Presidential Address:
“The Peoples of Asia”—Science and Politics in the Classification of Ethnic Groups in Thailand, China, and Vietnam

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Introduction

On a visit to a northern province in the 1950s, Hồ Chí Minh, who had spent many years during the war with the French living with upland peoples in northern Vietnam, asked local authorities how many ethnic groups were found within the province. Professor Đặng Ngữêm Văn, the doyen of ethnologists in Vietnam, has written that President Hồ Chí Minh personally directed Vietnamese ethnologists to find the answers to several apparently simple questions which in fact required scientific verifiability: How many ethnicities are there in Vietnam? What are they? What are their habitats?

(Đặng Ngữêm Văn 1998, 10–11)

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The author is grateful to Cheung Siu-woo, Stevan Harrell, Oscar Salemink, Janet Sturgeon, and Jane Keyes for their comments on drafts of the article. This article was presented originally as the Presidential Address to the fifty-fourth Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, Washington, D.C., 6 April 2002.

The "scientific" project of ethnic classification undertaken for political purposes in Vietnam beginning in 1958 was comparable directly (and not unrelated) to a similar project undertaken in China in the 1950s. Almost at the same time the Thai government, which, since the early part of the twentieth century, had pursued integrative and assimilationist policies toward peoples with diverse cultures living within the boundaries of the country, also sponsored ethnological research to determine the distinguishing characteristics of peoples living in the uplands of northern Thailand.

The recognition of marked differences between peoples living in these and other Asian countries is, of course, not a recent discovery. Records dating back centuries show that in Asia, as throughout the world, there always have been typologies of human variation. What is different about the ethnological projects of classification of varieties of peoples in China, Vietnam, and Thailand, as well as elsewhere in the world, is that they are predicated on an assumption that differences can be determined scientifically.1

In their book *Primitive Classification*, Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss note: "Far from being able to say that men classify quite naturally, by a sort of necessity of their individual understandings, we must on the contrary ask ourselves what could have led them to arrange their ideas in this way, and where they could have found the plan of this remarkable disposition" (1963, 9). They also observe that "[e]very classification implies a hierarchal order for which neither the tangible world nor our mind gives us the model" (8). I wish first to inquire into the genealogy of the *scientific* modes of classification used for peoples in Asia and then to explore the implications of the hierarchical relationships that are the consequence of the application of these modes of classification. It is my thesis that the science on which ethnic classification has taken place is fundamentally flawed. At the same time, I will argue that the political application of such science has resulted in the creation or reification of ethnic distinctions that have become significant in social relationships within these countries while also obscuring other processes of ethnic change that are occurring within and between countries. While I use Thailand, Vietnam, and China as my cases, the arguments I will make are equally salient, I maintain, to other countries, both in Asia and elsewhere.2

The Origins of the Scientific Classification of Human Differences

The science on which Vietnamese, Chinese, and Thai ethnologists based their research had its origins in scientific theories first developed in Europe that sought to...

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1I use the term *scientific* in this paper to refer to methods of classification based on principles first developed in Europe and later adopted in other countries. Stevan Harrell (personal communication, 26 May 2002) has pointed to the work by Laura Hostetler (2001), who has shown that by the late Qing, Chinese officials were using a systematic mode of classifying peoples on the frontiers of China. The principles used, however, were more akin to the natural historical schemes of Linnaeus than to those of post-Darwinian Western anthropologists. While pre-modern understandings of differences among peoples in all of Asia (and elsewhere) have influenced the implementation of modern systems of classification, Western-derived *scientific* systems were adopted as the primary basis for classifications undertaken in the twentieth century.

2Indeed, some of the same arguments I make here have been made already with regard to the development of ethnological research in India (see especially Pels 1999a, 1999b; Pinney 1990a, 1990b; Guha 1998). See also the essays in Bremen and Shimizu 1999 and Pels and Salemink 1999a for broader comparative perspectives.
explain human diversity. These theories were predicated on an assumption that the observable world consisted of discrete elements whose essential characteristics could be identified and then used for systematic classifications.3

The first theories that sought to explain differences with reference to human biology commonly are referred to as racial theories. Our genealogical quest for the origin of these theories leads back to Carl Linnaeus (1707–78), who, in the eighteenth century, first undertook a systematic classification of living organisms on the basis of their morphological differences.4 During the nineteenth century, Linnaean principles were combined with new discoveries capped by the work of Alfred Russel Wallace (1823–1913) and Charles Darwin (1809–82). During the latter half of the nineteenth century, the dominant approach to the study of human diversity in Europe and North America was with reference to observable biological characteristics. Numerous efforts were undertaken to refine a basic four-fold racial classification into numerous subtypes using biometric measurements.

By the early twentieth century, Western anthropologists had collected sufficient biometric data for efforts to make a systematic scientific racial classification of the peoples of the world. In 1925 the physical anthropologist Leonard Halford Dudley Buxton published The Peoples of Asia, in which he analyzed biometric measurements of crania as the primary basis for a racial classification of the people of a region extending from the Near East (meaning Central Asia) to the Far East. While the data appeared to make very precise distinctions among peoples, Buxton himself noted that “vast columns of figures and infinite measurements [are] imperfectly understood [and] subject to endless controversy” (1925, 4). Despite this caveat, Buxton nonetheless undertook to classify the peoples of Asia using such data. I will not attempt to review in any detail the results of his efforts because these have long been superseded by other systems of classification. I would like, however, to quote from some of his discussion of what he terms the aborigines of China:

[The aborigines] form . . . a very interesting group which has been little studied. They are usually classified by the Chinese as follows: there are four divisions, the Man, the T’u, the Miao and the Yao. These names are not very satisfactory. The Man—the Chinese word is more or less the equivalent of the Greek word barbaros . . . The word T’u means earth or native, practically autochthonous . . . The word Miao means plant or shoot, and again practically means autochthonous . . . Yao is a dog name, not necessarily a disgrace in Eastern Asia.

In Kweichow it is applied to an itinerant race of tinkers. . . .

(1925, 155)

He goes on to say this system “is too artificial to be satisfactory” and proposes, instead, a three-fold classification for the aborigines of Guizhou, Sichuan, and Guangxi into Miao, Lolo, and Chung-chia (1925, 155). For Yunnan, he says that the limited research

3See Oxford English Dictionary (s.v., “classification”) for the eighteenth-century origins of the idea of “classification.” I am indebted also to Oscar Salemink (personal communication, 2 June 2002) for pointing out that classification “assumes (1) the existence of cores or essences that are neatly distinguishable and thus divided, and (2) a focus on the boundaries dividing categories.” See Pels and Salemink 1999b, 18–19 for additional information on the origins of scientific classification systems for humans. Janelle Taylor has brought to my attention the book Sorting Things Out: Classification and Its Consequences by Geoffrey C. Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, which includes a good discussion of what they see as being the formal characteristics of classification systems (1999, 10–11).

4I use “genealogy” here, following Michel Foucault (1977b).
to date suggests that peoples in this region may well represent mixtures of racial stocks found in both Western and Southeastern Asia (157). Two points are notable about his analysis. First, he, like all his successors in projects of human classification, rejects premodern categories as unsatisfactory. Despite this, he still employs, as do all other scientific classificatory schemes, indigenous labels for the distinctions made on the basis of presumably objective criteria.

The efforts by others to classify peoples of Asia by race all have failed because of the fact that all humans can interbreed, and physical characteristics do not remain unchanged among the same people from one generation to the next. Gordon Bowles, another physical anthropologist, in his People of Asia published in 1977, a half century after Buxton's book, starts with what have now become well-established facts about human populations: "Human populations . . . possess a wide genetic potential which increases variation through chance mutations or new genetic combinations in each generation. . . . Completely stabilized breeding isolates . . . are exceedingly rare . . ." (2). Like Buxton, Bowles seeks to classify the peoples of Asia according to morphological differences. Human biology in the form of genetics had made great advances by the time of Bowles' work, and he eschews use of the biometric measurement favored by Buxton because, as he notes, "within a few score generations body shape and size can respond hereditarily to environmental pressures" (291). Instead, he uses studies of genetic information manifest in "blood group systems, serum proteins, certain glandular secretions and a limited number of enzymes" (296). The data collected from such studies also permit mathematical determinations of distinctions between peoples.

Bowles still continues to employ visible morphological evidence for some of the distinctions he draws. In particular he asserts that "the visible traits that distinguish most of the peoples of east Asia are so distinctive and dominant that the biological demarcation line can be drawn more definitely along the eastern and northern borders of south Asia than along any other frontier [in Asia]" (1977, 343). Nevertheless, when he comes to consider the information on genetic distributions among those peoples he finds that "East Asian [meaning both East and Southeast Asian] populations are so heterogeneous that it may not be an exaggeration to say that there is no single monogenic or polygenic trait that is common to all so-called Mongoloids" (344). He still persists, however, with his genetic classification of East and Southeast Asian peoples, proposing that they belong to seven population "groups" and 113 population "clusters" (346-48).

Most who proposed racial classifications in the nineteenth century assumed that biological differences were associated with differences in behavior. By the time Bowles—who was one of the last scientists to attempt a systematic racial classification of the peoples of Asia—published his book, this assumption had long been discredited by scientists. Genetic differences—as much more recent genetic research demonstrates—are relevant as conditioning factors for behavior, but they are not determinative.

Scientific racial classifications have never been considered in any of the states of Asia, with perhaps the exception of Japan, as the basis for understanding the diversity among peoples under their jurisdiction, even though racial thinking has been manifest to some degree in popular thought in several, perhaps all, Asian countries.5 However, an aspect of racial thinking—that there are inherent differences among peoples—is

also often associated with classifications based on culture rather than biology. I will have more to say about the problem of essentialism in ethnic classification later on.

In contrast to racial theories, Western theories of language have proven to be far more significant in the scientific determination of differences between peoples. The genealogy of the historical and comparative linguistic approach to classification can be traced to William Jones (1746–94), who discovered in the late eighteenth century that Greek, Latin, Gothic, Celtic, and Sanskrit shared a common origin. During the nineteenth century, a growing number of scholars began to build on Jones’s discovery that the basic sounds—what would later be called “phonemes”—used in these languages could be shown to have derived from a common system of sounds.

The recognition that all spoken languages employ a limited set of distinctive contrasts in sound and that these contrastive elements or phonemes are related to each other in a systematic way was, without question, one of the major accomplishments of nineteenth-century science. Although nineteenth-century linguists and their successors also studied the syntax or grammar and semantics of languages, systematic comparisons of phonological systems became the equivalent of genetics in tracing the historical relationships among languages and dialects and for distinguishing languages of one family from another. Such distinctions, backed by the very precise and quantifiable phonological data that could be elicited from informants, subsequently were made a primary basis for distinguishing among peoples. But just as the students of biological differences among humans had made the false assumption that these differences were associated with distinctive behavioral traits, so, too, many have made the untenable assumption that phonological differences are correlated with other cultural differences.

The genetic relationships among phonological systems are, moreover, not the only significant relationships among languages nor are they the best criteria for distinguishing among languages. As James A. Matisoff, one of the foremost Asian linguists, has written, “languages which once had no genetic relationship whatsoever may come to appear extremely similar, due to a prolonged period of contact and influence” (1983, 60). Thus, Vietnamese contains a high percentage of vocabulary borrowed from Chinese to which it is genetically unrelated; similarly, in standard Thai a high percentage of words are derived from the genetically unrelated Khmer, and many of these words are, in turn, derived from yet another genetically unrelated language, Sanskrit. What Matisoff is pointing to more generally is that languages, like other cultural traditions more broadly, are products of diverse historical influences, as well as genetic transmissions.

