

MAJORITY-MINORITY SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Hoang Ngoc Thanh

Our country, Viet Nam, has been much written about and better known for the long war than from its dominant characteristics and national endeavors, such as, how it has been dealing with the minorities in the past and in the present for national integration and progress. Our whole nation, according to official statistics, has more than 41 million inhabitants, with 22 millions in the North and over 19 millions in the South. Over ten percent of the population are ethnic minorities different from the ethnic Vietnamese. They live mostly in valleys, plateaus and highlands in contrast to the ethnic Vietnamese who settle in lowlands and plains.

For generations the relation between the majority and the minorities has been an important question for the Vietnamese people. Since the minorities have been scattered in frontier areas bordering China and Laos, it has been essential to have their collaboration for national development and southward expansion.

My paper deals with the relations between the majority and the minorities (excluding the ethnic Chinese) in our country from the past to the present and the contributions of the elite and the universities toward these relations. To help clear the way, an overview of the minorities is presented first. Regretfully, however, due to the lack of materials and the means for investigation, not much on North Viet Nam will be discussed.

For foreigners, it is not difficult to distinguish the ethnic minorities from the ethnic Vietnamese in physical appearance. Not only are their apparels different, but so are their complexions and facial features. The most developed groups in North Viet Nam such as the Muong, the

Thai and the Tay wear pants or skirts and dress, in cuts different from those of the lowlanders, while many tribesmen in South Viet Nam, commonly called Montagnards or mountaineers, still wear the loincloth for the men or a simple kind of skirt for the women, except among those living near the ethnic Vietnamese or having frequent contacts with them. A few small tribes such as the Hroi and the Maa still have their front teeth broken to the gums as a sign of maturity and have the lobes of their ears pierced and stretched to insert pieces of wood or ivory as ornament. Most minorities have darker complexion than the ethnic Vietnamese, except probably for the Thai in the North.

The Minorities in North Viet Nam

In North Viet Nam, the most numerous minorities are the Muong, the Thai, the Man and the Meo. The Muong number about over 300,000 and are found in the valleys of the provinces of Hoa Binh, Ninh Binh, Son Tay, Thanh Hoa and Nghe-An. The Muong have been considered as the first settlers in the area of North Viet Nam and have not been influenced by Chinese civilization during the long Chinese domination of the Vietnamese people up to 939.

The Thai in Viet Nam belong to the ethnic Thai groups who had moved from China into Thailand and Laos. They divide themselves into two sub-groups: those living on the left bank of the Red River, who are the Tay, and those on the right bank, who are the Thay. The Tay number about 240,000 and are scattered in the provinces of Cao Bang, Lang Son, Bac Can, Thai Nguyen, Tuyen Quang, Yen Bay and Ha Giang. The Tay have considerable contact with the ethnic Vietnamese and are fairly well developed.

The Thay are more numerous, about 700,000, and are found in low valleys under 300 meters and mostly near sources of water in the provinces of Lai Chau, Lao Kay, Son La of Northern Viet Nam as well as in the provinces of Thanh Hoa, Nghe An and Ha Tinh of Central Viet Nam.

Furthermore, the Thai are divided into Thai Den or Black Thai, Thai Trang or White Thai, and Thai Do or Red Thai, depending on the color of the dress of their women. The White Thai are in general tall,

well built, their women good-looking and have fair complexion. They are rather liberal in their customs. Young people get acquainted with one another easily and choose freely their mates. The Black Thai are rather conservative and supervise their daughters strictly. The Red Thai speak a dialect similar to Laotian and burn their dead instead of bury them as the other Thais do.

The Man are found in the high mountainous areas of the provinces of Lai Chaum, Lao Kay, Ha Giang and Cao Bang from the altitude of about 300 meters to 900 meters. There are about over 100,000 Mans.

The Meo live on maize in mountains above 1,000 meters high. They are well-built, healthy and good mountain climbers. They number about 200,000.

