

THE MAKING OF ETHNIC BOUNDARIES BETWEEN THE CIL AND THE K'HO (SRE) IN NINH GIA COMMUNE, DUC TRONG DISTRICT, LAM DONG PROVINCE, VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

In Vietnam, and probably in many other countries, ethnic groupings according to State official lists are not entirely identical with the actual ethnic affiliations in local contexts. Since 1979, the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has officially counted and documented the names of the 53 ethnic minorities. This information was based on the report of the ethnic composition of the people living in Vietnam made by Vietnamese ethnologists. In the ethnographic discipline in Vietnam, the perspective that views cultural characteristics as having an ethnic identity defining quality is apparently a popular view. In reality, one can have deep ethnic differences without correspondingly important cultural differences; and one can have cultural variation without ethnic boundaries.

During my field research from 2004 to 2011 in Lam Dong province, I overheard some *Cil*s talking to one another that the *Cil* in Dang Sron hamlet, Duc Trong district have already become the *K'ho* (Sre). In some interviews with officials in charge of cultural and ethnic affairs in Duc Trong district, they also reported that there was no *Cil* in Dang Sron and it was an area of the *K'ho*. Some even said that the *Cil* in Dang Sron have been “K'ho Hoá (K'ho-nized)”- turned into *K'ho*. Are there still ethnic boundaries between the *Cil* and the *K'ho* in the area?

In terms of administrative space, the *Cil* and the *K'ho* (Sre) in Dang Sron shared a common lived space. Over time, under particular circumstances, the *Cil* in Dang Sron *bon* might have adopted an ethnic label imposed upon them by outsiders. And it is from this social phenomenon that an ethnic community can develop a second identity in addition to their local ethnic identity. I believe that the *Cil* in Dang Sron are a case in point. The purpose of this paper is to explore the process, social changes and the making of ethnic boundaries between the *Cil* and the *K'ho* (Sre) in Dang Sron in Lam Dong province, Vietnam.

Therefore, in Vietnam, ethnic classification was done by scientists by their objective research and analysis based on some criteria such as same territory, same language, same subsistent economy, same culture and ethnic awareness. Accordingly, in Dang Sron, if ethnic awareness was considered as the most important criterion, the *Cil* were still themselves. However, if culture was to be the most significant feature, the *Cil* in Dang Sron should be identified as the *K'ho* (Sre).

Keywords: Ethnic Boundaries, Ethnic Identity, Strategic Hamlet, Religion, the *Cil* and the *K'ho* in Vietnam.

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An outline of among the *Cil* and *K'ho* (Sre)

Lam Dong is located in the central highlands of Vietnam, where there are many ethnic groups. As a matter of fact, ethnic group denominations often change in historical process. There is always a phenomenon that some denominations are no longer in reality meaningful to the peoples. On the contrary, due to historical impacts, especially migration, many local groups of the same ethnic people acquire new different ethnic names [Mac Duong, 1983:27].

In 1979, the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has officially counted and documented the names of the 53 ethnic minorities. Accordingly, the *Cil* and *Sre* are small local groups of the K'ho [Coho, Koho]. The K'ho, including the small local groups (Sre, Cil, Lat, Tring, Nop, Codon) lived in Lam Dong province, which is a Mon-Khmer language group in Vietnam².

The *Cil* and *K'ho* (Sre) are matrilineal groups, whose lineal surnames and properties are inherited from mother's side. Each *bon*³ is small, comprised of 2 or 3 lineages residing in 4 or 5 "*hiu rot* (long house)". Each *hiu rot* is then separated into some bounded spaces which are dwelling places of several couples and their children.

Prior to 1960, the K'ho (Sre) cultivated paddy rice. The Sre lived in Duc Trong and Di Linh districts of Lam Dong Province. The *Cil* was a nomadic group that lived temporarily in various areas, depending on availability of land. The *Cil* lived in Lam Vien Plateau, Lac Duong district of Lam Dong province which is

a mountainous area at the height of 1,500 meters over the sea level north east of Da Lat city.

The *Cil*'s main economic activity was shifting cultivation (slash and burn). Typically, the *Cil* moved along streams in wild forests to choose relatively sloping plots to grow corns. Each plot would be cultivated for about ten years, and then let abandoned while new plots would be explored. Each *bon* and lineage had their own plots of land at specific streams or forests. Land might be let abandoned for a long period of time but still belonging to its initially exploring lineage.

In the 1960s, the Republic of Vietnam⁴ forced ethnic groups, including the *Cil*, to converge in *Strategic Hamlets*. They forced the *Cil* to leave their *bon* in the deep forests. It was explained to them that this was so that they could take refuge from the *Việt Cộng*⁵. The underlying reason was that the government wanted to separate the people from *Việt Cộng* – under the motto "*tách cá khỏi nước* (separating fishes from water)" – and to gather them into residential zones for the sake of control. The zones were bounded by fences and ditches to control people's movement in/out. The zones were termed "*ấp chiến lược* (strategic hamlet)"⁶ which aimed at preventing people from supplying food to *Việt Cộng*. After 1964, the *Cil* were established next to residential areas of the K'ho (Sre) in Duc Trong, Di Linh, Don Duong districts of Lam Dong province. Most of the *bon* were divided and relocated into newly-organized administrative hamlets. These constituted administrative

² According to *Danh mục các thành phần dân tộc ở Việt Nam* (The list of ethnic minority groups in Vietnam), March 2, 1979 Report by Director of the Bureau of Statistics of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

³ *Bon* is a cultivating and lived space of some lineages which is socially (relatively) exclusive.

⁴ Republic of Vietnam (*Việt Nam Cộng Hòa*) was a state which governed Southern Vietnam, from 1955 – 1975.

⁵ *Việt Cộng* stands for Vietnamese Communist.

⁶ After 1961, the South Vietnamese government attempted to separate peasants including ethnic groups from Communists by forcing emigration to "fortified villages".

units which made it possible for the government to control people and their economic activities.

