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SOME ISSUES ON ETHNIC COMPOSITION AND ETHNIC CLASSIFICATION IN OUR COUNTRY TODAY

***Abstract:** Ethnic classification in our country has been officially conducted since the late 1960s, chaired by the Institute of Anthropology under the Social Sciences Committee (now the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences). On December 22, 1978, the Vietnam Social Sciences Committee and the Central Ethnic Committee submitted a report to the Prime Minister on the results of ethnic classification. Authorized by the Government Council, on March 2, 1979, the General Director of the General Statistics Office signed Decision No. 121-CCTK/PPCĐ, promulgating the "List of Vietnamese Ethnic Compositions" for unified use in the 1979 Population Census as well as in regular statistical work and related fields. The list of Vietnamese ethnic compositions is a significant contribution of the Vietnam Social Sciences Committee and the Central Ethnic Committee, specifically the Institute of Anthropology. However, due to certain subjective and objective factors, issues still arise regarding the ethnic names and the composition of some ethnic groups and local communities. Therefore, this article revisits and discusses aspects related to ethnic names, ethnic composition, and the work of ethnic classification in our country today.*

***Keyword:** Ethnicity, ethnic name, ethnic composition, Classification.*

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Introduction

For a long time, our country has had numerous ethnic groups living together, which can be divided into two main groups: (1) Ethnic groups born and settled in Vietnam and (2) Ethnic groups migrating from other countries to Vietnam (the entire

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ethnic group or a part of it). For ethnic groups migrating to Vietnam, there were migrations that took place several hundred years ago, but there were also new migrations in the last hundred years or so. That is not to mention the small-scale migration of a part of the people of some ethnic groups that did not take place in large migrations. This migration process has caused some ethnic groups that originally had a common origin to be divided into many groups and live intertwined with other ethnic groups in the same or different localities. During that process, cultural exchanges, languages, livelihoods, mixed-ethnic marriages, etc., took place more and more strongly, leading to an increasing level of similarity between ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups or local groups even merged with other ethnic groups or local groups of other ethnic groups.

In the context of migration and increasing integration, the level of similarity between ethnic groups leads to a situation where one ethnic group is called by many names, including the common name of the ethnic group, the names called by local groups, and the names called by other ethnic groups. Moreover, because there are many local groups residing in different places, although belonging to the same ethnic group, they only have self-awareness and solidarity within their local group, and self-identify as ethnic according to the local group. Therefore, in the past, it was impossible to determine exactly how many ethnic groups and local groups in the same ethnic group there were in Vietnam, and where these ethnic groups and local groups resided. That is the reason why, immediately after peace was restored in the North in 1954, especially after the country's reunification in 1975, our Party and State directed the organization of investigations to determine the ethnic composition in Vietnam to serve state management, especially for population census or statistics, implementation of ethnic policies and other related fields and tasks.

1. Overview of Ethnic Composition Determination Process and Some Issues Raised About Ethnic Composition in Our Country Since 1979

In the late 50s of the 20th century, a number of scientists working at the Central Committee for Ethnic Minorities initially conducted research to determine the ethnic composition of our country. The initial results were published in 1959 in the book "*Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam*", estimating that our country had 64 ethnic groups, including the Kinh (Viet) majority and 63 ethnic minorities. From 1960 to 1973, a number of other studies conducted in the North, combined with research from students and cadres from the South who went to the North, and the organization of a

number of seminars in 1973 in Hanoi, estimated that our country had 59 ethnic groups, including the Kinh majority and 58 ethnic minorities (Khong Dien, 1995: 31-54). Since 1968, the Institute of Ethnology under the Vietnam Social Sciences Committee was established and assigned the task of investigating and determining the ethnic composition of our country. Under the direct guidance of the Vietnam Social Sciences Committee, the Institute of Ethnology has coordinated with a number of agencies to carry out this task, especially with the Institute of Linguistics under the Vietnam Social Sciences Committee and the Central Ethnic Committee.

At that time, one of the key issues was to develop a set of criteria to determine ethnic composition. Based on our Party's national viewpoint and absorbing selective experiences from a number of countries in the world, especially the Soviet Union and China, through many discussions between scientists on ethnology, language, history and practical activities on ethnic work, three criteria to determine ethnic composition in our country were developed. Accordingly, a community of people considered an ethnicity must meet three factors: (1) Having a common language; (2) Having common cultural characteristics; (3) Having a common ethnic self-awareness - self-identifying as an ethnicity. These three criteria are often expressed briefly, that an ethnic community must have a *Common language, cultural characteristics and ethnic self-awareness* (see also Mac Duong, 2003; Khong Dien, 2002). Basically, these three criteria ensure a scientific basis, consistent with the characteristics of ethnicity and ethnic issues in our country in the 1970s.

