CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION
LAHU ETHNICITY, A BOOK OF NINE STORIES

This book describes Lahu peoples’ partaking in the modern-capitalist transformation we are all submitted to. It provides stories of Lahu subjects -both individual and collective- I have met at different places, notably in their highland communities in Northern Thailand. In it, I describe local villagers’ changing perspectives and the equations they have articulated on developments affecting their fragmented society. I shall commence by introducing the individual Lahu subject, my long-term research partner Jakhadtè. The following text, which provides matter of thought for my ensuing analysis, is part of a conference paper this indigenous highland villager authored for the 2004 Kunming International Conference of Visual Anthropology.1 It provides perspectives Jakhadtè decided to share with other, mostly academic, participants at the conference so as to draw their attention to following problem:

“I am keen to learn more about the use of video documentation for the benefit of our own Lahu minority people living in various countries of Southeast Asia. I believe that if I can take anything I learned here [at the conference] back home, this will be of benefit for my own Lahu community. Many Lahu living in Thailand have been asked to attend different seminars and workshops. For Lahu-Thai who have attended mostly agricultural workshops before, it has often been a difficulty to have the community they represent benefit from this experience. Usually, the workshops we attend in Thailand have presentations, discussions, explanations, and sometimes there are slides to see. Once the workshops ends, the participants receive a folder

1 The text is slightly adapted from Jakhadtè’s original conference paper which -now put into digital format- can be found in the digital archive of Leiden University.
each to take back home to teach the farmers of their community what they have learned during the workshop. However, many Lahu attending them are illiterate peasants. Most do neither speak well the central Thai language nor are they highly educated as to be sure about the terms used in these documents.”

Jakhadtè, Kunming Presentation, 01.03

Jakhadtè’s words describe a situation that is part of what my thesis attempts to illuminate, namely processes of identity construction. I shall, while interpreting this and other Lahu narratives, give attention to their authors’ thoughts, voice and words, because they are the resources for my multi-sited transcription of Lahu peoples’ communal concerns. Invoking here a first image of transformation, I suggest that Jakhadtè’s thoughts emerged from experiences discussed among the members of his community. Leaving behind the restraints of a northern Thailand village, these experiences and concerns combined to become the voice our protagonist had for approaching the regional forum. Jakhadtè’s voice, which transported communal experiences and concerns beyond the habitual space of his indigenous community, left his body to become the articulate perspective of a common highland farmer addressing non-Lahu others on issues of indigenous video documentation. Transcending the cultured sphere of the indigenous community, this voice was not only the subject’s means to expose a communal concern to others acknowledging a communal concern, it was also my means to transcribe it for an English-speaking audience and evidence it for the honorable reader.

Jakhadtè’s words, which informed his Kunming audience about developments he wished to document, were transcribed and translated into English to become the written text document we can now read on Lahu peoples’ concerns with an agricultural development scheme. The trilogy of thoughts, speech, and text may accompany us on the journey to embrace the basic triangulation of People, Culture, and Space I apply for my interpretation.² It is, of course, up to us what we read in a

² I shall occasionally capitalize words such as Development, Transformation, Change, etc so as to highlight their central position in my discourse. This helps me to distinguish their bounded and their fluctuating notions, the latter of which I transcribe as multi-faceted processes, namely developments, transformations, changes, and so on.
text like this, *how* we read its contents, and *why* we may wish to discuss its ‘cultured’ form. I suggest taking note of Jakhadtè’s explicit differentiation between the absent benefits for Lahu villagers from agricultural extension workshops, and the potential benefits they could obtain from the indigenous film-making he proposed to the visual anthropologists. I shall, in the first part of this book discuss a major chunk of Jakhadtè’s proposal for a change, and indicate the rationales of its application in the form of Lahu video documentaries.

Ethnicity, as we know it, refers to the identification of subjects by those who identify themselves on the base of their genealogical pertinence to an indigenous culture community or a culture group, and/or their ancestral persistence in the human ecology of an area where their language—in our case ‘Lahu’—is spoken. It also refers to ethnic identifications delivered by ‘significant others’ who define these community or group members on the base of alternative information. A simple formula such as this should hold true for indigenous groups to claim ethnic distinctiveness according to international rights organizations. We ought to embrace the circumstances of such claimed distinction in the light of political and economic pressures informing the legal side of ethnic identifications as well. Besides the trilogies of this book, we shall also accommodate the dialectics of power that have made ethnicity a double-sided coin featuring winners and losers of a habitual game called “Persistent Change”. We shall see alternative identifications being produced and reproduced among members of a named (and often renamed) culture group because of their intermittent continuity with outsiders to their culture community and ethnic group. These significant others have created their alternative information, often on the base of a common past or shared experience—like in the case of the Thai—and sometimes on the base of a particular mission, in our case an agricultural extension scheme.

To understand the rules of ethnicity’s persistent change we shall look at local perceptions of power, which not only inspires and imposes culture communities’ adoption of ethnic identifications but also determines the dynamics and dichotomies

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3 I have evidenced Jakhadtè’s self-identification as ‘Lahu-Thai’ and as a ‘common highland farmer’ both of which encode different meanings and also different loyalties.

4 My own mission to discuss Lahu identifications is meant to produce concepts for further research on ethnicity and its related processes.
of ethnic continuity. In order to cope with this and more complications, we must apply a systemic approach. To this end, I have studied that what local villagers deemed constitutive of, or vital to, their ethno-cultural identity, thus discussing the changing qualities of interethnic relationships that have inspired and/or imposed Lahu group members’ appropriation of external identifications concepts such as ‘Musser’. The ethnographic data I have collected among Lahu (alt. Musser) villagers covers a wider range of issues than I could possibly present in a single book, I just hope to be pardoned for occasionally condensing and diffusing my analysis. Since this dissertation is an academic exercise I shall establish dimensions, components and agency of ethnicity in holistic terms, applying a grounded approach on highland farmers’ societal experience that has generated data for a qualitative analysis of their concerns. Having taken part in local villagers’ interethnic relationships, I shall contribute ‘outsider’ as well as ‘insider’ perspectives for the main topics of this book, namely Lahu ethnicity (or ethnic Lahu identity), and development research (or research on developments). These topics overlap in ways I now wish to delineate at the methodological level, thus pointing out possible strategies for inductive knowledge construction. Findings I am about to present in this book are evidenced and exemplified from participant observation and local sources, submitting meanings that villagers have attributed to themselves while evaluating, as well as redefining, Politics of Identity.

Having done participatory research among indigenous peoples such as the partly illiterate farmers from my Lahu research communities, I offer a modest if grounded outlook on those with whom I have spent years discussing their objects of concern. My analysis of developments said to have triggered concern among Lahu peoples is subjective, it acknowledges sub-liminal and intuitive processes that accompany ‘experiential knowledge’ construction. I shall (re-) construct the informed as well as sentient conditions of development agency, pinpoint respective commitments of participant subjects, and interpret from this position, identity statuses obtained in the process. Narratives, by which to discuss local villagers’ direct and indirect relationships to significant others, reveal communal concerns that are of primordial order, such as groups’ shelter from legal encroachment, forced eviction, social discrimination, economic abuse, to name a few. I shall evidence primordial
concerns under the headings of development, transformation, or plainly ‘Change’. In addition to forwarding community members’ deliberations on their concerns with developments, I shall reveal the territorial notions of their social domain, or simply ‘Space’, thus illuminating the embodied intersections of ethnicity and state-afforded developments in which villagers’ voices needs to be heard.

To sustain my construct of vital concerns, I shall offer brief narratives and stories describing villagers’ reflections, and also my own observations and intuitive analysis, of Lahu agency. By these subjective references, we shall look at villagers’ distress, gained from situations of despair, alienation, frustration etc., as well as their determination to leave suffering behind. I shall interpret effects arising from national and regional developments, thus analyzing farmers’ group perspectives in continuation of, and difference to, past perspectives. Since developments have diversely affected Lahu peoples’ perspectives and narratives, they will be contextualized in chronological terms rather than structures or functions, although both will be highlighted for the purpose of systematization. I shall, by revealing commonalities and discrepancies validate my terms of representing local authors’ social experiences, while discussing them at the junction of social innovation and cultural appropriation. In order to plough these fields I shall focus on Lahu communities’ crucial experiences, and plant the meanings of their speech into the sandy soils of my robust representations. Farmers’ depictions of articulate and disarticulate ‘life worlds’ render an imagined place I may now submit to readers’ fantasy.

**Lahu Subject:** This book is dedicated to peoples who have voiced their identifications in various contexts, and have encouraged me to conceive their (ethno-cultural) group identity by understanding their points of departure, which I am inclined to suggest to my readers, as well. The subjective analysis of the kind I offer is curious and creative in character, it *traces* concepts villagers use to signify their concerns to be known, and *produces* concepts inspired by the needs and concerns they

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5 I shall occasionally capitalize words such as Development, Transformation, Change, etc so as to highlight their central position in my discourse. This helps me to distinguish their bounded and their fluctuating notions, the latter of which I transcribe as multi-faceted processes, namely developments, transformations, changes, and so on.
have signified. With the following account I introduce three dimensions of Lahu ethnicity, namely People, Culture, and Space. Having earlier invoked a first image of transformation, I briefly delineate the contexts in which we situate the social actor, the producer and re-producer of cultural and ethnic articulation - our first dimension: the ‘Lahu Subject’. The Lahu Subject of this book comprises individual and collective units of analysis, that is to say peoples and people subscribing to the distinctive ethnonym ‘Lahu’. Jakhadtè, who presents himself as a common highland farmer, embodies the individual, discrete unit of analysis embodied by a Lahu villager, whereas his ‘culture community’ represents a collective unit of analysis pertinent to a culturally diversified ethnic group.

Since both the local villager and his highland community have attained identity statuses through identification, we shall place Subjects’ group identity in articulation with, and observation of, significant others. In a first instance, I shall examine Lahu identity construction in the context of designation. I introduce various possibilities to identify, define, and design, the Lahu Subjects, thus offering alternative possibilities to discuss them in relation to both Lahu and non-Lahu others. To validate aggregate designations such as ‘Culture Subject’ I envisage the socially informed, rather than genetically engendered, members of a ‘culture community’, thereby establishing the imperative link between ethnicity and culture. I may briefly explain the ‘cultured’ notion of ethnicity.

At the categorical level, Lahu villagers are cultured Subjects such as everybody else around here: pertinent to a linguistic stock, sanctioned by a set of moral traditions, and creative in weaving patterned concepts into their informed discourse on local developments. What makes them ‘cultured’ at the situated level, is their distinctive self-identification as members of a Lahu group. We shall embrace cultured Subjects, who use aggregate concepts such as ‘common highland farmer’ in representation of their group identity, and who (re-) create their ethnicity concepts amidst an ongoing articulation process that produces new situations and alternative identifications. I have evidenced a villager who speaks to us in representation of his ‘culture community’, a locality I shall situate at the overlap of social, ethnic, and cultural statuses.
For validating exterior designations I shall discuss concepts from my own ‘cultured’ inventory, thus exemplifying multi-valent and ambiguous notions of culture discourse.\(^6\) I shall evidence these overlaps so as to promote a *cumulative understanding* of the Subject. My ethnicity-cum-development research has focused on the discursive agency as a primordial means to convey particular meanings, which I shall discuss by de-constructing aggregate and multi-valent designations in philological terms. While embracing discourse as a vital medium to establish and (re-) construct Lahu group identity, I shall interpret and analyze, as well as create, particular designations. In a second instance, I shall examine Lahu identifications in the context of representation, thus exemplifying means and also processes to represent the culturally informed Subject.

