

特集・ベトナムのガイ人—客家系マイノリティの歴史・宗教・エスニシティー

Memories, Migration and the Ambiguity of Ethnic Identity: The Cases of Ngái, Nùng and Khách in Vietnam

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Abstract

This paper, based on fieldwork conducted among the ethnic groups speaking *Hakka* dialects in Vietnam, aims to answer the questions of who are the Ngái and how they perceive their own ethnicity, which may help fill some gaps in our current understandings on this ethnic group.

Our findings suggest that the Ngái and Khách (Hakka) groups, although living in different places and referred to by various names, share common distinctive features of culture, religion, language, history and the like. The perception of ethnicity among them is however relatively flexible and vague, partly because of migration, cohabitation and interaction with other groups in the places of settlement. This finding tends to support the theoretical suggestion that ethnicity is fluid and will change when circumstances change.

1. Research Background ¹⁾

At the national conference on ethnic classifications in Hanoi 1973, the ethnic groups named as *Ngái*, *Khách*, *Hẹ*, *Ngái Hắc Cá*, *Ngái Lầu Mần*, *Sán Ngái*, *Xín*, *Lê*, *Đản*, *Xuyến* were grouped together as sub-groups of the Hoa (Hán) nationality [Viện Dân tộc học 1978; Nguyễn Trúc Bình 1973b]. In 1979, they were redefined as Ngái peoples, which is different from the ethnic Hoa. Noticeably this reclassification, which separated the Ngái from the ethnic Hoa, was publicized when the Sino-Vietnamese border war was at the peak, and therefore raised the question of the political motivation of Vietnam's ethnic classifications [Hardy and Nguyen Van Chinh 2004]. In the socio-political context of Vietnam in 1979, the authority of ethnic affairs confirmed that the recognition of Ngái as a single ethnic group was "firmly based on the scientific criteria" and was "a practical way to fight

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against the conspiracy of Chinese hegemonism” [Việt Bàng *et al.* 1979].

The recognition of the Ngái as a single ethnic group in 1979 did not receive any critical discussion; there was no information on who are the Ngái and why they are separated from the Hoa. The official collection of “*Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam*” published by the Institute of Ethnology under Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences (first edited in 1978 and republished in 2014) has no chapter on the Ngái people.

This article, based on fieldwork conducted among three sub-groups of Ngái, Khách and (Hoa) Nùng, aims to answer the questions of who are the Ngái, and how do they perceive their own ethnicity, which may help fill some gaps in our understanding on this ethnic group.

Our fieldwork focused on the groups referred to as Ngái, Nùng and Khách who speak Hakka dialects and live in different parts of northern and southern Vietnam. Our findings indicate that although these groups are known by various names,²⁾ they have close historical relations and share common distinctive features of culture, religion, language, and the like. The perception of ethnicity among the Ngái sub-groups is however relatively flexible and vague, partly because of migration, cohabitation and interaction with other groups in the places of settlement. These findings tend to support the theoretical suggestion that ethnicity is fluid and will change when circumstances change [Constable1994; Tanoue 2012; Heggheim2011]. We want to add that together with self-perception, state intervention in the area of ethnic classification has also contributed to shaping and reshaping the ethnicity of the Ngái and Khách groups in Vietnam.

2. Ngái and Khách in Bắc Giang Province

The official statistics show that the Ngái population in 1979 was 4,841 [Tổng cục Thống kê 1979], but fell to 1,035 persons in 2009 [Tổng cục Thống kê 2010]. The Ngái were reported to live mainly in Thái Nguyên Province (495 persons, 48% of the total Ngái population in Vietnam) and Bình Thuận (157 persons), with the rest in the provinces of Tuyên Quang, Cao Bằng, Đồng Nai and Đắk Lắk [Tổng cục Thống kê 2010]. Other big groups speaking Hakka and Ngái dialects living in the provinces of Bắc Giang, Đồng Nai and Hồ Chí Minh City are not recognized as Ngái regardless of the fact that they identify themselves as *Ngái nhin* (Ngái people) and *Ngái Hắc-Cá* (Khách or Hakka).

While conducting fieldwork in Bắc Giang, we asked the Hoa (Ngái) about their ethnicity and

2) The Ngái group has other names such as *Sán Ngái*, *Ngái nhin* or *Ngái lâu*; the Khách group is often referred to as *Hẹ*, *Hakka*, *Khách* or *Khách Gia* while the Nùng group are known as *Hoa Nùng* (Nùng speak Chinese dialects) or *Hoa Hải Phòng* (Chinese from Hải Phòng).

the answer we received was slight uncertainty, with people saying that they are Chinese who speak Ngái and Khách dialects. According to them, their language (Ngái and Khách) is different from Pac-Va of Guangdong.³⁾ We were given the explanation that the name *Ngái* literally means far and dispersed. The word *Ngái* or *Ngái* (depend on the local way of pronunciation) also means “I” in their first personal reference, equal to the “*ngô*” or “*ngô*” in Guangdong dialect while the names Khách or Hắc-Cá means “visitors coming from afar.” At all villages we visited in Bắc Giang, the Ngái and Khách live in the same village and do not seem to have any boundaries between them except some differences in their spoken dialects. Outside their home, Ngái dialect is commonly used as means of communication for both groups. We were told that apart from some particular words, the difference between the two dialects is just in pronunciation. They can use both dialects to communicate with each other. The elder people in the village explain that the Ngái dialect is influenced by the Guangxi dialect while the Khách received influences from the Guangdong dialect.

Oral history sources and family records of the Ngái in Bắc Giang and Thái Nguyên reveal that the Ngái first waves arrived in the borderlands between Guangxi and Móng Cái around the middle of the 19th century. Tran Duc Lai [2013] and Tuấn Quỳnh [1974] however argued that Ngái speakers must have arrived and settled down in the borderlands earlier, from the mid-17th century, while the Hakka speakers moved into the area much later, mainly from 1861 onwards.⁴⁾ Most Ngái and Hakka families in our interviews said their ancestors arrived in Hà Cối, a district of Quảng Ninh bordering Guangxi province, more than a hundred years ago, counting 7-8 generations down to their generation.

