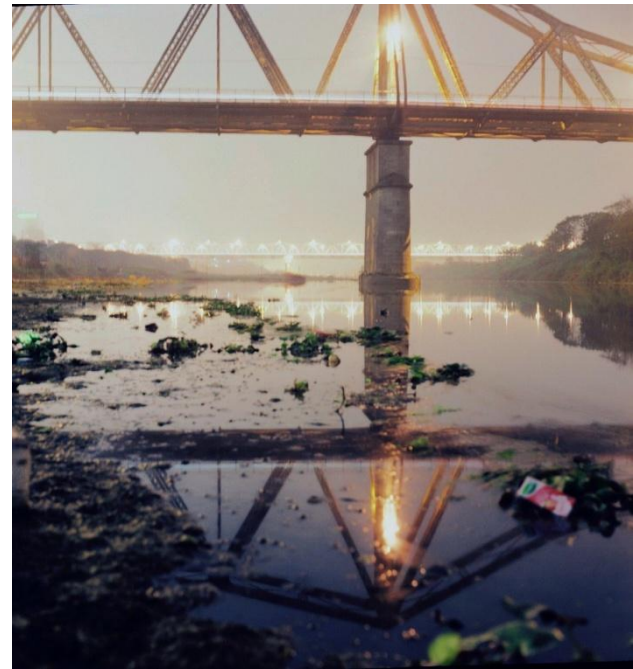


For obtaining the degree of Master of Letters in
Environment, Culture & Communication

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Master Dissertation

**Imperialistic Influences
on the Vietnamese
Discourse of Nature and
Environment**



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Abstract

The dissertation discusses the Vietnamese discourse on environment and nature and its changes through imperialism from the kingdom of Văn Lang until today. It argues that the indigenous understanding in Vietnam was shaped by a two dimensional relation between humans and nature and environment. Firstly, environment was seen as something to be used in order to produce food and a living and therefore had a material relevance. Secondly, nature was seen as something holy, possessed by spirits who were worshipped and fulfilled spiritual needs. This twofold understanding, which is a continuum rather than two separated concepts, lost its balance through imperialist influences and the materialistic notion of environment was strengthened. The first influence, Chinese Confucianism, brought with it a more profound separation between humans and their environment with. This influence, however, was not as strong for the subalterns (following the tradition of Gramsci and Guha) as for the ruling elite. It was French imperialism and the change of agricultural structures that lay the basis for a deep discourse change from spiritual nature to an environment that had to serve economic ends. This was picked up and spread among the mass population by the socialist government in independent Vietnam. The process culminates in today's adaption of the western eco-imperialist discourse that settled the story-lines of environmental realism and neo-liberalism in Vietnamese policies and the environmental movement. Despite losing the balance between nature and environment, parts of both still do exist as one can see in Vietnamese policy papers and online publications by local non-governmental organizations.

Key words: Vietnam, environment, nature, discourse, imperialism, eco-imperialism, environmental realism, neo-liberalism

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Map of Vietnam

Overview over the History of Vietnam

Declaration of Originality

*The soldier comes to another front now, the environmental front....
Without environmental recovery, Vietnam cannot have economic recovery.*

General Võ Nguyên Giáp

Cit. in O'Rourke (2004, 181)

1. Introduction

People living in northern Vietnam will not forget the first half of 2014. In winter, the mountainous region at the border to China saw a lot of snow although it is hardly freezing in regular winter. The spring was hotter as usual with degrees over 40°C in Vietnam's capital Hanoi. The summer started with heavy rain falls and widespread flooding on Hanoi's streets. What is exceptional now might become an everyday business in the upcoming decades. Global climate change will lead to extreme weather events including precipitation and temperature but also to other major consequences such as sea level rise. According to studies by the United Nations, Vietnam is in danger of losing up to 30% of its territory and the rice basket of the country, the Mekong delta, will most probably suffer high losses in rice harvest due to salination (Iponre 2009).

Vietnam needs mitigation and adaption measures to combat the threat of climate change. However, there has been a lack of attention in the academic literature on the crossroads of environmental and Vietnamese studies. Publications that concern both issues can mostly be found in the economic, political or agricultural disciplines (see Adger et al. 2001, Boomgaard 2007, Dasgupta et al. 2004, Hirsch and Warren 2002, Nguyen 2003, Spoor et al. 2007, O'Rourke 2004) and even those are partly outdated. Projects on sustainable agriculture or trainings for policy makers in the field of environment do exist as well but they are mostly lead by institutions from the Global North (Frijns et al. 2000, 281). It is therefore questionable if those projects can be successful at all. Can projects that were created in one cultural context be applied to another context? To answer this question, it is essential to try to understand how the concept of "environment" and "nature" and also the human-nature relation is understood in Vietnam and how and why it has changed throughout history.

This is why the aim of my dissertation is to analyze how the discourses on "environment", "nature" and the human-nature relation in Vietnam were changed by imperialist influences and to question if the environmental projects created by the West are yet another part in the row of cultural imperialism. To begin with, I will critically discuss the terms used in the dissertation: how I conceptualize the terms "nature", "environment" and "Vietnamese". Also, I am asking the question if it is necessary to state a difference from the very beginning between Western concepts and ideas in the Southeast Asian Vietnam and therefore might reproduce orientalist images. Referring to Said, I say that it does although one has to be careful with pre-assumptions and generalizations. Following this short

argumentation, the theoretical background for the work is introduced. The first part is developed from Said's work on culture and imperialism (Said 1993) and, as I am speaking of imperialism in the environmental discourse, of the development of eco-imperialism.

The second part concerns the methodology used for analyzing the environmental understanding as a discourse analysis. The basic works are Foucault's theory of discourse (Foucault 1991) and Maarten Hajer's extension of those by the ideas of Billig and Harré for the application to the environmental discourse (Hajer 1995). It is important to note that the aim of the dissertation is not to contribute to the development of the theory of discourse analysis. Rather it is aimed to bring cultural imperialism and environmental discourse together to open the field of the cultural role of environment and nature in Vietnamese culture which has been highly under-researched and has only been touched as side questions of research questions in the disciplines mentioned above (see Jamieson 1993, Lundberg 2004, Luttrell 2001). Furthermore, I suggest a methodology brought together from different approaches to undertake this missing research. In the chapter on data selection I explain why I have chosen diverse kinds of sources and approaches for the discourse analysis. Fitting in with the historic circumstances, different materials from folk tales to policy papers were used.

The analysis part consequently shows how the concept of "environment" has changed in Vietnam throughout history. Four influences are identified for this purpose. To set the scene, the indigenous understanding on environment and culture is introduced which is formed by Animist beliefs that were dominant in that time in Southeast Asia. The earliest concept was constituted of the satisfaction of material needs by the environment and a notion of nature that represented the spiritualism connected to the local flora and fauna.

The first imperialist influence to change the discourse on nature and environment came with the Chinese invasion about 100 years BC. Confucianism entered Vietnam from the north and emphasized a separation of humans and nature that was not previously apparent in Animistic terms. The discourses on nature and environment started to drastically change with the influence of the Western world when France established its Indochinese colony. I follow the argument that the French reforms of agricultural structures paved the way for materialist capitalist environmental discourse today but did not strongly influence the mindset of the subaltern¹ at that time. The French triggered an independence

¹ I use the term *subaltern* in the tradition of theorists like Gramsci and Guha. I thereby refer to the non-elitist group of the ruled-upon, in the Vietnamese case the peasant population. The rewriting of history including the agency of the subaltern is a central project for the subaltern studies group (Said 1988, vi-viii).

movement that again was based on a Western philosophy and deeply transformed the Vietnamese hegemonic discourse. As the Communist Party used the materialism of Marxism to fight Animistic beliefs during the years of revolution and up to the *đổi mới* years of political renovation in the 1980s, the material notion of environment was strengthened while the spiritual nature was weakened.

With a strong institutional frame, created by the socialist government, it is worth shifting the perspective from the subaltern view to a new institutionalized narrative of environment and nature. Policy papers document that the story-lines of environmental realism and neo-liberalism today form the hegemonic environmental discourse. These discourses are also reproduced by environmental organizations which apply them in local community projects. The consequences of this new eco-imperialism are an adaption of the story-lines by local non-governmental organizations (LNGOs), but only partly. The concept of nature can still be found in publications by the LNGOs and the Vietnamese government. It is therefore questionable whether Western environmental projects can be successful when only working with the environment but not nature.

To make ethical considerations of the work transparent, I added an Appendix to explain why I, yet another white academic, chose to write about a topic outside my own cultural space.

