Expressions of Relations between Ethnic Group and Interference by the State in Implementation of Ethnic Policies in Dien Bien Province

Author’s Details:

(1) Thi Thu Hien Phan - University of Economic and Technical Industries
(2) Thi Kim Oanh Pham - Dien Bien Technical Economic College, Vietnam

Correspondence: Thi Thu Hien Phan No. 296/61/12 Linh Nam Street, Hoang Mai District, Hanoi, Vietnam. E: ptthien.kt@uneti.edu.vn; T: +(84) 0914 915 926

Abstract: The paper analyzes the situation of ethnic groups in Dien Bien Province, Vietnam. At the same time, assessing the State’s intervention in implementing policies to ensure social security for ethnic minorities in Dien Bien Province in Vietnam.

Keywords: Ethnic group, ethnic policies, Dien Bien, Vietnam

1. Introduction

Vietnam’s history of construction, protection, and development of the country has been closely connected with the history of formulation and development of different ethnic groups in the Vietnamese community. Of the relations between different ethnic groups in Vietnam in general and in Yen Bai province in particular, solidarity and unity have been the typical features throughout the history being the rule of development of Vietnam. Such solidarity has been ensuring the survival of each ethnic group as well as the whole national community throughout the development process.

Throughout more than one thousand years’ resistance to the domination by Chinese feudal states, nearly one hundred years’ resistance to the French colonists, and more than twenty years’ resistance to the US invasion, the ethnic groups in Vietnam have been cooperating side by side in the cause of national construction and protection forming a unified solidarity among the Vietnamese community which have contributed critically and decisively to national liberation revolution and regaining of independence and freedom, building a unified state from the central to the grassroots level under the leadership of only one political party - the Vietnam Communist Party.

Considering the relations of ethnic groups during the course of building a state ruled by laws in Vietnam is to review human rights, social justice, equality of ethnic groups, personal freedom, discriminations against ethnic groups, democracy, ethnic people’s participation in state management and supervision of state activities, and contribution of ideas to general policies of the whole community. This is also a challenge to every locality, territory, and nation during their construction of a modern democratic state.

Dien Bien is a mountainous province in Northern Vietnam and home to 19 different ethnic groups, each of which has its own culture of life organisation, production methods, customs, and conventions... contributing to the province’s rich and diverse culture. Based on the guidelines and directions of the Vietnam Communist Party and the laws of the State, the province has provided active ethnic policies to build up the united bloc, promote the people’s mastery, ensure social justice and harmonization of interests between ethnic groups and the majority.

However, the question is how those issues have been implemented. What positive impacts have they had? Have ethnic policies had values in practice? Have ethnic people promoted their mastery? Are the relations between ethnic groups really equal or just formally equal? It is because not every issue mentioned in official documents will get into practice comprehensively and bring about real values.

In this assignment, we would like to address specific expressions of relations between ethnic groups in Dien Bien, and also the implementation of ethnic policies to both increase and ensure equality and solidarity among ethnic groups in the coming time. In studying and completing this written assignment, we have based ourselves in analyzing relations between ethnic groups in Dien Bien province against theoretical views of the Vietnam Communist Party and the State and in line with actual expressions of those relations. At the same time, we have compared those relations of different historical periods in Vietnam which include the feudal era and the socialist age in the province. In addition, we have considered influential factors of those relations and identified the viewpoints and directions for ethnic issues in the coming time provided by the State in general and the province in particular.

1. Overview of the natural and social setting and ethnic composition in Dien Bien

Dien Bien is a mountainous inland province in the Northwest region of the country, with geographical coordinates 20054’ - 22033’ North latitude and 102010’ - 103036’ East longitude. Located about 504 km west of Hanoi, Son La province to the east and northeast, Lai Chau province to the north, Van Nam province (China to the northwest) and Laos to the west and southwest. It is the only province sharing the border with Laos and China more than 455 km, of which: The borderline with Laos is 414,712 km; with China is 40.86 km; There are roads to northern Lao provinces and Yunnan province of China, with air routes from Dien Bien Phu to Hanoi with an average flight frequency of 2
flights per day. The province has 10 district-level administrative units with 130 communes, wards, and townships (of which 29 border communes); the population of nearly 55 thousand people, including 19 ethnic groups. On the Vietnam - Laos borderline, in addition to the two opened border gates, Huoi Puoc, and Tay Trang, the next 3 pairs of additional border gates will be opened. On the Vietnam-China border there are pairs of border gates of A Pa Chai - Long Phu. In particular, Tay Trang border gate has long been an important border gate of the Northwest region and the whole country, agreed by the Government of Vietnam and Laos to be upgraded to an international border gate and the Border Gate Economic Zone is being built. This is a great condition and opportunity for Dien Bien to promote international trade, proceeding to build this area into the main transshipment area on the Trans-Asia route to the north, connecting the Northwest region of Vietnam with the region. Northern Laos - Southwest China and Northeast Myanmar.

