

### CHAPTER III

## HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MUONG PEOPLE IN MAI VILLAGE

This chapter presents the historical development of Muong people in Mai village from when it was set up about a hundred years ago until now. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the changing natural and social conditions, on which change in ecological knowledge of Muong peoples in Mai village is born. To attain that goal, this chapter periodizes the agrarian transformation process in Mai village into three main periods based on changes in natural, political and economical conditions. The first period from village settlement to 1954 was characterized by the *Nha Lang*<sup>1</sup> regime and the traditional ecological system. In this period, the Muong people lived in harmony with nature and tended to conserve nature. The period from 1954 to 1980 was the cooperation building and collective period. In this period humans were seen as nature's master and therefore nature was overexploited. From 1980 to now is the decollective and market economy period. The idea of natural conservation is mentioned by both state and local people as an aim in managing natural resources. Within the framework of each period, I will focus on the three main connected issues; Ecological Values, Social Organization, and Natural Resources Management. These are all closely related to local ecological knowledge. This chapter is divided into three sections in comparison with each other. (1) *Nha Lang* regime and the traditional ecological system, (2) The cooperation building and collective period (3) The decollective and market economy period.

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<sup>1</sup> *Nha Lang* is political regime in Muong traditional society. It is some kind of chiefdom relationship between ruling and dominated class.

### 1. The *Nha Lang* Regime and Traditional Ecological System (before 1954)

To understand historical development of the Muong people in Mai village, it is necessary to understand the historical background of the Muong people in Vietnam. The questions who are the Muong, where are they come from and how they relate to other ethnic groups in Vietnam, are raised here to give a general picture of Muong people.

The Muong is the third largest group among the 54 ethnic communities inhabiting in Vietnam. The Muong group has a population of 914.500 peoples (Dien 1996) belonging to Viet-Muong group. Muong people reside in Vietnam in provinces stretching from Son La in the North West to Nghe An in the North of Central Vietnam. Muong people often call themselves *Mol* or *Moai* meaning "human". The Viet refer to them as *Moi*. This is the Vietnamese pronunciation of *Mol* but the meaning is "barbaric". The term "*Muong*" originates from a word "*Muang*" in Thai language. It indicates the place where people live such as a country, a city, a township or a commune. It also indicates the political domain of a group of peoples. In Muong language, "*Muong*" is a word which indicates a small area including one or several valleys surrounded by the one mountain range. A "*Muong*" is a group of villages and a political unit. A "*Muong*" can be small or large. It could includes several to one hundred villages. Each "*Muong*" is dominated by a clan. Viet peoples use the term "*Muong*" to refer to indigenous peoples, who live in a "*Muong*" and they also give the name "*Muong*" to this specific group of people. Viet people do not make a distinction between "*Muong*" as a group of people or "*Muong*" as a group of villages. Although this usage is not appropriate and always creates confusion it is accepted and becomes popular in Vietnam especially in Northern Vietnam.

Historical documents show that the Muong people have the same primitive origin as the Viet people of the Hung Vuong State (Binh 1978, Tan 1972, Vuong 1972, Cuong 1988). Both Vietnamese and Non-Vietnamese scholars postulate a *pre-*

*Viet Muong* living in the large mountainous area of Northern Vietnam 2700 years ago, who were the result of the integration of a branch of Lac Viet<sup>2</sup> people and a group of lowland Mon-Khmer people (Ngoc and Duong 1983).

The primitive *pre -Viet Muong* people were not the sole inhabitants of the mountainous region stretching from Son La province in the Northwest to Quang Binh province in Central North of present-day Vietnam. They mixed with other groups inhabiting the same region, such as Tay-Thai, Hmong, and Yao groups. The naming classification and number of groups speaking *pre -Viet Muong* languages is still under debate, but those normally included *Viet, Muong, Chut, Tho, Nguon, May, Duc (Ruc), Sach, ThaVung, Palatan, Aren, Ma Lieng, Poong, and Cui* which still reside in Vietnam today (Duong 1996: XVII; Tai 1986). Among those groups, *Viet Muong* is the language that has the biggest number of speakers. Other ethnic groups in *pre -Viet Muong* groups have small numbers of peoples, ranging from around several hundred to several thousand of people. It is considered that the Chut, Tho, Poong and Cui... languages are the dialects of the *pre -Viet Muong* language. These groups still keep old elements of *pre -Viet Muong* language because they distinguish themselves from other groups and still live in the mountains. The ethnicity in *pre -Viet Muong* group can be divided into two main groups: the pure Viet–Muong group and a local group including Chut, Tho, Sach, May, Ruc, Nguon, Poong, and Cui...

In the period between first to sixth century, Viet Muong people is pure group. From seventh century the separating between Muong and Viet people in Viet Muong group happened slowly. Because of population pressure and the success of wet rice agriculture, a part of *Viet Muong* peoples (Viet peoples) moved step by step to the lowland. They occupied the large area surrounding Tonkin Gulf and set up their villages there. The other part of the *Viet Muong* peoples (Muong peoples) still lives in highland. Because of the lack of commonalties between the lowland and

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<sup>2</sup> The Lac Viet people are postulated as the ancestor of primitive Tay people who originally lived in mountainous area but latter moved to lowland.

highland and the Chinese invasion, the Muong people became more and more separate from Viet peoples.

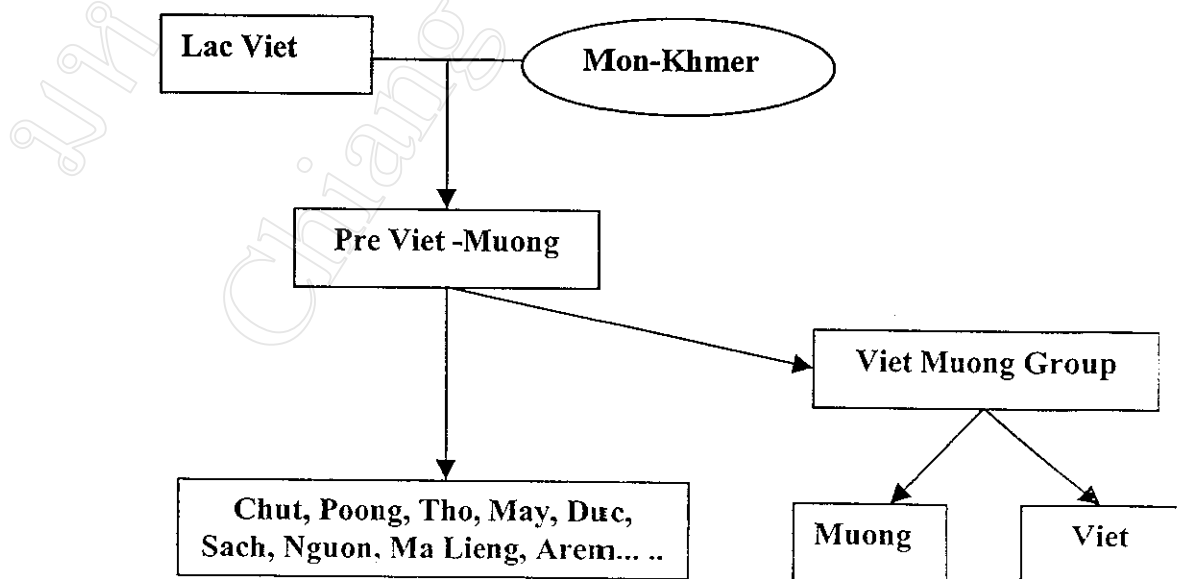
Until 10th century, under Ly dynasty, Viet people gained their independence from the Chinese and established their own state. However, Viet people had been strong influenced by Chinese culture especially its written language and social organization. The Muong peoples, on the other hand, live in the mountainous areas and became more and more separated from Viet peoples. They still maintained the traditional *Viet Muong* culture and language. They lived next to Tay and Thai groups therefore Thai language and culture affected to Muong society. Meanwhile, Viet peoples continued to receive Chinese cultural elements and develop their own culture to form a new one. So the Viet became set in their view of Muong people as belonging to a different groups. Since the tenth century, the Viet and Muong peoples were completely separated into two different groups (Tu 1996). Since then, in the view of the Muong peoples, those Viet peoples are called Kinh, meaning “persons of Kingdom” and the Muong peoples are called Muong meaning “persons of country”.