2. Theory: (Eco-)Imperialism

2.1. Critical Discussion of Concepts

Writing about the understanding of environment and nature in Vietnam, one runs into three major problems of definition right when setting the scene: How does the spectrum from nature to environment constitute itself? Can one accept the political definition of Vietnam for a cultural analysis? In how far is the assumption that there is something specific to say about Vietnamese culture in contrast to Western cultures legible and in how far orientalist? The first chapter seeks to clarify those questions to pave a common ground for the understanding of the dissertation.

While the concept of nature has been in use for centuries in the English-speaking world, the coinage term environment is relatively recent. In 1828 Thomas Carlyle translated Goethe's *Umgebung* into English and thereby translated not only a word but a whole idea of a new human-nature relationship that was shaped by the industrial revolution (Jessop 2012). Also the Vietnamese *môi trường* is, as is environment from *Umgebung*, a literal translation of "surrounding area". Nature and environment share the same core, the accumulation of organic objects that constitute our reality: trees, lakes, earth, animals. However, they interpret these objects in a different way. As Macnaghten and Urry write in "Contested Natures" (1998), environment is manageable good, a reality included in the modernist frame of enlightenment and industrialisation - after all, the term environment was coined during that period of time. Nature is not a single entity but a range of co-existing natures that are "constituted through a variety of socio-cultural processes" and are discursively ordered (1-2). While the environment is seen as something separate from humans, nature has the space to incorporate humans and its cultural metaphors. It is important, however, not to see environment and nature as each other excluding contrasting concepts. They are two ends of a transgressed spectrum. As John Berger puts it in the relation to animals: "A peasant is fond of his pig and is glad to salt away its pork. What is significant [...] is that the two statements in that sentence are connected by an *and* and not by a *but*." (Berger 1993, 7). Only together do spiritualism and materialism build a practical understanding of human's life in its surroundings.

With this complexity in mind, I will use the terms environment and nature as categories for my analysis to picture the shifting balance away from the spirituality contained in nature to the materialism in environment. Due to the specific cultural and historical circumstances of the Global South, there might be a difference between the

Western working definition of environment and nature and the understandings of them in other cultures, such as Vietnam. As these two terms will be filled with detailed explanation and thereby with local meaning, a conceptual use of them is still helpful as it allows putting the problem of materialistic (environment) and spiritual (nature) balance into words. Also it allows confining an orientalist assumption right at the start by neither only speaking exclusively of an orientalist and romanticized nature-friendliness of non-Western indigenous cultures nor transferring the neo-liberalist value theory of the environment to the Vietnamese context.

To better understand the link between culture and nature and the environment, Stoffle, Toupal and Zedeno (2003) offer an explanation I want to adapt. They argue that cultures have a core set of beliefs, values and norms that is constituted through the human-nature relationship. As nature used to inform all parts of everyday life, for example weather and climate the agricultural patterns or the range of festivals of a culture based on natural phenomena as the beginning of spring, it is the central part people's "cultural landscape" (98). Cultural beliefs lie on top of the actual topographic landscape and together form the reality of the daily lives of people. Culture can be seen as a way of ecological adaption and way of getting on and understanding one's immediate surroundings (Kalland 2003, 4).

But what is this "Vietnamese" context? Today, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (*Cộng hòa xã hội chủ nghĩa Việt Nam*) is a Southeast Asian nation that stretches in an S-shape from the border with the Chinese province Yunnan in the north to the Gulf of Thailand in the south. This shape has not existed for a long time yet. Unified in its full 1650 km length it was only for some decades under the Nguyen dynasty in the 19th century and again 1975 with the Vietnamese victory over the United States of America (USA). Historically, Vietnam spread from the Red River delta in the north where the first state that can be called Vietnamese has existed from 2500 BC under the name of Văn Lang. The Western world today calls this cradle of Vietnamese history North Vietnam and the part below the Cloud Pass close to the city of Đà Nẵng South Vietnam. In Vietnam, however, another distinction is widely made, the threefold separation of North, Central and South Vietnam (*miền Bắc, Trung và Nam*). The three regions geographically overlap with the French division of Tonkin (North), Annam (Centre) and Cochin China (South). In the dissertation, the area that I call Vietnam refers to the historically changing political boundaries. It starts with Văn Lang when speaking about the indigenous understanding of Vietnam and will include a North, Centre and South by the chapter on the colonial period.

The most difficult situation for defining Vietnam exists today. Environmental organizations and political centres of power that are important for the discourse analysis

are located in the north and the language used in publication is the Northern Vietnamese dialect that differs noticeably from the Central and Southern dialects. Therefore, my analysis suffers from a bias on the cultural Northern Vietnamese understanding but as policies and projects are implemented throughout Vietnam and developments in the South matter for the historical argumentation, I decided to call the geographical area for my research Vietnam. It is interesting for further research but goes beyond the horizon of the dissertation to analyse regional differences.

The Republic of Vietnam includes 54 ethnic minorities who draw their cultural understandings from a different history and habitats. The minorities mostly live in the mountainous areas in the borderlands while the ethnic group of the Viet settle in the lowlands. This is why when referring to people, I will speak of the ethnic Viet instead of the political Vietnamese. Despite the ethnical homogeny, Vietnamese culture is not to be seen as a monolithic set of ideas. As Said says, culture is not the property of anyone (1993, xxvii) but a constantly transforming network of ideas, concepts and representations. When using the term Vietnamese culture, this interrelated and changing network is referred to.

The third problem to discuss in this critical introduction of concepts might be the major one. It is the problem of speaking about “the West”, “non-Western cultures” and by confronting an indigenous understanding of the environment with western influences on it. Especially the field of nature has a long academic tradition of creating orientalist differences. Most European descriptions of locals in the Global South have been speaking of a primitive but, or rather therefore, environmentally friendly life closer to nature than their European counterparts. Exploitation of natural resources was declared non-existent and causes for it seen in lacking rationality and different religious beliefs, an opposition of modernity in the 19th century (Kalland 2003, 4-8). Dove et al (2003, 39) criticize that most authors, even themselves, run into the trap of criticizing the “conceptual divide between Western and non-Western systems of environmental knowledge” by using the same words and frames and are therefore reproducing the divide.

The best argumentation on why this divide came into being and why it has to be spoken about although it is based on wrong representations of cultures offers Edward Said (1993). Said sees the orientalist descriptions of distant cultures as one way to subordinate a people, turning it into less-civilized people and therefore legitimizing the rule upon them in order to civilize them (xi). Writers played a major role in this process but it is the intellectuals who act as “ideologists of the ‘West’” (41) when they inscribe the orientalist images into scientific disciplines and discourses up until today.

This process of *Othering*, of speaking of “them” and “us”, was artificial and connected to an agency but we cannot simply let go of it in today’s analysis of cultures. “Cultures are not impermeable” (261) and influence and change each other- the Vietnamese cultured changed the French culture and vice versa. The Vietnam of today cannot be studied without the process of *Othering* that was partly incorporated into the Vietnamese mindset.

2.2. Said’s “Culture and Imperialism”

Said’s (1993) argument not only serves as an explanation why we can look at Vietnam and speak about the Global South and North but it is also fundamental for understanding how to study imperialism and culture, therefore informing the structure of the dissertation. Furthermore, it extends and critiques Foucault who is the methodological basis of the dissertation and is discussed in the next chapter. Said demonstrates points to connect nature and culture and, under consideration of authors like Carmen Gonzalez (2000), imperialism can be specified to the form of eco-imperialism today.

In the very beginning of “Culture and Imperialism”, Said points out that “past and present inform each other, imply each other and co-exist with each other” (1993, 2). It is crucial for analyzing imperial influences to see what has existed before them, what the indigenous understanding of nature and the environment is. Only then is it possible to analyze how the understanding was transformed by imperial influences. To get a description of culture at a point of time, Said suggests to look at narratives and to discuss which practices and representations can be found in them (xii-xiii). I therefore chose to analyze Vietnamese folk tales for the role of the nature and environment in them. Tucker (2003, 116) adds to this approach as he says that religions preserved as well as changed traditional ways of understanding. The role of environment and nature within the religions is added to the analysis of the folk tales to get a more detailed description of local understandings because religion is a major part of cultures (Geertz, 1983).

So today’s Vietnamese understanding of environment and nature is formed by the influences of cultural contacts through trade, migration and warfare within Asia and later on with Europe and the European offshoots but above all, through imperialism. Said states that imperialism includes “thinking about, settling on, controlling land that you do not possess, that is distant, that is lived on and owned by others” (199, 5). Following Said’s definition of imperialism, one can already classify the rule of the Chinese upon Vietnam during the first thousand years AD as imperialist.