Dien Bien is on average some 1,500m to the sea level and located in a monsoon tropical region with much rain and sunlight and high temperature, affected by dry and hot winds from the west. The average temperature around the year ranges from 21 to 230C, 140C at the coldest and 390C at the hottest time. The average humidity is up to 85%; the rainfall between June and September accounts for 80% of the year’s; the average rainfall is 1.300 – 1.200 mm (cited from Annual Statistics, 2015).

Dien Bien province has undergone more than a century of construction and development. Its ethnic groups had made important contribution to the war for independence and freedom, the resistance wars against the French colonists and the US invasion, construction and protection of Northern Vietnam and liberation of Southern Vietnam for the final reunification, security of the northern borderline as well as the current cause of industrialisation and modernisation of the country. The ethnic groups in the province all live together across the province having rich and distinguishing cultures. All have mixed into a precious culture trove added to that of Vietnam which has been kept and promoted by ethnic groups in Dien Bien under the Party’s leadership.

Dien Bien is home to 19 ethnic groups (Thai; Mong; Kinh; Dao; Kho Mu; Ha Nhi; Lao; Hoa (Han); Kbang; Muong; Cong; Xi Mun; Si La; Nung; Phu La, Tho, Tay, San Chay, and other ethnic groups. Each ethnic group has its own characteristics of language, customs, culture … forming a colorful picture for Dien Bien culture.

according to the preliminary survey results of the 2015 Population and Housing Census, the average population in Dien Bien is 547,785 people, of which: male 273,931; women have 273,854 people; the population living in urban areas reached 82,691 people; The population living in rural areas reaches 465,094 people.

Each ethnic group has its own distinct features of inception, customs, and conventions, cultural tradition, and development level. In addition, due to territorial separation due to the lowland and highland, past communications remained much limited and thus local differences have remained until even today.

2. Expressions of relations between ethnic communities in the feudal state

2.1. Factors influencing relations between ethnic groups

For an objective consideration and evaluation of relations between ethnic groups, we will investigate natural and social settings that directly influence those relations.

2.1.1 Natural setting

The ethnic groups live separately in a remote and isolated area with a harsh natural setting. The rest of the provincial population including some Kinh, the Thai, Mong live in the lowland area where there are more favourable conditions for economic development, transportation, and trade… The clear differences between the two lands and climatic areas … directly influences economic development and cultural differences between different ethnic areas.

2.1.2 Economic factor

Poverty is the overall picture of the mountainous economy of Dien Bien. It is necessary to consider the poverty of ethnic groups in this period because most groups lived in separate areas; their production was deeply imbed with water rice civilization mixed with farming on the mountains or relics of fruit picking depending on nature and begging for help from gods. Their production was mainly self-sufficient. Some practiced shifting cultivation through deforestation for farming so their life was unstable. Apart from that, local dignitaries tended to possess favourable production materials and exploited people’s wealth and labour so that rich and poor gap was increasingly bigger.

2.1.3 Socio-cultural factor

Each ethnic group in Dien Bien province has its own development process. Since they lived in separated areas, their production methods, ways of social life organisation … were all different. We will present this issue of some ethnic groups in Dien Bien.

Mong people

The Mong in Dien Bien province lives mainly on high rocky mountains of difficult terrains and communication which isolate them from other ethnic groups. They lived in the patriarchal nucleus family with strong marriages. Mong people uphold their clans. They believe that clan members were brothers from the same ancestors who can give birth and die in one’s house. Clan members may recognise one another, though they do not know each other, through altar display, leaving corpse at home, and tomb arrangement. The clan head is trusted and respected by all clan members.

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The resident unit of the Mong was Giao which consisted of several clans or one single clan, and from ten to a hundred houses. The resident unit was formed because of the two reasons: (i) due to the residential land and farms, and (ii) due to the common land gods they prayed to, common conventions and commitments. Each Giao has one head or two ruling in turn who take the responsibility to supervise families to follow common conventions. Several Giaos made up a Giong whose leadership was not elected but taken up the highest local dignitary. This unit was also formed to be an administrative unit which had the same god praying.

The Mong had their own system of dignitaries ranging even to the hamlet level... Depending on their ranks, they could take land from those without sons, migrants, or criminals which was farmed and harvested by common people. The dignitaries could use common people’s labour to serve them, to raise horses... The social gaps varied depending on whether they lived in fixed places or practiced shifting cultivation.

Because the Mong believed that there were many ghosts, wizards played an important role in their society. Wizards were considered embodiments of gods who could expel demons, prayed for good weather, practised spells and could even become a king if he was much trusted. Everything in life was connected to supernatural forces of divines and ghosts. Marriages were relics of group form where cousins could get married to one another and may be due to wishes to retain wealth within the extended family. Though for love, marriages were fundamentally a kind of sale where silver and valuable things were given to the girl’s family (to buy her). Superstitious things existed in wedding rituals such as chicken bone luck query to decide if a couple could get married or not.

In the current society, the Mong live together with other ethnic groups under the same polical regime of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. A majority of them, however, keep living on high mountains with the harsh natural setting and thus a poor life. Trăm Tấu and Mù Cang Chải districts both have nearly 50 % of its households living in poverty and hunger. (Report on Implementation of Poverty Reduction Project in the two districts by the Province’s Department of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs, 2009).