Many Ngái families still keep their family records, even though some may not be able to read or understand their content. Some records were created recently when they returned to their ancestral land in China to search for their roots and relatives. For Ngái people, the most important things in their family record are the history of the lineage, their hierarchical positions in the kinship system, but also the instructions about how to name their children in the correct way.⁵⁾ This latter point is the reason why many Ngái families have recently found their way back to the homeland in Guangdong

3) *Pac-Va* is a southern Chinese dialect, commonly spoken in the Sino-Vietnamese borderlands.

4) In 1861, a local elite Lê Duy Minh fled to China, recruited soldiers, most of them Hakka people, and returned to seize Hải Ninh. After several fierce fightings, Lê Duy Minh and his soldiers defeated the Hue imperial army and successfully occupied this borderlands in 1862. The Hakka who supported the resistance was allowed to settle in the area.

5) Like the ethnic Chinese, Ngái and Khách people follow an old-established practice of naming taboos. Each family has its own naming scheme which uses a generation name, whereby each generation shares an identical character. This regulation can be found in the family records, and it is considered disrespectful to the ancestors if one names a child with the personal names of senior members of the family. Daughters are generally not entered into the family records and will not share the sons' generation name.

and Guangxi Provinces to find family records and search for relatives.

The life stories told by the Ngái in Bắc Giang indicate that their ancestors came from Guangxi and Guangdong Provinces in China. Phong-seng, Guangxi, Fujian and Guangdong are names that are often mentioned in their stories. According to their oral histories, Ngái families in Bắc Giang today first arrived in the borderlands of Hải Ninh (Quảng Ninh today) and then moved a little further into highland areas such as Bắc Giang, Lạng Sơn and Thái Nguyên Provinces. Based on these oral histories, we can reconstruct the main routes used and places passed by their ancestors, starting from the districts of Đàm Hà and Hà Cối in Quảng Ninh Province to the districts of Sơn Động, Lục Ngạn, Lục Nam (Bắc Giang), then Đồng Hỷ, Phú Bình (Thái Nguyên), and even further north to the provinces of Lạng Sơn, Cao Bằng and Lào Cai. The main purpose of such movement was to search for new land for farming. These movements only stopped when the French left North Vietnam in 1954. Migration however continued during the Sino-Vietnamese military conflict of 1978-1979. In 1978 many Ngái families left Vietnam for China after the call of Chinese government in the 1978 Huaqiao crisis. We were told that in certain Ngái villages of Lục Ngạn district, more than half the village population had left for China. After the normalization of Vietnam-China relations in the early 1990s, a new movement of labor migration from Ngái villages crossed the border, heading for sugarcane plantations in Guangxi and factories in Guangdong to find jobs and to visit their ancestral lands. Relations with relatives were perhaps an advantage for the Ngái in Vietnam to keep up ethnic relation with their Ngái and Hakka in China.

The most popular religious beliefs of the Ngái and Khách in Bắc Giang and Thái Nguyên are Guan Yin (or *Guan Yin Pu Sa*) worship and village guardian worship. The Guardian Deities worshipped in various villages of the Ngái are *Tai Voong* (Đại Vương in Vietnamese, meaning The Lord). The villagers did not know who Tai Voong was, but a few elderly men believe he was the Chinese Great Conqueror Ma Yuan (*Phục Ba Tướng Quân Mã Viện*). This information needs to be examined more carefully. Besides, the Ngái communities also worship various protective spirits and the Earth God. Every year, villagers celebrate their guardian spirit on the 2nd February (in the lunar calendar). Every year, the ritual convener is rotated among the male heads of the families in the village. On this day, male members share the costs to prepare a great banquet to show their respect to the Deity and Guan Yin; all participants then enjoy common meals at the temple.

Together with worshipping Guan Yin and various deities at the community level, the Ngái people's most important rituals including the (lunar) New Year Festival, Lantern Festival (full moon of the 1st lunar month), Qingming Festival (known as Tomb-Sweeping Day or Ancestors' Day) on the 3rd of March Lunar, the Mid-July Ghost Day, Mid-Autumn Festival (15 July Lunar) and Kitchen

Guardian's day (23 December Lunar). The Duanwu Festival (5th of May Lunar), New Rice Festival (10th of October Lunar) and the Mid-Winter day are also celebrated. As followers of Buddhism, the Ngái people eat vegetarian foods on the 1st day of the Lunar New Year and the 1st day of every lunar month, but not under strict compliance.

At the family, the ancestral altar is always placed at the most honorable location in the house, often with three incense burners, one in the middle for Guan Yin, one on the right for family ancestors, and one on the left for Kitchen Guardians. In the past, the Ngái used to make incense burners from pieces of bamboo but now ceramic ones are also accepted. All family members must know the right position for each incense burner, as these must not be confused.

At New Year, red papers are pasted on the entrance of the house, the altar as well as production tools and big trees in the garden, to symbolize the expectation of good luck and happiness.

2.1 *Hoa Nùng in Đồng Nai Province*

In 2014, we carried out fieldwork among the Hẹ/Hakka in Hồ Chí Minh City, and it was here that we were informed that there is an “ethnic minority group” called the Hoa Nùng, who speak Ngái and Khách dialects and mostly live in Đồng Nai Province. This group identifies themselves as Nùng or Hoa Nùng (Chinese Nùng) but the local government officially identifies them as ethnic Hoa.⁶⁾ The Hoa Nùng people are concentrated in three communes of Định Quán district, Đồng Nai Province but they can also be found in other districts of Hồ Chí Minh City, Bình Thuận and Lâm Đồng provinces. The total population of this group is estimated at about 60,000, with 35,000 in Định Quán district, making up 15% of the total population of this district [Ban Dân vận tỉnh Đồng Nai 2005]. Our interviews with the Hoa Nùng in Định Quán reveal that this group migrated to the South from Hải Ninh Province (nowadays Quảng Ninh Province) in 1954. They are from the same linguistic family as speakers of the Ngái and Khách dialects who live in Bắc Giang and Thái Nguyên provinces. The name Nùng comes from the Nung Autonomous Zone established in 1947 by the French in Hải Ninh. When they moved to the South, the local people referred to them as Hoa Nùng because they do not speak Tai language (as the Nùng do) but Chinese.

