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### ► To cite this version:

Christian Culas, Grégoire Schlemmer, Thanh Phong Tran. Construction and management of ethnicities in Southeast Asia: cultures, policies and development. Lagrée S. (ed.), Diaz V. (ed.) Social differentiation and inequalities: methodological and cross-cutting approaches to questions of gender and ethnicity, 4, Agence française de développement, pp.239-284, 2012, Conférences et séminaires (AFD). hal-01294192

**HAL Id: hal-01294192**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01294192v1>**

Submitted on 28 Mar 2016

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## 2.3. Construction and Management of Ethnicities in Southeast Asia: Cultures, Policies and Development

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Trần Hồng Hạnh – Institute of Anthropology, VASS*

### *(Retranscription)*

#### Day 1, morning of Monday 18<sup>th</sup> July

##### [Christian Culas]

Welcome to the workshop on ethnic groups in Southeast Asia. We will start with introductions from the participants; this workshop is structured so as to promote the methodological and pedagogic dimension, and exchanges and discussions will be a priority all week.

*Presentation of the trainers and participants  
(see biographies of trainers and list of participants at the end of the chapter)*

How will these four and a half days of group work unfold?

We will devote this first day to the ways in which ethnic groups are designated and named, and our approach will initially be theoretical and methodological: we will explain the constructivist and naturalist approaches. We will ask what an ethnic

group is and how and why we make ethnic classifications. In the afternoon, we will turn towards case studies in Việt Nam and in Laos.

Tuesday will be devoted to the relationship between the law and ethnic groups. We will start with the legal situation so as to be able to observe the relationship with what is visible in the field. Sociologists and anthropologists use the law very rarely as an instrument of knowledge; we will try to establish a relationship between law and anthropology. We will conclude this second day with case studies.

Questions from applied anthropology and development anthropology will be studied on Wednesday morning, then we will together organize three working groups, one group per trainer with a specific theme. Friday morning will be devoted to presentations from each group; from these we will derive a synthesis for the public reporting session on Saturday.

[Grégoire Schlemmer]

Anthropology is above all a way of looking at, a way of approaching things. As well as adding to your knowledge, our objective will be to question what you believe you already know. To do this, we will start from the central

question: "What is an ethnic group?" which will lead us to touch on numerous other themes.

### 2.3.1. Elements of Theory on the Construction of Ethnic Groups

[Christian Culas]

#### Box 7 Construction of Ethnicity (1)

To show how ethnic groups and representations of ethnic groups are constructed over time and in different countries.

A) Question of "social construction"

Definition: naturalism is the doctrine which maintains that social phenomena exist before being categorized and independently of any effort to categorize them. They exist in nature, or in essence.

Definition: constructivism is the doctrine according to which social phenomena do not exist *a priori* and independently of work undertaken to categorize them.

B) The construction of ethnic groups *via* names

Giving a name to an object is one way to give it social existence and sometimes to appropriate it for oneself.

Always think in terms of reciprocity: if the State names the ethnic groups then what name do the ethnic groups use for representatives of the State?

C) The construction of ethnic groups *via* the passing of laws

Passing laws can set limits on what is an ethnic group and what is possible and legal for ethnic groups within the State.

Laws are also a way of integrating ethnic groups within the State system. Has the State consulted the ethnic groups on this point?

D) Heuristic advantages of constructivism

If social phenomena are constructed, we can try to understand how, by whom, with what aims?

This allows us to ask questions about the process, about exchanges, about dynamics, about social change: "how does that work?"

Source: Author's construction.

The constructivist approach is in opposition to the essentialist or naturalist approach. We are going to apply this theoretical approach which allows us to say "because all social facts are constructs, it is also possible to deconstruct them: to understand how

they were constructed". The objective of this first presentation is therefore to show you how ethnic groups are socially and ideologically constructed and to analyze that construction.

Axis 1. Names, labels. Giving an object a name, whatever it is, is a way to make it exist in the social context and sometimes to appropriate it, that is to take it for oneself. This is true for ethnic groups but also for any term. The second idea concerns more specifically the labels for different groups. If we try to understand how the State names ethnic groups, this means also looking at how the ethnic groups refer to the majority population – how do ethnic groups refer to the representatives of the State?

Axis 2. The construction of ethnic groups by the production and creation of laws.

Ethnic groups are subject to the law, they are written into the Vietnamese and Laotian constitutions, the State has created a legal framework around ethnic groups. What is an ethnic group? What should it and can it do? How are these groups framed in law? Were ethnic groups consulted about the laws which apply to them?

Axis 3. The angle of the constructivist approach. Questions such as how groups function, their origins and their objectives are questions derived from the constructivist theory; asking these questions prompts us to consider what we mean by a construct.

### Box 8 Construction of Ethnicity (2)

The diversity of ways of designating ethnic groups over time and in different countries shows:

- The arbitrary nature of designations (chosen by the dominant groups);
- Transformation over time (not immutable designations);
- The political nature of the choice of designations.

*Source: Author's construction.*

The way in which ethnic groups are named differs according to the country and its history. In some countries, ethnic groups are labeled with names which they themselves do not know. There is an arbitrary character to the choice of names given. For the anthropologist, this shows that the administrative structure

doesn't have detailed knowledge of the different ethnic groups. If the representatives of the State do not know how people refer to themselves, then they probably don't know how they live, their standard of living, their social relationships, etc.

Table 61 Comparison of Terms in Different Countries

COUNTRY	TERMS	TYPE OF GROUPS	ORIGINS	LAWS
USA	<i>Minorities</i>	Women, Blacks, Asians, Asiatics, Amerindians, Hispanics	The 1960s, J.F. Kennedy: combat the inequalities between Whites and Blacks	<i>Affirmative action</i> or positive action ("positive discrimination" is a misinterpretation)
USSR, China, Vietnam	Nationalities, Ethnic minorities ("people of small number")	Cultural groups Russia 128 nationalities, China 56, Vietnam 54	Communist conception of ethnic groups, origin Stalin, <i>Marxism and the national question</i> , 1914	Specific regulation with rights (number of children, aid, etc.). But also cultural constraints.
France	Cultural groups, cultural communities (official ban on using the term "ethnic group" in France)	Several dozen cultural groups in the past  5 today? (Alsatian, Basque, Breton, Catalan, Corsican) + Rom	1539 Edit de Villers-Cotterêts: French as the national language + royal law applied throughout! 1789 Revolution: definition of the people of France!	Mid-20th century: specific laws on bilingual schools, cultural productions, taxes (in Corsica).
Australia	Aboriginals (term "ethnic group" never used – instead "tribe")	Over 1,000 distinct cultural groups	1838 first report for the protection of Aboriginals	1838 first Whites condemned for murders of Aboriginals 1992 recognition of land rights

Source: Author's construction.

To widen our knowledge of ethnic groups, here we have several countries which have minorities or ethnic groups. The point of this table, which gives a very global perspective, is to show you that the issue of minority populations and their management in law is not specific to Việt Nam; many countries in the world encounter the same kind of problem.

Let's take the example of the United States. All social groups considered as minorities are called "*minorities*"; they include women, Blacks, Asians, Native Americans, Hispanics, but also homosexuals, that is to say individuals who are in the minority in terms of their sexual orientation, not in terms of their social or hereditary identity. The creation of these categories of "*minorities*" dates from

the 1960s. It stems from one of President Kennedy's socio-political projects: to combat the inequalities between whites and blacks, but also between different dominated groups, a precise categorization was needed. The production of categories has two objectives here: a better management of populations and the avoidance of discrimination between groups. The direct consequence of this policy was the establishment of laws in the 1960s and 1970s which said, for example, that if 15% of the American population was black, then a corresponding proportion of the administration should be black. The same percentages of ethnic groups should be seen in each administration as were seen in society – a policy of quotas.

Ethnic categories were produced in a similar format in the Soviet period, in China and in Việt Nam. In Việt Nam, the approach of classifying and managing ethnic minorities in around 50 groups dates from the 1950s and 1960s. The same thing can be seen in Laos. Ethnic groups are broadly seen as people who need help, and the central, national government must support their development. What is surprising is that in the constitutions of Laos and Việt Nam, the State commits itself to support the development of ethnic groups, but in contrast it does not commit itself to help poor Vietnamese – very poor Kinh are not officially referred to in the constitution. Researchers need to ask themselves why the constitution refers to aid only for ethnic groups, not for the whole of the population.

The case of France is very unusual because the use of the term “ethnic” is banned in official texts and sanctioned in research. One cannot refer to Basques, Corsicans or Bretons as French ethnic groups, as this would not be accepted in a published text. Historically, each French region was home to people who did not speak French, and who had a different culture and traditions; the French system of centralization, in a sense, eliminated this cultural diversity. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, a royal edict imposed the French language in all the administrative districts of the kingdom. To draw a parallel with Việt Nam, an article of the Vietnamese constitution specifies that popular jurisdictions and tribunals can be held in Vietnamese or in any ethnic language. To my knowledge, however, no tribunals have really held proceedings in any language other than Vietnamese (Kinh).

The specific characteristic of Australia is that this continent was home to more than

a thousand ethnic groups, and then there was colonization by people from England in a country where as yet there was no white population. Over a period of several centuries, a relationship of domination developed, with on one side the whites who possessed economic power, arms and a powerful social organization, and on the other side peaceable ethnic groups made up of small, scattered tribes which would for the most part be eradicated.

This overview thus presents a panorama of different relationships between emerging States and minority populations, whether they are ethnic minorities or, as in the US, women or homosexuals. For me, this helps to broaden my ideas and to show that many situations exist which have no connection with Việt Nam, Laos or China.

### 2.3.2. Identifying and Classifying Ethnic Groups

[Grégoire Schlemmer]

Do we know clearly what an ethnic group is? One methodological principle in anthropology is to reflect on the words and the terms that we use. It's their precise definition and rigorous use which makes them no longer just words, but concepts. The notion of ethnicity is particularly complex, and at the end of this week if you have the impression that you understand less of what we're talking about, our objective will partly have been met!

Ethnicity is a form of belonging. These forms are multiple and change depending on the person to whom you are talking – if I am talking to a woman, I can present myself as a man; if I am talking to someone who comes

from Asia, I can present myself as European; if I am talking to someone German, I can present myself as French, etc. One's sense of belonging can also be religious or linguistic. Ethnicity is only one form of belonging. In comparison notably to sexual or political forms of belonging, one distinguishing factor of ethnic origin is that it is all-encompassing: if I say that I am from this ethnic group, then people imagine that I speak this language, that I follow this custom, that I live in this region of the world, etc. At this level, ethnic origin is comparable to national origin – if you say that you are Vietnamese, people think that you speak Vietnamese, that you live

in Việt Nam, that you are governed by such a political system. Ethnicity and nationality are close, in the sense that both notions refer to a common culture, perceived as a heritage from the past and which is supposed to create solidarity between its members. The problem is that one nation is often made up of several ethnic groups, as in Việt Nam. Thus there can be a hierarchy between the ethnic and national forms of belonging. This gives rise to a question which is central to our work: how a State or a government can govern a diverse range of peoples. To manage them, it must identify them; so how do we determine what an ethnic group actually is?

### Box 9 *What is an Ethnic Group?*

**A group with specific objective characteristics?**

- Linguistic;
- Territorial;
- Cultural, etc.

**A group which defines itself as such?**

- By a specific name;
- By a common sense of affiliation.

Defined thus, all groups belong to one ethnic group or another.

**A group which is defined as such (by others)?**

- By the dominant population;
- By official classifications (the State).

Defined thus, sometimes only minority groups form ethnic groups.

*Source: Author's construction.*

A classic definition is to take objective criteria: linguistic, territorial, cultural ones. In this way belonging is often inherited – you are born in a Hmong village, you are Hmong; in a Kinh village, you are Kinh. States choose these criteria, but in reality things are not always so simple. Let's take two examples:

- It's true that the Hmong form an ethnic group, but they are without a territory in its proper sense: they are found in Laos, in Thailand, in China, in different parts of Việt Nam, etc.

- In Laos, a distinction is drawn between the Tai Dam, Tai Deng and Tai Khao, which are different groups of Tai, defined as distinct ethnic groups, but who speak the same language.

Another criterion which can seem simple is to ask people what ethnic group they are from. This criterion implies a sense of belonging. But you can be born in a village, speak the language of that village and not feel that you belong to the community where you were born because your way of life has changed – for example if you have lived in the city or abroad.

