K a t u i c E t h n o g r a p h y P r o j e c t

Research Report Series

Katu Ethnography
Part One: Livelihood and Culture

Progress Report from Fieldwork in

Quang Nam Province, Vietnam

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Kaj Århem

Draft: please do not quote
The author can be contacted at
kajarhem@yahoo.se

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Vietnam Museum of Ethnology

Göteborg University, Sweden

Contents:

1. Introduction

This is the first part of a planned longer report from fieldwork in progress among the Katu people in the western highlands of Quang Nam Province, Central Vietnam. (An outline of the content of the full report is appended.)

Fieldwork among the Katu was carried out within the context of a larger research project, referred to as "A Comparative Ethnography of Katuic Peoples of Central Vietnam" (Katuic Ethnography Project). The project is hosted by, and carried out in collaboration with, the Vietnam Museum of Ethnography (VME) in Hanoi. Financial support is provided by the Research Division of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida/SAREC). Initiated in 2003, the project comprises three coordinated but independent ethnographic studies, each focussing on a distinct, Katuic group: Katu, Ta Oi and Bru-Van Kieu. The research team presently consists of Kaj Arhem, (Gothenburg University), Luu Hung (VME), Nikolas Arhem (Gothenburg University), Pham Van Loi (VME), Nguyen Truong Giang (VME) and Vu Phuong Nga (VME).

The Katu study includes four different case studies in Quang Nam Province carried out by Dr Hung (in Anong, Lang and Atieng communes, Tay Giang District), K. Arhem, N. Arhem and Ms Nga (in partly overlapping villages in Prao town, Avuong and Talu communes, Tay Giang and Dong Giang Districts) respectively. Dr Hung and K Arhem pursue the general issues addressed by the project (see below) while N Arhem has concentrated on cosmology and the environment, and Ms Nga on gender issues and the role of women. Mr Giang works with the Ta Oi in A Loi District, Thua Thien Hue Province, and Mr Loi with the Bru-Van Kieu in Hung Hoa District, Quang Tri Province.

The present report presents results exclusively from my own fieldwork. I have deliberately left out the preliminary results from the work carried out by my colleagues in order to assess the strength and limitations of my own field data

collected so far, and to be able to place my material alongside the results of the other studies. At a later stage, when the independent studies (presently under way) are complete, we hope to integrate the results into a joint, final report.

The overall purpose of the project is, briefly, to explore and document central social institution and vital cultural traditions among the three major Katuic groups – the Katu proper, the Ta Oi and the Bru-Van Kieu – with a view to grasp Katuic cultural identity and distinctiveness. In the final report we hope to compare the results from the different studies in order to attain an overall picture of Katuic society and traditions: what the different Katuic groups have in common and what differentiate them from one another (and from other, non-Katuic groups). The final step in this analytical process would be to relate our results to the existing literature on inter-ethnic relations in the region, past and present, and to the ethnography of adjacent ethnic groups, including the Kinh majority population.

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My own case study is informed by classical cultural (interpretive) analysis; its aim is to comprehend the cultural logic of Katu society at a generalised level, the systemic interconnections among what I take to be the central institutions, values and conceptions underpinning Katu society as a whole. In the first part of the report, presented here, my objective is to discern and draw attention to the cultural organisation and symbolic ordering of Katu livelihood practices. If I succeed in convincing the reader that practically every aspect of Katu subsistence, from rice cultivation to hunting and livestock rearing, is imbued with, and shaped by, fundamental cosmological concepts, beliefs and values, then my aim is accomplished.

Fieldwork was carried out in the four study villages (Arek, A Ur, Ading 3 [Panoong], Areh) during five visits lasting between 2-5 weeks: June, July-August, and November-December, 2003; February-March and July-August, 2004. All in all, I have spent four months effectively in the study villages. During the first trip, which was a reconnaissance tour among the Katu in Quang Nam Province and the Bru-Van Kieu in Quang Tri Province, I was accompanied by Dr Hung and an interpreter from VME;

in the following three trips I was assisted by Ms Nga (VME) and, in the last trip, by Ms Dam Huong (independent interpreter).

All field data has been collected with the help of Vietnamese-English interpreters (Ms Nga and Ms Huong). In the study villages we have also engaged one or several local assistants, interpreting from Katu to Vietnamese whenever necessary. This manner of work has largely determined the form and methodology of fieldwork; most data has been collected by means of extensive thematic interviews with a limited number of "key informants" (mostly adult and elderly men, locally respected and well versed in Katu traditions, but also a handful of knowledgeable women). Interviews on the same or related topics have been repeated in the various study villages as well as in the course of our recurrent visits to the same villages.

It is my impression that villagers have taken a growing interest in the project as fieldwork has progressed, and most villagers have been willing to share their knowledge with us. Themes have been picked up and progressively developed in the course of the fieldwork and as our knowledge of Katu society has grown. As a methodological strategy I have furthermore focussed attention on special events unfolding in the village at the time of our visits (comprising contingent events such as marriages, conflicts, possessions, illness and death, the introduction of electricity and the arrival of traders as well as recurrent and ritual events associated with the alternation of seasons and the agricultural cycle). I have therefore seen it as essential that fieldwork spans the entire annual cycle.

The present report is preliminary in form and content; a number of issues remain unresolved and some of my affirmations may well be factually wrong or questionable. I have frequently (but not consistently) indicated the provisional status of certain statements with a question mark or comment in the text. In particular, the reader will note a disturbing lack of quantitative data supporting some of my general assertions. However, a village and household survey is under way which, hopefully, will fill in the most glaring information gaps. My interpretations are subject to further verification (or, at least, support from additional research and complementary information supplied by my co-researchers in the project). Questions and conjectures in the text should thus be seen as a call for further research. Hopefully some of the

questions will be answered and the most speculative conjectures revised in the process of further research. And, let me repeat: the present report presents results exclusively from my own fieldwork; several issues dealt with in a preliminary fashion here are detailed or developed further in the preliminary reports of my co-researchers, and will be taken into account in the final, joint report.

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A final note to the reader: The chapters that follow are extracted from the longer report in preparation; they are to be preceded by several introductory chapters on the Katu people and environment, their social organisation, village life and spirit beliefs, and followed by chapters on marriage customs, blood sacrifice and the rituals and beliefs associated with death and funeral (see list of content in the appendix). Consequently, a number of notions and issues are here taken for granted which will be explained and contextualised in the full report. The presumptive reader, plunged into a material with little or no ethnographic introduction, may justifiably feel at a loss. I apologize for this, and can only hope that the reader's patience will be repaid upon reading the full report when completed. I have chosen to present this extract only to make publicly available some preliminary results which I judge to be of certain general interest while the final report is still in the process of completion.

2. Settlement and Agriculture

Historically, the settlement pattern and the livelihood system of the Katu (Katu Nal) were inexorably connected; they were two sides of a single adaptive system evolved to ensure sustainable survival in the distinctive tropical highland environment they occupied. Until the recent past (up to the American War) it seems that the settlements in the high/mid AVuong area consisted of small, scattered villages generally located to the summits or higher slopes of densely forested hills and mountains. The Katu say that, in the past, people liked to live on the hill tops "so that the sound of drums and gongs could reach far across the land". Subsistence was based on shifting cultivation (upland dry-rice and manioc being the staple crops), hunting, fishing and gathering of wild forest resources. The various subsistence activities formed an integrated livelihood system providing the basis for survival; however, the system also seems to have been capable of producing a substantial surplus which was continuously converted into wealth of various forms, and channelled into circuits of exchange, trade and public rituals, all contributing to constitute Katu social and cultural identity.

Villages were semi-permanent. Movements of settlements were irregular and triggered by external (political, environmental) as well as internal (social, cultural-religious) factors – fighting and warfare, depletion of swidden land, decline of game, fish and wild food resources in the vicinity of the settlement, and, perhaps most importantly, inauspicious death, illness and misfortune within the settlement. Though villages frequently moved long distances, it appears that movements were more commonly confined to a fixed territory or "homeland" (?). Evidence from villages along the Mraang stream in Avuong commune (Arek, Adhuong, AUr and the defunct settlements of Charr, Raroh and Saliep) suggests that catchment areas and loosely bounded sections of river basins constituted such territories. The villages located (and rotating) within such a territory might have constituted the highest-ordered, most inclusive socio-political unit in Katu society.

[Traditional villages were ideally circular in form, and many still display a circular spatial layout (A Ur, Areh. A Ding 3). The characteristic oval houses on stilts, with a stooped, thatched roof – referred to in Vietnamese ethnographic literature as turtle-shaped – surround an open space in the centre of which is the impressive, beautifully decorated communal house, the *guol*. The *guol* harbours communal activities, visitors and village-wide rituals. It has strong male connotations and is intimately associated with hunting and the ritual feasting on game meat. Katu say that the houses are placed in circle around the *guol* in order that each dwelling should have a view of the in the centre. The village itself was surrounded by a compact wooden (or bamboo) fence to protect villagers and domestic stock from enemy attacks and wild animals. Two or more gates led into and out of the residential space of the village. These gates played a prominent role in the public ritual life of the village; their opening and closing marked the alternation between periods of public access to, and ritual closure (*dieng*) of, the village.]

The typical village consisted of some 4-8 houses occupied by localised lineage segments from one or several clans. Single-clan settlements seem to have been quite common, occupied either by a single lineage or several lineages of the same clan, (ritually) allied by virtue of their common clan bond. Co-residing but unrelated lineages of a single clan could either be inter-marrying or not. In the case of multi-clan villages, usually consisting of families from two or three inter-marrying clans, the norm seems to have been that the inter-marrying families related to each other in terms of a single wife-giver/wife-taker relationship – i.e., the village constituted a dyadic entity of wife givers and wife takers, the typical case being one where a dominant wife-giving lineage supplied wives for one or more smaller and subordinate wife-taking units. In other words, the village was structured around an asymmetric alliance relationship.

Each such small village depended on other, similar villages for its social reproduction. Several neighbouring villages thus constituted localised networks of intermarrying settlements. A cluster of such intermarrying villages formed the core of the territorial unit and maximal building-block of the Katu traditional polity, as suggested above. Given the asymmetric marriage rule structuring Katu society, families could not exchange women in marriage on a reciprocal basis. Instead the various villages

constituting such a localised network of villages were closely tied to one another in chains or circuits of wife-giver/wife-taker relationships, each cluster, in turn, being similarly connected to other, analogous local networks, thus progressively spreading over and integrating the entire Katu territory.

Each village was headed by a headman, drawn from the one dominant lineage in the village. As a village grew in size, some houses would hive off, creating a new village close to the original one; an adult son with a growing family of his own would, for example, establish a new settlement on a hill adjacent to the parental settlement. Any one village thus constituted a node in a network of neighbouring villages, more or less closely related in terms of kinship, clan affiliation and marriage. Villages further away had increasingly tenuous bonds of clanship and inter-marriage. The political relationship with distant and unrelated villages was often one of avoidance or open hostility (see below).

Traditional Shifting Cultivation

Shifting (slash-and-burn or swidden) cultivation of upland rice was the mainstay of the local economy. Swidden fields were located to the hills and slopes surrounding the village. The defining feature of shifting cultivation is the rotation of fields, where each field is cultivated for a relatively short period followed by a long fallow period. The Katu appear to have preferred clearing their fields in old, thick forest, requiring regeneration periods of ten or more years. New fields were cleared, burned and sown every year. Any single field was normally used for a single rice crop (sometimes followed by 2-3 years of cassava cultivation) before being left fallow for some 12-15 years. In the past, the Katu cultivated a great number of varieties of both ordinary and sticky rice, each variety with its own peculiar characteristics and requirements. The rice was intercropped with a number of other plants, including maize, millet, pineapple, sugarcane, yams, taro, pumpkin, banana and other fruit trees turning the swidden into a complex and diversified agro-ecosystem. Fallow-fields in different stages of crop succession were sometimes harvested for several years after its single rice crop (?)

Though fields rotated in long-fallow cycles, settlements were, as noted, relatively stable, often remaining in a single site for 5-10 years or longer before shifting to a nearby location in the same locality or territory. The ideal scenario seems to have been a quite stationary settlement surrounded by extensive stretches of old forest within which swidden fields were rotated on a sustainable basis in cycles of 12-15 years. In the Avuong region, many of the current villages have occupied the same locality for 50-100 years or more – despite prolonged periods of war and colonial (and post-colonial) resettlement policies. Collected village histories suggest that settlements shifted location as surrounding forest was progressively cleared for cultivation or in search for better land or, again, as houses deteriorated and grew infested with vermin. Villages also disintegrated as a result of internal conflict; the component families would disperse and resettle in other, adjacent villages.

However, it appears that, in the past, village movements -- from one local site to another, and from one territory to another – were dictated more by religious and political than by economic or environmental factors; a village site associated with serious disease, misfortune and death, or a settlement attacked by an enemy village, would promptly be abandoned (cf. Le Pichon 1938). Indeed, Le Pichon relates cases where a single village moved every one or two years for a period of 10-15 years due to death and disease in the village and incessant feuding between villages. We also recorded various accounts of how villages moved, fissioned and regrouped in reaction to French colonial rule. Thus, villagers sought to escape the severe taxation imposed upon them by relocating to less accessible areas, deeper in the forest or higher up the mountains. During the American War, most villages were forced to disperse and shift location several times to evade bombing and the spread of “agent orange” toxin. It is a remarkable fact, testifying to the resilience of the Katu social system, that most villages survived as social units during this turbulent time, and that, on the whole, villages tended to relocate to their original sites as soon as the war ended.

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An important adaptive feature of the Katu settlement pattern, past and present, is the seasonal alternation of individual households between village (*buol*) and temporary field houses (*nha dhuong*). Every household has a field house in a strategic location

near its swidden fields, usually located somewhere between thirty to ninety minutes walking distance away from the village. The field house serves as a resting place while clearing, burning and working the forest fields, and as a shelter for drying the reaped rice before carrying it to the village or granary. During periods of intensive field work – while clearing forest, burning and sowing, guarding the young seedlings, and throughout the harvest time – households generally move out to their field houses for weeks or months on end. Thus, during the year, any single household may spend some 3-4 months in its field house; the duration varies from household to household, and from year to year.

Normally, several adjacent field houses form a small settlement near the swiddens of its occupants. The households occupying a single such temporary "field settlement" form what Izikowitz (2001) aptly has called a "swidden group": the members of the swidden group cooperate in clearing adjacent forest fields, guarding the fields from crop predators and simply enjoy each others' company during otherwise lonely days and nights in the forest. Such field settlements usually contain some 3-5 closely related households; in a survey of five field settlements (2004), all were organised around a wife-giver/wife-taker relationship – 2-3 male agnatic kinsmen (of a single family compound) and their affines (*cha sao*: sisters' husbands or sons-in-law). As such, the swidden group constitutes a smaller-scale structural replica -- or "fractal" -- of the village as a whole. However, while the village is a relatively stable residential and social unit, the swidden group tends to be transient and fleeting; a field settlement may last for no more than a year but more often for two or three years (or longer). As a social unit, the swidden group endures as long as the settlement, but may occasionally be a more stable arrangement, the same households residing together from year to year, and moving together from one field-cluster (usually a hill) to another over a long stretch of time.

The traditional Katu settlement pattern thus has a bipolar character; families and households seasonally move between two distinct social environments: the relatively larger village and the smaller swidden group occupying a field settlement. While the village, even in the past, tended to be rather stationary, the field settlements are transient, changing location (and often composition) every two or three years depending on the rotational of swidden fields. Mediating between the shifting fields

and the stationary village, the transitory field settlement builds a significant measure of adaptive flexibility into the Katu settlement pattern.

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Katu notions of land tenure are essential for grasping their system of shifting cultivation. We are here concerned with the indigenous (pre-war) system of land tenure which, to a large extent, is still in operation (see below on the ineffectiveness of the new land law in the area). To grasp this customary system of land tenure, it is convenient to make a first distinction between (1) village land or village territory, which is jointly held by a village community and comprises both primary and secondary forest, and (2) individually owned plots of land (xxxx), which are always land that – at one point in time or another -- has been cleared for cultivation. Such plots may either consist of fields under cultivation (*haree*) or secondary forest (xxxx), i.e., land left fallow.

(1) *Village land* is the territory legitimately claimed and controlled by a particular village through the authority of its headman. Any villager, by virtue of being recognised as a member of the village, has the right to clear land for cultivation anywhere within the village territory (but see N. Århem, forthcoming, on "prohibited places"). The village land consists of the forest land surrounding the village; its boundaries are precisely demarcated with reference to topographical features in the landscape – streams, hills and valleys. In the past, village boundaries were either asserted by the founder in unclaimed territory or negotiated with headmen of neighbouring villages. The village's control over a given territory ceased to be effective when the area was abandoned and the village, as a unit, moved to another area where it would claim new territory. Individual families could retain rights in the land originally cleared by them, but only as long they were able to effectively defend their interests against competing claims by newcomers to the land. In any case, a strong spiritual connection persists between the land once claimed by a village founder and the descendants of the founder, even long after abandoning the ancestral land. This is reflected in the practice to retain the name of the original village, usually referring to the place (hill) where it was originally founded.

Village movements and the establishment of a new village in an area of unclaimed forest are accompanied by elaborate ritual. Indeed, human control over territory – village land – is ritually established. Before clearing land for a new settlement, the village founder (headman) must secure the consent of the spirits of the sky, land and forest – particularly the spirits of specific, named hills, patches of forest and streams within the territory in question. This is done by means of a sequence of auguries and blood offerings referred to as *buoy krung*, or *drüng krung* (literally "worshipping the forest"). The sequence starts with a snail augury (cf. N. Arhem, forthcoming), followed by the killing of (two) dogs, chicken (for augury), goats and pigs in this order over a period of six days. By means of this series of auguries and sacrifices, the officiant feeds and placates the spirits, and, in the manner of a petition, announces his intention, on behalf of the whole village, to settle on the land, clear its forest for cultivation, and to hunt and fish within the territory. When the first harvest in the new territory is reaped, about a year after the opening ceremony, the sequence (ideally) culminates with a complete buffalo sacrifice – the maximum expression of gratitude towards the now presumably benevolent spirits. In this way, the village founder takes possession of the land and makes it safe for settlement and cultivation.

Similarly, it appears that when a village abandons an old settlement site for a new location, the spirits of the sky (land, forest etc) are informed and placated, so as not to harass the villagers and cause them misfortune in their new locality. This ritual takes place in the *guol*, the community house of the village and the public ritual space of the villagers but also the abode of the village spirits personifying the spirits of place – the sprits of the specific village territory (see chapter on hunting). On abandoning a site, a village might dissolve and its constituent families disperse, or it may move as a more or less intact community to another locality, thus establishing a new village in an uninhabited and unclaimed stretch of forest as described above. However, often a core group of the old village would join an already existing village in the new territory. We recorded several examples of such regroupings in the Avuong region over the past 50-75 years (Charr, RaRoh, Areh, Adhuong). In various cases, the headman of the host village, would invite the members of (or a core group of families from) another village to settle permanently in the host village in order to increase the latter's size and political strength. All such rearrangements were accompanied by rituals taking place in the village of origin (as described above) as well as in the village of

destination: as the new families arrived in the host village, the host group carried out a communal ritual in their *guol* in order to announce the arrival of the newcomers to the village spirits, and ask the spirits to be complacent, and to receive the newcomers with benevolence and magnanimity.

