CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

In recent decades, in their rush to modernize their economies, the countries of Southeast Asia – Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Vietnam – have to make choices as to the path to development they will pursue. Each country has its own unique pattern of development, but all are becoming increasingly integrated into the global capitalist economic order. Each of the countries, in its own way, has adopted the modernization theory of development, with the goal of evolving from a rural agrarian society to an urban industrialized one. At the macro level of development, this process entails large infusions of foreign aid, the adoption of a western market economy, industrial development, and increased foreign trade. Micro level development involves attempting to provide economic opportunities, infrastructure development, and improvements in the quality of life in regions and local communities through the efforts of governments and western development agencies. (McCaskill, 1997:26-27)

In an effort to integrate local communities into the national mainstream, governments institute policies such as national educational systems, local government structures tied to centralized authority, agrarian reform, opportunities for geographic mobility to urban areas, and development programs. Parallel to these efforts of economic development, the governments of the above countries have to make attempts to protect natural resources and the environment from being degraded through establishing policies, programs and projects toward development in mountainous areas as well as indigenous people, such as programs to establish national parks or natural reserves, resettlement programs for highlanders, and so on.

In Vietnam, since the 1954 military victory in the North and 1975 military victory in the South, the state has completed its national liberation, and the nation-state has begun to implement a number of development programs for its purpose of nation building and economic development. Within this context, the modern state has placed a high priority on the development of the uplands following the "scientific model" of central Hanoi policy makers and planners.

First of all, the uplands of Vietnam cover three-quarters of the country's land surface. They are characterized by great cultural diversity and are home to 50 of

Vietnam's 54 officially recognized ethnic groups. These minorities range widely in language, cultural practices, and living situations but they share one thing in common: the government blames nearly all of them for engaging in shifting cultivation and destroying Vietnam's remaining forest cover (McElwee, 1999). Their economic status has been traditionally poor, due to their remote locations, lack of government services, and socio-economic marginalization from the national mainstream (Rambo and Jamieson, 2003).

Secondly, since 1975, Vietnamese uplands have been confronted with serious difficulties in terms of political and socio-economic problems. Especially, in the Central Highlands, a group of pro-American montagnards continued fighting under the banner of FULRO (United Front for the Liberation of the Oppressed Races). With the national development initiatives, the government had established developmental policies toward uplands and ethnic minority population in order to serve for production units and military security together with life stabilization of minority groups (Wandel, 1997). On the other hand, growth of population, poverty, and environmental degradation in upland areas are difficult problems that need to be resolved in the developmental strategies of Vietnam. The population of the uplands is growing very rapidly. Between 1960 and 1984 the population of the northern uplands increased by more than 300 percent. The rate of population growth in uplands is high due both to high birth rates of local populations and continued rapid in-migration. Birth rates for upland ethnic minorities are well above the national average, and many tens of thousands of ethnic minorities have moved from the northern uplands to the Central highlands (Rambo and Jamieson, 2003; and Cuc, 2003). Rapid population growth in the uplands of Vietnam is especially worrisome because it is occurring in the context of an already severely degraded environment.

The environment of uplands areas has been drastically and rapidly degraded over the past 50 years because of such interventions as war, migration, population growth, development programs and so on. Deforestation is considered by many Vietnamese to be the most serious environmental problem facing the nation because of loss of valuable timber, loss of biodiversity, erosion of land and especially because it is believed that it results in the occurrence of natural disasters such as floods and

droughts. It is a widespread and still growing problem; soil quality has decreased while weed competition has increased due to shortened fallow periods in shifting cultivation resulting in some hectare soils become fallow. Biodiversity is declining; many species of plants and animals have disappeared or become very scarce.

The poverty situation in the uplands is much worse than that in the lowlands. Among the poor people, ethnic minorities are particularly vulnerable to poverty. According to statistics from the Central Institute for Economic Survey in 1998, ethnic minorities accounted for 28% of the poor people in the nation while they accounted for only 14% of the total population. The northern ethnic minorities account for more than a quarter of the nation's poor. The Institute also predicted that if the current economic model were applied for the next 10 years, the proportion of the poor ethnic minorities would increase to 34% (ADB, 2002).

It can be said that the Vietnamese uplands are in a state of deepening environmental and social crisis after liberation in 1975 to now. Signs of environmental and social crisis of uplands are numerous and readily visible. Very rapid population growth has placed excessive pressure on an already degraded environment. Deforestation has seriously depleted the natural resource base. Biodiversity has plummeted. The length of swidden fallow periods has been greatly shortened, undermining the sustainability of existing agricultural systems. Soil erosion has reduced fertility on millions of hectares land. Vast areas of formerly forested land are now classified as "barren hills". Restoration of full productivity to these areas will require a very long time. Unless current trends are reversed, there is a real danger that in coming decades the uplands will suffer widespread environmental disaster and massive human tragedy (Rambo and Jamieson, 2003).

