DIVERSIFYING LIVELIHOODS: HMONG USE AND TRADE OF FOREST PRODUCTS IN NORTHERN VIETNAM

Claire Tugault-Lafleur, Geography Department
McGill University, Montreal

Submitted July 2007

A thesis submitted to McGill in partial fulfilment of the requirements of a degree of a Master of Arts

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the importance of forest products for Hmong highland minorities in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam. Since their migration from Yunnan nearly two centuries ago, the Hmong in upland Vietnam have remained relatively autonomous, relying on a diverse production system including wet rice terraces, swidden fields, livestock, non-timber forest products and, more recently, for a limited number, handicraft and tourist-related activities. In 1992, the Vietnamese Government, via Decree 327, officially banned all forms of slash-and-burn practices and opium cultivation, thus cutting off highlanders from important sources of income. Drawing on qualitative field work, I examine the changing livelihood portfolios and the place of forest products within the Hmong domestic economy from the socialist (1954-1986) to the post *Đổi Mới* period (1986-present) in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province. Then, focusing on one such forest product, by using a case study of cardamom, analysed through a commodity chain approach, I detail trade networks and inter-ethnic exchange dynamics regulating the commercialisation of cardamom in Lao Cai province. As such, this study unravels the dynamic and fluid nature of Hmong livelihood strategies and the place of forest products within these livelihood portfolios.

SOMMAIRE

Cette thèse explore l'importance des produits forestiers pour la population montagnarde Hmong dans le district de Sa Pa, province de Lao Cai, au nord du Vietnam. Depuis leur migration de la province du Yunnan il y a environ trois siècles, les Hmong sont restés relativement autonomes, vivant essentiellement de riziculture en terrasses et d'abattis-brûlis, élevage de bétail, cueillette de produits forestiers non ligneux et, plus récemment, de l'artisanat et autres activités touristiques. En 1992, l'état vietnamien bannit officiellement toute forme d'agriculture d'abattis-brûlis et la culture d'opium sous le décret 327, coupant ainsi les Hmong d'importantes sources de revenus. A travers une approche qualitative, cette thèse se penche sur l'évolution historique du portfolio d'activités économiques des Hmong, examinant plus particulièrement la place des produits forestiers durant l'époque socialiste (1954-1986) et la période post *Đổi Mới* (1986-présent). Puis, à travers une étude de cas sur la filière de la cardamome, cette étude détaille les différents réseaux de commerce et les dynamiques d'échange inter ethniques régulant le commerce de la cardamome dans la province de Lao Cai. En somme, cette investigation démêle les stratégies de vie diverses et fluides des Hmong et la place qu'occupent les produits forestiers à l'intérieur de ces pratiques de subsistance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the many individuals and institutions that have inspired, supported, challenged and cheered me up throughout this entire Master's project. Apart from being an intellectual accomplishment for me, the connections and friendships developed throughout this process are what made this process unique and meaningful. I first thank my supervisory committee, Drs Sarah Turner and Jean Michaud for their insights, comments and useful advice throughout this research project. I would also need to extend a special thanks to Sarah Turner for her valuable ideas, support, and guidance making a welcoming transition to academia. Her commentary on numerous drafts and encouraging comments provided me with essential support. I would also like to extend thanks to Jean Michaud, who, through his longstanding experience with the Hmong has provided me with helpful insights. I would also like to thank Dr. Oliver Coomes at McGill, Nancy Peluso at UC Berkeley and Marlène Elias for their helpful comments on this thesis. Special thanks also to Professors Lan and Phuc (at Universite de Montreal) for their patience and careful instructions of Vietnamese tones. Finally, I would also like to thank Gill Green for his editing assistance as well as Laura Shoenberger and Christine Bonnin for their friendship, support and advice.

I would also like to acknowledge the generous support from McGill University and the Social Science and Humanities Research Council in Canada. In Vietnam, this research would have also been impossible without the logistical support and staff at the Center for Environment and Sustainable Development at the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences in Hanoi – Professor Nguyen Ngoc Tuan and Mr. Dang Duc Phuong. I owe a special thanks to my team of field research assistants for their incredible support and patience with my endless questioning during field work interviews. Most importantly, thank you to all the Hmong interviewed for their wisdom and patience, and finally all the Hmong girls in Sa Pa town for their remarkable kindness and friendship.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES AND TABLES

FIGURES

TABLES

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Whilst predominantly subsistence-based, the livelihoods of ethnic minority Hmong in upland Vietnam are becoming increasingly integrated into the market in ways determined by their ethnic identity, historical colonial legacies, local political organization, and their relationships with the State (Sowerwine 2004; Michaud and Turner 2003). In northern Vietnam, changes in land rights, market opportunities and shifting land tenure practices have raised a number of questions about the long-term sustainability of forest product supply as well as highlanders' participation within the market (Sowerwine 1999). This study focuses on the Hmong minority group, examining more specifically their historical interactions with the forest environment under various historical, political, and economic regimes. With Vietnam becoming increasingly integrated into the global economy via local, national and international markets for agro-food and forestry products, this research also examines how such forces are impacting upon Hmong individuals and households, examining their responses to these market integration pressures. As such, this study takes a longitudinal approach in analysing their changing livelihood strategies and their use and trade of forest products in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, shown in Figure 1.1.

1.1 INVESTIGATING HMONG LIVELIHOODS AND FOREST PRODUCTS

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam is politically composed of hierarchical administrative units. Provinces are divided into districts, districts into communes, and further into villages and hamlets (Jamieson 1993). Each administrative unit has its own People Committee, which represents the Communist Party and acts as an administrative body (*ibid.*). Lao Cai province is one of the most northern upland provinces in Vietnam sharing a border with Yunnan province in China (see Figure 1.1). It comprises ten districts, of which Sa Pa is the chosen field site for this research. At the time of the 1999 census, with a total population of 594,364 individuals, 12 ethnic groups were classified as resident in Lao Cai province (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1999).[1] Within Sa Pa district alone, nine different ethnic groups were officially recorded; namely, the Hmong, Yao, Tay, Giay,

[1] Indeed, the northern mountainous area (comprised of eleven provinces) is a region of high cultural diversity, comprising 31 out of the 54 different ethnic groups classified in the country (Michaud, Turner and Roche 2002).

Muong, Thai, Hoa, Xa Pho and the Kinh (or Vietnamese lowlanders) (*ibid.*). Within Sa Pa district, the Hmong comprised about half of the total population for this district, totalling 37,905 individuals (*ibid.*).

This study examines more specifically the case of individuals belonging to one highland minority group, the Hmong, who are thought to have migrated from the bordering Chinese province of Yunnan nearly two centuries ago. At the beginning of the millennium, the Hmong comprised just under a million people in Vietnam, in relation to the country's total population of 83 million individuals (Corlin 2004).

FIGURE 1.1: SA PA DISTRICT IN LAO CAI PROVINCE (SOURCE: TURNER 2007)

The landscape in Lao Cai province is marked by a steep topography including large basin areas, narrow valleys, and a few mountain ranges as shown in Figure 1.2 (see below). The Hoang Lien mountain range, bordering the western side of the district of Sa Pa (the highest altitude district of the province) comprises probably the last remnants of old growth forests in the entire northern upland region (Le Van Lanh 2004).

FIGURE 1.2: A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF SA PA TOWN (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006)

**Note: the mountains in the background are part of the Hoang Lien Park.*

Lao Cai province's economy is predominantly rural, with ethnic minorities practicing different variants of subsistence cultivation (Michaud, Turner and Roche 2002). Highland minorities such as the Hmong have, in the past and until this present day, managed forest resources for a variety of purposes, despite insecure tenure rights over agricultural land and forests (Sowerwine 2004b). Regardless of the growing presence of the State and market forces in the region, the Hmong have remained relatively autonomous, both in terms of their modes of economic production and socio-political organization, with their livelihood activities geared towards subsistence agriculture, the collection and trade of various forest product, and more recently, handicraft production and tourism (Corlin 2004; Michaud and Turner 2000, 2003; Vuong Xuan Tinh 1997). Figure 1.3 shows a picture of a typical Hmong hamlet in Sa Pa district, with some forest patches in the background. Indeed, forests play both direct and indirect roles in sustaining their lifestyles, supplying Hmong households with fodder, fuel wood, construction materials, herbal medicines, honey, and game (Corlin 2004).

FIGURE 1.3: A HMONG HAMLET IN SA PA DISTRICT (SOURCE: TURNER 2005)

The 1990s marked a period of important changes in the highland political economy (Sowerwine 2004a, 2004b; Corlin 2004). In 1992, the Vietnamese Government, via Decree 327, banned all forms of slash-and-burn practices as well as opium cultivation, thus cutting off highlanders (including the Hmong) from important sources of cash income (Di Gregorio, Pham Thi Quynh Phong and Minako Yasui 1996). With the highest poverty rates in the northern uplands, the State has recently implemented a series of rural development initiatives focusing on tourism development and livelihood diversification (Sunderlin and Huynh Thu Ba 2005).

1.2 OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The collection of forest products from the Hoang Lien forest in Sa Pa district has provided significant livelihood income for the Hmong living nearby. As such, the aim of this study is:

> ***To examine the historical and contemporary importance of forest products for the livelihoods of Hmong highlanders in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam.***

This research aim is further explored via two main research objectives, each of which has two subsidiary research questions. The first objective of this thesis is **to**

examine Hmong livelihood portfolios and their historical use of forest products throughout the post-colonial period. Taking a historical perspective, from the time of Vietnam's independence from French colonial rule in 1954 onwards, I characterise the household use of forest products and the overall importance of such goods within Hmong livelihoods portfolios in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province. To do so I ask the following two research questions:

1. *During the socialist period (1954-1986), how were Hmong livelihood portfolios structured in Sa Pa district and how did forests contribute to these?*

2. *Following a series of market reforms beginning in 1986, how have Hmong livelihoods changed and what roles do forest products now play for Hmong households?*

The second objective for this study, closely related to the research questions above, is **to analyse the contemporary cultivation and marketing dynamics of medicinal cardamom in Lao Cai province**. Drawing from commodity chain and actor-oriented approaches, I explore the spatial dynamics of commodity flows, the actors involved, and the relations governing the cultivation to consumption processes for medicinal cardamom, a specific forest product harvested by the Hmong in Sa Pa district. I explore how historical, political and socio-economic factors have shaped the trade networks for cardamom, analysing cultivation constraints and trade barriers for various actors. In doing so I ask **two** associated research questions:

1. *How is cardamom cultivated in Sa Pa district, who is involved in this process, and what constraints do they face?*

2. *How is the marketing of cardamom organised, what are the trade difficulties faced, and who stands to benefit the most?*

In sum, this thesis details the changing livelihood portfolios and the place of forest products within the Hmong domestic economy from the socialist (1954-1986) to the post *Đổi Mới* period (1986-present). By using a case study of cardamom, analysed through a commodity chain approach, I detail local trade networks and inter-ethnic exchange dynamics to illustrate the social embeddedness of highland trade networks in northern Vietnam.

1.3 NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS, LIVELIHOODS, AND COMMODITY CHAINS

The conceptual framework underpinning this study provides a framework of analysis to examine locally Hmong-forest interactions under changing institutional, political and economic conditions. The conceptual framework used for this study draws upon four bodies of literature – namely non-timber forest products, rural livelihoods, commodity chains, and actor-oriented perspectives.

Non-timber forest products have provided essential, supplementary, and luxury materials to human communities for as long as humans and forests have co-existed (De Beer and McDermott 1989; Peters, Gentry and Mendelson, 1989). However nowadays, the harvesting of forest products is sometimes described as an activity of 'last resort' for lower income segments of a population living in developing countries (Perez and Arnold 1995; Neumann and Hirsh 2000; Belcher and Kusters 2004). In such cases, the harvesting and processing of forest products is generally undertaken by marginalized groups, who rely upon a variety of plants, animals, or fungi for either direct use or sale (Belcher and Kusters 2004). In Vietnam, Sunderlin and Huynh Thu Ba (2005) explore the different linkages between forests and poverty, arguing that forests have played an important role in poverty alleviation in the past. Drawing on such literature, this study details the various forest products collected by the Hmong for either direct use or for sale in highland markets.

A **livelihood framework** focuses on the assets and activities, but also on the access to these, and how these are mediated by institutions and social relations (Bebbington 1999; Ellis 1998, 2000). Rural livelihood studies have contributed to a better understanding of specific individuals' survival mechanisms and household income-generating strategies, including how rural households become gradually integrated into the market (Alther *et al.* 2002; Meert *et al.* 2005; Dorward 2003; Hy Van Luong and Unger 1998). In Southeast Asia, the composition of rural livelihoods is highly diverse and has increasingly included non-agrarian components (Rigg 2003, 2006). In the context of this study, I draw upon this literature to examine the livelihood portfolios of Hmong highlanders in Sa Pa district and characterise their historical use and trade of forest products from the socialist to the post *Đổi Mới* period. I pay attention to the ways Hmong actors

have defined and sustained their access to forest resources whilst resisting endogenous and exogenous changes throughout the post-colonial period.

Finally, this study draws upon **commodity chain analyses** while also incorporating critiques from **actor-oriented perspectives** to analyse the contemporary cultivation and marketing dynamics of medicinal cardamom in Lao Cai province. Commodity chains refer to "series of relations through which an item passes, from extraction to conversion, exchange, transport, distribution and final use" (Ribot 1998: 307). Such a framework will be used to detail how trade networks in upland northern Vietnam are strongly shaped by ethnicity, gender and power relations. In turn, actor-oriented perspectives recognize that commoditization processes are composed of specific constellations of interests, values, and access to resources which take shape through the actions of diverse sets of inter-linked, socially-situated actors (Long and Villarreal 1998; Long 2001). Meaning and social symbols emerge as "the outcome of 'localized' encounters between various social actors endeavouring to define and pursue their own livelihoods" (Long and Villarreal 1998: 736). By placing agency at the center of this analysis, this thesis explores the various power imbalances across different groups of actors involved in the cardamom trade in Lao Cai province and Hanoi city.

Utilising this conceptual framework, this study draws primarily on qualitative research methods as the main source of data collection, in combination with a range of secondary sources. Empirical information was gathered from Hmong informants, cardamom traders of different ethnicities, as well as a number of key informants during field work in 2006 in Lao Cai province.

1.4 THESIS OUTLINE

Following this introductory chapter, I present, in Chapter Two (Conceptual Framework) the four bodies of literature underpinning this study. I present a more detailed review and critique of literature on non-timber forest products, rural livelihoods, commodity chain analyses, and actor-oriented approaches, pulling out key points from each of these bodies to inform my research investigation.

Chapter Three (Context) introduces the broader historical, political and social context of Lao Cai province to better situate my field work findings in

subsequent chapters. After detailing the location and ecological conditions of my field work sites, I discuss the political economy of the province from the socialist and to the post *Đổi Mới* period. I then focus on the Hmong in Vietnam, detailing their migration history, socio-political organisation, and their particular relationship to the highland landscape.

In Chapter Four (Methodology), I present my research design and qualitative approach for this study. I also include a discussion on the unique research environment in Vietnam and the challenges faced by foreign researchers when conducting empirical investigations on politically sensitive topics.

In Chapter Five (Results), I draw upon my field work to examine historical trends in Hmong livelihood strategies and the roles of forest products for these rural households in Sa Pa district, hence focusing on my first research objective. I first explore historical trends in Hmong livelihoods within the post-colonial era, before moving on to discuss the contemporary Hmong livelihood portfolios in Sa Pa district. I detail their agricultural and economic activities, with a particular attention to households' use of forest products.

In Chapter Six (Results), I focus on a specific medicinal plant, cardamom (*Amomum aromaticum*), which has become, in recent years, an important cash crop for the Hmong in Sa Pa district. Concentrating on my second research objective, this chapter details the cultivation, marketing and consumption of cardamom in Lao Cai province and beyond, paying particular attention to how ethnic, gender, and historical factors shape the contemporary trade networks for this forest product in upland northern Vietnam. Finally, in Chapter Seven (Discussion and Conclusions), I summarize the main findings of my two results chapters, discussing my empirical findings in light of broader debates on rural livelihood dynamics in upland northern Vietnam.

CHAPTER 2: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK TO STUDY HMONG-FOREST INTERACTIONS IN HIGHLAND VIETNAM

As outlined in Chapter One, the aim of this study is to analyse the historical and contemporary importance of forest products for the Hmong living in Sa Pa district, upland Vietnam. Two main research objectives help inform this aim. First, patterns of forest product use and trade will be examined historically, from the end of French colonial rule in 1954 to the present-day period. Second, contemporary trade dynamics for forest products will be analyzed using the case of cardamom to explore the social and cultural embeddedness of rural systems of exchange spanning across three geographical and socially distinct regions: upland and lowland Vietnam as well as Yunnan province in China.

This chapter presents the conceptual framework that underlies and supports the empirical research for this study (shown in Figure 2.1). Four distinct, yet interrelated, bodies of literature create 'building blocks' to explore the importance of forest product for the Hmong in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam; namely, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), rural livelihoods, commodity chains and actor-oriented approaches. Each of the four building blocks (rectangles at the top of Figure 2.1) encompasses key conceptual ideas which inform the broader aim of this study. These ideas, pulled from the broader bodies of literature on each theme, are summarised in the four boxes in Figure 2.1.

Key ideas taken from the body of literature on non-timber forest products (or 'NTFPs') serve as a first building block to examine how NTFPs are part of a people's livelihood portfolios, and how changes in resource access and market opportunities affect the latter (Section 2.1 of this chapter). From this body of literature I draw key theoretical concepts to analyse the variety of forest products used and/or traded by Hmong households in Sa Pa district. I begin this section by exploring the definitional debate surrounding the term 'NTFP' (Section 2.1.1). I then detail different NTFP 'user strategies' for rural households in the developing context (Section 2.1.2), and finally explore the development debates on poverty and the commercialisation of NTFPs (Section 2.1.3).

The second body of literature on rural livelihoods (Section 2.2 of this chapter) provides key ideas that together act as a building block for examining peasant livelihoods and survival strategies in the context of the Hmong living in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai

province, northern Vietnam. A livelihood framework offers a structured and systematic approach to understanding how livelihood portfolios are built and negotiated in the rural context by different actors. Focusing on concepts of assets, capabilities and access, this study draws from rural livelihood studies to characterise the importance of forest products for Hmong households, and also how cardamom traders earn a living through the commercialisation of cardamom, a medicinal plant cultivated and commercialised in Lao Cai province. In Section 2.2, I introduce some definitional elements central to studies on rural livelihoods (2.2.1), before focusing particularly on social capital assets, access theory, risk coping strategies and their implication for livelihood sustainability. Drawing key points from this discussion, I present the livelihood framework for this study (2.2.2).

The third body of literature on commodity chains (Section 2.3) provides key elements that together shape the third building block for this study. A commodity chain approach is used to analyse the different processes governing cardamom cultivation, processing, distribution and consumption as well as the groups of actors involved at each stage. In this section, I first provide a definition of commodity chains (2.3.1) before moving on to introduce two sub-sets of the approach; namely production-to-consumption systems (2.3.2) and trade networks approaches (2.3.3). From these two approaches I draw on key ideas which will help analyse the historical development of cardamom trade networks, as well as the multi-sited nature and meanings of cardamom production and consumption.

The fourth building block in this study draws from the literature on actor-oriented approaches (Section 2.4). An actor-oriented perspective examines the local and social meanings of commodities as well as the various political interactions between agents in a given social setting (2.4.1). With its focus on agency and power interactions (2.4.2), an actor-oriented approach is useful for highlighting unequal power relations amongst the different actor groups involved in the cardamom commodity chain in northern Vietnam.

Together, these four building blocks guide my empirical investigation into the historical and current day use and trade of forest products by Hmong highlanders in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam.

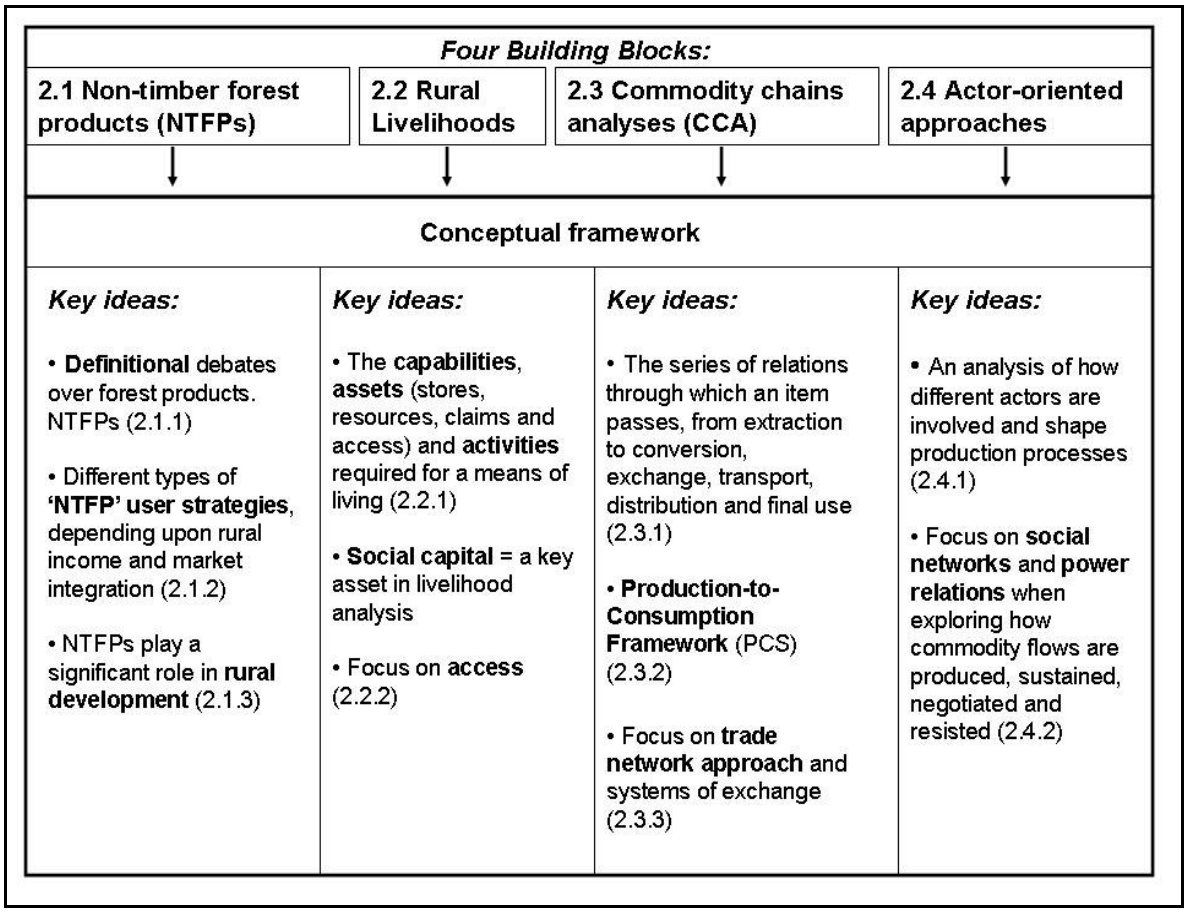

FIGURE 2.1: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING FOREST PRODUCTS USE AND TRADE IN UPLAND VIETNAM

2.1 NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS (NTFPS)

2.1.1 Defining NTFPs

Sometimes referred to as 'minor forest products' or 'non-wood forest products' (NWFPs), the term NTFP is highly contentious, having a multiplicity of meanings, depending upon users and their agendas. As noted by Belcher (2003: 161):

> There are major differences in the understanding of what an NTFP is, and also in the expectations about how and why NTFPs are important. Different individuals/organizations have used the same term, but have modified the definition in different ways as to suit their needs.

In one of the first reports documenting the importance of NTFPs in Southeast Asia, authors de Beer and McDermott (1989) defined 'NTFPs' as "all the biological material other than timber which are extracted from forests for human use" (cited in Belcher 2003: 161). NTFPs thus include a wide range of products, such as plants used for food, forage,

fuel, medicine, fibres and biochemicals. NTFPs also include animals, birds, reptiles, fish, insects, fur and feathers. While this definition has the advantage of encompassing a broad range of products, it fails to define the degree of human intervention on the biophysical system, leaving space for ambiguity on what should be included (or excluded) from this definition (Belcher 2003).

Along these lines, the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has initiated a series of meetings, workshops and consultations in order to refine the definition of 'non-wood forest products' (or 'NWFP')[2] and facilitate an exchange of information about forest products at a global scale (FAO 1999; Belcher 2003). In 1999, NWFPs were defined as "goods of biological origins other than wood, derived from forests, other wooded land and trees outside forests" (FAO 1999: 1). Two points are worth emphasizing here. First, the FAO definition *excludes* all woody materials such as timber, forest chips, charcoal, fuel wood, as well as small trees used for tools, household equipment and carvings. Second, the FAO definition *includes* products derived from natural forests, wooded lands, and plantations from both plant and animal origins – all of which are part of the broad definition of the term 'forest' (Belcher 2003).[3] Products collected directly in the forest (such as wild mushrooms, herbal medicine, orchids, and bamboo shoots) are obvious examples. However, the FAO includes in this definition any products which can be derived from both natural forests *and* plantations. Included in the definition of 'forest' are derivatives from traditional agroforestry systems such as trees and plants which are not necessarily planted but actively 'managed' such as gum arabic (*Acacia senegal*) or rubber (*Hevea brasiliensis*). The FAO also includes products from other wooded land such as *Acacia albida* and the Karité tree, *Butyrospermum parkii*. While these deliberations bring us closer to a holistic definition of what constitute NTFPs, there remains a lack of consensus amongst researchers, NGOs and other organisations as to what to include and exclude from the NTFP definition.

A second problem is that the notion of NTFP has also been problematised for dichotomising resources into arbitrary categories which lose meaning for local user groups. As will be described in more detail in Chapter Five, Hmong resource use in Sa Pa district are based on highly diverse agro-systems overlapping different spaces – from

[2] The term 'non-wood forest product' and 'non-timber forest product' have been used interchangeably in the literature (Belcher 2003).
[3] For further explanation and definitions surrounding the term 'forest' and 'wooded land', see the FAO working paper on the terms and definitions of Forest Resources Assessment (FAO 1999).

terraced fields, horticultural gardens, swidden fields, to forests. They do not necessarily have fixed boundaries between fields and forests, and the Hmong tend to adopt a more holistic view of the biophysical world (Michaud; pers. communication 3/11/06). As this example demonstrates, a broader perspective on 'NTFPs', encompassing both wild and more 'managed' products is required to avoid the exclusion of certain key assets in people's livelihood portfolios.

A definition for this study:

Throughout the latter chapters of this thesis, I use the term 'forest product' to avoid some of the contention and definitional debates over the term 'NTFP'. Drawing from the work by Neumann and Hirsh (2000), Arnold and Pérez (2001), Belcher (2003), and Kusters and Belcher (2004), I use the term 'forest product' to designate ***any biological resource that is harvested or intensively managed in the forest, which is then used for direct consumption, barter/exchange, or income-generation***. In the case of the Hmong living in Sa Pa district, forest products typically include wild foods (mushrooms, bamboo shoots, honey, roots, vegetables and wild meat), firewood, bamboo shoots, construction materials, herbal medicines, and cardamom (*Amomum aromaticum*). Having established this working definition for my thesis, I now turn to analyse how forest products have been characterised within household economic strategies, thus continuing to pull key ideas from the literature to establish the first building block of my conceptual framework.

2.1.2 Classifying 'NTFP user strategies': coping, diversifying and specialising

The following section draws from various NTFP case-studies to illustrate the different roles forest products can play for rural households. As previously mentioned, the intensity of collection trips and human management for NTFPs can vary. Some NTFPs may be simply collected by a group of people while others are more intensively managed by human populations (Belcher and Kusters 2004). The latter is the case for medicinal cardamom (*Amomum aromaticum*), a plant which grows under the canopies of old growth forests in Vietnam, Laos and China, which will be later examined in the Hmong context. Within Asia, many of the NTFP case-studies have concentrated on other intensively managed NTFP systems, such as rattan and resin production in the Philippines and Indonesia (Neumann and Hirsh 2000). In some cases, NTFPs have been traded for centuries; and sometimes even well before the European presence in the region

(*ibid*.). In fact, many of the Asian case-studies reflect relatively stable resource bases and markets for these types of goods (Belcher and Kusters 2004). In this study, I examine both the subsistence and commercial role of forest products for the Hmong living in Sa Pa district, contextualising the household use of these products within a broader social, political and cultural context.

In their review of NTFP agro-systems in Asia, Belcher and Kusters (2004) refer to three 'NTFP user strategies' to categorise different household uses with respect to forest resources. These groups are: 1) coping strategists; 2) diversified strategists; and 3) specialised strategists. In Chapter Seven, this classification system will be used to analyse the case of Hmong households in Sa Pa district.

The first group of NTFP users, *coping strategists*, have a relatively lower average income with limited opportunities for employment (Belcher and Kusters 2004). Households are generally located in relatively isolated areas with limited access to transportation infrastructure or markets and tend to reside close to remaining old-growth forests in so-called 'frontier' areas. Coping strategists work as subsistence farmers and supplement their incomes with hunting and gathering, using forest products more for personal consumption than for commercial purposes. Nonetheless, NTFPs often represent the main source of income for a rural household. In this 'use strategy', household members invest little effort in NTFP production and forest products are simply harvested from the wild, from old-growth forests or fallow fields (*ibid.*). Among this user group, the harvest and sale of NTFPs help make ends meet but proves insufficient to effectively lift people out of poverty (*ibid*.).

The second group of users, 'diversified strategists', use NTFPs more as a source of income 'on the side'; that is, in complement to other forms revenues from farm production or rural wage labour (Belcher and Kusters 2004). NTFPs may be collected from the wild (as with the first group of users) or be more intensively cultivated and households earn the bulk of their income from agriculture or from off-farm labour or trading. What distinguishes this group from the coping strategists above is that NTFPs are important for diversifying income, thereby spreading risks. That is, forest products act as a means of insurance and are important at critical periods of the year in which the income from other sources is low (*ibid*.).

Finally, the third group of NTFP users, 'specialized strategists', use NTFPs as a main source of cash income. In this last group of users, NTFPs provide households with

more than 50 per cent of the total household income (Belcher and Kusters 2004; Ruiz-Perez *et al.* 2004). In addition, households tend to be better connected in terms of transportation infrastructure and are usually better integrated into the market economy than in the two last user groups. Owing to the high management input combined with high product value, these resources tend to have the highest value of forest-production per hectare, and because it is usually considered a economically attractive activity, the trade networks for such goods are relatively well developed. Some contemporary examples include the production of specialised foods such as mushrooms, Brazil nuts, fruits, medicinal products – many of which are traded internationally (*ibid.*).

Belcher and Kusters (2004) caution that the three different categories mentioned above are not fixed, but may overlap with one another. While this classification system is useful as an alternative way to describe household use of NTFPs, these criteria might exclude other important factors. For instance, the agricultural practices of a remote highland village in Southeast Asia are often shaped by factors going beyond the village boundary – such as social networks and the exchange of goods and ideas across local, district, provincial and national borders (Rerkasem and Rerkasem 1995). The gathering of bamboo shoots for sale in the Hmong village of Pah Poo Chom, Northern Thailand, is a case in point (Cooper 1984). The activity is considered ecologically sustainable partly because a new demand for labour in cabbage cropping which has decreased overall human demand on their biophysical environment (Cooper 1984). In this case, an alternative economic opportunity (the intensification of cabbage cropping) has resulted decreasing harvesting activities for NTFPs such as bamboo shoots. This, in turn, has stimulated re-growth of forests in the area. In addition, this particular case highlights the flexible nature of these livelihoods, as bamboo harvesters moved from collecting NTFPs as a coping strategy to a more diversifying strategy. As mentioned above, these NTFP user strategies should never be seen as fixed, but rather malleable through time and changing circumstances.

2.1.3 NTFPs and rural development

Starting with Peters, Gentry and Mendelson (1989), a growing body of literature has shown that tropical forest products provide local people with non-timber forest products of substantial value, leading to consideration of NTFP harvests as a strategy for sustainable development (Byron and Arnold 1999; Wunder 2001; Belcher and Kusters

2004). Encouraged by such findings, numerous publications, meetings, conferences and projects were launched during the 1990s to improve NTFP management and to help create and capture more value from NTFP production, processing and trade (see Ruiz Perez and Byron 1998; Neumann and Hirsh 2000, Marshall, Newton and Schreckenberg 2003, among others). Implicit to these initiatives was that "NTFPs could be used to improve people's welfare in an environmentally friendly way" and that "NTFP commercialisation would create more incentives for conserving forests" (Belcher and Kusters 2004: 1). However, practioners and researchers have more recently argued for a better understanding of the factors (beyond the value and market prices of NTFPs) which affect, in turn, income generation for tropical forest people (Godoy and Bawa 1993; Coomes and Barham 1995, 1997).

The supplemental roles that NTFPs provide are considered to be important for the poorest households in rural areas (Godoy and Bawa 1993). The literature suggests that NTFPs often act as 'safety nets' or forms of insurance for the rural poor, or lower-income segments of the population with less consumption-smoothing options (Godoy and Bawa 1993; Coomes 1995; Pattannak and Sills 2001; Dovie 2003; Schackleton and Schackleton 2004; McSweeney 2005). With limited credit and insurance options, rural household will often diversify their economic activities to balance out income fluctuations throughout the year (Morduch 1995). Consequently, the consumption and sale of NTFPs by tropical forest people constitute one coping mechanisms to reduce risk in case of crop failure (Godoy *et al* 2000; Neumann and Hirsh 2001; Pattanayak and Sills 2001). However, there is also considerable heterogeneity in NTFP collection which is linked not only to income but to an array of "microeconomic, geographic, and household factors shaping resource use patterns of forest peasant households" (Coomes and Barham 1997: 181). In a case-study in the Peruvian Amazon, Coomes, Barham and Takazaki (1999) argue that the level and type of wealth (i.e. land and non-land assets) are a key factor conditioning how forest people use their local resources. These authors suggest that small differences in wealth amongst households can make a difference in the opportunities available, giving rise to diversity and specialisation in economic livelihoods (*ibid.*).

While there is a growing international recognition that NTFPs play crucial roles as 'safety nets' for the rural poor in developing countries, there remains much doubt as to whether the commercialisation of NTFPs can serve as an engine for local development (Byron and Arnold 1997; Arnold & Ruiz Perez 2001; Sheil and Wunder 2002; Marshall,

Neumann and Schreckenberg 2003; Neumann and Hirsch 2000). In a comprehensive worldwide review of the literature, Neumann and Hirsh (2000: 132) argue that "the impacts of NTFP commercialisation remain poorly understood, partly because of a lack of detailed, ethnographic, historically-based case-studies". Similarly, Belcher and Kusters (2004) stress the importance of analysing the local context around NTFP extraction/cultivation and trade by examining not only production processes, but also the nature of property rights, market demand, gender roles[4], the size and accessibility of markets, and finally the availability of alternatives in driving different 'NTFP user strategies' (detailed below). A good example of such studies is provided in historical analyses exploring successive periods of booms and busts cycles and how these affected the livelihood opportunities of indigenous extractors.[5] Finally, it is also important to note that NTFPs create diverse livelihood opportunities for different individuals/groups, often resulting in distributional/equity issues (Neumann and Hirsch 2000; Belcher and Kusters 2004). For instance, some studies have highlighted the role of the 'middlemen' in extractive markets, which are often portrayed in a situation of power *vis-à-vis* NTFP extractors (Peluso 1992). An attention to such market factors is thus essential to understand the nature of the linkages between NTFPs and their potential for local development.

In the case of Vietnam specifically, Sunderlin and Huynh Thu Ba (2005) explore the different linkages between forests and poverty, arguing that forests have played a vital role in poverty alleviation in the past in Vietnam, but that this relation remains poorly understood. Given that forest products are often part of individual's risk spreading strategies, one might ask what are the livelihood implications of changing forest access and market trade structures? Drawing key ideas from the literature examining household-level 'NTFP user strategies' and debates over NTFP and their potential for rural development (as noted on the left hand side of Figure 2.1 above), I explore the historical and contemporary importance of forest products for Hmong households in Sa Pa district.

[4] For detailed case-studies focusing on the distributional benefits of NTFP within communities according to gender and age, see Carr (2004).
[5] See Barham and Coomes (1996) who examine the case of the rubber boom in the Amazon and McSweeney (2004) for a case-study of the dugout canoe trade in Honduras.

2.2 RURAL LIVELIHOODS

In this section, I detail the essential components of a livelihood analysis, thus developing the second building block of my conceptual framework. I draw particular attention to the social capital assets, access, and risk coping mechanisms, which will be used in later chapters to examine Hmong livelihood transformations and power imbalances within inter-ethnic trade networks in upland northern Vietnam.

2.2.1 Defining rural livelihoods

Since the early 1990s, there has been much discussion over an appropriate framework of analysis for unravelling the multi-faceted and fluid nature of rural livelihoods in developing countries (Bebbington 1999; Bouahom, Douangsavanh, and Rigg 2004; de Haan and Zoomers 2005; Rigg 2006). One of the pioneering definitions came from Chambers and Conway's (1992: 7) work, in which authors define livelihoods as "the *capabilities*, *assets* (stores, resources, claims and access) and *activities* required for a means of living". In this section I detail the ways in which these three concepts will help inform an investigation on the nature of Hmong livelihood portfolios in Sa Pa district.

First, '*capabilities*' are defined as the abilities of individuals to realize their potential as humans in the sense of both 'being' and 'doing' (Sen 1984, 1997). Capabilities go beyond achieving basic needs and a good quality of life, but also consider people's ability to make choices, develop skills, and become full participants in changing their lives. Second, '*assets*', the second element of Chamber and Conway's (1992) livelihood definition, encompass different forms of capital people draw on in order to make a living. More recently, the livelihood definition has broadened to include not only the material but also the non-material assets and entitlements that people hold in relation to institutions, regulations and cultural norms (Scoones 1998; Bebbington 1999; Radoki 1999; Ellis 2000; Toner 2003). For instance, Bebbington (1999) stresses the importance of adopting a broad conceptualisation of the resources that people claim access to in order to make a living. Understood as 'forms of capital', Bebbington (1999: 2029) lists five types of assets: natural (environmental endowments), produced (economic and financial), human, cultural, and social capital. The interactions between these different types of capital are illustrated in Bebbington's livelihood framework, shown in Figure 2.2 (see below). All five forms of resources (or inputs) interact with one another to determine people's sense of material well-being, poverty, and their sense of capability to constitute

their set of livelihood strategies. In this framework, assets act as "the vehicles of instrumental action (making a living), hermeneutic action (making living meaningful) and emancipatory action (challenging the structures under which one makes a living)" (Bebbington 1999: 2022). Hence, the forms of capital assets (human, natural, cultural, produced and social capital) can be viewed as instruments for survival but also as tools for potential empowerment and change (*ibid.*). Human agents are also active in the process of using, transforming and reproducing certain livelihood pathways or portfolios (*ibid.*).

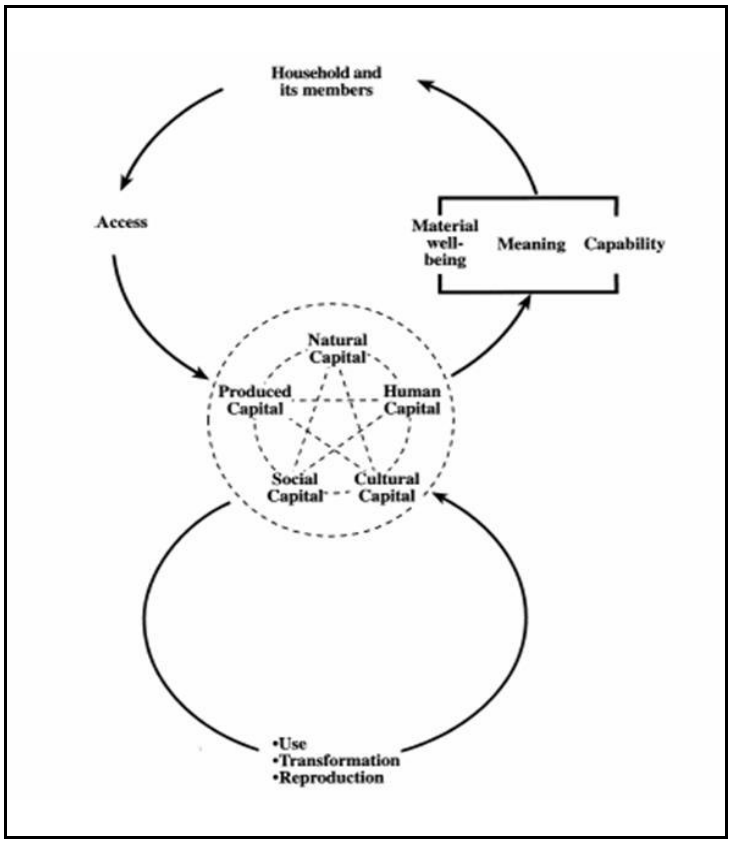

FIGURE 2.2: INTERACTIONS AMONGST ASSETS, LIVELIHOODS, AND POVERTY (SOURCE: BEBBINGTON 1999: 2029)

Finally, '**activities**', the third building block in Chamber and Conway's (1992) definition, refer to the means by which households generate any cash or in-kind contribution to material welfare (*ibid.*). Along these same lines, Long (2001: 241) describes livelihoods as the "practices by which individuals and groups strive to make a living, meet their consumption necessities, cope with adversities and uncertainties, engage with new opportunities, protect existing or pursue new lifestyles or cultural identifications, and

fulfil their social obligations". The cash component of income includes crops or livestock sale, wages, rent, and remittances. The in-kind component refers to the consumption of household farm production, payments in-kind, bartering, and exchange of consumption items (Ellis 2000: 11). To some extent, the notion of 'activities' in Chamber and Conway's (1992) definition overlaps with Sen's (1984) idea of 'capabilities'. All three components of Chamber and Conway's (1992) definition – *capabilities*, *assets* and *activities* – form the theoretical basis for investigating the nature of rural livelihoods in a given setting. Having defined these three foundational elements, I now explore specific sub-themes within the livelihood literature which will guide my analysis of Hmong livelihood portfolios in subsequent chapters.

2.2.1.1 The importance of social capital

In his livelihood framework, Bebbington (1999, see also Bebbington, Guggenheim, Olson, and Woolcock 2004) stresses the particular importance of social capital assets in determining the composition of livelihood activities. Here, social capital is understood as the social networks, linkages and trust utilised by individuals or groups in order to 'get by' or 'get ahead' (Portes 2000; Woolcock and Narayan 2000; Lin 2001; Turner 2007). In turn, social capital assets shape actions which, in turn, "enhance people's ability to access and defend resources, transform them into income, and spheres of markets, state and civil society actors" (Bebbington 1999: 2023). Social capital is vital in understanding how "actors engage with other actors in the spheres of market, state and civil society in order to gain access over resources, to influence the *de jure* rules of access over society, or to turn their assets into commodity bundles" (Bebbington 1999: 2023).

Earlier work on social capital sought to distinguish between three forms of social capital – namely; *bonding*, *bridging* and *linking* social capital. These three forms can be classified according to the scale and nature of these linkages (horizontal or vertical) between actors (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). *Bonding* social capital refers to the 'social glue' or the 'means to get by', and is composed of social networks present amongst family and friends (*ibid.*). Bonding social capital is a common feature of homogenous communities, such as members of the same ethnicity or class status. A second form, *bridging* social capital, refers to more open networks bridging different communities or individuals of different class and/or ethnicity (*ibid.*). Bridging social capital is thus more heterogeneous, incorporating more diverse social networks and forms of associations

between individuals. In addition to these two forms of social capital, other authors have begun using the term *linking* social capital when referring to more associational ties amongst actors at various scales (Woolcock 2001). That is, linking social capital focuses on both the horizontal and vertical linkages amongst individuals and groups. Linking social networks can be seen as a means by which ideas, resources and information can be shared by various individuals beyond the immediate community such as non-governmental organisations, government institutions, and other internal agencies (Policy Research Initiative 2003). Different combinations of these three types of capital (bonding, bridging and linking social capital) result in diverse economic development outcomes of those involved.