We thus have two kinds of criteria: objective criteria – a heritage from the past – and a

feeling of belonging, which are not always obvious. Moreover, these two criteria are not always linked. Let's take the example of an individual born to Vietnamese parents and who has grown up in France. Isn't it possible that he no longer speaks Vietnamese and no longer practises the religion of his ancestors? He dresses like a French person. He wouldn't meet a single one of the objective criteria but he could say "I am Vietnamese!" For you, is that person Vietnamese? It's important to know, because when we make classifications, the entire population needs to be identified. Imagine this in your own country. How can we then class the entirety of the populations of Việt Nam, over 80 million people, or that of Laos or Cambodia?

**Image** *The Akha Groups of Phongsaly*



Source: Author's construction.



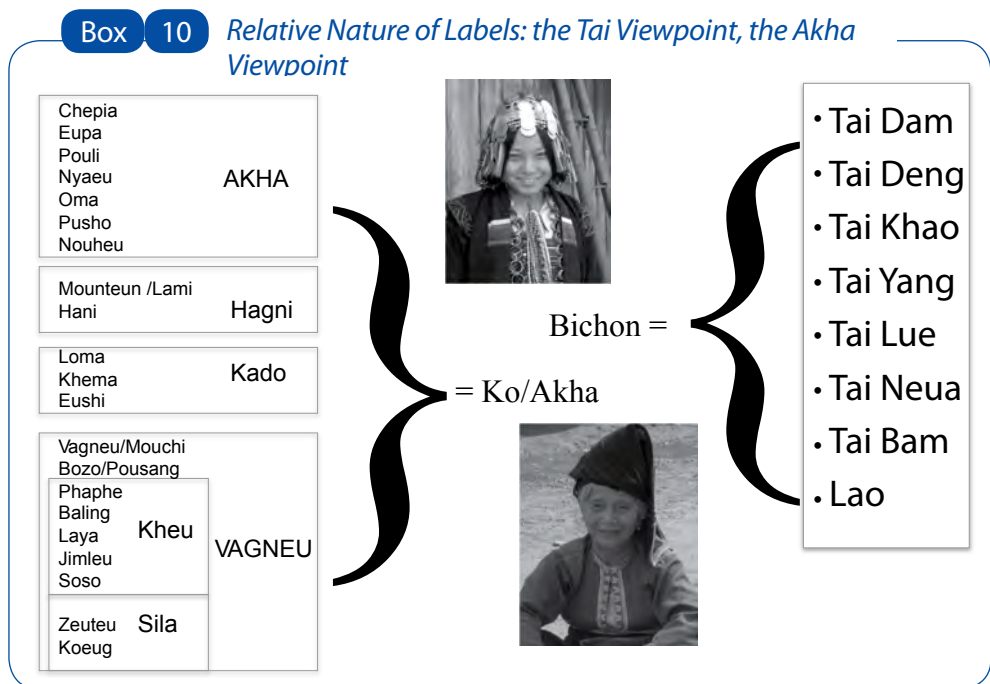
If we look at these images, the first person at the bottom right speaks a language very close to that of the person whose photo is to his right. Their villages are only a few kilometres apart. To the external observer, their cultural practices are identical. However, they are from two distinct groups, Nouheu and Eupa. And these groups do not intermarry. When I asked why, I got the reply that it was because their traditions differed. When I asked for an example, they replied: *“When we worship our ancestors, we put two glasses of alcohol on the altar and they put three”*, a criterion which is to us a simple detail. Here, all the objective criteria are met, but the sense of common belonging does not exist.

As defined earlier, one might think that all human beings have an ethnic affiliation because they all have a sense of belonging to a community, have a language which they

share with others, live in a village which they share with others, etc.

We’re coming to the second interpretation of the “ethnic group”, where the ethnic group is always other people. In fact, there is very often an implicit association between an ethnic group and a minority group. This is a relative definition, because it depends on a point of view, that of the majority, which often means the State (the Kinh in Việt Nam, the Lao in Laos, etc.).

For many people, ethnicity has a slightly negative sense, a marked difference to the majority. Two definitions of ethnicity can be put forward: that which one gives oneself – in which case everyone should have an ethnicity, which is not always the case – and that defined by the majority, thus ethnicity is linked to the fact of belonging to a minority culture.



Source: Author's construction.

For a Lao, all the groups mentioned are called Ko or Akha. In the State classification, shortcuts are needed. The State cannot classify the three hundred groups present in Lao, and because the government is from the majority population, it has lumped wide ranges of groups together, particularly those groups culturally most distant from the Lao majority, to which most members of the administration belong.

An example. In Laos there are a number of Tai: Tai Yang, Tai Lao, Tai Neua, Tai Lue, etc. Their differences in terms of culture, dress

and language are similar to those between the different Akha groups. However, these groups have not been classified together, but recognized as separate in the official classification. One might think that this is because they are culturally and socially closer to the majority group, the Lao, and therefore better known. Now imagine that Laos is governed by the Akha: the Tai groups would then perhaps all be known as Bichon in the official classification, while each Akha group would be specified. Classifications change according to the person doing the classifying.

### Box 11 *How and Why We Make Ethnic Classifications?*

Objectives: - Descriptive (taking stock of things as they are);  
- Normative (in pursuit of some objective).

What could be the normative objectives of classification?

To create a stable list of groups (fixed and covering the entire population) to facilitate identification and representation of the population, notably with a view to assuring national cohesion.

What are the potential biases of classifications?

- Choice of name (but which? There is not always a link with the autonym, the name which the ethnic group uses for itself);
- Choice of divisions and groupings (according to State-led criteria);
- Implies a unique and fixed ethnic affiliation;
- Implies choices which reflect the point of view of the classifier.

*Source: Author's construction.*

States need to classify. This requirement is partly a wish to describe, but also has the objective of standardization. Let's be clear from the start that it's not a matter of making accusations, though it's true that the discourse of anthropology is often seen as anti-establishment. For us, being critical means that you need to reflect on the "why"

to do better and to go further. Let's take two examples linked to this second objective:

- When the French colonized northern Việt Nam, it was important to identify each ethnic group and its spokesman – a leader – so as to impose a system of taxation based on different ways of life;

- In some countries, such as India, there is an official representation of each community in Parliament. It's important to define these communities clearly so as to represent them.

This is also why anthropologists examine the logic of these classifications, to show their limits, their drawbacks, but also with the aim of making them more accurate. A name must be chosen – and sometimes there are multiple names: the name a group gives itself, the name given by such a neighbour, and so on – and criteria to establish a homogenous classification. However, these criteria overlap

in an unsystematic way and it is possible to belong to several ethnic groups.

For example, in the era of trade caravans drawn by horses, the few Akha who took on this practice identified themselves with the Han Chinese, the group which operated a quasi-monopoly over this trade. But when they returned to their region, their village, they became Akha again. Diachronic analysis, over time, would allow us better to measure the ever-changing character of these classifications, as shown below by the divisions in Laos:

### Box 12 Evolution of Ethnic Classifications in Laos

- Before 1960: a hierarchical classification on a political basis:
  - The Tai (“free men”);
  - The Kha (“subservient men”).
- 1960-1986: an integrating classification, on a geographical basis:
  - Lao loun (Plains Lao);
  - Lao theung (Lao of the slopes);
  - Lao soung (Lao of the peaks).
- 1986-2011: a “scientific” classification on a linguistic basis:
  - Tai-Kadai;
  - Austro-Asiatic;
  - Hmong-Iu Mien;
  - Sino-Tibetan.



Source: Author's construction.

#### [Christian Culas]

The situation highlighted for the ethnic groups in Laos was also found historically in Thailand. Formerly, all the ethnic groups in

the North of Thailand were known in Thai as Chao Khao, which means “Mountain people”; twenty years ago, their official name became Thai Phu Khao, the “Thai of the mountains”. Localized coastal ethnic groups, often

nomadic and all bearing different names, are called “Thai of the sea”. The generic term “Thai” is used here to signify integration within the Thai State, but from the cultural, linguistic, historical and religious points of view none of these groups is similar to the ethnic majority Thai, or Siamese.

### Srey Sophorvny

In Cambodia, the ethnic groups live in the mountainous regions in the north-east of the country. However, there are also Vietnamese, Chams, Muslims and Chinese who live in the plains, but these groups are not considered as minorities.

### [Grégoire Schlemmer]

They are considered as minorities, but not as ethnic minorities. Besides, you’ll note that in Cambodia the ethnic minorities historically and linguistically have the same origin as the majority. In many countries, ethnic minorities are associated with aboriginals, the original inhabitants... In Cambodia, they all arrived together. In Laos, the original inhabitants were groups which have long been known as Kha – thus the majority don’t really want to draw attention to this fact. The current classification criterion for ethnic groups in Laos is linguistic. But firstly, speaking a language which comes from the same linguistic family doesn’t actually mean speaking the same language – there can be a great diversity of languages within the same linguistic family – and nor does it mean sharing the same culture or even the same cultural base. Groups which appear linguistically similar can live in very different ways; and groups belonging to two different linguistic families can have a very comparable way of life – as can be the case in Việt Nam between the Mường and the Tàì, or between the Tàì Nung and some of the Dao.

All this is to illustrate that since the concept of ethnicity is complex, ethnic classifications are always a bit arbitrary, and talking of minority groups often makes no sense except in terms of the relationship toward the State and the dominant population.

### Jimreivat Pattiya

Aren’t there some Austronesians on the border between Việt Nam and Laos?

### [Grégoire Schlemmer]

In my view, Austronesians don’t exist; there are simply people who speak languages belonging to the Austronesian family. We’re talking here about linguistic categories, not social or cultural ones. Many people make the mistake of using them as cultural or “ethno-linguistic” categories. Moreover, these linguistic categories have been gradually constructed by researchers, they are not data. Finally, there are sometimes political biases in the constitution of these categories. In China, a rapprochement is made between the Tibeto-Burmese and the speakers of Chinese languages; some Chinese and Vietnamese linguists say that Tibeto-Burmese, Chinese, Tai-Kadai and Austro-Asiatics belong to one family. In this way, within one nation, all the populations have a common origin.

### [Christian Culas]

In Việt Nam, this debate has existed for a long time, on the relationship between Mường et Kinh. It is sometimes difficult to disentangle scientific research from ideological positions.

### [Grégoire Schlemmer]

Thus we must always ask ourselves which point of view we’re speaking from. Who are you when you study this group, what are your

ideas, your position? One must take a critical look at oneself.

### Jimreivat Pattiya

When one is working with the people of North-Eastern Thailand, to say that they are Lao is viewed very poorly by the government. We have to speak of North-Eastern Tai populations, but linguistically they speak Lao.

#### [Christian Culas]

Today, there are more people of Lao ethnicity (both culture and language) in Thailand than in Laos; they are called Issan, “people of the North-East”. The reason is simple: in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the objective of conflict between different States – Laos, Thailand, Cambodia – was to capture populations. When Thailand invaded Laos, millions of

people were taken to Thailand and stayed there.

### Day 1, afternoon of Monday 18 July

#### 2.3.3. Names Given to Ethnic Groups in Việt Nam

##### [Christian Culas]

To complement what was presented this morning, I’d like to present you with an approach to the analysis of ethnic names. We’ll see that the first names used in history were generic, they were used to refer to vast social groups which rarely corresponded to the ethnic populations’ own perceptions of identity. Who produced and used these ethnic names? How were they formed, at which period in history and with what objectives?

#### Box 13 From Generic Designations to Emic Designations

- **“Generic designation”** means that a term designates a group of things which we think have numerous points in common.

Example: “Ethnic groups” is a generic term which encompasses numerous populations which are different but all “ethnic”.

- **“Emic designation”** means that the term is used by the ethnic groups themselves. We distinguish *emic* which designates ways of thinking and talking described by people themselves, from *etic* which refers to ways of thinking and talking described by people exterior to those studied (researchers, the State, development projects, neighbours, other ethnic groups, etc.).

Example: “Mèo” = *etic* term, “Hmong” = *emic* term.

*Source: Author’s construction.*

The “generic designation” is easy to understand, the term is used to designate a group of things which have or are supposed to have similar or close elements, and which are therefore from the same group. The widest generic term which we used

this morning was “ethnic group” or “ethnic minority”. Grégoire took the example of the Akha, found in about twenty different sub-groups, but whom the Lao just call Akha. You understand that the generic designation remains very vague: individuals who are

sometimes very different are lumped together in one group.

For an anthropologist, the distinction between *emic/etic* is a very useful analytical instrument.<sup>[10]</sup> *Emic* refers to all the patterns of thought and behaviour described by a people themselves; on the contrary, *etic* refers to ways of thinking and describing things by people outside the group being studied.

