

**”Nature and Human in Sino-Vietnamese conceptions and practices. Articulations between Asian vernacular ”analogism” and Western modern ”naturalism” modes of identification”**

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Christian CULAS

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Abstract:

One important finding about nature in Vietnam is there are only little studies about the ideas-conceptions of nature and about the relations between human and non-human in Vietnam. My main objective is to describe and to understand what are the conceptions and practices of nature in Vietnam today. To attempt to reconstruct the conceptions of the world and the relationships humans / nature (or “non human” (Latour 2004) in Vietnam, I will proceed in two ways. First, I will give an overview of historical landmarks of the conceptions of relations human/nature and human/human (politics), because Vietnam is one important place where traditional Chinese mode of identification and worldview (“analogism” Descola 2005) and modern Western mode of identification and worldview meet (“naturalism”) and build a new synthetic and hybrid way of thought and action. Second, some examples of what nature means in Sino-Vietnamese conceptions and practices will show the diversity of ways of thinking and acting nature. Historical process that built the current conceptions and practices of nature in Vietnam is deeply syncretic and hybrid.

Three examples selected will help us to understand what are the diversity of Vietnamese conceptions of nature: a) Taoist conceptions of Nature where man can learn and experience to reach nature through practice. b) Man can integrate some powers of nature by eating them. c) In Vietnamese conceptions and actions nature can be built by and around the human in “nature garden”, similar in many points to Japanese notion and landscape calls “*Satoyama*” where biodiversity is built and maintained by human.

These examples of contextualized conceptions and actions with nature can show how the analogical tradition can articulate, integrate, and oppose with different forms of naturalism in certain specific situations to build the current conceptions and practices of nature in Vietnam.

Key words:

Vietnam, China, Nature, Relation human/non-human, Ontologies, Analogism/Naturalism

## **Introduction**

### ***1) Finding***

According to surveys I conducted since 2006 in Northern and Southern Vietnam<sup>1</sup> and on the basis of the literature, we find that the vast majority of projects for the protection of natural areas or the environment in general applied in Vietnam are failures. (O'Rourke 1995, 2001 ; Zink 2013).

The reasons for these failures are multiple. Some are related to the orientations of Vietnamese public policies. Vietnam, like many other countries<sup>2</sup>, faces a dilemma in its development process. In order to maintain a high rate of economic growth, Vietnamese governments have chosen to promote industrialization and intensive agriculture at the expense of protecting the environment. (Bass et al. 2010 ; O'Rourke 1995 ; Sikor and O'Rourke 1996). Other reasons are also related to the functioning of the information-communication system and control of violations of environmental protection laws. In short, the complexity of the laws and the very frequent corruption among civil servants are obvious obstacles to effective protection (Do 2009 ; Culas forthcoming 2018).

Based on field studies and a wide range of literature on this topic, I can say there is one of the reasons usually forgotten or missing by researchers and experts: It is about the ways of thinking and acting the relations between human and nature (or non-human) by Vietnamese population.

My paper focuses on some specificities of nature's conceptions and practices in Vietnam in order to better understand the difficulties of applying environmental protection projects in this country. It is interesting to note that all the environmental protection projects applied in Vietnam have been conceived and designed on a Western philosophical and ontological reference scheme. Implicitly, the populations involved locally in these projects are supposed to have the same conceptions of nature as Westerners...

First I need to explain what "Western philosophical and ontological reference scheme" means. Historical and philosophical researches that studied the construction of the idea of "nature" in the West has shown that the exclusive division between humans (culture, language, thought) and nature (without culture, without language, without thought ) is a production from the Renaissance (14th to 16th centuries) and the beginnings of modern science in Europe (Descola 2005; Latour 2004). In short, from this period, we observe a formalization of the thought of nature according to a dual and exclusive model: Culture / Nature, Human / Non-human. This ontological schema or "modes of identification" developed in the West to think nature is called "naturalism" because it essentializes nature as an entity distinct from humans. While in China, Vietnam and Japan, if the division Nature / Culture exists in some forms, it is less rigid and especially many bridges are thought to connect humans and non-humans by correspondence and analogies (Bruun and Kalland 1992).

