

# Promoting Prestigious Persons' Role in the Ethnic Groups to Contribute to Implementing the Ethnicity Policies in Vietnam

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**Abstract** Prestigious persons are distinguished ones in each ethnic group, each family or in each area where they live. They have a prestige and influence over the people in each certain region. They are among ethnic groups, including dignitaries like: "Phia", "Tao", "Tho ty", "Lang dao", "Tri chau", "Thong ly", "Thong quan" (in the past); are war veterans, retired officials, outstanding businessmen, religious dignitaries (at present)... They have an especially important role in community life, in implementing ethnicity policies, developing economy and society, preserving culture, maintaining the stability of politics, security and order in ethnic group's regions. Promoting the role of prestigious persons in the implementing the ethnicity policies in the cause of building and defending Vietnam country is a consistent orientation and policy of Vietnamese Communist Party and The State of Socialist Republic of Vietnam; therefore, appropriate solutions are needed to promote the role of this class.

**Keywords:** *prestigious persons, ethnic group, promotion, role, ethnicity policy*

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## 1. Introduction

Vietnam is a community of 54 ethnic groups, in which the Kinh people is the majority, taking up 86% of the country's population. The other 53 minority ethnic groups take up about 14%. Because of the specific characteristics of culture, customs, living conditions, ethnic group relations... in many ethnic groups, a class of persons with special role in the community was formed. They are the dignitaries such as "Phia", "Tao", "Lang dao", "Tho ty"... positions like "Tri chau", "Thong ly", "Thong quan"... Afterwards, in many ethnic groups there are more persons with high education levels, high social positions, being businessmen, religious dignitaries... As the head of families, villages, *ban* (a name used to describe villages in minority people's regions, mostly in the northern areas of Vietnam),... they have different roles, influences in governing all the aspects of lives of the minority peoples. In the five years (2013-2017), the prestigious Mong People in the North West provided 2807 pieces of information, propagated, educated and converted 131 law infringers successfully; directly involved in successfully resolving 381 cases of security and order in the area. There have been 61 prestigious people who have been given commendable certificates by the Prime Minister and 441 people for their contributions to socio-economic development and the maintenance of the North West order (the statistics from Ethnicity Committee).

They have the prestige on the people and are acclaimed and called "prestigious persons" in minority ethnic groups. To promote the role of prestigious persons in developing economy, society, culture in these areas contributing to implementing ethnicity policies, building and defending the country, the State of Vietnam needs to have suitable orientations, policies and solutions for this special class.

## 2. Content

### 2.1. Prestige and Prestigious Persons in Minority Peoples

Many scientists have studied the concepts of prestige and prestigious persons. Most of them believe that prestige is "charisma, trust, admiration of everyone" [1] and a prestigious person is "a person who is trusted, admired and followed by a group of people in the society" [2]. In essence, prestige is the credibility and admiration of a social group for a person or a group of persons; is a general recognition, which has social meanings of the power and influence of a person or a group in a certain field of the society. The prestige of a personal or a group changes over the stages of history; monitored by moral standards, value orientations, ideologies, and social institutions, in different phrases of history. In different societies, the concepts of prestige have differences in the content and the expression. In each different social class, geographic area and people, the concepts of prestige are also formed with different criteria.

The prestige of a person is one of elements creating the category of morality. The content of prestige comprises trust, respect of the people around to a specific person. With the characteristics of a social psychological phenomenon, prestige is a general recognition, which has social meanings, built on the basis of power and influence of a person to a group of people or a community.

From the concepts above, we can affirm that a prestigious person is “a person who has a power and influence in the certain limitation to a part of people in society; trusted, admired and followed by them [3]. Also, in the concept of some authors, a prestigious person includes both power and credibility or influence. Credibility is not only an expression of power (although that power is formed in some ways – self-made or given) but also a submission in a certain extent. Credibility is also shown in conveying and enforcing will, along with social experience from one generation to the next, from a group to each individual and from an individual to another.