Confronting with these difficult problems, the Vietnamese government has placed a high priority on the growth-oriented development strategies. Some programs, policies and projects toward the development of upland areas and ethnic minorities have been established, such as: Sedentarization program in 1968, New Economic Zones program in 1976, Forest land allocation program in 1988, program for Socioeconomic Development in the most disadvantaged Communes (program 135) in 1998 and so on. The programs and policies provided a lot of opportunities and prosperities for the

development on socio-economic of most its population, however, it also brought out many challenges for their lives.

Among those programs and policies, Sedentarization program has been designed more specifically for ethnic minorities in upland areas. It has impacted largely on everyday practices, traditional culture, customs, and social structure in community of the ethnic minority groups. With the implementation of the program, local people have been separated and excluded from their traditional villages and forest where they have lived for long time and where their culture, their identity and beliefs are rooted. They are increasingly marginalized from both their material and cultural life when moved to new locations. It means that they are neither able to maintain their livelihood following traditional lifestyle, nor can they practice their cultural/spiritual activities because of the intervention of the program.

The questions examined in this study are: (1) Why has the state program caused such problems for ethnic minorities while the role of the state in the program is to help enhance the standard of living? (2) How do the ethnic groups respond to this? (3) How do they adapt themselves to a new context?

There are many ways to answer these questions, but I would like to find the answers in the context of Thua Thien Hue uplands of Vietnam. My study is undertaken in Giong village of Huong Nguyen commune, which is introduced in the next section.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Sedentarization program was officially launched for shifting cultivators to practice Sedentarization and fixed cultivation following Government Resolution No. 38/CP of 12 March 1968. This program has been designed more specifically for ethnic minorities, with the intention of changing certain traditional practices that have been considered as backward, environmentally unsound, and a constraint to modern agricultural development. Since then, the program has been considered to be one of the most important steps in poverty reduction and hunger elimination in the upland regions (ADB, 2002). Behind of the program, the Vietnamese Government sought to address twin goals of protecting watershed forests allegedly at risk of being destroyed by the highlanders while improving national defense by relocating ethnic minorities

from isolated and sensitive border areas to regions under government control. At the same time, the program has tended to emphasize the need to assimilate the ethnic minorities into the economic and social life of the larger society like the Kinh people (ethnic Vietnamese or people of the capital) (Rambo, 1995; Kampe, 1997).

The program has brought development opportunities for ethnic minorities. Economic opportunities in many villages have been enhanced, their children can attend schools, and all people in community can access to other social services such as road, electricity and information system and others welfare. However, the program has also represented a great threat to them. The initiative for development of ethnic minorities frequently comes from the perceived threat that their way of lives were posed by the government (McCaskill, 1997). Traditional practices of ethnic people like shifting cultivation, hunting and logging are not freely implemented. Besides, when the state implements Sedentarization program that aim to protect the forest and to improve the economic life of ethnic groups, it also influences their traditional life. The program has broken down or weakened the traditional social and cultural structure including system of values, religious beliefs, customary law, languages, and local knowledge; also affected are village intellectuals, the traditional family form, and village organization (ADB, 2002; McElwee, 1999). It has broken the traditional village lay-out, common property has been replaced by private property, plots have been fenced, and longhouses have been separated (Salemink, 1997). Moreover, social relationship have also changed when those who have potential and capitals get rich very fast, while those who lack such conditions become poorer and are pushed to be landless. This leads to social classification in the communities, which are traditionally communal and united.

Therefore, in the study on Sedentarization issue in Gia Lai – Kontum and Lam Dong (the Central highlands), Salemink stated that the purpose of program is not for benefit of minority people but only dominant of the state and the Kinh people on ethnic groups in order to control all the territories as well as populations. The author argued that the program is not suitable for lifestyles of ethnic groups (the Montagnard) (Salemink, 2000).

The case study in Lao Cai Province indicated that the living standard of Hmong people continues to be fairly low, with some households experiencing a two to three month food shortage although they were settled following the program of Sedentarization. Some households were even returning to their old community to use old swidden fields while maintaining a primary residence in the resettled state-built village. That is, their residence may be fixed but their fields remain under rotational agriculture (McElwee, 1999).

Though various studies that have evaluated and pointed out the above impacts of the policy to the local people, the state has still enforced its programs (Rambo 1997; McElwee, 1999). Why is this? I argue that there are two reasons. Firstly, it is because the state believes in evolutionary theory that all human societies progress unilaterally from primitive to slave, feudal, capitalist and then to socialist modes of production (Thang, 2001). Moreover, the socialist ideology follows that all members are equal; so, "backward" ethnic minorities should be developed the same way as the majority. The state rationalizes that it has responsibility to bring modernization to "uncivilized" ethnic minorities. Therefore, traditionally "inferior" styles of living and cultures of the minorities must be transformed to universal national standards of the major Kinh people (loc.cit). However, it does not mean that all local communities are similarly affected. Some people may perceive that the transformation is appropriate; so, they adapt the changing easily. But simultaneously, some may feel suffered and oppressed; so, they select their own ways of resistance or protest against external intervention.

