

The Hmong Response to State Intervention in Vietnam's Upland: A case study of a remote hamlet in North Central Vietnam

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베트남 산악지역에서의 국가의 간섭과 흐몽족의 대응 - 베트남 북중부의 프론티어 마을을 사례로 -

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Abstract : The Hmong people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Vietnam. They traditionally practice shifting cultivation for their daily subsistence. This group has a traditional governance system as well as strong clan and kinship relationships that occupy an important role in maintaining Hmong culture and livelihoods. The state's approval of the legitimate and statutory law for the Nature Reserve largely excluded local rights of access to and the use of natural resources. This study focusses on Hmong responses to the state interventions of the establishment of the Nature Reserve as well as forest land allocation. Based on Scott's contribution of Moral Economy (1976), the authors argue that local responses function as a 'risk-averter' against state intervention. Meanwhile, the intra and inter-ethnic relationships based on the 'subsistence ethic' help locals successfully mitigate state intervention. These findings help the state rethink their interventions, which have been constructed with very little respect for local differences or the desires of ethnic peoples. Furthermore, the main findings, which reveal that not only the intra-ethnic relationship but also the inter-ethnic relationship among ethnic minorities can play an important role in maintaining the Moral Economy, are expected to deepen the previous understanding on the Moral Economy, which has previously constrained its scope to the intra-ethnic relationship.

Key Words : Hmong people, Local response, State intervention, Vietnam's upland

요약 : 베트남의 소수민족 중 하나인 흐몽족은 전통적으로 험준한 고산지역에 거주하며, 이동식 화전농업으로 생계를 유지하면서 강력한 혈연집단을 형성하여 왔다. 또한 혈연적 유대감에 기초한 흐몽족의 관습적 거버넌스는 그들의 문화와 생활양식을 유지하기 위한 중요한 요소로 기능하였으나, 국립공원 설치를 위한 법적 조치와 국가에 의한 정당화는 이들의 자원에 대한 이용과 권리를 크게 침해하는 것이었다. 이 논문에서는 자연보호를 위한 국립공원의 설치에 따라 지역자원에 대한 관습적 이용이 제한된 흐몽족을 사례로, 이러한 국가의 간섭을 어떻게 비켜가며 Scott (1976)가 언급한 '도덕적 경제공동체(Moral Economy)'를 어떻게 현실화하며, 자신들의 생활에 미치는 영향을 최소화하는

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지를 고찰한다. 분석 결과, 타인호와썩 푸후(Pu Hu)국립공원의 설치에 따라 마을 이전을 강요당한 흐몽족은 '생존을 위한 윤리의식 (subsistence ethic)'을 공유하는 다른 소수민족과의 관계 및 흐몽족 내부의 관습적 거버넌스를 일종의 '위기회피(risk-avertter)' 기제로 구사하면서 국가의 간섭을 교묘하게 비켜가면서 강제적인 마을 이전과 자원이용에 대한 제약이라는 위기를 극복하였다는 것을 알 수 있었다. 이러한 본 연구의 성과는 소수민족의 내재적 다양성과 관습을 무시한 국가의 간섭을 재고할 것을 촉구하는 동시에, 주로 소수민족의 마을 내부관계에 국한하여 분석한 기존의 도덕적 경제공동체론의 한계를 극복하여 동남아시아 소수민족연구의 지평을 소수민족간의 공조관계까지 확대하였다고 볼 수 있다.

주요어 : 흐몽족, 지역대응, 국가간섭, 산악지역, 베트남

1. Introduction

Vietnam's upland is inhabited by more than 14 million people from ethnic minorities (Rambo and Jamieson, 2003). Well into the second half of the 20th century, people living in the uplands used land under a variety of customary property arrangements tied to customary politico-legal institutions (Sikor, 2011). Uplanders hold their own customary systems of land tenure, governance systems, and traditional practices of farming, i.e. swidden cultivation. Customary law is the legal constitution of a village, including civil and criminal codes, and other articles on preserving the ethics, customs, and habits related to social organization as well as to the life of the village. Local regulations enshrine customary village laws that attempt to place restrictions on the withdrawal of resources from common lands (McElwee, 2011).

Today, Vietnam's uplands societies are faced with the loss of autonomy and problems of dependency on the politico-administrative body (Rambo and Jamieson, 2003). The nationalization and privatization of land and natural resources were largely implemented in the Vietnam uplands beginning in 1986. Large areas of land and natural resources, ac-

cessed and managed by forest-dependent peoples, have been confiscated to serve global and national interests in biodiversity conservation in Vietnam since 1990 (Zingerli, 2005). The Vietnamese government set up many Protected Areas, which consist of the National Park and a Nature Reserve, for protection and environmental and biodiversity conservation. Currently, there are 164 Protected Areas established under sponsorship from both the Vietnamese government and international organizations (Do *et al.*, 2017). Meanwhile, the land used for the protected areas significantly expanded from 880,000 hectares in 1986 to 2.4 million hectares in 2006 (Dressler *et al.*, 2013). This type of conservation largely excluded local rights of access to and the use of natural resources. Consequently, forest-dependent peoples lost local commons previously used for their traditional livelihood activities (Cam, 2011; McElwee, 2010). The process of the Vietnamese government's nationalizing of common village lands can be seen in forest land allocation (Sikor, 2011). Former communal lands were privatized, and land rights were changed based on a market-oriented land tenure system (McElwee, 2011). Furthermore, the local community has experienced the gradual loss of local commons and their subsistence needs have been threatened (McElwee, 2011). However, many studies on ethnic

minorities in Vietnam found that local people are neither passive nor do they accept the status created by the state and more powerful people (Sowerwine, 2004; Scott, 2000). These ethnic peoples have employed different strategies in their everyday practices to respond to state intervention. Thus, the results of state intervention have produced a diversity of outcomes. State intervention has proceeded smoothly in some areas but has not been completed in others.