While the Chinese rule mainly influenced Vietnam through a new dominant Confucian discourse and the spread of Confucian values and systems, the French colonial power acted mainly through agriculture policies as will be explained more in detail later on. Nowadays (Said's replication of the imperial cycle in the 20th century can be extended to the beginning of the 21st century as well), imperialism is implied into the global structure through "setting rules of the economic development" (346). Calling nations "underdeveloped" legitimises again the intervention in other countries sovereignties and the establishment of new extraterritorialities. This economic rule is closely connected to cultural rule, as ideas from and about the Global North expand alongside free markets expansion (350). Culture is again influenced through imperialist practices and also the cultural understandings of nature and the environment.

Important is the concept of eco-imperialism as it uses this core of cultures to gain advantages through using power outside one's own area of sovereignty. Eco-imperialism takes different forms that reach from Green Grabbing (the appropriation of land for environmental ends such as the establishment of national parks (Fairhead, Leach and Scoones 2012)) over the creation of environmental standards in trade to mere resource extraction (Gonzalez 2000; Veltmeyer 2013; Petras and Veltmeyer 2013). Essential to all forms is that along with these economic and political processes comes an ideology, the discourses of neo-liberalism and modernization (Dempsey and Robertson 2012, Hajer 1995). Eco-imperialism is legitimised through two myths: firstly that environmental protection is a luxury that the Global South cannot afford and secondly that the North plays a leadership role in environmental protection despite the fact that the North caused and continues to cause the ecological crisis (Gonzalez 2000). As a result, environmental protection and capitalistic economic growth are connected and one cannot have one without the other. To this narrative also belong terms like "sustainable development" or "eco-system services". "Eco-system services" are symbolic for the neo-liberalisation of nature as it is reduced to a service provider that can be valued in monetary terms (Dempsey and Robertson 2012).

The second discourse essential for my analysis is connected to the process of modernisation. In this process, the environment is represented in a scientific manner. It is reason-based and perceived as something existing independently from humans and therefore observable and calculable. In naming this discourse, I use the term environmental realism, proposed by Macnaghten and Urry (1998, 1). Environmental realism and neo-liberalism are connected as they both see the environment as something manageable

separated from humans. However, environmental realism does not necessarily carry the notion of monetary exploitation and economic growth as neo-liberalism does.

In the analysis of the political frame work for environmental protection and the work of the NGOs, I therefore look for exactly these discourses of neo-liberalism and environmental realism to see if eco-imperialism influenced the local understanding of nature and environment.

3. Methodology: Discourse Analysis

3.1. The Methodology of Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis is a suitable methodology for discussing the cultural understanding of the environment and nature and its changes due to imperial influences as it connects power with knowledge and explains how the way of speaking about a problem (the discourse) and who is speaking influences the creation of new knowledge. Michel Foucault is the theorist representative of discourse analysis. Foucault's theory (1993) is subject to two criticisms that change the theoretical framework I am using for the discourse analysis in this dissertation. One is Maarten Hajer's critique of the missing individual agency and the social backgrounds that inform the making of a new discourse (Hajer 1995, 49). Said agrees with the criticism and misses the dimension of the imperialist experience in Foucault's theory that he only applies to the French context within its own metropolitan area (Said 1993, 47).

Foucault suggests that in a society, the "production of the discourse is at the same time controlled, selected, organized and regulated" (1993, 11) by the means of bans and systems of exclusion. Among the former are taboos, the ritual of circumstances and the existing or lacking right of the speaking subject. The right to speak is influenced by the prohibition of words, exclusion of madness and the will for truth. The will for truth is closely connected to the will for knowledge. The system of knowledge makes every word we are saying understood or unintelligible for others and so the system of knowledge is an object of fight. Whoever can define how something is understood has power. Powerful subjects can control rules of the discourse. For example through classification if something is true or mad through framing in disciplines of what is said. Foucault notes fairytales as an example of a discourse collection which have meaning beyond their story. Their retelling is a suitable example for a historical discourse analysis. As a result, his theory of discourse analysis fits

well for the chosen material on describing the Vietnamese indigenous understanding of nature and the environment.

Furthermore, Foucault explains how knowledge is organized in disciplines and discourses must fit the language of institutionalised categories in order to be heard and not be marked mad or irrelevant. This system makes it possible that the powerful of the disciplines can reproduce themselves by establishing the rules. To belong to a discipline, something has to talk about the object of it and use its proper words. The ritual within the disciplines regulates who has the qualification to speak. Through the agreement to the rules of the disciplines, individuals define that they belong to each other. Consequently, if someone wants to belong to the powerful discourse setting elite, the rules have to be accepted and reproduced. This is also true for Vietnamese elites who adapted a Western lifestyle in order to have their share in power and for environmental organization such as the World wide Fund for Nature (WWF) that uses the environmental realism discourse to affect the people in power.

As a drawback, Foucault does not explain how discourses can actually change and how new patterns are established. Here, Hajer offers the socio-psychologists Harré and Billig as solution. Hajer argues that everyone acts upon one's own reality that is dependent on discourses but realities are always particular and depend on specific framings according to time and space and therefore offer a limited but diverse selection of discourses a subject can choose from (1995, 16-17). The dependency on the discourses we can select is culture but the differences of choices are individual agency. As also the environmental discourse is embedded in this socially formed selection of discourses, environmental problems are socio-ecological problems (18). This explains how for example the French discourse on environment was not taken up by the Vietnamese population immediately. Although the French were in power, the historic context of resistance allowed a rejection of their discourse on a level outside the political field. However, in order to win in the political field, the liberations movements in the Global South had to adapt to the dominant colonial discourses in order to fight free (Said 1993, 132). In fact, only when another Western ideology came into play, the liberation movement gained momentum - the Communist ideology.

The regularities in what is being said lead to an analysis of social and cultural backgrounds that is, according to Harré and Billig, strongly influenced by interpersonal and social interaction, whose rules again can be called culture and produce story-lines. Story-lines are an indicator of inter-discursive communication and facilitate discourses by reducing their complexity (1995, 61-63). By simplifying them they help to create and

maintain a discursive order and reflect change and permanence in discourse and therefore in power and knowledge. A discourse is powerful thus hegemonic when it is translated into institutional arrangements, for example in policies or organizations.

Said criticizes the same as Hajer which is the lacking social background of agents in the process of discourse regulation and the possibility for change. While Foucault focuses on the irresistible physics of power, Said claims that individuals do have their responsibility in colonising, such as authors, intellectual politicians. Said also states that “each cultural discourse unfolds according to different agendas” (1993, 334) and again allow for looking a specific Vietnamese environmental discourse while acknowledging the historical influences through Chinese and Western discourse.

Also, Foucault’s theory has to be adapted to a non-Western cultural background by redefining what it institutional and how a discourse can therefore gain hegemony. While institutionalisation for Foucault is the establishment of a discourse in disciplines and politics, it has to be seen wider in the Vietnamese case. The institution that matters in the traditional Vietnamese society, also under Chinese influence, was the village (Roubequin 1939, 73) and if a discourse is supposed to be hegemonic, it is reliant on the power and knowledge production on the village community level. This changes through urbanisation beginning but not yet gaining momentum under the French; and through the penetration of the village level by the Communist Party. The socialist government implies its government structure down to grass root levels so that party politics, also influenced from the traditional bottom-up principle, is the institution for hegemonic discourses.

Hajer (1995) finds in his analysis of environmental discourse of acid rain in the UK and the Netherlands that ecological modernisation is the hegemonic discourse in environmental policy. For my purpose, ecological modernisation is not the appropriate discourse to use as it refers to political and economic reforms towards environmental-friendly capitalism (Mol and Sonnenfeld 2000, 6-7). Frijns, Phung and Mol (2000, 270) note that the theory of environmental modernization is not feasible in the Vietnamese context.

3.2 Data Selection

For the first part of the discussion, folk tales are used as primary literature for the discourse analysis of the indigenous understanding as Said (1993) and Foucault (1993) both argue that narratives reflect culture, in this case the culturally defined role of nature and environment. The chosen folk tales are stories that can be found in all collections of

Vietnamese tales (n.a. 1978; Nevermann 1952; Nguyen and Sachs 2003) considered for this research. Also they are stories closely related to the historical identity of the Viet as one people dating back to the Hung Kings and Văn Lang 3000 BC and are therefore widely known among the population and representative for an indigenous understanding among the subaltern.