By discussing aggregate designations, such as ‘highland farmer’ or ‘culture subject’ I shall show how these are used for representing the members of Lahu culture communities and sub-groups. While ethno-cultural designations will be situated in the schedules of socio-cultural overlaps, I abstain from using them in evidence of a ‘scheduled tribe’ an ‘incomplete development’, or other future-based concepts, but in evidence of Subjects’ communal extensions. I shall provide evidence of ethno-cultural representations being transmitted across culture communities, whose authors we may also consider as ‘culture agents’ (yet another aggregate designation), which emphasizes the bonded deeds of peoples embodying cultured ‘life worlds’. I shall, in my discussion of these extended domains, represent the ‘common highland farmer’ from northern Thailand as an informed culture agent who effectively transmits Lahu peoples’ communal concerns. Also the non-Lahu promoters of the contested innovation in Jakhadtè’s village must be regarded as informed culture agents, since their teaching practice for Lahu farmers represents the strategic interests of their own culture community.\(^7\) At stake is the development of an informed highland agriculture, which has prompted both sides to promote ‘knowledge’ in their own -culturally defined- terms, and represent each other as ‘knowers’ and ‘non-knowers’.

\(^6\) A designation like ‘articulate identity’ for example, invokes notions of potential *and/or* achievement both of which are habitually used in development discourse.

\(^7\) The writer and the readers of this book are culture agents, as well, as our analysis aims at informing the academic community, composed of individuals within with whom we share a system of meaning.
While each stakeholder of this knowledge construction envisions appropriate action for the benefit of civil society, we acknowledge that these culture agents have some ground in common, namely the object ‘knowledge’. There should thus be no serious obstacle for them to communicate on local schemes of knowledge enhancement, yet, at the critical level of encounter, this common ground may not even be palpable when there are differential needs for negotiating the ownership of ‘knowledge’, or when the habitual regime has been one of mutual avoidance. In this case, the common ground may not even be palpable, as the qualities and statuses of the object ‘knowledge’ are contested but not negotiated.

In a third instance, we look at Lahu Subjects’ identification processes, to be examined in the context of interethnic articulation. To discuss contested representations, I shall consult the local history of power relations—which is a hitherto unrecorded story of encroachment—and provide reasons why stakeholders of state relationships have not communicated with the respectively ‘others’ but merely performed official as well as indigenous rituals of difference. In tracing the quality of habitual and exceptional encounters I shall exemplify Lahu villagers’ partaking in local, national, and regional articulation, thus describing processes that has enhanced, and others that have blocked communications on communal concerns. I shall offer causations and rationales my Lahu research partners have articulated so as to show how alternative concepts have informed villagers’ interethnic encounter situations, and vice versa: how alternative villagers have informed interethnic encounter concepts.

In this dynamic context, Lahu Subjects will be evidenced by their (discursive) agency of systematizing—even symbolically—articulation concepts that endorse and sanction their ‘cultured’ group identity. In focusing on the conceptual agency of articulation, I shall reveal villagers’ perspectives on knowledge exchange, and describe their agency of establishing ‘principle orders’ such as ‘exchange’ for their group identity. To exemplify the ordering principles of Jakhadtè’s regional agency, I evidence both the rationale that inhabits his paper presentation in China, and the identity he introduced in Kunming, namely ‘Lahu-Thai’. I suggest that this self-

8 Jakhadtè’s regional agency, which has already been evidenced, produced a Lahu identification that inspires our debate on ethnicity as part of national belonging.
determined group identification emerged from a multi-sited and simultaneous agency, featuring the inter-related effects of articulation.

Before introducing the object of my study I may briefly highlight the epistemological approach underlying my *process-oriented* research. In order to discuss encounter situations that have triggered Lahu identifications of moral value, I shall describe societal processes in which local villagers’ experience of identification has been signified by Lahu and non-Lahu others, supplying the Subject with alternative statuses. I shall - while exemplifying statuses I (as one of these ‘others’) have discussed with local villagers- describe their agency of systematizing their concerns as a ‘cultured’ (re-) creation of co-modified systems. We shall acknowledge this reflexive agency as a pertinent condition of all sentient beings’ establishing ‘principle orders’, which in the Lahu case are designed for communal survival in the ‘Lahu highlands’. In the same vein, I shall establish evidence of my own systematizing agency, hence my applied politics of *in-situ Ethnology*. In presenting the process and procedures of my participatory field work, I shall examine the ordering principles of the reflexive agency I have discussed among Jakhadtè’s Lahu-Thai consociates.

My research process can be summarized as having observed villagers’ practices, discussed their relationships, listed their experiences, interpreted their concerns, transcribed their discourse, and systematized their perspectives. In discussing my interpretative linkages I shall evidence concepts Lahu peoples have applied for representing their group, next to those I myself have applied for describing them as Lahu, hence the articulation processes qua which identity statuses are being created and negotiated through interpretation. Identity statuses I shall discuss evidence Subjects’ partaking in local, national, and regional identification processes, and comprise the alternative causations and pertinent rationales of villagers’ multisited agency. We shall acknowledge simultaneous effects particular encounters have triggered, such as the ineffective development Jakhadtè simultaneously discussed in China and in the Lahu community.
In illuminating the process of my own identifications, designations, and representations of the Lahu Subject, I indicate the overlaps of my research topics (Lahu ethnicity and development research), at which this book’s methodological approach to knowledge construction is situated. My process-oriented discussion shall focus on both abstraction and interpretation, it explores possible means to present and re-present Lahu villagers and their concerns. I shall offer my terms of participatory field work, as well as co-modified concepts, approaches, and methods, by which to validate my use of Lahu Narratives on Change. I may occasionally highlight the metamorphosis from form to format and from text to texture as an order of principles that is relevant for both my transcription of local narratives, and the debate on participatory, or subject-based, research among the indigenous highland population.

Cultural metamorphosis inhabits, of course, not just the paper Jakhadtè presented in Kunming but also the people he re-presented there, as well as my analysis of multi-sited identity construction. I shall submit subtle as well as striking flows of transformation so as to explicit the itinerary - if scheduled - evaluation process that features habitually contested objects in villagers’ articulation with non-Lahu others. In registering small but significant differences – such as between presentation and representation we shall engage local and non-local knowledge, Lahu and non-Lahu concepts as part of the ‘knowledge construction’ at stake in these processes. Topics featuring prominently in Lahu identifications will be analyzed in terms of the inspirations and pressures local Subjects have accommodated, resisted and created.

**Lahu Object:** My study on ethnicity and development research aims at generating grounded data for a qualitative analysis of societal concerns, hence, my own object, the Lahu Narrative. In order to analyze the quality of developments that have triggered concerns among Lahu highlanders, I shall provide narratives that allow me to present and represent local villagers’ concerns. To this end, I introduce the second dimension of Lahu ethnicity, namely the Lahu Object. The Lahu Object I shall discuss is multi-valent, it comprises physical and meta-physical items that – being relevant to subjects’ ethno-cultural identity construction - are obtained, modified, and

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9 To exemplify the process of knowledge construction, I have already presented a basic condition of discourse, I depicted as a narrative’s transformation from thoughts to voice to words.
expressed to significant others. Similar to the Lahu subject, the Lahu Object entails singular and plural forms meanings I shall trace to illustrate villagers’ diversified and contested ownership expressions, such as the ownership of experiences, concerns, perspectives, discourse, etc. In illustrating identity statuses, that are informed by local villagers’ encounter with significant others, I shall forward their deliberations on Objects of Concern, using their rational logics and indicators to support their explanations.

In a fourth instance, I shall examine Lahu villagers’ discussion of practices and concepts in the context of evaluation, a crucial feature of development research. Group identity, which is a vital concern of my research communities, will be situated at the intersections of community members’ social enterprises and extensions under evaluation. I shall, in focusing on communal concerns, show how villagers’ evaluations contain both commonality and discrepancy, for which I shall establish co-modified indicators. Communal concerns, informing meanings being established, evaluated and re-defined among local community members, will be discussed vis-a-vis their authors’ communicational experiences with other partakers assessing change.

I may briefly describe the Lahu Object as part of an evaluation process I exemplify in chronological -rather than structural or functional- order, thus incorporating the discussion of indicators that serve our understanding of the Subject-Object relationship discussed in terms of concerns. Indigenous development indicators include contemporary and historical markers of change affecting villagers’ exposure to, and exposure of, pressures featuring in the discursive Objects of their speech; hence the claimed validity of social narratives I have transcribed. Contemporary Objects I have found while evaluating historical developments include the Lahu language which is a well known resource in the regional highlands, and yet fading away at the local village level. Lahu language use will be evidenced as a marker of identity construction, or more specifically ‘self-knowledge’ production the reader shall trace in communal visions and actions to this regard.

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10 Farmers from my research sites have articulated their assessments in various contexts, in which group identity excelled as a strategic Object.
The Object of local contestation (e.g. between agricultural ‘extensionists’ and native farmers) will be monitored on its way from discussed, to proposed and requested, and also applied, change. I shall show, in this transit, how Lahu self-knowledge is enhanced and displaced by economic and political developments, not to mention the militarization in some settlement areas, which has more often than not supported the collusion of local and external forces to the disadvantage of Lahu subjects. We shall see from these indigenous evaluations or assessments, how crucial Objects of cultural acumen and have vanished amidst migration and settlement experience in relative proximity to the lowland Tai.  

In a fifth instance, Lahu Objects will be examined in the context of cultural appropriation, which has been my local research partners’ favorite field of discussion. I shall discuss subjects’ agency of cultural appropriation to highlight what exactly is being appropriated or expropriated, thus introducing conceptual Objects. My discussion will offer what Lahu villagers have called ‘Lahu meanings’ of appropriation next to meanings of expropriation claimed to be caused, among others, by official training programs, promoting non-Lahu meanings of development. The concern-based construct I shall offer to the development debate provides stories of social divide that reveal how particular innovations (material, discursive and conceptual) have percolated Lahu group identity in both continuation of, and difference to, past concerns. While evidencing Objects of concern I shall also illustrate stories of encouragement to inspire our empathic reception of communities’ experiential narratives.

In embracing the articulate as well as disarticulate ‘life worlds’ Lahu peoples have inhabited, I shall trace meanings of appropriation by exemplifying notions of ‘cultural self-determination’ I have transcribed for my honorable reader. I shall show why the agency of ‘exchanging’ and ‘sharing’ should be regarded as the main agencies of appropriation. By tracing the ideological articulation of moral systems, I shall discuss whether local subjects (or social actors) can or cannot be identified in absence of their multifold objects. By using subjects’ narratives on communal concerns, such as Jakhadtè’s portrayal of a local learning experience, I shall establish

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11 Although an Object such as ‘self-knowledge’ is distributed over a myriad of regional sub-group polities, it is encoded in pan-Lahu assessments of villagers’ suffering fragmentation.
Lahu narratives as the genuine source for not only local villagers’ assessments, but also my own interpretative analysis of Lahu subjects and their Objects. We shall acknowledge Objects villagers have considered of vital importance for their collective unit’s articulation, be it their cult unit, their highland community, or their indigenous group.

I shall focus on values that farmers from my research sites have attributed to their Objects of appropriation, thus showing how these values—and their aggregate meanings—have signified their ‘cultured’ concerns with interethnic experience. Agricultural innovations introduced in Jakhadtè’s highland community constitute such a contested Object, as innovations at stake have been said to be in discordance with the ‘blessed’ or sacred agriculture practiced since immemorial time. I shall show how the accommodation of non-Lahu knowledge has been monitored and critically assessed by indigenous farmers challenging the aggregate meanings of dominion. Since our subject placed an inappropriate learning experience in contrast to the beneficial learning experience he expected to obtain from his film-making, I may, in order to later discuss benefit as a major concern of Lahu morality, briefly exemplify the link between two objects of concern, namely agricultural innovations and interethnic relationships. (Chupinit 1989)

Highland farmers from my research sites have been requested, since the mid-eighties, to comply with a combined force of governmental agency pressing them to abandon their ancestral cultivation schemes, desist of their traditional income source, refrain from cutting timber, lay down their hunting praxis, and engage permanent cash crop agriculture. In other words, Lahu peoples had to expropriate the strategic pillars of their self-sufficient survival regime in order to appropriate an alternative regime that, unknown and uninvited, has triggered alternative articulations. Cultural appropriations of contested Objects describe a pertinent agency that is, of course, not constricted to Lahu peoples but practiced by all groupings of civil society; also my discourse offers cognates such as ‘communal concern’ to produce definitions of Lahu Objects.

