

HO CHI MINH IDEOLOGY IN ETHNIC MINORITY POLICIES IN VIETNAM

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Abstract. Ethnic policies and their effectiveness in practice are of great importance to the sustainable and comprehensive development of a country. As a multi-ethnic country, Vietnam has shown constant efforts to resolve ethnic issues in order to ensure equality and development opportunities for all ethnic groups. For the purpose of clarifying the theoretical basis of Vietnam ethnic policies, the article has synthesized and analyzed the existing literature related to Ho Chi Minh ideology to indicate the reflection, the inheritance and the scientific application of his ideology about ethnic minorities in current ethnic policies in Vietnam. The author holds a strong belief that with a thorough understanding of this theoretical guideline, more proper and effective policies will be formulated and implemented in ethnic minorities' community.

1. Background

Vietnam is a multi-ethnic country with 54 ethnic groups including 53 ethnic minorities mainly living in mountainous areas and borders which have strategic positions of political importance, national security and defense and ecological systems. Ethnic minorities, together with the whole country, have made great contribution to the cause of national construction and defense. In the past, they were the cradle of revolution base, and the impetus for offensive uprisings against the invaders. Nowadays, they play a crucial role of a strong shield maintaining national dependence and strategic drivers for a sustainable socio-economic growth in the cause of country's renovation. However, besides great achievements we have obtained, ethnic minorities still lag behind and are suffering severe problems such as low economic levels, epidemic, unstable livelihood, illiteracy, etc. This reality creates an urgent need for more effective implementation of ethnic minorities' policies to improve their material and spiritual life, thus contributing to political stability, border security and national unity. This is also a sensitive issue that needs resolving scientifically and properly with cautions to avoid distorting arguments from enemies. Therefore, the author believes that in addition to reviewing and drawing lessons from the reality and undertaking socio-economic incentives for ethnic minorities, it is of importance to clarify and consolidate the theoretical basis on which ethnic minorities' policies rely.

In recent years, there have been many research projects focusing on ethnic issues

and the implementation of ethnic minorities' policies in our country. Most of them mainly dealt with the concept of ethnic minorities and their related issues on political, social and economic aspects in the light of Marxism - Leninism. In the meanwhile, Ho Chi Minh ideology whose rationale plays an important role in resolving ethnic minorities' issues in Vietnam has not received due attention from the researchers.

Employing a number of specialized research methods, namely historical method and logical method, together with the synthesis and analysis of existing literature, the article clarifies fundamental contents in Ho Chi Minh ideology concerning ethnic minorities' policies and confirms its contributions as an important theoretical background into the country's ethnic policies.

2. The fundamental contents in Ho Chi Minh ideology related to ethnic minorities' policy in Vietnam

2.1. Ethnic minority policies have to be directed towards national unity. This is the ultimate goal, top priority task and the matter of strategic importance to the success of Vietnam revolutions.

National solidarity is considered an invaluable tradition of the Vietnamese and our source of strength to fight and defeat the enemies during the country's history. Being absorbed with the national culture and history, Ho Chi Minh highly appreciated this tradition. Moreover, thanks to the study of the movements of the oppressed class in the world, he concluded that the reason why these struggles had not been a success was that they lacked proper leadership and, more importantly, a strong organization uniting all progressive forces. In the light of Marxism – Leninism and his first hand experiences he realized that masses play a decisive role and national unity is the ultimate goal and task of Vietnam revolutions.

According to Ho Chi Minh, national unity means uniting all individuals in Vietnam regardless of age - children or the elderly, gender - men or women, the poor or rich; regardless of majority or minority groups. Among them, he gave special attention to ethnic minorities and appreciated their roles and contribution to the cause of the country. Therefore, immediately after the success of August Revolution, he decided to establish Ethnic minorities Division to study and solve problems related to policies for ethnic minorities in the whole country. On 19 April 1946, President Ho Chi Minh attended a meeting with the Council of Ministers to discuss the matters of budget for food served in the army, the establishment of Ethnic minorities Division and other financial problems. On that same day, he wrote to Southern ethnic minorities on the occasion of their meeting in Pleiku, indicating that “ Kinh or Tho, Muong or Man, Gia Rai or Ede, Xe Dang or Ba Na and many other ethnic minorities are all Vietnamese, are all blood siblings. We share happiness and sorrow, poverty and prosperity; we live and die with each other.

