesting crops, and constructing houses - often attract voluntarily labour from other villagers. This is a popular village norm that was practiced to different degrees by all of the houses in the village that were interviewed. Traditionally, at the end of dry-rice harvest period, which usually falls at that end of March and consists of activities that attract intensive labour-exchange in a short period of time, the Bru-Van Kieu celebrate a festival called 'Cúng lúa mới', which loosely translates as 'greeting newly harvested rice'. The festival—which consists of slaughtering water-buffalo, swine, and chickens, and drinking that lasts for several days—is condemned by official authorities as superstitious, wasteful, and unnecessary, and is therefore prohibited. Nonetheless, the Bru-Van Kieu people in

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<sup>26</sup> Because the system does not recognize the second wife, all newborns of the second spouse are officially registered as children of the first wife.

Katup Village continue to celebrate ‘Cúng lúa mới’ at the village scale in a more covert form. The villagers no longer slaughter water buffalo for this festival, because they are too expensive for even the village to collectively afford. In addition, they may organize the festival after they have harvested and sold their industrial cassava, which occurs once a year.

### **3.6.2 Social and livelihood space beyond the reach of the state**

Unconsciously or not, the Bru-Van Kieu have downplayed the importance of the political border as much as they can by maintaining social relations and activities across a geographic area that is unobstructed by political boundaries. The physical gap, in the form of the Sepon River, and the political barrier are made insignificant by daily border-crossings via a boat, operated by a Katup family, which transports people, motorbikes, and goods across the river, without requiring travelers to present their travel document. Existing during the reign of the passport, such cross-border movement arrests our attention because it challenges the nature of a seemingly established system.

The Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village cross the river to Laos on a daily basis, for the purposes of both visiting relatives and their daily livelihoods. Given the history between Katup and its sister village in Laos, most of households in either village have relatives in the other. Bru-Van Kieu young men often cross the border to the Bru-Van Kieu villages in Laos to visit their relatives and to court partners introduced by their relatives.<sup>27</sup> The Bru-Van Kieu maintain intra-ethnic marriages not only with co-ethnics in Vietnamese territory but also in Laotian territory. What the authorities define as cross-border marriages seem to the Bru-Van Kieu merely as the normal social matching in their community.

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<sup>27</sup> There are five housewives who initially were of Laotian having converted to Vietnamese citizenship by marriage in Katup Village.

Apart from taking short trips to Laos to visit their relatives, the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup also cross the border on daily basis for their livelihood activities, which include collecting forest products and practicing of swidden farming.<sup>28</sup> While collecting NTFPs and extracting timber has traditionally been done by Katup villagers, even on the Laotian side, the Vietnamese Bru-Van Kieu's practice of cultivating land in Laos reminds us of a strategy for negating the adverse impacts that stem from the loss of land used for shifting cultivation and the conversion of land over to commercial crops. Faced with the land deprivation on Vietnamese side, the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village, as well as the Kinh people in Lao Bao Town and its neighbour communes, look for sparsely populated areas in Laos where they might cultivate cash crops, especially bananas, thanks to the better soil fertility found there. The local, Laotian Bru-Van Kieu were informed that the agricultural land in this remote corner of Laos is beyond the strict, official jurisdiction, and practically under customary control of the Laotian Bru-Van Kieu; hence, their Vietnamese co-ethnics could acquire land for production by borrowing it from their Laotian co-ethnics. The borrowers are usually families in Katup Village who have become landless after engaging in the cash-crop economy, or families whose land was unproductive. The right to borrow and the obligation to lend land may sound unfamiliar to outsiders, but for the Bru-Van Kieu people, it is a popular social norm from the past that follows the principle of reciprocity and mutual help. Mr. H, a Bru-Van Kieu household head in Katup Village in Laos said:

*"...he has no land but a family to feed. I have spare land that I can survive without. Letting him borrow the land to plant crops is the right thing to do..."*

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<sup>28</sup> Among 72 households in Katup Village, 69 engaged in daily collection of non-timber forest product such as bamboo sprout, fuel wood, bird, bee honey and porcupine's stomach, 25 in swidden farming; and 38 in timber extraction such as teak in Laos territory

(Field survey, 2013)

It should be noted that the state representatives at local level are well aware of cross-border activities exercised by the Bru-Van Kieu. Their tolerance of “illicit” activities can be stemmed from several reasons: first, local law enforcement are short in staff and finance; second, so-called “illicit” activities generate rent-seeking opportunities for the local officials (explain more!!!).

### **3.6.3 "Them" and "us"**

It is true that, even before the demarcation of the international border, the Bru-Van Kieu people travelled, unhindered by the river, around the area to collect forest products and practice farming. If cross-border activities among the Bru-Van Kieu who live in Katup Village did not coincide with the unfavourable changes that have occurred in their surroundings over the last 40 years, how can they be considered as reactionary? We argue that, even though the activities were not unprecedented, the Bru-Van Kieu consciously interpreted their actions in a different manner. In other words, their reactions were an attempt to bridge the enormous economic and political gap in order to bring themselves some advantage in their unequal struggle against the state and the dominant majority. The following examples, both of which illustrate the preferential treatment of co-ethnics by the Bru-Van Kieu people, will further expand on the above argument.

As mentioned before, both the Kinh and Bru-Van Kieu use a boat, operated by a Bru-Van Kieu family living in Katup Village, to cross the Sepon River. The boat's owner- operator gives preferential treatment based on ethnicity. He never asks for a

fee when transporting<sup>29</sup> his Bru-Van Kieu co-ethnics, regardless of whether they are Laotian or Vietnamese. As for Kinh travellers, however, there is always a cost.

**Table 3.3: Laotian Bru-Van Kieu treatment of Vietnamese farmers according to ethnicity**

Kinh farmers	Bru-Van Kieu farmers in Katup
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Large area (three to four hectares)</li> <li>- Lease land</li> <li>- Tenure ends when a batch of banana trees is no longer productive</li> <li>- Lease uncultivated land and hire local labourers from both Kinh and Bru communities to work the land, lease the land, and buy the already planted bananas.</li> <li>- Agriculture entrepreneur</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Small area (less than one hectare)</li> <li>- Borrow land (no payments to the landowner<sup>30</sup>)</li> <li>- Tenure as long as needed by the borrower; ends when a batch of banana trees is no longer productive or when landowner thinks the borrowers have not used the land in the proper or pre-agreed upon way</li> <li>- Work for subsistence</li> </ul>

Source: field survey, July 2013.

In another example, although there are both Kinh and Bru-Van Kieu farmers cultivating land belonging to the Laotian Bru-Van Kieu people, the Laotian landowners' treatment of these two ethnic groups is different. The relationship between Laotian landowners and Kinh farmers is that of an owner-renter, in which the latter have to pay a fair sum of money to the former in order to rent their user rights. At the same time, the relationship between the Laotian Bru-Van Kieu and their Vietnamese co-ethnics is that of an owner-borrower, in which the latter does not make any monetary payments (Table 3.3). This is because the Bru-Van Kieu

<sup>29</sup> The fee was about VND 10,000 (US \$0.5) as of mid-2013

<sup>30</sup> The annual land tariff, paid via the head of village-group to the district authority, is 30,000 Laotian Kips, equivalent to US \$4, which is not a substantial amount by local standards.

developed a perception that, unlike the Katup Bru-Van Kieu who rented the land to supplement their household economy, the Kinh farmers engaged in for-profit ventures.

#### **3.6.4 "Illicit" timber relationship**

As mentioned earlier, there is a small number of Bru-Van Kieu households engaging in the more lucrative timber smuggling from Laos to Vietnam (Note 17). Although deemed illicit, at village level this activity is made possible by the relationship between these Bru-Van Kieu villagers and members of Border Patrol stationed in the post at the very the entrance to the village. According to one Bru-Van Kieu timber smuggler, they pay bribe directly to these Border Patrol men at about 40 to 50 percent of market value of each smuggling, estimated at around USD 800-1000. These bribes would guarantee them no interference during the transport made by motorbike to Kinh buyers outside their village.<sup>31</sup> Apart from "safe passage" of their timber to the buyers, the Bru-Van Kieu are frequently provided with information from local Border Patrol of specific times when law enforcement officers from higher chain of command visit the village, disregard on-going arrangement between local Border Patrol and villagers and apply strict to cross-border any illicit activities. From local Border Patrol perspective, the revenue gained from smugglers enable them to carry out their "dân vận" (public relation)

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<sup>31</sup> Official barriers from their village where they usually store their smuggled timber before dispatching to their next destination of Kinh intermediate living along the main National Highway or Kinh carpenters in Lao Bao Town includes not only Border Patrol but also Public Security, Market Control, Tax and Traffic Control. Nonetheless, the bribe to Border Patrol is one-off as they do not have to trickle their profit to other law enforcements. Without further detail, the Bru-Van Kieu suspect that their bribe would be divided among these forces.

operation<sup>32</sup> at village level. In addition, creating a close relationship with those Bru-Van Kieu having extensive cross-border economic engagement helps Border Patrol gain information about other informal conducts in border area. This information is important in making periodic report to higher command justifying their request for further investment of financial and human resources to strengthening border security.

### **3.7 Discussion**

#### **3.7.1 From moral economy to market economy**

It is argued that official interventions and market intrusions in Lao Bao Town have resulted in the social and political marginalization of the Bru-Van Kieu people in Katup Village. This case study shows that livelihood and culture are highly interwoven in the transformation in Bru-Van Kieu society, first transforming their livelihood, then the loss of their traditional shifting cultivation, and finally expanding to the cultural and political domain, resulting in, for example, the demise of their traditional power structure. Changes in livelihood can lead to serious deterioration in the ethnic minorities' culture and identity, which extend beyond the understanding of planners and practitioners and may prompt resistance from the beneficiaries. This calls for understanding the term 'better-off' from the perspective of ethnic minorities rather than from a national majority's definition of development. The theme of this paper is not to suggest that the Bru-Van Kieu people object to change. Like any societies, they are interested in improving their standard of living and lessening their daily hardship. They resist because the changes, brought about by state development policy and market liberation, are too drastic to the degree of threatening the existence of the cultural and economic world that the Bru-Van Kieu understand. In this case,

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<sup>32</sup> Includes but not limit to dissemination of different national policies, organizing of soldier-villagers meetings in national remembering days to instill a sense of national identity.



the response of the Bru-Van Kieu can be seen as a classic example of Scott's school of "moral economy" and "everyday resistance". One of the most important assets of the Bru-Van Kieu people in Katup Village is their cultural capital, which they share with their cross-border co-ethnics. The dense network of kinship, history, and language shared with their co-ethnics creates a social space that enables the Bru-Van Kieu people to escape from the harsh grip of the totalitarian state. Norms regarding resource use in this transnational and traditional community become useful tools for the Katup villagers to use when mitigating the impact of the official institutionalization of resources and of market penetration. Although cross-border farming and NTFPs collection are purely livelihood activities, maintaining these activities also means conserving both a culture and development agenda that is unconformable with the state's definition of how national identity. The authors strongly believe that the Bru-Van Kieu villagers in Katup Village do not think that their daily activities are acts of resistance against the state's agenda. However, their form of subtle resistance seriously questions the power of the state at its border, because it undermines the very first objective of the state in creating international border, which is to build a homogeneous political space, from the centre toward the edge of the society, within which the state can effectively exercise its power.

This case study, however, illustrates elements supporting Samuel Popkins (1979) model of rational self-interest and utility-maximizing peasant behavior. The behavior of small number of Bru-Van Kieu timber smugglers proves that decision to engage in cross-border activities is not only a reaction to loss of subsistence economy, preservation of traditional mobility but also rational economic calculation. The fact that cross-border timber smuggling is made possible transnationally based on both traditional network of kinship and relationship with state actors implies that the Bru-Van Kieu employ both moral economy to political economy principles to

sustain their livelihood. While the transaction with co-ethnics on Laos territory is based on traditional sense of mutual help and ethnic cultural capital, the transaction with Border Patrol on Vietnam side is calculated on perception of market risk and shared benefits with state and non-state actors. Different from moral economy in which actors show great effort to minimize risks, the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village are well aware of the benefit and also the risk accompanying their smuggling activities when dealing with actors outside of their ethnic moral network. A Bru-Van Kieu engaging in timber smuggling informed that he would not abuse the relationship with their cross-border co-ethnics as he only maintain a certain number of cross-border smuggling trips only to keep his household economy above average despite constant demand from Kinh intermediate for more supply. His reasoning is to not upset fellow villagers or cross-border co-ethnics by becoming too engaging in becoming rich. The act of smuggling represents a rational Bru-Van Kieu peasant who strikes a delicate balance between moral and political economy principle.

This analysis shows that the Bru-Van Kieu are not passive agent of development process as they can utilize both traditional and official resources to support their livelihood. It reminds us to be careful not falling into the pitfall of ‘resistance mentality’ which “assuming state–society relations are always about resistance, or that certain groups are unwilling to accept changes, or that change must necessarily instill resistance” (Forsyth, 2009).

### **3.7.2 State-making by accommodating informal activities**

Before the intensification of cross-border official trading, the state exercises a relaxed degree of border control. To the local the border was an abstract concept at this time because they were free to roam the area and there was not significant presence of state representative at local level to remind them that they are in fact

crossing from one state to another. Since the increase of cross-border trade, the state emphasizes on controlling the flowing of material and people for taxation, as well as preventing smuggling. The increased presence of law enforcement, along with popular education on the topic of border and sovereignty change the perception of local people on border reality. Despite of official education effort, local people interpretation of state's concept of territory is influenced mainly by economic and social interest. Difference in level of official investment in infrastructure development projects providing electricity, clean water, housing, education and health care on the 2 sides of the border creates a sharp contrast socio-economic settings either side of the border, provide local people with a hardened line of separation. Local people may accommodate state's concepts of territory without necessary abandon indigenous concept. Cross-border farming and ethnic/cultural interaction point to the prevalence of traditional space little affected by official territorial boundary. The Bru-Van Kieu make use of official definition of territory to their advantage to exploit other ethnic groups economically (e.g making money from Kinh people passing the border on boat) or newly created economic opportunities (e.g the smuggling of timber, collection of forest products across border to supply domestic demand brought about by the exclusion from resources access), in the meanwhile, they challenge this very concept through activities deemed illegal and subversive from official perspective. The state does not have enough financial and human resources to exercise maximum enforcement of political border, as a result it cannot create an absolute authority on border people. Within its limited resources, the state place its priority on controlling territory and natural resources more than on controlling local population and their cultural geography.