This point finds further support in the fact that many in Asia (as well as in other parts of the world) are bilingual or even multilingual. That is, they share “communicative competence” with peoples whose native languages may be very different (Gumperz and Hymes 1972, vii). Matisoff, speaking of lingua francae that serve to facilitate relationships among peoples who speak different languages, observes: “The fact that a language comes to be used as a lingua franca by large numbers of non-native speakers . . . is due . . . to the accidents of political and cultural history.”

Buxton observed in the introduction to his book that an alternative for classifying human difference to the method that he employed, which, he noted, “is not dissimilar in principle to that used by many morphologists for classifying other animals,” is “one is based on language that is predicated on the rapid advances made at the beginning of the last [nineteenth] century by the comparative philologists” (1925, 4).

I follow historical linguists in using “genetic” for the connections among phonological systems, although these connections are clearly not genetic in a biological sense.
Despite these problems in employing the assumption that language differences are invariable indicators of cultural difference, it has in fact become central to most approaches to ethnic classification.

Support for historical/comparative linguistics in identifying fundamental cultural differences that are transmitted in a genetic-like way from one generation to another also came from the nineteenth century from a new science, that of ethnology. The adoption of the root ethn- from the ancient Greek word ethnos (people) for use in a systematic study of human differences appears to have first occurred in Germany in the late eighteenth century (Pels and Salemink 1999a, 23). By the 1830s the term ethnography, borrowed from German (Oxford English Dictionary, s.v., “ethnography”) had been introduced into English and became the basis for the founding of British ethnology (Oxford English Dictionary, s.v., “ethnology”). Although both British and continental ethnologists gave increasing attention during the nineteenth century to the cultural manifestations of human differences, they continued to link these to biological differences. The preferred term of nineteenth-century ethnologists for different human types was race.

This is not the place to provide a detailed account of the emergence of an ethnology (or ethnologies) that fostered the projects of the scientific classification of peoples into ethnic groups. I wish here to focus on only two strands in this genealogical inquiry.

One strand begins with the work of the American Lewis Henry Morgan (1818–81). Morgan’s research on kinship established that systems of kin terms were fundamental to human society in a way comparable to the relationship of phonological systems to language. He went beyond this, however, in his book Ancient Society ([1878] 1985), to propose that all human societies could be classified on the basis of their social structures (family and government), economies (subsistence and property), and cultures (language and religion), as belonging to one of three evolutionary stages—savagery, barbarism, and civilization.

Morgan’s approach was deeply influential on Karl Marx and, even more, on Friedrich Engels. Marx’s notes on Ancient Society were used after Marx’s death by Engels for his Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State, in the Light of the Researches of Lewis H. Morgan (German original 1884; English translation 1972). Engels reformulated Morgan’s theory in light of, in his terms, “the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history [that] is, the production and reproduction of the immediate essentials of life.” Engels’s historical-materialist version of Morgan’s ideas subsequently were reworked by V. I. Lenin and Josef Stalin for the science of ethnology

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8I use “ethnology” instead of “anthropology” because anthropology can also mean the study of physical differences. I take ethnology to subsume theoretical commonalities between continental European ethnology, British social anthropology, and American cultural anthropology.

9Peter Pels and Oscar Salemink point out that because histories of anthropology typically begin with the emergence of a discipline, earlier work that was ethnographic tends to be ignored (1999b, 22–23). Oscar Salemink (personal communication, 5 June 2002) called my attention to the work of Vermeulen (1992), who has traced “ethnography” to the German University of Göttingen in 1770. Robert Cribb (personal communication, 10 April 2002) alerted me to the fact that the term ethnic (or ethnik) was used in English in the seventeenth century with a very different meaning to that which it subsequently acquired. The Oxford English Dictionary (s.v., “ethnic”) confirms that from at least the late fifteenth century and into the eighteenth century the term can be found to refer “to nations not Christian or Jewish; Gentile, heathen, pagan.”

10I take this quotation from an English translation of Engels’s preface to the 1884 edition as found on a website of the Marxists.org Internet Library (Engels 1884).
that was later adopted in all countries led by a communist party. Particularly noteworthy for our purposes is Stalin's widely used definition of a nation as “an historically evolved, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture” (Stalin 1953, 307). As Walker Connor notes, the “nation” in early Marxist-Leninist thought “was explained as a historically evolved phenomenon that comes into existence only with the demise of feudalism and the rise of capitalism” (1984, 7). Marxist ethnologists, however, subsequently used Stalin’s definition to differentiate between subnational groups that were—following the evolutionary scheme derived by Engels from Morgan—far from having reached the capitalist stage.

The second strand I will follow here is one found in non-Marxist Anglo-American anthropology. Until World War II, Anglo-American anthropologists focused their attention on peoples belonging to Morgan’s categories of “savagery” and “barbarism,” although the preferred term for such peoples came to be “tribe.” In a 1912 version of the influential handbook for anthropological research published by the Royal Anthropological Institute, the definition of “tribe” appears rather similar to Stalin’s definition of “nation.” A tribe is “a group of a simple kind, nomadic or settled in a more or less definite locality, speaking a common dialect, with a rude form of government, and capable of uniting for common action, as in warfare” (Freire-Marreco and Myres 1912, 156). Although they used different terms for the peoples they studied, there was a consensus prior to World War II among all ethnologists and anthropologists, Marxist and non-Marxist, that there were fundamental social structural, cultural, and economic differences among peoples that remained the same from one generation to the next and, thus, made it possible to produce scientifically precise classifications of different peoples.

Most ethnological and anthropological work undertaken in the pre–World War II period was in territories under European, American, or Japanese colonial rule or among Native Americans in the United States. The war, however, brought a major change in Western, and especially American, anthropology. It had prompted efforts in the United States to compile as detailed information as possible on the different peoples living in the areas, mainly in Asia, where American troops were fighting. These efforts led to the founding of the Human Relations Area Files (HRAF) in which systematic information from all possible sources was compiled on the different cultures of the world.

By the 1950s, American anthropologists began to use the term “ethnic group” instead of the older terms. The choice was made partially in reaction against the older evolutionary approach and partially because of a growing recognition of many different types of groups other than “tribes” as originally conceived. The combination of systematic comparison and the new terminology led to the production of such works as the HRAF-sponsored Ethnic Groups of Mainland Southeast Asia (LeBar, Hickey, and Musgrave 1964) and the associated “Ethnolinguistic Map of Southeast Asia.” But even as these apparently definitive works were published in 1964, the basic

1Stalin first published this essay in 1913. I am quoting here from an English translation.

12 In France, the term groupe ethnique had been used at least as early as 1937 (Malleret and Taboulet 1937), but it was not a common term. Oscar Salemink (personal communication, 5 June 2002) notes that prior to the end of the French-Indochina war in 1954, French ethnologists working in Indochina used various terms such as race, populations sauvages, peuples or peuplades, and, occasionally, tribu. The term montagnard was used specifically for upland-dwelling peoples in Indochina. For further discussion, see Salemink 2002.
assumptions which underlay them were being challenged increasingly in Western anthropology.

The challenge to Anglo-American anthropology can be said to have begun with the publication in 1954 of E. R. Leach's *Political Systems of Highland Burma*. Leach had set out before World War II to study a "tribe"—the Kachin—living in upper Burma based on fieldwork in what he thought was a representative community of this tribe. His research was reoriented, however, when during the war he traveled as a British officer widely throughout the Kachin hills. He came to realize that the Kachin, contrary to "the ordinary ethnographic conventions" he had learned before the war, were not a people with a single language, a common social structure, and an unchanging political system (1954, 281). Rather, the Kachin included speakers of several distinct languages (Jingpaw, Maru, Nung, and Lisu), had a social structure that oscillated between two different types through time, and were organized politically in relationship to another quite different people, the Shan. In other words, the Kachin did not fit the classical model of a "tribe" or that of an ethnic group being a "culture-bearing unit."

Leach's interpretation of the Kachin as a product of political relationships with other distinctive peoples foreshadowed the development of theories of ethnicity that emphasize the interactions between peoples rather than their essential differences. Leach himself only hinted in his study that colonial domination and Christian missionization were beginning to transform fundamentally the political relationships of the Kachin. His approach laid the groundwork, nonetheless, for understanding why the Kachin are, seemingly paradoxically, a significant ethnic group in contemporary Burma.

This conundrum can be understood in light of post-1960s theoretical work on the study of ethnicity. Since all humans acquire linguistic and the cultural habits—what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) has termed *habitus*—that make it possible for them to act in the world before they are conscious of doing so, such habits can seem to be essential to their very being (see Abu-Lughod 1991, 144; Hastrup and Olwig 1997, 11; Tapp 2002, 64). Whether or not some or all of these patterns are in fact taken as *primordial* (see Geertz 1963; Keyes 1976) or whether other patterns—such as another language or new occupational skills or acquired social status—will supersede the earliest learned patterns, depends, however, on the situations in which people act (Keyes 1981). The social recognition of significant differences among peoples depends, moreover, not only on the patterns that previously have been acquired but also on which patterns become salient in relationships between peoples who see themselves or are seen by others as being different.

In the modern world, nation-states have assumed preeminent roles not only in structuring the situations in which social relationships take place but more significantly in determining what differences are significant for the peoples living

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13In his 1954 work, Leach did not use the term "ethnic group," but he makes clear in a comment on a paper by Raoul Naroll (1964; Leach's comments included with the article) that he drew on his Kachin research to challenge a conception of "ethnic group" that preserved the same features as "tribe."

14Bourdieu introduces the concept of *habitus* for the "dispositions" that lead people to act in ways that reproduce the world as it is lived in (1977, 72, 78, 82). The habitus leads to the production of a *common sense world* (Bourdieu 1977, 80); that is, the world, although constructed, is naturalized (164). The habitus, becoming naturalized, generates a hierarchy of relations, a mode of *domination*. Since the habitus is unconscious, this domination goes unrecognized, or, in Bourdieu's terms, "misrecognized" (*méconnaissance*) (5, 21–22, 97, 133, 172–83).
under their jurisdiction. As I have written elsewhere: "Modern states or movements seeking to capture state power have sought to promote ('invent') dominant narratives about the cultural heritage and the destiny of those claimed to constitute a national community. Nationalist discourses have created an environment in which ethnicity has flourished" (Keyes 1997b, 153). The Kachin, to return to our example, are an ethnic group in Burma today because of the politics of ethnicity in that country (Smith 1991).

While biological, linguistic, and ethnological sciences can generate significant work about the differences among human beings, they cannot determine the differences between "peoples" or "ethnic groups." Such determination, as I will now attempt to show, has been a product of politics, especially the politics of modern nation-states.

Civilized Peoples and Peoples of the Frontiers

The politics of ethnic classification that began in the colonial era were predicated on assumptions about territoriosity and human differences that were different fundamentally from those held in Asia in the precolonial period. In the precolonial era, the empires in mainland Southeast Asia and China were separated primarily by frontiers rather than borders. In the precolonial era, fundamental differences among peoples were primarily matters of either Sinitic or Buddhist civilization, locality and kinship, not biology or even spoken language.