12 The situation which Jakhadtè simultaneously discussed in China and in the Lahu community, has caused, for instance, his individual agency of ‘transporting’ local farmers’ concerns to an international audience, and thus take active part in the debate of societal transformation.
In a sixth instance, Lahu Objects will be interpreted in the context of morality, for which I shall examine the negotiation of spiritual values villagers have attributed to ‘culturally appropriate’ ‘self-knowledge’ while providing pertinent reasons for their respective contestations of knowledge definitions afforded by non-Lahu others. The crucial issue with morality lies, of course, in the power with which expropriations have been made effective and appropriations can be made effective. Conceptual Objects to be examined include Lahu peoples’ contemporary as well as historical concerns with developments affecting their groups’ survival regimes. These shall be discussed at the hands of social memory where villagers’ agency of exchanging and sharing experiences, information, and perspectives, to be anchored in spiritual and also ideological terms. I shall exemplify memories of challenging developments I have transcribed, and evidence villagers’ responses to the habitual, if counterproductive development praxis of significant others having established dominion over their place.

In Kunming, Jakhadtè described a common face of development, thereby qualifying as inappropriate the experience local farmers were gaining from agricultural training courses conducted in the mountains. While these courses offered important knowledge on cash crops farmers were asked to produce, we embrace ‘knowledge’ and ‘learning’ as strategic Objects not just of communal concern but of communal survival, thus acknowledging their contestation as part of the local Politics of Power. Objects of communal survival also include the maintenance of cultural institutions which are as well known in the highlands as the Lahu language, hence the pan-Lahu concern with cultural encroachment and economic pressures furthering the spiritual dispossession of indigenous mandates. I shall show how indigenous institutions and authorities have been devaluated by either, exclusivist and assimilatory politics.

Before turning to introduce a third dimension of Lahu ethnicity, I may briefly present the morality of interethnic relationships between Lahu farmers and Thai trainers. In the above mentioned extension scheme, indigenous farmers learned how to apply chemical substances, such as artificial fertilizers and pesticides they would
and could not afford by their own means. Interethnic relationships commented in 
this case were assessed in function of a projected outcome from agricultural trainings, 
namely the efficient transfer of knowledge on new farming techniques that official 
trainers were expected to secure. Local farmers established relationships with these 
Thai culture agents in order to obtain best results for the commercialization of new 
crops, which locally stationed ‘development officials’ marketed for them. Villagers 
did not aspire to attain amicable relationships with agricultural specialists who “follow 
another system and show no regard for the sanctity of our fields and plants”, so my 
research partner Nakü. While in this case farmers perpetuated the social distance 
displayed by Thai officials, I shall also examine cases of constructive affiliations, 
which I shall exemplify in the context of interpretation. For the last decade or so, 
economic concepts that were promoted for villagers from my research communities, 
were interpreted as political rather than economic or cultural re-arrangements, as 
farmers started to accommodate Thai peoples’ values.

Even though indigenous concepts of exchanging and sharing have more often 
been frustrated than enhances, I exemplify processes of constructive affiliation, such 
as in the following case. Among the officially promoted concepts there was a module 
that suggested Lahu villagers’ accommodation of eco-tourism, an economic concept 
transmitted again by means of training courses. In this scheme, villagers were advised 
to retain their ceremonial practices and their harmonious bonds with nature so as to 
attract non-Lahu visitors to their place, especially in times of their New Year and New 
Rice festivals. While home-stay tourism was promoted as an innovative option, 
workshop trainers’ interest for cultural details, family situations and health statuses 
facilitated the establishment of personal relationships between them and the Lahu 
trainees.

13 These substances desecrated indigenous concepts of plant and soil treatment. They did not match 
farmers’ interpretative system, in which human agency of cultivation is granted by spiritual allowance.
14 As an intermediate effect of change villagers at my research sites have felt submitted to various 
schemes of ‘poppy replacement policies’ promoting not only alternative crops and farming systems but 
also alternative culture values, which were however found to conflict with communal values. A related 
effect was that implied literacy was seen to create contested identity definitions which triggered 
processes of social division.
Asked to cooperate in the production of a small, illustrated tourist hand-out, Lahu graduates from these courses have described feeling that not only they (as participants) but also their indigenous culture was being acknowledged. Relationships crafted with the Thai trainers of the eco-tourism scheme were not assessed in terms of an economic outcome, like in the above example, but in terms of friendly and trustworthy exchange of views. We acknowledge that officials promoting eco-tourism approached Lahu villagers quite differently from officials promoting pesticides’ use: while the first subscribed to the paradigm of self-sufficiency, the second subscribed to the paradigm of growth. We also acknowledge that the power to impose or resist, accommodate or control economic innovations is closely linked to the political context in which communication takes place. My discussion on Objects of different as well as changing value will focus on villagers’ partaking in alternative culture systems, including their system of interpretation.

I shall, by deconstructing oral and symbolic representations, exemplify both Lahu-cultured and Thai-cultured idioms local villagers have applied in their definitions and interpretations of dependent and sovereign developments. Acknowledging the experiential discrepancies of stakeholders, we shall consider the concerns of Lahu community members as being different from those of official development promoters and other non-Lahu stakeholder of villagers’ ethnic and cultural transformation. In the same vein we shall embrace farmers’ innovative possibilities to transcend social difference, and attain power by which to establish a base of shared reflection, shared understanding, and shared analysis with non-Lahu others such as myself. The time-space axis, on which I shall place the simultaneity of these societal processes, will be tailored to cover the conceptual means I shall use for analyzing Lahu subjects and their Objects at the inter-phase of power and innovation.

15 The ‘cartoon dictionary’ featured the tribal costumes of various minority groups, including the Lahu Na Sheleh, and basic words enabling tourists to establish basic communication with their Lahu host families.

16 Our difference in conceiving the Lahu subject resides, of course, in our variant acquaintanceship with the case, and thus in the differently informed possibilities to identify the communal concerns expressed by Jakhadté and his Lahu consociates.
To exemplify this analytic location I have first introduced a discursive Object, namely Jakhadtè’s narrative, and deconstructed it for our consideration of both, local participation in processes of state development and nationhood construction, and elements that inform our interpretation of the speech act in a non-Lahu place.

**Lahu Space:** Having mentioned the time-space axis, I introduce Lahu Space as a third dimension of Lahu ethnicity. Space will be examined as a cross-sector topic of this book, thus its separate place in the title. My discussion of Space will feature a diversity of concepts I use to show Lahu peoples’ persistence in the civil society of the Greater Mekong Sub-region, now called GMS.\(^{17}\) In illuminating a terrain of great diversity I shall conceptualize meanings of Space, such as ‘body’, ‘locus’ or ‘place’, next to conceptual notions of territorial and cultural belonging such as ‘habitat’ or ‘domain’. Contemporary meanings of Space evidence a reality that is crafted by multi-sited and multi-vocal identities, and shows in villagers’ inter-relational agency, discourse, and perspectives. Having briefly exemplified villagers’ learning practices at the overlap of agricultural innovations and development policies, I anticipate my use of a similar schedule for analyzing their accommodations of state-relationships at the overlaps of governance, health and education.

In a seventh instance, I shall examine local representations of Lahu Space in the context of cohabitation, thus discussing a socio-cultural habitat my research partners have acknowledged as theirs and other highland groups, namely the highlands of the Greater Mekhong Sub-region. In discussing a ‘culture habitat’, which can no longer be accommodated in ancestral terms, and yet, is present in local peoples’ discourse I shall discuss how Lahu peoples’ belonging to the multi-ethnic highland society has persisted independent of its thinkers’ citizenship status, and often in absence of alternative definitions naming and re-naming the peoples, their region, their country, their border district, etc. Lahu concepts of spatial belonging can be described in ‘galactic’ terms, which I shall use to present the combination of historical (experienced, memorized) and cultural (physical, spiritual, social, political) forces

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\(^{17}\) Map 1 (page 19) indicates some locations where I have ‘collected’ Lahu narratives, thus evidencing narratives’ places of origin in the mountainous habitat of a Tai-speaking region.
affecting the static and dynamics of Lahu polities in the region.\textsuperscript{18} Local representations shall be examined in a conceptual space, in which pan-Lahu identifications are created in spite and in ignorance of natural and political borders, thus describing the conceptual extensions of a language that has pervaded the region’s highland population since earlier periods. In describing the articulate agency of co-habitation I shall validate the concept of ‘galactic’ identity.

To describe the pluralistic relationships in the highland society I shall also apply ‘cultured’ concepts of Space. Besides the conceptual galaxy of scattered polities, Lahu Space also defines the political locus of subjects’ interethnic articulation, which will be discussed as part of a co-habitation process that informs, and is informed by, villagers’ past and present experiences with external power holders. Lahu peoples’ civil society processes have mainly been contested between Lahu speakers from the highlands and Tai speakers from the lowlands, both perpetuating territorial identities in terms of possible exchange practices. ‘Cultured’ Space will thus be discussed for situating the highland cultures in difference to that of the lowlands. Since villagers’ accommodation of alternative systems includes their negotiations with the State, I shall, in an eighth instance, examine villagers’ spatial concerns in the context of dominion. Definitions of Space I shall offer, exemplify Lahu villagers’ exclusions and inclusions of spatial terms such as boundaries or zones (including those invented at non-Lahu places) which are anchored in the meanings villagers’ attribute to these objects of concern. I shall reveal from Lahu relationship discourse, that shifting Space definitions also include the mention of time, as I may evidence by quoting my research partner Nakü, 53 years old:

“\textit{We don’t need borders and border police. They teach us where we belong. But we know that already, because they (the borders and the border police) came much later to this place. They may as well tell us all wrong.}”

\textsuperscript{18} We have already traced the galactic space for Jakhadte’s presentation of a local problem, by acknowledging his proposal in China for an alternative knowledge development in Thailand.
Map 1: “Lahu Landscape”. Vertical arrows show localities referenced in Lahu narratives; horizontal arrows: show selected sites where Lahu narratives were collected. (Image source: Encarta Earth by Day Images. Microsoft).
The above map shows a physical landscape with Tibet to the Northwest of Lahu people’s cultural habitat. Establishing various meanings of Space, I shall, in my discussion on conceptual articulation focus on villagers’ possibilities to communicate their perspectives across Space, namely to significant others from both Lahu and non-Lahu ‘places’. By presenting the findings of my grounded field research, I shall situate identity concepts my local research partners have voiced in their discussions of developments in place. These findings reveal that villagers have established strategic self-concepts through their local relationships with significant others, and also by differentiating between self-managed, or autonomous decision-making processes, and processes guided or imposed by external forces. I shall regard Lahu Space as the locus of villagers’ articulation with alternative power domains based outside their cultural system, and yet attempting to gain control over their communal domains.

In this context of dominion, I shall discuss villagers’ experiences of pressure and encroachment, formerly attained through direct communication, and now increasingly often through indirect communication. Local definitions of Lahu Space entail aggregate concepts such as ‘village domain’ or ‘home land’, which have emerged from an ancestral repository. In showing, from local discourse, how former experiences have mineralized into spatial perspectives I shall discuss these perspectives, and thereby validate my own use of aggregate concepts of Space. In a ninth, and last instance for the moment we look at the body of Space, which will be examined in terms of an imagined space, hence the discursive realm of social construction. Cultural autonomy, for instance, is such a realm, clearly showing in Lahu speech, which is rich in metaphorical, paraphrased, and subject-less statements that obtain shared meaning through discursive reflection.