Folk tales have the disadvantage of not giving a clear reflection of the time they derive from. As they were orally inherited, they were modified through the passing on by each generation. Still, they are a viable source for analysing and indigenous discourse as they are the only source representing the subaltern who were illiterate and constituted the major part of the Vietnamese population. Reading Chinese classics would only represent the educated and royal elite. On top of that one can identify modifications made by the imperialist influences and separate them from indigenous mindsets. Considering religious concepts of Animism and Confucianism one finds parts of the stories that can be traced to Confucian ideas. The folk tales therefore also exemplify the first imperialistic influence on the Vietnamese environmental discourse.

The second imperialistic influence came with the French colonialisation. The French imperialist and colonialist project was not mainly interested in changing Vietnamese culture but in exploiting the resources of the colony. As Said notes in this respect, France differed greatly from England as Paris was not interested in turning the Viet into non-white Frenchmen and –women and therefore did not run a big campaign on re-educating Indochina. France was interested in “prestige, profit, plantations, slaves”(Said 1993, 204), which was achieved through agricultural reforms. That these reforms did not change the Vietnamese discourse on environment and nature immediately is shown by a selection of folk songs collected in the 1950es and 1960es (Balaban 2003). Again, folk songs are a way into the mindsets of the non-elite.

An analysis of literature from the Communist revolution onwards, in order to see a discourse change, is not appropriate. As the first years under Socialism were shaped by war and the time after 1975 by building a socialist national identity, literature was only allowed to be written with the means of supporting the revolution and liberation struggle. Art for art's sake was forbidden and critical literature censored (Nguyen 2004, 58). Within the resistance literature against the socialist regime which came up after a unified Vietnam was established, critique was directed mainly against lack of freedom in the new Vietnam and ecological concerns were not highly ranked. Literacy campaigns were successful among the farmers and workers so that also the oral tradition of folk poetry lost a big part of its meaning and was replaced by written pieces on socialist realism (134-139). This is why a

change in material for the discourse analysis is required. Instead of analysing tales and poems I make use of the connection between religion and the discourse on environment and nature to follow the development of religious practices under the socialist regime. Approaching today I will also look for story-lines in policy papers on the environment that started to be published in 1992 with the *Law on environmental protection* and have been updated regularly since.

Finally, to grasp the new form of eco-imperialism and its manifestation through the environmental movement besides the level of state politics, I will discuss the online publications of two international non-governmental organizations working on environmental projects in Vietnamese communities (INGOs). The story-lines found there are then compared to local non-governmental organizations to see how far the local discourse has changed through eco-imperialism (LNGOs). The analysed organisations are chosen according to their impact because of their well-known reputation and long history working in the field in the case of the INGOs, and their pure existence in the case of LNGOs as there are hardly any environmental LNGOs due to strict political control mechanisms by the socialist regime (see Frijns, Phung and Mol 2000, 281).

4. Analysis: Discourse Changes through Imperialistic Influences

4.1. Indigenous Understanding and Chinese Imperial Influences

Calling Animist concepts an indigenous understanding of nature simplifies the matter. Cultures within the region of East and Southeast Asia have mutually influenced each other throughout the millennia and it is not possible to speak of an essential Vietnamese culture (McHale 2004, 66). Following our conception of Vietnam as it is today, Mchale claims that “Vietnamese” culture was only reached during the Nguyễn dynasty and the first unified Vietnam from north to south which included all the influences historical influences from China, the highlands, the Cham, etc (Ibid.). Still, one can trace which mindsets have existed before the first influence that could be called imperial and in various academic sources Animist beliefs are seen as existent before Vietnam was sinicized (Boomgaard 2007, 65).

The first perceptions of knowledge are based on the specific environment people grow up in and have an ancestral tradition in (Lundberg 2004, 147). For example, Jamieson states in his monography on Vietnamese culture that the ecological differences between the stability of agriculture in the Mekong delta and the unpredictability of the Red River

delta influence culture and social organization on the two areas until today (Jamieson 1993, 5). While inhabitants of the north needed stronger discipline and a well-working cooperation within the village to organize the necessary drainage system, Southerners did not develop a centralized agricultural organization.

Due to the need of cooperation in agriculture, the village has been an important landowner in the area of the Red River delta. Land was redistributed every other year within the village to support poor families and provide subsistence for every village member (29). This long tradition continues until today as bottom-up pressure from the village units lead, for example, to the renovation politics of the 1980s where responsibility for agricultural land was handed back from the state to families and villages (O'Rourke 2004, 32; Kerkvliet 2005). With the formation of Vietnam, the bottom-up principle was complemented by a centralized government that relied on Confucian hierarchies and became an essential part of the agricultural structure as it coordinated canal and dyke systems over larger areas than the village (Luttrell 2001, 64; Jamieson 1993, 9).

What was found throughout Southeast Asia, and also in Europe back then as John Berger would argue (Berger 1993), were two sides of humans engaging with their nature and environment. On the one side, buffalos were used to plough fields and cockerels for entertainment in cock fights. The environment was exploited for food. Slash and burn techniques were used to diversify the wet-rice cultivation and beyond the main subsistence culture a small part of agricultural products were used for trade (Boomgaard 2007, 69-80). This is part of the materialist function of the environment. On the other side, animals were not only eaten and used for entertainment but also used for belief ceremonies and certain species such as tigers were not killed due to their possession of spirits (187-195). Also, before burning parts of the forest or before hunting, spirits were asked for their good will and ceremonies were performed to please spirits of the forests, the sea or mountains. Village festivals were organized according to natural phenomena such as the biggest moon in autumn (Mid-autumn festival, *Tết Trung Thu*) and the New Year's celebration welcoming spring (*Tết Nguyên Đán*).

This twofold understanding of nature and the environment can be found throughout folk tales. Nguyen and Sachs (2003, 2) describe the role of naturalistic elements in Vietnamese folk tales as a way to explain natural phenomena. In the tales, the fear and the admiration for nature were combined as was the reality people lived in with imagined spheres. This means that the world view at the time was constituted through two parts: the visible and non-visible (Cuc 1999, 68). This divide was later on reproduced and further divided by the Confucian influence of Chinese imperialism. The visible and non-visible part

was separated into and applied to three spheres: Earth, humans and heaven. The visible part of the Earth was made of mountains, the sea, fields, etc. The correspondence to this in the non-visible world was mountain or forest spirits. In the human world the two parts were living people and passed ancestors who have been worshipped from pre-Chinese times until today. The third part existing between earth (*địa*) and humans (*nhân*) was the heaven (*thiên*) which was made of the visible moon, sun, rain and the invisible god.

The two examples I use to illustrate the spiritual part of nature in the pre-imperialist Vietnam are the tales “The Anger of the Waters” and “Two cakes fit for a king”. “The Anger of the Waters” exemplifies the importance of water and mountain spirits and their integration into human culture. The tale tells us a story that can be found not only in Vietnamese tales: the story of a princess looking for a suitable husband. In this case however, no human is worthy enough to become the prince of the Viet kingdom, every candidate is rejected until both the Spirit of the Mountains (*Sơn Tinh*) and the Spirit of the Waters (*Thủy Tinh*) ask the king for permission to marry his daughter. To decide who the better son-in-law would be, the king challenges the two and promises the one his daughter who returns earlier with the most beautiful and precious wedding gift. *Sơn Tinh* arrives first bringing treasures of the forest and mountains such as aloe, ivory, rare woods and precious animals. By the time *Thủy Tinh* gets back with his presents (sea animals, pearls, etc.) the princess is already married to *Sơn Tinh*. *Thủy Tinh* gets so angry that he causes heavy rains and major floods. *Sơn Tinh* finally uses his powers to stop the floods but ever since the loss of *Thủy Tinh*, he would flood the kingdom once a year. What we can see in this story is the close connection between human and spirit world as two representatives get married; humans and nature have a close relationship. Also, natural things as woods are considered precious and are worth being a wedding present. At the same time ivory and aloe are not parts of a subsistence economy and monetary value is attached to them. These are elements of nature and environment. Lastly, the story offers an explanation for the population of the annual floods, attaching belief to natural phenomena.

The worship for nature and also this time the imperial-induced divide between earth-humans-heaven is well-represented in the story “Two cakes fit for a king”. Again a king is worried about who is supposed to inherit the kingdom as he resigns. To choose one of his sons, he asks all of them to bring a very special meal for him for his birthday. The one who would bring something he had not tried before would inherit the throne. All sons set off for far away journeys to look for exotic food. Except for one who is the poorest son, living a peasant life. This son does not think about gaining the throne but about making his father happy on his birthday. After long sleepless nights he and his wife come up with the

idea of creating two cakes of rice, pork and beans wrapped in banana leaves. All ingredients they used were self-cultivated and subsistence food but arranged in a new manner to worship these basic but most precious ingredients. On top of that, they formed one cake in a round form (*Bánh trôi*) to represent heaven and a square one (*Bánh Chưng*) to represent earth. The king is stunned by the food and chooses it over tiger livers and other meals his sons bring from far away. The element of nature is in the middle of this story, the worship of being kept alive by natural gifts that are given by heaven. Even today, these cakes are the traditional food served every year for the Lunar New Year celebration (*Tết Nguyên Đán*).