In the time since Viet and Muong people are separated into two different ethnic groups, the Viet people have step by step became the domination group both in the economic and political domain. They moved to the lowlands, and occupied the large river basins and build their villages and towns. They mainly cultivated wet rice and step by step gave up dry rice cultivation. The social and political organization of Viet people became centered on the village. Commerce and small industry were developed. Soon the Viet peoples organized their society and set up Vietnam feudal states. They opened their foreign relationship with China, India, Laos, Kampuchea, and Thailand. Other ethnic groups in Vietnam such as the Muong, Tay, Thai, Meo played the role as periphery states which gave respect and tribute to the Viet states. The Viet peoples and other ethnic groups including Muong people in that period had a center-periphery type of relationship through expressing manpower. The Viet state were considerably more prosperous because of their access to large scale rice growing. The mountainous population more and more

became distinctly different from the lowland residents. The Muong peoples who are mountainous population were defined as belonging to a different ethnic group to Viet people. On top of this Muong people who are mountainous population were officially separated as another ethnic groups. Until now, because of their mountainous location, Muong as well as other ethnic groups are called as *nguai mien nui* or *nguai mien nguoc* (highlanders or upper stream people) while Viet peoples are called as *nguai mien xuoi* (lowlander or down stream people) as for their river basin location.

Thus from the *pre Viet - Muong* group which includes many ethnic groups, Muong and Viet peoples separated to form a Viet Muong group in general and then Viet and Muong separated into two different groups. In a similar fashion, other small ethnic groups with *pre-Viet Muong* ancestry developed into their own culture as different branch of *pre-Viet Muong* group because of their physical and economic separation. The ethnicity in *pre -Viet Muong* group is showed in figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1: The Ethnicity in Pre Viet - Muong Group



Source: Adopted from Tan (1978)

### 1.1 Muong Traditional Ecological Principles

Each ethnicity in our world has its own way to define nature and themselves as humans. The perceptions of humans about nature and about humans themselves reflects their worldview, which contains ecological principles. Those principles are considered as the non-technical aspects of their knowledge. The Muong folk tales are very important to show how Muong people understand nature and society. “The Birth of Land and Water” – the famous Muong funeral song - is the most valuable source in exploring Muong worldview. “The Birth of Land and Water” explains the origin of earth, water and human being in creatively way:

“Vung dat ngay xua con bac lac

Vung nuoc ngay xua con boi loi

Troi va dat con dinh vao lam mot

Chua co khuc song Ly chay lot la bai

Chua co khuc song Cai chay lot la de

Nuoc song Dam, De khi xua chua co

Bong com trai lua doi ay chua nen...”

(Once upon a time land did not appear yet

Once upon a time water did not appear yet

Sky and earth still stick together

There is not yet Ly<sup>3</sup> river flowing Bai<sup>4</sup> leaf

There is not yet Red River flowing De<sup>5</sup> leaf

There is not yet water in Da and Ma river

Once upon a time there is not yet rice

(Thien, 1978)

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<sup>3</sup> Ly might be Lo river

<sup>4</sup> Bai is a kind of leaf to thatching

<sup>5</sup> De also is another kind of lead is use to thatch

The Muong peoples believe that earth and water were born before humans. When the earth first appeared in the universe, it looked like a pot's mouth. "*Dat den bang mieng cai ang, dat vang bang mieng bat dia*" (Black land is just equal to the pot's mouth, yellow land is just equal to the bow or disc's mouth) (Thien 1978). Then plants appear. The banyan was the first tree appearing on the earth. After many time growing up and then falling this tree was decayed and becomes the other plants and animals in which the birds, namely *Ay* and *Ua* produced human beings. Thus human is a product of birds. This implies that man is a part of a web of social relationships linking animals with human beings; and the supremacy of the power of nature over to that of human beings. These supernatural forces are always called as ghosts or monsters. Human being must confront with these forces. It is flood, drought, fire, and wild plants and animals. "The Birth of Land and Water" mentions serious floods submerged all houses, villages, plants, animals and human being. The *Chu Dong* tree is another a kind of monster dangerous to human beings. The strange tiger named *Din Vin Duong Vuong* or the ghost named *Ma Khi Ma Cot* kills other plants, animals and human beings as well. It is clear that nature is attributed with superpowers that human beings must pay respect to.

The power of nature is also expressed though the ceremonies that Muong peoples do to worship their spirits. Before hunting, the Muong people worship the forest spirits to ask their protection of hunters and villagers. They say that they hunt because they need food to survive. The words of the *Mo*<sup>6</sup> song, which are read by ritual man in front of worshiping table inform the spirits about the villagers's hunting and ask permission to do it as well. *Mo* song describes carefully the gifts that hunters and villagers respectfully provide to the spirits. It does not mention anything about the animals that they desire to kill and it also does not mention anything about their success or failure hunting. Here, we see one more time traditionally the Muong people do not overexploit nature. They respect nature

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<sup>6</sup> *Mo* is a type of ritual song. There are many kinds of ritual song but funeral song is the most popular.

because nature is made up of their spirits, and patron nature provides them with life. The balance of power lies with nature, not with the people. Therefore Muong people tend to live in harmony with nature rather than violate nature.

Besides explaining nature, the songs of the Muong people also express their perceptions about society. In “the Birth of Land and Water”, social order and organization are also mentioned. The Muong believe that a society with a *Lang*<sup>7</sup> class and a *Dan* class is considered a natural making. Humans need to have *Lang*. *Lang* was born to take care of people, lead people and create a peaceful society. Muong people desired to have a chief to protect them so they agreed to invite *Da Can*, the superman to be the first *Lang Cun* in Muong society. He is became the *Lang* because the Muong people want him to be like that. Muong society is built under the leadership of the *Lang*. Therefore the Muong people accept the *Nha Lang* regime as a necessary demand for their life<sup>8</sup>. Social relationships in traditional Muong society follow a patron - client pattern.

It should be noted that Muong people have a holistic view of society. They recognize that there are many different ethnic groups speaking diverse languages surrounding them. They recognize that society is complex containing both rich and poor people, children, elder, men, women, and disable peoples; and that a society can involves both good and bas aspects (Thien 1978). The community with its solidarity is emphasized as the root cause of victory. In the confrontation with nature

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<sup>7</sup> *Lang* or *Nha Lang* are the words to indicate the ruling class in Muong traditional society and are also used to call a particular male member in that class. In *Lang* clan there are three levels *Lang Cun*, *Lang Dao* and *Lang Thuong* (see more in figure 3-2).

<sup>8</sup> Almost Muong funeral song is read by *Po Mo*- the ritual men who take care the soul of the dead. The question whether *Lang* is *Po Mo* is in need to consider to know that if *Nha Lang* regime based on funeral song to rule Muong society. Cusinier (1996) and (Tu 1996) assume that *Po Mo* is the person who can learn by heart *Mo* song and know how to conduct ritual ceremonies. According to the references of Bui Thien in “the Birth of Land and Water”, the persons who provide their documents to write “the Birth of Land and Water” are the *Po Mo* whose family names are Bui. This family name accordingly does not belong to *Nha Lang* family name. It proves that *Po Mo* and *Lang* not always are the same persons. *Po Mo* normally comes from *Dan* class.



to survive, Muong people must base their lives on the power of communal solidarity and the ability to lead of their chief. The “Birth of Land and Water” also describes each of the revolutions in human life since the beginning of time. It also explains the origin of house, fire, and water; day, month and year, rice, buffalo, and chicken; alcohol, bow and gong as well as other activities such as making cloth and tools. In all explanations, nature appears as the mother who produces all things on earth including human beings and their society.