After the Unification in 1975, the current government proposed a fixed cultivation, residence program, and a model of collective economic development called “*tập đoàn sản xuất (the group of agricultural production)*”. In post “*Đổi Mới (renovation)*”⁷, the *Cil* have been influenced by the policy of developing a multi-sector economy and independent household economy to cultivate coffee, high-yield corn, and persimmons.

The *Cil* and *K’ho* (Sre) in some ethnography researches

According to Jacques Dournes, to the Sre [*K’ho*-Sre]... the *Cil* are like the *Moi* to the yellow skin (the *Kinh*). Dournes also notes that the most prominent difference between the *Cil* and the *K’ho* [*Sre*, in Di Linh district] is their residential area, the size of their social organization of each *bon* and their relative economic condition. They share a similarity in their impoverished situation [Dournes 2003: 112-117].

In 1959, La Van Lo wrote that the *K’ho*, also called the Sre or the *K’ho* (*Sre*), have a population of 30,000; and the *M’nong* (including the *Chil* [*Cil*], *Gar*, *Rlam*, *dip*, *Dudang*, *Bunor*, *Preh*, *Noong* groups) have a population of 10,000 [La Van Lo 1959: 216-218]. Remarkably, in this research, the authors consider the *Cil* as a local group of the *M’nong*.

In 1967, Hickey considered all the *Ma*, *Cil*, *Sre*, *Lat*, *Nop*, and *Tring* groups as local groups of the *K’ho* [Hickey 1967:25].

In 1973, Do Van Tu divided the *Cil* into two groups, one of which belongs to the *M’nong* and the other to the *K’ho* [Do Van Tu 1973: 119].

In 1983, Mac Duong believed that the *Cil* should have been classified as a group of the *M’nong*. He argued that under the French colonization, among the *M’nong* there were conflicts and fights for status; therefore, the *Cil* moved to Lam Vien highland in Lac Duong district, Lam Dong province. Under the impact of missionary activity among the *K’ho* and the effects of new Protestant customs, the *Cil*, *Lat*, and *K’ho* (*Sre*) groups were closely integrated and consequently classified as the *K’ho* (*Sre*) in scientific documents. “It is believed that it is necessary and logical to arrange the *Cil* and the *Lat* into the *K’ho* in order to reinforce the rapid development of national solidarity in the region where there were still many ethnic discrimination and profound prejudice. The elimination of complicated ethnic names would contribute to the process of eradicating narrow localism, and reinforcing national solidarity” [Mac Duong 1983: 29-32, 304].

In 1984, Phan Ngoc Chien wrote:

“The *K’ho* have different levels of economic and social status. Ethnic groups who are living in highland such as the *Cil*, *Nop*, and *Codon* practice shifting cultivation and often wander around hills so that their *bons* are only temporary. On the contrary, because they are living in the valley where cultivating land is fertile the *Sre* and *Lat* grow paddy rice and thus have a higher level of social structure [Phan Ngoc Chien 1984: 111].

In 1999, Tran Si Thu notices that historically, the *M’nong* and *K’ho* have always been neighbors who mutually influenced each other. Consequently, some *Cils* may consider themselves as the *K’ho* while others consider themselves *M’nong* [Tran Si Thu 1999:12].

In 2002, in the proceedings of the

⁷ *Đổi Mới*: literally, ‘renovation’. In 1986, the current Vietnamese government began to reform economic policy for developing.

workshop entitled “*Discussing criteria to re-identify some ethnic groups in Vietnam*”, Phan Xuan Bien writes:

“The *K’ho*, except its core group, is the *Sre*, therefore, other groups such as the *Nop*, *Kodon*, *Chil*, *Lat*, and *Toring* may need further careful research. Probably, the *Cil*, *Lat*, and *Toring* had the same origin, but in historical process they followed different development orientations and had no close relations with the *Sre*, *To La* and so on [Phan Xuan Bien 2002:4].

In the same perspective, Dang Nghiem Van notices that “in the central highlands, there are intermediary groups which are groups possibly self-identifying as belonging to one people or another.” Likewise, he considers the *Cil* to be a middle group of the *M’nong* and the *K’ho* [Dang Nghiem Van 2002:133].

In 2003, Bui Minh Dao believes that: The *K’ho* are not a pure people; rather they consist of several local groups. The *Sre* grow paddy rice, while the *Cil* live in high mountains and forests and subsist on horticulture. To the *Sre* one must cultivate paddy rice to be rich while to the *Cil* one has to have a set of six gongs (*cing*), and 10 old jags (*yang*). He also notices that among the *K’ho*, original ethnic self-awareness seems to be blurring while consciousness about local groups is very strong [Bui Minh Dao 2003: 20-24].

However, the authors tend to examine similar cultural and social characteristics of local groups such as the *Sre*, *Cil*, *Lach*, *Nop*, *To La* and *Mang To* in order to generalize into the characteristics of the *K’ho*. This causes the authors to fail to demonstrate the boundaries between these local groups of the *K’ho*, especially, the historical process which leads to similarities and differences among them.

In 2005, Phan Ngoc Chien recognizes

some differences between the *K’ho* and the *Cil*: In terms of language, despite the fact that the two peoples understand each other, their intonation and vocabulary are different. Economically, the *Cil* in Lac Duong carry out horticulture while the *K’ho* are agriculturalists. As a result, the former are semi-sedentary, sharply contrast to the latter who are sedentary. The *Cil* have surnames while the *K’ho* do not. Religiously, the *Cil* are Protestants and the *K’ho* are Catholics. Customarily, the two people practice distinctive wedding and funeral rituals. According to data collected from fieldwork research, Phan Ngoc Chien concludes that based on geographic and social environment and respondents’ seniority, the *K’ho* and the *Cil* use different criteria to self-distinguish themselves.