As already partly pointed out above, these indigenous understandings were influenced by religious tradition entering Vietnam from China. The latter influence can be thought of as first imperialistic experience of Vietnam. For one thousand years the Red River Delta was ruled from the Chinese court and culturally influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, not only during the time Vietnam had to pay its tribute to China but also later on the cultural influence persisted despite the continuing warfare between the two states. Under the Lý dynasty that followed the long Chinese rule, Buddhism flourished and co-existed with the Confucian tradition. Under the Lý kings and the upcoming Buddhist tendencies, the role of the king as high priest of agriculture was established and temples were build to honour the gods of grain (Jamieson 1993, 9). The importance of Buddhism and Confucianism changed again under the Trần dynasty. Confucianism was the official ideology while Buddhism remained a part of religious life. Neo-Confucianism entered Vietnam with the invasion by the Ming dynasty from China in the 15th century and was cultivated by the Lê and Nguyễn dynasty into the 20th century. Jamieson (16) summarises the interplay of Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism, Animism as “a single system, best thought of as Vietnamese folk religion”. This culminates in a curious present situation as most of the Viet claim their religious orientation that is inscribed on the identity card as *không*, meaning no religion (Lundberg 2004, 72).

It is difficult to grasp an essence of what Confucian teachings have to say about nature and the environment. Confucianism is not a single religion or philosophy but a collection of various Chinese scholars, the first one being Kong Zi, known in the Western world as Confucius. Several teachers followed after him and eventually there was a break in the philosophy as Neo-Confucianism is classified differently than the first writings, also concerning the environment and nature. Ivanhoe (1998, 59) argues that neither Confucius nor the second influential teacher Meng Zi (Mencius) wrote anything that could be interpreted as environmental ethic but that the founder of neo-Confucianism Hsün Tzu explicitly spoke about ethical problems related to the environment for the first time.

Although in the first period of the philosophy there was an emphasis on harmony and interconnectedness of all being, nature was only one among five human visions, the others being society, politics, authority, history and carriers of a mandate of heaven (Weiming 1998, 13). This mandate of heaven allowed humans to see them as outstanding, the “I” separated humans from the natural world and lead to the three-fold world view of earth-human-heaven (*địa-nhân-thiên*). This separation persisted also in Neo-Confucianism but all elements were equalized in importance into a cosmo-anthromorphic world view (Ro 1998, 172). What strongly persisted in the Vietnamese culture is the element of Ying and Yang, the teaching of all forces having to be in balance (Jellema 2007, 472; Jamieson 1993).

Not only is it questionable what the essence of Confucianism is; but also in how far it affected the Viet. It is clear that court life, hierarchy and scholar tradition were strongly shaped by Confucian’s influences. However, Viet scholars as Đào Duy Anh doubt the influence on the subaltern (McHale 2004, 90). He argues that Confucianism “stimulated Vietnamese to develop their character” but did not form the basis of this character as can be exemplified by the newly introduced threefold divide in the pre-existing visible and non-visible world. Another scholar, Phan Đại Doãn, says that the Viet simplified Confucian teaching and focused on its practical application such as filial piety including the already named offerings for ancestors (*hiếu*) or the right way (*chính nghĩa*) instead of deep philosophical implications (Jellema 2007, 489; McHale 2004, 67). They put their argument on the basis that Viet scholars hardly published writings on Confucianism and no local sources were developed but only existing Chinese ones used.

As with Confucianism, Daoism is also a collection of different beliefs. They are all connected in the belief in *Đạo* which can be seen as argument of an environmentally and naturally friendly Daoism. *Đạo* simply means “the Way” that aims for total harmony and unity. Nature is not something outside one’s body but an integral part of one’s life (Lundberg 2004, 76). It is the cause for everything as “Humanity follows the Earth, the Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows the *Đạo*, and the *Đạo* follows what is natural” (Palmer and Finlay 2003, 89).

Buddhism is widely seen as environmental friendly religion per se. This is because of the basic Buddhist teachings of the Middle Way and the Eight Fold Path that preaches to cause as few harm as possible to exit the cycle of rebirth. All life is suffering and so the religious aim is to gain enlightenment to enter Nirvana, the state of nothingness. However, there is a difference in theory and practice. While the killing of animals is actually not allowed as it causes harm, only few Buddhist have a vegetarian diet and even monks consume meat when it is a donation (Sponsel and Natadechda-Sponsel 2003, 362). The

question also remains as to which parts of Buddhism persisted in Vietnam. The form practiced in Vietnam today is the Pure Land School which, as happened to the Confucian tradition, is a simplified version. It focuses on prayer and faith and less on deep philosophical lifestyle changes (McHale 2004, 147).

In summary, there were influences and they did impact Vietnamese discourses on the environment and nature but it is hard to say to what extent. Buddhism and Daoism do not challenge the discourse on environment and nature found in Animist beliefs. Confucianism in contrast enhanced the position of humans outside nature. Considering the presented two tales, one can read Confucian values into them, for example filial piety as the son with the rice cakes only seeks to please his father. Also the separation of Earth-Humans-Heaven is represented by the cakes. Although it is not clear in how far Confucianism penetrated the subaltern, it did at least in the hierarchical structure of society, also including heaven and earth.

4.2. Changes through French Imperialism

“The Chinese understood Vietnam better than the French. Without religious mandate, with little knowledge of Vietnamese traditional morality, and even less attention to local nativism and sensibility, the French were merely inattentive conquerors” (Said 1993, 252). While Chinese imperialism brought with it new societal organisation and values that at least penetrated all population groups, the French were not mainly concerned with changing the Vietnamese cultural mindset. This change happened as side-effect of the actual goal they pursued; the economic exploitation of over-seas territories and agricultural reformation.

The transformation of landscape was severe under French rule and this change of habitat of the Viet also transformed local discourses. As Christopher Morris (2011, 155) suggests, environmental transformation happened before colonisation but it was different in type as it went hand in hand with a new underlying ideology of the modern state, enlightenment sciences and economics. This is why it is essential to look on agricultural reforms and their consequences on the Viet to understand how discourses on the environment and nature changed under French influence.

With the establishment of the colony, scientific research into the colonial fauna and flora soon turned into a strategy on how to use the local environment for the purpose of economic gain (McClellan and Regourd 2000, 40-42). Vietnam’s agriculture was aimed on substitution and creating marginal revenues for the purpose of the village who was the

main land owner. The French accumulated and transferred land ownership into the hands of a few landlords and enhanced the system of tenancy (Luttrell 2001, 65). They tried to make the agricultural economy more efficient by changing techniques of planting and the selection of crops. Shifting cultivators were turned into settled wet-rice producers for better control of the agricultural production and because rice was chosen as one of the main goods to be exported (Boomgaard 2007, 223; Aso 2012, 20). Export was an important economical branch and source of income for the colonizers and to strengthen that export, commercial plants were introduced that could be sold on the European market, among them coffee, tobacco and rubber (Freud 2014, 99; Boomgaard 2007, 178; Roubequin 1939, 109). These crops were cultivated on plantations whose areas tripled during the decades (Jamieson 1993, 90). Also mining and industry were rapidly expanded in order to push the export numbers (Ibid.; Roubequin 1939, 60). When the economic crisis in Europe weakened the trade, yet more new crops were introduced in order to be independent from imports from France, such as bread (Freud 2014, 97).

The agricultural techniques hardly changed in the northern part as the French administration thought of the peasants in the Red River delta as efficient and hard-working (Biggs 2011, 109-112; Roubequin 1939, 62). As a result, northerners were resettled in the Mekong delta to teach the peasants in the South a better way to cultivate their plants. Canals and dykes were built and thereby changed the visual landscape of the area (Duong, Safford and Maltby 2001, 193; Roubequin 1939, 63). For example, more than two million hectares of floodplains were transformed into cultivated canal systems (Biggs 2011, 109). But because the reforms were implemented in a top-down manner without accompanying education, they hardly caused a discourse change for the peasant population. Folk poems from this time still represent both ends of the spectrum: the environment as something to be cultivated in order to survive and the natural element of awe and worship as can be seen in the folk poems.

