

ETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS DURING THE PERIOD OF INDUSTRIALIZATION, MODERNIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATION

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Abstract: Ethnic relations is now a topical and urgent issue which needs special attention, especially in some strategic areas where there are diverse ethnic composition and religion, including the Central Highlands. In particular, in the context of development, international integration and globalization today, ethnic relations and ethnic management in the Central Highlands are facing many opportunities but also many difficulties and challenges. The article raises some specific issues about the role of ethnic relations in sustainable development in the Central Highlands, the structural characteristics of ethnic people of the Central Highlands, simultaneously analyses the characteristics of ethnic relations in the Central Highlands today. On this basis, the article raises a number of issues in ethnic relations in the Central Highlands associated with the comprehensive and sustainable development in economy, society, culture, environmental protection and rational use of natural resources; political stability, security and defense; strengthening the national unity bloc, all are urgent tasks of strategic significance in the current situation.

Key words: Ethnic group, ethnic relations, Central Highlands.

1. Role of Ethnic Relations in Sustainable Development in the Central Highlands

In recent years, ethnic relations has been a matter of urgency that needs special attention, especially in some strategic areas which have diverse ethnic composition and religion, including the Central Highlands. Local conflict, ethnic collision appeared in a number of places, affecting the stability and sustainable development of the region, and also new problems arose in the relations among ethnic groups themselves, ethnic groups and the nation – the country. Ethnic relations is not constant, it may change in the development process of the

country in general, and in particular, of the Central Highlands.

Ethnic relation is understood as contacts, exchanges, cooperation and partnerships, links, cohesions, dissociations, etc. among individuals or representatives or various organizations in the community of an ethnic group or between ethnic groups. In fact, as ethnic relations take place in all fields, at any time, in any place in the social life of all ethnic groups and among ethnic groups, they are so varied and complex, including many respects, many fields, dimensions...

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related to the stability and instability, development and non-development of each group, each area, each region, each country.

The structure of ethnic relations includes the following specific aspects:

- *Relationship entity*: Including individuals, representatives of communities, and civil societies, both traditional and modern.

- *Purpose of relations*: Including benefits related to the area or territory of residence, the natural environment, economy, politics, culture, society, religion, security, defence, influencing, enticing...

- *Scope of relations*: Including internal ethnic relations, relations between ethnic groups, between ethnic groups with the State, transnational ethnic relations.

- *Content of relations*: Including all the domains of ethnic and national social life such as area of residence, economy, politics, society, culture, religion and belief, the environment, etc. The content of relations is always associated with the purpose and mechanism, the method, the subject and scope of the relationship.

- *Form of relations*: These are expressions of relation to each other like visits, exchanges, cooperation, links, merges, sociability, sympathy, support or opposition; cohesion and dissociation...

- *Method (mechanism) of relations*: Method of relations relationships is understood as the expression of relationship types, measures, responses in relationship according to ethnic group practices, according to the agreements, taking advantage and enticing in any form, overwhelming by force ...

- *Time and space when relations take place*: In fact, ethnic group relations take place

in every group, everywhere, all the time.

For the multi-ethnic country of Vietnam, in general, and in the Central Highlands, in particular, ethnic relations have always been one of the driving forces that can either promote or hinder the development of the region and the whole country. In the context of development, international integration and globalization today, ethnic relations and the management of ethnic relations in the Central Highlands are facing not only opportunities but also many difficulties and challenges for the stable and sustainable development of the ethnic groups and the country.

Recognizing the role and great significance of the ethnic relations matter, through the revolutionary periods, the Party and State have paid special attention to the development of good relations between the ethnic groups and the strengthening of the national unity bloc; have always considered the relationship of equality, unity, mutual assistance for development, as both strategies during the revolution and as the basic principles of the ethnic policies of the Party and the State of Vietnam.