To sum up, Muong people traditionally possess the rich store of ecological principles. They develop these principles from generation to generation. Ecological principles are the main ways that people give meaning to nature and their society and people organize their social relations according to these meanings. In other words, social organization reflects the ecological principles of the people. These two issues relate closely to each other. The following section will present traditional Muong social organization.

### **1.2 Traditional Muong Social Organization**

Each Muong, a group of several to a hundred villages in one or several valleys close to each other in the surrounding hills, is considered a state. The social organization in each state is divided into two levels: community and household. At the community level, Muong society is differentiated into two main classes in which the ruling class called the *Nha Lang* (chief) and the dominated class called the *Mol* or *Dan* (people). *Nha Lang* clan lives in a Muong while *Dan* clans live in many Muong. Moreover *Nha Lang* clan differentiates to each other by their own family name such as *Bach Cong*, *Dinh Cong*, *Dinh The*, but different *Dan* clans bring the same family name as *Bui* (*Mui* in Muong language). Therefore *Bui* become not only a family name but also as the word to indicate the social status of a class in Muong society.

In each Muong, there is a *Nha Lang* clan which includes the members of a family name. For example the *Bach Cong* clan in Muong Rech, *Dinh Cong* clan in Muong Dong, or *Dinh The* clan in Muong Bi. Thus, the dominating or ruling class is divided into different clans, and each clan lives in a Muong and dominates that Muong.

*Lang Cun* is the oldest son of *Nha Lang* clan. He is the chief of a Muong. He has power to control over the whole Muong politically but in term of economic benefit he only directly control on those villages which play the role of the center of the Muong, called the *Chieng*. His brother who is oldest son of his uncle, called the *Lang Dao*, control other villages outside the *Chieng*. The other sons in *Nha Lang* clan called *Lang Thuong*. They had to rely on their oldest brother.

*Dan*, dominated class, includes many individuals of different clans, live in many villages or even in many Muong. *Dan* clans were divided into three main levels.

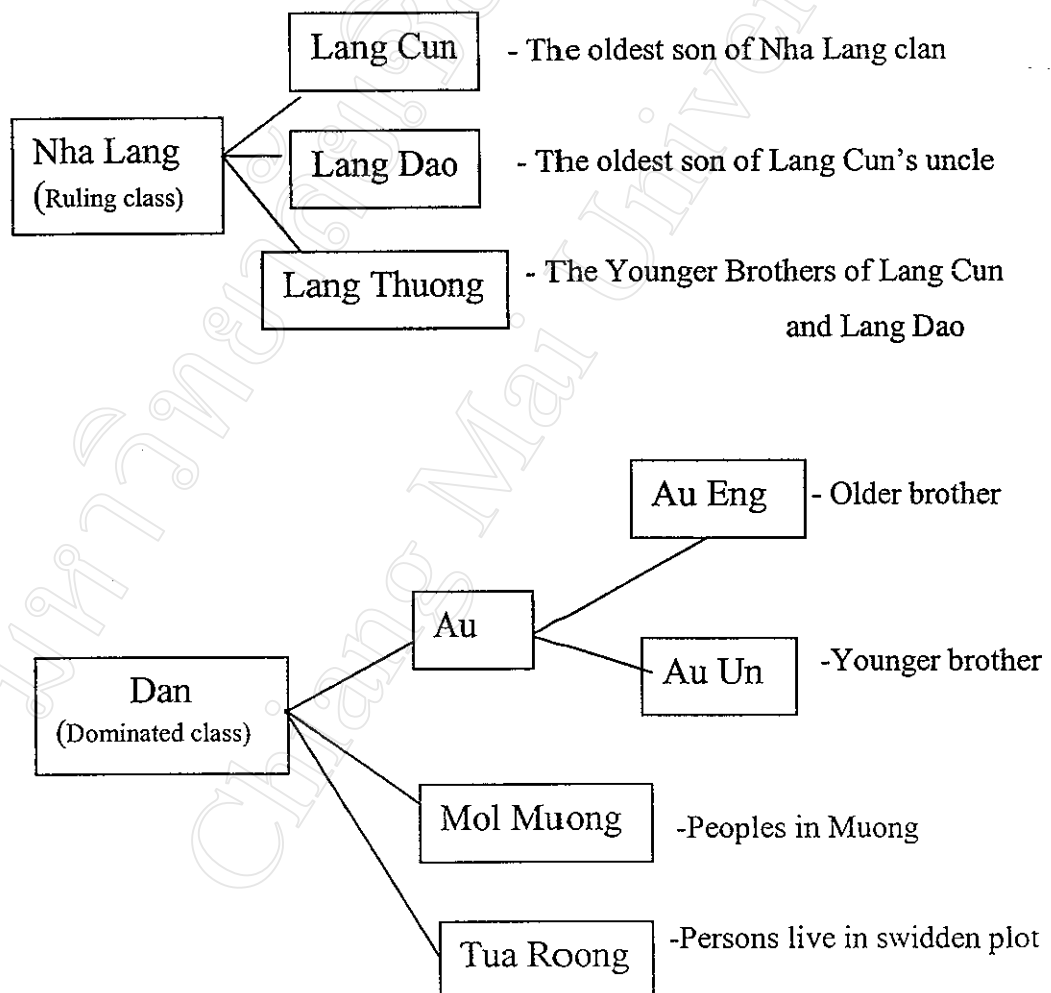
The highest level of *Dan* class was *Au* who got the promotion of *Lang Cun* or *Lang Dao* to serve him in looking after the Muong. Higher level in *Au* is *Au Eng* (older brother) and the lower level is *Au Un* (younger brother) (*Au Eng* and *Au Un* are not necessary biological brothers). The position of *Au Eng* is hereditary but *Au Un* position can be taken in turn by different peoples in *Dan* clans.

The middle level in the *Dan* class was the *Mol Muong* (peoples of Muong). Paddy land is allocated to the *Dan* by the *Nha Lang*. This allocation is done once and is permanent. Once a plot of paddy land is allocated to a *Dan*, it belongs to him forever. But the *Dan* landholder has to separate his land between him and his younger brothers. Just like in the *Nha Lang* clan, in *Dan* clan younger brothers had to rely on their oldest brother. If the oldest son can not support to his younger brother's families those younger brother had to practice swidden plot instead to paddy field to feed their needs. Those families are put into other level called *Tua*

*Roong* (persons who live in swidden plot). It is the lowest level in *Dan* class and also in Muong society.

The different classes in Muong traditional society is expressed in figure 3-2.

**Figure 3-2: Social Classes in Muong Traditional Society**



As we have seen Muong traditional society is divided into two main classes *Nha Lang* and *Dan*. Between two classes there is a barrier that completely prevents them from one to the other forever. A man who belongs to the *Dan* class can never

become the *Nha Lang* class. In special cases, for example when a person in the *Dan* class saves the *Lang's* life he can get a promotion by changing his family name from *Bui* to *Dinh*, *Quach*, *Bach* or *Ha* but his social status is never changed. He is threaten as other *Dan* peoples is. A *Nha Lang* man can marry a *Dan* woman but even if she is his first wife she is still considered only his stepwife. Social stratification happens slowly and only within the *Dan* class. Some *Mol Muong* can become *Au* and in some cases they move down to *Tua Roong*.