Also important to consider are the negative aspects of social capital, often ignored in the earlier literature on this topic (Portes and Landolt 2000). Indeed, recent research has pointed out to the potential negative outcomes associated with high levels of specific forms of social capital (or denser social ties) such as isolation of non-group members (with some benefiting at the expense of others) (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Strong ties within the family or ethnic group can also charge individuals with a range of responsibilities or 'group loyalties' which prevents them from empowering themselves (*ibid*.). In the Latin American context, Narayan (1999) noted that indigenous groups were marked by high level of solidarity (thus bonding social capital), but they remained economically marginalised because they lacked the ability to mobilize resources to shift the rules of the game and unequal power relations in hierarchical, ethnic power based societies. In post-*Đổi Mới* Vietnam, studies of social capital with regards to family networks (Dalton, Pham Minh Hac, Pham Thanh Nghi and Nhu Ngoc Ong 2000; Norlund 2003), small scale enterprises operated by youth (Turner and Nguyen An Phuong 2005), and relocated sampan livelihoods (Da Costa and Turner 2006) have pointed to the importance of bonding social capital, with little bridging and almost no linking being present in their case study populations.

Drawing on such literature, and taking a micro-level approach, this study aims to uncover the various forms of social capital (bonding, bridging and linking) shaping the inter-ethnic exchange dynamics governing the trade of cardamom in Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam. As such, I will provide a qualitative analysis on the form, quality, social norms, as well as attitudes associated with such network relations. Finally, I will

also examine whether each groups of actors involved in the cardamom trade are experiencing positive or negative effects from the use of such capital.

2.2.2.2 Focusing on access

Building on the literature on environmental entitlements (Leach, Mearns and Scoones 1999) and access to resources (Ribot 1998; Ribot and Peluso 2003), livelihood studies are now incorporating more explicitly a political ecology dimension to their analyses. Such studies have gone beyond simply looking at property rights, and have highlighted the importance of extra-legal and structural mechanisms shaping access (Ribot and Peluso 2003). Access theory focuses on all the potential means by which a person is able to benefit from assets, acknowledging the fact that power is a cultural and politico-economic web within which actors operate. More specifically:

> Different people and institutions hold and can draw on different 'bundles of powers' located and constituted within 'webs of powers' made up of these strands. People and institutions are positioned differently in relation to resources at various historical moments and geographical scales. The strands thus shift and change over time, changing the nature of power and forms of access to resources (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 57).

Access theory thus examines how power is embedded structurally within social networks and relations, and the ways in which these affect people's ability to benefit from resources under particular political and cultural circumstances (Ribot and Peluso 2003). This requires examining the "illicit actions, relations of production, entitlement relations, and the histories of all of these" (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 57). Access theory also sees relations between individuals and groups continually evolving, depending on an individual's or group's position and power within various social relationships (Ribot and Peluso 2003). In terms of general methodology, access theory involves:

> 1) Identifying and mapping the flow of the particular benefit of interest; 2) identifying the mechanisms by which different actors involved gain, control, and maintain the benefit flow and its distribution; and 3) an analysis of the power relations underlying the mechanisms of access involved in instances where benefits are derived. (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 59).

Access is therefore an important factor constantly re-shaping people's livelihood portfolios. As power is structurally embedded within local political structures, social networks in turn affect people's ability to benefit from resources (*ibid.*). Drawn into a

livelihood analysis, this helps us recognise different spheres of power over resource use. In this study, I draw from access theory to examine the power struggles within commodity chains for medicinal cardamom in Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam. When detailing the numerous actors and power dynamics in this trade, I identify the particular benefits and mechanisms by which different actors involved gain, control, and maintain the benefit flow and its distribution in the cardamom commodity chain.

2.2.2.3 Sustainable livelihoods? Resilience, vulnerability, and risk coping strategies

In recent years, 'sustainable livelihoods approaches' (SLAs) have been increasingly part of a global development discourse (De Haan and Zoomers 2005). At the center of this debate are issues of vulnerability, risk coping/mitigation strategies, and resilience (Ellis 1998, 2000; World Bank 2000). Derived from the work by Chambers and Conway (1992), a livelihood strategy is considered 'sustainable' when one accounts for the long-term effects of human activities on maintaining the resource base for use by others and future generations.

Implicit to the idea of 'sustainable livelihood' is also the idea that such activities will be resistant to external shocks and stresses (Scoones 1998). It is argued that engaging with the complex nature of people's livelihoods can improve prospects for analyzing situations of vulnerability amongst the rural poor, and consequently help in devising mechanisms which will render them less vulnerable to exogenous shocks and stresses (Toner 2003). Derived from the ecological sciences[6], the concept of resilience has been central to the definition of sustainable livelihoods. Within the realm of social sciences, resilience refers to the "the ability [of individuals or groups] to cope with and adapt to environmental and social change mediated through appropriate institutions[7]" (Adger, Kelly, Winkels, Huy, Locke 2002: 358). In contrast, vulnerability is viewed as the combination of exposure to the latter shocks and/or stresses and having difficulties coping (Chambers 1989; Ellis 2000). Vulnerability must be addressed in terms of exposure to risk factors which affect populations to mitigate both internal and external

[6] Within the discipline of ecology and biology, the term 'ecological resilience' refers to the ability of an ecosystem to recover from disturbances (Adger 2000). Social and ecological resilience are inextricably linked because "institutional structures such as property rights, govern the use of natural resources creating incentives for sustainable or unsustainable use" (*ibid.*).

[7] Within this definition, institutions are defined in a broad sense as including the "habitualised behaviour, rules and norms that govern society, as well as the more usual notion of memberships, constituencies and stakeholders" (*ibid.*: 348).

shocks and stresses (Adger 1999, 2002; Adger *et al.* 2000). At the community level, social resilience is shaped by "the dynamic structure of livelihoods, access to resources, and social institutions" (Adger *et al.* 2002: 358). Whilst increasing income inequality and degradation of the resource base undermines social resilience, diversification and increasing income levels have the opposite effect (*ibid.*). Put simply,

> Those who are unable to cope (temporary adjustments in the face of change) or adapt (longer term shifts in livelihood strategies) are inevitably vulnerable and unlikely to achieve sustainable livelihoods. Assessing resilience and the ability to positively adapt or successfully cope requires an analysis of a range of factors, including an evaluation of historical experiences of responses to various shocks and stresses (Scoones 1998: 6).

Finally, risk coping strategies include those mechanisms utilised by individuals and/or groups facing rapid environmental, social, economical and political change. The latter include, among others, income and asset diversification, specialization and building forms of insurance in times of need (Fafchamps 1999; Ellis 2000; World Bank 2000).

As described in Section 2.1.3, it has been increasingly shown that forest products provide a form of coping strategy or a means of insurance, with these shocks and stresses resulting in changing livelihood strategies. In the context of this study, I pay attention to the ways in which the Hmong in Sa Pa district have responded to various shocks and stresses, and focus on their use and trade of forest products throughout the socialist and post *Đổi Mới* period. Drawing from the empirical findings on the composition of Hmong livelihood portfolios and their use of forest products (Chapter Five), I focus on the particular mechanism of livelihood diversification and examine the evolution of their assets in a changing institutional environment.

2.2.2 A livelihood framework for this study

This study draws from Ellis' (2000: 31) definition of livelihoods, described as "the *assets* (natural, physical, human, financial and social capital), the *activities* and *access* to these (mediated by institutions and social relations) that together determine the living gained by the individual or the household" (2000: 10). Here, assets form the starting point, representing "the basic building blocks upon which households are able to undertake production, engage into labour markets, and participate in reciprocal exchanges with other households" (Ellis 2000: 31). A household is defined here as "the basic unit of production and consumption" (Ellis 1998: 19). The author includes both the notion of

assets and activities but eliminates the potential confusion of the term 'capabilities' used earlier by Chamber and Conway's (1992).

According to Ellis (2000: 6), "individual and household livelihoods are shaped both by local and distinct institutions (for example, local customs regarding access to common property resources, local and national land tenure rules), social relations (gender, caste, kinship and so on), and economic opportunities". As such, I will examine the wider set of power relations (Ribot 1998; Ribot and Peluso 2003) that constrain or enable Hmong highlanders to benefit from the commercialisation of cardamom, a medicinal product found in Lao Cai province. While also paying attention to the broader institutional, political and economic context, this study draws from Bebbington's (1999) livelihood framework by placing an emphasis on agency – that is, individuals themselves in the process of livelihood creation. As such, the focus here is on decision-making and behaviours at the household level. Finally, pulling out key points from the literature on social vulnerability, resilience and risk coping mechanisms, I pay attention to the ways in which Hmong households in Sa Pa district have transformed and adapted to a changing institutional context. Using these key ideas, I explore the ways in which the Hmong in Sa Pa district draw upon a wide range of assets and entitlements, and how they have negotiated, built and defended their livelihood strategies over time.

2.3 COMMODITY CHAINS ANALYSIS

Comprising my third conceptual framework building block, this section explores literature on commodity chain analysis to investigate how such an approach can support a study of forest product trade in highland North Vietnam. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the second objective of this study is to examine trade networks for forest products in upland Vietnam. To support this analysis, in this section, I first introduce a classic definition of commodity chains (Section 2.3.1), before moving on to critique two sub-sets of the approach; namely, the production-to-consumption systems (PCS) in Section 2.3.2, and finally trade network approaches in Section 2.3.3.

2.3.1 Defining Commodity Chains

'Commodity chains' have been defined by Hopkins and Wallerstein (1986: 159) as "networks of labour and production processes whose end result is a finished commodity".

More specifically, commodity chains can be seen as "series of relations through which an item passes, from extraction to conversion, exchange, transport, distribution and final use" (Ribot 1998: 307). Such relations are represented as location-specific 'boxes' or nodes that are historically and socially constructed. Indeed, commodity chains examine how, and for whom such market circuits operate, and thus provide a tool for understanding "who benefits from natural resources, how they benefit, and how those patterns of benefit distribution might be changed" (Ribot 1998: 308). A commodity chain analysis (CCA) framework thus comprises four key elements:

> First is an empirical as well as theoretical focus on markets, in lieu of formal neo-classical economic modelling […]. Second is an attention to power (its sources, uses and effects in a socially heterogeneous environment). Third is an approach to politics and political institutions as endogenous to the existence and functionings of markets, with attention to the different market agents involved in a socially-differentiated environment engaging into collective action. Fourth, and last, is the view that regulation (by which they mean both state and non-state forms of control) is also an endogenous feature of markets (Ribot, 1998: 308).

A CCA framework operates at multiple scales, spanning the geographical extent of production, distribution and exchange. Such an approach can be used in a number of contexts, spanning from broader politico-economic analyses for goods internationally traded to smaller, local markets. Since the 1990s, the commodity chain approach has varied much in scope and content with much of the literature focusing on goods and services traded on international markets (Gereffi and Korzeniewicz 1994). While these studies are useful for analysing at global market interactions, such analyses sometimes fail to address power dynamics in trading networks at more regional and local levels (Marsden and Arce 1995; Goodman and Watts 1997; Long and Villereal 1998; Long 2001). In response to these critiques, some authors have developed alternative framework of analysis for examining agency and power dynamics at more regional and local scales, as noted next.

2.3.2 Production-to-Consumption Systems

Belcher (1998: 59) defines a Production-to-Consumption System (or PCS) as "the entire set of actors, materials, and institutions involved in growing and harvesting a particular raw material, transforming this raw material into higher-value products and marketing the final products" (1998: 59). More specifically, the PCS framework "considers the

production, processing and marketing of biological products according to three dimensions: vertical coordination, horizontal linkages and the intensity of the activity" (*ibid*. 57). Building on experiences in the agricultural sector, the PCS framework accounts for the diversity of NTFP extraction and trade activities whilst paying attention to the development potentials of NTFP in any given context. By emphasising the vertical and horizontal linkages between the different actors, one can more easily assess the opportunities and constraints in NTFP systems (*ibid*.). In a review of case-studies from Asia, Belcher and Kusters (2004: 2) draw attention to the following factors in the local context which affect production and trade of NTFPs in a particular environment:

1. Geographic setting
2. Biological and biophysical characteristics of a product
3. Characteristics of the raw material production system
4. Ecological implications of production
5. Socio-economic characteristics of the raw material production system
6. Institutional characteristics of raw material product.

As discussed in Section 2.1.1, NTFPs production systems are diverse, some involving little, and others more, intensive human management. Similarly, the PCS framework accounts for these variations by introducing an element of intensity. As one sector develops for a particular NTFP, the PCS framework addresses the change in intensity for each activity: cultivation, processing, distribution, transport, and finally consumption (Belcher 1998). Following a PCS approach, the 'raw material production' stage can vary from simply gathering in the wild, through moderate wild resource management, to more intensive cultivation. Once the steps of raw material production are understood, the PCS framework moves on to examine the organisation of trade and the role of various actors – producers, processors and traders. Finally, the PCS framework examines supply and demand factors such as the nature and the size of the market, investment flows, credit arrangements, technological arrangements and innovations, policy environment, tenure status and transportation infrastructure (Belcher and Kusters 2004).

As discussed in Section 2.1.3, NTFPs can be especially important to more vulnerable groups such as women, hired labourers, independent traders and indigenous groups (Belcher and Kusters 2004). The PCS framework accounts for these local variations, examining how the production and commercialisation of NTFPs can be shaped by factors such as ethnicity and gender. In one case-study on the harvesting of cardamom near Ba Be national park in Bac Kan province, Dinh Van Tu (2004) argues

that the small-scale trade of cardamom tends to be largely controlled by women, but as the scale of operation increases, men become increasingly involved. In addition to gender roles, the PCS framework is also attentive to state influence and interactions with local law, showing that conservation initiatives and state policies can affect greatly the organisation of trade and power dynamics amongst actors. For instance, in Vietnam and Laos, it has been argued that neo-economic liberalisations policies have resulted in emerging economic opportunities related to the regional export of NTFPs, consequently generating new pressures on forest resources (Aubertin 2004, Dinh Van Tu 2004; An Van Bay 2004). This fact is particularly interesting, given that NTFPs are usually not even taken into account in national statistics, and often are not taken seriously by policy-makers at the higher levels (Belcher and Kusters 2004).

A problem with the PCS framework, however, is that it fails to address the organisation of trade along a historical continuum, sometimes picturing the organisation of trade in a very static way. As a result, historical factors which have shaped the development of these trade chains may be dismissed. I therefore argue that a trade network approach, discussed next, combined with the PCS framework, provides a stronger means of addressing the dynamism on how these commodity chains are built and change over time.

2.3.3 Trade network approaches

Considering that markets represent social, cultural and political institutions, specific histories of market creation can offer a powerful means of illustrating how politics come into play and influence commodity chains (Peluso 1992; Michaud 1997; Michaud and Turner 2000; McSweeney 2004; Turner and Michaud 2006). In examining highland livelihoods in Vietnam, both the inheritance of the past and the production of new forms of market and state relations need to be linked in research (Michaud and Turner 2003). Complementing commodity chain analyses, trade network approaches offer a tool to understand how historical factors have shaped the contemporary organisation of trade for certain commodities (Lewis 1989; McSweeney 2004; Bush 2004). As such, I draw on insights on rural trade networks approaches (or 'systems of exchange') to strengthen this building block of my conceptual framework.

Exploring inter-ethnic trade networks in the highlands of the Philippines, Lewis (1989) analyses how Burguias minorities have been active in transmontane trade for

centuries, well before the colonial era. Lewis (1989) illustrates how markets have, and continue to be part of the so-called 'tribal' economies, with wealth and social power being the foundation of this trade across indigenous minority groups in the island of Luzon. However, such entrepreneurial-communal linkages are not restricted to the Filipino context, but can be found in many parts of the world. In her study on the dugout canoe trade in Honduras, McSweeney (2004) examines how a seemingly ordinary commodity, a dugout canoe, can nonetheless play significant economic, cultural and social roles for ethnic groups in Central America's *Mosquitia* region. McSweeney (2004) argues that this trade has constituted a form of 'ethnic production specialisation' over centuries, also becoming a source of ethnic identity and pride for a local indigenous group. More importantly, the analysis shows how a trade network approach can illuminate the multi-scaled and multi-sited nature of rural livelihoods.

I emphasise three key points from this approach. First, as discussed in the context of NTFPs (Section 2.1.3), many exchange systems in remote rural settlements are dynamic in that they evolve along with international economic 'boom and bust' cycles (Barham and Coomes 1996). In fact, one could argue that contemporary livelihoods can be seen as hybrid products of past and modern networks of trade (Lewis 1989). Such an approach also demonstrates how individual investment choices are often shaped by exogenous economic forces (see Coomes 1997), operating at different scales ranging from state regulations regarding cross-border trade to informal kinship networks. Second, historic economic capabilities are grounded in people's historical trade experiences within a globalised economy (Michaud and Turner 2000; McSweeney 2004). A trade-based approach therefore synthesizes some of the social, cultural and political strands with which livelihoods are historically woven – thereby recognizing the role of human agency and giving a role to knowing agents who can resist these broader economic forces (McSweeney 2004). Third, an attention to historical factors highlights the specific advantages (and disadvantages) that accrue to people over time through particular forms of exchange. Hence, one could argue that a trade network approach endorses a more endogenous or 'emic' perspective on rural livelihoods in that it can shed light on the set of local practices which play a role in alleviating or perpetuating poverty.

In the context of this study, I focus on the case of the cardamom trade in Lao Cai province to unravel the historically-constructed forms of exchange between highland Hmong and the lowland Kinh (ethnic Vietnamese). My analysis in later chapters will

demonstrate how their involvement in this trade must be placed within a broader historical context of new market integration forces in the northern uplands (Alther *et al*. 2002; Nguyen, Panatothai and Rambo 2004; Sikor 2001, 2004). As such, this study adopts a temporal perspective in analysing Hmong use and trade of forest products in the region by examining Hmong human-forest interactions from the socialist (1954-1985) to the post- *Đổi Mới* period (1986-present).

In sum, two different sub-sets of the commodity chains literature were introduced in this Section; namely, Production-to-Consumption Systems (PCS) and trade network approaches. Together, these two frameworks allow us to explore the political, economic and social factors shaping the ways actors negotiate, construct, and de-construct the various nodes in the cardamom commodity chain, examined in Chapter Six. Key points from both of these literatures (see Figure 2.1 above) will be used in the analysis chapters to discuss the nature of commodity flows, production relations and inter ethnic relations of trade regulating the commerce of cardamom in highland Vietnam.

2.4 ACTOR-ORIENTED APPROACHES

2.4.1 Defining actor-oriented perspectives

The fourth and final building block of my conceptual framework incorporates key ideas from actor orientated approaches. These approaches have gained increasing popularity amongst economic geographers focusing on issues of agrarian restructuring in global agro-food networks (see for instance the work by Marsden and Arce 1993, 1995; Goodman and Watts 1994; Whatmore and Thorne 1997). A central argument to this work is that conventional political economic analyses of changing agro-food systems are insufficient to explain the heterogeneity of peasant's responses. In addition to the institutional context, an actor-oriented approach draws attention to the multiplicity of arrangements and the role of human agency within the latter (see, for instance, Marsden and Arce 1993, 1995; Cook 1994; Lowe and Ward 1997; Whatmore and Thorne 1997).

Within the context of commodity chains, actor-oriented approaches look at how different actors are involved and shape production processes. While some commodity chain analyses focus on the sets of relations clustered around the value-adding activities, "all efforts […] are doomed to sterility unless they illuminate commodities in motion" (Appadurai 1986: 16). Building upon Appadurai's concept of the 'social life of things', goods have 'biographies' and are composed of a diverse set of circumstances and result

from the way actors use or interact with the objects in question, endowing them with specific meanings or values. As such, actor-oriented approaches aim to uncover this 'unevenness' in meanings and values along commodity chains and examine symbolic interactions amongst actors within these socio-economic, political and cultural systems.

2.4.2 Social networks, power and access

Actor-oriented analyses can be useful in highlighting how social networks and power relations in structures such as commodity flows are produced, sustained, negotiated, and resisted (Long and Villareal 1998). As such, the focus is on human agency, meanings, power relations, symbols and values surrounding the production, marketing and consumption stages of any given commodity.

In Vietnam, market-oriented *Đổi Mới* reforms has exposed peasants to new cash crops and other agro-food commodities (Tan 2000; Sikor 2001, Sikor and Dao 2002; Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Ti 2005), and the Vietnamese State has played a pivotal institutional role as a "social carrier of processes" (Marsden and Arce 1995: 1271). In his ethnographic account of the coffee pioneer-front in Vietnam's central highlands, Tan (2000) explores the connectivity between the 'local' and the 'global' using a multi-scaled approach. His study provides a rich account of how global agro-food export processes such as the worldwide market demand for coffee are played out locally and have translated into different meanings for various actors. This change in meaning is what Tan (2000: 61) calls "an uneven discourse regarding the quality of the coffee bean". That is, "as actors are involved in multiple networks and roles, peasants cannot simply be viewed as coffee cultivators along a production chain, but also frontier households trying to survive" (*ibid*.).

Hence, actor-oriented analyses recognize that commoditization processes are composed of specific constellations of interests, values and resources and take shape through the actions of diverse inter-linked, socially-situated actors (Long and Villareal 1998; Long 2001). Relationships amongst actors are embedded in "the various sites of production and consumption, and involve social and discursive struggles over livelihoods, economic values and images of 'the market'" (Long and Villareal 1998: 726). In their analysis of maize husks trade flows and consumption in Mexico and the southern United-States, Long and Villareal (1998) illustrate the various cultural and social values, as well as meanings behind the consumption of an ordinary commodity

across national borders. Using life stories and individual narratives, they characterize the social and cultural significance of husk production, marketing and consumption across both sides of the US-Mexican border. Bringing attention to differential transnational discourses, an actor-oriented approach is used to highlight the multiplicities and ambiguities of social values and cultural identities – a perspective which is usually absent in classic commodity chain analyses.

Drawing key ideas from this approach, I argue that chains and networks are not simply disembodied webs of relations generated by the growing demand for a product in national and/or transnational markets. Instead, meaning and social symbols emerge as "the outcome of 'localized' encounters between various social actors endeavouring to define and pursue their own livelihoods" (Long and Villareal 1998: 736). In the context of this study, I draw on this literature to examine the importance of ethnic identity and class differences shaping the 'social fabric' of commodity flows for a particular highland forest product in Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam.

2.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has outlined the main bodies of literature used to build the conceptual framework for this study. These four interrelated building blocks will guide my empirical investigation into the historical and current day use and trade of forest products by Hmong highlanders in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam.

First, this conceptual framework draws from the literature on non-timber forest products (NTFPs), rural livelihoods, commodity chains, and actor-oriented perspectives. First, the definition, classification, and implications of NTFP commercialisation for poverty and development were discussed, from which I developed the definition of 'forest product' that will be utilised throughout the remainder of this study. Second, using Ellis' (2000) and Bebbington's (1999) work on rural livelihoods, I reviewed three key components of a livelihood framework – capabilities, assets and activities – drawing attention to the importance of social capital, access as well as notions of livelihood sustainability, resilience, and risk coping/mitigation strategies at the household level. In Chapters Five to Seven, my results, I will draw on these ideas to analyse the diverse and flexible livelihood portfolios of the Hmong in Sa Pa district, and how also cardamom traders earn a living through the trade of cardamom in Lao Cai province. Third, a commodity chain approach will be used to examine the spatial organisation of the

cardamom trade and social actors involved, drawing more specifically on the PCS framework and trade network perspectives. Fourth and finally, an actor-oriented approach offers a means to produce a nuanced analysis of patterns of production and consumption for cardamom spanning geographical and political boundaries. Drawing key ideas from this approach will help investigate the ethnic and gendered relations of productions amongst actors involved in the cardamom commodity chain. As a whole, this conceptual framework provides an important analytical tool to examine the historical and contemporary importance of forest products for the livelihoods of Hmong highlanders in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam.

CHAPTER 3: CONTEXTUALISING HMONG-FOREST RELATIONS

In this chapter I lay the foundations for understanding Hmong-forest interactions in their historical and contemporary context. More specifically I detail the physical, politico-economical, and social characteristics of Sa Pa district in Lao Cai province, the chosen field site for this study. Particular attention is given to the highland minority Hmong who play a primary role in regional forest product extraction and cultivation, living in or nearby Vietnam's remaining old growth forests.

This chapter is organised in three main sections. First, I introduce the province's physical landscape, detailing its topography, climate and forests (Section 3.1). Second, I trace key historical events in the northern highland region from the French colonial occupation, socialist rule, to the current *Đổi Mới* period (Section 3.2). I examine the changing socio-economic, political and institutional context of Lao Cai province, and examine how these changes have impacted highlanders' access to land and forest resources. In Section 3.3. I focus on the Hmong, exploring their migration history into northern upland Vietnam, their socio-political organisation, relationships with the land, and economic activities at the village level. As a whole, this chapter provides the basic framework for analysing changing Hmong livelihood strategies and forest product use in Chapters Five and Six.

3.1 LAO CAI'S LANDSCAPE, PEOPLE AND FORESTS

3.1.1 Topography and ethnicity

The landscape in Lao Cai province is characterized by large basin areas, narrow valleys and a few mountain ranges. Elevation ranges from 100 meters above sea level in the Red River delta valley to the summit of Vietnam – Fan Si Pan Mountain (3143m) (Michaud, Turner and Roche 2002). The Hoang Lien mountain range in Sa Pa district, of which Fan Si Pan is the highest peak, has a barrier effect on atmospheric circulation, creating a relatively cloudy, cool and humid climate (*ibid.*). This steep relief and rugged terrain has decisively shaped land-use patterns for highland minority groups living in this region (*ibid*). Within the province of Lao Cai, Sa Pa district is characterized by steep slopes resulting in the predominance of cultivated terraces (see Figure 3.1).

FIGURE 3.1: RICE TERRACES IN SA PA DISTRICT (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006)

Lao Cai province is home to a high number of ethnic minority groups (twelve in Lao Cai and nine in Sa Pa district) cohabiting within a relatively small geographical area. Using digital cartographic imagery and Geographic Information System (GIS), Michaud *et al.* (2002) correlated topography and ethnicity, showing how the lowland Kinh (ethnic Vietnamese) occupy generally low elevation districts in the province while ethnic minority groups, in contrast, live in higher and more mountainous terrain, or in districts such as Sa Pa, Bac Ha and Bat Xat (see Figure 3.2A for the province as a whole, and 3.2B for only the districts of Sa Pa and Bac Ha). Such ethnic heterogeneity is especially important when considering local power dynamics within interethnic trade networks for cardamom, as discussed in Chapter Six.

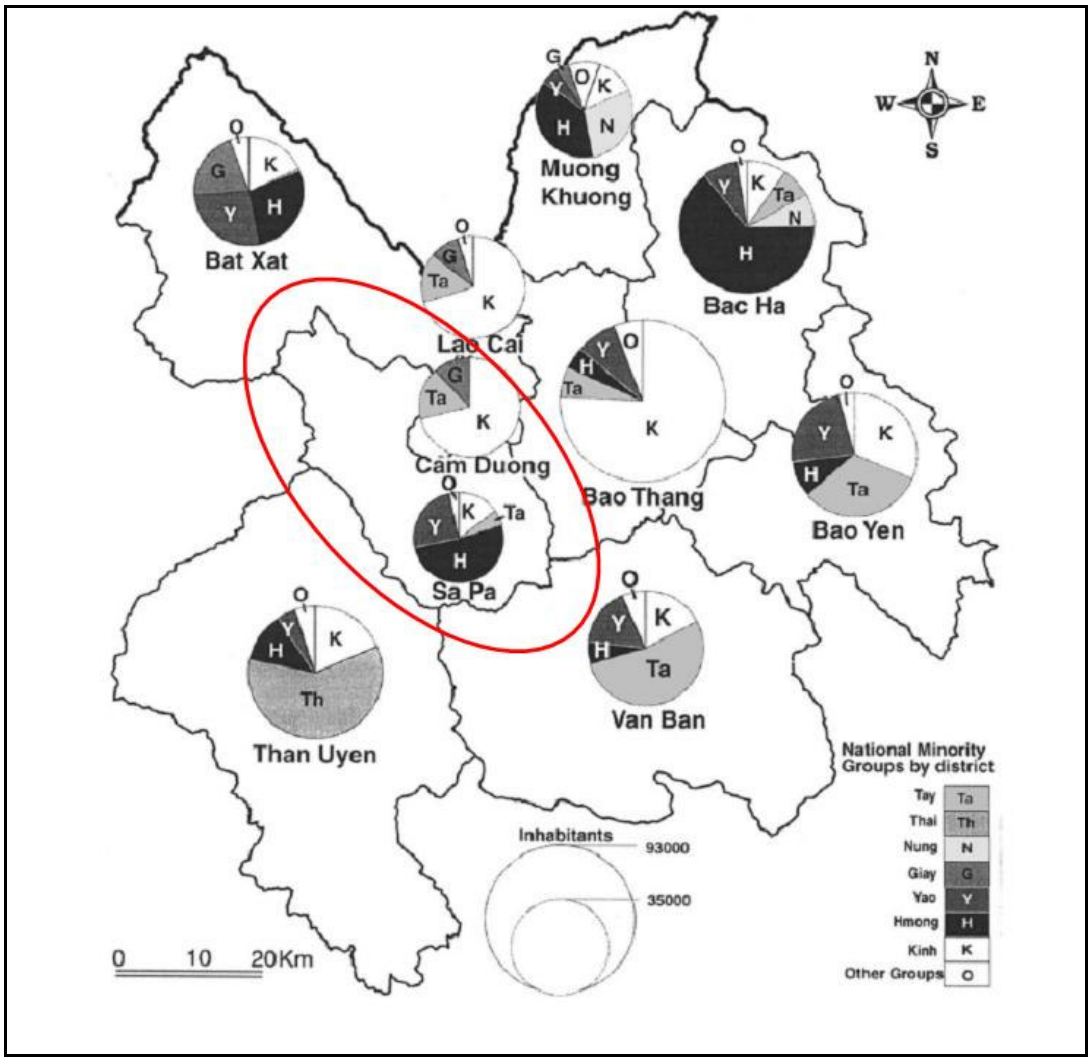

FIGURE 3.2A: ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF LAO CAI PROVINCE AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL (ADAPTED FROM MICHAUD *et al.* 2002: 294)

**Note: the legend lists the different ethnic groups by district. Of particular interest are the relatively higher proportions of Hmong (represented by the letter 'H') found in the districts of Sa Pa, Bac Ha and Muong Khuong (higher altitude districts). In contrast, Kinh (lowland Vietnamese) are concentrated in lower districts and urban centers. Since this map was produced, Than Uyen district has been reallocated to Lai Chau province to the west.*

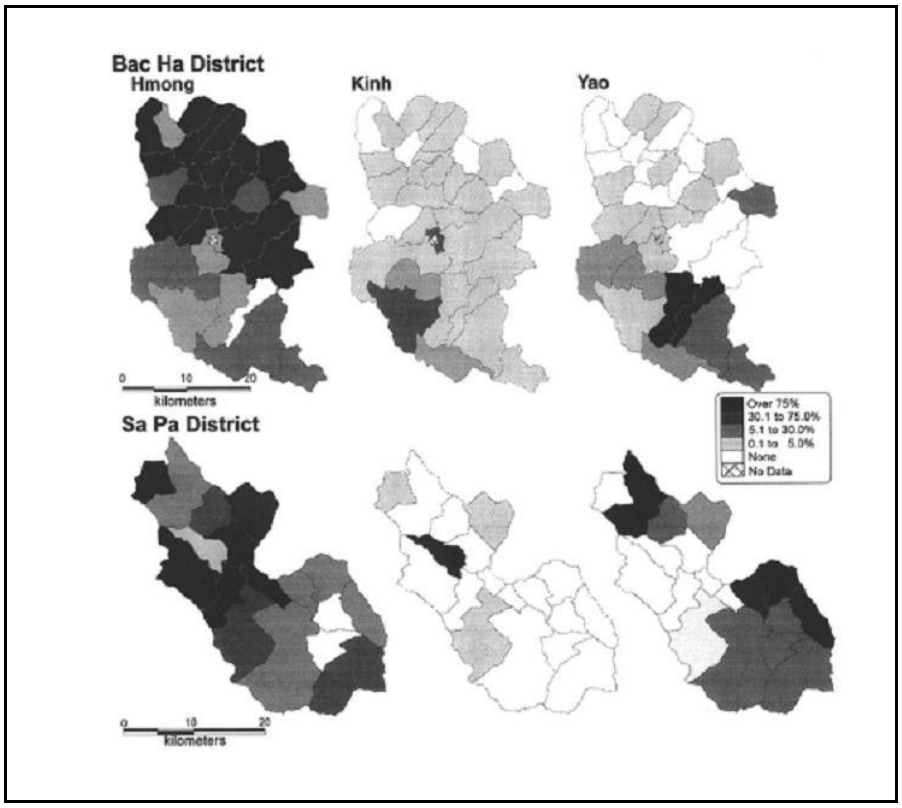

FIGURE 3.2B: ETHNIC COMPOSITION OF TWO DISTRICTS AT THE COMMUNE LEVEL (SOURCE: MICHAUD *et al.* 2002: 296)
** Note: the darker shaded areas (communes) indicate a higher density of the designated population. Both Sa Pa and Bac Ha districts are represented here and, as indicated by the darker shades, both show a high proportion of Hmong in comparison to other ethnic groups.*

3.1.2 Forests in Lao Cai province

Upland forests in central and northern Vietnam are home to 24 million people, most of whom belong to the 53 officially categorized ethnic minority groups in the country (Poffenberger and Nguyen Huy Phong 1998). These ethnic groups such as the Hmong have inhabited in or nearby forests for many generations and forest resources have played a key role in reducing their vulnerability to crop failures or other hardships, providing these populations with subsistence goods and other farming inputs (*ibid*.). However, a substantial decline in forest cover in the second half of the twentieth century has occurred, receiving increased attention from the domestic and international governmental and NGOs. Indeed, from the 14 million hectares of forest extant in 1943, only 9.3 million hectares remained in 1995 in Vietnam (Poffenberger and Nguyen Huy Phong 1998). As such, in the 1990s, the government adopted a series of policies and reforms to promote

afforestation and foster the development of a protected area network (Luttrell 2001; McElwee 2001; Sowerwine 2004).

Lao Cai province includes a variety of vegetation types, notably one of the country's remaining old growth forest. Sa Pa district includes one of Vietnam's protected forest[8], the Hoang Lien National Park, shown in Figure 3.3. (Tordoff, Swann, Grindley and Siura 1999). The total area of the reserve is 29,845 hectares comprising the six communes of San Sa Ho, Lao Chai, Ta Van and Ban Ho in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province and Muong Khoa and Than Thuoc communes in Than Uyen district, Lai Chau province (Le Van Lanh 2004).[9] Its buffer zone area is 38,874 hectares covering 13 additional communes and one township (Sa Pa town) belonging to four districts of Lao Cai and Lai Chau provinces (*ibid*.).

Declared by State authorities as a nature reserve in 1986, the site was upgraded to a National Park in 2002, and comprises a high number of rare and indigenous plant, animal and timber species (Tordoff, Swann, Grindley and Siura 1999). The park is officially categorised as a 'special use forest', and is directly managed by park authorities based in Sa Pa town (*ibid*.). All other forested land within Lao Cai province (and outside the Park's boundaries), including the 'buffer zone' is classified as 'protection' or 'production' forest, and is managed by the Forestry Department and State representatives in each of the local People's Committees at the district and commune level (*ibid*.).

[8] Forest and forest land area in Vietnam is divided into three categories: protection forest, production forest, and special use forest. System of special use forests consists of National Parks and Nature Reserves that are significant to the biodiversity conservation, as standard national forest ecosystem samples (McElwee 2001).

[9] For a more detailed map of Sa Pa district and its various communes, see Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four.

FIGURE 3.3: THE HOANG LIEN NATIONAL PARK (SOURCE: MINISTRY OF FORESTRY, OBTAINED BY TURNER 2007)
**Note: the blue line indicates the provincial border between Lao Cai to the east and Lai Chau to the west. All the green shaded communes are part of the Hoang Lien National Park and the remaining named communes surrounding them are part of the buffer zone.*

In Vietnam, most management plans for parks advocate strict protection for high biodiversity zones, where human presence is, in theory, excluded (McElwee 2001). For instance, the State prohibits the following activities within national parks and reserves: logging, exploiting (excluding activities related to forest cleaning and rehabilitation), game hunting, and collecting any plant or animal specimens under any means and forms (MARD 1997). In the "*Review report on planning, organization and management of special use forest*", the MARD prohibits humans from making loud noise or conduct activities likely to negatively affect the forest's fauna and flora (*ibid.*). In the case of the Hoang Lien National Park, such regulations are posted in one of the main entrances, just outside of Sa Pa town (see Figure 3.4).

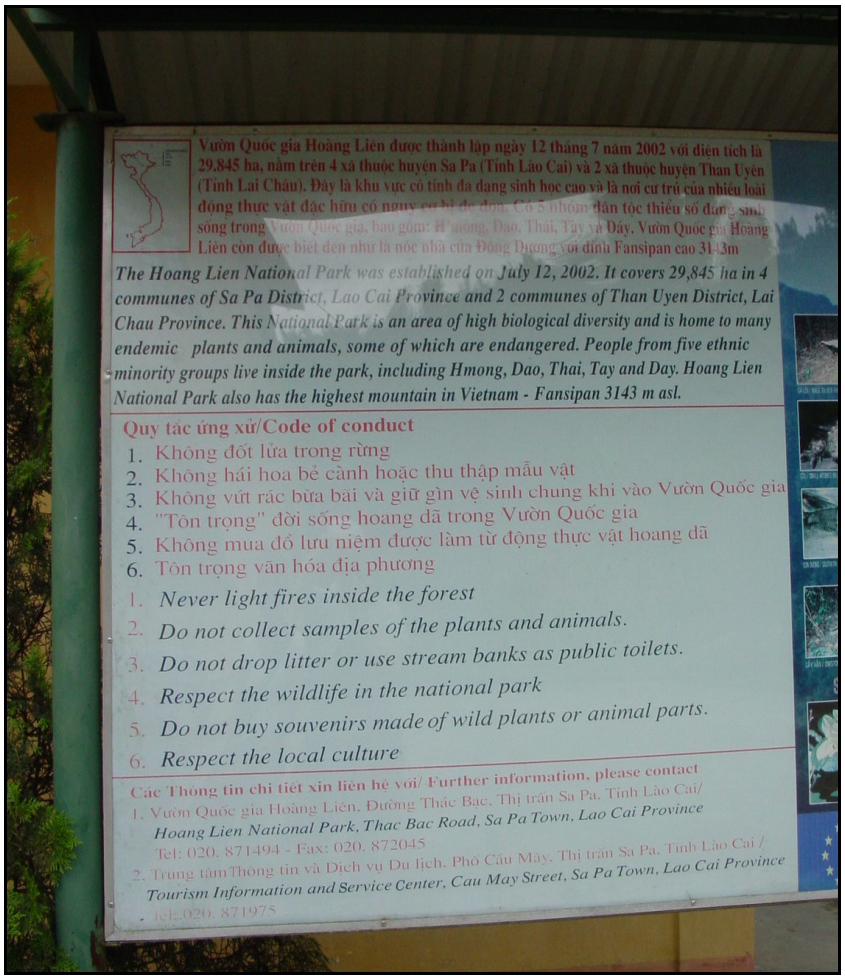

FIGURE 3.4: REGULATIONS FOR THE HOANG LIEN NATIONAL PARK (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006)

When discussing the national park system in Vietnam, McElwee (2001: 4) classifies the different typologies used for protected areas:

> 'National parks' usually consist of a strictly protected inner core in which almost all anthropogenic activities are banned. Outer cores allow for such activities as regenerating and replanting schemes, some 'low-impact' resource use, and recreational activities. Buffer zones that allow for regulated production activities are supposed to be managed either by or with the help of park officials, but are outside most parks' officially demarcated boundaries.

In 1999, the Forest Protection department and IUCN reviewed the status of buffer zone management in Vietnam and criticised the ambiguities associated with confusing, overlapping and sometimes contradictory claims over forested land (Gilmour and Nguyen 1999). In the buffer zone of a park, management authorities are local – that is, at the

district and commune level – and usually include People's Committees, State-forest enterprises, provincial departments of agricultural and rural development, and department of Land Administration (*ibid*.). This multitude of actors has lead to uncertainty (of who can use what resources), frustration, and confusion among the various stakeholders. In Vietnam, the gap between legal and local forest practices remains an underlying source of tension between Park officials (and their conservationist agendas) and ethnic minorities trying to fulfil their everyday subsistence needs (Sowerwine 1999, 2004b). As such, forest user rights are interpreted differently by local forest users, local district and commune officials, and park management authorities.

The Hoang Lien National Park has a number of villages and hamlets living both within, and bordering the Park's boundaries (in the 'buffer zones') Ethnic minorities living in Sa Pa district are allowed certain agricultural subsistence activities such as rice paddy farming and horticulture, but are prohibited certain forest rights such as logging and swidden cultivation (MARD 1997). However, when interviewing ethnic minority households in the region, the divide between land included in the national park and the buffer zone remained unclear. In Chapter Five, I build upon this context to examine further the impact of changing forestry reforms on highlanders' livelihoods in Sa Pa district.

3.2 POLITICAL ECONOMY

By turning now to examine Hmong-State relations in the post-colonial period, I provide the political and economic background for analysing Hmong highlanders' livelihood portfolios, which will be later examined in Chapter Five.

3.2.1 French colonial state (1883-1945)

Prior to French colonial occupation, Vietnam's northern highlands were politically administered by Vietnamese rulers while also operating under the influence of Chinese imperial powers (Michaud 2000). Officially, French colonial authorities came to power with the signing in 1883 of the Treaty of Huê, dividing Vietnam into the Tonkin and Annam protectorates (Culas and Michaud 2004). From then on, France began increasing its military and administrative presence in the northern highlands and the high region was then divided into four military territories managed by four different military commanders. Their degree of authority, however, was never completely effective or consistent *vis-à-vis*

highland minorities (Culas and Michaud 2004). Instead, the French were mostly interested in the economic potential of the lowland areas, where vast plantations of rubber and other cash crops were introduced and, as a result, severely disrupted indigenous land tenure systems in contrast to highland areas. Indeed, as observed by Corlin (2004: 298):

> The highlands, where the Hmong lived, were generally considered uninteresting 'blank spots' on the map, inhabited by 'savages'. Occasional Catholic and Protestant missionaries made their ways to preach Christianity and try to 'civilize' highland communities.

In the northern highlands, French colonial authorities first adopted a 'divide-and-rule' strategy, making arrangements with local chiefs to get some of the local authorities working with them (Michaud 2000). Towards the end of 1890s, a rail link between the city of Haiphong on the coast and Lao Cai town in the highlands encouraged the settlement of French colonists in the Lao Cai region. The progressive penetration of the colonial administration into the highlands eventually led to the settlement of a small Catholic mission in Sa Pa town (Michaud and Turner 2000). At the turn of the 20th century, the town of Sa Pa became a military outpost and, later on, a popular tourist hill station for French expatriates living in Hanoi (Michaud and Turner 2000, 2003). Figure 3.5 shows an aerial photograph of Sa Pa town taken by a Vietnamese photographer, Manh Hoach, active in the 1920s and 1930s. The photograph shows the summer house of the resident superior (at the very top of the hill), and the military station half way up the hill (centre top of photo) (Michaud; pers. communication 6/22/07).