The concept of a 'Moral Economy' was introduced by Scott (1976) and emphasized that the norm of reciprocity and the norm of subsistence play an important role for peasant prevention of the risks from state intervention. Much of the existing scholarship on the Moral Economy, however, has approached the subject from an intra-ethnic perspective. For example, the studies by McElwee (2007) in Ha Tinh Province, North Vietnam, indicated the redistribution of income from rich to poor household as a social obligation and the dependence on common land as a social right between villagers. Adam (1993) also reported a similar case in West Africa. The Bambara tribe in Mali set up the non-market claims and transfers in a variety of forms, ranging from cereal gifts and livestock loans to migrant remittances and labor exchange based on kinship, friendship, and patronage to cope with food insecurity. Likewise, the intra-ethnic perspective was strongly represented in the two case studies of the Dao and Black Thai villages in Vietnam (Sowerwine, 2004; Scott, 2000). The previous studies related to the Moral Economy, however, constrained their scope to the intra-ethnic relationship, and did not engage with the 'subsistence ethic' of both intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relationships, even though through an inter-ethnic relationship, an intra-ethnic relationship can be fostered to mitigate state intervention. Therefore, building on

Scott's contribution of the Moral Economy (1976), this paper aims to identify the roles of inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic relationships among the ethnic minorities in the processes of local responses to state intervention through the case study of the Hmong ethnic minority in North Central Vietnam. The authors argued that state approval of the legitimate and statutory law excluding the local right to use natural resources threatens social norms and subsistence needs. The local responses, however, functioned as a 'risk-averter' against state interventions. The intra and inter-ethnic relationships based on the 'subsistence ethic' help locals successfully mitigate state intervention.

2. Methodology

This paper uses an upland village in North Central Vietnam as a case study, where a local community was affected by biodiversity conservation and forest land allocation. In 1998, the Hmong people were displaced by the Pu Hu Nature Reserve establishment in Suoi Ton hamlet, Phu Son commune, Quan Hoa district, Thanh Hoa Province. Our research is mainly based on key informant interviews and household questionnaire surveys. First, we conducted key informant interviews with three staff of the Pu Hu Nature Reserve, Quan Hoa Forest Protection Department (FPD) and the officials in charge of land management in the commune. Interviewees took the main responsibility for managing the Pu Hu Nature Reserve as well as for the implementation of forest land allocation in the Suoi Ton hamlet. The focus of the interviews was mainly to understand the resettlement process, activities for the management

of the Pu Hu Nature Reserve and the process of forest land allocation in the research site. Furthermore, the authors interviewed the village leader of the Muong people in Khoa hamlet, who shared land with the Hmong people in the new resettlement site. The authors investigated the Muong's motivation and reasons for this act of sharing. Additionally, we interviewed the communist party leader who was a former village head, the village head, two persons who are leaders of a clan, and five households. The aim is to understand the social-economic and political state of the community before resettlement, and how community activities respond to state intervention. Finally, fourteen households among a total of sixty-four, which represent the diverse responses of the local Hmong regarding their resistance to the state intervention, were randomly selected for interviews. The semi-structured questionnaire focused on household livelihoods before and after state intervention. Also, the authors determined household responses to state intervention, especially the sharing of land among households in instances in which they lost land due to the Pu Hu Nature Reserve establishment. The recall method, used to collect data on condition before resettlement, relies on the memories of respondents. In order to avoid mis-memories related to events occurring 20 years ago, we interviewed different types of actors to cross-check their memories, which made our data reliable enough to reconstruct the situation before resettlement.

Data were collected during three principal periods of fieldwork: 12th-15th June 2015, 16th-27th November 2015 and 24th February-15th March 2017¹⁾. Table 1 presents the characteristics of household respondents. The respondents were mostly male, accounting for 86% of the sample. The highest proportion (36%) was 46-55 years of age. The hometown of

Table 1. Characteristics of household respondents

Type	Persons	%
Gender		
- Male	12	86
- Female	2	14
Average age (55 years old)		
>65	3	21
56-65	2	14
46-55	5	36
36-45	4	29
26-35	0	0
15-25	0	0
Hometown		
- Yen Bai Province ²⁾	12	86
- Son La Province ³⁾	2	14
Living experience		
- Less than 20 years	1	7
- More than 20 years	13	93
No. of household member		
- Less than 5	1	7
- Between 5 and 7	6	43
- More than 7	7	50

Source: field survey in 2017

most respondents was Yen Bai Province and 93% of households have lived there for more than 20 years.

The remainder of this paper is divided into five sections. The first section will describe the history and the geography of the study area. Second, social-economic and political Hmong communities before the state intervention are illustrated. Third, we present the process of the displacement program for the Pu Hu Nature Reserve establishment. The fourth section describes how the state intervention process was implemented at the research site, after which we focus on local responses which mitigate those of the state. The final section attempts to develop our discussion within the concept of the moral economy from the perspectives of both intra and inter-ethnic relationships.

3. Outline of the research site

The research site is the Suoi Ton hamlet. This hamlet is located at the North-Western frontier of Thanh Hoa province, 200 km from Thanh Hoa City (Figure 1). Reaching the hamlet requires a three-hour drive from Thanh Hoa City. This hamlet was affected by the displacement program for the Pu Hu Nature Reserve establishment in 1998. Resettled people from Suoi Ton hamlet were Hmong.

Before 1998, this Hmong ethnic group had been living in Cha Lat hamlet 30 km away from the new resettlement site. Cha Lat hamlet was in the depths of the mountains where locals had lived in relative isolation. The hamlet was accessible only by foot, and it took one to two days walk to commute to its centre. Historically, people originally came from

Yen Bai Province and Son La Province in the North Vietnam Uplands. In their hometown, a rotational swidden farming system was traditionally practised by households. While their farmlands were no longer sustainable for cultivation, they decided to find a new place. In 1992, the first lineage of 13 households in the Mua clan of Hmong people in Son La Province migrated to the Cha Lat hamlet⁴⁾. Two clans of Vang and Giang in Yen Bai Province then settled in the hamlet between 1993 and 1994. In 1996, most of the Mua clan of the Hmong people in Yen Bai Province migrated to the Cha Lat hamlet. Until 1997, there were approximately 109 households and 652 people living in this hamlet. As a result, there were four main clans in this community: Mua (Son La), Vang, Giang and Mua (Yen Bai).

On February 9, 1998, the government established the Pu Hu Nature Reserve under the *Decision No. 577/BNN-KH* of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)(CRES and VNU, 2015). The total area of the Pu Hu Nature Reserve was 27,503 hectares, in which 16,265 hectares is a strictly protected area, and 11,238 hectares is an ecological restoration zone (CRES and VNU, 2015). The overall management of the Pu Hu Nature Reserve was the responsibility of the Forest Protection Department (FPD) under MARD management. The land use was defined as a 'Special Use Forest'⁵⁾. The main purpose of its establishment was to conserve the typical forest biodiversity of North Central Vietnam. It also conserved precious and endangered species. The final purpose of the Reserve was the protection of the watershed forests of the Ma and Luong Rivers which are two important rivers in the Thanh Hoa Province (Center for Biodiversity and Biosafety, 2008).