In feudal Vietnamese society, some minority ethnic groups created dignitaries like: “Phia”, “Tao” (Thai people), “Lang dao” (Muong people), and councils of village’s elders (ethnic groups in the Central Highland – Tay Nguyen)... These persons are considered as the upper class in the society. They have a dominant role in the traditional societies of the minority ethnic group’s areas, in the organization, the ideology, and the spirituality and have a quiet deep influence over the people. When French colonialists invaded Vietnam, the above dignitaries were given more power and privileges, linked to positions like “Tri chau”, “Thong ly”, “Thong quan”. So, many minority ethnic groups formed a social class, including those who have political ascendancy (in possession of political positions, dignitaries in the old society). They also have good economic conditions and ability of theocracy (through the performance of religious acts and ancient beliefs) or tribal power (head of families, head of villages, chieftains, village’s elders); therefore, they increase the ascendancy and the credibility of the minority peoples within some certain limits.

In spite of having power and influence on a certain extent, prestigious persons also have a close bond with the minority ethnic groups, always stay close and intimate to the people, are able to know the people’s feelings, wishes and aspirations, and have knowledge about the economic, political, social situation of the minority ethnic’s areas... The “institutions” of the traditional society, like customs, families or theocracy and religious doctrines, ensure this bond... Thanks to them, prestigious persons in the minority ethnic groups can live among their people in the same region or somewhere else, but still maintain the power and credibility given by the people [3].

With their prestige and influence, prestigious persons are trusted, admired, acclaimed and highly appreciated. In general, the minority peoples consider prestigious persons as an elite class of persons, a symbol of power, personality about traditions of the country...; they are the pride of the villages, the peoples and families. The ethnic people always believe in their roles, their responsibilities and proclaim them their representative; they act on behalf of the people to settle all the mutual affairs in order to bring benefits to the entire community.

The first reason why prestigious persons are so admired, trusted, acclaimed and followed by the people is that they

have more prominent traits than their fellow-ethnic people. Besides, it is because of the objective conditions like traditional customs of the minority peoples, the characteristics of people’s mentality, eco-social features in minority ethnic group’s regions...

In everyday life, prestigious persons have the capability to impact and govern a part of the people within a certain extent. They have the ability to persuade, affect and draw people to take part in some activities, or they can change the actions, the ideologies and the perceptions of people about daily matters in life... [4].

In general, prestigious people in Vietnam's ethnic minorities have some typical characteristics:

First of all, a prestigious person of the ethnic minority is firstly a member of an ethnic minority. They have "authority", which affects first of all their ethnic community.

Secondly, prestigious people have a close relationship with their ethnic minorities, who are always close to their peers. They can understand their thoughts, aspirations and economic, political and social lives of ethnic minorities... Social “institutions” such as customs of the nation, family or theocracy, doctrine ensure the relationship... Therefore, prestigious people in the minority can reside with the masses in the same area or reside in another place.

Thirdly, a prestigious person is one who is trusted, respected and honored by the community. Ethnic minorities confide in them and acknowledge that the prestigious people are the "elites", the symbol of strength, personality, and national tradition... the pride of the village, *ban*, ethnic group, and family. Ethnic minorities believe in their role and responsibility and honor them as representatives on behalf of their fellow citizens to solve common problems in order to bring benefits to the community.

Fourth, prestigious people in the ethnic minorities are capable of impacting and directing a certain part of the population in area. This is the "special talent" of the prestigious people in the ethnic minority community. For example, they can involve the masses in something; they can change the people's thoughts, perceptions, and actions on a problem that is happening in life... The influence of the prestigious people in ethnic minorities is determined in each range, in each village, *ban*, in each commune, district, or area of their residence, many communes, districts, and provinces.

In conclusion, prestigious persons in minority peoples are distinguished persons in each people, family or area where they live, and have the credibility and influence on their people in certain regions. Depending on their stand and their role, they can affect, govern a part of the people; their influence can be within a village, a *ban*, a district or an area where they inhabit; the effect on a part of people in a negative or positive way is determined by their personal ideas. To a certain extent, prestigious persons can be considered as “spiritual leaders” of a part of the minority peoples.