Noticeably, Phan Ngoc Chien suggested that hitherto the *K’ho* was indentified as consistings of some ethnic groups belonging to Mon-Khmer language group, including the *Ma*. However, there is an alternative classification of the *K’ho* which, is comprised of two local groups – the *K’ho-Sre* (cultivating paddy rice) and the *K’ho-Mir* (horticulturalists). Ethnic consciousness of the *K’ho* in general exceeds awareness about local groups. However, in particular, the *K’ho* in Da Knang still consider themselves a distinctive people and the *Cil* who live next to them belong to a different people [Phan Ngoc Chien 2005: 231-232].

For the last 50 years, each ethnic group in Lam Dong province have experienced their historical process of tremendous social change. In this paper, I intend to elucidate the migration process and making of ethnic boundaries between the *Cil* and the *K’ho* (*Sre*) in Dang Sron hamlet, Duc Trong district, Lam Dong province.

Migration and Social changes among the *Cil* and *K’ho* (*Sre*) in Dang Sron

Dang Sron hamlet (Ninh Gia commune) is crossed by the national highway 20, 15 km from Lien Nghia town (Duc Trong district) in the Northeast, and 30 km from Di Linh town in the South. Dang Sron is a turning point on the national route 20 leading to Bac Binh district, Binh Thuan province.

In terms of administrative boundary, before 1975, Dang Sron *bon* was located between Tuyen Duc and Lam Dong provinces. Until 1986, Dang Sron still belonged to Di Linh district. Since October 1987, when Ninh Gia commune was established, Dang Sron has been identified as a hamlet, belonging to the administrative area of Duc Trong district.

Before 1964

In Dang Sron there were ten *K'ho* households living in long houses. They were a *K'ho* group who subsisted on paddy rice and were considered as belonging to the *K'ho*. Dang Sron *bon* of the *K'ho* existed for such a long time that the *K'ho* in Duc Trong district considered them as the *K'ho-Dang Sron* (the *K'ho* of Dang Sron *bon*).

In 1960, K'Na who is *K'ho* in Dang Sron *bon* was an official in the government of the Republic of Vietnam. K'Na came to the *Cil* in Da Rle stream (also known as Da Rle *bon*) to suggest them move to Dang Sron to reside. He promised that they would be supplied land to cultivate. Accordingly, about five households of some lineages such as *Da Krieng*, *Ko Sa*, *Dong Gur*, and *K'long* migrated to live next to the *K'ho* in Dang Sron while still keeping their traditional subsistence pattern of horticulture, mostly growing corn, near the *K'ho* fields.

Near Dang Sron *bon* there existed Dang Ja *bon* and N'Hanh *bon* of the *K'ho*

(Sre). The people have been agriculturalists and permanently resided in the regions since the French colonialism. Prior to 1960, despite the fact that these *bons* were not far from one another in terms of geographic distance (approximately 10km), they had possessed distinctive cultivating spaces (field) and residing spaces. In Dang Ja and N'Hanh, there were some valleys serving as paddy rice fields with relatively large area such as *Nau ra*, *Lam bop*, *But gle*, *Sre dang*, and so on. However, there seldom were social interactions among the *bons*. Particularly, in each *bon*, members of matrilineal families lived in long houses and mainly subsisted on paddy rice and cattle-breeding (buffalos). In each *bon* there is a graveyard for all the deceased of the matrilineages.

Geographically, compared to their fellow people, the *K'ho* in N'Hanh *bon* used to reside further away from Highway 20. However, under the impacts of wars, especially after 1960s, the people in N'Hanh moved to live next to those in Dang Ja.

From 1964 to 1968

In the period from 1964 to 1968, Dang Sron became a "strategic hamlet" under the administration of the southern government of the Republic of Vietnam. The local government forced the *K'ho* in Dang Ja *bon* and N'Hanh *bon* to move to Dang Sron *bon*.

In 1964, there were 4 households of Dang Ja *bon* and 8 households of N'Hanh *bon* migrating to Dang Sron *bon*⁸. As a strategic hamlet, Dang Sron consisted of two zones, two *bons* each, which were separated from one another by earthen trails of 2-4 meter wide. The *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* and the *K'ho* of Dang Sron *bon* belonged to one zone (called Dang Sron

⁸ The four households in Dang Ja *bon* are families of K'Reng, K'Hun, K'Yeo, and K'yun; in N'Hanh *bon* are of K'Breng, K'Brum, K'Sen, K'Nan, K'Sot, K'But, K'Gel, and K'Yung. During my field research they all died only to be survived by their heirs.

bon) while the *bon* of the *K'ho*-Dang Ja and the *K'ho*- N'Hanh belonged to the other (called Dang Ja *bon*).

Even co-residing in Dang Sron, the *Cil* were still horticulturalists who explored hills to grow corn and rice while the *K'ho*-Dang Ja *bon* and *K'ho*-N'Hanh *bon* grew paddy rice in their former *bons*. However, because of time restriction in strategic hamlet, they had to leave to work on their former field from 8:00 AM and return before 5:00 PM. In other words, while sharing a common living space, the *bons* retained their distinctive economic spaces.

In terms of religion, in Dang Sron, there was a Protestant church where the *Cil* and the *K'ho*-Dang Sron prayed to their Gods. Notably, the *K'ho*-Dang Ja *bon* and the *K'ho*-N'Hanh *bon* did not adhere to any religion and thus their only social interactions were on their traversing to their former field.

In short, due to the impacts of the war, four *bons* were forced to co-exist in Dang Sron. Within the limited space of a strategic hamlet, physical distance among houses was 3 to 5 meters. The *K'ho*-Dang Sron *bon*, *K'ho*-Dang Ja *bon* and *K'ho*-N'Hanh *bon* experienced a new shared history of life. Yet in reality, their cultural traditions were not integrated in the new locality.

Restructuring lineal systems of ten *Cil* households in Dang Sron shows that from 1960 to 1968, there was no marriage between the *Cil* and the *K'ho*. The latter considered the former as the needy

foresters. On the contrary, to the former, the latter were known as “buffalo manure eaters” (because they used buffalo manure in their paddy field!)