From Han times on, the rulers of the Middle Kingdom recognized no borders. Rather, those who lived on the frontiers of the empire were considered to be barbarians (man) who had not yet been civilized; that is, they had not yet accepted the order presided over by the emperor or the authority of a literature written in Chinese. Expansion into frontier areas was justified, and continues to be justified, in Chinese historical writing "as actions of a benevolent emperor/state acting justly with divine endorsement, to preserve order" (Wade 2000, 43). The barbarians were to be transformed—that is drawn "into the fold" (guihu) through education (jiaohua) or royal power (wanghu). "Those who remain beyond the pale of civilisation are 'outside of the transformed realm' (huawai)" (Fiskesjö 1999, 140). "Barbarians" were divided further into those who were "raw" (sheng) or "cooked" (shu): Those [barbarians] who submitted to Chinese rule but still remained culturally different were the 'Cooked' barbarians, set on the path towards becoming registered, tax-paying, and corvée-delivering 'good' subjects. Those among their brethren who remained beyond all forms of Chinese rule were the 'Raw' barbarians, those who were not yet 'Cooked' or readied for civilization" (Fiskesjö; 1999, 151). The "cooked" barbarians were ruled indirectly through what was known as the tusi system, one in which local chiefs, whose authority derived from the particular traditions of the peoples over whom they presided, acknowledged the overlordship of the Chinese emperor (see Wiens 1954, 215 ff.). Geoff Wade observes that "foreign polities were often simply considered as frontier

15Some borders were recognized in premodern times (see Wijeyewardene 1991), but I remain persuaded by the arguments of those who see well-defined borders as a concomitant of the creation of modern nation-states.
16This distinction parallels that of Leach (1960).
17On Chinese frontier policies and the civilizing missions undertaken in frontier areas, see Wiens 1954; Fitzgerald 1972; Harrell 1995.
18See also Harrell 2001, 36–37 for an additional discussion of the shu/sheng distinction.
polities further removed geographically" (2000, 31). That is, the peoples of these polities were barbarians who had not yet been transformed even into the "raw" category, although in the future they might well be.

The Vietnamese, after gaining independence from the Chinese empire in the eleventh century, instituted their own version of the frontier policies of the Chinese empire. The Vietnamese "push to the south" (nam tiên) from the Red River Delta into what became central and southern Vietnam from the fifteenth century on brought under their rule diverse peoples—notably the Cham and Khmer—many of whom adopted (although not always voluntarily) Vietnamese civilization. The Nguyễn dynasty, founded in 1802, extended the Chinese imperial model to yet other non-Vietnamese peoples within its empire. What is particularly noteworthy is that the Khmer were considered to be "border barbarians" (phiên) or "upper barbarians" (cao man), comparable to the "minorities of Yunnan, Kweichow, Sinkiang, and Taiwan in the Ch'ing period" (Woodside 1971, 236). Vietnamese efforts to "civilize" the Khmer ended only in 1863 when the French established a protectorate over Cambodia.

The Vietnamese court considered some other "border barbarian" peoples living beyond the frontiers of the Vietnamese empire as vassals (viên phương chủ quốc lại công) (Woodside 1971, 237). In addition to vassals in what is today Laos, the Nguyễn court also designated the Kings of Fire and Water (sorcerer-chiefs) of the Jarai (Gia Rai), an upland people in what is today the Central Highlands of Vietnam, as vassals (Salemink 1997; Woodside 1971, 237–38; Hickey 1982, 166–67). The chiefs of some other upland-dwelling peoples, such as those known by the Sino-Vietnamese names Tho, Nung, Man, and Meo in the northern highlands, were treated much like the tusi in the Chinese system (Woodside 1971, 244; Abadie 2001, 19).19

Alexander Woodside observes that applying the "hierarchical categories of the vast Chinese tributary system . . . to a much smaller world" led to a "magnification of the Vietnamese court's tendency to isolate minority peoples," while at the same time providing impetus for their sinicization (1971, 243). Many upland-dwelling peoples, however, were considered to be "savages" (mộ) (Hickey 1982, 154, 165; Salemink 1991, 1995, 264–65), much like the "raw" barbarians in the Chinese system, or those who had not yet begun to be civilized.

In those areas of mainland Southeast Asia dominated by Buddhist kingdoms, a different frontier model, one derived from Indian ideas of statecraft, prevailed (see Heine-Geldern 1956; Tambiah 1977; Wolters 1982). Although some Southeast Asian Buddhist rulers attempted to emulate Asoka, the great fourth-century Buddhist emperor in India, by becoming a cakkavātīn (universal ruler), no Buddhist ruler ever came close to creating an empire comparable to that of the Chinese. The reason for this lay primarily in the fact that legitimate political authority was conceived of as emanating not from an institution but from the Buddhist charisma (pāramitī, or positive kamma) of the individual ruler. When a particularly effective ruler died, his heir did not inherit his charisma but had to demonstrate anew that he also had his own very positive legacy of positive kamma from a previous incarnation.

As a consequence Buddhist kingdoms waxed and waned; they were, in S. J. Tambiah's terms, "galactic polities" (1977). Because Buddhist polities lacked the bureaucratic organization of the Chinese empire, moreover, lesser lords and princelings were able to maintain their own relatively independent polities in territories distant

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19The translation of Maurice Abadie's important study imposes an anachronistic usage of terms on his work. For example, the "races" of his original title (1924) is rendered as "minorities" in the title of the English translation.
from the courts of the great kings. Although some powerful Buddhist rulers—such as the emperors of the Burman and Siamese empires—attempted to extend their authority over smaller Buddhist kingdoms and principalities, they never considered these lesser polities as being outside the civilized world. They did, however, distinguish them either with reference to their capitals—for example, Ayutthaya (Siam), Ava (Burma), Luang Prabang (Laos)—or by terms that foreshadow, but are not equivalent to, modern terms for nations and ethnic groups. For example, the Siamese referred to Tai-speaking peoples living in polities immediately to the north of them as “Lao.” When frontier regions where Buddhist polities already existed were incorporated into these empires, local kings and lords usually were allowed to remain as vassals rather than be replaced by officials appointed by the center. For example, in the nineteenth century when the Vietnamese and Siamese empires were both competing for control of the Khmer kingdom, the Siamese sought not to civilize the Khmer as the Vietnamese did but only to ensure that the Buddhist Khmer king was a vassal of Siam.

Those in the Buddhist world did share with the Chinese and Vietnamese a view that there were uncivilized peoples living on the frontiers of their empires. The Siamese, like those of other Buddhist polities dominated by Tai-speaking peoples, used the term khâ for peoples living outside the realms (hâmûuang) ruled by Buddhist kings and lords. While many such peoples were considered “wild” (pā), some, such as the Karen living in the frontier area between the Siamese and Burman empires (Keyes 1979; Renard 1980), were recognized as being betwixt and between civilized and savage. They were comparable structurally to the “barbarians” of the Chinese and Vietnamese.

Those who were subsumed by the “civilized” Chinese, Vietnamese, or Siamese within generalized categories, such as man, moi, or khâ, saw themselves in different terms. For the most part, the distinctions they drew were based on locality—the people of a given valley or village in contrast to others living in other valleys or villages—or on kinship, that is, organized around lineages and clans. These locality and kinship distinctions, associated with a large number of different names, proved to be of much greater interest to the Western and local linguists and ethnologists who began during the colonial period to introduce radically new ideas about differences among peoples than the contrasts held by the dominant precolonial authorities among the civilized, barbarians, and savages.

The peoples who lived in the frontiers occupied what C. Pat Giersch (1998, 2001), writing about the Yunnan frontiers of the Chinese empire in the late Qing (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries) period, has termed the “middle ground.” The Qing rulers, although committed to imposing a uniform order on all areas and extending Han civilization to all barbarians under their jurisdiction, lacked adequate technologies and resources to do so. The limits of Han power made it possible for indigenous peoples living in these frontier areas to negotiate with, to trade with, on occasion to cheat or even violently resist, in some instances intermarry with, and yet other times simply to ignore the Han officials and migrants who intermingled with them in these frontier areas. Drawing on the idea of a “middle ground” formed between expanding settlers of European descent and Native Americans that was proposed by the American frontier historian Richard White in 1991, Giersch has shown how the peoples of the Yunnan frontier, Han and indigenous peoples together, constituted a “motley crowd” in which a variety of compromised (from the Qing point of view) political and economic structures and mixed cultural patterns emerged. Similar middle grounds were also found on the frontiers of the Burman, Siamese, and Vietnamese empires.
Peoples within Borders

In the period between the early nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, the map of Asia was redrawn—or, more accurately, the map of Asia was drawn precisely for the first time with reference to legally recognized borders. Western colonial powers imposed on all the countries of Asia, in Thongchai Winichakul's words, a new "technology of territoriality" through the instrumentalities of border commissions and mapping (1994, 16). The result was the replacement of older understandings of territoriality in Asia by new ones that delimited precisely the boundaries between what were now understood as distinct nations. The resulting "geo-bodies" of the nations of Asia predicated on this new territoriality created "effects—by classifying, communicating, and enforcement—on people, things, and relationships" (Thongchai 1994, 17).

An Anglo-Siamese border commission set up following the first Anglo-Burman war of 1824 to 1826 can be said to have begun a new era in both mainland Southeast Asia and southern China. As the British conquered more territory in the mid- and late nineteenth century in what became British Burma, they compelled the Siamese and then the Qing empires to enter into processes to demarcate the boundaries between their colonial domains and those they accepted as being under the control of another power. During the latter years of the nineteenth century, the British also found themselves confronting another colonial empire in Southeast Asia—one created by the French. Beginning with their conquest of southern Vietnam (which they renamed Cochin China) and the establishment of a protectorate over Cambodia in the 1860s, the French also began to insist on internationally recognized boundaries between the lands under their control and the lands beyond their domain. By the end of the nineteenth century, French forces had brought under the jurisdiction of the new entity of Indochina an area that bordered Siam to the west, Qing China to the north, and in one small area, British Burma in the northwest. By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, the boundaries between British Burma and Siam, China and Indochina, and between Indochina, Siam, China, and British Burma had been fixed by treaty.20

The fixing of the borders of Asia set the stage for yet another transformation—the conversion of some of the peoples living within these borders into ethnic minorities. A discourse of ethnicity eventually would eclipse premodern discourses of cultural diversity. While I certainly do not dispute the observation made by other scholars that ethnic differentiation is rooted in premodern distinctions (see, for example, Proschan 2001), I maintain that ethnic classification has been deployed as a technology of power only by modern states; in other words, modern states have set out to make legible, in James Scott’s (1998) term, the "motley crowds" located on their frontiers.21

20The boundary between British Malaya and Siam was also determined by this time, but I do not discuss peninsular Southeast Asia in this article.
21My argument, first advanced a decade ago (Keyes 1992), has been shaped by Foucault's (1977a) examination of how the modern state "disciplines" its subjects; by Benedict Anderson's examination of how the "late colonial state's style of thinking about its domain" entailed a "totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility to anything under the state's real or contemplated control" (1991, 184; see also Cohn and Dirks 1988); by Scott's analysis of the processes by which states attempt to impose "standard grids" (1998, 2) on the diversity of both humans and nature which they bring under their control; and by the work of other students of ethnicity who have shown, in the words of Brackette F. Williams, how "state, civil society, and nationalist precepts constrain processes of ethnic identification" and "influence modes of ethnic organization" (1989, 426).
Beginning in the late nineteenth century, European researchers, armed with new theories of linguistics and anthropology, began to undertake systematic linguistic and ethnological fieldwork not only in the territories under British or French rule but also in the Siamese and Chinese realms. Some of these researchers, like Auguste Pavie, Sir James George Scott, and Lt. Col. Louis M. Auguste Bonifacy, were scholar-officials employed by colonial governments.22 Erik Seidenfaden, a Dane employed as an advisor to the Siamese government, oversaw a significant ethnological research effort carried out by Siamese officials (Seidenfaden 1935). The foundational ethnological and linguistic research in China was carried out primarily by missionary-scholars, such as Samuel Clarke (1911) and Samuel Pollard (1921, 1928), who spent years working among non-Han peoples.23

Colonial governments gradually came to recognize the importance of anthropology as a tool for effective administration of the territories under their authority. H. N. C. Stevenson, a British official in Burma responsible for administering the relatively remote Chin Hills, observed in 1943 that “the science of Anthropology has been revolutionized and its importance to the administrations concerned with primitives raised to such a degree that most governments insist on their executive officers having some anthropological groundwork in their training” (vii).