Thus, we can see the stability and sustainable development in the political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of the country, in general, of the Central Highlands, in particular, are affected by the issues of ethnicity and ethnic relations. This is shown in the following main points:

- First, good ethnic relations always create stability and support for mutual development among groups, on that basis, facilitating ethnic unity, tight coherence in a

unified nation, thus maintaining political and social stability, national integrity and sovereignty.

- Second, good ethnic relations are the basis of primary importance for the stability and robustness of the political system, especially at the grassroots level.

- Third, good ethnic relations play the role of promoting comprehensive socio-economic development in a sustainable manner, contributing to the preservation and promotion of cultural values of ethnic groups in the process of boosting industrialization, modernization and integration.

- Fourth, good ethnic relations always influence the process of expanding exchanges and contacts, creating solidarity between the same or different ethnic communities in the Central Highlands and other ethnic groups in the country and in the world, in the region, especially in neighboring countries.

2. Structural Features of Ethnic Groups in the Central Highlands

The Central Highlands is a historical-ethnographic region, a very diverse geographical area of ethnic composition and culture. Until the early twentieth century, the population of the Central Highlands mostly consisted of indigenous ethnic people, accounting for 90% of the population, now the Central Highlands resides people of all of Vietnam's 54 ethnic groups. Of which, Kinh accounts for 64.7%, indigenous ethnic groups make up 26% and latecomers occupy 9%.

- The onsite minority ethnic groups are often referred to as "native" with a population of about 1.2 million belonging

to two language groups: Mon - Khmer and Austronesian. The Mon- Khmer language group includes the ethnic Bana, Xodang, Coho, M'nong, Ma... Austronesian language group includes ethnic Giarai, Ede, Churu, Raglai. In traditional societies, ethnic groups often resided in separate villages, each village has conventional boundaries, but were followed very strictly. Today, in such a village, there often reside people of many ethnic groups, even alternating between the native and the ethnic minority migrants from other areas.

- The Kinh migrants moved up from the plains with a population of 3,362,479 people, including: Kinh migrants before 1954; Kinh people moving according to a migration plan to new economic zones; Kinh people arriving to work and construct agro - forestry farms and Kinh people coming as free migrants after 1975. The part of migration to the Central Highlands before 1975 accounted for a small number that have already integrated with the local population and adapted to the living conditions there. The part of Kinh people arriving to work and build agriculture – forestry farms and the part of Kinh people coming to build new economic zones after 1975 account for the relatively large number, concentrating mostly in urban areas, basaltic soil plateau, where trade, cultivation of wet rice and industrial crops, performance of many different jobs, occupations and services are facilitated.

- Since the late 1980s and early 1990s of the twentieth century, a number of ethnic minorities in the northern mountainous provinces, such as Tay, Nung, Thai,

H'mong, Dao, Muong... have migrated to the Central Highlands due to different causes.

The free migrant minorities to the Central Highlands, with an estimated population of 400,000 people, reside concentratedly in the Highlands' basaltic soil and forested regions. A division of ethnic Tay, Thai and Dao turned to farming industrial production of commodity crops. Particularly the H'mong minority, who mainly live in the remote, forested areas with the livelihood mainly of cultivating food crops. A part of them has not settled sustainably and stably, they even keep moving from one place to another.

Thus, the ethnic composition as well as the picture of distribution of the ethnic population in the Central Highlands have seen many changes, fluctuations and become increasingly diverse. Alternating residency among ethnic groups is increasing not only in a province, a district, a commune but also in the village with multi-ethnic composition of residents. In some areas of the provinces of the Central Highlands, some ethnic minority groups have their co-ethnic residents in Laos, Cambodia and some other countries. This fact facilitates and increases opportunities for ethnic groups to contact, exchange, learn, and help each other in many ways. However, the presence of an increasing number of ethnic compositions, together with alternating residence among ethnic groups, the expansion of ethnic relations in the region, inter - regional and transnational expansion are posing new challenges, or even causing a number of new problems in ethnic relations in the Central Highlands.

