



SOME ISSUES ABOUT STRENGTHENING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ETHNICITY POLICY FOR THE KHMER ETHNICITY IN VIETNAM

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Abstract: Vietnam has distinct regional cultures, with the Khmer ethnic group playing a vital role in the cultural diversity of the Southwestern region. This research utilized content analysis of secondary data on the Khmer to reflect challenges implementing current ethnic policies and propose enhancing solutions. Recommendations focus on raising awareness and investment to preserve Khmer religious-cultural heritage. More priority is needed in remote areas to improve education quality, healthcare services, economic growth and poverty reduction for the Khmer. Policies should concentrate on agricultural development, new technologies, tourism, vocational training and job creation to increase productivity and incomes. With appropriate guidance, Vietnam can further advance social equality and national unity. The study provides insights on limitations in current ethnic policies and practical measures to strengthen implementation, affirming the importance of ensuring minority rights for national development.

Key words: Ethnicity; Khmer; Vietnam; Ethnic Policy; Party and State.

Introduction:

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country, with many ethnic minority groups living scattered in plains, mountains, border areas, islands and remote areas which are of strategic importance in terms of socio-economic and national defense-security aspects. Therefore, the Party and the State of Vietnam have always paid special attention to implementing ethnic policies to develop socio-economy for ethnic minority people towards the goal of “wealthy people, strong country, equitable, democratic and civilized society” (Central Propaganda Committee, 2015). In particular, the Party

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and the State of Vietnam pay special attention to the living conditions of over 1.3 million Khmer people concentrated mostly in the southwestern provinces (Vinh, 2023). With the spirit of determination to “Implement policies of equality, solidarity, mutual respect and support among ethnic groups” (National Academy of Public Administration, 2014, p.167). Thus, the Party and the State of Vietnam always create favorable conditions for ethnic groups to develop together, closely associated with the common prosperity of the Vietnamese ethnic community, preserving and promoting cultural identity, language and good traditions of ethnic groups, fighting discrimination and division thoughts among ethnic groups. Timely policies of the Party and the State of Vietnam for ethnic minority people in general and Khmer people in particular have brought positive results, improving living standards, reducing poverty and contributing to the strategy of great national unity. However, the life of Khmer people still faces many limitations and emerging difficulties, including precarious economic conditions, many poor households, low education level and dependence mentality on state support. Thereby, the paper aims to provide some recommendations and solutions to enhance the implementation of ethnic policies for Khmer people in Vietnam in the new situation.

Analysis:

1. General theoretical issues on Vietnam’s ethnic policies and current policies applied to the Khmer ethnic group in Vietnam

Ethnic policy is a specific policy of the ruling class in a multi-ethnic country. Ethnic policy has been discussed on the general spirit and principles of the policy concept applied to a specific target. According to scholar Rodolfo Stavenhagen, ethnic policies are designed to “exacerbate or mitigate, resolve potential conflicts” (Stavenhagen, 1996). Thereby, ethnic policy aims to maintain a balance and equality among ethnic groups in a country to create overall stability, harmony and prosperity. For Vietnam today, the principle of “equality, solidarity, mutual assistance for development” is the foundation for the Party and State’s ethnic policies during the period of building equality and justice among ethnic groups domestically. Therefore, Vietnam’s ethnic policy can be understood as: “The collection of perspectives, guidelines, and policies of the Party and State directly affecting ethnic groups and inter-ethnic relations. Ethnic policy has the class nature of the State in both domestic and international spheres” (National Academy of Public Administration, 2004, p.50).

Additionally, the Vietnam Philosophy and Culture Research Board states: Ethnic policy resolves relations in a multi-ethnic community of a country according to the ruling class’ viewpoint. The ethnic policy of the Communist Party is a system of guidelines and solutions to realize political, economic, cultural and social equality among ethnic groups, with a focus on ethnic minorities with underdeveloped socio-economic conditions. The ethnic policy of the Communist Party and Socialist Republic of Vietnam ensures the strength of the entire ethnic community and fine traditional identities of each ethnic group, properly handling interests between ethnic groups based on Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh’s ideology and Vietnam’s reality (Communist Party and Socialist Republic, 2002, p. 42). From the above analysis, Vietnam’s ethnic policy can be understood as the

strategy and concrete plans of the Party and State regarding political, economic, social, cultural, etc. spheres affecting ethnic groups and inter-ethnic relations, corresponding to each revolutionary period, based on the principles of equality, solidarity, and mutual assistance for common development.