Colonial regimes in the domains under their control used the results of ethnological and linguistic research to construct censuses of the peoples living within the borders of their domains. Indeed, as Charles Hirschman (1987) has shown in the case of British Malaya, the census became a primary tool for reifying systems of classification of cultural differences among the populations in the colonial territories. In British Burma and Malaya, the fundamental distinctions were labeled “races,” although the term was based more on cultural than physical differences. For example, the 1931 census in Burma categorized peoples into the racial types of “indigenous,” Indian, Chinese, Indo-Burmese (that is, of mixed Indian and Burmese descent), and other (Furnivall 1948, 118).

A similar use of “racial” distinctions was also employed, although to a lesser extent, in French Indochina. David Streckfuss has identified an article, “Les Races de l’Indochine” by A. T. Mondière published in 1882 and (as a continuation) in 1883, as the first effort to advocate for the use of anthropology for the colonial enterprise (1993, 127). His “races” were based not on physiological differences but on linguistic and cultural characteristics. The term race appears, as Streckfuss notes, to have been used by the French, and I think the same was true for the British, to designate “groups that had reached a certain level of ‘civilization’” (128).

The aforementioned British Burma census of 1931 indicates a distinction between races that increasingly became significant during the colonial period—namely a distinction between indigenous and migrant peoples. For J. S. Furnivall, whose 1948

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22Both Pavie and Scott directed very large research projects—the former mainly in what is today Laos and the latter in upper Burma—which resulted in reports (Pavie 1898–1919; Scott and Hardiman 1900–01) that remain invaluable for scholars. Bonifacy (1919) drew on his own research and that of others to develop the first ethnological course for French scholars and officials.

23I have here made only a few references to Western ethnological and linguistic research in China and mainland Southeast Asia between the late nineteenth century and World War II. For a detailed examination of the history of this research for China, see Guldin 1990, 1994, and for Indochina, see Salemink 1991, 1995. See also Pels and Salemink 1999b for a more general discussion of the relationship between colonialism and anthropology in Asia.
Colonial Policy and Practice remains a fundamental work for understanding the politics of cultural diversity in Asia (and elsewhere), the large unassimilated communities of alien Asians (that is, Asians who had migrated from other countries) in the Asian countries under colonial rule created conditions of pluralism that distinctly lacked a common social will (see also Furnivall 1939). The existence of peoples whose origins lie in a country other than the one in which they are now living became, and remains, one of the major problems for the politics of cultural diversity.

Both British and French colonial governments recognized that among the indigenous populations of the countries under their authority were significant numbers of people living in upland areas who were quite different from the dominant peoples of the countries. Such peoples were often labeled “primitives” or “savages,” although the preferred term in English writings by the end of the colonial period was “tribe.”

In a handbook synthesizing much information about Indochina published in 1943 by the Naval Intelligence Division of the British Admiralty, the following appears at the outset of a chapter entitled “The People”:

The population of Indo-China is not a homogenous one. Differences in physical characteristics, language, religion, and mode of life divide the people into several large groups within which there are many local differences in physical and cultural development. These groups include the Annamites [that is, Vietnamese], the Cambodians, the Cham, the Moi [upland dwelling ‘savages’ in central Vietnam, southeastern Laos, and northeastern Cambodia], the Laotians (a branch of the Thai), the Thai proper, and a number of tribes such as the Man, Miao and Lolo in the mountains of Laos and Tonkin. . . .

Apart from the ethnic groups which are specifically Indo-Chinese there are also those constituted by recent immigrants, including a large number of Chinese and small numbers of Europeans, Indians, Malays, Javanese and Japanese. Unions between such immigrants and Indo-Chinese, especially between Chinese or French and Annamites, have produced various hybrid groups such as the Minh-Huong, a Sino-Annamite cross, the Sino-Cambodians and the Eurasians of European-Annamite blood.

(Admiralty, Naval Intelligence Division 1943, 133)

This passage represents, I believe, the type of thinking about cultural diversity that was bequeathed to postcolonial regimes in the wake of World War II. Diverse characteristics are the attributes of groups, which include a number of different indigenous peoples, some of whom belong to tribes, as well as to a number of different migrant peoples, some of whom are hybrids. The anonymous authors of this work also employ the term ethnic to subsume all the different peoples within the borders of Indochina. Although the term as used here does not have the same meaning as it comes to have in the post–World War II period, its usage foreshadows the way in which the politics of diversity have been approached by postcolonial regimes.

Modern Classification of Peoples within
Thailand, China, and Vietnam

The independent regimes of Thailand, China, and Vietnam have instituted policies regarding the diversity of peoples within their borders that are predicated on

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24See footnote 12 for discussion of the terms used in French ethnology.
Western theories and linguistic and ethnological research by Westerners and Western-trained native scholars. But the translation of Western concepts and ideas into Asian languages has resulted in their acquiring significances not found in Western languages. These policies have been shaped, moreover, by different understandings of national unity within the internationally recognized boundaries of the modern states.

Thailand

I will begin with Siam—or Thailand, as it was renamed after 1939 (a change relevant to the story I am telling)—because it has the longest history of the three countries I am considering in confronting the question of what political stance to take towards the diversity of peoples within their borders. Unlike in both China and Vietnam where, as we shall see, diversity came to be construed with reference to “scientific” principles rooted in the work of Marx and Engels, few differences in Siam/Thailand have been accorded official recognition. Nonetheless, beneath the surface of what is often portrayed as a highly homogenous society are differences that are sometimes quite significant in social relationships. Table 1 provides a listing of ethnic or ethnoregional categories that today are significant in some social situations together with my estimates based on the 1990 census of the numbers associated with each category. Each of these categories has a genealogy that has been shaped by modern Thai nationalism.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in independent Siam, a project developed in connection with the creation of a modern state to classify the peoples within the domains of the state. Although this project—one which Thongchai (2000a) has characterized as being focused on the “Other Within”—had its roots in premodern views on the relationship of peoples to the political center of a kingdom and to Buddhism, it was also influenced by Western ideas that were recognized by the Siamese elite as associated with powerful regimes involved in creating colonial empires that included Siam’s neighbors (see Streckfuss 1993). The Siamese ethnographic project was initially one of what Thongchai (2000a, 59), following Mary Louise Pratt (1992, 7, 9), has termed “autoethnography.” Thongchai demonstrates that ethnography is not only a project of Western colonialism but also has been a means for “advancing a hegemonic agenda over dominated subjects” by a non-Western authority (2000a, 59). The Siamese project was also a “hybrid” one, “locating and juxtaposing peoples, including the elite themselves, in a new linear (progressive temporal) cosmic order called civilization” (Thongchai 2000a, 41; see also Thongchai 1994, 2000b).

If Western linguistic criteria had been used in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Siam would have been considered a very complex society. I estimate that the Siamese empire—which until the creation of Indochina included much of what is today Laos—in the late nineteenth century included within its domains indigenous peoples constituting at least 20 percent of the total population who spoke languages not belonging to the Tai language family. Well over half of the population was considered to be Lao by the Siamese, although this category included peoples speaking a variety of different Tai languages and dialects. In addition, a growing

25For incisive intellectual histories of the translation of Western conceptions for understanding differences between peoples into Chinese, see Crossley 1990, and into Thai see Streckfuss 1993 and Thongchai 2000a.
Table 1. Thailand: Ethnic and Ethnoregional Composition By Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic/ethnoregional Category</th>
<th>Other Names</th>
<th>Language Family</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percent of Population, 1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thai (speakers of standard Thai; includes most Sino-Thai or Lâk Cin)</td>
<td>Siamese</td>
<td>Tai</td>
<td>Central Thailand</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai klang (central Thai)</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Tai</td>
<td>Northern and eastern Thailand</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isan (northeastern Thai)</td>
<td>Lao</td>
<td>Tai</td>
<td>Northern Thailand</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khon Muang (northern Thai)</td>
<td>Yuan</td>
<td>Tai</td>
<td>Western Thailand</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khon Pak Tai (Southern Thai) (includes most Tai-speaking Muslims)</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Sinitic</td>
<td>Mainly Bangkok</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khamen</td>
<td>Khmer</td>
<td>Austroasiatic or Mon-Khmer</td>
<td>Northeastern and eastern Thailand</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai-Malay</td>
<td>Pattani</td>
<td>Austronesian</td>
<td>Southern Thailand</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen (one of the officially recognized hill tribes [chão khao])</td>
<td>Karenic</td>
<td>Karenic</td>
<td>Northern and western Thailand</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Tai-speaking peoples</td>
<td>Tai</td>
<td>Northern and northeastern Thailand</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kui, Kuy</td>
<td>Suai</td>
<td>Austroasiatic or Mon-Khmer</td>
<td>Northeastern Thailand</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong (one of the officially recognized hill tribes [chão khao])</td>
<td>Miao</td>
<td>Miao-Yao</td>
<td>Northern Thailand</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other hill tribes [chão khao)]</td>
<td>Most Tibeto-Burman; also Yao and small Austroasiatic groups</td>
<td>Northern Thailand</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Yuan</td>
<td>Viet-Muong</td>
<td>Northeastern Thailand</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other and Unidentified</td>
<td>Yuan</td>
<td>Viet-Muong</td>
<td>Mainly northeastern Thailand</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: The estimates in this table are based on census data and on the following: Kunstadter 1967, 397–400; U.S. Department of the Army 1970; Smalley 1994, appendix B; Skinner 1957, 181–90 (for Chinese and Sino-Thai); McKinnon and Wanat 1983; and Lewis and Lewis 1984 (for tribal peoples).

The population of immigrant Chinese accounted for as much as 7–8 percent of the population in the late nineteenth century.26

When the French in the last decade of the nineteenth century and first decade of the twentieth century compelled the Siamese court under King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) to recognize their authority over the area lying to the east of the Mekong river, as well as in two pockets on the west bank that would become French Laos, the court realized that according distinctive identity to the very large number of Lao living with the kingdom would provide justification for further French expansion. In part for this reason and in part because the court had embarked on turning Siam into a

26On the premodern languages in the Siamese empire, see Keyes forthcoming. The following discussion of the politics of cultural difference in Thailand is based on Keyes 1997a, forthcoming.
modern state, King Chulalongkorn and his advisors initiated a policy of what retrospectively can be called “national integration” (see Keyes 1971).