Thai people
The Thai were united in the hamlet with some clans sharing the same irrigation and cultivation system. They lived politically under the administration of landlords whose subordinates had to submit food and produce to him. Together with great Kinh landowners, different levels of dignitaries in Dien Bien had formed a class of landowners exploiting farmers heavily to maintain their own social status. Farmers suffered from two oppressing and exploiting levels of landlords on behalf of the centralized state and village heads on behalf of state laws and village conventions. They worked hard but could not enjoy their labour fruits. As a result, there was an undynamic, stagnant and undeveloped economy.

In the contemporary society, the Thai live in solidarity with other ethnic groups under the same political regime of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Kinh people
The Kinh came to the province very early in history and together with other races they change this province into a cultivated area.

The Kinh has a tradition of growing rice. In Vietnam, rice-growing had been developed among the Viet at least since the 2nd Millenium BC. The Kinh has much experience in making irrigation and increasing the number of crops and growing overlapping crops in a year. They reclaimed and cultivated in the low land mainly along the Red River and some went to live in the highland among ethnic races of Thai, Mong, Ha Nhi... Apart from growing rice water, they also reclaimed land to grow maize, manioc... and developed forestry, forest gardens, fruit trees, and industrial trees... The family structure is of a small patriarchal one in which men take the lead while women do housework and actively participate in social activities. Their conventions, customs, culture, and beliefs do not remain the same as those of the Kinh in deltas., partly because of a necessary simplication and adjustment during their migration to the province and partly because of limited conditions in mountainous areas.

The Kinh in Dien Bien has made a great contribution to the cause of national construction and protection. They had provided labour and wealth to resistance wars sending tens of thousands of young men to battles across the country. In the construction of Dien Bien and Vietnam in general, the Kinh, together with other ethnic groups, have reclains lands, applied science and technology... to improve their lives and build a civilized society.

2.2. Actual expressions of relations between ethnic groups
Looking at the social organisation, marriage, beliefs,... of the ethnic groups in Dien Bien, we can see that their social life was deeply imbued with theocracy and political power due to deep influences from Confucianism and Taoism. Rulers of ethnic areas had supreme powers.

In terms of culture, when understanding remained low, material life suffering, and poverty regularly experienced, people’s awareness and thinking were dominated by spirituality among other things. Spirituality in this sense is not yet negative while not completely positive. Together with it, customs, conventions, local teachings, ways of thinking... had rooted in people's consciousness becoming spiritual strengths of every citizen and village community. Such
cultural factors include both negative and positive aspects which could not be removed in a short time from the social life. Such a removal takes time and positive impacts of progressive factors.

Mountainous society is completely different from a plain one. While plain people uphold festivals, honor famous people and village patrons, … mountainous people appreciate local and ethnic rituals and customs, and even those of clans. While the former has village conventions that provide legal regulations, the latter does not have village conventions except for some groups having unwritten laws. Ethnic groups maintain lifestyles in clans and races instead.

It can be seen under the feudal time through expressions of social organisation, socio-economic development in ethnic minorities and majorities that the relations between different ethnic groups at the time being were mainly of courtesy without expansion and exchange. In ethnic minorities, the mandarin class enjoyed common people’s work results and provided forms of tribute submissions and laws to regulate community relations while people had no participation in common issues of the community. Their only duty was to work and submit produce or even their own labour. However, due to various factors such as social perception, the ethnic populations, the conflicts between the ruling class and the ruled in ethnic communities in Dien Bien province, a separate state was not a real need. Therefore, in consideration of human rights in those areas under the feudal time, researchers can find only wishes for a well-off life, equality in marriages, freedom… seen in folk cultures such as history, poetry, luck asking rituals...

Under the French colonial time, all the ethnic areas in Dien Bien were under the rule of the French colonists whose social policy was obscurantism extinguishing people’s sense of resistance. The French wanted to educate a generation blindly believing in western civilization and fearing their guns and power. The local rulers were then used to serve the colonists’ exploitation. To implement the policy of “war against war, Vietnamese against Vietnamese” most effectively, they established a Thai autonomy to assert on paper the issues of self-determination and equality of ethnic groups, and, at the same time, to separate people and resistance movements inducing some ethnic people to follow them fighting against resistances.

As a result, apart from the rich/poor gap, the issue of self-determination of some ethnic groups against the rest of the people in the province was extremely acute. The colonialists’ establishment of a supported ethnic autonomy was one way to separate different ethnic groups and emphasize territorial sovereignty and self-determination of some ethnic races against the overall revolutionary cause of the Vietnamese.

The issue of solidarity among the ethnic people was at the time considered in either way: some ethnic people following the French wanted to split the unity while the majority wanted to liberate themselves and their class. They and the ethnic majority had conducted the democratic revolution in August 1945.