At the outpost now for three years,
By day, on guard. By nights the mandarin plans.
Clearing bamboo, slashing wood stands.
The body is pain. I can't complain.
My food is bamboo shoots and plums.
My fuel and friends are the bamboo.
In the well, one fish swims alone and free.
(cit. In Balaban 2003, 29)

In this poem, bamboo is seen as food and fuel as well as friend. The person to recite this poem probably is someone working on a plantation for the French, as he speaks about clearing but it is painful, both physically and mentally if we refer to the notion of bamboo as

friend. Also, the own destiny is reflected into nature as the fish is the symbol of the freedom the singer is missing.

Each evening, ducks paddle, egrets fly.
Mister Elephant snaps sugarcane then strides into the forest.
I'll follow to strip rattan for plaits,
Fetching them home to make a sling for you to go peddling.
Selling at no loss? Why, that's a profit.
Go on, have a look at the sun's face, at the moon's.
(36)

Here the elephant is anthropomorphised by the "Mister" and a connection is made between the animal and the human who uses sugar cane plants to go peddling so we again find notions of nature and environment. Berger (1993, 11) notes anthropomorphism as expression of the proximity between humans and animals. At the same time, the economic notion of the French is ridiculed as there might be a profit but the real value still lies in nature (here the sun and the moon) itself.

But the new notions of capitalism were not only rejected. In the later period of French colonisation they were appropriated for the Viet's own means. The French invested in agricultural science to gain economic growth, the Viet took over this investment strategy with the aim strengthening the nation (Aso 2012, 41). A good example on how French ideology was appropriated for the independence fight and therefore changed the Vietnamese mindset is the revolutionary Phan Chu Trinh. Under the Chinese system, business was depicted as something unworthy of the educated elite and only appropriate work for uneducated peasants who needed to trade some of their agricultural products in to afford things they did not produce on their own. Trinh broke with this tradition by starting up a private business as member of the new urban elite. Although his business failed and went bankrupt, he turned dirty business work into something respectable (Jamieson 1993, 59).

Finally, despite the introduction the concepts of export and economic growth beyond subsistence agriculture, the introduction of industry and technology by the French lead to urbanisation and the creation of a new working class and French-educated elite in the cities (Jenkins 2001, 219). So on the one hand, the French strengthened the environment notion over the nature notion by emphasising the monetary value of plants and animals. However on the other hand what had a deeper impact was that it brought with it the ideas of industrialisation and rational science which had a greater effect on environmental discourses in the long run. It was the 0.5% of wealthy Viet educated in French schools that would adopt Western ideas of business, egalitarianism and liberty and thereby lead to

another Western informed independence struggle, the Communist movement (Jamieson 1993, 72). This movement with Hồ Chí Minh as its figurehead saw the appropriation of Western ideas the only means of creating an own nation-state. The new urban and rural poor, created by French dispossession, were in the end the driving force for the success of the Communist movement.

4.3. Influences from Marxism

In the academic literature there is a wide debate on Marxism and ecology (see Burkett 2006, Sundararajan 1996, Skirbekk 1994). In the centre of the discussion stands the question whether Marxist theory is supportive or repressive of ecological movements and changes. The contestants of Marxist ecology argue that Marx' theory is deeply materialistic and that the philosopher displayed natural resources as given and unlimited (Callicott and Ames 1989, 25; Burkett 2006, 6). Also, the Marxist adaption of commoditisation of natural resources from capitalism enhanced the human domination of nature and the creation of surplus value lay according to Marx only in the exploitation of labour, but not of natural resources (Burkett 2006, 10).

Supporters of Marxist ecology say in contrast that only because ecological limits have not been a major topic during Marx's life time and he therefore did not consider it in its theory, it does not mean that the theory is inhibiting environmental or natural movements. The theory of exploitation of labour by the capitalist in order to gain surplus value can be translated one to one on natural resources, the surplus value turning into an extractive surplus (Skirbekk 1994, 99). Furthermore, the problems of the working class described by Marx were ecological ones, even if not explicitly framed as those: pollution in the new urban areas, malnutrition, and overpopulation (Skirbekk 1994, 97). The capitalist practice of dispossession, primitive accumulation and the new divide between urban manufacturing and the industrialisation of agriculture is a critique of unsustainable practices and of the alienation of workers from rural areas and thereby from nature (Burkett 2006, 292). All in all, materialism is relevant for ecology as it is "bound up with [...] the natural contexts of human life" (Sundararajan 1996, 377).

The theory aside, to see which results Marxism really had on the real discourses on environment and nature one has to analyze processes in states with a Marxian state ideology, such as Vietnam. Here, socialist policy mainly had implications that destroyed nature (both in discourse and in real life) and enhanced the notion of environment by

oppressing Animist beliefs as opium of the people and land reforms. The land reforms included the dispossession of landowners and the collectivization of land under the control of the socialist government (Spoor et al. 2007, 20). However, the collectivisation on village level does not imply a return to pre-French agricultural practices. Following the Soviet model of development and being influenced by the Great Leap Forward in China, the Vietnamese Communists also aimed to a modernization of production in order to have a prosperous people and state and exploited resources (Skirbekk 1994, 96). Technology and cooperative work should lead to a growth in agricultural output as should the industries built in and around urban areas. Besides the collectivization process, Viet from the overpopulated Red River delta were forced to resettle in the highlands and introduce wet-rice agriculture to the ethnic minorities (Lundberg 2004, 55). As a result, forests in the mountains were cleared because they firstly had to create space for productive agriculture and secondly because forests were unknown, feared and perceived as something negative by the Viet who were used to an undisturbed wet land (Ibid.).

What changed the mindset of the Viet and the discourses on nature and environment was the policy on religions by the socialist government. Due to government campaigns, religion turned from a public to a private matter. One aim of the campaigns was to eliminate superstition as it was seen as backward and therefore as holding back the development of new secular state (Jellema 2007, 486). Moreover, public religious festivals used to cause high public spending. Festivities like funerals lasted for days and could cost so much that it would bankrupt whole families. The socialist government preached modesty and advised its people to turn three-day banquets for the New Year celebration into an afternoon offering sweets to close friends and neighbours. Excessive feasts were seen as relict of the old hierarchical system and the saved finances that would have been spent on celebrations could this way be used for the national liberation fight. Outside of the influence of the party, the poverty induced through decades of warfare first with the French and later on against the USA made it impossible to organize big, costly village festivals (Ibid.).

Marx' thought religion to be the opium of the people thus lead to the elimination of some religious practices. Not all religions were affected in the same way. Hồ Chí Minh for example accepted Buddhism as legitimate beliefs as long as they did not interfere with party politics. The Buddhist Monastic Community carried 1980 the slogan "Dhamma, nation and Socialism" (Matthews 1992, 65-68). Daoism also appears to have been unaffected by anti-religious campaigns as it was not lived through rituals. Animism and Confucianism were the beliefs affected the most. As already mentioned, the superstition of Animism did

not fit to a new modern state that was based on rational science and progress and to call someone an uneducated superstitious peasant (*người quê*) is until today an insult. Also, while Buddhism was institutionalised and therefore controllable for the government, Animism was decentralised and as a consequence not governable and dangerous for the legitimacy of the government (Endres 1999, 3). Natural spirits were replaced by communist and national spirits. As an example, Lê Lợi or the Trưng sisters who fought against the Chinese in history, and after his death also Hồ Chí Minh were deified (Lauser 2008, 122-126). The fear and worship of the spiritual element of nature was thereby destroyed and the commoditised environment in the name of a prosperous people enhanced. Confucianism was also officially abandoned by the new government as feudal hierarchical heritage of the past that helped to keep the class system alive. As the Confucianism links to nature were weak as argued in chapter 4.1, this was in contrast to the policies on Animism not very influential for an environmental discourse change.

4.4 The Current Discourse and its Influences from Eco-Imperialism

Under the pressure of poverty and a starving peasant population, the Vietnamese government started a new era of politics when introducing *đổi mới* politics in 1986. These renovation politics mainly included economic liberation and the change from a planned economy to a socialist oriented market economy (*kinh tế thị trườngng hường xã hội chủ nghĩa*) and legalised private property, business and the opening of the Vietnamese market to foreign investment. But this liberalisation process was not only limited to the economic sector. Although religious leaders were imprisoned and persecuted when publically criticizing the socialist government, daily religious practices including superstitious ones were no longer oppressed and the tradition of ritual picked up again (Lauser 2008, 121; Digregoria and Salemink 2007, 433). For example village festivals were re-established although with modifications. They were now held in a “semi sacred” context (DiGregorio and Salemink 2007, 436) as festivals were under control of the government and served religious and political ends at the same time: worshipping ancestors and building a national identity. The time of religious oppression however had a long term impact. As Dang (1995) found in a survey in Hanoi, beliefs were rare among young and educated people and if persons practiced rituals, they did not explain it with a deep belief in something supernatural but as tradition that maybe could work for one’s own advantage. So this

revival that could have led to a rebirth of the notion of nature did not do so. This is also due to the new influence of Western discourses.