Secondly, under the "ethnic hierarchical classification" which classifies people into civilized vs. uncivilized, majority vs. minority, ethnic minorities are frequently perceived as "backward" and "primitive" and referred to in derogatory terms. They are often blamed for unsavory ecological practices, such as burning the forest and causing severe land erosion and flooding in the lowlands as a result of their swidden agricultural practices. Several state officials and developers, who work with ethnic minority communities, view indigenous culture as inferior to that of the dominant society and as an impediment to the development process. Therefore, changes to indigenous or traditional culture are viewed as part of the process of nation building, in which ethnic minorities become integrated into the social and political fabric of the

nation state. Local knowledge should be replaced by "scientific knowledge"; shifting cultivation should be replaced by fixed cultivation, and so on. The result of this notion has been that the local knowledge of the people and the process of changes brought out by development projects are largely ignored (McCaskill, 1997; Parnwell and Bryant 1996, cited from Peluso 1992; Bryant 1997).

Under such circumstance, do local people have any response? The local people often respond to changes of socio-economic, political and cultural conditions caused by the outside interventions. Those responses are different from different groups depending on specific circumstances. Bryant and Bailey (1997) contend that normally, poor people have long responded to maintain their livelihood opportunities but they always attempt to avoid provoking powerful actors into any retaliatory action that might exacerbate their position. They therefore often apply strategies of adaptation that aim to minimize adverse effects on them. They find themselves in a dialectical situation in which they are in an attempt to adjust to new conditions. Moreover, they are increasingly becoming aware of the fact that they are required to compete with other groups for scarce resources and to integrate into the dominant society (McCaskill, 1997). At the same time, they adapt to enclosure or environmental degradation by extending the time spent pursuing livelihood needs, or to utilize diverse social and economic "coping" strategies (Piseth, 2001). They modify their traditional economic practices. In some cases, they try to apply the modern technology or external knowledge while at the same time retaining important aspects of their indigenous knowledge or traditional culture in their daily practices. Many indigenous people adapt to the changes caused by state policy by taking advantage of new economic opportunities generated by the capitalistic market (Bryant and Bailey, 1997).

However, local people do not always choose strategies of adaptation to respond to environmental changes and external forces that impact on their life. In several cases, attempts to force indigenous people to give up their way of life or to relocate them to non-traditional lands may lead to conflict over time (McCaskill, 1997). The indigenous people normally react against those who make them become marginalized under different forms, such as peasant rebellion in colonial time, peasant movement, protesting demonstration (collectively organized forms) or everyday

resistance (individual form) (Scott, 1985; Peluso, 1992). For example, Hmong in Lao Cai province react against the state program of Sedentarization by continuing to return to their old commune to use old swidden fields while maintaining a primary in the resettled state-built village (McElwee, 1999). Bahnar ethnic group in the Central Highlands of Vietnam respond by refusal to cooperate with state agencies to protect forests which the state declared as state property and denied the traditional rights of local communities. Many of them even cut tall trees in order not to be "left empty-handed" (Salemink, 1997).

In sum, the program on Sedentarization has been designed more specifically for ethnic minorities, with the intention of changing certain traditional lifestyle and practices considered as "backward," "nomadic," "primitive," and "uncivilized" into modern and civilized lifestyle. It has made local people become marginalized from access to natural resource, which is traditionally the basic resource of their life, their traditional culture is threatened, and their indigenous knowledge gradually fall into oblivion; the quality of their lives has also deteriorated. In order to survive and adapt to new environment local people have to adjust themselves and negotiate with or react against the state the insufficient problems in their daily lives.

Recent studies have been done on this issue, but most of them tend to emphasize aspects of description of the implementation process, the results and the limitations, as well as the impacts of the program on the local people. For instance, McElwee (1999) examined the results and the limitations of the program. Meanwhile, Salemink (2000) focused on the impacts of the program on ethnic groups in the Central Highland of Vietnam in terms of traditional culture, property rights and livelihood. In my case, I focus on examining how the Cotu people of Giong village in Huong Nguyen commune make adaptive responses to fixed cultivation and Sedentarization program after they have been displaced from traditional residence and then marginalized from rights to access to natural resources, traditional practices, as well as their rituals in new location.

Being traditional shifting cultivators, the Cotu people, mainly ethnic minority group of Huong Nguyen commune classified as having special difficulties in Thua Thien Hue province, have been seen as "undeveloped" and a threat to the watershed

forest conservation of Huong River. So, they were moved from small villages or hamlets scattered along the river and stream banks in the upper stream of the Huong River in 1996 following Sedentarization project of A Luoi District. Although the state has invested basic costs to create stable life and improve the standard of living for them but they have lost access to natural resource, which is traditionally basic resource of their life, on the one hand, they have to face difficulties and limitations in access to new technology as well as cultivation methods and other activities related to their livelihood in new circumstances.

However, caught between the impact of such program and the pressure to survive, local people need to adjust and adapt their livelihood strategies to the changes brought about by the Sedentarization program and the changes in the natural environment. These strategies require the combination between local knowledge and scientific knowledge in production practices, the negotiation within members in community and with the state about the problems involving in their livelihoods such as right to access to natural resources, ritual, production activities and so on.