Mai village is small. At the time of village settlement, Mai belonged to a Muong namely Muong Bai<sup>9</sup>. There was a *Lang Dao* who kept power over Mai village and other villages in Hien Luong and Hao Trang communes today. As has just been explained, the *Lang Cun* is the headman of a Muong and he is considered the person who controls over Muong but in reality he only controls some center villages which is called the *Muong Chieng*. Mai and the other Muong villages in Hien Luong and Hao Trang communes are not amongst the *Muong Chieng* therefore they are under the control by the *Lang Dao*. The *Lang Dao* do not live in Mai village. He lives in another village, which is 10 km from Mai. All Mai villagers belong to the *Dan* class even though there is some *Lang* family names such as *Ha*, *Sa*, or *Dinh*. The reason for this is the ancestor of those families in Mai village were formally *Lang* families but they were only *Lang Thuong* in other regions they came from, and they move to Mai village because their brothers (*Lang Cun* or *Lang Dao*) could not support them. This frequently happens in many Muong regions.

There is a village headman in Mai village. The villagers elect him to this position. Normally, someone who is prestigious and is respected by villagers becomes village headman. The time to reelect the position of village headman can be two or several years depending on the practical situation. The village headman is

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<sup>9</sup> The word "*Mai*" is Vietnamese pronunciation of "*Bai*" in Muong language. *Muong Bai* indicates the *Bai (Mai)* village and also a group of others Muong villages in two communes today know as Hien Luong and Hao Trang.

the person who represents the *Lang* in all village matters and is responsible for taking care labor in land of the *Nha Lang*.

At the household level the Muong family is organized by nuclear families, which include parents and their single sons and daughters. In the traditional family having several generations living together seldom happened. A Muong family at that time normally had about 6 to 8 children. They desired to have a lot of children as a symbol of happiness and prosperity.

Muong people follow the patriarchal regime. The father was the head of the family having the power to decide all the important matters of the family. The oldest son was also respected because he would be the person who inherited all the power that his father had. The sons were the persons who formally inherited the property of their parents. Women were ignored in the family matters and women could not especially participate in community matters. They have no inherited rights, especially in families belonging to *Dan* class which do not have a son or "*thu lut*" families<sup>10</sup>. However, before they were married, the girls had more freedom. They played an important role in economic activities. They were also the main labor forces in family. They can give their opinions but were not the decision - makers. Married women in Muong traditional society had to depend on the status of their father and husband. Women in Lang clan must chose husband in another Lang clan because their children will follow the family name of their husband. The family name decides the social status of her children. Therefore it is sometime difficult for those women to finding suitable man in a Lang family. They even had to live without husband. Unmarried women were considered as the unhappiest matter for every Muong family.

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<sup>10</sup> *Thu lut* happens when the head of the family died but he had no son. Land and property former belongs to this family now are collected as common property.

All the members of a Muong family were involved in agricultural activities. Mai villagers did not go to school at the time of village settlement to 1945 because the school was too far from their village and also because the school was for only the rich and children of the Lang class. The children were responsible for raising cattle or other animals. Teenagers could help their parents in planting or harvesting. Anyone from age 16 up is considered as real labor in the family and could marry and become young fathers or mothers. The elders were respected and they participated in the work that was suitable for their age such as making liquor and other housework. There were some specific works for men and women. Women are responsible for all the housework. Hunting is only for men and making cloth is only for women. In cultivating, making holes is the responsibility of the man, whilst seeding is the responsibility of the women. The women are the people who select seed and keep it for the next crop. They are also the people who gather wild vegetables for the family and for animals. Therefore Muong women keep a rich store of knowledge relating to agricultural activities and resource management. In some senses, the labor division in Muong society is a natural labor division between young and old, men and women.

On the whole, Muong society was affected strongly by a patriarchal regime. At the community level, the social organization of the Muong people included two classes, *Lang* and *Dan* that were separated from one another forever. At the household level the male member with the most important being the father and the eldest son, are given the decision making rights in the family matters. The woman is in a depending position.

Ecological principles not only affect social organization but also the way people manage their resources to survive. Therefore in the same way that social organization reflects the worldview of the people about the society, the forms of resource management reflect the worldview of people about nature. Hence ecological principles, social organization and natural resource management are related closely to each other.

### 1.3 Natural Resources Management

The most important issue in natural resource management is property regime. The property regime decides the form of resource management. In this study I just focus on forest and land management as the two most crucial resources for Muong people who are agricultural residents and whose life relies mostly on forest. The Muong people have their own property regime over their resources. This property regime is expressed clearly in relation to paddy land - the crucial resource, which brings highest security to local residents.

In Muong traditional society paddy land is divided into two main forms: private land (*Na Lang*) and communal land (*Na Cong* or *Na Dan*). As we know there are two classes in Muong traditional society: *Lang*. and *Dan*. The property regime of Muong people for land also expresses the social status of these two classes and even the different levels within each class. The name of each class or level within a class is used to name property: *Na Lang* (*Lang's* land), *Na Dan* (*Dan's* land) and *Na Au* (*Au's* land). Thus we can see that the social status of Muong people is expressed not only in their family names as explained in the previous section but also in the area and quality of land that they receive. Now I will go deeper in each form of land property.

*Na Lang* is a form of private property, however private property in Muong society is different from that in other societies. The owners of private land only have using right but not selling right. *Na Lang* is the highest fertility land and near to water source or village. It belongs to the *Lang* family. The reason why the *Lang* owns that land is because the *Lang* is the first person who converts wild land to become fields for his own rice and buffalo. He is also the person who contributes the biggest amount of labor. Therefore his neighbors give him the right to use the best plots of land (Muong people call *Con Na*). *Lang* family has the right to use that land or bequeath that land to his children but it can not be sold.

*Na Jan* or *Na Phan Viec* or *Na Cong* (communal land) is distributed amongst the *Dan* people. Similar to *Na Lang*, *Na Jan* can not be sold. It only can be used for pawning. *Na Dan* is divided into many parts and each level in *Dan* class receives one. *Au* people who had to be responsible for serving the matter of *Lang* family received the more fertile parts. Then, the part left over was distributed to villagers. To receive *Na Jan*, the *Dan* farmer had to work without payment for the *Lang* family and the common tasks of the Muong. The *Lang* have the right to take the *Na Jan* from this farmer and give it to another farmer in the case that they did not obey the rules of the Muong or if the farmer did not have son to inherit that land (*thu lut* family-see previous section). The *Na Jan* was cultivated by the owner who could be *Au* or *Dan* and all products of that land were fully owned by him. This land was also inheritable by the owner's son.

The other type of land was *Na Ruom* (wordy land). The *Na Ruom* were small plots cut on less fertile land located far from the village and the irrigation system. It was fallowed in many years if there was not much rain. It was not paid much attention by the *Lang* and other people. This kind of land also was a kind of private land but mostly belonged to the *Dan* class.

It should be noted here that land is allocated once and forever to *Na Lang* and *Na Dan*. Plots are not redivided because the area of each plot is too small and normally in the foot of the hills. Hence each plot of land is tight to each household or family even though their members increase year after year. This explains why besides the families that occupy paddy land, there are also many families that only rely on dry land, I means the *Noc Troi* family or *Tua Roong* family from the previous section about Muong social structure.

Paddy land is owned by specific members of different classes out forest and other resources are common property of the community. The *Lang* is the person who keeps his control over the forest. Hunting for example is practiced by individuals and can also be organized by the community of which *Lang* is the head. He is the



person who decides when and where they do hunting. Elders report that they freely enter the forest to go hunting and gathering and also cutting the forest for their swidden agriculture but in special times, for example in the big hunting or cutting big trees to build a house, villagers need to have permission from the *Lang*. The *Lang* can be the leader of the hunter or if he does not participate, he always receives the gifts from the hunters. The *Lang* also can forbid the villagers do hunting. The elder remind that in a case where a *Lang* family has someone die or get sick and that is considered the punishment of the forest spirits, villagers can not hunt. The hunting is also forbidden at the certain times of the year when the *Lang* assumes that it is not a suitable time to do hunting.

The Muong people also have a custom that first person who discover forest product, for example a bird or bee nest, can mark the site with a special symbol to inform others that it has an owner. When choose a plot of forest to slash and burn they can also mark it in the same way.