This policy was predicated on a vision of a “Thai nation” (chat Thai) that entailed a very different assumption about the relationship of peoples within the boundaries of the Thai state than that which had previously been held under the Siamese empire. The term chat is derived from the Sanskrit/Pāli term jāti, “that which is given at birth.” Until modern times, and still today in some contexts, chat is understood to mean a “life” in a succession of lives. The modern meaning, introduced by the court elite from the late nineteenth century on, is, however, that of a people who share a common heritage from the past.

The heritage of the chat Thai was conceived as so broad as to make possible the inclusion of most peoples living within the newly drawn boundaries of the country. First, all peoples speaking related but mutually unintelligible languages belonging to the Tai language family were by administrative fiat construed as sharing a common language. Second, all those who followed Buddhist traditions—even though the several traditions were different and even though adherents might speak non-Tai languages—were considered to share a common religion. These two premises made it possible to claim in the early twentieth century that at least 85 percent of the population were members of the Thai nation. Differences within the nation were then construed as regional rather than ethnic. Thus, people who might have been recognized, following Western theories, as ethnically Lao were instead construed as being northeasterners or northerners (see Keyes 1967). The use of regional rather than ethnic criteria for recognizing differences also obscured some significant differences. Thus, speakers of Khmer and Khmer-related languages living in northeastern Thailand were rendered invisible, and speakers of Malay who also followed Islam became a type of “southern Thai.” Although some indigenous peoples resisted “national integration” in the first decades of the twentieth century, the implementation by the 1930s of a compulsory system of primary education which used a standardized form of educated central Thai language as a medium of instruction and from which students learned the history of the nation in which differences were minimized, the vast majority of the people in the county began to think of themselves as being members of a Thai nation, no matter what domestic language they spoke or what local traditions they followed.

The biggest problem of diversity faced by Thai governments in the first decades of the twentieth century was posed by the existence of a very large population of immigrants and descendants of migrants from southeastern China. Migration had increased dramatically during the last half of the nineteenth century after the economy of Siam was opened to international trade in 1855. G. William Skinner has shown that during the period from the last quarter of the nineteenth century to the end of World War I, “the number of Chinese in Siam steadily increased . . . [and] the rate of increase in the Chinese population was consistently higher than the rate of increase in the total population” (1957, 80). He estimates that the percentage of Chinese, including locally born Chinese, in the Siamese population grew from 6.2 percent in 1870 to 9.8 percent in 1917 (79). The percentage of Chinese in the population continued to grow significantly until World War II, when migration from China was ended effectively first by the war and then by anti-immigration policies adopted after the war. In 1947 the Chinese, including both migrants and locally born Chinese, accounted for 12 percent of the total population of the country (Skinner 1957, 183).

From the beginning of the twentieth century through the end of the 1930s when migration from China effectively came to an end, governments of Siam/Thailand
followed a policy of assimilation (น้อยบ้า ผาสม กลม คลิ่น) toward the Chinese that was directly parallel to the policy of national integration adopted with regard to indigenous peoples (see Khacatphai 1972, chap. 3). Although in the 1920s many Chinese resisted the closing of Chinese-medium schools, the carrot of being accepted as Thai if they went to Thai schools proved very attractive to a large percentage of those migrants who remained and to their descendants.

As a consequence of these policies of assimilation and national integration, by the time Siam was rechristened as Thailand in 1939, the vast majority of the population of the country accepted that their national identity superseded whatever other linguistic and cultural heritage they might have. In the late 1930s, however, the ultranationalist regime of Phibun Songgram began to construe “Thai-ness” (กษัตริย์ไทย) as not confined to those living within the boundaries of Thailand. Luang Wichit Wathakan, the architect of nationalist ideology under Phibun, drew on Western linguistic and ethnological studies for a conception of a Thai “race” that included Tai-speaking peoples outside the borders of Thailand. The term used for race, ชองชาติ, combines ชาติ with ชน, another term also meaning “people.” Luang Wichit maintained that by tracing the genetic connections among different Tai languages it was possible to find a common origin to all the Tai-speaking peoples. But even more, those who share this common origin—traced back to the Kingdom of Nan Chao in Yunnan which, in fact, subsequent scholars have shown was not dominated by Tai-speaking peoples—are also assumed to share other characteristics (Wichit 1961).

Phibun used the conception of a ชองชาติ ไทย to launch a pan-Thai movement, or a มหาอานาชาติไทย (Great Thai Empire) as it was known in Thai, modeled on what “Hitler was doing with Germany in Europe” (Somkiat 1986, 271). This empire would unite “all the peoples of Thai stock, wherever they may be settled, into a single State with Siam [Thailand] as its nucleus” (Crosby 1945, 13). Although the pan-Thai movement collapsed with the defeat of Thailand as an ally of Japan in World War II, the conception of a ชองชาติ ไทย, a Thai “race” whose members shared some unchanging characteristics, has continued to attract considerable attention among some in Thailand, as we shall see.

In the post–World War II period, the question of diversity within Thailand reemerged for several reasons. During World War II, Thailand had attempted to redraw its boundaries to include territories in British Malaya, British Burma, and French Indochina. Although Thailand was forced to withdraw back to borders fixed during the colonial period, border issues still continued after the war. They arose because the outbreak of conflict between Viet Minh and French forces in Indochina in 1946, the independence of Burma in 1948, and the victory of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in China in 1949 led some peoples from those countries to flee or emigrate to Thailand. Most of these people could not be construed as Thai nationals or even members of a Thai race. In addition to issues of border security, Thai governments in the 1950s began to be pressured strongly by the United Nations and the United States to bring production of opium in the highland areas to an end. Thus, Thai governments began to ask questions about peoples living in upland border areas. Beginning in the late 1950s, Thai governments began to sponsor or draw on ethnological research in these areas to determine who were the peoples of the upland border areas. As a result, a formal classification of upland tribal peoples (ชีแอซ่า) was made, a classification that remains in place to the present time.27

27On the history of classification of “hill tribes” in Thailand, see Pinkaew 1996; see also Geddes 1967; Manndorff 1967.
During the same period, the Thai government became concerned about peoples who had entered the country without permission. The most significant population of illegal migrants in the eyes of the Thai government from the 1950s through the 1960s consisted of Vietnamese who had fled from Vietnam and settled in northeastern Thailand (Poole 1970). In addition, many members of hill-tribe groups also were considered to be illegal migrants since they could not prove they had lived in Thailand for any length of time. Following the end of the Indochina War in 1975, more refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia arrived in Thailand. While most of these were resettled eventually in third countries, their presence justified the continuation of policies that precluded illegal migrants from becoming Thai. More recently, concerns about illegal migrants have become focused on refugees and economic migrants from Burma. Policies regarding illegal migrants seek to ensure that the borders of the country continue to distinguish Thai nationals from others.

In seeming contradiction, since the 1980s the Thai have renewed their interest in those who can be assumed to belong to a chonchāt Thai, whether they live in Thailand or outside of the kingdom. Although this interest is no longer linked to an irredentist movement, it has led to an extraordinary amount of linguistic, ethnological, and historical research about peoples subsumed under the rubric of "Tai." Somewhat paradoxically, this work has also led to a reopening of the question of what different types of Tai peoples are found within the country. Ethnoregional classifications have been deconstructed in order to identify the different Tai-speaking groups, as well as other ethnic groups (chātiphan), living within Thailand. Associated with reopening of the question of diversity within Thailand has been the rediscovery of the Chinese links of a substantial part of the population.

China

In the 1950s, the new communist-led government gave Chinese scholars the mandate to carry out a systematic scientific classification of the diverse peoples (minzu) within the country. The results of the project, summarized in the following tables, appear to give a precise accounting of the significant cultural differences within the borders of China. But this precision, purportedly based on good scientific research, is in fact the product of particular politics of cultural difference.

The project of ethnic classification that took place in China in the 1950s has its roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. After 1911 the new revolutionary government at first perpetuated a late Qing perspective that the most significant peoples within the empire were Han, Manchu, Mongols, Xinjiang Muslims, and Tibetans (Crossley 1990, 835; Mackerras 1995, 44–45). These five groups were represented on the new revolutionary flag (Eberhard 1982, 151). This older classification of the peoples of China, however, did not remain in place for long.

A major change in thinking about human differences was introduced into China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century by Chinese who were influenced directly (as students in Japan) or indirectly (through reading Japanese works) by

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28See below for discussion of this research.
29The term chātiphan is an academic neologism that has been used only since the 1970s.
30I am indebted to Cheung Siu-woo of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology for his assistance in obtaining material concerning the history of Chinese classification of minority peoples.
Table 2a. Peoples Republic of China: “Ethnic Groups” (minzu)
Major Groups by Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Other Names</th>
<th>Language Family</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percent of Population, 1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Han</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Sinitic</td>
<td>Countrywide</td>
<td>91.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhuang</td>
<td>Chuang</td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>South: Guangxi</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manchu</td>
<td>Tungus</td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hui</td>
<td>Sinitic</td>
<td>Countrywide</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miao</td>
<td>Miao-Yao</td>
<td>South</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uygur</td>
<td>Uighur</td>
<td>Turkic</td>
<td>North: Xinjiang</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yi</td>
<td>Lolo</td>
<td>Tibeto-Burman</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>0.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tujia</td>
<td>Lolo</td>
<td>Tibeto-Burman</td>
<td>South: Hunan</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolians</td>
<td></td>
<td>Mongolian</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibetans</td>
<td>Zang</td>
<td>Tibeto-Burman</td>
<td>Tibet</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bouyei</td>
<td>Buyi, Pu-yi</td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>South: Guizhou</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dong</td>
<td>Kam</td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>South: Guizhou</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yao</td>
<td>Mien</td>
<td>Miao-Yao</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Zang</td>
<td></td>
<td>North: Manchuria</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bai</td>
<td>Minchia</td>
<td>Tibeto-Burman</td>
<td>South: Yunnan</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hani</td>
<td>Akha</td>
<td>Tibeto-Burman</td>
<td>South: Yunnan</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazak</td>
<td>Turkic</td>
<td></td>
<td>North: Xinjiang</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Li</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>South: Hainan</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dai</td>
<td>Lue, Pai-I</td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>South: Yunnan</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2b. Peoples Republic of China: “Ethnic Groups” (minzu)
Other Groups by Language Family

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Groups</th>
<th>Language Family</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percent of Population 1990</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 other groups</td>
<td>Tibeto-Burman</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 other groups</td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 other groups</td>
<td>Mongolian</td>
<td>North</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 other group</td>
<td>Miao-Yao</td>
<td>South</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 other groups</td>
<td>Austroasiatic</td>
<td>South: Yunnan</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 other groups</td>
<td>Turkic</td>
<td>North: Xinjiang</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 other groups</td>
<td>Tungus</td>
<td>North: Manchuria</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 other groups</td>
<td>Indo-European</td>
<td>North: Xinjiang</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 other group</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>South: Guangxi</td>
<td>&lt;0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Japanese thinking which, in turn, had been shaped by Western theories of race. The term minzu, based on the Japanese minzoku, began to appear in certain Chinese publications in the late nineteenth century, initially, according to Cheung Siu-woo, who has researched the Chinese sources, with reference to peoples of foreign countries.31

As Pamela Kyle Crossley (1990) has noted, the Chinese minzu was not a precise equivalent of the Japanese minzoku. The historical meaning of min is simply “people as a whole,” while zu “indicated a small group of people within a locality or a larger organization, and over time acquired the sense of kinship” (Crossley 1990, 20). The Chinese term minzu acquired new meanings when it began, probably from the 1920s on, to be understood with reference to Soviet theories of nationality (Crossley 1990, 20).