I shall offer villagers’ certainty of an envisioned place, to show where -and where not- communal concerns could be negotiated with significant others. Of course, this cultural autonomy is embodied by the subject, not reducing such a vision to his or her village community and its communal boundaries. Rather, we shall see that the aim of Lahu self-knowledge is extended to representative groups communicating local concerns across national borders and at meetings and forums. In that they are established on the base of imagined and contested demarcations, boundaries of ethnic Space are as contentious as autonomous designations to discuss. I shall quote
villagers’ memories to evidence how the concept of cultural autonomy has inspired, in oblivion of national borders, villagers’ discourse on physical, social, conceptual, and spiritual notions of Lahu identity. In addition to presenting villagers’ systemic meanings of a galactic domain of Lahu autonomy, I shall discuss both the locus and the body that Space represents for the Lahu borderland population and its ethnocultural identifications across the political divide, thus showing how autonomous identifications merge into an ‘articulate locus’ with a ‘defended body’ of identity.

In order to describe this merger I shall portray Lahu Space as peoples’ social spot, where their agency, purposes, commitments, and other ‘sociables’ are anchored next to those of other culture agents partaking in the process. Villagers’ narratives have described Lahu Space as an unbounded extension, limited only by their possibilities to (re-) generate and communicate their self-determined systems, and negotiate outsiders’ possibilities to articulate their own suggestions. Hence, the gradual (and sometimes abrupt) loss of cultural autonomy that brings about a culturally divided body of society and socially divided communities I shall describe. As for myself, I have suggested that although the loss of cultural autonomy has affected Lahu villagers’ (ethnic) group identity, no defeat should be spelled out as long as community members engender the creation of alternative strategies to redefine and rehabilitate their communal negotiations in alternative contexts.19

My suggestion to the honorable reader is that we ought to read politics of identity, politics of power, and politics of space, in all ethnic identification, Lahu and non-Lahu, which is why I may propose ‘ethno-cultural’ and ‘cultured’ rather than ‘ethnic’ designations. To decode these dynamics takes time and a participatory approach, it means to involve participant villagers’ interpretations without any ‘but’ and ‘if’. In anticipating a more thorough discussion of these proceedings I wish to mention a module of my participatory field research. In order to interpret meanings of

19 In this context, we should note that the local experience Jakhadtè took to China is as much a part of the transformation process as are the thoughts he exposed to the non-Lahu audience there, and the written words that are now anonymously conveyed to the readers of his text. Local response to cultural erosion is, I argue, negotiated by everybody at my research sites, at any one place they transit, and at any one moment they happen to have an opportunity to do so. It shows in the habitual idioms used, discursive and non-discursive, to define their place in society.
cultural transformation in place, I engaged an experimental research that featured ‘Shared Reflection’, which is, of course, a communal object not just of Lahu community but the academic community, as well, constantly requiring situated tools for the culture research conducted by its members. As there won’t be much space for a philosophical debate, the participatory tools, modules and approaches I have applied will be discussed in methodological terms. However, I trust to be allowed to also outline the ethical underpinnings that inform qualitative (not quantitative) analysis of our Culture Science in the making, and thus in ‘Politics of Change’.

Before posing and answering the first question of this book I briefly summarize my introductory session for the three ethnicity dimensions I have presented here. My line of departure was that Change, resulting from guided and un-guided processes, has affected and also benefited Lahu highland farmers. As its effects on farmers’ interactions with non-Lahu culture agents are regarded of crucial importance for culture communities, I have highlighted some contexts in which I shall discuss their respective assessments. I have claimed that cultural transformation among the Lahu of northern Thailand is now occurring amidst imposed livelihood systems, in which individual articulation has become an important option, though not all community members at my research sites have felt urged to participate in practical and conceptual innovations said to benefit their community. At the same time, articulation processes have also implied Lahu peoples’ negotiations at other places. Backed by Jakhadè’s exposure in Kunming of a communal concern, I have argued that because of unsustainable or ineffective (not incomplete) developments, community members of the Lahu society now recur to discussing their concerns abroad their socio-political battlefields.

By highlighting various overlaps I have suggested that Lahu group consciousness arises from processes of cultural creation, erosion, and rehabilitation - all of which are of communal concern -, and situated villagers’ struggle to negotiate and regain control over their increasingly dependent lives while engaging diversified strategies in response to the loss of former self-reliance. As there seems to be insufficient communication on intended change I have deconstructed a meaning of agricultural development, and introduced my examination of ‘cultured’ subjects, objects, and space. I have anticipated my further use of Lahu narratives which shall be
interpreted and reconstructed as an expression of local farmers’ concerns. In designing villagers’ traditional agency of sharing and exchanging communal concerns I have exemplified discrepant experiences, namely the relationship experience with official extension personnel with whom neither of these statuses was attained, as different from the experience with extension personnel with whom both were possible. Having just mentioned ‘shared reflection’ as a module of my field work I should add that besides my integration of villagers’ suggestions and perspectives also the questions they generated were incorporated in this study.

I shall later discuss in which ways this option has contributed to my transcriptions of Lahu subjects’ historical and contemporary concerns, and here reveal only that some of the questions they posed informed and inspired my interpretations more than many of their statements. Questions villagers shared with me enabled me to monitor my own understanding of the communal rationales that are entailed, if not sophisticatedly encoded or even enshrined in their narratives on “Lahu ethnicity amidst Change”. While the following question is neither part of this topic nor part of villagers concern, it exemplifies, for our further analysis, the applied meaning of ‘shared reflection’ I may now extend to my readers.

**Question 1:** How are Lahu narratives on changing identifications transposed for the reader?

My short answer is: by tailoring a systemic approach to fit the interpretation process. While the cross-cultural production, collection, and use of qualitative data require a considerable interpretation effort on the part of the field researcher, we must also acknowledge the considerable effort rendered on the side of local villagers. In order to not only transcribe Lahu narratives for my local discussions but also transpose them for the reader, I opted for both, fully embracing villagers’ own terms of communication (even when I would not fully understand them), and consistently asking them to explain their statements (while giving them feed-back on my learning process). This basic rule follows, of course, the orders of rudimentary possibilities, which must be discussed in terms of a grounded methodology rather than ambitious theories.
I may claim, however, that even the most rudimentary methodology can result in new theories, if the interpretation processes is made transparent. By ensuring this procedure I could transcribe, transpose, and translate these locally discussed narratives for readers’ own interpretation process. Since local information entails experiences of changing relationships villagers have reported and discussed with me, not with someone unknown to them, the second basic rule I have applied is to acknowledge that all social narratives can illuminate meanings of transformation, yet not all of their meanings are meant to be made evident. I shall focus on Lahu narratives that describe effects which can be transposed for the reader without compromising villagers’ need for discretion. While the local interpretation has enabled me to present, on the base of narratives, Lahu villagers’ partaking in, or witnessing of, particular developments, I should mention a third rule, which consists of tracing the overlaps and intersections together with local research partners.

The approach I have chosen for studying both Lahu ethnicity and participatory research possibilities assumes that local villagers’ group identity implicates their use of cultural resources, spiritual institutions, and discursive dispositions, contestation of which occurs at various intersections of their social space. Each intersection informs - and is simultaneously informed by - cultural agency, including practices and concepts. Each place implies different opportunities to be considered and statuses to be created. Having formulated my basic codes for transposition, I should now list some activities I have engaged in the process of ‘shared reflection’ I am proposing to extend to my honorable readers. In addition to the obligatory shifts between academic and indigenous concepts, which I shall later examine, I have had the fortunate opportunity to absolve following schedule:

1. identify three dimensions of Lahu ethnicity, namely people (or subjects), culture (or objects), and place (or space), and secure their shared -if analogically shared- meanings
2. trace communal concerns in various components of Lahu ethnicity such as experience (or encounter), exposure (or revelation), exchange (or articulation), expression (or appearance)
3. transcribe social narratives on any and all of these concerns whilst discussing them in the context of transformation (or change)

4. establish objects of communal concern in various fields, namely pertinence (or ownership), pervasion (or extension), and persistence (or continuity)

5. translate (from Lahu and Thai into English) social narratives that have been discussed and interpreted in place

6. evidence my locally validated understanding and incorporate my subjective observations

Developments and Development

The intention of this study is to give inputs for devising development policies that support sustainable and culturally suitable articulation schemes between Lahu communities and non-Lahu agents -including state officers such as education and health personnel- and civil society organizations’ institutions. The study contextualizes ethnic identification purposes in the challenging articulation between indigenous and state strategies; envisaging communicational improvements in terms of cohabitation –not segregation- of people; and culture group statuses in terms of articulation -not assimilation- of identities. In order to envisage this aim, a self-governed monitoring process would have to be encouraged among the most disadvantaged groups suffering from the most systematic degradation of their livelihoods and identities. This process would primarily focus on indigenous Lahu community groups presently making place for hydropower development, mining enterprise and commercial deforestation in the upper Salween, Shweli and Mekong watersheds, areas now violently exposed to both grand style investments and human rights abuses.

While the political situation in some of these areas does not foresee any participatory form of process monitoring, and non-local subjects have been restrained from visiting these sites, it is imperative to consider small-step initiatives and micro-level research on communication processes. By these self-help projects we may discuss Lahu peoples’ alienating experiences of forced displacement, labor conscription and human trafficking as forms of suffering. I have argued that it is
important to afford communication between local villagers and state officials. However, in many cases, state officials are either not in service of the local people but rather in service of those evicting them, or they have no skills to develop understanding of these processes. While the strategic and arbitrary character of managing cultural and ethnically defined livelihood systems has not been sufficiently reflected, respective strategies have often been misplaced.

I shall here focus on changing state relationships and Lahu peoples, social self-space, where culture management has become a serious matter of concern. In placing Lahu identity concerns within habitual and eventual dynamics of ‘coexistence with other languages’ (a Lahu Na Sheleh concept) I shall point out situations and processes by which cultural and ethnic bases of identification are unequally requested, thus infringing on the right to multi-cultural cohabitation. In order to discuss local people’s arguments regarding their social space and identity bases, the following sections discuss social trajectories and the values Lahu ethnicity obtains throughout intercultural articulation processes with the state. Portraying aspects of local peoples’ past and also contemporary history, the study follows the foot steps of identification processes vis-à-vis Lahu Na Sheleh people strategically protecting themselves more than other Lahu subgroups from alienating experiences, but because of their comparative reclusion have been less articulate.

In order to discuss local peoples’ value system in the context of state relationships I assess Lahu ethnicity as being constructed both in contact with the mainstream culture and also within the indigenous live worlds of the highland society. The thesis’ focus on the relevance of intercultural communication schemes is to provide information on identity concepts regarding situations that procure alternative identifications of Lahu peoples’ culture space and community domains. Information gathered is based on social narratives and other circumstantial statements concerning indigenous Lahu people’s state relationships. I shall briefly exemplify experiences of pressure I construct at the hands of Lahu villagers’ valuation, thereby focusing on their possibilities to steer developments pervading their peripheral place, and to leave identity statuses behind while articulating with more interconnected agency. Lahu identity statuses arising from processes of eviction, exploitation or repression, reflect variously problematic combinations of environmental degradation and human
trafficking, forced displacement and illegal labor migration; hazardous tourism and child prostitution are the most drastic ones. These combined effects have been observed from ‘abroad’ local communities’ culture systems, and although efforts have been made to enhance communal participation in development programs - i.e. in drug eradication - neither these Lahu stakeholders nor their respective assessments have been sufficiently acknowledged as relevant sources of information.

In some areas, official communication with civil society’s indigenous member communities is practically non-existent and in others no state services are planned to be extended at all. Accordingly, communications from the side of the local population have been ignored or explained away with shallow arguments, the most common of which is that indigenous villagers lack formal education, informed institutions and language skills required for discussing state-sponsored developments. In Southeast Asia, people-centered developments and concepts thereof have been linked to the technologies of power described by Foucault (1992) and Bourdieu (1984). These technologies have used script as a medium of communication and control. However, script has also facilitated processes of empowerment and liberation from these external controls.