The Minorities in the South

In the South, the minorities comprise about thirty tribes. These tribes are divided into several linguistic groups, the most important of which are the Mon-Kmer, the Malayo Polynesian group and the Chem. Besides, a number of people from the minorities in the North also moved to the south after the partition of the country into two zones. The Mon-Kmer group consists of the Bru of Pacoh, the K'tu, the Hre, the Cua, the Bahnar, the Sedang, the Die, the Halang, the Cil, the Kaho, the Maa, the M'Nong, the Chroo, and the Stieng. The Malayo-Polynesian group include the Jarai, the Rhade, the Hroi, the Cham, the Raglai and the Churu. The most important among these tribes on the basis of their aggressiveness and their number are the Sedang, the Bahnar, the Jarai and the Rhade.

The Sedang are reputed for their warlike attitude and their number is estimated at 30,000. They live in the districts of Dakto, Daksut and Toumrong in the province of Kontum. The Sedang are usually very poor and they have many rituals and ceremonies.

The Kaho are scattered in the highlands stretching from the province of Tuyen Duc to Long Khanh. They number about 40,000. The Kaho as well as the Jarai and the Rhade practice the matriarchal system.

The Jarai are probably the most numerous tribe in South Viet Nam with a population of over 150,000. They are found in the pro-

vinces of Pleiku, Phu Bon, Kontum and Darlac. In the past the Jarai were under the control and influence of their two famous sorcerers, named the Sadet of Fire and the Sadet of Water. The latter was killed during the war against the French and no successor to him has been named, while the Sadet of Fire is still alive. It seems the Jarai had been under the administration of the Cham for many centuries since there are still now remains of Cham towers in areas inhabited by the Jarai. Furthermore, the Jarai and the Cham understand each other linguistically more or less.

The Rhade or Ede are the second largest minority group in the South with a population about 100,000. They are scattered in the provinces of Darlac, Khanh Hoa, in the south of Phu Bon and in the northern area of the province of Quang Duu. They prefer to gather on the slopes of high hills. They had a number of famous leaders such as Ama-Trang-Guh, Ama Ual, Y Ut and the name of the city and province of Ban Me Thuot comes from the name of their chieftain Ama Thuot. Among the Rhade, men, women and children all smoke long pipes. They have become more advanced than the other minorities in the South due to their considerable contact with the ethnic Vietnamese.

Lastly, in South Viet Nam now there are about 70,000 Cham who are the descendants of the once prosperous kingdom of Champa. The Cham live in the provinces of Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, Binh Tuy and Phuoc Long. Many of them have been Vietnamized, mixing much or marrying with the ethnic Vietnamese. A number of Cham have been doing as well as the ethnic Vietnamese themselves.

Moreover, over 70,000 people from the minorities in the North had moved to the South in 1954 and have settled down in Cam Ranh, Binh, Tuy, Darlac, Tuyen Duc, Lam Dong, Long Khanh, Gia Dinh, Bien Hoa and Kien Giang. They have formed many new communities which have prospered through farming, trade and many handicrafts.

Characteristics

The minorities in the North or in the South gather in villages which vary from the very small, consisting of a dozen or so people, to the very large with a population of a few thousands. In certain areas,

especially in the North, a number of villages form a district which was put under the authority of a ruling family. Tribesmen usually build their houses on stilts with the space below the house used for storage, animal pens, children's play or as a means of security against wild animals. The most important place in the house is the hearth around which the people in the house gather for meals and sleep.

A number of tribes in the South utilize long houses providing quarters for a number of families so that more than a hundred people may live in a single long house. Besides, many villages of Montagnards have a communal house which is the most ornate structure in the village and serves as the indoctrination center for tribal lore and traditions. Unmarried men have to sleep there.

The major means of livelihood among the minorities include farming, hunting, fishing, gathering wild forest products and producing handicraft works such as crossbows, utensils, and clothing materials. The most developed ethnic groups or those living in flat lands, such as the Thai in the North and the Kaho in the South, practice wet-rice farming like their countrymen on the lowlands. But many tribes especially in the South still use the "slash and burn" method. They also grow vegetables and raise domesticated animals for sacrificial purposes and food. They capture game or kill it through the use of traps, the bow and the arrow, spears and guns. The minorities in the North such as the Muong, Thai, Mau or Meo can produce their own muskets with the materials bought from the lowlands or from China.