After a year, when the newcomers had duly settled in and reaped their first harvest, the host community and the newcomers jointly held a grand, public ritual, to which every newcomer-household contributed domestic animals, wine and rice, in order to celebrate the successful fusion of the two groups into one village, and to confirm to the enlarged collectivity of village spirits and ancestors that the new households (and house spirits) had come to stay. [The ritual is probably more correctly described as a feast for this expanded community of spirits]. This grand ritual apparently took the form of a *prngooch* ritual, i.e. the ritual otherwise carried out when two hostile or unrelated villages decide to establish a peaceful alliance. Thus, the *prngooch* ritual is a prerequisite for intermarriage between the two groups. (The exact procedures, offerings and exchanges involved varied according to the nature of the extant relationship between the two groups). In all events, the ritually confirmed fusion of the two village units effectively opened up for the possibility of inter-marriage between host families and newcomers in the new, enlarged village. By means of this ritual incorporation, the newcomer-families also acquired full rights in the new village territory.

If a single family, or a few families, from one village joined another, a smaller, less elaborate version of the same ritual was carried out; it is called *prngooch söaro* (“eating taro leaves”). Again, the rite established the rights of the newcomers to clear and cultivate land anywhere in the territory of the host village. This manner of obtaining rights in land belonging to another village or owned by another local lineage (in the case of a single-lineage village) is called *körnöl katiec* (literally “purchasing land”).

(2) *Individual ownership* to forest land is established by clearing the forest. This is the fundamental principle of Katu land tenure: the man who clears a patch of forest becomes its permanent owner. Once cleared, the land belongs to his particular family, whether actually cultivated or fallow. In effect, almost every part of the forest – even

seemingly virgin, old forest – is said to have an owner. The joint land holdings of a family constitute an essential part of its property; all the land once cleared by a man is transmitted to the male descendants of the original owner and eventually divided among them. Upon the death of their father, the sons inherit exclusive rights to all the land once cleared and cultivated by the father. This land is then divided up among the sons, so that the secondary forest re-cleared by any of the sons will be his individual property as long as he lives. A man's rights in his family land are permanent and inalienable, although he can temporarily lend and ritually transfer land to others (see below).

The clearing of primary forest, or old secondary forest in a new territory, requires the consent of the spirits of the land (forest, hills…) and, accordingly, involves a series of ritual acts. Thus, when a man clears a plot of land *for the first time* he must take a series of ritual steps which are described in detail in the next chapter (The Rice Cycle). Very briefly, these steps involve the clearing of a small "test" area on the site for the planned swidden; as this is done, the male household head keenly searches for signs of the spirits' response by means of omens and dreams. If the response is interpreted as auspicious, the procedure is repeated and the small clearing thus progressively expanded until the entire swidden field is cleared, usually with the help of close male kin and affines (the swidden group). In this manner, a male household head establishes individual ownership of the area cleared and its subsequent yields. This right does not, as noted, extinguish as the field reverts to forest. When the owner returns to the same patch of once-cleared forest, irrespective of the period it has been left fallow, he does not have to repeat the ritual steps just described. The same goes for his sons or other male family members; by the first felling of the trees, and the accompanying ritual acts, the area is permanently secured and made safe for family use. The field has been wrested from its original owners, the spirits of the forest, and incorporated, as it were, into the village domain, thus falling under the authority and protection of the family ancestors (?)

The borrowing of fields is commonplace. A man may ask another (an affine, friend or ally in the village) to be allowed to clear and cultivate one of the latter's fallow fields for one season. Such a request does not seem to imply any formal or ritualised payment (though in the case of a wife-giver/wife-taker relationship it customarily

involves a flow of gifts from wife-taker (borrower) to wife-giver (lender)). However, requests are far from always heeded; in Arek we learned that a man with little land repeatedly had asked a neighbour [his wife-giver (?)] for permission to clear and cultivate some of the latter's extensive and extremely fertile land but to no avail. One is lead to surmise that good land is jealously guarded and fertility "stored up", as it were, for future use within the family line.

Longer-term transfers of land (or use rights in land) do, however, occur: the arrangement between Lip and the late Thoc is a case in point. The two men lived in the neighbouring villages of A Ur and Adhuong in the Mraang territory, and belonged to the same clan (Arat-Alang). The former's (Lip) village was however small, the latter's (Thoc) big. Lip was poor and Thoc rich. [The two villages were ritually allied?] Lip searched for better land to establish a new village/settlement. His family had swidden fields in Thoc's territory and Lip thus asked Thoc if he could settle on the latter's land in Adhuong territory. They made a deal; Lip brought large quantities fish, chicken, cloth, wine and rice to Thoc (thus acting as if he were wife-giver to Thoc]. [The latter, the headman of Adhuong village and owner/master of the land, corresponded with game meat and pork, and they jointly feasted on the food (?)] In this way they sealed a pact between the two families. They mutually agreed to share any game obtained during future hunting exploits in the territory, thereby implying that they, from then on, constituted a single village community. The two families now held joint rights in the territory. This type of transfer is also referred to as *körnöl katiec* ("purchasing land"): Lip's family acquired permanent rights in land in the Adhuong territory. As he and his family settled in the new territory, he carried out the land-worship rite (*buoy krung*) in order to appease the spirits of the land/forest; only then could he clear the land.

In short, traditional Katu notions of land tenure, which are still locally valid, implied a thoroughly regulated system of land use in which wide tracts of forest were divided between villages. The clearing of forest for cultivation was closely monitored and coordinated among houses within each village under the authority of a headman. Rights in village land and individual/family ownership over specific tracts of forest were ritually established and sanctioned, resulting in an enduring relationship between living family and lineage members and the potent and protective spirits of the family

land, who were believed ultimately to guard its fertility and regulate its returns. The whole system was flexible and allowed for expansion, mobility and re-arrangements of settlements within the wider human-environmental and socio-political dynamic constituting the Katu social reality.

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In the past, the agricultural calendar was closely associated with the seasonal rhythm of the highland monsoon environment. The swidden fields were cleared in January, when the monsoon rains had retreated and the previous year's harvest was long since gathered and stored in the granaries. [Note: The timing of the forest clearing varied depending on the kind of forest cleared: young (secondary) and old forest require different periods of drying] The cleared land was left to dry for several moths before burning at the end of the dry season in May (?) The sowing of rice and corn took place shortly before the onset of the rains. Thus the rice sprouted at the time of the first rains in June-July. The rains continued up to December when it gradually receded. The heavy rains fell between September and November, roughly coinciding with the harvest season of the rice in October-November. The harvest continued through November and December. At the beginning of the lunar year, a new cycle of clearing, burning and sowing started. This seasonal cycle roughly corresponded to the agricultural calendar characteristic of many other upland peoples in mainland Southeast Asia. As will be shown below, it has over the past three or four decades been replaced by a different agricultural calendar, adopted from the majority population, and associated with new varieties of rice (see report by Luu Hung 2004). [Check details of old agricultural calendar!]

The significant features of this "traditional" agricultural calendar was that the Katu sowed the new rice "with" the beginning of the rains and harvested it at the end of the rains, thus at the same time taking advantage of the rains during the cropping season and minimising the erosive impact of the torrential rains on the steep hill fields; the mature plants (rice, corn and cassava) were still standing at the peak of the wet season, providing the vulnerable soils on hills and mountain slopes with a thin but important protective cover, and thus allowing for a relatively quick forest regeneration on the subsequently abandoned fields. [Check argument against ecological literature!]

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The pre-war Katu cultivation practices, as we can reconstruct them from various native accounts, display all the characteristics of a prototypical shifting-cultivation system: a short cropping period followed by a long fallow period, rotation (shifting) of fields and a high diversity of crops (mixed cropping) (Ruthenberg 1976). Numerous works on the subject have demonstrated the type as a sustainable form of agriculture in sparsely populated tropical forest environments (for reviews of the literature, see Netting 1974, Moran 2000). Shifting cultivation is a long-fallow system implying extensive land use. The intensity of land use is conveniently measured with reference to the intensity of field rotation (referred to as the *R*-factor). Ruthenberg (1976:15) defines *R* as the number of years of cultivation multiplied by 100 and divided by the length of the cycle of land utilisation. The length of the cycle is the sum of years of cultivation plus the number of fallow years. The characteristic *R* indicates the proportion of the area under cultivation in relation to the total area available for farming; the longer the fallow period in relation to the period of cultivation, the lower the *R*-factor and, by implication, the greater the sustainability of the system.

Ruthenberg (1976:16) has proposed a typology of cultivation system according to the intensity of land use which is highly instructive for our purposes. At one extreme are the extensive forms of fallow farming referred to as shifting-cultivation systems ($R<33$). By this definition, shifting cultivation systems imply that less than 1/3 of the arable land is annually under cultivation. The higher *R* becomes, the higher is the percentage of the cultivated area in relation to the totally available farming area, and the more stationary the character of the farming becomes. When cultivation extends so far at the expense of fallowing that *R* reaches or exceeds 33, then we may speak of short-fallow systems, implying a relatively stationary form of cultivation ($R>33$). When the *R* value exceeds 66, and the soil is cultivated nearly every year or on a permanent basis, we speak of permanent cultivation systems ($R>66$):

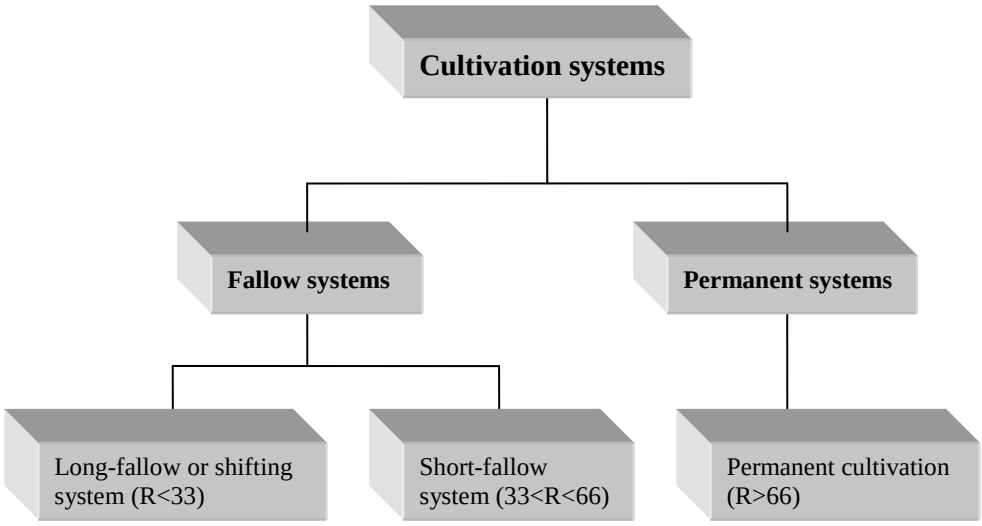

Figure: A typology of cultivation systems (after Ruthenberg, 1976:16)

Judging from the sketchy information we have of the traditional Katu cultivation system, the *R*-factor appears to have varied somewhere between 6-10, implying that less than 10% of the arable/cultivable land is under cultivation at any particular point in time. When asked, Katu men would state that, in the past, a field would be cultivated for one season (1 crop of rice and maize) followed by 12-15 fallow years ($6.3<R<9.1$). In some particularly fertile areas of the Avuong region (f ex in the present territory of Arek) swidden fields could be used for two successive cropping seasons ($R = 11.8$ if the fallow period is set at 15 years). We also know that certain fields were turned over to cassava cultivation for 2-3 successive years before they were left fallow. (One local estimate suggested that 1/5 of the swidden fields were thus converted into a cassava-based field.) It seems likely that some of these fields, particularly in the vicinity of settlements, were eventually converted into short-fallow fields and/or permanent gardens. In brief, the pre-war cultivation regime was probably composite, including a variety of land-use forms, ranging from long- and short-fallow systems ($6<R<37$) to permanent gardening ($R>66$). However, the basis of the regime was a prototypical system of extensive shifting-cultivation on a long-fallow, sustainable basis.

Under conditions of low population pressure and extensive forest land, such as appear to have prevailed in Avuong region in pre-war times, shifting systems are (potentially) highly sustainable. However, the type is vulnerable to changes in the man-land ratio. Shifting systems thus have little capacity to absorb growing populations or restrictions on the use of arable forest land. A growing population confined within a limited territory tends to intensify the land use by lengthening the cultivation period and shortening the fallow period. The shifting system may turn into a more or less stationary fallow system, usually leading to loss of soil fertility and decreasing crop yields (Ruthenberg, 1976:56-60). When population growth, increasing sedentarisation and land constraints combine, the equilibrium of the land-use system is disturbed and the shifting system may eventually degrade into soil-mining. This is, as we shall see, a threatening scenario currently facing the Katu – along with many other indigenous shifting cultivators in Southeast Asia.

However, we should also keep in mind that the pre-war shifting system operated in a highly unstable socio-political environment, hardly conducive to economic security. Feuding and raiding between villages were commonplace, causing sudden displacements and frequently sending whole villages into headlong flight. Similarly, local conceptions of sickness, death and other misfortunes could seriously disrupt everyday agricultural routines and seasonal cycles: depending on the season, planting and harvesting would be postponed until proper ritual precautions had been taken. A bad death in the village could cause the whole village to move; villagers would kill their domestic stock and abandon standing crops as well as already reaped harvests. As noted above, it was not rare that villages in the past moved every other year or so, due to inauspicious deaths and raiding (cf. Le Pichon, 1938).

The upshot is that the traditional shifting cultivation operated under conditions of extreme uncertainty. While the elaborate ritual practices accompanying the livelihood activities supplied a certain existential comfort and meaningful order in everyday life, it also made the entire system inflexible and rigid. And though the dispersed and mobile settlement pattern allowed for a high degree of adaptive flexibility in the tropical forest environment it also made the settlements highly vulnerable in a political environment which was extremely unstable. Conversely, one might also argue that shifting cultivation was an adaptive form of cultivation -- indeed, the only

possible cultivation regime -- in such a highly vulnerable, fluid and uncertain socio-political environment.

The Current Livelihood Situation: Diversification and Intensification

Today, the settlement and livelihood situation is more varied and complex than in pre-war times: small settlements tend to fuse into composite villages; villages have largely relocated closer to major roads and market towns, and moved from higher altitudes to lower ground with access to well-watered land suitable for paddy (wet rice) cultivation. The resulting picture is one of small and big villages existing side by side, some located in high and remote forest areas, others in lower altitudes near roads, shops and markets. Local livelihood systems are at the same time becoming increasingly diversified, and villagers progressively drawn into a monetary economy. Settlement- and livelihood patterns accordingly vary along a spectrum from more traditional-like to increasingly modernised and market-oriented villages and local economies.

This momentous transformation of Katu society is mainly driven by the post-war modernisation policies. Since national unification 1975, the socialist state has consistently urged the Katu (and other upland minorities) to settle in permanent villages and to give up shifting cultivation in favour of intensive wet rice cultivation and the adoption of the common Vietnamese household production system centred on the home garden, fish pond and livestock pen (the VAC system). These are the fundamental building blocs of the Vietnamese modernisation and "sedentarisation" policy. Thus, all villages in my study had shifted location to their present location as a consequence of persistent government pressure. In one case (Ading 3), the shift is under way; in another (AUr) it took place 2003. In all cases the government has provided both incentives and material rewards for compliance, including: seed, tools and metal sheets for roofing. The sedentarisation policy has been backed by a progressively enforced ban on the clearing of old forest, thus effectively removing the basis for a sustainable shifting system.

As a result, the local livelihood system in most Katu villages has altered dramatically. Today most households participate in a broad range of livelihood activities including

shifting cultivation and permanent paddy cultivation, gardening, small scale cash crop production, livestock rearing, fishing, hunting and gathering. However, the availability of suitable land for wet rice cultivation is generally limited and dry rice cultivation on swiddens remains the backbone of the local production system. Paddy rice, on the whole, constitutes a supplementary crop for household consumption as well as a source of cash. For the few households which control sufficient paddy land, wet rice has become a principal source of income from sale. [Statistics] Due to the relatively great concentration of people in the larger villages, the land suitable for swidden cultivation adjacent to the villages is scarce. There is a clear tendency that arable land near the villages is subjected to increasingly intense land use. New swiddens are progressively cleared further and further away from the village. It is not uncommon that villagers to walk for up to 45 minutes or an hour (or more) to reach their forest fields.

Current cultivation regimes thus range from extensive (long-fallow) shifting cultivation, over short-fallow systems and garden cultivation on a more or less permanent basis to intensive wet rice cultivation. The Katu differentiate between swidden fields which are intermittently cultivated and cleared by burning, and gardens which are permanently cultivated and thus never burned. Paddy fields (*na, dhuadh*) constitute an altogether different cultivation realm. The swidden fields are of two broad kinds: *haree* and *trua*. The former, *haree*, is the paradigmatic, long-fallow forest field, generally ranging between 1-2 ha in size. It is typically dominated by upland rice in association with maize and/or millet (rice-maize-millet associations). The *trua* field,is a smaller field near the village, cultivated in short-fallow cycles (the fallow periods ranging between 2-7 years). *Trua* fields are dominated by cassava (tuber-pineapple-sugarcane associations). These fields are referred to as “women’s fields” since they produce crops mainly consumed by women (and children). As a rule, *trua* fields are swiddens originally planted with rice which have been turned over to less demanding crops such as cassava (along with sweet potato, yam, taro, pineapple, sugarcane etc), thus allowing a more intensive land use than the ordinary rice field. The cassava is harvested for several successive years before the field is allowed to rest and regenerate. [Check classification of fields!]

There are also two kinds of gardens, home gardens and stream-bed gardens, both called by the Vietnamese term *vuon*. Thus, some well-watered swidden fields near rivers and streams are turned into permanently cultivated stream-bed gardens planted mainly with fruit trees (banana, papaya, jack fruit, guava…), tubers (cassava, taro, yam, sweet potato…), pumpkin, squash, melon, pineapple, sugar cane, ginger… There is an evident developmental relationship between the two kinds of swiddens fields and the stream-bed garden so that some of the extensively cultivated swiddens (*haree*) over time tend to convert into short-fallow fields (*trua*); some well-watered *trua*-fields may, in turn, be converted into permanent stream-bed gardens. The fenced-in home gardens, always located in the immediate vicinity of the owner's house within the village bounds, is cultivated with fruit trees, vegetables, spices, medical and magical plants of various sorts. Just as the paddy fields in the vicinity of the village, the home garden constitutes a separate cultivation regime, independent from the shifting system and its transformations [and probably adopted from the lowland Kinh population]. The range of different fields and cultivation regimes currently in use among the Katu in the study villages are represented in the Figure below:

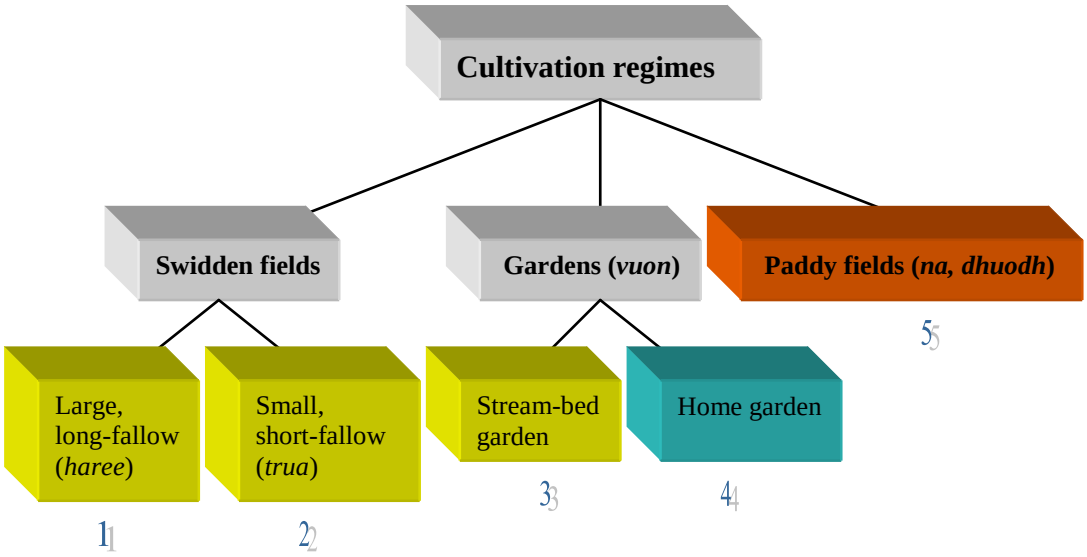

Figure: Categories of fields and cultivation regimes in the study villages

Most households in our study combined long- and short-fallow swiddens (1, 2) stream-bed gardens (3) and home gardens (4). All cultivated both swiddens and home

gardens. The majority of households also owned and cultivated a paddy field (5), though the proportion between those who owned paddy land and those who did not varied considerably in the study villages. The area under wet rice also varied notably from household to household. In addition, some households are engaged in cash cropping (mainly cinnamon). [Need statistics! Are there communal tree-crop plantations?]