Here's an example. Formerly, "meo" was used in Việt Nam to designate the Hmong – an *etic* term which came from outsiders, in this case Vietnamese; the Hmong referred to themselves as Hmong – an *emic* term. The study of the history of the designation of ethnic groups, in the archives in particular, highlights the use of very general terms, and the more one approaches the present day the

more precise they become. We move from very wide generic terms to *emic* terms.

Let's apply a diachronic method. I'm going to compare the same populations in the same places but at different moments in history. My variable will be time.

The situation is particularly full of contrasts in the mountainous areas of Việt Nam, where the presence of the Kinh – or Vietnamese – is very recent. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there were almost no Vietnamese in the current provincial capitals in the North of the country. Only civil servants were present, for short durations; those political and administrative officials responsible for the control of the region. This explains why the Kinh know these hill-country populations so little.

**Table 62** Evolution of Ethnic Designations in Việt Nam

DATES	Exonym	Exonym	Exonym	Exonym
18 <sup>th</sup> -19 <sup>th</sup> centuries	<b>Mọi</b> (Wild people, South)	<b>Mán</b> (Wild people, North)	<b>Thổ</b> (Aboriginals, North)	<b>Mèo</b> (Cat)
1900 1950	Ede, Bahnar, Jorai...	Mán-Yáo-Dao, Mèo, Hani...	Tày, Nùng, Giáy...	Mèo-Hmong
1950 2010	Ede, Bahnar, Jorai...	Mán-Yáo, Hmong, Hani	Tày, Nùng, Giáy	Flower, Black, White, Red Hmong...
Future?	Names of ethnic sub-groups?	Iu Mien Ké Mien Ké Moun...	Tày, Nùng, Giáy	Black Hmong Shi Hmong Peb Hmong...

Source: Author's construction.

[10] For a historical and epistemological approach to *emic/etic*, we direct the reader to the following publication: Olivier de Sardan (1998), *Emique*, L'Homme, 147: 151-166. (<http://www.percee.fr>)

This summary table sets out the designations of different ethnic groups that we have found in the Vietnamese archives. You will note that the series starts from the 18<sup>th</sup> century because there are very few data on these groups before that date.

In Vietnamese, *Moi* means “wild”, “that which is not civilized”. This designation is specific to the South of the country. It was used for almost two centuries, then at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century ethnic designations were amended to shift towards the *emic*. The same is visible for the *Mán*, which also means “wild”, for the Northern region of Việt Nam; it’s an ancient Chinese term taken up by the Vietnamese. Our colleague Hạnh will expand on this – see the part of the table within a border.

The *Thổ* are also a very composite collection – the *Mường* group is included under this designation in some regions. The term is interesting because it designates the inhabitants of a place, the aboriginals; it means “those who live in that place”.

The fourth column concerns the *Mèo*; this name comes historically from an adaptation of the Chinese term “*miao*”. In the French colonial period, the *Mèo* were referred to alongside the *Hmong* group; then the term gradually disappeared, even though there is still a *Tài-Mèo* region, and specific groups – *White Hmong*, *Black Hmong*, etc.

## 2.3.4. Definition and Classification of Ethnic Groups in Việt Nam

[Trần Hồng Hạnh]

*Trần Hồng Hạnh takes three criteria for the identification of ethnic groups used officially in Việt Nam and covered above – see section 2.3.2. Criteria for the identification and classification of ethnic groups:*

- A common language. The Institute of Ethnology classifies ethno-linguistic families into three distinct groups: Austro-Asiatic, Sino-Tibetan and Austronesian;
- Cultural practices – a criterion which is seen as vague and difficult to determine (see the example of ancestor-worship practices used by Grégoire Schlemmer this morning);
- Sense of belonging – reference criterion for the publication of the list of ethnic groups in Việt Nam (see decision 121TCBKTCPB dated 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1979).

Take the example of the *Dao*.

The *Dao* in Việt Nam are called “*Kiểm miến* (*Kim mùn*), *Điêu miến*, *Yù miến*, *Ìn miến*, *Biều miến*” – self-naming, that is, using a name which each community gives to itself. The names “*Kiểm*, *Kim*, *Diu*, *Yù*, *Ìn*” all mean “forest”. “*Miến*, *Mùn*” refers to the person, the man.

However, the designations *Kim miến* and *Kim mùn* are imprecise, because the *Dao* are not the only group to live in forested areas; *Điêu miến*, *Yù miến*, *Ìn miến*, *Biều miến* are used in Sino-Vietnamese by the *Dao*.

Exonyms – names given to a community by another community – are very different because they refer to the *Dao* group – *Động*, *Dạo*, *Dào*, *Xá*, *Mán*, *Trại*, etc.:

- **Động**: a designation widely used in the ancient region of **Việt Bắc**, a historic unit of territory which means village or hamlet;
- **Dạo** or **Dào** are corruptions of **Dao**, in the same way that the **Hmong** are called **Mèo**, **Mẹo**;
- **Xá** is often used in the region of **Yên Bái** and of **Lào Cai** – a designation common to many ethnic groups in the North-west of **Việt Nam** which expresses contempt, racial discrimination;
- **Mán** refers to a “barbarian” ethnic group which lives outside the residential areas of the **Hán** group – racial discrimination.

As for many other ethnic groups, the name of the group is closely linked to its history: a group originally from China, the timing of their arrival in **Việt Nam** still an open question – from the 11<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, according to different authors. Different modes of migration determined the areas where they settled: the Northwestern areas of **Việt Nam** – *via* roads, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century; the North-East and some provinces of the Centre – from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, mainly *via* river transport.

- In the 13<sup>th</sup> century: the **Dao quần trắng** from **Phúc Kiến** migrated towards the provinces of **Quảng Yên**, **Lạng Sơn**, **Cao Bằng**, **Thái Nguyên** and **Tuyên Quang**; a small number of them established themselves in **Vĩnh Phú** or in the provinces of **Yên Bái** and **Lào Cai** and bore the name **Dao họ**;
- Between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> century: the **Dao quần chẹt** and **Dao tiền** migrated towards the provinces of **Quảng Đông**, **Quảng Yên**, **Vĩnh Phú**, **Hà Tây**, **Hòa Bình**, **Yên Bái** and **Tuyên Quang**;
- In the 17<sup>th</sup> century: the **Dao thanh y** from the province of **Quảng Đông** migrated towards **Móng Cái**, then crossed **Lục Ngạn**

and the river **Đuống** to get to **Tuyên Quang**; some of them went to **Yên Bái** and **Lào Cai** and were known as **Dao tuyền**;

- In the 17<sup>th</sup> century: the **Dao đỏ** and **Dao tiền** of **Quảng Đông** and **Quảng Tây** migrated to **Cao Bằng**, **Bắc Kạn**, **Hà Giang** and **Tuyên Quang**;
- In the 18<sup>th</sup> century: the **Dao đỏ** migrated to **Lào Cai**;
- At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: the **Dao lô gang** settled in various provinces of **Việt Nam**.

You'll note from these names that the first element is self-naming and generic; the second element refers to the clothing worn. Currently, about 30 **Dao** groups have been identified in **Việt Nam**, of which the main ones are: **Dao tiền**, **Dao đỏ**, **Dao quần chẹt**, **Dao quần trắng**, **Dao thanh y**, **Dao cóc ngáng**, **Dao cóc mùn** and **Dao làn tên**. For about thirty years now, this group has also been present in the provinces of the Central Highlands and in the East and South of the country. These population movements have contributed to the cultural enrichment of the group.

### Jimreivat Pattiya

The **Dao** are scattered over a very large area, from the Northern mountains to the Central Highlands; is this due to the political will of the government or just a spontaneous migratory movement?

### [Trần Hồng Hạnh]

In contrast to the **Hmong**, the **Dao** don't move in an organized way. The main reason for these migrations is an economic one.

In **Lao**, the government displaced **Hmong** and **Dao** living in national parks or national forest areas; the effects on the way of life of these populations were very damaging.



### Lê Hải Đăng

The Institute of Ethnology categorizes three ethno-linguistic “families” while the Museum of Ethnology identifies five; what is the reason for this?

### [Trần Hồng Hạnh]

The classification into three linguistic groups is an official document of the Institute of Ethnology, but even there there are different views. It is true that the Museum of Ethnology distinguishes five different groups: Austro-Asiatic, Austronesian, Sino-Tibetan, Tai-Kadai and Hmong-Dao.

### [Christian Culas]

I think that one explanation is that a division into five linguistic families in Việt Nam, in Laos and in Thailand fits the vision of all the international publications by the most eminent linguists. This classification carries weight in numerous countries: Japan, France, the US, the UK, etc. To my mind the Môn-Khmer, Tàì-Kadai and Mèo-Đào families are very different – tonal languages or not. How can one group these different minorities together? The question remains open.

### Nguyễn Thị Hà Nhung

In my opinion the name Đao is a name given to this group by the Chinese.

### [Trần Hồng Hạnh]

The names Kim mun, Yu mien, etc., are autonyms – *emic*. They all have a common meaning, “person living in the forest”; these different names are known as Đao in Sino-Vietnamese.

### [Christian Culas]

Just an anecdote on the naming of the Yao in Việt Nam. In the text, “The Descriptive Geography by Emperor Đổng Khánh”, is written in Chinese characters, when the Đao or Yao are mentioned, the Chinese character Yao is used, but the symbol has changed. In Chinese, we have the symbol for a snake, and here we have the symbol for a man. The Vietnamese appropriated the Chinese character, but they pronounce it Đao not Yao, and the symbol for the character was modified. This is an external logic: we have a Chinese character which comes to Việt Nam, but there’s no link to people; all this takes place between learned Chinese and Vietnamese writers who “play” with characters. These are exonyms, a completely *etic* dimension.

### [Grégoire Schlemmer]

Yao is a Chinese term, which is interesting for our discussion because it designated a category which was more political than ethnic, in this case meaning groups exempt from servitude – for services rendered to the Emperor. Secondly, even if it’s not an autonym, it did confer an attractive political status so there were groups who had an incentive, at particular moments, to identify themselves as Yao. In fact, in both China and Việt Nam, there are groups speaking the Tai language who have been subsumed within the overall Yao grouping.

### 2.3.5. The Approach of Ethnicity: The Laotian Example

[Grégoire Schlemmer]

I would like to use the Laotian province of Phongsaly, my area of study, as an example of issues of ethnicity. I will take various prejudices, often aired in the press or public opinion, associated with ethnic minorities and try to provide a criticism of them, deconstruct them, using examples from that province.

First “received wisdom”: ethnic minorities constitute a group, implying that they have points in common which link them to each other, distinguishing them all from the majority.

According to the official classification in Laos, there are thirteen ethnic groups in Phongsaly. During surveys conducted in the field, when I asked individuals to identify themselves by group, I myself counted about forty different designations. These interviews were held in about 150 out of the 600 villages in the province. It’s noteworthy that the Lao, the ethnic majority of Laos, constitute only 3% of the population of the province – a very tiny minority! From among the multiple ethnic groups identified, let’s look at the Tai Lue. The Tai Lue group is very close to the Lao in every way. To simplify, let’s say that what distinguished the two was their original political affiliation: the Tai Lue were the subjects of the ancient kingdom of Sip Song Panna (Xishuanbanna in Chinese – now integrated into the Chinese province of Yunnan, which borders Phongsaly), while a Lao was a subject of the kingdom of Lan Xang, the former name for Laos. The ethnic definition here is typically established on the basis of political factors.

Today, a Lao of Phongsaly is closer to a Tai Lue of Phongsaly than he is to a Lao from the South of the country. Dwellings, manners of dress and language are identical; they are neighbours and communicate with each other. Nevertheless, the official classification defines one of these groups, the Lao, as forming the majority, and the other as an ethnic minority...

Let’s take another example of the ambiguities of official classifications, the example of the Ho (or Haw) in Phongsaly. This group is closer to the Hoa of Việt Nam than to the Ho of Thailand, because the latter are often former caravanners from China, who were Muslim traders – in China, they were known as Hui, and formed an ethnic group of “nationality” due to their religious affiliation. What about the Ho of Phongsaly? Officially, they are an ethnic group. They accept and claim the designation “Ho”, which assures their position in Laos, notably by distinguishing them from more recent migrants from China. But among themselves and in their own language, they define themselves as Han, that is the biggest ethnic majority of China. Thus the Ho, numerically a tiny minority in Laos, see themselves as belonging to a group which represents about a third of the human race. These two examples beg the question: what are the criteria for the definition of ethnic and minority groups in Laos, when within this category are groups based on a former political origin (the Tai Lue), others stemming from recent migrations but defining themselves as part of the dominant Chinese majority group (Ho) and others grouped together through ignorance (Akha/Ko)?