The reference to this group as Nùng caused some confusion about their ethnicity. The first researcher who questioned the identity of the Hoa Nùng group was Christopher Hutton [1998: 125-132], when he was in contact with the “Vietnamese boat people” at Nei Ku Chau detention camp in

6) *Nùng* is the official ethnonym of a Vietnamese ethnic minority of speakers of a Tai language. This group is also referred to as Tho (indigenous people), while in China they are officially identified as Choang nationality. The Chinese Nùng of our study speak a Hakka dialect and use the name Nùng to imply that they are from the Nung Autonomous Zone of Hải Ninh, established by the French from 1947 and existed up to 1954.

Hong Kong. As reported by Hutton, he at the beginning assumed that these Nùng would be speakers of a Tai dialect, but then found that “they spoke a kind of Chinese, very much like the varieties of Cantonese found in the western Guangdong Province and the Guangxi-Vietnam border, and the term they used for the language they spoke was Ngai, but they did not have a strong identity claim of ethnic group they belong to.” Hutton came to a conclusion that “the labels Ngai and Nung suggest a minority, but linguistically, these people were Chinese. They spoke Chinese or Chinese-like dialects.” [Hutton 1998: 129]

In Vietnam, a study of the Hoa Nùng was published by Trần Hồng Liên [2008] when she studied the Chinese in Đồng Nai Province. According to Liên, most of Hoa Nùng speak the Hẹ/Hakka dialect and a smaller group speaks Ngái dialect: “They share common characteristics of language, customs and beliefs and the need to reconfirm their ethnicity.” Although Liên has identified the distinctive cultural features of the Hoa Nùng, she tends to label this group as a sub-division of Han Chinese who “still maintain a more traditional and conservative culture” and states that it is the result of the French’s “divide and rule” policy [Trần Hồng Liên 2008].

Before 1975, the Hoa Nùng in Đồng Nai was officially categorized as the Nùng ethnic group by the former government of the Republic of Vietnam. Several publications by Hoa Nùng veterans during this time also confirmed they are “*người Nùng*” (Nùng people) or “*dân tộc Nùng*” (the Nùng ethnic group). According to an ethnography entitled “*Đồng bào sắc tộc Nùng*” (The compatriots of the Nùng ethnic group), the Hoa Nùng was one of the components of the Nùng nationality living in the Northern Uplands of Vietnam [Tuấn Quỳnh 1974]. The ethnic Nùng had three sub-divisions: (1) The Nùng of Cao Bằng & Lạng Sơn Provinces; (2) The Nùng of Hà Giang Province; and (3) The Nùng of Hải Ninh Autonomous Zone [Tuấn Quỳnh 1974: 16]. The Nùng of Hải Ninh Autonomous Zone were composed of two sub-groups called *Tsin lầu* and *Ngái lầu*, and mainly lived in the districts of Hà Cối, Đầm Hà, Tiên Yên and Móng Cái of today’s Quảng Ninh Province.⁷⁾ Although Tuấn Quỳnh was perhaps confused by grouping the Nùng speaking Tai language and Ngái speaking Hakka dialects in one ethnic group named as ethnic Nùng, his observation on the historical root of *Ngái-lầu* of Hải Ninh was quite relevant. According to him, what characterized the Ngái was loyalty to the Ming dynasty. They left China for Vietnam and settled down in the borderlands with the permission from Vietnam’s authorities. The group called Hắc-Cá arrived later, from 1861 onward, when

7) Hải Ninh Province, established on 10/December/1906 by decree of the Indochinese Governor General, included the three districts of Hà Cối, Móng Cái, and Tiên Yên. It borders with China to the north and the Gulf of Tonkin to the east. In 1912, Hải Ninh Province was included in Military Battalion Number 1. This new unit also covered the District of Bình Liêu (nowadays part of Lạng Sơn Province).

the Le Duy Minh resistance against Vietnam's central government was launched. Since two groups of *Ngái-lâu* and *Tsin-lâu* came earlier, they were defined as *Pun-ti-nhan* (indigenous people) while the *Hắc-Cá* came later, were referred to as *Làu-Màn* (drifting people) and were mainly distributed in urban towns such as Móng Cái and Hà Cối [Tuấn Quỳnh 1974: 26-28].

Another source of information about the origin of Hoa Nùng was the book written by a native ethnic Nung who served as a high ranking officer in the Nung Autonomous Zone [Tran Duc Lai 2013]. According to this author, the Nung of Hai Ninh was composed of three major groups, namely the Ngai, San Diu and Hac-Ca.⁸⁾ Among them, a more populated group called *Ngái* were scattered through southern China, from Phong Seng district in Guangxi province to the borderlands with Vietnam, and part of them had settled in Hai Ninh for generations. They were referred to as *Tsin-lau*, meaning peasants, by the original residents in Hai Ninh [Tran Duc Lai 2013: 1]. The second group named Hac-Ca arrived much later than the Ngai group. They took advantage of the troubled situation in the borderland between Hai Ninh and Guangxi during 1861-1865 to invade Hai Ninh and settled there. They were referred to as « *Lau Man* », meaning drifters or vagabonds [Tran Duc Lai 2013: 2]. The third group, the *San Diu*, came from Guangdong and Guangxi, have moved to the mountainous area of northeastern Vietnam since the 16th century. These three groups (Ngai, Hac-Ca and San Diu) gradually reconstituted themselves into a large extended family, residing on the borderlands of Hai Ninh which later became the Nung Autonomous Territory [Tran Duc Lai 2013: 3].⁹⁾