Due to the complexity of the ethnic process and historical origins of ethnic groups, many ethnic groups in our country have compatriots with much larger populations living in neighboring countries and in the region, including majority ethnic groups such as the Han in China, the Lao in Laos, the Khmer in Cambodia, the Thai in Thailand..., therefore we do not officially use the criteria of historical origins of ethnic groups as in determining the ethnic composition of the Soviet Union, but only for reference. We also do not use the criteria of having a common ethnic territory as in the Soviet Union and China, because the intermingling of ethnic groups and local groups in our country has been going on for a long time, in fact our country does not have any locality or region where only one ethnic group resides. The fact that some localities are called by unofficial names such as "Muong Land", "Thai Land" or "Thanh Land"..., is to indicate an area with a large population of Muong and Thai people compared to other ethnic groups, or to indicate an area with geographical - historical - cultural characteristics, completely unrelated to "the territory of one or several ethnic groups".

When there were criteria for determining ethnic composition, since 1968, many delegations of officials from the Institute of Ethnology with the participation of linguists have gone to investigate and field survey to study the language, culture, and self-awareness of ethnic groups according to the three established criteria, combined with organizing many working sessions in the localities to collect opinions of officials and people. Throughout the investigation process, a principle was thoroughly understood: determining ethnic composition is not only based on self-declaration, that is, self-identification of ethnicity by the people, but must be based on research results according to the stated criteria, combining scientific knowledge of ethnology, linguistics and related sciences (psychology, history...) to compare and contrast between ethnic groups, between local groups of the same ethnic group. However, in reality, some ethnic groups and local groups are very difficult to identify according to the three scientific criteria, because they migrated to Vietnam at different times and intermingled with other ethnic groups and local groups in many places..., leading to the fact that although they are the same ethnic group or local group, they have many dissimilar factors but are similar to other ethnic groups that have long intermingled in the same area. For example, there are ethnic groups and local groups belonging to this ethnic group but using the language and even being deeply influenced by the culture of other ethnic groups because they are ethnic groups and local groups with small populations that have long intermingled with ethnic groups with large populations; there are local groups that claim to be their own ethnic group but lack scientific basis;... For ethnic groups and local groups whose identification criteria have been "blurred" and inconsistent as above, the working groups have exchanged and discussed with local officials and representatives of ethnic groups and local groups to reach consensus. However, this is a difficult and complicated task, especially for ethnic groups and local groups whose criteria for identification are unclear, hence it is difficult to avoid shortcomings, leading to some ethnic groups and local groups identified in the 1979 *List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups* being forced according to the feelings of some researchers.

Based on the results of the investigation determining the ethnic composition chaired by the Institute of Ethnology, with the agreement of the Social Sciences Committee and the Central Ethnic Committee, on March 2, 1979, authorized by the Government Council, the General Director of the General Statistics Office signed Decision No. 121-TCTK/PPCĐ officially promulgating the *List of Vietnamese ethnic compositions with 54 ethnic groups*. Among the 54 ethnic groups, many ethnic

groups have other names and local groups, specifically in 1979, the whole country had over 300 local groups (General Statistics Office 1979).

Because the ethnic composition in our country is diverse, with different origins and ethnic processes, and belongs to the historical category..., there are always fluctuations over time under the influence of many domestic and international factors. In addition, in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, our country was still at war, many regions had bandits, FULRO..., therefore the conditions for investigating and determining the composition of ethnic groups were very limited, especially among ethnic groups that lived scattered in mountainous areas, remote areas, and border areas. Not to mention the limited academic issues in this period, hence it is inevitable that there could be some scientific shortcomings. In addition, as mentioned, ethnic groups in Vietnam are inherently complex in terms of historical origins, ethnic processes, residential distribution..., leading to increasing similarities between ethnic groups in the same living area, especially since Economic Reform (Doi Moi) up to now. This makes the criteria for determining ethnic composition for some ethnic groups and local groups "blurred", they may have many similarities with other ethnic groups but are different from their own ethnic groups, especially as this trend is increasing rapidly, the criteria are becoming more and more "blurred".

Along with that, after 1979, when the investigation and determination of ethnic composition in our country were completed, there were many changes in the world regarding ethnic issues: the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc in Eastern Europe collapsed; ethnic conflicts occurred in many regions and countries; the impact of some major countries and international organizations increased ethnic consciousness and arose movements demanding autonomy and secession of some ethnic groups in many places in the world;... In Vietnam, since the results of determining ethnic composition were announced, the ethnic policies of our Party and State have been gradually improved, bringing many benefits to ethnic minorities, especially those with small populations, living in mountainous, remote, border areas, and areas with many difficulties. This is one of the factors affecting the psychology and awareness of a part of the people about determining their ethnic composition in order to enjoy preferential policies of the State. Meanwhile, we have not regularly instructed and propagated to cadres, schools, media, and people how to use names and identify ethnic groups correctly and consistently across the country, leading to errors in the use of names and identification of ethnic groups in some ethnic groups and local areas.