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Rivers may run dry, mountains may be eroded, but our unity is never diminished. We are determined to unite all forces to protect our freedom and independence.” [8, p. 545-546].

Through many articles, letters and talks, President Ho Chi Minh was always concerned about the national unity. He constantly reminded ethnic minorities of their blood bond and duties to support each other like members in a family, to defeat enemies’ divisive machination. He used the most simple and obvious symbol for the unity strength: “like a bunch of sticks, this is Kinh, Thai, Meo, Xa, Man, Muong. Separately, each one can be broken. Yet if hold together, no one can break them. We not only can avoid the risk of being broken. We can stand up against anyone that means to do so as well. We, Vietnamese people, must unite as this fist.” [10, p. 45].

As the supreme leader of the Party and the country, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, during 24 years, President Ho Chi Minh has become the soul of the great and sustainable national unity. Among the contributions he made to Vietnam revolutions, the viewpoint of national unity has been of significance theoretically and practically. Our Party has considered Ho Chi Minh ideology as a principle in the process of implementing ethnic minority policies. At the sixth meeting, the Party set the task of “promoting the tradition of unity, revolutionary tenacity and bravery of ethnic minorities in order to strengthen the national unity and improve the socio-economic level in mountainous areas ...” [2, p. 450-451]. In the tenth meeting, the Party, again, confirmed “ethnic issues and ethnic minority unity hold a strategic and fundamental position in the revolution cause” [5, p. 12]. The eleventh meeting continued to emphasize that “uniting all ethnic minorities is a strategic task in our country’s revolution cause. All ethnic minorities in Vietnam should be equal, should love, respect and support each other in the cause of industrialization, modernization and national defense serving the ultimate goal of prosperous people, strong country, equal, democratic and civilized society.” [7, p. 244].

2.2 Treating all ethnic groups with fairness and equality and creating favorable conditions for them to support mutual development.

On the basis of inheriting and developing Marxist – Leninist platform of ethnicity in Vietnam context, President Ho Chi Minh pointed out that “Our country is an independent country of multi-ethnicity. All ethnic groups are equal in rights and obligations...Our ethnic policies are to enhance the equality and support among them to advance to socialism” [10, p. 596-597]. According to President Ho Chi Minh, ethnic equality must be connected to the protection of their rights and benefits regardless of minority or majority.

He also recognized that the goal of national independence we achieved was to take good care of their living standards in socio-economic, political, cultural, education

and medical aspects. Therefore, this struggling independence would become meaningless if the people still suffered from hunger, poverty, diseases and illiteracy. To ensure the equality among ethnic groups, as Ho Chi Minh believed, ethnic policies need to aim at shortening the development distance between ethnic minorities and the Kinh by creating good conditions for socio-economic development in ethnic minorities, encouraging support from people in low-land areas and removing ethnic prejudices and national narrow-minded views. He always told government officers to avoid arrogance for being ethnic majority or inferiority complexity of being a minority. He seriously demanded the Party committees, local government officers, unions and Party members to "...overcome the thinking of ethnic majority, national inferiority complex, narrow-minded ethnicity views" [12, p. 136]. He also diagnosed specific symptoms such as "The major ethnic groups are prone to arrogance. Local staff and people tend to consider themselves minor, then underestimate their strength, easily give up and refuse to make efforts. This needs to be avoided" [12, p. 136].

As mentioned above, the national unity is the strategic path we chose, the driving force and the determining factor for our victory in the cause of national defense and construction. Considering both theoretical and practical aspects, the national unity cannot be obtained without ethnic equality. This conclusion was consistently shown in Ho Chi Minh ideology and proved through the Vietnam revolutions. The principle of ethnic fairness and equality is mentioned not only in the Party's documents and the policies, but also in the Vietnam laws, that is in Article 6, "All Vietnamese citizens are equal in all aspects: political, economic and cultural" [13, p. 9]; in Article 8, "In addition to being equal in rights, ethnic minorities are assisted with all aspects to quickly keep pace with the national development" [13, p. 9]. Constitution 1992 stipulates, "The State shall implement the policy of equality, solidarity and mutual assistance among all ethnic groups and forbid all acts of discrimination and ethnic separation. The ethnic groups have rights to use their own language in spoken and written form, preserve their cultural identity and promote their good traditions. The State policies are aimed at the comprehensive development in all areas and all aspects to improve the material and spiritual life for ethnic minorities." [13, p. 138].