All people who lived inside the boundary of the

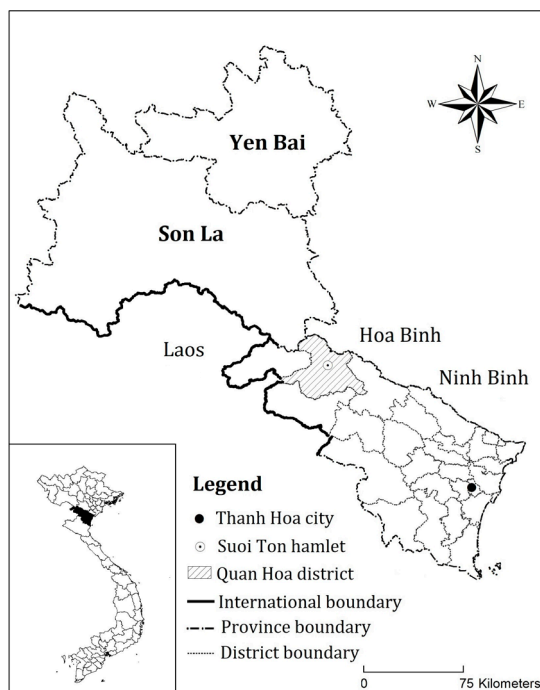


Figure 1. Location of research site

Pu Hu Nature Reserve had to move to a new location. As a result, the Cha Lat hamlet was also forcibly resettled to a new location assigned by the government. Local authorities named the new resettlement site the Suoi Ton hamlet. The hamlet has a buffered zone with the Pu Hu nature reserve. This hamlet is located at altitudes ranging from 400 to 600 meters above sea level. It is bound in the north by the Tai Giac hamlet, in the west by the Khoa hamlet and in the east and south by the Pu Hu Nature Reserve (Figure 2). The total land of this new resettlement is approximately 300 hectares, of which roughly 200 hectares is forest land. Compared to the Cha Lat hamlet, the new resettlement has relatively good infrastructure. The road is accessible by motorcycle and four-wheel drive vehicles from the central commune to this hamlet. The government has built convenient

facilities such as electricity, a kindergarten, and a primary school. The Suoi Ton hamlet consisted of 65 households with 385 people from four main clans. In the new resettlement area, the villagers freely selected locations for building their houses. Four clans, resided at separate locations near small streams scattered around four areas. As a result, the households of the same clans were close to each other, similar to what they experienced in the Cha Lat hamlet.

Local livelihoods are principally based on agricultural activities. The most prominent crops are dry rice, wet rice, maize, cassava and bamboo. Raising livestock, particularly cattle, buffalo, chicken, and pigs, plays a role in the household economy. Extra cash comes from cutting bamboo shoots, banana leaves, and so on.

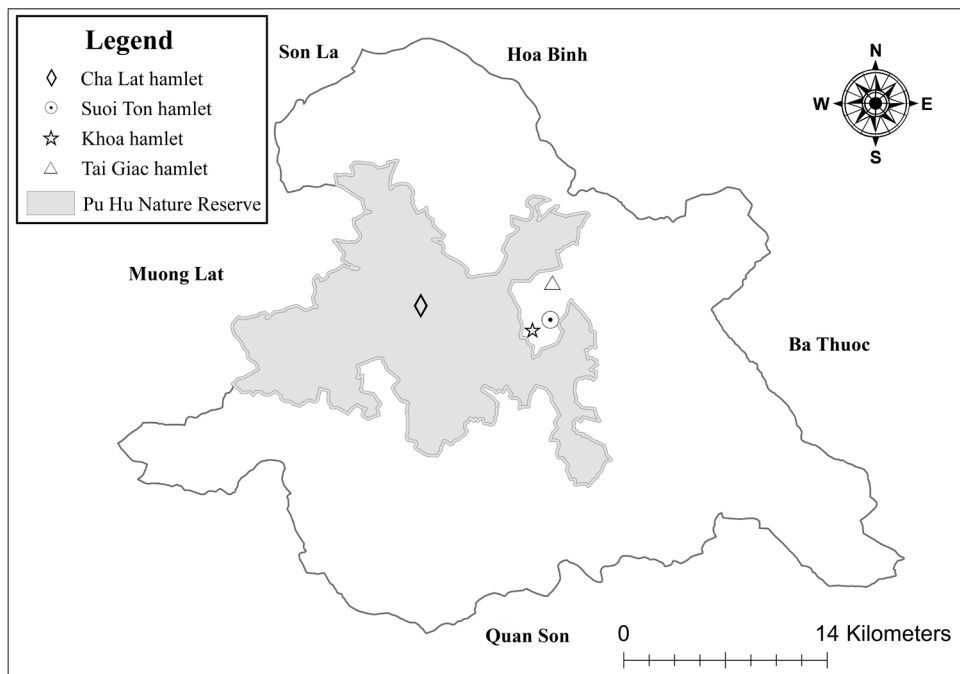


Figure 2. Locations of research hamlets and Pu Hu Nature Reserve

Source: field survey in 2017

4. The social-economic and political Hmong community in the Cha Lat hamlet before state intervention

The Hmong, who lived in the Cha Lat hamlet, are one of 54 official ethnic minorities in Vietnam. This ethnic minority group ranks as the fifth largest group with 1,068,189 people, equivalent to 1.24% of Vietnam's population in 2009 (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2009). Historically, the Hmong people migrated from Southern China to North Vietnam at the end of the eighteenth century due to turmoil with Chinese feudal lords. The majority of the Hmong people (over 91%) are settled in the northern mountainous regions of Vietnam. The re-

mainder primarily live in Thanh Hoa (1.4%), Nghe An province (2.7%) in the Central region and Dak Lak (2.1%), Dak Nong province (2%) in the Central Highlands (GSO, 2009). They often settle in the rugged uplands, 800-1500m above the sea level, where they have traditionally practiced shifting cultivation.