3. Expressions of relations between ethnic groups in the socialist republic of Vietnam

3.1. The viewpoint of the Vietnam Communist Party and State on relations between ethnic groups

Succeeding in August 1945, the revolution of national liberation in Vietnam not only established equality between the Vietnamese and the rest of the world but also provided the same rights to both the ethnic majority and minorities in Vietnam, removing the local noble class or exploiting landowners while establishing a government system of people and by people. It had provided opportunities for mountainous, remote and innermost people to develop all their abilities. The birth of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam Nhà nước marked an important turn in the relations between ethnic minorities and the majority. The VCP views the adjustment of relations between ethnic groups and national solidarity is a process but has a consistent assertion of the strategic position of the ethnic issues. The contents of ethnic policy vary depending on the specific historical situation and conditions of each development phase.

3.1.1 Between 1945 and 1975

In this period, Vietnam undergone the war resistances to the French colonists in the North and then to the US invasion in the South. The ethnic groups had contributed labour and wealth to the cause of national liberation and country reunification. However, in order to reassert entitlement to democracy, equality of relationships increased the unity among ethnic groups and facilitation of quick progression in all fields of northwestern ethnic minorities, the incumbent President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at the time had signed Ordinance No. 230 dated 19/4/1955 establishing the Thai - Meo Autonomy. The ordinance claimed that the autonomy was part of the republic, and its government was a local one under the direct leadership of the central government. The government and people of the autonomy shall be subject to the republic’s general guidelines and policies and entitled to absolute freedom and democracy while having equality of rights and duties given to the other groups in the country. The ordinance also regulated that central agencies shall take the responsibility to study specific features and situations to provide guidelines suitable to the government’s general guidelines and to the specific conditions of the autonomy; to help the autonomy government to develop politically, economically and socially; to assist in local cadres training and retraining. All socio-economic policies must be based on the sense of equality, solidarity and mutual assistance among ethnic groups while removing the idea of majority chauvinism and narrow-minded ethnic ideas.

It can, therefore, be concluded that equal relations and unity among ethnic peoples were cared by the state of Vietnam even when the latter was facing wars and economic difficulties.
However, it could be said that issues of ethnic equality have not had specific policies for actual implementation. Issues remained much on paper while their implementation merely communication and propaganda.

3.1.2 Between 1976 and 1986

After liberating the South and reunifying the country, Vietnam started building its socialism. The VCP had identified as follows:

In terms of socio-economic development in ethnic minority areas, there should be adequate expressions of the ethnic policies developing the close and good relations among the ethnic groups on the basis of solidarity, equality, mutual assistance for collective mastery… Development in all aspects of one ethnic group goes hand in hand with the enhancement and development of the community of ethnic groups in our country. (VCP Party Congress document, 1986).

The ethnic work and policies of the party and the state in this period were uniformly organised in the whole country while the North had been building socialism and the South recovering from wars carrying out socio-economic recovery and development. The new requirements and tasks of the state in this period were to conduct the synchronous and comprehensive implementation of ethnic work based on a full study of every ethnic area and group so as to provide suitable policies.

The Dien Bien government had specified the state policies to suit actual local situations. It had focused on economic, social and cultural development in highland, remote and innermost areas, ethnic dominating areas with a concentration on forestry and agricultural development which was the province’s natural strengths. At the same time, the province had promoted the development of industries and small and craft industries while focusing on cultural, educational and health development for ethnic groups so as to make mountainous region catch up with the delta, to facilitate minorities in catching up with the majority and to provide ethnic peoples with a stable life. The province continued to expand intensive farming models, introduced high-yielding plants into cultivation, establishing some industrial tree zones, cattle raising areas, tea or cinnamon growing areas... It had applied flat rate payment within collectives so that individuals actively utilized land, applied scientific and technical advances for increased productivity and high outputs. The flat rate mechanism had promoted the autonomy of members of collectives, increased productivity and created tight relation among them and improved their lives.

3.1.3 Between 1986 and now

VCP’s main ethnic policy contents are to focus on the construction of mountainous economic structure towards the development of commodity economy, close relations with neighbouring provinces, promotion of regional strengths, good implementation of multisectoral economic policies, readjustment of production relation, revision of management, and thorough liberation of mountainous production potentials. The party has identified that the cause of socialism construction and mountainous socio-cultural development are the common cause of the whole country while they are the first cause of ethnic peoples and immigrants in mountains. It has aimed at comprehensive mountainous development in terms of economy, politics, culture, society, and national defence and security; including socio-economic development, adequate attention and settlement of social issues, and material and cultural improvement for the people. The 2013 Constitution claims as follows:

The state shall implement the policy of equality, unity and mutual assistance among ethnic groups; strictly forbid every act of ethnic discrimination or separation. Ethnic minorities may use their own spoken and written language, preserve their national character and promote their good customs, tradition, conventions, and culture... (The SRV’s 2013 Constitution).

Equality, unity and mutual assistance among ethnic groups are considered by the state of Vietnam to be one of the determinant factors for its sustainable development. Accordingly, national solidarity is the primary factor and the root of all victories of the Vietnamese revolution. It is, in fact, unity among people who share the common goal of class, national and social liberations. During the construction of modern socialism, unity is necessary among peoples to promote the whole national, both traditional and modern, power, spiritual and material strengths and especially human strengths. A national unity bloc should be built to include party unity, solidarity among classes and international one so as to build up a synergy. Great unity has, therefore, become an objective and dynamics of the country’s development process.