Recently, the Party and State of Vietnam have always paid attention to and kept up with the practical living conditions and continually adjusted appropriate policies for the interests of the Khmer people. Currently, the Party and State of Vietnam are applying the following valid ethnic policies for the Khmer people:

TABLE 1: CURRENT ETHNIC POLICIES APPLIED TO KHMER ETHNIC GROUP IN VIETNAM

STT	DECISION AND DECREE OF THE STATE OF VIETNAM	FIELD
1	Religious Law No. 01/2016/QH14	Culture
2	Decision 12/2018/QD-TTg	Politics
3	Decree 05/2019/ND-CP	Economy
4	Decision 1917/QD-TTg	Education
5	Decision 2959/QD-BYT	Health

Firstly, religious policy for Khmer pagodas, monks and nuns The religious policy and management of religions, including Khmer pagodas, monks and nuns in Vietnam are stipulated in the Law on Religion and other relevant documents. Specifically, the Religion Law No. 01/2016/QH14 was passed by the National Assembly on November 18, 2016 and took effect from January 1, 2018 (The Library of Law, 2016). The implementation of the religious policy for Khmer pagodas, monks and nuns helps the Khmer ethnic minority maintain and develop their religious and cultural values and traditions, preserve and develop the religion as a place for spiritual practice, cultural exchange and life experience sharing for the ethnic community. It also helps promote the social role of monks in educating, advising and assisting ethnic minorities; and contributes to economic and tourism development based on the cultural and religious heritage of the Khmer people.

Secondly, policy for prestigious people in ethnic minority communities This policy is implemented through Decision 12/2018/QD-TTg on criteria and policies for prestigious people in ethnic minorities (Library of Law, 2018). The implementation encourages the Khmer's participation in political, economic and social activities; promotes the bridging role of prestigious people between the community and the local government, helping authorities understand people's aspirations and provide timely support for the Khmer's stability and development. The prestigious also play an important role in educating and conveying cultural values to enhance ethnic pride and strengthen great national unity.

Thirdly, economic development policy for the Khmer This policy is demonstrated in Decree 05/2019/ND-CP, Decision 1719/QD-TTg on socio-economic support for ethnic minorities and

mountainous areas (Thu, 2022). The implementation helps promote local economic growth, job creation, income increase for the Khmer to improve their living standards. It also supports infrastructure development to facilitate business and investment; enhances the Khmer's production capacity and product consumption to aid economic growth and living standard improvement. Moreover, it focuses on education and training investment to create quality human resources and job opportunities for the ethnic minority.

Fourthly, education and health policies for the Khmer The education policy is shown in Decision 1304/QD-TTg on the 2016-2025 national education and training program. It provides the Khmer better access to quality education, contributing to human resource development, strengthening inter-ethnic solidarity and unity. The health policy is mentioned in Decision 2959/QD-BYT on ethnic minority and mountainous health development until 2030 (Dong, 2022). It helps the Khmer get better healthcare, disease prevention and treatment, hence reducing mortality rate and enhancing the community's health. This also strengthens local health facilities and capacities for the Khmer to actively engage in socio-economic activities and local development. The policy reduces financial burden on ethnic minority families regarding healthcare expenses, raising their health awareness for effective disease prevention and treatment.