In Cha Lat, all land and natural resources surrounding a community were defined as communal property. The land belonged to the community, but cultivation and cropping were done by individual households⁶. They claimed land based on the norm of subsistence to meet their day-to-day requirements for "safety first". As a result, the differences in landholding per person among households were fairly minimal. According to the survey data from four-

Table 2. Landholding and livelihoods of households interviewed before resettlement (1998)

No	Hometown	Age	Family member (person)	Year of migration	Land holding 1998 (ha)	Landholding / person (ha)	Crops (*)	Livelihoods (**)
1	Yen Bai	47	4	1996	3	0.8	1, 2	1, 2, 3
2	Yen Bai	38	2	1998	0.7	0.4	1	1
3	Yen Bai	39	7	1996	1.5	0.2	1, 2, 3	1, 2, 3
4	Yen Bai	49	5	1993	3.8	0.8	1, 3	1, 2
5	Yen Bai	54	9	1996	4	0.4	1, 3	1
6	Yen Bai	70	4	1994	4	1.0	1	1, 2
7	Son La	86	6	1993	4	0.7	1	1
8	Son La	68	6	1992	2	0.3	1, 3, 4	1, 2
9	Yen Bai	65	7	1996	1	0.1	1, 3	1, 2, 3
10	Yen Bai	44	4	1996	4	1.0	1	1
11	Yen Bai	65	7	1996	0.5	0.1	1	1
12	Yen Bai	47	5	1996	1	0.2	1	1
13	Yen Bai	53	6	1997	4	0.7	1	1
14	Yen Bai	40	8	1993	6	0.8	1, 3	1, 3
Average					2.8	0.5		

Note: (*) 1. Dry rice 2. Sticky rice 3. Cassava 4. Maize

(**) 1. Agricultural 2. Livestock 3. NTFPs

Source: field survey in 2017

teen households, the average landholdings per household and per person were about 2.8 hectares and 0.5 hectares, respectively. Among the households interviewed, the largest landholding per household was 6 hectares, while the smallest was 0.5 hectares (Table 2). Furthermore, the households who had a small amount of land could make up their livelihoods from other activities such as raising livestock or collecting non-timber forest products (NTFPs).

According to the results of the household survey, villagers used forest areas for livelihood activities related to agriculture, livestock and NTFPs, which primarily met family consumption needs. For agricultural activities, the villagers planted dry rice, cassava, maize and sticky rice in swidden land. One hundred percent of respondents planted dry rice as the main source of their daily subsistence. The dry rice was planted for 2-3 crop cycles, then the land was left fallow. Dry rice had a yield which ranged from 2000 to 3300 kg/ha⁷⁾. Aside from dry rice, the Hmong used this land for planting cassava, maize, and sticky rice. There were six households, among a total of 14, who planted cassava, which was then used as a source of food for livestock. Meanwhile, few households (14%) benefited from selling sticky rice to earn extra money. Villagers usually sold sticky rice to other ethnic minorities such as the Muong. Prices ranged from 700-1,500 VND/kg (0.03-0.07 USD)⁸⁾. The raising and care of livestock constituted their other farming activity. Villagers mainly raised chicken, pigs, and cows around their homes, without fences. Products from the forest were extra sources of livelihood for villagers. From November to December, the villagers went to the forest to hunt the wild animals. This was their source of daily food. Villagers also collected timber as a source of fuel and built their houses in the forest⁹⁾. Because cultivated land was well fertilized,

all crops prospered. Livestock developed without epidemic diseases¹⁰⁾. A 47-year-old's household interview described life in Cha Lat before state intervention: "In Cha Lat, my family had three ha in three plots. The land was abundant with a high yield. Dry rice had yielded about 2,700 kg/ha. The production is enough food during two years. Therefore, my family always had enough food for daily subsistence" (Household interviewees, February 2017).

According to the results of key informant interviews¹¹⁾, in Cha Lat, all activities of the community were under the leadership of the village head and clan head. Households of the same clan usually live in one or close clusters to support each other. Labor exchange is the traditional way that villagers used to help each other in farming. People mainly help others within their clans first and then help their neighbors. They clear fields, plant rice, weed, and harvest from the field to home. Each time a family receives help from someone, they return that help within the same planting season. However, in the special case of widows, the ill, or houses which lack laborer's, they are not required to return the help they receive, as labor is given as mutual support from the community. The other activities of mutual support in this community include building houses. If anyone is endeavoring to build a house, the other members of the village could assist in making walls, roofing, or supporting with material from the forest by felling timber. Providing assistance to each other is a part of everyday life for Hmong people. The community has rules that govern the way they may assist each other in daily life when one or some households face difficulties. Particularly, in the case of funerals, each household assists the grieving family with a faggot of firewood, some maize corn, or bottles of wine, provided during the funeral. Alternatively,

in the Mua clan, households gave 10 kg of dry rice to households with illness. Furthermore, the local people used their bonded relationship to help newcomers to reclaim their lands as a gesture of mutual assistance. Additionally, within a clan, families assist each other in their daily lives. As noted by a 70-year-old¹²⁾, his family moved to this hamlet in 1994. As he was a newcomer, it was very hard for his family to cultivate the land, which was located far from his house. Therefore, his brother-in-law helps his family by lending two hectares of land. In addition, participation in communal events not only maintains community spirit and solidarity, but also creates comfortable opportunities for people to share ideas and knit social relations with their fellow villagers.

5. Implementing the resettlement program

In 1998, the displacement program for establishment of the Pu Hu Nature Reserve was implemented. In total, this program displaced 3,026 Hmong

people (500 households) in eight hamlets which belong to the two districts of Quan Hoa and Muong Lat (Table 3). The Hmong in Cha Lat were included in the government's relocation program. They were forced to move out from their homes located in the area occupied by the Pu Hu Nature Reserve.

In Cha Lat hamlet, forced resettlements from the Pu Hu Nature Reserve have been implemented from April 1998 to January 1999¹³⁾. This was divided into three main periods: (1) the announcement and propaganda related to resettlement (April-July 1998); (2) the selection of the relocation area and compensation for host communities (August-December 1998); (3) the move to the new relocation area (January 1999-March 2000). The Forest Protection Department of Quan Hoa district and the Pu Hu Management Board were responsible for the whole process. The first period mainly related to the announcement of the resettlement program, which took place during a village meeting. Acquiring the community's agreement to the displacement at the first village meeting was not easy. There was inconsistency regarding the displacement between local villagers and the government. The community refused to move from their

Table 3. The number of displaced Hmong in the Pu Hu Nature Reserve

Hamlet	Location	Household	People
Suoi Ha	Trung Ly commune, Muong Lat district	15	92
Pum	Trung Ly commune, Muong Lat district	89	537
Vanh	Trung Ly commune, Muong Lat district	79	476
Kep	Trung Ly commune, Muong Lat district	79	482
Na Y	Trung Ly commune, Muong Lat district	70	426
Co Luong	Trung Ly, commune Muong Lat district	36	219
Dang	Trung Thanh commune, Quan Hoa district	23	142
Cha Lat	Phu Son commune, Quan Hoa district	109	652
Total		500	3026

Source: Report of the resettlement program, the Pu Hu Nature Reserve, 2000

lands, meanwhile, the government used strong pressure to force community displacement. The village leader admitted that there was no way to refuse the government's decision. Although the community did not have enough power to avoid their displacement, some households still tried to delay leaving to have time to harvest their crops. The plan was to move all villagers out of the Pu Hu Nature Reserve by the end January 1999; however, until November 1999, twenty-one households out of 109 still lived in the Cha Lat hamlet. This resulted in the forced displacement of eight hamlets, and the Cha Lat hamlet was finally completely moved to a new resettlement site in March 2000 after the authority agencies burnt all houses of those who had delayed their departure. As noted by one witness from the twenty-one households, "It was a bad memory. They threw away my assets and burnt up my house. They shouted angrily and strongly forced us moved out from Cha Lat" (Key informant interview, November 2015 and February 2017).