## 2.2. The Role of the Prestigious Persons in Minority Peoples of Vietnam

The result of investigations shows that prestigious persons in the minority peoples have special roles, important and realistic contributions to implementing

ethnicity policies, contributing to the cause of building and protecting the Country. It is depicted specifically as follows:

*Firstly*, prestigious persons have contributed to implementing the guidance and the policies to develop economy and society, establish a new life, preserve the identity of traditional culture and fight the unprogressive ideas, the narrow-minded racial discrimination and superstitious customs and radical customs in minority people's areas. Many prestigious persons are excellent businessmen, stay very active in real-life activities; among them, there are young people who have knowledge, economic conditions and always stay active in manufacture and business. Through these persons, the agencies and units involved in carrying out propagating and motivating the people disseminate knowledge of intensive farming, crop rotation to them; help them in the experimental planting of new highly – productive breeds; apply technologies and scientific achievements in farming; actively transform the structure of plants and livestock to match the need of commodity production and service; link production to consumption and hold the people's interests in high regard. Thanks to the efforts of prestigious persons in propagandizing and motivating the people, many families now know how to apply technologies and scientific achievements in production, decrease poverty and grow rich on their own pieces of land. By that way, the trust of the ethnic people in the orientations and policies the State of Vietnam is increased [5].

In most minority people's areas, even exceptionally arduous ones, there are now transformations in the economic, agricultural and rural structure, changes in the customs of manufacture, application of technology, intensive farming, producing more goods to consume and to sell at the markets. Therefore, the people's physical and mental life continues to be improved; the unity of families and peoples continues to be strengthened; the peoples help each other to make progress; new cultural customs are formed in marriages, funerals, festivals... the cultural identity of ethnic groups is reserved and developed; depraved, time-consuming and money-wasting customs are now being decreased... More and more good examples of the hard-working, socially active and progressive persons appear. The appearance of prestigious persons – “orange” billionaire in Ha Giang Province, “tea” billionaire in Thai Nguyen Province, “Sua wood” billionaire in Tuyen Quang Province... are good examples for the people to look up to and grow rich in their homeland.

*Secondly*, prestigious persons have actively and effectively participated in resolving complicated security issues in many areas. Many persons who have raised awareness and clearly identified their responsibilities and duties in the cause of protecting security and order of local regions in particular and the cause of building and defending the country in general, thus, they have practical activities and certain effectiveness to the movements in local regions.

In recent years, in many ethnic minorities, there have been many activities like: illegal doctrine propaganda, superstitious activities; free immigrations; civil conflicts involved usage and possession of land; human trafficking through the border; the transportation of narcotics and

drug trafficking; illegal infiltration of foreigners at the border; actions of outside forces to propagandize and spread separatism ideas... in many minority people's areas. These activities have negative effects on the security situation and the task of defending the nation; cause difficulties for the development of economic and society and also for implementing the ethnicity policies in these areas [[6]; 56-60].

Along with the efforts of the state departments and the entire political system at the minority people's regions, motivating and promoting prestigious persons to effectively solve the problems above are very important. Promoting prestigious person's role is very crucial to motivate their own relatives and the local minority people, help to raise the awareness and disbelief of false propaganda, erase the illusion of separatism and autonomy, actively join in the movements against criminals and social diseases. Besides, prestigious persons participate in motivating, directly educating and helping those who once violated the law to reconnect to the community and erase unpleasant self-consciousness with surrounding people... These active activities of prestigious persons crucially contributed to maintaining the stability of social order in the regions [[6]; 172].

*Thirdly*, prestigious persons also help to motivate the people not to conduct free immigrations, motivate those who have immigrated to return to their previous shelter, create convenient conditions for them to settle their life and works.

In recent years, free immigration has continued to be complicated in many ethnic minorities, which makes the socio-economic situation become complicated, both in the place of destination and the place of travel; life of ethnic minorities is so difficult. Apart from socio-economic reasons, customs and habits, in recent years, the issue of free immigrations has many other causes. It is the bad elements propagating, deceiving, forcing some people to leave villages, *ban* to migrate to the new land.