With the increasing transnational trade, the need to control local population becomes more urgent, the state increase presence in the border area. However, *de*

*jure* territorial control does not automatically translate into *de facto* power over the population on this territory because before the ascending of official rules, human space/geography in this area was governed by traditional and indigenous laws. What are the actual process of official enforcement and regulation in the border area? In order to set control on local border population, the state relied on practical rules resulted from negotiation and compromises with local activities. Through these negotiated rules with local actors that the state, as a political authority, has been able to establish capacities to exercise its authority, admittedly partial, regarding the cross-border flow of people and material. The fact that states come to being through the practical exercise of these rules supports the argument that the state is not a monolithic entity. In fact it is an effect of the practices and interactions between different state and non-state actors.

Border making is not a passive notion or simple line draw on the map but an active process involving in different state and non-state actors that may provide a closer look to state-society relations. The authors argued that it is state-territorialization, by creating zone of exclusion or inclusion has created constructed space where state and non-state actors constantly contest. Although the practices of state representatives at local level conflict with what they are mandated to, they are in fact part of state-making. Through the negotiation between local officials and ethnic minority people which results in compromises and tolerance of illicit activities, the state starts to set practical rules and gradually gain a foothold in an area where just recently still out of reach from the state authority. This analysis implies that the process of state-making is based on local specifics, that is the state might have to compromise their indivisible and monolithic nature to accommodate “illicit” activities and informal rules to be able to gain the first stepping stones to gain authority. From local people's perspective, accepting state authority at village

level can be seen as a gain because the relationship forged with local state actors enable the Bru-Van Kieu to operate in a quasi-official mode outside their village in more institutionalized with people of different ethnicity for economic profit.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This case describes the dynamics between state-territorialization in the border area, understood as a strategy of state-making and enhancing the state's authority, and responses of local people. Exercising internal territorialization by establishing administration on people and resources, the state has marginalized local ethnic minority group leading the latter to seek intensification of cross-border use of natural and cultural resources. This, in turn, compromises sovereign aspect of state-territorialization. Sovereign-territorialization, aiming to create a state boundary within which a universal set of official rules can be applied, is threatened by the re-invention of traditional ethnic institution. Not abandoning its objective of establishing rules for all subjects within its sovereign, the state comes to term with accepting negotiated informal rules for border citizens regarding cross-border flow of human and resources. This analysis that while the state can be accommodating, local ethnic minority people also are not passive but able to use their tradition agencies to negotiate with more powerful actor helps dismantle not only the image of a rigid, uncompromising and monolithic state but also the view that ethnic minority people are passive beneficiaries of marco state and economic processes. While the political behavior of Bru-Van Kieu people is in resonance with Scott's school of moral economy and everyday resistance, it would be for the benefit of ethnic groups in general if researchers and development planners are careful not to portray them in overly romanticized or 'traditional' settings that deny their ability to take advantages of new official and market opportunities.

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## CHAPTER 4

### LIVELIHOOD STRATEGIES OF ETHNIC MINORITY IN THE BORDERLANDS: CASE STUDY OF THE BRU-VAN KIEU IN NORTHERN CENTRAL VIETNAM<sup>33</sup>

#### 4.1 Introduction

For the last 40 years after peace was acquired, the state<sup>34</sup> has paid great attention to the development of this area leading to major changes in social, political and economic landscape. After 1975 the state organized mass migration of Kinh people, the national ethnic dominant, to the upland area following New Economic Zone (NEZ) policy. It is estimated that from 1.2 to 1.5 million people in Vietnam resettled from densely populated lowland area to NEZs in the upland in 1975-1980 (Desbarats, 1987). The official rationale behind this policy is to redistribute national population, which was dense and concentrated in lowland area while sparse in the upland (Hardy, 2000). While the majority of this migration was to the Central Highland (Hardy, 2000), upland in northern central Vietnam was also fluxed with immigrants from coastal lowland area.<sup>35</sup> In parallel to resettlement of lowlanders to upland area, the state established an administrative system<sup>36</sup> initially aiming to govern population of immigrants but later incorporated that of ethnic minorities. In addition, the state also appropriated local resources such as land and forest into official framework regardless of existing customary rules of ethnic minority people.

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<sup>33</sup> From the north to the south, this region includes following provinces: Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh, Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Thua Thien Hue.

<sup>34</sup> The Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

<sup>35</sup> In 1975 alone the population of Huong Hoa, the district in which the study was conducted, increased to more than 50,000 with addition of 15,000 lowland immigrants (Oanh, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Modern administrative system in Vietnam is established in following hierarchy: Central, Province, District, and Commune.

Because of the immigration of lowland Kinh people, in the most easily accessible places in upland northern central Vietnam indigenous people became the minority in their traditional land, where traditionally they were the only dwellers. Furthermore, the space and the mobility of ethnic minority are also challenged by the establishment of political border between Vietnam and Laos in the late 1970s. Traditionally, ethnic minorities in this upland area periodically rotated their settlement and agriculture land to a more favorable location.<sup>37</sup> Their ecological niche in the past was a vast area that is now divided by international political border. To put it another way, the setup of border and increasing presence of official authority undermined traditional shifting practice of ethnic minority people. The latest major process affecting this area is the commercialization of local resources as a result from market opening policy since the late 1980s. Under macro-economic reform, the Đổi Mới policy, Vietnam transformed from a centrally-planned and autarkic into a dynamic market-based and highly internationally integrated economy. Integration into global economy resulted in great availability and circulation of commodities and new economic opportunities on one hand, but on the other hand from a local perspective, resources such as land, forest and labor that were once used only for subsistence economy have now become chained in a wider consumption network beyond their control. Within this context, based on an empirical research on the Bru-Van Kieu in a border village in northern central Vietnam, this study's major objective is to investigate how ethnic minorities adapt their livelihood to challenges instigated by macro social, political and economic processes. By analyzing livelihood adaptation among ethnic minorities, this study also identifies strategies that ethnic minorities use to negotiate with more powerful political and economic forces.

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<sup>37</sup> Rotational cycle is about 3-15 years (Schrock et al, 1966).

## 4.2 Political context of the Bru-Van Kieu in Vietnam

Under the Constitution of Vietnam all ethnic groups have equal social and political rights regardless of minority or dominant status. Ethnic minority groups play an important role in anti-colonial struggle and the Second Indochina War (McElwee, 2004; Pholsena, 2008). Since the foundation of modern state in Vietnam in 1945, ethnic minority groups are often encouraged to participate in political institutions.<sup>38</sup> During the field survey, it was not uncommon to see Bru-Van Kieu or Pacoh individuals working in political and administrative institutions at commune and district level. The assignment of ethnic minority people to local political positions, however, is not a guarantee for preservation and exhibition of full range of social and cultural life of ethnic minority. The state views ethnic minorities as being at the early stage in Marxist-Leninist framework of social evolution in which development proceeds in stages from primitive to modern and socialist (McElwee, 2004). This official view was resonated by various authors claiming that the Bru-Van Kieu's traditional farming system using simple tools such as a machete, ax and stick, the *phat*, *dot*, *cot*, *tria* technique and its low productivity were proof of their "backward-ness" while animistic beliefs in the existence of individual spirit in natural phenomena and entity such as river, mountain and forest was proof of their "superstitious-ness" (Loc, 1984; Hong; 2002; Manh, 2001). In order to leap forwards to a more socially and economically advanced stage, ethnic minorities are encouraged to preserve only "positive" cultural trait and economic activities and get rid of behaviors deemed "backward" and "superstitious" (Rambo, 2003). Defining which cultural traits and economic activities as "positive", "backward" and "superstitious" is, however, in the hands of Kinh people based on their own reference

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<sup>38</sup> As in 2015 the percentage of representatives from ethnic minority background in Vietnam's National Assembly, the highest governmental organization and highest-level representative of the people responsible for law making, is 15.6% which is slightly higher than the percentage of ethnic minority in national population at 14.3% (Office of Vietnam's National Assembly, 2015; General Statistics Office, 2010).

and experience (Rambo, 2003). In Katang Village, the research site, in particular and broader geography of Bru-Van Kieu, stories of successful individual Bru-Van Kieu are about those who were able to travel far beyond the confines of village life, obtain training under official educational institutions in lowland centers and then return to hold position in local political institutions at provincial, district or commune level. As a result of official training and position, even the Bru-Van Kieu in local political and government institutions - the successful examples - do not view their ethnic group's cultural traits based on their own reference system but that of the Kinh's. Hence, they do not approve of the expression of these "negative" traits. During the colonial struggle, in order to create a nation-state image, as a metaphor the country was compared to one family in which different ethnic groups were considered as brothers and sisters (Rambo, 2003). Until nowadays this view is still highly influential in official education institutions and mass media when the topic of ethnic relation between ethnic dominant and minority was mentioned. Influenced by Marxist-Leninist framework and neo-Confucius philosophy in the context of state building, this relation describes the dominant Kinh, assuming the role of an elder brother giving instruction and guidance to the little brothers, the various ethnic minorities (Salemink, 2008). The elder brother is also expected to exercise tolerance and patience towards his little brothers if the latter do not follow the instruction strictly or deviate from the chosen trajectory. A provincial decree issued in 1975 left no doubt on the point that Kinh immigrants was more advanced in socio-economic conditions and therefore, in position to endow development knowledge on Bru-Van Kieu people:

*"...provincial authority gave directives to the immigrants to build shelter within the area of ethnic minority people. Villages of Van Kieu*

*people from now became administrative unit under commune authority for convenience in socio-economic management. Kinh people would help mountainous brothers to start paddy cultivation, husbandry, trading, healthcare to facilitate socio-economic development and extrication of backward and superstitious practices and isolation of long standing self-providing economy ...".<sup>39</sup> (Su and Hoc, 2010).*

The view of Kinh people on the Bru-Van Kieu, as would be shown later in the article, was in line with official view.

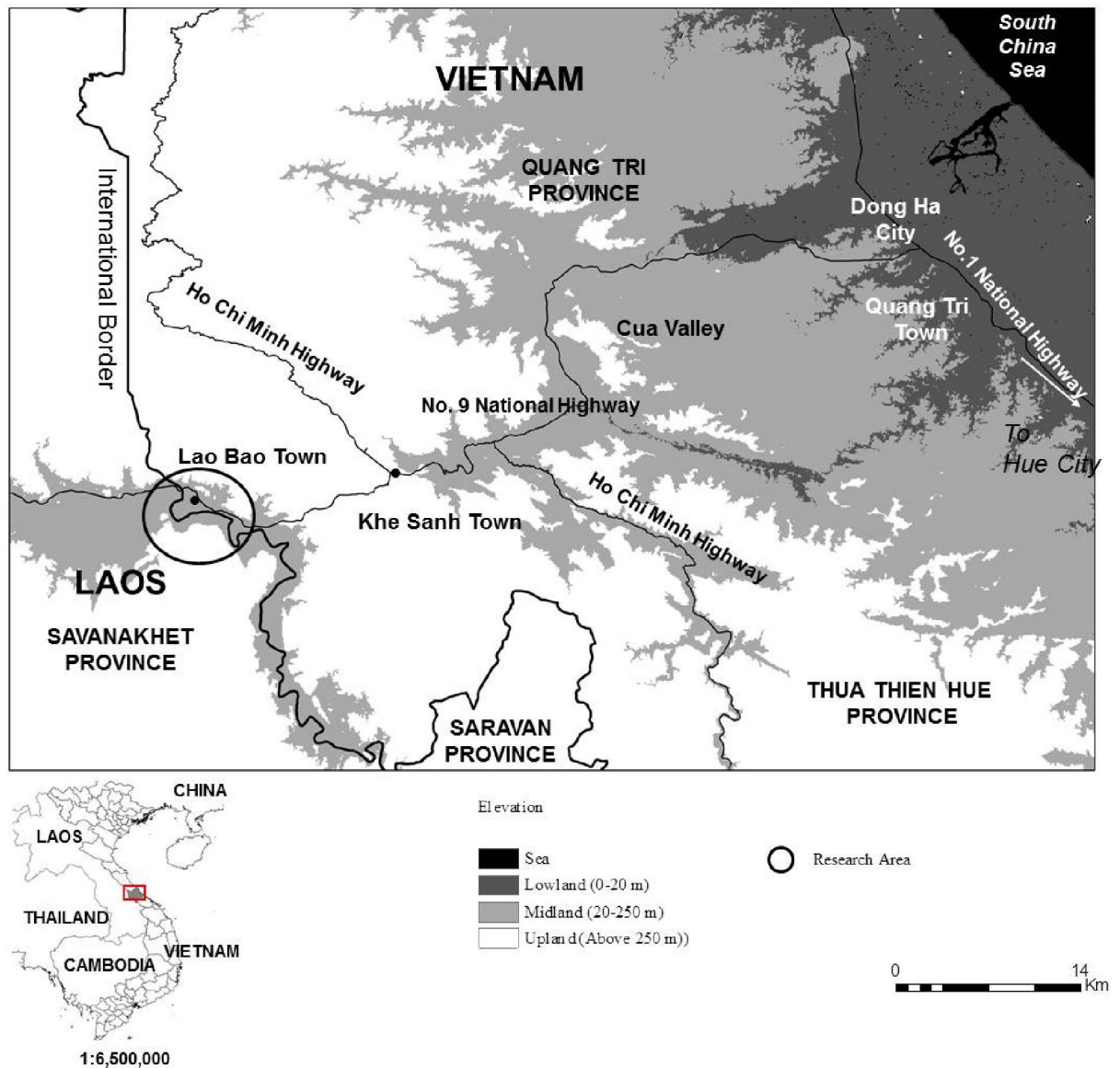
#### **4.3 Profile of the study village**

The authors employed a mixed-methods approach including semi-structured individual interview, participatory observation and analysis of secondary materials. With the focus on livelihood adaptation of ethnic minority to macro political, social and economic processes, the scope of the survey was only on the Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village. Few Kinh individuals were also interviewed only to clarify their association with the Bru-Van Kieu. General information of the village was obtained from documents provided by Lao Bao Town People's Committee, the local state administration, and the interview with the village head.<sup>40</sup> The authors conducted qualitative interviews for a total of 16 households chosen randomly out of 87 Bru-Van Kieu households.

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<sup>39</sup> All translation of text from Vietnamese to English was made by the authors unless stated otherwise.

<sup>40</sup> Function of a village head is to convey instructions and message from Lao Bao Town People's Committee to villagers. He was chosen by the villagers and legitimized by official authority. Usually village heads are middle school or high school graduates with great command in written and reading skill in official Vietnamese language. Village head does not receive official salary but a monthly allowance from local administration.