The peoples co-existed in Dang Sron and shared religious and political experience (war sufferings) and somehow economic activities. However, from 1964 to 1968, social boundaries among the *Cil*-Da Rle *bon*, the *K'ho*-Dang Sron *bon*, *K'ho*-Dang Ja *bon* and *K'ho*-N'Hanh *bon* were very explicit.

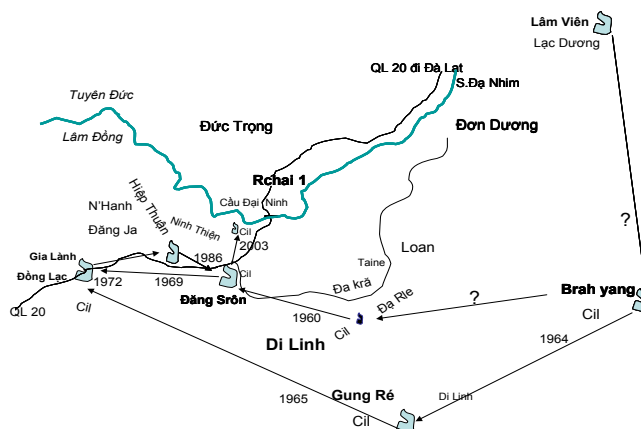
From 1969 to 1972

The Government of the Republic of Vietnam continuously reinforced their power to fight against the communist revolutionaries. The strategic hamlet model was reapplied and people were forced to migrate. In 1969, people in Dang Sron found themselves taken by military trucks to resettle in Gia Lanh, Di Linh district. In this region, they were once more organized in a “strategic hamlet”.

Previously, about 3 kilometers away from Gia Lanh, there was Dong Lac (or Dinh Lac) where existed 25 households of the *Cil* in Da Pler *bon* who had come from Brah Yang mountain⁹.

In 1964, prior to their moving to Dong Lac (Di Linh), the *Cil* in Brah Yang mountain had concentrated in Joe *bon* (*bon* of the *K'ho* (Sre) in Gung Re (Di Linh). They had hired land from the *K'ho* to cultivate. In 1965, they were forced by the government to migrate to Dong Lac.

⁹ According to elder K-Broi (born 1946, currently residing in Dang Sron), the *Cil* in Brah Yang mountain originated from Lam Vien highland. Once upon a time there were some Lach who terrorized the *Cil* there by accusing the latter of poisoning the former. First the former came to the latter asking for food, then put something into the food and accused the givers of the crime. As a compensation for their convicted crime, the *Cil* had to pay cows, pigs and chickens. The incident happened several times which caused the *Cil* to become so afraid that they had to leave their *bon* for new places, which eventually led to their resettlement in Brah Yang mountain. Prior to 1950, in the Brah Yang mountain area, there were several *Cil* *bons* such as Da Mong, Da Lo Un, Da Ryon, Da Pler, Da Rle, Da Drong and Da Ryam.

Map 1: The Cil in Brah Yang mountain moving to Dang Sron (1964 – 1986)

(Drawn by Pham Thanh Thoi)

According to elder K'Broi, up to 1960, all of the *K'ho* in Gung Re, Ka La had converted to Catholicism. He himself came to Gung Re to study the religion's doctrine and simultaneously learned *K'ho* writing system. Since 1960 he has "served God (evangelize)" among the *Cil* (in Da Pler *bon*) in Brah Yang.

In strategic hamlets in Dong Lac and Gia Lanh, inhabitants built their houses within the space of their own *bons*. However, the distance of the *bons* was not far from one another for the sake of the governmental control.

From 1972 to 1986

Until 1972, life and work of the inhabitants in Gia Lanh had been very hard. When they first moved in they were supplied by the government 10 pieces of iron sheet to build their houses. After a while, the sheets were ruined. In terms of their subsistence, they had no land to live on. Elder representatives¹⁰ for people from Dang Sron proposed to the government¹¹ to let them return to their former *bon* so

that they might have land to cultivate. They were approved. However, they were not allowed to freely return their former *bons* such as Dang Ja, Dang Sron or N'hanh. Instead, they were asked to move to Hiep Thuan (3km from Dang Sron). The *Cil* (previously from Brah Yang mountain) in Dinh Lac moved with the hope of having some pieces of land to subsist on. In Hiep Thuan, under the administrating of K'Breng, new comers were settled into three zones, in a triangle shape along Highway 20 as follows:

- A Zone: for the *K'ho*-Dang Ja *bon* and N'hanh *bon*
- B Zone: for the *K'ho*- Dang Sron *bon* and the *Cil*-Da Rle *bon*
- C Zone: the *Cil*- Da Pler *bon* (Brah Yang mountain)

In the zones, each household was allocated 2000 m² to build their houses which were close to others'. They were also supplied by the government 10 pieces of iron sheet, mosquito nets, blankets, and

¹⁰ K'Breng was elder (Cau kuang kră) of Dang Ja; Kon Sa K'Brep was of Dang Sron *bon*; Kon Sa K'Brep was of Da Pler *bon* (Brah Yang mountain).

¹¹ K'tép was the head of Dang Ja commune; Ko Dong K'doi was the head of three *bons*.

rice and salt so that they might easily settle down. While in Hiep Thuan, the people resumed cultivation on their former land. Particularly, the *Cil*-Da Rle explored their new land in hills surrounding paddy rice field. At the same time, the *Cil*-Da Pler established their new cultivating land near the field of the *K'ho*-N'Hanh. Because it was not crowded and unexplored land remained available, among the *Cil*-Da Pler and the *K'ho* there was no conflict. Moreover, the *Cil* kept their practice of shifting cultivation in many places (slash and burn) while the *K'ho* grew paddy rice, sowing in early rainy season and harvesting in the dry season.