FIGURE 3.5: SA PA TOWN DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD (SOURCE: MANH HOACH 1935, DIGITALISED BY MICHAUD)

The colonial presence encouraged the production of written documents, articles and notes by French missionaries and military expeditions, thus forming the very first set of ethnographic material on highland minorities in northern Vietnam (*ibid.*). However, their contact with highland minorities remained limited and the French were more interested in securing their political boundaries with China than developing the economic potential of the region (Michaud 2000). Indeed, historical evidence suggests that indigenous land tenure systems in these highlands were, overall, far less affected than their counterparts in the lowlands (Corlin 2004).

3.2.2 Socialist period (1954-1986)

French efforts to secure political boundaries in the highlands proved insufficient in resisting communist forces towards the mid-twentieth century. In 1946, the First Indochina War erupted and catalyzed a series of reforms within the political economy of Vietnam (Hardy and Turner 2000). In the 1950s, the collectivization process – in which all land was to be owned and managed by the State – began in the northern region, but unevenly affected rural villages across the landscape (Michaud 2000). The northern socialist regime stipulated that only small residential land and a family garden could be privately owned. All remaining lands became State property and had to be managed by cooperatives or run as State enterprises (Corlin 2004). Each District's People Committee

became responsible for the land allocation process and established an 'output contract system' (*ibid.*). Under this regime, households were allocated a land parcel based on the size of the family and contracted to sell part of their production to the cooperative at set State prices (*ibid.*).

Busy with the reunification war from the 1960s to the early 1970s, the Vietnamese State had little time to review its policy on highland minorities, maintaining instead a patronizing attitude *vis-à-vis* highland minority groups (Michaud 2000). Parallel to these collectivisation efforts, the State embarked on a campaign to move some war refuges from the densely populated lowlands into what became known as 'new economic zones' in the highlands (Corlin 2004; Hardy and Turner 2000). Some were to be resettled in forested areas classified as 'barren land', despite the fact that ethnic minorities were already using these areas and resources for hunting and shifting cultivation purposes (Corlin 2004).

Despite new migrants arriving in the uplands, highland minority groups were, during the socialist period, far less affected by State land reforms than their Vietnamese counterparts in the lowlands and many highland groups continued living in the highest altitude areas relatively autonomously. Indeed, when discussing the changing land tenure regimes during the socialist period, Corlin (2004) argues that collectivization efforts were never efficiently implemented in mountainous areas, partly due to the persistence of cultural prejudice, superstitions, and fear of Kinh lowlanders *vis-à-vis* highland minority cultures. In fact, very few Kinh were actually willing to settle permanently in the highlands and police new collectives. Numerous initiatives and projects were thus abandoned, leaving highland minorities more or less free to engage in economic competition with local and regional markets (Michaud 1997).

3.2.3 *Đổi Mới* (1986 and beyond)

Beginning in the mid 1980s, the Vietnamese State embarked on a series of 'economic renovation' strategies collectively referred to as *Đổi Mới*. In an effort to revitalize the stagnant economy and some of the failures associated with rural collectivisation and the cooperative system, *Đổi Mới*'s package of reforms shifted national economic policies and objectives from a more planned and centralized, to a more market-oriented regime (Lavigne 2000). Officially launched at the Sixth party congress in December 1986, these reforms marked a period of significant change in Vietnam's economy, affecting people as

well as forests in the highlands (Rambo 1995; Neef 2001; Pattenella 2001; Corlin 2004). As noted by Sowerwine (2004b: 99) with regards to the Northern highlands, these reforms included:

> (a) decollectivisation, classification, allocation and titling of forest and agricultural land to individual households; (b) economic investment into montane area development to intensify fixed cultivation and sedentarisation of highland minorities, as well as reforestation of so-called barren lands; and (c) liberalisation of domestic and foreign markets, creating new patterns of investment and consumption of the highlands.

The first legal step towards more individual and private control of the land was, in fact, taken five years before *Đổi Mới* in 1981 with the implementation of *Directive 100*, which shifted the responsibility of production from cooperatives to individual households (Neef 2001). In 1988, the *First Land Law* and *Resolution 10* were adopted, restoring the farm household as the main unit of production, leading to large-scale decollectivisation in many parts of the country (*ibid*.). The *1993 Land Law* then set the stage for the integration of the rural economy within national markets, reinforcing some of the land principles first expressed in *Resolution 10* (Lavigne 2000). Under the 1993 legal framework, all land and water in Vietnam continues to remain the property of the State, who leases land to individual households and organizations for varying lengths of time – 20 years for agricultural land and 50 years for forests (Corlin 1995; Neef 2001). The land use planning, registering and the issuing of legal documents and land disputes became decentralized to the province, district and commune levels, more specifically to the People's Committee office in each commune (Corlin 2004). Land recipients – usually male household heads – were given Land Tenure Certificates (also known as 'Red Book Certificates') giving them five new land rights: the ability of exchange, transfer, lease, inherit, or mortgage land (Neef 2001).[10] The issuing of these Red Book Certificates also meant that the possessor could have concrete evidence of his or her right to use land for a stipulated period of tenure (Corlin 2004). In other words, "even if land [could] not be bought or sold in a literal sense, it ha[d] nevertheless obtained a commercial value" (Corlin 2004: 301).

[10] This land comprises not only land on which a house is built (and its immediate surroundings), but also any agricultural lands such as rice paddy lands and corn fields. However, swidden land such as opium or cardamom fields are not included in Red Book Certificates (Sowerwine 2004).

It has been argued that these agrarian reforms have had mixed effects on the ground, impacting various ethnic minorities on the basis of their historical legacies, social and ecological settings, and relationships with the State (Sowerwine 1999; Neef 2001; Corlin 2004). On the one hand, land decollectivization could be seen as providing more land security for rural households, especially in contrast to the socialist period. However on the other hand, this new system also favours households with literacy skills and those with good 'connections' with State authorities (Neef 2001; Corlin 2004; Sowerwine 2004a, 2004b). In addition, the fact that land has acquired more of a commercial value has opened the door for all sorts of legal and illegal transactions (Corlin 2004). Lacking literacy and fluency in Vietnamese, low economic capabilities and limited access to resources, ethnic minorities have a limited voice and are often marginalised within new land and forest allocation schemes (Hirsh and Nguyen Viet Thinh 1996; Rambo, Le Trong Cuc, Reed and Di Gregorio 1995; Corlin 2004; Sowerwine 2004a, 2004b).

Along with this agrarian restructuring, the *Đổi Mới* period witnessed a number of forest reforms limiting highlanders' access to forest resources. In the northern highlands, several reforestation and forest protection programmes were carried out in the later part of the 1980s and throughout the 1990s (Sowerwine 2004b). Such initiatives have included Vietnam's strategy for the conservation and use of biological resources, detailed in the *1991 Forest Protection and Development Law*, the *1992 Logging Ban*, and the *1993 Environmental Protection Law* (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1992, 1993). The ambitious *Five-Million-Ha reforestation programme* (also known as *'Program 661'*), launched in its first phase in 1998 by the Forestry Department, aimed at reforesting Vietnam's so-called 'barren lands', an estimated total land cover of 12 or 13 million hectares (Poffenberger *et al.* 1998). Ethnic minorities in northern Vietnam are regularly blamed by the State authorities for their 'destructive' slash-and-burn practices while other proximate causes of deforestation – high population growth, deforestation by incoming migrants from the lowlands, and widespread poverty – remain overlooked (McElwee 2001; Pattenella 2001). Interestingly, the vast majority of these reforestation activities have disproportionately taken place in the north and central highlands – precisely those regions with higher numbers of ethnic minorities (McElwee 2001; Neef 2001; Sowerwine 2004b). Many of these programmes have been unable to reach their expected targets, as long-term investments and improved access to financial capital are required for promoting local participation (Corlin 2004; Pattenella 2001; Vuong Xuan Tinh and

Hjemdahl 1996). As described in Section 3.1.2. the creation of National Parks in Vietnam has generated a new set of people-park conflicts. Indeed, National Parks in Vietnam provide another example of how national policies create boundaries between people and the resources which have traditionally supplied these populations with foods, shelter, fuel wood, medicine (Sowerwine 1999).

Finally, as part of the general wave of economic liberalization, *Đổi Mới* policies have pushed for more open market reforms and favoured the regional integration between lowland and highland economies. In northern Vietnam, Sowerwine (1999) examines the changing market structure of the medicinal plant sector and how it was restructured considerably in the 1990s. First, the reduction of health care subsidies combined with trade liberalisation resulted in a pronounced increase in demand for and extraction of medicinal herbs from the northern highland provinces. Second, with the opening of international market borders, a tremendous surge of people – especially women – are today participating in such trade networks and an important proportion of these cross-border flows remain undocumented (*ibid*). While some point to the involvement of ethnic minorities in transmontane trade as a new phenomenon (Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Ti 2005; Nguyen Panatothai and Rambo 2004), one could also argue that their participation has been also historically ignored. Indeed, the Hmong in Lao Cai province have a long tradition of economic interactions with neighbouring valley populations, with market days being sites of both economic exchange and socialization (Michaud 2000b, 2006; Michaud and Turner 2000, 2003). During the colonial period, highland ethnic minorities were involved, notably, in the commerce of timber and non-timber forest products for salt and metals with lowlands populations via the Tai-speaking groups dwelling at mid-altitude (Michaud 2000b).

To sum up, this section has analysed how, throughout the 20th century, both French colonial authorities and communist forces had limited influence on Hmong highlanders, who remained relatively autonomous economically, socially, and politically from lowland Kinh. Despite the gradual penetration of State and market forces into this landscape in the second half of the 20th century, the Hmong have remained fairly autonomous in terms of economic production and socio-political organisation (Corlin 2004). During the post *Đổi Mới* period, a package of agrarian, forestry, and market reforms have impacted upon the highland economy – and in particular, the livelihoods of ethnic minorities by imposing new restrictions on traditional land use systems and

limiting their access to forest resources. Nevertheless, Sa Pa town (see Figure 3.6) remains today a socially vibrant hill station and an important site of commercial and social exchange for many highland ethnic groups living in nearby hamlets. With such a broader context in mind, I now examine the cultural ecology of the Hmong in upland northern Vietnam.

3.3 THE HMONG IN NORTHERN VIETNAM

When studying the political ecology of the Yao, another ethnic minority in northern Vietnam, Sowerwine (2004a: 369) describes the relationship between those highlanders, their natural environment, and the broader political economy as constituents of their "environmental imaginaries". The latter are defined as the ways in which "people view and classify their landscape, their knowledge of ecosystem processes, and the gendered ways that people work, manage, and shift through the landscape for economic or medicinal needs" (*ibid.*: 370). These perceptions evolve constantly, being a product of both historical constraints and opportunities related to disease/health, economic strategy, ecology, gender relations, property relations and spirits/religion (*ibid.*).

As a result of their particular historical legacies, the Hmong remain culturally distinct from the Kinh (the lowland Vietnamese). In other words, the Hmong in Vietnam have unique environmental imaginaries – or a set of economic practices, political organisations, as well as spiritual cosmologies in remembrance of their past in remote Chinese hinterlands (Michaud *et al.* 2002). Setting the context for an analysis of Hmong forest use in Sa Pa district in Chapter Five, this section deals more broadly with Hmong ethnic minority group in Vietnam and details their migration and settlement history, socio-political organisation, and finally their unique spiritual connections to the highland landscape.

3.3.1 History and population dynamics

Of the many highland tribes which emigrated south from China into the Vietnamese portion of the Southeast Asian Massif, the Hmong are probably the most recent migrant group (Culas and Michaud 2004; Michaud 2006). In contrast to the Tay ethnic group and other highland minorities (who are thought to have migrated between one and two thousand years ago), the Hmong and the Yao are thought to have migrated from Yunnan province, China, only in the late 18th and 19th century respectively (Michaud 2006). The

exact geographical origin of the Hmong 'homeland' remains ambiguous, partly because of the lack of clarity as to the ethnic identity of those groups by colonial authorities (*ibid*.). As early as 2,679 BC, some Chinese annals make reference to the *Miao*, a term used by the Chinese when referring to all non-Han populations inhabiting the southern mountain chain (Michaud 2000). These southern tribes – *Miao* or *Mans* – had been banished from the Central Yangtze plains to Northwest Kansu by Yii the Great during the years 2,205-2,198 BC (Cooper 1998).

Geddes (1976) highlights the importance of examining the political and economic regime changes within China in order to understand the past and contemporary *Miao* migrations into the Southeast Asian Peninsula. Between the 17th and the 19th centuries, China experienced rapid demographic growth, pushing many members of the Han population from the densely populated lowlands into the mountain ranges and high plateaus already occupied by highland groups (Cooper 1998; Culas and Michaud 2004). Taxation, rebellions, repressions and Han migration waves into these frontier areas became a growing source of conflict and political disorder, which contributed in pushing highland populations further south, down and across the mountain ranges of Yunnan, Ghizhou and Sichuan. Throughout the 19th century, the highland region in the Southeast Asian Peninsula continued to experience political unrest and conflict (Michaud 2000). In the second half of the 19th century, European infiltrations into the south of China for missionary and commercial enterprises hindered the Peking government, who sought to reinforce their military and administrative infrastructure in its southern frontiers (Cooper 1998). Meanwhile, relations between the Hmong and the Chinese deteriorated steadily, resulting in a series of rebellions and suppressions. As a result of this build-up of tensions in southwest China a number of highland minorities from the southern Yunnan province crossed into the southern portion of the Southeast Asian Massif into Vietnam, Laos and Thailand (Culas and Michaud 2004).

Colonial archives reporting the *Miao* presence in the Indochina Peninsula date as far back as 1860, which coincides roughly with the arrival of the French military missions into upland Tonkin (Michaud 2000a). In Vietnam, the first written reports of *Miao* groups date from the second half of the 19th century although migration waves could have occurred as early as four centuries ago (*ibid.*). These migration waves generally took the form of pioneering households grouped together, who started clearing some forest to grow crops such as dry rice, maize, and opium (*ibid*.).

3.3.2 The Hmong kinship system and relations with the land

Belonging to the Austro-Asiatic language family, the Hmong in northern Vietnam generally live in mono-clanic hamlets and practice a form of exogamy in which spouses are found from outside patrilineal descent groups, and hence outside the hamlet (Michaud and Turner 2000). Traditional Hmong society is bound by kinship with a group of patriarchal families worshipping the same ancestral spirit (Michaud and Culas 2000; Vuong Duy Quang 2004). That is, the Hmong are related to each other "primarily through blood ties and alliance, not through geographic proximity or political affinities" (Michaud and Culas 2000: 114). In this system, families in the same lineage can expect to rely on each other for mutual assistance, although families in the lineage act as independent economic units (Pham Quang Hoan 1995). This form of organization also concentrates power in the household head, whom determines the course of action for himself and his immediate family (Michaud and Culas 2004). The *xeem*, or patronymic clan, forms "the basis of all social interactions and individuals are primarily classified according to their membership in a particular clan" (Tapp 1989: 19). The clanic exogamy rule mandates young adults to seek a marriage partner outside their patronymic group. Given that most highland hamlets are mono-clanic, highland market places constitute a prime space in which young individuals can meet potential partners (Michaud and Turner 2000). Figure 3.7 shows a crowd of young Hmong coming to the busy Sunday Sa Pa marketplace, the girls wearing their household's finest silver jewellery.

FIGURE 3.7: HMONG YOUTH IN THE SUNDAY SA PA MARKETPLACE (SOURCE: TURNER 2005)

In Hmong traditional society, the village (*jiao*) is the basic unit of organisation and each hamlet usually bears the name of the person or family who founded the settlement (Pham Quan Hoan 1995). Moreover, the kinship group leader is in charge of supervising the conduct of clan members and can administer punishments in case of the violation to customary social rules. These punishments often consist of fines in money, silver or livestock. Finally, the kinship group leader is in charge of deciding if, when and where the group should move to another place (Pham Quang Hoan 1995, 1997).

The relationship of a Hmong kinship group to its land and environment is complex and varies with the location and types of subsistence agriculture (Corlin 2004). Customary laws provide the rights and the duties of members of the kinship group and govern access to resources. As described by Vuong Duy Quang (2004: 325):

> In Vietnam, each Hmong household exploits its land and has a right of ownership to it. The village as a community has no right of ownership and cannot interfere with the land of individual families. People outside the kinship circle have no right to infringe on this land or interfere with its use. The land management of the Hmong does not traditionally acknowledge limits based on geographical administration, including district, provincial or state borders.

Similarly, during my field work in Sa Pa district amongst Hmong hamlets, I observed that Hmong traditional land tenure rights seemed to rely entirely on the household. In addition, over time and through inheritance and blood alliances, a Hmong family often 'owns' land and swiddens in another village, or in another district. Traditional land tenure systems thus operated differently than in modern State systems of land classification and control (Corlin 2004).

Hmong individuals understand that forests, upon which they rely heavily for forest product collection and swidden cultivation, cannot be exploited unsustainably. As such slash-and-burn practices are regulated by each village committee composed of various male household heads, and there are specific punishments for those who break these rules (Pham Quang Hoan 1995). Before 1954, each village was headed by a *seo phai*, who usually was the head of the dominant kinship group, and enjoyed great influence and whose duty was to maintain order within the village (*ibid*.) Two meetings were held regularly every year to discuss and resolve common issues, including the allocation of forest land to each kinship group for production and for preventing potential conflicts; stipulating the appropriate time for village cattle to wander freely to ensure the safety of crops; and also determining the forest where wood and bamboo could be collected for house construction. In Hmong customary resource management system, "swidden cultivation is the affair of every individual household, but any Hmong community counts on the lineage and clans to exert control over its members" (Vuong Duy Quang 2004: 330). In the case of forest land cleared for cultivation, the household or the individual that cleared it maintains user rights over his or her land (Pham Quang Hoan 1995).[11] Such rules also applied, in the past, to opium poppy fields which were cultivated on a long-term basis, and rights of inheritance belonged to the household, even if left in fallow (*ibid*.).

The Hmong kinship group is also traditionally responsible for conserving forests near mountaintops and close to bodies of water in order to protect watersheds and prevent landslides and erosion (Vuong Xuan Tinh and Hjemdahl 1997; Corlin 2004; Vuong Duy Quang 2004). Indeed, the Hmong attach great importance to water resources and have strict regulations and punishments in accordance to their customary laws (Pham Quang Hoan 1997). For instance, it is forbidden to bathe, wash clothes, or slaughter cattle at the

[11] User land rights are generally transmitted from father to son although there are some cases in which women such as widows will inherit the land from their husband.

he he, or at the source of water (*ibid.*). In terms of forest protection, customary rules are reinforced at the village-level through an annual oath-taking ceremony (*Nào Sùng*) held every few years (Pham Quang Hoan 1995, 1997; Vuong Duy Quang 2004). Deeply embedded in oral traditions, detailed regulations are adopted by community members regarding the exploitation of forests and forest lands around the village. For instance, community members designate the specific forest areas that cannot be exploited, such as forest areas at water sources. However, forest products such as fire wood, medicinal plants and wild foods are considered 'common-pool' resources and may be collected by all families within a community (Pham Quang Hoan 1997).

3.3.2.1 Geomancy

In Hmong tradition, land is not a commodity that can be bought or sold. Rather, the territory and it resources – water, vegetation, and game – belong to the ancestral spirit of the locality, and the living humans are simply the stewards of this land" (Corlin 2004: 305). Geomancy refers to a belief that the landscape is imbued with powers affecting people's fortunes (Tapp 1989). A Taoist belief imported from the Chinese *feng-shui* system, the Hmong as well as many other highland minority groups in northern Vietnam such as the Yao, hold the spiritual belief that mountains, waters and special 'points' within the landscape are imbued with specific powers and meanings, which are in turn responsible for a person's fortune. In northern Thailand, Tapp (1989: 149) illustrates the critical role of geomancy for the Hmong in explaining villagers' attitude towards "externally-induced development, natural misfortunes such as droughts and floods, and the contest between members of different ethnic groups for control over land-use systems". In terms of its implications for human-environment relations, the concept of geomancy illustrates the special attachment that Hmong individuals may hold with regards to a particular place. In this cosmological framework, people confer powers to the spirits embedded in the landscape to determine their fortunes (Corlin 2004).

Corlin (2004) sums up the traditional Hmong view of the environment by explaining that they tend to make a distinction between 'culture' and 'nature'. Culture is represented by the local human-manipulated habitat with its swidden fields and rice terraces, as well as society itself, governed by the clan system and customary laws. 'Culture' or society is then contrasted with 'nature', the outside wilderness of the 'untouched', with its wild spirits. Corlin (2004) uses the land metaphor as a way of

reflecting the intricate understanding by the Hmong of the ecological conditions of an area. He argues that the Hmong agro-ecological systems can be seen as "a compromise between two needs: the need for food and the necessities for life yet also a deep respect for nature and its spirits on the other" (Corlin 2004: 309). Social mechanisms regulating social and environmental decisions show a respect towards the land, forests and crops, and further contribute in maintaining law and order in Hmong traditional society (Pham Quang Hoan 1995, 1997).

3.3.3 Economic activities[12]

Living in the highest elevation areas of Vietnam, the Hmong rely on a composite production system which includes rice terraces, corn and swidden fields, forest products and many other complementary crops for subsistence foods. The Hmong have had a long tradition of sedentary agriculture both before and after their migration from Yunnan, despite the fact that they are often commonly referred to as 'semi-nomadic' people by State authorities (Culas and Michaud 2004). Indeed, the Hmong have generally favoured rice paddy over swidden cultivation wherever natural conditions allow them to do so (Corlin 2004). Figure 3.8 shows a typical Hmong house with surrounding rice paddy fields, horticultural gardens. Corn and planted bamboo trees are planted on the steeper slopes behind the house.

FIGURE 3.8: HMONG HOUSES IN LAO CHAI COMMUNE (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006)

[12] More detailed livelihood portfolios specific to the Hmong in Sa Pa district are analysed in Chapter Five.

Apart from rice and corn grown as staple foods, the Hmong grow complementary foods such as sweet potatoes, cucumbers, calabash, chayote (or 'choko'), green beans, and pumpkins in small horticultural gardens. Next to these gardens or in the village surroundings, Hmong women also tend fields for growing hemp and indigo (see Figure 3.9). It is chiefly Hmong women who are responsible for the sowing, cultivation and harvesting of these two crops, as well as the processing of these materials into usable wear (Mai Thanh Son 1999).

FIGURE 3.9: HMONG GIRLS IN AN INDIGO GARDEN (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006)

Agriculture remains by far the most important livelihood activity and specialisation is limited, although some individuals may develop an expertise as blacksmiths, wedding intermediaries or shamans (Lemoine 1972). Apart from agriculture, other livelihood activities include livestock breeding, hunting, fishing, hunting-gathering activities in the forest, wage labour, and, more recently, providing trekking tourist services and handicraft production which is sold in Sa Pa town (Michaud and Turner 2000, 2003; Turner and Michaud 2006). Despite the fact that many minority people depended on the cultivation of opium as an important source of cash in the past, the Vietnamese state banned the sale and later, the production of opium in 1992 (Di Gregorio *et al.* 1996).[13] As a means of

[13] The sale of opium was formally banned in 1981, but the Vietnamese State tolerated small-scale production until 1992.

gaining access to cash, some Hmong and other ethnic minorities in the region are now selling fruit (plums and peaches), handicrafts for tourists, medicinal plants and other forest products in highland markets. Vuong Duy Quang (2004: 324) has argued that "the income from trade and commerce bring no significant additional income as the market economy is chiefly developed in urban areas where Kinh traders are dominant". However, I would argue that Hmong livelihood strategies are more complex and diverse, and depend largely on natural capital assets and individual capabilities in a given place. An in-depth analysis of these strategies for Hmong households in Sa Pa district is given in Chapter Seven.

3.4 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have examined some of the ecological, demographic, political, economic, and social characteristics of Lao Cai province in order to better situate the context for analysing forest product use and trade by Hmong highlanders in Sa Pa district – analysis which will be later presented in Chapters Five to Seven. As explained in Section 3.1, ethnic heterogeneity is a major feature of Lao Cai province, and its steep topography combined with the presence of forests has shaped the specificities of both past and present land use practices amongst ethnic minorities living in this region. Moving on to consider the local political economy in Section 3.2, I highlighted the politically sensitive relations between ethnic minority groups and the Vietnamese State. During the colonial and socialist period, highland minority groups appear to have been much less affected by the State than their counterparts in the lowlands. However, during the post *Đổi Mới* period, agrarian, forestry, and market reforms posed new restrictions on highlanders' traditional land-use regimes while also altering the context of trade between lowland and highland regions. In Section 3.3, I focused on a particular ethnic minority, the Hmong, detailing both their material as well as spiritual connections to the highland landscape. With such a context in mind, I turn to examine the changing roles of forest products within Hmong livelihood portfolios in Sa Pa district. However, before moving to my results, I detail the methodological tools used to collect and analyse the data for this study in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

Intrinsic to the field work process in Vietnam is the web of power differences inherent to the formulation of research questions, the negotiation of multiple levels of access, the hiring of local research assistants, and finally the multiple positionalities cleaved by ethnicity, age, gender, and class among others (Sowerwine 2004a). In this chapter I detail my field sites, explain my research methods, and highlight some political and methodological dilemmas of doing field research in Vietnam. My field work consisted of eight consecutive weeks in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, where I conducted interviews with Hmong households in eight different communes within Sa Pa district, and with cardamom traders in Sa Pa town and Lao Cai city, the provincial capital and a border town with China. I spent an additional three weeks in Hanoi during which I established professional contacts with my host institution, the Vietnamese Academy of Social Science (VASS), collected secondary source, and interviewed additional key informants.

This case-study draws primarily on qualitative research methods as the main source of data collection. A qualitative approach was used in order to investigate the complex sets of behaviours and motivations, as well as collect a diversity of meanings, opinions and experiences while showing respect and giving a voice to informants (Dunn 2005). This last point is particularly salient when studying the Hmong, a marginalised population group in Vietnam. During my fieldwork in Sa Pa district, I employed a broad range of interviewing techniques to explore Hmong livelihood strategies and the various socio-political conditions shaping their choices. Although qualitative methods are often cited for their lack of generalizing power, problematic narratives, and lack of rigour, I argue that these methods can be rigorously and appropriately applied in investigating complex social phenomena. As Kvales (1996: 244) describes:

> The complexities of validating qualitative research need not be due to an inherent weakness in qualitative methods, but may on the contrary rest on their extraordinary power to picture and question the complexity of the cultural reality studied.

This chapter is organised as follows. After describing my field sites in Section 4.1, I move on to present my sampling strategies and the variety of methods used for this study in Section 4.2. I then discuss my methods for data analysis in Section 4.3. Then, I move

on to consider the unique research environment in Vietnam in Section 4.4 by examining access and researcher-interpreter dynamics. I conclude this chapter by exploring issues of positionality and the main political and ethical dilemmas of doing field research in upland Vietnam in Section 4.5.[14]

4.1 FIELD SITES

Research for this thesis was conducted within the province of Lao Cai, northern Vietnam (see Figure 1.1 in Chapter One). Lao Cai province includes ten districts: Bát Xát, Sa Pa, Lào Cai, Cam Đường, Bảo Thắng, Văn Bàn, Bảo Yên, Bàc Hà, Si Ma Cai and Mướng Khướng. A map of Sa Pa district with the main interview sites is presented in Figure 4.1. The star indicates the town of Sa Pa while the smaller points show the communes visited for household interviews.

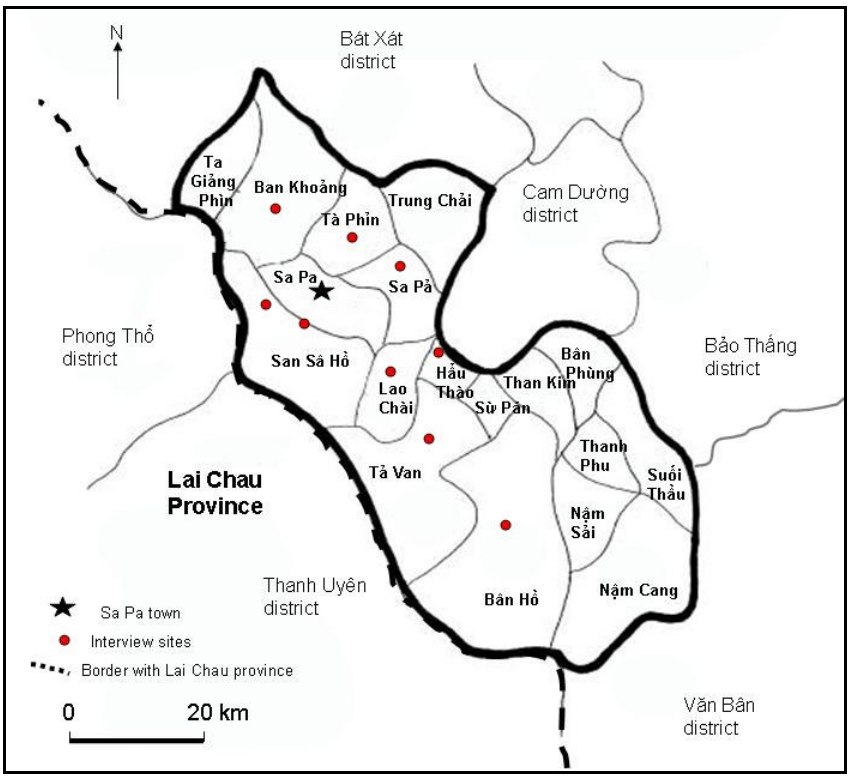

FIGURE 4.1: MAP OF FIELD SITES (SOURCE: ADAPTED FROM SOWERWINE 2004a: 325)

[14] Ethics approval for this research project was granted by the McGill University Research Ethics Board-I. Please see Appendix A for a copy of this certificate.

My field work was conducted within one of these districts, Sa Pa, where I interviewed both Hmong household members and cardamom traders. I chose to focus on this particular district since it is known that the vast majority of the Hmong population in Lao Cai province is concentrated in the highest altitude districts of Sa Pa and Bac Ha (Michaud *et al.* 2002; see also Figure 3.2A and 3.2B). All communes visited for this study were predominantly populated by Hmong living in the buffer zone of the Hoang Lien National Park.

When conducting Hmong household interviews, Sa Pa town was my 'home base' and I made day trips to eight different communes within Sa Pa district. Given the poor road infrastructure in the region, these field visits were mostly done by foot and occasionally by motorbike – the main mode transportation used by both locals and foreign tourists. I was given official permission to visit the communes of Bản Khoang, Tà Phỉn, San Sa Hồ, Lao Chài, Tà Van, Sa Pả, Hấu Thào, and Bàn Hồ, as my objective was to cover all the communes within the Hoang Lien National Park. My official certificate of authorisation to these communes had to be negotiated with both district authorities and each of the local People's Committee offices in every commune.[15] In turn, my investigation into the cardamom commodity chains brought me to visit the homes of various intermediaries in the villages, Sa Pa town, and Lao Cai city, the provincial capital on the Chinese border.

4.2 METHODS: INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATIONS

To conduct this research I drew upon both interviewing and participant observation techniques. I used multiple types of interviews where situationally appropriate: semi-structured interviews with Hmong households, oral history interviews with elderly Hmong women and older Kinh residents in Sa Pa town, conversational interviews with cardamom intermediaries and wholesalers, and finally more formal, structured interviews with key informants. Before detailing my interviewing techniques, I first present my sampling strategies.

4.2.1 Sampling strategies

Bradshaw and Stratford (2005: 72) discuss how often in qualitative research, "the sample is not meant to be representative since the emphasis is upon an analysis of meanings in a

[15] Issues of access are discussed further in Section 3.4.1

specific context". While this may seem imprecise, Patton (1990: 184) reminds us that "there are no rules for sample sizes in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources". For this particular study, four types of purposeful sampling (Patton 1990, 2002) were used, including criterion sampling, opportunistic sampling, convenience sampling, and snowball or chain sampling.

First, *criterion sampling* was used in targeting Hmong households who lived both within, and next to the Hoang Lien National Park (for a more detailed description of the National Park borders see Figure 4.2, Chapter Four).[16] Criterion sampling was also used to select only traders involved in the cardamom trade, either as small-scale intermediaries or wholesalers in Lao Cai city. Second, *opportunistic sampling* was an integral part of my research, giving me enough flexibility to adapt to changing field conditions, but also allowed me to take advantage of the unexpected. Third, *convenience sampling* had to be used because of a limited access due to the language barrier. All Hmong household respondents for this study were selected while conducting walks in hamlets. Women are traditionally more involved in labour tasks within and around the immediate household sphere whereas men are involved in labour tasks in village surroundings and forests. Hence, women were more often near their homes during the day and were more readily available to talk. Fourth, a *snowball sampling* approach was used when identifying cardamom traders at different nodes in the cardamom commodity chain, as cases were identified from people who knew other cardamom traders in Sa Pa town and Lao Cai city. Each informant was given a code name to protect their identity (for a more detailed description of my informants, see Appendix B). Table 4.1 gives a brief summary of informants, place, type of interviewing techniques and total number of interviews for this study.

[16] This was the case for the communes of San Sa Hồ, Lao Chài, Tà Van, and Bàn Hồ where the majority of my interviews were conducted. In addition, I also conducted some interviews with Hmong families in the communes of Bản Khoang, Tà Phỉn, Sa Pả, and Hấu Thào, located in the buffer zone of the Hoang Lien Park.

TABLE 4.1: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES

Interviewees	Place	Type of interviews	Total
Hmong household Elderly women	Hmong hamlets Sa Pa town	Semi-structured interviews Oral histories	32
Cardamom traders Intermediaries Wholesalers	Sa Pa town Lao Cai city Hanoi	Conversational interviews	23
Key informants: Sa Pa residents State officials NTFP specialists NGO worker	Hanoi Lao Cai city Sa Pa town	Formal structured interviews	7

Table 4.2 (see below) lists the total number of interviews with highland minorities (mostly Hmong) by gender and commune in Sa Pa district. A total of 32 interviews were conducted with Hmong household members (as well as three interviews with Yao women in Tà Phin). The inclusion of Hmong households in different communes allowed me to draw both commonalities and differences between households with regards to their household strategies.

TABLE 4.2: SEMI-STRUCTURED AND ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS WITH HIGHLAND MINORITIES[17]

Communes	Women	Men
Bản Khoang	0	2
Tà Phỉn (Yao)	3	0
San Sa Hồ	8	1
Lao Chài	5	1
Tà Van	3	2
Sa Pả	0	1
Hấu Thào	2	1
Sa Pa town ***Oral histories**	3	0
Totals	**24**	**8**

**Note: all interviews in this table were semi-structured, except for three oral history interviews with elderly Hmong women in the Sa Pa market.*

A total of 23 conversational interviews was conducted a variety of actors involved at different 'nodes' in the cardamom commodity chain. Table 4.3 lists the categories of cardamom traders interviewed, ranging from itinerant traders and shop-owners in the villages (cardamom intermediaries), wholesalers in Sa Pa town and Lao Cai city, eldery

[17] All informants for household interviews were Hmong, with the exception of three Yao women in Ta Phin commune.

Sa Pa residents (retired cardamom traders), and market retailers of herbal medicine in Hanoi.

TABLE 4.3: CONVERSATIONAL INTERVIEWS WITH KINH AND GIAY CARDAMOM TRADERS[18]

CARDAMOM TRADERS	WOMEN	MEN
INTERMEDIARIES	**6**	**1**
WHOLESALERS IN SA PA **ELDERY SA PA RESIDENTS (ORAL HISTORIES)**	**4** **2**	**0** **1**
WHOLESALERS IN LAO CAI	**3**	**0**
HERBAL MEDICINE RETAILERS	**6**	**0**
TOTALS	*21*	*2*

The higher proportion of females is reflective of the gendered division of labour in Vietnamese society, amongst which, trade is traditionally a female task (Jamieson 1993).

4.2.2 Participant observation

In qualitative research, participant observation is a technique used to provide descriptive information, complementary evidence and a richer contextual understanding of the socio-temporal context of interest (Kearns 2005). During the first two weeks in the field in Sa Pa district, participant observation was used to adapt my research topic and refine my research focus to manageable proportions. Upon arrival in Sa Pa, I also conducted four preliminary interviews with Hmong household members. This first phase of interviewing helped me adjust my research questions[19] and get a better sense of the local markets for forest products. Participant observation was also ongoing throughout my stay in Sa Pa district, as I engaged more actively in the social settings themselves, either by helping a Hmong family in rice transplanting for an afternoon, or when sitting with Hmong girls embroidering in the Sa Pa market. In those situations, I adopted a more engaged position, or that of a participant-as-observer (Gold 1958). I recorded all of my observations and my interviews as part of my field notes, written each evening.

[18] All interviews in this table were conducted with Kinh traders except for three semi-structured interviews with Giay village-based traders (one man and two women).

[19] At the beginning of my field work, I had not anticipated the degree of sensitivity with some of my interview questions, as some of my Hmong informants avoided my questions with my first Kinh research assistant.

4.2.3 Semi-structured interviews: Hmong household members

Thirty semi-structured interviews were undertaken with Hmong households members in order to gain a better understanding of the role played by forest product in their livelihood portfolios, my first major research objective for this thesis. As a style of interviewing, semi-structured interviews have "some degree of predetermined order, yet ensures some flexibility in the way issues are addressed by the informant" (Dunn 2005: 80). In this particular study, semi-structured interviews allowed me to explore the diversity of experience and insights of Hmong individuals with regards to their livelihood choices and strategies over time. Also known as an 'interview-guide approach' (Kitchin and Tate 2000), this form of interviewing asks open-ended questions and respondents are not restricted to choices provided by the interviewer (*ibid.*). Instead, the researcher defines a range of topics and issues in advance in an outline form but the interviewer can vary the wording and sequence of each of these questions during the interview process. This gives the researcher the flexibility and freedom to explore new avenues of inquiry (Kitchin and Tate 2000).

For these semi-structured interviews with Hmong household members as well as for the oral history interviews with Hmong elders, I worked alongside two Hmong field research assistants who acted as interpreters and 'cultural brokers'.[20] A typical day in the field comprised a one or two-hour walk (depending on the state of the road) to a specific commune. Once we arrived in the village, my assistants and I walked around the commune before conducting one or two interviews with Hmong household members in their homes. At the beginning of each interview, my field assistant introduced us both to the family, explaining where I was from and the purpose of my study, before opening the floor to any questions that my informants would have. I also ensured at the beginning of the interview that if they did not want to answer a question, they could stop the interview at any moment. Household interviews lasted two or three hours with breaks in between, as my informants were busy with household tasks such as fanning the fire, preparing food or taking care of young children.

Prior to these interviews, I created an interview guide which formed the basis of my questions to household members. An example of this guide is provided in Appendix

[20] I discuss the implication of working with a diverse set of interpreters in Sections 4.2.7 and 4.4.2. The selection of local Hmong interpreters was crucial, as the first Vietnamese researched assistant from the VASS could not speak any Hmong. Since I was mostly interviewing Hmong households, I absolutely needed local interpreters.

C. The interviews started with general questions such as the size, age and gender structure of the household, family situation, as well as different types of crops grown and other economic activities. We then moved on to ask more specific questions such as the types of forest products collected and used by the household, the time and energy devoted to such activity, and if they sold any of these forest goods in the Sa Pa market. Other related questions addressed the different types of 'emergency foods' collected, the seasonal availability of these items, the source and frequency of fuel wood and fodder collection, and finally the different processable materials used for making household articles and building materials.

During all of the interviews with Hmong I preferred not to jot down notes or tape-record any of the conversations. The Hmong are a politically and socially marginalized group in Vietnam (Cooper 1998; Michaud 2000, 2006; Corlin 2004), and the presence of a researcher taking notes or tape-recording could have added some stress and contributed to officializing the interview process and made my informants uncomfortable. At the end of each interview, my field assistant and I would always sit down in a quiet area of the village and debrief the interview and cross-check information together. During this time, I also asked my assistant if there was anything were surprising, seemed unusual or interesting to her. This account of assistant/interpreters perceptions also allowed me to gain a more in-depth understanding of the local cultural norms associated with these events and processes.

4.2.4 Oral histories: Hmong elders and Sa Pa residents

In addition to semi-structured interviews mentioned above, oral history interviews were conducted with elderly Hmong women in the Sa Pa market, as well as with Kinh Sa Pa elderly residents (see Table 4.2). As a form of interviewing, oral histories are conducted in an "informal question-and-answer format with a person who has first-hand knowledge of a subject matter of interest" (George and Stratford 2005: 107). In the discipline of human geography, oral histories are often used to study "hidden geographies"; that is "the place-based lives and memories of disadvantaged people, minority groups, and others whose views have been ignored or whose lives pass quietly, producing few, if any written records" (*ibid.*). Oral histories focus on personal perceptions, histories and seek personal accounts of significant events (Dunn 2005). In this study, oral histories were used to gain a historical perspective of human-forest livelihood activities over time, the specific

importance of the forest for fulfilling their needs, as well as the impacts of shocks and stresses such as wars, local conflicts and famines. During these interviews, I was also interested in hearing about the changing context of Hmong-Kinh trade networks, the historical economic importance of logging and opium, and finally the cultural meanings attached to certain commodities such as cardamom and other medicinal plants.

In addition, oral history interviews were conducted with three older Sa Pa residents (two women and one man, all Kinh), shown in table 4.3. All three interviewees were Kinh residents who had migrated into Sa Pa town during the early socialist period and they all had witnessed important changes in the local political economy. The two women interviewed were in the late fifties and had both traded cardamom with ethnic minorities during the socialist period. The eldery man interviewee was older, in his late sixties/early seventies, and had worked for the government before opening the first hotel businesses in Sa Pa town. These interviews served to better contextualise the historical trade relations between Kinh residents and ethnic minorities, as well as the changing spatial structure of trade since the beginning of the 1990s. Having developed more of a long-term rapport with these informants, I occasionally asked them if I could jot down notes during the interview as they became more comfortable with the interview process.

4.2.5 Conversational interviews: cardamom traders

In addition, my inquiry into the cardamom commodity chain, my second major research objective, led me to conduct conversational interviews with a broad range of actors involved in the cardamom trade beyond the initial cultivation stage. The gender and category of traders interviewed are listed in Table 4.3. Conversational interviews are not content-focused like semi-structured interviews but, like oral histories, are informant focused, with questions emerging from the immediate context of the conversation (Kitchin and Tate 2000). The purpose of these interviews was to identify the spatial flows as well as the trade networks for actors involved in the cardamom commodity chain. For these interviews, I worked alongside a fourth field assistant, a local Vietnamese tour guide hired from one of the hotel businesses in Sa Pa.

A total of 23 interviews was conducted with traders at different ‘nodes’ along the commodity chain, including intermediaries (village shop owners or independent traders), wholesalers in Sa Pa town and Lao Cai city, and finally market retailers in two herbal medicinal markets in Hanoi. Since all cardamom traders were either Giay or Kinh,

working with a young Vietnamese woman was not as politically sensitive as with the Hmong and access was made easier by the fact that she was familiar with many of these cardamom traders from working in Sa Pa for five years. A snowball sampling approach was used to locate some of these intermediaries in the various communes, who then referred us to cardamom wholesalers in Sa Pa, who then gave us the names and home addresses of cardamom wholesalers in Lao Cai whom we also interviewed.

The content of these informal conversational interviews varied greatly. A sample of the interview questions addressed is provided in Appendix D. Trading activities continuing during interviews or discussions with friends of the interviewee who intervened would sometimes re-directed our conversations. Nevertheless, the content of these interviews focused on the various marketing aspects of the cardamom trade, including transportation arrangements, distribution, pricing (market prices and average returns), trade volumes, informal credit arrangements, and consumption practices. As in the case of Hmong interviews, I preferred not to jot down notes during these interviews as I felt this would have contributed to officializing the process and topics such as income and profits – perhaps as a historical legacy from the socialist period – are often perceived as politically sensitive topics amongst the lowland Kinh (see Scott, Miller and Lloyd 2005).