In order to understand the process of adaptive responses to the program on Sedentarization I emphasize social and natural environmental change created by the program as the decided factor of changing process. At the same time, I look at the Cotu people as agencies responding to suffering which they have been experiencing and adaptive strategies to maintain their livelihood as well as their cultural practice in new location.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to explore the above issues, this study investigates following specific questions:

1) How are the Cotu people displaced and resettled following the government program?

2) How does the process of displacement and relocation influence the lives of Cotu people?

3) How are the Cotu people marginalized in their new location?

4) How do the Cotu people adapt themselves to the new settled location?

1.4 Research Objectives

This study aims:

1) To understand the process of displacement of Cotu people according to Sedentarization program in the context of Huong Nguyen commune, A Luoi District, Thua Thien Hue Province.

2) To explore the impacts of the program on the lives of Cotu people and their marginalized process in the new location.

3) To identify and analyze the process of adaptive responses of the local people to the program on Sedentarization.

1.5 Research Methodology

1.5.1 Research Site Selection

Huong Nguyen commune - one of twenty-one fixed cultivation communes of A Luoi district that are classified as having special difficulties in Thua Thien Hue - includes six villages: Giong, A Ri, Mo Nu, Ta Ra, Cha Du and Nghia; I decided to choose Giong village for my study.

The reasons that stimulated me to select this site are presented as follows: Firstly, Giong village, which consists of forty-nine households with 286 people, is the largest and most densely populated village of Huong Nguyen and is located near the center of Huong Nguyen commune. Simultaneously, it is a village that has been settled earliest and quickest after the Sedentarization program was launched in Huong Nguyen. In addition, although fixed cultivation and settlement nearly 10 years in new location, but its people, the Cotu still have to confront some challenges such as, the lack of land suitable for agricultural cultivation, the limitation in access to natural resources, the difficulties of application of scientific knowledge and modern technology to practice agricultural and forestry activities, the disappearance of traditional rites, the invalidation of traditional institutions, many households living under poverty line. It is thus a place that has experienced many outside interventions. Most development projects in Huong Nguyen commune have been implemented in

Giong village but not in other villages. Secondly, Giong is seen as having the longest village history in the Huong Nguyen. Several traditional cultural activities of the Cotu people in Huong Nguyen are maintained in this village.
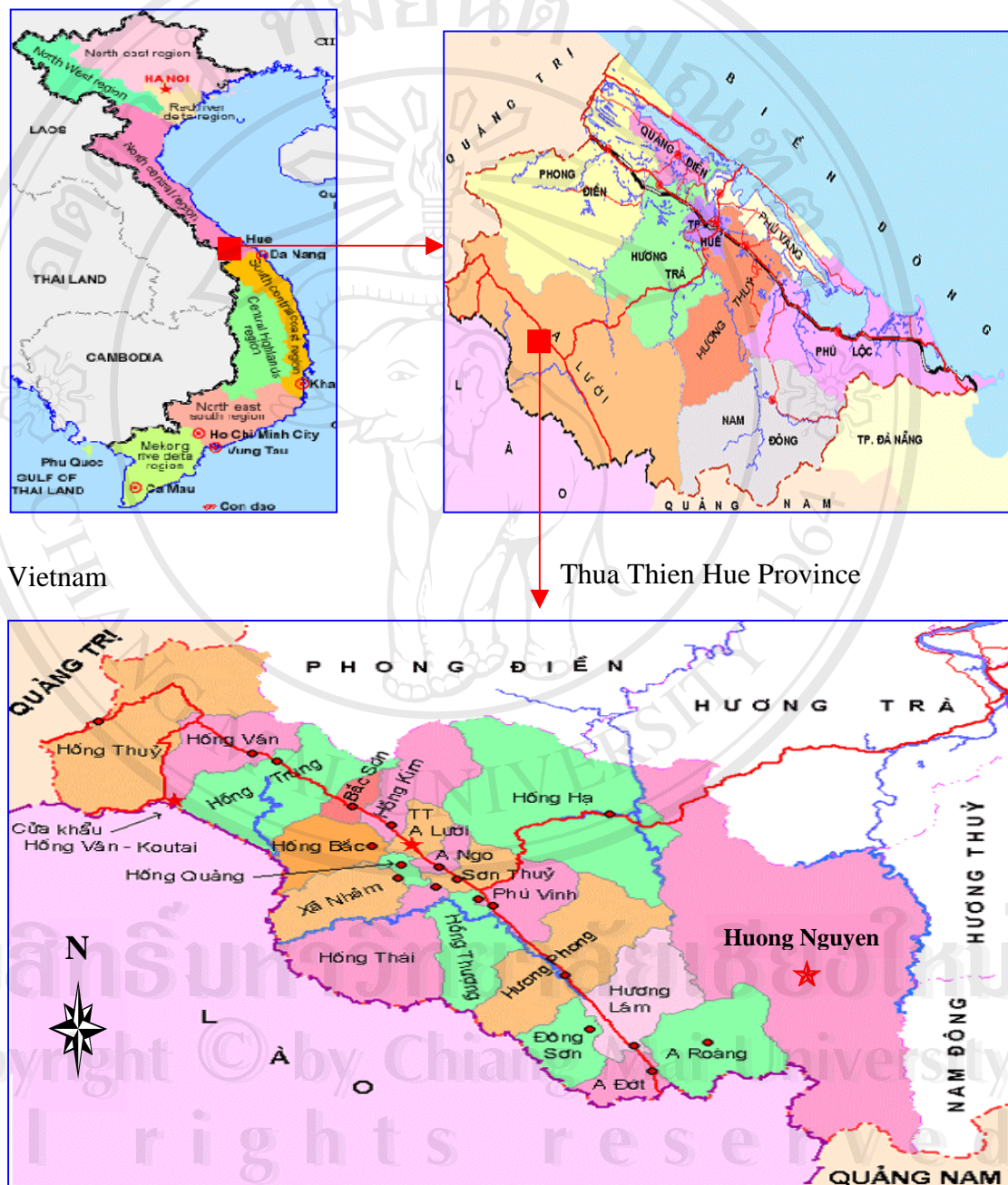