A French document titled “*Report of the French No.1 Military Battalion*,” which is preserved at Quảng Ninh Province Archives, contains some important notes on ethnic groups in the northeast region, including Móng Cái and Hải Ninh, in the early 20th century. This source of information, written by a French military officer, gives an overview on the history of various groups that originated from China. According to the report, a large area from the edge of Cây Cau on the Vĩnh Thục island up to Bình Liêu (today Lạng Sơn Province) was inhabited by various ethnic groups: the majority groups were An Nam (Kinh people) and Hắc Cá indigenous (*Pùn Tì Hạc Nhân*) people.¹⁰⁾ Together with *Hạc Cá Nhân* (Hakka or Khách Gia), who were also referred to as *Lừu Mần Nhân* (drifting people) were groups of *Ngái Nhân* (Ngái people), *Sán Dìu Nhân* (Sán Dìu people), *Phén Nhân*, *Cháy Hà Nhân*, *Pan Y Nhân*, and *Thủ Nhân* (?). The report, based on linguistic comparison,

8) Hắc-Cá and Khách are different names used by local people to refer to the Hakka group. We continue to use both “Hắc-Cá” and “Khách” to designate the Hakka as away to respect local practice.

9) According to the ethnic classifications of the government of Vietnam, the Sán Dìu is an independent ethnic group who speak a southern Chinese dialect (Cantonese). They are believed to have migrated from Guangdong to Vietnam around the 17th century. In China, this group is officially categorised as part of Yao nationality.

suggested that the population of Hải Ninh borderland could be classified into 5 major groups. They were: (1) Pùn Tỳ Hạc nhân; (2) Ngái nhân and Hạc Cá nhân; (3) Sán Diu, Sán Chi Hà and Sán Chi; (4) Thủ nhân, Phén, Pan Y; (5) An Nam or the Kinh people [Trần Quốc Hùng 2014].

Unlike the French categorization, the Hải Ninh governor Ha Luong Tin, in his book *Tiểu dẫn về Hải Ninh* (Introduction into Hải Ninh, written in December 1932) classified the population in his province of Hải Ninh into 5 major ethnic groups, named Nùng, Kinh, Thổ, Mán and Hoa; three quarters of them were Kinh people [Trần Quốc Hùng 2014].

Despite their differences, the three sources of information mentioned above all reveal the fact that the so-called Nùng of Hải Ninh Province originated in China. They spoke Ngái and Hakka dialects and played an essential role within the Nung Autonomous Zone of Hải Ninh. The name Nùng was not an ethnonym, but derived from this administration unit. When they followed the French to move to the South in 1954, this name was used to distinguish them from the other Chinese groups who landed in the South in earlier periods.

It is important to add that although the Ngái and Khách settled down along the borderlands, only those who lived within the Nung Autonomous Zone were referred to as the Nùng people while parts of them living outside of the territory (like Bắc Giang, Thái Nguyên and Lạng Sơn) were still called as Ngái, Khách or Chinese.

The Nung Autonomous Zone, or *Xứ Nùng Tự trị* (in French: *Territoire Autonome Nung*), was established in 1947 by the French. On 14 July 1949 the Military Administration Council of Territory decided to pass the autonomy statute establishing the zone as a *Hoàng Triều Cương Thổ* (Crown Domain), to show their loyalty to Emperor Bảo Đại. This action was officially approved by Quốc Trưởng Bảo Đại (as head of state) by the Act No. 6, signed on 15 April 1950. According to the official document published by the head of the autonomous territory “*Hải Ninh tự trị Nùng khu địa lý đồ lược chi*” (Brief Introduction to the Nung Autonomous Zone of Hải Ninh),¹⁰ the Autonomous Zone was designed to be run by a small government with the legislature body including elected representatives, an executive administration unit, a judiciary and public officials. The total popula-

10) This document divided Hắc-Cá into two groups: (1) Hắc Cá *bản địa* (indigenous Hắc Cá who settled in the area earlier) and (2) Hắc Cá *lưu dân* (drifting Hắc Cá, who did not settle in any particular place). We are interested in the group named *Pùn tỳ Hạc nhân* (Indigenous Hắc Cá) because this may refer to a group speaking Ngái and Hakka dialects that lived in the coastal area of Quảng Ninh from very early in history. Research by Li Tana [2006] and Tạ Chí Đại Trường [2006] mentioned a group that originated from the land of Mán prefecture (Fujian) and Quế Lâm (Kuei-lin, Guangxi). Their settlements are from Guangdong to Guangxi, Hongkong, Hainan to Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand. This group was also known as *Đàn*, *Đàn Gia*, *Ngái*, or *Soisangyang* (people who do fishing and live on boats, or floating people) according to old Chinese documents.

11) The original version was written in Hán Chinese characters (2nd edited in 1952), preserved at Quảng Ninh Museum, translated into Vietnamese by Nguyễn Thanh Dân.

tion of the autonomy territory was about 120,000, with Chinese Nùng 60%, Yao 12%, Kinh 13%, Thổ (Tày) 6%, Thanh Y (sub-group of Yao) 6%, and Huaqiao 3%.¹²⁾ The autonomous territory had police, security forces and an army, including formal and informal forces. Military forces were well organized from the top central level down to local village levels. All were placed under the authority of an officer named Colonel Vòng A Sáng.¹³⁾

The Nung Autonomous Zone was established “on the French order, aimed at making use of ethnic minorities to cope with Viet-Minh,” but its existence lasted just 7 years and collapsed in 1954 after the Viet Minh’s victory at Điện Biên Phủ [Trần Đức Lai *et al.* 2008]. To show loyalty to the French, Vòng A Sáng organized a big evacuation moving all military forces and their families from Hải Ninh to the South. Available documents on this huge migration published by Ngô Đình Châu [2009], Nguyễn Văn Lục [2004], Tuấn Quỳnh [1974] and Tran Duc Lai [2013] have provided a detailed picture on the whole process of migration of the Hoa Nùng from Hải Ninh to Sài Gòn and then Sông Mao (today Bình Thuận Province). According to Tuấn Quỳnh [1974], about 65,000 people participated in this migration. Because of the large number of migrants who moved to Sài Gòn at that time, the city could not bear them all. The resettlement authorities finally found Sông Mao in Bình Thuận an appropriate place to move this group to. This was a large, deserted place with the natural conditions similar to Hải Ninh in the North (?), and convenient to move to from Sài Gòn by railway. About fifty thousand Hoa Nùng people were transported from Sài Gòn to Sông Mao and the migration was only completed in 20 May 1955. A new district named after their old land of Hải Ninh was established. The majority of its population was those who migrated from Hải Ninh Autonomous Territory. The district was placed under the direct leadership of Vòng A Sáng—the former head of the autonomous zone.