After 1975, the *K'ho* and the *Cil* in Hiep Thuan participated in "production teams". Each zone was divided into one or two teams. The teams in A and B zones primarily cultivated paddy rice. Nearly 40 hectares of paddy field of the *K'ho*-Dang Sron was deployed by the teams. Simultaneously, in C zone, the *Cil*-Da Pler joined production teams to grow corn, manioc and pines. In this period, the government policy was to develop an "agriculture-forestry" economy. Members of production teams recorded their working days (converted into points) and received rice and salt or money (seldom) for their points. In reality, despite working in production teams, inhabitants of A, B, and C zone were always in hunger. From 1976 to 1988, the majority of wild forests became "base areas" for the FULRO¹² organization. Therefore, the current Vietnamese government was afraid that the *Cil* might become suppliers for FULRO's activities. The government wanted to eliminate FULRO by segregating them in

wild forests in many ways. First, planned settlement areas for the *Cil* along main roads off the forests were proposed. Secondly, *khu kinh tế mới* (new economic zones) were established to attract the Vietnamese immigrants from Northern provinces. Thirdly, collective economic development, with the model of *tập đoàn sản xuất* (agricultural production team) was largely implemented within the communities, aiming at extensively cultivating rice, corns and trees over bare hills. As a result, the *Cil* became no longer a wandering people with a shifting economic pattern in deep forests.

After 1986

In 1986, K'Dinh (son of Captain K'Na), as a representative of the *K'ho* of Dang Son *bon* (including the *Cil*-Da Rle), proposed to the government to allow them to return to their former *bon* (where they had lived before 1969). This area had been occupied by the Vietnamese to grow corn and manioc since 1975.

The proposal was granted and the government released a decision to return the land in Dang Sron back to the *K'ho* from the Vietnamese. Accordingly, all inhabitants from Hiep Thuan were moved back to Dang Sron. Noticeably, it was initially only people from Dang Sron (including the *Cil*-Da Rle) that were allowed to return back to their former *bon*, not all inhabitants in Hiep Thuan. In reality, all inhabitants from the three zones migrated to Dang Sron, a region with an area of about 20 hectares. Subsequently, they were not allowed to return to Hiep Thuan to live or to cultivate. It was explained that they were allocated 2000 m² in Dang

¹² FULRO is the abbreviation of French phrase: *Front Unifié pour la Lutte des Races Opprimées* (Unified front for the Struggle of Oppressed Races). This organization consists of ethnic minorities in the Highlands and the Cham people in Central of Vietnam founded in 1964 and operated on the Central Highlands region of Vietnam and a border part of Cambodia to a portion of the end 1988. The goal of this organization to fight the Vietnam government demanding autonomy for ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands and central Vietnam.

Sron by the government in exchange for their land in Hiep Thuan which was then managed by the government.

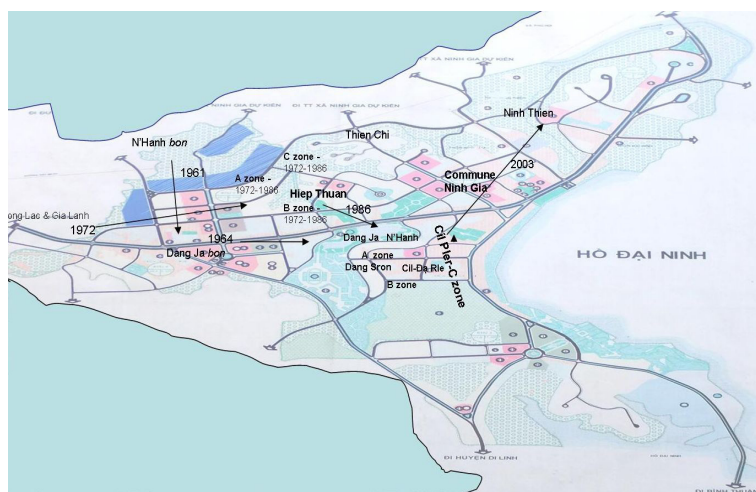
Upon moving back to Dang Sron, based on the number of households of each *bon*, people were organized into three different regions. Boundaries among the *bons* were trails which are about 8 to 10 meters wide.

- C Zone: for the *Cil* Da Pler *bon*, concentrated in an area near Dai Ninh Lake.

- A Zone: for the *K'ho*-Dang Ja *bon* and N'Hanh *bon*.

- B Zone: for the *K'ho*- Dang Sron *bon* and the *Cil*-Da Rle *bon*.

Map 2: A, B, C Zone in Dang Sron hamlet in 1986 – 2003



Drawn by Pham Thanh Thoi

Each household managed themselves to rebuild their houses. In terms of subsistence, after the production teams were dissolved (1984-1985), people grew corn, and rice on their land near their *bons*. However, as stated earlier, with the appearance of the 78th governmental farm, a military base (in Hill 994, commune Ninh Gia), a brick factory (in N'Hanh) and new Thien Chi economic zone and so on, cultivating area decreased tremendously. Members of the *bons* had to explore their land from remote places.

In 2003, an area of 5 hectares resided by the residence of 45 *Cil* households (Da Pler *bon*) was affected by Dai Ninh hydroelectric plant project. They had to move to Ninh Thien where each

household was allocated 400m² to rebuild their house. Consequently, their residential area decreased from 2000m² to 400m². Noticeably, their cultivating land was all flooded and no longer arable.

The *Cil* (Da Pler *bon*) were Catholics who came to Tam Bo church (Di Linh) to attend Sunday mass while in Hiep Thuan and Dang Sron. Since 2003, after moving to Ninh Thien, they have gathered at K'Neu's residence to pray under the instruction of priests from Tam Bo church¹³.

The *K'ho*- Dang Sron *bon* and the *Cil* in Da Rle *bon* were Protestants. Since 1975, the religion was forbidden by the government which led the followers to keep their faith for their own. From 1988 to 1998, the *K'ho* lived in Dang Sron *bon*

¹³ Mass for the *Cil* is on Sunday while it is on Saturday afternoons for the Vietnamese in Ninh Thien.