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The agricultural practices are supplemented by hunting, fishing and gathering; livestock rearing (buffalo, cattle, goats, pigs and poultry), fish breeding and craft production for use and sale within and outside the village. Hunting and fishing are traditionally very important activities which still play significant roles in Katu society. They will be dealt with in a separate chapter; suffice here to say that hunting (including trapping), though currently contributing relatively little to the everyday diet, is exceedingly significant in the social and ritual life of Katu villages. Fishing in rivers and streams is an almost daily activity. Though symbolically less significant than game, fish accounts for a substantial part of the household protein intake. [Note: Some households harvest substantial amounts of fish from their private fish ponds.] The gathering of forest and river resources for sale, trade and home consumption is considerable, and includes fruits, nuts, shrimps, snails and clams for consumption, and, in particular, honey and rattan for sale. In some parts of the region, and for certain diligent households, honey collection amounts to a major source of cash; great quantities may be collected and sold to traders and local shops during the months of July and August, fetching millions of VND. [Check notes for quantitative data!]

Craft production comprises mainly basketry and, in a handful of households in our study, textile weaving on hand looms. Both are traditional Katu crafts of great refinement. Basketry is a male pursuit, performed by all adult men and includes a wide array of artefacts: carrying baskets of various kinds (the three-part *salet* basket, harvest basket…), small waist baskets for sowing and reaping the rice, winnows and trays. Some men are recognised as skilful craftsmen who weave baskets on demand for other households as well as for sale outside the village. Textile weaving, by contrast, is a female skill, presently deployed only by a few skilful women. Uncut,

decorated cloth and traditional shirts, skirts and loin cloth are valued objects of trade and exchange (particularly in connection with marriage). [In some villages, weaving has been developed into a craft industry constituting the village's main source of cash (i.e. Dhrong village in Talu commune)]

Livestock is an essential asset in Katu households. The buffalo is the most valued domestic animal, and – along with jars and gongs – one of the supreme items of wealth in Katu society. It is principally kept for ritual use – as a sacrificial beast. The buffalo sacrifice is, as noted, the supreme ritual act, performed in a variety of contexts: marriage, funeral, serious illness and in the context of major lineage rituals (*aveng*). It is also an important object of exchange. Thus, every marriage should ideally be sealed by the transfer of one or more buffaloes from the groom's (wife-taker's) to the bride's (wife-giver's) side; not until a buffalo is transferred and sacrificed is the "debt" incurred by the groom for the receipt of a wife (the "bride wealth") considered finally paid. Today, cattle may substitute for the buffalo. Pigs are similarly kept mainly for ritual consumption, and are killed in connection with every family or public ritual – in the context of planting, harvesting and opening the rice granaries, and in connection with the major life cycle rituals. Whenever a buffalo (or cattle) cannot be afforded, one or several pigs have to do. Goats, it is said, are the favoured food of forest spirits and the spirits of the swidden, and, hence the privileged sacrificial animal dedicated to these categories of spirits. Finally, chicken are killed for every ritual, small and big, private and public; the chicken is the principal vehicle of divination and its feet are augured before any significant action is taken in the context of family and village life.

In short, livestock and poultry form an essential part of the Katu ritual system, thus being mainly destined for sacrifice and ritual consumption. In the Katu perception, they are kept as food, not primarily for humans but for the numerous spirits, ghosts and ancestors that populate their universe. As such, they are essential for sustaining life the Katu way; according to Katu traditions, auguries, sacrifices and food offerings to the spirits are necessary for leading an exemplary and dignified life. A household owning several buffaloes, pigs and poultry is a wealthy household; one having neither buffalo nor cattle or pigs is considered a destitute household according to local standards. Such a household is considered lacking the basic means for leading a

socially acceptable life. In the study villages, only a few households would, at any particular time, own one or more buffaloes, or heads of cattle, while most would keep a small herd of pigs, and poultry. [Statistics] Most families, however, would, if need be – for example, in connection with a pending wedding – be in a position to convert part of the family wealth (jars, gongs) into the required livestock.

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Though production for domestic and ritual use remains the basis for the local economy, all households participate to some extent in the cash economy. The involvement in the wider economy varies considerably and economic differentiation within and between villages is quite conspicuous. Surplus rice, particularly from paddy fields, and cassava is sold in the market or along the highway. Relatively wealthy households – those with access to ample and good-quality swidden and paddy land -- can make a substantial profit from the sale of rice. [For a good year, one such household reported a surplus of about 200 ang, which can be sold for 3 million VND. Rice prises: 10-15 000 VND/ang] Outputs, however, fluctuate dramatically from year to year, mainly depending on climatic and environmental conditions, and a surplus one year may be turned into shortage the following year. Other major sources of cash are the sale of honey, rattan, cash crops (principally cinnamon) and craft products (baskets). Although the income from such transactions is generally low in absolute terms, its relative importance for the domestic economy could be considerable for some households. Livestock are also sold or traded according to needs and circumstances. [Quantitative data!]

Village functionaries (and the few working on a part-time basis for the commune or district administration) enjoy a small income in the form of a regular salary. War veterans similarly receive subsidy from the state. In a largely subsistence based domestic economy, such incomes are important sources of cash. Except for two or three household heads, engaged in salaried labour away from the village, all households in the study villages fully participated in the composite, cultivation-based livelihood system sketched above. Measured in mere monetary terms, Katu households – even the most affluent ones – are poor. Yet, there is no hunger or misery, no abject poverty. Demands are limited, expenses usually few and small.

Most households have enough to eat and are able to cover their basic monetary requirements. On the whole, villagers lead lives which are both materially satisfactory and socially gratifying according to local standards. The village, the extended family (local lineage or lineage segment) and networks of kin and affines provide individuals and households with social, economic and existential security when needed. Food, goods and other prestations circulate between families according to traditional norms of kinship and marriage which are still vigorously upheld, and form a vital part of the Katu sense of community and collective identity.

Economic differentiation manifests itself locally in differences in family possessions – the quantity and quality of jars and gongs, the amount and kinds of livestock, control over good swidden and paddy land, and the possession of consumer goods such as radio, television sets and, today, motorbikes. In larger, composite villages, where land is scarce, access to good, arable land near the village is notably variable. It is evident that the composite and diversified nature of the "new" local economy, particularly when developing in a setting of increasing population concentration and shrinking land resources, puts heavy pressures on the traditional system of land tenure which still guides the allocation of land in the villages. National legislation with respect to land tenure is still little known, and carries little weight in local affairs. Where new villages are located on old village land, and where members of the old village form part of the new, enlarged village, original land owners tend to control the best land in the vicinity of the village by virtue of having cleared and cultivated it in the past. Thus, in one of the study villages, four or five families own, in accordance with traditional Katu principles of land tenure, most of the good swidden land near the village. Newcomers to the village, i.e., families originating from other villages but who may have lived for a generation or more in the present village, have to contend with unclaimed land further away from the settlement area.

The resulting picture is one where original landowners control most of the best-quality land while more recent residents own smaller patches of lesser-quality land (steep slopes, sub-optimum soils etc) near the village and more extensive, good-quality land at considerable distance from the settlement. The quality of the land in any locality may differ quite considerably according to local estimation; one particularly fertile and quite vast expanse of land near Arek is said to allow two

successive rice crops on a long-fallow, rotational basis. Though borrowing of land is widespread and thus may compensate for inequalities in land ownership, borrowing mainly occurs between close allies. One household owner, a “newcomer” to the village, told us that he had repeatedly asked a villager – owner of an extensive area of fertile land in the vicinity of the village – to be permitted to clear and cultivate a patch of the latter’s land, but to no avail. The privileged land owner, who was an original occupant of the village, insisted in keeping the family land strictly within the family.

The situation is different in villages, such as Ading 3 (Panoong) and Areh, relocated in accordance with national resettlement policies on land originally belonging to other villages. Here the new village territory was allocated afresh, as it were, to all households; in these villages there were no original land owners and allocation therefore unfolded on an egalitarian basis. The same egalitarian conditions applies to the fourth village in our study, AUr, but for yet other reasons: here the new village is relocated on old village land, but the new village is entirely congruent with the old village and all the households in the village are original land owners with roughly equal access to swidden land according to a distributional pattern established between the families in the remote past.

Access to paddy land is conditioned on slightly different principles but to similar effect. Paddy land is usually restricted to narrow sections of flat and low-lying land along a river or stream flowing through or near the village settlement. A stream and its immediate surroundings is thus divided into clearly bounded cultivated sections, forming a string of paddy fields extending outwards from the village centre. Traditional owners of village land can claim rights to paddy land only in so far as they actually prepare and cultivate fields. Thus, access to paddy fields is strictly predicated on active utilisation which, in turn, is determined by the labour effort a household can put into the preparation and maintenance of one or more paddy fields. Nevertheless, the distribution of paddy land is notoriously unequal, particularly in larger, composite villages where good paddy land is scarce. Thus, in one of the study villages, three families controlled considerably more paddy land than the rest of the families; of these three families, one belonged to the founding families of the village, and two were original owners of the land in the locality where the village is presently situated. In the other villages in our sample, the constitutive households have roughly had

equal opportunities to claim individual ownership; the precise distribution of paddy fields here depend on other factors, including the demographic composition and economic strength of the household as well as the will and determination of its head. The general rule seems to be that the earliest occupants of a village take possession of the best land for paddy cultivation, the size of the fields being a function of the work force the household is able to mobilize for the task. New fields are added on at the end of the string of paddy fields and, thus, at an increasing distance from the village.

Thus, in the case of both swidden- and paddy land, unequal access to arable land is a consequence of the fusion of several original settlements and the resulting accretion, at different points in time, of new households to a core of original families. In other words, the traditional Katu system of land tenure, evolved in a setting of almost limitless expanses of old forest prudently exploited by small, scattered and semi-mobile settlements, has been transferred to an entirely different setting to which it is ill adapted – a setting characterised by relatively larger, composite and permanent villages confined within administratively fixed and bounded village territories.

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Swidden cultivation remains the mainstay of the local economy and constitutes the axis around which life revolves in Katu villages. The details of the pre-war system of shifting cultivation are insufficiently known, and it is thus difficult to assess the precise changes in the system. Currently each household generally cultivates several fields simultaneously: two medium-to-large fields (1-2 ha) in the forest, and one (or two) smaller, short-fallow fields, near the village. A widespread practice is that a swidden group jointly clears adjacent fields at one location and then, during the same season, at another, separate location. The two swiddens of each constituent household are burned and planted in close coordination with the other households in the swidden group, usually with somewhat different crop associations in the two locations (?) The next year the same procedure is repeated, and so on in a cycle of 8-10 years, when the first fields are re-cleared. At the end of the cycle, each household thus have 16-20 fields in different stages of regeneration to which it may return on a rotational basis. The swidden group may stay intact throughout the rotation-cycle or may vary in composition over the years. This synchronic rotation of two fields in two separate

localities within a group of cooperating households was a pattern that recurred in several accounts though the length of the rotation cycles varied from 5-10 years in different accounts (as compared to the 12-15 year cycles stated as the norm under traditional conditions).

Above we observed that the two main types of swidden fields among the Katu, the larger forest field (*haree*) and the smaller *trua* field near the village are dominated by rice-maize-millet associations and the cassava-pineapple-sugarcane associations respectively. Often rice, maize, cassava (and other tubers), sugarcane, pineapple, and a range of other common cultigens occur in both types, though in different proportions. The picture is compounded by the fact that a steady proportion of the rice-fields are converted into cassava-fields by the inter-planting of cassava amongst the sprouting rice. The typical cropping sequence in a rice field is that maize is planted a day before the rice (in March), while sugarcane and cassava are simultaneously planted in April, just after weeding the rice field and when the rice is still green. The cassava is said to take about a year to ripen, but can be harvested for up to five years (?) In May or June, pineapple is planted in the ripening rice field. The rice is planted across the entire surface of the field, while corn is typically planted in vertical, near-straight lines, running from the top of the field to its lower end. It is common to mix ordinary and sticky rice in the same field in various proportions (often on a half/half basis). Other common crops – including sugarcane, cassava and pineapple – are planted at the lower part of the field, forming a transition band between the rice-and-maize cultivation and the adjacent forest or bush vegetation.

Cropping-and-fallow sequences in the shifting system are seemingly endlessly varied according to needs and circumstances specific to each household and changing from year to year. The result is a great number of intermediary land-use forms between the extensive and intensive extremes, typified by the long-fallow rice field and the short-fallow cassava field. Conversions occur in both directions: rice fields turn into cassava fields, but cassava fields may also be allowed to regenerate after an intensive cycle and thus re-turn into an extensively cultivated rice field.

The length of the fallow period for rice fields (spanning the range from extensive to intensive) vary accordingly; a very approximate picture of the range of variation

emerges from the responses of six male household heads asked to estimate the average length of the fallow periods of forest fields. As can be seen, estimates range between 3-10 years ($9<R<25$) with a core range between 5-7 years ($13<R<15$):

hh head	estimated fallow period (in years)
1	3-5
2	4-5
3	4-7
4	5-7
5	8
6	10

The dry-rice agricultural calendar of today differs substantially from the cycle in the past. In the 1940s, I was told, an increasing number of Vietnamese traders, settlers and insurgents fighting the French colonial regime began to arrive in the Katu territory. These men intimated to the Katu – and eventually convinced them – that their traditional agricultural cycle was inappropriate and outmoded since it implied that they, the Katu, harvested their rice during the rainy season. To the Kinh people, this age-old practice seemed irrational since working the fields on steep mountain slopes during the rains were hard and risky, and since crops sometimes got damaged by the heavy downpours. As a result, following the lead of the Kinh, the Katu adopted a new calendar which is the one currently in use across the Katu territory. [Cf. Luu Hung's report: a new rice variety]

According to this current agricultural calendar forest is cleared in December – January; fields are burned and sown in February-March, and harvested in July-August. As in the past, households move out on the fields according to a bi-polar pattern – first during sowing and then again during harvest time. The important difference from the old pattern is twofold: first, sowing is done in plain dry season, well before the onset of the rains, and, secondly, harvesting is done at the end of the dry season or just at the beginning of the rains, but well before the peak of the rainy

season. In other words, while the traditional cycle implied sowing and harvesting "with" the rains, the new cycle means sowing and harvesting "against" the rains. [Also: rice ripens quicker: in 3 (4) months]

Estimates of dry rice yields and the productivity of swidden cultivation are yet very tentative. A first observation is that yields vary dramatically from year to year in each household owing principally to weather conditions, but also to specific circumstances in relation to the household's cultivation cycle (field selection, timing and quality of burning, "rain washing", timing of planting, seed predation etc). This means also that the productivity of fields differ greatly from household to household. Generally, villagers stated that a dry rice yield of 2-300 ang [1 ang=7 kg] is a good yield for a year/household. Correspondingly, a yield of 50-100 ang is a bad yield. [As an example, in 2003, V (Arek) harvested 200 ang while K (Panoong) produced 120 ang; the following year (2004), V harvested only 90 ang] According to local estimates an annual yield of about 100 ang is considered a household minimum, barely enough for survival. The precise requirements, of course, vary from household to household depending on its size and composition. Anything above this minimum allow for sharing, feasting, exchange or sale in the market. If rice yields drop below the minimum requirement, as it did in many households 2004, the household is forced to rely extensively on cassava (and help from kin and allies).

The productivity of fields is locally measured by reference to the relationship between the amount of rice sown in the field and the volume harvested; we were told by one man in Arek that, in the past, 2 ang of seeds under normal circumstances yielded about 50 ang of rice. Today, he continued, one has to sow 5 ang to obtain the same yield. On this estimate, then, the overall productivity of swidden cultivation has dropped to less than half of the pre-war figure.

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Wet rice cultivation operates on entirely different principles. As opposed to the upland rice swidden, the paddy field is a highly specialised ecosystem, exclusively planted and permanently cultivated with rice (monoculture). Where the swidden imitates the diversified and stratified structure of the natural forest (the rice being

intercropped with higher, leafy plants providing a protective cover), the paddy field is an open, uncovered and wholly artificial ecosystem. And whereas the swidden field is ecologically highly vulnerable an unstable (insofar as even slight alterations in the cropping/fallow ratio produces dramatic changes in productivity), the paddy field is a remarkably stable and sustainable ecosystem, capable of producing constantly high yields/ha for sustained period of time irrespective of soil conditions (but granted a stable supply of water) (Geertz 1963).

Water is here the key factor and limiting resource. Yields depend on the continuous and careful regulation of the water supply. The stable and controlled supply of water requires considerable infrastructural investments. The typical paddy field (*na, dhuadh*) is a walled-in field capable of containing water, a dam or terrace surrounded by low earthen walls, to which water is channelled via dikes or channels and sluices which regulate the flow of water. The paddy field itself has to be horizontal and level to allow an even distribution of water in the field. Frequently, water has to be channelled over considerable distances, implying quite impressive infrastructural works and a large labour input. Optimally, the rice is planted in moist, softened soil. As the seed sprout and the young plants grow, the water level in the field is progressively increased. As the plants are ripe for harvest, the water is drained away, leaving the field dry and ready for harvest. To obtain the best conditions, the field is drained once or twice during the growing season in order to clean and fertilise (with livestock manure) the fields. The water should not be allowed to stagnate, but flow gently through the field (allowing a continuous supply of nutrients). In short, the construction, maintenance and repair of the infrastructure (channels, fields, sluices…) associated with paddy cultivation require a considerable investment in time and labour. [Check details on the work process!]

Katu paddy fields in the Avuong area are consistently small (0,2-0,3 ha). Under good conditions, two crops are produced annually. The first crop of wet rice is typically planted in December and harvested in April; the second is planted in July and harvested in November. The two rice cycles, the swidden and the paddy cycles, are thus roughly complementary: the first paddy harvest kicks in at a time (April) when the stored dry rice is dwindling; the second crop (November) supplements the new dry-rice crop harvested in August-September. [Check!]