For the above reasons, after 45 years, since the *List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups* was published in 1979, problems have arisen, such as: some local groups currently belonging to one ethnic group want to become separate ethnic groups (the San Chay ethnic group consists of two groups that want to separate into two separate ethnic groups, Cao Lan and San Chi; the Pa-co group wants to separate from the Ta-oi ethnic group to become the Pa-co ethnic group; the Ca-dong group wants to separate from the Xo-dang ethnic group to become the Ca-dong ethnic group; the Nguon group wants to separate from the Kinh ethnic group to become the Nguon ethnic group;...); some ethnic groups want to change their names (Hmong becomes Mong, Kho-me becomes Khmer, Gia-rai becomes Jrai...); Some communities want to be identified as a separate ethnic group or local group of an ethnic group, because they have not been identified in the 1979 *List of Ethnic Groups of Vietnam* (the Ta Mun community in Binh Phuoc and Tay Ninh, the Bhnoong in Quang Nam...). From these issues, some ethnic groups, local groups, and local authorities have submitted documents presenting their wishes, requesting the National Assembly and competent authorities at the Central level to consider and resolve. From here, it is necessary to research to clarify the nature of the above phenomenon, whether it is due to the ethnic self-awareness of the majority of people or just the opinion of a group of people; due to scientific errors in investigating and identifying ethnic groups in 1979; or due to the impact of interests in implementing the State's ethnic policies, in order to have more suitable solutions to the new reality, minimizing arising problems and negative impacts that may occur (see also Nguyen Van Minh, 2023).

2. The Re-identification of Ethnic Composition in Our Country in Recent Times

The above situation was the context for the Vietnam Social Sciences Committee (now the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences) to assign the Institute of Anthropology to preside over and coordinate with the Institute of Linguistics to carry out the Project "*Investigation to determine ethnic composition in Vietnam*" from 2001 to 2006. To implement the Project, the Institute of Anthropology organized many seminars and workshops to discuss the criteria for determining ethnic composition in the current period, the final result was still unanimous in keeping the three criteria used to determine ethnic composition until 1979, because these criteria still ensured a scientific basis (Khong Dien, head of the Project 2006). On that basis, the Project conducted an investigation to determine the ethnic composition of 42 local groups belonging to 19 ethnic groups in 23 provinces/cities. At the same time, many seminars and discussions were organized in Hanoi and some localities to collect opinions from local officials and

representatives of ethnic groups and local groups who wish to redefine ethnic composition and change names. The main results of the Project include:

- Recommend that 33 local groups of 15 ethnic groups remain unchanged and not be divided into separate ethnic groups, because there is not enough scientific basis, including: Ngan group of Tay ethnic group; Na Mieu group of Hmong ethnic group; Xa Pho group of Phu La ethnic group; Thuy group of Pa Then ethnic group; Tu Di group of Bo Y ethnic group; Keo, Mon, Cuoi, Lam La, Nhu Xuan, Dan Lai-Ly Ha, Tay Poong groups of Tho ethnic group; Sach, May, Ruc, A Rem, Ma Lieng groups of Chut ethnic group; Khua, Tri, Ma Coong, Van Kieu groups of Bru-Van Kieu ethnic group; Pa Co, Pa Hy, Ta Oi groups of Ta-oi ethnic group; Ro Ngao group of Ba-na ethnic group; Ha Lang group of Xo-dang ethnic group; Trieng and Ve groups of Gie-Trieng ethnic group; Bih group of E-de ethnic group; The Xre, Chil and Lat groups belong to the Co-ho ethnic group; the Cham Hroi group belongs to the Cham ethnic group.

It is recommended that 5 local groups currently classified as Tay, San Chay, Giay and Kinh ethnic groups be transferred to local groups of other ethnic groups to ensure scientific basis, including: the Thu Lao and Pa Di groups of Tay ethnic group be transferred to Nung ethnic group; the San Chi group of San Chay ethnic group in Cao Bang be transferred to Dao ethnic group; the Quy Chau group of Giay ethnic group in Cao Bang be transferred to Nung ethnic group; the Nguon group of Kinh ethnic group be transferred to Tho ethnic group.