Today, descendants of the migrants from the Hải Ninh Autonomous Zone continue to live in the district of Định Quán and Biên Hòa City, Đồng Nai Province. During the Huaqiao crisis in 1978-1979, many Hoa Nùng families emigrated in search of new settlement in Western countries or returned to China. Those who remained in Vietnam continued to live in the district of Định Quán,

12) According to the official document *Lược chí địa lý Khu tự trị Nùng* (A Brief Introduction of the Nung Autonomous Zone), all Chinese groups who lived in rural areas and worked as farmers, such as Ngái, Khách, and Hán were referred to as Nùng people and were indigenous people, but the Hoa who lived in urban settings like Móng Cái City were Hoa Kiều (Huaqiao) who kept Chinese citizenship [Trần Minh 2014].

13) Vòng A Sáng was born in 1902 in Móng Cái into a Ngái speaking family. He graduated from the French Military School (*Saint Cyr*) in 1934. He was appointed as a colonel in the French army. In 1954, Vòng A Sáng led a “historical migration” taking thousands of Chinese Nùng to the South, where he continued to serve Military Forces of the Republic of Vietnam as the Head of Battalion No. 5 until 1957. He was then elected as Representative of the Nùng at the National Assembly [Tuấn Quỳnh 1974: 40-42].

Đồng Nai Province. Our key informant in Định Quán told us his life story by confirming his origin as “a Chinese speaking Ngái dialect” in Hải Ninh. He said:

“My father was born in Hà Cối, Hải Ninh in the North. My family migrated to the South in 1954. At the beginning, my father served in Vòng A Sáng’s military troop. He was then transferred to Đà Nẵng battle field where I was born. In 1965 my family returned to Định Quán to join with the community of Hoa Nùng because here we found the close relation with relatives and friends. We prefer living together in one place with relatives as a community and we love to work on farm. Today we still keep practices and customs we had before in Hải Ninh. The Ngái and Khách dialects continue to be used as our main languages of communication although in public places we normally use the Kinh—national Vietnamese language. (Interviews with PDQ in Định Quán, 8 Aug. 2016)

Similarly to the Ngái in the North, the Hoa Nùng of Định Quán particularly emphasize the importance of taking care of ancestral tombs. They keep the custom of reburial but do not organize the death anniversary of ancestors like the Kinh, Vietnam’s majority ethnic group. Instead, the birthdays of parents and relatives are well organized to show their great respect to older people (aged 61 and above). Instead of celebrating their ancestors’ deaths, the Hoa Nùng shows their remembrance of ancestors on the occasion of Qingming Festival (normally on the 3rd of March Lunar Calendar). If they cannot organize rituals on this ancestor’s day, they can wait until the 9th, 19th or 29th of September (Lunar Calendar). Like the Ngái and Khách in Bắc Giang, Hoa Nùng people in Định Quán observe traditional rituals at the New Year Festival, the Duanwu Festival (5th of May Lunar), the Ullambana Festival in mid-July (*Lễ Vu Lan*), Mid-Autumn Festival (15 August Lunar), New Rice Festival (10th of October Lunar), the Mid-Winter (second half of November) and Kitchen Guardians day (23 December Lunar).

The Hoa Nùng in Định Quán also arrange their family altar and incense burner in the same way as the Ngái and Khách of Bắc Giang do: the most important element is the incense for Guan Yin, the Ancestors and the Kitchen Guardians. Besides, all families place the incense burner on the both sides of the entrance, which is said to show respect to the house guardians and to prevent evil spirits entering. The God of Earth and the God of Wealth are placed on the ground under the ancestral altar. Pieces of red paper are also pasted at the entrance, on the top bar of ancestral altar, and various places in the house and garden to welcome the New Year.

At the community level, the most sacred space for the Hoa Nùng people in Định Quán is the

Temple of Guan Yin (Goddess of Mercy) and Xa Vong (Guardian Spirit, who is celebrated on the 2nd day of the 2nd lunar month), as found among the Ngái in Bắc Giang. In this sacred space we also found temples where the God of Earth (*Thổ Địa*) and God of Wealth (*Thần Tài*) are worshipped.¹⁴ Together with worshipping Guan Yin and other spirits in the community temples, the Hoa Nùng in Định Quán added Guan Wu to their pantheon, as a combination. Guan Wu is mainly worshipped by various Hán Chinese groups in urban settings like Sài Gòn or Biên Hòa cities but is not found among the Ngái of the North. The Hoa Nùng celebrates the Guan Yin festival on the 19th February every year as the major ritual ceremony of the community.

The Hoa Nùng in Định Quán are divided into two sub-groups, namely Ngái and Khách, but they mix together in the same villages. The population of the Khách group is estimated to be one third of total Hoa Nùng population in Định Quán. The most common religious practice for both groups is ancestor worship. Of the 35 Hoa Nùng clans in Định Quán, the Sầm is one of the largest. They recently raised financial contributions from members around the world to build a large clan worship hall. The head of the Sầm lineage (born in 1943) who keeps the family records said his grandfather was born in Guangdong and migrated to Vietnam in the mid 19th century. The family first settled in Hà Cối, Hải Ninh, where he was born and which he regards as his homeland. His memories about this homeland were just a big market located along the road running through the town and a beautiful river named Hà Cối. He wished to revisit his home village in Hà Cối and the Sầm family members who now live in Thái Nguyên and Bắc Giang.