According to local estimates, the productivity of paddy cultivation is roughly similar to that of swidden cultivation as measured in terms of the input/output ratio of seed/harvested rice. In other words, the same amount of seed yields the same amount of rice in the two cases. (However, much less rice is planted in the small paddy field than in the combined swiddens). [Find out how much!] Note, however, that the paddy field normally yields two crops/year. [What are the average yields from paddy fields? D in Arek, for example, has one 0.3 ha paddy field; in 2004 he planted it with 5 ang rice] Two circumstances limits the prospects of wet rice cultivation in the region: (1) there is a shortage of adequate land for paddy cultivation; only a narrow strip of land along rivers and streams in the vicinity of the village is suitable for paddy cultivation. [As noted above, in larger villages, such as Arek, only a fraction of the households (ca 25 % ?) are actually engaged in wet rice cultivation as compared to the situation in Areh, where 26 of 27 hhs cultivate paddy]; (2) the water supply, drawn from nearby streams, is often scarce and erratic, frequently resulting in yields below expectation – even when two crops are reaped in a single year. [More quantitative data] We must conclude that wet-rice cultivation as a basis for the local economy, could sustain only relatively small villages in the region.

Given adequate conditions, the relative advantage of wet-rice cultivation over swidden cultivation is its capacity to absorb a growing population. As opposed to the shifting system, paddy cultivation allows almost limitless intensification of land use without a decline in yields per cultivated area. The productivity of a paddy field is largely a function of its careful management and improvements of infrastructure and cultivation techniques. It seems to be possible to extract ever bigger yields from a field by working it ever more intensely – by using transplantation techniques; periodically draining and weeding the field; ploughing, harrowing and levelling the soil; fertilising with manure and perfecting harvesting techniques (Geertz 1963). In short, granted a stable supply of water, farmers can increase the yields from their paddy fields in accordance to their needs and in proportion to the labour (and time) they are able to invest in the management of the fields.

Wet rice cultivation is a recent practice among the Katu, introduced in the aftermath of the American war (around 1975). Adopted from Kinh farmers, it has been strongly

promoted by the state as part and parcel of the socialist development package. However, as a new and unfamiliar agricultural practice it tallies badly with traditional Katu livelihood system in two fundamental respects: (a) it requires a considerable male involvement in the whole cultivation process, from preparatory works to harvest, and thus effectively turns men into cultivators whereas in the traditional system cultivation was strongly associated with women and female identity. The development of wet-rice cultivation could thus deprive Katu women of their role and identity as rice cultivators (see the following chapter); (b) it also requires and effectively establishes a fixed, sedentary settlement pattern which goes against the grains of the traditional Katu social organisation centred on small, semi-permanent and fluid settlements sustained by shifting cultivation. The adoption and deployment of wet-rice cultivation to its full potential thus requires a complete transformation of Katu society.

Trajectories of Change: Development or Decline?

A consideration of past and present settlement- and cultivation regimes gives rise to some concern: the pre-war pattern of small, dispersed and semi-permanent settlements allowed, as far as we are able to judge, a fairly high-yielding and sustainable regime of dry rice cultivation. Traditional social institutions – networks of kinship and alliance, notions of land tenure etc. – permitted the fission and fusion, movement and rearrangement of villages in response to environmental and socio-political perturbations. On the other hand, the unstable political environment and the indigenous system of beliefs and ritual practices – often propelling villagers to abandon inauspicious village sites, killing the livestock and discarding entire rice crops – prevented the optimal use of the shifting system and inhibited any spontaneous developments towards a more sedentary settlement pattern.

The current situation, generally characterised by larger, composite and permanent villages, has its own problems and predicaments: arable land in the vicinity of villages is increasingly scarce; wet-rice cultivation has limited potential in the hilly, broken highland environment and is, as yet, culturally and economically poorly integrated in the local livelihood system. The diversification of survival strategies and the growing emphasis on cash crop production in combination with the scarcity of land rapidly

propel Katu society in the direction of deepening economic differentiation. The evident tendency towards an intensification of the shifting system, implying shorter rotation cycles and an increasing reliance on cassava, inevitably leads to both falling productivity in the swidden system and soil degradation of forest land. Current rice yields from swidden cultivation appear, on the whole, both lower and more erratic than under the traditional regime, and the supply of wet rice and supplementary vegetables and fruits from home gardens seem not to fully compensate for the underperformance of the present regime of dry-rice cultivation.

The introduction of new, fast-growing varieties of upland rice and the concomitant change of the agricultural calendar may have reduced periods of rice shortage in the traditional system (between planting and harvesting) as well as the labour burden during harvesting time (which occurred during the rainy season). On the other hand, our study suggests that the new practice may at the same time have contributed to the evident decline of productivity in the swidden system. Thus, the twin facts that the rice is now planted at the peak of the dry season and harvested before the heavy rains in October-November would seem to (a) hamper plant growth in the early stages of development, and (b) enhance the risk of soil erosion due to the impact of the rains on the exposed upland- and mountain fields – since the fields are deprived of their protective crop covering immediately before the heavy rains. [As noted, villagers insist that swidden fields yielded better in the past] In short, there are reasons to assume that the old cultivation cycle, adapted to the upland rain regime, though perhaps more labour intensive, might indeed have been both more productive (in terms of absolute yields) and more sustainable. [Check agronomy/ecology!]

On balance, there seem to be serious reasons for concern about the future and sustainability of the current livelihood system in Katu villages. This concern is underscored by comparative findings from two different village settings: one, large and relatively established village (Arek), located near the HCM highway and within easy reach of the district capital, and another, small village (AUr), recently established on ancestral land deep in the forest and comparatively far away from roads and markets. In the former village, typical for current development trends in the region, good cultivable land is increasingly scarce; in the latter, which is reminiscent of a traditional settlement, good swidden land – thick, old forest – is abundant.

In 2004, dry-rice yields in the former, “modern”, village were (according to villagers as well as my own observations) considerably and consistently lower and of poorer quality than in the latter, “traditional” village. To this should be added the fact that fish and game for household consumption (and honey and rattan for sale) were also much more abundant in the latter village (see below). The daily diet in the small and remote traditional-like village was hence conspicuously richer, more abundant and varied, than in the modern village. These admittedly somewhat impressionistic findings strongly suggest the need for exploring alternatives to current development trends in the region (based on further and careful study of Katu livelihood regimes, past and present).

The work by Rambo (1995) and collaborators (Rambo et al, 1997) on ethnic groups in the northern uplands of Vietnam, provide suggestive comparative material as well as possible models for such an alternative development. The Tay of Da Bac District, Hoa Binh Province, have developed what Rambo calls a *composite swidden system* where households simultaneously manage both permanent wet rice fields in valley bottoms and shifting swidden fields on hill slopes, and collect wild resources from the forest. The distinctive characteristic of the composite swidden agro-ecosystem is that swiddening comprises an integral component of the total system; it is neither a remnant of an old, pure or “primitive” shifting system, nor a recent supplement to an over-exploited wet-rice system as a result of excessive population growth. Instead, the Tay have practiced both forms of agriculture as integral parts of a total livelihood system evolved during a very long time, probably for centuries (Rambo et al, 1997:103).

The adaptive potential of the composite system is that it promises a relatively stable and sustainable cultivation regime under much higher population pressure than can be sustained under a pure, or simple, swidden regime. The wet-rice component of the system, although constituting only a small total area, enjoys a relatively high and stable yield. Since households meet one-half of their grain requirement from their paddy fields, they clear a significantly smaller area of swidden fields each year than would be the case if they had to rely exclusively on swiddens to meet their consumption needs. Consequently, the carrying capacity of a given area is twice as

great as it is when rotational swiddening is the primary mode of adaptation. The composite system would seem to be eminently suitable to an environment, such as that prevailing in the uplands of Quang Nam, where forests are extensive and the terrain broken and hilly, and where, accordingly, well-watered and level land suitable for paddy cultivation is scarce. In the long term, such a system might evolve in the direction of the Talun-Kebun system of Java: here, a highly sustainable and very productive system of long-fallow swiddening remains an important component of an agro-ecosystem that supports perhaps the highest population density of any mountain area in the tropics (Rambo et al, 1997:104).

Tendencies in the direction of a composite swidden system are evident among the Katu in the AVuong region, and the potential is obviously present for such a development. However, the process may reach its full potential only under three conditions: (a) that the swidden component in the system is allowed to operate flexibly within sufficiently large areas of forest land, (b) that the size of settlements is optimally calibrated to the availability of both adequate swidden and paddy land, and (c) that the two cultivation regimes are allowed to gradually integrate into a wider socio-economic setting and become part of a refigured Katu identity which is at the same time anchored Katu traditions and responsive to new opportunities and contemporary conditions.

3. The Rice Cycle

Economies and livelihood systems are culturally organised. Past and present cultivation regimes among the Katu thus have an important cultural – symbolic and religious – dimension. This particularly applies to the cycle of upland rice production which is punctuated by an elaborate sequence of rituals – from the clearing and burning of forest fields over sowing and weeding to the harvesting of the ripe crop. These rituals continue to be strictly performed today.

Rice is both the staple and the single most valued food among the Katu. It is the paradigmatic food; no meal is considered complete without it, though cassava periodically makes up, particularly for women, a greater part of the daily diet. Rice and rice cultivation is intimately associated with women. The work related to rice – sowing, tending the rice fields, harvesting, winnowing and pounding the harvested rice, and cooking it for consumption – are quintessential female tasks (though men may participate in both sowing and harvesting). When the rice is harvested only the female household head is allowed to bring the rice into the granary, and only she may open the granary and take out the first grains of the stored rice. The rice granary is her exclusive domain; no man is allowed into it. The female household head, the (first) wife of the male house owner, is the head and owner of its granary.

The rice plant is said to have soul, *ravai (rövai)* – a notion that is otherwise intimately associated with human beings, buffaloes and large game animals. As the plant grows, the rice soul ascends through the growing plant, from the seed buried in the soil, through the stem into the developing ears and finally comes to rest in the ripe rice grain. (There is a clear analogy here with the human head and the animal skull as the abode of the soul; see chapter on hunting below.) As the rice is harvested, Katu say that the soul of the harvested plants escapes and takes up its abode in the last standing plant in the field. This last standing plant is finally cut whole, carefully placed on top of the harvested rice, and carried from the field to the granary. The rice soul, now

representing all the plants of the harvested field, is enjoined to follow the rice to the granary, where it remains until next sowing season.

This ritually treated rice plant, containing the collective soul of all the plants in the field, is referred to as *ayech avi* – the Grandmother of the Rice. At the beginning of the new growing season, the rice grains from this "mother plant" are mixed with the rice selected for sowing. The rice soul, contained in grain of the mother plant, thus describes an unbroken circuit from seed to grain, from soil to granary and back into the soil. It is not consumed, nor given away or sold. The rice soul belongs to the house and must never leave it.

In mythical and metaphorical discourse, the growing rice is described as a child. [NOTE: The Katu have numerous myths in which the rice is described as a newborn child crying for his/her mother's attention] The relationship between the ancestral plant (represented by the seed) and its fruit (the new crop) is thus conceived of as that between (grand) mother and (grand) child. Granted that the notion of "grandmother" (*ayech*) here most probably is an expression of respect fundamentally connoting "senior woman" or female family head, the mother of many children, I will, in the following, refer to the significant and fundamentally uterine relationship between the ancestral plant (the seed) and its fruit (the new rice) as a mother-child relationship. In an extended, symbolic sense, it appears that the Grandmother of the Rice (the Mother Plant) is identified with the female household head: the woman who sows, tends and reaps the rice. Thus, the female granary owner – eventually every woman – is herself the Rice Mother, who engenders and nurses her Rice Children and, thus, ensures the cyclical generation of the family rice.

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Every significant practical activity in the agricultural cycle is accompanied by a major ritual event. The rituals accompany the various phases of the cycle of shifting cultivation – from the clearing and burning of forest, through the growing season of the plants to the harvesting of the ripe crop – and are exclusively concerned with the cultivation of upland rice. Wet-rice cultivation, which is relatively recently introduced

among the Katu, and the cultivation of subsidiary crops – maize, manioc, millet etc. – are, as far as I know, lacking in ritual elaboration.

The rice-cycle rituals are essentially family rituals. Each house or family compound, usually occupied by an agnatically extended family (lineage segment), is responsible for carrying out the ritual in question. However, each ritual is followed by public feasting, involving several houses or a faction of the village. Since these rituals tend to be closely coordinated in time so that all houses in a village are likely to perform any of these rituals in close sequence and within a few days of one another, the whole village seems at times – especially at planting and harvesting – to be caught up in intense feasting, villagers going from one house to another to partake of each others' feasts.

In the past, the main rice cycle rituals appear to have been coordinated within each village and, indeed, the concern of the entire village community. Decisions on the timing of clearing and burning, sowing and harvesting were taken by the village headman or the village elders, and depended as much on ritual as practical considerations – whether, for example, there were death or disease in the village or in a neighbouring village, in which case the work would be postponed to a more auspicious moment. Even today, when practical considerations hold sway over/ ritual ones, village elders and ritual authorities are consulted for auspicious days to initiate burning, sowing and harvesting. As a result, the major events of the agricultural cycle tend to be deliberately coordinated in time: in any village, the burning of cleared fields, planting and new rice rituals tend to take place during a few consecutive days.

[According to the traditional cultivation cycle, the ritual "opening of the granary" (see below), which largely coincided with the beginning of the lunar year (January-February), also opened the agricultural year; it preceded and actually signalled the time for clearing the new fields. However, the introduction of new rice strains ("three-month" rice) and the concomitant adoption of a new agricultural calendar in the decades preceding the American War (see above), has displaced the traditional ritual cycle. Thus, since the rice harvest now takes place two-three months earlier than in the past, clearing normally takes place before the opening ritual of the granary (?) The content and purpose of the ritual opening of the granary – the blessing of the seeds for

the new crop – have therefore partly shifted to the Tet ceremony, adopted from the Kinh majority population and celebrating the new lunar year in late January or early February]

The following is a preliminary description of the major rituals related to the agricultural cycle. It is based mainly on informants' accounts, supplemented by observations in the field; data on clearing derives exclusively from verbal accounts, as does the brief description of the "growth ritual" taking place about a month after sowing and the "opening of the granary" inaugurating the new agricultural year. Rituals accompanying burning, sowing ad harvesting were observed in the field.

Clearing and Burning Forest Fields

1. Before clearing forest, the male household head makes a small "test" clearing, called *chok haree* (?), at the site chosen for a new swidden field. This small clearing, only a few square meters in extension, serves to stake out a man's claim to the chosen area. More importantly, however, the act of preparing the test clearing is an announcement to the spirits of the land (*abuy krung*) of his intention to clear the site; as such it is a request, addressed to the spirits, for permission to cut the trees and burn the land in the chosen area.

We collected several accounts of the preparation of the test clearing. All suggest that the work is a highly ritualised, gradual and probing process, aimed at finding out the disposition of the spirits with regard to the selected site and the project of converting it into a swidden field. An auspicious day of the lunar calendar is chosen for starting the work. [Check field notes!] In the past, I was told, a whole village started clearing on the same day, the auspicious day being announced by the village headman. Two or three days before the announced day, the village was closed to strangers; it was declared taboo (*dieng*). The taboo lasted until the third day of clearing (?) Strangers were not allowed to enter the village during this period.

At the beginning of clearing, before cutting the first tree, the spirits are addressed, and permission requested. In the past, according to one man, the cutter first hit the tree trunk lightly with his axe, then sat down at the base to smoke pipe while silently

addressing the spirits. After finishing the pipe, and as the smoke dissolved in the air, the man could start felling the tree. Today, the cutter clears the underbrush around the tree and burns some incense before cutting the tree. According to another account, the stump of the first felled tree is covered with a banana leaf, tied around the trunk with a rattan string, and a small ceremony is carried out at the spot to placate the spirits, asking them not to harm people when cutting the trees. We were also told that tree cutting should take place after sunrise and before sunset; at dawn and dusk the spirits wander the forest and might harm people. One should also avoid cutting trees on full-moon days [dates ?], since, at this time, all spirits are awake and worms – which may destroy the wood – abound in the woods.

The test plot is gradually expanded; the first day only a couple of square meters are cleared, the following day another few meters are added, and so on, for three days. During these days, the man – the male household head – keenly searches for signs of the spirits' disposition: as he walks along the path to the site and back, and as he works on the clearing. The dreams he (and his wife) have during this period are carefully interpreted; dreams are considered coded messages from the spirits and a principal means of communication between men and spirits.

According to our interlocutors, the spirits may respond in a variety of ways: if you cut or otherwise hurt yourself while clearing, causing blood letting; or, again, if you encounter a snake or dead rat/mouse along the path between the house and the clearing; or, if you hear one of several kinds of birds (the *tavet*, *yopedi*, or *tre* bird; all unidentified) singing, or if several birds follow you on returning from the clearing, this is considered a bad omen and the plot must be abandoned. If the *tre* bird (with red throat/belly and strong voice) sings discontinuously (tre… tre… tre…), you may address the bird and announce your intention to clear and burn the land. In case you want to clear a plot originally belonging to someone else, you should explain to the birds/spirits that you have the original owner's permission. Birds, it should be noted, are considered by the Katu as messengers of the spirits.

If nothing of this happens, but you (or your wife) have a bad dream during the three days of clearing the test plot, you must, we were told, discontinue the cutting and abandon the site. Examples of bad dreams are: someone chases you; you see an

abundance of blood (or any red substance); thunder storm and heavy rains; a burning house; a multitude of buffaloes… Other dreams, however, are good omens as when you dream of plenty of blue-green water; a big river with clear water; a big stone; that someone offers you rice or corn, or, in the case of a woman dreamer, that you become pregnant (?)

If all signs are auspicious until the third day, the man starts clearing the field in earnest, now usually together with a group of other men and women who mutually cooperate on each others' swiddens (the swidden group), the men cutting the big trees, the women clearing the underbrush. However, if an accident occurs during the early stages of the clearing – if anyone in the party hurts him- or herself, or a knife is broken, this is interpreted as a bad omen, and the field may be abandoned. In such a case, the whole process is started up again at a new site. Katu say that these procedures (including the clearing of a test plot) are strictly adhered to today; no-one would continue clearing a tract of forest after receiving a bad omen. Accidents and ominous signs are seen as unequivocal messages of disapproval on the part of the spirits.

This sequence of ritual steps takes place when clearing a forest field for the first time. Subsequent clearing of the same area (after a fallow period) does not involve the ritual sequence just described, granted that the clearing is performed by a member of the family originally clearing the field, and that the field has been continuously in use on a rotational basis by the same family (see above). By contrast, the rituals accompanying the succeeding phases of the agricultural cycle (burning, sowing, weeding, harvesting…) are annual events, repeated in full year after year.

2. Burning the cleared land takes place about two months after cutting the forest (currently in early or mid March), when the trunks and branches are sufficiently dry. It is a perilous task on the steep hillsides where Katu swiddens are invariably located; the heat evolved is tremendous, and the danger of falling or getting entangled in the maze of cleared trees, bush and branches and, thus, of getting caught in the blazing fire is great. There is also a risk that the fire trespasses into other fields or engulfs adjacent settlements or temporary field houses. The task of burning the fields is an

exclusively male enterprise and generally entrusted the household head and one or two experienced helpers.