**Figure 4.1 Relative location of research site**

In addition qualitative information is also gathered from 2 Kinh cross-border traders who can be found in the local Lao Bao market as retailers, 2 Kinh restaurant owners who were also Katang Villagers but opened their business in the village in Laos just across the border and last but not least a border officer of Border Guard Station of Lao Bao International Border Gate. Another source of secondary information is documents and reports from District Statistics Office. The main field survey was conducted in October 2013 with follow-ups in March 2014 and June 2014.

### 4.3.1 Physical settings

Katang Village is in Lao Bao Town,<sup>41</sup> 80 km from the provincial capital of Dong Ha City and at the end of Vietnam's No. 9 National Highway. As of 2012, the village comprised of more than 150 households from approximately 800 people of the Bru-Van Kieu, Pacoh and Kinh. Modern Katang Village retained few characteristics of a traditional Bru-Van Kieu village. Most of the houses are one-storey houses made of concrete instead of traditional ones on stilts. Even though different ethnic groups are well mixed in term of physical location of their houses, it is still possible to distinguish houses of Kinh people from those of 2 ethnic minorities based on pattern of external structure and decoration.

The village lies in arguably the busiest session of Lao Bao Town. Within short walking distance from the village gate is the most important economic and political infrastructure of the region including duty-free supermarket, Border Guard Station, security-strengthened area for customs and immigration services and Lao Bao Border Gate.<sup>42</sup> During official working hours, the area just in front of Katang Village is lively crowded with border crossers waiting impatiently for official clearance of their commodities or vehicles, local women trying to sell Vietnamese and Laotian mobile phone simcards, informal money exchangers competitively offering the best possible deal to border crossers, food sellers under tin-roofed stall

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<sup>41</sup> Town is an administrative unit equivalent to commune. While town is usually referred to urban area, commune is confined to rural environment. Lao Bao Town belongs to Huong Hoa District, Quang Tri Province.

<sup>42</sup> In 2009, official documents report that through Lao Bao border gate total of exports and imports was nearly USD 216 million, total cars and trucks entering and departing was more than 52,000 while there were nearly a quarter of a million people going through the border gate (Shiraishi, 2013). The number of people passing through the border gate in this report, however, was only accounting for people going under immigration process conducted by Border Patrol. Number of local people passing through the gate daily was not accounted for. According to reports from Quang Tri Province authority, the numbers for 2014 until October are more than 61,000 vehicles; USD 340 million in total exports and imports; and nearly 430,000 people going through Lao Bao border gate (Minh, 2014).

or motorbike taxi drivers looking for possible customers from the stream of by-passers, and cart -puller with their loaded cart preparing to cross the border. Deeper into the village, the landscape turns sharply to hill and mountain where local people practice swidden farming. The western side of the village is in fact a session of the international border with Laos through which many undesignated routes were formed and used by local people who do not wish to cross the border at official border gate.

#### **4.3.2 History of village ethnography and economy**

The elders of Van Kieu ethnic claimed that the village has existed for long before the outbreak of the Second Indochina War (1954-1975). The villagers fled the war-torn area in the early 1960s and only returned when peace was reached in the mid-1970s.<sup>43</sup> In October 1975, there were more than 30 Kinh households in NEZprogram from the lowland area of Quang Tri Province resettling in Katang Village in close proximity to existing indigenous Bru-Van Kieu. From 1975 to the late 1980s, Kinh people in Katang Village supported their lives by experimenting collective farming of paddy and other crops<sup>44</sup> on the limited irrigated and flat land in the village. The Bru-Van Kieu continued traditional subsistence farming and exploitation of forest products despite official effort to incorporate them into collective farming. From the late-1980s, the agriculture system of Kinh people experienced fundamental changes. Collective farming system in Katang Village was gradually declining with official approval. During this period, restriction on regional flow of people and commodities were lifted. Coupled with improving condition of

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<sup>43</sup> This account is not unique. Other villagers of ethnic minority in Laos-Vietnam border shared similar experience. For detail, see Huijsmans and Tran (2015).

<sup>44</sup> In 1976, agriculture land for Kinh population in Lao Bao was as follows: paddy 13ha, cassava 21ha, peanut 1ha, bean 4 ha, sweet potatoes 5 ha.



No. 9 National Highway, trading condition between Lao Bao Town and lowland area flourished. Kinh farmers significantly diversified their agricultural practice towards products of more commercial value<sup>45</sup> rather than self-sustaining as before. At the same time, a large number of Kinh people participated in the various commercial cooperatives responsible for selling upland agriculture and forest product to lowland and buying staple food, diet supplementary and household consumables to satisfy the demand from immigrant population. Lao Bao market was opened in 1989, immediately becoming the center commerce and finance of not only Lao Bao Town but also the entire upland area of northern central Vietnam. The position of regional trading hub of Lao Bao was further consolidated with the formation of Lao Bao Special Economic Zone in 1998 aiming to boost transborder trade between Laos and Vietnam. The majority of Kinh people in Katang Village shifted into trading and services related.

The transformation of Lao Bao Town to a regional trading hub attracted further spontaneous migration to Katang Village of not only the lowland Kinh who looked forward to finding their niche in the booming economy but also the Bru-Van Kieu from neighbor communes. Most of the interviewed immigrant Bru-Van Kieu households were from Khe Sanh Town<sup>46</sup> and were known to each other via kinship

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<sup>45</sup> During this period, pepper and mango became main products and sources of income for Kinh farmers.

<sup>46</sup> Khe Sanh Town, the capital of Huong Hoa District, is also on No.9 National Highway about 20kms to the east of Lao Bao Town. During the Second Indochina War, the Bru-Van Kieu in this area faced a dilemma. They would have to either resettle in Khe Sanh Town, under control of South Vietnam government, to form villages around a US Marine Corps's base or migrate further west into Laos's border area, under control of the North Vietnam Army (NVA) and NLF to avoid the raging war in the middle. Staying in the middle was not an option because opposing sides of the conflicts would accuse them of being sympathizers of the enemy (Clarke and Vessey, 2007; Hickey, 2002; McElwee, 2008). Because of the battle between the US Marine Corps and the NVA in Khe Sanh Town in 1968, it was estimated that about 7,000 of originally about 10,000 Bru-Van Kieu evacuated the town to Cua Valley further east and Quang Tri Town while a small proportion migrated further south to what is now western part of Thua Thien Hue Province. In 1972, the Bru-Van Kieu in Quang Tri Province also had to migrate to Hue City and Danang to avoid war turmoil. After the war, the survivors

before settling in Katang Village. They indicated that the pull-factor for migration was the attempt to capitalize the opportunities from increasing demand for forest products. The push factor was a mainly the lack of agriculture land in their origin place, Khe Sanh Town. Similarly to Lao Bao Town, Khe Sanh Town was also a NEZ for Kinh immigrant lowlanders after 1975.<sup>47</sup> Because this NEZ focused on agriculture in an area already limited by heavy contamination of unexploded ordinances left over from the war, the pressure on the Bru-Van Kieu who returned to Khe Sanh Town as war refugees to look for a farming livelihood was enormous. As a result, the Bru-Van Kieu in Khe Sanh Town actively looked for economic opportunities either in non-farm activities or relocation to elsewhere from their crowded home town. Some acquired experience in non-farm activities with Kinh people during various stages of dislocation during and after the war. Mr. Pa Vieng, 64 year old, of Katang Village shared his account:

*“...when I migrated to Quang Tri Town in 1968, there was no land for dislocated Bru-Van Kieu to practice agriculture. I worked at porter at local market in exchange for food or petty cash.” (Field survey, 2014)*

Upon arrival in Katang Village, they focused on exploiting and trading forest products rather than farming. Traditional institution of indigenous Bru-Van Kieu did not extend to immigrant Bru-Van Kieu, thus the latter only occupied residential area

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returned to their former villages in Huong Hoa District with the exception of a few hundred migrating to Dak Lak Province.

<sup>47</sup> In 1968 and 2011, population of KheSanh Town is about the same at 12,000. Ethnic composition, however, is totally different. In 1968 ethnic minority, mostly Bru-Van Kieu, accounted for 83% while Kinh people accounted for only 17% of population. In 2011, Kinh people were the majority at 86% while Bru-Van Kieu only shared 12% of total population (Clarke and Vessey, 2007; Oanh, 1993; Huong Hoa District's Statistics Office, 2012).

and small farming land either in steep slope of poor fertility that escaped existing dwellers' attention. Most of the interviewed Bru-Van Kieu of immigrant households informed that the farming land that they had had only been acquired by purchase from the indigenous by the saving from cart-pulling business. It is noted that in the early 1990s indigenous Bru-Van Kieu's livelihood still relied on subsistence farming and harvesting of forest products for consumption and trading. Even though subsistence farming was still a dominant contribution to household economy, its efficiency was gradually reduced because of a sharp cut in the Bru-Van Kieu's landholdings as a result of institutional changes. Traditional shifting cultivation which was an extensive farming system was only possible because each household was entitled to large area of land. The state discouraged this agriculture practice as it was deemed "backward" and "unproductive". Parallel to this discouragement, the state exercised various institutional tools<sup>48</sup> that undermined the ability to practice this farming system. Not recognizing traditional rights of the Bru-Van Kieu to land, official authority allocated land to Kinh immigrants, firstly to collective associations and then to individuals resulting in a sharp reduced land landholding among the Bru-Van Kieu that made shifting cultivation unsustainable. In order to keep shifting cultivation, a farmer revealed that he had to travel further and made do with less fertile land only to see that the increased input of time and labor was returned by reduced output. In addition, with increasing demographic and economic pressure the forest in Vietnam side of the border was no longer be able to support livelihood of the borderland ethnic minority as it did in the past (Huijsmans and Tran, 2015; Pholsena, 2008). Since *Đổi Mới* the physical surrounding Katang Village has

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<sup>48</sup> Examples of institutional tools are, but not limited to, the following: allocation of land to farming association during collective period; establishment boundary between administrative units that limited people from one unit to farm on the land of others; establishment international political border; land allocation to individual household after *Đổi Mới*.

changed significantly. Part of the residential and farming area of Katang Village has been subjected to land acquisition for construction of official buildings. As a result, residents of Katang Village have experienced several events of internal resettlement in which they were simply relocated to unoccupied area in the village on the back of the village and further from the main road. Because of this internal resettlement, households were no longer separated by ethnics but in a well-mixed pattern. Late Kinh immigrants usually bought residential land and houses from indigenous Van Kieu people, gradually displacing all of the latter from road-orienting location favorable for engaging in trading or services.

In summary, Katang Village is different from traditional Bru-Van Kieu village in both physical and social structure. Homogeneity in term of ethnicity no longer exists because the indigenous Bru-Van Kieu have mixed with their Kinh and Pacoh immigrant neighbors. Even the Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village can be divided into 2 groups. The majority composes of indigenous Bru-Van Kieu who claimed to be the residents of the village from time of undocumented history and the second is the group of immigrant Bru-Van Kieu households. Daily interactions such as social chatting and drinking occurred more frequent within each of these 2 Bru-Van Kieu groups than between groups. In term of economy, Kinh people were more adaptive to changing condition. From the position of outlanders struggling with unfamiliar condition just to meet basic needs, they gradually capitalized on the opportunities brought about by increasing regional and international trade. The Bru-Van Kieu, on the other hand, struggled with new economic and political condition.

#### **4.3.3 Bru-Van Kieu household economy**

At the time of the survey in 2013-2014, agriculture, collection of NTFPs, offering labors for hire and pulling carts cross the border were main components of

Bru-Van Kieu household economy (Table 4.1). Even though agriculture still plays an important role in household economy, extensive shifting traditional shifting cultivation has ceased and was replaced by intensification of local corn, bean and cash crop such as cassava and "bời lồi" tree (*Litsea glutinosa*) on swidden land while garden land is insignificant in household economy. With an exception for one household made of a young couple separated from their extended family, almost all (93.8%) of interviewed households have landholdings (Table 4.2). Landholding is, however, less than 2ha in most households.

The majority of interviewed households report agriculture as their main livelihood while the about a third claimed cart-pulling, which is transporting commodities across the border in exchange for cash payment, as such. Based on main livelihood, the Bru-Van Kieu population can be divided into cart-puller and farmers (Table 4.2). In general, heads of cart-pulling households are younger (37.2 years of age on average) than farmers households (41 years of age on average) while average number of household members is similar to both groups at 4.6, higher than 4.2 of village average. In farmer households, supplementary livelihoods are labors for hire, collection of NTFPs, motorbike taxi drivers while in cart-pulling households, members engage in cultivation of cash-crop, timber collection, and motorbike taxi driver.

**Table 4.1 Sampled Bru-Van Kieu households (HH) in Katang Village**

<b>HH ID</b>	<b>Main livelihood</b>	<b>Other livelihood</b>	<b>Resettlement history</b>
1	agriculture	hired labour	resettled in 1975
2	agriculture	NTFPs collection	separated from extended family settled in 1975
3	agriculture	NTFPs collection	separated from extended family settled in 1975
4	cart-puller	agriculture; timber collection	separated from extended family migrated from Khe Sanh in 2001
5	cart-puller	agriculture	separated from extended family migrated from Khe Sanh in 2001
6	agriculture	NTFPs collection	separated from extended family settled in 1975
7	agriculture	hired labour	resettled in 1975
8	cart-puller	agriculture	migrated from Khe Sanh town in 1999
9	agriculture	motorbike taxi driver; NTFPs collection; hired labour	resettled in 1975
10	agriculture	NTFPs collection; hired labour	separated from extended family settled in 1975
11	agriculture	NTFPs collection; hired labour	resettled in 1975
12	agriculture	NTFPs collection	separated from parents after marriage
13	cart-puller	agriculture	migrated from Khe Sanh town in 2000
14	cart-puller agriculture	agriculture; motorbike taxi driver	migrated from Khe Sanh Town in 1990
15	agriculture	hired labour	migrated from Khe Sanh Town in 2000
18	agriculture	NTFPs collection	separated from extended family settled in 1975

Among farmer households, labor for sale is more popular among the younger generation in (18-40 years of age). Young indigenous Bru-Van Kieu villagers often face shortage of land and job opportunities for lack of skill training. For this group, they can stay in Lao Bao to find job as hired labor or migrate to Laos working for various logging companies. Those staying can offer their labor to constructions works, agricultural works on both Kinh's farm and Bru-Van Kieu's farm. Collection NTFPs such as rattan, wild fruits, honey, etc. for sale provides a supplementary but highly unstable source of income for households. According to village statistics, there were 25 active cart-pulling households.