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<sup>1</sup> Lao Cai and Kien Giang provinces.

<sup>2</sup> See extreme pollution cases of Chinese cities.

The central idea of this approach is that each culture, each human group or society will classify humans and non-humans<sup>3</sup> according to a large number of criteria (same physical, same ancestors, same kinship system, same spirit, etc.). This broad set of criteria can be summarized into two main distinctions: resemblance / difference of interiority (spirit) and resemblance / difference of physicalities (body). The synthesis of these ontological possibilities is presented in the diagram below.

	<b>Modes of identification</b>	<b>Modes of identification</b>	
- Resemblance of interiority (spirit) - Difference of physicalities (body)	<b>Animism</b> (South America, North America, Siberia...)	<b>Totemism</b> (Australia, Africa...)	- Resemblance of interiority (spirit) - Resemblance of physicalities (body)
- Difference of interiority (spirit) - Resemblance of physicalities (body)	<b>Naturalism</b> (Western countries...)	<b>Analogism</b> (China, Vietnam, Japan, India, South America...)	Difference of interiority (spirit) - Difference of physicalities (body)

Fig. 1.1 Scheme of modes of identification possible (Descola 2005: 221, adapted by Culas 2018)

The above-mentioned theoretical framework will be the basis of our demonstration. The thinking and practice of Chinese and Vietnamese in relation to nature are globally classified in the "analogism" because in this mode of relations between human and non-human we observe that "Everything is constantly connected with everything". The distinctions between humans and non-humans are not key of thinking in Sino-Vietnamese conceptions. Because all the categories of actors in the world (human and non-human) are all different, then the Chinese and Vietnamese modes of identification work on the mapping of these different categories, this is what is called "analogism". It is by analogy that the different categories of the world are strongly linked to make sense, to make system. But for this very diversified world to be thinkable, these analogical modes of identification have created many forms of hierarchies between beings. The first of them applies to the cosmos which is divided into three levels: the highest is the "Sky", the middle level is that of "Men" and the lower level that of the "Earth". The classic Chinese formula is "Put the man in the center" (以人为本) » (Ouyang 2008: 1). In the same logic, China, Vietnam and Japan, have built social and linguistic hierarchies between men. As evidenced by the different levels of Vietnamese terms, the use of neutral "I" and "you" (as in English) are most often replaced by classificatory terms such as "older brother", "younger brother", "older aunt", "younger aunt", etc. In these systems of thought, the person is not isolated by the words that designate her, to name a person is to call to the all social, cultural and symbolic hierarchy that gives her his complete position and status (Berque 2014, 2014; Mus 1988).

## 2) *State of art about Vietnam*

The questions we raise here about the thought and actions of and about nature have been analysed in different ways for a long time in China<sup>4</sup> and Japan<sup>5</sup>, but they are still very little

<sup>3</sup> Since B. Latour (2004), we prefer the notion of "non-human", which is more descriptive and not ideological than "nature", because the opposition between human and nature is not necessary. The non-human can be an object (a mountain, a river, a car ...), a living being (plant, animal), an arrangement or a spirit or a god.

<sup>4</sup> For example, in China, the study of relationships human / nature is very old, as shown by a poet and philosopher, Tao Yuanming (365-427) which is a symbol of classical Chinese study about nature (Lu 2017; Lee 2005)

studied and there is no intellectual Vietnamese production on the relationships between human and nature.

I would like to start with a brief state of knowledge in the literature on the relationships between humans and non-humans in Vietnam.