It is proposed to add 01 new local group, which is the Ta Mun community in Binh Phuoc and Tay Ninh provinces, currently not classified as any ethnic group (the locality is temporarily classified as the Xtieng ethnic group to implement ethnic policy) to be classified as a local group of the Xtieng ethnic group. It is proposed to separate three local groups belonging to two ethnic groups into three new ethnic groups, namely: the Cao Lan group belonging to the San Chay ethnic group into the Cao Lan ethnic group; the San Chi group belonging to the San Chay ethnic group into the San Chi ethnic group; the Ca-dong group belonging to the Xo-dang ethnic group into the Ca Dong ethnic group. Thus, the Project's proposal is that the San Chay ethnic group (Cao Lan - San Chi) will no longer exist and our country will have a total of 56 ethnic groups, including 53 ethnic groups that retain the names identified in 1979 and 3 new ethnic groups: Cao Lan, San Chi and Ca Dong (see more Khong Dien, ed. 2006).

On January 15, 2006, the *Project on Ethnic Composition in Vietnam* was accepted with excellent results. The Acceptance Council highly appreciated the

Project's contribution to the study of ethnic composition in the current period, but also requested further thorough study of a number of issues, in order to make recommendations and proposals more appropriate to the current context of the country, the region and the world. The leadership of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences at that time decided not to publish the results of the Project.

Because some ethnic groups, local groups, and local authorities continue to request a review of the names and ethnic composition, in recent years, the Committee for Ethnic Minorities has carried out many research projects to investigate and determine the composition of some ethnic groups in our country. At the request of the Committee for Ethnic Minorities, the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences has allowed the Committee for Ethnic Minorities to refer to the research results of the *Project on Investigation and Determination of Ethnic Minorities in Vietnam* mentioned above. Up to now, the Committee for Ethnic Minorities has presided over the implementation of a number of tasks on determining the names and ethnic composition of our country according to its assigned functions and tasks. Specifically: in 2014, the Ethnic Committee, under its authority, drafted a Submission and Decision for the Prime Minister to consider and promulgate the *Criteria for Determining Ethnic Groups*, in which the three criteria proposed by the Institute of Ethnology when determining the ethnic group composition of Vietnam up to 1979 and the Project implemented in 2001 - 2006 mentioned above were still used, but the order of the criteria was reversed: (1) Sharing a common sense of ethnic identity; (2) Sharing a common language; (3) Sharing characteristics of ethnic cultural identity. However, to date, the set of criteria proposed by the Ethnic Committee has not been promulgated. From 2018 - 2022, in carrying out its assigned tasks, the Ethnic Committee has reported several times the draft results of the task of determining the names and composition of ethnic groups to the competent authority for consideration. Each time, the competent authority organized work with relevant ministries, departments and branches to listen to the Ethnic Committee present draft results and give comments, on that basis the Ethnic Committee studies and completes, but up to now there are still some contents that need further research and clarification. Therefore, the competent authority continues to assign the Ethnic Committee to receive comments and contributions to study, edit and complete the results according to the principles: ensuring the rights and legitimate aspirations of the people; based on scientific basis and a set of criteria suitable to current practical conditions; clarifying the legal basis; receiving high consensus in the political system and people of related ethnic groups;

comprehensively assessing the impacts, especially not causing social disturbance, people's thoughts, waste;...

The draft results of the Ethnic Committee basically have many similarities with the proposals and recommendations of the Institute of Anthropology in the Project "*Investigation to determine ethnic composition in Vietnam*" mentioned above. However, the final draft focuses on some main contents as follows: (1) Maintain the 54 ethnic groups according to Decision No. 121-TCTK/PPCĐ dated March 2, 1979, but amend and supplement the way of writing the names of 5 ethnic groups to suit the practical situation, including Kho-me to Khmer, Hmong to Mong, Bru-Van Kieu to Van Kieu, Cơ Lao to Cờ Lao, Xtieng to S'tieng. (2) Add another name "Bhnong" for the Gie-Trieng ethnic group. (3) Allow the unified way of writing names for 4 ethnic groups according to the way of writing ethnic names in Decision No. 121-TCTK/PPCĐ in 1979 and open parentheses to write the name of another ethnic group right after, specifically, the Cao Lan people of the San Chay ethnic group are written as the San Chay ethnic group (Cao Lan), the San Chi people of the San Chay ethnic group are written as the San Chay ethnic group (San Chi), the Pa Co people of the Ta-oi ethnic group are written as the Ta Oi ethnic group (Pa Co), the Ca-dong people of the Xo-dang ethnic group are written as the Xo Dang ethnic group (Ca Dong).