The government assigned the resettlement site without consultation with local villagers. The resettlement site is located in a swidden field and bamboo groves of the host community. One community is the Muong ethnic group, who lived in the Khoa hamlet, and the other is the Thai ethnic group, who lived in the Tai Giac hamlet (Figure 3). Before resettlement, two host communities have cultivated paddy fields close to their residential areas for subsistence, while in swidden land relatively far from the residential areas, cassava and maize were planted for raising livestock¹⁴). The bamboo trees, planted in large areas scattered near four small streams, is the primary source of household cash income. In total, the land of both Khoa and Tai Giac hamlets before 1998 totaled 494 hectares and 300 hectares,

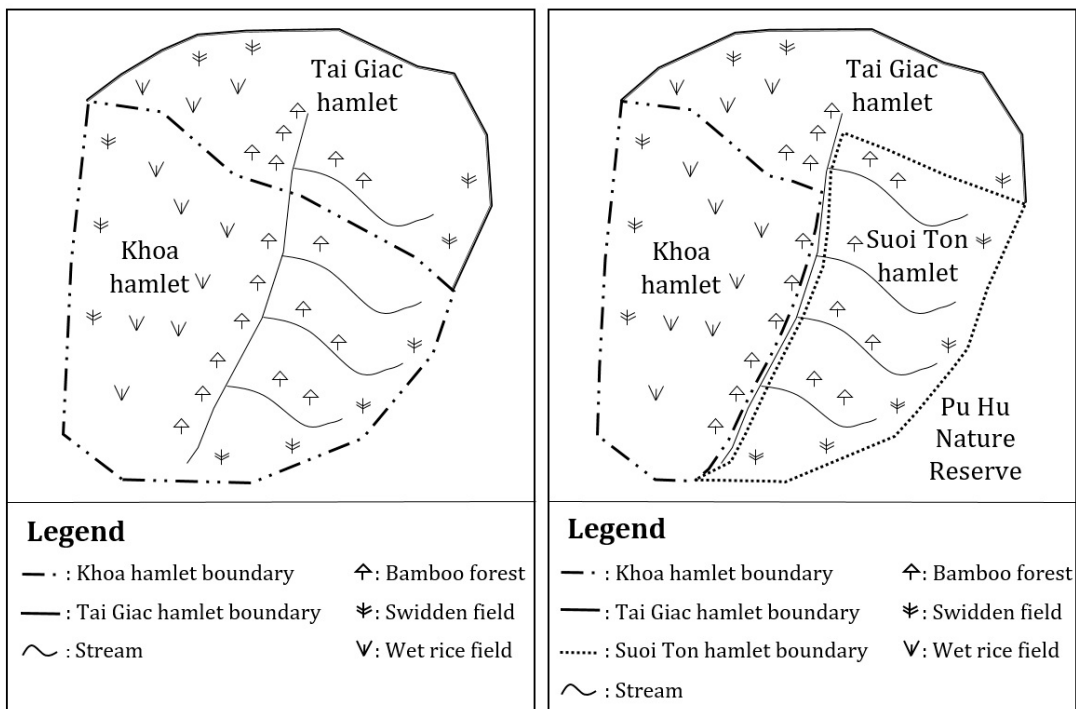
respectively. To set up the new resettlement area, the government suggested that each of the host communities should share 150 hectares of land. Due to the small land area, however, the Thai people in the Tai Giac hamlet only agreed to share 100 hectares of land with the new settler. Meanwhile the Muong people shared 200 hectares of land with the new settlers¹⁵). The village head of Muong hamlet explained the reason for sharing land "At the first time, our community did not make all consensus among households. However, we should share the land for help Hmong people who was affected by the Pu Hu Nature Reserve establishment. Their situation was more difficulty than us. All of their lands in Cha Lat hamlet lost, while we still have rice paddies and bamboo lands even if we share land to them" (Key informant interview, June 2015). This explanation from the village head of the Muong hamlet clearly indicates a norm of reciprocity functions, even in inter-ethnic relationships, though the shared lands with the Hmong were not the main sources for either the Muong or the Thai, whose main livelihoods are dependent on paddy fields, not swidden land. Despite the risk of a future land shortage for Thai and Muong peoples and although the extent of sharing Moral Economy with other ethnic group was different for the Muong and the Thai, they felt that they had a moral duty to help the Hmong people due to the displacement process. It is worth noting that besides the small land holding of the Thai hamlet, the Muong share a very similar cultural background with the Hmong and had experiences with the Hmong in Cha Lat through the trade of sticky rice. Actually, there has not been a single land dispute among these three ethnic groups after resettlement¹⁶), which demonstrates the inter-ethnic sharing of the Moral Economy and is not merely the result of passive re-

sponses to the state intervention.

After receiving 300 hectares of land consisting of both swidden fields and bamboo groves from the host communities, the swidden land inside the Suoi Ton hamlet was openly accessible to all households, who could claim as much land as they needed for cultivation based on customary laws. The results of the household survey revealed that, as of 2004, the average size of landholding per household and per person in Suoi Ton was 1.8 hectares and 0.3 hectares, respectively (Table 4). To make up the decreased land holdings in the resettled area, besides reclaiming the swidden land inside the Suoi Ton territory, the villagers encroached on the land for swidden inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve until 2004. After the

establishment of the Pu Hu Nature Reserve, in theory, all human activities have not been allowed inside the reserve. In reality, however, between 1999 and 2003, many Hmong people claimed the land inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve as they did before resettlement. Among fourteen households, eight households (57%) practiced shifting cultivation inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve during this period of time.