Unlike China and Japan where there are philosophical and religious schools that study the relationship between men and nature for several centuries. The first works on the question of nature in Vietnam dated from the French colonial period<sup>6</sup> (1858-1945) (Przyluski 1909, Cadière 1918; Stein 1942). These are usually ethnographic studies of pagoda gardens and tree cults. In the years 1980 to 2000 with the economic opening of the country, new studies deal with these topics. The most remarkable works based on precise field surveys are those of ethnobotanist Dinh Trong Hieu<sup>7</sup>. As the titles of these articles can show "Signs-Nature, Signatures, Biodiversity: the 'religious groves' in Vietnam. For a concept of 'green vestiges' " (1997) and "Gardens in Vietnam: the nature between cultural representations and cultural practices" (2000). Two of his articles directly address broader issues such as "The Impacts of the Communist or Marxist-Leninist Development Model on the Environment in Vietnam" (1990) and "The Relationship between the Social Sciences and Biodiversity" (2003).

For the years 2000, we note an original sociological survey by questionnaire of twenty people in Hanoi (Pham and Rambo 2003). The main objective of this innovative study was "Comparative studies of public perceptions of environmental problems and environmental consciousness in Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam". The secondary objectives were to know how people perceive environmental responsibilities between individuals, governments and large private companies. The main weakness of this survey is that it only records responses to an environmental questionnaire. This is not enough to know the real practices of the Vietnamese.

We must also point out Frédéric Thomas's Ph.D thesis about *The forest exposed: anthropological essay on the construction of a tropical scientific object: "Indochinese forests and woods"*, (2003). From a historical point of view, several chapters approach the Chinese and Vietnamese cosmologies on forests and on nature and also introduce the diversity of conceptions of nature in Vietnam by highlighting the cosmologies and rites of certain ethnic groups of Highland of Central Vietnam.

Except for Dinh Trong Hieu's works, there is to my knowledge no serious field study that deals with the relationship of men to nature among Kinh (majority group in Vietnam). On the other hand, some anthropologists specializing in "minority" mountain ethnic groups have studied the relationships between local cosmologies and the conceptions of nature<sup>8</sup>. With

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<sup>5</sup> Japan concentrates several original initiatives. The most important is certainly "International Partnership for the Satoyama Initiative" promoting collaboration in the conservation and restoration of sustainable human-influenced natural environments (Socio-Ecological Production Landscapes and Seascapes) through broader global recognition of their value (<http://satoyama-initiative.org/>). Note also the projects from Research Institute for Humanity and Nature (Kyoto, 2001) to conduct integrated researches in global environmental studies. (Batten and Brown 2015; Kazuhiko 2010; Iwatsuki 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Dinh T. H. (1996-1997)

<sup>7</sup> Researcher at French National Center for Scientific Research, Museum of Natural History (Paris) from 1981 to 2003.

<sup>8</sup> Dournes (1954, 1974), Nguyen Van Thang (1995) and Vuong Xuan Tinh (1998).

regard to the literature on Vietnam, there is a lack of both field researches and synthetic and philosophical approaches that integrate the symbolic and phenomenological dimensions of the man / nature relationships.

However, from the above data and their contextualization with the religious and popular representations of the Vietnamese, it is possible to begin to see the outlines of the thoughts and practices of nature.

Of course, there are many studies in Vietnam on the management of natural resources<sup>9</sup> (fauna, flora, management of protected areas...) but these researches are almost all focused on a "Western naturalism" approach and is based on the principle that man and nature are two exclusive and distinct entities. On the other hand, almost all of these works study human and natural relations through the relations of uses, productive relations and technical relations. All symbolic, religious, emotional and philosophical dimensions of human / nature relationships are forgotten. The purpose of this paper will also be to show that in order to understand what nature means in Vietnam today, we must be able to integrate both the technical and scientific dimensions (such as the utilitarian uses of natural resources) as well as the dimensions less easy to grasp and to describe, such as those related to tree cults, sacred forests or the symbolic aspects of plants and animals of traditional Vietnamese medicine. In this way, my approach is similar with Augustin Berque (2014) when he finds that modern science based on the "naturalist" modes of identification focuses solely on the technical, utilitarian and economic dimensions of human activities, but that it obscures all the activities of "phenomenological" type that can also be called sensitive, emotional, affective or belief-related activities.