From a scientific perspective, it is necessary to continue to research and clarify the following contents:

It is necessary to clearly analyze the international, regional and domestic contexts that affect the changes in ethnic composition and names of some ethnic groups in our country today. From there, assess more clearly and deeply the impact of the changes compared to the *List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups* issued in 1979 at the present time, especially predicting the effects that may occur on other ethnic groups and local groups in our country that have wanted to change their names or separate into separate ethnic groups but have not been considered. At the same time, it is necessary to plan a solution if after the announcement of the results, there are some other ethnic groups and local groups that continue to request to change their names or separate into another ethnic groups, what should be the solution? It is necessary to assess the impact of these changes on the political, social, ethnic, economic, psychological and national consciousness fields; How will the revision of issued official documents, as well as the recompilation of learning materials and textbooks, records and papers of ethnic groups

with changes in name and ethnic composition be carried out, the time and cost of implementation;...

It is necessary to clarify the results of scientific research according to unified criteria to be able to change the names - ethnic names of three ethnic groups: Kho-me to Khmer, Hmong to Mong, Bru-Van Kieu to Van Kieu. Because changing the name of an ethnic group must be based on scientific results: the principle of using a unified pronunciation and writing method for all ethnic groups (in the common language or according to the pronunciation of the ethnic people or in Latin that foreigners have used to write the names of ethnic groups in our country..., or using all of these methods); the name of an ethnic group must ensure popularity for all local groups of that ethnic group residing in localities in the country and refer to the common name of the world for that ethnic group, not just based on the opinion of a part of the people or a local group and local authorities. It should be noted that one of the characteristics of ethnic groups in our country is that there are many groups residing in many localities, leading to quite common differences in ethnic self-awareness, cultural and linguistic characteristics. If we only rely on the opinions of a few people, representing a group or a part of the population to make changes, other groups, parts of the population and other local authorities will continue to have opinions. Changing the name from Hmong to Mong is to avoid writing it wrongly, saying it wrongly as H'mong, Hơ Mông, Hờ Mông, but in reality, in the Hm sound combination, H is a silent sound (wind sound), so even if it is written as Hmong, the correct reading is still Mong (note that the world agrees on writing it as Hmong); meanwhile, changing the name from Kho-me to Khmer will lead to possible misreading as Khờ me. Therefore, the problem here is the solution to propagate and guide the staff, media organizations, schools, people..., on the correct and consistent use (speaking, writing) nationwide, and should not change the name if it is not scientifically correct.

It is necessary to clarify the scientific basis for changing the name from Cơ Lao to Cờ Lao, Xtieng to Stieng. In fact, Cơ Lao or Cờ Lao, Xtieng or Stieng are just the heavy or light pronunciation, windy or silent sounds of groups of people of the same ethnic group but residing in different localities, which has little direct relation to the correct or incorrect names of ethnic groups, while changing the name of an ethnic group will lead to other problems in many fields as mentioned. Therefore, the question is whether this change ensures a scientific basis and is actually necessary, and its impact needs to be assessed comprehensively, clearly, and specifically. At the same time, the issue here, as discussed above, is to guide and propagate for cadres, media

organizations, schools, and people to use (write and speak) the names of ethnic groups correctly and consistently nationwide.

In terms of practice, in the process of determining the composition and names of some ethnic groups by the above agencies, from 2001 to now, there have been different opinions, mainly according to the following two viewpoints. *Firstly*, determining the names and composition of some ethnic groups today is essential to meet the legitimate aspirations of the people of some ethnic groups and related local groups; contributing to the implementation of the good ethnic policies of our Party and State; demonstrating respect and ensuring the rights of ethnic people - the right to correctly determine the ethnic composition and use the correct ethnic name of their ethnic group. *Secondly*, the desire of some local groups to separate into another ethnic group has many reasons, including cases that are not based on scientific basis and ethnic self-awareness, but are governed by the policy of giving priority to many benefits for ethnic minorities, especially those with small populations. On the other hand, if some local groups separate into their own ethnic groups, it may be difficult to control the tendency of ethnic segregation, that is, some other groups continue to have the desire to separate into their own ethnic groups. Meanwhile, due to the increasing exchange and acculturation between ethnic groups, the differences between ethnic groups and local groups in terms of language and culture are increasingly unclear, leading to the criteria for determining ethnic composition being gradually "blurred". Changing ethnic names and separating into another ethnic groups of some local groups also raises a series of other issues related to the time, money, and effort of the people and the country as written above, while the name and composition of ethnic groups are not urgent issues that need to be resolved immediately. In the current context, the priority issue is to effectively implement ethnic policies, socio-economic development policies, and ensure national security and defense in ethnic minority areas, especially in strategic areas and areas of special difficulty, to improve the quality of life of the people, which is more urgent than redefining ethnic composition and ethnic names. At the same time, considering the experience of other countries, it shows that China has many ethnic groups and local groups, but only identifies 56 ethnic groups, and in the past few decades has not accepted the re-identification and addition of ethnic composition. Many other countries in Southeast Asia and around the world also have many ethnic groups living together but do not carry out the determination of ethnic composition (see more Nguyen Van Minh 2023).