In 2004, the average of landholdings per household was slightly decreased by 0.2 hectares over 6 years, from 2.8 hectares in 1998 to 2.6 hectares in 2004. Likewise, there was a slight decrease in landholding per person from 0.5 hectares before resettlement (1998) to 0.4 hectares after resettlement (2004). However, the eight households (57%) could



(a) Before land sharing

(b) After land sharing

Figure 3. Hamlet boundaries, land use before and after land sharing

Source: field survey in 2017

Table 4. Landholding per household (hh) and per person before resettlement (1998) and after resettlement (2004)

No	Landholding 1998 (ha)		Family member 2005* (person)	Landholding/hh 2004 (ha)			Landholding/person 2004 (ha)			Changed land 1998-2004 (ha)	
	per house hold	per person		Total	Pu Hu	Suoi Ton	Total	Pu Hu	Suoi Ton	Land-holding/hh	Land-holding/person
1	3	0.8	6	2.5	2.0	0.5	0.4	0.3	0.1	-0.5	-0.3
2	0.7	0.4	4	3.0	0.0	3.0	0.8	0.0	0.8	2.3	0.4
3	1.5	0.2	7	2.2	1.0	1.2	0.3	0.1	0.2	0.7	0.1
4	3.8	0.8	7	4.8	0.0	4.8	0.7	0.0	0.7	1.0	-0.1
5	4	0.4	9	3.0	1.0	2.0	0.3	0.1	0.2	-1.0	-0.1
6	4	1.0	6	4.0	0.0	4.0	0.7	0.0	0.7	0.0	-0.3
7	4	0.7	6	2.0	1.0	1.0	0.3	0.2	0.2	-2.0	-0.3
8	2	0.3	6	2.0	1.0	1.0	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.0	0.0
9	1	0.1	7	4.0	2.0	2.0	0.6	0.3	0.3	3.0	0.4
10	4	1.0	4	1.5	0.0	1.5	0.4	0.0	0.4	-2.5	-0.6
11	0.5	0.1	7	0.5	0.0	0.5	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.0
12	1	0.2	5	1.5	1.5	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0	0.5	0.1
13	4	0.7	6	3.0	0.0	3.0	0.5	0.0	0.5	-1.0	-0.2
14	6	0.8	10	3.0	3.0	0.0	0.3	0.3	0.0	-3.0	-0.5
Avg.	2.8	0.5	6.4	2.6	0.9	1.8	0.4	0.1	0.3	-0.2	-0.1

Source: field survey in 2017

* The authors collected the data of family members as of 2005.

keep the same or more landholdings than before the resettlement (Table 5). Some of them could expand their lands through reclamation of the land inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve.

In short, until 2004, the villagers had kept their

customary land tenure even after resettlement. It is worth noting that the inter-ethnic relationship based on the common 'subsistence ethic' played a crucial role in mitigating state intervention.

Table 5. Comparison landholding before resettlement (1998) and after resettlement (2004)

Landholding in 2004	Number of households (%)
Less than before resettlement	6 (42.9)
Same as before resettlement	3 (21.4)
More than before resettlement	5 (35.7)

Source: field survey in 2017

6. State intervention in the new settlement and the Hmong response

After resettlement, the socio-economic and political life of the Hmong community was challenged by state interventions. The two primary state interventions are highlighted in this section, i.e. limited

access inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve and Forest Land Allocation (Table 6).

1) Limited access inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve and the redistribution of land among villagers

In 2004, the government began strictly controlling local people's activities inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve. The authority of the Pu Hu Nature Reserve established seven checkpoints with 15 rangers to prevent the encroachment of local people. Every week, they patrolled 2-3 times to discover illegal activities. Nature reserve authorities do not allow swidden or other activities which exploit natural resources and the ecological system. Additionally, the government clearly defined the boundary between the Nature Reserve and the Suoi Ton hamlet to prevent the encroachment of villagers. Apart from swidden cultivation activities, the Hmong people cannot cut timber for house construction, collecting NTFPs for their daily food. The Nature reserve authorities carried out many propaganda campaigns to newly legitimize the reserve. Also, they punished encroachers who illegally cut down trees. Many households who logged timber for house construction were fined¹⁷⁾. Besides the ban on logging, hunting wild animals for food

was also prohibited. Many guns which were used for hunting animals in the Pu Hu nature reserve were confiscated by rangers. Consequently, NTFPs, one of the traditional livelihood activities of villagers, was gradually restricted. The villagers could no longer freely access natural resources as they did before. The limitation on access to natural resources inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve in 2004 caused the loss of land. Fourteen household interviewees revealed that there were eight households (57%) who had lost land in the Pu Hu Nature Reserve. The total land lost was 12.5 hectares (Table 7). The largest piece of land was three hectares, and the smallest one was one hectare. Land scarcity became a serious challenge for their livelihood.

To cope with these problems, the village community devised a solution—sharing land among villagers. Accordingly, the village head and the clan heads mobilised landed households to share their land to help households with less land overcome this hardship. Also, mutual assistance within the community is popular in this community. First, the donors enthusiastically registered the plots of land that they were willing to share with landless households. Areas of land, as well as land locations, were decided by the donors. Second, the households with less land applied for assistance with their situation to

Table 6. Timeline of state interventions in the Suoi Ton hamlet

Year	State intervention
1998	Resettlement program for the Pu Hu Nature Reserve establishment The Hmong were forcibly moved from the Cha Lat hamlet to the Suoi Ton hamlet
2004	Limited access inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve The Hmong were prohibited from access to natural resources inside the Pu Hu nature reserve
2005	Forest land allocation Individual households were allocated land based on the statutory land rights systems

Source: field survey in 2017

the village community. Mainly, they were landless due to the land they lost inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve. Alternatively, even though they did not lose land, their land was inadequate for sustaining the demand of daily subsistence activities required to raise a larger family. For instance, Table 7 illustrates that household No. 11 received 0.5 hectares of land from his relative in the Vang clan despite the fact that he had not lost land inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve. Subsequently, the village head and the leader of clans selected donors and recipients. Priority was given to the recipient who was the closest kin to the donor. The result of our household interviews indicated that seven households of donors and recipients were in the same clan (Table 7). Leaders then chose donors and recipients from different clans. Finally, after all these steps, the village head and leader of the clans, accompanied by donors and recipients, chose new boundar-

ies of land to avoid disputes.