3. Characteristics of Ethnic Relations

in the Central Highlands

The structural characteristic of ethnic groups in the Central Highlands is varied with different historical backgrounds, languages, population, levels of socio-economic development, culture, religions, beliefs, ways of using natural resources... This basic characteristic defines the following major ethnic relations: relations between ethnic groups with the country-the nation; relations between ethnic minorities with ethnic majorities; relations within each ethnic group.

Those ethnic relations, in spite of their different role, position and importance, are inter-related and mutually promoting each other; they should therefore be considered significant and requires research to identify and properly handle. Those relations are expressed in many fields, from the origin, history and process of each ethnic minority group, to the language, economy, society, culture, marriage, family, clan, etc.

- First, Relations between Ethnic Groups in the Central Highlands to the Country - nation

This relationship was formed early in the development process of national construction and defense. This is a special relationship that embraces all ethnic relations, making success - failure, prosperity - failure, loss - existence of the nation. The Party and State, through the lines and policies, affect the people of all ethnic groups in the Central Highlands. The guidelines and policies of the Party and State are the most concentrated, the bridge of the relationship in the direction from the Party, the State to the people. In ethnic relations perspective, it is

true that a policy either creates consensus or causes disagreements, which can be seen as true criteria to evaluate the right or wrong of the policy.

So far, the State has promulgated and implemented a number of policies aimed at boosting the socio-economic development of ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands and has gained great achievements, including notably the Party Central Committee's Resolution 5, the Party Central Committee's Resolution 7, Program 135, Decisions 132, 134, 168... Besides, in order to promote economic potential and strengthen national defense and security, along with guidelines to move people from other places to the Central Highlands to build new economic zones, the State has strengthened the political system, trained staff and established many State - owned agricultural-forestry farms, which has made a positive impact, accelerating socio-economic development in the Central Highlands.

However, the fact shows that, in the process of implementing a number of policies in the provinces of the Central Highlands, some shortcomings have exposed, such as not paying adequate attention to ethnic characteristics, the suitability and effectiveness of such policies have not come up to expectations, failed to attract the active participation of people of ethnic minorities. Overall, the economy in ethnic areas remains under-developed, and there are a number of difficulties in economic restructuring. Some households lack production land; the gap in the level of development and the living standards of ethnic groups tend to increase... All these things make a

part of ethnic people disturbed, affecting their confidence, making them prone to reactionary forces' abusing propaganda to undermine the national unity bloc, which is one of the reasons of political instability in some areas in recent years.

- *Second, the Relationship between Ethnic Minorities and the Ethnic Majority*

This relationship is universal and increasingly intensive in the fields of residence, language, economy, society, culture, etc. The Kinh plays a large role, is the core of ethnic solidarity in our country and in the Central Highlands, in particular. When the ethnic majority and the ethnic minorities unite, the cause of national unity becomes strong. Given the importance, popularity and growing trend of intensive development, this is the basic relationship of ethnic relations in the Central Highlands.

To unite the ethnic majority and the ethnic minorities, it is essential to develop equality, cohesion, respect, mutual assistance for development; overcome the ideology of ethnic majority, narrow-minded ethnic ideology, local ethnic ideology and mutual discrimination; accelerate the sustainable economic, social, cultural, environmental development and strengthen the political system in the Central Highlands.

In fact, the relationship between the ethnic minorities and the Kinh majority is a two-way relationship. On one hand, it was the inherent solidarity and harmonious relationship before 1975, when the Kinh population in the Central Highlands was small. On the other hand, the relationship tended to become complicated after 1986, when the pressure of mechanical population

growth in the Central Highlands came from 0.5 million in 1976 up to more than 3.5 million in 2009.

The land policy of the State is correct, but the implementation process is sometimes not very good, which intangibly adversely affects the relationship between the Kinh and indigenous ethnic groups. The difference in the level and ability for socio-economic development as well as the participation in the political system at the grassroots level have led to deepening the division in income and life between the majority Kinh and the indigenous minorities, which, in turn, is considered as the cause of problems arisen in the relationship between the Kinh and ethnic minorities, that need to be addressed and resolved in a satisfactory manner.