Ethnic equality results from basic human rights. It is among the basic principles of the ethnic policies of the party. It is equal rights of all ethnic races in all aspects of social life which are ensured by the law. Its contents are expressed mainly in that all ethnic groups are equal to rights and duties politically, economically, culturally, socially and opportunity of development. Ethnic citizens are helped in all aspects to quickly catch up with the general level. Mutual assistance for co-development is an objective factor in relations between ethnic groups. It includes assistance by the more developed ethnic majorities to less-developed minorities. The state’s assistance is extremely important because it is a focused investment that facilitates the progression of minorities. Mutual assistance among ethnic groups for co-development is the superiority in the party’s ethnic policies.
Having deep awareness of the strategic significance of the issues of ethnic groups and their solidarity, especially in the renovation of the country, VCP has paid continuous attention to construction and good implementation of ethnic policies so as to enhance and promote the strengths of the massive solidarity bloc. Under its comprehensive renovation guideline and identification of ethnic policies as part of social policy, the Party has claimed:

It is the party and the state’s task to increase the unity bloc of the country’s ethnic groups, promoting the revolutionary spirit and creative capacity of ethnic minorities in the cause of construction of the SRV.

The party’s ethnic policies provide absolute equality in all aspects between ethnic groups, offering necessary conditions to uproot economic and cultural gaps between minorities and majorities. (VCP Congress document presented at the 8th National Congress, 1996).

In practice priority policies given to ethnic peoples in remote, innermost and needy areas do not mean their implementation is doing a favour to them, but equality, unity, mutual respect and assistance for progress instead. The guideline of equality, unity, mutual respect, and assistance for progress and realization of industrialisation, modernisation, construction and protection of the country is, therefore, the core content of the party’s new idea on ethnic issues, policies, and unity.

It should be said that contents and requirements of equality and mutual respects among ethnic groups do exist objectively during the implementation of social management, though there are economic, cultural and social gaps between ethnic minorities and majorities, even to a great extent in some places. Implementing ethnic policies must be linked to a consistent practice of respecting and ensuring the religious freedom of the citizen in line with the law. In practice, ethnic, religious and human right issues are always sensitive because hostile forces keep making use those issues to stimulate and separate the population, ethnic groups, and religions and harm the national interests. Therefore, good implementation of those policies is to contribute to overcoming those discriminations and separations as well as inferior complexes of ethnic groups and religion. Renovation and good implementation of ethnic policies to settle ethnic issues and create national solidarity are the cause of the Vietnamese community under the VCP leadership.

Expansion and promotion of democracy are objective requirements while social discipline and national moral standards must be respected. Social justice must be ensured so that ethnic minority can increasingly deeply realize and better implement the ethnic policy of the party and the state and more successfully settle socio-economic issues in those areas.

3.2 The state’s interference to ensure relations between nations in the present period

Based on the theory and practice, we can say that relations between minorities and majorities in Dien Bien in particular and in Vietnam, in general, are those of equality, unity and mutual respect which can be seen in all aspects of social life. Let us review what state interferences have been available.

3.2.1 In political terms

An ethnic minority citizen has every basic political right as that of a Kinh. He or she may participate in state management activities and supervision of state activities through direct or indirect democratic ways which include direct comments raised at hamlet meetings or through his/ her right of denunciation and complaint, or through his/ her representative at the National Assembly at the latter’s meetings with voters... In addition, ethnic minority representatives are always found in the National Assembly.

3.2.2 In economic terms

Due to the typical characteristics of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, those in Dien Bien tend to inhabit mountains, highland, and innermost areas where there are no favourable conditions for economic development. The province has provided economic development strategies that promote advantages of land, natural resources and available labour force to reduce poverty and narrow down the economic gap between the Kinh and ethnic minorities, between the mountainous areas and plain and urban ones. Like the Kinh, ethnic minorities are also entitled to economic development, production and business in line with the law. In addition, they are facilitated by the state through subsidy to prices, provision of seeds and breeds, and farming supplies...

3.2.3 In educational and cultural terms

Under Vietnam’s active integration into the world, its culture in general and its subcultures all mix with that of many other countries in the region and the world. What matter is how Vietnam can receive selected progressive ideas, healthy cultural traits of other cultures to enrich and beautify its own, and at the same time, know how to preserve and promote its culture facing negative influences of other foreign cultures which are immigrating into Vietnam and Dien Bien.

To overcome this situation, Vietnam has been promoting its literacy programme; it has finished universalisation of primary education and been popularizing lower secondary education while building a system of boarding schools for ethnic students of all levels to facilitate their learning. The country has also been diversifying and quickly developing training and vocational training forms in ethnic areas; introducing vocational programmes in ethnic boarding schools; continuing its good implementation of priority policies for ethnic students’ entry in colleges and universities, and working out organisation of a system of training schools for ethnic intellectuals and cadres.