The full impact of Soviet theories of nationality, however, would not be felt until after the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. Internal conflicts and the war with Japan prevented any sustained attention being given to the relationship of peoples within the contested borders. Considerable ethnological and linguistic research, however, was still carried out during this period, by some foreigners as well as by Chinese ethnologists and linguists trained in Western approaches. A number of these, including the Western-trained Lin Yaohua (Lin Yüeh-hua) and Fei Xiaotong (Fei Hsiao-t’ung), would also play key roles in the minzu classification project undertaken after 1949.

In the 1950s, soon after the communists assumed power, “many Soviet experts [came] to China for the purpose of helping workers from the Nationalities Institute of the Chinese Academy of Sciences to identify the various national groups in China and classify their languages” (Moseley 1966, 20–21). Although Lin and Fei were then the leading figures in the institute, the Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist approach to the study of minorities had a dominant influence.

As the project of minzu shibie (ethnic classification) undertaken by the Nationalities Institute has been the subject of extensive analysis (see Deal 1971; Diao 1967; Schwarz 1978; Connor 1984; Tam and Wu 1988; Dikötter 1992; Harrell 1995, 2001; Mackerras 1995; Tapp 2002; Mullaney 2002), I will not undertake a detailed review here, particularly as some of the same issues that emerge from the Chinese case are also associated with the much less well-studied Vietnamese case. I wish here to note only a few salient aspects that resulted from the project. First, the minzu shibie project was undertaken on the premise that scientific theories and theoretically informed research would make it possible, in Thomas S. Mullaney’s words, to determine “the precise make-up of the nation” (2002, 2, emphasis added). Second, in contrast to the premodern distinction between the civilized Han and the barbarians or the Qing and early Republican recognition of the five major “races” of China, the minzu shibie project equated all minority peoples by designating all of them as minzu. As Frank Dikötter has observed, a conference held in 1962 determined to use the term minzu in all cases, “thereby ascribing a political status to all the minorities, whatever their stage of development” (1992, 109 n. 41). Third, and related to this, the Chinese departed from the Soviet prototype in not recognizing differences between two levels of difference, which in Russian are indicated by the terms narod and narodnost. In other words, none of the peoples of China would be construed as a people who could make claims to separate nationhood. All minzu were considered to be integral components of the nation of China (Zhongguo). Finally, the minzu shibie project resulted in the creation of ethnic groups out of the much more variegated cultural mosaic of China. Over four hundred potential groups identified on the basis of local distinctions were reduced to the officially recognized fifty-six minzu.

The minzu shibie project, as Nicholas Tapp has concluded, "looks in retrospect like one of the great colonising missions of the twentieth century, a huge internal ‘self-Orientalizing’ mission designed to homogenise and reify internal cultural differences in the service of a particular kind of . . . cultural nationalism" (2002, 65). The same conclusion also applies to the Vietnamese ethnic classification project.

Vietnam

In Vietnam, postcolonial policies toward the diverse peoples living within the borders of the country have been shaped, as in China, primarily by principles in the work of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin that the Vietnamese Communist Party had derived from the Soviet Communist Party. Although other principles were employed during the period from 1954 to 1975 when anticommunist governments ruled southern Vietnam, the reunification of Vietnam in 1975 under a government led by a communist party has insured that the Marxist principles prevailed.

In 1979, after the reunification of the country made it possible for ethnologists who previously had confined their attention primarily to the northern part of the country to carry out fieldwork in the Central Highlands and elsewhere in central and southern Vietnam, a definitive answer to Hồ Chí Minh’s question of “How many ethnicities are there in Vietnam?” could be given. The answer was fifty-four, a number that was close to, but slightly less than, the total of minzu in China. (A summary of the results is in Table 3.) The Vietnamese Communist Party, however, has departed from its Soviet mentor in its application of these principles. Although strong similarities can be identified between the politics of diversity in Vietnam and China, the implementation of minority policies has also had different consequences.

Key to understanding postcolonial Vietnamese policies toward the diverse peoples living within the boundaries of the country is the concept of dân tộc, a term that is cognate with the Chinese minzu. The term dân tộc can mean “the nation,” but its more usual meaning is to designate the diverse peoples or ethnic groups who make up the Vietnamese nation (Dang Nghiem Van 1998, 13 n.). When used in the second sense, the term is often subsumed in the phrase dân tộc thiểu số “ethnic minorities.”

The term dân tộc first took on political significance for the postcolonial era in the constitution written and promulgated by Hồ Chí Minh following his declaration of independence in August 1945. Connor, in his National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy, has noted that the Vietnamese Communist Party, after Hồ Chí Minh’s declaration of independence in 1945, abandoned a previous policy based on the Soviet policy of recognizing the right of self-determination for some peoples. “The constitution of the new republic, adopted on November 9, 1946, made no mention of either self-determination or the right of secession, the territory of Vietnam being declared ‘one and indivisible.’ Throughout . . . the document (Articles Four through Seventy), but with one exception, the non-Vietnamese were referred to as ‘ethnic minorities’” (1984, 108).34

33In fact, the first classification resulted in sixty-three dân tộc (Lã Văn Lô et al. 1959; Schliesinger 1997, 4). One would like to know if the number of minzu officially recognized as existing in China influenced the determination of the number of dân tộc in Vietnam. Because the population of Vietnam is so much smaller than that of China, the near equal number of Vietnamese dân tộc to the minzu in China shows that the Vietnamese ethnologists were “splitters” in contrast to the Chinese “lumpers.”

34Connor quotes from the English translation of the constitution as it appears in Cole (1956). David G. Marr notes that while “ethnic self-determination” had been promised by the Indochinese Communist Party in the 1930s and early 1940s, the emphasis in Party and Viet Minh publications was on the unity of all peoples (including the Khmer and Lao) in the struggle against the French (1995, 180).
### Table 3. Vietnam “Ethnic Groups” (đản tộc) By Size

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People (Vietnamese Name)</th>
<th>English name</th>
<th>Language Family</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Percent of Population, 1989</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kinh, Việt</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>Viet-Muong</td>
<td>Countrywide</td>
<td>86.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tay</td>
<td>Tay, Tho</td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thái</td>
<td>Black Thai; White Thai</td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoa</td>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>Sinitic</td>
<td>Urban centers, mainly in Ho Chi Minh City</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mường</td>
<td>Muong</td>
<td>Viet-Muong</td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khơ Me</td>
<td>Khmer, Khmer Krom</td>
<td>Mon-Khmer, Austroasiatic</td>
<td>Southern Vietnam</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nùng</td>
<td>Nung</td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H'mông</td>
<td>Hmong (Meo)</td>
<td>Miao-Yao</td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Đao</td>
<td>Yao, Mien</td>
<td>Miao-Yao</td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gai Rai</td>
<td>Jarai</td>
<td>Austronesian or Malayo-Polonesian</td>
<td>Central Highlands</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ê Đê</td>
<td>Radé</td>
<td>Austronesian or Malayo-Polonesian</td>
<td>Central Highlands</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chàm</td>
<td>Cham</td>
<td>Austronesian or Malayo-Polonesian</td>
<td>Central and Southern Vietnam</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S'n Chay</td>
<td>San Chay</td>
<td>Tai-Kadai</td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ba Na</td>
<td>Bahnar</td>
<td>Mon-Khmer, Austroasiatic</td>
<td>Central Highlands</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xô Đăng</td>
<td>Sedang</td>
<td>Mon-Khmer, Austroasiatic</td>
<td>Central Highlands</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 other groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Central and Southern</td>
<td>0.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 other Tai groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 other groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 other groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Central Highlands</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Kadai groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 other groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Northern Highlands</td>
<td>&lt;0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The principle of underlying unity of the diverse peoples of Vietnam is clearly set forward in a policy statement adopted in August 1952 by the politburo of the Lao Dong or Vietnamese Communist Party regarding ethnic minorities (đản tộc thiểu số). The document opens with the following statement regarding the diversity of peoples

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*I am quoting here from an English translation of “a captured enemy document” (Vietnam Communist Party 1970). I also have checked this document against a reprinting of the Vietnamese original (Vietnam Communist Party 2000). I am indebted to Frank Proschan for providing me copies of both the Vietnamese and English translation of this important document.*
in Vietnam: “Vietnam is composed of Vietnamese people (đan tọc Kinh) and many ethnic minorities (đan tọc thiếu số)” (Vietnam Communist Party 1970, 1; 2000, 36). The document acknowledges that cadres of the party have sometimes perpetuated “old prejudices,” shown disrespect for “the local people’s customs, manners and beliefs,” neglected “the ethnic minorities’ capability for self-liberation,” and demonstrated other shortcomings (1970, 2–3; 2000, 38–39). It also asserts that some of the minorities “are still very backward (lạc hậu)” (1970, 1; 2000, 36). Nonetheless, it maintains that the minorities have suffered primarily because of the oppression and exploitation of the French and their lackeys. The document enunciates a policy to “unify the ethnic groups [of Vietnam] on the foundation of equality and mutual assistance for independence, freedom, and common welfare” (1970, 2; 2000, 37).

The ethnological project undertaken during the 1950s was shaped by a distinctive Vietnamese nationalist interpretation of Marxist theory. While the diverse groups of Vietnam, especially those in the highlands, were viewed as being products of a universal evolution of social formations, they were also seen as sharing similarities that were a product of a unique national unification of Vietnam that began in the prehistoric period. In other words, non-Kinh đan tộc are assumed to share with the Kinh a common nước, a country. Lê Văn Hảo, who “taught ethnology in Saigon and Hue (South Viet Nam) until 1968 when he joined the resistance movement and became President of the Alliance of National Democratic and Peace Forces in the Hue . . . region” (1972, 9), described the ethnological project undertaken under the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the following terms:

To ethnology, an important branch of the social sciences, the task falls of studying the formation and development of ethnic groups and the characteristics of their material and cultural life in order to bring out their best traditions, reveal the backward survivals so as to liquidate them step by step, contribute to the reformation and promotion of ethnic societies, strengthen solidarity between ethnic groups as well as national pride.

(1972, 9–10)

With such a guiding principle in mind, the ethnologists of Vietnam set out to produce a “scientific” classification of the đan tộc in Vietnam.