Vietnam   Thua Thien Hue Province

Figure 1.1 The Study Area: Huong Nguyen Commune, A Luoi District, Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam
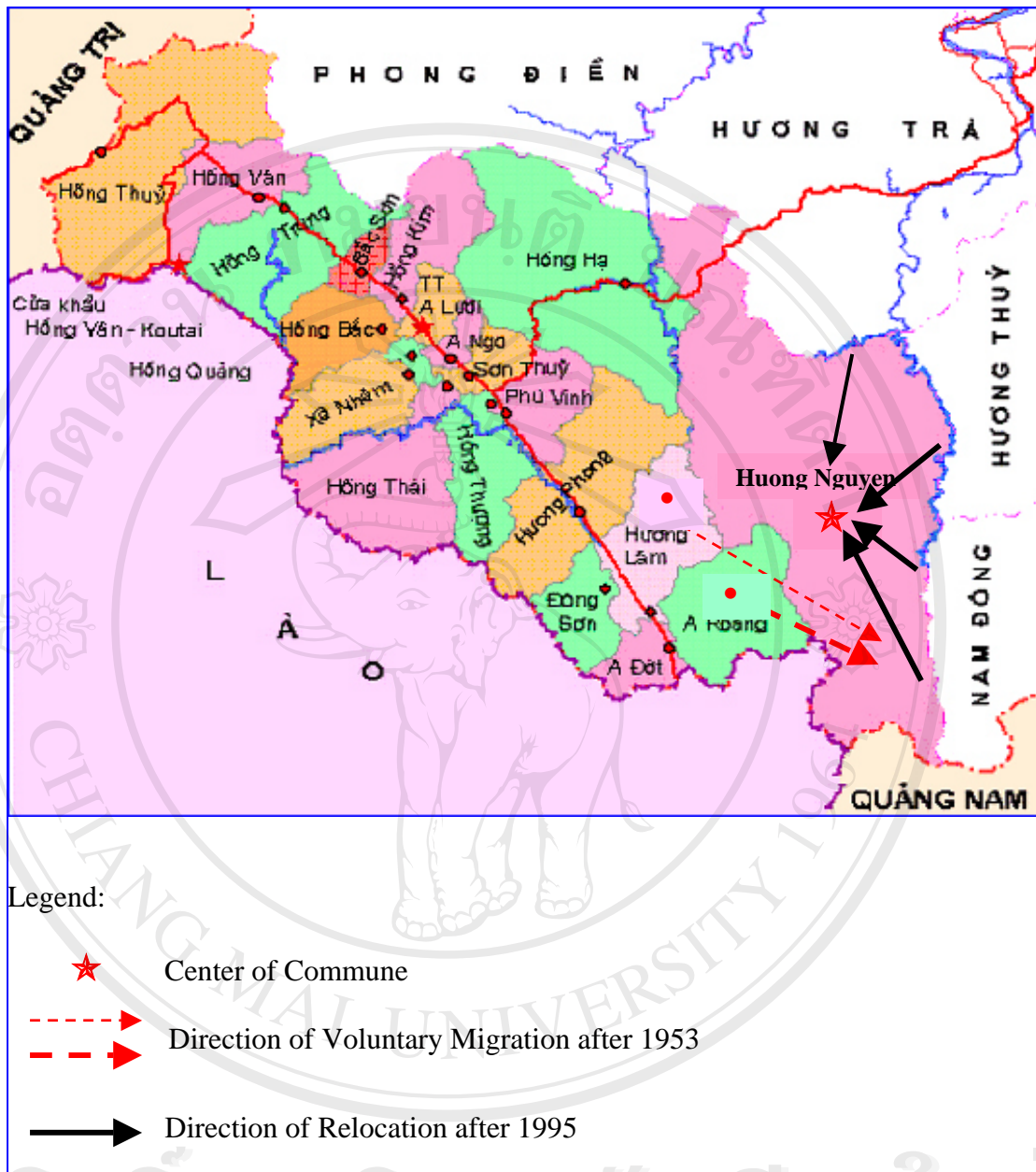
Source: www.thuathienhue.gov.vn/english/bando.asp