It can be seen from Table 4.2 that there is a significant difference in material wealth between agriculture household group and cart-puller one. On average, a cart-puller household possesses nearly 1 and a half motorbikes compared with only 1 motorbike for every 2 agriculture households. The distribution of consumer durables is also skewed in favor of cart-pulling households. Observation on the village reveals that "cart-puller" family live in generally better houses of better condition, build their own houses in traditional style by more expensive material and with more decoration while most of agricultural/subsistence-based families live in standard house sponsored by the state. The authors are attracted to the better-off condition of cart-puller households and wonder what are the local specifics for economic stratification in the village because macro development policies offer little explanation. It is decided that a closed-up investigation on micro-economic environment in which cart-pullers operate would be conducted. The following session describes the business of cart-pullers and their daily economic interactions.

**Table 4.2 Selected indicators for sampled Bru-Van Kieu households**

HH size	Age of HH head	Number of labors	Land holdings (ha)	Assets holding		Consumable durables				House grading**
				Motorbike*	Others	TV set	Electric fan	Bicycle	Karaoke system	
Agriculture households										
6	61	5	1.5	1	small farming hand tools	0	0	1	1	2
4	22	2	0.8	0	small farming hand tools	1	1	1	0	2
3	20	2	0.0	1	small farming hand tools	1	1	1	0	2
4	32	1	0.5	0	small farming hand tools	0	0	1	0	1
6	41	3	0.5	1	small farming hand tools	1	1	2	0	2
5	36	2	0.4	0	small farming hand tools	0	0	1	0	2
7	60	4	1.2	1	small farming hand tools	0	1	1	1	1
4	35	2	1.0	0	small farming hand tools	1	0	2	1	2
5	50	4	1.2	1	small farming hand tools	0	0	1	0	2
8	34	3	1.0	1	small farming hand tools	1	1	2	0	2
6	61	5	1.0	1	small farming hand tools	1	1	1	0	1
Sum	NA	33	9.1	7	NA	6	6	14	3	NA
Average	41.1	3	0.8	0.6	NA	0.5	0.5	1.3	0.3	1.7
Cart-puller households										
3	25	2	0.7	1	cart	1	1	1	1	3
4	33	2	0.3	2	cart	1	2	2	0	4
7	55	7	2.0	2	cart, diesel-powered hand-held grass cutter, diesel-powered water pump	1	2	1	1	4



5	33	2	0.5	1	cart	1	3	0	1	3
4	40	3	1.0	1	cart	1	1	1	1	3
Sum	NA	16	4.5	7	NA	5	9	5	4	NA
Average	37.2	3.2	0.9	1.4	NA	1	1.8	1	0.8	3.4

\* Motorbikes can be categorized as consumer durables, however in Katang Village they are also assets of high value.

\*\* Grading of physical house is from 1, for the poorest constructed to 4, for the finest built.

1. Made of scrap timber, no flooring, tin-roofed, no larger than 20m<sup>2</sup>.

2. Made of concrete, no flooring, tile-roofed. Partially sponsored and built by the government.

3. On stilts in traditional style, covered by scrap timber, tin-roofed.

4. On stilts in traditional style, covered by high-quality timber, tile-roofed, extra exterior decoration.

NA Not applicable

#### **4.4 Livelihood strategies**

Legal border trade is categorized into 2 types, official trade (*chinh ngach* in Vietnamese) in which commodities must be declared for tax purposes; and small trade (*tieu ngach* in Vietnamese) where commodities transported by local people living on either side of the border was exempted from custom service and duty. Vietnamese customs officers do not tax commodities carried by local residents of Laos's Sepon District and Vietnam's various communes along the border if the commodities are personal belongings and daily necessities and of values under 2 million VND (Shiraishi, 2013). Meanwhile, Laotian customs officers do not tax commodities regardless of price carried by local people even if they are for commercial purposes. It is in this complex, diverse and dynamic chain of commodity and related services of small trade that Bru-Van Kieu found their economic niche and established a new livelihood as cart-puller.

##### **4.4.1 What is a cart-puller?**

Cart-pullers transport commodities across the border through border guard and custom procedure (Figure 4.2). The commodities do not belong to cart-pullers themselves but to Kinh cross-border small-traders either local-based or from long-distance provinces. In other words, cart-pullers are providers of transport service in exchange for cash payment. In the early 1990s when transborder trade between Laos and Vietnam started to increase in volumes, there was a growing demand for porter services. At that time only Kinh people and immigrant Bru-Van Kieu entered the porter business. It is explained that differently from indigenous Bru-Van Kieu, immigrant Bru-Van Kieu had more experience in economic activities that involved services with Kinh ethnic group in exchange for cash from their history of various resettlements during the war to lowland population centers where there

was not enough land for them to practice agriculture. Later Kinh women employed the cart to increase the efficiency in transporting commodities. Several Bru-Van Kieu fellow porters adopted this innovation and entered the business themselves. At the time of the survey, there were both Kinh and Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers of total around 35. Most of them (25) were Bru-Van Kieu although Kinh women were the first to experiment with the cart-pulling business. All of cart-pullers were women aged from 17 to late 50s. Apart from occasional assistance from male families member, the cart-owner usually hire another Bru-Van Kieu woman to help her with the operation of the cart.

Cross-border traders take advantage of official exemption for local cart-pullers from customs inspection and immigration procedure<sup>49</sup> when transporting commodities across the border. Border patrol and customs officers, however, reserve the rights to inspect the cart at anytime. Between Kinh and Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers, the latter are usually more preferable to make transport of commodities because they are more likely to escape official attention than their Kinh peers. Another advantage of hiring Bru-Van Kieu cart-puller is that as the ethnic minority they are exempted from passage fees.<sup>50</sup> Without paying these fees, the cost of hiring a Bru-Van Kieu cart-puller incurred to cross-border traders is lower than that of a Kinh for the same job. On a busy day, a cart-puller can earn about 250-300 thousand VND per day on average after payment for helper which is around 50 thousand VND.

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<sup>49</sup> For non-locals, passports or border passes are required.

<sup>50</sup> As in 2014 the fees for each border crosser are as follows: 20,000 Laotian Kips on weekdays and 30,000 Laotians Kips on weekend at Laos immigration desk and 10,000 VND a piece at Vietnam immigration desk. These fees are subject to frequent adjustment by border officers and complaints from regular border-crossers.



**Figure 4.2 Bru-Van Kieu women cart-puller in front of border checkpoint into Dansavanh Border Gate<sup>51</sup>**

(Photo taken by authors in 2014)

New recruits to cart-pulling business are usually from within kinship-based networks of existing cart-pullers. These new recruits already gained experience of the business when helping their family members or relatives operating the cart. As a helper, a cart-puller-to-be got to know the contacts as well as the nuts and bolts of cart-pulling business. Existing cart-pullers can also share information and customers to the new recruits. Most of the cart-pullers are from immigrant Bru-Van Kieu families and as the result of recruitment from kinship-based networks, this livelihood is exclusive within network of immigrant Bru-Van Kieu. It is noticeable that there was no indigenous Bru-Van Kieu entering cart-pulling business. On the question regarding the obstacles to become a cart-puller at the first place, indigenous Bru-Van Kieu of 50-60s of age believed that gaining entry to the business as cart-puller was challenging because the complex operation business required the understanding of

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<sup>51</sup> This gate is on Laos, opposite and about 300m from Laos Bao gate on Vietnam side.

how different Kinh economic actors and official actors operate. They disapproved the commercialization of social relations among Kinh people, illustrated by the saying *porridge is spooned out only after paying up* (*tiền trao cháo múc* in Vietnamese) which conflicts with their tradition of mutual and non-monetary support. Younger generation in 20-30s of age from indigenous families singled out lack of finance<sup>52</sup> and social contacts as the main barriers to the business.

#### 4.4.2 Creating a new social network

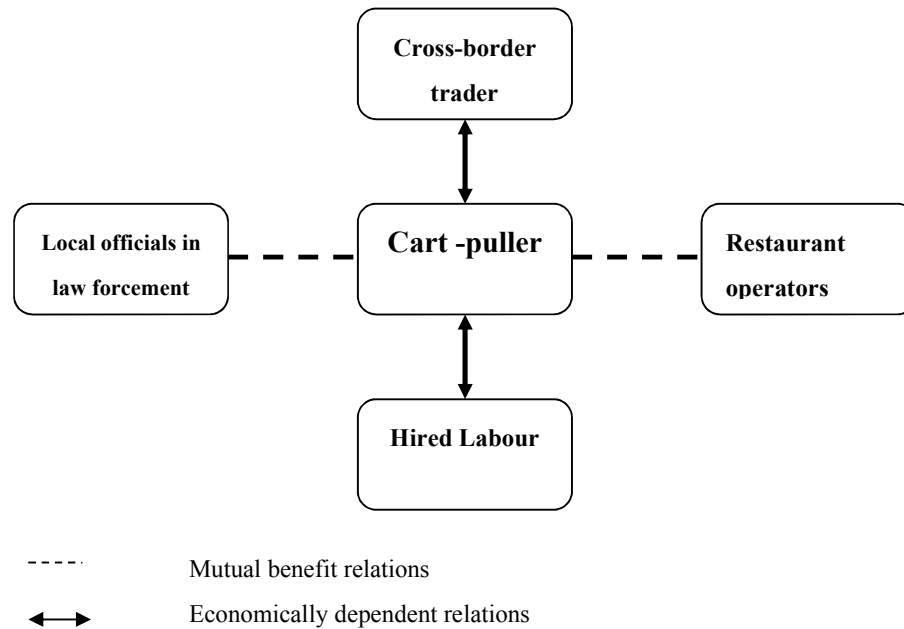
During the course of their business, individual Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers created a social network that transcended the boundary of ethnicity, social class and nation-state (Figure 4.3). This network provided Bru-Van Kieu woman cart-pullers with the opportunity to access information, contacts and even informal finance that normally a non-participant Bru-Van Kieu did not have.

**With cross-border traders:** Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers provide services to frequent customers who are local Kinh cross-border small-traders or casual customers who are long-distance cross-border traders.<sup>53</sup> It is with local cross-border traders whom Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers forged their most important inter-ethnic relations. Local cross-border traders are usually also retailers in Lao Bao market, which is about 1km from the border gate.

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<sup>52</sup> Initial investment for a cart is about 2.5-3.0 million VND. Cart is not readily available but would be made by local blacksmith upon order.

<sup>53</sup> It is not uncommon for traders who arrive at the border area with a variety of commodities to drop off proportions of high-duty or illicit commodities that they do not want to declare to customs and load onto Bru-Van Kieu's cart. After going through customs and immigration services with the rest of licit load of commodities, they re-collect the illicit load ready on the other side of the border. The drop and re-collection point is usually one of numerous restaurants (*cơm bình dân* in Vietnamese) operated by Kinh people on both side of the border gate.



**Figure 4.3 Social network of Bru- Van Kieu cart-pullers**

The majority of their commodities,<sup>54</sup> which are of Thai origin, are stored in warehouses in various border villages in Laos. Traders from Lao Bao market would then cross the border to buy in commodities in wholesale and make them transported across the border to Vietnam. After settling in Lao Bao market, these commodities would be either retailed to tourists<sup>55</sup> or wholesaled to next level retailers from lowland cities such as Dong Ha, Hue, Dong Hoi, and Danang. Some of local Kinh cross-border traders are originally border porters and cart-pullers themselves while

<sup>54</sup> Local cross-border traders imported soft drinks, brandy, electric appliances (LCD TV, rice cooker, microwave oven, electric fans, and air conditioner), plastic-ware, tobacco, and confectionaries. For long-distance cross-border small traders, their focus is not only importing but also exporting. Apart from similar commodities imported by Lao Bao's traders, long-distance traders import Laotian agriculture and forest products such as charcoal, banana, and sticky rice. On exports, they bring processed and dried aquaculture and agriculture product, cheap clothes for various Vietnamese communities in Laos and also rural Laotian population.

<sup>55</sup> Until 2012 Lao Bao is a famous destination for shopping tour for domestic tourists. Thailand products offered in Lao Bao Town are in the same categories as commodities produced domestically but cheaper and more diverse.

the majority are immigrants from within Quang Tri Province such as Dong Ha or Khe Sanh.

As Kinh traders usually hire a certain Bru-Van Kieu to transport their commodities across the border, trust gradually formed between them which became beneficial to both Kinh traders and Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers. It is not uncommon for Kinh traders to let the cart-puller to manage scheduled pick-up of commodities from bus terminal or warehouse on Laos side without their presence. They sometimes have the trusted cart-puller carry money across the border to pass on supplier of commodities. Having their trusted Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers handling additional works such as commodities and finance transaction with suppliers, Kinh retailer can conveniently save time and effort to mind other matters. From a Bru-Van Kieu perspective, a long term relation with Kinh retailers guarantees them a stable job and source of income. In addition, in case of urgent need of cash, Bru-Van Kieu can ask for advanced payment from Kinh retailers. This informal credit is valuable in the context of shortage of financial support from official credit institutions.

**With local officials in law enforcement:** Through daily encounter, Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers become "known" to certain border patrol guards and custom officials, and vice versa. Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers occasionally present border patrol with small gifts such a pack of tobacco, a bottle of wine purchased in Laos or even general information about the Bru-Van Kieu population in Katang Village in general.<sup>56</sup> In exchange, border patrol and custom officials often ignore their transport of illicit commodities, or sometimes provide information about the next

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<sup>56</sup> As their main function is the security of border area, border guards need to gather information on major illegal and criminal activities such as trafficking of human or narcotics substances. Being locals frequent the border area, the Bru-Van Kieu, are often the first to recognize any persons or activities out of ordinary. Therefore they could be a potential information source to border patrol.

coming "strict period" due to presence of provincial and central officials.<sup>57</sup> Border officers exercise certain tolerance towards Bru- Van Kieu cart-pullers because in their view these ethnic minority women are poor and ignorant only smuggling at a minimal scale only to support their family. By the same token, a Kinh restaurant owner who is familiar with daily politics at the border gate describes the situation as follows:

*"If the border guards catch a Bru-Van Kieu smuggling, this Bru-Van Kieu is only subject to public work such as garbage cleaning at the border gate or clearing the weeds in official buildings. After this they just repeat the wrong-doing."*

The view from official law enforcers and the restaurant owner is in fact in line with that of general population dominated by Kinh and mass media portraying ethnic minority as ignorant of laws and rules. Considered by Kinh neighbors and official as "backward" and "laggards", law-breaking activities of the Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village are understandable and tolerable.