With the *đổi mới* liberation process, Vietnam was open not only for the flow of goods but also for the flow of ideas and mindsets. Concerning the environment, this flow enhanced the loss of nature in favour of the environment even further and the environmental discourse today is mainly shaped by eco-imperialist story-lines of environmental realism and neo-liberalism. It is the capitalist notion of economic growth and the accompanying reforms as well the environmental movements in form of environmental organizations that fall under this eco-imperialism. With the integration in the global market, its climax being Vietnam becoming a World Trade Organization member in 2005, the capitalist ideology including economic growth and the increase of production is implemented in the local economy. For example the traditional aqua cultures thrived due to the high demand rate from Western countries and the growth of the economy caused environmental depletion (Boomgaard 2007, 312). Also the Green Revolution took hold of Vietnamese agriculture and for the sake of higher production rates mechanisation, intensification and the use of fertilisers brought farmers a higher income on the cost of the environment (288). These new economic perspectives were accepted by the population as they allowed for a part of the population to survive and others to prosper, but either way economic growth has been advantageous for most (Jamieson 1993, 294).

As the environment suffered from the nation's new wealth, programs to protect the environment were introduced relatively early. Already in the 1960s the first national park was opened in Cúc Phương in North Vietnam. This model spread and today there are 116 national parks, nature reserves or similar throughout Vietnam (Vietnam Environment Administration 2009). Their establishment relied on a process of Green Grabbing during the 1990s and early 2000s as ethnic minorities were forced to resettle to make a protected, human free area possible that further divided humans and nature (Rugendyke and Nguyen 2005, 197).

Following this first form institutionalisation and adaption of environmental concerns by the government, the environmental discourses were integrated into national policy. The hegemonic discourses that dominate the institutions including the government and non-governmental organizations are neo-liberalism and environmental realism. The general governmental framework by the Communist Party consists of several elements that have been introduced since the *đổi mới* reforms. In the manner of the environmental realism discourse, the Research Centre for Natural Resources and Environment (*Trung tâm nghiên cứu tài nguyên và môi trường*) was established at the University of Hanoi in the

1980s. A *National Plan for Environment and Sustainable Development* was firstly introduced in 1992 and so was the *Law on Environmental Protection* in 1993 (Mercker und Vu n/a, 22-45; Schepke 1996, 53). Today the main policy papers designed under the Ministry for Natural Resources and Environment are the *Law on Environmental Protection* (latest revision on 2005), the *Vietnam National Green Growth Strategy* (2012), the *National Target Program to Respond to Climate Change* (2008, not available for citation) and the *National Strategy on Climate Change* (2011). As becomes already clear through the titles of the papers and the name of the ministry, the story-lines of resources as single-use entities and the neoliberal notion of sustainable development and ecosystem services are dominant (see Nguyen et al. 2001, 255). Story-lines that appear most in the laws and plans are for example “sustainable development”, “natural capital” and “sustainable growth”. This represents the discourse of neo-liberalism. Strategies to cope with climate change speak about “sustainable consumption behaviour”, “competitiveness” and “the polluter-pays-principle” also neoliberal story-lines. “Technological innovation” as another coping strategy and the repeated use of “efficiency” indicate the environmental realism discourse. All these involve notions of environment instead of nature and emphasize extrinsic values. But in each document, there are one or two points added that relate to intrinsic values and nature as well. In the *National Strategy against Climate Change* both contradictory discourses are connected:

Development must observe laws of the nature, harmonize with the nature and befriend with the environment; economic development should be suitable to ecological features of a certain region, produce a minimum of waste, especially carbon, and strive for a green economy.
(National Strategy against Climate Change 2011, n/a)

Also the Green Growth Strategy combines extrinsic and intrinsic values:

The rich and beautiful traditional lifestyle is combined with civilized and modern means to create comfortable, high quality and traditionally rooted living standards for people and society of a modern Viet Nam. Implementing rapid and sustainable urbanization while maintaining the living in harmony with nature in rural areas and establishing sustainable consumption behaviours within the context of global integration.
(Green Growth Strategy 2012, 3)

Imperial influence on the Vietnamese mindset strengthens the environmental notion in the policy framework but are still accompanied by indigenous notions of harmony with nature.

The other branch of the institutionalisation of discourse is the Western environmental movement. There are more than 160 registered international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) in Vietnam, with many of them working on environmental issues (O’Rourke 2004, 197). The INGOs have the advantage of not being as

restricted and controlled in their activities as local NGOs. Local NGOs often cannot work naming a specific problem or support specific actors but have to embed their urge for change within wider community programmes without direct political criticism. It is therefore the INGOs role to support communities in environmental problems, provide a network and bundle powers or support environmental projects in communities over the long term. As the INGOs are the organisations working close with local communities, they are able to implement their discourses on a grass root scale.

The story-lines of Western NGOs overlap with the ones already present in the Vietnamese government papers. Basis for the analysis are online publication by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV). These two organizations were chosen as they have a large share in projects in Vietnam within the NGO spectrum and have existed for decades. The SNV is “shaping the future of development” by bringing “innovation” into the “development sector” (SNV Vietnam 2014). In addition to the neoliberal discourse of “market-based solutions” and the development of “value chains of agricultural products” it also works with the story-line of technology and thereby with environmental realism. “Innovation” is a pillar for the work of the organization and the SNV emphasizes “technology” for “changing for the better” (SNV Vietnam 2014). What SNV does not, however, is separate humans and environment but see them connected. The SNV for example sees “protecting livelihoods” and “preserving forests” (SNV 2014) as two sides of the same problem.

The WWF, in contrast, separates humans and the environment by having an emphasis on conservation work of forests and species as is apparent in the campaign against the trade of Rhino Horn or for the protection of tigers in the Vietnamese rainforests. This treatment of the environment from outside and in a rational manner indicates environmental realism. The separation in the specific project work is contrasted by the story-line in the overall approach of “strong interaction between ecosystem integrity, sustainable economic development and human well-being” (WWF 2014). On top of that, the WWF has the strongest neoliberal discourse by repeatedly using the terms “ecosystem services”, “valuable natural capital” and the opening of “new markets” through sustainable aquacultures (WWF 2013). Also the “sustainable development” story-line is omnipresent. It also mentions, although only once, an intrinsic value by seeking to preserve “places sacred to the world’s various faiths” (WWF 2013,6). Despite this exception, environmental realism and neo-liberal discourses are hegemonic.

When looking into the publication of two LNGOs, the Sustainable Development Club (SDC) and the Education for Nature Vietnam (ENV), there are some analogies but also

some differences to INGOs. The ENV is an organization founded by the former director of Cúc Phương national park. Its mission is “wildlife conservation” and the “protection of nature” by achieving a “life in balance with the natural world” (ENV 2014). It seeks to save species from extinction by “reducing consumer demands” (Ibid.) on trading products from rare animals such as bear bile, law enforcement and the support in creating new legislation. The discourse of environmental realism can be found throughout the conservation organization. Projects include education and awareness raising for people living close to national parks and for people living in hotspots of wildlife trade, policy and legislation lobbying and corporate partnership as “business can play a valuable role in supporting conservation efforts” (Ibid.). Although the ENV stresses the life in balance with nature and therefore intrinsic values, it still focuses on a separation of humans and nature by the support of human-free national parks. It wants to fight the economic branch of trading wild animals but wants to achieve it by cooperating with businesses. This is not only a discourse of environmental realism but an implicit notion of neo-liberalism.

The SDC is local like ENV, founded and lead by Viet. Despite the name that represents the discourse of neo-liberalism, the SDC does not speak about ecosystem services, economic growth or similar paradigms. It seeks to connect “improving the livelihoods of the poor” with “awareness on environment” and “personal growth” (not economic growth) and “social impact” (SDC 2014). Their projects are anthropocentric and want to protect the environment for human’s sake. Moreover, the SDC mentions an intrinsic value implementing a project called “We love mother nature” that aims to “educate primary school children about the environment” (Centre for Sustainable Development Studies Vietnam Magazine 2014). Consequently, environmental realism and neo-liberalism are implicitly apparent through the awareness building that relies on the scientific side of the environment and the role of environment as means to fight poverty. The discourses are complemented by an emotional reference.