3. The Need to Determine Ethnic Composition and Ethnic Names in Our Country Today

In our country, determining ethnic composition is not only for statistical purposes, but also closely linked to the goals and tasks of implementing the Party and State's ethnic policies, ensuring the principles of equality, solidarity, respect, and mutual assistance among ethnic groups for mutual development; preserving the cultural and linguistic diversity of ethnic groups; respecting the people's rights to self-determine ethnic composition;... Determining ethnic composition, names, and local groups of some ethnic groups is a practical requirement, because in the process of statistics, implementing ethnic policies, social management, etc., among some ethnic groups in some localities and in the media, books, magazines, newspapers, etc., ethnic names have been recorded incorrectly or recorded according to the name of the local group. The reason is that since 1979, when the *List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups* was issued, we have not provided guidance or propaganda on how to use it, so officials in some localities do not understand the basic principles in declaring the ethnic groups of the people; we also do not provide guidance or propaganda in the political system, media agencies, schools, and people on correct and consistent use, leading to the situation of writing the wrong ethnic names, recording ethnic names according to local groups that people self-identify on personal documents or on the media as mentioned, causing difficulties in implementing policies for ethnic minorities and social management work in ethnic minority areas. Therefore, in the work of operating and managing at a macro level, it is necessary to clearly identify and stabilize ethnic groups, and correctly and consistently use the names of ethnic groups nationwide. However, this requires a consensus on the understanding and use of the *List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups* issued in 1979 nationwide, especially at the grassroots management level and in communication, propaganda, teaching, education..., on how to call and use ethnic names, local group names, and ethnic self-awareness correctly and consistently.

The Party, the State and local authorities have implemented many preferential policies for a number of ethnic groups, so currently there is a group of people who want to identify themselves as ethnic groups that are enjoying many preferential policies. There are even some local groups within a clearly defined ethnic group, but they still want to separate into their own ethnic groups to benefit from the policies. Therefore, it is also necessary to consider and evaluate the impacts of policy implementation to solve the current practical problems of ethnic composition. In case the *List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups* issued in 1979 is to be found to have major errors,

and no longer suitable to the current reality, and needs to be replaced with a new list, the names and ethnic compositions should be re-determined, but it must be implemented comprehensively and synchronously throughout the country, thoroughly resolving and ensuring the scientific basis of the issues raised, not allowing new issues to arise. Accordingly, the core is to build a set of criteria suitable to current conditions for investigation and survey to ensure scientificity. If there is not a set of criteria that meets scientific requirements and legal basis, it will not be implemented.

4. Some Issues to Consider in Building a Set of Criteria to Determine Ethnic Composition Today

Vietnamese ethnologists and linguists have proposed three main criteria to determine the ethnic composition in our country based on a thorough study of the views of scientists around the world, and at the same time based on the reality of our country in the 60s and 70s of the 20th century. In addition, they also refer to a number of other criteria such as residential area (ethnic territory), historical origin, etc. Therefore, up to now, basically, these three criteria are still consistent with the reality of Vietnam. However, due to many issues such as globalization, socio-economic development, integration with countries in the region and internationally, the impact of cross-border and transnational ethnic relations, especially the increase in the process of inter-migration, exchange, language and cultural acculturation, ethnic self-awareness of some ethnic groups, etc., the criteria for determining ethnic composition have also raised problems. In addition to the ethnic self-awareness that has changed little, the criteria for language and culture have changed dramatically due to many factors. The culture and language of ethnic groups themselves have also changed over time and in dynamic space, leading to some ethnic groups using the language or borrowing many linguistic elements of other ethnic groups. The cultures of ethnic groups are increasingly similar, making the criteria for determining ethnic composition gradually "blur". Therefore, the issue is to build more specific and clear elements in each criterion to have a scientific basis for determining the ethnic composition and ethnic names of ethnic groups in the current conditions. To build this appropriate set of criteria, it is necessary to rely on the inheritance of each existing criterion, conduct more in-depth and comprehensive research to specifically determine the elements in each criterion to be able to evaluate the ethnic composition in a unified and accurate manner according to the proposed criteria, determine whether new criteria need to be added, such as the criterion of common historical origin. Regarding the three existing criteria, the following issues should be noted:

Regarding ethnic self-awareness: It is necessary to study and clarify the changes in the self-awareness of some ethnic groups and local groups in recent times, in order to determine what is the ethnic self-awareness from tradition, that is, the true original consciousness of the majority of people belonging to an ethnic group with the self-awareness that has recently arisen to benefit from policies or for other reasons of a part of the people in an ethnic group; it is necessary to clearly distinguish between ethnic self-awareness and the self-awareness of local groups in the same ethnic group. This criterion must be specific, especially in the current context when the ethnic self-awareness of a part of the people in a few ethnic groups is undergoing strong fluctuations.