**With restaurant operators:** In a village on Laos side a short distance from the border gate along No. 9 National Highway there are numerous popular restaurants serving meals to different categories of border crossers including long-distance coach passengers, truck drivers, cross-border traders and various locals in informal businesses. Around mid-day is the busiest time because it is about the time coaches, minibuses and trucks departing from cities in the coast of Central Vietnam such as

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<sup>57</sup> In their daily interaction, border guards can tolerate the rules and regulation breaking activities of local people to certain extent; however, in the presence of their superior from District and Central level, this tolerance is no longer exercised.



Hue, Dong Ha, Da Nang and Dong Hoi arrive at the border and clearing customs and immigration procedures for lunch. They also serve breakfast mostly for local cart-pullers, motorbike taxi drivers and money exchangers. In addition, a small number of night coach passengers arriving at the border from inner Laos cities such as Vientiane, Pakse and Savannakhet in early morning waiting for the start of daily working hours are also potential customers for these restaurants. The owners of these restaurants are mostly Kinh who are residents of Lao Bao Town renting space in in this from Laotian to open restaurants. There is heated competition for customers among restaurant. To boost their appeal to customers, several restaurants owners offer extra services such as acquiring immigration stamp for passport holders overstaying officially permitted duration.<sup>58</sup> Another approach employed by restaurant owners is providing information to cross-border traders who need transport service for the commodities to the right cart-pullers. A typical restaurant owner would have a cellular phone full of contacts of cart-pullers to whom he can call upon whenever there is demand for cross-border from his restaurant customers. The ability to pin-point the cart-puller who can transport commodities, especially illegal ones, through border with least chance of being inspected greatly aid the restaurant operators to attract customers to his restaurants. In comparison to Kinh peers, it should have been more disadvantageous for Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers to create a bridge with Kinh restaurant owners because the relation is cross-ethnic. The

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<sup>58</sup> Vietnamese nationals working in informal sectors in Laos do not acquire working visas but travel to Laos as tourists, a status which does not require any visas. They are allowed to stay in Laos for 30 days for each entry, a duration which most of them excessively stay. For over-stayed passport holders, they are subject an official fine of USD 10 for every excessive day by Laotian immigration authority. Using their social connection with Laotian immigration officers, restaurant owners negotiate for a reduced unofficial fine on behalf of over-stayed passport holders. Over-stayed passport holders have to pay restaurant owner for such services. The information about these capable restaurant owners are popular among long-distance coach drivers who customarily have free meal and drink at said restaurant owners.

key to their success was the status of ethnic minority leading to the fact that their informal economic activities were rendered as insignificant as a challenge to official authority and therefore, were tolerated. The ability to permeate the border in such manner suits the informal nature of small-trade and petty smuggling operation of Kinh people and lends weight to the Bru-Van Kieu in economic negotiation with this ethnic dominant.

**With hired labourers:** As seen in Table 4.1, farming is the second important livelihood for cart-pulling households. In these families while the women engage in cart-pulling, the men often work in agriculture. When agriculture needs intensive attention such as land preparation, watering, digging holes for seedling, these household may face labour shortage especially among young families in which the husband is the only remaining labour apart the wife who is already occupied by as cart-pulling. A woman cart-puller mentioned that sometimes she temporarily dropped from cart-pulling to focus time on helping her husband with agriculture, however, it was not desirable because income from cart-pulling is better and more readily. In this case, they may hire another Bru-Van Kieu from indigenous group. Bru-Van Kieu landowner does not hire one particular labourer. Meanwhile, young Bru-Van Kieu can offer his labour to other authentic jobs such as worker in construction site, motorbike taxi drivers or agriculture work for Kinh farmers in various banana farms in Vietnam and also cross the border or numerous illicit jobs readily offered in the border area. Selling labor to Bru-Van Kieu landowner is their favourite because it is less risky than illegal jobs, more relaxing than in construction site where he must follow strict instruction and schedule as part of the team but offer same payment as agriculture work (80-100 thousand VND per day), and more stable income than a day as a motorbike taxi driver. Differently from the relations between Kinh small-traders and Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers, that between Bru-Van Kieu

cart-pullers and indigenous Bru-Van Kieu laborers is not yet a patron-client relation. The demand for agriculture is only casual for which different labourers are hired at different time, preventing a long term relation to be formed.

## **4.5. Discussion**

### **4.5.1 Everyday resistance**

Border is the symbol and *raison d'être* of state's sovereignty. As a result more often than not the state tends to tighten governance of population, resources and increase the exercise of power in the borderlands (Eilenberg, 2012). It was not surprising to see the very first state's exercises on the upland of northern central Vietnam were increasing the control of the frontier area and establishing political border to claim sovereignty right after the war. The state has attempted to assert both domestic sovereignty, defined as “both the structure of authority within a state and the state’s effectiveness or control”, and interdependence sovereignty, defined as “the ability of a government to regulate the movement of goods, capital, people, and ideas across its borders” (Krasner, 2001).

Like other ethnic minorities in the mountainous area in Vietnam, extensive traditional shifting cultivation of the Bru-Van Kieu was an ecologically and socially rational choice to adapt to a environment (Hong, 2002; Manh, 2001) where the terrain made it difficult to practice irrigated farming and a society where manpower was sparsely distributed.<sup>59</sup> Bru-Van Kieu's shifting cultivation was only possible because of their physical mobility, the ability to change location of settlement and cultivation in short notice. Nowadays, regardless of the fact that shifting cultivation

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<sup>59</sup> In comparison to paddy field, shifting cultivation was inefficient in term of output per unit area but efficient in term of output per unit labor (Conklin, 1954). While in the lowland there was a shortage of land in parallel to abundance of labor, the condition in the upland is totally opposite. Abundance of land and shortage of labor made shifting cultivation a rational choice among upland ethnic minority (Scott, 2009).

is no longer applicable, physical mobility remains important to the Bru- Van Kieu because it is essential for the operation of new-found livelihood of transborder cart-pulling. The current border crossing practice of Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers, which is through the official border gate but unregistered and mostly not inspected, is an intermediate between traditionally free roaming over a vast geographic space and modern documented movement under state's control. This intermediate was reached because while state building process in the frontier, for e.g. institutionalization of resources and border formation, has undeniably compromised physical mobility of the Bru-Van Kieu, the latter is still be able to exercise border crossing in the blind side of the state's sight. What this means is that in reality local Bru-Van Kieu can always find an undesignated route to filter through this permeable border. A combination of understanding of the terrain in this area, featured by mountains, forests and rivers which was ideal for concealment of human, and shared cultural geography with residents on either sides of the border is advantageous for a Bru-Van Kieu attempting to cross the border unchecked. This presents a challenge to the ability of the state to completely control the transborder flow of people. In this context, while the act of daily border crossing of the Bru-Van Kieu and the lack of formality from official authority usually seen in border-crossing elsewhere can be considered as "middle ground" or compromise between state's sovereignty and local ethnic minority's institution, it is also a proof of on-going contestation and challenge from the later to the former.

By the same token, the Bru-Van Kieu's smuggling and even small-trade can also be considered an act of subversion against state's authority. Considerable difference in commodity price as a consequence of the differences in the economic condition between Laos and Vietnam turns cross-border trade into a viable economic, if not highly profitable, strategy. Smuggling, small trade and official trade are not different

in their economic nature, which can be understood as the exploitation of differences in prices by circulation of commodities from one country to another. Their difference is only in legal status. The legality or illegality of commodity circulation is not a result of natural process but an imposition from the state. The border between legality of official trade and illegality of smuggling is shaped in the relation to state's law and authority (Bruns and Miggelbrink, 2012). In this context, smuggling by the Bru-Van Kieu clearly challenges the state's sovereignty and can therefore, be regarded as subversive. The act of smuggling and informal border crossing of Bru-Van Kieu women is a form of "everyday resistance" of the marginalized by compromising the ability of state's institutions to control their self-defined agencies (Scott, 1985; Wilson and Donna, 2012).

Introduced in 1985 by James C. Scott in the context of class struggle, the concept of "everyday resistance" refers to the daily and common form of peasant's opposition to state's oppression. In contrast to peasant rebellions and revolutions which are few and rarely successful, everyday acts of resistance such as foot-dragging, non-compliance, petty theft, desertion, feigned ignorance, sabotage, etc. are more popular among the peasant and may have greater impact in re-shaping class relations. Among the Bru-Van Kieu, this resistance might be unconscious because although they may realize the illegality in their action, they nonetheless may not realize the political implication, which is challenging state's sovereignty and authority. Even though this "everyday resistance" is illegal, it is not without legitimacy. Local Bru-Van Kieu legitimized smuggling and considered it "natural" justifying from the need for a livelihood to meet daily household basics. Being caught in a transforming economy where traditional farming is no longer a viable option and in a society where indigenous culture and knowledge were deemed irrelevant, the need to have a livelihood and to make a living lends weight to the

rationale of daily border crossing and smuggling. It is not only the ethnic minority but also state's representatives at the local who found legitimacy for the Bru-Van Kieu's illegal activities and subversion to the state's authority. Van Schendel and Abraham (2005) deliberated that "many transnational movements of people, commodities, and ideas are illegal because they defy the norms and rules of formal political authority but they are quite acceptable, 'licit', in the eyes of participants in these transactions and flows". The fact that the Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village were smuggling and daily border crossing, especially at unofficial and undesigned routes was the least well-kept secret among local population. State's officials tolerate these activities because firstly, similar to mainstream view, they consider Bru-Van Kieu people as ignorant, backward and laggard who also need to make a living; and secondly, although challenging state's authority these activities do not present a direct and destructive threat which might lead to collapse of state's sovereignty. This tolerance challenged the former wisdom to treat state authority as nearly complete. In fact there is mutual interaction and negotiation between local people and the state where the latter may exercise of power at varying degree of conformity to the written rules and regulations based on local social and political condition.<sup>60</sup>

#### **4.5.2 Economic adaptation**

Although tolerated, the illegality of smuggling means that different economic actors cannot seek for assistance from official institution in case of a violation of informal contracts. Consequently people have to rely on informal social network. For the Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers, traditional kinship-based network is vital to gain entry to the business. It is now again employed in the livelihood struggle against unfamiliar economic and social conditions brought about by external political and

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<sup>60</sup> Due to the tension in border area between China and Vietnam during the 80s, informal border crossing of local people was strictly controlled (Schoenberger and Turner, 2008).

market forces. In addition to the use of traditional network, the Bru-Van Kieu cart-puller also actively forge new social network of people of different ethnic and economic background in a geography unbounded by political border. While the role of traditional kin-ship network is to gain entry to the business, new bridging network is vital to the daily operation and the possible casting of a successful cart-puller. The process in which a Bru-Van Kieu is transformed from an individual with social relations limited to only their socio-economically equal fellow villagers and kins to an individual more associating with people from different ethnic and economic backgrounds is an adaptation that does not occur suddenly. It can be seen that most households in the cart-puller business were immigrant Bru-Van Kieu who might have acquired experience in encountering with different social and economic groups during their migration process. The indigenous groups, on the other hand, not having this type of human capital were slowly adapting to new condition.

Bru-Van Kieu women engaging in cart-pulling business often started with limited resources which were their skillfulness in local language, social capital in the form of bonding within their kinship network and status of ethnic minority. All of these resources were, however, by no means considered to be significant in reference to mainstream definition. Yet, they are fundamental for the Bru-Van Kieu in broadening their social network and forge a living out of adversity. Creating social network with different people from social and ethnic background was a practice rarely heard of in the history of the Bru-Van Kieu in this area, yet, vital for their survival in this time of transformation. This social network allows Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers to access new resources such as information, job opportunities and finance. In cart-pulling business, a proportion of Bru-Van Kieu population in Katang Village was able to capitalize on opportunities brought about by shifting social, economic and political landscape. Given the circumstance that their traditional

shifting cultivation was no longer viable and sustainable, this adaptation is significant and arguably provides them with more control of their well-being than the alternative of becoming hired labourers practiced by the younger generations of indigenous Bru-Van Kieu. On a different note, while smuggling and daily informal border crossing can be considered as resistance, they also gradually integrate Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers into the state's sovereignty. By becoming part of a network, in spite of informal nature, the Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers are interwoven into macroeconomic "demand-and-supply" dynamics beyond their control. State policies on domestic economy and international relations would affect the Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers more directly than ever before.

It should be reminded that traditional Bru-Van Kieu society was cephalous. This case showed that vertical dependent relations were formed within Bru-Van Kieu community. The quickly adapting cart-pullers were getting better off economically and gaining more power over indigenous Bru-Van Kieu villagers who were slow to adapt. Although a strictly defined patron-client system was yet to be formed, a dependent relation was created in which poorer indigenous Bru-Van Kieu provides labor in return for financial payment from better-off cart-puller Bru-Van Kieu. This may provide a suggestion for how the internal social structure of ethnic minority groups in upland northern central Vietnam will transform in the future, from traditional structure of equal and horizontal economic and power relation to modern structure where household differentiate material wealth as a result of being successful at varying degree in adapting to external economic and political pressure. It could be the case in the future that the better-off may translate their economic superiority into political superiority.



#### **4.6 Conclusion**

Decision-making regarding to the development of upland in Vietnam in contemporary history is often without participation of an important component of the upland population, the ethnic minorities. In a state where the dominant Kinh people are the majority in demography and politics, the Kinh take the initiative to plan and execute upland development based on their lowland template with little regard to culture and history of in the ethnic minorities. In this context, it is expected that ethnic minorities would suffer a downward spiral in both economic and social well-being. Drawn from the example of the Bru-Van Kieu in border area, the authors argue that human geography of ethnic minorities in upland area of northern central Vietnam is shaped by not only external forces but also by their own traditional culture. Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers have proven that different from mainstream view, ethnic minorities are not just passive local receivers of macro political and economic processes, but they are also able to preserve their agencies in dealing with difficulties brought about by external forces to retain the control of their lives. It is concluded that cart-pulling business, as a livelihood strategy, is only possible because of the ability to maintain traditional physical mobility which is acquired by subtle and covert everyday resistance to the state. The story about the ethnic minority in this region, however, is not just about resistance but also adaptation, a process in which they use limited resources to reshape their social sphere to tap into new type of resources and opportunities. By adaptation, however, the Bru-Van Kieu are gradually integrated into the sphere of authority and sovereignty of the state. Thus, by engaging in an active and continuous negotiation with the state's authority and with different economic actors, a proportion of ethnic minority people were able to lessen the impact of state's appropriation.