4.2.6 Formal structured interviews

The final type of interviewing for this study involved formal, structured interviews with two NTFP specialists in Hanoi, one national park officer and one NGO worker in Sa Pa town, and finally two provincial forest department officials in Lao Cai city. Upon my arrival in Vietnam, I conducted interviews with two researchers at the NTFP Research Center in Hanoi to gain a better understanding the historical context surrounding cardamom production in the northern highland region. These individuals then put me into contact with Hoang Lien National Park authorities and a local program officer working for Oxfam Great Britain (GB), all located in Sa Pa town.

Upon my arrival in Sa Pa district, I interviewed the park manager for the Hoang Lien reserve (a Kinh man) and the local programme officer for Oxfam Great Britain (a Kinh women). Later, I also interviewed two officials working in the Forestry Department Office based in Lao Cai city (two Kinh men). A more structured approach was used as these interviews took place in more formal spaces: government offices while sipping

some bitter green tea. In contrast to other interviews, I was able (and perhaps expected) to jot down notes during the interview process. The aim of these interviews was to clarify ethnic minorities' user rights with regards to forest resources as well as the government's involvement in the cardamom trade. When interviewing the local NGO officer for Oxfam GB, I attempted to gain a better understanding of their ongoing development projects, and Hmong livelihood strategies since she also had done several livelihood surveys in one of Sa Pa's commune.

4.2.7 Working with assistants/interpreters

During the course of my eight weeks in Lao Cai, I worked with four different field assistants (all young women) of different background and ethnicities. Ngoc[21] (27 years old) was a young urbanite from Hanoi. As a State employee, Ngoc was responsible for reporting all my research activities to my host institution in Hanoi. However, like many other Vietnamese female researchers (Scott, Miller and Lloyd 2005), Ngoc did not enjoy fieldwork in rural areas, and left me after staying for a total of one week in Sa Pa. For the remaining seven weeks, I worked with three other young women interpreters: Chee, Liu (both Hmong), and Linh, a Kinh. Chee and Liu (22 and 23 years old, respectively) were both Hmong women who worked as tour guides for hotel businesses in Sa Pa.[22] Being exposed to oral English through interactions with foreign tourists, Chee and Liu had mastered English, despite very little formal education. By choosing to work with Hmong female assistants, I was hoping to facilitate interviewing Hmong women in the villages, and to create a more comfortable environment for them to express their ideas. Linh (21 years old) was Vietnamese but, like Chee and Liu, worked as a tour guide and spoke English well, in addition to some French and a litle Hmong. Through her personal connections, Linh demonstrated good networking skills in locating cardamom traders who all traded from their private homes. Finally, Linh was also good in building a good rapport and trust with our interviewees, which proved to be essential in this research context. Some of the political and ethical dilemmas of working with a diverse set of interpreters are discussed in Section 4.4.2.

[21] All names are pseudonyms.

[22] Sa Pa town as a hill station has seen a remarkable growth in both foreign and domestic tourists in the past decade (see Michaud and Turner 2000, 2006), thus providing some local Hmong girls with new work opportunities as tour guides for highland tourist treks.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

As discussed by Cope (2005), the purposes of coding range from data reduction to data organisation, exploration, analysis, and theory-building. In the context of this study, I used the themes developed in my conceptual framework as *a priori* codes to begin my analysis. These were then refined and developed further by the use of *a posteriori* codes, built through an inductive process as my analysis unfolded. My qualitative analysis relied on a set of both descriptive and analytic codes used to explore repeated ideas and themes throughout the data. Whilst descriptive codes can be thought of as category labels, reflecting themes and patterns that are stated clearly directly by informants, analytic codes are used by ethnographers to reflect a theme the researcher is interested in or one that has become important. In other words, analytic codes "dig deeper in the processes and context of phrases and actions" (Cope 2005: 225).

From the first round of coding, 52 codes (developed *a priori* and *a posteriori*) emerged from my data. By grouping these 52 codes schematically – my second level of coding – seven main themes emerged: (1) livelihoods during the socialist period, (2) contemporary agricultural practices, (3) the reliance on forest products as sources of subsistence and as sources of cash, (4) the economic importance of cardamom, (5) access to forests, (6) the geography of the cardamom trade and actors, and finally (7) the consumption practices associated with cardamom in both Vietnam and China. These different themes then formed the organizational framework for my analysis in Chapters Five and Six. Before discussing these results in further detail, I now present the challenges associated with 'doing field work' in upland Vietnam.

4.4 RESEARCHING IN VIETNAM

Several authors writing on field work in socialist and post-socialist countries have recognized the unique set of challenges, constraints and political dilemmas faced by researchers due to the historical legacies from the earlier political regimes (see, for instance Li 1989; Curran and Cooks 1993; Marr 1993, Kurti 1999; De Soto and Dudwick 2000; Scott, Miller and Lloyd 2005). De Soto and Dudwick (2000: 4) have argued this "specificity lies in a shared socialist past that continues to play a role in the everyday life, social relationships, and cultural practices of post-socialist societies". As a result, "personal relations in socialist societies were based on strong demarcations between 'insiders' and distrusted 'outsiders'" (*ibid.*). They argue that researchers working in post-

socialist fieldwork contexts experience a number of methodological and logistical constraints, ranging from gaining access to research visas and invitation letters, appropriate permits, to researching sensitive topics and dealing with a lack of transparency from government institutions (Scott *et al.* 2005). When describing his fieldwork experience in Hungary, Kurti (1999: 173) argues that "many of us who conducted research in the former Soviet Block know too well that official permissions, ministerial and collegial approval were of primary importance".

Researchers in post-socialist settings face a unique set of challenges as they navigate different institutional cultures, research-interpreter positionalities, and some of the practical and ethical dilemmas in research relationships (Scott *et al.* 2005). When writing on fieldwork experience in post-Tiananmen China, authors Curran and Cook (1993: 74) describe the particular research environment in which the social sciences come under government scrutiny, as the social sciences were often deemed "incompatible with the country's socialist agenda". As such, empirical or 'bottom-up' approaches are generally discarded by researchers for less participative, 'top-down' research. Similarly, Li (1989: 907) argues that "government officials and lawyers [in China] often keep a wary eye on investigations that attempt to get at the bottom side of things". As a result, ethnographic approaches to research have tended to be neglected in post-socialist settings. Similarly, in Vietnam, "there is a tendency […] for the positivist paradigm to dominate empirical research design and practice, as reflected in the bias towards 'apolitical' quantitative methods" (Scott *et al.* 2005: 31). Undertaking in-depth, open-ended qualitative research is often abandoned for more structured and quantitative approaches, such as mapping, surveys, and questionnaires.

When discussing the ethics and politics of doing 'sensitive research', Sieber (1993) calls attention to the relationship between the topic and the social context in which the research takes place. Recognizing these risks (or being 'culturally sensitive') means that one must "design the research and interact with research participants, community members, gatekeepers, and relevant others" (*ibid.* 19). Within the context of this research, I had not anticipated quite the extent of sensitivity around certain topics before starting my fieldwork with interpreters. In Vietnam, the context is particular in that gatekeepers (State officials) keep a close eye on any social investigations which could pose any risk to the image of the State or go against Socialist party ideologies. As a result, foreigner researchers in Vietnam have traditionally faced a high degree of suspicion and secrecy

from government officials as well as general members of society (Fforde 1996; Scott *et al.* 2006). Only after my fieldwork was launched did I realize the extent to which many Hmong avoided discussing anything related to the forest in the presence of a Kinh assistant.[23] Because of this, I revised my research in a more culturally and politically sensitive way to glean the necessary information on the Hmong and their use of forest resources. I found it particularly useful to use oral histories to gather information on Hmong life experiences under different policies and historical periods.

In sum, researchers engaging in field work in post-socialist contexts face both challenges and opportunities as "citizens of post-socialist societies [in contrast to stability or 'stagnancy of socialist societies] now find themselves confronting a mutable 'past' and unpredictable future" (De Soto and Dudwick 2000: 4). Since the beginning of *Đổi Mới*, State control over foreign researchers in Vietnam has loosened and new geographical research spaces have opened up in the northern highlands – areas which were previously considered politically 'sensitive' and 'off-limit' to social science researchers (Marr 1993; Sowerwine 2004a; Scott *et al.* 2006). Due to my approach and research topic, having the appropriate connections and negotiating my access through various gatekeepers proved to be a particular important part of my field work endeavour.

4.4.1 Accessing the field: negotiating under 'socialist' rules

The various tensions to be navigated between different actors – the State, the foreign researcher (myself), field assistants and, finally, the informants –need to be taken into consideration when reflecting back on the field experience and the data obtained. When writing about his field work experience in Hungarian Transylvanian communities within Romania, Kurti (1999: 184) comments how:

> What makes field work special in Eastern Europe, and different from Western European field work, was awareness of the ever-watchful eyes of the State and local bureaucrats, with special permits to participate and observe, and writing under the constraints of socialism.

In Vietnam, negotiating institutional collaboration is essential, as obtaining official permission at multiple levels (national, provincial and local) was first necessary before

[23] The northern highland region has had historically anti-communist pockets and has more recently been infiltrated by missionary organisations (Sowerwine 2004a). As such, the study of ethnic minorities and forestry rights is a politically sensitive topic.

engaging with local informants. Negotiating my access thus involved obtaining institutional collaboration and permission from various actors.

My research access was made possible through the research affiliations of my supervisor Sarah Turner and Jean Michaud (on my committee) with the Center for Environment and Sustainable Development at the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), in Hanoi. Without these connections, it would have been impossible for me to conduct my research. VASS officials arranged a research visa for me, obtained permission from provincial level authorities in Lao Cai, and gave me an official introduction letter for interviewing government officials. In addition, my host institution appointed me a young research assistant, who also acted as an interpreter and arranged interviews and authorizations from local State authorities (at the level of province, district and commune) in Lao Cai province.

Maintaining harmonious relations with the host institutions and the VASS research assistant proved invaluable to gain and maintain access for myself but also for future researchers. However, as Scott *et al.* (2005: 31) explain:

> Research partnerships ideally should include mutually beneficial opportunities for shared learning, exchange of ideas and the advancement of knowledge. While host/partner institutions in developing countries may share these expectations, their immediate incentives may also include more concrete benefits, such as the remuneration of assistant services.

Upon arrival to Vietnam, my initial task was to negotiate the terms of reference with my host institution, which proved to be a process entailing unexpected administrative and financial surprises. Prior to departure from Canada, I was told that I would work with a Vietnamese woman from the institute and that she would stay with me for the entire duration of my stay in Lao Cai province (eight weeks). However, during my first meeting with the director of the VASS, I was suddenly told that that their research assistant had quit her job. I was reassured by the director of the institute that they had found another person to replace her – Ngoc – who, by an 'odd coincidence', was the niece of the VASS director. Ngoc worked as a librarian, had never been to Lao Cai province, and did not have any past experience working with a foreign researcher. Moreover, I was also told that Ngoc could stay only for the first week because she was busy with her other job and had family obligations. I also suspect Ngoc was not particularly enthusiastic about leaving her young husband alone in Hanoi for many weeks. This echoes the discussion of Scott *et al.* (2005) on how female Vietnamese researchers or interpreters are often

reluctant to join research teams going to rural areas because they are often unable to spend long time period away from family.

When reflecting upon her fieldwork experience, Sowerwine (2004a: 260) also comments:

> There are profound assumptions about the fieldwork process embedded within the ideal type ethnography that tend to ignore strict yet variable political constraints. Most fundamental is the assumption that access to the research site and subjects, both spatially as well as temporally, is a given (once the permission has been granted).

As a method of keeping an 'eye on me', I had to provide the VASS (before leaving for Lao Cai province) a detailed programme of the exact number of weeks I was planning to spend in Sa Pa, the number of communes I wanted to visit, how many interviews I was planning to do, and with whom. Upon my arrival in Sa Pa district, I was told by district authorities that I was not permitted to stay overnight in the villages with the Hmong. Regardless of my official permissions and introduction letters with the necessary 'Red Stamp', official authorities at the district and commune level exercised a greater degree of authority at the local level and required their own internal review process.

My first (and last) trip to Bản Khoang commune illustrates how, despite 'official permission', my access to informants was sometimes denied and subject to local rules. After 8 weeks of being in the field, I decided to visit the commune of Ban Khoang, one of the northern and most isolated communes in Sa Pa district. Many of the Hmong who I had spoken with in San Sa Hồ and Lao Chài communes had suggested that I visit Ban Khoang since they thought cardamom seeds originally came from this commune. I had been given formal permission from the District People's Committee to visit the commune and rented a jeep from Sa Pa town for a full day. After a two hour drive on a windy mountain road, our research team (my supervisor, another graduate student and my Hmong field assistant) finally reached the village of Can Ho, where we interviewed two Hmong households. After the interviews, my field assistant Liu and I then sat down and I pulled out a notebook to debrief our interviews together. At this time, a young Vietnamese man approached us and bluntly asked my assistant Liu what I was doing here. When Liu told him I was a student, he started yelling at my assistant and told us to accompany him in the local People's Committee office. Then, for about 30 minutes, he closely scrutinized my permission paper, interrogated Liu on the nature of my research, and threatened to confiscate my authorization papers. According to Liu, he was angry

because I had all the appropriate permissions and he could not bribe us for money. When we finally were allowed to leave the office (after what seemed much longer than 30 minutes), we were told by the officer to never come back to Ban Khoang commune. Only a few weeks later did I find out that there had been some American proselytizing in a neighboring commune and so more stringent rules were being applied to foreigners in that area.[24]

Another example of access control occurred during my first week in the field, when being introduced to the head of Ta Van commune. Indeed, the commune head suggested he act as my personal 'guide' to personally introduce me to Hmong families, in exchange for a 'small fee' (US $50). We had to politely refuse his offer and told him we were not planning on doing systematic households surveys. As suggested by Sowerwine (2004a), such a gesture could also be seen as a legacy of the socialist 'way of doing things', as the entire research process in Vietnam has to always constantly be negotiated under 'socialist rules'. However, this anecdote also shows the extent to which research in developing countries – and certainly this is the case for Vietnam – is becoming increasingly 'commodified' (Scott *et al*. 2005).

4.4.2 The upsides and downsides of working with field assistants

Working with four different interpreters in Vietnam (one State employee, two Hmong interpreters, and one local Kinh) implied unexpected challenges as well as some advantages. Not only was I trying to gather good, sound data but I had to also manage working with four different personalities and background experiences. For each assistant, I had to explain clearly the purpose and objectives of my study, brief them on how not to ask leading questions, and learn the best stategies for reviewing the content of each interview together. However, working with assistant interpreters allowed me to pay a close attention to the body language of my informants and gave more time for direct observations in the gardens, livestock, and their homes. Working with interpreters also meant I could easily cross-check information and clarify possible misunderstandings.

With regards to my first Vietnamese research assistant, state employee Ngoc from the VASS, the first challenges in negotiating a particular research approach for my study. As discussed by Scott *et al.* (2005: 31), "the social science field is still developing in

[24] A similar observation about foreign proselyte activities was also made by Sowerwine (2004a) when doing ethnographic research with the Yao in Ban Khoang commune.

universities and colleges in Vietnam". As such, researchers operate within a broader institutional culture in which a positivism paradigm and quantitative approaches are often seen as more rigorous than inductive, qualitative inquiries (Chuan and Poh 2000). Upon my arrival in Sa Pa with Ngoc, my first dilemma was to negotiate my idealized ethnographic research approach with her, as she asked me several times in a disapproving tone why I asked the Hmong so many open-ended questions. Reporting a similar field work experience Vietnam, Scott (2005: 33) observed:

> To many people, it seemed odd that I wanted to engage them in discussion about processes (for example, land allocation). These types of 'how' questions were always the ones I found hard to elicit responses to.

Similarly, I found difficult to negotiate a more ethnographic research approach with Ngoc. Despite my attempt to explain to her the purpose of my study, she would hesitate to ask non open-ended questions, in more of a survey manner. Although I spent time explaining the more inductive approach I wanted to take, Ngoc complained about the unstructured format of the interview process and did not like the fact that she could not have a questionnaire sheet with a list of questions and a choice of answers. Once, she simply refused to translate back what my informant had said, saying the answer was too long and impossible to translate. On such occasions I really did wonder how I could develop confidence and close community relations with highland minority individuals with such an assistant always by my side.

Another problem was that Ngoc seem to lack cultural sensitivity during interviews with Hmong individuals. Ngoc tended to be rather opinionated in not wanting to ask certain questions she judged as too sensitive, and made no effort to connect with Hmong outside of the interviews, sometimes showing inappropriate facial expressions while a Hmong person was talking to us, or worse, signs of boredom after 15 minutes of interview. Similarly, Scott *et al.* (2005) argue that working with interpreters who have some understanding or empathy for the research participants and who genuinely value the knowledge of locals is crucial. Another problem with Ngoc was her constant desire for social companionship which left me with little time in the evening to write notes, talk informally with local Hmong girls, or simply relax and reflect on the day's events.

Thankfully, working alongside two Hmong and one local Kinh young women proved extremely useful in overcoming some of these barriers. Certainly, working with local Hmong interpreters entailed some problems as other members of the community

appeared to be jealous of their remuneration[25], yet working with Chee and Liu proved extremely advantageous overall. First, Chee and Liu facilitated my access to interview elderly Hmong women who could not speak any Vietnamese. Second, both were born in with the region and this made it much easier to establish contact with many Hmong families whom they shared patrilineal clan ties with. Similarly, working with Linh (my second Vietnamese interpreter) was useful to locate Kinh cardamom traders in the various villages, Sa Pa town and Lao Cai city. Finally, in contrast to Ngoc, both Chee, Liu and Linh were tour guide and did not mind going on long treks.

In sum, conducting qualitative field work in northern Vietnam encompasses a unique set of trade-offs and set of challenges. When negotiating my access with a broad range of actors (local representatives of the State, my host institution, and field assistants), patience, flexibility and negotiation proved to be invaluable skills.

4.5 POSITIONALITY, POWER AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Situating the production of knowledge has become a central theme in feminist geography. Linda McDowell (1996), for instance, argues for a greater need to recognize the way knowledge is produced, 'situated' or marked by its origins. Recent efforts to integrate greater reflexivity in geographical research stem from a need to question the politics of the research process including, among other things, the unequal power dynamics in field research (England 1994; Rose 1997), the link between the personal and the political (Kobayashi 1994; Wolf 1996), and the notions of 'bounding' the field (Katz 1994). In addition, Dowling (2000: 31) argues that,

> collecting and interpreting qualitative information relies on a dialogue between you and your informants. In these dialogues, your personal characteristics and social position – elements of your subjectivity – cannot be fully controlled or changed because such dialogues do not occur in a social vacuum.

As such, adopting a qualitative approach in a cross-cultural context requires examining the ethics and politics of the research process, including one's positionality as well as the nature of researcher-interviewee and researcher-interpreter relationships. In the context of

[25] Working as tour guides for hotels in Sa Pa is often perceived as more prestigious and more lucrative than working in the rice fields. My two Hmong field assistants told me that they sometimes felt the jealousy of other community members because of their relatively higher wages.

fieldwork in the developing world, power relations between the 'researched' and the researcher are particularly salient. As argued by Staeheli and Lawson (1995: 332):

> When western feminists enter developing settings, they cannot escape the power relations that exist between those societies or between themselves as academics and their research subjects, even if they wish to do so. Western researchers are in a position of power by virtue of their ability to name the categories, control information about the research agenda, define interventions and come and go as research scientists.

Indeed, unequal power relations, positionality, and the ethical dilemmas of doing field research have been discussed elsewhere in the context of marginalised populations and indigenous people (see, amongst others, Devereux and Hoddinott 1993; Mosse 1994, Wolf 1996; Mullings 1999; Tuhiwai Smith 1999; Scheyvens and Storey 2003; Scheyvens and Leslie 2000; Howitt and Stevens 2005). Building upon these discussions, I turn to examine these issues with regards to my own field experience in Vietnam in the context of my multiple positionalities.

4.5.1 My positionality

Different characteristics such as age, ethnicity, gender, origin and ideological affiliation shape the power relations between the 'researched' and the researcher. When reflecting on the politics of doing field work in Vietnam, Scott *et al.* (2005: 36) write: "the ambiguous nature of our status as foreign researchers, but also young and female, meant that we were often treated in quite different ways". Throughout the course of my fieldwork, I became increasingly aware of my multiple positionalities and their effect on data production.

Throughout my field experience I found that my gender, age and 'foreignness' both opened, as well as closed some research spaces. When I arrived in Vietnam, I came as a 24-year old, single, white, female, francophone Canadian Masters student. Despite numerous trips to Central and South America, Africa and Europe, I had never set foot in Vietnam, or indeed, in Asia. Situating my positionality is challenging as my gender and ethnicity served different purposes for different people in various locations. As discussed by Scott *et al.* (2005), female Vietnamese researchers are normally seen as having a relatively 'low' status in society, but my foreignness gave me a somewhat 'higher' status. As a result of this ambiguity, I probably appeared less threatening to government officials and park authorities than had I been a foreign middle-age male researcher. However

because of my ethnicity, I was no doubt treated differently than if I had been a young Vietnamese female researcher. My foreignness gave me a somewhat higher status, as I was occasionally invited by members of my host institution to 'drinking sessions', to which Vietnamese female researchers are traditionally excluded from.

Within villages, age, gender and ethnicity also played a role when developing rapport with Hmong women. Being a young woman, I believe it was easier for me to engage in conversations with Hmong mothers and grand-mothers than if I had been a middle-aged male researcher. As a young woman, I was often invited to carry the youngest baby, help women in the kitchen, or sit down with elderly women in the marketplace to learn some embroidering skills. Moreover, my foreignness status as an 'outsider' (non Kinh) meant I was probably less intimidating than if I had been a Vietnamese researcher, given all the political implications this would have brought. As England (1994) has suggested, I also found that being an outsider brought benefits in terms of access to information, as Hmong informants did not hesitate to openly criticize Vietnamese State policies, or say they were 'poor' and economically marginalised. In one instance, when interviewing a female Hmong herbalist in Ta Van commune, my Hmong field assistant told me that my informant did not mind sharing explaining to me her botanical health practices because she knew I was not going to report them to Vietnamese official authorities (Mai Yia, 6/23/06). These relations were crucial in establishing trust with my informants and ultimately shaped their willingness to participate in my research. On the other hand, coming as an older male researcher would have made it a great deal easier to talk directly to Hmong men about their cardamom cultivation. Being a female researcher also meant I was less likely to be invited to drink rice wine with the male household head. However, as a young female student, it was much easier to engage in conversations with the mother and grand-mother of the household.

When talking about her fieldwork experience with the Yao (another highland minority group) in Sa Pa district, Sowerwine (2004a) comments on how the gender and age of her assistants played an important role in shaping the way the interpreter was positioned, and thereby received, in relation to the men and women in the village. Within my own field experience, I realized quickly that the ethnic identity of my assistants affected my ability to access information from my informants. During my first week of interviews with Ngoc, the Vietnamese interpreter from the VASS, the Hmong women seemed intimidated by her presence, generally answering my questions with 'no', 'yes' or

'I don't know'. When discussing sensitive topics such as forest product collection, ethnic affiliation proved to be a major factor of influence in building a good rapport between my assistants and my interviewees. When conducting interviews with Chee and Lam, Hmong informants were less shy and were much more willing to discuss politically sensitive issues such as illegal logging, cardamom, and the collection of forest products within the Hoang Lien National Park. At the same time, interviewing Kinh (Vietnamese) cardamom traders was easier with a Kinh interpreter, since both Chee and Liu felt intimidated to speak Vietnamese and they both said that Kinh traders refused to talk to them because they were Hmong (Chee, 7/30/06). Thus, when investigating the cardamom commodity chain networks, I worked again with a Vietnamese interpreter, Linh.

In sum, my analysis of multiple positionalities at various levels – with my host institution, when developing rapport with my informants, and finally with my interpreters – shows the importance of considering how gender, age and ethnicity shaped my access to information.

4.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have outlined in detail the research design for this thesis, describing the field sites, field methods, sampling strategies and data analysis used. In addition, attention has been given to the ethical and political dilemmas of doing field work in Vietnam. I argued that a good understanding of sensitive issues as well as the social context in which research takes place is crucial as field researchers navigate their access through various gatekeepers. Moreover, this chapter has shown how the broader research environment as well as multiple positionalities of the self as well as researcher-interpreter relations shape the data collection process. With these methodological issues in mind, I now turn to examine my results and analysis in Chapters Five and Six.

CHAPTER 5: HMONG LIVELIHOODS AND FOREST PRODUCTS USE IN SA PA

In this chapter, I draw directly upon my field work data to analyse historical and contemporary Hmong livelihood strategies and the roles of forest products for these rural households in Sa Pa district. I thus revisit the notions of assets, activities, and access discussed in my conceptual framework (Chapter 2, Section 2.3.3), bringing them together to explore the diverse, adaptive and fluid nature of Hmong livelihood portfolios in Sa Pa district.

This chapter meets my first research objective: **to examine Hmong livelihood portfolios and their use of forest products in post-colonial Vietnam**. I do so by asking two secondary research questions. Firstly, during the socialist period (1954-1986), *how were Hmong livelihood portfolios structured in Sa Pa district, and how did forests contribute to these?* Secondly, *since the series of market reforms beginning in 1986, how have Hmong livelihoods changed and what roles do forest products now play for Hmong households?*

To answer these two questions, I first provide an historical overview of Hmong livelihood portfolios (5.1), first during the socialist period (5.1.1), before examining the impact of changing State policies over forest and markets in the post- *Đổi Mới* era (5.1.2). In the second part of this chapter, I examine in more depth Hmong current livelihood portfolios (5.2), examining their food systems (5.2.1) and the role played by forest products within these livelihood portfolios (5.2.2).[26]

5.1 HISTORICAL TRENDS

5.1.1 Socialist period: swiddening, logging and opium trade

As discussed in Chapter Three, farm cooperatives as well as fixed cultivation and sedentarisation programmes were part of a national agricultural collectivization project initiated in the early 1960s in northern Vietnam. In Sa Pa town, a botanical research center was established in 1961 as part of a government initiative to promote sedentary

[26] Although a relatively small group of Hmong women in Sa Pa district are, since the mid-1990s, increasingly involved in other off farm economic activities such as handicraft and tourism, this chapter covers mostly their agricultural activities and their use of forest resources. This is not to deny the economic importance of tourism and handicrafts for some rural households. For a more in-depth analysis of textile commodity chains within the Hmong livelihood systems, see Michaud and Turner (2000, 2003) and Turner and Michaud (2006).

agricultural practices for local Hmong and Yao highlanders (Phuc An[27], 6/21/06[28]). Nonetheless, interviews with Hmong elders suggest that the Hmong continued their traditional farming practices, which included, for the most part, swiddening agriculture from which they derived a variety of foods including tubers, dry rice and several varieties of corn. In terms of highlander incomes, the opium poppy was an important source of cash along with the trade of some precious woods such as *Fokienia hodginsii* with the lowland Kinh (Lam 7/10/06; Kao 6/23/06; Cham, 6/13/06).[29] Hmong elders interviewed discussed the economic importance of the opium poppy as a source of cash which allowed them to buy rice in difficult times. In Lao Chai village, a Hmong woman, Zhia (7/15/06) explained that when her husband died in 1986, she rented out her rice fields to her brother-in-law and worked in another family's opium poppy fields in order to support her three young children. Along with opium, the Hmong recalled trading other forest products and vegetables in the villages and in the Lao Cai city market (Lam and Chu 7/10/06). In the 1970s, Mai Yia (6/14/06) explained how her parents had to travel several days, on horses or by foot, to the market in Lao Cai city to sell chillies and a white tuber (possibly cassava). Hmong elders also talked about a plant collected in the forest, the buds of which were filled with an aromatic oil highly prized by the Kinh (Lan 7/13/06, Cham 6/13/06, Pham 6/4/06). In Lao Chai commune, Lia (6/3/06) reported that her parents earned money by selling wood to Kinh traders on a regular basis. Lia then added that today, they could not do this trade anymore and she had to make handicrafts and grow cardamom to make a living (*ibid*.).

The socialist period was punctuated by border conflicts such as the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese war, which marked a period of intense poverty and hunger for ethnic minorities in the region. An elderly Hmong woman, Cham (6/13/06) told me that after her husband died, she had been left with four young children. She talked about the harsh living conditions, saying that during this time period, one could not simply go to Sa Pa to buy rice, so many of the Hmong, including herself, went to the forest to collect roots, mushrooms, insects and frogs to eat. She recalled, "sometimes we did not have any rice to eat for three or four days, so we had to go to the forest to get potatoes [or wild tubers] – one red and two white". Later, Cham continued, "today we have more rice to eat so we

[27] As discussed in Section 4.2 of Chapter Four, interviewees have been given a pseudonym to protect their anonymity. These codes are explained in appendix B.
[28] All dates for interviews are in the format of month/day/year.
[29] *Fokienia hodginsii* is a valuable timber tree which is used in construction and the manufacture of furniture in Vietnam, and which contains valuable essential oils (Tordoff *et al.* 1999).

don't need to go the forest anymore". Indeed, following the growing influx of international tourists to Sa Pa, Cham sells handicrafts and worries less about having enough rice. Another elderly Hmong woman, Lam (7/10/06) described her perceptions with regards to the 1979 Sino-Vietnamese border war, explaining, "people were very hungry and my family and I went hiding in the forest because there were a lot of soldiers with guns in Sa Pa. Everybody were very scared. We stayed in the forest a long time and ate only leaves, mice and frogs". Such comments are revealing in that they highlight how forests, during the socialist period, provided a key role in terms of protection and subsistence foods in times of war, famine and insecurity.

5.1.2 *Đổi Mới*: restructuring the highland economy

In Section 3.2.3 of Chapter Three, I explored the broader impacts of *Đổi Mới* on the political economy of the highlands. Here, I explore further these effects in terms of changing forest policy reforms and State development initiatives – both of which have shaped Hmong households' access to new livelihood opportunities during the post *Đổi Mới* period.

5.1.2.1 *Forest land allocation and protection policies*

Forest policy reforms have had implications for patterns of resource use and local power relations between the various ethnic groups living in the northern highlands (Sowerwine 2004b). New property arrangements, forest classification systems, as well as recent reforestation initiatives have impacted the Hmong in terms of accessing different livelihood opportunities. As explained in Chapter Three, the Hoang Lien Forest was upgraded to a National Park in 2002, and affected the traditional land management systems of the Hmong. In an interview with the Hoang Lien National Park director, I was told that households living within the park could not hold a legal Red Book certificate to their land (GO1, 5/26/06). All households living within the Park are also prohibited from certain forest user rights such as collecting plant/animals from the forest, lighting fires, hunting, and bringing their cattle to the forest to graze (*ibid.*). Another side-effect of the 'protected' status of the Hoang Lien forest is that households living within the Park do not own a legal title to their land and cannot participate in reforestation compensation schemes such as the Five Million Ha programme. Parts or sometimes the whole communes of San Sa Hồ, Lao Chài, Tà Van, and Bàn Hồ are part of the Hoang Lien

National Park. Consequently, none of these households are eligible for receiving any form of compensation for protecting the forest. During my field work, all but one Hmong household member interviewed had never heard of the Five Million Ha reforestation programme.

When interviewing Hmong households in Sa Pa district, my informants would often describe themselves as 'poor', saying that because of such new policies, they could not go to the forest to cut trees to sell to the Kinh as they used to in the past. They frequently referred to the bans on swiddening, logging and opium cultivation which had cut them from historically important sources of cash income. In Cat Cat village, one elderly Hmong interviewee, Cham (6/13/06) who worked in the Sa Pa market making handicrafts, explained to me how her family used to grow opium and sell wood to the Kinh. In other instances, I was told by my informants that some of the poorest households were more susceptible to trade wood with some Kinh traders because they needed more the money, having very little rice paddy land (Lu 6/6/06; Noua 6/7/06; Lim 6/28/06).[30] Lim (6/28/06), another elderly woman, reported that one of her sons occasionally went into the forest to cut some wood, but only "very far away in the forest, close to Seo Mi Ty [a hamlet with no road access located further into the Hoang Lien National Park]". Later in the interview, Lim admitted that she was afraid that her son was risking being caught by official authorities, but then added that he had little choice to make ends meet, since his wife did not know how to make handicrafts. For Hmong households, the trade of wood (and perhaps opium) thus remained an important source of cash income until the early 1990s. However, institutional changes were not the only force shaping this livelihood transition – indeed, rural development projects and improved market access have also greatly affected contemporary livelihood portfolios in Sa Pa district.

5.1.2.2 *Accessibility to development projects*

In the early 1990s, both State and other NGO funded development projects were undertaken to 'revitalize' the stagnant economy in the northern uplands. In their case-study in Ban Kan province, Alther *et al*. (2002) indicate the role of roads shaping access to a range of livelihood options for rural households. The authors argue that farmers

[30] The extent to which illegal logging (and opium production) occurs is hard to estimate. The illegal nature of these activities means Hmong households are often hesitant to discuss these issues and indeed, may completely omit this topic in the presence of a Vietnamese interpreter (for a more in-depth discussion of this issue, see Chapter Four, Section 4.5.2).

located closer to roads responded to post *Đổi Mới* changes by diversifying their income into a broad range of non-farm activities, as a result of being exposed to government programmes and having access to market information.[31] Indeed, they argue that farmers in Bac Kan province have been increasingly responsible for creating their own livelihood strategies, and having access to market information revealed to be a crucial input in their productive livelihood decisions. Similarly, in Sa Pa district, overall accessibility was improved through various rural infrastructural and agricultural development initiatives. Schools and health clinics were built in each commune, and some communes were provided with electricity in 2001 (Cho 7/6/06). Another important change was the paving of a road linking Sa Pa town to Su Pan commune (see Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four), completed in 2004. The construction of this paved road meant that households in the communes of Su Pan, Hau Thao, Ta Van, Lao Chai could now travel to Sa Pa town by foot in less than three hours. Increased accessibility and reduced travel time meant that Hmong villagers could more easily buy goods in Sa Pa town and occasionally sell some forest products to Kinh.

In terms of rural development programmes, there has been a shift away from agricultural extensification to intensification (with the introduction of hybridized rice and maize seeds), in addition to diversification initiatives carried out by district officials. In the late 1990s, Hmong households in Sa Pa, Ta Phin and Trung Chai communes were provided with fruit seedlings (mostly plums) for additional income generation (Pham Tuan, 6/20/06).[32] When the seedlings were distributed, there was not a lot of fruit on the market, and prices were high. However, as trees began to bear fruit a few years later, some Hmong abandoned commercial production fairly quickly as the Sa Pa market became 'flooded' with plums (*ibid*.). With no present infrastructure to process the fruit, the Hmong presently face a limited market. Moreover, an over supply means that prices gained do not warrant the time and labour involved.

[31] Alther *et al.* (2002) examine the impacts of accessibility on livelihood options for rural households in the northern uplands of Vietnam. They demonstrate how accessibility greatly affects households' ability to (1) participate in State programmes and development projects, (2) market agricultural and forest products, (3) find non-agricultural employment opportunities (outside of subsistence agriculture); and finally (4) migrate.
[32] Similar projects were also carried out in different north upland provinces such as Bac Kan province (Alther 2002).

5.1.2.3 *Promoting market access*

In addition to these agricultural extension projects, some initiatives carried out by NGOs such as Oxfam Great Britain (GB) and Craftlink have included livelihood diversification projects aiming at developing non-agricultural, market-oriented activities, often oriented directly towards ethnic minority women. Some of these projects operate closely along State development objectives. As one local programme officer explained, "our livelihood diversification programme aims at enhancing local capacities of ethnic minorities, so that farmers can move away from subsistence agriculture into more commercialized production" (Pham Tuan 6/20/06). In Ta Phin commune, where the NGO Craftlink operates, some Yao women are now active in handicraft making and involved in trading these goods themselves in a small Craftlink shop. In addition, the NGO provides these Yao women with basic language training in English.[33]

In Sa Pa, many Hmong women have taken advantage of increased road and market access to participate in various textile trade chains in the last few years. Indeed, Hmong women from specific communes around Sa Pa town come on a regular basis to town to sell 'ethnic' handicrafts to other Kinh traders in small shops or sell them themselves to foreign tourists on the street or in the covered Sa Pa market.[34] In addition, the sale of other forest products such as wild orchids, honey, mushrooms and other wild forest products helps some households to earn sufficient cash to buy additional rice, maize, and other goods. Finally, about 20 Hmong teenage girls are hired by Kinh-owned hotels, to work as private tour guides for highland treks.

In sum, the post *Đổi Mới* period has seen a rise in new livelihood opportunities for Hmong households in Sa Pa district. Although recent State forest policies and land allocation policies are often discriminatory *vis-à-vis* the Hmong, changing market conditions are also offering new livelihood opportunities. Finally, roads play an essential role in giving farmers in these villages new opportunities to participate in development projects as well as within trade networks for agricultural and forest goods. With such a context in mind, I now turn to examine current Hmong livelihood portfolios in Sa Pa district.

[33] For a more thorough description of Hmong traditional craft traditions and practices in Sa Pa district, see the work by anthropologist Mai Thanh Son (1999).
[34] For a more in-depth study of highland textile commodity chains, see Turner and Michaud (2006)

5.2 HMONG LIVELIHOOD PORTFOLIOS, SA PA DISTRICT

By placing this study within a livelihood framework I pay attention to the assets, activities, and access to these, mediating people's ability to make a living (Ellis 2000). Taking a community/household level approach, I now turn to analyse the repertoires of agricultural and economic activities of the Hmong in Sa Pa district, describing their food systems (5.2.1), and the various forest products used for subsistence and cash needs (5.2.2).

5.2.1 Hmong food systems

Vuong Xuan Tinh (1997a) describes Hmong food systems in Vietnam as coming from five main sources: terraced rice fields[35], upland fields for corn and other swidden crops, livestock, horticultural gardens, and forest products.

5.2.1.1 *Wet rice*

Rice constitutes the main staple food for Hmong in Sa Pa district, along with subsidiary crops such as corn and cassava. Because of the high elevation and cool temperatures, Hmong in Sa Pa district can grow only one crop of rice per year (Chee 7/6/06). From April to May, rice paddy fields are ploughed and fertilized with manure, leaves from the forest, and sometimes also fertilizers bought in a small village shop or in Sa Pa town (*ibid.*). In Lao Chai commune, Zhia and her daughter Chi (7/15/06) explained the wet rice cultivation cycle and the gendered division of labour associated with each task. Ploughing is the most physically demanding task, and is thus usually done by men. Mothers and daughters sow the seeds as the first rains begin, sometime in the third or fourth month (March or April) (see Figure 5.1 below). Young rice seedlings are left to grow until the 5th month (May), before they are ready to be transplanted. The transplanted seedlings then grow throughout the rainy season, from May till the end of September. Rice is then harvested in late September or October (*ibid.*).

[35] If soil conditions and topography allow this type of subsistence cultivation.

FIGURE 5.1: HMONG TRANSPLANTING RICE IN LAO CHAI COMMUNE (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006).

Villagers reported growing several varieties of rice, constantly experimenting and selecting seeds that best maximized yields and taste. Seeds are usually kept from year to year or may be bought, received or exchanged from traders, family, friends, or from the government. In San Sa Ho commune, Cho (7/6/06) reported that local varieties of rice were not as good as the new seeds bought from the government. He said preferring to use the new improved rice varieties. In nearby Lao Chai commune, Chi (7/15/06) described to me how people in her village always grew different varieties of rice, using the newly improved 'short' rice seeds from China mixed with the 'long' traditional varieties of rice. Chi provided a similar comment as Cho in San Sa Ho commune, saying that villagers seemed to like the new Chinese rice because of its higher productivity and shorter maturing time, but that people also kept growing old local varieties because villagers "prefer[ed] the taste of the local varieties better" (*ibid.*). In sum, it appears that the Hmong are taking advantage of new technologies selectively – that is, they choose what is best suited for them to balance the ecological limits of the land they cultivate and their taste preferences.

5.2.1.2 *Dry rice, corn and swiddens*

Dry rice (also know as highland rice) was historically an important crop, but was less abundant during my field visit in 2006. In San Sa Ho commune, Lu (6/6/06) explained

how households in her village continued to plant dry rice on mountain slopes because of more land available than in older village settlements such as Cat Cat hamlet.[36] Later, Lu added that families in Cat Cat or in Lao Chai commune – historically older settlements – did not have any suitable land left for dry rice because the population density there was deemed too high for this type of land-use. Indeed, Chi (7/15/06) from Lao Chai commune explained that not all families could keep a small plot of highland sticky rice for ceremonial events like the Hmong New Year. Planted for ceremonial purposes, this dry rice can also be part of a household strategy when households occasionally experience shortages of foods at the end of the rainy season (usually from July till the next rice harvest in late September and October). In San Sa Ho commune, Lu explained how her family planted dry rice along with wet rice, so they could start eating the dry rice from June to September, when wet rice supplies from the preceding year were finished. Hence, as discussed by Corlin (2004), Hmong households in Sa Pa district seem to prefer paddy farming over dry rice.

Along with rice, corn is a subsidiary crop to the Hmong food system and is part of the daily diet for the Hmong living in steeper and/or rockier terrain such as Ban Khoang and Ta Giang Phin communes (for a layout of these communes, see Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four). Corn is always planted on steeper slopes, where wet rice cultivation is difficult or impossible. Corn also plays a role as feed for livestock and insurance in case of other crop failures (Chi 7/15/06). As in the case of rice, households cultivate several corn varieties with seeds kept from the year before, receive seeds from extended families, friends or neighbours, or sometimes buy new hybridized seeds from the government (Cho 7/6/06).

In addition to rice and corn, Hmong may or may not have swidden fields in which they grow tubers or other root vegetables such as cassava. However, since the new bans on swiddening, some Hmong households are abandoning their swiddens fields and turning to focus on cardamom production, raising cattle or collecting wild forest products for sale in the Sa Pa market. An elderly Hmong woman, Cham (6/13/06), explained how, in the 1970s, "we [the Hmong] grew more cassava and potatoes because there was not enough rice for people to eat but now, the people prefer to grow wet rice". As explored earlier in this chapter (Section 5.1.2), Hmong have been pushed away from swidden production due to new forest land allocation and protection policies. As a result, Hmong

[36] Dry mountain rice also requires more land and a fallow period of about 7 to 8 years (Sowerwine 2004a).

view rice paddy farming as a more secure guarantee of food production than dry rice and swiddens. Yet at the same time, dry rice and corn are used as secure 'food nets' in case of crop failures.

5.2.1.3 *Horticultural gardens*

Small gardens provide a third, supplementary source of food for Hmong households. In Sa Pa district, Hmong women cultivate mustard greens, string beans, taro, pumpkins, cucumber and ginger, all used for cooking, as well as hemp and indigo used in the production of traditional clothes (Chee 6/23/06). Women are usually in charge of these gardens, as well as the fabrication of clothes. In addition to meeting Hmong food and clothing needs, households sometimes have a medicinal plant garden (Ly 6/5/06; Mai Yia 6/23/06). In Lao Chai commune, only two herbal healers sometimes have medicinal plant gardens next to their homes and use these plants for minor health problems such as stomach aches and head aches, cooking spices, or medicine for livestock (Ly 6/5/06).

5.2.1.4 *Livestock*

Livestock represent an important asset for Hmong households and act as a form of monetary insurance – in addition to being an icon of social status and wealth. Livestock are used for farm work and also ceremonial purposes such as weddings, funerals or when someone in the family is ill. Livestock includes mainly pigs, horses, mules, buffaloes, oxen, chickens and ducks. Fodder is gathered by children and women in the village surroundings and nearby forest. Buffalos are raised primarily for working in the fields while chickens, pigs, ducks (and sometimes goats) are used for rituals and consumption (Mai Yia, 6/14/06). When a household needs cash quickly, the father of the households brings a chicken to the Kinh-owned store in the village to sell (Cho 7/6/06; Foua, 5/27/06). Additionally, money and chickens are often used to pay a healer or shaman when a family member gets sick (Mai Yia 6/14/06). More recently, only a small group of Hmong households have started fish rearing in small human-built ponds (Shio 7/13/06). However, the production of fish remains for domestic consumption and at the time of my field interviews, none were sold in the Sa Pa market.