We can see that Muong traditional society has its own property regime over land, forest and other resources, its own traditional customs and its own social institutions. We can also see that this regime keeps property inside the community. The Muong social structure has characteristics common to many society in that the different kind of exchange of labor and communal property are under the power of the headman. The relationship between the members of a Muong is that of a client-patron. It is clear that Muong society is typical of many traditional rural feudal societies.

French conquered Hoa Binh in 1885. This province is divided into 6 districts. Da Bac district included two cantons namely Duc Nhan and Hien Luong (table3-1). Mai village belongs to Hien Luong canton. The French confiscated the lands of the landlord for their plantations which were mostly rice, cotton or coffee plantation.. They paid more attention to expansion of the rice area. The paddy rice area was

increased very fast from 4,760 paddy plots in 1889 to 14,500 paddy plots in 1901 (The Resident Superior of Tonkin Cabinet, 1889).

**Table 3-1: Da Bac District:  
Villages and its Population in French Colonial Period**

Cantons	Villages	Population
Duc Nhan	Duc Nhan	238
	Qui Duc	122
	Hao Trang	269
Hien Luong	Hien Luong	98
	Tu Ly	135

Total: 629

Source: Tonkin Cabinet, 1889

Village elders remember that French soldiers came to their village frequently and took their poultry or pigs or whatever they had. Villagers had to move their houses into the forest to escape from the French during the time of French colonization. They had to live as foresters and do shifting cultivation or hunting and gathering of forest products for their food. Besides giving tribute to the landlord, the Muong peoples had to pay direct or indirect taxes to the French. This was heavy a task for farmers. Sometimes they had to work without payment for the French, in plantation or road construction for example. They were also forced to be French soldiers. In some big Muong villages, the landlords cooperated with the French to exploit the Muong farmers. The French forbade keeping the bodies of dead relatives in their house for a long time even though this was a specific custom of the Muong. Liquor, tobacco and opium were strictly forbidden. On the other hand, activities such as building hospital stations and other improvement were rarely done.

The French taxes were very high and fixed regardless of the life-situation of the taxed person; 2,50 Dong per head for the registered persons and 0,30 dong per head for non-registered persons (Tonkin Cabinet). These taxes were not reduced in time of bad harvests. Because of the oppression of the French, the Muong people became involved in the anti- French colonization movement lead by Viet Minh. Many Muong peoples in Mai village were Viet Minh soldiers and other supported the Viet Minh with rice, firewood or food. This support contributed to the win of Viet Minh over French.

In general, under French colonization the life of Muong peoples more or less changed because there is the combination between *Lang* class and French owners in ruling dominated Muong farmers.

## **2. Collectivization Period (1954 to 1981)**

August 1945, Vietnam got its independence from the French under the leadership of President Ho Chi Minh. The modern Vietnamese nation - state was born. A year later, this young Vietnamese state confronted the recolonization of the French. During the French war, the Muong people as well as other ethnic groups in North Vietnam were a very important force supporting to Viet Minh army. After the victory of Vietminh in Dien Bien Phu in 1954, Northern Vietnam was able to be at peace under the rule Ho Chi Minh government. At the same time, Southern Vietnam is involved in American War. The Vietnamese government had many policies designed to reestablish the country and develop the economy to support the war in the South. This section will present changes in Muong society during the collective period from 1954 to 1980.

### **2.1 New Ecological Principles**

Since 1954, there was a great deal of change in Muong society. The *Nha Lang* regime which had formally dominated Muong society was now replaced by

democratic government. The nation-state building teamed with new ideology created changes in the ecological principles of Muong traditional society. This first change was in Muong people's perception about nature.

In contrast to idea in the past perceiving nature as superior and dominating force to human beings, in the collective period, human beings were seen as the masters of nature, and the power of man was seen to be the ability to convert nature to produce goods and necessary things. Natural resources were considered as endless resources. Exploiting nature was seen as the way to making wealth. This ideology was applied step by step in Muong society. Elders in the village described how they were afraid of entering in some specific forest plots that were told as ghost forests or spirit forests. They were afraid of making the spirits angry or that their spirits would punish them. Sometime when they got seriously ill, they believe that this was because they had done something wrong and spirits had punished them. The power of nature was still something hidden from them. They had to invite a *Po Truong* who take care the soul of living people to pray to the spirits. But step by step their children did not believe in taboos any more because they had learnt scientific knowledge. Natural phenomena were explained by scientific knowledge instead of being the secrets. Former customs and rules were considered backward and not suitable for modern society. *Po Mo*, the ritual men who took care the souls of the dead, who sing all the *Mo* sung was now eradicated. Forest spirits, land spirits, agricultural spirits and *Than Thanh Hoang*<sup>11</sup> spirits worship customs were now considered as superstitious practices. These traditional customs were forbidden among Muong peoples in particular and among other ethnic groups in general. It should be noted here that the Muong peoples did not give up their ritual activities and customs immediately. The traditional customs were still kept for a long time but latter on, the new ideology step by step penetrated and replaces the old customs.

Thus the perception seeing nature as a superpower was now replaced by new ecological principles, which implies nature is something that human beings could

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<sup>11</sup> Than Thanh Hoang was the first person who founded the village or hamlet

dominate. Change in the perception of the relationship between human being and nature was not the only change brought by the revolution, there was also change from human being to human being.

Muong traditional society which under the *Nha Lang* regime had two classes, the *Lang* and *Dan* as changed during the land reform and collective period. In social relations, the patron-client relations were replaced by equal relations. Democratic society aimed to bring the equal rights to everyone. The slogan “*nhan dan la nguoi lam chu*” (people are owners) appeared in everywhere. The equal society was defined in terms of an economy where there are neither rich people nor poor people. In term of social and political status it is defined as being when there is neither exploiting class and no exploited class. This ideology in reality creates unreal equality among rural residents. It did not differentiate between hard working and lazy people and between the strong and the weak people. Specially, people want to keep being poor as the symbol of moralist. In Muong rural society, although there is supposed to be one farmer class, which works in cooperation, in fact, the society still contains status differences. Some of the Muong had opportunities to go to school and become teachers, doctors, civil servants, or workers or served in armed forces. A part of Muong farmers become State cadres. These peoples had more power than others. The new ideology of equality, and freedom was propagated among Muong people. Change in Muong people’s perception about the people-people relationship affected the way in which they organized their society. The following section will present the changing of the social organization of the Muong people in the collective period.

## 2.2 Social Organization

The social organization of the Muong people under the collective period included two different linkages. On the one hand, there was the link with the production system. On the other hand, there was the link with communal activities.

Under the collective period, at the commune level, the co-operative plays a key role in the social organization of the Muong people.

The co-operative (*Hop Tac Xa*) as a production unit was built firstly at the village level, then at the commune level and later on at the inter-commune level. It had responsibilities for both agricultural production and the welfare of its members. In co-operative, farmers were organized into different working groups according to different productive activities for example the transplanting group, plowing group, harvesting group, forestry group, and commercial group. In each group there was a head who took care of the work time of each member in the group. There were also many kinds of co-operative such as agricultural, forestry, and commercial co-operatives. Each co-operative had a chairperson and assistants as well.

In this period, the co-operative had important economic and social functions. As economic production unit, co-operative had the rights to use and manage certain areas of land and forest. It periodically distributed land for cultivation, granted land to households for houses and home gardens, organized the work tasks of the working groups, determined the remuneration of labor, procured agricultural inputs and products, provided information and technical advice, granted loans for special needs, collected taxes, and distributed income. Social functions of the co-operative included provision of social services such as the operation of schools, healthcare stations and also maintenance of the social order.