In Vietnam, the Romanization of oral scripts meant a popular alternative to the Chinese script accessible only for a small elite. In China, people-centered developments happened to uproot imperial power structures, a concept that has traditional meaning in the paradigm of Mao Dsedong’s revolution. In Thailand, where western development models stretched infrastructure and also conceptual roots among rural communities, people-centered developments have become a leading paradigm in the last thirty years. After some failures scores of academics showed criticized these programs, which continued being externally guided development efforts with unilaterally designed goals (Peter Hinton 1989; Chupinit Kesmanee 1992; Don McCaskill and Ken Kampe 1997). There is now a more systematic observation on the effects that stem from external development and aid programs designed for highland

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20 These clichés have been challenged in the eighties when participatory development became an illusive buzzword for community-based initiatives; especially those being funded by western donors generally committed to democratic forms of decision-making. Yet, calls for participatory planning, problem-solving and decision-making ran out of steam while losing ground to the economic imperatives of global markets relentlessly pushing ahead.
Moreover, there are general revisions of NGO experience and lessons learned from development projects in the hills (David Korten 1987; Tawin Chotichaipiboon 1997; Hagen Dirksen 1997, to name a few) which inform us about problems arising in these schemes. Government officials realizing community-based work in highland communities should thus be warned. Yet, they generally lack appropriate tools to conduct effective participatory assessments (Kenneth King 1989). These agents should be provided with constructive suggestions for the development of approaches that are in accordance with perspectives onto self-determination as expressed by indigenous communities. Yet, suggestions should not only meet ethnic highlanders’ perspectives. They will have to fit into both socio-cultural problem solving strategies (David Korten 1986) and the administrative scheme of community management. Now there is an ever more organized concern among indigenous peoples, reflected in diverse forums of national or regional extension (Asian Indigenous Peoples Pact 1995, IWGIA 2000). At the same time, there are more authentic views published by members of ethnic minority groups (Deleu Choopoh 1997; Prasert Trankanan 1997; Jakhadtè 2002) speaking up for their ethnic groups’ social interest.

In the context of globalization there is increasing concern regarding people’s cultural identification – that is to say their attachment to culturally defined actions and perceptions. Impacts arising from fast transformation processes include changing statuses of cultural identity and social mobilization which have often been paired with conflict and violent action (A.Appadurai 1998; S.Tambiah 1989; J.Friedmann 1984), thus drawing comparable concerns. The relationship between cultural identification, invigorated group processes, and governmental attempts to obtain control over culture domains, are all receiving more attention than ever before. Yet, while these processes appear comparable to a certain degree, they may not be explained by the single phenomenon called globalization. This all-encompassing term for the inter-relatedness of contemporary transformation processes has no explanatory value of its own.

Moreover, when using this *passe-par-tous* we must not divert our attention from the fact that cultural crisis and transformation are accommodated in different communities (Leonard Frank 1986; Elawat Chandraprasert 1997; Research and Development Center 1997).
ways, according to localities (region, country, settlement, etc.) and actor groups such as members of government, civil society, cultural diaspora, and so on. These rapid processes of transformation have alienated a great deal of world citizens, whereas others have benefited from them; and the Lahu people are no exception. Since particular responses seem to occur in accordance with culturally defined parameters they require closer examination. I shall approach cultural identification acts at the hands of encounter situations described in the Southeast Asian highland region. The concept of encounter allows me to address complex processes of change that have affected the identity and integrity of ethnic minority groups such as the Lahu. While this concept implies the notion of unexpected change it does not exclude people’s voluntary, if conditional, participation in concrete actions.

In the Southeast Asian highlands, indigenous nations, groupings and communities have persisted at the margins of modernizing mainstream societies. They have been applying their own governance, ecologically relevant wisdom, and organizational skills since long before nation states established their contemporary boundaries and central conservation policies. Indigenous communities ensured their self-sufficient livelihood systems in the mountainous habitats, namely the southern extensions of the Himalayan forest ranges. Backed by their respective leadership institutions, these population groups’ formerly maintained more or less autarchic culture systems that persisted under repeated waves of warfare, and in absence of modern nation states’ forestry or welfare departments’ official space politics. I have already discussed the linkages between ethnicity and state derived from my field work. As I have anticipated in the initial part of this book, there are various commitments of Lahu ethnicity, out of which I have chosen to examine articulation and development experience.

We have seen, in this context, how these topics’ overlap, as nation state construction and habitual culture praxis are inter-related in a most striking way, thus suggesting our consideration of ‘imagined communities’. While the nation state is a community of ‘cultured’ citizens, and ethnicity a community of ‘culture’ villagers, both these communities constitute mutually intelligible referent systems. Their mutual references encode social actors’ cultural agency and thought, and also ideological models emerging from, and catering to, variously exclusive and thus contested forms
of tribalism and nationalism. (B.Anderson 1991) I shall now discuss these constructs as embodied by subjects’ social agency, using the cultural medium as the primary tool of analysis. This allows me to show how both have consolidated their respective support systems of socio-cultural relevance. Indigenous actors in place may find that these principles are opposed to each other, especially when being expropriated from their ethnic group identity in order to gain membership as state citizens.  

It is a question of prioritizing statuses; some may gain social status in their indigenous community while fighting for becoming members of a particular state system. Alternatively, some are to gain identity status for fighting against this expropriation. While a combination of influences propels power dynamics, in these processes the state represents a purely ideological matter that emphasizes political proceedings’ legitimacy out of an invented tradition of commonality – called culture. Ethnicity, instead, is composed of both natural and social references, emphasizing cultural bonds’ legitimacy out of an experienced and thus primordial, ancestral genealogy. These conditions bear significant consequences for peoples’ emotional and spiritual attachments to respective membership and the derived statuses. Since both constructs ethnicity and state, bear important meanings regarding indigenous actors’ sense of (a) cultural belonging, (b) spatial continuity and (c) identity extension, their commonalities are discussed vis-à-vis three concepts. I briefly define pertinence, persistence and pervasion in the overlap of ethnicity and state, and thereby derive meanings of, and for, Lahu ethnicity’s spatial domains:

- Firstly, both constructs -state and ethnicity- are models that have formative influence on how social actors may, or may not, conceive of themselves in difference to those who don’t pertain to their respective cultural unit of reference -their culture community- within a given nation state, providing a space of belonging. Hence, the concept of pertinence.
- Secondly, within both constructs’ embodied realities, cultural pertinence is used as a prime tool with which to materialize the continuity of a collective

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21 They may, for instance, gain social status as citizens only if renouncing to their tribal identity. Importantly, when being disposed of cultural attachments across a particular state border because of their ethnicity, indigenous people may have important arguments with regards to identity statuses.
identity model, thereby constituting respective reference systems’ dynamics to maintain these models throughout space and time. Hence, the concept of persistence.

- Thirdly, in order for state and ethnicity models to persist, institutions of political and spiritual mandate are required, which sanction and also enhance particular proclamations of members’ formal and informal culture group associations; thereby guiding ways through which social agency can position itself. Hence, the concept of pervasion.

**Pertinence:** In that state and ethnicity are constructed models for cultural belonging they provide room for enacting and thus conceptualizing spatial as well as temporal rituals of cultural ownership. This refers to those arrangements actors claim as their culture space. This self-space is represented and also defined in terms of territory -or culturally encoded habitat- which through inhabitation becomes members’ pertinent identity domain. Next to spatial notions, this sense of belonging, or pertinence, is strategically anchored in notions of time and space, thereby impregnating social actors’ sense of historical commonality. These temporal notions manifest themselves in respective agency’s social memory and culturally encoded discourse on the past, whereby traditions are remembered.

While discrete and also imagined community members obtain their identity status throughout acts of remembering, inventing and constructing cultural concepts of ‘home’, the pertinence of culture habitats is of primordial importance for ethnicity and state. By projecting cultural forms of pertinence, these constructs enhance actors’ states of awareness and possible consciousness or deliberations thereof, namely because they offer relevant strategies of self-orientation for their respective cohabitants. Moreover, by institutionalizing culture group membership, both constructs’ policy arrangements cater to members’ sense of belonging, which is manifested in actors’ partaking in particular traditions and discourses. These patterns offer patronage over actors’ means of self-representation, so that cultural pertinence only obtains value throughout socially competent membership performance. Conditional attachments arising are a strategic means to gain (a) access to, (b)
ownership of, and (c) control over, cultural systems’ references that intentionally inform social agency.

Self-determined ownership claims to procedures of ethnicity and state are interesting for various reasons. According to positions and perspectives taken in this regard, one may consider members’ partaking in social eventualities as acts of either subordination or self-determination. One may criticize the ideological character of these models so as to reveal processes by which images of pertinence obtain politically significant—and yet contentious—meanings for culture communities in place. By discussing cultural pertinence as these models’ static expression, we may argue that they promote nothing more than the chauvinism of a parochial or nationalistic ideology that obstructs the expression of a plural or liberal agency. Actors’ use of more ample grounds on which to interrelate, articulate and negotiate with other parties would be subdued by the dominance of imposed concepts of collectivity.

When we examine how these models’ particular linkages foment friction and culturally contested attitudes among partakers (the members of political and civil society), we can observe the conditional character of cultural attachment, belonging, or pertinence. The conditional character of pertinence informs the politically important base of civil actors’ cultural autonomy and their emancipation from alienating schemes of dominance. This autonomy of identity would rather be grounded in the form and content of security upon which both ethnic community and state members rely so as to obtain control over their own lives’ proceedings, including, of course, necessary adaptation efforts involving culture.

When regarding cultural membership’s opportunities for alternative engagement with other systems, one may argue that ethnic, cultural and national self-determination not only promulgates exclusivist terms of inter-relation, and thus offer few possibilities for non-members to request partaking in the respective systems. Membership conditions would thus reduce respective actors’ pronouncements to a self-contained form of participation, probably resulting in little interest to explore, or engage in, alternative concepts of cultural ownership. On the other hand, when emphasizing the political importance of cultural pertinence for intercultural, inter-ethnic and international communication, particular membership schemes could be
used so as to hold at bay the processes of cultural encroachment, and subsequent subjugation schemes. Self-determination can be obtained by means of a broader or more solid negotiation base. Cultural pertinence of social processes would then mean a self-determined group membership that enhances social consciousness, identity perceptions and conceptualization of the strategic identity domain.

**Persistence:** Membership arrangements are strategically provided and sanctioned by state and indigenous communities’ respective institutions and the every-day schemes of a more or less pertinent cultural agency that is embodied in civil or indigenous societies’ system. In that these constructs (state and ethnicity) are not only models of partaking but also of continuity or persistence, they provide participant actors with a collectively achieved negotiation power indebted to a significant past. This commitment is anchored in a significant though contested space of the society, thereby institutionalizing notions of continuity or persistence.

While it may be argued that local actors traditional proceedings are - or can be- validated only for some kind of representation of the past but not the future, this time-space compression would again deny the adaptability of cultural conditions to the advantage of local actors. People’s perceptions of themselves in relation to other spaces and other times would only create a condition for institutional dominance over their own conceptualizations. Furthermore, since cultural settings, logics and ideologies are institutionally enshrined in both ethnicity and state, we may criticize that social actors’ reference to identity, space and time becomes a normative matter of arbitrary manipulation, in which actors are coerced into obedience, and compliance. This obedience to, and compliance with, rigid mind frames would allow for no other than the institutionally prescribed forms of historical consciousness.