Until recently, the Hoa Nùng in Định Quán earned their living by growing rice and tobacco. Nowadays almost all the families in the villages grow coffee and cash crops which yield more profit than rice.

In brief, the Hoa Nùng in Định Quán (Đồng Nai) have close relations with the Ngái and Khách (Hắc-Cá) in Bắc Giang and Thái Nguyên provinces. They were referred to as Nùng or Hoa Nùng because they were included in the Nung Autonomous Zone after their settlement in the South in 1954. Their life stories are still full of memories about the land of Hải Ninh where their ancestors and parents lived before leaving for the South. After living in the South for more than 60 years, and now fully adapted to their new cultural environment, the Hoa Nùng still maintain their traditional culture, language and memories of community history, and prefer gathering together with their relatives and ethnic fellows in their own villages.

14) A survey by the Định Quán district Department of Culture reports that the Hoa Nùng worship more than 20 different deities and spirits [Phan Đình Dũng 2015].

2.2 *Khách (Hắc-Cá or Hẹ) in the Southern Urban Settings*

Of the people in southern Vietnam who claim to be Hoa, about one-tenth are Hakka, who are also referred to by different names such as Hẹ, Hắc-Cá or Khách.¹⁵⁾ In northern Vietnam, this group is commonly known by the names Khách or Hắc-Cá but in the south, they are often called the Hẹ. It is not clear how that name came about. The Hẹ, Hắc-Cá or Khách describe the dialect they speak as *Hac-Va*, meaning the language of the Hakka or *Ngai-Va*, my/our language. The Hẹ or Khách group mainly lives in several districts of Hồ Chí Minh City. They also live in big cities such as Đà Nẵng, Biên Hòa and Hội An, and various towns in the Mekong Delta.

Scholarship on Chinese history reports that the Hẹ migrated to southern Vietnam around the second half of the 17th century. Some of the Hakka followed their leader Mạc Cửu to move to Hà Tiên in 1671 in search of new land. Another group landed in Đà Nẵng in 1679 under the leadership of two generals who were loyal to the Ming Dynasty, Trần Thượng Xuyên and Dương Ngạn Địch [Huỳnh Ngọc Đáng 2005]. The Nguyễn Lord allowed the Chinese immigrants to settle in Biên Hòa, Mỹ Tho and Hà Tiên. From the middle of 17th century onwards, more waves of Chinese immigrants continued to land in southern Vietnam as settlers, particularly under the French [Huỳnh Ngọc Đáng 2005; Trần Hồng Liên 2008]. According to Luong Nhi Ky [1963: 51], between 1889 to 1906, more than 1.2 million Chinese migrated to South Vietnam. By 1952, the Chinese population of the South had grown to 1.5 million, about 6% of the total population. Of these, the Chinese speaking Hẹ/Hakka dialect made up about 11%, ranking third among the five Chinese dialects, after Guangdong (41%) and Teochou (37%), and before Fujian (8%) and Hainan (3%) [Trần Giao Thủy 2014]. Đào Trinh Nhất [1924] described the Hẹ (Hà Cá) group's way of life as follows:

“The population of Bang Hà Cá was between 150 to 200 thousand and they came from the north of Guangdong Province in China. The group had big trading companies in Sài Gòn and Chợ Lớn.... Some of the Hà Cá worked as big contractors, and owned maritime transportation companies. Most of the Hà Cá worked as blacksmiths, stone carvers, tea traders, and a majority of small traders in the towns were Hà Cá people.”

By contrast with the Ngái and Khách, who live in rural areas and worship Guan Yin, the Hẹ/Hắc-Cá live in urban settings and worship Thien Hau Thanh Mau (*Mazu-Tianhou*). It is said that the Tianhou Temple in Bửu Long (Biên Hòa City) is among the first temples built by Chinese Hakka im-

15) The total population of ethnic Hoa in Vietnam is 823,071 persons, in which 414,015 persons reside in Hồ Chí Minh City, making up about 50% of Hoa population in the country [Tổng cục Thống kê 2010].

migrants in Vietnam. The Hẹ or Hắc-Cá people of Biên Hòa worked as stone carvers, and alongside Tianhou Mazu, they also worshipped the founders of the stone, metal and wood working professions in the same temple.

In Hồ Chí Minh City's district No. 5, on Nguyen Trai Road, the Assembly Hall of Bang Hẹ/Hắc-Cá was built next to the Guangdong Assembly Hall. The two groups worshipped Tianhou and Guan Wu respectively. Whichever southern city or towns they live in, the Hắc-Cá people set up a temple worshipping Tianhou Mazu. The temples are also used as a place for gatherings and for organizing the management the group.

Remarkable activities organized today by the Bang Hẹ (Hakka Association) in Hồ Chí Minh City promote a spirit of philanthropy among its members, aimed at supporting the education of children, assisting poor families, organizing cultural activities, and especially promoting the language training in Hakka dialect for all.¹⁶⁾ Activities connecting the community are held by the Hakka Association. In 1962, *Sùng Chính Hội Quán* raised financial support to build a well-known hospital in district 5, which was nationalized after 1975 and renamed Trần Hưng Đạo Hospital. Recently, a Hakka Committee for Education Promotion has been set up to support children of Hakka families to sustain their education at all levels, which is said to preserve good relations among the association's members and maintain the traditional culture of the Hakka.

In one interview with a Hắc-Cá on his ethnicity, we asked what boundaries make the Hẹ/Hắc-Cá different from the Hán Chinese and how they define their ethnicity. Without any hesitation, he said: "We speak Hakka dialect but we have been part of the Chinese community in Vietnam for generations, and Guangdong dialect is also a common language for all Chinese groups in the South, so we can say we are people of Chinese descent." (Interviews with LP, Hồ Chí Minh City, 22 February 2015).