The reduction in the average of both landholdings per household and per person was caused by state intervention. After land sharing measures were implemented by the villages, there was a slight decrease in land holdings. The average acreage per household decreased from 2.6 hectares in 2004 to 2 hectares in 2005. Likewise, compared to 2004, the average landholding per person steadily decreased by 0.1 hectare in 2005 (Table 8). Although the Hmong community has been faced with land scarcity, they still maintain their mutual support, assisting other households as they did before. Even if this assistance would not offset lost land, some villagers could not overcome the land shortage for their subsistence needs. For instance, household No.1 received help from his brother who shared one ha of land. Due to this help, members of his family could overcome

Table 7. The land share among households in the Suoi Ton hamlet

No	Landholding 2004 (ha)	Lost land (ha)	Received land (ha)	Shared land (ha)	Relationships of donors and recipients	Landholding 2005 (ha)
1	2.5	2	1	0	Same clan	1.5
2	3.0	0	0	1	Same clan	2
3	2.2	1	0	0		1.2
4	4.8	0	0	0		4.8
5	3.0	1	0	0		2
6	4.0	0	0	0		4
7	2.0	1	0.5	0	Same clan	1.5
8	2.0	1	0	0		1
9	4.0	2	0.5	0	Same clan	2.5
10	1.5	0	0	0		1.5
11	0.5	0	0.5	0	Same clan	1
12	1.5	1.5	0.3	0	Same clan	0.3
13	3.0	0	0	0		3
14	3.0	3	1	0	Same clan	1
Total	37	12.5	3.8	1		27.3

Source: field survey in 2017

Table 8. Changes of landholding per household and landholding per person in 1998, 2004 and 2005

No.	1998			2004			2005		
	Family member (person)	Land-holding (ha)	Land-holding /person (ha)	Family Member* (person)	Land-holding (ha)	Land-holding/ person (ha)	Family member (person)	Land-holding (ha)	Land-holding/ person (ha)
1	4	3	0.8	6	2.5	0.4	6	1.5	0.3
2	2	0.7	0.4	4	3.0	0.8	4	2	0.5
3	7	1.5	0.2	7	2.2	0.3	7	1.2	0.2
4	5	3.8	0.8	7	4.8	0.7	7	4.8	0.7
5	9	4	0.4	9	3.0	0.3	9	2	0.2
6	4	4	1.0	6	4.0	0.7	6	4	0.7
7	6	4	0.7	6	2.0	0.3	6	1.5	0.3
8	6	2	0.3	6	2.0	0.3	6	1	0.2
9	7	1	0.1	7	4.0	0.6	7	2.5	0.4
10	4	4	1.0	4	1.5	0.4	4	1.5	0.4
11	7	0.5	0.1	7	0.5	0.1	7	1	0.1
12	5	1	0.2	5	1.5	0.3	5	0.3	0.1
13	6	4	0.7	6	3.0	0.5	6	3	0.5
14	8	6	0.8	10	3.0	0.3	10	1	0.1
Avg.	5.7	2.8	0.5	6.4	2.6	0.4	6.4	2.0	0.3

Source: field survey in 2017

* The numbers of family member in 2004 was assumed to be the same as in 2005 due to lack of data in 2004.

their food shortage. Some households, however, such as No. 3, 5, and 8, who lost land inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve, did not take the opportunity to receive help from the community. They seemed to consider other households, who were more impoverished than their own households. For instance, the key informant interviewee who lost one ha of land inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve and did not receive land from other households explained his position: "Although my family lost 1 hectare of land inside Pu Hu Nature Reserve, we still have two plots of land, roughly 1.2 hectares that we followed since 2001. Though our situation is better than others who both lost the land inside Pu Hu Nature Reserve and were landless in the Suoi Ton hamlet. These landless

households more urgently need the help than my family. Therefore, I didn't register to the community for receiving land" (Household interviewee of 39-years-old, February 2017).

2) The implementation of forest land allocation and local community negotiation between customary law and statutory law

In Vietnam, more than 9 million hectares of state forest land were allocated to individual households, communities, and economic entities beginning in the 1990s. At the same time, the government has urged local people to become involved in protecting

forests and developing plantations as well. In Thanh Hoa Province, where forest land accounts for 63% of the natural land area, the government implemented forest land allocation since 1995. The Forest Land Allocation in Suoi Ton hamlet was implemented 10 years later than the other parts of the province. In 2005, the local government implemented Forest Land Allocation in the Suoi Ton hamlet and followed the guidelines of Decree No.02/CP on forest land allocation for organisations, individuals, and households. The local authorities decided to allocate forest land of approximately 100-120 hectares in 300 hectares of the Suoi Ton hamlet that was formerly used for swidden cultivation to over 64 households of Hmong people. The duration of a longer-term lease is fifty years. The government believed that the forest land allocation to individual households helped to ensure the tenure of households. The Quan Hoa Forest Protection Department and official in charge of land management in the Phu Son commune took the main responsibility for land allocation to individual households. They expected the land distribution to be equal. Individual households received the land by lottery. The average amount of land allocation per household was 1.5 hectares.

However, the implementation of this reallocation was inconsistent for the local community. The community did not follow the forest land allocation of the local authorities and refused to participate in the process of distributing plots. The villagers resisted the long-term allocation of forest land because they did not want to break the 'harmony' in the relationship of both their kinship within the clan and with other clans. After a long discussion between local and authorities, the forest land allocation was implemented as a form of compromise between customary law and statutory law. The distribution of land

among villagers was accepted by the local community based on customary law, while the land certificate issued by government officers was based on statutory law. First, households declared their land plots, in which the household had a traditional claim of 'first come first served'. Then, households pointed out the location of land to the Village Management Board in which the village head and clan heads were representatives. Before the Village Management Board documented the acres of the plots without measurement, they confirmed whether there was a dispute on plots to prevent land disputes after allocation. Finally, the government officer received the results of forest land allocation from the local community. They then issued the Land Use Right Certification to each household.