The minorities are largely self-sufficient except in their need for salt, iron, utensils and medicine. In general, their economy is only at the bare subsistence level except for a number of groups in the North, such as the Nung and the Meo. Before 1945, the Nung have had a decent standard of living since they have been working their lands as hard as the ethnic Vietnamese and a number of them also engaged in commerce, opened shops, became blacksmiths, carpenters, jewellers and did earn money. The Meo used to grow poppy and traded it as well as honey and mushrooms for salt and other commodities. Some tribes in the South have been so poverty-stricken and indebted that they are ready to offer their loyalty and serve at once those who are kind to them and pay them more.

An outstanding factor which has been hampering the advancement of the minorities especially those in the South is their religious attitude or their superstition. They are usually animistic in their beliefs. They attribute conscious life and spirit to every form of reality including plants, trees, stones, rivers, mountains, particular bits of ground or certain pieces of rock and the sky. Natural phenomena such as thunderstorms, floods, and fire are also believed to have spirits. For them, some spirits are good but many are malevolent and cause harm or sickness. It becomes necessary, therefore, to ask a shaman or sorcerer to perform rituals to appease them. The rituals include the offerings of rice, wine, betel and the sacrifice of a chicken, dog, pig or buffalo. To cure sickness, they also request their shamans to perform similar ceremonies, which are rather costly and reduce them to poverty. Furthermore, they usually abide by a number of taboo requirements which are a real barrier to their advancement. A number of tribesmen dare not use dung as fertilizer, do not get out of their villages for work on certain days, or are fined if their wives get pregnant within one year of their marriage.

The minorities in the North have had considerable contact with the ethnic Vietnamese and the Chinese and have become less superstitious. The Thai and the Man also worship their ancestors and Buddha. The least superstitious minority is probably the Meo who rely more on themselves than on the supernatural in their work and struggle for existence.

As can be seen, the various minorities in Viet Nam have characteristics which make them different from the majority of their countrymen. Though living in the same national community, the relations between the majority and minorities have not been always smooth and peaceful. We will review their relations in the past and give more emphasis to the events in the last few decades.

The Majority-Minority Relations

In dealing with the minorities, many political regimes in Viet Nam have played the role of the big brother. The term "moi" which is used by the common ethnic Vietnamese to call the tribesmen in Central Viet Nam is derogatory, and means "savage," or "uncivilized." A num-

ber of opportunists from the lowlands also take advantage of the simplicity and sincerity of the tribesmen to exploit them. On the other side, many minorities have been surrounded by their superstitions and taboos, and they have preferred to remain aloof to the majority and to advancement and national integration. However, all in all, the successive ruling regimes in Viet Nam have been able to keep control of the areas inhabited by the minorities through the skillful use of the carrot and the stick, by marital alliances, and by winning them over with favors and privileges. Force has been used only when it was necessary, such as when an uprising broke out.

A Glance at the Past

From the past to the present, a number of minorities have been scattered in the frontier areas between China and Viet Nam. It was essential for the national dynasties to control them after the independence of the country in 939. The kings of the Ly dynasty (1010-1225) gave their daughters in marriage to the chieftains of the various tribes and appointed them as mandarins in charge of the administration of the minorities under them. These chieftains had quasi-complete autonomy in their regions provided every year they offered precious products to the kings such as ivory tusks, cinnamon and honey among others. Now and then, some kings took the daughters of the tribe chiefs as concubines. The Ly dynasty did use force in 1038 and 1048 to repress the rebellion of the Nung family. But as soon as the repression was achieved, the court resorted again to the policy of winning over the minorities with a generous treatment. However, to face any emergency, the dynasty did station troops at strategic locations and established a number of agricultural settlements in areas next to the minorities. The people, whether tribesmen or ethnic Vietnamese, have been free to make a living in any region, going back and forth bartering or trading goods. The minorities in the North, therefore, have had considerable contact with the ethnic Vietnamese. The loyalty of the minorities in the northern area was very important for the Vietnamese in the many struggles to preserve their independence from China.

By the end of the 15th century, the Vietnamese dynasties made

their contacts with the tribes in Central Viet Nam. At the time the kingdom of Champa appeared to have controlled a number of tribes in Central Viet Nam such as the Jarai and the Rhade. A number of tribesmen also served in the Cham army. But the Vietnamese kings who overcame the Cham had the good sense of not punishing or harming the tribes, but left them to themselves, while taking care to organize the lands newly taken from the Cham. Moreover, they set up a limit and did not allow the tribesmen to move down to the plains. Besides, the same policy toward the minorities in the North was also implemented in Central Viet Nam, that is, conferring mandarinal grades to the chieftains of the tribes and making them into vassals of the court of Viet Nam.