A đan tộc was defined, following Stalin, as being “[a] stable community, formed over a historical period, involving relationships of identity in regard to language, habitat range, socioeconomic activities, cultural characteristics—a community whose members are conscious of their shared ethnic identity, on the basis of the foregoing relations” (Dang Nghiêm Văn 1998, 14). Although ethnic self-consciousness appears to be the ultimate criterion for determining ethnic divisions between local groups, those who undertook the classification of đan tộc found “self identity” too subjective to be adequate for a “scientific classification.” Nguyễn Văn Thắng, a Vietnamese ethnologist, observes in his recently completed dissertation in anthropology at the University of Washington that “in practice, the ethnic consciousness of members of ethnic groups was not fully respected. In cases where there were disagreements between the self-definition and the definition made by ethnologists, the ethnologists were instructed to use ‘scientific data’ collected among people or elicited from historical records to explain to the people in question who they were” (2001, 137). He goes on to describe that what actually were taken as “scientific data” were

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36I have substituted my translation “ethnic groups [of Vietnam]” for the English translation’s “the Vietnamese people and various ethnic minorities in Vietnam” because the original reads cac đan tộc.
"observable cultural traditions," such as language, residential patterns, and ritual activities. When there were disagreements between local groups and the researchers regarding the identity of a people, an identity was "imposed" on the group.\textsuperscript{37}

As in China, this classification had the effect of officially reducing diversity in the country because many local groups were compelled to accept an imposed identity that was different from that which they used for themselves. The classification also had the consequence of officially fixing diversity. But, as we shall see, the classification of \textit{dân tộc} has not proven to be the final answer about who are the Vietnamese peoples.

\section*{Border-crossing Peoples and Peoples across Borders}

The projects of classification of the peoples within the borders of Vietnam, Thailand, and China would seem, because of the \textit{scientific} premises on which they have been based, to have resulted in a precise fixing of who these peoples are. But these projects have generated a new problem of ethnic classification that undermines the premises on which they are based. Some peoples in the ethnic system of one country see themselves and are recognized as belonging to border-crossing communities. Others trace their history to migrations across borders. And yet others are connected by language, kinship, or culture to peoples in another country. The classificatory systems predicated upon the assumption that peoples belong within borders are thus rendered problematic by the connections of peoples across borders and peoples who cross borders.\textsuperscript{38} A full study of border-crossing peoples and peoples across borders is well beyond what I can undertake here. Instead, I will take three examples that raise questions about what it means to be "Thai," "Vietnamese," and "Chinese."

\subsection*{The Tai Outside of Thailand: The Case of the Zhuang}

If one looks at the tables of the ethnic composition of Vietnam and China, one quickly notes that the largest minority \textit{dân tộc} and \textit{minzu} are speakers of Tai languages. The recognition of Tai-speaking minorities in China and Vietnam has been paralleled in Thailand, as I have discussed above, by academic and popular attention to those who are considered to belong to a Tai "race" (\textit{chonchät}) whose members are found outside of the borders of Thailand. An unanticipated result of the reification of Tai-speaking groups within the borders of China and Vietnam has been the establishment of linkages across borders between these groups and Thailand. While several Tai-speaking groups, such as the Black and White Thai of Vietnam and the Dai (Lue) of

\textsuperscript{37}Keith Weller Taylor (2000) has shown the consequences of the reification of ethnic distinctions in his insightful paper on the origin of the ethnonym (and ethnic group?) \textit{Mường}. \textsuperscript{38}There is a now a growing literature on such border crossings and linkages across borders. I have benefited in my thinking about this subject from discussions with Cheung Siu-woo (personal communication; see Cheung 2000) and Janet Sturgeon (personal communication; see also Sturgeon 2000, n.d.) (see also Walker 1998; Evans, Hutton, and Eng 2000). A particularly interesting case that has received considerable attention is that of the "Hmong" (see especially Culas and Michaud 1997; Michaud and Ovesen 2000; Nguyễn Văn Thắng 2001; Prasit 2001; Smalley 1986; Tapp 2000, 2002) and the related case of the "Miao" in China (Desmond 1995; Schein 1999, 2000; Cheung 1995a, 1995b, 1996, n.d.).
China, might be chosen to illustrate the juxtaposition of the projects to identify peoples within borders and the project to identify linkages of peoples across borders, I will focus here on the case of the Zhuang because the Zhuang, in contrast to other groups, can be said to have been created by an ethnic classification project.\footnote{I have discussed elsewhere (Keyes 1992, 1998) the ways in which the Lue (Dai) of China and the Black and White Thai of Vietnam are viewed in Thailand (see also Keyes 1995).}

Although the term Zhuang (Chuang in the Wade-Giles system) has an ancient history in Chinese (Kaup 2000, 25–29), it was not used prior to the 1950s in a consistent way to designate those peoples of Guangxi and eastern Yunnan who are today recognized as belonging to the Zhuang ethnic group. In prerevolutionary times, Han people often called those living in the area simply as turen (local people), a counterpart to a variety of indigenous terms incorporating the word pou (person, people) (Kaup 2000, 28; Wiens 1954, 35; LeBar, Hickey, and Musgrave 1964, 230; Bauer 2000, 324).

These local peoples, speaking a variety of different languages and dialects, developed strong cultural relationships with the Han. The strong influences of Chinese culture made it possible for some, perhaps many, to pass as Han. Frank LeBar, Gerald C. Hickey, and John K. Musgrave, summarizing the reports of prerevolutionary studies, concluded that not only did these local people speak Chinese as well as their local dialects, but “their way of life [was] in many respects indistinguishable from that of the Han Chinese peasantry” (1964, 230). If they became literate, they either learned Chinese or used a Chinese-derived system for writing their own languages (Bauer 2000). In prerevolutionary times, these local people did not share a common identity as Zhuang (or anything else); “they had little or no knowledge of those living outside their immediate vicinity” (Kaup 2000, 53).

The CCP also did not conceive initially of the Zhuang as a united people with a common heritage. In 1953, however, as a result of the ethnic classification project undertaken by the party, the Zhuang became recognized as a distinct people—indeed, as the largest ethnic minority in China. The party, as Katherine Palmer Kaup has concluded in her study of the Zhuang, “for reasons driven by conditions both inside and outside Yunnan and Guangxi, created the Zhuang nationality by grouping together smaller ethnic communities and labeling them ‘Zhuang.’ Once indoctrinated through the central government’s massive propaganda campaign to build Zhuang ethnic solidarity, the Zhuang nationality began to take on a life of its own” (2000, 14).

The new life of the peoples of this minzu living primarily in an officially demarcated area called the Western Zhuang Autonomous Prefecture in Guangxi (after 1956 subsumed in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region) was as members of a group understood both inside and outside of China as being related to other groups of peoples speaking Tai languages. With the leadership of an emergent Zhuang elite, a panethnic Zhuang cultural heritage began to be “rediscovered” and presented through festivals and publications.

The increasing visibility of the Zhuang identity attracted the attention of scholars in Thailand who had embarked on their own project of study of the Tai peoples linked by language and cultural traditions. Since the late 1980s, a number of scholars have gone from Thailand to Guangxi to study the Zhuang (see Srisakara and Pranee 1993; Pranee Wongthes 1995; Pranee Kullavanijya 1995; and Pranee, Amara, and Suvanna 1996).\footnote{Cheah Yan Chong (1989), a Chinese scholar who was raised in Thailand, has also contributed to the Thai understanding of the Zhuang.} As a result, the Zhuang have been seen, in the characterization of two senior
Thai scholars, Srisakara Vallibhotama and Pranee Wongthes, as "the oldest of the Tai sibling group" (プラックタイ kao ke tiห sui) (1993, title page). This means that the Zhuang are presumed to have preserved cultural traditions that predate the influence of either Chinese or Indian civilizations on Tai-speaking peoples (Srisakara and Pranee 1993, 28).

Zhuang leaders now are finding valorization for their efforts to promote a distinctive cultural identity within the borders of China from a politics of identity located outside these borders. Further valorization of a separate Zhuang identity is now also coming from Western scholars for whom the Zhuang have become a subject of study (see Barlow 1987, 2000, 2001; Kaup 2000). And, tourists from Thailand and the West, as well as internal Han tourists, are beginning to be attracted to the reinvented Zhuang festivals. The Zhuang, thus, are no longer only a minzu within the borders of China; they are also a Tai people with transborder connections to other Tai peoples.

**Overseas Vietnamese**

Since the 1980s a category of people not subsumed within the classificatory grid of the Vietnamese began to become more important. The name used for those in this category—Việt Kiều—was similar linguistically to the term huaqiao used increasingly from the nineteenth century on to refer to people of Chinese origin who had migrated and settled in other countries. The Vietnamese term, however, has some connotations not associated with the Chinese one. Among the earliest communities of overseas Vietnamese—which is what the term Việt Kiều means—were ones established by those who had settled in Siam in the late eighteenth century. Much larger communities were established during the colonial period in France, in Cambodia and Laos (then also components of French Indochina), and even in some other French colonies, such as French Polynesia. By far the largest number of Viêt Kiều are those who fled from the thirty-year conflict between 1945 and 1975 and in the aftermath of reunification in the late 1970s. By the early 1980s, well over a million and a half people of Vietnamese descent were living in the United States, France, Australia, and Canada. Refugees from Vietnam had also gone to Thailand, where they were considered to be illegal migrants until the late 1970s, and to China where most, being of Chinese descent, were absorbed in the Han majority. In addition to communities founded by refugees, other communities were established by economic migrants in Russia and Eastern Europe, where they originally had gone as guest workers.

Although many of those who had fled as refugees were, and still are, very hostile to the Vietnamese government, since the 1980s a rapidly increasing number of Viêt Kiều have returned to Vietnam to visit and even to work. For this reason and because

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41 An English subtitle of this Thai language publication is simply "The Oldest Tai".
42 Jeffrey Barlow (1996) also has on the web a long bibliography on the Zhuang and related peoples of Vietnam, with sources in Chinese and English.
43 Although kiều, like the Chinese qiao, is conventionally translated as "overseas," including in Vietnamese-English dictionaries, the root meaning of qiao from which kiều is derived (probably via the Cantonese kiu), Stevan Harrell (personal communication, 26 May 2002) notes it is "residing in a place not one's original home."
44 Some of the large number of Sino-Vietnamese who fled Vietnam have chosen to identify in their new homes with communities made up of immigrants and refugees from China or Hong Kong. Some in the United States, however, have opted for an identity as Việt Hoa and some as Viêt Kiều. More research needs to be done on how such people of Chinese descent from Vietnam now living abroad relate to Vietnam.
since the 1980s, overseas Vietnamese, particularly those in the United States, have been the largest source of foreign exchange in the country, the category of Việt Kategorie has become far more significant than most of the categories in the official list of dân tộc.

The Việt Kieu are not, despite this name, simply Vietnamese living temporarily outside of the boundaries of Vietnam. Most who are classified as Việt Kieu when in Vietnam actually are foreign nationals—that is, they hold citizenship in a country other than Vietnam. Many also reject, as I have shown in another paper (Keyes 2001), the implication that their primary identity is Vietnamese or Kinh by insisting that they are Vietnamese-American or Vietnamese-Canadian—that is, members of an ethnic minority in another country. The existence of the Việt Kieu renders problematic the assumption that all the peoples of Vietnam are united within the boundaries of the country.

Overseas Chinese

The prototypical diasporic people within and from Asia are the so-called overseas Chinese (huaqiao). I say so-called because the term huaqiao obscures the fact that the migrants and descendants of migrants from China actually have come to adopt a variety of ethnic, as well as national, identities. In doing so, the fixity of the category of Chinese has been rendered problematic.

Writing of efforts by the Qing to extend imperial control over the southwestern frontier of the empire from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, Giersch cites evidence that many of the Han people who settled in the region married with local peoples. Although this sometimes resulted in the Sinification of the non-Han spouse, at other times the reverse occurred. “By the eighteenth century,” Giersch writes, “intermarriage and acculturation sometimes blurred the line between migrant and indigen” (2001, 85). This blurring was of concern to imperial authorities who sought to prevent it by outlawing intermarriage.