Co-operatives were put under the management of district and provincial authorities as well as that of the state and its institutions. These agencies provided guidance, technical advice, and funding to co-operatives. Each co-operative made its own five- year plan which regulated the output, area, quality, quantity, and technology of production as well as price and the amount of goods exchange. The State based on annual report made by the co-operative on the year past to give its direction for the next year. Production systems organized in such a way are very

typical of centrally-planned and top – down mechanisms due to the great number of indirect labors needed this system brings very little economic affectivity.

Besides the co-operative, the Communist Party and the People's Committee were the two other main structures of state authority at the commune level. The Communist Party Base was headed by the political secretary, who was elected by the party members of the commune. The main duty of the Communist Party Base was to see that national policies were implemented at the local level. The Communist Party Base consulted with the powerful and observed decisions with the co-operative, and reported to the district secretary of the party.

The People's Committee was elected by commune members who were aged 18 years or over. The committee handled the daily logistics of the village, focusing on the general well being of the commune members. It also oversaw several mass organizations including the Youth Organization, Women Association, and Farmer Association. These associations had a vertical structure from the national level down to the province, district, and local village levels. They had important social and educational functions and carried out community service projects.

At the village level in Mai, the linkage among Muong people plays the important role in their lives. This was expressed in the role of village headman. In this period the village headman although a public servant, was also farmer. He participated in the co-operative the same as the other farmers did. Normally he was the head of a working group. The villagers elected him (sometimes because of his prestige but sometimes at the suggestion of the State cadre) as their representative in all the matters relating to them. The village headman was responsible for the economic, cultural and social activities in community. He was also the village representative in the local government.

The social organization of Muong people in Mai village was strongly affected by the administrative system. The administrative system in Vietnam in the

period from 1954 to 1980 included 4 levels: the national, provincial, district, and commune. At each level, governmental power was divided into three sections: the People Committee, the People Council and the Communist Party. Other organizations such as the Youth Organization, Woman's Association, and Farmer's Association also had a presence in different levels of the administrative system. Each level simultaneously contained the representatives of the government, social and political organizations. There was always a combination between co-operative, people's council, people committee, communist party and other organizations in agricultural production and in other communal activities. Thus it can be claimed that the centralized democratic and socialist organization is the primary social form.

Change in ecological principles and social organization create change in natural resources management. The following section will present natural resource management in the collective period.

### **2.3 Natural Resource Management**

The forms of natural resource management in the collective period were affected strongly by changes in property relations. After the Indochina war, Northern Vietnam was in the process of reestablishment. Farmers counted for 99% of total Vietnamese population at that time. Because they used to be the main force in the French war the Vietnamese State paid special attention to farmers. The first policy of Vietnamese government toward agriculture and farmers was land reform policy. The land reform policy in North Vietnam was issued in 1958. The State confiscated land that formally belonged to the landlord and French owners and verified the right to own land and other natural resources. Through its land reform policy, the state made the change of land owners and retained its control over the national economy and natural resources. The State gave the right to manage land and natural resources to state enterprises and co-operatives.



Going along with land reform policy was a movement for co-operative building which started in 1960. Land was collectivized. Productive materials, labor and technology were designated communal property. In the co-operative, working time was counted by “*cong diem*”<sup>12</sup> system. The farmers worked together in co-operative and shared the products of their working time. Farmers received an income based on this system of working labor.

This land reform policy and cooperation building made strong changes in Muong society. Land that formally belonged to the *Nha Lang* clan was now used and managed by co-operative. The former rules of land ownership and tribute to *Nha Lang* were broken down. The number of Muong farmers in general and in Mai village in particular participating in the co-operative increased year by year as both in terms of self-determination and the encouraging of government<sup>13</sup>. Mai village at that time consisted of 8 households with a population of 40 persons. These 8 households formed two production groups. Mai was a small village thus they combined with Dung village (in Hien Luong commune) to set up a co-operative. The elders report that at the beginning, the soil was fertile and they gain the good harvests. The co-operative gave them more rice and other agricultural products. Therefore their life was better compared to that under *Nha Lang* regime. Latter on, because of the weak management capacity and centrally - planed mechanism, because the cadre was bureaucratic and corrupted the farmer became lazy, the labor productivity was low and the life of villagers was more difficult.

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<sup>12</sup> *Cong diem* regime counted one day working as a *cong*, one *cong* is ten *diem*. There were also some specific works that counted for several *diem* or several *cong* but not based on working time. They worked a maximum of 210 *cong* per year. In some years farmers received several grams rice for 1 *cong* (one working day).

<sup>13</sup> Rural residents in Vietnam at that time were divided into 4 classes: land lord, middle farmer, small farmer and poor farmer. Among these 4 classes only the small farmers hesitate to participate in co-operatives because they had their own small land areas. The landlord had already had their land confiscated and middle farmers were afraid to face the same fate, so were very eager to participate in the collective process. On the other hand, for the landless and poor farmers, both of which had no land, participation in the co-operatives was a very good opportunity.

The land reform policy and co-operative building were highly typical parts of the bureaucratic and centralized planing economy. On the one hand these policies contained the positive political aspects<sup>14</sup> and therefore encouraged farmers to accept collectivization which seems to have been suitable for the war-torn conditions of the Vietnamese economy. While all young men and women served the war, the elders and children were the major labor force rural areas, co-operatives encouraged the solidarity and mutual aid in community. On the other hand, when this economic model was used for a long time, it lead to negative consequences. In social aspects, although the state claims to eliminate no rich and poor so there is no class and equality for everyone, in reality, that equality was unreal because there was no difference between the hard working and the lazy or between the strong and the weak. In economic terms during the 20 years of the cooperative building process, production improving did not catch up with increasing population. The income from *cong diem* was decreased. The farmers became fed up with cooperation and neglected. Land was fallowed. Forest was over exploited. This leads to economic crisis in the end of 1970s and early 1980s.

Under the influence of co-operative building, shifting cultivation was identified by the government as a serious threat to the natural environment of the highland. So since 1968, the program of sedentarization has been applied in almost every area of the highlands. As practiced in its traditional form among the Muong as well as other ethnic groups in Vietnam, under conditions of low population density, this system was sustainable. But in reality, rapid natural population increases, together with the failure of cooperative production, the substantial migration of ethnic Vietnamese from the lowland and the intensive commercial exploitation of timber and other resources have now created a situation in which the forest is over exploited. So swidden agriculture is no longer sustainable. Besides this the local peoples cannot exploit forest and other natural resources freely as before. Forest

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<sup>14</sup> At the beginning, the word "people property" is formally used in state documents. Land, forest, and other resources are people property. This politically favors the poor farmers. In reality, "people property" is state property.

managed by the community but latter the state owns and controls over land, forest and other natural resources. However, both the central and local government did not do this task well leading to conflicts between state forestry enterprises and local peoples over exploiting the forest. In the view of local people, the forest has been their property for many generations, they have lived in the forest for a long time, and therefore they have a right to exploit the forest. Since state enterprises and co-operatives were set up, all the richest forests were transferred to them. These enterprises were responsible for exploiting, protecting and reforesting. In reality, because of poor management, these enterprises mostly focus on exploiting the forest and neglect other tasks. As the consequence, local peoples whether cut timber for state enterprises or illegal timber selling. This form of forest management has lead to forest being strongly degraded both in term of area and quality.

It is clear from the proceeding description that the programs and policies that the Vietnamese government carried out in the collective period created huge changes in natural resource management. As a result of weak management capacity along with the centered-planned mechanism and top down mechanism, the land was exhausted, and the forest overexploited. The co-operative building process in the rural area was shelled is broken down at the end of the 1980s. The main economic sector in Vietnam was agriculture, and farmers counted for more that 90% of the national population in 1980 but Vietnam faced a crisis due to the lack of food. The situation of farmers at that time was terrible. The crisis in agriculture affected to other sectors as well as the Vietnamese economy went through a very difficult time with the annual inflation rate reaching 700 to 800 %. In that context the Vietnamese State made a new land reform policy.