(including the *Cil*-Da Rle *bon*) established 4 places where they might pray within their own lineages¹⁴. In 1998, the places were grouped into two, one at K'Din's and the other at Ya Nhi's house which in 2001 united into just one place at K'Din's residence (about 80 households). The practice of worshiping and praying was officially allowed in 2005. In January 2011, a branch of the Protestant Church at Dang Sron was established with a board of administrators and approximately 700 adherents.

The migration processes and social relations of the *K'ho* and the *Cil* in Dang Sron over the last 50 years were relatively complicated. Based on data collected in case studies at each *bon*, the next section will provide a discussion on the making of ethnic boundaries.

The making of ethnic boundaries between the *Cil* and the *K'ho* (Sre)

In this paper, I am concerned about the significance of emotional interactions against the creation and perpetuation of individual memories in each *bon*. In each *bon*, every family/ lineage serves as a unit which creates memories and members' agency. Their sharing and informing about their history of migration and experiences are prominently significant data that I observed and recorded. Probably, in different social contexts, individuals in each *bon* have worked together to create and share both old and new social boundaries. Moreover, the process of inscribing commemorating space and memorizing stories expressed in these *bons* reveals cultural foundations that are powerful and particularistic.

Religious boundaries

Within the ascribed space of the *Cil* in Da Rle *bon*, it is said that their lineages

originated from the foot of Lam Vien mountain. In their southward migration process to "find land" to cultivate, Brah-Yang mountain was chosen by the *Cil* to settle down for a long period of time because it was tall and had a lot of streams and forests. In the 1950s, during the revolutionary war led by the Vietnamese Communist Party, *bons* of the *Cil* at Brah-Yang mountain were forced to move to many places to take refuge from the war and find their subsistence.

Subsequently, when the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* migrated to a place close to the *K'ho* in Taine (Da Kra stream), they converted to Protestantism while at the same time the *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* moved to settle next to the *K'ho* in Di Linh district (Gung Re) and converted to Catholicism. In reality, when the *Cil* at Brah-Yang mountain were forced to live in the *K'ho*'s land in Gung Re and Dong Lac, their conversion into Catholicism and learning to write at the church's school were meaningful to them. Similarly, to the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon*, their conversion was meaningful in that they now lived in the land of the *K'ho* (in Da Kra and Dang Sron *bon*) who were Protestants¹⁵.

While they shared the same origin in historical process of migration and social space (in Lam Vien and Brah-Yang), since 1960, due to their religious conversion, the two communities have become distinct in their social relations and interactions. In making their new community at Dang Sron, the *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* settled down in a distinctive area (C zone) while the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* moved to live within the *K'ho* community (B zone). They converted to Protestantism (*Yang Kon*). However, the *K'ho* of Dang Ja *bon* and of N'hanh *bon* converted to neither Protestantism

¹⁴ Group 1 at K'Din's house, group 2 at Ya Nhi's, group 3 at K'Dao's and group 4 at K'Rang's

¹⁵ In the process of conversion of both the *Cil* and the *K'ho*, the role of missionaries is always important.

nor Catholicism which caused them to live close to one another (A zone) in the process of their community creation.

Spaces where religious rites were practiced were also places of social interactions in daily life of many people.

Figure 1: The *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* and *K'ho* of Dang Sron *bon* (B zone) worshipping together at K'Din's residence in Dang Sron, 2011



Figure 2: The *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* (C zone) doing offerings at K'neu's residence at Ninh Thien resettlement, 2011



The Bible teaches people not to separate but to consolidate and share. However, to those who do not share the same religion, one regards him/her as “expatriate” or “ones not of the same religion”. In daily life, those who share the same religion usually interact and share much of their social lives to one another, compared to their interactions with

“expatriates”. This is explicitly apparent in my data about establishing marriage relationships among the *Cil* in Dang Sron since post 1960.

Marriage relations in the *Cil' bons* were colorful pictures. They were established according to matrilineal exogamous principles. Cross cousin marriages and non-kin couples were allowed, on the condition that the couples were introduced through middlemen. Mostly, marriage relations of the *Cil* were among lineages acquainting to one another. However, in principle, *Cil* people could get married to people from different lineages. Marriages with others from different ethnic groups (such as with the Vietnamese, the *Churu* or the *K'ho-Sre*, or the *K'ho-Lach*) have been dominant since 1980.

Despite the fact that they live next to one another, the *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* and the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* in Dang Sron seldom wedded to one another. Moreover, for those couples from the two communities, social interactions in their daily lives encountered difficulties.

Case number 1:

In 1982, K'Hanh (a *Cil* of Da Pler *bon*, C zone) got married to K'Dan (a *Cil* of Da Rle *bon*, B zone). The wedding ceremony did not take place at the church. K'Hanh's parents allowed her husband to keep his religion. However, when he moved to her household (C zone), her family and lineage forced him to abandon his religion and convert to Catholicism. But eventually, when he got sick later, he consulted a Shaman (Mr. Ja Da in Taine) and then decided to reconvert back to Protestantism.

Case number 2:

In 1992, K'Luong (a *Cil* of Da Pler *bon*, C zone) got married to K'Thim (a *Cil* of Da Rle *bon*, B zone) and moved to

live with her in Dang Sron. Upon getting married, the groom's side asked K'Thim to convert to Catholicism. There was no wedding ceremony, except for a get-together of the two families to have lunch. At the lunch, the bride's family separately sat and enjoyed the meal without drinking or smoking. Eventually, elders and missionaries from the bride's side did not eat nor drink.

Case number 3:

In 1990, K'Nhop (a *Cil* of Da Rle *bon*, B zone) wedded Ha Tos (a *Cil* of Da Pler *bon*, C zone). There was no wedding ceremony, only a meal with relatives of the two families. Upon their marriage, Ha Tos did not express which religion he would adhere to. Currently, they have had seven children; two of whom adhere to Catholicism with their father while the rest follow their mother as Protestants. On Sunday, the family divides into two groups to attend mass at two different places.