2. Some solutions to enhance the implementation of ethnic policies for the Khmer people in Vietnam

2.1. Regularly raise awareness for Khmer ethnic people on protecting and preserving pagodas, monks and festivals in Vietnam today

i) Continue training successor forces representing Khmer Theravada Buddhism with knowledge and ethics, supporting schools and classes teaching Buddhist doctrines for Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks at intermediate level, printing books, Tripitaka in Khmer (Pali) to meet the learning needs of monks and Khmer Theravada Buddhist followers. Creating favorable conditions for pagodas to organize classes on Vinaya texts, Pali language. Implementing the policy of supporting the training of Khmer Theravada Buddhist monks needs to go hand in hand with implementing policies on economic and cultural development in southwestern provinces. Continuing to raise awareness for monks, Management Boards, Khmer Theravada Buddhists on the country's economic renewal leadership, the role of religion in gathering solidarity between religions and ethnicities in the cause of building and protecting the Fatherland.

ii) Respecting and preserving cultural heritage at pagodas, places of worship, preserving and restoring historical and cultural relics, disseminating and guiding pagodas to well implement legal regulations on construction, repair, traditional religious activities. Guiding, assisting and creating conditions for Khmer ethnic people to organize traditional festivals to maintain and promote ethnic cultural identity, raising awareness and promoting positivity in festival activities. In particular, consolidating and maintaining traditional performing art troupes, encouraging cultural, artistic, physical education and sports movements, strongly implementing the emulation movement "All

people unite to build new rural cultural life, civilized cities”, eliminating superstition and outdated customs and practices.

iii) Continuing to well implement propaganda work among Khmer ethnic people on preserving and promoting their own ethnic cultural identity. Training core cadres in charge of preserving and promoting Khmer ethnic culture, further promoting the role of monks, prestigious people in the Khmer ethnic community for them to recognize and participate in the key role of self-preservation and promotion of their ethnic culture, through training activities, workshops, supporting the work of transmitting and promoting cultural and artistic values of ethnic groups in the community. Linking the preservation and development of Khmer ethnic culture with socio-economic development in each local area, ensuring a harmonious relationship between economic and cultural development, in conservation, promotion and development. The preservation and promotion of Khmer people’s intangible cultural values also needs to be associated with tourism development, creating conditions for developing some traditional handicrafts which are the strengths of Khmer ethnic people such as sculpture carving, weaving, etc., contributing to strengthening and promoting Khmer cultural identity and promoting community tourism in provinces across Vietnam.

2.2. Further increase investment in education and healthcare for Khmer people in remote areas in Vietnam

i) On education: Enhancing comprehensive quality of education and training to meet requirements of industrialization, modernization and integration. Continuously maintaining achievements of universal primary education at proper age and universal lower secondary education, having models of universal upper secondary education for large-scale expansion (including general upper secondary and vocational upper secondary). Focusing on expanding, upgrading and investing in new infrastructure in schools and community learning centers; continuing investing in improving quality of the ethnic boarding school system towards interconnected lower and upper secondary levels and meeting national standards, maintaining and improving the quality of teaching Khmer script in the general education system in areas with significant Khmer population, while also supporting teaching, management of curriculum content, teaching and learning Khmer language, Pali, Buddhist teachings in Khmer pagodas, ensuring sufficient textbooks for teaching and learning; consolidating and improving the teaching staff, resolving obstacles related to policies for teachers; researching integration of vocational training curricula into ethnic boarding schools. Effectively implementing policies on sponsored admissions and appropriate assignment of graduating sponsored students to schools; effectively implementing policies to support ethnic minority students with difficult circumstances pursuing studies at universities. Focusing on training management education officers and teachers who are Khmer people to meet immediate and long-term demands.

Developing the system of lower secondary schools, ethnic minority boarding upper secondary schools towards national standard schools in areas with a large Khmer population to

create conditions for ethnic minority children of school age to access education, minimizing school dropouts, and increasing graduation rates at all levels. Establishing teacher training schools in the Mekong Delta region and nationwide to train teachers who are Khmer people, including monks capable of teaching, to serve bilingual teaching at all levels. Providing scholarship policies to encourage outstanding policy beneficiary students and high-achieving students at all educational levels and majors. Investing in compiling bilingual Vietnamese – Khmer textbooks. For Khmer ethnic people, it is necessary to preserve their own spoken and written language in accordance with legal regulations, eliminate outdated customs that hinder, while also absorbing cultural quintessence of humanity to enrich traditional culture of the ethnicity. Investing in preservation of ranked historical and cultural relics; promoting forms of cultural arts, traditional festivals and traditional sports of Khmer people; effectively implementing policies on sponsored admissions according to Decree 134/2006/ND-CP dated November 14, 2006 and Decree 49/2015/ND-CP dated May 15, 2015 of the Government, selecting good and excellent ethnic students according to sponsored admission mechanism to medical schools to supplement medical human resources in ethnic minority areas.