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3.2.4. In social terms
To ensure equality between ethnic groups in entitlement to state social security policies, and to facilitate life improvement in all aspects so that ethnic minorities can live in a civilized society which suits their culturem Dien Bien has endlessly increased the number of clinics and medical staff for ethnic-dominating communes and hamlets; and promoted the quality of health care for ethnic people such as: organizing free health examination and medicine provision, holding preventive health care and epidemic preemption, communicating health care methods, especially for reproductive health...

The province has maintained and promoted forms of community activities, promoted the role of the village pachiarach and hamlet head in educating ways of living for community members, especially ethnic minority young people so as to prevent social evils that undermine social security and order such as drug addiction or overdrinking. It has recovered and developed traditional productions and craft villages linked with commercial and tourism development, employment, and income generation for ethnic people.

The state also provides a special privilege birth policy for those ethnic groups of less than 10,000 people (Vietnam’s population policy regulates that ethnic groups of less than 10,000 may have 3 children).

3.3 Factors affecting relations between ethnic groups in the current time
Through analyzing the specific areas the state of Vietnam has interfered to ensure social justice and promote people’s democracy, we have realized that those factors of big influence over relations between ethnic groups. We will here below further consider the difficulties and challenges against those factors during the integration period.

3.3.1 The economic factor
Implementing the state’s renovation policy in the integration into the world, the economic structure of ethnic areas has been shifting towards commodity production, effective exploitation of potentials and advantages for local socio-economic development. The material life of ethnic people is basically stable and increasingly improved. However, apart from good things brought by economic development, new issues have arisen in all fields of social life requiring settlement: the rich and poor gap between ethnic minorities and majorities, between rural and urban areas, and between the lowland and the highland have been increasing; the vulnerable groups such as women, children, ethnic people, the disabled suffer from a low integration capacity… If the state does not have timely regulative policies for social welfare that ensure fair benefits, there would be deep social separation. Those are potential conflicts causing instabilities in social, economic and political life.

3.3.2 Socio-cultural factors
Together with the economic development, the state’s social policy has been facilitating ethnic people to absorb mankind’s advanced cultural values, and popularize their own cultural character. However, the bad side of the market economy has been affecting ethnic-cultural reservation. It has caused some ethnic people to rely on luck and created opportunities for an uprise of negative supertitions. More dangerously, hostile forces have been using material things to induce part of ethnic people to cause instability in social order and security. Profit-oriented lifestyle upholding material values have transformed the traditional cultural values of ethnic groups. Antiques are stolen; cultural market days are gone; community meetings losing their values... the bad side of the market economy has been negatively affecting ethnic peoples’ cultural values in Dien Bien to some extent. These are also basic challenges during the development and integration of not only Dien Bien but also Vietnam.

3.3.3 Political factor
The Vietnamese, especially ethnic peoples, are to some extent affected by Confucianism, male chauvinism, the French colonists’ obscurantism… Along with the underdeveloped economic level, some ethnic people have weak perceptions. Some may not speak and write Vietnamese – the popular language of the country, and reserve old-fashioned customs and conventions… Those negative ideas have led to two consequences: on one hand, people may not be able to realize their democracy right, and on the other hand, they may not be interested in social and state issues (women may think they are men’s matters and people think they are state matters) and thus lose their own democracy. Besides, the legal mechanism remains unclear although the public sphere has been popularly established. In addition, due to political limitations as mentioned above, the voice of many communities and interest groups have not received positive feedback from the state.

3.4 Actual expressions of relations between ethnic groups
Most highland ethnic peoples are still facing economic difficulties relying much on state support; therefore, their enjoyment of material and cultural life remained limited. On the other hand, due to their limited education, ethnic people may feel inferior wishing not to integrate with the other groups.

To promote people’s mastery and innovation, the Vietnamese government has issued the Regulation on Grassroots Democracy identifying forms to promote people’s democracy. It has also established the role of the grassroots political system to ensure people’s active participation in giving comments to the making of socio-economic policies. However, ethnic cadres’s participation in the political system and state management remains mere formality with poor quality.

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Some localities have not conducted well the openness and democracy in land use planning, land compensation prices, resettlement policy, and management of public finance. Some local governments lack solidarity experiencing bureaucracy, corruption, wastefulness and negative activities without timely prevention. Farmers’ complaints remain complicated affecting people’s trust in governments. Some ethnic people depend on state support.

On the other hand, due to the bad side of market mechanism and low awareness, some people from the ethnic majority has not had proper respect for ethnic groups.

4. SOME ISSUES OF ETHNIC POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN DIEN BIEN

4.1. Results of ethnic policy implementation

Social policy is the state institutionalisation of the party’s directions on settling social issues related to people, groups or the whole society in terms of human development because humans provide social justice, security and order, and development. Ethnic policy is an important component within the social policy for building a socialist state ruled by law in Vietnam.