### **3. Decollectivization and Market Economy (1981- 2001)**

Decollectivization and breaking up of state enterprises and co-operative in the 1980s was the unavoidable consequence of the crisis created by the failure of the central bureaucratic economy. Since 1981, the Vietnamese government has pursued

a policy of decollectivization, developing a market economy and opening the country. These policies lead to new views firstly on the relationship between humans and nature and secondly on social relations between humans themselves.

### 3.1 Ecological Principles

By the 1980s, the forest area in Vietnam was decreased seriously. Land and other natural resources are exhausted. At the same time the population has increased very fast. This has raised the need to reconsider the relationship between man and nature. In the decollective period, people slowly recognized that natural resources are not endless. The more humans overexploit natural resources the more they become scarcer. People started to foresee the tragedy they would have to confront once natural resources ran out. Because of this, people come up with the idea of conserving natural resources. Nature and human beings were considered as different parts of the ecosystem. This new ideology is not only recognized by the state and government but also by the local people themselves. Mai villagers expressed their concern that the forest area was now decreasing very fast. Elders reminded the young that when they were young forest was thick and rich in plants and animals. The forest covered a large area, easy to get food, medicine and other necessities from the forest. The land was fertile, and therefore they got good harvests. They lamented that the situation of the forest was at present very bad. People did not see the precious trees and animals that used to be abundant in their forests before. Houses, roads and bare hills replace the forest. The young generation worried about their future because they saw the population increasing very fast while the land and forest were degrading. They had to share the limited land and forest area with many other people. Because they suffered the consequences of overexploitation of the forest and land their consciousness about protecting and conserving forest was raised. They participated in forest planting and protecting campaigns. They came to believe that protecting forest and land was the way to keep wealth for their children. The perception of the Muong people toward nature changed. They respected nature

and valued natural resources. This changing in ecological belief also remains in changing perception of social relationship as well.

The concepts of freedom and equality appeared in 1945 are still considered the ideals driving the process of nation- state and socialist country building. Therefore, in social relations, people are treated equally. The inclusion policy has been a successful policy of the Vietnamese government practiced with ethnic groups in general and in particular with Muong people. All people have the right to participate in all political, social and economic activities. The constitution verifies the right to citizenship of all Vietnamese people. In reality, in the period of decollectivization and market economy, equality has been understood differently to the way it was understood in the previous period. In terms of economic equality, there was differentiation between hard working and lazy people, between strong and weak people, and between the knowledgeable and knowledge-lacking people. Thus people receive benefits based on their own ability. People accept the differences between rich and poor in their society. In terms of social welfare, all people have the right to have school, hospital and other services but they have to pay fees because these services are not subsidized by the state as they were in the previous period. Thus not only in economic but also in social aspects, commodity and market relationship have gradually affected to Muong society. The mutual aid and exchanges in traditional society have now changed to market relations. Wage labor has replaced labor exchanges. Thus the people-people relationships in Muong society now reflect the market mechanisms and commodity economy.

### **3.2 Social Organization**

Market mechanism and commodity economy have step by step penetrate to Muong society. This has strongly affected Muong social organization. In the period of decollectivization and market economy, the role of the co-operative in social organization of the Muong people in Mai village has been replaced by the decision

making role of households. Individuals also have the chance to develop their ability and personal experiences.

Co-operatives have been gradually abolished as the basic administrative unit. Government policy has aimed at transforming them into economic units that provide technical support services to peasants. *Khoan 10* (Resolution 10) and the land law of 1993 considerably reduced the role of co-operatives in agricultural production. Co-operatives were totally stripped of their administrative function in the allocation of land, capital, agricultural inputs, and labor. Drastic reductions in the staff of the co-operatives were mandated. Tax collection was shifted to the people's Committee. The size of communal land and hence the function of the co-operative in its management, has been significantly reduced.

The co-operative has been transformed into an economic unit that competes with the private sectors in the provision of agricultural support services. The land Law explicitly defined the role of the cooperation as a provider of services, such as supply of fertilizer and other agricultural inputs, pest management, irrigation, and electrification. However cooperation members are free to purchase agricultural inputs from the private sector if they find prices and quality to be more attractive.

As co-operatives have been stripped of their administrative function, the People's Committee has become the primary government organ at the commune level. The People's Committee has been authorized to collect contributions from farmers to cover the cost of village services and administration. The Communist Party maintains the power in sharing decision making rights with the People's Committee. The duty of the Communist Party Base is similar its duty in previous period: seeing that the national policy is implemented at the local level. There are other organizations such as the Women's Union, Youth Association, Farmer Association and Veterans Association. Those organization take care its members. Among those organizations, the Women's Union has the most widespread

membership. This union works very well with effective activities such as providing loans to develop household economies and other cultural activities.

In the collective period, the co-operative as a unit of production played an important role in resource management and economic development. But in the present period the household has been paid special attention by the government. The State considers the household as unit of production and also as the unit of consumption. It is considered that land and other resources are better managed by household so land and forest are allocated to households. Households are given the right to manage their land, forest, time, capital and labor to improve their household economy. They organize their productive activities by themselves rather than rely on the co-operative and the state. Households in Mai village have been given an important role in developing the economy and also in resource management.

In short, social organization in the decollective period has shifted from a system that based on co-operatives as integrated territorial units of governance to a system that consists of a variety of functional institutions. Each of these institutions governs one particular aspect of agricultural production and rural livelihood.

### **3.3 Natural Resource Management**

Economic reform policies have not just lead to economic change but also changes in natural resource management. The first reform policy introduced by Vietnamese government was *Khoan 100* (Contract Policy under the decision number 100 of the Politico) aimed at reformation in agricultural collectives, was very popular. The agricultural reforms aimed at encouraging the farmers who are the main participants in participating in production to solve the problem of food shortage in Vietnam. In order to achieve that purpose, land was distributed to farmer in certain period of time along with some production materials and equipment. Farmer organizes the production process himself and has to submit a certain amount

of agricultural products, his *Nang Suat Khoan*<sup>15</sup> (production quota) to the co-operatives which redistributes them to the farmers. Any production in excess of the farmers' production quota was retained by the farmer, thus farmers tried to produce as much in excess of their production quota as possible in order to be better off. This policy succeeded in both productivity and production quantity. However, it was used for only a short period leading to a new reformation.

Following on from the 1981 reformation, the second reformation called the *Khoan 10* (Resolution 10, the contract policy under the decision of the 10<sup>th</sup> Assembly of the Politico) in 1986 aimed at improving goods production. This time, the most production materials were distributed to farmers and the farmer used those materials for themselves. The land was considered state property and was extended to farmers for a certain period of time. Farmers cultivated the land extended to them and paid tax back to the co-operatives according to their production. This policy encouraged farmers to work even harder because the whole income of the farmer is decided by their working productivity. The production system was changed through this reformation. Goods produced increased especially rice. This reform paid more attention to commodity production instead of household consumption.

Accompanying the reform in agricultural policy, the introducing of high yield varieties and new technologies to farmer was paid special attention. The efforts of the government to increase food production by introducing high yield varieties and new technologies to farmers were successful in feeding the large, 70 millions population of Vietnam. At the same time as having enough food, in 1989 Vietnam exported its first two million tons of rice to the global market. In the following years, Vietnam exported 2 to 3 million tons of rice per year and became the second largest rice exporter in the world.

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<sup>15</sup> The productivity counted in each area of land is called "*nang suat khoan*" (production quota). Farmers pay their productive results by this quota to cooperation. The left belongs to them.



The turning point in economic reform and in opening the country to the international market was the promulgation of land laws in 1993. The land laws confirmed that the land belonged to and was managed by the state. According to this law, the government allocates plots of land to households as well as to organizations to support long-term land use: agricultural land for a the period of 20 years and forestry land for a period of 50 years. Land allocation to households also allows for inheritance and transfer rights of the land. If at any time the government decides to reclaim the land, farmer will be compensated accordingly. This law brings the new forms of economic development and new mechanisms for local peoples to participating in natural resource management. The legal environment was opened to develop household economies toward commodity production and privatize natural resources management forms.