Case number 4:

In 1995, K'Lien (a *Cil* of Da Pler *bon*, C zone) married to K'Theu (a *Cil* of Da Rle *bon*, B zone). No wedding ceremony was held. Although living with her at her household, her husband and his family have always urged K'Theu to leave Protestantism and convert to Catholicism. K'Lien told his in-laws that he indeed wanted to convert to his wife's religion but it was very difficult to do. Currently, they have five children but their home life has been full of conflict.

There were some more cases of intermarriage between the *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* and the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* in Dang Sron. Noticeably, these marriages happened in the period from 1975 to 2005 when Protestants had to try their best to "self-maintain their religion" by worshiping at home within small groups. This is the period when the *Cil* Protestants were not

allowed by the government to have their own religious branch or churches. In this circumstance, it is impossible to say that they "left their religion"!

Observably, pastors or priests did not forbid one from choosing one religion over the other upon his/her marriage. However, to many people, their religious orientation was substantively influenced by their relatives and communities. The *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* adhered to Catholicism, which was termed Yang Bap in the *K'ho* language, meaning God's Father while the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* followed Protestantism, called Yang Kon in the *K'ho*, meaning God's Son. In the point of view of the *Cil* of Da Pler, one should not leave God's Father for God's Son!

In terms of rituals in wedding ceremony, the *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* believed that Protestants did not drink; they might sing to express their happiness. However, non-religious songs were not sung, except for those religious ones. On the contrary, the *Cil* Catholics drank, danced and freely sang whatever songs they liked at weddings. Due to the difference, marriages between the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* and *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* did not usually include all the rituals in a wedding ceremony. Attendants were not always from both sides of families; if the wedding was organized at the bride's side, the groom's relatives would not attend (or intentionally showed up lately) and vice versa. Most of the cases of "cross-religious marriage" among the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* and the *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* were between those couples who dated and fell in love. Their love put their parents into a position of having no choice but accepting their getting married.

In Dang Sron, among those who shared the same religion, wedding ceremonies always received full and sincere participation of relatives from

the two sides. Accordingly, there have been marriages among the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* and the *K'ho* of Dang Sron *bon* since 1970¹⁶. On the contrary, despite their 50 years of living close to one another, the *K'ho* of Dang Sron *bon* could not establish any marriage relation with the *Cil* of Da Pler *bon*¹⁷.

In the case of the *K'ho* of Dang Ja *bon* and N'Hanh *bon* (A zone), fewer marriage relations were established with the *K'ho* of Dang Sron *bon* (B zone) than with the *Cil* (B zone and C zone). Recently, due to the fact that Protestantism has been officially recognized by the government, the *K'ho* Dang Sron have had their own religious organizations, thus the *K'ho* in A zone had two options. Those who liked to drink or smoke would adhere to Catholicism and getting married to other Catholics. Simultaneously, those who wanted to quit drinking or smoking would convert to Protestantism, and eventually preferred to get married to Protestants.

Generally, in Dang Sron, religion clearly separated social space, given the fact that the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* and the *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* did not share the same religious space. Among the *K'ho* and the *Cil* in Dang Sron, religion increased intra-ethnic social distance and interactions (as illustrated in the case of the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* and the *Cil* of Da Pler *bon*). On the other hand, religion loosened inter-ethnic boundaries (as in the case of the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* and the *K'ho* of Dang Sron *bon*). People in Dang Sron distinguished themselves in terms of whether they came from zones C or B, based on which history of life has been written for the next generation.

Administrative and lineal surnames boundaries

The history of migration and resettlement of the *Cil* and *K'ho* in Dang Sron hamlet was in a very complicated process. Based on the pattern of "strategic hamlets", the boundaries of social space of *Cil* and *K'ho* communities have changed. Specially, since 1964, Dang Sron has been no longer a *bon* of the *K'ho*. It was a lived space (not a cultivating space) of four *bons*.

When *bons* were arranged into one same administrative unit, how did that administrative space influence the boundaries among *bons*? Noticeably, if administrative space is understood as land's surface area with some amount of population, it is impossible to envision social boundaries within that community. In Dang Sron, in terms of administration, there seemed to be no concern about the differences in origins and previously existing social boundaries among people from the *bons*. Before and even after 1975, administrators claimed that Dang Sron belonged to Di Linh, an area occupied by the *K'ho*. There were neither the *Cil* nor the *Churu* in Di Linh as was the case in Lac Duong, Duc Trong and Don Duong districts.

However, *bon* (of the *Cil* and the *K'ho*) is not only a concept for demarcating an ethnic group's geographic boundary, but also an important cultural concept for expressing the existence of the social relationships that the group has established. The cultural meaning of *bon* is even more accentuated when individuals use their space for their identity representation. In

¹⁶ In 1973 and 1974, there were five cases of marriage among the *Cil* of Da Rle *bon* and the *K'ho* of Dang Sron *bon*.

¹⁷ Based on genealogy, there were many cases of marriage between the *K'ho* (Sre) of Dang Sron *bon* and the *Cil* of Da Pler *bon* with the *K'ho* in Tam Bo, Di Linh district. The reason would be because the *K'ho* in Tam Bo were Catholics. The *K'ho* males of Dang Sron *bon* (Protestants) in Tam Bo may leave Catholicism to move to live with their wives in Dang Sron. Some explained that in recent years there were many men who drank and fought to one another; therefore, it is said that it is preferable that their sons convert to Protestantism

the history of migration and social change among the *Cil* and the *K'ho* in Dang Sron, the *bon* was an important ethnic indicator of ethnic boundaries, especially when they talked about it as their own lived experiences.