The local ethnic committee functions to uniformly conduct ethnic work management and ensure implementation of ethnic policies. The ethnic committee in Dien Bien is under the leadership of the provincial People’s Committee advising and assisting the latter to conduct state management of ethnic work and carrying out some other duties and functions assigned to it by the latter. It contributes to uniform management of ethnic work from the central to the local level. Specifically, The committee provides long-term programmes and work plans for ethnic work, advises on measures to improve the material and spiritual life as well as education improvement for ethnic groups. Of the province...

Home to many different ethnic groups, Dien Bien has made efforts to implement ethnic work focusing on support to economic development, improved living conditions, narrowing down the rich and poor gap among ethnic groups. The result can be seen in the following things:

In terms of economic development and agricultural and forestry production: it has developed a socialist-oriented market economy suitable to local features and conditions ensuring ethnic minorities can exploit their local advantages to enrich themselves and the country. Under state support, agricultural and forestry production has been focally developed comprehensively with a positive shift of production structure towards commodity production. Needy communes have been supported through the province’s various policies for investment and support that encourage the development of cultivation, animal raising, forestry jobs, aquaculture, instruction on the promotion of farming, fishing, and industry. Introduction of new and advanced technology in production has contributed to a change of cultivating customs, quick increase of food growing areas and short duration industrial trees. The local economy is developing at nearly 12% per year on average in the recent years. The province has well-conducted price subsidy policies and free support to production in highland and needy ethnic areas. The highlands have had the effective mobilization of fixed settlement and farming introducing high productivity animal and plant breeds into production for higher income. Development of agriculture and forestry has formed increasingly large concentrated production areas linked to processing such as tea, bamboo shoot, manioc, cinnamon areas... The removal of opium growing has been supported by highland people shifting to new economic structure and production.

Animal raising has been focal developed and identified as the main production. There have been policies and investment decisions for the development of cattle and aquaculture; focusing on improvement and development of cows, lean pigs, and sea products in forms of farms, semi industry, and industry. Forestry production has been much invested to raise new forests and protect preventive forests and new ones. The policy has been supported and implemented by the people. The province has gradually reduced the number of especially needy communes; basically completed the fixed settlement and farming and ended free migration; basically settled lack of farming land for farmers; prevented environment degradation. At the same time, it has accelerated investment in the construction of the correct infrastructure to positively serve economic development. So far, 100% of the communes in the province have had motorway to communal centre in the dry season, some intercommunal and interhamlet routes have been made with concrete. Irrigation works have increased watered and reclaimed areas. Such welfare constructions as markets, schools, commune clinics, electricity, and clean water have been paid attention and invested to actively support the socio-economic development for mountainous areas; 65% of rural people have clean sanitary water. The school network has been enhanced, rickety classrooms removed... Thanks to those activities, the highland economy has undergone a positive change; people’s life remarkably improved and chronic hunger in the highland basically removed.

In terms of commerce and services: the network of mountainous and ethnic markets has been quickly developed. Essential commodities have been provided to meet the consumption needs of people in the highland, needy, remote and innermost areas.

In terms of culture: eco-tourism, cultural tourism, and spiritual activities have been paid attention to aiming to renovate historical and cultural relics and preserve the traditional culture of ethnic minorities in the province. The province has endlessly improved every condition for ethnic peoples to approach and benefit from mankind’s advanced
cultural achievements, to inherit positive cultural traditions and at the same time, it has removed outdated customs that prevent their progression. 90% of the population has access to television and 100% to the radio. It has proper policies for cultural performances and those working in the field of ethnic arts and culture. Through festivals, folk culture values have been preserved and promoted increasingly enriching people’s cultural and spiritual life.

**In terms of society:** Accelerating poverty reduction. Dien Bien has been implementing many policies for ethnic areas such as priority lending for poor households, instructions on ways of working, transfer of production technology and experience to poor households so that they can eliminate poverty themselves. In addition, it has provided capacity building training courses for poverty reduction cadres, especially those working in communes and hamlets. The province has supported poor households to remove their rickety houses... to ensure the acceleration of poverty reduction and sustainable poverty reduction in ethnic minority areas.

**In terms of education and training:** Dien Bien has implemented special policies for the highland and ethnic minority to create change in quality and effectiveness. The educational system from kindergarten to secondary schooling in ethnic minority areas has been enhanced and developed to the level that << 100% of the communes have kindergartens>> (Report on ethnic groups and patriotic movement of ethnic groups in Dien Bien, 2010). The number of ethnic people going to primary education has been increasing. The system of academic schools for ethnic children has been consolidated and developed. In addition, vocational training has been promoted with special attention to the promotion of traditional textile and craft villages.

**In terms of healthcare:** Health examination quality and epidemic prevention have been improved; material facilities and doctors upgraded... Campains are launched to reduce early marriage to improve population quality. Improvements can be seen in pregnancy care program, anti-malnutrition in children, vaccination, free examination for children aged under 6; provision of health insurance cards for poor households...

**In political terms:** The province has enhanced and improved effectiveness of the political system, especially regularly those of mountainous districts and communes; 100% of ethnic minority communes have VCP members. Ethnic cadres and officials account for 20% ranging from the government of the commune, district to province and in state management agencies of the province. They are trained of the Vietnamese spoken and written language to ensure their understanding and respect to people as well as their responsibility to the latter. It is the practice over the years in Dien Bien that either the Chair of the People’s Committee or the Provincial Party Secretary is from an ethnic minority.