An alternative view to this stasis would, instead, stress and legitimize the continuity of particular traditions, because these traditions have the potential to safeguard strategies of cultural continuity or persistence as a threshold of collective identity action. Since these traditions provide relevant –if symbolic- definitions of changing perspectives, the traditional schemes they provide can also be regarded as safe zones from where shifting arrangements and perspectives can part while continuously re-constructing threads of continuity according to changing experiences. This persistence would then cater to the political needs of social actors or members to
redefine and delineate new perspectives in continuation of, or also in comparison with, traditional forms of cultural pertinence and persistence. This leads us to the discussion of cultural extensions in an imagined space, such as a culture habitat, where the meanings of identity are possibly extended throughout local communities’ socio-cultural pertinence, persistence and pervasion.

**Pervasion:** In that ethnicity and state are constructed models of social membership endurance and also other loyalties to continuity, they reflect social actors’ networks and these actors symbolical confirmation of these purposes. The symbolic matter of both state and ethnicity extends throughout social network propagation, or pervasion, signifying notions of political agency’s extension. Cultural pervasion is embodied by actors who intentionally evoke these system’s cultural sanctions; although sanctions may also be pervaded by those who do not -or not entirely- agree with these arrangements. By extending political purposes of identity in terms of strategic content, these political extensions of cultural self-determination make an effort to establish self-referent meaning on their members. Moreover, the social agency representing ethnicity and state makes institutionally based -and also circumstantial and spontaneous- use of the cultural medium, thereby turning it into the prime tool of social extension in place.

To this end, the extension of cultural identity or pervasion constitutes the social space in which culture communities survive and their imagined institutions expand control over particular time-space definitions that are validated or refuted throughout discursive details encoding cultural meanings of the respective agency in space. One may assume that cultural extension or pervasion is bound to meet and create contested meanings with regard to this space’s boundaries which would not allows for community or state members to shift direction. For not only membership performance and social space, but also their respective meanings would be subject of institutional control and dominance.

Yet, one may also consider that while strategic identity would pervade by acknowledging normative forms and contents of political importance so as to establish comparative value (or at least analogies) to alternative spaces. In this case one may want to argue that meanings of cultural space pervade throughout the embodied extensions of both significantly collective networks in society and also
throughout individual materialization of alternative meanings to this regard. Pioneering new interpretations of cultural extension could then occur along roots and routes of a transpiring cultural identity, but also by shifting significant concepts of these constructs’ boundaries. By exploring cultural identity’s strategic creations in situ, one would probably emphasize forms by which members of local communities and diaspora were able to resist alienating encroachment schemes, that is to say others’ establishment of social control over their identity, resource and space use.

On the other side, it may be considered that institution’s provisions of meanings (e.g. regarding collective identity models) are void of significance when these provisions only encode traditional concepts of cultural ownership and continuity without incorporating new situations, and thus strategic identities’ alternatives. One may then argue that state and ethnicity provide insufficient possibilities to impart more than symbolical means for indigenous actors to pervade their particular social purposes. Yet, the concretely lived experiences that people narrate may speak of a different reality. According to Lahu people’s discourse, identity statuses provided by the Thai state use arbitrary power relationships that are concretely felt, for instance, in terms of exclusion and punishment, whereas those provided by Lahu ethnicity provide consensual power relationships among community members agreeing to upon pervading symbolic practices.

In this section of the introductory chapter I intend to further our notions of ethnicity, state and development. It discusses development in its various meanings of the terms, namely as (a) an institutional reality with historical origins, (b) an aim-oriented undertaking to enhance particular forms of decision-making, and (c) a way to bundle applied meanings in historicizing reflections of social space. Here, I refer to assumptions concerning various intricacies of power and the implications pertaining to the universalized modernization plan avidly promoted on the base of ‘good intentions’. In particular, I shall revisit the powerful overlap of these constructs’ reference to culture, namely by analyzing culture as the medium of ideology. I shall examine influences the contemporary paradigm shift has had (or is having) on concepts regarding the increasing articulation between global and local processes of multiculturalism, including the diaspora formation among indigenous Lahu groups in Southeast Asia.
In the following, I shall firstly introduce a conceptually significant difference between ‘historical developments’ and ‘practiced development’, thereby swiftly pointing to one of the various ailments entailed in the semantics of this matter. By doing so, I wish to point out that meanings of development have been both enlightened and also blurred by respective theories’ more or less differentiated language use. While the particular ailment mentioned here, will directly lead us to concrete situations which provide contemporary developments with new definitions (such as multiculturalism) I will introduce this debate at the hands of respective language politics; thereby suggesting a visualized differentiation between ‘developments’ and ‘Development’.

Development, an institutional reality, has been fought for and fought against by innumerable theories to be consulted for the debate on power, namely the power of money. Here, I will compound my introduction by exploring the term ‘development’, which -according to theories and practices of development- obtains most diverse meanings. Especially when one is inclined to stress its historical precursor (namely the simply bounded combination of intentional and unintentional occurrences) ‘theories of development’ would have to be imagined as theories on particular ways to analyze sequences or occurrences in history, whereas ‘development theories’ would be conceptualized in terms of an intentional practice of change, as has been propagated during half a century and more. This differentiation may seem entirely redundant to some, yet it bears much significance on what is to be discussed further on.

Is it because of language use that Roger Chamber’s actor-oriented definition of development as “good change” had to be turned down even while his intention to create a genuine alternative to a practically unattainable term seemed to be acceptable? In that this inviting definition spells out local actors’ perspectives to strife for legitimate alternatives or improvements (meant by ‘good change’) - its application is concomitant as to the ideological symbolism involved in synthesizing notions of progress as an aim. The incompatibility of the translation arises from the fact that developments or bounded processes are evaluated by qualitative standards while progress is a status measured by degree. My reason for mentioning this case is twofold: Firstly, because I think that Chambers’ apparently errant development definition reflects indeed the ideological underpinnings promoted throughout
conventional concepts, application of which this development practitioner however attempts to overcome in practice, namely by means of participatory, pluralistic and multicultural research and development approaches.

Secondly, I think that this case reflects a persisting dilemma of the relationship to be established between development theories and development practice, namely that of a conceptual vacuum which has been historically filled with the hybrid notions of what I will then transcribe as capitalized Development. I, for myself, find it revealing that conventional concepts of development have always implied notions of ‘good change’ (especially among those accepting the scheme in its a uni-linear combination with progress), while for any reason these notions are not to be spelled out by someone who -rather than just wording their intended meaning- offers practical and political alternatives to a monolithic enterprise of innovation.

Since it is not the wording ‘good change’ which is unclear but rather the hybrid nature of traditional Development itself which needs to be straightened out in local practice, one may be inclined to see Chambers fall victim to the powerful contestation of language politics. This example embodies the core problems of the modern Development paradigm, which is why it has been chosen. Theories to this regard have done little to clarify the alienating confusion surrounding both, agents’ conflicting intentions of defining political alternatives to an established strategy of control, and alternative directions needed when developing a more appropriate language use for an envisaged or intended change.

Furthermore, it appears that ‘development’ has been expropriated from common discourse by a technocratic minded elite that -by elevating its status to ‘Development’ - has managed to legitimate even its most contentious assumptions regarding progress. While we may agree that an intended development should in principle obtain ‘good change’ there is arduous evidence that bad change has occurred where the force of intention -rather than reflection or consultation- has invaded development agents’ and other common actor’s respective dispositions. Especially among conventional development practitioners, whose adherence to the modernizing paradigm seems yet unbroken, this elevation has subsequently lead them to ignoring all alternative definitions of intended change while covering up Development’s own counter-productive effects. I may suggest that a substantial loss of horizon- seems to have
occurred to some of us who may not even have noticed that by laying universalistic
claims onto meanings of development, this term has almost been orphaned by the
 possibility to think of it in plural, that is ‘developments’.
This possibility, it seems to me, needs to be rescued for discourse before engaging in
debates on shifting development paradigms. However, it needs to be pointed out that
major schemes of devastation –worse than the comparatively harmless atrophies of an
impaired vision or a singularized mind set- have laid the historical groundwork for the
conceptual changes in question. It is indeed the natural and social devastations that
have brought about the climatic paradigm shift to be discussed here. It is the forceful
impact of single events such as the industrial accidents of Bophal (India 1984) and
Chernobyl (UDSSR 1986) that made some people part from conceptualizing
Development as the only recipe for prospecting future states of improvement. I shall
thus take another brief look at historical conditions which triggered the plan to
administer economically viable innovations to both urban and rural production
schemes, at a time when ecological hazards of industrialization were not yet known
on a broad base. I shall do so by asking some questions.
Again, we are confronted with many questions not all of which can be answered in a
single book. Why would respective innovation plans and their self-tailored language
conventions have to use theories of development? What made it possible for
developments to turn into a paradigm called Development? And how could it happen
that the Kantian rationality and the Foucaultian power of mind were put into the
service of technocratic undertaking the outcome of which is a static and unattainable
sort of change? Was it by means of the time-space compression the ongoing
expansion of justified progression (Escobar 1995) used to put pressure on local
cultures and identities in comparable ways?
Important, questions concerning Development’s existence need to be answered by
what happened to overtake developments’ former meaning. Is it then the hapless
sequence of events, which saw World War I flow into those of World War II, that
needed to be cut off so that developments would no longer mean for the world to be
left in the hands of a dangerous fate? Is it that these developments –I may be allowed
to call transcurrences- demanded such a radical departure from an established world
chaos, that all what had to be done (in order to stay clear of an unbearable eventuality
of World War III) was to put Development into the hands of altruistic planners? If that is the case we ought to recall the horrendous aftermath of countries devastated by the violence in terms of a mass-supported call for peace and security: the spiritual force that channeled post-war support for a more prospective development into the rationality of economic elites.

I say this because I think that we may not be able to conceptualize the shift from modern to post-modern development concepts without examining the momentum that triggered people’s intentions to establish a peaceful alternative to an insane state model run out of control. We will then have to look at those who came to take the lead in steering the ship away from traumatizing violence and danger towards a presumably controllable state of the world, namely that which President Truman road-mapped for the world in terms of a common future. More questions spring to the mind: Was it coincidence that an American president—a victorious ally in demounting Germany’s ethno-centric dictatorship at the time—decided upon developing the world’s regions by redistributing its wealth? I wish to think that President Truman was certain that by establishing international bodies of control no more genocide would occur, no more atomic bombs would fall, no more countries would be cut into pieces. But was this victor equally sure that his New World Order would guarantee peace and security for the world’s poor, whose Development he set out to foment?

Was this widely acknowledged world leader aware of the implications entailed in giving so much power to international finance bodies of development such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) or was he integral part of the scheme? We may be tempted to speculate whether this visionary would have approved of the third World Bank’s president Eugene Black (1962) arrogance, bonding the institution’s effort “…to render the language of economics as morally antiseptic as the language the weather forecaster uses in giving tomorrow’s prediction” (B.Rich 1994). While this is not the moment to assess whether developments to ensue could or could not be predicted in abstinence of moral values, one may still wonder about the underlying ideology that has omitted critical discussions on predictable (yet unintended) counter-effects characterizing developments such as environmental degradation or global warming. For, critical
views would be seen to obstruct the linear progress claimed to be achievable by the innovative means of modernization.

What is important for our understanding of the paradigm is not leaders’ visions or attitudes towards the morality implied in fomenting change. But discourses such as this set the stage for contextualizing both theories and practices of contemporary development. A result of the steadily modernizing ideology is that Development and progress still obtain a synonymous meaning in the language of many witnesses to the conventional growth paradigm; common people who are left in the belief that Development intervention ensures progress in improvements. Indeed, as of its original situation Development is meant to maximize the efficiency of relationships between human, natural and material resources and their respectively comparable distribution within given localities and across these into other areas of the country, the region or the world. Yet, since Development has been controlled by national, regional and global funding agencies which—in line with the aim-oriented rationale that guides their respective enterprises—impose innovation upon these relationships, we ought to see the power structures that characterize Development programs and projects financed.