3. Ethnicity and the Ambiguity of Identity

I have briefly presented research findings on the Ngái, Hoa Nùng and Khách/Hắc-Cá who are believed to be sub-groups of the ethnic Ngái. I indicated that these groups share common features, including culture, dialects and historical relations. The Hoa Nùng in Đồng Nai originated from the Ngái and Khách in the North and only separated after the Nùng Autonomous Zone collapsed and its population migrated to the South in 1954. Most of Hoa Nùng people who migrated south tended to gather in rural areas and work as farmers while another Hắc-Cá group, often referred to as Hẹ in

16) *Hội Quán Sùng Chính* (the Hẹ Association) in Hồ Chí Minh City has for many years organized free language training for anyone interested to learn the Hakka language (*tiếng Hẹ*).

the South, arrived in southern Vietnam earlier and nowadays mainly live in the big cities. This group seems to have a close relation with the Hán Chinese groups.

The perception of ethnicity among the Ngái, Hoa Nùng and Khách is relatively vague, apart from a commonly spoken dialect. The question of ethnicity is often raised when they are in contact with other Chinese and local Vietnamese.

If we consider the sharing of a common language, cultural traits, historical origins and self-perception as the important signifiers of ethnicity, we find that no common features are shared by the Ngái and the Nùng (who speak a Tai language). Surprisingly, the Ngái and Hắc-Cá in Đồng Nai did not see their label of Nùng as offensive. Indeed, they were proud to be labeled as Nùng. Tran Duc Lai tried to explain this, as follows:

“It is logical for Chinese settlers in Hai Ninh, who have absorbed the Sino-Vietnamese culture over the course of generations, to eventually re-identify themselves as Nung, a new group. For a long time, they have fulfilled the obligations and enjoyed the rights of Vietnamese citizens. Therefore, no one can deny the fact that the Nung are an integral part of the Vietnamese people...” [Tran Duc Lai 2013: 4]

The ambiguity of ethnic identity among the Ngái, Nùng and Khách was reported by Christopher Hutton [1998] when he asked about the ethnicity of refugees from Vietnam who were at the Hong Kong detention camps in 1978. According to Hutton, though most of them accepted the label Nùng, they did not have a strong identity claim of the order “we are the X people and speak the X language or we are the X people and speak Y language.”

“We asked informants about the languages they spoke and their ethnicity and we received a variety of answers. One gave Nung, Ngai and Vietnamese as the language they spoke; others Chinese and Nung; others Nung and San Diu; some Nung and a little Vietnamese, or just Nung. In giving their ethnicity, they tended to give Nung and Chinese, some with the assertion that Nung was a kind of Chinese. One gave his ethnicity as Ngai, Nung and Chinese; other gave his as San Diu.” [Hutton 1998: 127]

This dilemma of ambiguous identity in relation to the Ngái/Nùng/Khách groups can be traced back to colonial times when the French created the Nung Autonomous Zone (1947), which aimed at promoting a nationalist spirit to protect the Crown Domain as it coped with Viet-Minh and Chinese

expansion in the borderlands. The French who knew that the Ngái/Khách in this borderland were not Nùng, and that the so-called Nung Autonomous Zone had no participants who were ethnic Nùng speakers of a Tày-Thái language. The label Nùng in this case apparently had a profound political significance in the context of borderland history. The French practiced a kind of “indigenization” policy on those who speak Chinese dialects, turning them into loyal groups, and the Nùng label was selected as a rational choice. In this context, a Chinese speaker was by implication an overseas Chinese but a Nùng person speaking Ngái/Chinese dialects was a member of the Vietnamese national family. It seemed the political motivation imposed by the colonial state on marginalized ethnic groups gained effective results. Below is the voice of a Hoa Nùng veteran who fought under the French flag speaking about why they had to struggle to choose between the status of “overseas Chinese” and Vietnamese minority:

“The minority ethnic groups living in the Sino-Vietnamese border regions take refuge in the direction of Vietnam. They choose the state of Vietnam as their home state. They do not join China which is larger and more powerful nation. Why this choice? Probably in the past, the Han occupied their tribes, took their lands, governed and dominated them, treated them badly. I feel that although the Nung are closer to Cantonese in language and customs than to Vietnamese, they are proud to be Vietnamese, not Chinese.” [Trần Đức Lai *et al.* 2008: 313-314]

The Vietnamese official categories certainly do not accept the existence of the label “Chinese Nùng” as an ethnic group: this ethnonym is reserved for the other Nùng group, speaking Tai language. However, the politicalization of ethnic classification continued to be applied to the case of ethnic Chinese in post-colonial times. The way the government defined who are ethnic Chinese can help us understand this. On 8 November 1995, Decree No. 62-CT/TW issued by the Communist Party of Vietnam on “Strengthening the work among the ethnic Chinese in the new situation” wrote:

“The ethnic Chinese consists of those who are of Hán origin and other ethnic minorities who were Sinicized in China and migrated to Vietnam, who have Vietnamese citizenship but still keep their cultural features, speak Hán language and themselves claim to be ethnic Chinese.” [Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam 1995: 2]

Instead of using the ethnonym Hán Chinese and following the strict criteria of ethnic classification they created,¹⁷⁾ Vietnam’s policy makers have conceptualized the Chinese ethnic group flexibly, so

that it includes not only the Hán but also other Sinicized groups. This intervention has apparently contributed to the increasing ambiguity of ethnic identity. The Vietnamese ethnologists explained they choose the ethnonym *người Hoa* (*Huaren*) or *Dân tộc Hoa* (Hoa ethnic group) instead of the Hán because the name Hoa itself has a beautiful meaning, but more than that, it symbolizes “the good friendship” between Việt and Hoa [Nguyễn Trúc Bình 1973a: 98].¹⁸⁾

The definition of ethnic Chinese “based on Hán origin and Sinicized ethnic minorities” is even more ambiguous because one cannot measure the degree of “being Sinicised” needed to become ethnic Chinese. This definition however is of political value, as it opens a way for the state to intervene in ethnic classification. The case of the inclusion or exclusion of the Ngái groups into the Chinese ethnic group is a good example.