The practice of cross-border cart-pulling of Bru-Van Kieu indicates that the border is not simply a physical entity but a lively process subject to different interpretations from the state and local population. While political border is clearly defined and hardened with physical symbols of the state such as towering border gate, boom gate, flag and men in uniforms, local border practice is more embodied with interests of different social and economic groups along the border. In other words, while the sphere of state's authority might end abruptly at the border, social sphere of local interest and practice stretches much further across political border. The continuous negotiation between political border and social border challenges traditional view on the state as a rigid political entity. In addition, the case of the Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village illustrates that while with increasing presence of state's authority, border is a barrier and can be a source of inconvenience for local livelihoods, at the same time it also opens other windows of opportunity. Those who can capitalize this opportunity will be better off, while those slow to adapt are left alone to deal negative effects. The ability to adapt or not adapt to the process of border formation helps reshaping social structure of the Bru-Van Kieu.

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## **CHAPTER 5**

### **INTER-ETHNIC ASSIMILATION AND DIFFERENTIATION IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: LOCAL RESPONSE TO FORESTRY LAND ALLOCATION IN VIETNAM**

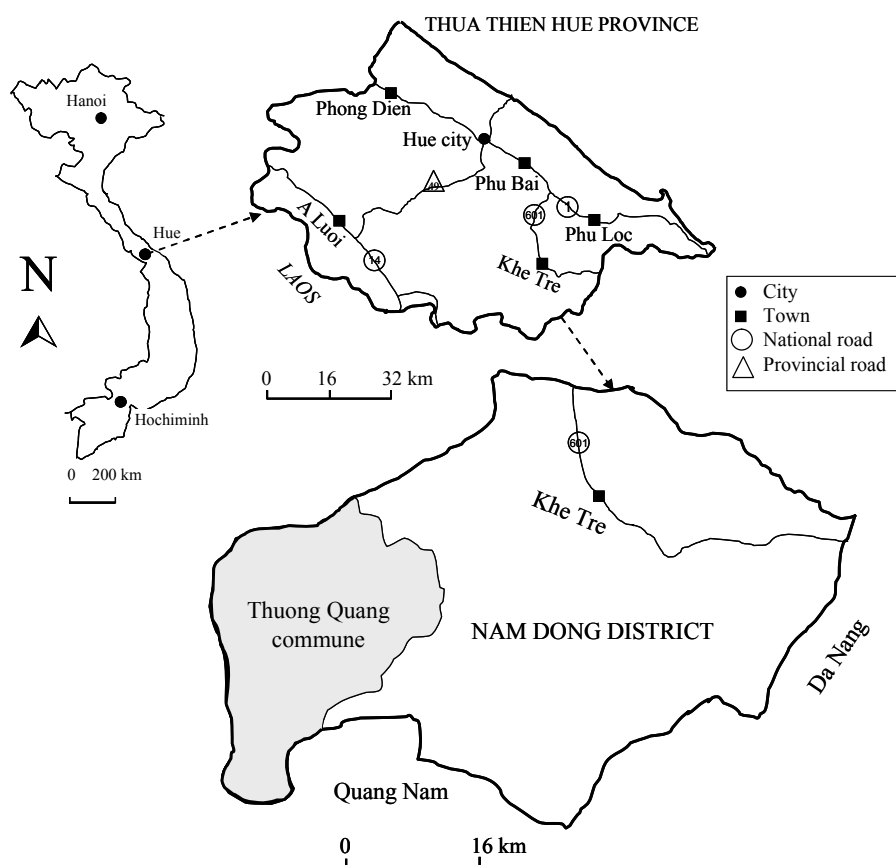
#### **5.1 Introduction**

In Vietnam where agriculture sector attracts more than 55 percent of national workforce, land for production purposes is an important resource. In cooperative model which was largely used before the late 1980s, instead of a connection between individuals or households to land, farmers worked on this mean of production under assignment and instruction of the cooperative, an intermediate layer of administration estate (Sikor and Nguyen 2007). From the late 1980s the model of cooperative was disbanded and land was de-collectivized to individual households. In the lowland, the subject of de-collectivization was paddy field while in the upland, given the lack of paddy field but abundance of forestry land, it was the latter which was subject of de-collectivization.

Upland area, featured by mountains and hills accounts for more than 70 percent of the country's land area (Sunderlin and Ba 2005). The area is also living space for more than a quarter of national population, of whom a large proportion is composed of ethnic minorities. Most of upland communities depended on forest and forest-related economy. While the general economic condition for households in lowland has improved significantly during the last 20 years, many upland communities, especially those of ethnic minority still face with constant food shortage and lack of access to adequate welfare services such as education and health care (Van de Walle and Gunewardena 2001). From the mid 1990s the government

has initiated various policies to allocate forestry land to individuals, households and communities. This set of policies was commonly known as Forest Land Allocation (FLA).

This empirical study was conducted in Thuong Quang commune of Nam Dong district, Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam (Figure 5.1). In Thuong Quang forestry land has been allocated to individual households via government programs since 2002. Commune population (approx. 1,700) is featured by 2 ethnic groups, the Kinh (40%) and the Katu (60%), living in 3 and 4 villages, respectively.



**Figure 5.1: Location of the study area**

Katu is a minority ethnic group, contributing less than 0.1 percent to country's population (no more than 50,000 individuals) and concentrating in mountainous area of Quang Nam Province on the south-west border of Thua Thien Hue (Thong 2004). Similar to other ethnic minority groups in Central Vietnam, customary social and political structure of the Katu was simple. The Katu clustered in isolated villages which were also the highest structure since there was no inter-village society. Social and political differentiation was minimal because ruling and ruled classes were not yet appeared. Even though individual household was the fundamental unit of forestry land use, land was still considered as common properties of all villagers (Schrock et al. 1966).

**Table 5.1 Land use in Thuong Quang commune**

Category	Area (ha)	Rate (%)
Agricultural land	597	3.8
Forestry land	14,334	92.3
Residential land	62	0.4
Special used land*	63	0.4
Unused land	346	2.2
Other	120	0.8
Total	15,522	100.0

Source: the district's land inventory in 2010

\* land for buildings of local administration and architectures such as kindergarten, hospital, war martyr's cemetery, etc.



On the contrary, Kinh people who migrated to the commune at the end of the 1970s from the lowland had been familiar with well-developed social and political structure. This ethnic group is national majority since they account for more than 85 percent of Vietnam population.

Most of land in Thuong Quang commune is forestry land (92 percent). Of which, 10 percent is allocated to household and community and 90 percent still belong to the state's agencies. Agricultural land accounts for 4 percent dividing into rubber plantation (80 percent) and food crop and others (20 percent) (Table 5.1).

This research aimed to examine how forestry land allocation was implemented in Thuong Quang commune and to explore the effects it resulted in on customary governance system in Vietnam. In particular, the authors would try to answer following questions as follows:

- How local relations, shaped by the existing local arrangement in management of forestry land, would determine the outcomes of FLA?
- Upon the implementation of FLA, how did these local relations change?
- Were there similarities and differences between different ethnic groups in reaction to FLA policies?
- What were the cause for such similarities and differences?

## **5.2 Methods**

The research was conducted in two villages of Thuong Quang commune, Village 1 was composed of mostly Katu people and Village 5 was made up totally by Kinh people. These two villages were selected because there were both forestry land recipient and non-recipients from both villages. The presence of both recipients and non-recipients in sampling population was thought to be important in determining local factors in allocation process. During three field surveys conducted in March,

June and November of 2010, primary and secondary data were collected. Primary data was from household survey which consisted of a questionnaire to extract following information: (1) general household information of households (household size, education, age and labor); (2) current and changes in land use system; (3) access to informal credit; (4) difficulties agriculture and forestry in general; and (5) wealth ranking based on observation. The survey was conducted for 81 households (45 of totally 73 households from Village 1 and 36 of totally 45 households from Village 5) accounting for 20% of commune households. In addition to individual household surveys, interviews were also carried out to key informants such as village heads, household heads who could reconstruct village history and forestry allocation process in detail. The purpose of semi-structure interview was to investigate the process of FLA at village level. Secondary data were collected from documents obtained at Commune People's Committee (CPC) - an official management organization at commune level. This included history of the commune; labor conditions; poverty issues; land use and land allocation process; land certificate issues as well as training and credit program. At district level, data for commune land use status was collected from district Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD).

## **5.3 Results**

### **5.3.1 Economy history of Katu and Kinh in Thuong Quang commune**

Prior to 1978, slash-and-burn cultivation and natural forest exploitation were the only two livelihoods available to Katu people. A Katu household would clear a forest plot, burn dried vegetation and cultivate on the land. Once land productivity reduced after 2-3 years of cultivation, this household would move to another plot and re-start another cycle of slash-and-burn. They would not return to former land plot

for 10-15 years until above-ground vegetation on their plot successively recovered. During this fallow period, other Katu household who wanted to cultivate on this land plot must seek approval from the former. After the arrival of Kinh people from coastal area in around 1978, although animal husbandry and wet rice cultivation were introduced by Kinh people, Katu's population still depended heavily on slash-and-burn cultivation and extraction of natural products from forest. Settling in Thuong Quang, Kinh people opened paddy field, however, in limited size because of landscape variances of mountainous area leading to difficulty in water supply for paddy field. As a result, they followed Katu people turn to slash-and-burn cultivation as the only viable livelihood. Since 2001, both ethnic groups started developing acacia and rubber plantation as a new livelihood. At this point, it should be emphasized that there was interaction between Kinh and Katu people. Kinh people learnt swidden farming (slash-and-burnt) technique from Katu people. As former paddy field farmers and fishermen, Kinh migrants in Thuong Quang did not have the skills and knowledge necessary to do swidden farming more effectively and productively. They learnt from fellow Katu neighbours by first being sharecroppers, and then gradually mastered the much needed skills. On the other hand, Katu people learnt from Kinh people wet-rice cultivation and animal raising. Although the condition of mountainous area did not favour the success of these two livelihood strategies, it was still important influence to Katu people at that time that up until now these two are providing significant contribution to Katu people's household economy.

### **5.3.2 Forestry land allocation in Thuong Quang commune**

Allocation process was in fact a legalization of household's customary rights on land. After households identified on field their rightly claimed land plot, FLA

officials checked if the plot is dispute-free before allocating land to corresponding household. Put it another way, forestry land allocation was a incorporation between customary and statutory laws when the former identified the rightful recipients and the later secured this right in law. In term of land ownership, it is showed that there was no major difference in the proportion of land owners from surveyed households between Village 1 (78 percent) and Village 5 (70 percent); and between Katu (75 percent) and Kinh (72 percent) households (Table 5.2).

**Table 5.2 Land ownership from surveyed households in Village 1 and Village 5 divided by ethnicity**

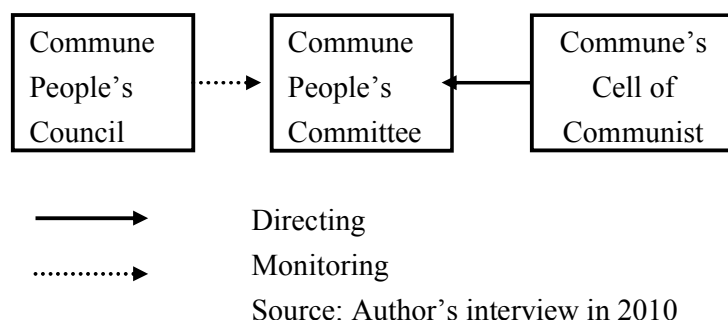
(Source: Author's survey result, 2010)

	Village 1			Village 5
	Katu	Kinh	Total	Kinh
<b>1. No. of survey household</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>2. No. of forestry land recipients</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>3. No. of forestry land non-recipients</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>

From the data of swidden land area, it was also found that average size of land allocated to Katu households was 1.18 +/- 1.75 (ha) while that of Kinh household was 1.59 +/- 1.77 (ha). The t-test for difference between this two means was conducted showing that the difference was not significant statistically ( $\alpha = 0.05$ , p-value = 0.3223). It showed that ethnicity was not responsible for degree of participation in FLA (ratio of household from each ethnicity having allocated forestry land) and quality of participation (area of allocated land)

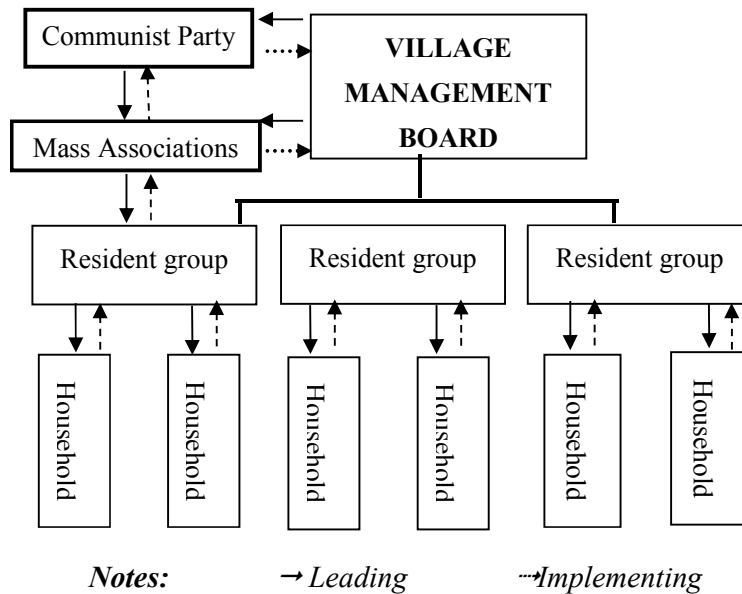
*Governing institution in Thuong Quang*

Regarding governing system in Thuong Quang, there were both formal and informal institutions. Formal institution was in form of there main agencies at commune level: Commune People's Committee, Commune's Cell of Communist Party and Commune People's Council. Of which, CPC was responsible for implementing policy as directed by higher authority, i.e. District People's Committee DPC or PPC. It also received general instruction of Cell of Communist Party at commune level (Figure 5.2).



**Figure 5.2 Institutions at commune level**

At village level, Village Management Board (VMB) was a replication of CPC for village level. Members of VMB, however, were not government officials. It means that they did not receive salary from State budget but only allowance. VMB's members were selected from and by villagers for 1 to 2 terms. Each term lasted for 4 years. VMB can be considered as a semi-autonomous organization at village level because its operation was not entirely independent from local authority. Each village was divided into several resident groups whose activities were overseen by VMB. Communist party and other mass Associations took the directing role most of social and political activities of households (Figure 5.3).



**Figure 5.3 Structure of village's administrative system**

The leading figure of VMB was the village's Headman. The Village Headman was selected by representatives of different mass organizations (Youth Union, Women Union, Farmer Union, and Veterans Union) and the villagers. He received approximately USD30 per month to perform his duty of being a link between villagers and commune authority.