After having discussed Development as an intended scheme of intervention which is mixed with, and at the same time measured by, concepts of progress let’s now turn to Development as a financed scheme of internationalization that has changed the local, national and global landscapes of the world. The point I wish to make here states that the internationalization of $transsurrencenotext$ cannot be separated from the very specific, capitalist money politics involved in the Development paradigm propagated during the fifty years of its existence. This money politics has made ample use of universalist claims concerning human wellbeing, to be induced and controlled by financial support structures. Prescribing these ends and also the means to achieve wellbeing or prosperity, processes of expansion of infrastructure and market systems have been conducted according to the premises of geopolitical truth claims combined with sterile financing schemes.

Making Development the vehicle to turn this ideology into the realities of globalization has given money politics the power to place conceptual distances between a ‘First World’ and a ‘Third World’, the ‘rich North’ and the ‘poor South’,
the ‘developed’ countries and the ‘underdeveloped’, etc., thus placing ethnic minority people such as the Lahu at the darkest corner of society. This culture of hierarchical classification gives home to morally antiseptic synonyms such as LDC (least developed country), GCP (gross capital product) and others including their respective plural forms such as NICs (newly industrialized countries), to name a few. By using the term ‘development’ as a cover for these classified money politics governments could promote Development as an unavoidable blessing to a world of avoidable differences.

I shall briefly discuss the paradigm shift in controlling change. Under given power constellations the conventional Development paradigm has also been used to request certain sacrifices –such as structural adjustments- on the side of countries turned into ‘beneficiaries’ of financial support schemes. Development in this context has meant intensified agriculture, austerity programs and other processes by which, for instance, the privatization of common resources have been pushed beyond sustainable limits in order to achieve prospering markets. However, this prosperity has often and evidently benefited local, national and global elites, only, while increasing the suffering of population segments whose livelihood depends on the direct use of common resources. In pushing and ‘executing’ prescribed forms of Development financing bodies have left little doubt about the various needs for ‘poor’ countries to cater to the large export markets of the ‘rich’ countries. While this is a simplistic representation of the capitalist market ideology, negative effects of the ever more intensifying industrialization drive -including the overuse of finite and ecologically vulnerable resources- could not long be kept under the lid, a paradigm shift was due.

Before turning to the debates of shifting development paradigms in contemporary theories I wish to portray the practical side of development procedures that is binding for both counterparts, the local project directors and the advisors, coaches or experts engaged. Development projects –small and large funding units covering a variety of fields and submitted to revision- are to be managed according to the specific criteria that private and public donors have established for planning, conducting and evaluating respective processes. While planning is to be done at the hands of participatory integration, other stations of the project cycle are less inclusive.
Evaluative means to assess projects’ effectiveness, turn-over points and other terms of progress include the constant monitoring of the cost/benefit ratio involved as well as the formal consideration of environmental and social implications.

In that respective funding units are only conditionally entitled to apply for reimbursement, managerial procedures are streamlined according to category, size and significance of the project. As is to be expected, significance increases not only with the geographic extension of innovation schemes in question but also with the political influence obtained throughout the negotiation meetings at various levels. This condition has implicated political decision-making structures in the world, particularly in that Development’s efficiency depends from crucial infrastructure, throughout which the promotion of innovative concepts and the material mobilization of production, labor and information systems takes place. Development projects do thus, in one form or another, implicate the socio-cultural texture of localities involved.

Observed from the managerial point of view there are many flaws and traps attached to the Development practice, many of which arise from the underlying ideology and power claims of funding agents.

One of them is that expenditures of a project can be calculated and will be reimbursed only if complete transparency is given which, of course, has not always been the case. Project managers are usually encouraged to make sure that progress is achieved by keeping control of processes at the levels of ‘activity’ and ‘output’, which is sometimes not possible. While it may be possible to produce numbers concerning social benefits of an ‘intervention’ it is less viable to quantify its social risks. Hence, while we may not always be able to account for all costs and risks involved, the possibility to measure and control particularly processes is basically limited, especially where power is used to impose communication. Imposing transparency in communication is, indeed, a major trap that hinders the proper assessment of unintended as well as unpredictable processes.

Flaws of Development may not be explained at the procedural level though project realities are often misrepresented to this regard. Culprits for harmful developments have been sought among project staff (including managers, directors, counter-partners, etc.), yet often in absence of these actors’ structural imbedded-ness in powerful processes of monetary redistribution. Of course, it is not the individual
project through which self-determined farmers may become ‘aim groups’ even without knowing it. However, at the local level Development came to be understood as induced by individual projects, not as part of an ulterior strategy to gain control over local realities. While the main flaw to my personal view consists of the fact that concepts of development have turned into power practices of Development, the problem to be discussed is stakeholders’ understanding of the pragmatic imperatives entailed in expanding the infrastructure of money, space, resource and culture politics, upon which power statuses are extended into the rapidly changing localities.

The paradigm shift concerning development theories has its main roots in the early ecological movement of Northern Europe where experiences with over-industrialization were longest and respective consciousness most mature; particularly at a time when social movements in that part of the world started to question the conventional rationality of the steered action plan called Development. (Escobar 1992, 1955). While until the sixties there had been no significant criticism of the deeply unbalanced consumption patterns that continued separating countries with low income from those with high income structures, European countries’ attitude towards the premises of modernity started changing – again at the hands of significant events, namely when it became known that the protective ozone layer around Earth was growing thin, and even more so, when the first oil crisis at the beginning of the seventies made clear that the paradigm of infinite resource use was to become obsolete (H.Löschmann 2001).

These events created situations where an alerted consciousness -asking for the re-conceptualization of natural resource use- saw the Club of Rome publish its *Limits to Growth* in 1972. This book and others not only meant a most serious challenge to the modernization project of the post-war time but indeed declared the end of the conventional Development paradigm. Major changes on the institutional side were also induced by the Brundtland Report (1987) which demanded the conceptual change towards resource-light production patterns while reducing resource-heavy consumption styles. The famous report prepared by a special United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development tendered the first ever World Commission on Sustainable Development, which was probably the global agent to facilitate the initiation of the contemporary paradigm shift; also propagated by the
World Conservation Union based in Switzerland and other international NGOs (B.Rich 1994) concerned with the unsustainable developments on Earth.

Rich, who termed sustainable Development a ‘mother-and-apple-pie formulation to which no objection would ever be delivered, pointed out that the Brundtland commission still strived for growth and that its report was “an endorsement of business as usual, papered over with pious expressions of good intentions; at best, it is an unintentional exposition of the very contradictions it purports to transcend in the notion of sustainable development” (Rich 1994:197). Indeed, it seems that this term was just an amended version of the conventional Development theory. Throughout the latest quarter of the 20th Century, resource-conscious theories developed in unequal ways, though none in absence of Weberian instrumental reasoning. Critical reviews of unsustainable Development offered by the environmental movement of northern Europe did not extend into those countries that struggled to reach the industrialization standards steadily promoted as a means to overcome ‘under-development’ and poverty still prevalent within their national boundaries.

While the European movement continued producing evidence on a state of ill-conceived consumption patterns that urgently needed to come to an end if Earth was to persist as a human habitat, calls for more sustainable developments were thus unheard among influential elites which continued heralding Development as a means to extend trans-national market systems. Countries’ elitist classes continued pushing ahead with their investment ‘needs’, thereby mobilizing new schemes of articulation throughout the geo-political extensions from which they profited. These schemes, including the liberalization of market structures, Western-centric education and administration forms, etc. took distance from earlier Development theories that were still committed to riddling the world of poverty. Yet, their conceptual modification did not reflect the environmental consciousness that had entered the Development discourse in northern Europe. Though these schemes still made use of President Truman’s original rationale (namely that development should be of benefit for civil society at large, and that it was to provide potentially prosperous linkages between world’s member countries, societies of which were to enjoy labor and food security), their discourse obtained meaning only in the context of rule. Hence, for them
Development meant ways to rule the modernizing world rather than to facilitate discourse on the viabilities and limits of the growth paradigm.

Given that modernizing nation states’ elitist minorities had the monetary power to both, link up with each other (thus building the base of the so-called ‘global consumer class’ and also to continue promoting progress as the most promising form of industrialization, Development concepts became ever more blurred. The vulnerability of the conventional paradigm, to which so many countries had subscribed, was not only evident in terms of environmental degradation. It also appeared that next to the natural kind of deterioration, social bases started to fragmentize in comparable ways, with labor migration steadily depopulating rural areas that offered no prospective resources to be extracted or exploited. Contrary to what had been promised throughout many years, the promulgated consumer perspective could thus not materialize to any larger extend. Rather, it became obvious that, although equality continued being the praised aim of the Development enterprise, no improved livelihoods were obtained for the masses of producers.

While powerful investors, including large multinational companies continued claiming that they would turn deserts into garden landscapes by means of Development, their support for the market-oriented articulation drive provided most unequal opportunities for the large majority of world citizens, many of whom felt betrayed or excluded from improvements to their suffering. In the seventies and eighties, large mega-projects were ‘executed’ in many areas of the world, some of which meant substantial transmigration and resettlement of populations making space for massive deforestation and other fields of resource extraction. Other mega-projects have included forced resettlement of local populations making place for hydro-power. With the globalization of adverse effects on environmental and social bases of existence taking their toll on local cultures, identity traditions and survival strategies, resistance started to emerge among populations that were excluded from state services, and also those who advocated these actors’ interests.

Among civil society associations and more formalized non-governmental organizations (NGO) alike it was then debated whether –under given conditions- Development could indeed produce any beneficial results other than for the privileged class of people that had enjoyed influence and power with which to secure
innovations of their own economic enterprise. Since these agents’ interests linked up in multinational production and consumption schemes that ignored calls for more sustainable forms of life, Development could not be freed from investors’ ideology while shifting its claims from ‘equal opportunities’ to the articulation among equals. In contrast to the modern Development theory these concepts obtained, however, most different meanings for the world actors. Part of the post-modern discourse shared by both peace and environmental movements was, of course, the call for articulation and networking against the falsity of the conventional Development practice.

Contents of these groups shifted the modern, static, meaning of Development from ‘benefit’ to ‘risk’ assumptions, in a discourse that enveloped environmental, social and cultural processes such as trans-nationalism and transmigration in a societal critique of these developments. Foucault’s explications regarding the power of language upon people’s mindsets and bodily performances expressed critique of that which had evolved into a ‘calculated management of life’: namely the power to extend control through diverse kinds of regulation, thereby subordinating identities to the hegemony of discipline (Foucault 1980 b). While only few intellectuals grasped the deeper sense of these thoughts, they inspired social movements affected by the expanding power of technological and digital sophistication in the late eighties.

By then, the globe was still divided along the rationales of Cold War ideologies where concepts of planned discipline were still valid amongst most people. Yet, local actors’ started to attain more practical positions with regard to resistance strategies opposing these systems’ concentrated forms of life administration, thereby using both cultural primordialism and multi-culturalism as means to fight modernity’s time-space compression (Harvey 1989) and its resulting fragmentation of local systems. Concepts of locality thus came to constitute the new paradigm of Development practitioners (N.Long and Long 1992) who—on their side—were to find ways to negotiate these concepts with powerful funding agents.

These continued pressing ahead with their theories of progress and modernity until another event took place, namely the financial crisis tumbling the model societies of the East, those Tigers who had always been evoked against critiques of the growth paradigm. Before that event, resistance movements located within the
impersonal organizations of modernity that Giddens describes (Giddens 1991), were rarely submitted to public discussions of any kind. Development practitioners, who came to devise actor-oriented models of innovation that omitted the capitalist conception of growth, had been cornered within these organizations, aptly criticized for being subjective, instigative, counterproductive, etc., losing their jobs and credibility as soon as they would step out into the open.

