



Fig. 2: The traditional foot-moving paddy mortar (Bourlet 1907: 360).

woman in his *ban* moves the basket three times in the same way as she cleans paddy. She and the baby parents, in particularly the baby mother pray loudly and with a ritual rhythm: "My kid, if thou were a Phi's kid, Phi comes and takes thou; if thou were a tiger cub, tiger comes and eats thou; if thou were a human kid, enter into our house and grow up healthy." This ritual prayer is repeated with cadences three times and after each time people are on the watch for some minutes. Phi and tiger don't appear, surely, and the silence in the surrounding environment confirms that the baby should be a child of the house's owner. Then the woman and the baby mother put a pestle as they pound rice at the flat basket above the head of a baby boy, they repeat this for at least three times. For a baby girl, the pestle is replaced by the *hày* or the *hông* (steamer). After that they bring the baby into the house and give him or her a chewed mouthful of glutinous rice (Bourlet 1907: 361; Hoàng Nó 1998: 529, and personal observation). When the baby's age reaches a month, he or she is given *khau lam* daily, first in chewed form, then in natural form. He or she is accustomed to consume glutinous rice from then on!

The Tháy baby mother has to eat *khau lam* with salt during the first month after the birth; this rice supplies strength to the nursing mother and breast milk for the baby because glutinous rice is helpful to milk production. In the Tháy folk beliefs, the *khau lam* and salt would purify the body of the parturient whose body and mind were heavily contaminated by evil *phi*. Later on, in case the mother passes away, boys have to eat *khau*

*lam* with salt too, at least for three days during her funeral. In doing so, they expect to show their gratefulness to their mother. Girls do not have to observe this ritual duty.

## 2.2 Childhood and Youth

At the age of six the Tháy girl feels already her maturity. Every early morning she participates in the pounding of rice in the family *chan* or transporting paddy to the pounding compound in the nearby spring. It is worth to note that the Tháy pound paddy with all three types of mortars: 1) horizontal foot-moving pestle and loose, high wooden mortar on ground (old style; Fig. 2), or stone mortar fixed in ground (this type needs at least three persons for pounding), 2) vertical hand-moving pestle and loose, low mortar on ground (one or two or three persons are needed; Fig 3), and 3) fixed, water-moving mortar built up across a nearby stream (one or two strong persons are needed for loading paddy and unloading rice); this mortar type is merely a modified horizontal foot-moving mortar. Wood was a material to make mortar and pestle. Recently the two foot- and hand-moving types are replaced step by step by small electric paddy treatment equipment. The second type of mortar and pestle is also stylized to become a musical instrument in rituals and in entertainment (Fig. 4). The traditional dance *Khác huông* (Pounding Rice) is one of the most appreciated dances among Tháy people in Nghe An province. The dance *Giô ông* (Moving Pestles)