However, in the Katu view, the metaphysical danger of burning the dry swidden is even greater. The fire may scorch a tomb house or grave site (although the Katu generally take care to separate fields and grave sites precisely for this reason; as a rule, swidden fields are located uphill and grave sites downhill); or it may burn and kill ground living animals, notably snakes. Each of these incidents is seen as extremely ominous, heralding disease, misfortune or death. If they occur, the offended spirits can only be placated by a major blood offering (traditionally buffalo, pig or goat). If a tomb belonging to another village is accidentally burned down, this could in the past even result in revenge killing and blood feud.

In the past, the burning of all the clearings of a particular village ideally took place during the same day, or within a few consecutive days. During the first day of burning, always taking place on an auspicious day, the village was closed (*dieng*) for visitors and strangers.

Before burning, the household head usually consults a local healer or ritual specialist (xxx) for protection against the spirits of the swidden. The idea here is that when men burn the swidden, the spirits of the place are likely to get annoyed. In retaliation, they may attack the family with disease and misfortune. To prevent this to happen, the man seeks help from the ritual specialist, asking him for the appropriate "medicine" – a plant (of the ginger family), the smell of which is said to chase away the malevolent spirits of the swidden.

The cleared land is set ablaze with torches made from dry bamboo stems. The men performing the task have to carefully coordinate their movements and carefully calculate the speed and direction of the wind. At the moment of setting fire to the dry heaps of bushes and branches, the owner of the field addresses the spirits (*abuy haree, abuy krung*…): "Now, to every ghost (*abuy*), to every soul of dead people inhabiting this area, I say – go away, leave this field lest you get burned…" Our interlocutor then offered the following explanatory comment: "since the ghosts have houses and families, just like living humans, the man (the owner of the field) tells the spirits to

move their houses and families to another area in the forest." In one family compound, we also observed that the female family head cut leaves from a particular plant (similar to pineapple) and spread them on the ground, forming a ring around the compound so as to protect the family from the angered spirits trying to escape from the burned field.

Sowing and Growth Rituals

3. Sowing (*truot*) generally takes place in March, immediately after burning. Men and women of a family compound collaborate in the process. Usually the different fields of all households in the compound are located adjacent to one another in the same swidden. The entire group of men and women works jointly, sowing each others fields. Traditionally, we were told, men formed a front line, making holes with a planting stick, followed by the women, carrying small sowing baskets (xxx) tied to their waists, from which they picked and dropped the seeds into the holes made by the men. Today men and women tend to do both operations at the same time, making holes with one hand and sowing with the other. (However, it is my definite impression that considerably more women are involved in the work than men). The lines of men and women, moving up and down the steep hill slopes against the pitch black background of the burned soil, is a spectacular sight – often in clear view from the village square.

In the past, the village was ritually closed to visitors during the first day of sowing. The rice used for sowing is taken from a specific basket, stored apart from the other rice in the family granary. This separate basket contains the family rice, kept exclusively for family use and containing the spirit of the rice. After sowing, the family members collect any remaining seeds from the bottom of the sowing baskets and again store it away in a separate basket for exclusive family use.

During the time of sowing, the family must not give away any rice to visitors and strangers or, indeed, anyone outside the family. If this ban is not upheld and rice is given away, the Katu say that the rice spirit and the spirits (*yang*) of the house get angry; the rice becomes *körlah* [meaning?] and may hurt someone, or cause bad crops

of misfortune in the family. The ban is lifted through a ceremony (*pörlich trö trüöt*) at the end of the sowing period.

Before starting the sowing, each family performs a sacrifice for the spirits of the forest and the swidden as well as for the *yang* of the family. A pig (or goat) is killed and offered to the spirits along with a chicken, cooked rice and (yellow) wine. The ritual, which is called *buoy trüöt* or *tap trüöt* (meaning simply "sowing ceremony"), takes place either in the house or at the newly burnt swidden. If it takes place at home, the spirits of the forest and the swidden are invited into the house to partake of the food offerings; conversely, if the rite takes place at the swidden, the house spirits are enjoined to come along to the swidden. In the house, the altar is prepared with several pieces of cloth, including women's skirt, shirt and belt. At the swidden, a small worshipping shelter is constructed with women's cloth as a roof cover. [Alternatively, a small altar frame of bamboo is prepared. In one instance, we saw a simple altar, a tray-like frame of wooden splinters, attached to a stick; a face was carved on the upper part of the stick.]

As the officiating elder offers the food to the spirits, he addresses them saying: "Spirits of the earth and sky, spirits of forest and swidden, *yang* of the house and souls of recently dead, today we start sowing the rice. We have prepared this food for you, please come and eat with us… We ask you to protect our crop, let the rice grow well, give us rain and good weather, don't let the seedlings dry or be eaten or damaged by birds or other animals. Please give us a good crop this year and protect our family from sickness and misfortune, let our family be prosperous this year, make sure that many Kinh people come to our village to sell jars and gongs, and that we acquire money to buy them…"

When sowing is completed, normally within a few days' time, the *pörlich trö trüöt* [or *pa ach (pa adz?)*] ceremony, which lifts the ban on giving away family rice, is performed. This rite takes place in the house, and again a pig or goat is sacrificed. However, as opposed to the ritual signalling the beginning of sowing, which is private, a family affair, this ritual, which marks the end of the sowing, is a public event to which visitors and guests from other houses and villages are invited. The officiant addresses the spirits saying: "We have now finished sowing; from now on

our family has no prohibition. Spirits of the house and of the rice, do not get angry when we offer rice to guests and visitors! We ask you to give us abundant crops and good health..."

At the edge of the newly sown swidden, a *chördang* [meaning?] stick – a split bamboo forming a Y-shaped stick – is now erected. The "horns" of the stick are separated by a cross bar, and at the base of the fork are stuck, or tied, a stone, or a clump of soil. (In one case, we saw a bundle of dried rice stalks stuck in a four month-old *chördang*). The *chördang* is said to protect the field from malicious slander and the envy of by-passers; it is believed that envy and slander may cause a bad crop, or misfortune on the part of the owner of the field, or the perpetrator of the slander him- or herself. (One informant stated that persons commenting on the crop – either maliciously or out of envy – will have their tongue stuck in their mouth like the stone propped in the fork). The stick, much like a scarecrow, is also said to scare away birds and other seed-eaters and, thus, to prevent them from preying on the seedlings. (I believe this is a "modernist" rationalisation, communicated to inquisitive outsiders like myself.)

[In view of published accounts from a related Mon-Khmer group, the Lamet (Izikowitz 2001), an alternative interpretation suggests itself; the stone (or soil, or rice stems/plants) stuck in the fork serves to tie or attach the rice soul to the growing plants in the field and to the land on which they grow. Izikowitz further suggests that the forked stick, common as ornament and ritual implement in the region, may well represent the horned head of a buffalo – the animal privileged by the spirits and, therefore, the ritual beast par excellence in the region. One might also wonder, if not the protective stick is believed to keep away malevolent spirits as well as malicious people from the field?]

4. When the new rice has grown to a height of about 15-20 centimetres, about a month after sowing, a ritual is held at the swidden. This rite is called *buoy ravil*, or *ravil haree* (literally "weeding ceremony" or "weeding the swidden"). Again a pig or goat is sacrificed to the spirits. The spirit of the swidden (*abuy haree*) is believed to have a special liking for goat's blood. The sacrifice is performed to ensure a good crop; the spirits are asked to protect the rice from drought, heavy rain storms, crop disease and

predators, and to make the rice plants yield a plentiful harvest. The spirits are also called upon to protect the family from disease and misfortune.

Harvest Rituals

5. When the rice is ripe for harvesting (*soot*, "to pick rice"), normally in July, the New Rice Ritual (*cha avi tome*, literally "eating the new rice", or *buoy soot*, "harvest ceremony") is performed. It is a family ritual, carried out in the main house of each family compound. In the past, harvesting started in September-October and lasted for about two months. The day for starting the harvest was augured and announced by the village headman, and the ritual carried out by each family on the same day or within a few consecutive days. The first day of the harvest was taboo, and the village gates closed. Today, though the timing is not – at least explicitly – ritually determined, families nevertheless tend to begin harvesting roughly at the same time, and all harvest rituals in any particular village tend to take place within a week or so in mid-late July.

The harvest ritual was, and remains, one of the central ritual events in the agricultural cycle. It is said that in the past, the family rites were synchronised so that when each family had performed its private rite, portions of the new, cooked rice were brought from each family, along with other foods and wine, to the *guol*, where a joint, communal meal was enjoyed, followed by drinking, singing and playing of drums and gongs. Thus, though the ritual offering to the spirits was a private act, directed to the spirits of the house and the swidden of each family, the ensuing feasting was a public event, engaging the village as a whole. This may still be true for small villages, and even in large villages it is still the case that every New Rice Ritual is followed by social eating and drinking, though on a smaller scale. As remarked above, harvest time is a time of prolonged, continuous drinking and feasting, villagers going from house to house for days on end to attend each others' celebrations.

The family head determines an auspicious day for performing the ritual. In the morning of the agreed day, the senior woman of the family (the senior wife of the family head) goes to pick the first rice from the swidden field. On the path she picks leaves of two plants (*alang, vövil*) and puts them on the path leading to the swidden.

This act is called *chö chöroong* [meaning?]. At the swidden she picks her harvest basket (xxxx) about half full, and then returns home, where she pounds and cooks the new rice. Meanwhile the male family head prepares the food offering in the main house of the family compound. A pig is killed and offered to the spirits.

The ritual follows the ordinary two-stage sequence of Katu blood offerings: (1) first, a chicken is killed and its feet augured. Fresh blood from the chicken is served on a tray with new, boiled rice and a several jars of wine. Ideally the offering tray also contains the meat of bird, rat and fish. The spirits – Pleng, the *yang* of the house, the rice spirit and the spirits of the forest and the earth/land are invited to come and eat. Then (2) follows the blood sacrifice proper: the pig is killed, and blood drawn from its slit throat. The carcass is cut up, and the meat cooked. When ready, the whole chicken, a cup of fresh pig's blood and its boiled head, tail, feet and intestines (liver, heart…) are placed with the other foods on the tray and offered to the spirits. This is the proper food offering, the essence of which the spirits are believed to partake.

On one occasion, two bowls of pounded rice and one, bigger bowl of un-husked rice were offered to the spirits; of the two bowls of cleaned rice, one was offered to the rice spirit, the other to the *yang* of the house. The unhusked rice was presumably reserved for the family members and invited guests. As the food was offered up to the spirits, the officiant and the participating male family members threw bamboo flowers to the ceiling and onto the cloth decorating the altar, and jointly addressed the spirits saying: "Today we begin harvesting the rice; to make you happy we kill a pig for you, don't be angry with us for offering you such a small pig, because it is all we can afford…; let the harvest be bountiful so that we have enough to eat…" The ritual was followed by wine drinking and feasting on the pork meat. Usually, as noted above, neighbours and relatives from other families join in the feasting.

If the harvest looks bad (for example, if the plants are small with few grains), and the yield is estimated to be poor, the female family head may take certain measures which are believed to magically increase the yield and, thus, prevent the family from hunger. In one case, on the morning following the family's New Rice Ritual, the eldest woman in the family went into the forest to pick five kinds of leaves: [list of leaves… check!]. We were told that the leaves are put in her harvesting basket, or tied around

the outside of the basket. The leaves are said to ensure that the new rice lasts until the next harvest – indeed, that the leaves makes the rice multiply so that even a poor harvest may last through the year. In another village, we were told that women collect seven kinds of leaves for the same purpose: *alang, achiec, vövinh, tröhol, adang, ayip* and *büc* (rambuttan).

Harvesting is an essentially female task, and though men today often work together with their womenfolk, women still do most of the work. The men's contribution consists, above all, of carrying the heavy (40-50 kg?) baskets or sacks of rice from the fields – often located half an hour's walk or more from the village. Women (and men) normally pick the rice by hand (though the practice of cutting the whole plant and threshing it at the swidden has been adopted in some families; significantly, it is mostly young men who perform this task).

During the harvest, many families chose to move to their temporary field houses at the swidden. Others remain in the village. Depending on the family's choice of residence, the harvest is either brought to the field house or directly to the village. The rice is then dried in the sun, winnowed (cleaned from empty husks, stems and other debris), sorted with respect to quality (poor rice is separated out and kept as animal feed) and future use – whether to be destined for immediate consumption, later consumption or for use as seed for the next rice crop. Ordinary rice and sticky rice are also kept separate. Rice for immediate consumption is taken to the house; the rest is taken to the granary – where the seed for sowing is stored apart from the rest of the rice. The seed which, according to the Katu, contains the rice spirit, must be stored away from the house (particularly from men, children and visitors who are all potential polluting agents); if someone would fall sick and die in the house where seed were stored, the seed would not yield a good crop during the ensuing season. The soul of the rice would be affected and the rice contaminated.

If the granary still contains old rice (from the previous harvest) when the new rice is ready for harvest, the old rice must be taken out in order to leave room for the new rice. The old rice may be consumed within the family or given away to relatives, or sold within the village. In this way, every family empties and cleans its granary before entering the new rice.

As the fields are being harvested, a few rice plants are left untouched in one corner of each field. (Recall that each household simultaneously may cultivate two or three fields of different sizes and located at different distances from the village). The reason, as noted above, is that the soul of the rice is believed to abandon the harvested plants and progressively take its abode in the still un-reaped plants. By leaving a few standing plants in each field, women ensure that he rice soul remains in the field until all the fields are harvested. These plants, left standing in a corner of each field, are called *könung haroo*.

When all the rice is picked except these last standing plants, the female family head – the oldest woman in the family, and only she – returns, on a separate and auspicious day, to pick the rice from these plants. For this purpose, she uses a particular basket; it is important that only one basket is used to collect the remaining rice from all the family fields. In effect, she collects, in this basket, the soul or spirit of the family rice. This rice is exclusively for family use, and should not be shared with other families or strangers. Accordingly it is stored separately in the granary. (It is from this rice that seed for the new crop is later drawn; see below). As the female family head thus reaps the rice from the remaining plants, the very last plant in each field is cut whole, with the rice remaining on the stalk, and placed on top of the rice in the basket. This last whole plant is referred to as the (Grand) Mother Plant. Before cutting it, the woman addresses the Mother Plant, saying: “Spirit of rice, please follow me home; don’t stay in the field…”, and with the stick for compacting the rice she leads the rice soul from the standing plant into the basket. Then she moves to the next field and repeats the procedure until the Mother Plants of all the family fields are cut and collected. All this must take place on a single day.

The basket of “family rice”, containing the soul/spirit of the family’s rice, is treated (dried, winnowed and sorted) with particular care, and eventually taken to the granary (one informant stated that it is *secretly* taken to the granary), where it is stored separately from the “communal rice”, i.e., the rest of the rice which can be shared with other families, given away or sold for profit. The whole plants (the Mother Plants), are stuck vertically – literally planted – into the basket of family rice along with the compacting stick, which is also stuck erect in the rice. It is from this

exclusive family rice that the seeds are selected for sowing the next crop, at the opening of a new cultivation cycle. The spirit in the Mother Plant is believed to protect all the rice stored in the granary. Then, the granary is closed, and cannot be opened until the next major ritual in the rice cycle: the Opening of the Granary. Thus, the closing of the granary also closes, at least in the traditional ritual cycle, the agricultural year.

Opening the Granary

6. When the rice stored in the house is finished, the family has to open the granary to access the rice in the store. The opening of the granary is accompanied by an important ritual, referred to as *loong körlang* (literally "to open the granary"). This ritual traditionally took place on the same day for the entire village; as with the other main rice cycle rituals, its timing was thus determined by the village headman and ultimately depended on ritual as well as practical considerations. Presumably it was performed on an auspicious day when rice in the different houses started to abate but well before any particular house was out of rice. I was told that, according to traditional practice, the opening of the granary should precede the clearing of new swidden fields, and thus, in effect, opened the new agricultural year. The ritual ideally took place in January, two to three months after the harvest.

Only the owner, the female family head, is allowed to open the granary and direct the ensuing ritual – the same woman who closed the granary after the harvest. No other woman is allowed to enter the granary at this occasion, particularly no pregnant woman (lest they will have problems during delivery). Before the opening, she collects leaves of three kinds of plants – *alang, vövil and kachray* – places some leaves on the path leading up to the granary and attaches others above the entrance. The leaves are believed to protect the granary and prevent evil spirits from entering into it as the door is opened. The granary owner enters and collects a calculated amount of rice from the family container; the rice taken out must be consumed on the same day. (One informant – an old man – said that only sticky rice is used for the ritual). As the woman enters the granary, she removes the whole Mother Plants "planted" in the rice, and tucks them into the ceiling, where they will remain until sowing time (when they are thrown away).

The rice is brought outside, husked and cooked in the house. A chicken and a pig are killed, and a ritual is performed following the same pattern as that described for the New Rice Ritual: after a chicken augury and the usual preliminaries, a tray is placed in front of the house altar and offered to the spirits. The offerings include: the whole chicken; head, tail, feet and internal organs – heart and liver – of the pig; bird, rat and fish, the specially prepared sticky rice and one or more jars of wine. The officiant – the male family head – addresses the *yang* of the house and the rice spirit, saying: "Today we start taking out the rice from the granary, don't be angry with us, let us now do as we please with the rice -- eat, give away or sell it according to our needs; please, make/let the rice last long, so no-one in the family has to go hungry, don't make us run out of rice this year…" Thus, the ritual opening of the granary lifts the ban on using the "communal rice" stored in it. [Therefore the ritual is also called *paachram* (or *padzram) ma haroo* ("lifting the ban on the rice")?] However, the "family rice" remains separate, for exclusive consumption within the family, and will later supply the seeds for the next season's rice crop.

After offering up the ritual potions to the spirits, the whole family take part of the meal. It is essential that the whole family – all its constitutive households – are gathered for the repast. At this occasion, the female family head must taste the first portion of the rice; then, the others may eat. When the family members have jointly tasted the ritual foods, friends and relatives are invited to share the meal. In the past, each family brought food and drink to the *guol* where a village-wide, communal feast was held to celebrate the opening of the new agricultural year. [If there was a bad death in the village, all the rice stored in granaries and houses had to be thrown away; villagers had to ask other villages for rice to eat and for sowing.]

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It is evident that the rituals connected with the rice cycle are fundamentally concerned with the nurturing and proper care of the rice soul/spirit. During the harvest, the soul is carefully and progressively led from the harvested plants to the remaining Mother Plant, from the standing plant into the basket, and from the field to the family granary. It is kept and confined in the granary until the time when the granary is opened. At the

opening ritual the whole family eats of the family rice; the ritual meal constitutes a true communion between family members and the soul of the family rice. The rice soul is literally becoming consubstantial with the living family members, an identification which applies with particular force to the female family head, the Rice Mother (granary owner), who opens the granary and eats the first portion of the rice.

This same rice, containing the rice soul, supplies the seed for next crop, planted in the cleared and burned swidden fields at the opening of the new cultivation cycle. When sowing is complete, the remaining rice grains are again carefully collected and kept for exclusive consumption within the family. In this way, none of the rice containing the rice soul ever leaves the family. As we saw, a whole series of ritual steps are taken to keep this specially valued rice within the family from one harvest to the next one. Indeed, a good portion of this spiritually charged rice is never consumed at all; it is harvested and replanted in a continuous, regenerative cycle. The rice cycle thus creates a spiritual continuum which is parallel to, and intertwined with, the succession of births and deaths constituting the agnatic family line, the patrilineal continuum connecting the living to the dead – the family ancestors. There is thus an intimate association, indeed, identification, between rice and family: the destiny and prosperity of the family are indissolubly connected with the spirit of its rice.