Their voices obtained weight only throughout a persistent commitment to alternative definitions of Development that continuously provided small-scale evidence of local people’s self-determined potentials. Few managed to submit these evidences to the financial power holders within their institutions rationale while many others were to embark on an effort of compromising between utmost variant interests in Development. This effort has made slow progress, so far. But it has resulted in an increasingly vast body of participatory practices that start from those whose potentials are to be supported in terms of communal engagement and sustainable empowerment in place; hence the localization of Development as a counter-discourse to the ongoing hegemony of state institutions and world elites.

The resistance movement to the outgoing Development paradigm (including its contradictive notions of progress and modernity) (B. Rich 1994) claimed that first of all the epistemological multiplicity of locality needed to be respected and embraced so as to put rationalized and secularized knowledge concepts back to their cultural bases of origin. Understanding local actors in the world -many of whom were members of ethnic minority groups and cultural diasporas- meant not only ‘localization’ as an answer to globalization. It also dignified the ethnicity of hitherto marginalized segments of population who were aggressively drawn into both the expanding consumer market and the demanding labor market, systems that homogenized people’s cultural identity in favor and service of modern nation state performance. In this context, local knowledge and indigenous epistemologies became inspiring buzz words of the Development practice in the nineties. Moreover, in this resistance discourse, multiculturalism would not just reflect the amorphous melting pot implied in the trans-nationalism of migrant labors and displaced populations. Neither would it rest at regarding cultural indeterminacy as a transitory result of intercultural exposure. Rather, ethnicity was to be promoted as providing sense of
social belonging and pride from where local actors could develop new forms of articulation with other actors.

In the last decade, meanings of ethnicity came to be proliferated as ways to embody the multicultural leverage applied so as to de-regulate administrative influence upon originally self-governed communities that had, at particular turning points, lost their labor force and customary cohesion to the modernization drive permeating through mainstream culture agents. On the other hand, these aspects of localization have also been absorbed by the global consumer class, whose icon (the image of a borderless globe symbolizes Development as this class’ representations of its own, delimited, extensions over all possible spaces on earth - however without representing its finite resources. (W.Sachs 2001) Trans-nationalism in the understanding of this population segment is found in the individualized developments that have grouped and merged financially potential consumers in difference to those forces who are still supposed to attend to this segment’s borderless various needs.

For this group of world citizens, tribal groups’ ethnicity and culture are interesting features to be consumed by means of tourism, art, dishes etc., thus providing it with a glimpse of a myth: namely other people’s exotic and untouched nature. Since transportation, trade and travel facilities have increased as much as the transmissible image-sounds of both mass media and internet, means of articulation have obtained new meanings. They have continued to separate the global consumer class from those who make an increasingly conscious use of these information technologies for other –less greedy- purposes, so that localization is no longer bound to the realities of those who are not affluent enough to travel by themselves. Instead, localization now means to free Development from its conceptual chains, namely by making use of technological advancements that allow for an unprecedented kind of social articulation among interest groups of most diverse cultural backgrounds.

However, technological advancement has also implied that frustrated or infuriated responses by some groups could turn into violent claims for a change – even in absence of poverty and environmental threats. It is in this context, it has to be expected that events such as the bombing and suicide-bombing of civil society places is to feed into a new dimension of Development. The apparent loss of control over cultural invigoration, and also the need for security among an anonymous mass of
world citizens will certainly bring about renewed concepts of development. While all of this does not seem to relate to Lahu peoples’ identity, I may claim that it does.

Outline: Because of the topics’ complexity the dissertation is split into six chapters, throughout which both of my topics (Lahu ethnicity and development research) are constructed in terms of field experiences, conceptual approaches and theoretical implications. In all chapters, Lahu identity is discussed at various levels, namely (a) the normative level, (b) the descriptive level, (c) the subjective level, (d) the analytical level, and (e) the political level. All chapters of examine prevalent and changing identifications at the inter-phase of these levels, yet, in order to enhance the potentiality of inter-disciplinary research I combine them for a holistic consideration of meanings. Since meanings of social, ethnic, and cultural identifications overlap in various ways, I spread them out to differentiate between systems of meaning, and identify implications for further studies. Dichotomies entailed in local discourse are evidenced or pointed out (e.g. as shared and unshared experience, intended and unintended developments, etc.) in order to be represented as such, whereas dichotomies entailed in my own discourse are submitted to discussion and validation. The basic structure can be outlined as follows: Chapter One introduces the topics.

Chapter Two situates Lahu identity in the Southeast Asian region and traces the rationales of an individual subject whose identity provides evidence of his social and discursive agency in other countries than his own. I present subsequent sections of Jakhadtè’s conference paper in order to further our understanding of dimensions and components of Lahu ethnicity, which are established at the hands of identity statuses. I examine the dialectics of Lahu identity statuses at the overlap of ethnicity and intension, thus describing the intended and unintended experiences of intra-ethnic and interethnic articulation, and highlighting villagers’ shared as well as unshared concerns with national borders, relevant information, hegemonic relationships etc. I provide, by illustrating these identity statuses, a diversified account of the study’s objects of concern.

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22 Items of this principle order are not isolated but integrated in a systemic fashion, catering irregularly to my research topics.
To evidence the intended conditions under which the subject has established creative relationships with Lahu and non-Lahu others (with whom to share experience, exchange views, discuss support, etc.) I show how Jakhadtè has applied insider and outsider statuses in his approach to potential partakers of his film-making initiative. I conceptualize the spiritual bonds that nurture this villager’s pan-Lahu references, and show how they are established as codex of compassion, hospitality, generosity, etc. in communities’ traditional agency of ritual exchange. While listing the experiential range of a discrete unit of analysis, I exemplify also other villagers’ exposure, and responses to, particular pressure, thus introducing my applied form of reflexive anthropology, I validate as an ongoing scheme. Since abstracted thought chains create problems for representing the dynamics of local people’s cultural praxis and concepts, I introduced these shifts also for my interpretations of (a) the object in question; (b) the social story told in a context, and (c) possibilities to transpose them for the reader.

Chapter Three describes the Lahu culture community I introduce as a collective unit of analysis, whose oral history I summarize, thereby showing how Lahu group identity has been scattered through migration, and how groups’ cultural units have been established in terms of diversity, polarities and dualities. In tracing different meanings of community I provide evidence of communities’ persistence at the village level, the district level, and the trans-boundary level, all of which are scheduled to signify objects of communal concern. I offer various text formats while focusing on ‘story-telling’ as community members’ habitual means to deliver information on their group’s concerns.23 I describe Lahu villagers’ intermarriage with non-Lahu others to reveal contemporary accommodations, and to point the difference between ideal and applied terms of sharing and exchanging. Citing innovations to describe villagers’ changing economy and its effects on indigenous governance concerns, I discuss the so-called ‘ownership of development outputs’ (in one case a cattle bank), and also my own constraints for representing communities intricate roots

23 In exemplifying story-telling I mention my own cultural pertinence, as well as the professional persistence and social pervasion that have inspired this study.
in civil society. While illustrating the ‘borderland’ situation I offer robust as well as subtle narratives on group experiences.

By exemplifying multi-layered meanings of Lahu identity, I evidence pressures that have triggered communal agency at the overlap of ethnicity and development. As external culture agents (e.g. development staff, visitors, traders, researchers etc.) have influenced identifications in place I highlight Lahu communities’ differential choices to adopt new means of decision-making. To this end I exemplify an outcome of Jakhadtè’s film-making, which evidences Lahu Na Sheleh peoples’ intra-ethnic consultation regarding a governance problem that arises from their growing dependency from non-Lahu culture agents, and has implicated their religious institution. To highlight Lahu villagers’ strategic responses to the dependency experienced with northern Thai or Tai peoples (also Khon Mueang), I provide narratives on villagers experiencing and resolving social dichotomies.

Chapter Four introduces the phenomenon of social truth by which I validate my ‘cultured’ dimensions (i.e culture subject, culture object, culture space) and insider/outsider relationship statuses. I discuss the cross-cultural -and thus multivocal- research tools I have applied for representing the authors of Lahu narratives, and for transposing cultural idioms included in them. While describing my local interpretation routine I discuss the duality of spatial identity for which I systematize the participatory methodology I have applied to develop my theoretical construct of spatial meanings. These tools, which are meant to inform a hermeneutic analysis of Lahu villagers’ social space, include my use of villagers’ discourse (including questions, metaphors, analogies, etc,) as well as quotations from my own, subjective field notes (including my ‘terms of engagement’ and participatory research relationships. While exemplifying particular challenges for interpretation, I discuss the political overlap of ethnicity and knowledge that signifies culture politics in place. The meanings I provide reveal villagers’ identity expressions within, along, and across particular boundaries, hence my discussion of questions. Having acknowledged

24 The smallest unit of the community –individual members- is acknowledged amidst communal rituals providing the spiritual linkage to the rest of the sub-group.
25 By describing the strategic meanings I have found in this process I establish the embodied, inscribed, empowered and contested meanings of spiritual space.
the reflection of emerging dependency in Lahu villagers’ ethno-cultural identification basis, I establish how Lahu space combines their physical, social and spiritual identity experiences (that are reflected and discussed by their cohabitation concepts), and show how social space obtains meaning with villagers’ alternative definitions of communal concerns. In tracing the qualitative meanings local farmers have established amongst themselves and negotiated with significant others, I evidence experiential discrepancies implied in their intercultural communication.

Chapter Five introduces the act of grouping peoples which I discuss I examine the regionalization of multi-cultural ethnicity, as part of a process that entails villagers’ loss of livelihoods, and social substance, and possibilities to engage alternative means of interethnic (or cross-cultural) negotiation. My selection of social narratives is meant to provide indigenous perspectives to our analysis pressures lying on settlement development and intercultural mobility in the Greater Mekong sub-region, both furthering villagers’ fast changing concepts of articulation at the overlap of ethnicity and culture. Besides introducing the scholarly discourse I offer indigenous theories on Lahu diaspora experience, which discuss developments in this habitat in terms of (a) the maintenance of self-designed institutions safeguarding local morality, (b) a consensual undertaking to enhance equitable decision-making, and (c) the enhancement of communal meanings encoded in historical discourse. Since Lahu identity concepts are influenced by effects of non-Lahu discourse I discuss various contexts of terminology, thus addressing the contemporary paradigm shift has had (and is having) on Culture Science and our concepts of these ‘glocal’ processes social space, including the increasing articulation between global and local processes of multiculturalism. I shall, in this context, discuss the process of Lahu Diaspora that has been commented on among indigenous Lahu Na Sheleh groups.

Chapter Six further discusses the regional culture body in transformation. I trace indigenous concepts of transformation from villagers’ historical migration, which was triggered by the Mongol invasion of their ancestral habitat and furthered by subsequent experiences of encounters with hegemony. To establish the communal value of this ancestral habitat and its geo-political divisions space I (re-) construct the mythical period of a pluralistic genesis to which Lahu villagers subscribe for their earlier settlements, including power domains they may no longer remember. I shall
thereby discuss meanings of historical consciousness of a divided people. In examining schemes of transformation I consult concepts by which to discuss Lahu subjects’ strategic attachment to their cultural systems, thus establishing the experienced difference between forced and voluntary displacement, as well as between forced and voluntary settlement.

I offer historical pacts made between Lahu and non-Lahu power holders in order to reveal villagers’ valorization of their indigenous institutions, and to identify a spiritual overlap of ethnicity and state. To discuss this overlap of indigenous and official systems, I evidence the meaning of an earlier encounter between two moral leaders who are now the longest reigning monarch of the Thai kingdom and the longest serving Gelupa (priest) of the Lahu. By the young King’s visit to young Jamo’s community I conceptualize a historical articulation in which ethnicity, culture and state converged in leaders’ acknowledgement of each others’ spiritual institutions. I shall examine this articulation so as to trace local theories of power, according to which Lahu peoples have felt (to some degree) safe-guarded by some state authorities against illegitimate claims from other official instances, e.g. government officials’ denying them citizenship documents.