Not as obvious as formal institutions, informal ones in Thuong Quang still provided plenty of evidences for their existence. The Katu, traditionally living together in a village with no more than 100 households, only had their fellow villagers to rely on among the primitive forest and hostile attitude of other ethnic minority tribes. In this condition, the Katu developed a customary institution governing the conduct and behavior of members of village to share the burden of hardship and survive together (Thong 2004). A closer look at the Katu community in Thuong Quang revealed such customary institution still exists nowadays. In other

words, individual Katu households still kept an affiliation to their community and customary rules still defines the actions of each member in various arenas. The presence of the patriarch in each village and his mediating role in conflict resolution between Katu households during FLA were the first evidences for the survival of customary institution in land management. It implied that before FLA the use of land among Katu households still followed customary rules even though the rules were not as strong as before. In Katu village, the patriarch was the symbol informal and customary institution. Unlike the village's Headman, the patriarch was preferably an elder with great experience. In a village of the Katu, the positions of the patriarch and the headman existed concurrently. In a Kinh people's village, a part from Village Headman there was no such similar position to the patriarch in Katu village. Customary institution of Katu has long history from the time when one Katu community was a single village. At that time a bonding of members was formed to provide support for each other to survive against harsh and isolated physical condition as well as the danger from wild animals and other tribes (Schrock et la 1966). Informal rules were passed from generation to generation that later they became more of spiritual importance than practical one. Following customary institution, Katu people consider forestry land as a common pool resource, important as not only a mean of production but also dwelling place of holy spirits. Enforcing mechanism for customary institution was strong because this was a close-knitted small community made of by households of several families. Acts of noncompliance would receive disapproval and result in denial of support from fellow Katu villagers. Given that Katu people were not yet able to effectively use resources from official channels, the support to one household from others was significant.

Their neighbors, Kinh people, faced numerous challenges from unfamiliar physical environment while receiving little support from those governmental

agencies responsible for resettlement program. As a result, they also had to rely on each other during the initial stage of resettlement. It is expected that, however, the newly formed institution of Kinh people was weak as a result of different social background of migrants. They might depart from the same commune, but they hardly know each other beforehand. Widely known explanation is that the two main groups that in state controlled migration after 1975 were: (1) landless poor farmers and (2) ex-officials of collapsed South Vietnamese Government (i.e. former soldiers, policemen and officials) (Desbarats 1987). The participation in resettlement in Thuong Quang might not have been voluntary for every household involved, hence, explained the weak community connection at their early time in Thuong Quang.

Similar to informal institution of Katu people, Kinh people's informal institution was formed from the process of adapting to new and unfamiliar social and natural environment. The different was that it lacked of historical depth because it was formed only after Kinh's people migration to Thuong Quang. Another contrast was they perceived and used land in a private property system unlike the Katu who considered land as common resource. Given the short history and heterogeneous background of Kinh migrants, this institution was weak and lacking of enforcing mechanism. At their start in Thuong Quang, Kinh people's informal institution was influenced by Katu people's customary institution as Kinh people borrowed customary rules on land management to their practice. Later they resorted to formal institution when the later became stronger.

## **5.4 Discussion**

In term of response to FLA, it was surprising that no significant differences between Kinh and Katu people in average size of allocated land and the year when they participated in FLA were found. The absence of contrasts possibly indicated



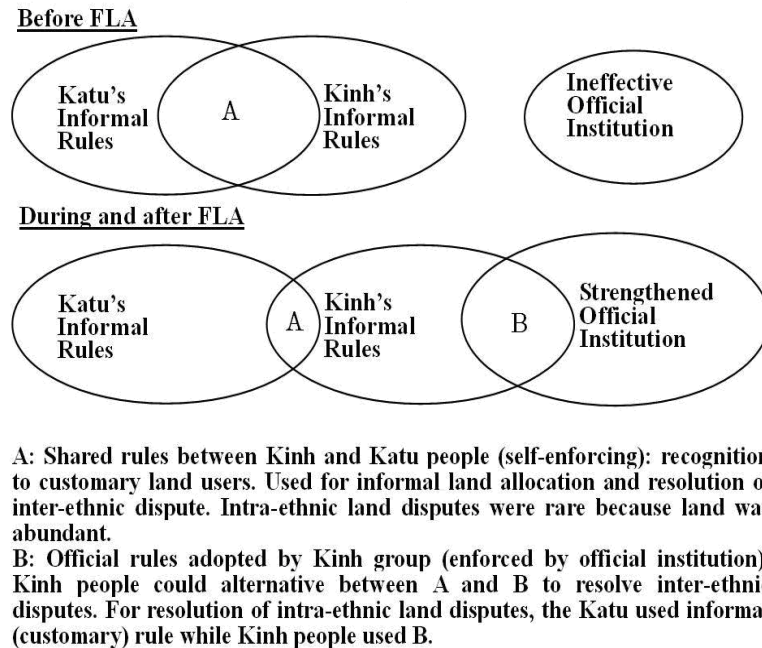
that the response to FLA from both groups was similar to each other. The answer to why two different ethnic groups with diverse cultural and economic background reacted similarly to FLA may present itself in an inter-ethnic assimilation process which bridged the gap between Kinh and Katu people. As mentioned before, Katu people and Kinh people learnt from each other new livelihood strategy. To both ethnic groups, what they learnt from others allowed them to better adapt to new environment in Kinh people's case and to have additional potential livelihood. During the course, it is most possible that Kinh people also learnt to use customary system in land management as the Katu had always did. Rooted among Katu community and embraced by Kinh migrants, customary land management was the undocumented arrangement between villagers that protected the land rights of households who first reclaimed land.

Despite this similarity, there was a sharp contrast in resolution of intra-ethnic conflict among each ethnic group. For the Katu, informal rules were effectively exercised by the patriarch - symbol of customary power - to resolve disputes. At the time of FLA, the patriarch no longer had the decision making power as in the past but still took important role of a mediator. In a land conflict, he facilitated the negotiation between households to find a solution that minimized the damage to community harmony. The patriarch did not always follow rigid formula to solve the disputes. He would consider different factors related to the land disputes, for e.g. history of land use, the need for land and economic condition of each involving party.

In Kinh people's village, the village headman did not take the mediating role but left the task to the authority. In other words, for intra-ethnic land disputes, Kinh people had no village's institution to help resolving. As a result, the disputes required attention of institutions outside village such as commune authority or

allocation program officials. The resolution from these institutions usually followed official rules which favored those with physical evidence than local knowledge of past land use.

Having argued on the existence of informal institutions in Kinh and Katu people, in this section the author would attempt to analyze the differences and similarities in reaction of two ethnic groups from institutional development perspective. Firstly, it is argued that Kinh people formed an informal institution similar to that of the Katu in term of land use and recognition of customary land owners. This was why both ethnic used customary land use system as a basis for official allocation. Without an effective legal institution prior to FLA to govern the use this resource and to protect their interest, Kinh people was influenced by customary institution of Katu people. That is to say Kinh people incorporated the Katu customary rules on land use into their own institution. The adaptation of Kinh people to an institution sharing values with that of the Katu in land use before FLA would not have occurred if they did not rely on swidden cultivation at the first place. Land suitable for familiar cultivation of wet rice was limited, forcing Kinh people to conduct swidden cultivation which was a traditional practice of Katu people. In other words, there was an assimilation process in which Kinh people replicated the Katu livelihood strategy and customary institution, albeit contrast in cultural background and previous economic experience. Figure 5.4 summarized the relative relation official institution and informal institutions of the Katu and Kinh people.



**Figure 5.4 Interaction between formal institution and informal institution**

It is argued that development policy can be considered an effort of the state to solidify official institution in benefiting community. Market-orientated land property relations are not intended to reduce the control and regulation of the State on land use but to change the system of control. Prior to FLA, financial and human resource limitation put handicap on management role of SFEs, State's forestry representatives at local level. In reality, forestry land was used as common pool resource. Via FLA, the State transferred the cost of management to households and at the same time effectively enforced control over forestry land by reserving the right to apply land use tax on recipient households (Tuan 2006). Official rules which was gaining influence via institutionalization of forestry land, was closer to Kinh's informal institution than Katu's one because Kinh people, as a dominant ethnic group, are controlling official institution nation-wide. That was why Kinh people trusted the official rules in resolving land dispute. To the Katu, land had not only economic

value as a resource but also spiritual importance, making their customary institution more conflicted and diverged from official one because the later treated land just as resource. Not considering the dynamic of land relations and the customary values of land on different actors, FLA program's officials resolved land disputed solely by their official rules. Instead of using official rules, which was not approved by Katu community for its inconsideration of customary value, the Katu resorted to their customary institution for resolution of intra-ethnic dispute.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

Given the sharp contrast in social and economic background between Kinh and Katu people in Thuong Quang commune, it was surprising to find out that there was no major difference in degree and quality of participation in FLA these two ethnics. Eventually, this similarity was the result of an inter-ethnic assimilation process during which the one ethnic group experienced new production activity from the practice of the other. For Katu people it was wet rice production for which cultivation techniques were transferred from Kinh migrants. For Kinh people, it was swidden cultivation. To practice swidden crops, Kinh people not only borrowed cultivation skills but also customary rules that governing land use system from the Katu. It was the use of customary rules in determining the owners of land plots that created basis for later official land allocation.

Institutional development perspectives gave explanation for these differences by arguing that Kinh people shared more commons with official institution than did Katu people. Given the fact that Kinh ethnicity is the dominant ethnic group controlling official institution nation-wide, this would be understandable. Trusting and understanding better official institution, Kinh people were more skillful in exploitation of legal tools. On the other hand, the conflicting nature between Katu

people's customary institution and legal one accounted for the slow adaptation of this group to official system; hence, hindered the capacity of Katu people in exploiting official resources.

There are two main conclusions drawn from this case study. Firstly, local factors (i.e. ethnicity) were important in shaping response of local communities towards implementing of government development policy and management of natural resource management, especially when official institutions were ineffective. Secondly, institutional development approach provided useful tool in the explanation of behavior and reaction of local community towards official development policies. Institutional approach also provided insights to the motives of different local actors during implementation process of development policy.

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## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This final chapter would conclude the dissertation by summarizing the main themes that have been discussed in each case study.

#### **6.1 State-territorialization in upland Central Vietnam**

The aims of state-territorialization usually fall into following categories: to gain and control access to natural resources for financial benefit of the state; to efficiently collect taxes and revenue from other sources; and to organize surveillance and gather information about people in order to control their movements and everyday activities (Vandergeest and Peluso, 1995). In all three case studies, the state has been seen consolidating its power through different approaches of territorialization. Shortly after the end of the Second Indochina War in 1975, the state started establishing administration in upland Central Vietnam demarcating of boundary to facilitate timber extraction, sedentarization of swidden cultivators and collectivization of agriculture by mobilizing lowland population to the upland. This administrative territorialization excluded ethnic minorities from their traditional use of forest by banning shifting cultivation as the cases for Katu and Bru-Van Kieu people. By excluding local people from their traditional use of forest, the state aimed to protect timber logging activities which generate vital source of revenue for the state. In Thuong Quang Commune, the state excluded Katu people from forest use on the claim that shifting cultivation is deteriorating to the environment but reward inclusion to state SFE which practiced timber logging at large scale. Apart from controlling economic interest, the state also aimed to control people by promoting sedentarization of swidden cultivators as seen in all three examples. The Katu and

Bru-Van Kieu were systematically administered into the operation of agriculture association which encourages collective farming at the expense of farming at household level. The ethnic minorities in these case studies were also subjected to state control of ideology. The state promoted the discard of shifting cultivation, encourages sedentarization and collective farming among the Katu and Bru-Van Kieu to help them evolve from traditional socio-economic structure deemed backward and superstitious to modernization and development of socialist ideology. FLA program in Thuong Quang Commune, on the other hand, represents a shift in territorialization approach from the state. Since Doi Moi, increased integration into global economy has triggered the state to relax its control over forest land and include local ethnic minorities into the management of local resource. This inclusion is, however, partial and regulated because the state still hold legal ownership of the forest land and keeps an important role in actual management regarding finance and material investment. FLA in Thuong Quang commune is in fact institutionalization of resource from governance by local institutions to governance by official rules which makes it more convenient for the state to monitor people activities at household level.

## **6.2 Assimilation, adaptation and everyday resistance**

The responses of marginalized ethnic minority groups in mountainous area in Central Vietnam are influenced by their local specifics. How ethnic minority people react at individual and collective level to oppressive external forces is determined by what kind of resources that they have.

The case of Katup Village demonstrates the use of cross-border cultural capital, represented in the form of kinship and ethnic ties. Sharing similar history, language, ancestor, tradition with their cross-border co-ethnics, the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup



Village to some extent were able to protect their tradition and culture in the face of increasing state power and market permeation. Cross-border interaction with their Laotian "brothers" acts as a safety net providing Katap Bru-Van Kieu with a greater degree of independence in economic and political context. That is they were able to sustain shifting cultivation to mitigate the impact from the ban of similar practice in Vietnam. Shifting cultivation also provides a supplementary source of staple food, hence reduces the extent of marginalization by exposure to cash crop and market economy. By engaging in cross-border activities and acting subversive to state imposition of confined territory and space, the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village were expressing "everyday resistance". Whether this covert act is unintentional or not, this shows resistance to external state and market actors at national and international scale on decision making process regarding the use of local natural and social resources, might it be labor, land, forest, mobility and cultural space. The safeguard of these resources is important for the Bru-Van Kieu to maintain and re-invent their cultural, identity and relative independence.

In similar geographic position in the border area, the Bru-Van Kieu in Katang however do not possess such cultural capital. Despite of speaking the same language and inheriting similar beliefs, the Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village came from different economic and family background. Katang village may not have the bonding and sense of unity as those in Katup Village. Lacking this kind of cultural capital, the prominent form of reaction among Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village is adaptation and assimilation. Adaptation, practiced by a small number of households, is described as creating cross-ethnic and cross-border relationship with economic and state actors to take advantage of economic opportunities brought about changing political and economic context. The ability to forge new relationship for economic purpose among this small number of households originated from their personal history of ethnic and

economic interaction before coming to settle in Katang Village. The majority of Bru-Van Kieu households in Katang Village, however, do not show either resistance or adaptation. These are the indigenous Bru-Van Kieu households who have root in Katang Village long before presence of state's authority and market liberation. This group may resemble several social aspects that the collective of Katup villagers have, more importantly; they do have the kind of cross-border cultural capital acting as a safety net and alternative strategy to help themselves out of economic and political situation brought about by external forces. The example shows that the Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village are integrating further and further into mainstream economic and political process, however in an opposite manner. The small number of villagers actively negotiates and re-shapes the relations with external actors and come out more independent economically and politically. The majority rest is more passive, becoming more dependent on the good will of external actors. Some may say they become exactly as external actors prejudice them to be.