Legend:

⭐   Center of Commune

┄┄┄▶   Direction of Voluntary Migration after 1953

━━━━▶   Direction of Relocation after 1995

Figure 1.2 Relocation of Giong Village of Huong Nguyen Commune Based on Interview

Legend:

House   Upland Crop Fields   Orchard

Community house   Paddy Fields   Forest

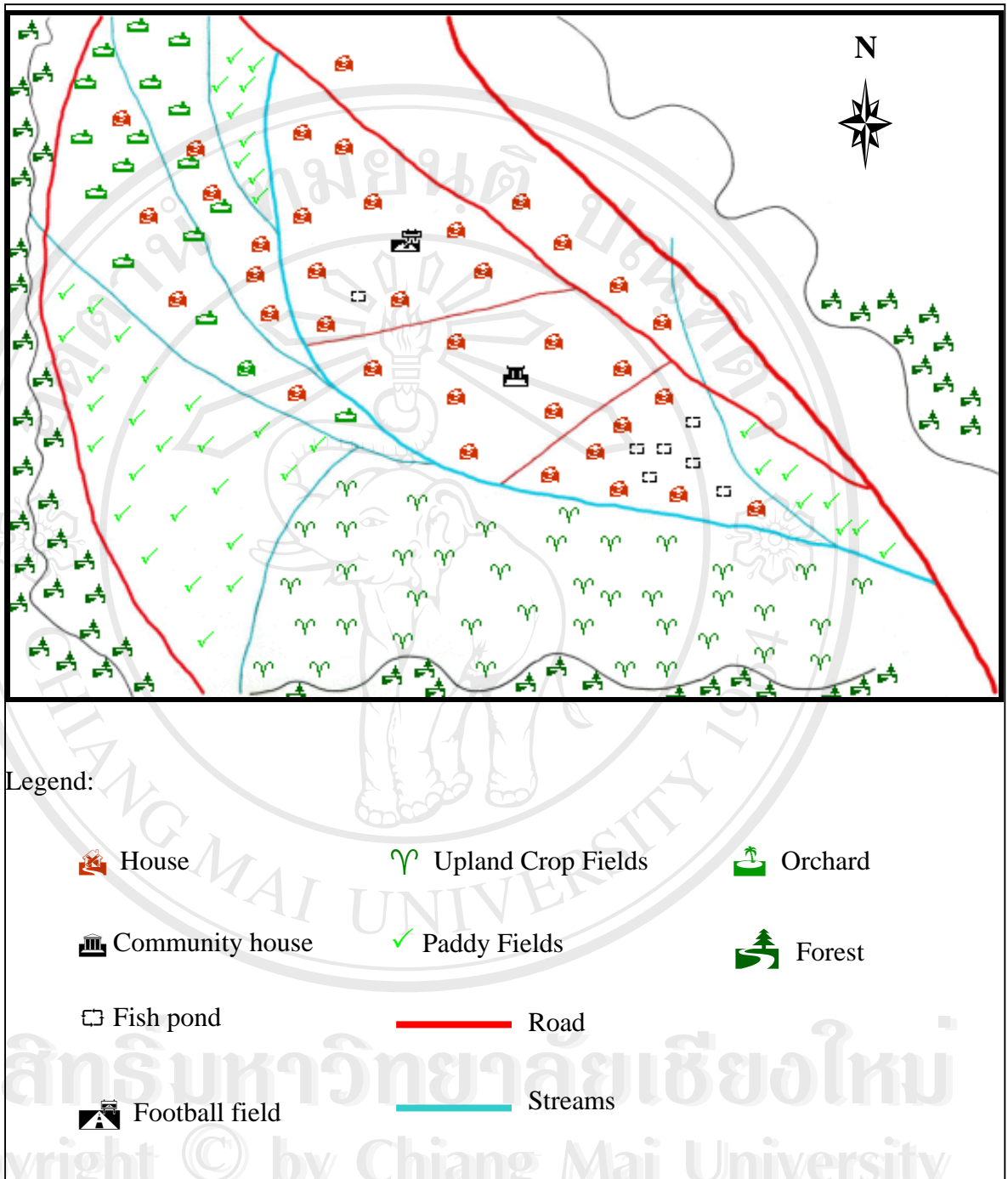Fish pond   Road

Football field   Streams

Figure 1.3 Cognitive Map of Land Use in the Study Area According to the Village Headman

1.5.2 Fieldwork and Methods

This study is based on documentary and field research. The study took place during four months from October 2004 to February 2005. I surveyed the Cotu people in Giong village about such things as livelihood, culture, customs and social networks. I also considered the lives of the Cotu people who were resettled to learn how their lives might have changed since resettlement in new location. Furthermore, I took time during my fieldwork to review the history of the Cotu people in Giong village following three stages: Pre-revolution, After-revolution and after fixed cultivation and settlement, and the impacts of Sedentarization program on the lives of the Cotu people. Additionally, I tried to learn about how the Cotu people respond to the program and how they adapt themselves in new locations. During my fieldwork, the following methods were used:

1.5.2.1 Key Informant Interview

When I started my fieldwork in October 2004, I first contacted the local authorities of Huong Nguyen People's Committee. After the initial meeting, the chairperson of the People's Committee, Mr. Ho Xuan Phong, gave me some time for an interview at his office. Soon after, I had the chance to interview the chairperson of Huong Nguyen commune, Mr. Ho Xuan Thuy, and the commune party committee secretary, Mr. Ho Xuan Thu. Through these three informants, I could explore official "mainstream" information about the economic and cultural life and social relations of the community. After discussing the general information of the Huong Nguyen commune and deciding to choose Giong village for my study, I was introduced to work directly with Giong village mayor, Ho Van Dung.

In Giong village, I stayed in the house of Mr. Ho Van Dung. He is a knowledgeable man who speaks Vietnamese fluently. He was an important translator of my interviews in Giong village. It was fortunate to stay in his family because his wife and children are very kind-hearted and friendly; they guided me to the households that I wanted to interview, and to the paddy fields, mountain fields and kitchen gardens. Furthermore, they helped me understand the traditional culture and customs of Cotu people through their stories.

1.5.2.2 Individual and Household Interview

Individual and household interviews enabled me to get specific information on the livelihoods, living conditions, life histories and social relations of the village, as well as the felling to Sedentarization program. During the study, I interviewed people of different genders, ages, social positions and ways of life. These interviews included both structured and informal discussions. For the structured interviews, I prepared questionnaires specific to households, life histories living and economic situations, religious belief, the felling of the local people to Sedentarization program. However, I realized that this kind of direct questioning was extremely formal, and so during the interview, I tried to talk about this information in a non-confrontational way and create a more relaxed atmosphere. Immediately after our discussion, I would write notes about what I had learnt from them. This method of data collection permitted me to gather valuable information for my study.

Due to time limitations, I was not be able to interview everyone in the village. Therefore, instead of selecting households randomly, during my later months in the field, I decided to interview people with distinctively different household groups: better-off households, middle households, poor households and very poor households. In each household group, I interviewed four to six households with different genders and ages in those households. In this way, I was able to get more comprehensive information about range of livelihoods strategies in the community.

1.5.2.3 Quasi-Participant Observation

Observation was also used to gather information about local living conditions, economic activities and social relations. During my study, I spent time within the village during different periods of the day, from morning to evening, to observe their daily life. Sometimes, I also stayed overnight in the village to understand more about their activities at night. Through this method of study, I was able to better understand their livelihood strategies and social relations of the Cotu people within the village (kinship and neighboring relations) and with outsiders (government authority, land-based people). In addition, observation was used to cross-check my information collected from the other sources.

During my study, I did not use participant observation in the broadest sense for a number of reasons. Firstly, it was because of time limitations, I could not participate in daily living activities as a member of the village. Secondly, the field site was in the remote area, and it took me about one and a half hours to reach by motorcycle from my house, therefore, rather than spending the whole day living with the people, I traveled back and forth during the day.

1.5.2.4 Secondary Data Collection

For this study, I made use of the available documentation related to my research interests. This data was found in various government offices, such as, the Provincial People's, People's Committee of the Huong Nguyen commune, and of Aluoi District, Department of Fixed cultivation and settlement of A Luoi District, Hue Department of Mountainous Ethnic Minority and Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Thua Thien Hue Province).

1.5.3 Data Analysis

For this step, collected data was tabulated in terms of research questions and objectives. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were applied during the analysis. During this process, theoretical issues were integrated in the analysis of social phenomenon to better understand the relevance and differences between theories and empirical field data. Furthermore, my analysis took into account the relevant arguments and critiques of social theories to strengthen my understanding of social dynamics related to my research site.

1.6 Thesis Organization

This thesis consists of six chapters whose brief contents are respectively described as follows:

Chapter one is a brief introduction, which explains the rationale of the research, the discussion of the research problem, the research questions and the

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objectives. Moreover, the research methodology and the thesis organization are also presented in this chapter.