The blurring continued in the nineteenth century, however, as hundreds of thousands of Han from southeastern China migrated to Southeast Asia. A significant percentage of these migrants, who were almost always male, took local wives and settled permanently outside the borders that were established to demarcate the Middle Kingdom from other nations. At the same time, while Chinese authority did not extend to these overseas Chinese (huaqiao) communities, some governments sought, like the Qing, to ensure that migrants and their descendants remained “Chinese.”

The huaqiao and their descendants in Thailand and Vietnam, because of different policies toward them, have had different fates. In Vietnam, where despite the closeness of Vietnamese culture to Chinese, the Hoa (as the Vietnamese Chinese are called) have remained a very distinct, and sometimes discriminated against, minority. In Thailand, however, while some remain who are distinctively Cín (referring primarily to urbanized Chinese) or Haw (referring to a small number of Yunnanese Chinese who have established communities in the uplands of northern Thailand) (Hill 1998), the much greater majority of “descendants of Chinese” (Lük Cín in Thai) are unequivocally a type of “Thai.”

The place of the Hoa in Vietnam owes much to the history of migrants from China to southern Vietnam during the colonial period. Chinese had settled in Vietnam before this period, coming mainly as traders. Because most Chinese migrants married local people with no objections from either the Vietnamese or Chinese courts, they and their descendants became undistinguishable from the Vietnamese. The closeness
of Vietnamese to Chinese culture also facilitated assimilation, perhaps particularly because literate Vietnamese usually knew Han (Chinese characters) as well as the Chinese-derived ideographic system known as Chu Nom. The situation of the Chinese in Vietnam became radically different, however, after the advent of the colonial period.

After the French conquest of Vietnam, the southern part of the country—which the French rechristened Cochin China—was ruled directly. Because French business interests found Cochin China the most attractive part of Indochina in which to invest, the economy of Cochin China grew far more rapidly than did the economies of any other component of Indochina. Most significant for our purposes is the fact that the growth of the Cochin Chinese economy attracted larger numbers of Chinese migrants than did any other part of Vietnam.

The expansion of the economy created a demand for those who could play middlemen roles, especially in the rapidly developing trade in rice, and work in godowns and as stevedores at the ports. Migrants from southeastern China responded in great numbers to these opportunities. From 44,000 Chinese living in Cochin China in 1879, the number increased five-fold until the Great Depression that began in 1929. By the mid-1930s, the number had again increased, reaching 171,000 in 1936–37. In that year, the Chinese constituted 3.7 percent of the population of Cochin China, as compared with 0.4 percent of the population of Tonkin (northern Vietnam) and 0.19 percent of the population of Annam (central Vietnam).

Unlike previous Chinese migrants to Vietnam, the new migrants remained very distinctive. In part this was a consequence of the French adoption of a romanized orthography for writing Vietnamese, which meant that Vietnamese and Chinese no longer shared a common written language. The French also recognized the congrégations organized by the Chinese for the migrants from different parts of southeastern China who shared a common speech. They further allowed the Chinese to establish separate schools, “the largest of these schools [being] at Cho Lon in Cochin China” (Admiralty, Naval Intelligence Division 1943, 159). In short, colonial rule created conditions that led to the development of a very distinctive Chinese population in Cochin China. The Chinese congrégations would not be abolished until 1960, several years after the establishment of the independent Republic of Vietnam (Schrock et al. 1966, 931).

By the time Vietnam was reunified in 1976 under the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, the Hoa of southern Vietnam clearly were ethnically very distinctive. Because of their dominant role in the economy, the government’s policy of eliminating private enterprise was targeted primarily at the Hoa. The status of the Hoa in Vietnam became even more difficult after China invaded northern Vietnam in 1979 to punish the country for its invasion of Cambodia. For these reasons, between 1976 and 1981, hundreds of thousands of Hoa fled the country, making up the majority of the so-called boat people. What is particularly notable is that the vast majority of the 300,000 Hoa living in northern Vietnam who had been the most

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45I base my account of the expansion of the Chinese community in Cochin China on Robequain (1944, 32–44) and Schrock et al. (1966, 931–34). Martin J. Murray has noted that rice production in Cochin China primarily for export expanded ten-fold between 1870 and 1930: “Chinese merchants dominated every aspect of the rice trade, except the actual cultivation undertaken by tenants” (1980, 449). The statistics on the percentage of Chinese in the population of various parts of Vietnam in 1936 to 1937 are from Admiralty, Naval Intelligence Division (1943, 212), which took the data from the Gouvernement General de l’Indochine 1937.

assimilated of any of the Hoa in the country fled to China after the Chinese invasion of Vietnam.

In the early 1980s, the government of Vietnam moved to halt what was becoming, de facto although not in intention, the ethnic cleansing of the Hoa in Vietnam. In 1982 a decree affirmed that the Hoa were Vietnamese citizens with the same rights and duties as all other citizens in the country. And in 1986 another decree lifted some remaining restrictions on Hoa entry into certain occupations such as the armed forces (Amer 1997, 21–22). Nonetheless, the Hoa remaining in Vietnam today still constitute a distinctive ethnic group.

The much larger community of descendants of Chinese in Thailand provides a marked contrast with the Hoa. As discussed above, policies instituted in Siam in the early decades of the twentieth century led to the assimilation of a high percentage of Chinese migrants and their descendants. As in Vietnam, most of those who have filled roles of economic middlemen and middle- and large-scale capitalists have been people of Chinese descent. From the 1930s on, members of the Thai elite—most notably those in the military who dominated Thai politics through the 1970s—began to forge alliances, often through intermarriage, with Chinese businessmen. Intermarriage in Thailand, as in southern China, contributed to the blurring of identities.47

But not all descendants of Chinese migrants, including many who hold Thai citizenship, lost their distinctiveness. Many retained a distinctive Chinese identity, particularly those living in Bangkok’s Yaowaraj district, often referred to as Bangkok’s Chinatown, as well as businessmen who had strong links with firms (often kin-based) in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Malaysia, and, after the reopening of relations between Thailand and the PRC in 1975, in mainland China. This usually has been associated with speaking one or another Chinese dialect. By the 1970s, the descendants of Chinese in Thailand were divided between those who remained distinctively Chinese—those whom the Thai refer to as Cín or pejoratively as Cek—and those identify as and are recognized as Thai but of Chinese ancestry—usually called Lük Cín, literally children (or descendants) of Chinese.48 In contrast to the Cín, the Lük Cín usually speak standard Thai as their primary language—indeed, I estimate that Lük Cín make up a significant percentage of those who speak standard Thai as their first language.

During the 1980s and especially during the 1990s, the military has been compelled to withdraw from Thai politics while businessmen have become increasingly dominant through their control of parliament. These businessmen have been predominantly Lük Cín. In 1999, according to one estimate, two-thirds of the members of parliament were of Chinese descent (Soh 1999), and on the basis of my own discussions with colleagues in Thailand about the election in early 2001, I would estimate that the percentage is today even higher. Even more striking, given the fate of Chinese in other countries including Vietnam, three of the last four prime ministers of Thailand—Banharn Silpa-Archa, Chuan Leekpai, and Thaksin Shinawatra—are Lük Cín and identify themselves as being of Chinese descent.

The rise to power of the Lük Cín has been associated with a new assertiveness about the Chinese contribution to the development of the Thai nation. In 1987, Sujit Wongthes, the Lük Cín intellectual and publisher of the influential journal, 47 On the role of the Chinese in the Thai economy, see Skinner 1957, 1958; and Suehiro 1989, 1992. On the history of the Chinese in Thailand prior to the 1970s, see Kasian 1992; Landon 1941; Coughlin 1952; as well as Skinner 1957.

Sinlapawatthanatham (Arts and culture), published in the journal his “Cek pon Lào” (Chinese mixed with Lao). This work, in which he argued that Thai national culture is actually a product of a synthesis of indigenous Lao (not Siamese) and migrant Chinese cultures, has become something of a manifesto for those of Chinese descent in Thailand who seek to be unequivocally Thai while still recognizing their Chinese heritage.

Conclusion

Who are the Chinese? The Vietnamese? The Thai? As a result of the fixing of the boundaries around countries that are today called China, Vietnam, and Thailand, the rulers of these countries had to confront the fact that diverse peoples—that is, peoples with different linguistic and cultural attributes—lived within these boundaries. Taking their lead from what seemed to be compelling scientific theories developed in the West, the rulers of these countries set out to determine precisely who lived under their authority. As the tables I have presented indicate, these projects each resulted in the official recognition of many peoples whose ancestors were invisible to the rulers of premodern empires or who were considered by them to be barbarians or savages.

While these modern systems of classification still entail assumptions of hierarchy, they also have the consequence of establishing each of the states as being pluralistic or multiethnic. An upland-dwelling Hani or Yao in Yunnan has as much right to claim to be Chinese as does the plains-dwelling Han anywhere in China. So too a Muslim Cham in central Vietnam or a Theravada Buddhist Khmer in southern Vietnam can make the same claim to being Vietnamese as can the Kinh living in the Red River delta. In the same way, Malay-speaking Muslims in Pattani in southern Thailand, upland-dwelling Karen in northern Thailand, not to mention the Lao of northeastern Thailand and the Lük Cin, are as much Thai as are the Siamese of Central Thailand.

Officially sanctioned pluralism has not eliminated older ideas of hierarchy that find expression in prejudices shaping everyday encounters between peoples who see each other as fundamentally different because of the persistence of old stereotypes. Moreover, some peoples living within the boundaries of these countries cannot make claims to belonging to the nation of the country in which they reside. Some are expatriates who are temporarily employed with foreign businesses, while others—like the hundreds of thousands of people from Burma living on the western border of Thailand—officially are considered illegal migrants. And some, especially in China (for example, Tibetans, Uygurs, and others) reject the national identity of the country in which they are legally citizens. For our purposes, however, what is significant is that Chinese-ness, Vietnamese-ness, and Thai-ness as national identities can be claimed by peoples with diverse cultural and linguistic heritages.

The byproduct of the undertaking of a scientific classification of diversity of peoples within the boundaries of states has been a clear distinction between the nation and the peoples or ethnic groups that are taken as belonging to this nation. This again

49 See, in this regard, Susan D. Blum’s study of how Han in Yunnan province regard members of minority minzu with a combination of superiority and “appreciation of the ethnic others’ greater simplicity and ruggedness” (2001, 68). See also Weisman 2000 and Pinkaew 1996 regarding the prejudices that many Thai hold toward those of the “dark” race and hill-dwelling peoples.
has another unintended consequence. What is Chinese-ness or Vietnamese-ness or Thai-ness if it is accepted that some who make claims to these identities are not citizens of China, Vietnam, or Thailand? The existence of communities of peoples who assert identities as Chinese but are citizens of Thailand or Vietnam, as Vietnamese but are citizens of the United States or France, of communities of peoples who are recognized by people in Thailand as being Tai but not Thai, renders problematic the official national ideologies of each of these countries.

To conclude, I have demonstrated that the question of who are the peoples of Asia cannot be answered with scientific certainty. At the same time, I have also shown that the political adoption of certain scientific theories regarding human diversity has generated new questions about who the peoples of Asia are. The project of classifying the peoples of Asia will thus forever remain a work in progress.

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