The Ngái people of Bắc Giang did not reject the name Chinese when they were asked about their ethnicity because their origins were in China, but they often emphasize that they are Chinese who speak Ngái and Khách dialects:

“It is not wrong to say that we are Chinese because our ancestors came from China, but we are Chinese who speak Ngái and Khách dialects, which is different from the Hán in Guangdong who speak Pac-Va. Under the French our parents were already recognized as Ngái people in their ID documents. In our generation, we were at first guided to claim to be Hán but from the mid-1970s onwards, we were asked to claim to be Hoa, and they told us Ngái also means *Huaren*. Since then, neighboring ethnic groups call us the Hoa, and our personal documents also note that we are Hoa people.” (Interview with Mr. Phan TQ, 76 years of age, Lục Ngạn)

Mr. Phan TQ’s opinion was shared by his neighbor. Mr. Luc SG (67 years old) said:

“I am a speaker of Ngai-Va. Earlier I heard that our parents spoke Ngai-Va and claimed to be *Ngái nhìn* (Ngái people). We came from Guangdong in China but my parents told us that we are the Ngái. In China, Ngai-Va is considered a kind of ethnic minority dialect, different with the language of Hán Guangdong speaking Pac-Va. The pronunciation of these two languages

17) Vietnam ethnologists used three major criteria to identify an ethnic group: linguistic characteristics, common culture traits and self-perception of one’s own ethnic group [Viện Dân tộc học 1978].

18) The term Hoa literally means “flower” in Vietnamese. According to Mạc Đường [1994: 17], the ethnonym Hoa was used for the first times in 1959, in the book *Các dân tộc thiểu số ở Việt Nam* [Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam], edited by Lê Văn Lô, Nguyễn Hữu Thầu, Mạc Như Đường [1959]. The use of the term *người Hoa* [Chinese] instead of Hán as an ethnonym was rejected by Đặng Nghiêm Vạn. His opinion was however weak enough to be convincible [Đặng Nghiêm Vạn 2003].

is different, for example the Ngai-Va say *theu ngong*, meaning buffalo, but the Pac-Va say *theu ngheu...*”

Such a confusing claim of ethnicity is also found to be popular among the Hoa Nùng of Đồng Nai. While in the field, local people showed us their ID cards which showed that members of the same family have different ethnicities, such as Kinh, Hoa and Hán. Their ethnonym however did not influence them too much, as they felt inside that they belonged to the same group who share common cultural features and language. They see themselves as Chinese Nùng who speak Ngái and Khách.

Besides the interference of the state in shaping ethnicity, the regular co-habitation and daily contacts with other ethnic groups at the local level are also factors influencing the vagueness of identity. We examined 80 couples in Bắc Giang and Thái Nguyên province who married from 1965 up to the 2015 to see how ethnic exogamy had an impact on ethnicity. Of these 80 couples, only 6% married wives/husbands from the same ethnic group. The rest were married with persons from Nùng, Tày, Sán Dìu and Kinh. In the past, the ethnic Chinese including Hán, Ngái and Hakka married within their ethnic group, to protect their property and culture. Mixed marriages however have become a common trend, particularly in areas where the population of the ethnic group is too small or isolated. Many children from ethnically mixed families do not know how to claim their ethnicity. Furthermore, the language and culture of different groups tend to become co-mingled in rural families. The trend of mixed marriages could be seen as a factor that shapes new identities for part of the Ngái community. They integrate further into the localities of their residence, while the Hakka in urban cities are likely getting closer to the groups of Hán Chinese. In these ways, the ethnicity of the Ngái people has been shaped and reshaped to adapt to the situation and context of their living conditions.

4. Conclusion

We have examined the perception of ethnic groups speaking Ngái and Hakka dialects in Vietnam, focusing on how they identify themselves and what factors contribute to the ambiguity of their identity. These cases help shed light on the ongoing debate on ethnicity. From a theoretical perspective, ethnicity could be assumed to be a biological given (*primordialism*) but can also be approached as a cultural construction (*circumstantialism*). Ethnicity can further be examined from the political-historical category of primordialism [Geertz 1973: 259]. Keyes [2002: 1170-1171] for instance, tries to suggest that “ethnicity derives from the cultural interpretation of descent” and can be seen as a means to insure the well-being of the group within the larger society.

Looking back at four case studies, we can see that the main question asked of the Hakka speaking groups around the world is whether they are a single ethnic group and what is their ethnicity. Cases of Ngái, Nùng and Khách in Vietnam seem to support the suggestion by Barth [1969] that a perception of ethnicity emerges in the process of interaction among ethnic groups. Ethnicity is not unchangeable entity of culture, and does not necessarily belong to a certain ethnic group. Ethnicity is fluid and changes when circumstances change.

The stories by the Ngái, Nùng and Khách clearly indicate that the history of migration, the socio-political context and the surrounding environment impact on their perception of ethnicity. However, this can be viewed from two different angles. The Vietnamese often see the groups of Ngái, Nùng and Khách as part of the Hán Chinese ethnic group. However, the Hán groups located in the Chinatown of Hồ Chí Minh City tend to refer to these groups as a kind of “ethnic minority,” suggesting that between the Hán and Ngái and Khách groups there exist boundaries with deep roots in their socio-political history. Similarly, the Ngái and Khách people when facing the Hán Chinese do not see themselves as part of the group. Heggheim [2011] explains this phenomenon from a historical context, believing that after a long history in contact with Hán, the Hakka people developed a “dual identity,” being seen as both Hán and non-Hán, depending on their specific circumstances. However, the way the Ngái and Khách in Vietnam often emphasize they are Nùng or Hoa Nùng speaking Ngái and Hakka dialects reflects a sense that their perception of ethnicity is not only based on a strong confidence in their shared history, language and culture but also constructed by a common socio-political history.

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