Chapter two presents theoretical relevance and literature reviews related to the concepts of displacement, marginalization, place and place-making used in the thesis. At the same time, this chapter provides the conceptual framework for the thesis.
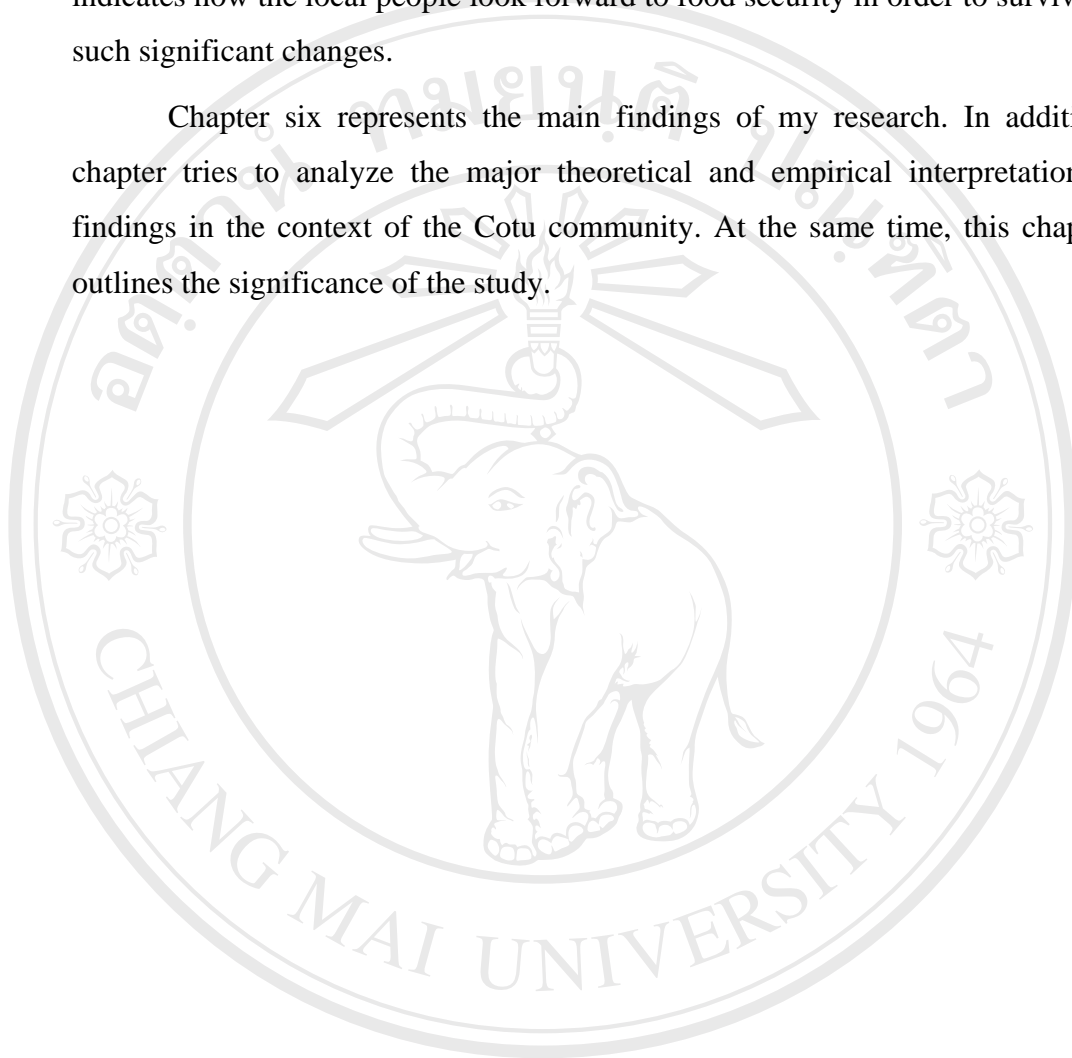
Chapter three focuses on describing the Cotu people in the Vietnamese society. This chapter provides the specific characteristics of the Cotu people in the context of Vietnam in general and of my research site in particular. It is an attempt to know the origin of the Cotu people in Vietnamese society, and history, traditional social structure, traditional livelihood activities, as well as indigenous knowledge and belief system in daily activities of the Cotu people in the context of Giong village in Huong Nguyen commune.

Chapter four concentrates on reviewing background of the Vietnamese Sedentarization program and its practice in Huong Nguyen commune generally and the Giong village particularly. This chapter is divided into two parts. The first part is background of the Vietnamese Sedentarization program and overview of the process of implementation of the program in Thue Thien Hue Province. The second part presents the practice of the program in Giong village of Huong Nguyen commune. At the same time, it provides the process of marginalization and the feeling of the Cotu people after they are displaced to new location following the program on Vietnamese Sedentarization.

Chapter five focuses on exploring the process of place-making as adaptive response of the Cotu people to the changes of physical, economic, social and political conditions in new location. This chapter includes two sections. The first section is a profile of the Giong village consisting of its natural and socioeconomic characteristics, and the second section analyzes the process of place-making of the Cotu people in new location. In this section I want to investigate how the local people rebuild "new home" in order to able integrate into the modern life but it still keep the specific characteristics of traditional culture. In addition, this section also shows whether the local people have capacity and strength to local control over the physical and social landscape through examine how the local people react over some

unreasonable issues related to their livelihood, customs and beliefs after resettled in new location, and how the conflicts resolve. At the same time, this section also indicates how the local people look forward to food security in order to survive before such significant changes.

Chapter six represents the main findings of my research. In addition, this chapter tries to analyze the major theoretical and empirical interpretation of the findings in the context of the Cotu community. At the same time, this chapter also outlines the significance of the study.