Second “received wisdom”: each ethnic group itself forms a discrete grouping, and these are more or less mutually exclusive.

The interesting thing about a region like Phongsaly is that despite its small surface area, it contains a great diversity of ethnic groups. However, the study of these populations shows that these groups share many similar practices with each other as well as with the Lao, which are the majority population and therefore not classed as an ethnic minority. These similarities override ethnic affiliation. For example, all the ethnic groups in the province have the same religious traditions around territorial rites, because they all live in the same territory. Groups influence each other in many ways, as much technical as sartorial, culinary, etc. Thus we understand that monographic research is important, but must be complemented by studies of the relationships between groups.

Third “received wisdom”: ethnic groups are groups which have endured over the long term, changing and evolving little.

But in fact ethnic groups are born, live and then die. The study of this dynamic is particularly interesting at Phongsaly because almost three-quarters of the population was not yet present in the province 200 years ago: many individuals migrated as a result of the violent revolts of the Hui and the Taiping which adversely affected the whole of South China in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. These migrations sometimes snapped the link between people who had come from the same group but found themselves displaced in different directions, bringing about the creation of new ethnic groups. Populations from the plains, who had a fixed habitat and used irrigation to cultivate rice, found themselves isolated in a forest setting. One mustn't think that these groups had no history; it's just not a written history. Likewise one mustn't think that these groups can't

change their way of life. Let's take the example of the Hmong. The majority of this group lives in China. They live in impressive sedentary villages and have tended irrigated rice-fields for many years. In Việt Nam, Thailand and Laos, they live mainly from slash-and-burn agriculture in mountain villages. To escape the troubles affecting South China, they had to adapt to a new mountain environment and to a way of life which allowed mobility and thus escape. In a few decades they made major changes to their way of life. Moreover, the idea that ethnic groups live in closed-off economic units is a tenacious one. But as far as we can go back in history, thanks to Thai and Chinese records, it is stated that mountain populations were integrated into economic networks on an international scale, through the production of cotton, opium, forest products, etc.

To conclude, let's remember that ethnicity is a fluid notion made up of several criteria which aren't necessarily linked. It's both a fairly objective kind of affiliation – based on a common cultural heritage – and also a feeling of belonging, which is partly subjective; and its position is defined by, or built around, its neighbours. It is characterized by a multiple, changing reality, which is as much social and political as cultural.

What are the methodological implications in the approach of ethnic groups?

- We need to examine transformations and changes over the long term;
- We mustn't over-emphasise ethnic groups and must be careful of generalizing;
- It's useful to take a more inclusive regional approach, touching also on local dynamics;
- We must be careful not to isolate ethnic groups, but instead integrate their

relationships with their neighbours as a key part of their identity.

[Grégoire Schlemmer]

Day 2, Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> July

### 2.3.6. Cartography in the Former Kingdoms of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and the Geographical Distribution of Linguistic Families

Let's look at historical maps and the division of populations and see how these can help us frame questions about ethnic affiliation. These maps are focused on the Laotian province of Phongsaly: they represent the location of populations living in the province, and of speakers of the linguistic families to which they are linked.

#### Map 1 Location of the Province of Phongsaly

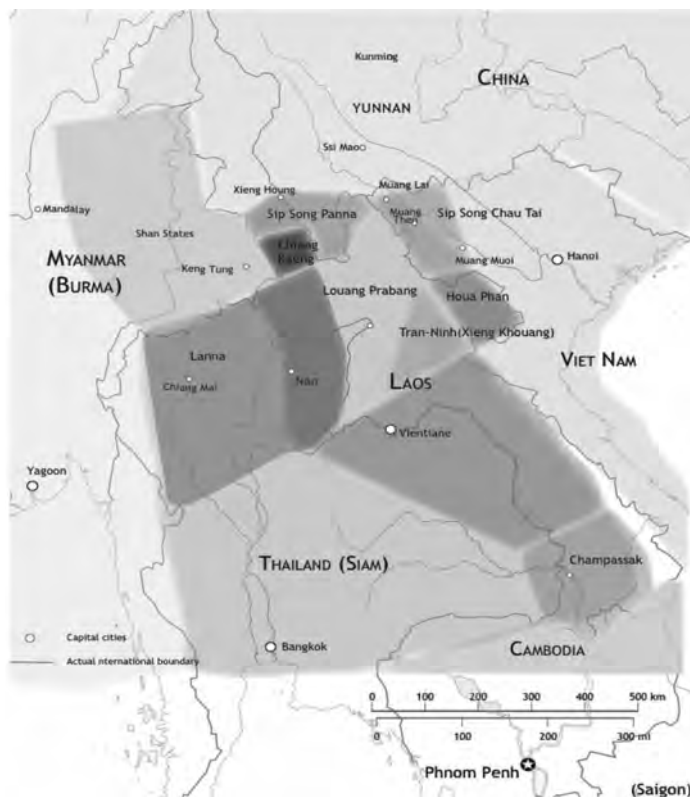


Source: Author's construction.

On the map of the province of Phongsaly, you will see to the West the province of Xishuanbanna in China – the ancient kingdom of T'ai Lue – and to the East, the region of Lai Châu, called Muang Lai by the

Tai – then to the South, you will find Điện Biên Phủ. It's a very mountainous area, with very few rice fields.

Map 2 Political Division of Present-day Laos in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century



*The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.*

*Source: Author's construction.*

This map shows the former kingdoms already mentioned: Sip Song Panna (the Lue kingdom), Muang Lai and Muang Then – which were part of Sip Song Chau Tai: the twelve districts ruled by the Tai. You can see neither present-day Thailand nor Laos, but instead a grouping of kingdoms with fluid frontiers.

**[Christian Culas]**

Each shaded area represents a principality with a princely court, autonomous political entities: to the West, the principality of Chiang Mai, then that of Nan, in Burma, the principality

of Chiang Kaeng; in Laos, Luang Prabang, Vientiane in the South and Champassak.

**[Grégoire Schlemmer]**

Only the political centres were important, the frontiers were fluid and could overlap. For example, the former kingdom of Tran Ninh – or Xieng Khouang – paid tribute to Hà Nội and to Luang Prabang; Luang Prabang itself paid tribute to Hà Nội, which paid tribute to China and Siam. One can clearly imagine the difficulties during the establishment of fixed, definitive frontiers so as to determine who owned which political entities.

### [Christian Culas]

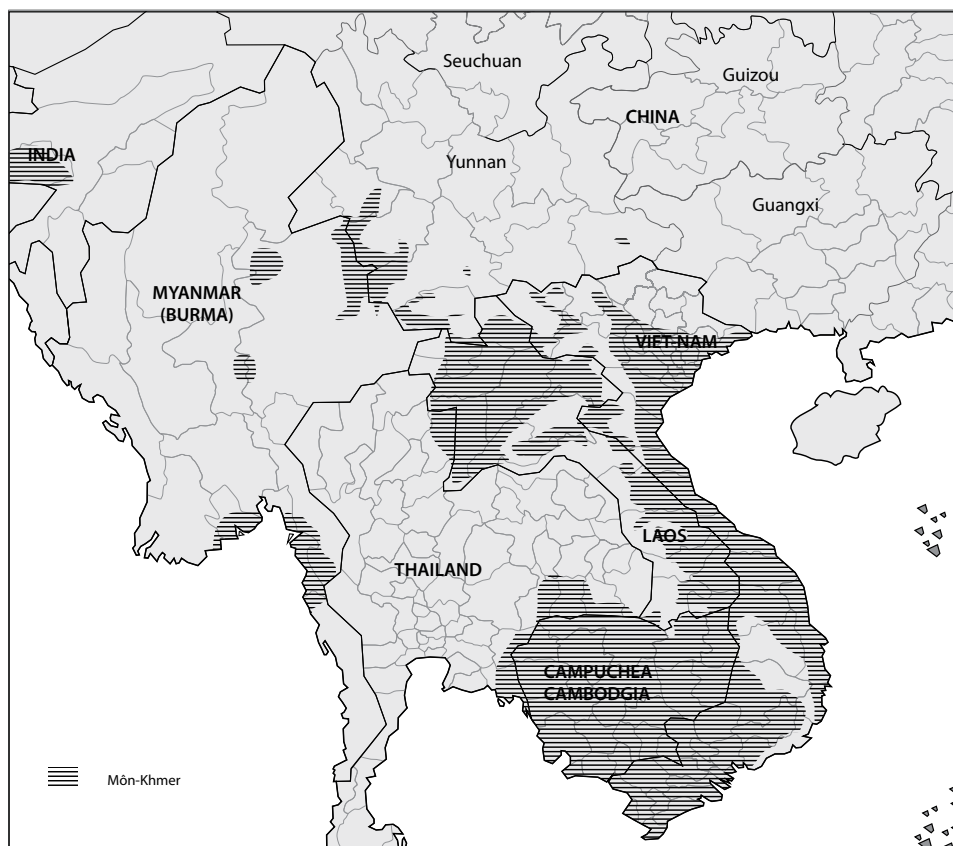
Boundary markers, like mapmaking, are recent in continental Southeast Asia.

The States controlled the areas close to the capitals, the rice-growing deltas, but exercised very little control over the hill and mountain areas – aside from a few missions by the official posted there. The first marked frontier between Việt Nam and China was defined in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The frontier between Thailand and Laos dates from the same era – drawn by a commission comprising Thailand, France, Laos and Great Britain. For a very long time, the local population had thus been very weakly controlled. Then the definition of frontiers pushed these populations into Thailand, Laos, etc.

### [Grégoire Schlemmer]

The historical approach is essential when studying ethnic groups. We must bear in mind that the present-day States are recent inventions. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, strict control of territory and its populations mattered less than the collection of taxes. This goes some way to explain how such ethnic diversity was possible: there was no attempt to unify the population *via* common governance, or by putting them to work together. Moreover, the cultural and linguistic diversity between groups served to justify and maintain political and economic distinctions – the culture of the dominant population and its elite thus keeping itself separate.

Map 3 *Distribution of Speakers of the Môn-Khmer Linguistic Family*



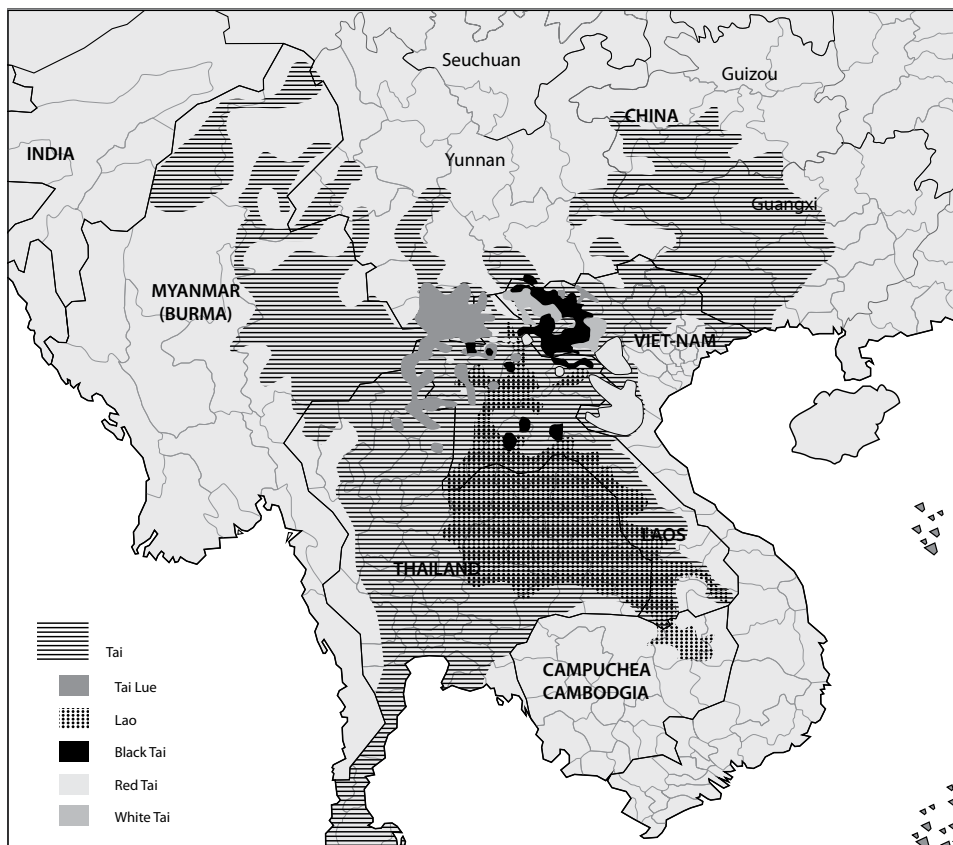
Source: Author's construction.