- Third, Relations among Ethnic Groups

This relationship carries neighboring characteristic, through the relationship between a village of one ethnic group with villages of other ethnic groups. The ethnic groups retain their own independence, respect and understanding of mutual harmony. The collisions and disagreements occur mainly in land relations produced by traditional production methods as well as the effects made by new innovation policies such as the Land Law, the Law on Forest Protection and Development, the redivision of the administrative boundaries. To develop the relationship between ethnic groups, it is essential to develop the indigenous perspective of mutual respect, understanding traditional practices of neighboring groups, constantly improve literacy levels and economic life in order to facilitate harmony, get closer together but still retain ethnic identity.

Among indigenous ethnic minorities themselves, due to a clear and strong sense of village alongside with the ethnic-national consciousness, generally harmonious relationship is the key relationship. However, in the process of innovation and development, the increasingly clearer difference and division between revolutionary base areas and other regions have taken place; in other areas, thanks to geographically easy conditions for investment, the society and economy have been developing, while in the revolutionary base areas which are mostly remote ones, due to difficult conditions for investment, the economy and society fall in retardation. This leads to the disturbed and unassured thoughts of a part of the people in the revolutionary base areas in terms of the Party and State's policy of gratitude for their sacrifice.

Relations between indigenous ethnic groups and the later migrated minorities are the two-sided relationship. On one hand, a harmonious, friendly relationship is present, embodied in the mutual assistance, learning, sharing for development. On the other hand, due to the differences in language, psychology, lifestyle, traditions and practices, in some places, at some times, the two segments of the population are not really sympathetic, sociable and sharing with each other, especially in some villages where residents are of mixed ethnic composition.

- Fourth, Relations within an Ethnic Group

This relationship in the Central Highlands is present through family, clan, village relationships, in which the elements of language, culture, customs, beliefs, history,

clan relations, and economy are both the ethnic cultural elements and the lasting ethnic cohesion of the group members, and just as elements to distinguish it from other ethnic groups.

Each ethnic group has its own culture, creating diversity in a unified country. Therefore, to improve the country identity in every ethnic group, it is necessary to develop the ethnicity-nation consciousness, the Vietnam civic consciousness and social relations in the ethnic groups.

- Fifth, Transnational Ethnic Relations

Relations with other nations, co-ethnic groups overseas are essentially ethnic relations in exceptional conditions carrying transnational nature. This characteristic is left by the ethnic history and in the context of the present process of development, integration and globalization, this relationship is expanding and growing. The activities in ethnic relations and transnational co-ethnic minority relations in the Central Highlands have positive aspects, but they also contain hidden sensitive elements prone to evil advantage that swaps the concept of "ethnic territories" and "national borders"; members only promote ethnic groups without realizing the national territory issue. To overcome this, it is necessary to raise awareness about the ethnicity-nation, about ethnicity-nation consciousness; develop factors that attach ethnic groups to the Fatherland, country; raise pride about the homeland; wary of the sinister plot of the hostile forces; better manage ethnic, co-ethnic relations, and transnational kinship in order to maintain security and national sovereignty.

At present, the transnational ethnic

relations in the Central Highlands provinces bordering Lao, Campuchia and some other countries in the world contain hidden instability for the socio-economic development, the protection of the environment, the ensurance of social orders and national defence and security, having unexpectedly direct effects on the ethnic cohesion, on the consolidation of the national unity bloc and the protection of national borders and sovereignty.

From the identification results, the initial analysis of five basic ethnic relationships in the Central Highlands, it is possible to provide the following comments:

The key characteristic, the red thread throughout ethnic relations in the Central Highlands now is unity, equality, mutual assistance which has become a good tradition, a physical force, an important mental motivation of the ethnic groups in the construction and development of the Central Highlands. The wider and deeper new relationships under the market mechanism, in various forms, have created a gradual integration among the different ethnic minorities themselves and the ethnic minorities with the Kinh. On that basis, the minorities have the opportunity to gain multi-sided development, step by step integrate in an upward trend in terms of livelihood, cultural life, trade and exchange, mixed marriages, etc.