But now and then such tribes as the Cua or Da Vach, the Katu, the Hre, the Kre in the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and Binh Dinh raided the plains. Government troops had to drive them away many times, but the same thing repeated itself over and over. By 1540, a competent mandarin named Bui Tan Han was appointed governor of the provinces of Quang Nam and Quang Ngai. Bui Tan Han realized that the majority-minority relations were not only a military problem but also a political one. He devised a twofold policy. First of all, new settlements were established in mountainous areas with ethnic Vietnamese farmers. Communications were improved and all kinds of contacts between tribesmen and lowlanders including barter and trade were encouraged. On the other part, the policy also aimed at promoting a national identity and integration by training tribesmen and encouraging them to serve in the national army and other services. An administrative service was also set up to deal with the wishes and grievances of the tribes. Such a policy was successful during Bui Tan Han's tour of duty and was continued for over a century.

But by the mid-18th century, the situation worsened. The tribesmen, especially the Cua or Da Vach, made incursions in the plains, causing destruction and terror among the lowlanders. In 1870, Nguyen Cu Trinh was appointed governor of the province of Quang Ngai with the mission of pacifying the Cua or Da Vach. At first, he tried to win them over with favors and privileges, but without success. He had to beat them militarily and then helped them materially by giving them

lands, tools and seeds. He found out the causes of the rebellion of the Cua or Da Vach. These were oppression and exploitation by corrupt mandarins, as well as poverty and misery. He took remedial measures and organized for them farms and communities. Gradually, the rebels returned to the control of the government. By the end of 1851, the governor submitted a full report to the court of Hue, presenting in detail the situation and suggesting the means to pursue a wise policy toward the tribes, for instance, to appoint only competent and honest mandarins and to tax the tribesmen only according to their means. But the court the Hue rejected the report and Nguyen Cu Trinh resigned soon after.

The situation was allowed to drift along until Nguyen Anh of the Nguyen dynasty unified the country at the beginning of the 19th century.

The policy of the Nguyen dynasty up to the French domination by the late 19th century had three purposes. First of all, a small great wall was built from Tra Bong in the province of Quang Ngai to An Lao in the province of Binh Dinh over 90 km long, to prevent tribesmen from raiding the plains. Then, the highlands of these two provinces were made into fiefs, that is, Vietnamese-administered territory, no longer an area reserved exclusively for the tribes. Thirdly, the court of Hue implemented a vigorous program of economic development of the highlands and mountainous areas.

This policy succeeded in keeping the tribes under control and transformed many areas into prosperous communities.

In 1863, the court of Hue appointed an able mandarin named Nguyen Than to be in charge of the highlands and the minorities of the coastal provinces of Central Viet Nam. Mr Nguyen Than came from a family well versed on this subject. His grandfather and his father had been in charge of the minorities in Northern and Central Viet Nam. He profited from their experiences and in 1891 he produced a work called *Phy Man Tap Luc*, providing guidelines in dealing with the minorities – the first of its kind in Viet Nam.

We see that during the 19th century the court of Hue was only preoccupied with the minorities living in the mountainous areas of the coastal provinces of Central Viet Nam. As for those found now

in the highlands of Central Viet Nam, that is, in the present provinces of Kontum, Pleiku, Ban Me Thuot, Phu Bon and Tuyen Duc, Quang Duc, the court of Hue considered them as vassals who had to carry out their duties accordingly, that is, to pay yearly taxes and offer precious products to the court every three years. As for the minorities in Northern Viet Nam, the court continued the same policy already implemented by the preceding dynasties.

However, when the French domination begun by the late 19th century, the question of dealing with the minorities passed from the court of Hue to the colonial authorities.