ii) On healthcare: Improving quality of primary health care and medical examination and treatment, focusing on upgrading hospitals, health stations, regional polyclinics. Continuing to deploy target programs on healthcare, health insurance policies, population, family planning, reducing birth rate. Striving for every person in the region to be provided with care. Directing strong transformation in improving medical ethics, quality of examination and treatment at provincial, district health centers and commune health stations to meet people's healthcare demands. Effectively implementing national healthcare programs. Focusing on directing to maintain achievements in building communes and towns meeting national criteria on healthcare. Promoting population and family planning work, reducing the rate of third childbirth among Khmer ethnic people. Upgrading basic healthcare services, creating conditions for people to access and use quality healthcare services. Improving the medical staff in both quantity and quality, having supporting policies for medical staff working in ethnic minority and especially difficult areas; hospitals need to arrange speaking Khmer fluent staffs to raise morale, medical professional ethics and service attitudes of officials, medical staff, especially doctors in public healthcare establishments.

Continuing to direct functional agencies to effectively implement programs, policies, projects on primary healthcare and protection, providing health insurance cards for Khmer ethnic people. Continuing to effectively implement work of caring for people's health, prioritizing investment in building and consolidating grassroots health system, building health stations and regional polyclinics, boosting preventive healthcare activities. Effectively implementing national healthcare programs in Khmer ethnic minority areas, especially on population and family planning, postnatal health, while also mobilizing support from authorities to invest in modern equipment, upgrading wards, adding beds, implementing free medical examination, treatment and medicine provision for poor Khmer households. Continuing to invest in hygienic water supply system for concentrated residential areas, educating people to raise awareness of ecological environment

protection, actively launching campaigns for pagodas, scattered resident households to build hygienic toilets within pagoda campus, household campus, traffic routes, irrigation ditches, offices, schools. Propagandizing residents on environmental and climate factors that can adversely affect health of Khmer people, thereby enhancing propaganda and mobilization for Khmer people to well implement environmental sanitation protection. Implementing proper healthcare policies for Khmer ethnic people living in areas with especially difficult economic conditions and poor and near-poor ethnic minority households.

2.3. It is necessary to focus on directing economic development, sustainable poverty reduction, and improving the living standards of the Khmer ethnic people

i) Continue to well implement the provincial Party Committee's action program to implement the Resolution of the 7th Conference of the 10th Central Party Committee on "Agriculture, Farmers, and Rural Areas" (Anh, 2013). The implementation of the program must be focused, prioritized and sustainable, concentrating on especially difficult villages and communes; resolving the most urgent and pressing issues, prioritizing support for poor households and the most difficult ethnic minority groups; providing direct support to poor Khmer ethnic minority households living in especially difficult villages and communes. Focus on directing, reviewing, adjusting and supplementing planning for production areas, specialized cultivation areas, accelerating the shift in production structure towards industrialization, modernization, strongly applying scientific and technological advances and mechanization into production, effectively exploiting the potential of land, water surface, labor force, etc. In production, focus on concentrated commodity production, intensive investment, strongly restructuring the economy associated with renewing the growth model, improving productivity, quality, efficiency and competitiveness appropriate to each locality in order to exploit potential advantages in the direction of converting crops, livestock economically, focusing on developing products with high economic value, closely managing seasons, strengthening control and prevention of epidemics; multiplying breeding models, breeding high-yielding, improving quality, disease resistance.

