

## Abstract

Jørgensen, Bent D., 2006, *Development and 'The Other Within.'* *The Culturalisation of the Political Economy of Poverty in the Northern Uplands of Viet Nam*, PhD thesis, Department of Peace and Development Research, School of Global Studies, Göteborg University, Göteborg, Sweden

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The dissertation deals with the issue of poverty in eight villages in Northern Viet Nam during the current Doi Moi reforms. In all reforms, poverty alleviation has been a main concern for which market economy and economic growth have been seen as largely successful tools. However, in parallel to economic growth, the social inequality has increased. Growing relative poverty in spite of significant development efforts is the *raison d'être* in this study. By focusing on economic, political, and cultural factors, it attempts to explore why some people are poor and why they remain so despite efforts of poverty alleviation.

The study shows how some of the people in the eight villages capture and exploit the current reform processes and continuously benefit from partly new flows of resources, knowledge, and political influence. Others end up in the shadow of these flows and become poor in a material sense. What makes it possible for these unequal flows to be locally sustained and legitimised in spite of a well-spread egalitarian ethos? The study suggests that 'the poor' becomes a socially constructed group that due to their identity is denied access to networks and benefits. The boundary between the poor and the non-poor is moulded from fundamental values embedded in the dominant development discourse that stipulates a distinction between failure and success, and between poor and non-poor. The poor gets the unpleasant, but serviceable, task of illustrating the negation of development and the non-poor legitimise the unequal flows of resources, knowledge, and political influence by referring to the inabilities of the poor to make use of these flows. The problem is exacerbated by widely embraced decentralisation reforms by which the local elite-dominated institutions are now charged with power to alleviate poverty. Hence, the study shows how development thinking and practice generate a fundamental dilemma when poverty alleviation policies on the one hand attempt to alleviate poverty, but on the other hand communicate a development discourse that makes poverty irredeemable within the local communities.

**Keywords:** *poverty, poverty alleviation, development, marginalisation, privatisation, modernisation, marketisation, democratisation, Development Studies, upland development, ethnic minorities, Hmong, Dao, Muong, Viet Nam (Vietnam).*