Regarding cultural characteristics: The culture of ethnic groups has changed a lot and quickly (self-transformed and due to external influences). Therefore, there needs to be specific criteria to confirm which cultural elements are considered original and the cultural core of an ethnic group; if that ethnic group can no longer retain the original cultural elements, which cultural elements are being practiced by that ethnic group can be used as criteria along with general cultural criteria to determine the ethnic composition.

Regarding language: Identify the basic words most commonly used in an ethnic group, excluding elements adapted from the common language and those of other ethnic communities. For ethnic groups that no longer use or have lost their own language, and now use many languages, and borrow many linguistic elements from other ethnic groups, how should this criterion be resolved? Identifying specifically and clearly the elements in the language criterion is also an important basis for accurately determining what are the traditional cultural characteristics/identities, what are the original cultural elements, the soul of the ethnic group.

It is apparent that in order to build a set of criteria that is suitable for current reality, ensuring scientificity, inheriting the criteria and methods for determining ethnic composition that have existed since the 60s and 70s of the 20th century and from 2001 to present, it is essential to concentrate resources, mobilize scientists, experienced managers, have knowledge and new research methods to achieve results that meet the requirements of the ethnic groups in Vietnam today. In particular, it is necessary to organize many seminars and discussions to directly and officially collect opinions from scientists, officials, people, especially intellectuals of the ethnic group on the common and specific elements for each criterion for determining ethnic

composition. Then, organize comprehensive and synchronous investigations and research on ethnic groups, local groups with issues that need to review ethnic names, and groups of the same ethnic group of the ethnic groups that are proposed to be separated into separate ethnic groups, to determine accurately and scientifically. The results achieved need to be promulgated officially and widely, and at the same time, instructions on correct and unified use of the way of speaking and writing for organizations, localities, cadres and people to implement. Therefore, it is necessary to first determine which ethnic groups need to clarify their ethnic names, which ethnic groups need to distinguish between local groups and which ethnic groups need to redefine their ethnic composition in order to implement the determination of ethnic composition in a synchronous and effective manner. Some ethnic groups and local groups have shortcomings such as the criteria for determination being "blurred", so there needs to be a feasible solution, suitable for the general context of the country and locality, meeting the aspirations of the people. If a set of criteria suitable for current reality has not been developed, the re-determination of ethnic composition in our country will not be implemented (see also Nguyen Van Minh, 2023).

5. Some Issues to Consider in Determining Ethnic Composition in Our Country Today

In reality, if we continue to apply the *List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups* issued in 1979 as it is now without disseminating and guiding cadres, organizations, and people to use it correctly and consistently throughout the country, some localities will find it difficult to distinguish, identify, and use the correct names of ethnic groups and local groups of the same ethnic group, for the reasons mentioned above. Therefore, there have been many petitions sent to the National Assembly and competent authorities at the Central level to request the re-identification of names and ethnic groups. This is a legitimate aspiration of the people and local authorities in implementing ethnic policies and social management.

However, if the re-determination of ethnic composition and names in our country is not carried out carefully and comprehensively according to the set of appropriate and accurate criteria at the time of implementation, this important work will not ensure scientific and legal basis, even cause ethnic division, affecting the unity of the nation - people. The determination of ethnic composition and ethnic names in our country today needs to aim for consensus and solidarity among ethnic groups, ensuring the strengthening of national unity; not causing disagreements in society, especially

between ethnic consciousness and national consciousness, between ethnic groups, population groups, etc. It is necessary to aim for fairness and appropriateness in the implementation of ethnic policies, ensuring harmony between national interests and ethnic interests, developing national factors and preserving ethnic identities in ethnic groups and localities.

In the current complex regional and international context, to create equality in ethnic policies and limit changes in ethnic composition, the implementation of ethnic policies should only focus on major comprehensive policies by region, by development level, ensuring that ethnic groups and households with the same living standards residing in the same area with the same development conditions can participate and benefit from policies rather than implementing specific policies for each ethnic group and some ethnic groups. Implementing such policies will avoid the mentality of comparing ethnic groups and population groups with each other, and people also do not need to change their ethnic composition to enjoy preferential policies reserved only for ethnic minorities or a few ethnic minorities.

It is necessary to strengthen propaganda and guidance for cadres in the entire political system, school system, all media organizations, and people of all ethnic groups on how to use ethnic names correctly and consistently nationwide; at the same time, clearly distinguish the composition and name of an ethnic group from local groups, the names of local groups within an ethnic group, etc. Otherwise, the misuse of names and ethnic composition will still occur whether the List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups issued in 1979 or the new *List of Ethnic Groups* (if any) is continued (see more Nguyen Van Minh 2023).