5.2.2 Forest products

In addition to the various food sources described above, Hmong household members, both men and women, make frequent trips to forests to gather firewood and a broad range of forest products to complement their subsistence needs, as detailed next.

5.2.2.1 *Wild foods*

Previous surveys in Ha Giang province (the province to the northeast of Lao Cai) indicate that Hmong there exploit up to 40 kinds of vegetables, roots and fruit from the forest (Vuong Xuan Tinh 1997a; 1997b). Living in or close to forests, Hmong in Sa Pa district have similarly accumulated an impressive body of knowledge on a variety of edible foods gathered from the forest. During interviews I found that these wild food were usually harvested opportunistically by mostly Hmong men, during periods of low labour demand in the rice paddy fields (Mao 6/23/06). Some such foods follow seasonal patterns whereas others can be collected throughout the year. Bamboo shoots are collected throughout the rainy season, from early March until June, whereas mushrooms are generally more abundant after a few days of heavy rainfall, but can be harvested year-round. Wild honey combs and game are harvested opportunistically throughout the year (Lu 6/6/06).

In the last two decades, interviewees reported to me that the scarcity of these wild foods in the Hoang Lien National Park had put a stress on poorer Hmong households, who often relied on these goods as a means of complementing their diet or for a secondary source of cash income. As a result, many families reported going less often to the forest because of the perceived low return to their labour. As one elderly woman, Lam (7/10/06) explained, "now, you need to walk for a very long time [to collect]. Before, the forest was much closer, we did not have to walk very far… Now, very few people go to the forest because it is dangerous". In Ta Van commune, Mai Yia (6/14/06) reported that only a small number of village members bothered spending the time to collect forest products, and that these harvesters were usually members from the poorest households.[37] Indeed, for these families, the extra cash was needed in order to supplement their diets. In Xin Chai village, Lu (6/6/06), a young mother, said she made regular trips to the forest to harvest mushrooms and bamboo shoots and then sold them to a Kinh vegetable trader in the Sa Pa market. She explained how the trade was 'dangerous' but she needed the money to buy enough rice for her family during the 'lean' months (June

[37] My informant defined poorest families as "those who don't have a lot of rice fields" (Mai Yia, 6/14/06).

till September). Later in the interview, Lu shared a story that highlighted the problems related to the illegal nature of her work:

> One day I went to Sa Pa with my friend to sell bamboo shoots. Just before entering town, the police stopped us and got very angry to us when they saw what was in our baskets. I had a basket full of fresh bamboo shoots to sell and they took everything away! This happened two times already to my friend. So now when we go to sell, we have to leave very early in the morning, when it is still dark and the government is asleep.

Facing constraints of resource scarcity, poor market prices and legal enforcement from Park officials and the police (given in the above quote), many Hmong interviewed now view the harvesting and trade of these wild foods as an unprofitable and risky activity. While wild foods have played a more important role in the past during times of famine and insecurity, the trade of these foods today seems important only for poorest households lacking access to sufficient rice paddy land and with important emergency cash needs, as in the case of a hospital treatment.

5.2.2.2 *Firewood collection.*

Firewood collection is a daily, year-round activity performed by all family members, including young children (Nia 5/28/06). Women typically collect firewood from nearby forests around their homes, or in swidden fields whereas men will usually bring back wood from further away in the forest (Hoa 6/4/06). As many swidden fields are in the process of being reforested, harvesters use dry branches, leaves and sometimes leaf stems for fuel. Interestingly, the collection of dead wood in the Hoang Lien National Park is tolerated by park authorities although households can be given a high fine if they are caught cutting live wood there (Lim 6/28/06). As a result, some families now plant small bamboo trees next to their homes for fuel wood (Chee 6/28/06; Cho 7/6/06).

FIGURE 5.2: A HMONG FAMILY'S FUEL WOOD COLLECTION IN SAN SA HO COMMUNE (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006).

5.2.2.3 *Bamboo and construction materials*

Construction materials are harvested directly from the National Park as well as from forests in the buffer zone to build houses and other farm infrastructure such as fences, irrigation canals, pigsties, and house furniture. Hmong men are knowledgeable about the value of a specific variety of bamboo type and, as noted above, they often keep clusters of bamboo trees near their homes for construction materials. In Hau Thao commune, Shio (7/13/06) explained how Hmong families had been told by district officials that they could not cut trees anymore, which were used in the past for constructing homes. Shio continued that regardless, many families – especially those living close to the forest – had continued to cut wood for building their houses and many families also used bamboo trees.

In addition to using bamboo for building materials, many Hmong plant a special variety of bamboo for making baskets used for transporting goods to and from the market (see Figure 5.3 below). During my field visits, I was told that most basket-makers lived in Hau Thao commune and these producers traded baskets with other Hmong from different communes (Cho 7/6/06). The weaving of these baskets is traditionally a male-oriented activity. Hmong men are generally responsible for tending trees, cutting and drying the bamboo stems into fine layers before weaving them into baskets. In Hau Thao commune, the wife of a basket maker, Shaw (7/13/06) told me her husband visited the Sa Pa market on average once a month to sell these bamboo baskets to other Hmong and sometimes

Kinh people. She added that each basket could fetch a price of approximately 120,000 Vietnamese *dông* (VND), equivalent to US $7.50).

FIGURE 5.3: SELLING BAMBOO BASKETS IN BAC HA MARKET (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006).

5.2.2.4 *Wild orchids*

Within the last five years, a market niche for wild orchids has developed in Sa Pa town, as an increasing number of Kinh tourists from Hanoi, who come to Sa Pa town for weekend get-away trips.[sentence not grammatical] Orchids are also highly appreciated as a gift by the Kinh during the Vietnamese New Year celebrations (Phuong 6/12/06). Orchid collection is considered highly laborious work, and only a few young Hmong men engage in this type of activity (Lan 7/13/06). On Sundays, Hmong men – usually from Sa Pa and Hau Thao communes – can be seen carrying orchid plants on long wood sticks to the town of Sa Pa (see Figure 5.4).

FIGURE 5.4: HMONG BOYS SELLING ORCHIDS AND OTHER FOREST PLANTS IN SA PA TOWN (SOURCE: TURNER 2005).

These wild orchids are sold to Kinh private traders in the villages or Sa Pa town (Van Phuong 6/20/06). During my field visits in Sa Pa, my assistant and I counted approximately 20 orchid traders (all Kinh) with homes based in Sa Pa town. These traders buy the orchids directly from the Hmong who come to town on the weekends and often transplant them onto large rooftop gardens (see Figure 5.5). Vietnamese tourists rarely buy orchids directly from the Hmong, but from these Vietnamese traders instead. These orchid traders also sometimes deal with traders based in larger lowland cities such as Haiphong, Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh (Phuong 6/12/06).

FIGURE 5.5: AN ORCHID ROOF-TOP GARDEN OF A KINH TRADER IN SA PA TOWN (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006).

5.2.2.5 *Medicinal plants*

Medicinal plants occupy both practical and symbolic roles for Hmong households in Sa Pa district, providing individuals with free, readily available access to traditional health care products. Hmong medicinal practices are distinct from traditional Vietnamese medicinal practices, which are often considered barbarian and similar to western medicine (Fadiman 1998). Hmong medicinal practices include both shamanism and botanical medicine, depending on the source of the disease. As Corlin (2004:308) describes:

> Apart from a substantial number of 'tame' household spirits, ancestral spirits, and the spirits of the local habitat, Hmong pantheism includes 'wild' nature spirits (*dab qus*) living in wild and uncultivated spots. These are likely to attack when disturbed and may capture a person's soul subsistence (*plig*) which causes sickness or death.

In Sa Pa district medicinal plants therefore provide remedies for the sick, considered to be inhabited by an evil spirit. During my interviews with Hmong herbalists, I was told that going to the forest was dangerous, as forests were also home to malicious spirits incarnated in wild animals and poisonous insects (Nao, 6/3/06; Pham, 6/4/06; Noua, 6/7/06; Cham, 6/13/06). In Hmong health cosmologies, religion, spirits and the use of medicinal plants are interconnected, with the forest being both the source of occasional diseases, and medicinal treatments used by healers to cure a person's disease (Cooper

1998). Hmong healer Zhia (7/15/06) reported using medicinal plants to cure a wide range of health problems, ranging from post-partum problems to head-aches and injuries caused by work in the fields or forest. In Hau Thao commune, another healer, Lan (7/13/06), reported using up to 200 different plant species from the forest. Ly's (6/5/06) mother in Lao Chai commune was a well-known herbalist who had individuals coming to her house when they were sick and needed some medical advice. When visiting her Ly's mother medicinal plant garden, Ly explained how the Hmong are generally afraid of Vietnamese medicine, because they often have the impression that Kinh doctors would simply amputate the leg or arm of a sick patient without even listening to them.[38] She then said that Hmong medicine was very different as "we believe that a person's illness is caused by a *dab qus* [wild spirit] which needs to be chased away. One way is to give the offering of a chicken or a pig to the hungry spirit so that he will leave the soul of the person".

As opposed to the Yao who have been reported to sell herbal medicine to Kinh traders[39], Hmong herbalists never reported selling herbal medicine on the market – or at least, my informants never saw the tree barks or dried mushrooms they sometimes sold to Kinh medicinal traders in Sa Pa as being 'medicine'. One Hmong herbalist, Lan (7/13/06) explained to me that "the spirits will be unhappy if I sell herbal medicine to the Kinh and the sick person can never be cured". Another Hmong female elder, Lam (7/10/06) explained: "We never sell our herbal medicine to the Vietnamese [Kinh]. If some people do, they sell only the dried medicine and a special tree bark and cut it into very small pieces. If not, the Vietnamese people will go to the forest and harvest it themselves". In Ta Van commune, herbalist Mai Yia (6/23/06) explained how she always used fresh herbal medicine from the forest or near her fields but the Vietnamese, in contrast, liked to use dried herbs. Mai Yia's comments are informative in that they reflect an intrinsic value associated with fresh medicinal plants. In a study on the medicinal plant market in Sa Pa, Delang (2005: 384) notes that "the market created by this growing demand has become very important for the economic and social lives of the Hmong and the Yao", adding that "the sale of medicinal plants is the main source of income for many households and villages". In contrast, I would argue that these medicinal plants are *not* as financially important as suggested. Rather, I would argue that herbal medicine sustains

[38] Similar concerns about western medicine are expressed in Fadiman's (1998) book "The Spirit catches you and you fall down: a Hmong child, her American doctors and the collision between two cultures".
[39] For a more detailed description of the commercialization of medicinal plants amongst the Yao, see Sowerwine (1999; 2004a).

Hmong health cosmologies which stand in contrast with the dominant Vietnamese health care paradigm, as the Hmong demand culturally appropriate medicinal care though shamans, maintaining certain ceremonial practices (such as animal sacrificing), and demanding *fresh* (rather than dry) herbal medicine to cure illnesses and disease.

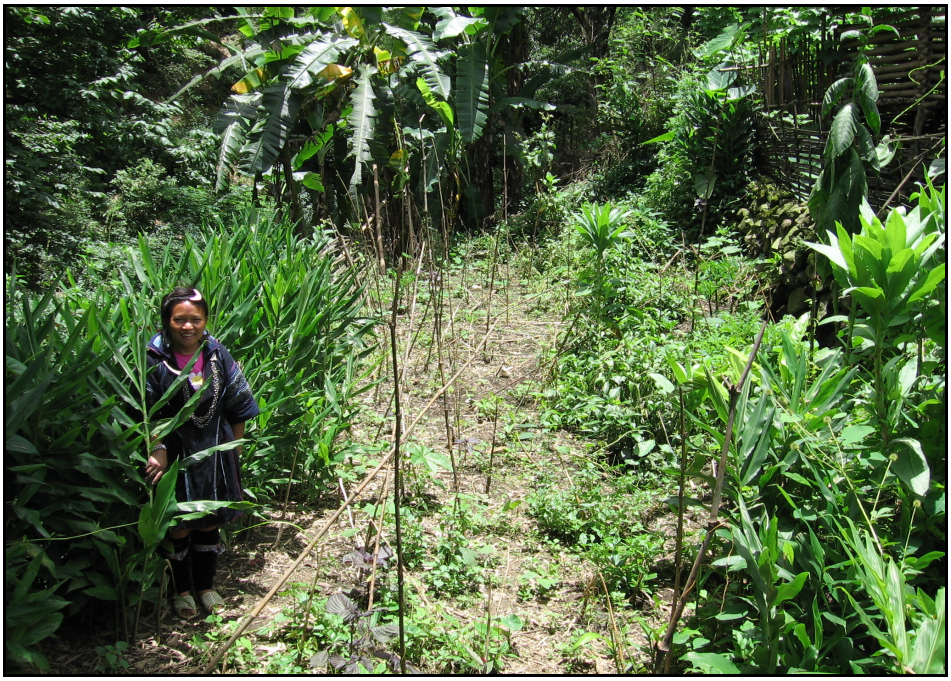

FIGURE 5.6: A HMONG HEALER IN HER MEDICINAL PLANT GARDEN (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006)

5.2.2.6 *Cardamom*

For an increasing number of highland Hmong living in Lao Cai province, cardamom represents an important source of cash income at a strategic moment of their labour calendar. In the next chapter, I focus on the complex set of inter linkages involved in cardamom production and marketing. Here, I introduce the economic importance of this forest product and examine how cardamom has become part of a diversification strategy for a number of Hmong households in Sa Pa district.

Cardamom (*Amomum aromaticum*) grows wild in the Hoang Lien National Park and surrounding forest, but has more recently been intensively cultivated under the shade of trees by ethnic minorities (chiefly Hmong and Yao) in Lao Cai province and other northwest provinces (Phan Văn Thang 5/22/06). Because of its high value-weight ratio, an increasing market demand, as well as government policies banning opium production and logging, Hmong individuals have been planting and harvesting cardamom more intensively since the later half of the 1990s under the tree canopy of forests (*ibid.*).

Indeed, the market price for dried cardamom in 2006 fluctuated between 80,000 to 100,000 VND/kg (US$5) compared to 15,000 VND/kg (US $1) for rice in the Sa Pa market.[40] In the communes of Lao Chai and Ta Van, families reported producing, on average, between 70 to 100 kilograms in 2005, roughly equivalent to 5.6 million VND (US$350) per family. [41] While some informants reported yields as low as 20 kg, other households in San Sa Ho and Ban Khoang communes reported sometimes harvesting and processing up to 100 or 150 kg per year. The highest yield reported was 200 kg for one household in Xin Chai village, San Sa Ho commune.

Sa Pa district's unpredictable weather makes cardamom yields fluctuate widely from year to year. When discussing these yields over the years, the vast majority of Hmong interviewees expressed a concern about the freezing rains in 2005. As cardamom fruit mature generally at the end of the rainy season, the fruit may be compromised by both rain and freezing rainy conditions. In Ta Van commune, producer Kao (6/23/06) reported losing almost half of his production in 2005 due to a cold, drizzling rain which had destroyed most of the plants. That particular year, he had been able to collect only 20kg. In Cat Cat village, Cham (6/13/06) explained how "in a good year, we can harvest up to 300 kg of cardamom but on bad years, we harvest only 100kg". In Giang Ta Chai commune, another Hmong elder, Foua (5/27/06), described how they had been able to harvest only 80kg (including that grown in the field of his son) because of a strong storm.

Nevertheless, the income from the sale of cardamom plays an non negligible role in securing food for households, especially since the cash earned from cardamom comes at a strategic part of the year when many families in Sa Pa experience food shortages. Cardamom requires relatively little labour input in comparison to staple crops such as rice and corn, and does not compete with their labour requirements. In June and July, when some families begin to rely more on corn or dry rice, families can use the cash earned from the sale of cardamom to buy the extra rice needed.[42] In Xin Chai hamlet, Moua (5/28/06) explained how she used all her money from selling cardamom for buying extra rice as well as other food items such as vegetables and fruit, meat, salt, cooking fat, monosodium glutamate (MSG), and occasionally small treats for children from a local market. The income from cardamom is also sometimes used to buy other household items

[40] The exchange rate used in this study was 16,000 VND for US $1.
[41] Market prices for cardamom are always given for dried cardamom fruit.
[42] During the months of June to August, the Hmong will often promise part of their production to local store owners, who extend credit to many villagers. These forms of informal credit arrangements are described more in-depth in the following chapter.

such as ready-made clothes, blankets, cooking pots, light bulbs, and oil. In San Sa Ho commune, Cho (7/6/6) explained how he sometimes used the cash earning from cardamom for more important expenses, such as the construction of a new home, the purchase of fertilizers, and/or new seeds for their fields. There are also signs of conspicuous consumption amongst the younger generations, as some are beginning to buy bigger 'luxury goods', such as radios or motorbikes if there is sufficient income after more immediate needs are met. In Giang Ta Chai, Foua (5/27/06) described to me how families in Seo My Ty – a village located closer to the forest – were able to earn a lot of money and buy televisions and motorbikes. Similarly, in Xin Chai hamlet, a Hmong woman, Lu (6/6/06) described:

> When the cardamom comes, we bring a lot of cardamom to give back to the *Kinh* people because we get food from them before the cardamom is ready. If you have some money left, people use it for buying animals like pigs and chicken… Some also use that money to make their houses stronger because we're not allowed to cut trees in the forest anymore. Many use it to buy some clothes for the New Year for children. If you are wealthy, some are able to buy things like televisions and radios.

Lastly, as briefly mentioned here by Lu, cardamom can also be used to purchase items for ceremonial purposes, such as weddings, funerals, and the Hmong New Year. Indeed, it is a Hmong custom to pay a bridal price, and a man is traditionally required to pay a certain amount of cash or goods (traditionally silver) to the family of the bride (Michaud and Culas 2000; Culas and Michaud 2004). The income from cardamom is also needed for preparing for the Hmong New Year, as families often buy warm clothes for the cool weather at that time, and purchase other domestic goods for improving the house for the celebrations (Lam, 6/6/06). In sum, the income derived from cardamom cultivation provides those Hmong able to harvest it with a flow of income for every day needs, in addition to being used in rituals and ceremonies which help to strengthen kin as well as community relations. In some cases, the income from the sale of cardamom is used to buy a bride and buy new clothes for the children for the Hmong New Year (Lam 6/6/06). Therefore, both materially and culturally, cardamom plays an important role in Hmong livelihood portfolios.

5.2.3 Livelihood heterogeneity: two examples from Sa Pa district

By placing this study within a rural livelihood framework (detailed in Section 2.2.2), attention is drawn to the assets, activities, and access to these which shape people's

abilities to make a living (Ellis 2000). Comparing different sources of income for a particular household allows one to grasp the heterogeneity of their livelihood portfolios. In the Hmong context, I draw upon Ellis' (1998: 4) definition of income as

> the cash earnings of the household plus the payment in kind of the household that can be valued in market prices. The cash earnings refer to items like crop or livestock sales, wages, rents and remittances. The in-kind component of household income refers to consumption of on-farm produce, payments in kind (for example, in food), and transfers or exchanges of consumption items that occur between households in rural communities.

In the context of this study, the total household income comes from wet rice, corn, garden vegetables, food, livestock feed and medicine from the forest, and swidden crops. In addition to this in-kind income, the cash component includes the cash earned by selling livestock, wage labour in Sa Pa town, cardamom, forest products, handicrafts, or tour guiding. Differences in access to capital assets, economic opportunities, and individual capabilities all result in different livelihood portfolios.

Figure 5.7A and 5.7B (shown below) give a rough estimate of the relative importance of each activity for two Hmong families, Hoa's (6/4/06) and Tao's (6/16/06), interviewed in Lao Chai and Ban Khoang communes respectively.[43] Each pie chart portrays the family's different sources of income, including both in cash and in-kind. In turn, different sources of income, put together, account for diverse livelihood portfolios. The different percentages can be thought as the importance of each activity to the basic survival of the household. Thus – although the market price for wet rice may be actually much lower than the cash income received from the sale of cardamom – the percentages associated with wet rice in these charts remain higher than any other income source because of the perceived importance of rice to the household's basic survival by its members.

Hoa's livelihood portfolio is shown in Figure 5.7A. In 2006, Hoa had five children and lived in Lao Chai commune, one of the first Hmong settlements established in the

[43] There are a number of methodological difficulties associated with measuring the total household income in the Hmong context. First, interviews were, for the most part, conducted with women with limited ability to read and write (for methodological reasons detailed in Chapter Four). Second, it was also difficult to use the market values for products (as they might not reflect the Hmong perception). Time devoted to each activity might also not be representative of the perceived value by Hmong. Third, activities often overlapped with one another: a trip to a swidden field was often combined with collecting fuel wood or herbal medicine. With these constraints in mind, these percentages should be seen as only *rough estimates* of mean income share by activity for these two households.

river valley (Hoa 6/4/06). As such, the population density in this commune is relatively higher than in other communes within the district and there is more population pressure on the existing ecological resources. Lao Chai is also considered to have fertile land and many rice paddy fields built during the socialist period, though hamlets are far from the forest line and Hoa's husband had to walk for a full day to reach his two cardamom fields. There, he was able to produce 70 kg of cardamom in 2005, contributing to about 15 per cent of their total household income in cash and kind. Hoa's family was fortunate enough to have enough rice to eat for the whole year, with their paddy land being important in terms of their total household income (approximately 40%). In contrast, dry rice, corn and swiddens provide only a minor part of the family's diet (15%). In fact, Hoa's family stopped growing dry rice in 2002, when her husband bought hybridized rice and corn seeds from the government. In addition, Hoa's family owned two water buffalo, chickens and ducks (10%) and a vegetable garden located closer to the river, providing them with vegetables to eat with their meals daily (15%).

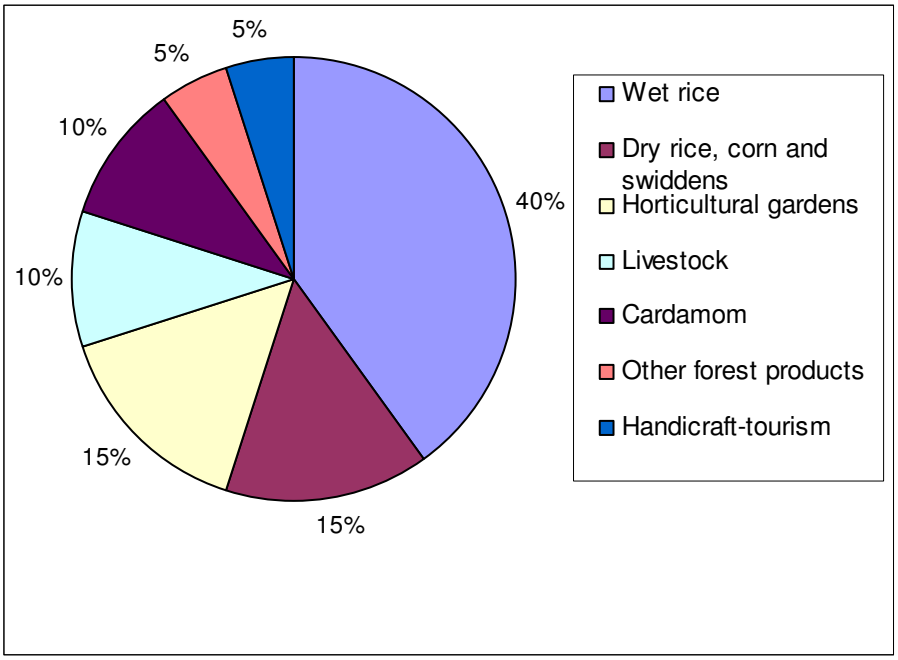

FIGURE 5.7A: LIVELIHOOD PORTFOLIO FOR HOA'S FAMILY, LAO CHAI COMMUNE (SOURCE: AUTHOR'S INTERVIEWS, 2006).
**Note: Percentages here reflect the importance of each activity to the basic survival of the household. These proportions were obtained during a series of semi-structured interviews with informants while establishing seasonal calendars. As shown in this figure, wet rice production accounts for approximately 40 per cent of the total household income – a higher percentage than any other activity, since it is the staple dietary food for this family year-round. The income derived from cardamom (10%) or handicrafts/tourism (5%) can be seen as more discretionary.*

In terms of market accessibility, Lao Chai is relatively well connected to Sa Pa town via a paved road. Between June to September, when there is less labour demand in the rice fields, Hoa explained how she went to the market twice a week to sell some handicrafts with other Hmong women in the Sa Pa market. She told me that the income from selling handicrafts varied a great deal from each trip and that she could never know how much she was going to earn. She regarded this source of income more as a opportunistic event than as a secure and regular source of income.

Figure 5.7B illustrates the livelihood portfolio for Tao's family in Ban Khoang commune. As noted earlier, variations in ecological settings and access to economic opportunities account for differences in the composition of these livelihood portfolios. Ban Khoang's steep topography makes rice paddy farming difficult, and fewer people have settled in this valley. Population density is lower than in Lao Chai commune and there appears to be less pressure on forest and water resources. The Hmong of Ban Khoang cultivate mostly dry rice and corn for subsistence foods, with occasionally some swiddens crops such as cassava and potatoes. In contrast to Hoa's case, wet rice accounted for only 20% of Tao's total household income. In contrast, corn, dry rice and other swidden crops was more important for the basic survival of the household, accounting for about 30 per cent of their total income. When interviewing Tao (6/16/06), he explained that cardamom provided his family with the vast majority of his earnings in cash – indeed, about 20 per cent of the total household income, since most of what he produced on his land was used for subsistence consumption. In 2005, Tao was able to collect 200 kg of dry cardamom from his three fields – much more than Hoa's family in Lao Chai. Living near the forest line, Tao only walked one or two hours before reaching his three fields, scattered in different parts of the forest.

In contrast to Lao Chai commune, Ban Khoang is more remotely located in terms of road accessibility, and there are no paved road linking villagers to Sa Pa town. A trip in a jeep can take up to two or three hours. Therefore, in contrast to the case of Hoa in Lao Chai, Tao's wife did not make handicrafts given this limited access, so Tao occasionally went to Sa Pa town to work for a Kinh person doing manual labour when cash was required.

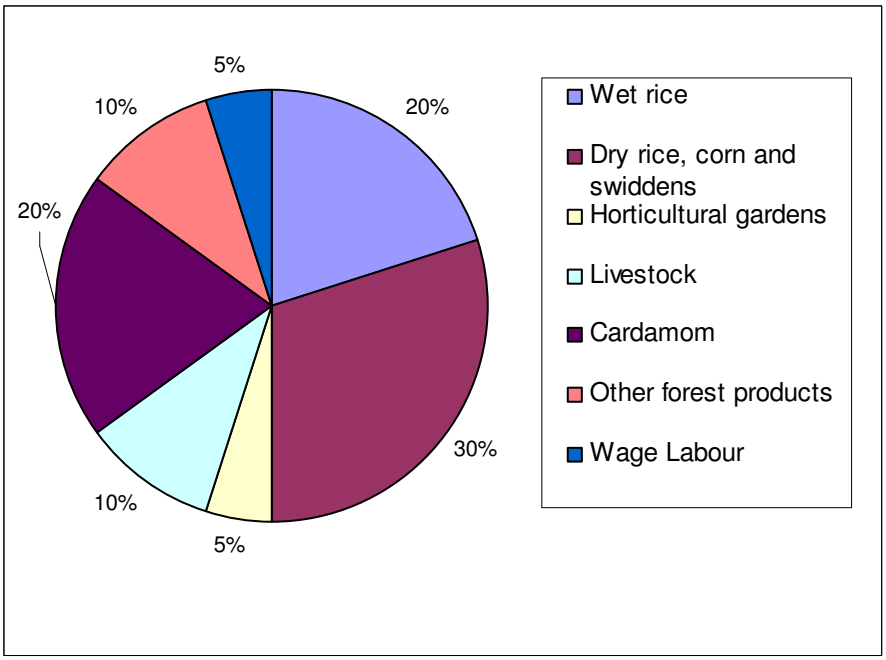

FIGURE 5.7B: LIVELIHOOD PORTFOLIO FOR TAO'S FAMILY, BAN KHOANG COMMUNE (SOURCE: AUTHOR'S INTERVIEWS, 2006).

For both of these households, forest products – with the exception of cardamom – held only a marginal position in terms of basic economic survival. Nevertheless, these goods played important subsistence roles, serving as food, livestock feed, or medicine. Another point to emphasize here is that both households viewed cardamom as important cash crops, on the same basis as perhaps opium and timber before the bans imposed by Vietnamese government authorities. However, other forest products such as wild foods, orchids and bamboo materials occupied a different category of 'forest products' in their minds, as these were used more opportunistically for domestic consumption or small income-generation. In sum, both Hoa's and Tao's livelihood portfolios prove to be highly heterogenous and diverse. A comparison of these portfolios at the micro level highlights the differential access to resources and economic opportunities, in turn shaping the livelihood activities developed by each household.

5.3 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In this chapter I analysed the assets and activities (or livelihood strategies) pursued by Hmong in Sa Pa district. The focus here has been on describing the ways in which

Hmong households in Sa Pa district have sustained, protected and developed their livelihoods throughout the post-colonial period, an era of multiple transitions.

In Section 5.1, I described how the socialist and post *Đổi Mới* regimes affected Hmong livelihoods in Lao Cai province. Between the 1960s and the end of the 1980s the highland economy was organised around kinship structures rather than by national agricultural collectivization schemes. In addition, the local economy was largely subsistence oriented, based upon swiddening, while logging and opium provided households with the bulk of their limited cash income. Economic renovation policies, land titling schemes and forestry regulations in the 1990s have challenged customary land use practices and access to forest resources. In Section 5.2, I then focused on the current livelihood portfolios of Hmong households in Sa Pa district, examining more specifically their use of natural resources at the household and community level. Indeed, analysing their livelihood activities allows us to explore in a holistic way the complex decision-making processes regarding resource use. Moving away from swiddening, opium cultivation, logging and forest products harvesting, the Hmong have recently begun intensifying certain agricultural practices such as wet rice and corn, but are also increasingly diversifying their sources of cash income with cardamom and, to a lesser extent, handicraft trade and tourism. In Section 5.3, I then illustrated the heterogeneity of Hmong livelihood portfolios using two cases from Sa Pa district; showing also how forest products appear to fulfil largely discretionary roles, but remain important in terms of responding to specific subsistence needs.

After holistically examining Hmong livelihood portfolios, I now turn to focus, in Chapter Six, on a particular forest product, cardamom, which has become a key cash crop for Hmong highlanders. I examine the ways that a range of actors of various ethnic groups participate in this trade, illustrating how ethnicity and power shape access along this commodity chain.

CHAPTER 6: MAPPING CARDAMOM COMMODITY CHAINS

In Chapter Five, I examined the diverse set of livelihood practices and the particular roles of forest product within Hmong livelihood portfolios in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam. In doing so I stressed the particular importance of cardamom, both as a medicinal plant and a cash crop for Hmong households.[44] In this chapter, I use the case of medicinal cardamom (*Amomum aromaticum*, also known by locals as *'thảo quả'*) to illustrate the social embeddedness of cardamom trade networks and the complex inter-ethnic power dynamics shaping this trade in northern Vietnam. Borrowing from commodity chain and actor-oriented approaches (detailed earlier in Chapter Two), I reconstruct the regional trade dynamics for cardamom through time, and then trace its contemporary journey from production/cultivation to final consumption. Drawing from interviews with a broad range of actors – Hmong cultivators, Kinh/Giay intermediaries, and wholesalers – I draw attention to ethnic and power based relations which ultimately shape the distribution of incomes amongst actors involved in this chain.

In this chapter I draw upon my conceptual framework to answer my second research objective for this study: ***to examine the current day production and marketing dynamics of medicinal cardamom in Lao Cai province***. In doing so I address my two research questions linked to my second research objective, presented in Chapter One. My first series of questions looks at the production aspects of the cardamom commodity chain (Section 6.1). That is, *how is cardamom produced in Sa Pa district? Who is involved in this process, and what are some limitations to cardamom production?* To answer such questions, I describe the plant's general biophysical requirements (6.1.1), before moving on to the history of the plant's domestication by ethnic minorities (6.1.2). Next, I explore the various labour activities (6.1.3) and finally address the limitations or production constraints experienced by Hmong households (6.1.4). My second set of research questions then explores the marketing issues associated within the cardamom trade in Lao Cai province (Section 6.2), asking the following questions: *how is cardamom marketing spatially organised in Lao Cai province? Who are the various actors involved? What are some of the trade difficulties faced, and finally, who stands to*

[44] It is important to note the fact that the Hmong are not the only ethnic minority group involved in cardamom cultivation but also the Yao (Sowerwine 2004a) and the Ha Nhi, who are present in Bât Xat district. However, this study solely focuses solely on the case of the Hmong, considered by traders to be the most important producers in the region.

benefit the most? A brief historical overview of trade networks during the socialist period (6.2.1) in turn provides a framework for exploring the spatial flows and actors involved in the contemporary cardamom commodity chain (6.2.2). In addition, I revisit the theory of access, defined earlier in Chapter Two, to analyse some of the difficulties faced by actors involved in the cardamom trade (6.2.3).

6.1 PRODUCTION

6.1.1 Cardamom in upland Vietnam

Medicinal cardamom is an herbaceous, perennial plant within the ginger family (*Zingiberacae*), which can reach a height of two meters at full maturity (Aubertin 2004).[45] Cardamom grows wild in Laos People's Democratic Republic (PDR) and in the northern highlands of Vietnam as an understory, rhizomatous herb (see Figure 6.1 below).

FIGURE 6.1: CARDAMOM PLANTS AT FULL MATURITY (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006).
**Note: the cardamom fruit are at the bottom of the plant's stem.*

[45] The name cardamom is used for species within three *genera* in the Ginger family (*Zingiberaceae*). One of these *genera* is *Amomum*, where the species are mainly found in Asia and Australia. Another, *Aframomum*, is distributed in Africa and Madagascar, and *Elettaria* is distributed from India to Peninsula Malaysia (Kvitvik 2001).

According to a cardamom specialist at the NTFP research center in Hanoi, there are five different species of cardamom in Vietnam, but the one with the highest value-weight ratio is *Amomum aromaticum roxb*, or *Amomum tsao-ko*, commonly found in Sa Pa district (Phan Văn Thang, 5/22/06). Cardamom plants start producing fruit the third to fourth year after taking root, and produce fruit annually thereafter (Aubertin 2004). Yields increase from the fourth year until about the tenth or fifteenth year but one plant can produce fruit for a period of 40 years. The plant flowers in April and June, and fruit start maturing throughout summer, from July to August, before being ready to be harvested from September through October.

Cardamom grows well in both evergreen and mixed deciduous forest, with moist soil, either in forest or in semi-shaded conditions, with 50 to 70 per cent canopy opening (Dinh Van Tu 2004). Cardamom demands consistent rainfall of about 100 days annually – hence a highly humid environment. These climatic conditions are characteristic of the eastern side of the Hoang Lien mountain range, as described in Chapter Three (Section 3.1.1). Cardamom grows well in primary or old growth as well as secondary forests, on sloped terrains, with an ideal temperature range of 19˚C to 22˚C (Phan Văn Thang, 5/22/06).

In Vietnam, cardamom has been harvested and traded by highland ethnic minorities in the provinces of Lào Cai, Yên Bai, Lai Châu, Hà Giang and Cao Bằng (Phan Văn Thang, 5/22/06). However, much of the cardamom in Vietnam comes from Lao Cai province, and within the province, the majority is from Sa Pa and Bat Xat districts (*ibid.*). Both of these districts are located on the eastern side of the Hoang Lien mountain range, where old growth forests have sufficient vegetative cover, moisture and cool temperatures (*ibid*.)

Under natural conditions, cardamom plant densities are relatively low, resulting in the Hmong needing to walk long distances before they can find any wild plants. However, cardamom density can be increased by propagating young rhizomes, whereby they are uprooted, cut, and replanted (Kvitvik 2001; Aubertin 2004). Other understory plants are generally weeded to achieve better growth and survival of the cardamom seedlings. Planting cardamom in forest 'gardens' can yield much higher results than those collected from the wild, with one hectare of planted cardamom yielding up to 50 kg of dry fruit (Aubertin 2004). When labour is invested in planting and weeding, cardamom can be seen as a half-domesticated plant, belonging to an "intermediate managed forest

ecosystem", in between hunting-gathering and an agroforest system (Foppes and Ketphanh 2000). Unlike other types of forest products such as wild foods, medicinal plants and wild orchids, cardamom plants have been domesticated and ethnic minorities in Sa Pa district have accumulated a substantial ethnobotanical knowledge concerning its cultivation.[46] When the fruit are picked carefully, without injuring the plant, the plant's capacity to produce new shoots is actually promoted (*ibid.*). Cardamom also has the advantage of being a good cover crop by offering protection from soil erosion (*ibid.*). Hence, cardamom cultivation is often viewed as a sustainable and profitable activity since the harvesting process tends to not only maintain, but augment the yield over time (Zhou 1993; Sharma, Sharma, Sinh and Sharma 2000; Aubertin 2004).

6.1.2 Origin of the seeds

Both Hmong and Yao ethnic minorities living in the highest elevation districts of Lao Cai province have traditionally used cardamom as a medicine for stomach aches and as a spice for traditional dishes (Phan Văn Thang, 5/22/06).[47] One elderly woman, Lam (7/10/06) described to me how cardamom cultivation was a longstanding practice for the Hmong:

> A long time ago, many Hmong people went to the forest to get the cardamom and used it for stomach problems. This was when there was a lot of forest around our homes. Many years ago, there used to be a lot more forest around us and so it was easy to go get cardamom and other food from the forest.

In addition, previous field work in Ban Khoang commune among the Yao by Sowerwine (2004a) suggests that the first cardamom seedlings came from Bat Xat district in the 1930s.[48] Cardamom seeds were then dispersed south, in Ban Khoang and Ta Giang Phin, before reaching the communes of San Sa Ho, Lao Chai and Ta Van (see Figure 4.1 in Chapter Four). The widespread domestication of cardamom then spread in response to a domestic demand from the Kinh, and possibly the French residing in the hill station of Sa Pa (*ibid.*). However, I found it difficult to find any trace of this trade in French colonial

[46] The various labour tasks associated with cardamom are described in Section 6.1.3.
[47] In Sa Pa district, cardamom production is almost always an economic activity exclusive to the Hmong and the Yao, who tend to live at higher elevations, in climate suitable for the cultivation of this plant.
[48] A 1975 newspaper accounts that Mr Thao A Vang (a Hmong man born in 1885) from Xin Chai hamlet in Bat Xat district was the first person to start planting cardamom domestically *circa* 1935 (noted in Sowerwine 2004a)

archives to which I had access, as the colonial authorities were mostly concerned with opium production and precious woods in the region.[49]

When asked about the origin of the seeds, the vast majority of informants reported that they (or their parents) had obtained the seeds through friends or relatives from Ban Khoang and Ta Giang Phin communes. In Ta Van commune, Kao (6/23/06) explained that elders in his village had received the seeds from relatives in various parts of the district, then using these seeds to plant new fields in the Hoang Lien forest. One Hmong elderly woman, Lim (6/28/06) reported that her mother used to plant cardamom close to her home and she remembered that villagers were using cardamom since at least the 1960s. Later, Lim mentioned that that her father had bought the seeds with silver coins from other Hmong in Ban Khoang commune, specifying that one silver coin was equivalent to approximately 10 kg of fresh cardamom at that time. Another Hmong informant in San Xa Ho commune explained: "cardamom seeds came from China. My father, who was living in Cat Cat village, got the seeds from relatives in Ban Khoang and Ta Giang Phin districts" (Cho, 7/6/06).

Hence, it appears that some Hmong in Sa Pa district knew about the existence and properties of this plant from at least the French colonial period. Evidence from in-depth interviews and other secondary sources suggests that cardamom seeds were transferred to the Hmong in Sa Pa district by relatives in Ban Khoang and Ta Giang Phin communes, before being transported south to the communes of San Sa Ho, Lao Chai, Ta Van and Ban Ho. Next I detail the various labour tasks associated with cardamom cultivation.

6.1.3 Labour activities

The total number of human-labour days associated with cardamom production is difficult to estimate, since planting, weeding, harvesting and drying varies according to each household and is often integrated with other livelihood activities, such as the collection of fuel wood or wild foods. However, from field observations, work in cardamom forests fields requires overall less human labour days relative to other food crops such as rice or corn.[50] In Ban Khoang commune, Sowerwine (2004a) found that the Yao sometimes

[49] These colonial archives were collected by Prof Jean Michaud, on my supervisory committee, to which he kindly gave me access. The content of these archives covers several economical and cultural aspects of several ethnic minorities in the Lao Cai region, of which of interest here are the '*Méos*' or the '*Miao*' (see, for instance, Frobet 1898; Taurett 1903, Bonifacy 1903, and Kouuy 1904).

[50] Some cases in Lao PDR for cardamom grown in similar conditions show an average of 30 people-days/ha/year investment for an average of 30kg/ha/year (Aubertin 2004).

visited their cardamom fields whilst preparing land for upland rice, maize or tubers, game hunting, or the collection of other forest products). The next paragraphs describe the sequence of activities involved in the cultivating cardamom for the Hmong in Sa Pa district.

6.1.3.1. *Planting the cardamom and preparing the fields*

Fields are generally passed on from older generations to the next, but new fields can also be 'cleared' or prepared by younger household members on a regular basis. Indeed, all Hmong household members interviewed had at least two, three, and occasionally up to five cardamom fields at various stages of maturity in different parts of the forest. In San Sa Ho commune, Cho (7/6/06), explained how he started cultivating cardamom 15 years ago, but his older brother worked in his uncle's field, which was over 50 years old (7/6/06). In Cat Cat village, Cham (6/13/06) reported that her family owned three fields, two being considered 'close' to their home (at two hours of walking distance in the forest), with a third field younger in age but located further in the Park, located approximately seven hours away from their home. In Ban Khoang commune, Tao (6/16/06) explained how he had three cardamom fields located in different parts of the forest, all at different stages of maturity. The two older fields (inherited from his parents) produced higher yields than the younger one in which he had recently planted new shoots. Tao was thus gaining higher returns from the two older fields inherited from his parents, but was preparing new ones for his children.

Sons in a household regularly claim *de facto* user rights to their fields by 'preparing' the land, which involves weeding, clearing some trees for lights, and planting new cardamom seedlings. As one women Lim (6/28/06) explained, "first you have to extract the wet seeds from the fruit, then you mix in with fire dust [ashes]… once these two things are well-mixed together, you plant them and then wait for another four or five years". After the fields are prepared, the men are in charge and visits to weed their fields three to five times a year. In Sin Chai village, San Sa Ho commune, cardamom producer Cho (7/6/06), introduced earlier, said he visited his fields twice a month during the first two months after the seedling were planted. Thus, preparing the cardamom fields is a predominately male-dominated activity, with customary rights passed on from father to son. Rights are sometimes transferable to women if their husband dies at a young age. During my field work, I encountered two cases, that of Mai Yia (6/14/06) and Lan

(7/13/06) who had both lost their husbands at a relatively young age (in their twenties), thereby inheriting their fields from them. In Ta Van commune, Mai Yia was single and now living with her brother-in-law who worked in her cardamom fields for her, and in exchange, was giving her some rice. In the Hau Thao commune, Lan shared a similar life story, but had temporarily abandoned her cardamom field after her husband's death. Lan then re-married two years later and worked in the same fields with her new husband. Hence, the age, number and location of the cardamom fields varies considerably from household to household, but all households have generally between two to four cardamom fields located in different parts of the forest. Access or rights of ownerships to these fields is subject to the same customary rights as for swidden fields.

6.1.3.2. *The cardamom plants come of age*

Four or five years after the cardamom seedlings are planted, the cardamom plants start bearing their first fruit. Before the harvest however, a yearly sequence occurs. The seasonal calendar in Figure 6.2 depicts the various agricultural and economic activities for an entire year and illustrates how the labour tasks associated with cardamom are integrated within other livelihood activities.