2.3 Developing the mountainous areas comprehensively in order for them to keep up with the low-land communities

Due to geographical and climatic features; previous colonial policies and the limitations of implementing ethnic policies, ethnic minorities still suffer a great deal of difficulties, uneven development and considerable development gap compared with that of low-land areas. As the result, President also showed special sympathy and attention to them and encouraged them to strive for socio-economic and cultural development. He regarded helping ethnic minorities as a compulsory task of the country's revolution and government officers. He said that "Under colonialism and feudalism, mountainous

people had a miserable life. Today, they are living in peace and independence, free from exploitation and oppression. However, the material life is yet improved much due to lack of care from government leaders. On behalf of the Central government, I handed this crucial task over to local officers from provincial to commune level.” [11, p. 323].

“Helping mountainous areas develop comprehensively” is not a generic motto but must be specified in policies in all aspects. At the Conference of the ethnic minorities in Vietnam dated 03 December 1945, President Ho Chi Minh affirmed that the State policies must include “1. Ethnic equality, the government shall abolish old practices and correct mistaken views; 2. The government shall try their best to support ethnic minorities in all aspects: a) in terms of economy, expanding agricultural production to many entitled beneficiaries, b) in terms of education, improving education level for ethnic minorities...” [8, p. 117-118]. In his speech at the meeting with government representatives of mountainous ethnic minorities in 1962, he set the immediate objectives to be achieved as follows “people have enough food and are healthier. Education level is improved. Transportation is more convenient. Villages are happier and national defense is, in turn, more stable.” [11, p. 610-611].

To accomplish the above goal, Uncle Ho offered a system of solutions through which he specified duties for each leadership level from the Central to the local and for each ministry, sector and Party member as well. He indicated that “About leadership, mountainous areas are of small population scattering in larges, and their conditions are varied. Therefore, the policies must be tailored to specific reality to avoid one-size-fits-all application. Local Party units and youth unions must be well developed and enlightened of socialism and worker class’ platform. It is of importance to build the capacity for local officers, especially the female, and commune officers. Leaders must be committed to the revolution process of the country to transform the Party’s resolutions to development drivers for people.

Each sector has to take responsibilities for the development of mountainous areas and pay more attention to this disadvantaged community.” [11, p. 611-612]. This has clarified his determination in overcoming the old constraints in ethnic policy leadership, which was one of the reasons for the underdevelopment of mountainous areas.

Ho Chi Minh’s aspiration of comprehensive development for mountainous areas has been implemented by the Party and State through a system of specific policies such as policies on capital mobilization, land, forests, resources development, science and technology development, markets and economic sectors, etc. These policies have been shown through many development programs and projects for mountainous areas as follows:

- The national programs for hunger, eradication and poverty reduction pursuant

to Decisions No. 133/1998/QĐ-TTg dated 27 March 1998 by Prime Minister gave priority to ethnic minorities and mountainous areas. The project invested in infrastructure, population restructuring, production support and livelihood development, resettlement and support for needy ethnic minorities...

- Socio-economic development program for extremely disadvantaged communes in mountainous and remote areas pursuant to Decision No. 135/1998/QĐ-TTg dated 31 July 1998 by the Prime Minister (implemented in 2,325 extremely poor communes).

- Program 134 (Program offering support for production land, residential land, houses and clean water for poor ethnic minorities households).

- 5 million ha afforestation project pursuant to Decision No. 661/QĐ-TTg dated 29 July 1997 by the Prime Minister.

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Besides the programs and projects for economic development, a number of consistent policies on education and training, community health care, preservation and promotion of cultural identity of ethnic minorities have also been implemented and initially gained encouraging results.