To sum up, the INGOs analysed apply the discourses of environmental realism and neo-liberalism in their environmental projects and enhance the myths of the West as environmental protector and the poor who cannot afford taking care of the environment alone and are therefore one more force in the row of imperialist influences on the Vietnamese mindset on environment of nature. Environment and humans are mainly seen connected but intrinsic values are hardly mentioned and the notion of nature therefore not apparent. INGOs combine different discourses and do not put such a strong emphasis on the economy. They do, although rarely, mention nature and focus on the environmental problem as a social problem. Imperialistic influences on the population level therefore are

only partly successful. With these differences in mind, it would be interesting to look on the success of programmes implemented under the modernisation discourse and if projects are well-received and understood among locals who themselves use other discourses. The environmental realism and neoliberal discourses still gained hegemony on a national level as they are institutionalized within the policy framework. As it has power it will probably continue to shape the knowledge of people and may change local discourses as did the imperialistic influences of the Chinese and French before. Researches such as Dara O'Rourke's on community action on environmental problems suggest that (O'Rourke 2004). Communities protested against the use of resources or their pollution by big companies in various cases throughout the country. The protests against only visible pollution are however not motivated by intrinsic values of nature as O'Rourke notes in his research on community-driven regulation. He says that "ecological impacts were rarely mentioned as a motivation for action unless they resulted in financial costs" (97). In this point we can see how deep the discourses of environmental realism and neo-liberalism penetrated Vietnamese society. The government has also managed to incorporate these protests into the hegemonic institutional framework as it included in the Law of Environmental Protection the possibility for communities to raise complaints about pollution that would be investigated and community members made wide use of this opportunity (96).

5. Conclusion

“Uống nước nhớ nguồn” (“Remember the font when drinking water”) is a Vietnamese proverb that not only asks people to be conscious about their environment but that is also a metaphor respecting historical heritage. In the dissertation, I traced the heritage of the Vietnamese discourses on environment and nature. I focused on changes in those through imperialist influences by China, France and eco-imperialism with attention to Western-influenced socialist policy. While Said (1993) made clear how closely cultural concepts and imperialism are connected, Foucault (1993) and Hajer (1995) provided the methodology in finding story-lines and discourse to conceptualise the imperial influences. Through the analysis of folk tales it became evident that the indigenous Vietnamese understanding was formed by the spectrum from spiritual nature to the materialistic environment. The latter notion won strength over the former over time. First, Chinese Confucianism created a separation of humans, earth and heaven and therefore interrupted the unity of humans and their nature and environment of the local Animist beliefs.

The next imperialist influence came with the French and the change of agricultural practices. The change in practice also led to a change in ideology as it brought with it the move away from a basically subsistence economy to a profit driven capitalist economy and rationalisation of a scientific environment. Although discourses did not change immediately as shown through folk poems, the concepts were effective long term as they lead to adaption of Western values and philosophies as Marxism in the national liberation struggle. The socialist government adapted the Marxist materialism and further weakened the spiritual nature by oppressing spirit beliefs as backward mindsets threatening the development of a modern, prosperous nation.

Finally the Western eco-imperialism changed the discourses on environment and nature again. The paradigms of environmental realism, like sustainable development, and neo-liberalism, such as eco-system services, form the institutionalised and therefore hegemonic discourses today. The Vietnamese government adapted them in its policies and environmental organization implementing projects in local communities work on the basis of these mindsets. However, a small notion of nature and the harmony of humans with it is still apparent in both governmental politics and in local environmental projects. It will depend on how powerful Western organisations become in the future if the discourses will further shift away from nature towards environment. If Western-based environmental projects want to be successful in implementing environmental-friendly behaviour, I suggest that they focus on the spiritual nature again and try to emphasis intrinsic as opposed to the

economic extrinsic values as was already suggested for Europe in the Common Cause Report (Crompton 2010).

Further research is necessary to analyse today's understanding of nature and environment among the Vietnamese population more deeply. Interviews with Viet can provide a better insight in to what extent far the understanding of the major population has been affected by eco-imperialism and in how far this is only limited to the political field. Differences in age, gender, various ethnic groups and urban and rural population would be interesting to focus on, too. Also, there are more influences than the imperialistic ones that changed the attitude towards nature and the environment. Natural phenomena as well as catastrophes may as well have had an impact.

This dissertation merely provides a point of beginning for researches on the cross road of culture and environment in Vietnam. I hope that this historical analysis gives impulses for discussions about the current understanding and the implication for the design and communication strategies for the environmental mitigation and adaptation methods that Vietnam needs urgently.

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6.3 Pictures

Photo on title page shows the Long Biên Bridge in Hanoi, taken by Nguyễn Minh Hà

Map in appendices from Lonely Planet. Accessed August 11, 2014.
http://www.lonelyplanet.com/maps/asia/vietnam/map_of_vietnam.jpg.

Appendices

A Ethical considerations based on the author's background

One incident during my internship with a local NGO in Hanoi exemplifies well why I got caught up in differences of understandings between cultures. Back then, I had the- as I thought- simple task to brainstorm ideas for a project proposal on gender equality. From my experience with German organisation I brought a bunch of ideas together, from a concert to offering books in exchange for flowers on International Women's day. It was ten pages in total and I was proud of my good work. However, my Vietnamese boss read through it quickly, turned to my Vietnamese co-worker and said: "Do it again, Julia's stuff is too western, we can't do that in Vietnam." He dismissed everything. What did it mean, it was too Western? I was disappointed as I thought that my co-worker who had told me before that women biologically do not like beer and are calm should set up a project on gender equality. By then, I had already spent about two years in Vietnam. This time and my undergraduate studies in Asian studies showed me both: that some things are not that different in Vietnam and Germany and that others are even more different than I thought.

Returning home from work I would usually get on my scooter, put on my helmet and face mask. The rush hour traffic was horrible and after a while in Hanoi I started coughing from the bottom of my lungs. At home, we sometimes could not open the windows as the smell from the polluted river a few steps away from our place would make breathing a not-so-nice-thing-to-do. And I had to wipe the living room floor at least once a week as our apartment got covered in black dust from the street outside too fast.

I could list many more examples like this but my point should be clear: environmental problems are visible in Vietnam, undeniable. The fact, that Vietnam will be one of the countries suffering the most from climate change gave me the last incentive to decide that my postgraduate studies in Environment, Culture and Communication would end with a thesis that picked up the question in my mind I had since the day at my internship: Do my Vietnamese friends understand the environment differently that I do? Planning to work in the environmental field in Vietnam in the future, answering that question seemed the right thing to start with. Involving my inherited role of the "white imperialist" I hope that the dissertation will provoke some thoughts and incentives for environmental activities by Western organizations in Vietnam although it is yet another analysis written by a white middle class academic on a culture that is not my own but that is close to my heart.

B Map of Vietnam



C Overview over the History of Vietnam

Year	Event/Dynasty
Hồng Bàng Dynasty (Văn Lang kingdom)	2524-258 BC
Thục Dynasty	257-207 BC
Triệu Dynasty	207-111 BC
First Chinese Rule under the Hán Dynasty (with interruption by the Lý)	111 BC- 936 AD
Liberation Struggle by the Trưng Sisters	40-43 AD
Ngô Dynasty	939-967
Đinh Dynasty	968-980
Early Lê Dynasty	980-1009
Lý Dynasty	1009-1225
Trần Dynasty	1225-1400
Hồ Dynasty	1400-1407
Second Chinese Rule under the Ming Dynasty	1407-1427
Later Lê Dynasty beginning with the liberation struggle by Lê Lợi (with interruptions by the rule of Mạc, Trịnh, Nguyễn and Tây Sơn lords)	1428-1802
Nguyễn Dynasty	1802-1945
French Colonialism	1858-1945
First Independence	1945
French War	1946-1954
American War	1955-1975
Reunification	1975

D Declaration of Originality



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Clearly referenced, in both the text and the bibliography or references, all sources used in the work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fully referenced (including page numbers) and used inverted commas for all text quoted from books, journals, web etc. (Please check with the Department which referencing style is to be used)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Provided the sources for all tables, figures, data etc. that are not my own work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not made use of the work of any other student(s) past or present without acknowledgement. This includes any of my own work, that has been previously, or concurrently, submitted for assessment, either at this or any other educational institution, including school (see overleaf at 31.2)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Not sought or used the services of any professional agencies to produce this work	<input type="checkbox"/>
In addition, I understand that any false claim in respect of this work will result in disciplinary action in accordance with University regulations	<input type="checkbox"/>

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I am aware of and understand the University's policy on plagiarism and I certify that this assignment is my own work, except where indicated by referencing, and that I have followed the good academic practices noted above

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