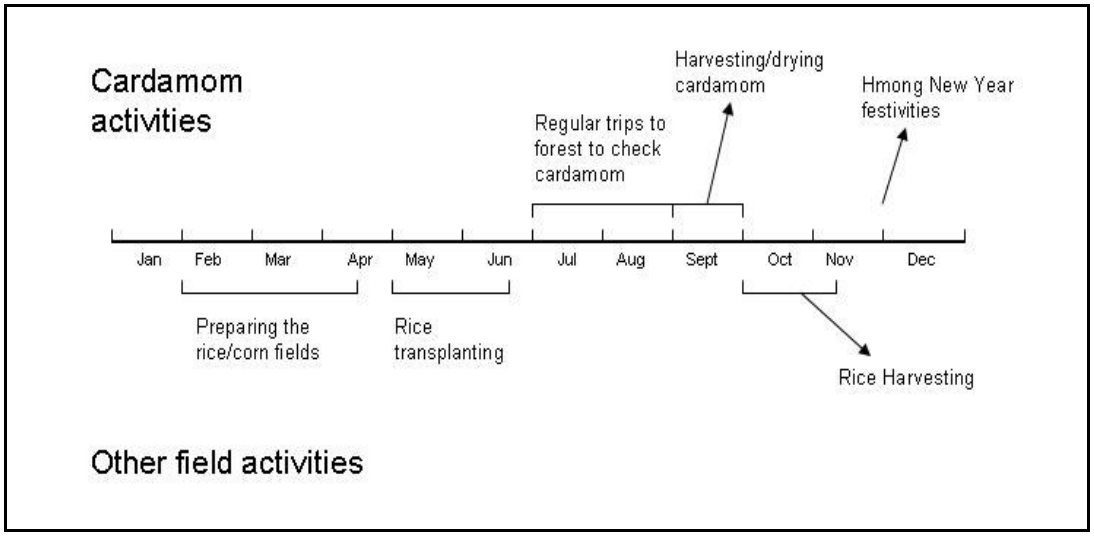

FIGURE 6.2: SEASONAL LABOUR CALENDAR (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006).

In February and March, the Hmong are active in preparing the fields for planting corn and wet rice. At the beginning of the rainy season[51], the Hmong are busy ploughing the

[51] The rainy season in the northern uplands of Vietnam usually starts in late April and lasts till the end of August, with heaviest rains in May and June (Sowerwine 2004a).

fields with the water buffalos before the rice transplanting which takes place in May. During the heavy rains in June and July, the Hmong have relatively less work to do, with the exception of weeding wet rice and corn fields. Hmong women might work on handicraft to sell to tourists coming to Sa Pa town and the surrounding Hmong hamlets in trekking tours. Hmong men may help a relative or a friend to build a house, or are busy repairing the house, bamboo irrigation canals, go on hunting trips. They also start making regular visits to their cardamom fields in late July and throughout the month of August. In Sin Chai village, Lu (6/6/06) explained how, in June and July, Hmong men spent many days in the forest to 'check' on their cardamom fruit whilst also collecting bamboo shoots, orchids or mushrooms. In Lao Chai commune, Lia (6/3/06) reported that Hmong men made frequent visits to their fields from mid-July until the harvest begins, in order to prevent other villagers from stealing their production.

The harvesting of cardamom falls at the end of the rainy season, just before rice harvesting, a period of high labour availability. In Sa Pa district, cardamom is harvested from August to late October, depending on the micro-climatic condition of each hamlet. Cham explained how the men in her family could spend between one and two weeks in the forest to harvest and dry the fruit. Similarly, when discussing the processing activities for cardamom, Lia (6/3/06), a Hmong woman in Lao Chai described:

> In early August, my husband and I leave for a few days to harvest and dry the cardamom in the forest. We have to walk for an entire day because it is very far. Sometimes I stay at home to take care of the children, but sometimes there is a lot and I have to leave with my husband to help him carry back all the cardamom. Together we build a small wood house [smokehouse] and hang the fruit over the fire to dry for three or four days.

Focusing on gender relations, Hmong men appear to be the ones responsible for preparing and looking after the cardamom fruit. Indeed, such work is generally associated with work in the swidden fields – also traditionally a male occupation in the gendered division of labour.[52] However, the harvesting and drying of the fresh cardamom fruit may involve both men and women, depending upon on the size of the harvest. When women are involved, the grand-parents stay in the village to take care of younger children, while husband and wife leave for a few days. The length of their stay in the forest varies according to the size of the harvest and the number of men in the family. Women may, or

[52] As discussed in Chapter Five, men also spend more time in the forest, hunting, collecting bamboo shoots, mushrooms, honey or small game while women are more involved in home gardens, rice and corn cultivation.

may not, help their husband to dry and carry the cardamom fruit back to the village. However, in Lao Chai commune, Lia (6/3/06) specified that "women always prefer to stay at home to take care of the children, working in the vegetable and indigo gardens". Similarly, in San Sa Ho commune, Noua (6/7/06) explained how she rarely went in the forest because of her fear of evil spirits and insects which could make someone sick. [53] She added that she went to the forest only to collect some fodder for the pigs (leaves from wild banana trees) and fuel wood. In Lao Chai commune, Nao (6/3/06) expressed a similar concern when having to walk long distanced in the forest to reach his fields. Nao described how people were afraid of going into the forest because of the wild animals, snakes and poisonous insects, which carried malicious spirits and could make a person sick. He did not like going into the forest himself, but that he badly needed the cash for buying subsistence goods.

No Hmong whom I interviewed spoke of any special ritual or ceremony associated with cardamom harvesting, even when directly asked about this possibility. Harvesting activities take place at the household level, each household harvesting the cardamom independently from one another. Older producers (also the most important producers) rely on younger household members to work in the cardamom fields and often own multiple fields at different degree of maturity. In Ta Van commune, Kao (6/23/06), in his late 50s, explained how he was helped by his eldest son. In one particular case, Lim (6/28/06), an elderly woman, said that the village leader would signal the time of harvesting for some families – but this was the only instance where a collective decision-making process was made. In general, each family operated independently from one another.

[53] As discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.2.2.5), the presence of evil spirits in the forest are thought to be one cause of contracting certain illnesses and diseases.

FIGURE 6.3: THE CARDAMOM FRUIT COME OF AGE (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006).

6.1.3.3. *Drying the cardamom fruit*

Processing the cardamom involves the drying of the fruit, and is usually done by the Hmong who harvest fuel wood *in situ*, next to their fields where they can more easily access firewood (Noua 6/7/06; Cham 6/13/06). After picking the fruit, Cham (6/13/06) explained, "the men build a small house in wood [smoking house] to have a fire over which the fruit are hung for four or five days".[54] In an interview with a cardamom trader in Sa Pa, Quy Giang (7/3/06) told me that 10 kilograms of fresh cardamom, after drying, generates approximately 3 to 4 kilograms of dried fruit, so a ratio of about 3:1. Once the fruit are cured over this fire for a few days, the men, sometimes accompanied by women, carry the dried fruit in baskets back to the village, where it can be sold to trade intermediaries. Mrs Thuy (7/3/06), a retired cardamom wholesaler in Sa Pa town, reported that only a small number of families sometimes sell fresh cardamom for a reduced price; most of them having already mortgaged the cardamom harvests to cardamom intermediaries who often act as credit lenders.[55] However, before describing the marketing aspects of cardamom, the various constraints on production are discussed below.

[54] It would take 15 days of sun-drying to achieve the same process (Aubertin 2004).
[55] Information on informal credit arrangements between Hmong producers and Kinh traders follows in Section 6.2.2.1.

FIGURE 6.4: DRIED CARDAMOM FRUIT (SOURCE: AUTHOR 2006).

6.1.4 Limitations to cardamom production

As discussed in Chapter Five (Section 5.2.2.6), cardamom represents a lucrative source of income for Hmong households in Sa Pa district. Having examined the plant's biophysical requirements and production yields, I now present some of the constraints and limitations associated with cardamom cultivation.

6.1.4.1. *Access to land and remote location*

During interviews with Hmong cultivators, a common concern expressed by Hmong households was a lack of adequate land suitable for cardamom cultivation. As expressed by Mao (6/23/06), a Hmong producer in Sa Pa commune, "there isn't enough [forest] land for everyone in the village". Mao explained how, because his village was 'older' and with more families living on the same land, many households felt there simply was not enough 'good' land for cardamom cultivation. Mao continued to explain how in San Sa Ho commune, households could more easily establish new cardamom fields because these were newer settlements which were all located closer to the forest. However, in San Sa Ho commune, Cham (6/13/06) expressed a similar concern, "before there was less people growing cardamom… people could get much more".

With a growing demand for land to cultivate cardamom, household members often complained about having to walk long distance before establishing their fields –

making harvesting and transportation much more difficult. In Ta Van, cardamom producer Kao (6/23/06) explained, "I have to walk for a very long time before I reach my fields. There is no good land nearby… unlike in Y Linh Ho or Seo My Ty [villages in San Sa Ho commune] where people can cultivate cardamom very close to their house because they live closer to the mountain [forest]". Indeed, in a field visit to Y Linh Ho village, a Hmong elderly woman, Lim (6/28/06) told me that her cardamom fields were located only one hour away from her house. In Y Linh Ho and Seo My Ty[56] – hamlets with lower population densities – households have easier access to forest land adequate for cardamom cultivation, yet face the barrier of market access. In contrast, villagers in more densely populated settlements such as Lao Chai commune walk longer distances to reach their cardamom fields.

6.1.4.2. *Access to labour*

Work in the cardamom fields requires relatively little labour-days, especially in comparison to other food crops such as wet rice and corn. Nevertheless, families facing labour shortages often rely on extended family, friends or kin for reciprocal labour arrangements. Evidence from field work suggests that relying on such labour arrangements plays an important role for young married couples and single-female headed households. In Ta Van commune, Mai Yia (6/14/06), introduced earlier, explained how after the death of her husband, she decided to rent her rice paddy fields to her brother in-law who helped her in keeping her cardamom fields 'active'. However, not all Hmong widows were able to rely on family or networks of friends. Lu (82 years old) worked part-time in the Sa Pa market making handicrafts (7/15/06) and explained how, after her husband died, she remained very young and had to momentarily abandon her cardamom fields. Alternatively, in Lao Chai village, Zhia (7/15/06) said that after her husband had died, she remained single and had to rent out her rice paddy land to another family in the village. In turn, she worked in her deceased husband's opium poppy fields. After the ban on opium in 1992, she changed crops and started cultivating more intensively cardamom. As she grew older, her son and daughter-in-law were gradually working in the cardamom fields for her. These life stories illustrate how cardamom production essentially thrives on unpaid kin or family labour and also the gendered division of labour tasks within the household. Indeed, work in the cardamom field is

[56] Y Linh Ho and Seo My Ty are located in San Sa Ho and Ta Van communes, respectively.

associated within work in the swidden and reflects predominantly male values. As such, young widows had to either rely on extended family support, or re-marry in order to maintain their user rights to their cardamom fields. Not surprisingly then, the most commercially successful cardamom growers were those with in-house access to male labour in the form of grown sons, brothers, sons-in-laws, or other close make kin with whom to trade off workloads.

6.1.4.3 *Insecure forest rights*

The Hmong have traditionally established cardamom fields in montane forests, which, in the past, remained under State control. However, as seen in Chapter Three (Section 3.2), traditional/customary rules regulating forest access prevailed during the colonial and well into the socialist period, despite enhanced State efforts to legitimise its authority over highland minority populations. In the early 1990s, a series of forest reforestation and protection measures outlawed swidden cultivation and opium growing. Nonetheless, the ways in which these policies have been implemented on the ground are far from being consistent (Corlin 2004; Sowerwine 2004b). Indeed, rights of ownerships to cardamom fields appear to be purely based on customary laws, as the Vietnamese State does not recognize this type of land-use in Red Book Certificates (GO1, 5/26/06).

In contrast to relatively egalitarian post-socialist property arrangements found for wet paddy rice property systems (Sikor 2000, 2004), property relations for forest land are subject to fluid and conflicting claims (Sowerwine 2004a, 2004b). The case of cardamom cultivation illustrates some of the struggles between *de facto* and *de jure* issues, as "boundaries around forest land types were never clearly demarcated nor explicitly managed under socialism" (Sowerwine 2004b: 101). In the context of this study, I would argue that insecure forest rights ultimately jeopardise the long term sustainability of cardamom cultivation in Sa Pa district. Indeed, the vast majority of Hmong household interviewed had cardamom fields located within the Hoang Lien National Park – land protected by State park officials (GO1 5/26/06; GO2 7/12/06). However, new regulations over forested land meant that Hmong were made vulnerable with regards to their user rights over forest resources, including their cardamom fields. Park authorities recognized the economic importance of cardamom for Hmong households and, in 2006, appeared to tolerate this type of land-use (*ibid*.). However, they

also expressed a concern over the fact that Hmong households collected fuel wood and made fires inside the forest to dry the cardamom (GO1 5/26/06).

As previously noted, cardamom fields do not fall into the new legal property rights framework for land (the Red Book certificates) and the vast majority of Hmong households interviewed did not own any form of recognised legal property title to their cardamom fields. During my field work, I only encountered one Hmong man who owned a legal land title to his cardamom fields. Mao's (6/23/6) case, in Sa Pa commune, was unique in that his two fields were located outside the Hoang Lien Park. Mao explained that he had worked for the local People's Committee in his commune, during which time he had heard about the Green Book certificates[57]. Before the 1990s, Mao had used his land for subsistence swidden cultivation. However, after signing for a Green Book certificate with government authorities, Mao was now letting the forest regenerate on his land classified as 'barren'. Mao then used the same piece of land to cultivate cardamom under the regenerating tree canopy. Today, Mao considered himself one of the most commercially successful household in Sa Pa commune, having switched from swidden agriculture to cardamom cultivation. Due to his ties with local State officials, Mao was able to participate in the Five Million Hectare Programme, and thus received a financial compensation for protecting the forest. Mao's case is informative in that it shows some of the household distributional inequalities associated with land allocation and reforestation policies, which tend to favour the wealthy, those with privileges, or those with the best political connections (Sowerwine 2004b).

Another issue associated with insecure forest rights is the erosion of customary rights, leading to successive disputes amongst village members and sometimes inter-village conflicts. As one older Hmong man, Kao (6/23/06), explained:

> People often steal cardamom from each other. […] It is very hard to do anything about it because you cannot catch people easily. Sometimes when there is a lot of drinking, people start fighting and accuse each other. Last year, two or three times, people started fighting and accusations broke into a fight. Generally, people can't do anything about it but in bigger cases, people go to the People's Committee to complain.

[57] Green Book certificates are analogous to the Red Book certificates and were put into place as part of the Five-Million-Ha reforestation initiative by the forestry department in 1998 for forest protection purposes. Green Book certificates are given to households who decide to reforest part of their land classified as 'barren land'. In exchange, families receive a seven-year compensation plan of 2.5million VND (equivalent to US$150), as well as technical assistance from agricultural extension workers (GO2, 7/12/06).

Cham (6/13/06), introduced earlier, described to me how the men in her village made two to three trips during the month of July to their fields and had to stay overnight to keep an eye on the cardamom fruit. As a way of protecting their fruit against theft, one household reported that they harvested cardamom earlier than usual in some seasons because if they waited too long, other villagers would not hesitate to steal their fruit: "The fields are very far from our house so we have to pick them early. But if we wait longer and no one takes them, then we can harvest more" (Lu, 6/6/06). This coping mechanism resulted in a loss in the quality of the fruit, as Hmong harvesters picked them as a one time event, rather than waiting for the fruit to fully mature, when they would be of higher quality. Ideally, cardamom fruit should be picked only when fully ripe, but, as well as having to be vigilant for theft, this would entail making several trips to the forest at different times during the harvesting season.

When discussing the issue of theft, Hmong cultivators talked about inequalities in yields between members of the same community which often pushed some individuals to steal cardamom from others. When disputes arise, villagers have to report the incident to the local People's Committee yet in practice, this reporting seldom occurs (Lim, 6/28/06). Moreover, the informal nature of cardamom production means that villagers usually prefer not to communicate these issues to local – usually Vietnamese – government officials. As Lim (6/28/06) explained, "when there is a big fights, people go to the village leader. Previously, people did not have to pay. However today, the village leader [government official] asks for 50,000 to 100,000 *dôngs* [equivalent to US$ 3-6] to resolve the dispute… so most people don't say anything".

To summarize, problems associated with cardamom cultivation in Sa Pa district are three-fold. A lack of access to available land for cultivating cardamom means that households are going further into the forest to establish new fields, making labour tasks more strenuous. Second, cardamom cultivation relies essentially on unpaid kin or family members, putting the elderly and women in a disadvantaged position – especially in conditions where access to other sources of income-generating opportunities is limited. Third, the Hmong hold no tenure rights to forests, thereby placing them as outlaws, unable to fully exercise their user rights over these cardamom fields. However despite these limitations, the Hmong in Sa Pa district still find it profitable to engage in cardamom production.

6.1.5 Cardamom production: a summary

In this section, I have addressed the ways cardamom is produced in Sa Pa district, who is involved in this process, as well as some of the limitations to cardamom production. Cardamom is a plant which fits well into the local ecological conditions of the region, and the Hmong in Sa Pa district have accumulated a substantial body of technical ecological knowledge (or 'TEK') about this particular forest products and the best methods for plant growth and cultivation. Field preparation, harvesting, and drying are labour activities which demand relatively little time within the Hmong seasonal calendar and do not compete with other labour activities. The cultivation of this cash crop is strongly shaped by cultural norms and gender, with Hmong male dominating this sphere of production. An examination of the various production limitations has shown the importance of access to land and male household labour. Finally, insecurity with regards to their forest rights, in turn, reflects broader issues of access to forest resources in northern Vietnam, as the Hmong remain politically and economically marginalised in reforestation, biodiversity and forest protection initiatives.

6.2 MARKETING

Here I focus on the marketing and trade networks for cardamom in Sa Pa district, examining the historical foundations (6.2.1), before considering in more depth the spatial flows and actors involved (6.2.2). Finally I examine some of the entry barriers shaping access along this commodity chain (6.2.3).

6.2.1 Historic development: trading cardamom during the socialist period

When examining Hmong highland livelihoods in Lao Cai province, Michaud and Turner (2003) argue that to fully understand the current trade networks and operations, one must also have a grounded understanding of historical State and market conditions in the northern highland region. In the context of the cardamom trade, how did these trade networks first develop in Lao Cai province? In Sa Pa town, Mrs Thuy (7/3/06), today a retired cardamom trader, explained "before the 1990s, there was no open trade possible between Kinh people and ethnic minorities and only the State was allowed to buy and sell goods". She added that Kinh traders in Sa Pa town bought cardamom from ethnic minorities (mostly the Hmong but also the Yao), before storing it in their homes. During field work interviews, one elderly Hmong woman, Noua (6/7/06) explained how her

parents used to grow cardamom in the forest 50 years ago and had started planting cardamom well before the socialist period. She added that her parents used to transport a load of cardamom on horses to Mung Can Chai district, in Yen Bai province (a province to the Southeast of Lao Cai), selling cardamom to other Hmong minorities living there. Other informants mentioned going to Lao Cai city, near the border with China, to trade chillies, swidden crops (mostly tubers) and cardamom with the lowland Kinh (Mai Yia 6/14/06; Kao 6/23/06). In sum, evidence from oral history interviews suggests that historical trade networks for cardamom developed from at least the socialist period, and perhaps even earlier.[58]

During the Sino-Vietnamese war of 1979[59], State pharmaceutical companies stopped purchasing cardamom for three years leading to many cultivators neglecting their fields (Sowerwine 2004a). During the 1980s, while the border was still closed, the government started buying cardamom again, but at a low price (6-7,000 VND/kg) (*ibid*.). A long term Vietnamese resident of Sa Pa, Tranh (6/29/06) described how, in the 1980s, cardamom was also traded on the black market for the domestic lowland Kinh market and there were a number of trade restrictions and taxes. Gradually more and more private, independent Kinh individuals started trading and bartering cardamom with ethnic minorities (both Yao and Hmong). These transactions generally took place on the main road or within hamlets, but there was little or no market activity carried out in Sa Pa town. Tranh added later that when the socialist economy began to falter (in the early 1980s), the private trade of cardamom – until then considered a black market – boomed, along with a gradual increase in market prices throughout the 1990s. Increasing trade opportunities with China, a relatively closer market than Hanoi, then shifted trade flows again. These increases in market prices for cardamom stimulated production at the household level and the number of private traders also grew, paralleling the introduction of trade liberalization laws associated with *Đổi Mới*. By the end of the 1990s, cardamom from northern Vietnam was overwhelmingly being exported to China.

[58] As noted earlier (Section 6.1.2.1) I was unable to find any reference to cardamom during the French period in available archives, but this might have been due to French interests lying elsewhere – notably in the trade of opium, coffin wood and silver.

[59] The tense Sino-Vietnamese relations at the end of the 1970s till the early 1980s resulted in a militarization of the borders and closed to any form of trade. Open conflicts and battles occurred mostly in the border areas for a few months between 1979 and 1980 but caused massive damage in building and transport infrastructure there (Donnell 1980). In terms of its effect on trade, hostile relations between Vietnam and China prevented any form of official border trade for a longer period of time, and only small-scale and secretive cross-border trade occurred (Womack 1994).

6.2.2 Spatial flows and actors

Trade networks for cardamom that originate in the northern highlands span across three geographical and culturally distinct regions: (1) highland forests (often considered, in the lowland imaginary, to be on Vietnam's 'periphery'); (2) a Kinh dominated border town and other lowland Kinh cities; and (3) China and other East Asian markets, the largest consumer markets for the Vietnamese cardamom. Since the break-down of the socialist trade system in the mid-1980s, the cardamom trade has relied on a complex web of private individuals – cultivators, itinerant traders, shop keepers, wholesalers and consumers – shown by points A to J in Figure 6.5.

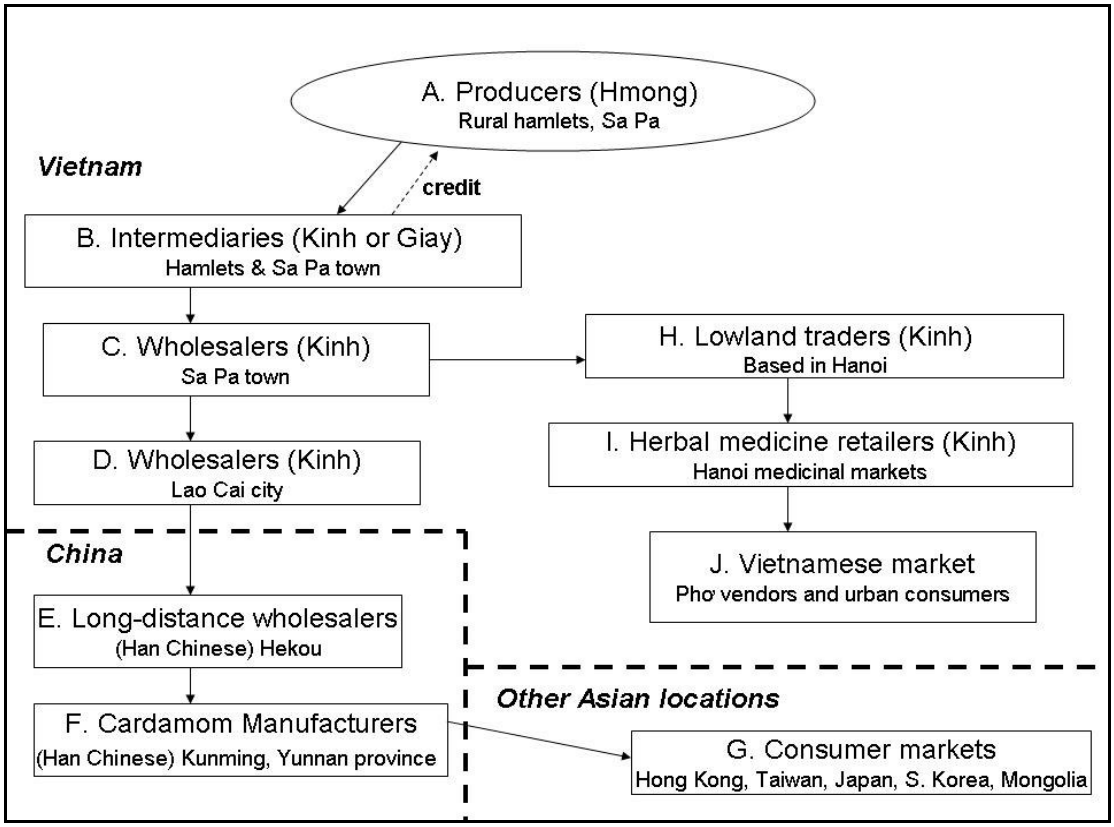

FIGURE 6.5: FLOW DIAGRAM OF THE CARDAMOM COMMODITY CHAIN (SOURCE: AUTHOR, 2006).

In the next section I unravel the spatial flows and actors involved in the cardamom commodity chain, examining how **ethnicity, power** and **access to capital –** key factors to this analysis – are intertwined and shape these trade networks. To keep these flows in perspective, the broken line represents different international border crossings.

6.2.2.1 *Itinerant or village-based intermediaries*[60]

Every year, from August till October, Hmong harvesters (point A, in Figure 6.5)[61] receive visits every two or three days from cardamom intermediaries (point B) who ask the Hmong if they have any cardamom to sell. When I asked Mai Yia, a Hmong woman introduced earlier, about the ethnicity of these intermediaries, she replied: "In my village [Ta Van] there are some Hmong, Yao and Giay people. [62] The Giay have traded a long time with the Vietnamese people [Kinh], so they know who to sell to and they have more Vietnamese friends than us [the Hmong]". In Hau Thao commune, Hmong harvester Shio (7/13/06) commented on these cardamom intermediaries, who came regularly in his village during the cardamom season:

> I know five traders very well because they come to buy cardamom every year. In the last couple of years, there are more Vietnamese people who come and ask about the cardamom. One year, we had more than 20 traders coming to ask us about cardamom. […] In the past, Hmong people went to Sa Pa to sell cardamom in one big shop to the Vietnamese government but now, many Vietnamese came directly to the village to buy.

During field work, I conducted seven interviews with village-based or itinerant intermediaries (point B). Two of them were Giay and five were Kinh and all had traded cardamom in one or two communes around Sa Pa town. Both women and men appear to be involved in this business, but an important proportion appears to be women (Lien Van 6/26/06; Lua 6/26/06; Tranh Huy 7/7/06). All these intermediaries had business connections with traders in Sa Pa town, and the majority brought the precariously wrapped cardamom on the back of their motorbikes back to the district town. Alternatively, one shop owner in Ta Van, Lua (6/26/06) told me she simply waited for the visit of wholesalers from Sa Pa town whom she knew very well, and who came to her home every few days or so during the cardamom season.

Given the seasonal nature of this trade, cardamom intermediaries often have to supplement their income with other economic activities. As one Kinh female itinerant trader, Minh Ha (6/7/06) explained:

---

[60] In this study I use the term 'intermediary' when designate specifically those traders who buy cardamom directly from the Hmong and re-sell it to wholesalers in Sa Pa town or Lao Cai city.

[61] To avoid repetition, the letters A to J in the following sections (6.2.2.1 to 6.2.2.5) all refer to the different actors involved in the cardamom commodity chain, shown in Figure 6.5.

[62] Three ethnic minorities co-exist in Ta Van commune but tend to occupy different parts of the commune. The Hmong live in the higher parts of the hamlets, on steeper terrain, and closer to the forest line. In contrast, the Giay have own more rice paddy land at lower altitude and closer to the streams.

> My family is from the Anam region [Central Vietnam] but I moved up to Sa Pa when I married my husband and started trading cardamom ten years ago. I made money a lot of different ways. I collected cardamom, sold some rice flour ice-cream in Cat Cat and Sin Chai villages, collected empty plastic bottles and metal cans to recycle. I also used to sell some peaches and plums in the Sa Pa market.

In Sa Pa town, another intermediary, Le Chi Thao (7/3/06) told us she also bought cardamom as well as mushrooms, medicinal teas and bamboo shoots from Hmong hamlets and sold them to wholesalers from Lao Cai. All of these intermediaries had either family or closer relatives residing in Sa Pa, and often previous trade experience – such as the case of Minh Ha (described above). Their past experience helped them secure some financial capital in order to establish a commercial relationship with the Hmong. Moreover, all the intermediaries and shop owners interviewed owned or had access to their husband's or a brother's motorbike, which gave them the mobility to collect the cardamom from minorities and bring it to their buyers in Sa Pa town.

Intermediaries also talked about the importance of building a regular clientele of Hmong suppliers over the years, as they became more and more familiar with Hmong village members. Often based in one commune, each intermediary visited the same households every year. For instance, shop owners in the different hamlets often traded cardamom with the Hmong since they were directly in contact with these families on a regular basis (Lien 6/26/06; Dung 6/26/06; Lua 6/26/06; Phuc 6/26/06; Tranh Huy 7/7/06). In addition, I interviewed three Giay traders (all of whom spoke Hmong) who also owned small general stores on the side of a road, next to a hamlet. Minh Ha (introduced earlier) also spoke a little Hmong, as she generally had Hmong clientele in her small trade business. Dung (6/26/06), a Kinh shop owner at the cross-roads of Ta Phin and Sa Pa communes, explained how she had arrived in the district in 1987 to begin work in a village cooperative. When she lost her job working for the government (in the early 1990s), she opened a small general store on the side of the road and started trading cardamom with the Hmong, who came to her shop on a regular basis to buy goods. As she described, "every time they [the Hmong] come, I ask them if they have anything to sell to me…I buy many things from them: chickens, sometimes rice, mushrooms, honey and bamboo shoots… then I started also buying cardamom". Having traded cardamom trade for more than a decade, Dung perceived herself as being a successful entrepreneur, saying that "the Hmong know me very well now and I know who to go see to get the cardamom". In contrast, her younger sister, Lien (6/26/06), in Ta Phin commune,

explained how she was not doing as well as her older sister (Dung). Lien had moved to Sa Pa much later, in 2002, after her divorce. Unlike her sister Dung, Lien's situation was more precarious and she could not speak any Hmong.

Important to note here is that these intermediaries also act as credit lenders to Hmong households in the hamlets, selling them dried foods, meat, vegetables, and farm tools, to be repaid later. In Sa Pa commune, Dung explained how, during the lean months (May to August), Hmong villagers purchased rice and other dried goods on credit, selling her the cardamom 'in advance' for a reduced price (40,000 VND/kg).[63] Clearly this exchange system places Hmong in a disadvantaged position in comparison to households who can afford to wait longer before selling their cardamom. This exchange system also shows the unbalanced power dynamics between Hmong harvesters and Kinh intermediaries which, in this case, appear to be based on unequal access to financial capital. In other words, their inability to mobilize enough cash makes it more difficult (if not impossible) for the Hmong to act as traders themselves, and hence capture higher benefits from their sales.

6.2.2.2 *Wholesalers in Sa Pa town*

During my field work in Lao Cai province, I interviewed four wholesalers (point C) who bought the cardamom from the cardamom intermediaries in the different hamlets around Sa Pa town. These Kinh wholesalers appeared to all belong to the upper middle-class or *nouveau riche*, living in two to three-storeys high, Hanoian-style homes in Sa Pa town. Each of these traders had access to a jeep through a husband, a brother, or a brother-in-law. As in the previous case, there is a predominance of Kinh women involved at this node of the commodity chain. As one wholesaler explained, "women are better in doing all the talking and bargaining…all the important people [wholesalers] in Lao Cai are women" (Ha Tam 7/18/06).

All wholesalers interviewed were middle-aged or retired women and had had a diverse occupational history, closely linked with changes in Vietnam's broader political economy. One trader, Mai Pham (7/3/06) explained how she was originally from a province in the central lowlands, but moved to the northern highlands in the early 1980s, working for the government in the food distribution programmes in rural cooperatives. After the dismantlement of cooperative system, Mai Pham then retired under Decision

[63] In 2006, the prices for dry cardamom varied between 60,000 to 90,000 VND/Kg.

176, a policy change which initiated a series of institutional reforms in 1989 and caused a sizeable loss of jobs in the civil sector (Sowerwine 2004b). In the mid-1990s, Mai Pham then opened a small shop in Sa Pa town where she sold staple grains such as rice, corn and other farm products mostly to Hmong families in the area. In 2006, her husband worked as a driver for a hotel business in Sa Pa and they borrowed the jeep from the hotel to collect cardamom in different hamlets.

For these wholesalers, having established relations with cardamom intermediaries (and occasionally directly with Hmong producers) revealed to be an important factor in one's business success. Indeed, all four wholesalers interviewed reported being in regular contact with cardamom intermediaries (point B) in several communes. These Kinh wholesalers were powerful actors in having access to large sums of financial capital – enough to act sometimes as credit lenders to Kinh village-based intermediaries. Being familiar with some of the most important Hmong cultivators also helped one's business to grow. For instance, Quy Giang (7/3/06) reported that his parents had started trading cardamom with Hmong from Nam Cang commune (see Figure 3.1 in Chapter Three) since 1984. Quy Giang learnt the ropes of this business early, accompanying his parents to the different communes since he was 16 years old. He explained to me his success by saying that he had traded cardamom directly with Hmong households and was also familiar with the most important cultivators. Another wholesaler Mai Pham (7/3/06) explained that she occasionally bought cardamom from the Hmong who came to Sa Pa during the weekend market, noting the importance of long term connections "a lot of the Hmong know me from a long time and they trust me and know I give them a good price". Her comment is revealing in that it suggests that long-term exchange relationships built on trust are essential in building a steady clientele of Hmong suppliers.

Long-term connections with other wholesalers in Lao Cai city (point D) were also important for wholesalers based in Sa Pa town, since the major part of their trade business activities were oriented towards the Chinese market. Wholesalers in Sa Pa talked about their long-term business relations, saying that they received regular phone calls almost every day from wholesalers in Lao Cai from August until the end of September – the busiest part of the year for cardamom trade. After agreeing on a given quantity and price, wholesalers from Lao Cai travelled in jeeps to pick up the cardamom in the Sa Pa town wholesalers' homes, occasionally giving wholesalers in Sa Pa a credit advance on a cardamom stock. Given the nature of this trade, one can more easily see

how Hmong cultivators – without a phone, financial means (to buy a jeep), and lacking strong ethnic affiliation and trust relations with the Kinh – could not participate as wholesalers in this commodity chain.

6.2.2.3 *Wholesalers in Lao Cai*

Cardamom wholesalers in Lao Cai city (point D in Figure 6.5) occupy a strategic position in exporting cardamom to China, the main market for the Vietnamese cardamom. In Lao Cai city, I interviewed three cardamom wholesalers who all confirmed that trade operations were, for the most part, dominated by women. Again, all of these wholesalers had had a diverse occupational experience giving them important tools for entering in this trade. In her home province, Xuan Nhu (see Figure 6.6) had also traded other goods such as herbal medicine and cardamom.

FIGURE 6.6: A CARDAMOM WHOLESALER IN LAO CAI (SOURCE: AUTHOR, 2006).

Xuan Nhu (7/4/06) described to me how she had moved from Yen Bai province to Lao Cai city in 1998, hearing about possible trade opportunities with China. While in Yen Bai, she sold cardamom for lowland Kinh traders who came from Hanoi. She said these traders would then deliver the cardamom in *Hai Thương* and *Lăn Óng* streets, important centers for their supply of herbal medicine in Hanoi's Old Quarter.[64] After moving to Lao

[64] The Old Quarter in Hanoi is a historical trading center in the city, with different streets specializing in different types of goods. The name 'Hai Thương' and 'Lăn Óng' are terms used for traditional herbal medicine in Vietnamese.

Cai city in 1998, Xuan Nhu re-oriented her trading activities towards the Chinese market. Between August and October, Xuan Nhu received visits from Chinese wholesalers (point E in Figure 6.5) who came to her home after phoning her to discuss quantities and prices. In 2002, she also began buying medicinal teas from ethnic minorities in Bat Xat district, distributing them to herbal medicinal markets in Hanoi.

The second wholesaler interviewed, Kim Ly (7/4/06) was originally from the outskirts of Hanoi but moved to Lao Cai in 1991. Between 1991 and 1996, Kim Ly worked in the Hekou market across the border from Lao Cai city in China, where she noted a potentially lucrative market for cardamom. After 1996, she came back to work in Lao Cai. In her past experience working in China, Kim Ly had established strong business partnerships with Chinese wholesalers (point E) specialised in the cross-border trade of cardamom. During the cardamom season, Kim Ly said that Chinese wholesalers contacted her almost everyday and after agreeing on a quantity and price, sent a truck across the border directly to her home. Developing familiarity and trust over the years with trade partners in China revealed to be particularly important for Kim Ly. As she described, "we don't need to see each other anymore because we know each other from a long time".

The third wholesaler interviewed, in contrast to the other traders, was born and raised in Lao Cai city. Mai Tuyen (7/12/06) considered herself as one of the most important wholesalers in town. She had also worked, like her counterpart Kim Ly, in the Hekou market in China in the early 1990s. Mai Tuyen then specialised in the trade of cardamom and came back to Lao Cai town after developed trade partnership with Chinese wholesalers in Hekou. Since 1996, Mai Tuyen specialised in the export of cardamom in China. As in the case of Xuan Nhu and Kim Ly, Mai Tuyen directed her trade business from home and by phone, and saw Chinese wholesalers only once a year. Mai Tuyen specified that it was always the Chinese wholesalers who sent a truck down to pick up the cardamom and she was not aware of any tax or fee to cross the border.

The cases of wholesalers Kim Ly and Mai Tuyen demonstrate the importance of having access to market information, pricing, and an ability to develop trade partnerships with other wholesalers across the border in order to establish a successful business. The large-scale nature of their wholesaling operations was evidenced by their access to financial capital (to buy large cars or small trucks). In addition, their strategic position next to the Chinese border put them in a position of power in regulating cardamom flows

across the Sino-Vietnamese border. Finally, the current organisation of this trade draws attention to the importance of trust – embodied in the notion of social capital – which is crucial in building long term trade relationships between Kinh intermediaries and wholesalers.

6.2.2.4 *Consumers*

The cardamom commodity chain can be characterized by a diverse array of consumers, both domestic and international, expanding the geographical scope of this chain. The domestic market for cardamom in Vietnam remains small, while the largest market remains, by far, East Asia with important points of consumption in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Mongolia (point G in Figure 6.5) (Mai Pham 7/3/06; Quy Giang 7/3/06; Mai Tuyen 7/12/06; Kim Ly 7/4/06).

Once the cardamom crosses the border from Lao Cai into China, the fruit are transported by long-distance Han Chinese wholesalers (point E in Figure 6.5) to Kunming city, capital of Yunnan province. These wholesalers take the dried cardamom fruit to pharmaceutical manufactures in Kunming city (point F), who grind the cardamom into a fine powder or reduce it to an essential oil so it can be processed into various pharmaceutical products (Kim Ly 7/4/06). The end-products are then exported to various consumer markets in China and other East Asian countries (point G). (Kim Ly 7/4/06; Mai Tuyen 7/12/06). The pharmaceutical industry in China buys, on average, a total of 2,000 tonnes of cardamom annually, with China producing for about half of this demand (Zaifu 1991). The remainder half is imported from the neighbouring countries of Vietnam, Laos and Burma (*ibid.*). Cardamom is included in at least 30 prescriptions of traditional medicine and is used for preparing medication against stomach-ache, thus reaching a potential 1.3 billion consumers, in addition to the Chinese diasporas around the world (Zaifu 1991; Zhou 1993).

Although East Asia remains Vietnam's largest export market, it is important to note that cardamom is a medicinal plant which has been also used by highland minority groups such as the Hmong and Yao, as well as by the lowland Kinh. At the end of the harvest season, Hmong cultivators keep a small handful of dried cardamom capsules, using it as a medicine for gastro-intestinal infections or other digestive troubles (Mai Yia 6/14/06). Cardamom can be used as a spice in a variety of traditional dishes (Chee 7/6/06). Every year, cardamom is used in making traditional rice cakes for the Hmong

New Year. Cardamom is mixed in with pork fat, which is then used as a stuffing in sticky rice balls which are then wrapped with banana leaves (Chee 7/6/06).

The local demand for cardamom in the Sa Pa market remains fairly small. In the last decade or so, the Sa Pa market has expanded not only in size, but in the variety and volume of goods as a response to a growing tourist influx from lowland cities (Michaud and Turner 2000, 2006). According to two local residents, the number of stalls selling *thuốc nam* and *thuoc bắc* (Vietnamese and Chinese medicine, respectively) at least doubled or tripled in the last five years (Thuy 7/3/06; Tranh 6/29/06). However, when interviewing a Kinh women trader in the Sa Pa market, Quynh Lam (5/28/06) explained that not all of these market traders sold cardamom – the reason being that most tourists found it expensive.

An alternative trade flow of cardamom (from that sent to China) is the sale of cardamom by Sa Pa Vietnamese wholesalers (point C) who receive visits by lowland traders (point H), commissioned by herbal medicine market retailers in Hanoi (point I). In Hanoi, some dried cardamom capsules can be found for sale in *Hai Thương Lăn Óng*, and *Thuoc bắc* streets in Hanoi's Old Quarter, the *Don Xuan* market (see Figure 6.7 below), as well as *Ninh Hiep* village, in the outskirts of the capital. *Ninh Hiep*, approximately 20 km north of Hanoi, is a strong cultural center for the processing and trading in medicinal plants coming from Vietnam's northwest highland provinces such as Lao Cai as well as China (Sowerwine 1999). The emergence of traders who travel to and from China to purchase herbs and those who market these herbs from *Ninh Hiep* to *Hai Thương Lăn Óng*, and *Thuoc bắc* streets in Hanoi are women.

FIGURE 6.7: MEDICINAL SECTION OF DON XUAN MARKET, HANOI (SOURCE: AUTHOR, 2006)

In Hanoi, herbal medicine retailers (point I) sell the cardamom to Hanoian consumers and street food vendors (point J). Indeed, cardamom is bought by street food vendors, small restaurants and eateries throughout Hanoi and is an essential ingredient for making *phở* or Tonkinese noodle soup (Thuy, 7/3/06). Making *phở* involves the careful preparation of a broth in which the cook boils bones and beef trimmings, mixing them with cardamom, cinnamon, star anise, and ginger (*ibid*.). *Phở* is considered by many as a street food, comfort food or 'soul food' for lowland Vietnamese, and is a popular symbol of culinary identity for lowland Kinh (Sowerwine 2004a). Hence, at the consumption end of the cardamom commodity chain, there are a diverse range of actors who buy cardamom for a variety of purposes.

6.2.2.5 *Commodity chain conclusions*

By taking a commodity chain approach, I have detailed the spatial organisation as well as the role of individual actors involved in this chain, from production to consumption. The cardamom commodity chain, as shown in Figure 6.5, is spatially complex, spanning across three geographical and culturally distinct regions: highland forests, a Kinh-dominated border town and other lowland cities in Vietnam and finally, the Chinese and overseas markets. As seen in Section 6.2.1, the relationships amongst the different groups of actors reflect how these trade networks are socially, ethnically, as well as historically

embedded. While often credit-based, these trade networks are also historically constructed through relations of power and ethnicity. Next I examine some of the trade barriers shaping the repartitioning of incomes amongst actors within this chain.

6.2.3 Mapping access along the cardamom commodity chain

In this last section examining cardamom marketing, I hinted at some of the factors shaping actors' ability to derive financial benefits along the cardamom commodity chain. Drawing from the theory of access (Ribot 1998; see also Ribot and Peluso 2003) detailed in my conceptual framework, I now analyse the ways in which these 'access mechanisms' shape power and, in turn, the distribution of incomes amongst actors along this chain. More specifically, I focus on the "structural and relational mechanisms of access, [as] the ability to benefit from resources is mediated by constraints established by the specific political-economic and cultural frames within which access to resources is sought" (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 164). In the context of this study, I draw attention to three interrelated factors shaping actors' ability to derive benefit along this chain: (1) access to financial capital, (2) access to market information, and (3) access to social capital assets, based in trade experience and social networks of trade.