This map represents the distribution of Austro-Asiatic populations; it covers Cambodia, Việt Nam the Eastern half of Laos, part of Burma and extends as far as India.

We can see here a continuous or block-by-block occupation, which could lead us to suppose some kind of cultural homogeneity. This map testifies to the scepticism we must maintain in relation to social and cultural interpretations of linguistic families: just because you speak a language belonging to

the same linguistic group as someone else doesn't mean you have anything at all in common with him. At the social and cultural level, these populations are extremely diverse; we find people from the plains and from the mountains, founders of great kingdoms or forming small isolated groups, influenced by Chinese or Indian civilization, of different religious affiliations, etc.

Map 4 *Distribution of Populations Speaking the Tai Language in Phongsaly*



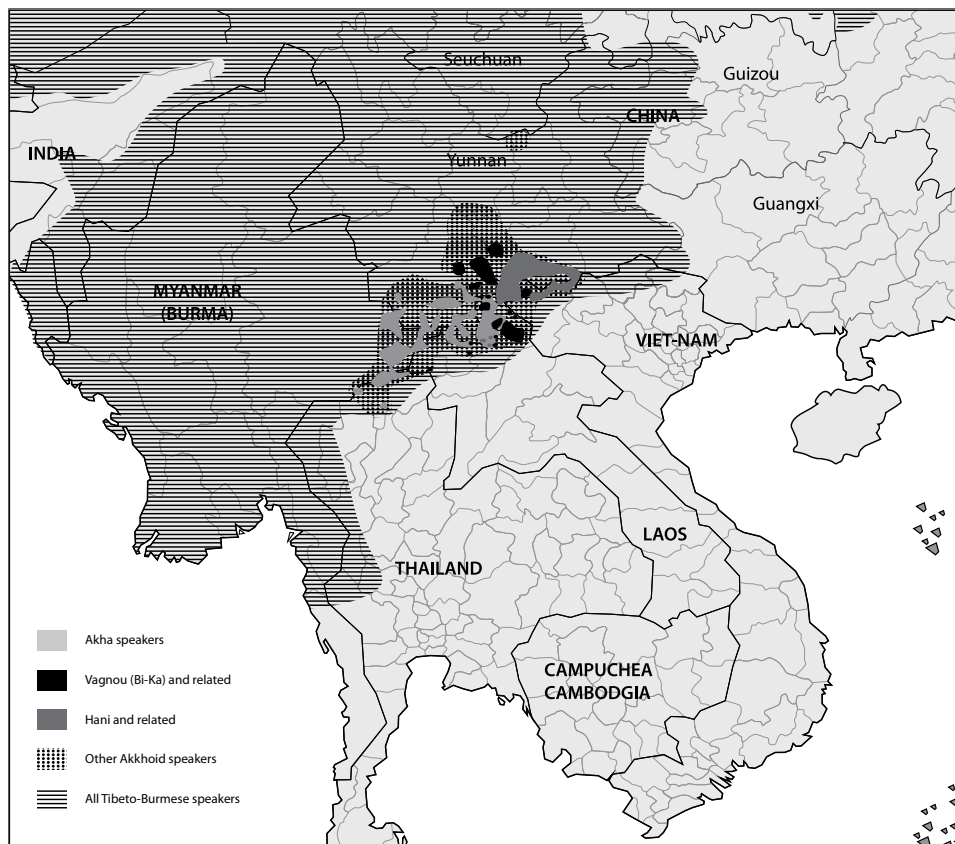
Source: Author's construction.

The map of Tai speakers illustrates the link between political entity and ethnic affiliation. Tai-speaking populations, who share many social and cultural similarities, are distinguished above all by their affiliation with a political entity: the Tai Lue were the inhabitants of Sipsongpanna, the Tai Khao of Muang Lai (Lai Chau), the Tai Dam of the

regions around Muang Theng (Điện Biên Phủ) and Muang Muoi, etc. We can see that these groups form fairly compact populations, and that their scattering far and wide happened in later migrations. You will also observe that the Lao are now more numerous in Thailand than in Laos.



Map 5 Distribution of Akha and Hani Populations

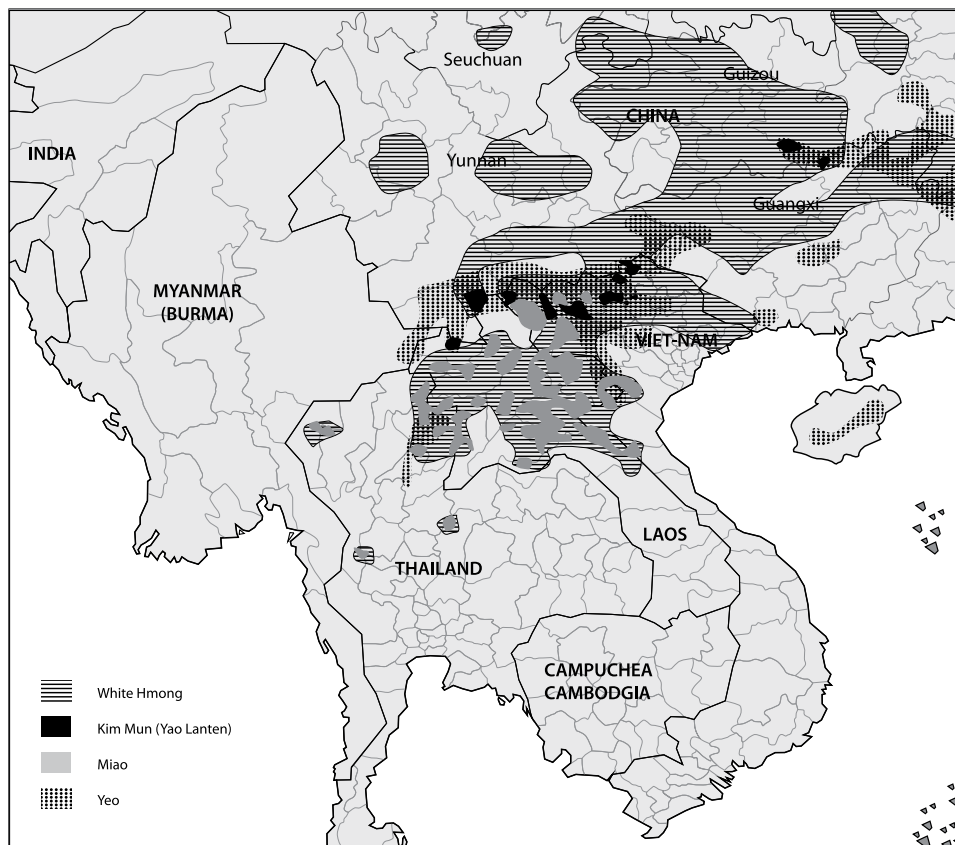


Source: Author's construction.

This map shows populations from the Akha-Hani grouping.

What is interesting is that the Hani are scattered over several countries but still remain fairly cohesive; in this case, we can almost see the outline of a frontier or border.

Map 6 *Distribution of White Hmong, Kim Mun and Other Populations Speaking Miao-Yao*



Source: Author's construction.

Here you have the distribution of White Hmong among all Hmong and others who are linguistically related. These populations are present in huge numbers in China, from where they originate, which allows us to set in context some ideas which are too frequently associated with the Hmong. For example when people say that the Hmong subsist on slash-and-burn agriculture, they are really talking about the Hmong of Southeast Asia, who are the most well-known and studied. But this has a tendency to be seen as a way

of life which is deeply embedded in Hmong culture. In reality, this only concerns a fringe population during a specific period in history: the groups which fled from war and famine in China in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and who therefore adopted a means of subsistence adapted to that period of displacement. But let's not forget that the majority of Hmong still live in China, in villages which have long been in a fixed location and where they practise irrigated rice cultivation.

### 2.3.7. Constitution, Law and Ethnicity

[Christian Culas]

We have approached ethnicity *via* its labels and designations so as to better understand how the relationships between these were established. How do States refer to ethnic groups? What do ethnic groups call themselves and each other? How do ethnic groups refer to the representatives of the State?

This session will be dedicated to looking at ethnicity through the lens of law and constitutions. This is an original approach and I would emphasize the value of a study of the closeness between law and anthropology. We will set out the differences between the legal framework in statute and in practice, with the aim of understanding the constitutions of these countries and examining the position of ethnic groups within them.

#### Box 14 *The Value of Studying Legal Issues for Anthropology (1)*

**Law:** a normative science, sets the basis for what is legal:

- Among the human sciences, law has a unique position: its objective is not to describe and analyze what people do, but to set the framework for what is legal and illegal = normative dimension;
- Law defines with a greater or lesser degree of precision “what one must do” in certain circumstances and the consequences if one does not respect these norms (information, penalties, coercions, social restrictions, etc.) = dimension of control and constraint.

*Source: Author's construction.*

To my mind the countries seen as “modern or developed” – Europe and the United States, for example – have obscured the fact that a major part of law was oral. This traditional, customary and oral legal tradition remains very active in the ethnic regions of Southeast Asia and in certain African countries. We will reflect together on the link between national law, which is written and fixed, and forms of local law, which are oral, negotiated and often more flexible.

system of control and constraints which, in the worst case, leads to the exclusion of individuals from the community – there's no imprisonment or the death penalty. One of the key questions in the management of ethnic groups is to understand how national law, which is supposed to be the same for the whole nation, can fit together with customary law, which only applies to a specific local group.

Written national law is associated with the State and a system of strong controls and constraints; customary law is more localized, and generally involves a community with a tradition of common law and a flexible

**Box 15** *The Value of Studying Legal Issues for Anthropology (2)*

Anthropology: a descriptive science, describes what is done (without a normative approach):

- Anthropology, like law has a particular position in the social sciences: its methods, its way of describing social situations, its objectives. To describe in the most faithful and rigorous way possible “what people do” and the ways in which they represent (think) to themselves what they do (actor’s point of view) = empirical dimension;
- Anthropology has a critical and reflexive (self-examining) point of view on anthropologists’ descriptions = critical and reflexive dimension;
- Anthropology makes a distinction between the *emic* point of view of the actors and the *etic* point of view of the researchers and of the State.

Source: Author’s construction.

The defining characteristic of an anthropologist is a deep contextual knowledge of local populations. Two main avenues of research emerge: what people do, and what people say about what they do. Specifically in the epistemology of anthropology, we don’t have access to what people think or what they believe; we have access to a debate on thought or belief. Just one remark for those anthropologists specializing in religions. It is an abuse to write “*the Hmong believe in the spirits of the forest*” because we have no way of verifying

this, but it is possible to say “*the Hmong worship the spirits of the forest*” or “*the Hmong say that they believe in the spirits of the forest*”. Here there is a research position which is characteristic of and specific to anthropology. We must not confuse what people say and what the researcher is saying – a distinction already underlined between *emic* and *etic*. The example of the Dao is relevant here. Who created this term? Local populations, researchers? Our discussion has shown that it’s difficult to say. One safeguard is to use a reflexive loop to evaluate written sources.

**Box 16** *The Value of Studying Legal Issues for Anthropology (3)*

To bring together the approaches of law and anthropology:

- The overall objective of anthropology applied to ethnic groups is to understand how ethnic groups live and in particular how relationships between ethnic groups and the State are organized;
- To bring together the qualities of law (formulating standards, explaining how national laws and customary law are created) and the qualities of anthropology (describing what is done and how people think about what they do);
- Law gives a purely *etic* viewpoint (from the exterior, that of the State and not of the actors), while anthropology gives both the *emic* viewpoint of the actors and the *etic* viewpoint of the State.

Source: Author’s construction.

I'd like to ask you some questions around the phrase: *"The overall objective of applied anthropology in relations to ethnic groups is to understand the nature of the relationship between the ethnic group and the State."* We're referring here to a very particular branch of anthropology, political anthropology. I don't think it's possible to study ethnic groups without political anthropology. The term can differ from country to country but in this case it refers to the study of the organization of groups of humankind.

#### Yves Perraudau

In economics, we would speak of a political economy to differentiate between a private economy, the management of a personal inheritance, and the management of a city in the past. What was collective was what entered the political economy. This term has been abandoned due to its ambiguity. But at the outset we still have that logic: what is collective, what belongs to the group, eventually to the Nation-State, is political.