The French realized the fertility of the highlands of Central Viet Nam, therefore they held control of the region for their exploitation. They promoted division and hatred between the minorities and the ethnic Vietnamese. They were mostly interested in employing the cheap labor provided by tribesmen for their plantations of tea and coffee. From 1887, when they established their domination over the highlands to March 1945, and from 1946 to the early 1949, when the French left the highlands for good, the tribes had only 3,522 secondary and primary pupils out of a population of under a million. The literacy rate was about less than one half percent inspite also of the work of a number of Catholic and Protestant missionaries. The mortality rate was fairly high, also. The tribes rose many times against French rule, by themselves or in collaboration with their countrymen from the lowlands. For instance, there were uprisings of the Mdburn tribe on the banks of the Da Rang River in 1894, the Stieng in the province of Gia Dinh in 1859 and at Trang Bang in 1869, the Bahnar in the region of An Khe from 1938 to 1942, and the M'Nong under Ama Trang Long in 1945, to quote a few at random.

In the North, most of the Muong, Thai, Meo, Lolo supported tacitly or openly many revolutionary activities against French domination. Many Vietnamese patriots took refuge in the villages of the minorities. Without their support, it would have been difficult for the Viet Minh to carry out their guerilla activities successfully against the French and the Japanese up to 1945. One tribesman, Chu Van Tan from the Tay, has become a general in the North Vietnamese army. The French policy of oppression and exploitation made it easier for the ethnic

Vietnamese to call upon the minorities to join them in the fight against the foreign yoke.

However, after the Vietnamese people regained their independence, the relations between the majority and minorities have not been as cordial and friendly as expected.

The Policy of Autonomy of the North Vietnamese Government

In an attempt to win over the minorities to their cause whether in the North or in the South, the North Vietnamese government has been promoting the policy of autonomy for the minorities. After the cease-fire in July 1954, the Hanoi government set up two autonomy zones for the minorities. The first has been the Thai-Meo Autonomy Zone with the provincial city of Son La as capital. This zone has all the institutions of a small state such as a mini-congress, a chief executive elected by the people, and an administrative council of ten members representing the various ethnic groups in the zone. The second has been the Viet Bac Zone which was formed in 1956 with the three provinces of Cao Bang, Bac Giang and Lang Son and also included in 1957 the provinces of Lao Kay, Yen Bay and Ha Giang with the provincial city of Thai Nguyen as capital. But two years later, the two provinces of Lao Kay and Yen Bay were reverted to the direct control of the central government in Hanoi. This zone has also the same institutions as the other one.

Besides, in Hanoi there has been a central committee for minorities with the prerogatives of a ministry in charge of the autonomy zones. The North Vietnamese government has set up two training centers to train cadres from the minorities for work in the north as well as in the south. During the resistance war against the French (1946-1954) the Ho Chi Minh government also organized an autonomy zone for minorities on the highlands of Central Viet Nam. It won over a number of prominent tribesmen such as Nay Der, Nay Phin, Y Ngon, Y Wang, Y Kham, Y-Jonh-Nie-K'Dam or Minh Son, and Y-Bih Aleo among others. After the division of the country in 1954 these persons went to the north for a number of years, then returned to the South and were given key positions in the Communist organization for the highlands.

For instance, Y-Bih Aleo was appointed vice president of the Communist front or of liberation in charge of the highlands and Y-John-Nie-K'Dam or Minh Son became the highest ranking officer from the minorities in the south.

Furthermore, Communist cadres have been making tremendous efforts to win over the tribes. They live, work and eat with tribesmen. A number of them even have their teeth broken to the gums or their ear lobes pierced and stretched as tribesmen or even marry girls from the tribes. Furthermore, from 1958 on, groups after groups of tribesmen from the south were taken to the north and given VIP treatment. After their return to the south, these tribesmen would be good propagandists for the north.

At first, the policy of granting autonomy and good treatment from the North Vietnamese government seemed to give good results and to get the support of the minorities in the country. However, as time went by, the minorities found out that they did not have real autonomy but the Workers Party through its cadres has decided everything for them. Agricultural taxes levied by the Communists have been pretty heavy; tribesmen have had to transport food and war materials over long distances; they had to endure so many hardships, to work very hard for the building of "socialism"; and they have been under control in their daily living and activities. The tribesmen used to be carefree, to live and work as they wished, and especially not to be "collectivized." The result, it seems, has been that the minorities especially in the North have been gradually disenchanted with the North Vietnamese government. They have had a passive attitude and no longer implement policies or directives from Hanoi with enthusiasm. The Late President Ho Chi Minh once complained that 50% of the minorities in the provinces of Cao Bang and Lang Son refused to join agricultural cooperatives though they had supported actively the revolutionary cause during the French domination, according to North Vietnamese sources (*Van Tho Ho Chi Minh* [Writings by Chi Minh], Hanoi, 1964, p. 159).