Access to financial capital is vital, as one's commercial success is often measured in terms of purchasing power *vis-à-vis* Hmong cultivators. As seen in Section 6.2.2.1, the trade of cardamom at the village level relies on a debt-to-credit structure, in which village-based intermediaries – and sometimes wholesalers in Sa Pa – act as credit lenders for Hmong harvesters. As one wholesaler, Mai Pham (7/3/06) explained, "you need money in order to buy cardamom from minorities. Most people [intermediaries] give the money first to the Hmong, before the cardamom is ready". Best positioned to give credit advances are those who have developed long term commercial ties with Hmong cultivators. She continued, "I do not have a lot of problems because I have been trading cardamom for 15 years and everyone in the community knows me well". When Mai Pham first started trading cardamom, she had to borrow money from a bank in Lao Cai. As her business grew, she could buy a little more cardamom over the years. In addition, other intermediaries and wholesalers mentioned the importance of having a minimum of capital to buffer the occasional, yet major fluctuations in market prices (Quy Giang 7/3/06; Lien 6/26/06; Tranh Huy 7/7/06). In San Sa Ho commune, intermediary Tranh Huy explained how he had lost important sums of money when he first started trading

cardamom because of unexpected drops in prices in the middle of the season and the fact that he had no leverage on market prices. Tranh Huy felt insecure because, he explained, important fluctuations in market prices and relatively low returns meant he was more exposed to financial losses. Hence, having access to financial capital is essential for cardamom intermediaries and wholesalers, allowing them to act as credit lenders to Hmong cultivators, but also to help them absorb unexpected drops in market prices.

Access to market information (on prices and market trends) is a second mechanism which influences actors' ability to derive a financial income from this trade. Prices for cardamom vary annually but also seasonally. In Cat Cat village, Noua (6/7/06) explained, "prices vary during the year. If I wait to sell more up towards the Hmong New Year (November-December), I can sell the cardamom for a better price, sometimes 90,000 to 100,000 VND for one kilo".[65] In the same village, another elderly woman, Cham (6/13/06), explained:

> I prefer to sell only a little bit every time, never all at once. This way we can get a better price because the price is never the same within one season. But if you need quick money, then some people sell it [cardamom] all in one time. This is bad because you get much lower price.

These comments are informative in that they show how Hmong producers are aware of seasonal price differences between farm gate and retail prices, despite their remote location in rural hamlets. However, being pressed with more basic survival needs, the Hmong hold little bargaining power over prices *vis-à-vis* Kinh intermediaries. In addition, price information is poorly disseminated amongst actors along the chain. When conducting field work in 2006, Hmong cultivators interviewed said prices for one kilogram could range from 40,000 to 100,000 Vietnamese *dôngs* (VND). This lack of market transparency and their dependency on intermediaries' for market information means that Hmong cultivators have little leverage on prices and thus feel insecure with regards to their revenue from year to year. Evidence from Hmong household interviews suggests that cardamom harvesters received a farm gate price as low as 40,000 VND (US $2.50/kg) for cardamom. In contrast, the retail price for cardamom in Hanoi (7/23/06) and Ho Chi Minh City (8/10/06) was between 100,000 to 120,000 VND/kg (US $7-7.50/kg).

[65] At the time of field work (summer 2006), the exchange rate was US$1 for 16,000 Vietnamese VND.

A third important mechanism of 'access control' is one's ability to develop trustful social networks of trade with other actors in an insecure market environment. In other words, I argue that access to social capital explains why, in the cardamom trade, some individuals are disadvantaged over others. When describing the organisation of this trade earlier, I examined how Kinh intermediaries and wholesalers appear to rely on social networks of trust (based on common ethnic affiliation) to access resources such as credit and market information. As such, the Hmong – who lack access to such social networks of trust – cannot 'move up' easily along the chain and become intermediaries or wholesalers themselves. Social capital amongst Kinh intermediaries and wholesalers *themselves* shows how access to social networks of trust based on past trade experience shapes their ability to become successful entrepreneurs. In the last decade, the competition between cardamom intermediaries has grown, and trade partnerships with Hmong suppliers proves to be important in securing one's revenue. In Section 6.2.2.2, the case of Quy Giang, a wholesaler in Sa Pa, illustrates the importance of developing trustful commercial relations with the Hmong, which had been built over time. In Xin Chain village, a Hmong cultivator, Cho (7/6/06) similarly explained:

> Each year, I sell cardamom to a Vietnamese lady who owns a shop [Mai Pham in Sa Pa town]. This lady has been selling rice and corn for a long time to my family so I know her well. I began trading cardamom with her 10 years ago, when we [the Hmong] used cardamom as money to buy some rice necessary and other food necessities.

In Sa Pa town, wholesaler Mai Pham (7/3/06) in Sa Pa town made a similar remark, saying that she knew a lot of Hmong because from her previous work as an agricultural extension agents in rural cooperatives during the socialist period. In Lao Cai, wholesalers' trade experience in China suggests that they had accumulated enough social capital (trustful relations with Chinese wholesalers across the border) to prosper from this trade. Hence, access to forms of social capital has allowed the Kinh and the Giay to 'get ahead' *vis-à-vis* the Hmong, thus giving them the ability to derive higher returns and become successful entrepreneurs in this commodity chain.

6.3 CHAPTER CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, I have analysed the inter-ethnic exchange dynamics and social embeddedness of the highland commodity chain for cardamom in Sa Pa district, northern Vietnam. From production to consumption, this case illustrates the limitations of

analysing commodity chains in a purely mechanistic approach. Instead, in this chapter, I have emphasised the local socio-economic, political and cultural relations systems – in other words the 'social fabric' – in which the commodity chain actors operate. In particular, emphasis has been on highlighting "how social networks and power relations in commodity flows are produced, sustained, negotiated and resisted" (Long and Villareal 1998: 748). In brief, this chapter has met the second research objective of this study, examining the *historical and current day production-to-consumption system for cardamom* in Sa Pa district.

I began by detailing the production processes for cardamom (6.1), examining the plant's general characteristics, the history of its domestication, the labour activities, and finally, the main challenges and limitations faced by Hmong cultivators. In this first Section I focused on Hmong highlanders, the key producers of cardamom in Sa Pa district. Cardamom cultivation draws on traditional ecological knowledge accumulated over time, and demands relatively little labour input relative to other food crops, providing the Hmong with a non-negligible source of cash income at a strategic time of the year. However, limited access to land and labour, combined with decreasing forest user rights pose serious constraints in terms of the overall sustainability of this livelihood activity. The case of cardamom also illustrates a fundamental disjuncture between formal forest property rights and local understandings and practices related to the forest resources. These unique land arrangements are, in turn, based on pre-existing social structures and historical land-use practices interfacing with socialist State rules and regulations (Sowerwine 2004b).

Turning to examine the marketing aspects of the chain (6.2), I analysed the historical foundations of these trade networks during the socialist period, before focusing on their contemporary period. By examining the spatiality of this trade and the actors involved at different stages from production to consumption, I have shown how these trade networks are socially and ethnically diverse. Investigating the consumption end of the chain, I then explored the consumption end of this chain, in both domestic and international markets. Finally, I have shown the importance of ethnic power relations shaping access to different forms of capital – especially social and financial capital. Indeed, the dominance of Kinh traders in the Vietnam-based marketing nodes highlights how ethnicity and access to financial and social assets are closely intertwined, ultimately shaping individuals' capabilities to exploit different livelihood opportunities.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This thesis has explored the historical and contemporary importance of forest products for the livelihoods of Hmong highlanders in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, northern Vietnam. After introducing my thesis and presenting my conceptual framework in the first two chapters, I set the ecological and socio-political context for this study in Chapter Three, paying attention to Hmong migration history, socio-political organisation, and relationship with the land. In Chapter Four, I then introduced the methodological approach and tools used for this empirical, field-based investigation. Supported by these conceptual, contextual, and methodological foundations, I addressed my first research objective in Chapter Five, *analysing Hmong livelihood portfolios and their historical use of forest products throughout the post-colonial period*. Drawing from interviews with Hmong households, I first detailed their economic activities during the socialist (1954-1986) and post *Đổi Mới* period (1986-2006), before looking more specifically at the place of forest products within these livelihood portfolios. My results suggest that during the 1960s and 1970s, the Hmong economy in Lao Cai province was largely subsistence oriented, with limited sources of cash income coming primarily from logging and opium cultivation. During the post *Đổi Mới* period, with changing land and forestry regimes, Hmong households are facing new challenges with regards to their access rights to forest resources. Interviews with Hmong individuals suggest that some families are coping with these changes by engaging into new livelihood activities such as cardamom cultivation, guiding, and handicraft production for tourism. Hence, diversity and flexibility are two prominent attributes of many Hmong contemporary livelihood portfolios in Sa Pa district, with forest products fulfilling both subsistence and commercial roles. In Chapter Six, I then addressed my second research objective, examining *the contemporary production and marketing dynamics of cardamom in Sa Pa district*. Using a commodity chain approach, I highlighted how cardamom trade networks are ethnically, as well as spatially diverse, encompassing different networks of exchange which are historically contingent and socially embedded. The dominance of Kinh traders in the higher marketing nodes of this chain shows how ethnicity and access to capital – more specifically social and financial capital – are closely intertwined, thereby shaping individuals' capabilities to exploit different livelihood opportunities.

Building upon these results, this last chapter is organised in three parts. In Section 7.1. I examine the socio-economic implications of the cardamom trade for the many actors involved: first, by analysing the distribution of incomes within this chain; and then, by examining how such trade relations are shaped by informal ties and social networks, forming different types of social capital. In Section 7.2. pulling out other key ideas from my conceptual framework, I analyse NTFP user strategies and, more broadly, livelihood diversification strategies employed by Hmong households in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province. Finally, in Section 7.3, I show how a multi-scalar approach is useful in understanding both household-level decision-making processes and more regional ethnic-based power relations in Vietnam's northern highlands, leading to important policy implications.

7.1 SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE CARDAMOM TRADE

In Chapter Six, I examined the production, marketing and consumption aspects of the cardamom commodity chain in highland Vietnam and beyond. In this section, I now draw from my conceptual framework – more specifically from access theory (Ribot and Peluso 2003) considered in Section 2.2 – to examine the power struggles amongst actors involved with this commodity chain.

7.1.1 Capturing the financial gains from trade

As discussed in my conceptual framework, commodity chains can be used as analytical tools for understanding who benefits from natural resources, how they benefit, and how these patterns of benefit distribution might be changed (Ribot 1998; Ribot and Peluso 2003). Since the 1990s, the cardamom trade in northern Vietnam has become increasingly fragmented with the participation of numerous agents – some of whom derive substantial benefits from this trade. After identifying and tracing the nodes of interactions within the cardamom trade in Chapter Six, I now consider the distribution of income amongst the actors involved. I focus here on the volumes and prices at each node of the commodity chain to determine which groups of actors – harvesters, intermediaries, wholesalers, retailers and consumers and of which ethnicities and genders – control the distribution of incomes along this chain. The monetary distribution of these revenues for Hmong producers, Kinh intermediaries and wholesalers is outlined in Figure 7.1, below.

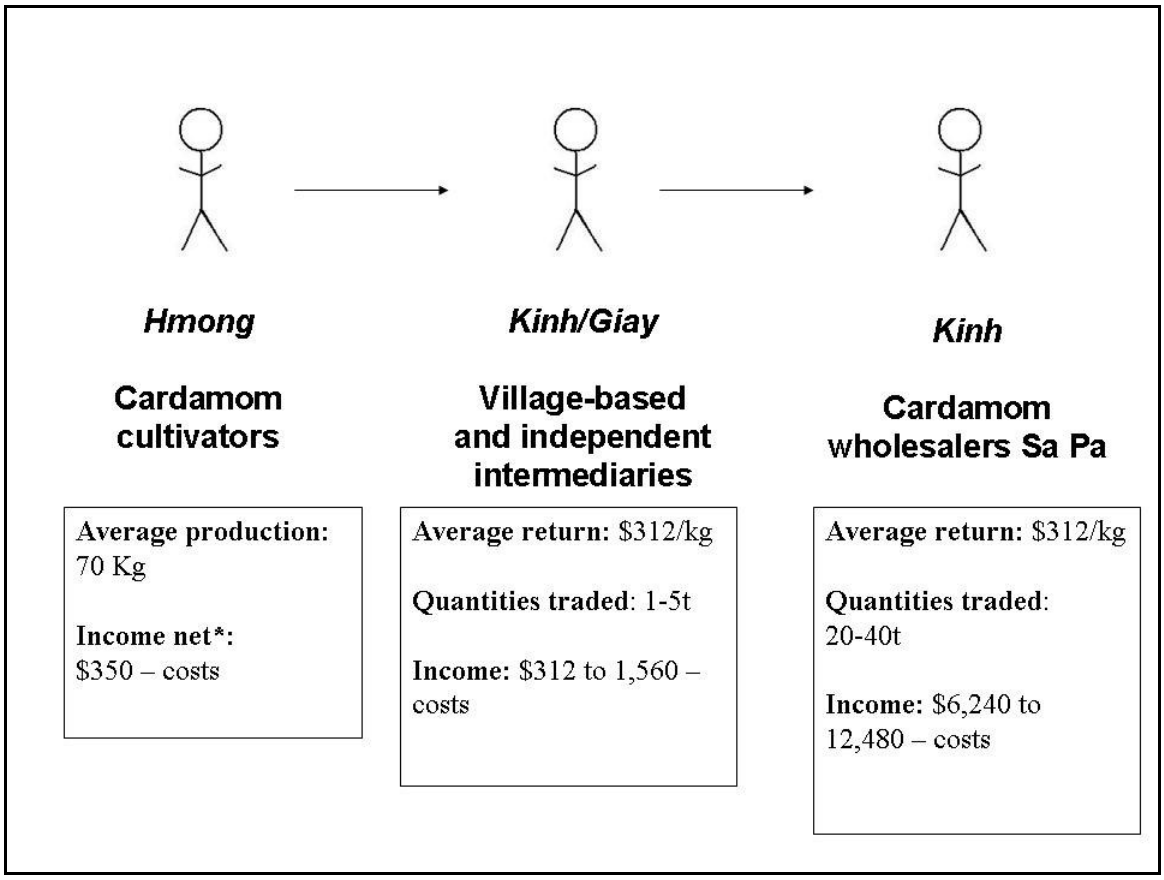

FIGURE 7.1: DISTRIBUTION OF INCOMES AMONGST CARDAMOM ACTORS
**Note: Within a season (with one season per year), the income net for one Hmong household is equal to their gross income (quantity multiplied by the price/kg) minus the costs incurred (number of human-labour days devoted to this production within one year). A similar formula can be used to calculate the returns for traders and wholesalers. Their income is equal to their gross returns (volume traded multiplied by the average returns per kg traded) minus transportation costs. All prices and income are expressed in US dollars.* [66]

In Sa Pa district, interviews with *Hmong cultivators* suggested that families typically produced, on average, 70kg of dried cardamom in one season, roughly equivalent to VND 5.6 million (US$350).[67] In turn, *Kinh and Giay*[68] *village-based intermediaries* (for

[66] As discussed in Chapter Six (Section 6.2.3), prices varied significantly across communes and from year to year. Income and profits are calculated using cardamom prices for 2006, which varied around 80,000 VND/Kg (or US$ 5.35). However, as noted in the Chapter Five, there are a number of methodological difficulties associated with calculating costs (income net) for Hmong households given their subsistence-based livelihoods.
[67] Production varied from family to family. For instance, in Lao Chai and Ta Van commune, individual households reported an average of 70 kg, while households in San Sa Ho and Ban Khoang communes reported, on average, between 100 and 200 kg.
[68] The Giay, as part of the larger Thai-Kadai linguistic group have an important history as trade intermediaries between Hmong and lowlanders, and their involvement here is interesting as a continuation of those historical ties (Michaud 2006).

the majority women) reported being able to collect between one and five tons of cardamom from Hmong cultivators in one season.[69] Indeed, volumes for each intermediary varied substantially, depending on how much credit one could mobilize in a given year. As seen in Chapter Six (Section 6.2.2.1), if intermediaries could buy 'in advance' from the Hmong (or be promised part of their production), they were better positioned to reap a higher share of the returns from this trade. Operating with an average return of 5,000 VND (or US$ 0.30) a kilogram, these intermediaries could potentially earn up to 5 million VND (or US $312) for each ton of cardamom bought and sold, minus costs associated with transportation[70] and market risks. Indeed, both Kinh and Giay intermediaries reported being sensitive to fluctuations in market prices, sometimes operating with financial losses within a season. All the intermediaries interviewed complemented the income from this trade with other economic activities, either acting as wholesalers for other forest products (Minh Ha 6/7/06; Le Chi Thao7/3/06), or operating as small shop owners in various Hmong hamlets around Sa Pa town (Lien 6/26/06; Dung (6/26/06; Tranh Huy 7/7/06). Located in the district center, *Kinh cardamom wholesalers* in Sa Pa (again, mostly women) bought substantial quantities of cardamom, pooling from various intermediaries across different communes in the district, as well as sometimes buying directly from Hmong harvesters themselves who came to Sa Pa town. The power of such wholesalers was largely based in their access to large sums of financial capital – enough to act sometimes as credit lenders to Kinh or Giay intermediaries based in these Hmong hamlets. This process of "tying traders" (Bush 2004: 42) gave these wholesalers bargaining power over their suppliers in the villages. These wholesalers collected, on average, between 20 and 35 tons of cardamom each year (Mai Pham 7/3/06, Ngoc Minh 7/3/06, Quy Giang 7/3/06). One important wholesaler in Sa Pa town, Ha Tam (7/18/06) reported buying between 30 and 40 tons of cardamom in a season. Operating with the same average returns as Kinh intermediaries (VND 5,000/kg or US$0.3), Ha Tam was able to earn up to VND 175 millions (or just over US$ 10,000). From this income however, she had to also deduct a series of costs associated with transportation, risk and transactions. Nevertheless, after ten years of operating in this business, she was still left with enough money to buy a new jeep. Hence, in contrast to Hmong cultivators and

[69] Intermediaries told me they could not give me exact numbers for quantities of cardamom traded in one year as they often do multiple trips to villages in one season.

[70] The main transportation cost was fuel for their motorbikes, sold at approximately 11,200 VND per litre, with about 3 litres to fill up a *Honda Dream*

Kinh/Giay intermediaries, cardamom wholesalers appear to derive far greater returns from this trade – at least ten to twenty times greater than the income earned by Hmong cultivators.

One could argue that the forest-derived incomes from the Hoang Lien National Park are reaped throughout the different nodes of the cardamom commodity chain, albeit at very different scales. The case of the cardamom commodity chain suggests that power relations are structurally embedded within local political structures, social relations of production, and marketing power dynamics which, in turn, affect patterns of benefit distribution (Ribot 1998; Ribot and Peluso 2003). Such benefits are derived through access to the forest resources, labour opportunities, and market access. This unequal distribution of income also reflects some of the market factors discussed in Chapter Six (Section 6.2.3). As one Kinh orchid trader, Van Phuong (6/20/06) explained:

> I sell wild orchids that I buy from the Hmong. Before, I use to go to the mines in Hau Thao and work there so I met a lot of Hmong in the villages. After a while I started buying cardamom from them, like many other people. But some years I lost a lot of money so I cannot trade cardamom anymore.

Despite the fact that Van Phuong could find many Hmong cultivators in Hau Thao commune, she explained how she was unable to mobilize enough cash to buy and sell large amounts of cardamom in order to make business profitable. Later, she added that this trade was 'risky' because of wide fluctuations in market prices and the fact that she had no power leverage on cardamom market prices.

The above analysis highlights the importance of ethnic power relations shaping access. As noted in Chapter Three, power relations in upland Vietnam keep the Hmong in a marginal position *vis-à-vis* both the Vietnamese State as well as the lowland Kinh population in general (Michaud 2000, 2006; Michaud and Turner 2000; Corlin 2004; Vuong Duy Quang 2004). Lacking financial capital and market access, the Hmong are likewise confined to their role as cardamom cultivators. They do not act as traders in Sa Pa and have yet to trade this lucrative product across the Chinese border themselves. As such, they gain only marginal returns for their harvesting efforts, while the economic value-added at other stages of the commodity chain is reaped by the Kinh, the Giay and in some marketing directions, the Chinese.

In Chapter Three (Section 3.2.3), I discussed how, despite State efforts to revitalize the northern upland economy, the Hmong (as well as other highland minority groups) remain economically marginalized through unequal land allocation and

reforestation programmes (Vuong Xuan Tinh and Hjemdahl 1996; Pattenella 2001; Corlin 2004; Sowerwine 2004a, 2004b), not to mention political unease regarding some of their historical political choices (Michaud 2000a, 2000b, 2006). Similarly, an analysis of the distribution of the incomes within the cardamom commodity chain suggests that while Hmong producers are able to derive just enough cash to complement their in-kind income, Kinh wholesalers in Sa Pa and Lao Cai benefit from various "mechanisms of access", enabling them to earn considerably higher revenues (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 161). As defined in my conceptual framework, these mechanisms refer to "the ability of individual or groups to gain, control or maintain entry into exchange relations" (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 166). With respect to the cardamom trade, these include direct access to physical infrastructure, such as roads, border access, markets. Other structural mechanisms include social ties of dependence, trust and loyalty based in social history, reciprocity, ethnic identity, economic status. Market factors include credit arrangements, market information and financial capital. Finally, informational mechanisms (which could be also considered forms of human capital) include knowledge of market prices and technical and management skills (*ibid.*).

Finally, this investigation draws attention to how different forms of capital – produced, natural, social, cultural and human – assets interact with one another to form "bundles of power" (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 153). An analysis of the cardamom commodity chain suggests that access to financial capital is often tied to ethnic identity in upland northern Vietnam, with the bulk of the financial capital being controlled by the Kinh. It is precisely these forms of capital assets which enabled Kinh cardamom wholesalers in Lao Cai to establish commercial partnerships with Chinese wholesalers across the border. In turn, these same Kinh cardamom wholesalers were able to strengthen their economic power by reinvesting their financial gains into new business partnerships, thereby capturing a greater share of cardamom production. In doing so, they expanded their businesses by lending credit to Kinh/Giay cardamom intermediaries in the villages. In contrast, none of the Hmong interviewed could access enough financial capital or had the social connections to participate at higher nodes in this chain, although their actual willingness to move up along the chain remains debatable.[71] What remains certain, however, is that access to financial and social capital assets (discussed next)

[71] Indeed, whether or not the Hmong actually wish to become more involved in lowland-highland commodity-chain for certain goods remains a contentious issue (see Section 7.2.2 of this chapter).

plays a key role in shaping the unequal distribution of incomes within the cardamom commodity chain.

7.1.2 Social capital, informal ties and networks

An investigation of the power structures within the cardamom commodity chain suggests that in highland Vietnam, ethnic power relations are socially embedded and materialized in informal social ties and trade networks (Turner and Michaud 2006). Indeed, when detailing the conceptual framework used for this study, I have argued that commodity chains, if informed by an actor-orientated approach, can provide a powerful means of understanding the social fabric in which various relations of production and exchange occur. While focusing on social networks, linkages and trust (detailed in Section 2.2.1.1 in Chapter Two), I now examine the social capital assets shaping the ability of actors – Hmong cultivators as well as Kinh/Giay intermediaries and Kinh wholesalers – to derive financial benefits along the cardamom commodity chain.

As detailed in my conceptual framework, social capital is crucial in determining a person's ability to construct meaningful livelihood portfolios (Bebbington 1999). Different forms of social capital – bonding, bridging, and linking social capital – can result in highly different social and economic development outcomes (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). When analysing the relational power dynamics within the cardamom commodity chain, I argue that *bonding* social capital is of primary importance, with little *bridging* and almost no *linking* social capital being present. That is, bonding social capital – or the reliance upon strong loyalty within a homogeneous group – is relied upon by Hmong cultivators, cardamom intermediaries and wholesalers. In contrast, there appears to be fewer heterogeneous and diverse social networks (or forms of bridging and linking social capital) amongst the groups of actors within this chain.

Indeed, bonding social capital is implicit in the various informal help arrangements amongst Hmong clan members. When examining the production and cultivation of cardamom in Chapter Six (Section 6.2.4.2), I highlighted how Hmong villagers traditionally rely on close and extended family members, neighbours and friends for support in times of need, to harvest and dry their crops, and for help in diversifying their livelihood activities. Many of the elderly Hmong women interviewed said they either re-married after their husband died, or lent parcels of land to their extended family, friends or neighbours in exchange for food, thus maintaining their user rights to the

cardamom fields of their deceased husbands (Mai Yai, 6/23/06; Lam and Chu 7/10/06; Jing 7/10/06; Lan 7/13/06; Zhia 7/15/06). Bonding social capital is also visible in the ways the Hmong meet their labour requirements, manage risks, gain access to land, maintain their cultural integrity, and resist State policies, norms and regulations regarding forest access.

Bonding social capital is also present within the marketing dynamics of trade between cardamom intermediaries (Kinh and Giay) and wholesalers (all Kinh), who similarly depend upon extended family and friends for financial support and accessing marketing networks. Indeed, Lien's (6/26/06) case, introduced earlier in Chapter Six (Section 6.3.2.1), showed how her ability to enter the cardamom trade was directly linked to the help of her older sister Dung (6/26/06) who had traded cardamom since the early 1990s, thereby acquiring long term business skills and the necessary business connections in Lao Cai city. Similarly, Tranh Huy (7/7/06), another Kinh intermediary, was helped by other family members living in Lao Cai city, who also had appropriate trade connections. As detailed in Chapter Six (Section 6.2.3), the marketing of cardamom is therefore based on informal commercial relationships developed on the basis of social history, reciprocity, and trust. Bonding social capital is also shown by the way Kinh wholesalers in Sa Pa and Lao Cai talked about their business partnerships with other wholesalers (Quy Giang 7/03/06; Ha Tam 7/18/06; Kim Ly 7/12/06; Mai Tuyen 7/12/06). As one of these traders explained:

> When I first came to Lao Cai, I had to make a lot of friends with other cardamom wholesalers in Hekou [China] and I always sold to them every year. Now I have good business because I have experience trading cardamom and the Chinese 'believed me' [trust me] (Kim Ly 7/12/06).

In contrast, both bridging and linking forms of social capital appear to be much less influential for actors as a whole, confirming the findings of other investigations on social capital in Vietnam (Dalton *et al.* 2000; Norlund 2003; Turner and Nguyen An Phuong 2005; Da Costa and Turner 2006). However, the presence of informal credit schemes between Hmong villagers and Vietnamese/Giay store-owners (described in Chapter Six, Section 6.3.2.1) could arguably be seen as a form of bridging social capital. Indeed, these credit arrangements incorporate individuals of different ethnicities, class and occupational backgrounds. Yet overall, there appears to be less bridging than bonding social capital in this chain, and informal help schemes tend to remain distinct for each ethnic group. Linking social capital plays an even more negligible role, as there

seems to be little or no involvement from the part of the State authorities or other institutions such as non-governmental organisations to regulate this trade, assist, or help form commercial partnerships between different actors. From the State's point of view, the Hmong seem to engage in cardamom cultivation in a rather disorganized way and state officials whom I interviewed saw no economic benefit in intervening in the cardamom trade. During my field visit in 2006, district authorities were aware that the Hmong cultivated cardamom under the forest canopy of the Hoang Lien National Park but adopted a *laissez-faire* policy with regards to this cardamom cultivation (GO1, 5/26/06).

In sum, the above analysis suggests the predominance of *bonding* social capital in part due to the structure of power relations in upland northern Vietnam, closely intertwined with ethnic relations. Field interviews point out that bonding social capital supersedes other forms of social capital (bridging and linking), as Hmong producers, Kinh and Giay intermediaries, and wholesalers rely overwhelmingly on intra-ethnic social networks of trust for information and support.

7.2 LIVELIHOOD TRANSFORMATIONS

In Chapter Five, drawing from field work data, I examined historical trends in Hmong livelihood portfolios, before analysing, at the household and community level, contemporary Hmong livelihood activities in Sa Pa district. In doing so I presented the repertoire of agricultural and economic activities of the Hmong, with special attention paid to their use of forest products collected/cultivated in the Hoang Lien National Park. Based on this analysis, I now call attention to the three household NTFP 'user strategies' and how these reflect broader trends in Hmong livelihood strategies.

7.2.1 Coping, diversifying, or specialising forest product strategies?

Coming back to the literature on non-timber forest products presented in my conceptual framework (Section 2.1.2), I introduced three different 'NTFP user groups': coping, diversifying and specialising strategists (Belcher and Kusters 2004). I now turn to analyse these strategies in the context of Hmong use and trade of forest products in Sa Pa district.

Findings from Chapters Five and Six suggest that Hmong households in Sa Pa district have adopted a mixed approach in terms of their 'NTFP user strategies'. During the socialist period, I detailed how the Hmong relied on forest products as emergency

foods in times of famine and war, in a subsistence oriented economy (see Chapter Five, Section 5.1.1). The Hmong thus used forest products more as a *coping* strategy, since they relied less on wet rice paddy cultivation for their dietary needs. Since the 1990s onwards, in the context of a general restructuring of the highland economy, some families have begun intensifying rice and corn cultivation and use forest products more as a source of discretionary income. As such, Hmong households use forest products for complementing other forms of revenue from farm production to spread risk, hence acting more as *diversifying* strategists. Nevertheless, poorer households with less paddy land (the strongest proxy for household wealth according to my informants) continue to depend on these products for subsistence foods. This comes back to the proposition, introduced in Section 2.1.3, that small differences in wealth amongst rural households can make a difference in the opportunities available, giving rise to diversity and specialisation in economic livelihoods (Coomes *et al*. 1999). Finally, when considering the case of cardamom cultivation discussed in Chapter Six, one could argue that the Hmong are now acting as *specialised* strategists. That is, Hmong households in Sa Pa district appear to engage in cardamom cultivation as an intentional strategy to complement their subsistence agricultural production, with the cash from this particular forest product often being the main source of cash income. In sum, one could argue that the Hmong in Sa Pa district have combined three types of NTFP user strategies, acting as coping, diversifying and specialised strategists.

7.2.2 Distress, progressive, and selective diversification of livelihoods

When examining Hmong livelihood portfolios *as a whole* – that is, incorporating their forest product strategies as discussed above, as well as other livelihood means – one could argue that the Hmong in Sa Pa district have adopted various livelihood strategies to deal with uncertainty and change.

When defining the livelihood framework used for this study (Chapter Two, Section 2.2.2), I detailed how rural households may devise different risk coping and/or risk mitigation strategies in order to decrease their vulnerability to exogenous shocks and stresses (Fafchamps 1999; Ellis 2000; World Bank 2000). Some of these risk coping strategies included income and asset diversification, specialisation, and insurance (Ellis 1998). Here, diversification refers to "the process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival

and in order to improve their standards of living" (*ibid.* 4). In their work in rural Laos Bouahom, Douangsavanh, and Rigg (2004) make a distinction between *distress* and *progressive* diversification, calling attention to two distinct motives pushing households to diversify. Closely following Ellis' (1998) definition, *distress diversification* refers the ways in which rural households decrease their vulnerability to risk by reallocating resources away from agriculture into various non-farm activities. Diversification can be seen as a response to a crisis and a means to address uncertainty and change. Alternatively, discussed in a more positive context, *progressive diversification* refers to a means by which households can lever themselves into higher return activities, in turn leading to higher standards of living (Bouahom *et al.* 2004). Finally, Turner and Michaud (2006) have argued for a third approach which they have called *selective diversification*. In their study of highland textile commodity chains involving Hmong women, they argue that Hmong engagement in this trade is "selective, intentionally taken so as to fit the pluriactivity which makes up their livelihood portfolios" (Turner and Michaud, 2006: 20).

Building upon this discussion, I would argue that the Hmong in Sa Pa district have built over time both diverse and fluid livelihood portfolios – echoing to what Bouahom *et al.* (2004)'s comment, when saying that households with differential access to economic opportunities and with different prevailing conditions consequently develop different responses in their livelihood systems. In Chapter Five (Section 5.2), I detailed how Hmong households in Sa Pa district have been successively involved in different types of trade (coffin wood, opium, cardamom and traditional textiles) at different stages during the post-colonial period. An analysis of their contemporary livelihood portfolios suggest that households have responded to post *Đổi Mới* changes and regulations (bans on opium cultivation and logging) in two ways. First, as a response to increased scarcity of arable land, some Hmong households have intensified their agricultural production, experimenting with new technologies (using hybridized seeds and buying fertilizers) as a means of revivifying agriculture. Second, some Hmong have responded to new market opportunities by engaging into new, off-farming activities such as handicrafts, fish rearing and the collection of forest products. In the particular case of the cardamom trade, many Hmong households in Sa Pa district rely on the sale of this single forest product for the bulk of their cash income. The cash derived from cardamom constitutes a means by which households can buy not only domestic goods, but also other forms of 'produced

capital' (Bebbington 1999) such as fertilizers and improved seed varieties which are then reinvested in agricultural production. Hence, rather than being a sign of distress, the harvesting of cardamom could be seen as a case of progressive diversification, whereby families attain new standards of living by engaging in non-traditional activities such as the cardamom trade. In doing so, the Hmong of Sa Pa district have sustained lifestyles which remain highly diverse, as well as adaptable and flexible.

When assessing the spatial and social changes in fish trade networks in neighbouring Laos, Bush (2004: 42) notes that these trade networks have evolved from being an "artisanal trading system characterized by a large number of small-scale exchanges with low levels of supporting infrastructure to a trans-border investment-driven system of trade that is socially-mediated and spatially contingent". Changes in the nature and scale of rural trade networks for goods are, of course, not unique to Laos. When considering trade networks for cardamom historically, one could argue that similar changes are taking place in Lao Cai province, as a group of Hmong households are diversifying their livelihood portfolios and responding to a growing demand for cardamom in China. During the socialist system, trade networks for cardamom were considered illegal by the government and only a small number of independent Kinh intermediaries bought cardamom from ethnic minorities to sell in the underground domestic market. Since the mid 1980s, economic renovation policies, followed later in the 1990s, by infrastructural development programmes (road building, agricultural extension services, and market reforms) expanded marketing opportunities for ethnic minorities. For instance, more open Sino-Vietnam border policies have resulted in an increase of cross-border trade activities (Schoenberger 2006), and more specifically, the number of Kinh wholesalers able to establish commercial partnerships with traders in China. Trade networks for cardamom are becoming increasingly complex and diverse, with different actors sharing unequal benefits along this chain. Moreover, the influx of financial capital has facilitated the emergence of more exclusive market channels, in turn reflecting the hierarchical power dynamics in contemporary Vietnam society.

With these complex market dynamics in mind, one might ask whether the Hmong actually wish to specialise and intensify cardamom cultivation further, thereby becoming more integrated into the market economy. Based upon my field work, I would argue that Hmong willingness to participate in the market is *selective* – as they carefully choose certain economic opportunities which best fit their needs and belief systems. In Chapter

Five (Section 5.3.2.5), I have shown how, following a growth in domestic tourism in recent years, there has been a marked increase in the number of traditional herbal medicinal market stands and small shops throughout Sa Pa town (Tranh 6/29/06; Thuy 7/3/06). Living in hamlets next to forests, members of the Hmong and Yao ethnic minorities are well-positioned to collect and sell such goods to Kinh market retailers in Sa Pa town. Indeed, herbal medicine is especially popular amongst Kinh tourists who come to Sa Pa for weekend 'get-away trips' and to enjoy the highland scenery (Michaud and Turner 2006). Nevertheless, when interviewing Hmong on whether they sold herbal medicine to these herbal medicine retailers in Sa Pa, Hmong informants consistently replied that fresh herbal medicine should *never* be sold to the Kinh, but only given or exchanged amongst friends, family or healers (Mai Yia 6/23/06, Zhia 7/15/06; Lam 7/10/06; Lu 7/10/06). One healer and botanist, Lan (7/13/06) explained to me in Hau Thao commune:

> We cannot bring the medicine and sell it to just anybody in the market because the spirits will be angry and this is very bad for the sick person. The spirits are very important for making people feel better. When somebody is sick, you cannot just go buy medicine… you need to go see somebody to help you. For one problem, you have to take many different plants.

Lan's comments illustrate how medicinal plants and botanical knowledge hold spiritual value in Hmong health cosmologies. Despite an increasing market demand for these goods, the Hmong – unlike their Yao counterparts (see Sowerwine 1999, 2004a) – appear to keep their herbal medicine knowledge outside the formal market system. This is not to say that the Hmong are resisting *all* economic prospects brought about by increased tourism in Sa Pa. However, I would argue, along similar lines to Turner and Michaud (2006) that the Hmong in Sa Pa district are currently diversifying their livelihood portfolios selectively, in ways that best suit the opportunities available to meet their needs. In other words, "flexibility around a solid, culturally embedded core appears to be an important characteristic feature of Hmong livelihoods in Sa Pa district" (*ibid.* 23). These selective choices are made even more obvious by the fact that, in contrast to their beliefs regarding traditional medicine, the Hmong consider cardamom as a cash crop more than a medicine. As such, they are more than willing to sell most of what they harvest to Kinh and Giay intermediaries in the villages, keeping only a very small portion for their own needs. At the same time, field-based evidence suggests that not all Hmong households are rushing in this economic activity and many of them appear to be aware of

their limitations to productions, as examined in Section 6.1.4). Hence, I would argue that Hmong are both embracing *and* resisting new prospects offered by the growing market integration of the highland economy into lowland markets in ways that are appropriate for their cultural systems.

7.3 THESIS CONCLUSIONS: A MULTI-SCALAR APPROACH TO HIGHLAND LIVELIHOODS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.3.1. Taking a multi-scalar approach

This thesis has explored the changing livelihood portfolios of Hmong in Sa Pa district, Lao Cai province, as well as the social embeddedness of highland trade networks for cardamom in upland Vietnam. Reflecting back on the research undertaken for this thesis, I would argue that scale – a central theme in geographical analyses – is of pivotal importance to this study. In Chapter Five, I began my analysis with a historical investigation of Hmong livelihood portfolios, with a particular emphasis on the subsistence role of forest products for Hmong households. Working at the household and community level, I emphasized the diverse and fluid nature of Hmong livelihood activities and their use of forest products over time. In Chapter Six, the scale of analysis then shifted to examine the cardamom production and trade for various actors within the province of Lao Cai and across state borders. In doing so, I stressed the power dynamics and access-based mechanisms shaping the distribution of financial benefits amongst the multi-ethnic agents involved in this trade.

The conceptual framework designed for this thesis, bringing together different scalar approaches, is an important tool in allowing these different elements to be examined and illuminated. Indeed, "individual and household livelihoods are shaped both by local and distinct institutions (for example, local customs regarding access to common property resources, local and national land tenure rules), social relations (gender, caste, kinship and so on), and economic opportunities" (Ellis 2000:6). Using a livelihood approach in Chapter Five, I first explored, at the micro-level, how livelihood portfolios were constructed and negotiated by the Hmong in Sa Pa district. A longitudinal analysis of their assets, activities and access to these illustrated the diverse and flexible nature of these portfolios over time. Then, incorporating elements from both the micro- and meso-scale, I explored the historical, political and socio-economic factors shaping highland

trade networks for cardamom in Chapter Six. Borrowing from commodity chain and actor-oriented approaches, I examined the spatial dynamics of the cardamom trade, the actors involved, and the power struggles taking place along this chain. Such an approach resonates with Dicken, Kelly, Olds and Yeung (2001: 106) when they argue that "the network understanding of how commodities and services are produced, distributed and consumed highlights the grounded mechanisms through which a web of international economic relationships is actually created and reproduced". Drawing from access theory (Ribot and Peluso 2003), I examined the particular production constraints and trade barriers for the many actors involved. Then working at the meso scale, my analysis suggested that the commercialisation of cardamom in Sa Pa district is strongly shaped along gender and ethnic lines. Indeed, while cardamom cultivation is predominantly the affair of Hmong men, cardamom marketing, distribution, and export is largely controlled by Kinh women. These Kinh wholesalers benefit from easier access to both financial and social forms of capital while Hmong producers continue to face multiple constraints and uncertainties with regards to their livelihood futures.

In sum, the use of a multi-scalar approach to rural livelihoods, as undertaken in this study allows one to unravel the complex dynamics shaping these livelihood choices by uncovering the constellation of actors involved, power relations, and the inequalities at play. Indeed, while a household/micro level analysis of Hmong livelihood portfolios suggests that they are able to derive substantial revenue from this trade, a broader analysis of the networks of trade for cardamom, at the meso scale, suggests that other actors are economically favoured, and able to capture higher revenue from this commerce. Hence, adopting a multi-scalar approach to highlanders' livelihoods in northern Vietnam provides a window of opportunity to unravel the issues of access, power, and ethnicity. As such, this study contributes not only to a growing body of literature on the Hmong, but more broadly to ethnographic based, multi-scalar studies investigating the nature of the agrarian transition in Vietnam – the type of study which is imperative if the Vietnamese State or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) hope to engage positively with these livelihoods.

7.3.2. Policy implications

In my conceptual framework (Section 2.1.3), I discussed briefly the importance of analysing the development outcomes of NTFP extraction and trade in their local context,

especially since these impacts remain "poorly understood, partly because of a lack of detailed, ethnographic, historically-based case-studies" (Neumann and Hirsh 2000: 132). Based upon my findings, one might ask whether an intervention from outsiders such as the State or well intentioned NGOs shifting the balance of power in favour of Hmong producers would – or would not – be desirable.

Since the early 2000s, the Vietnamese State alongside several multi-lateral agencies (European Union, Asian Development Bank and World Bank) has promoted various highland development programmes with a focus on livelihood diversification and market integration (Pham Tuan, 6/20/06). Similarly, scientists at the NTFP research center, a sub-division of Vietnam's MARD (Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development) have investigated the potential benefits of cardamom production for highland minorities (Phang Van Thang, 5/22/06). When studying cardamom agroforestry systems in the Sikkim Himalayas, Sharma *et al.* (2000: 108) argue that cardamom cultivation is "an example of how local mountain niches can be exploited sustainably". Similar studies on the ecological sustainability of cardamom agro-forestry systems in Laos (Kvitvik 2001; Buckingham and Tu Minh Tiep 2003; Buckingham 2004; Ducourtieux, Visonnavong and Rossard 2006) suggest that cardamom may be seen as a sustainable alternative to historically important highland cash crops such as the opium poppy. However, Ducourtieux *et al.* (2006) also call for a better understanding of how cardamom fits into local agricultural systems and the market risks involved for small-scale producers.

Based upon my findings, I would argue that for any intervention to be effective, outsiders should first gain a more nuanced, local understanding of the motivations driving these livelihood choices whilst being acutely aware of the socio-economic context in which these decisions take place. Historically, Hmong livelihoods have proven to be both diverse and flexible, meaning that households may decide to abandon cardamom cultivation if they face high risks or perceive low returns to their labour. That is, if another economic opportunity comes along, cardamom could be abandoned for the profit of another crop. As argued by Bouahom *et al.* (2004), there can be a real danger of 'pigeon-holing' families and their livelihood strategies. Indeed, field work evidence suggests that some Hmong families depend more heavily on cardamom than others. Consequently policy makers or development practitioners should be aware of the limitations of using a 'blueprint' approach when developing rural development strategies.

Most importantly, a historically grounded, multi-ethnic and multi-scalar approach is essential if one hopes to develop pro-poor programmes for local resource users – one that acknowledges and takes into central consideration social inequities embedded in relations of trust and distrust, historical relationships between ethnic groups, and the willingness (or not) of the Hmong themselves to enter further into the market economy.