To attempt to reconstruct the conceptions of the world and the relationships humans / nature in Vietnam, I will proceed in two ways that will structure this article:

First, I will give an overview of historical landmarks of the conceptions of relations human/nature and human/human (politics), because Vietnam is one important place where traditional Chinese modes of identification and modern Western modes of identification meet and build a new synthetic way of thought and action.

Second, some examples of what nature means in Sino-Vietnamese conceptions will show the diversity of ways of thinking and acting nature. What I present today is still a work in progress, this is just the first step of a long term research project.

## **I - Historical landmarks of the conceptions of relations human/non-human**

Presenting the history of the conceptions of nature in Vietnam in a few broad phases may seem very simplistic, it is not a question here of going into details but rather of showing how historical conceptions and modes of identification can be synthesized to constitute the complexity of current conceptions.

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<sup>9</sup> Vu and Nguyen (2011), USAID (2013)

<b>DATE</b>	Ca 3000 BCE - 111 BCE	<b>ca. 111 BCE - 939 CE</b>	939 CE - 1862	<b>1862 - 1945</b>	<b>1945 - 1986</b>	<b>1986 -&gt; today</b>
<b>Political System</b>	...Dong Son culture - Nan Yueh kingdom	<b>China's Han conquers Nan Yueh</b>	Vietnamese dynasties	<b>French colonisation in Vietnam</b>	<b>First communist period</b>	<b>Second transitional communist period</b>
<b>Modes of identification</b>	Indigenous Vietnamese mode of identification	<b>Introduction of Chinese analogical mode of identification</b>	Syncretism between Vietnamese and Chinese modes of identification	<b>Introduction of French naturalist mode of identification</b>	<b>Development of Marx-Lenine naturalist mode of identification</b>	<b>Development of "Market economy" mode of identification</b>

Fig.1.2. Chronology of ontological conceptions in Vietnam (Culas 2018)

I will only outline the four bold steps in the diagram above, as they are the most important milestones in the evolution of human and non-human relationship conceptions in Vietnam.

### **1) Ancien Vietnam under Chinese rules**

From 1st century BCE to 10th century after, Vietnam was under Chinese rules. During this long colonization, intellectual and political elites were trained according to Chinese criteria to build a body of scholars. This body of political, moral and aesthetic principles will gradually spread to the entire Vietnamese population. Thus these principles and their practical applications will be borrowed, assimilated and often adapted by the population of all social classes. Thus will gradually established a Sino-Vietnamese cosmology without conceptual separation between nature and human. Some Chinese literary formulas describe this cosmology: "All belong to The Great All, the orders and hierarchies create the links between them". For example, the conception of imperial political power is directly connected to the cosmological conception of the world. The Chinese character "King" 王 (Váng) has a traditional etymology: three horizontal lines are Sky, Human and Earth, and the vertical one is making the best connection between them. Its symbolic meaning is "To govern is to establish the harmony between Heaven, Human and the Earth". We find again the idea of the link and the search for harmony between entities and distinct cosmological spaces. Relationships between human and nature and human and human are based on analogical mode of identification (Descola 2015).

### **2) French colonisation (1858-1945)**

French colonisation (1858-1945) introduced in Vietnam a conceptual and exclusive separation between nature and human<sup>10</sup>. The two domains that will have the greatest impact in Vietnamese thinking are the introduction of modern scientific, technical and industrial approaches and, some new political ideas including individualism, State-Nation system, democratic and human rights. We note that Vietnamese elite incorporated some elements of Western naturalism with a strong focus on political points of view because their main objective was national emancipation in reaction to colonial domination. But they paid less attention about new conception of nature. But the most important borrowed items about

<sup>10</sup> The presentation of Mrs Bui Linh Hue (Thai Nguyen University, Vietnam) about "A Ecocritical Study of the Discourses on Progress and Western Civilization by Early 20th Century Vietnamese Intellectuals", made at the ASLE Conference in Hanoi (2018), complete my demonstration of Vietnamese borrowings to French modernity.

relationships with nature are probably Western medicine and science. Today we can observe a juxtaposition without contact of two medical systems in Vietnam: the traditional one based on an ancient knowledge fund partly common to China, the other Western-style scientific and technical medicine. Western naturalism mode of identification was also a strong basis for Marxist-Leninist ideology.