In the South, by the end of 1961, the tribesmen began to leave the Communist-controlled areas for the South Vietnamese side. In the next year, that is in 1962, the flight to the government side became an

exodus. Many reasons accounted for this. The tribesmen seemed to be no longer able to support the exactions of the Communists for their war efforts, though they were requested in suave and catching slogans. On the other hand, due to governmental economic blockade and military attacks, the Communists could not maintain their control over the tribes, who usually choose the side giving them relative security and material help for a decent living. Their reasons have been overwhelmingly practical, not ideological.

But in government-controlled areas, the relations between the majority and the minorities went through many upheavals. The tribesmen resisted the heavy-handed policy of Vietnamization of the late president Ngo Dinh Diem, then they even rebelled and agreed to get integrated into the national community only after getting what they wanted.

From Opposition to National Integration in the South

From 1954 to November 1963, the late President Ngo Dinh Diem decided on the policy toward the minorities in the South. As a former mandarin, he had experience in such matters. He wanted to hasten the process of Vietnamizing the tribes and at the same time developing the highlands. He had good intentions and was really a great patriot. During his years in power, one must recognize that he was active in exploiting new areas, establishing new settlements, making efforts to improve the living conditions of the people. But President Diem's policy created resentment among the tribes for many reasons. First of all, he did not recognize their ownership of the areas in which they moved back and forth due to their "slash and burn" way of farming. The tribesmen also were not convinced that the government's policy served their best interests. The government also did not take into account enough the traditions and customs of the tribes.

A number of educated tribesmen formed an opposition movement which was later labeled as BAJARAKA, a combination of the names of the four tribes Bahnar, Jarai, Rhade and Kaho. In July 1958, copies of a list of grievances were disseminated in the provinces of Pleiku, Kontum and Darlac. In this list of grievances, the tribes complained

that lowlanders deprived them of their lands, opportunists exploited them and the ethnic Vietnamese as well as the government still called them "moi." For them, government employees coming from the tribes were discriminated against and not given positions deserving of their merits and abilities but were made to serve only as subordinates of the ethnic Vietnamese, including tribesmen who served as officers in the national army. The list of grievances also accused the government of not training tribesmen on the officer level, and some units of the national army for pillaging a number of tribes' villages. A number of complaints seemed to be substantially justified such as the cancellation of the teaching of the languages of the tribes at the primary level and the dissolution of the "courts of justice" based on the oral customs of the tribes.

As can be seen, the Bajaraka movement in 1958 did not demand any kind of autonomy but just a redress to grievances. But it made the mistake of requesting help and intervention from the foreign embassies in Saigon, which caused president Ngo Dinh Diem to jail its leaders and to dismiss from the government and the army tribesmen connected with the movement. However, the president set up a Social Work Service for minorities in Hue and promoted a more enlightened policy toward the minorities by ending discrimination and giving more recognition and respect to their customs and traditions. Although he did not satisfy their main requests, such as the ownership of land, he did, by the skillful use of economic blockade military operations, as well as the service of relatively competent and honest administrators, turn the tide, more or less, in his favor by causing the tribes to leave the Communist controlled areas en masse in the few years preceding his overthrow, especially in 1962.

After the downfall of the Diem regime, the new government released the imprisoned leaders of the Bajaraka movement such as Paul Nur and Nay Luett who became later ministers for minorities. But the political situation in South Viet Nam was not stable at the time and many short-lived administrations did not have any definite policy toward the minorities except to appoint prominent tribesmen to good positions. Meanwhile, former leaders of the Bajaraka movement and other educated and competent persons from the tribes such as Y-Bham

Enuol, Y-Dhon-Adrong, Y-Nuin-Hmok, Y-Nam-Eban and Y-Bhan-Kpor formed a movement called FULRO (United Front for the Liberation of the Oppressed Races) and staged a few attacks on government posts at Darlac in September 1964 and at Pleiku and Phu Non in December 1965. The government punished those who had caused bloodshed, but at the same time it paid close attention to the demands of the FULRO. It seems that this movement, as well as the Bajaraka before it, struggled for the common wishes of the minorities. In general, both requested special status for the minorities in the national community, special services to take care of them, and proportionate representation in the government from the central to the regional level.