#### [Christian Culas]

The difference between private and public is evident in reading the works of Hannah Arendt – a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century German researcher in political science who worked on authoritarian political systems – in particular her work *The condition of modern man*: the private sphere concerns the family, what is internal to the house; politics identifies all that is external. Hannah Arendt makes clear distinctions, for example about individual liberty which exists in the political world but not in the family. The family is a world of constraints, naturally hierarchical, where the external view is absent; politics, the community, the city, the State are domains of rules where individuals are equal, a place for discussion and negotiation. Let's go a bit further. To my mind it's really wrong to draw a parallel between nation and family, to say *"The Nation is a great big family"*. That implies the elimination of political relationships: to believe or to make believe that a nation is a family is to take away from that social group any political dimension. This reflection is particularly true when one comes to ethnic issues.

### Box 17 Theoretical Framework on Constitution and Law (1)

Hierarchy of legal statutes (in theory):

In theory, there are four levels of legal statutes in Việt Nam:

- (1) Constitution;
- (2) Laws adopted by the National Assembly;
- (3) Decrees by the Permanent Committee of the National Assembly (known as "decree laws". Government decrees are created by the Prime Minister;
- (4) Legislative measures at the lower level: decisions, directives and circulars from the Ministries and agencies of government. Resolutions and directives from the highest level of the Communist Party. Orders and instructions from the People's Committees at provincial and district level (Rose, 1998: 98, n° 12).

Source: Author's construction.

Our example concerns Việt Nam, but the question makes sense for any other country: how is a State organized in terms of law and the levels of law?

In Việt Nam there are four hierarchical levels of legal statutes. This implies that any lower level must conform with the higher level – the laws voted by the National Assembly must not

contradict the Constitution of Việt Nam, etc. This is an incontrovertible principle. Levels 1, 2 and 3 are homogenous. In contrast, when we come to the last level, we realize that a number of different institutions can issue legal documents. This brings us to a practical question: how can these be harmonized with the higher levels?

### Box 18 *Theoretical Framework on Constitution and Law (2)*

Hierarchy of legal statutes (in practice):

In theory, according to the authors one can distinguish up to 22 levels in the hierarchy of legal statutes in Việt Nam:

Principal difficulties:

- Lack of effective dissemination of new laws;
- Impossibility for the non-specialist (peasants or ethnic groups) to understand how the legislative system works in practice;
- Numerous contradictions between the levels of laws (lack of coordination between the official services which produce the laws and regulations, no service has an overall vision of the entire system).

*Source: Author's construction.*

In Việt Nam, the study of law is particularly difficult. There is no Official Journal disseminated free at an accessible level, nor is there any national, central body which publishes new laws. Laws are not all officially and widely published – dissemination by the People's Committees doesn't claim to be really effective. People remain ill-informed. It's true that large-scale lawmaking in Việt Nam is a recent phenomenon: between 1945, Việt Nam's declaration of independence, and the policy of Renovation (1986), fewer than 500 laws were passed; between 1986 and 2005, more than 10,000 were passed – cf. business legislation, international trade, etc.

#### Yves Perraudau

The market brings regulation with it, and this is provided by the State, with planning. The growth of the market economy necessarily imposes a rise in the juridical approach, and during the shift between a planned economy and a market economy, there is an intermediate period without law. The legal framework must come, because the freedom of the market needs a framework.

#### [Christian Culas]

Experts in Vietnamese public law are few, for two main reasons: the State is not an easy interlocutor: the economic stakes for the

people involved are very different – let's just imagine the difference in salary between a government employee specializing in public law and an advocate who defends private companies. Thus there are very few public law texts for analysis or research on public law produced by Vietnamese in Việt Nam.

Vietnamese lawyers who do practise public law tell us that in reality, in practice, there are up to 22 hierarchical levels of legal statutes in Việt Nam. The situation becomes particularly complex when you realize that no part of the Vietnamese Government has an overall view of these different hierarchical levels: it has resulted from the creation of rules by provinces or districts which are to a greater or lesser extent disconnected from the higher levels.

*Christian Culas refers to the work done during the training workshop in field survey methods during previous meetings of the Summer School. The conditions for eviction of peasant families and forms of land law in a village in the foothills of Tam Đảo were studied from 2008 to 2010. We refer the reader to the following publications (cf. [www.tamdaoconf.com](http://www.tamdaoconf.com) and the websites of partner organizations):*

*- Bourdeaux, Pannier and Tessier (2011), Training in Surveying Methods and Fieldwork Practices in Socio-anthropology: "Issues, Tension*

*and Conflict Surrounding Land Appropriation and Use", in Lagrée (scientific Ed.), "Transitions Decreed, Transitions Experienced. From Global to Local: Methodological, Cross-cutting and Critical Approaches", collection Conférences et Séminaires, n° 2, AFD-ÉFEO-Tri Thức, pp. 249-283;*

*- Ardit, Culas and Tessier (2010), Anthropologie du développement : formation aux méthodes d'enquêtes de terrain en sociologie et anthropologie, in Lagrée, Cling, Razafindrakoto and Roubaud (scientific Eds.), « Stratégies de réduction de la pauvreté », Éditions Tri Thức, Hà Nội, juillet, pp. 485-540.;*

*- Culas and Tessier (2009), Formation en sociologie en anthropologie : méthodes et flexibilité, enquêtes de terrain et organisation du recueil des données, in Lagrée (scientific Ed.), « Nouvelles approches méthodologiques appliquées au développement », Éditions Thế Giới, Hà Nội, May, pp. 241-356*

Instances of purchase of agricultural land for the construction of golf courses, grand hotels, etc. have multiplied in the last few years. The legal documentation produced at provincial level is rarely checked by higher levels of the hierarchy. For the private citizen, in particular, it's hardly possible to comprehend the complexity of the legal situation.

**Box 19** *What is a Constitution?*

- A text which fixes in a set of principles the bases of the organization and functioning of the State;
- A text which confers the legitimacy and permanence of power, whilst setting its limits;
- A text which organizes and guarantees the public liberties of citizens;
- A text which has the objective of defining and maintaining the cohesion of a nation

= A text which guides the nation.

- It reflects how the nation was conceived, and notably the position of ethnic groups within it.

Ethnic groups in the constitution: study what is said about them both explicitly and implicitly.

*Source: Author's construction.*

The constitution is the shared overarching head which manages and organizes the entire system of the State and the nation, which fixes the basic principles of the organization of the functioning of a State. Its text confers legitimacy and permanence on the national power, but includes limits to that power – *cf.* ways in which different institutions control each other, like the Assembly which controls the Senate – and defines and guarantees the civil liberties of citizens. In terms of what interests us, we can see that in the constitutions of Southeast Asia – except in Thailand or Burma, which hasn't had a constitution since the 1960s, – in multi-ethnic countries like Laos and Việt Nam for example, ethnic groups are directly and specifically designated in the constitution.

**Trần Hoài**

You have said that in Việt Nam there is no public service responsible for publishing the official legal texts, but in my visits to communes in the centre of the country, I noted legal volumes from the legal publishing house.

**[Christian Culas]**

In many communes – even urban ones – these publications do not exist. There is no official route, or perhaps information is disseminated many years later. There is a bottleneck between the publication of laws and their dissemination.

**Lê Hải Đăng**

There is an Official Journal in Việt Nam but it doesn't publish all the legal texts, and citizens don't have access to it.

**Yves Perraudau**

When does a law take effect? In France and I think in other European countries, law takes effect from the moment of its appearance in the Official Journal. If this appearance takes place two or three years later, what happens? Is the law applied or not?

**Jean-Luc Maurer**

I'd like to come back to the parallel between the State and the family drawn by Christian: those States which make believe that the nation is a family in fact



deny citizenship. Does this way of behaving, which is fairly widespread throughout Asia in general, explain a certain acceptance of authoritarianism?

[Christian Culas]

This approach creates an uncontested hierarchical relationship. In social systems based on Confucian principles, like Việt Nam or China, it's unacceptable to question paternal authority – father, grandfather, ancestors. In some constitutions we can see a clearly paternalist position toward ethnic groups – those of Laos and Việt Nam for example.

Jean-Luc Maurer

To what extent has this State paternalism been internalized by ethnic groups, and can it explain a certain passivity?

[Christian Culas]

If the State sees itself as the “Father of the Nation”, then the citizens are the children whom the father protects and helps, and the ethnic groups are the “weak” children, one might say. It's a national, State-driven vision.

From the point of view of the ethnic groups, I don't think that this kind of relationship is resented as such. One important issue is to evaluate the degree to which different groups feel that they belong to a nation. For the governments of every country, that is fundamental.

Jean-Luc Maurer

Without going so far as to say that people known as “minorities” dream of their own State, encompassing parts of several countries, don't your suggestions borrow

something from the theory of James Scott, who postulated that the strategy of ethnic groups is to develop a passive resistance so as to minimize their integration into nation-States and preserve their autonomy to the greatest extent possible?

[Christian Culas]

Most ethnic groups haven't any desire or plan to create States. James Scott's work, to which Jean-Luc Maurer refers, is *The Art of Not Being Governed*, published in 2009. The work covers 500 years of the history of the management of ethnic groups living in border areas, in the North of Southeast Asia: at its heart is an examination of the resistance of ethnic groups to State integration.

I have two criticisms to make of his work. Firstly, a number of ethnic groups have had a State system, or at least a very hierarchical system – the Tai Lu, the White Tai, the Yi in China. Then to affirm that ethnic groups organize themselves against the State is to my mind very excessive. We saw earlier on the maps that border areas are buffer zones – often mountainous – where ethnic groups were in contact with the State in a very *ad hoc* way, and its pressure was relatively weak. These groups remained for centuries in a relationship of awareness of the State, and not necessarily of pressure from it. The idea that they were organized politically against the State is to my mind absolutely wrong. It's a dichotomous vision – ethnic group/State – which I don't support. When one works in ethnic villages, the main subject of discussion and interest is not the State but one's neighbours, those one is surrounded by every day, whether they are from the same ethnic group or not.

[Grégoire Schlemmer]

There's nothing that unifies the minorities except the fact of being a minority. In Laos, we have very varied relationships between ethnic groups and the State. Let's not forget that certain ethnic groups were constituted on a political basis – e.g. the Tai. During the group work, we'll see specific examples of very widely differentiated relationships with the State – integration, escape, detachment.

### 2.3.8. The Position of Ethnic Groups in the Laotian Constitution

[Grégoire Schlemmer]

I'd like to set out for you an analysis of the Laotian constitution, so as to examine the position of ethnic groups within that constitution and the representations which are associated with it.

*An extract from the Laotian constitution is distributed to the participants and it is read in the session.*

Here is an extract from the preamble of the constitution, followed by various selected articles.

#### Box 20 Extracts from the Preamble of the Laotian Constitution (1)

- For several millennia, the multi-ethnic Lao people lived and developed in this well-loved land. Over six centuries ago, our ancestors founded, at the time of Tiao Fa Ngum, a unified country, Lan Xang, and made it prosperous and glorious;
- From the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Lao territory was constantly the object of lust and aggression from foreign powers. Our people therefore unified to develop the traditions of heroism and resistance of their ancestors and to engage in continuous and obstinate struggle so as to regain independence and liberty. (...)

*Source: Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, published by the Supreme People's Assembly, Vientiane, 1991.*

#### Box 21 Extracts from the Laotian Constitution

- Art. 1. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is (...) a unified and indivisible country of all ethnic groups.
- Art. 2. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is a State of the people's democracy. All power is with the people, practised by the people, in the interests of the multi-ethnic people from all social strata of which the workers, farmers and intellectuals form the pivot.
- Art. 8. The State applies a policy of solidarity and equality between the diverse ethnic groups. All the ethnic groups have the right to preserve and develop their beautiful manners, traditions and cultures as well as those of the Nation. All acts of division and discrimination between the ethnic groups are forbidden. The State applies all measures designed to develop and enhance the economic and social standard of living of all the ethnic groups.
- Art. 19. The State ensures the development of the education and training of new generations of good citizens. Educational, cultural and scientific activities aim to raise the level of knowledge, patriotism and the spirit of devotion to the regime of people's democracy, the spirit of solidarity and concord among the ethnic groups and to enhance the conscience of the people to be the master of their country. The State (...) ensures the development of the education in the regions inhabited by ethnic minorities.
1. Art. 22. All Lao citizens, whatever their gender, social condition, level of education, beliefs and ethnic origin, are equal before the law.

*Source: Constitution of the Lao People's Democratic Republic, published by the Supreme People's Assembly, Vientiane, 1991.*

I've identified some of the terminologies used in the constitution. We can see that "Lao people of multiple ethnicity" are mentioned

in the preamble, followed by "our ancestors" and "our people".