The liberation of the country from the French colonial forces will be partly thanks to communist organizations. I will distinguish two communist periods because their political orientations and practical applications are very different.

### **3) First Communist Period (1945 à 1986)**

During the First Communist Period (1945 à 1986), Marxism – Leninism ideology and project was an imported system of human relationships from Russia, China and France. In short, we can say this is an extreme case of application of Western naturalism (Descola 2015) because development of human society can be done without paying attention to non-humans. The main components of the Communist Party-State ideology and actions are:

- *Marxist social evolutionism* is founded on a “natural” and “historical” hierarchy between societies with different steps of material, technical and political development (from feudal society and capitalist society to communist society)
- *Collectivization of the means of production* is actions against capitalist system to share resources and productions tools with equitable distribution for all.
- *Modernisation and industrialisation* used natural resources without limit as tools to achieve these goals of nation development to reach communist objectives.
- The main tools of this socio-economical and political system are a *very strong social, cultural and political control on the society*, because the final aim is to build the “New Socialist Man” for Revolutionary purposes to reach the “Perfect society”.

### **4) Second Communist period (1986 until today)**

The Second Communist period called « Transitional Period » begins with Đổi Mới Economical Reforms (1986) and continues today. The new national slogan is “Socialist-oriented market economy”. In short, to achieve the ultimate communist goal one must use the capitalist system, as China did since the 1980s. From the analytical point of view, this is another aspect of Western naturalism mode of identification because on Western capitalist ideology nature and non human don't have any right, so they can be used to produce wealth and generate profits. On this point, Marxism and capitalism share the same relationship of uses of nature.

The main components of this transitional period are:

- *Marxist social evolutionism* need to be adapted because market economy will be a new support to build the socialist society.
- *The Private enterprises are often strongly connected with Party-State system*. These connections and the high level of corruption among officials allows a very low level of respect of the laws: This leaves a large open door for many offenses for the environment (massive deforestation, large-scale agricultural and industrial pollution).

- *The first national goal is economic development*, which is also a guarantee of political stability, for that, we rely on the use of natural resources. Economic development is the first and the protection of the environment comes after, later.
- Even with important economical changes, we observe a strong cultural and political control on civil society and media (Internet, newspapers, social movements...)w;

Beyond the complexity of borrowing and syncretism processes (which we cannot detail here), the main thing to remember is how these ideas and practices will fit in superimposed layers. We observe this even if the new elements seem to contradict the old ones. As seems to be the case of Sino-Vietnamese traditional medicine based on analogies between natural substances and parts of the human body and technico-scientific medicine based on chemistry and modern physics. However, these elements are not mutually exclusive or not delete each other out. They are cohabiting. For example, it is usual for Vietnamese patients to follow a traditional medical treatment and at the same time a modern treatment. The fact that these treatments belong to two logical, two distinct modes of identification does not make any problem for the patient. In practice, in a pragmatic way, they can accumulate and syncretized by superpositions of more or less nested layers. However, detailed case studies of these ontological syncretisms are still missing for Vietnam.

We observe these different forms of syncretism both in discourses (see the very utilitarian dimensions of national development objectives) and the daily actions of Vietnamese (cults of sacred trees and forests on one side and the other side (serious industrial and domestic pollution...) in relation to nature today.

## **II - Examples of relations between nature and man in Vietnam, China and Japan**

The three examples below of what "nature" means in Sino-Vietnamese world will make it possible to show the diversity of the means of expression of the relation to nature in the same mode of identification and at the same time the homogeneity of the type of exchange between human and non-human.

### ***1) Learn to reach nature through practice***

According to the Chinese philosopher Chuang Tzu (4th century BC): When men reach a very high level of mastery of their arts (religious rituals, studies of classical texts, technical and aesthetic through physical exercise or handicraft, etc.), they can act without mobilizing their minds.