Conclusion

Ethnic composition is a historical category, constantly fluctuating and changing. Our country is a multi-ethnic country, many ethnic groups have many local groups, most of the ethnic groups reside in many places and belong to important areas of the country. Meanwhile, many ethnic groups in our country have compatriots abroad, so there are cross-border and transnational relationships in many fields. Therefore, determining ethnic composition in our country is not only a very sensitive task in the international and domestic context, but also extremely difficult and complicated because the criteria for determining ethnic composition have been "blurred" and are becoming more and more "blurred". That is the reason why, although there is a real

need to redefine the names and ethnic composition, this work requires careful consideration from many aspects, especially the impact on the sense of ethnic solidarity, national solidarity, people's ideology and public opinion, national security and defense in border areas, ethnic minority areas, etc., to avoid unwanted consequences. If the work of redefining the names and ethnic composition is carried out, it is necessary to ensure scientific quality based on a set of appropriate criteria, receiving the consensus and agreement of the majority of ethnic people, especially when the criteria are "blurred" over time, the consensus of ethnic people is a very important factor.

The research results from 2001 to present of the Institute of Anthropology and the Ethnic Committee have contributed to providing scientific arguments, raising theoretical and practical awareness of new movements of the ethnic process arising in the process of promoting industrialization, modernization of the country and international integration; gradually clarifying the nature of the phenomenon of wanting to change ethnic names and ethnic composition in a number of ethnic groups or local groups since the *List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups* in 1979. In particular, the studies have clarified the need to change ethnic names and ethnic composition arising in recent times, especially since Doi Moi to present, of a number of ethnic groups and local groups due to the rise of ethnic self-awareness and nationalism; the impact of the implementation of ethnic policies of the Party and State towards ethnic minorities, especially those with small populations; The impact of ethnic and racial issues in the world;... However, up to now, the official results have not been announced, because some issues need to be further studied, so the problems arising about the names and ethnic composition in our country from 1979 to the present have not been resolved. Because this is a complex problem in science and practice, especially the fact that a set of criteria for determining ethnic composition suitable to current conditions has not yet been issued, not to mention the need to be very careful, ensuring scientific nature, legal basis, and national solidarity in a multi-ethnic country. Therefore, while still using the *List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups* issued in 1979, to limit the misuse of names and ethnic groups, competent authorities should have an official document requesting and guiding the entire political system, media organizations, school systems, and people of all ethnic groups to correctly and consistently use the names and ethnic groups in the *List of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups* issued in 1979 nationwide./.

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Tóm tắt

**MỘT SỐ VẤN ĐỀ VỀ THÀNH PHẦN DÂN TỘC VÀ
XÁC ĐỊNH THÀNH PHẦN DÂN TỘC Ở NƯỚC TA HIỆN NAY**

Nguyễn Văn Minh

Viện Dân tộc học và Tôn giáo học

Viện Hàn lâm Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam

Xác định thành phần dân tộc ở nước ta được tiến hành chính thức từ cuối những năm 60 thế kỷ XX, do Viện Dân tộc học thuộc Ủy ban Khoa học xã hội (nay là Viện Hàn lâm Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam) chủ trì. Đến ngày 22/12/1978, Liên Ủy ban Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam và Ủy ban Dân tộc Trung ương đã có tờ trình Thủ tướng Chính phủ về kết quả xác định thành phần dân tộc. Thừa ủy quyền của Hội đồng Chính phủ, ngày 2/3/1979, Tổng cục trưởng Tổng cục Thống kê đã ký Quyết định số 121-CCTK/PPCĐ ban hành “Danh mục các thành phần dân tộc Việt Nam” để dùng thống nhất cho cuộc Tổng điều tra dân số năm 1979 cũng như trong công tác thống kê thường xuyên và các lĩnh vực liên quan. Danh mục các thành phần dân tộc Việt Nam là đóng góp to lớn của Ủy ban Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam và Ủy ban Dân tộc Trung ương, mà trực tiếp là Viện Dân tộc học. Song, do một số yếu tố chủ quan và khách quan ở nước ta vẫn đang đặt ra một số vấn đề về tộc danh, thành phần dân tộc của một số dân tộc, nhóm địa phương. Do đó, bài viết này trở lại thảo luận một số nội dung liên quan đến tên gọi, thành phần dân tộc và công tác xác định thành phần dân tộc ở nước ta hiện nay.

Từ khóa: Dân tộc, tộc danh, thành phần dân tộc, xác định thành phần dân tộc.