In lineal boundary, the *K'ho* in Di Linh were different from the *Cil* in Lac Duong or Duc Trong district in that the former possessed lineal surnames while the latter did not. The *K'ho* in Di Linh were always named with “K” and “Ka”.

When *Cil*s people in Dang Sron needed to get their birth certificates, IDs or residential registrations, no matter whether they were the *Cil* or *K'ho*, they were named with “K” (male) and “Ka” (female). Though the *Cil* appealed several times to officials that they wanted their *Cil* surnames, “K” or “Ka” was always stuck in their documents. It was explained to them that it was for the sake of controlling convenience and that long surnames would be difficult to spell and write down¹⁸.

Consequently, the *Cil* of older generations had no surnames in their personal documents. Neither do their children now. According to officials, children names followed their parents'; therefore, it would be administratively complicated if the children were not given “K” or “Ka” in their surnames.

Moreover, with the goal that “*eliminating complicated surnames contributes to push away narrow localism and facilitate favorable conditions for national solidarity*” [Mạc Đường 1983:32], people did not want to make things complicating. Consequently, the *Cil* in Dang Sron had no lineal surnames in their personal documents, in contrast to their fellow *Cil* in Lac Duong or Duc Trong.

Currently, in terms of administrative space, the *Cil* and the *K'ho* in Dang Sron shared a common lived space. In administrative documents (for the government to administrate citizens), they had the same lineage surnames with “Ka” or “K.” Therefore, if examining administrative residential boundaries and personal documents, it is impossible to distinguish the *Cil* from the *K'ho*. This reality existed for tens of years leading to some commenting that in Dang Sron, there were only the *K'ho*-Sre while the *Cil* in Duc Trong or Don Duong district lamented that their fellows in Dang Sron “have been *K'ho*-nized!”.

In studying the *Cil* in Dang Sron I observed that for tens of years, people have been struggling in many ways to preserve their lineal surnames in order to make it easy for others to recognize who they were and which lineages they belonged to. The *Cil* always recited or wrote their lineal surnames in their wedding ceremonies and funerals. Likewise, when praying for the sake of someone, they spoke out that person's full name. On the gravestones, the deceased's full names were inscribed by the *Cil* in Dang Sron.

It can be said that it is inadequate to identify ethnic origin or ethnic relations solely based on administrative boundaries. It is impossible to acknowledge a person as a *Cil* or *K'ho* solely basing on administrative documents such as birth certificates or residential registrations. However, in communities, lineal surnames were maintained and served as the most easily distinguishing boundaries between the *Cil* and the *K'ho*, especially when the peoples prayed to their God.

I believe that many mainstream ethnographers in Vietnam missed this

¹⁸ K'Din, 53 years old, living in Dang Sron

important marker in the *Cil*'s ethnic identity when they tried to subsume the *Cil* under the rubric *K'ho*. The ethnic boundaries between the *Cil* and the *K'ho* may probably not be found in overt cultural traits like clothes, housing styles, or whatever in a people's tangible culture, but should be explored and discovered through observing, communicating with, and listening to the people involved. As Keyes put it when referring to the "primordial" quality in ethnicity that one finds in the Geertzian view, "Ethnicity ... entails an assumption that there is something essential or given in the distinctions between peoples. But one has to *look beyond some sets of cultural traits* to find this primordial basis for ethnicity [Keyes 1997: 153; emphasis added].

In terms of administrative space, the *Cil* and the *K'ho* in Dang Sron shared a common lived space. In administrative documents (for the government to administrate citizens), the *Cil* and *K'ho* had the same lineal surnames beginning with "Ka" or "K." This reality existed for tens of years, leading to some observers commenting that in Dang Sron, there were only the *K'ho* while the *Cil* in Duc Trong or Don Duong district lamented that among their fellows in Dang Sron "the *Cil* have been *K'ho*-nized!"

In the ethnographic discipline in Vietnam, the perspective that views cultural characteristics as having an ethnic identity defining quality is apparently a popular view. There is always an imbalance of power between the classifiers or those who make an identification of others and those who are classified. In the ethnic identification work, the power is weighted in favor of the ethnographer who is granted the task of classification [Phan Ngoc Chien & Pham Thanh Thoi 2010: 253]

In reality, one can have deep ethnic differences without correspondingly important cultural differences; and one can have cultural variation without ethnic boundaries. Eriksen, asserted that, "During the past thirty year..., hardly a single serious contribution to the field has failed to point out that there is no one-to-one relationship between culture and ethnicity ...; that cultural differences cut across ethnic boundaries, and that ethnic identity is based on *socially sanctioned notions* of cultural differences, not 'real' ones" (italics in original) [Eriksen 2001:42].

Conclusion

Over time, under particular circumstances, the *Cil* in Dang Sron *bon* would have adopted an ethnic label imposed upon them by outsiders. And it is from this social phenomenon that an ethnic community can develop a second identity in addition to their local ethnic identity, I assume. I believe that the *Cil* (Da Rle *bon* and Da Pler *bon*) in Dang Sron are a case in point.

The multidimensional and situational nature of ethnicity mentioned above seriously challenges the essentialist perspective in ethnic studies (a perspective that is not difficult to find in mainstream ethnographic discourse in Vietnam). The main reason is that essentialism in ethnic studies tends to freeze a phenomenon that is dynamic and ever-flowing in real life. The essentialist perspective in ethnic studies also tends to limit and reduce identity-forming factors to stable in-group cultural qualities while ethnicity itself is generally relational and often subject to particular contexts of social relations. Essentialism in ethnic studies is also criticized for tending to view differences between social groups, including ethnic communities, as originating from group

internal characteristics, thus neglecting the implications of inter-group interactions, and for tending to overemphasize the homogenous character of a group and thus missing the ever-present in-group variations. I would argue that those ethnographers who took on the State's assignment to classify ethnic minorities

using a list of cultural similarities and differences as a classifying tool and neglecting the actual process of social interactions in particular localities ran the risk of following in the footsteps of those who take an essentialist point of view in ethnic studies.

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