For example, an excellent wood-carver can take several decades to make his action on the wood without having to think about it. A kind of automatism both conscious and spontaneous made possible because man, material and action are no longer separated, or so little separated that they succeed in making totally One. The action is then done in a natural way, without effort and reaches its perfection. This action is then in conformity with Sky, which is natural and spontaneous (Billeter 2010). The action of man on the world is then in harmony with Sky and Earth, so by this way man can then reach nature. We find again the idea of governing in

harmony with the cosmology which is at the center of the practice of management of men by traditional Chinese royalty. Man can access to nature by a long work on himself. So access to nature is achieved by a significant effort, a deep attention to non-human and actions and long time training. This idea and practice are in opposition with Western conception of nature where nature is thought of as something "given" that cannot be "acquired" by experience, conscience and training.

This first example also shows that ancient Chinese philosophical and ontological conceptions are often directly connected with very concrete or even technical practices, such as calligraphy, *Tai-chi-chuan*, wood carving, swimming in whirlpools or cutting of meat, etc. (Billeter 2016, Levi 2003). Thought and action are usually united in this world.

## **2) *Integrate some powers of nature by eating them***

China and Vietnam are two countries with a very high demand for wild meat from protected species for traditional medicine uses but also for cooking expensive dishes.

Thus the last rhinoceros was killed in Cat Tien national park (Southern Vietnam) in April 2010 for his horn sold 20.000 Euros. The last tigers and bears are endangered because of the very high price of their meat. Chinese and Vietnamese believe that animal species are able to transmit their qualities to humans. By eating certain parts of these animal humans can incorporate some of their physical and spiritual qualities. For example, meat and bones of tiger and bear are supposed to transmit the power of the animal, especially the sexual force. The horn of Rhinoceros because it symbolically resembles a phallus are supposed to strengthen the sexual abilities of the man, it is the same for fresh snake blood. While the chemical composition of Rhinoceros horn is exactly the same as the human hairs and nails and snakes sexual abilities are rather mundane. These are symbolic actions and thought by analogy.

This is the same analogical thinking than medical "doctrine of signatures"<sup>11</sup> in European Middle Age: "the leaves in the shape of eye look after the eyes"... This is an example, where human and non-human can share the same domain. Although different in their physicality and in their interiority, humans and non-humans can exchange physical abilities.

## **3) *Building nature around the human***

- Pagoda Gardens in Vietnam

For Vietnamese peasants of Red River Delta, we observed that for them nature is not a distant thing that one would encounter in the deep forests or in the mountains far from their own places of life, but nature is mainly around them, just next to them (Culas 2018). In a milieu they know well and on which they act on a daily basis. According to them, nature is especially present in the gardens of pagodas, in their own gardens and in the big old trees at the crossroads (Przyluski 1909, Stein 1942, Dinh 1985, 2000). This specific way of thinking and constructing nature contrasts sharply with the Western idea of "wilderness", protected from the attacks of human activities: A "virgin nature" thought out of any relation to man (Larerre 2008).

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<sup>11</sup> Bennett (2007).

- *Satoyama: Biodiversity maintained by human in Japan*

The Japanese notion of *Satoyama* combines in a single word the idea of nature, of human and the relationship between them. “*Sato*” means “village and its agricultural lands” and “*Yama*” means “mountain and the maintained forests that make it up”. *Satoyama* includes the environmental mosaic of forests, tree plantations, grasslands, farms, lakes and villages. This is a specific form of biodiversity maintained and built by humans. In 2010 at UNESCO assembly, Japan proposed to introduce the concept of *Satoyama* into international regulations on environment and biodiversity<sup>12</sup>. *Satoyama* means man and nature are not separated but necessarily connected by reciprocally influencing each other. The idea of “man made landscapes that build man” (Takeuchi 2010) is also central in A. Berque's demonstration (2014) to overcome and criticize Western dualism thought between human and nature.