Village patriarchs, heads of villages and prestigious persons have promoted their role in encouraging, comforting, helping and mobilizing their compatriots to work, live, not to nomadise and shift cultivation of wandering hill tribes. For those who have migrated, when they return to the local area, their former place to continue living and working, they usually have the guilt and self-deprecation. In order to avoid disunity in the community, prestigious persons have mobilized compatriots to help them in many aspects so that they can soon integrate into the community, don't have a complex with those around them and quickly settle. Up to now, they have mobilized more than fifty-five thousand households, eighty thousand people to abandon the intention of migration. They have received financial support, land allocation, forest allocation to stabilize life [7].

*Fourthly*, prestigious persons have promoted their own role to solve the conflicts and complicated problems happening in the interior of peoples in the areas.

In fact, the contradictions and disputes within ethnic minorities are caused by various causes, including socio-economic causes (land and natural resource disputes, etc.) customs, traditions, culture, beliefs, religions ... Contradictions and disputes are sensitive issues, easy to explode into complicated social conflicts. Without

understanding the customs, habits and culture of ethnic minorities, it is impossible to solve them thoroughly. Therefore, the resolution must be very clever, delicate. It cannot be resolved quickly by the application of law, coercion, because this issue is related to the customs, habits and psychology of the people. In many cases, the government find it difficult to deal with or they are ineffective.

The prestigious person, with the knowledge and understandings about the customs, the mentality of ethnic groups, with the stand as “court”, “referee” in local regions, voluntarily stands out to pacify and settle the conflicts and disagreements in the villages, which in many cases the local government solves the problems with inefficiency or meets heavy difficulties in dealing with the problems. All the problems above would be impossible to be completely solved without the role of prestigious persons [7].

### 2.3. Solutions to Promote the Role of Prestigious Persons in Implementing the Ethnicity Policies

Promoting prestigious persons’ role in the minority peoples is one of the major orientations and policies of the State of Vietnam in order to effectively implement the ethnicity policies and contribute to building and defending the country. To best enhance the roles and the abilities of prestigious persons, the commissars, the governments and the involved the units need to pay attention to these following matters:

*Firstly*, the State needs to conduct surveys, examinations, classifications and collections of prestigious persons in minority peoples. From that, the State needs to identify the extents, ranges, limits, influence, political intention, abilities and levels of abilities of each person in order to define the appropriate contents, forms and measures of motivation. It is necessary to pay attention to prestigious persons with a history of people motivation at the areas, specially the persons who are recognized by the people in order to promote their role, prestige and influence. In that process, we have to really respect their prestige and their influence on the people; constantly heighten their perception of politics, promote the positive aspects and decrease the negative aspects in themselves, limit negative affects form outsides.

*Secondly*, we need to initiatively find and choose persons who are from minority ethnic groups, including war veterans, retired officials, capable and enthusiastic young people, successful businessmen, and then help to create their actual prestige by improving thier knowledge of economics, supporting them with funds and markets... so that hey can become the role models for people in reducing poverty, enriching them in their own home country. In the socio-economic conditions of ethnic minorities, the people's life and education have been constantly improved so the number of prestigious people needs to be increased, especially the young, who have real knowledge in all fields [8].

*Thirdly*, we closely combine propaganda, motivation, education, persuasion with applying appopriate treating policies in order to best promote the role and influence of prestigious persons in implementing ethnicity policy. Reality shows that the attitude, the composants, the extent and the inflence levels of prestigious persons in minority ethnic groups are not the same (to the extent of a village or of many villages, a district, a province or a region...). Therefore, when conducting this work, we have to be very consistant, close and we have to fit in with them, so that we can gain their trust, their respect and their love, create compassion for them; Besides, we have to care for the aspirations, their feelings, family conditions, the extent of their influence. By doing those things, we are able to produce a suitable policy to best promote prestigious person’s role, prestige and effectiveness [8].

## 3. Conclusion

Prestigious persons are persons who have great roles and influences in minority ethnic groups. They also greatly contribute to solving economic and social issues, stabilise politics, and implement ethnicity policies in local areas; help to promote the tradition of revolution and national integrity between ethnic groups; reserve the cultural identity; fight the backward ideologies, racial discrimination and superstitious customs; help to build a prosperous and happy home country. Studying and systematizing theoretical and real issues about prestigious persons in minority peoples is to add scientific arguments to define and implement the orientations and policies of the State of Vietnam in order to promote prestigious persons’ role, contributing to the cause of building and defending the country.

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