The close connection between women and rice is expressed in a multiplicity of ways and at every stage in the cycle of rice rituals. Women perform the mains tasks in the cultivation cycle: sowing, weeding and harvesting; they are the key figures in the rice cycle rituals: opening the granary, initiating the planting and the harvesting, and ritually closing the granary. In effect, the female family head thus opens and close the entire cultivation cycle. The role of the male family head in this context is largely limited to executing the blood sacrifices and food offerings accompanying the rice cycle events (sowing, harvesting and opening the granary).

The cycle of rice rituals formed an integral part of the traditional agricultural calendar: the opening of the granary opened the new agricultural year (January); it preceded the clearing of the forest and ended the prohibition on touching the family rice, thus allowing subsequent sowing as well as the allocation of rice outside the family. By the same symbolic logic, the closing of the granary at the end of the

harvest, when the last rice had been gathered and stored away, closed the annual cultivation cycle (October). Significantly, both these key rituals were performed by the female family head; it was she, the Rice Mother and owner of the family granary, who opened and closed the annual cultivation cycle. It is in this light, I believe, we should understand the (apparent) fact that the Katu, in the past, only named ten months of the year; the last two moths had no names. With respect to the agricultural year, they were residual.

[Today, however, this transparent symbolic logic no longer holds. With new rice varieties and the new agricultural calendar, rice is planted and harvested earlier. Clearing now usually precedes the opening of the granary, and the traditional significance of the ceremonial opening of the granary has been taken over by (or fused with) the national Tet holiday, celebrating the lunar New Year (?)]

All rice cycle rituals are family events, establishing an intimate spiritual and corporeal connection between rice and humans, both living and dead members of the family. The female family head here plays the central role, representing all the women of the house, and mediating between the spirit of the rice and the *yang* of the family. In all these respects, rice cultivation contrasts with hunting; hunting is the male pursuit par excellence, surrounded with elaborate rituals all centring on the *guol* and, thus, on the village as a whole. As opposed to rice, which is basically consumed within the family, meat is essentially a social food, necessarily shared and ritually distributed among households within the village as a whole (see next chapter).

In the past, all the major rice cycle rituals were village events in the sense that they were coordinated in time for each village by the village headman and involved village-wide periods of taboo, during which the village was closed to strangers and visitors. In other words, the house-based family rituals were coordinated at a higher level by the village as a whole, as if the male authority vested in the headman ultimately had to prevail over the ritual prominence of women in the rituals devoted to the spirit/soul of the family rice. Even today, the rice rituals tend, as noted, to be coordinated in time and supervised by village elders. Individual male family heads agree on appropriate and auspicious days for initiating burning, sowing and harvesting the rice.

The fact that each event is followed by social feasting, including the sharing of meat and wine, effectively invests the family-centred rice rituals with a profoundly social dimension, consolidating the relationships between houses and families in the village. Like all important local rituals, they activate the relations of kinship, affinity and locality which structure Katu society at large.

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Except for the prescription that the woman who reaps the first corn (maize) must also consume it (just as the woman who takes out the first rice from the granary must also consume the first portion of cooked rice), there seems to be no rituals in connection with any crops other than rice. While rice is closely associated with women and the role of women in Katu society, cooked rice seems to be essentially male food -- as if women cultivate and cook the rice for the men to consume. Accordingly, it is common practice, particularly when rice is scarce, that men eat rice while women (and children) eat boiled or roasted cassava. In particular, rice seems to be kept for esteemed male visitors and guests. Men, as a rule, do not eat cassava. As opposed to rice, cassava is low-prestige food. Thus, boiled cassava constitutes the staple for domestic pigs.

However, it should be noted that cassava is also used for wine-making; most of the wine consumed in the Avuong region is prepared from fermented cassava. [Rice wine is presently scarce, only occasionally consumed during ritual events. In villages near market towns, bottled rice wine is bought from the shops.] Wine (*bua*) is an important element in all rituals; in Katu conception, wine is a ritual drink, intimately associated with spirit worship and feasting. Wine is offered to the spirits and the ancestors, and is socially consumed in the feasting and drinking following upon all Katu rituals. Like meat, and as opposed to rice, wine is essentially social – communal – "food", enjoyed in the context of public rituals and in the company of relatives, friends and neighbours.

[NOTE: Explore the alimentary symbolism: rice-corn-millet-cassava; sticky vs ordinary rice; wine-meat-rice; rice vs cassava wine; etc…!]

4. The Hunting Complex

Hunting and fishing played an important role in Katu society in the past – both economically and culturally – and continue to do so in the present. As livelihood strategies they are complementary and each can be viewed from both a practical-technical and cultural-symbolic perspective. Fishing is comparatively more important in terms of its alimentary contribution than hunting but less significant in cultural terms. By contrast, hunting, though presently relatively insignificant in terms of its dietary output, is socially and culturally of utmost importance; hunting is for men what rice cultivation is for women. It constitutes male identity and is at the centre of Katu cosmology and community organisation. By introducing the notion of the "hunting complex" I want to point towards this symbolic richness and pervasive importance of hunting in Katu society, far beyond its significance as a subsistence practice.

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From a practical or technical point of view, Katu hunting is largely based on the use of an impressive range of ingenious traps. Trapping technology is elaborate. (However, since most traps are set quite distantly from the village, and involve a considerable degree of secrecy, I have little precise information on this technology, but consult Izikowitz (2001) for a very similar technology; see also N. Arhem, 2005). The most conspicuous trap is perhaps the *tahoo,* consisting of a long, heavy wooden lance, expertly rigged to stab large mammals; the lance is trigged by a string suspended across an animal path. A single hunter could set and regularly visit 35 (different) traps in a year (S. in Areh).

According to our Katu interlocutors, hunting is most productive and salient during the rainy season, from September to December. At this time animals are found closer to fields and human settlements. According to the traditional agricultural calendar, this period coincided with the ripening and harvest season of the rice and corn. Hunting

and trapping accordingly served as an important means of protecting fields against seed and plant predators; fields were surrounded, as it were, by a cordon of traps of great variety. In this way, the Katu caught and still catch wild boar, deer, wild goat, muntjac, saola, rodents and diverse species of fowl… [specify further!]. Hunting, then, could be said to form an integral part of Katu agriculture, or vice versa (since the lush fields attract a variety of game animals)!

In setting (and visiting) traps, the Katu – as always with important activities – let themselves be guided by their lunar calendar. Certain days are considered particularly auspicious for hunting (*kalang, tabrang*); others notoriously inauspicious (*da, törkuöl, avier*, acc. to S, Areh). Opinions seem however to vary from locality to locality: in Arek, *nn* days [specify!] were mentioned as auspicious, suggesting a consistent and inverse relationship between agriculture and hunting: days auspicious for agricultural activities are inauspicious for hunting and vice versa – a perfectly logical pattern in terms of Katu cosmology.

A certain species of small rodent (*ka lui*?), caught in the fields, is intimately associated with Katu identity; apart from being part of their regular diet, it is an important element in ritual food exchanges, and in social and ritual feasting in general. A species of flying squirrel (*chum adhuop,* unidentified) is also a coveted game animal since its meat is attributed with strong medical/magical properties. In addition, the occasional bear and tiger are also bagged – though tigers are becoming extremely scarce. [Note: the last recorded tiger kill goes back to the mid 1970s.]

Not all hunting depends on trapping; spears, cross bows and shotguns are also used, though guns have recently been banned by the authorities. I am told that spears are commonly used in hunting wild boar during the peak of the rainy season (October), when animals are easily tracked. Crossbows and poisoned arrows are particularly used for pursuing monkeys and big birds. Dogs are an important auxiliary to the hunter, and figure in Katu hunting magic (see below). Whatever the hunting strategy and technology used, success largely depends on an exact and profound practical knowledge of the local forest environment: the appropriate traps have to be set on the trails of the particular animals sought at the right season or time of the year. Sounds,

tracks, droppings and other signs have to be read and understood by the hunter; this applies in particular to spear- and crossbow hunting.

However, the Katu account of hunting skills is entirely different; in their view, success essentially depends on esoteric knowledge of hunting medicine (*yeneu*) and the help from certain classes of spirits, including the souls of previously killed game animals. In the words of a Katu master hunter: "there are two things that help a hunter: skulls (harbouring the soul of previously killed game) and leaves (the hunting medicine)."

Skulls, Leaves and Animal Spirits

Hunting is surrounded with considerable ritual activity: rituals are performed before important hunts or trapping expeditions and after a successful kill. Hunting medicine, consisting of leaves from a variety of plants secretly cultivated (by men) in the forest, plays a central role in Katu hunting practice. In their view, a good hunter is a man who has the appropriate knowledge of these magical plants. In preparation for a hunt, the hunter should separate himself from his family, carefully go over his hunting gear, collect and prepare the magical leaves, and pay close attention to his dreams.

[The *guol* – "communal house" – plays a pivotal role in this context. Every village, small or big, say the Katu, should have its *guol*. Elaborately decorated both outside and inside, the *guol* is the material expression of village identity, "the face" of the village (as it was repeatedly put to us): the size and condition of the *guol* reflect the power and prestige of the village and its leadership. In the past unmarried men slept in the *guol*, and here warriors prepared for raiding other villages. Meetings and important village-wide rituals were held in the *guol*, notably the rituals following upon successful hunts, and, in the dim past, the infamous (and inappropriately called) "blood hunts" (*brec*) – the ritual killing of human victims of distant and unrelated villages.]

It is here, in the male space of the *guol*, that the hunter seeks seclusion from his wife and children during the night before a planned hunt. Hunting is an exclusively male activity and intimately associated with male gender identity; in a cosmological

context, males are essentially hunters or “killers”. As such they are opposed to women as pro-creators and rice cultivators, mothers and life givers.

Stuck into the sooth-blackened ceiling of woven palm leaves along the interior backside of the *guol*, are rows upon rows – sometimes up to a hundred or more – of decorated skulls from the animals killed by the villagers. Small and big, the skulls represent the whole range of game pursued by Katu hunters – including, deer, wild goat, wild boar, squirrel and bear. In the presence of this grim gallery of skulls, some painted with eyes and faces and each believed to harbour the soul of the killed animal, the hunter prepares his weapons and consults the forest spirits before the pending hunt.

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In order to understand the rituals surrounding hunting, we must take a closer look at Katu ideas about the enigmatic figure of Kömorbar, a spirit being which closely corresponds to what phenomenologists of religion call a Master of Animals. Kömorbar is a female being; *kömor* is a female marker in Katu language, and *bar* refers to “a pair”. Thus, Kömorbar is in some way a double or dual, female being. She is also referred to as *avua*, literally meaning “grand-grandmother” or “old woman” – a term expressing great respect (cf. the Grandmother of the Rice, *ayech*). We were told that she wanders the forest in tandem with a male sprit being referred to as Cherying krung (*krung* means forest). However, this latter being, said to look like a hairy bear, is almost never mentioned by name, and figures little in rituals and native thought in general.

Considering the additional fact that Kömorbar is attributed with male features – in dreams she appears as an old, bearded and hairy man – it seems to me plausible that Kömorbar should be understood as an androgynous spirit being with dominantly female connotations. Fundamentally female, she is contextually or situationally accorded male attributes; on this interpretation, her alleged male counterpart, Cherying krung, is her male aspect.

Kömorbar is the Guardian and Keeper of all living creatures in the forest, including trees and all other plants, and fishes in the streams. Kömorbar, said one informant, keeps the animals of the forest like a woman keeps and nurtures her domestic pigs. She rules over the life and death of the animals. Her principle concern seems to be the animals pursued by human hunters for food, particularly large game in the forest. Thus, it is to Kömorbar in particular that the hunter addresses himself before going hunting and after a successful hunt. She is the Provider of Game; according to her whim or desire, she does, or does not, release animals to human hunters.

Hunting, then, in the Katu view, is essentially concerned with the relationship between spirits and humans, between Kömorbar and the hunter. The hunter must please Kömorbar, provide her with food and gifts that please her. In return she yields up her own precious possession – the game animals of the forest. If Kömorbar is pleased and content, she supplies the hunter with the coveted game. If not, she not only denies him game but may also cause misfortune; the hunter may fall badly, be hurt by a charging wild boar, or by a falling tree… Accidents in the forest and bad luck in hunting are interpreted as Kömorbar's revenge or retaliation for bad treatment, or inappropriate behaviour on the part of the hunter.

The painted and smoke-dried skulls, stuck into the ceiling of the *guol*, are the "shelter" of the souls of the killed game (*rövai adah*). Katu say that the soul follows the head into the *guol*, and take up its abode there. They also say that the soul reports to Kömorbar (and to the live animals in the forest) about how it is treated by humans in the village; if the hunter or, more commonly an elderly relative or representative of the hunter, performs the proper ritual, then the soul is content and the hunter will enjoy continuing hunting success. However, if the proper ritual is not performed, if the killed game is not treated with appropriate care and respect, the soul reports its discontent to the Keeper of Animals, and she will punish the hunter by withholding game, causing a tree to fall on him, or making him fall and break his leg… Respect seems to be a key issue in this ritual treatment of the animal victim; the carcass and its accompanying soul, now turned into a ghost (*abuy adah*), must be treated with due respect. It must be accorded its proper post-mortem – funerary – care, as it were.

The *guol* house, then, is in significant respects, a skull house. It harbours the souls of game turned into spirits. It is alive with spirits. In a way, the *guol* in itself is an enlarged skull, a shelter of animal spirits – a tomb house of sort. One (blind) man, previously a skilful hunter, told us that "in the night you can sometimes hear noises from inside the *guol*, as if from children playing. It is the spirits of the animals that moves about in the *guol*…" Another old man, a past master hunter and village head, preferred to sleep in the *guol* to stay close to the spirits of the skulls, rather than sleeping in his known house (L, Galai).

When questioned why it is so important to keep the skulls of the game killed, Katu respond that the skulls are necessary to ensure hunting luck; if the animals are not ritually treated and the skulls cleaned, decorated and placed in the skull-ceiling of the *guol*, the game in the forest would run away from the hunter and evade being caught in the traps. Kömorbar would not provide for humans. It is also said that the skulls must stay in the *guol*, not in the ordinary houses where women and children stay: "Kömorbar does not like to stay in the presence of pregnant women" and she may be "harmful to women and (newborn) children". Indeed, Kömorbar is herself closely identified with the *guol*. She is the principal and honoured "guest" at the ritual banquet held in the *guol* following a successful hunt; the offerings of blood and meat from the killed animal are principally dedicated to her. Therefore, she is also referred to as the spirit of the *guol – abuy guol*.

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Medicine (*yeneu*), leaves of certain plants, is the other essential means of hunting success according to Katu hunters (for detailed accounts; see N. Arhem 2004, forthcoming). I have recorded two partly overlapping lists of plants used to procure the magical leaves, one from an old hunter in Areh (S), the other from the master hunter in Arek (C) [cf. also N Arhem, forthcoming]:

Hunting medicine (yeneu):

Areh	Arek
1 achüp	*achuc*
2 yervil	*sörvir*
3 mapap	*mabhap*
4 caut	
5 achec	
6 achöi	
7	*ahon*
8	*pörooih*
9	*mölööc*
10	*puih*
11	*apöm*
12	*yörlang*

The first three plants are apparently the same, with different local accents. The first plant, *achüp*, was mentioned by several other hunters as a potent *yeneu*. Except for *achöi*, a ginger plant, I cannot identify the plants. According to our Katu interpreter, all the plants in the first list (Areh) are onion-like plants. Of the plants in the second column (Arek), *yörlang* (12) has the effect of keeping away other hunters from a certain hunting territory claimed by the hunter using this plant. Conversely, if a hunter consistently fails to bag or catch game in a particular area, he assumes that another hunter uses *yörlang* to keep him away from the area in question. However, if the trespassing hunter is knowledgeable, he may apply leaves of the *pörooih* plant (8) to counter the effects of (12)!

These plants are secretly cultivated in small plots (xxx) in the forest; each hunter is expected to have his own little garden. The plot is unfenced, simply marked with a stone or stick. The plants may be obtained by other villagers, relatives or bought in near or distant markets. The specific repertory of plants known and kept by any one hunter is learnt from other, elder hunters, and thus varies from individual to individual, and from one locality to another. The Katu say that the plants have soul

(*rövai*), and that they are inhabited by spirits (*abuy yeneu*). When the hunter tends his secret garden and picks the leaves in preparation for a hunt, he addresses the plant spirits, and invokes them to help him in the hunt.

The idea here seems to be that the leaves are particularly pleasing to Kömorbar; they seem to have an irresistibly seductive effect on her, causing her to release or give up animals to the hunter. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the very same hunting medicine is explicitly said to have a similar seductive effect on women. The hunter carrying the medicine must avoid meeting women on the hunting trail; if he happens to encounter a woman he must keep silent, concealing the destination and purpose of his mission in the forest (cf. N. Arhem, 2004, forthcoming).

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As is the case in many parts of the world, dreams play an important role in the context of hunting also among the Katu. If a hunter's dream augurs badly, the hunt is abandoned. Thus, I was told, that if, on the night preceding a hunting expedition, the hunter dreams that he meets a woman carrying green bamboo tubes (such as those used to stuff meat and fish in for grilling or smoking), then he knows he will catch an animal. This woman, the informant added, is Kömorbar herself. The image in the dream – a woman carrying (green) bamboo tubes, presumably filled with meat – evokes the image of game caught in a trap; apparently the former (dream) image is interpreted in terms of the latter.

Another hunter gave the following clues for interpreting dreams: if the hunter, before going into the forest, dreams of an old, hairy and bearded man who suddenly shakes his head, he should abandon the plan; the man in the dream signals to the hunter that there will be no game. If, on the other hand, the old man in the dream offers the hunter cigarettes, he will catch animals. Though I was offered no exegesis, it would seem that the old man is none other than Kömorbarr – now in her male guise as Cherying krung. Here, the act of receiving something from a figure representing Kömorbar is clearly understood as auspicious.

Hunting Ritual: Preparations

Hunters prepare themselves in different ways for a pending hunting-and-trapping expedition; the manner of preparation may vary from case to case, and depending on earlier successes or failures. The following generalised account of practices preceding a hunt, drawn from various informants, is likely to apply primarily to situations of persistent bad luck in hunting; the more important the hunt, the more elaborate the ritual acts preceding the hunt. Though the account probably fuses past and present practices, most of what is recounted can be observed today.

To ensure success in hunting, the hunter goes to his secret medicine garden in the forest one or two days before a planned hunt. He picks a few leaves while asking the spirits of the plants (*abuy yeneu*) to grant him luck in hunting. He then returns home at dusk with the leaves carefully tucked away in his tri-partite back basket, *salet* (an indispensable part of the hunting equipment). On the way back, he must avoid meeting women and children.

As he arrives at the village, he goes straight to the *guol* (today he may go to his own house), where he performs a small, private ritual: he kills a chicken (the chicken should be white; spirits do not like dark feathers!) and performs the usual augury by means of the chicken's feet. He puts the liver and a cup of blood from the chicken, a bowl of rice and a few *yeneu* leaves on an altar frame prepared for the occasion (called *drang guol*, [or *a brang brui?*]). The frame is then hung from the skull ceiling, as the spirits are invited to come and eat.