In summary, following resettlement in Suoi Ton Hamlet, the two events above clearly represent how the intra-ethnic relationship functions to mitigate the impacts of the state intervention within the scope of the Moral Economy. The intra-ethnic redistribution of land within Hmong communities provided a safety net for villagers in times of resource scarcity.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This study began with the aim of assessing the dynamics of Hmong people's responses to state intervention and determining how the Hmong in the Suoi Ton hamlet have responded to the intervention. As Scott (1976) noted, the most important principle of Southeast Asian peasants is based on norms of reciprocity and the 'right to subsistence'. All members of the community have a right to a minimum level of subsistence, and the community must sup-

port this right. They have a moral duty to help one another. They prefer to maintain 'safety first' for survival, rather than take risks to maximize their income (Scott, 1976). Political mobilization occurs when there is widespread belief that elites or government are ignoring the duties of the subsistence ethic (Scott, 1976). Sowerwine (2004) depicted two Dao communities in the uplands of Vietnam who successfully negotiated the replacement of forest reforms by using local power relations, local specific ecological conditions and customary practices. In another case of Black Thai people in Thai Nguyen Province, bonds of kinship among local villagers help them successfully acquire their ancestral lands from Kinh immigrants¹⁸ since decollectivisation (Scott, 2000). Furthermore, previous studies on the Hmong in Northern Vietnam argued that the individual households successfully responded to market forces by using selective livelihood diversification which was based on their needs, culture systems, and ethnicity (Turner and Michaud, 2009; Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2011). The Hmong people in our study area corroborate with the previous results of Hmong studies about intra-ethnic relations through sharing the bonds of kinship and ethnicity. On the other hand, however, the evidence from this case study provides additional insights into the school of Moral Economy, arguing that inter-ethnic relations can encourage an intra-ethnic dynamic to mitigate the state intervention.

Before the state intervention, the Hmong people had been regularly meeting their day-to-day requirements for survival by using natural resources shared in common. Strict management rules and customary laws were established to provide access to resources in an egalitarian and sustainable way. Also, the traditional governance system consisting of rights and

regulations, maintained social cohesion, village kinship, and risk sharing obligations within a community. The limitation of access inside the Pu Hu Nature Reserve has largely reduced and eliminated their ability to meet their basic subsistence needs. Most villagers have found themselves living under great pressure from resource scarcity. In the resettled hamlet, the Hmong did not have enough cultivable land to feed their families. They could not collect products from the forest. Our results revealed that the Hmong people responded to the state intervention by sustaining the local rights of subsistence and the normative values of traditions in the Hmong community. The redistribution of land intra-ethnically within Hmong communities functioned to mitigate risk, based on norms of reciprocity and subsistence. This also provided safety nets for villagers in times of resource scarcity. Furthermore, Muong and Thai peoples shared land with Hmong peoples in their resettlement. This indicated a norm of reciprocity in inter-ethnic relationships. Despite the risk of future land shortage for Thai and Muong peoples, they felt they had a moral duty to help Hmong people due to the displacement process. As a result of inter and intra-ethnic reciprocity, the moral economy still existed in this community. Customary elements, based on kinship, mutual assistance, and communal ownership, played an important role for Hmong people in Cha Lat, in particular, as well as for general ethnic minorities in the Vietnam uplands. However, the implementation of state intervention has not closely considered the existence of customary elements and local interests.

These findings may assist the state in rethinking its interventions, which have been constructed with very little respect for the differences and desires of ethnic peoples. Furthermore, the main findings, that

not only the intra-ethnic relationship but also the inter-ethnic relationship among ethnic minorities can play an important role to maintain the Moral Economy, are expected to deepen the previous understanding on the Moral Economy, which has previously constrained its scope to the study of the intra-ethnic relationship alone.

Notes

- 1) Due to the large number of respondents who speak only the Hmong language, the authors employed a local Hmong who is young and speaks Vietnamese fluently as interpreter. In order to avoid translation misunderstanding, we also conducted cross-checking during all the field surveys.
- 2) Yen Bai Province lies in the west of Vietnam's northern region. The population of Yen Bai province as of 2009 was 743,400 persons. This province is the home of 30 different groups of people, of which the Kinh, the ethnic majority, accounts for about 54%, ethnic minorities for more than 40% including Tay, Thai, Dao, and Hmong. There were 81,921 Hmong people (11%) in Yen Bai Province. They mainly resided in Mu Cang Chai (53%), Tram Tau (25%) and Van Chan (12%) district. The hometown of respondents were Tram Tau and Van Chan district.
- 3) Son La Province is one of six North-western provinces in Vietnam. The population of Son La as of 2009 was 1,007,500 persons. This province is inhabited by 34 ethnic groups, of which Thai (54%), Kinh (18%) and Hmong (12%) account for more than 80% of the province's population.
- 4) The households received information from their Hmong friends who lived close to the Cha Lat hamlet. Subsequently, this group shared information with their relatives or friends in both the Son La and Yen Bai Province. For instance, the 50-year-old's household interviews explained that he knew information on the Cha Lat hamlet from his younger brother who migrated there in 1994. Meanwhile, in his hometown, he had three-four ha available for cultivation. However, the land quality was no longer good for growing crops. The land required too much labor to remove grass, and it did not cultivate well.
- 5) 'Special Use Forest' has been established to maintain ecosystems, to conserve biodiversity, to provide opportunities for scientific research, to protect cultural and historical sites and for outdoor recreation and ecotourism. 'Special Use Forest' includes national parks, nature reserve, landscape protection areas, and scientific research and experiment forests.
- 6) Key informant interview with the communist party leader who was a former village head, 18th November 2015.
- 7) The information gathered from five household interviewees: No.1, 24th February 2017; No.3, 25th February 2017; No.4, 25th February 2017; No.8, 27th February 2017 and No.12, 1st March 2017.
- 8) In March 2018, 1 USD is approximately 22,725 VND.
- 9) A 47-year-old's household interview (No.1), 24th February 2017.
- 10) A 54-year-old's household interview (No.5), 26th February 2017.
- 11) Information of local governance system and social relationship in Cha Lat hamlet collected from key informant interview of clan head of Vang (Yen Bai), Mua (Son La), 25th February 2017 and 26th February 2017 respectively.
- 12) Information collected from household interview of No.4, 25th February 2017.
- 13) The information of implementing the resettlement program was collected from a key informant interview with staff of the Pu Hu Nature Reserve on 27th November 2015; the official in charge of land management in the commune on 17th November 2015, former village head on 26th February, 2017, and members of a household which delayed moving to the new resettlement on 21th November 2015 and 23th February 2017.
- 14) Key informant interview with village head of Khoa hamlet, Mr Ha Van Pet, 12th June 2015.
- 15) Key informant interview with village head of Khoa hamlet 15th June 2015, village head of Suoi Ton hamlet on 13th June 2015 and the official in charge of land management in commune on 17th November 2015.
- 16) The data source is same with 15).
- 17) The household interviewee said 'I used the timber for house construction and was fined 6-7 million VND (264- 308 USD)'.
 - 18) Kinh is the majority ethnic group in Vietnam accounting for 85.7% of the total population in the 2009 census (GSOV, 2009). Since the 1960s, the large number of immigrant Kinh people in lowland of Red River Delta moved to Thai Nguyen Province under the New Economic Zones program.

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