As a whole, this study has examined the dynamic and fluid nature of Hmong livelihood strategies and the place of forest products within these livelihood portfolios. First, the analysis has shown how Hmong livelihood portfolios in Sa Pa district have evolved and adapted to a number of politico-economical changes, as new forestry and market regulations are extending in formerly remote rural areas. Interviews with Hmong households suggest that forest products continue to play both subsistence and commercial roles, but these goods are increasingly seen as optional or discretionary sources of income. Second, an investigation on the cardamom trade networks in Lao Cai province highlighted the social embeddedness of highland trade networks, and more specifically the roles of ethnicity and power shaping access along this particular commodity chain. Indeed, a geographical attention to cardamom trade networks also offers a means of exploring the multi-sited nature of Hmong livelihoods, and the different propelling forces pushing rural households to diversify into new livelihood activities. Ultimately, this study calls attention to how a historically-grounded and multi-scalar approach to rural livelihood is vital if one hopes to operationalise poverty alleviation strategies which will be meaningful to local resource users.

APPENDIX A: ETHICS CERTIFICATE

McGill

Research Ethics Board Office
McGill University
845 Sherbrooke Street West
James Administration Bldg., rm 419
Montreal, QC H3A 2T5

Tel: (514) 398-6831
Fax: (514) 398-4644
Ethics website: www.mcgill.ca/research/compliance/human/

Research Ethics Board I
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

REB File #: 179-0306

Project Title: Income from the forest: Hmong use and trade of forest products in Northern Vietnam

Principal Investigator: Claire Tugault-Lafleur **Department:** Geography

Status: Master's student **Supervisor:** Prof. S. Turner

Granting Agency and Title (if applicable): McGill Internal SSHRC; SSHRC MCRI-Challenges of the agrarian transition in Southeast Asia (PI-S. Turner)

This project was reviewed on 17 March 2006 by

Expedited Review ✓
Full Review ____

George Wenzel

George Wenzel, Ph.D.
Chair, REB I

Approval Period: March 17, 2006 **to** March 16, 2007

This project was reviewed and approved in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Subjects and with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans

---

*All research involving human subjects requires review on an annual basis. A Request for Renewal form should be submitted at least one month before the above expiry date.
*If a project has been completed or terminated and ethics approval is no longer required, a Final Report form must be submitted.
*Should any modification or other unanticipated development occur before the next required review, the REB must be informed and any modification can't be initiated until approval is received.

cc: Prof. S. Turner

APPENDIX B: LIST OF INFORMANTS

B.1: LIST OF HMONG INTERVIEWEES[72]

Cho: 1st man interviewee, chief of Xin Chai hamlet, in San Sa Ho commune, middle-aged
Nia: 1st woman interviewee, in San Sa Ho commune, middle-aged
Moua: 2nd woman interviewee in San Sa Ho commune, middle-aged
Lu: 3rd woman interviewee in San Sa Ho commune, middle-aged
Lam: 4th woman interviewee in San Sa Ho commune, middle-aged
Zhou: 1st woman interviewee in Cat Cat village, San Sa Ho commune, elderly
Noua: 2nd woman interviewee in Cat Cat village, San Sa Ho commune, middle-aged
Cham: 3rd woman interviewee from Cat Cat village, elderly, now working making handicrafts in the Sa Pa marketplace
Lim: 1st woman interviewee in Y Linh Ho hamlet, San Sa Ho commune, elderly
Jing: 1st woman interviewee in Ta Van commune, middle-aged
Mai Yia: 2nd women interviewee in Ta Van commune, herbal medicine healer in Ta Van commune, middle-aged
May: 3rd woman interviewed in Ta Van commune, middle-aged
Kao: 1st man interviewee in Ta Van commune, elderly
Lia: 1st woman interviewee in Lao Chai commune, middle-aged
Hoa: 2nd woman interviewee in Lao Chai commune, middle-aged
Pham: 3rd woman interviewee in Lao Chai commune, elderly
Ly: 4th woman interviewee from Lao Chai village, 25 years old. Ly lives with her mother who is also a herbalist healer for the village
Nao: 1st man interviewee in Lao Chai commune, middle-aged
Lu: elderly woman interviewee from Lao Chai commune. Lu works in the Sa Pa market making handicrafts with her daughter Zi.
Lam: elderly woman from Lao Chai commune. Lam works during the day at the Sa Pa market making handicrafts.
Chu: elderly woman from Lao Chai commune. Works with Lam during the day at the Sa Pa market making handicrafts
Zhia: 5th woman and medicinal plant healer in Lao Chai commune, middle-aged
Foua: 1st man interviewee in Giang Ta Chai commune, middle-aged
Salome: 1st Yao woman interviewee in Ta Phin commune, middle-aged
Shia: 2nd woman interviewee in Ta Phin commune, elderly
Lau: Yao 3rd woman interviewee in Ta Phin commune, middle-aged
Mao: 1st man interviewee in Sa Pa commune, middle-aged. Mao also acts as village chief and shaman
Shio: 1st man interviewee in Hau Thao commune, middle-aged
Shaw: 1st woman interviewee in Hau Thao commune, middle-aged. Her husband is one of the few basket makers in the village.
Lan: 2nd woman interviewee in Hau Thao commune, middle-aged. Wife of Shio and herbal healer

[72] All of these names are pseudonyms.

Tao: 1st man interviewee in Ban Khoang commune, middle-aged
Lao: 2nd man interviewee in Ban Khoang commune, middle-aged

B.2: LIST OF FOREST PRODUCT TRADERS

Minh Ha: cardamom intermediary (itinerant trader based in Sa Pa town), middle-aged Kinh woman, interviewed in San Sa Ho commune
Lien: cardamom intermediary, middle-aged Kinh woman, shop-owner/village-based trader in Ta Phin village, younger sister of Dung.
Dung: cardamom intermediary, middle-aged Kinh woman, shop-owner/village-based trader in Sa Pa commune.
Tranh Huy: cardamom intermediary, middle-aged Kinh man, shop-owner/village-based trader in Y Linh Ho hamlet (San Sa Ho commune)
Lua: cardamom intermediary, young Giay woman, shop-owner/village-based trader in Ta Van commune
Phuc: cardamom intermediary, young Giay woman, shop-owner/village-based trader in Ta Van commune
Le Chi Thao: cardamom intermediary (itinerant trader based in Sa Pa town), middle-aged Kinh woman, interviewed in San Sa Ho commune

Mai Pham: cardamom wholesaler in Sa Pa town, middle-aged Kinh woman
Ngoc Minh: cardamom wholesaler in Sa Pa town, middle-aged Kinh woman
Quy Giang: cardamom wholesaler in Sa Pa town, middle-aged Kinh man
Ha Tam: cardamom wholesaler in Sa Pa town, middle-aged Kinh woman

Xuan Nhu: cardamom and herbal medicinal plant wholesaler based in Lao Cai city, middle-aged Kinh woman.
Kim Ly: cardamom wholesaler based in Lao Cai city, middle-aged Kinh woman, spoke Chinese.
Mai Tuyen: cardamom wholesaler based in Lao Cai city, middle-aged Kinh woman, spoke Chinese.

Van Phuong: Orchid seller/retailer in the Sa Pa marketplace, Kinh elderly woman.
Phuong: Orchid wholesaler based in Ta Phin village, middle-aged Kinh man.

Quynh Lam: herbal medicine market retailer in the Sa Pa market, middle-aged Kinh woman.
Tran Anh Tu: herbal medicine market retailer in the Sa Pa market, middle-aged Kinh woman.
Lua Xuan: herbal medicine market retailer in the Sa Pa market, middle-aged Kinh woman.
Nam Ha: herbal medicine market retailer in the Sa Pa market, middle-aged Kinh woman.
Hong Hoa: herbal medicine market retailer in the Sa Pa market, middle-aged Kinh woman.
Phuc: herbal medicine retailer in Don Xuan marketplace (Hanoi), middle-aged Kinh man, buys and sells cardamom from middle-people

B.3: GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND KEY INFORMANTS

Government Officials (GO):
GO1: Director of Hoang Lien National Park
GO2: Department of Forestry representative, Lao Cai provincial office

Key Informants

Phang Van Thang: Researcher at the NTFP research center, a sub-division of the MARD (Ministry of Agricultural Resources and Development)

Pham Tuan: Local programme officer for Oxfam UK., Sa Pa satellite office. Pham Tuan was a young female Vietnamese researcher doing a Masters in Anthropology at Hanoi University.

Tranh: a 70 year-old Kinh Sa Pa resident. Retired government employee, Mr. Tranh now owns a hotel business in Sa Pa town.

Thuy: Wife of Mr. Tranh. A retired cardamom trader, Mrs. Thuy now works as a hotel manager with her husband, Mr. Tranh.

Phuc An: a middle-aged Kinh retired lady living in Sa Pa town. Phuc An was hired as a botanist/biologist and was sent to Sa Pa in the early 1960s as part of the government migration schemes. Phuc An worked as an agricultural extension worker in the Sa Pa botanical center. Her husband used to trade cardamom in the early 1980s.

Chee: Hmong girl in her early twenties living in Sa Pa town but working as a local tour guide for a Kinh hotel business. Chee worked with me as a field assistant/interpreter. Her family is from Ta Van commune.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR HMONG HOUSEHOLDS

1. How many children do you have? How many people are living in this house with you and what is their relationship with you?
2. What goods do you gather from the forest?
3. Can you give me some details as to where these locations are? [*if it's not a secret]* – How long does it take you to walk there? Are there many places or one specific place where you collect each type of good?
4. How long have you been gathering these goods for? [*If relevant*] How long from this one site or many/different ones?
5. Did your parents collect these goods before you – your aunt/uncle/grandparents? Do you know when they started?
6. Do you know many people in your hamlets collect forest products?
7. How often do you go to the forest to collect these goods? Do you go alone or with others? If with others- who? [*Inquire about the gender, age, and relationship to interviewee*].
8. Do you use these goods in your household? What for?
9. Why do you collect the goods that you do?
10. How do you process or transform (cook, grind etc) these goods before you use them if necessary? [*Get details for each separate forest product*].
11. If you collect these for medicinal purposes, what's the purpose?
12. Do you sell these goods as well? If yes, do you exchange these products for money or do you get other goods in exchange?
13. How do you process these (if at all) before you sell them?
14. Do you sell these goods directly to people who use the goods for themselves or to someone who then sells to customers (a middle person)?
15. How much do you sell them for? Does this price vary through different times of the year?
16. If directly to customers, where do you sell them? Is it at a market – which one? If not, where? How often do you try to sell the goods, and if at a location not close to here, how do you get there? Do other members of your family sell the goods with you?
17. Do you have special rights or need permissions to collect forest goods from certain areas around here? Do you negotiate with other people where you will collect goods from? If so, how is that negotiation undertaken?
18. Why do you sell these goods in the market? Is this important income for you? If so, what do you do with the money earned from selling those products?
19. What other goods do you sell, if any? Do you sell your rice? How much rice do you harvest each year and how much of this can you sell?

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR CARDAMOM TRADERS

1. Where does your cardamom come from (which village/commune)?
2. When did you start trading cardamom?
3. Who collects the cardamom for you? When? From where? Who processes the cardamom?
4. How does the cardamom reach the market? How often are these products transported into markets? Who pays for any of the transportation costs?
5. How much do you sell the cardamom for? Who determines the price of the good? Is there any seasonal variation in prices?
6. What is the relationship between you and the harvester/intermediary/wholesaler [*depending upon the actor*] – family, clan, or none? If none, how long known each other and how did relationship begin?
7. Do you know how many traders sell this product in this market? Are these from the same ethnic group as you?
8. Is the cardamom collected given to intermediaries on credit or trust? [*If based on credit*] how does one access financial resources?
9. What do you do with the returns from this trade? Are they re-invested in the trading business to buy other goods? Or, alternatively, is this money earned going directly to fulfil family needs?
10. Are there any known barriers that make it difficult for some traders to enter in this business?
11. Do you pay a fee or tax to sell here?
12. Who buys the products? Are customers mostly from nearby hamlets or some come from outside of the province to buy these goods?
13. What do people use your product for?

REFERENCES

Adger, W. N. (1999). Social vulnerability to climate change and extremes in coastal Vietnam. *World Development, 27*(2), 249-269.

---------- (2000). Social and ecological resilience: Are they related? *Progress in Human Geography, 24*(3), 347-364.

Adger, W. N., Kelly, P. M., Winkels, A., Luong Quang Huy & Locke, C. (2002). Migration, remittances, livelihood trajectories, and social resilience. *Ambio, 31*(4), 358-366.

Alther, C., Castella, J. C., Novosad, P., Rousseau, E., & Tran Trong Hieu (2002). Impact of accessibility on the range of livelihood options available to farm households in mountainous areas of northern Vietnam. In J.C. Castella & Dang (eds.), *Đổi Mới in the mountains, land use changes and farmers' livelihood strategies in Bac Kan province, Vietnam*. Hanoi: Agricultural Publishing House.

Anderson, A.B. & Loris, E.M. (1992). Valuing the rain forest: economic strategies by small-scale extractivists in the Amazon estuary. *Human Ecology* 20 (3): 337-339.

Appadurai, A. (1986). *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.

Arnold, M., & Ruiz, P. M. (2001). Can non-timber forest products match tropical forest conservation and development objectives? *Ecological Economics, 39*, 437-447.

Aubertin, C. (2004). Cardamom (*Amomum* spp.) in Laos PDR: The hazardous future of an agroforest system product. In K. Kusters & B. Belcher (eds.), *Forest products, livelihoods and conservation. Case-studies of non-timber forest products systems* (Vol. 1, Asia). Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR.

Auerbach, C. F., & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and analysis*. New York: New York University Press.

Barham, B. and Coomes, O.T. (1996). *Prosperity's promise: the Amazon rubber boom and distorted economic development*, *Dellplain Latin American studies; no. 34*. Boulder, Colo: Westview Press.

An Van Bay (2004). Bamboo (*Neohouzeaua dullooa*) production and trade in Cho Don, Vietnam: NTFP extraction from allocated forest lands. In K. Kusters & B. Belcher (eds.), *Forest products, livelihoods and conservation. Case-studies of non-timber forest products systems* (Vol. 1, Asia). Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR.

Bebbington, A. (1999). Capitals and capabilities: A framework for analyzing peasant viability, rural livelihoods and poverty. *World Development, 27*(12), 2021-2044.

Bebbington, A., Guggenheim, S., Olson, E., & Woolcock, M. (2004). Exploring social capital debates at the World Bank. *Journal of Development Studies, 40*(5), 33-64.

Belcher, B. (1998). A Production-to-Consumption System Approach: Lessons from the Bamboo and the Ratttan Sector in Asia. In E. Wollenberg & A. Ingles (eds.) *Incomes from the forest: methods for the development and conservation of forest products for local communities*. Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR.

---------- (2003). What isn't an NTFP? *International Forestry Review, 5*(2), 161-168.

Belcher, B., & Kusters, K. (2004). Non-timber forest product commercialisation: Development and conservation lessons. In K. Kusters & B. Belcher (eds.), *Forest products, livelihoods and conservation. Case-studies of non-timber forest products systems* (Vol. 1, Asia). Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR.

Bonanich, E (1994). *Global production, the apparel industry and the Pacific Rim*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Bonifacy. (1903). *Travail ethnique sur les races peuplant le 3e territoire militaire, Secteur de Hà Giang.* [Ethnography on minority populations living in the 3rd military territory, Ha Giang sector] Archive #313.

Bouahom, B., Douangsavanh, L., & Rigg, J. (2004). Building sustainable livelihoods in Laos: Untangling farm from non-farm, progress from distress. *Geoforum, 35*(5), 607-619.

Bradshaw, M., & Stratford, E. (2005). Qualitative research design and rigour. In I. Hay (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography*. South Melbourne, Vic. New York: Oxford University Press.

Buckingham, S. (2004). *Synthesis report on cardamom cultivation*: Fauna and Flora International - Community-based Conservation in the Hoang Lien mountains.

Buckingham, S. & Tu Minh Tiep (2003). *A rapid characterization of Amomum aromaticum (Roxb.) in three villages in Van Ban district, Lao Cai province*: Fauna and Flora International - Van Ban Community-based Protected Area Project.

Bush, S. R. (2004). Scales and sales: Changing social and spatial fish trading networks in the Siiphandone fishery, Lao PDR. *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography, 25*(1), 32-50.

Byron, N., & Arnold, M. (1999). What futures for the people of the tropical forests? *World Development, 27*(5), 789-805.

Castella, J. C., Tran Quoc Hoa, Husson, O., Vu Hai Nam & Dang Dinh Quanh (2002). The declining role of ethnicity in farm household differentiation: A case study from Nuoc Phai. In J. C. Castella & Dang Dinh Quanh (eds.), *Đổi Mới in the mountains: Land use changes and farmers' livelihood strategies in Bac Khan province, Vietnam*. Hanoi: The Agricultural Publishing House.

Chambers, R. (1989). Vulnerability, Coping and Policy - Introduction. *IDS Bulletin-Institute of Development Studies* 20 (2):1-7.

Chambers, R., & Conway, G. (1992). *Sustainable rural livelihoods: practical concepts for the 21st century.* Brighton: Institute of Development Studies.

Chuan, G. K., & Poh, W. (2000). Status of fieldwork in the geography curriculum in Southeast Asia. In R. Gerber & K. C. Goh (eds.), *Fieldwork in geography: Reflections, perspectives and actions*. Dordrecht; Boston; London: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Cook, I. (1994). New Fruits and Vanity: Symbolic Production in the Global Food Industry. In J. Bryson, N. Henry, D. Keeble and R. Martin (eds.), *Economic Geography Reader*. London: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.

Coomes, O.T. (1995). A century of rain forest use in western Amazonia. *Forest and Conservation History* 39 (109-119).

Coomes, O. T., & Barham, B.L. (1997). Rain forest extraction and conservation in Amazonia. *The Geographical Journal* 163 (2):180-188.

Barham, B.L., Coomes, O.T., & Takasaki, Y. (1999). Rain forest livelihoods: income generation, household wealth and forest use. *Unasylva* 198 (50):34-42.

Cooper, R. G. (1984). *Resource scarcity and the Hmong response: A study of resettlement and economy in northern Thailand*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.

---------- (1998). *The Hmong*. Thailand: Artasia Press.

Cope, M. (2005). Coding qualitative data. In I. Hay (ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography*. South Melbourne, Vic. New York: Oxford University Press.

Corlin, C. (2004). Hmong and the land question in Vietnam: National policy and local concepts of the environment. In N. Tapp, J. Michaud, C. Culas & G. Y. Lee (eds.), *Hmong-Miao in Asia*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.

Culas, C., & Michaud, J. (2004). A contribution to the study of the Hmong (*Miao*) migrations and history. In N. Tapp, J. Michaud, C. Culas & G. Y. Le (eds.), *Hmong/Miao in Asia*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.

Curran, D. J., & Cook, S. (1993). Doing research in post-Tiananmen china. In C. M. Renzetti & R. M. Lee (eds.), *Researching sensitive topics* (pp. 71-81). Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Dalton, R. J., Pham Minh Hac, Pham Thanh Nghi, Nhu Ngoc Ong (2002). Social relations and social capital in Vietnam: Findings from the 2001 world values survey. *Comparative Sociology, 1*(3-4), 369-386.

De Beer, J. H., & McDermott, M. (1989). *The economic value of non-timber forest products in Southeast Asian with emphasis on Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand*. Unpublished manuscript, Amsterdam.

de Haan, L., & Zoomer, A. (2005). Exploring the frontier of livelihood research. *Development and Change, 36*(1), 27-47.

De Soto, H., & Dudwick, N. (2000). *Field work dilemmas: anthropologists in post socialist states*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Delang, C. O. (2005). The market for medicinal plants in Sa Pa and Hanoi, Vietnam. *Economic Botany, 59*(4), 377-385.

Devereux, S. (2001). Livelihood insecurity and social protection: A re-emerging issue in rural development. *Development Policy Review, 19*(4), 507-519.

DiGregorio, M., Pham Thi Quynh Phong & Yasui, M. (1996). *The growth and impact of tourism in Sa Pa.* Honolulu: Center for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies, Eat-West Center.

Donnell, J. C. (1980). Vietnam 1979: Year of calamity. *Asian Survey, 20*(1), 19-32.

Dorward, A., Poole, N., Morrison, J., Kydd, J., & Urey, I. (2003). Markets, institutions and technology: Missing links in livelihood analysis. *Development Policy Review, 21*(3), 319-332.

Dowling, R. (2005). Power, subjectivity and ethics in qualitative research. In I. Hay (ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography*. South Melbourne, Vic. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ducourtieux, O., Visonnavong, P., & Rossard, J. (2006). Introducing cash crops in shifting cultivation regions – the experience with cardamom in Laos. *Agroforestry Systems, 66*(1), 65-76.

Dunn, K. (2005). Interviewing. In I. Hay (ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography*. South Melbourne, Vic. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, F. (1998). Household strategies and rural livelihood diversification. *Journal of Development Studies, 35*(1), 1-38.

---------- (2000). *Rural livelihoods and diversity in developing countries*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press.

England, K. V. L. (1994). Getting personal: Reflexivity, positionality, and feminist research. *Professional Geographer, 46*(1), 80-89.

Fadiman, A. (1998). *The spirit catches you and you fall down: A Hmong child, her American doctors, and the collision of two cultures*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Fafchamps, M. (1999). Rural poverty, risk and development. Rome: Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO).

FAO. (1999). Towards a harmonised definition of non-wood forest products. *Unasylva, 198*(50): online [http://www.fao.org/forestry/site/unasylva/en/].

Fforde, A., & De Vylder, S. (1996). *From plan to market: the economic transition in Vietnam*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Foppes, J., & Ketphanh, S. (2000). Forest extraction or cultivation? Local solutions for Laos PDR, *FOREASIA - Workshop on the evolution and sustainability of "intermediate systems" of forest management*. Lofoten, Norway.

Frobet. (1898). *Vie territoire militaire, cercle de Lao Kay, secteur de Bat Xat*. [Life in the military territies, Lao Lay region, Bat Xat sector] Archive # 66105-BX.

Geddes. (1976). *Migrants of the mountains: The cultural ecology of the blue Miao (Hmong Njua) of Thailand.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

George, K., & Stratford, E. (2005). Oral histories and human geography. In I. Hay (ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography*. South Melbourne, Vic. New York: Oxford University Press.

Gereffi, G., & Korzeniewicz, M. (1994). *Commodity chains and global capitalism*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Gilmour, D. A., & Nguyen, V. S. (1999). *Buffer zone management in Vietnam*. Hanoi: IUCN-Vietnam Programme and Forest Protection Department.

Godoy, R., and Bawa, K.S. (1993). The economic value and sustainable harvest of plants and animals from the tropical forest: assumption, hypotheses, methods. *Economic Botany* 47 (3):215-219.

Godoy, R., Wilkie, D., Overman, H., Cubas G., Demmer J., McSweeney K. and N. Brokaw, N. (2000). Valuation of consumption and sale of forest goods from a Central American Rainforest. *Nature* 406 (62-63).

Gold, R. L. (1958). Roles in sociological field observations. *Social Forces, 36*, 219-225.

Goodman, D., & Watts, M. (1994). Reconfiguring the rural of fording the divide - capitalist restructuring and the global agrofood system. *Journal of Peasant Studies, 22*(1), 1-49.

----------. (1997). *Globalising food: Agrarian questions and global restructuring*. London; New York: Routledge.

Gough, I. (2004). Human well-being and social structures: relating the universal and the local. *Global Social Policy*. 4(3): 289-311.

Hai, C. T. (2000). Trade activities of the Hoa along the Sino-Vietnamese border. In G. Evans, C. Hutton & K. E. Kuah (eds.), *Where China meets Southeast Asia: Social & cultural change in the border regions*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Hardy, A., & Turner, S. (2000). Editorial: Migration, markets and social change in the highlands of Vietnam. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint, 41*(1): 1-6.

Harraway, D. (1991). *Simians, cyborgs and women: The reinvention of space*. London: Free Association Books.

Hirsh, T., & Nguyen Van Thinh (1996). Implication of economic reforms in Vietnam: Agrarian and environmental change in Hien Luong. *Australian Geographer, 27*, 167-183.

Hopkins, T. K., & Wallerstein, I. (1986). Global commodity chains in the world economy prior to 1800. *Review, 10*(1), 157-170.

Howe, D. (1996). *Cross-cultural consumption: Global markets, local realities.* London New York: Routledge.

Howitt, R., & Stevens, S. (2005). Cross-cultural research: Ethics, methods, and relationships. In I. Hay (ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography* South Melbourne, Vic. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hy Van Luong & Unger, J. (1998). Wealth, power and poverty in the transition to market economies: The process of socio-economic differentiation in rural china and northern Vietnam. *China Journal, 40*, 61-93.

Jamieson, N. L. (1993). *Understanding Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kearns, R. (2005). Knowing seeing? Undertaking observational research. In I. Hay (Ed.), *Qualitative research methods in human geography*. South Melbourne, Vic. New York: Oxford University Press.

Kitchin, R., & Tate, N. J. (2000). *Conducting research in human geography: Theory, methodology and practice*. Harlow New York: Prentice Hall.

Kobayashi, A. (1994). Coloring the field - gender, race, and the politics of fieldwork. *Professional Geographer, 46*(1), 73-80.

Kouuy (1904). *Notes ethnographiques sur les Méos ou Miao Tse.* Archive #329.

Kurti, L. (1999). Cameras and other gadgets: reflections on field work experiences in socialist and post socialist Hungarian communities. *Social Anthropology, 7*(2), 169-187.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, Ca. Sage Publications.

Kvitvik, T. (2001). *Cultivating and collecting cardamom (Amomum spp.) and other NTFPs in Muong Lung district, Luang Namtha province, Laos PDR.* Unpublished MSci. thesis

Lavigne, M. (2000). Transition to the market in Asia: The case of Vietnam. In E. Maskin & A. Simonovits (eds.), *Planning, shortage, and transformation*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Leach, M., Mearns, R., and Scoones, I. (1999). Environmental Entitlements. Dynamics and institutions in community-based natural resource management. *World Development 27(2)*: 225-247

Lemoine, J. (1972). *Un villageHmong vert du Haut Laos*. Unpublished manuscript, Paris.

Lewis, M. W. (1989). Commercialization and community life - the geography of market exchange in a small-scale Philippine society. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 79*(3), 390-410.

Le Van Lanh (2004). Hoang Lien National Park. Sa Pa tourism and information center, Sa Pa. National culture publishing house: Hanoi.

Li, T. M. (1999). *Transforming the Indonesian uplands: Marginality, power and production*. Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers.

---------- (2002). Local histories, global markets: Cocoa and class in upland Sulawesi. *Development and Change, 33*(3), 415-437.

Li, W. (1989). The sociology of law in china: Overview and trends. *Law and Society Review, 23*, 909-914.

Limb, M., & Dwyer, C. (2001). *Qualitative methodologies for geographers: Issues and debates*. London. New York: Arnold, Oxford University Press.

Lin, N. (2001). *Social capital. A theory of social structure and action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Long, N. (2001). *Development sociology: actor perspectives*. London. New York: Routledge.

Long, N., & Villarreal, M. (1998). Small product, big issues: Value contestations and cultural identities in cross-border commodity networks. *Development and Change, 29*(4), 725-750.

Lowe, P., & Ward, N. (1996). Field-level bureaucrats and the making of new moral discourses in agri-environmental controversies. In D. Goodman & M. Watts (eds.), *Globalising food: Agrarian questions and global restructuring*. London: Routledge.

Luttrell, C. (2001). Historical perspectives on environment and development. In Adger. W.N., P. M. Kelley & Nguyen Huu Ninh (eds.), *Living with environmental change: Social vulnerability, adaptation and resilience in Vietnam.* New York: Routledge.

Mai Thanh Son. (1999). Craft tradition and pratices: the Hmong of Ta Phin, Sa Pa, Vietnam. The Vietnam Museum of Ethnology and Craftlink. Hanoi.

Marr, D. G. (1993). Education, research, and information circulation in contemporary Vietnam. In W. Turley & M. Seden (eds.), *Reinventing Vietnamese socialism: Đổi Mới in comparative perspective*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Marsden, T. K., & Arce, A. (1993). The social construction of international food: A new research agenda. *Economic Geography, 69*, 293-312.

---------- (1995). Constructing quality - emerging food networks in the rural transition. *Environment and Planning A, 27*(8), 1261-1279.

Marshall, E., Newton, A. C., & Schreckenberg, K. (2003). Commercialisation of non-timber forest products: First steps in analysing the factors influencing success. *International Forestry Review, 5*(2), 128-137.

Mazurkiewicz, L. (1992). *Human geography in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union*. London. New York: Belhaven Press; Halsted Press.

McDowell, L. (1996). Spatializing feminism: Geographic perspectives. In N. Duncan (Ed.), *Bodyspaces: Destabilizing geographies of gender and sexualities*. London, New York: Routledge.

McElwee, P. (2001) Parks or people: exploring alternative explanations for protected areas development in Vietnam. Paper presented at conservation and sustainable development – comparative perspectives, Yale University, August 2001

McSweeney, K. (2004). The dugout canoe trade in Central America's *Mosquitia*: Approaching rural livelihoods through systems of exchange. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers, 94*(3), 638-661.

---------- (2005). Natural insurance, forest access, and compounded misfortune: forest resources in smallholder coping strategies before and after hurricane Mitch, northeastern Honduras. *World Development 33* (9):1453-1471.

Meert, H. G., van Huy Lenbroeck, T., Vernimmen, M., Bourgeois, & Van Hecke, E. (2005). Farm household strategies and diversification in marginal farms. *Journal of Rural Studies, 21*(81-97).

Michaud, J. (1997). Economic transformations in a Hmong village of Thailand. *Human Organisation, 56*(2), 222-232.

---------- (2000a). From southwest China to upper Indochina: An overview of Hmong (*Miao*) migrations. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint, 38*(2), 119-130.

---------- (2000b). The Montagnards and the state in northern Vietnam from 1862 to 1975: A historical overview. *Ethnohistory, 47*(2), 333-367.

---------- (2006). *People of the Southeast Asian massif: Historical dictionary*. Lanham, Maryland: The Scarecrow Press Inc.

Michaud, J., & Culas, C. (2000). The Hmong of the Southeast Asian massif: Their recent history of migration. In G. Evans, C. Hutton & K. E. Kuah (eds.), *Where China meets Southeast Asia: Social and cultural change in the border regions*. New York: St-Martin's Press.

Michaud, J., & Turner, S. (2000). The Sa Pa marketplace, Lao Cai province, Vietnam. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint, 41*(1), 84-99.

---------- (2003). Tribulations d'un marché de montagne du nord-Vietnam. *Études rurales, 165-166*, 53-80.

Michaud, J., Turner, S., & Roche, Y. (2002). Mapping ethnic diversity in highland northern Vietnam. *Geojournal, 4*, 281-299.

Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) (1997). *Review report on planning, organization and management of special use forest*. MARD: Cuc Phuong, Vietnam.

Morduch, J. (1995). Income Smoothing and Consumption Smoothing. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 9 (3):103-114.

Morris, J. & An Van Bay (2002). *An overview of the NTFP sub-sector in Vietnam*. Hanoi: Non-Timber Forest Product Research Center.

Moser, C.O.N. 1998. The asset vulnerability framework: reassessing urban poverty reduction strategies. *World Development* 26 (1):1-19.

Mosse, D. (1994). Can there be validity without reliability? *Educational Researcher, 23*(2), 5-12.

Mullings, B. (1999). Insider or outsider, both or neither: Some dilemmas of interviewing in a cross-cultural setting. *Geoforum, 30*(4), 337-350.

Narayan, D. (1999). *Bonds and bridges: Social capital and poverty*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

Neef, A. (2001). Sustainable agriculture in the northern uplands: attitudes, constraints and priorities of ethnic minorities. In W. N. Adger, P. M. Kelly & N. H. Ninh (eds.), *Living with environmental change: Social vulnerability, adaptation and resilience in Vietnam*. London; New York: Routledge.

Neumann, R. P., & Hirsch, E. (2001). *Commercialisation of non-timber forests products: Review and analysis of research.* Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR.

Nguyen Van Thang (1995). The Hmong and Dzao people in Vietnam: Impact of traditional socio-economic and cultural factors on the protection and development of forest resources. In A. T. Rambo (ed.), *the challenges of highland development in Vietnam*. Honolulu, HI: East-West Center.

Nguyen, T. L., Patanothai, A., & Rambo, A. T. (2004). Recent changes in the composite swidden farming system of a Da Bac Tay ethnic minority community in Vietnam's northern mountain region. *Southeast Asian Studies, 42*(3), 273-293.

Pattanayak, S., and E. Sills. 2001. Do Tropical forest provide natural insurance? The microeconomics of non-timber forest collection in the Brazilian Amazon. *Land Economics* 77 (4):595-612.

Pattenella, D. (2001). Forest land allocation and deforestation processes in the uplands. In W. N. Adger, P. M. Kelly & N. H. Ninh (eds.), *Living with environmental change: Social vulnerability, adaptation and resilience in Vietnam*. London; New York: Routledge.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

----------(2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Peluso, N. L. (1992). *Rich forests, poor people: Resource control and resistance in Java*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Peters, C.M., A.H. Gentry, and R.O. Mendelson. (1989). Valuation of an Amazonian Rainforest. *Nature* 339:655-6.

Pham Quan Hoan (1995). *The role of traditional social institutions on community management of resources among the Hmong of Vietnam*. Unpublished report.

---------- (1997). *Local knowledge on natural resource management of ethnic minorities in Vietnam.* Paper presented at the Ethnic Communities in a changing Environment, Chiang Mai.

Poffenberger, M., & Nguyen Huy Phon (1998). National forest sector. In M. Poffenberger (ed.), *Stewards of Vietnam's upland forests*. Berkeley, CA: Asia Forest Network Center for Southeast Asia Studies, University of California Berkeley.

Policy Research Initiative. (2003). Social capital workshop: report of findings: Government of Canada.

Portes, A., & Landolt, P. (2000). Social capital: Promise and pitfalls of its role in development. *Journal of Latin American Studies, 32*(2), 529-547.

Quy, Chu Huu (1995). Overview of the highland development in Vietnam: General characteristics, socio-economic situation, and development challenges. In Rambo, Reed, Le Trong Cuc & D. Gregorio (eds.), *The challenges of highland development in Vietnam*. Honolulu, Hi: East-West Center.

Rambo, T. (1995). Perspectives on defining highland development challenges in Vietnam: New frontier or cul-de-sac? In R. Rambo, Le Trong Cuc & D. Gregorio (eds.), t*he challenges of highland development in Vietnam*. Honolulu: East-West Center.

Rambo, T., Le Trong Cuc, Reed, R. R., & Di Gregorio, M. (1995). Introduction. In *The challenges of highland development in Vietnam*. Honolulu: East-West Center.

Rerkasem, K., & B., R. (1995). Montane mainland south-east Asia: Agro-ecosystems in transition. *Global Environmental Change, 5*(4), 313-322.

Ribot, J. C. (1998). Theorizing access: Forest profits along Senegal's charcoal commodity chain. *Development and Change, 29*(2), 307-341.

Ribot, J. C., & Peluso, N. L. (2003). A theory of access. *Rural Sociology, 68*(2), 153-181.

Ric Riamputtong, P., & Ezzy, D. (1999). *Qualitative research methods: A health focus*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Rigg, J. (2003). *Southeast Asia: The human landscape of modernization and development*. London; New York: Routledge.

--------- (2006). Land, farming, livelihoods, and poverty: Rethinking the links in the rural south. *World Development, 34*(1), 180-202.

Roche, Y., & Michaud, J. (2000). Mapping ethnic groups in Lao Cai province, Vietnam. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, 101-110.

Rose, G. (1997). Situated knowledge: Positionality, reflexivity and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography, 21*(3), 305-320.

Ruiz Perez, M., & Arnold, J. (1995). *Current issues in NTFP research.* Paper presented at the Research on NTFP, Hot Springs, Zimbabwe.

Ruiz Perez, M., & Byron, N. (1998). A methodology to analyze divergent case-studies of non-timber forest products and their development potential. *Forest Science, 45*(1), 1-14.

Ruiz Perez, M. *et. al.* (2004). Markets drive the specialization strategies of forest people. *Ecology and Society, 9*(2), 4-27.

Schackleton, C., & Schackleton, S. (2004). The rural importance of non-timber forest products in rural livelihood security and as safety nets: A review of evidence from South Africa. *South African Journal of Sciences, 100*, 658-664.

Scheyvens, R., & Leslie, H. (2000). Gender, ethics and empowerment: dilemmas of development field work. *Women's Studies International Forum, 23*, 119-130.

Scheyvens, R., & Storey, D. (2003). *Development fieldwork: A practical guide*. London; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Shoenberger, L. (2006). *Crossing the line: The changing nature of highlander cross-border trade in northern Vietnam.* M.A. thesis. McGill University, Montreal.

Scoones, I. (1998). *Sustainable livelihoods: A framework for analysis*. Brighton: Institute for Development Studies.

Scott, S., Miller, F., & Lloyd, K. (2006). Doing fieldwork in development geography: Research culture and research spaces in Vietnam. *Geographical Research, 44*(1), 28-40.

Sen, A. (1997). Human capital and human capability. *World Development, 25*(12), 1959-1961.

Sheil, D. & Wunder, S. 2002. The value of tropical forest to local communities: complications, caveats and cautions. *Conservation ecology 6* (2): 1-16.

Shillington, L. (2002). *Nicaragua case study - gendered access: commodity chain analysis of non-timber forest products from Laguna de Apoyo nature reserve, Nicaragua.* Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

Sieber, J. E. (1993). The ethics and politics of sensitive research. In C. M. Renzetti & R. M. Lee (eds.), *Researching sensitive topics*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications.

Sikor, T. (1995). Decree 327 and the restoration of barren lands in the Vietnamese highlands. In A. T. Rambo (ed.), *The challenges of highland development in Vietnam*. Honolulu, HI: East-West Center.

---------- (2001). Agrarian differentiation in post-socialist societies: Evidence from three upland villages in north-western Vietnam. *Development and Change, 32*(5), 923-949.

---------- (2004). Conflicting concepts: Contested land relations in north-western Vietnam. *Conservation and Society, 2*(1), 75-96.

Sikor, T., & Pham Thi Tuong Ti (2005). The dynamics of commoditization in a Vietnamese uplands village 1980-2000. *Journal of Agrarian Change, 5*(3), 405-428.

Sikor, T., & Dao Minh Truong (2002). Agricultural policy and land use changes in a black Thai commune of northern Vietnam, 1952-1997. *Mountain Research and Development, 22*(3), 248-255.

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London; New York. Dunedin, N.Z. New York: Zed Books; University of Otago Press; St. Martin's Press.

Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1992). Government decision no.18-hdbt by the council of ministers on total ban on logging and hunting of 13 species of trees and 36 species of animals, and a limited ban on logging/harvesting of 19 plants and animals: National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.

Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1993). Government law for environmental protection: National Political Publishing House, Hanoi.

Socialist Republic of Vietnam (1999). *Census of Vietnam*. General Statistic Office.

Sowerwine, J. C. (1999). New land rights and women's access to medicinal plants in northern Vietnam. In *Women's rights to house and land: China, Laos and Vietnam*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

---------- (2004a). *The political ecology of Yao (Dzao) landscape transformations: Territory, gender and livelihood politics in highland Vietnam.* PhD thesis. University of California, Berkeley.

---------- (2004b). Territorialisation and the politics of highland landscapes in Vietnam: Negotiating property relations in policy, meaning and practice. *Conservation and Society, 2*(1), 97-135.

Staeheli, L. A., & Lawson, V. A. (1995). Feminism, praxis, and human-geography. *Geographical Analysis, 27*(4), 321-338.

Sunderlin, W. D., & Huynh Thu Ba (2005). *Poverty alleviation and forest in Vietnam*. Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR.

Talbot, J. M. (1997). The struggle for control of a commodity chain: Instant coffee from Latin America. *Latin American Research Review, 32*(2), 117-135.

Tapp, N. (1989). *Sovereignty and rebellion - the white Hmong of Thailand*. Singapore: Oxford University Press.

Taurett, D. (1903). *Les Méos de Lao Chay.* Archive #364.

Thurston, A. (1983). *The social sciences and field work in China: Views from the field*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.

Toner, A. (2003). Exploring sustainable livelihoods approaches (SLAs) in relation to two interventions in Tanzania. *Journal of International Development, 15*(6), 771-781.

Tordoff, A., Swann, S., Grindley, M., & Siurua, H. (1999). *Hoang Lien natural reserve. Biodiversity and conservation evaluation 1997/8.* London: Society for Environment and Exploration.

Tu Dinh Van (2004). Extraction and trade of cardamom (A*momum villosum*) from Ba Be national park, Vietnam. In Kusters K. & Belcher B. (eds.), *Forest products, livelihoods and conservation. Case-studies of non-timber forest products systems* (Vol. 1, Asia). Bogor, Indonesia: CIFOR.

Turner, S. (2005). Nascent market capitalism under question: interpretations of success among Makassar entrepreneurs. *Tijdschrift Voor Economische En Sociale Geografie* 96 (3):264–274.

---------- (in press). Small-Scale Enterprise Livelihoods and Social Capital in Eastern Indonesia: Ethnic Embeddedness and Exclusion. *Professional Geographer* (November issue, 2007).

Turner, S. (2007). Trading Old Textiles: the Selective Diversification of Highland Livelihoods in Northern Vietnam. *Human Organization* 66 (4): 401-416.

Turner, S., & Michaud, J. (2006). 'Imagined, adapted and transnational economic strategies for marginal actors in a centralized state: Livelihoods of the Hmong in Lào Cai province, northern Vietnam'. Paper presented at the Vietnam Update Conference. Australia National University. November.

Turner, S., & Nguyen An Phong (2005). Young entrepreneurs, social capital and *Doi Moi* in Hanoi, Vietnam. *Urban Studies* 42 (10):1693-1710.

Vandergeest, P. (2003). Racialization and citizenship in Thai forest politics. *Society & Natural Resources, 16*(1), 19-37.

Vuong Duy Quang (2004). The Hmong and forest management in northern Vietnam's mountainous areas. In N. Tapp, J. Michaud, C. Culas & G. Y. Lee (eds.), *Hmong-Miao in Asia* (pp. 321-331). Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.

Vuong Xuan Tinh (1997a). *Food systems of the Hmong people in Ha Giang province, Vietnam.* Paper presented at the Food Culture in Southeast Asia, Seoul.

---------- (1997b). *Looking for food: The difficult journey of the Hmong in Vietnam.* Paper presented at the Anthropological Perspective on Food Security, Wisconsin-Olach.

Vuong Xuan Tinh & Hjemdahl. (1996). *A study of Hmong and Dao land management and land tenure, Nam Ty commune, Hoang Su Phi district, Ha Giang province, Vietnam*. Hanoi: Vietnam-Sweden Mountain Rural Development Programme.

Whatmore S. and Thorne, L. (1997). Nourishing Networks: Alternative Geographies of Food. In D. Goodman and M. Watts (eds.) *Globalising Food: Agrarian Questions and Global Restructuring.* London: Routledge.

White, T. A., & Smucker, G. (1998). Social capital and governance in Haiti: Traditions and trends. In *The challenges of poverty reduction*. Washington, D.C: World Bank.

Wolf, D. L. (1996). *Feminist dilemmas in fieldwork*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press.

Woolcock, M. (2001). The place of social capital in understanding social and economic outcomes. *Isuma, 2*, 11-17.

Woolcock, M., & Narayan, D. (2000). Social capital: Implications for development theory, research, and policy. *World Bank Research Observer, 15*(2), 225-249.

World Bank (2000). World Development Report 2000-2001. Attacking Poverty. Washington, D.C.: World Bank.

Wunder, S. 2001. Poverty alleviation and tropical forests - what scope for synergies? *World Development* 29 (11):1817-1833.

Zaifu, X. (1991). From shifting cultivation to agroforestry in the mountainous areas of yunnan tropics. In Z. Zhaohua, C. Mantang, W. Shji & J. Youxu (eds.), *Agroforestry systems in china*. Beijing: Chinese Academy of Forestry - IDRC.

Zhou, S. (1993). Cultivation of *Amomum Villosum* in tropical forests. *Forest Ecology and Management, 60*(1), 157-162.