In the present day context, the ethnic relations in the Central Highlands have continued to promote the fine traditional values, but gone beyond the regional, national scope and are becoming more complicated. In particular, these relations

are being affected by many factors, including factors related to the plot called "peaceful evolution" of the hostile forces to destabilize political security, sabotage the fruits of innovation initiated by the Party. It is possible to say that ethnic relations in the Central Highlands now have been going through many changes in all aspects, which requires correct understanding and appreciation, through scientific research, both general and specialized, to clearly identify the nature and predict the moves, trends in ethnic relations, offer appropriate and timely viewpoints and solutions so as to proactively manage, adjust and develop good ethnic relations; especially to manage the relations that are inconsistent with the interest of the country-nation, and the ethnic minority people in the Central Highlands.

The groups of possible causes of complicated ethnic relations in Highlands include:

- The causes left by ethnic history and the history the Central Highlands.
- The causes due to the inadequacies of some ethnic policies of the Party and State that have been implemented.
- The causes due to limitations and shortcomings of the political system and staff.
- The effects of factors such as: alternating residence; religions and beliefs; market economy; globalization, consequences of the colonialist rule in the past and the plot of "peaceful evolution" of the current hostile forces in the Central Highlands.

4. Arising Problems

In the process of promoting industrialization, modernization and integration of the country, ethnic relations in the Central Highlands have seen a number of new complex issues

affecting sustainable development, especially the national unity bloc. On the other hand, some problems are not entirely new in the process of promoting industrialization, modernization and integration in the Central Highlands have risen or flared up again. They are issues related to land use rights of ethnic people; internal ethnic group relations and relations among ethnic groups related to geographical residence, conditions of socio-economic development, religions and beliefs, ethnic relations, and co-ethnic cross-border and trans-national relations, inter - regional relations between ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands with other minorities, especially with co-ethnic northern mountainous provinces, the minority people in Vietnam - Laos, Vietnam - Cambodia borders and other countries. Therefore, it is necessary to study the moves, trends, forms of ethnic relations and factors affecting the multi-dimensional relationships, as well as the impact of ethnic relations on sustainable development in the Central Highlands in the new national, regional and international context.

Regarding the management of ethnic relations in the Central Highlands today, first of all there is a need to consider two main areas: mechanism and management forms. In the field of mechanism, often there are these kinds of policy: laws, media awareness and some other control measures. Forms of ethnic relations management also include various organized types (using the power of the political system and the power of the social and political organizations) and the local non-sided ones (promoting the values in the village-community relations, the role of prestiged people in the

community, the religious leaders...) to ensure the right to equal development of ethnic groups and other groups of the population; ensuring the interests of the ethnicity-nation, and the ethnic minority people in the Central Highlands.

Ethnic relations and ethnic policy are two interconnected areas, mutually influencing each other. While implementing the basic principles of the ethnic policy of the Party and the State, we should have a profound sense that legally in the Central Highlands ethnic groups are equal, but in fact, if genuine equality is to be achieved, it is essential to continue to promote research, further innovate awareness of the work of planning and implementation of ethnic policies in the current situation.

Ethnic relations in the Central Highlands have been influenced by many different factors; along with interest to the traditional factors, it is also necessary to pay attention to the contemporary issues such as religions and beliefs and the establishment of ethnic - religious communities, which becomes clearer and is having more profound impact; the regional and international effects on the issues of ethnicity and religion; the advantage taken by the external hostile forces...

In the above context, solving the basic problems of ethnic relations in the Central Highlands together with comprehensively and sustainably developing economy, society, and culture, protecting the environment and rationally using natural resources; ensuring political stability, national security and defense; strengthening the national unity bloc, are the urgent tasks of strategic significance in the present situation.

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