### 4.2 Some difficulties and challenges facing the promotion of implementation of ethnic policies in Dien Bien

Over the past years, limitations remain in farming and forestry production, though developing; economic development in ethnic minority areas remain much weaker than the general level. Highland, remote and innermost communes, especially hamlets, have been facing low economic shift, low economic effectiveness, lack of sustainability, low competitiveness, low quality of commodity.

Ethnic production conventions in the highland remain outdated mainly relying on manual work with traditional experience, extensive farming, self-sufficience, and non-market production. Most of the highland labourers have not been trained vocationally while services and solutions of extensive farming, forestry, and fishing, as well as the transfer of new technology and vocational training, have not been strong enough for a progressive breakthrough. The grassroots cadres’ capacity weaknesses such as low academic and professional levels are popularly found. As a result, the implementation of guidelines and policies have not met requirements or been difficult to carry out. Training for grassroots ethnic cadres, though cared, have not met practical requirements. The above situation requires urgent enhancement and completion of the grassroots political system along with cadre training.

Security in the highland and ethnic areas is basically maintained, but there are potential instabilities in some places. Though gradually reduced over the years, free migration has not come to an end. Regrowing opium faces dangers of the explosion as the growing area, though reduced, remain unstable. Those fields scatter in remote and innermost regions bordering other provinces making it difficult to find and remove them.

### 4.3 Dien Bien’s direction on future ethnic policy

The province will continue to review ethnic cadres and civil servants developing and implementing good planning and training, use and compensation for them. It will develop priority policies to attract qualified cadres to work in needy communes and areas.

The province will provide mountainous socio-economic development planning in line with its overall one. It will develop and publicise regional planning, town planning... to attract investments. Development projects for agriculture, forestry, commerce, and industry will be developed and implemented to make the economic shift. The province will well conduct poverty reduction and fixed settlement and farming to stabilize production. It will also mobilize people to fully stop growing opium and deforestation for farming.

The province will effectively use the central government’s support and assistance from local businesses and army units for poor districts, needy communes, and hamlets with many poor households. In the coming years, the province should help poor people to settle such issues as lack of food, drinking water, production materials, and tools and temporary housing.

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The province will enhance the construction of the political system, building and preserving the massive unity bloc, preventing localism, separation, and lack of unity among ethnic peoples. It will enhance and improve the quality of the grassroots political system in ethnic areas to perfect cadre quality and increase the numbers of ethnic party members. The province will increase its propaganda and improve ethnic people’s awareness of state and party’s policies, prevent superstition and gradually remove outdated conventions; implement the regulation of grassroots democracy; promote the role of village pachiarch, hamlet chiefs and clan heads who are trusted by the community to protect and enhance the massive unity bloc.

It will continue effective implementation of educational and cultural development programmes increasing the radio and television cover and improving training quality; increasing and encouraging the teaching of the ethnic minority language in schools, families, and hamlets; improving the quality and size of vocational training and creating employment for ethnic young people. It will increase activities of communication and propaganda at the grassroots level, increasing quality and the length of radio and television programmes in ethnic languages; researching, collecting, preserving and promoting good cultural traditions of ethnic minorities. The province will promote practical solutions to help ethnic minorities to preserve and develop their culture.

Under the current condition, fearing a loss of cultural character is firmly based. Many Vietnamese leaders and scholars have over the years paid attention to the preservation of national cultural character. It is because Vietnam in general and Dien Bien, in particular, has a long cultural tradition which has been existing for thousands of years without losing its own character but perfecting itself through learning from Chinese, French and Russian cultures. There is nevertheless no guarantees that the Vietnamese will not lose their character facing integration into the world if the people and the state do not have practical actions. Internal strengths of ethnic peoples should at the same time be promoted to preserve and promote their own cultures because they are creators and users of their culture.

The province will enhance social and political security and order avoiding pressing spots in ethnic areas, implement the religion policy making timely and effective prevention of hostile forces’ schemes to separate or destroy solidarity.

CONCLUSION

The mountainous Dien Bien province is home to many ethnic minorities with the underdeveloped economy and many difficulties in people’s life. Due to its historical, social and natural settings, ethnic groups in Dien Bien have unevenly developed socio-economic development: low land ethnic groups are more developed than those in highland and remote areas. Many groups live in an extremely harsh natural setting so their production is unstable, their life poor and backward.

Throughout the history, Dien Bien has always considered ethnic issues and solidarity a strategy for its socio-economic development. Depending on each historical phase and socio-economic development state, the ethnic policies vary to fit practical demands. The integration into the rest of the world and development of multisectoral commodity economy further requires equality among ethnic groups, poverty reduction, social security, ethnic democracy during the construction of the country.

In order to contribute to the construction of the socialist state ruled by law in Vietnam, ethnic issues closely linked with unity, equality, mutual respect and assistance have been not only mentioned in legal documents but also asserted in social life.

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