2.4. Paying attention to building capacity for local government staff, especially ones were ethnic minorities.

During his living time, President Ho Chi Minh was particularly keen on building cadre staff for the revolution cause. According to him, government officers are “those who explain the Party and Government’s policies to people and facilitate their understanding and implementation. At the same time, they also contact people to report local situations to the Party and Government. The Party and Government can, in turn, promulgate right policies tailoring particular situations. Therefore, the staff is of great importance and training the staff is the key task of the Government.” [9, p. 506]. Furthermore, it is true that all the guidelines and policies of the Party and Government are proposed and put into implementation by the officers. The accuracy as well as the success of a policy depends on them. President Ho Chi Minh once confirmed that “the success or failure in any task depends on the quality of officers” [9, p. 510]. In the task of building the Government staff, he made a conclusion that first and foremost attention should be paid to selecting and evaluating officers, in which ethic qualities should be given top priority since the Party is the representative of the working class and the national interests. After that, the selected officers are trained and used effectively for the sake of their development and maturity.

According to President Ho Chi Minh, the implementation of ethnic policies must start from the building of local staff focusing on training, developing and building capacity for officers who are ethnic minorities. In his speech at the meeting reviewing

the movement of agricultural cooperation, production development in combination with democratic reforms in mountainous areas on 08 October 1961, he stated, “We must pay attention to training and promoting mountainous officers. Kinh officers certainly assist mountainous ones to make progress in management work and improve their resilience. This support does not mean replacing them to do their tasks.” [11, p. 418].

President Ho Chi Minh also paid special attention to building the capacity for women officers in ethnic minorities. In his speech at the mountainous women’s conference on 19 March 1964, he emphasized, “You must try to study including compulsory education, political education and vocational education. You cannot make progress without education. If you are determined, you can study. Today many teachers, doctors, technicians, military captains are mountainous women... The Party committees at all levels have to develop and train more female Party members and youth unionists as well as support ethnic minorities’ cadres. This is the most important task assigned by the Central Government.” [12, p. 215-216]. Training female cadres in ethnic minorities proves the equality of our regime and also confirms the wide recognition of ethnic women’s contribution to the revolution cause in Vietnam.

Ho Chi Minh ideology about ethnic issues has demonstrated a clear sense of his noble humanism, leaving us a valuable heritage of national unity that he had spent a lifetime constructing and preserving. His ideology and example of engaging ethnic minorities into the national cause and development has become a strict guideline for our Party and Government formulating and implementing ethnic policies, which in turn have made positive changes in socio-economic and cultural life of ethnic minorities in recent years.

3. Conclusion

Ho Chi Minh ideology about ethnic minorities policies has inherited Vietnamese traditions of national unity, humanism, humanity values in Eastern cultures and successfully applied Marxism and Leninism, particularly Leninist platform on ethnicity, to solve ethnic issues and ethnic related policies in Vietnam. The core contents of Ho Chi Minh ideology about ethnic issues include building the strong block of national unity, promoting equality among all ethnic groups in all aspects: economic, political, cultural, and social, comprehensively developing mountainous areas to enable them to keep pace with the development level of low-land areas and constructing ethnic minorities’ cadres. This has become the theoretical basis and the cross-cutting guideline for the Vietnam Communist Party in resolving ethnic issues during the revolution leadership.

Following the spirit of Marxism and Leninism and Ho Chi Minh ideology about ethnic policies and their implementation, our Party and State have always considered ethnic issues and ethnic unity as a long-term strategy in the country’s revolution cause: it is both the goal and the driving force of the industrialization and modernization of the

country in the orientation of socialism. Right in the Resolutions promulgated at the first National Congress (March, 1935), our Party identified “The Central and Provincials units have to appoint a number of experts to study and direct the implementation of ethnic policies and the advocacy of ethnic minorities” [1, p. 74]. Since the establishment of Ethnic minorities Division after the success of the August Revolution, ethnic issues in general and ethnic minorities’ in particular have occupied a special position in all important decisions related to policies of our Party and State in consistency with the guideline “All ethnic groups in the great Vietnamese family are of equality, solidarity, mutual support and development to successfully implement the cause of industrialization and modernization, national defense and advancement to socialism and valiantly fight against national division conspiracy of enemies”.

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