### Box 22 *The Categorization of Populations Used in the Laotian Constitution*

- "Lao people of multiple ethnicity";
- "Our ancestors", "our people";
- "Unified and indivisible country of all ethnic groups";
- "Multi-ethnic country";
- "Citizens";
- "Ethnic groups";
- "Social strata of all ethnic groups".



*Source: Author's construction.*

We have here a people, "our people", which is singular, and at the same time this people is qualified as "multi-ethnic", which is plural. When we say "our ancestors", one might ask which ancestors, of which population group, are being referred to here. Moreover, we read "a people", "citizens", "ethnic groups", "social strata", the plurality of terms used to designate people within the Lao nation also begs questions. Among the factors which differentiate citizens, and which are

mentioned in the constitution, we have for example gender, social condition, level of education, beliefs. All these elements are not enough to make a society, they are still parts of a whole. The only element which is sufficient to form a society, other than nationhood, is ethnicity. Ethnic groups are a social unit, which can potentially form a nation-State. The key difficulty for the drafters of this constitutional text was to reconcile the unity of the nation and its ethnic diversity.

**Box 23** *Elements Associated with Ethnic Groups in the Constitution*

Positive points (to be preserved):

- Beautiful manners;
- Traditions;
- Culture.

Negative points (vocabulary of forbidden elements):

- Division;
- Discrimination.

Elements to be developed:

- Economy;
- Society;
- Education.



*Source: Author's construction.*

On the basis of this text, I grouped into three categories the vocabulary associated with ethnic groups. The first category contains positive connotations, and here we find mention of beautiful manners, tradition and culture. Then come the negative elements, with a vocabulary of forbidden elements, where we can see fear of divisions in society and discrimination – ethnicity seen in some ways as a sub-nation concurrent with the nation. Finally, we can see that there are aspects “to be developed” for ethnic groups but not for the whole nation. Is it possible to bring about development without discriminating? Here again there seems to be a contradiction which the authors have tried to finesse: whilst forbidding negative discrimination which could divide ethnic groups, they have written into the constitution itself some positive discriminations, because the economy, society and education of the ethnic groups must be developed.

What I want to show is the difficulty that the nation’s legislators themselves had in reconciling national unity and ethnic diversity, in avoiding creating divisions among the Lao people whilst recognizing the existence, the fact, of differences. One solution was to present ethnicity solely as a cultural entity: the ethnic group is one which has dances, songs and attractive costumes, but not a social and political entity making decisions about its own future. In fact, this text presents a difference, because the State, the “we” of the constitution, makes decisions about the development of the ethnic groups. The text does not refer to development of social strata, because that is obvious or because the ethnic majority will develop by itself: they will make decisions about their own future, in contrast to the ethnic groups who manifestly need an external referent to determine their fate.

What is your position on this issue? We've spent two days trying to demonstrate that ethnicity is extremely complex, and the same thing is true of development. The main thing is to understand better in order to act better. Inadequacies in development projects often go along with an absence of discussion and consultation, notably about ethnic issues.

### Lê Hải Đăng

In the context of globalization and international migration, what is the relationship between development and preservation of cultures? What is the viewpoint of the Laos government on this issue?

### [Grégoire Schlemmer]

As an anthropologist, I am always interested and fascinated by the diversity of human societies and their traditions. But I still question the idea of "preservation". We hear a great deal of debate about the necessity of preserving traditions, continuing to wear traditional clothing, the danger of introducing television into the villages, etc. For example, currently, the Laos government has a policy of preservation of all cultural elements without a visible political basis: music, songs, traditions. My point of view is that one can help to document cultural traditions, help their development if there is demand from those concerned, or indeed so that the changes are not too brutal, but that one cannot demand that they remain static, because the world changes. Societies have always evolved, and their cultures too, and one must sometimes be wary of the preservation debate which would try to freeze societies in an artificial timelessness. In summary, I think that everyone should be able to express and develop his or her culture, and also to

change it. One can understand that people from these ethnic minorities want to wear jeans and watch television, as do those who campaign to limit the introduction of these consumer goods to minorities to which they do not belong, in the name of their cultural preservation.

## Day 3, Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> July

### 2.3.9. Applied Anthropology and Development Anthropology

#### [Grégoire Schlemmer]

You have expressed a strong interest in issues around development for the ethnic groups, and so we would like to suggest that we cover how anthropology can be useful in concrete terms in a developmental approach.

However, we should clarify at the outset that in anthropology there are no directly applicable methods. It's at the same time a source of richness, and a difficulty, of our discipline that the fundamental principle is that all information must be seen in context. Also, when we speak of methodological tools, these are things that you must think about and pay attention to during your surveys.

Anthropologists accord huge importance to time. Conducting a survey requires a relationship of trust with the individuals with whom one is working, and it also demands that the society under examination get used to our presence and that we ourselves get used to it. In this sense, listening is the crucial point. This may seem obvious, but in many development projects the opinion and knowledge of the people affected by the project are not listened to sufficiently. It's important to interest oneself in the daily life

of these people, not just the information that one is trying to obtain.

Your position and that of the person you're talking to will influence the discussion that you will have. You must be conscious of this: are you perceived as a close companion or an external factor, as having superior status or that of an equal? In every case, to understand truly a society and the people with whom you are working, you will need time and patience, so as to win people's confidence. Your questionnaire must, therefore, transform into a discussion, whilst taking everything you hear with a pinch of salt; we can reduce this to the formula "listening charitably and examining critically".

Another important point is the existence, in all communities, of interest groups. Societies are not homogenous, not everyone has the same interests, and a survey often reflects a personal point of view.

Let's take two concrete examples, linked to the issues of ethnic terminology which we discussed at length:

- Near my area of research, I recently observed a development project which aimed to support the development of raising pigs and chickens in *Ko* villages. To do a good job, those responsible had recruited an "interpreter of the *Ko* language" and they were amazed to find out that he had great difficulty in communicating within the village. But remember that *Ko* is a generic term used by the dominant population to refer to a great variety of groups, using languages which are sometimes mutually incomprehensible. Here is a basic example of the fact that, if you want to work with people, it's useful to start by knowing what they call themselves! Of course, the

managers of this development project had asked, and the villagers had replied that they were *Ko*, because they knew that that is how they were referred to externally. But if you show a bit of interest in who these people are, during a friendly discussion, they will very quickly tell you what they call themselves, and their feeling of not always having much in common with the other groups lumped in with them under the overall label *Ko*. Anyway, without an effective interpreter these discussions took place in the Lao language, and thus only the men were able to participate. A compromise proposal was put forward to develop the activities. After several months, those responsible for the project noted that in fact the activities had made very little progress. This was because no consideration had been given to the fact that it is women who are in charge of raising animals. Thus the plan had easily convinced the men to get the women to do extra work – but the women – who already had to fetch water, firewood, work in the fields, etc. – obviously didn't see things the same way.

There are always relationships of domination within societies, and often women are more dominated than men. We must identify certain factors so as to delete these variables and free the survey from this problem. For example, note that what a woman says in a group meeting is sadly not necessarily reliable, but that you can have a friendly chat with her after the meeting, and pose the same questions again. You're likely to get very different responses. The same goes for the local authorities: the viewpoint of a peasant village chief can be full of contradictions, depending on whether

you're talking to the peasant, or the village chief.

- About ten years ago, my research led me to work on various aspects of the rural economy in Laos, notably hunting and the opium culture. So I had an interview with the village chief, but no useful information emerged out of the discussion. Then I put away my notebook and my tape recorder; we left our official roles behind us and went to eat together. I no longer had in front of me the representative of authority in the village, but a peasant; and, by questioning him in a way that implicitly assumed it was normal to hunt and cultivate opium, I was able to converse with him on these sensitive subjects.

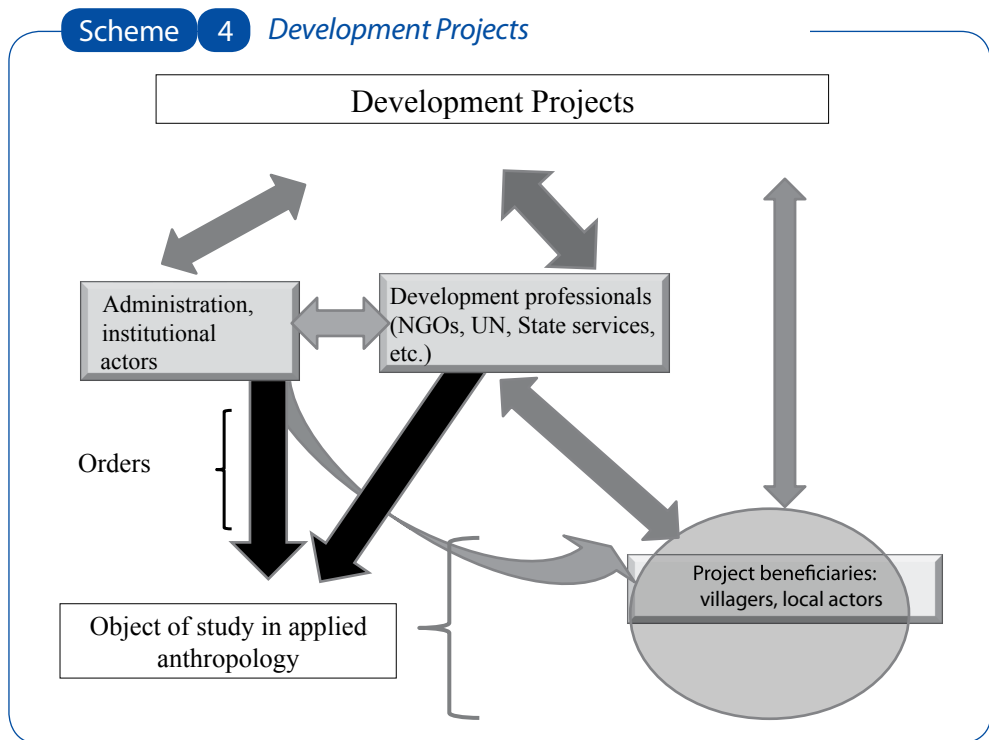
However, in this case be careful, and remember that any information given to you

unofficially can only be used anonymously! We have an ethical code to respect.

[Christian Culas]

We enter into the details of daily life, into personal relationships with the people we study. This is a very important dimension. Never forget that the quality of the data you gather in the field depends on the quality of the confidence your interlocutors have in you. The basic principle is to create a relationship of confidence, so that people will tell you things that they wouldn't tell just anyone. On the other hand, you are responsible for this information, and you can't divulge it no matter where to no matter whom.

Let's take a step back and differentiate between applied anthropology and development anthropology.

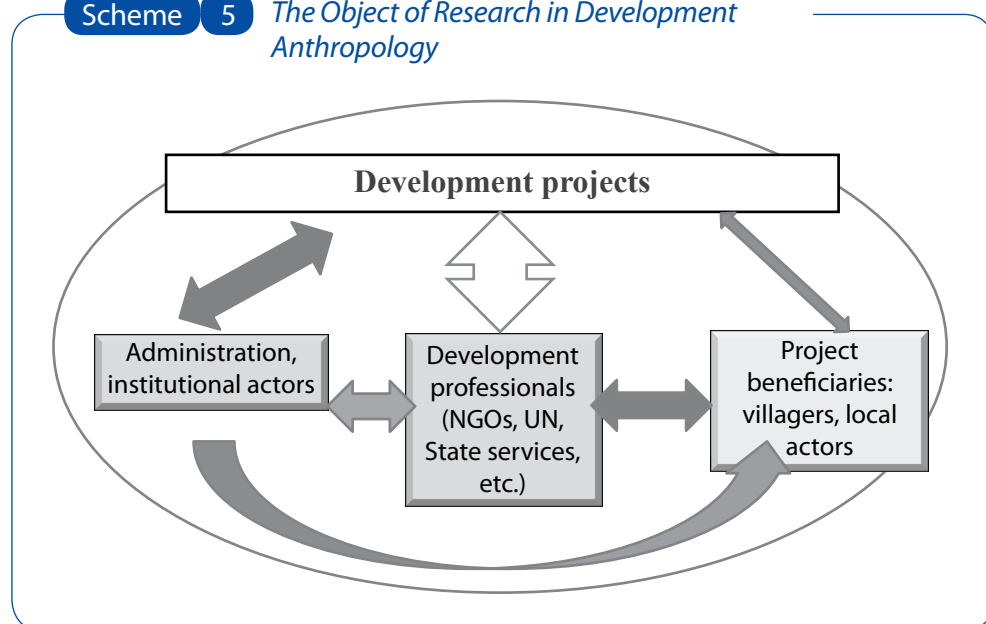


Source: Author's construction.