When the chicken is boiled, he places the whole chicken, together with fish, rice, a jar of wine and some additional leaves on a tray which, in turn, is placed on the altar-shelf under the skull-ceiling. The severed legs of the chicken are tied to the hanging altar frame. The hunter (or his chosen representative) now performs the second phase of the worshipping act, offering the food to the spirits – Pleng, Kömorbar, *abuy krung, abuy adah, abuy yeneu…* – and pleading them to bring luck in hunting. A bunch of green bananas is hung from the skull ceiling; green bananas are believed to be especially desirable to Kömorbar. The bananas will hang there until ripe when they are consumed by the family (except by pregnant women).

After the ritual the hunter enters the forest, bringing the *yeneu* leaves carefully concealed in his *salet* basket. On the hunting trail, he must again carefully avoid meeting any woman; if he accidentally does so, he must keep silent and under no circumstances reveal his true mission lest the woman would follow him and spoil the hunt. When he comes across an animal track, he let the leaves touch the foot print, and then throws away the leaves – it is mandatory not to bring the leaves back into the house where his wife and children stay. The hunter then returns to the village confident that the coming days will bring him a good catch.

Another account provides additional details: The ritual offering to the spirits the evening before a hunt includes: 1 chicken, 1 bunch of bananas from the swidden, 4-5 fishes, 2 bowls of rice and 1 jar of wine placed on a tray on the main altar in the *guol*. The chicken augury is performed. The toes of the chicken's right foot represents the main actors in he hunting drama: the hunter (thumb), the game (toe closest to thumb), Pleng (middle toe), and the skulls in *guol* (containing the spirits of previously killed game, and subjectified in the figure of Kömorbar).

As the officiant offer the food to the spirits, he addresses them saying: "Today I am offering a chicken to you; please give me luck in hunting, let me catch an animal…" He directs himself to the skulls and says: "You are already dead, I offer you a chicken, please help me…, give me luck and let me be safe in the forest".

The following day, before entering the forest, the hunter performs another small but important rite: he takes waste from cassava-wine making (rice husks kept in the *guol* specifically for the purpose), mixes it with scrapings from the claws of his hunting dog, and, while holding it in his hand, he moves his hand over the dog, saying: "Spirits of the forest, do not hurt me or my dog; let me catch plenty of animals…" The mix is then thrown away (?) This small ritual is called *chare kapat*. (Another informant added that the material handled in this ritual included three charcoals or pieces of firewood from the *guol*).

The hunter then puts *yeneu* leaves in his *salet* and enters the forest. When he encounters an animal track he puts the medicine leaves in the track, and proceeds to his traps, confident that he will catch and kill an animal.

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If unsuccessful for a long period, the hunter resorts to various ritual procedures, including offerings and prayers in the *guol* house as recorded above. He may also perform an offering in the forest, at one of his many traps, where a small bamboo altar is erected, and some ripe bananas and sticky rice offered to the forest spirits. [This ritual is called…?]

The standard procedure, however, seems to be a chicken sacrifice (and augury) together with the obligatory food – bananas, cooked rice and wine for the spirits; all offered on the small, hanging bamboo altar (*drang guol*) made for the occasion and suspend from the skull ceiling in the *guol*. During the ritual, bamboo flowers are thrown onto the altar and skull ceiling, the number of flowers that fall on the altar or stick to the ceiling indicating the number of prey animals to be caught in the coming weeks and months. The feet of the sacrificed chicken are tied to the small altar frame; in an old *guol*, scores of wizened chicken feet may dangle from one or several altars hanging from the ceiling.

In the small hamlet of Dövil in a remote corner of Avuong, I was told that the principal hunter in the village also performs a bi-annual ritual in the forest aimed at ensuring the fertility and multiplication of game animals in the area. A place which is believed to be favoured by Kömorbar is chosen for the ritual, which is carried out in June and November – at the beginning and end of the rains. Chicken, green bananas, sticky rice fermented in wine as well as ordinary rice are offered. The officiant addresses the spirits, saying: “Spirits of the forest, Owners of the Animals, please give us food -- animals, bees with honey… -- so that we will have an abundance of meat and honey; please do not cause us harm, let us not be killed or mauled by the tiger, or stung by bees…” The rite is simply called *buoy krung* – “forest worship”.

Hunting Ritual: Killing and Aftermath

A successful hunt or trapping round entails an elaborate sequence of rituals. The following is one hunter’s account of what takes place when an animal is killed and

brought back to the village; the narrative is supplemented by details from other accounts as well as my own observations of the events following the trapping of a wild goat in the Dövil territory (July 2004).

When a hunter has killed or caught an ordinary game animal (a regular-size animal of a common game species), he announces the feat by calling out to his fellow villagers: "ho, ho, ho…", the number of "hoes" indicating the size of the animal. He then cuts a piece of meat from the animal, the piece taken from the spot where the animal was fatally wounded, grills it over fire at the site of the kill and offers it to Kömorbar. In the case of a certain kind of deer (unidentified/name?), an augury may be carried out: a piece of the intestines is cut and placed in the glowing ashes until inflated. If it cracks open with an explosive sound, like a gunshot, the hunters expects to kill a bear or wild boar in the near future; if it deflates with a hissing sound, it means that he will kill another deer of the same kind in the coming days or weeks.

If the kill is exceptional – a very big wild boar, bear or tiger – then, the hunter returns to the village in silence, secretly announcing the kill to a close friend or relative in the village. The accomplice, in turn, goes to the *guol* and calls out to the villagers that a big animal has been slain. He calls the young men of the village to join him (and the hunter) to retrieve the animal. (The reason why the hunter does not himself publicly announce the kill is, I believe, to conceal his identity to Kömorbar and the spirit/ghost of the killed animal, and so to evade the possible revenge on the part of Kömorbar; cf. the account of a tiger hunt below).

As the party of men approach the village with the carcass they sing and yell. In the past, I was told, they stopped outside the village gate where they erected a special pole, at the top end of which they carved or painted (with charcoal and blood from the killed animal) a stylised face. The pole was apparently erected to scare away malevolent forest spirits and the ghost (or ominous aspect of the soul) of the killed animal (see below).

Another informant's account adds some significant particulars: the party bringing the carcass would stop outside the village, cut the head off (if it was not previously done at the site of kill), and pull some hair from the head and tail of the body (thus

metonymically representing the whole animal) and bury it in the ground. If it is a small or regular-size animal, the men would erect a *kalam*, two crossed sticks (forming a wooden X), at the "burial site" outside the village gate. If the animal is big (a large wild boar, for example), they would instead erect a *xnur adah* ("ceremonial game pole") consisting of a wooden mortar (*tapal*) especially made for the occasion, and 5-7 (uneven numbers) sharpened sticks in a circle around the mortar, each stick ointed with charcoal and blood from the killed animal. The head and the rest of the carcass were then carried into the village to the accompaniment of singing, hoeing and the sound of gongs and drums.

It seems reasonable to suppose that the *kalam* and the *xnurr adah* mark, or actually constitute, a sort of tombs for the soul of the dead animals. When asked to explain the practice, the narrator (S, Areh) added that, as a result of the ritual, the bad soul (*rövai mop*) was made to stay outside the village while the good soul (*rövai liem*) was encouraged to follow the skull inside the village. Kömorbar is then invited into the *guol* to join the villagers in the ensuing feast (cf. the account of a tiger hunt below).

As the hunting party enters the village with game, villagers receive the men with gong and drum beat until the whole party has disappeared into the *guol*. The carcass is placed on the floor, under the skull ceiling. An altar – constituted by a traditional cloth hanging from the lower ceiling along the back wall of the building – has been prepared. A live chicken and a tray containing 3 bowls of rice, fish, bananas and a jar of wine are placed near the head of the animal. The hunter or, more frequently, an officiating elder, then addresses Kömorbar and the rest of the spirits involved in the hunting process: "You helped us catch this animal; we now offer you food and wine. Please give us good hunting fortune in the future…" This is the first stage of the offering ritual (*buoy hat*).

Then, the chicken is killed and the feet augured. The carcass is taken outside to be cut up and the meat subsequently cooked inside the *guol*. Villagers now bring rice to the *guol*, a portion from each house. The rice will be cooked with the intestines of the animal to a soup which later will be collectively consumed among the villagers. At this point, the second stage of the ritual (*buoy xxx*) begins: A tray containing the boiled chicken (together with its severed feet), 3-5 bowls of rice, a plate with the liver,

heart and selected pieces of meat from the killed animal and a jar of wine, is placed on the altar in front of the decorated cloth. As the officiant addresses Kömorbar and the skulls for the second time, inviting the spirits to partake of the food offered to them, young men circum-ambulate the central pillar (xxx) in the *guol*, beating the drums and gongs, the rhythm depending on the animal killed. The meat, liver, heart and blood from the offering are then put in a bamboo tube and stored away until later when it will be used in a divination act. Only the officiating elder(s), the hunter/trap owner and his hunting comrades participate in this, second stage of the ritual.

Following the completion of the offering rite, the communal rice soup is served; the whole village – men, women and children – is expected to take part of this communal meal in the *guol*. Men and women (and children) eat separately: men at the right, women and children to the left of the entrance. All the while, the meat, including head and tail, are simmering in one or several big pots in the *guol*

Late in the evening, when women and children have left the *guol* and returned to their dwellings, the climax of the ritual sequence takes place: now, men (including young boys) from the whole village gather in the *guol* to eat the head and bone marrow (and assorted portions of meat) from the killed animal, and to transform its head into a magically potent skull: when the head has been cleaned of its edible parts, and while the men and boys feast on the meat and marrow, the hunter or his representative paints the cleaned skull with a mix of charcoal and blood and then carefully sticks it into the skull ceiling.

The same man then picks up the bamboo tube containing the pieces of meat, liver and heart that was stored away after the food offering, and grills it until thick smoke rises from the tube. He then takes the tube in his hand and moves it with sweeping movements in front of the skull just inserted among the others in the skull ceiling. As smoke fills the whole building, he addresses Kömorbar, asking her for hunting luck in the future. Then, he returns to the fireplace, heats the tube again till smoke is emitted and repeats the act; this is done three times. Thus, Kömorbar is fed. After these acts, which culminate the ritual sequence, an augury is performed with the empty bamboo tube (see below).

The following morning the full amount of meat is meticulously divided, each house in the village receiving a portion, folded in a piece of fresh banana leaf. As the meat is allocated, women and children from every corner of the village turning up at the *guol* to receive their portions, the drums and gongs are played for the last time. The communal events are now over, but here and there in the village, groups of men gather to continue the feasting and drinking throughout the day and into the second night…

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In August 2004 I witnessed parts of this ritual sequence in the small and remote settlement of Dövil. Though incomplete, my observations add some important details to the preceding generalised account:

On our way to Dövil village (on a reconnaissance visit together with my interpreter and Katu guide) we learnt that a wild goat (*sön yuong*, or *ye zung* in Vietnamese) had just been caught in a trap belonging to Mr Tren in Dövil. During a rest along the path, a party of young men – including two sons of Tren – caught up with us carrying the killed and butchered animal in several back baskets. We joined them. As we approached the village, the young men started hoeing loudly – ho,ho, hoo…, announcing their arrival. Entering the village through a small gate, other young men from the village came to meet us, playing drums and gongs. To the sound of gongs and drum beat the whole party entered Tren's house. The whole village consisted of only four well-sized house. There is no proper *guol* in the village but Tren's house served as such; in it are kept the village drum and other communal paraphernalia, and a multitude of skulls are stuck in its ceiling. In effect it functions as skull house and stage for village rituals.

At the centre of the back wall in the house, an altar space was prepared; a woman's cloth was suspended from the ceiling, in front of which a wooden bed was placed, serving as seating place for the officiating group. As the party entered the house, the men laid out the butchered carcass on the bamboo floor on the left side of the house as one enter, and then carefully assembled the body parts so as to recompose the complete animal with head, tail, legs and trunk in proper place, the head pointing

towards the back wall of the house. A tray of offering was placed on the bed, in front of the decorated cloth and right under the skull-ceiling. The offering contained: two overfull bowls of rice, a jar of wine… (most probably a chicken and possibly other items; unfortunately I did not properly record the details). The officiating group of men (Tren, his old father and young sons) then threw bamboo flowers onto the hanging cloth and lower part of the skull ceiling, addressing the usual spirits – Kömorbar, Pleng, the spirits of the forest, of the skulls…: "We have killed this animal for you, we offer you this food and drink. Please come and eat with us, and don't be angry…" They then partook of the food on the tray.

After this relatively brief act, in which only the trap owner's immediate male family members participated, the whole village (four families in all) was treated with rice, chicken and soup on the intestines of the animal caught, the men seated in the right-hand part of the house, women and children in the left-hand part. (Though I did not notice it, pieces of meat, liver and heart from the killed beast were now apparently stored away, later to be grilled in a bamboo tube and offered to the spirits as recorded above; see also below). The communal meal continued until the evening.

Around nine o'clock, the head of the animal which had been boiling in a big pot was ready and promptly cleaned of its meat. The meat was portioned out and shared among the men present. Tren, the trap owner, then painted three circles on the cleaned skull with charcoal and blood, and placed the skull alongside the other skulls at the right end of ceiling. As this happened, his adult sons walked in circle in front of the altar, playing drums and beating the gongs.

Next, Tren picked up the bamboo tube filled with the pieces of meat, liver and heart from the animal, and placed it in the ashes of the hearth until the content was thoroughly smoked. He then took the tube from the fire place and moved it back and forth in front of the skull ceiling three times. As smoke from the tube filled the house, he uttered: "I have killed this animal for you, Kömorbar, to eat. I always try to feed you; let many animals be caught in my traps so that I can feed my family…" At this point, his father, who sat at the right of the altar, burst out into loud hoeing – ho,ho,hoo…, thus calling the spirits to come and eat. (I did not record whether this sequence of acts was repeated three times as described above).

Then a divination act followed at the fire place. Tren split the bamboo tube in two halves, removed the smoked content and handed it over to one of his sons (to be shared among them). He subsequently let the two halves drop onto the floor while uttering a question: “When will I next catch an animal..?” The procedure was repeated three times. The augury was explained to me as follows: if the two halves fall one side facing upward, the other downward [drawing], it is a good omen. If this happens the first time, then the hunter will catch an animal the first time he visits his traps; if it happens on the second throw, he will catch an animal the second time he visits his traps, and so on. If both halves fall facing either downward or upward [drawing], it is a bad omen, announcing bad luck in hunting. This divination finished the rituals on the day of the kill. It was now approaching midnight, but the men stayed on for several hours, eating, drinking and smoking by the two fires providing the only source of light in the dark, smoke-filled house.

The following morning, the meat was redistributed, each household in the village receiving its share. Portions folded in banana leaves were also stacked in back baskets and carried by a group of young men to relatives in the two other, neighbouring settlements – AUr and Galai.

A Tiger Hunt [To be added]

The Cultural Significance of Katu Hunting: An Interpretation

Let us recall the main elements of Katu concepts and ritual practices relating to hunting: in their view, hunting and trapping essentially revolves around the relationship between Kömorbarr, the androgynous Owner of Animals, and the human hunter. Though androgynous, contextually displaying both male and female attributes, Kömorbarr is fundamentally a female spirit being, the Lady of the Forest, Keeper of Animals and Provider of Forest Bounty. She is, I have suggested, the personification or subjectification of the animal collectivity, the subjective aspect of game animals understood in the ordinary sense of non-human, corporeal beings. Conversely, game animals are objectifications of the generic Animal Spirit, Kömorbar, who is

instantiated as the soul/spirit (*rövai adah, abuy adah*) of each individual, corporeal animal.

Hunting is an exclusively male occupation; indeed, it is the paradigmatic male activity (along with the enactment and supervision of ritual, and, in the remote past, feuding and the ritualised killing of other human beings). A hunter is supposed to prepare himself away from women and children in the exclusive, male domain of the *guol* – the skull house. He should not sleep with his wife the night before a hunt; it is not spurious that some hunters, like the old master hunter in Galai, prefer to sleep, not in their dwellings but in the *guol*, in the intimate presence of the animal spirits. In the *guol*, the hunter cohabits, as it were, with the Lady of the Forest – Kömorbar.

His main instrument – his principal weapon, if you will – is the magic leaves, the *yeneu* medicine, tended in a secret garden in the forest, carried along in the back basket – an indispensable appendage, almost extension, of the hunter, and made to touch the foot prints of the pursued animal. The leaves are said to please Kömorbarr, just as the woman's cloth and the ear pendants and necklaces attached to it which, draped over the back wall in the *guol*, forms the altar space, the inner sanctum, of the skull house. The *yeneu* leaves, it seems, serve to seduce the Lady of the Forest (just as it apparently seduces women coming across the hunter's path), as if the hunting medicine were a kind of love potion, arousing in Kömorbar a special affection – an attraction, even desire – for the adept hunter; the magical leaves makes her release her game, and conduct the animals into the hunter's trap, across his path and into his hands…

In this light, the strong male connotations of the *guol* take on an additional meaning: the skull house is the privileged domain of Kömorbar, a resinct where men cultivate their relationship with the Lady of the Forest, Provider of Forest Bounty and, indeed, where the hunter temporarily cohabits with her to ensure not only luck in hunting but also the multiplication and regeneration of animals life in the forest. On this interpretation, Kömorbar, is the hunter's consort. Hunting is all about cultivating and strengthening this alliance between hunter and the Keeper of Game, an alliance that have distinctively conjugal or affinal – perhaps even sexual – connotations. Is it too farfetched, then, to depict the *guol* as space of regeneration where the continuing

fertility of the forest is secured? In analogy with the symbolic connotations of the ordinary dwelling as a conjugal space where husband and wife cohabit to secure the reproduction of the family line, the *guol* can be seen as a symbolic space where the hunter and his spirit consort ritually ensures the renewal end multiplication of the forest animals. The *guol*, then, is a House of Animal Regeneration.

In this light, the interdiction prohibiting women – particularly pregnant women – to enter the *guol* in preparations for a hunt and during the culminating moments of hunting rituals become understandable. And Kömorbar's stated gusto for unripe banana emerges as a vivid, almost crude, allusion to the erotically charged relationship between hunter and prey, subjectified as the Lady of the Forest. It is abundantly clear that the gendered connotations of hunting in Katu society are dictated as much by intellectual/symbolic and cosmological notions as by practical and pragmatic reasoning; hunting as an exclusively male -- indeed the supreme male -- pursuit, forms an essential part of Katu culture as meaningful system of ideas and a distinctive way of life.

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The skulls of killed game are ritually handled (cleaned and decorated), preserved and publicly displayed in the *guol*. The *guol* is, in effect, a skull house. The skulls of killed animals are repositories of the soul of the animal, now turned into spirit or ghost (*abuy adah*). In a sense, the preserved skull is the grave of the animal spirit; by extension, the *guol* itself is a grand-scale tomb (house) of animal spirits.

The Katu differentiate between benevolent and malevolent, potentially helpful and harmful aspects of the animal soul (*rövai*). The separation between the two aspects of the soul constitutes an important ritual task following a successful kill; we saw that the hunter's party took care to bury the ominous spirit (aspect of the soul) outside the village while erecting a simple wooden structure in the form of a cross or mortar. (It is significant, I think, that the function of the latter, in the context of daily livelihood practices, is to separate the rice grain from the husk). The benevolent spirit is invited into the village and into the *guol*; it follows the skull, as the Katu say.