They got what they wanted. The new Constitution, promulgated in April 1967, recognizes the existence of the minorities in the national community. It pledges to respect their traditions and customs, to re-establish the courts of justice based on oral customs for them, and to set up a council on minorities to advise the government on matters dealing with minorities. President Nguyen Van Thieu signed two decrees in August 1967 promulgating a special status for the minorities as the most favored ethnic groups and to give them ownership of land. At the end of the year a Ministry for the Development of the minorities was also set up and a former leader of the Bajaraka, Paul Nur, was appointed to head the ministry. The Council on minorities was also formed in 1969, according to the Constitution.

On the first of February 1969, the FULRO, en masse, composed of about 5,471 persons, half of them women and children, formally gave up their arms and returned to the control of the government at a ceremony presided by president Nguyen Van Thieu and in the presence of the diplomatic corps at the highland city of Ban Me Thuot.

The development of the minorities has been pursued actively ever since by the Ministry for the Development of the Minorities in collaboration with the other branches of the government under the supervision of the president and the two legislative houses, ten percent of the members of which now come from the tribes.

Many achievements speak for themselves. Up to the end of 1973, 1,602,395 hectares of land were established as living areas for 1,562 villages of tribesmen and 40,329 montagnards were granted 97,225

hectares as private property. Agricultural production has been increased by the distribution of seeds, pumps, fertilizers, insecticides, by propagating better methods of cultivating the land, by increasing and promoting contact with the ethnic Vietnamese, and by establishing cooperatives and experimental stations. At the same time the development of education has also contributed to free the minorities a little from their superstitions and taboos. At the end of 1973, 66,651 children attended primary and secondary schools and 159 young people attended colleges for the 751,585 tribesmen under the control of the South Vietnamese government out of a population of over a million tribesmen in the south, according to official statistics. Primary textbooks in twenty-two languages of the tribes have been printed and distributed. The literacy rate is now about 35%. A number of students from the tribes have been sent abroad to complete their higher education under a scholarship program of the government. A Research Center for minorities was also opened at Dalat last December.

But one should not forget that the minorities, as much as the majority, in South Viet Nam have suffered much from the long war. A number of tribes have been caught between the two fires and some have been decimated, such as the Cua or Da Vach in our native province of Quang Ngai. Only recently, in 1972-1973, the government had to relocate about 56,129 tribesmen who had to flee from their villages for good.

In all fairness, we must recognize that many good measures have been accomplished for the cause of the minorities who are offered now not equal but favored status and opportunity to catch up with the majority for mutual progress and national integration.

In Vietnamese society the "si" or scholar has been held in high esteem. In traditional Viet Nam prior to the coming of the French it was the scholar-mandarin who administered the country for the successive ruling dynasties. They were the scholar-mandarins Bui Ta Han, Nguyen Cu Trinh and Nguyen Thant, who formulated policies toward the minorities and implemented them for the interests of the nation.

The modern "si" in Viet Nam, with his establishment that is the university, seems to be much better equipped than his predecessors in dealing with such problems as the minorities. But the "si" in traditional Viet Nam was fully utilized to the best of his potential and abilities by the dynasties in power.

So far, universities and higher institutions in South Viet Nam have helped to train middle-level technicians, nurses, teachers and cadres in various branches to work among the minorities. They have been doing research and publication on the many aspects of the minorities, from their customs and habits to their languages and history. They have contributed to make the general public and the decision-making authorities to be more aware of the questions related to our less advanced country-men.

It appears that more can be done with better means and a favorable environment. The newly-founded Research Center for Minorities at the mountain resort city of Dalat so far has a managing staff, materials, and some means, but appear to lack enough researchers. The need arises for dedicated and scholarly persons to renounce the modern conveniences of city life, to live and work among the minorities part of their time, and to observe and research on the spot, not with political purposes, but with the aim at accomplishing a *mission civilisatrice*.