Fig.3.1 Scheme of Satoyama Initiative (<http://satoyama-initiative.org/en/>)

To describe the relations woven between humans and non-humans in *Satoyama*, specialists speak of "socio-ecological landscapes" (Ichikawa 2012). I think according to the examples above, it is possible to go further in the analysis of the meaning of "socio-ecological landscapes"<sup>13</sup>. In a discrete but central way, the *Satoyama* diagram above presents the third perspective as "Recognition of the *value* and the importance of *local tradition* and *culture*" (my italics). But the content of this perspective is not only sociological and ecological, it asks to introduce other dimensions that are underlying in our examples above. The notion of "Value" is directly connected with ethics and religion, thus with the relationships between humans and non-humans, sometimes including immaterial beings (spirits and divinities, and all beings of the so-called "supernatural" world).

<sup>12</sup> The Global Workshop on the *Satoyama* Initiative was held at UNESCO (Paris, 2010).

<sup>13</sup> See the history of invention of landscape in China (4th century) and Europe (16th century) (Berque 2013).

In fact, Satoyama is not only innovative because it integrates ecological and social dimensions and their reciprocal interactions, but it also opens the landscape to philosophical, ethical and religious dimensions.

## **Conclusion**

These three examples show the diversity of the conception of nature and non-human in the Sino-Vietnamese and Japanese world. In the first example, nature is the product of human learning after a long practice until the activity becomes integral part of the human being. The second example show how certain qualities of non-humans (animals or plants) can be integrated into the human body and mind-spirit. Finally, the last example shows how the idea of nature and biodiversity is not to be found in isolated, protected and supposedly "virgin" spaces, but rather in gardens and socio-ecological landscapes built and maintained by man. One of the common features of these examples seems to be that nature is not a self-defined and immutable state (as in the Western naturalism mode of identification) but this is the product of an action (examples 1 and 3), or the product of a relationship between human and non-human (examples 2). In Western naturalistic mode of identification, nature is defined as a state of things, as an object. There is nature when there is no man. In the Sino-Vietnamese analogical mode of identification, nature is defined rather by types of actions and specific agreements between humans and non-humans. It is in a very particular relationship with humans that nature can be defined.

In the world, there is thus a wide variety of ways of how to conceive of "nature" and the relationship between humans and nature. Many of them are still largely unknown. Often these relationships are only lived and acted by the local people, but there are not the object of philosophical and ontological discourses constructed. This is what we observed for Vietnam and for the populations of mountain ethnic groups in Vietnam, China, Laos and Thailand, but also for many forest populations in the Amazon or Siberia (Descola 2015). In the case of China, some Taoist, Buddhist and Confucian schools of thought have for several centuries studied the relationship between man and nature, including political, medical, religious and metaphysical dimensions.

Describe, know and perhaps understand the conceptions and practices of nature in different social groups of Vietnam (artisanal fishermen, collectors of plants and animals in the forest, rangers, mountain farmers, polluting industrialists ...) will allow to define what discourses on nature they are willing to hear and understand from a protection project, but also what they will be able to do in this direction. These different ways of speaking about nature and the possible protective actions will be built with local people and according to their conceptions and practices. But the protection project must still be able to integrate all the local dimensions of nature, so it must be able to challenge Western supremacy over the dual idea of Nature / Culture.

The analysis of human societies is usually based on three broad dimensions (economy, social and environment). But these three dimensions do not make it possible to describe for all the relationships that humans have with non-humans, and in particular with nature.

By introducing new dimensions, such as philosophical, ethical and religious, but also the emotional, affective and sensitive dimensions, because they produce meaning, channel or guide the relations between humans and non-humans, we will reach a level of understanding

much higher and much finer of local realities. To characterize the new dimensions outlined above, often neglected in all kinds of studies, the geographer specialist in Japanese culture, A. Berque (2013, 2014) speaks of "phenomenological" dimension, and the sinologists specialists in Taoism, J.-F. Billeter (2016) and J. Lévi (2003) speak of the "spontaneous" dimension.

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