You'll see on this figure a whole series of elements between the development project and the anthropological study: institutional actors, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), the beneficiaries of the project... The first element to define applied anthropology is that it responds to demand: the anthropologist responds to an order. You will note that the aim of applied anthropology is limited to the project beneficiaries, to local actors. The groups "administration, institutional actors" and "development professionals" are not the subject of the applied anthropological study. There are two main points to note here: the anthropologist is included in the project, and the project is above the anthropologist in terms of hierarchy; it gives orders and controls the work. This means, for example, that if the project managers have decided that the

anthropological study is to be done in only two weeks in four villages, you don't have the choice to say "Actually I'm staying six months to study ten villages". Your task has been defined in advance, usually without asking your opinion and based on little knowledge of local reality. You are responding to orders without having been asked your opinion: this is "consulting". These are the constraints, above all temporal and thematic ones, which are the main limits of this study. In addition, if you are asked to study the local introduction of an agricultural project, and you realize during the study that you need to survey at the district level too, as that is where the agriculture service provided training, you will receive the response "That's not foreseen, the district level is outside the scope of our work, not included in the logical framework nor the terms of reference".

**Scheme 5** *The Object of Research in Development Anthropology*



Source: Author's construction.



In this figure, the configuration is almost reversed. This time, anthropology is at the top and oversees the totality of the project. The position is very different because the anthropologist considers that the beneficiaries, local actors, donors, NGOs, the agents of development – which will act locally –, as well as the administration, will be the subject of the development anthropology study. One of the aims of this particular study will be the links between the administration and the donors, between the development actors and the beneficiaries. This kind of relationship between anthropological research and projects is still very rare in Việt Nam; this approach is much more developed in Africa, Thailand and Malaysia, for example.

[Trần Hồng Hạnh]

How do you view the participation of anthropologists in development projects in Việt Nam? Have Vietnamese anthropologists already participated in development projects, acting as development anthropologists?

[Christian Culas]

I think this must have happened, but within limits. The initiative needs to be taken outside the project, because when the time comes for a project to be evaluated, it is naturally thought that some parts of it are unknown to the anthropologist, for example financing and the drafting of terms of reference. Another important dimension is to put together a history of the project: how was it designed? Was it a provincial, national or international initiative?

The three kinds of actors – institutions, administration, local beneficiaries – are subjects to study separately.

Nguyễn Thị Hà Nhung

From the perspective of applied anthropology, development professionals, donors and NGOs are therefore in charge, whereas in the second figure, they are the subjects of anthropological study?

[Christian Culas]

With a slight nuance: donors supporting studies in development anthropology are often exterior to the project, which allows for more freedom of action. Your question is very interesting because there are cases where an anthropologist is asked to put himself in the position of development anthropology: in certain particularly complex projects, he is asked to consider all the constituent parts.

[Grégoire Schlemmer]

The role of an anthropologist in development projects or in relation to the government can be that of messenger or translator: you need to get across the points of view and the opinions of people who are generally in a position of subordination or domination, towards those who want to make changes around them. You need to master two languages, that of the government or the NGOs and that of the peasants or the society with which you are working. This doesn't imply that you agree with one side or the other, but the simple fact of reporting and translating their expectations, what they are made up of but also how they are expressed and communicated, is already very valuable.

[Christian Culas]

To say development anthropology is a simplification; we're really talking about anthropology of social change and development.

Anthropology examines individuals in a community who are evolving within different processes, and development projects are only one part of the dynamic of change – many works on development study development projects as if the world was made up of nothing but development projects! People do so many other things besides these projects: they take initiatives, they make innovations by themselves, without the need for any hand-holding. One must also understand how the project is embedded in a much wider and more complex context – one must look simultaneously at agriculture, social relations, rituals, ceremonies, modes of financing, etc.

Let's take two examples to illustrate this:

- I was a consultant for the World Bank in Laos in 2000, in the province of Khammouane, on the hydro-electric dam project Nam Theun 2. The terms of reference included a four-week study, with the drafting of a report, in five forest villages of which the population (of the Brou ethnic group) was going to be displaced to "become" cultivators of irrigated rice fields. The team was made up of agronomists, foresters and biodiversity specialists. I was in charge of the anthropological part. My initial concern had been to make sense of the task: how was I to study five isolated mountain villages without road access in one month? I suggested to the Bank a three-month study in this region with a more rigorous and realistic report, but charging only one month's consultancy fee. I received a categorical refusal. I had to fit in with the constraints given; the study was completed in only one month in four villages, not five as intended;
- Helped by the population, the first part of my work was to make a list of products

gathered in the forest: roots, tubers, fruits, leaves, etc. Precise information was gathered on the cultural calendar and the use made of each product. The objective here was to understand the relationship of the population with its forest surroundings. My report to the Bank on this agro-ecological balance was unequivocal and can be summarized thus: this was an ethnic group which had perfect knowledge of its context; its nutritional needs were met. The shift to irrigated rice cultivation appeared nonsensical, and a key factor in the creation of deep economic and social imbalances.

Epilogue. Of the twenty-four pages of reporting delivered after this month of study, the World Bank extracted fewer than ten, which – taken out of context – allowed for every possible interpretation;

- What we are dealing with here is a striking example of research in applied anthropology, characterized by a form of consultancy: short study period, strictly defined tasks, lack of control over the final report;
- Second example: the Vietnamese national programme for poverty reduction in communes facing extreme difficulty in mountain areas and with ethnic populations – P135. This huge project started about fifteen years ago and is now in its third phase. The main objectives are infrastructure development, roads, dispensaries, schools, training of peasants, etc. – financing is both Vietnamese and international, especially from the World Bank. This project has given rise to numerous evaluation studies so as to understand better its impact, but very few studies look at the life and activities of the actors side-by-side with the project itself. Here, to my mind, is a restricted vision – at the least – of

the reality of the populations which we are studying;

- We are leading a study on development, within the anthropology of development and social change, in a commune of the province of Lào Cai. We are looking at the relationships, links and influences between the project and the outside world. These themes are new, although the project has existed for fifteen years, with dozens of evaluations already completed. This alternative viewpoint pushes into the foreground a classic academic and development problem: sectorization. If you work on issues of public health, education or agriculture, you must ask yourself about their relationship to the rest of society, how the population thinks about them and experiences them;
- Our project is embedded in an ethnic commune of the province of Lào Cai, and financed by the AFD. To be precise, we are working on the relationships between development projects, local dynamics and autonomous initiatives – like the choice of which crop system to use. For this study of development within the commune, we drafted the terms of reference; the involvement of the donor was minimal. The time input was programmed over two years (subject to renewal). Another striking difference; this was a scientific production.

### Jimreivat Pattiya

Was there already a Vietnamese government development project at Lào Cai when you chose to study this region?

### [Christian Culas]

That's an interesting question, because in Việt Nam, in the mountainous areas, in ethnic

villages, almost all villages have been covered by projects. The commune we are studying is Tay, a group which is mid-to-above-average among ethnic groups, in terms of the development of the province. We have identified no fewer than fifteen projects in the last ten years in the commune. Our aim was to find a commune where projects were well established, so as to compare them, but at the same time where actors were also developing their own local initiatives.

### Stéphane Lagrée

So many projects in ten years – doesn't that constitute a brake on development in itself?

### [Christian Culas]

Some projects proposed the same activity, just a few years apart: for example water projects since 1995, of which four covered work on water supply in the same parts of the commune. Projects were started, only partially achieved, didn't work, were redone... This underlined the poor coordination between projects over time. And it was quite clear that these activities did not form part of local history: they were seen as outside the reality and the memory of the population.

### [Grégoire Schlemmer]

Development projects obviously have positive aspects, but one of their perverse effects is that they come across as gifts which people accept. How can you refuse a project when it has been decided in partnership with the provincial or district authorities? But the danger is that it will disrupt local initiatives, which is why it's so valuable to work on innovations.

Examples are set out by *Trần Hồng Hạnh*:

- *In the area of health: deliveries of sanitary equipment ill-suited to the needs of the population – unused delivery beds and bags (Lào Cai province);*
- *In the area of education: plans to supply schoolbags to students who lack textbooks and exercise pads;*
- *In the area of food security through training: multiplication of projects without taking account of local capacity (Nghệ An province).*

[Grégoire Schlemmer]

I would take two points from this for our general argument: the value of an anthropologist is to try to understand why a project isn't working; the aim of anthropology is to try to understand a society better before thinking about a project.

Trần Hoài

Since this morning we've talked a great deal about the position of anthropology in the development project. I'd like to know what is the role of the development anthropologist in the launch of the project, in the financing. Who finances the work done?

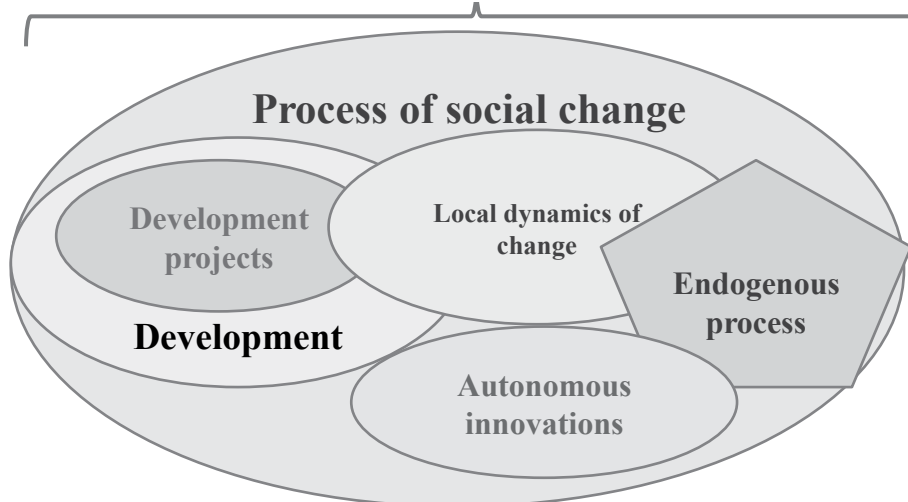
[Christian Culas]

That's an excellent question, which is very hard to answer because there are few development organizations, like the World Bank or AFD, which agree to finance projects whose only output is studies. Our task is also to propose projects which are sufficiently clear, easy to understand and motivating, with potentially strong results.

Scheme

6

### The Object of Research in Anthropology of Social Change and Development



Source: Author's construction.

The anthropologist is an actor in a social group, he designs projects and their aims; he can take as the object of his study either a donor or a peasant.

### [Grégoire Schlemmer]

I think the important thing for you is to be aware of certain keys to understanding during the time when a project is being put together, and even if you are doing applied anthropology, you take a little distance to assess your own actions.

*The trainers divide the participants into three working groups:*

- Group led by Grégoire Schlemmer: study of the text by Vanina BOUTE, "Names and Territoriality among the Phounoy, How State Makes Ethnic Group (Lao PDR)" – text available at [tamdaoconf.com](http://tamdaoconf.com); critical examination of statistical tables: comparison of data on habitat, education and profession in the province of Phongsaly (Laos), classified by ethnic group;

- Group led by Trân Hồng Hạnh: local knowledge, customary law and development;

- Group led by Christian Culas: development of tourism in mountainous regions (district of Sa Pa) – text covering the social transformations linked to tourism among the Hmong, analysis of prejudices towards ethnic groups in articles from the Vietnamese press.

After having worked all day Thursday and the first part of Friday morning with a trainer, each group presented an initial summary so as to prepare the final report on Saturday. The presentations took up certain methodological points touched on during the week, based on practical work: taking a critical look at the notion of ethnic groups, construction and deconstruction of prejudices, etc/emic, etc.

## Selective Bibliography

OLIVIER DE SARDAN, J-P. (1998), "Emique", L'Homme, 147 : 151-166. [on the Internet: <http://www.persee.fr>].

SCOTT, J. (2009) *The Art of Not Being Governed: An Anarchist History of Upland Southeast Asia*, Yale University Press, ISBN 0-300-15228-0.

## Reading ([www.tamdaoconf.com](http://www.tamdaoconf.com))

Summarized adaptation of Vanina BOUTE (2010), "Names and Territoriality among the Phounoy, How State Makes Ethnic Group (Lao PDR)", in *Interethnic Dynamics in Asia: Ethnonyms, Considering the Other through Ethnonyms, Territories and Rituals*, Christian Culas and François Robinne (Eds.), London and New York: Routledge (Routledge contemporary Asia Series).