Land policy was an important issue because it promotes the socio-economic development of the country as a whole on the one hand and of the upland areas in particular on the other. In the upland areas, each household is allocated agricultural land to use for twenty years, and forest land to manage for fifty years. When the land agreement expires, the villagers usually have the opportunity to continue using the land. This land policy is a legal basis to guarantee that everyone has the right to use land, and it helps to improve agricultural and forestry production activities. However, on other hand land the allocation process remains the drawback.

The most common difficulty that the implementation of government policy regarding agricultural and forest land allocation in remote areas faces is the lack of land for new members of communities. Allocation of agricultural and forest land to households is reflected by the possession of red books (agricultural land) and green books (forest land) respectively by households. In the case of Mai village, most villagers have green books and red books. The area of land is limited so the ownership of each household is clearly delineated. Once the land is allocated there is nothing left to provide to any new members of the community. This has currently resulted in some families who do not have opportunity to have land, to looking for

alternative ways of earning an income, by running small shops, collecting forest products, or acting as mediators for traders or wage labor.

The second problem facing the implementation of land policy is that the policy only focuses on the land area and pays little attention to production from, and quality of the land. This is a common problem in many countries around the world. In special case of Mai village, some other problems identified during the study time were that the methods and techniques used to measure the borders of land areas and funds available for measuring and mapping land areas are limited. The commune cadres report that they face difficulties in classifying land types. The reason is that they only have an old map drawn by the French before 1954 to allocate land to villagers and some areas on that map show forest which in reality are bare hills or dry fields. Therefore the land types in reality do not match to that on the map. There is also the problem of the actual area of land allocated to each household because of the different topography and location of each plot of land.

The other problem which has been affecting the village in the past few years is conflicts over land and natural resources between local residents and newcomers who have been moved in since the Hoa Binh Dam construction. Mai village did not suffer the direct impacts of Dam but they had to share their limited resources with a new resettlement village called Luong Phong, which was founded near Mai after the construction of Hoa Binh Dam is constructed. At the beginning of Luong Phong's settlement in 1987, it contained 8 households and about 30 persons. In January 1991, the number of households in Luong Phong reached to 63 households<sup>16</sup> with a population of about 400 persons. Government officers cut 150 ha land classified as unused land of Mai and Ngu village territories to create a territory for Luong Phong. The good relationships at the beginning have now changed to conflict. Mai and Ngu villagers think that the Luong Phong villagers occupied land that were rightfully theirs, and in opposite Luong Phong villagers say that the state has already

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<sup>16</sup> The number of communities had to move from reservoir increased as for the water levels rise at the high of 120m.

compensate for them. As a consequence, they shoot encroaching livestock from neighboring villages, which stray into their land. Due to the impacts of limited land area and quality, most people who moved to Luong Phong to escape the effects of dam construction have had to move on again to New Economic Zone in Central Highlands of Vietnam. Up till now 56 households in Luong Phong have moved to the New Economic Zones. Therefore there are 7 households left in Luong Phong but they still retain the total land area of 150 ha. Thus the average land area per capita in Luong Phong is higher than that of Mai. Mai and Ngu villagers complain that they lack land for cultivation and blame Luong Phong villagers who they say are occupying land which should be theirs.

Going along with the reform of agricultural developmental policies, forest has also been paid special attention because the forest area is decreased very fast in 30 years of collectivization period. Since 1990, many policies relating to forest and forest management have been set up. The law governing forest protection, which was approved by the National Assembly in 1991, is an important document. In the past forestry was mostly based on state forest enterprises and timber exploitation. Presently, forestry policies pay more attention to forest protection and plantation. The state provides forest management rights to local governments and households through the allocation of forestland. State companies must change their tasks from exploiting forests to planting and protecting forest. In addition, forestry department and armed forces are also involved in forest protection and plantation. The legal regulations about forestry tend to be more oriented to communities. This is considered as social forestry. Forestry economics has shifted from forest exploitation and timber trade to forest protection and development. Also the community potential in forest land management has been recognized. This perception is in keeping with reality but the results are rather limited because of ineffective management regimes.

Results of the study show that the forest is well protected managed and developed by local peoples when it is allocated to them. However, the forest

allocation operation mechanisms have not met the demand of the local people for forest allocation. Mai villagers have been encouraged to plant forests in order to interest them in the forestry business. But the bamboo and other species planted in their forests are not local varieties. They are brought from other provinces. They cost much and some are not suitable for local weather and soils. In the bamboo harvest time but no one goes to the village to buy it. This does not encourage the villagers to do forestry economy. The most important issue raised in forest planting is that local authorities focus on the quantity of planting not the quality of the planted forest, and therefore few trees survive. This practice of reforestation does not produce forests. Eventhough the number of trees that have been planted is high, after many cycles of replanting, the areas of forest remain unchanged.

To summarize, land and forest were first managed by co-operatives and state enterprises in the collective period but latter on in decollective period land and forest are allocated to households. This change in property relation has improved economic development in Vietnam as a whole and in the highlands in particular toward the market economy. As economic development increases some farmer become rich. The general living standard of the people is improved. At the same time, the changes in management of nature do not remove the negative impacts on both the social and economic fronts.

#### **4. Synthesis**

In this chapter I have presented the historical development of the Muong people in Mai village from its settlement until now. It is clear that the development process brings the change in local community in many aspects. In term of economical and political structure, Muong society has shifted historically from Nha Lang regime of landlord and tenant to socialist regime by collectivization with working groups and cooperation and by privatization with household economy

presently. The social economical mechanism has shifted from autonomous mechanism to center-planned mechanism and to free market mechanism.

In the context of socio-economic and political change, ecological principles about the relationship between human and nature and relationship among human also changes. Derived from the belief that nature is superpower to human being, the Muong people in traditional society tends to live in harmony with nature. They conserve nature because nature is their spirits. The perception that human is master of nature and nature is the field to be conquered, leads to the overexploitation of resources in collective period. As a consequence, natural resources have been degraded. In recent decades, people aware the necessary of natural resource conservation for sustainable use. People understand the complex interaction between human and nature in the ecological systems. Therefore people tend to conserve and protect nature rather than exploit nature. Thus it is raising the idea of natural conservation. In short the human-nature relation changes from conservation idea in traditional society to exploitation idea in collective period and back to conservation idea in present period. The social relation among people in community have shifted from patronage-client relation in Nha Lang regime to unreal equal relation in collective period and to the market relation presently.

Local ecological knowledge has been shifted from traditional knowledge in Nha Lang regime to the domination of scientific knowledge in collective period and to the combination of both traditional and scientific knowledge in present time. In this transformation process, there is a lot of overlap and articulation between local knowledge and scientific knowledge, and it is very difficult to differentiate them. Although it is believed that the popular trend of the local ecological knowledge transformation is that it leads to the loss of traditional knowledge. But in specific conditions of Muong community in Mai village, under the affects of natural and social conditions it is clear that Muong peoples do not complete adopting knowledge from outside. They tend into keeping some of their own customs and habits as the cultural aspects of their knowledge. Local knowledge is reproduced and mingled to

introduced knowledge. This creates the complexity and diversity of knowledge system which are flexible applied in the way Muong peoples synthesizing practical experiences to adapt the change of social and natural environment.

State policies especially the policies related to property relations influence strongly to the local community. Changes in property relation have been considered as the main factor affecting other sectors. Each period characterizes by its own property relation. This chapter has focussed on analyzing the connections between changes in property relations and changing perception of Muong people about the relationship between human and environment and person to person. It also focused on the changes in the forms of natural resource management, which were the results of changes in natural, socio-economic conditions in the agrarian transformation.