ii) Invest in agricultural production development to increase economic efficiency. Investment programs for agricultural development should focus on typical local products such as fruits, vegetables, seafood specialties, aquaculture. At the same time, new technologies need to be introduced into production to increase productivity, reduce costs and improve product quality. Develop the fishery processing industry, strengthen farming of seafood varieties with potential for developing the fishery processing industry but have not been fully exploited. Invest in enterprises in the fishery processing industry, bring modern technology into production and promote exports. At the same time, it is necessary to introduce policies to support enterprises to enhance competitiveness in the market, thereby creating stable jobs and income for ethnic people. Strengthen the development of community tourism, taking advantage of community tourism as a potential field in pagodas with unique architecture that attracts domestic and foreign tourists. Support skills training for local people in tourism, while investing in building homestays and guesthouses in rural areas to

attract tourists. The development of community tourism will help increase income for local people and improve the lives of the Khmer ethnic people in the district.

iii) Continue to disseminate and mobilize fellow citizens to replicate linkage models, participate in developing various forms and scales of economic cooperation in order to well implement the linkage of production associated with processing and consumption of agricultural products, supply services for production and output for products, increase the value of goods, contributing to increasing income, improving and raising people's living standards. Review, plan and make investment projects to build irrigation works, upgrade and expand existing works, combined with new construction investment to create synchronization to promote the effectiveness of major works invested by the central government in the locality, ensure response to climate change, synchronized operation serving diversified production, promoting land area advantages. Focus on directing and building new rural development models in communes according to the national target program. Coordinate the direction of banking systems, credit institutions in the locality, with preferential policies to support capital sources so that people have conditions to develop production, especially prioritizing support in the field of agricultural production, livestock breeding, aquaculture and development of small industry and handicrafts.

2.4. Strengthening the Training of Officials and Respected Individuals within Ethnic Communities

i) It is essential to improve the quality of education provided by indigenous leaders within the region to establish a source for training officials from the Khmer ethnic group. This will enhance the effectiveness of training individuals from the Khmer ethnic group, particularly students in universities, colleges, and preparatory schools, so they can enter relevant fields upon graduation and leverage their skills, intelligence, and abilities for the benefit of the younger generation of Khmer people. This will also ensure a succession of well-trained officials.

ii) There should be special incentives, policies, and benefits in place to attract competent Khmer individuals to serve in local organizations. A systematic plan should be developed to train, nurture, and assign individuals who are proficient in the Khmer language to effectively communicate and engage with the Khmer population. Adequate support and remuneration should be provided to the officials working in Khmer communities. Proper positions should be allocated to Khmer officials in areas where they interact regularly with Khmer people to address concerns such as a lack of Khmer Party members in certain areas. This will enable officials to understand the thoughts, desires, and legitimate concerns of the Khmer community, allowing them to promptly resolve local issues. Only by understanding the thoughts, desires, and cultural heritage of the Khmer people, as well as their socioeconomic situation, can officials effectively address the needs of the community. Simultaneously, it is crucial to establish criteria for assessing the quality of ethnic officials, including their competence, moral integrity, political allegiance, task completion, and the trust of both the Party members and the people. Policies should be in place to honor core ethnic officials with strong reputations, who have made significant contributions to their communities, and

create training programs for influential individuals within Khmer communities to strengthen their capacity in disseminating and promoting Party and State policies.

Conclusion:

The paper has analyzed the concept of Vietnam's ethnic policies and the importance of ethnic policies in Vietnam. From there, the paper has proposed several key solutions including raising awareness and investment to preserve Khmer cultural and religious heritage such as pagodas, monks, and festivals. There needs to be greater priority given to remote areas to improve education quality, healthcare services, economic development and poverty reduction for Khmer people. Policies should focus on agricultural growth, new technologies, tourism, vocational training and job creation. Land use programs must consider impacts on Khmer people. With proper guidance and solutions, Vietnam can further promote social justice and unity. The research provides profound insights into limitations in current ethnic policies and proposes practical measures to strengthen implementation. It affirms the importance of ensuring ethnic minority rights for national development. The Vietnamese Party and State need to continue demonstrating their commitments to ethnic equality and support. Comprehensive policies are important to improve living standards, reduce poverty, and enable the full participation of minorities like Khmer people in Vietnam's industrialization and modernization journey.

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