While the result from state's presence and market permeation to the Katu people in Thuong Quang Commune is assimilation into mainstream political and economic system which is similar to the context of the passive majority of Katang Village Bru-Van Kieu just mentioned above, the difference is in the process of assimilation. The majority of the Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village fall into marginalization and eventually assimilation to the bottom of political and economic pyramid because of the lack of engagement in political and economic process. In contrast, the Katu people in Thuong Quang were absorbed in mainstream system because of their interaction with similar process. When FLA process is implemented in Thuong Quang Commune, traditional institution of the Katup was utilized to divide the land. That is to the state, instead of dismissing traditional rules, encourage its expression in facilitating official institutionalization of local resource. Assimilation into official

institutions occur only when local Katup people were exposed to market process creating conflict economic interest and contested interpretation of resource management rules based on informal and formal rules. Increasing in forest land privatization and competition from Kinh neighbors, the Katu people in Thuong Quang Commune gradually spiral out of traditional rules and social relations to incline into official rules to protect their forest land and economic investment.

The author's intention is only to emphasize the dominant trend of responses in each village, not to state that there is only one single process, whether it is assimilation, adaptation or resistance. A combination between these three processes can be observed in all case studies, the extent of which each process is expressed is depended on how specific ethnic groups are position vis-à-vis integrating forces and what power they have to negotiate with external forces.

### **6.3 Social differentiation**

The three case studies illustrate the shaping of social relations both inter-ethnically and intra-ethnically. Kinh people in all studies are from immigrant households arriving in the frontier area as outsiders in unfamiliar territory. They come with little knowledge regarding both social and natural geography of the new area. To some extent, some may argue that their political and economic situation was lower than indigenous ethnic minorities because the latter have traditional claim on the resource, better understanding the nature and long-bonded village relation. After more than four decades, the current situation is reserved. Kinh households are generally more advanced in economic well-being, in the meantime enjoy more social and political benefits thanks for better understanding of official system. In Katup Village and Thuong Quang Commune, despite of living in close proximity, ethnic minority people rarely interact with Kinh neighbors except for occasional petty

trading with Kinh retail shop owners. When the state organized resettlement to NEZs, one of the objectives was to building inter-ethnic bridges for mutual support and development. In all studied villages, the relationship between Kinh people and ethnic minority groups can be described as anything but harmonious and mutual understood. Perception of inequality with their Kinh neighbors also prompt Katup Village Bru-Van Kieu people to take advantages of Kinh people economically. The exception of inter-ethnic interaction can be seen only in Katang case when Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers and different Kinh economic actors form relationship for mutual economic benefits. The case of Katang Village also represent clearly social pyramid in which Kinh economic actors reside on the top, forming a patron-client relations with the minority of Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers who in turn start translating their economic superiority into political advantage over the majority of Bru-Van Kieu from subsistence economy household. Inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic social differentiation is rooted in a changing relation among social actors. Although not publicly discriminating against the ethnic minorities, policies that focus on economic development may limit participation of one ethnic group while facilitate the access of another in available resources, making competition for resources and opportunities extremely unequal. Ethnic minority households relying on subsistence households are not on equal footing to compete with their Kinh neighbors who gain more access to natural and political resources as the state becomes more powerful in the periphery. Similarly, difference in ability to access resources among groups of Bru-Van Kieu triggers economic inequality that may leading to social and political stratification if there is no traditional institution to maintain subsistence ethic as the case of Katang Village.

#### **6.4 Moral economy and market economy**

Moral economy refers to social institutions that form mechanisms for a buffer. Kinship and neighbor relations, community activities, and common property resources, etc., serve the functions of ensuring a subsistence security, especially of those in need. Rather my purpose is to emphasize the central role of local social institutions in helping households and communities to bounce back from the shocks of hazards, disasters, economic crisis, and other unexpected circumstances, both natural and man-made.

The concept of moral economy provides a useful tool to understand reaction of traditional rural agrarian communities to external market and institutional factors. From the len of moral economy, the example of Katup Village can be seen as a well-knitted and risk-averse community trying to avoid exposure to state hegemony and market intrusion. Perceived as becoming disadvantageous in new social relations imposed by the state that limit their access to resources and space, the Bru-Van Kieu strengthen traditional ties. Through these ties, they were able to maintain their subsistence economy to reduce exposure to market economy which has the potential to disrupt their traditional homogenous social structure. Nonetheless, moral economy cannot be resilient on their own, but rather susceptible to changes introduced by external factors, including policies and market. The case of the Katu in Thuong Quang Commune shows that moral economy was disintegrated when the farmers engage in market to seek more economic benefit but also subject to higher risk. It is not argue that the Katu people are lack of moral economy. Instead, it emphasizes that the moral economy, as local institutions, is a type of resource that need constant replenishment in order to keep a community from disintegration on the onset of external forces. Unlike the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup Village, the Katu in Thuong Quang Commune cannot find extra reserve of resource to maintain their moral

economy. The lack of moral economy might not be a total disaster, as shown by the case of Katang Village. In the absence of local institutions regarding sharing resources and risk, the Bru-Van Kieu cart-puller have to adapt and find new form of economic and institutional capital. The case of Katang also indicates that the ethnic minorities in upland Central Vietnam can adapt to market economy, in contrast to official and popular portrait as passive and resistant to change. It would be, therefore, for the benefit of ethnic minority groups in general if researchers and development planners are careful not to portray them in overly romanticized or ‘traditional’ settings that deny their ability to take advantages of new official and market opportunities because doing so is also marginalizing them from inevitable institutionalization and commercialization of rural resources.

### **6.5 Institutional evolution**

These case studies show the interaction between informal and formal institution. The Thuong Quang case shows that in the absence of formal institution, informal institution can be useful tool to help the state implementing its policy. Allocation of forest land among Katu people was made possible thanks to traditional resource management and conflict resolution. The author argued that in a transition economy from socialist orientation to market liberation, there are new forming social relations where the state has yet established according rules to govern. In this case, informal rules are useful to coordinate collective action of community. Through the FLA process, the state becomes more powerful in controlling people by establishing a relation with individual household via Land use certificate and different financial scheme. With the increasing presence of official rules and enforcement measure to correspond state and ethnic minority people, traditional institutions is diminished.

The case of the Bru-Van Kieu in Katup village illustrates the conflicting between official and traditional institutions. Traditional institutions of the Bru-Van Kieu emphasizes village autonomy and risk-averse by minimizing exposure to market economy. State, on the other, exhibit political will to control village and exercise imposition of ideology to household level. Traditional institutions were able to withstand the oppression of state rules because they were not bounded within the territory on which the latter are effective. The Bru-Van Kieu people in Katup Village daily cross-border activities enforce their traditional institutions. As long as the state finds it difficult to impose strict control of cross-border activities, its official rules would not trump over traditional rules. From state's perspective, insufficient funding and man power made it impossible to exercise absolute control over border activities. However, with increasing presence in border area, the state was able to negotiate with local people to exercise its rules, despite of being in partial form. This example shows that in places where state rules are still weak, informal rules can be accommodated to govern the de facto daily activities. While the Bru-Van Kieu cannot maintain their autonomy and cross-border activities to the extent they practiced in the past, the state cannot also exercise the power that it presumably has within its territory. Questions regarding the balance of power of these two set of informal and formal rules would be interesting. One might argue that increasing transnational trade and migration between Laos and Vietnam would urge the state to fasten its grip over the control of cross-border flow of material and people to reduce loss of tax and maintain national sovereign, and therefore totally replace informal rules in border area. On the other hand, disparity in economic and social condition between the two sides of border would also trigger "illicit" activities from local Bru-Van Kieu directly for their benefit or representative for other social groups. This

increased level of cross-border activities would further enforce their ethnic ties and cross-border institutions.

The discussion of institutional evolution also extends to the Bru-Van Kieu in Katang Village. Traditional institution in Katang Village among the Bru-Van Kieu, or more precisely, the absence of an effective version to protect the benefit of local villagers was pre-condition for the Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers search for new network of relations outside their ethnic base. Economic benefit from these newly forged relations in turn, enables these Bru-Van Kieu cart-pullers to initiate social relation with the majority of Bru-Van Kieu population engaging in subsistence economy. In the mold of patron-client relations, the new intra-ethnic bond between Bru-Van Kieu people in Katang Village may provide a hint of how future social structure of ethnic minorities look like when exposure of ethnic minority group to more powerful state and market forces is inevitable.



## APPENDIX

### Questionnaire for household survey

(Date ..... 20....)

Interviewer:

#### A. General information

**Question 1.** Name of household head:.....Gender.....

**Question 2.** Village:....., Thuong Quang commune

**Question 3.** Ethnic group: ☐ Kinh ☐ Katu (Cờ tu) ☐ Others (please specify)

**Question 4.** Category of household economic situation (according to household head's ranking):

☐ Poor ☐ Normal ☐ Better off

**Question 5.** Resettlement situation:

☐ State's controlled migrant (year of arrival: ..... ) ☐ Native ☐ Newly-separated household

**Question 6.** How many people are there in a household? Number of mouths..... Number of main labors:

#	Name	Relationship with head	Age/ gender	Educational level	Main job	Belonging to any organization?	Name of the organization
1 (head)							
2							
3							
4							
5							

6							
..							

**Main job** (0) unemployed (1) agricultural cultivation on family land (2) Forestry cultivation on family land  
 (3) Agriculture/forestry hired labour (4) Immigration labour (5) Husbandry (cattle/poultry/pond fishing raising) (6) governmental officials (governmental agencies, schools, medical stations, hospitals) (7) Social subsidized beneficiaries (8) Retired (9) Small handicraft (10) Resources exploiters (timer and other forest recourses)

**Age/gender** (M) Male (F) female

**Ex.:** Female, 23 years old: 23F

**Educational level** (0 )non-schooling

(1) able to read and write (2) high school/technical school/ college, university and postgraduate

**Name of social organization**

**Level of official** (1) District-level official (2) Commune-level official (3) village-level official

**Question 7.** How many plots of agriculture/forestry land does your family have? Total pieces:

Land piece no.	Area (m2)	Year start using	Origin of land	Using area at present (m2)	Main plants/crops at present	Land use authority book no.	Type of land	Topography	Land quality assessment by household
1									
2									
3									
4									
5									
....									

**Original of land** (1) reclaimed (from forest) (2) inherited (3) purchased (4) hired or borrowed (5) lend (6) other sources

**Main plants/crops at present** (1) rice (2) corn (3) cassava (4) potato/bean (5) rubber tree (6) acacia (7) pepper (8) others (specify)

Land use authority book (red book) (Y) yes (N) no (NA) no idea/cannot answer

**Type of land** (1) swidden land (2) hilly/mountainous land (3) wet rice field (4) other types of land (5) other types of land (please specify)

**Topography** (1) flat land (2) low sloping land (under 8%) (3) sloping land of average level (under 14%) (4) high sloping land (under 25%)  
(5) very high (more than 25%)

**Question 8.** Area of residential land

	Area (m2)	Year start using	Origin of land	Land use authority book
Old house (if any)				
Present house				

**Origin of land** (1) self reclamation (2) inheritance (3) purchasing (4) hiring

**Question 9.** On each piece of land, what kinds of plants/crops were planted?

Plot no.	2010	2009	2008	2007	2005	2004	2003	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998	1997	1996	1995	1994	1993	1992	1991	1990	1989	1988	1987	1986
1																								

2																								
3																								
4																								
5																								
...																								

**Main plants/crops at present** (1) rice (2) corn (3) cassava (4) potato/bean (5) rubber tree (6) acacia (7) pepper (8) rice of mountain farming land (9) others (specify)

## C. Credit

### Question 10. Credit situation of household

No.	Loan origin	Borrower	Loan amount		Purpose of borrowing						
			In money	In artifacts	Agri-culture	Forestry production	Daily expenditure	Health care and education expenses	Other purposes	Loan interest (%/month)	Mortgage
1	BARD										
2	BSP										
3	Poverty reduction fund										
4	Credit funds of women unions										
5	Loan from relatives/friends										

6	Private fund										
7	Other sources (please specify)										

*Borrower specify number based on order of family members on question 6*

*Mortgage red book, other properties*

*Loan amount Money in debt which is not yet paid*

#### **D. Difficulties in economic production**

**Question 11.** Difficulties affecting agricultural production (in order of importance from 1- 5)

Difficulties	Ranking of importance
<i>Very bad</i>	
<i>Land locating at difficult position or hard to access</i>	
<i>No land</i>	
<i>Lack of work forces</i>	
<i>Lack of capital</i>	
<i>Impossibility to access loans/credit</i>	
<i>Land locating at difficult position or hard to access</i>	
<i>Impossible to sell products</i>	
<i>Land use authority not assured</i>	
<i>Others (please specify difficulties)</i>	

***Highest important (1) – least important (5)***

**Question 12.** Difficulties affecting forestry production (in order of importance from 1- 5)

Difficulties	Ranking of importance
<i>Very bad</i>	
<i>Land locating at difficult position or hard to access</i>	
<i>No land</i>	
<i>Lack of work forces</i>	
<i>Lack of capital</i>	
<i>Impossibility to access loans/credit</i>	
<i>Land locating at difficult position or hard to access</i>	
<i>Impossible to sell products</i>	
<i>Land use authority not assured</i>	
<i>Others (please specify difficulties)</i>	

***Highest important (1) – least important (5)***

**E. Assessment of household economic situation via properties** (*interviewer's own assessment*)

**Question 13.** Type of house

1. House with walls made from timber/thatch, earth floor/and thatch roof
2. House with wall made from mixed block/cement floor/fibro cement roof
3. Well-decorated house made from brick/ceramic tile floor/ tile roof

1	2	3
↓	↓	↓
<hr/>		

*Note: Tick ☐ on the most suitable position to the present situation of the house..*

**Question 14.** Tick on the following properties if any (interviewers should combine observation methods with questioning household heads)

- ☐ TV      ☐ Cassette      ☐ Refrigerator      ☐ Electric rice cooker      ☐ Washing machine

**Question 15.** Transportation means and productions facilities (interviewers should combine observation methods with questioning household heads)

- Bicycle      Quantity:..... bikes  
Motorbike      Quantity:..... motorbikes  
Diesel powered machines      Quantity..... machines

**Question 16.** Household ranking according to interviewers' justification

- ☐ Poor household      ☐ Normal household      ☐ Better-off household