It seems to me that the ritual handling of the head and skull of the killed animal is aimed precisely at transforming the potentially harmful and revengeful ghost of the victim into a benevolent, potentially helpful and protective spirit which henceforth can be enlisted and deployed by the human hunter to his advantage – to assist him in future hunting expeditions. The "symbolical burial" of the animal outside the village gate (where the buried hair from the head and tail of the carcass metonymically represent the whole) and the subsequent ritual handling of the head in the *guol*, form parts of a single expressive act which actually accomplish the separation between the ominous and auspicious aspects of the animal victim, thus dividing the monolithic soul of the living into two contrastive spirit agents. This whole process, following on the killing of an animal, closely parallels that of the death and burial of a human being, where the harmful aspect of the deceased person is progressively transformed into a benevolent and protective ancestor spirit, *yang* (see chapter on death and burial).

[In the case of a killed tiger, the spirit of the animal is so powerful that the head is not brought into the village – as if the villagers would not be capable of controlling the potent force unleashed by the killing, and contained in the head of the dead tiger. Here the ritual is thus aimed at expelling the tiger spirit from the vicinity of the village.]

The spirits of the skulls (*abuy adah*) in the skull house are already domesticated, as it were. Significantly, they are also referred to as *yang*, benevolent spirits – the *yang* of the *guol* and the *yang* of the village (*yang guol* and *yang buol*, respectively) – in close analogy with the benevolent spirits of the house, the *yang doong* – the family ancestors. The ritual transformation of potentially harmful animal spirits into benevolent village spirits is thus linguistically expressed: the *abuy adah* are turned into *yang guol* or its equivalent, *yang buol*.

From a Katu perspective, then, hunting constitutes a process involving what we would call both expressive and instrumental acts which, for them, however, are but aspects of a single and unitary praxis – from the ritual preparations, through the actual killing of the game to the ensuing rituals in the *guol* and the communal sharing of the meat. At the centre of this process is the double transformation of the soul of the live animal, first, through the physical act of killing, into a potentially harmful spirit or

ghost, and subsequently, by means of the ritual handling of the skull, into a benevolent spirit, *yang*, kept in the skull house.

As opposed to the communal sharing of meat which completes the ritual process, the ritual handling of the skull is a "private" event insofar as it is performed by the hunter/trap owner himself or his representative and male family members. The privacy of this act points to its central meaning: to strengthen the personal bond between Kömorbar and the hunter. The whole ritual sequence is concerned with establishing and maintaining an intimate bond with the spirit of the killed animal and, by extension, Kömorbar – guardian of all the animals in the forest.

Eventually, through the communal sharing of meat, a specific and substantial bond of identification is also created between Kömorbar and the village as a whole. The animal ghost becomes a benevolent village spirit because it is ritually incorporated into the village community by means of an analogous two-stage process: the private ritual handling of the skull on the part of the hunter/trap owner and the subsequent public act of communion – the village-wide sharing of the meat of the whole animal. Thus, Kömorbar, representing the community of game animals in the village territory, is incorporated in each and every villager; her essence spiritually unifies the whole village. She is the village spirit. The villagers quite literally embody Kömorbar, and the *guol*, as her privileged precinct, is the material manifestation of village unity – the village as a single, unified social body.

The reasoning here can be summarised as follows:

live animal		dead animal		skull in *guol*
	→		→	
rövai		*abuy adah*		*yang guol/buol*,

where the collection of skulls – the community of animal spirits – in the *guol* is metonymically and iconically identified with Kömorbar:

yang guol/buol = Kömorbar = Protector of the Village,

thus creating a spiritual as well as substantial bond between humans and the game animal dwelling in the village territory.

A Note on Fishing

Compared to the elaborate ritualism surrounding hunting, fishing emerges as a straightforward pragmatic activity with little symbolic elaboration. Fish makes up a considerably larger portion of the Katu daily diet than meat. During much of the year, fishing (including the gathering of crabs, shrimps and river snails) is a daily activity in most households. Though rivers and streams in the mountainous heartland of the Avuong region are generally small and swift-running, choked by innumerable rapids, they appear to have been, at least until the recent past, well stocked by a diversity of fish species skilfully cropped by Katu fishermen.

Katu are expert fishermen and use a range of diverse fishing tools and instruments, including conical basket traps (xxx), set in suitable places in rivers and streams, usually where the stream is dammed up with stones, sticks and debris; hand-operated scoop (hoop) nets; cast nets and a variety of other kinds of nets. Men often dive with locally made diving masks and scoop nets; they also use spear and fishing rod (with line and baited hook). Fishing with poison from the bark of certain trees also occurs (particularly in preparation for marriage, when large quantities of fish are required). Though men prepare and set fish traps, and carry out the more demanding fishing methods (like diving with scoop net, spearing and casting large nets), women and children frequently participate in household fishing activities.

Though playing a significant role as an item of ritual exchange between affines and as food for spirits in sacrificial rituals, fish has none of the profound cosmological and spiritual connotations of the big game in Katu religious life. Along with rice, fish have fundamentally female connotations in Katu cosmology. Lacking in spiritual potency, fish are seen as harmless; accordingly, the capture and killing of fish require none of the ritual precautions of the wild game. No permission is solicited before going fishing, and no thanks-giving rituals are performed after a successful fishing expedition. Fish are, quite simply, ordinary food. Nature – perhaps we should say Kömorbarr -- is expected to provide fish unconditionally.

However, there is one significant exception: in preparation for a wedding, when fish are killed on a massive scale, the fishermen are requested to announce to the spirits of the forest and the river the reason for their predation, and request permission to cull the desired amount of fish lest disease and misfortune might befall them and their families. This fact suggests that, despite their "feminine" and "secular" connotation, fish nevertheless form part of the animistic universe in which all animals of any significance to humans are attributed with soul, *ravai* – a measure of humanlike subjectivity and agency: animals are persons, non-human subjects with the capacity and potency of influencing the fate of humans.

The female connotations of fish in Katu cosmology which, on the one hand, account for its "secular" character, and the lack of ritual surrounding its capture, do, on the other hand, allocate it a specific role in Katu rituals: smoked fish form an essential part of the ritualised food given by wife-givers to wife-takers in connection with marriage (just as game meat, at the same occasion flows in the opposite direction); fish also make food offerings in the context of blood sacrifices to the ancestors complete in the sense that the food offered is made to comprise both male and female food – meat or pork from the sacrificial animal and rice, game meat and fish… [Note: Fish is said to be a preferred food of the yang of the house and the spirits of recently dead]

[In the past, the bride's family was expected to give large amounts of fish to the groom's family as part of the exchange of food and wealth between wife-givers and wife-takers. The wife-givers mobilised all the men in the bride's village to go fishing as much as they could for the occasion. The usual practice was to dam up a section of a stream and kill the fish in the dam with fish poison (or lead away water from the main stream and poison the fish trapped in the dried-up stream). The fish caught in this way were given to the bride's father; the latter corresponded by offering the villagers a soup on the entrails of the fish (cf. the corresponding custom in connection with the hunt). The bride's party then smoked or grilled the fish in bamboo tubes which, along with other gifts, were carried to the groom's village for the wedding feast.]

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The enigmatic figure of A Ul, intimately associated with streams, rivers and the underground, is besides Kömorbar one of the principal spirit agencies in the Katu pantheon. In many respects, A Ul seems to be the logical opposite of Kömorbarr, indeed, her male counterpart. He is said to live inside the earth; the sources of streams are the points or gateways through which he enters and exits this world. Big fish are said to be his "children", and a crocodile-like monster or water-being (*böyöa*) is his "dog". He is the original Maker and Master of (old) gongs; he is the one who, in ancient times, taught the Chinese and Kinh people to make gongs out of precious metal (bronze…). Owners of precious old gongs may point out that this or that gong, displayed in the house, is made by, or a gift from, A Ul. Thus, if, for example, you find a gong in the river or in the forest, it is considered a gift from A Ul.

Though the Master of gongs, A Ul is supposed to be deaf. As an underground being, he cannot hear human beings, nor the sound of gongs and drums when played by humans. No prayers or petitions are addressed to him, although he may be placated with the occasional pig sacrifice and the offerings of "jars" and "gongs" manufactured by banana leaves and thrown into the stream where he is believed to dwell (N. Arhem, 2004). A Ul is known to capture women to become his "wives". He entices women to have sex with him. I heard various stories about women who were said to be consorts of A Ul; children who grow up handicapped or malformed are sometimes identified as children of A Ul. [cases!] If a woman who returns from the forest, pale and silent, with no appetite, her men-folk suspect she has been captured by A Ul; from now on she is his secret consort.

A Ul is also believed to cause women to fall ill; their stomachs swell as if they have become pregnant, maliciously impregnated by A Ul. These women can only be cured by ritual specialists who blow (xxx) over them and prescribe the sacrifices and offerings mentioned above. Illness caused by A Ul is said to be common; various cases were mentioned to us, and there were several healers (all male) in the study villages, specialising in this type of illness.

In brief, A Ul and Kömorbar can be seen to form a contrastive pair in the Katu spirit pantheon:

A Ul	*Kömorbar*
Male	Female
Have sex with women	Consort of the male hunter
Destructive/malevolent (causes illness)	Creative/protective (revitalises nature)
Chthonic Being (associated with streams)	Forest Being (associated with hills)
Owner of Gongs	Owner of Animals/Skulls

The Depletion of Game and Fish

In the past we can assume that hunting and fishing did not adversely affect the natural environment to any significant extent. Settlements were small and scattered, and human predation widely spread and of low intensity. This assumption is supported by villagers affirmations that fish and game were generally in abundant supply even in the relatively recent past – in the decades before the American War.

Today, game is scarce and though fish and shrimps are an almost daily dish, the amount of fish consumed is small. Villagers are unanimous in their assertion that fish (in the rivers and streams) were much more plentiful in the past when villages were smaller and more dispersed through the forest. They blame the scarcity of both game and fish today on the larger villages and higher population concentration as compared with the past. Currently hunters have to go deeper into the forest in search for game, and fishing becomes productive only far away from human settlements – usually in the upper and less accessible reaches of rivers and streams. Consequently, hunting increasingly appears to become a specialisation adopted by a few, skilful men while every-day fishing becomes a leisure activity pursued by men, women and children alike in their free time or during slacks of other, more pressing duties. Large scale fishing is occasional (and seasonal). Traditional fishing activities appear to have been largely supplanted by the breeding of fish in artificial and privately owned fish ponds, common in every village.

This expressly stated, and subjectively experienced, change – the increasing scarcity of wild game and fish, and the reduced productivity of hunting and fishing in the larger villages (Areh, Arek) – was corroborated by comparative observations during a week-long visit to the remote village of A Ur; here fish were abundant at a time (July) when it was decidedly scarce in Arek, and yields were conspicuously larger than in the latter village. During our visit, the wild goat mentioned above was caught, and the meat supply per capita was substantially bigger than in Arek. Our observations, as well as the villagers' own perception indicate that rice, game and fish quite simply are in more abundant supply in the smaller, "traditional" village than in the larger, "modern" village. (However, we shall also bear in mind that in villages like Arek and Areh, located relatively near markets and shops, food can be bought by those who can afford it.)

The reduced significance of game and fish in the local diet notwithstanding, hunting and the ritualised sharing of game still play an outstanding social and cultural role in Katu society. While in the past, meat redistribution was a focal event, centred on the *guol*, creating and maintaining the cohesion of the village community as a whole, today the sharing of meat in the larger, composite villages increasingly tend to centre on the hunters house and involve only a part -- segments or factions -- of the village. Only big game – a mature deer, wild pig or goat – are redistributed in the *guol* and among all the houses of the village. This down-scaling of meat sharing and feasting makes explicit the segmentation and factions in the modern, composite village: its cleavages and fissures become apparent. Often these factions are concomitant with the villages of origin of the distinct faction members, the old settlements that make up the current, composite village, thus revealing the strong attachment to, and cohesion of, these smaller, ancestral villages even in the new, more complex village setting.

5. Conclusions

Katu livelihood practices form an elaborate cultural system – an open and dynamic system of meaning – constitutive of the Katu collective identity. Hunting, fishing and cultivating are as much concerned with spiritual fulfilment and the making of a meaningful life as with survival. Hunting, as we have seen, is a quintessentially male activity. It encapsulates the values of maleness, sociality, and power in Katu society. The ideal Katu man is a strong, skilful hunter who supplies his family and village community with meat. A successful hunter earns prestige and respect from his fellow villagers, and he confers wealth, power and the blessings of the spirits upon the village as a whole. Though hunting and trapping are usually carried out on an individual basis, even in secrecy, the yields are publicly displayed and socially shared: a portion is offered to the spirits and the rest is ritually redistributed among the households in the village. In this sense, game meat is eminently social food. The communal feasting on meat ideally involves all houses in the village; as such it continuously constitutes, maintains and reproduces the village as a collective social body.

The cosmological connotations of hunting are equally significant. The rituals carried out in connection with hunting and trapping are geared towards the increase of fertility and the renewal of life in the forest, beyond the socialised realm of the village. Just as household and family in the village are protected by a multitude of lineage and family ancestors, the game in the forest are nurtured and sustained by a female spirit being, Kömorbar, Keeper and Guardian of the Animals – a kind of Game Mother. The task of the male hunter is to cultivate his relationship to the Game Mother and, by means of the appropriate rituals and blood offerings, cause her to yield up her vital bounty of forest game to the human hunter and, through the communal sharing of the meat, ultimately to the whole village. Hunting, then, just as cultivation, is a means of reaping the wealth of the forest for human purposes, and bringing its yields into the realm of the village to be shared among people and spirits alike.

By contrast, rice cultivation is intimately associated with women and the relative privacy of house and household. The exemplary woman is a prosperous cultivator and mother of many children; her granary is replete with rice to feed a large family. The toils of rice cultivation and food preparation, and the nurturing and care of her children are the sources of a woman's pride and dignity. The rice brought from the fields is the property of the individual households; though served also at social occasions, rice is mainly shared within the family or the compound inhabited by a local lineage segment. At the end of the harvest, each house keeps a portion of its rice for sowing and exclusive household consumption, thus making sure that the soul of the rice stays in the family line. Indeed, this rice is kept locked up in the granary until the opening ceremony of the granary, heralding the new agricultural year. Thus, as opposed to meat which is ritually redistributed for the prosperity of the village as a whole, rice is intimately tied up with the wellbeing of the individual house and the continuity of the family line.

The many rituals accompanying the cultivation cycle are devoted to the rice spirit – the Rice Mother protecting and safe guarding the continuous fertility of the family rice. The cycle of rice rituals culminates during the ceremonial Opening of the Granary, when family members – and they alone – share the rice now taken out from the opened granary, thus identifying with the spirit of the family rice, referred to as the Rice Mother (Grandmother). During the ritual, the rice spirit becomes incorporated into, and consubstantial with, the living family members who, in turn, are epitomised by the female family head who leads the ritual and takes the first portion of the rice. The senior woman of the family thus literally becomes one with the spirit of the rice; she becomes herself the Rice Mother.

Hunting and rice cultivation thus form the two axes of the Katu livelihood system. As culturally constituted livelihood practices they embody, and actively establish, the notions of male- and femaleness in Katu society and, by implication, the essence of being human the Katu way. Hunting and cultivation also symbolically represent the two fundamental building blocks of Katu society and the values associated with them: on the one hand, the village, representing the wider community of families and lineage segments tied together by bonds of clanship, marriage, friendship and formal

alliances; on the other hand, the house embodying the family and local lineage segment.

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The traditional Katu livelihood system, centred on hunting and shifting cultivation, form part of a grander cultural economy, geared to the reproduction of Katu society and, ultimately, life itself. In this grander economy, the products of the basic subsistence activities – rice, fish and meat etc. – are linked, through barter, trade and exchange, to other forms of tangible wealth, such as precious porcelain jars, gongs, decorated cloth and livestock. This tangible wealth is, in turn, accumulated and circulated in networks of exchange between affines and allies and, eventually converted into supreme intangible values such as esteem, power, fertility and spiritual potency. Jars, gongs, cloth and livestock thus constitute the fundamental exchange objects in marriage alliances: the groom's family (wife-takers) transfer livestock (ideally one or several buffaloes), jars and gongs to the bride's family (wife-givers), while the latter reciprocate with decorated cloth and woven mats… This exchange of livestock and artefacts is accompanied by an equally significant and precise exchange of food items: game meat is transferred from the groom's party to that of the bride's, while the latter correspond with the opposite transfer of grilled fish in bamboo tubes.

These specified and mutual transfers between affines continue in the context of a series of exchange rituals as long as the marriage lasts (usually until the death of one of the spouses), thus giving form and substance to the networks of marriage alliances binding families and local lineages together into wider communities. Livestock offerings, of which the buffalo sacrifice is the supreme religious act, in an analogous way create and maintain the relationship between human beings and the spirits which, according to Katu beliefs, ultimately sustain life and fertility among humans as well as in nature. The exchange of wealth and the ritual sacrifice of livestock thus contribute, from a Katu point of view, to constitute and reproduce society and, ultimately, the entire cosmos.

This larger, cultural economy, which will be the subject of the forthcoming second part of this report, sets the tone of life in Katu villages today. The cultural values,

which motivate and underpin this economy, permeate everyday chores and public ritual practices. Though changes have occurred, and new ideas and practices are continuously adopted, these changes have largely been absorbed by, and accommodated to, this grander economy geared to the generation of life at large. However, the progressive transformation of the patterns of livelihood as a consequence of government policies and new economic opportunities and predicaments, will eventually also change the fundamental values of the Katu society.

These changes are not always for the better, nor without problems. We have seen that the concentration and sedentarisation of the Katu population in fixed villages have caused a growing scarcity of arable land near villages, resulting in a considerable intensification of land use to the point, in some parts, of land degradation. There is also a notable tendency towards the depletion of game and fish resources near larger villages. In addition, current development policies emphasising the development of cash cropping and paddy cultivation generate a growing socio-economic differentiation in the villages. And while the adoption of wet rice cultivation has given men a greater role in agriculture than in the past, the demise of the traditional shifting cultivation is seriously undermining the role of women in Katu society. Similarly, the decline in the importance of hunting as a result of hunting restrictions and the growing pressure on land near the villages is depriving not only men of their principal source of identity but also the village of its strongest traditional source of unity and cohesion: the village-wide meat-sharing festivals. These issues must be seriously addressed by government authorities and development policies at all levels of the Vietnamese society.

On the basis of the preliminary findings of the present study, it seems that everything is to be gained from: *(a) developing the traditional shifting cultivation into a composite swiddening system* which would reduce the pressure on arable land and allow women to retain their traditional role as skilful cultivators and “Rice Mothers” alongside the men’s emerging role as paddy (wet-rice) cultivators, and *(b) preserving small-scale hunting and trapping on a subsistence basis* and under local (village-level) control as a means of protecting the fields against predation, supplementing the diet, and reinforcing village solidarity and unity through the ritual sharing of the game meat. In this way, I believe, the Katu will be able to meet the challenges of the future

while, at the same time, drawing on their rich cultural traditions and retaining their sense of identity among the diversity of peoples and cultures making up the Vietnamese nation. One would hope that there is – and that there will continue to be – a place in this wider national society for a distinctively Katu way of being Vietnamese.

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Appendix

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[Chapters 5-7 included in the present report – Part One]