

# BUILDING THE KHMER ETHNIC CADRE FORCE IN TRA VINH PROVINCE TO MEET TASK REQUIREMENTS IN THE NEW CONTEXT

**Lam Ngoc Rang<sup>(1)</sup>**

*(1) Tra Vinh Provincial Political School  
Corresponding author: lnrangtctv@gmail.com*

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## Abstract

Building a contingent of ethnic minority cadres has consistently been a guiding principle and strategic policy of the Communist Party of Vietnam throughout different revolutionary periods. Consequently, ethnic affairs in areas with ethnic minority populations have always received special attention from the Party and the State. Effectively carrying out this work ensures equality, solidarity, and shared development among ethnic groups across the nation. This article evaluates the current status of ethnic affairs and the Khmer ethnic cadre force in Tra Vinh province and proposes several solutions to enhance ethnic work and develop a contingent of ethnic cadres capable of meeting the demands of the new era.

**Keywords:** building, Khmer ethnic, cadre force, Tra Vinh province

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## 1. Introduction

Vietnam is a unified nation comprising 54 ethnic groups, with the Kinh accounting for approximately 87% of the population and the remaining 53 ethnic minorities making up over 13%. These ethnic communities, living across Vietnam's territory, have long shared a tradition of unity and resilience in facing natural disasters and foreign invasions to build and defend the nation. Due to differences in natural and social conditions, population size, and levels of economic and cultural development, disparities exist among these ethnic groups. Many ethnic communities residing in border areas maintain long-standing kinship and ethnic ties with families across national borders. These characteristics underscore the importance and complexity of the ethnic question in Vietnam. From its founding in September 1945, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam has considered ethnic affairs a crucial component of its revolutionary cause. The core objectives of the Party and State's ethnic policies are to:

Promote equality, solidarity, and mutual support among ethnic groups; Oppose chauvinism and narrow-minded nationalism, eliminate discrimination, and foster unity in building and defending a strong, unified Vietnam; Vigorously develop the economy and culture to improve the living standards of ethnic communities and gradually reduce

disparities in development caused by historical legacies; Respect, preserve, and promote the fine cultural identities of each ethnic group; Ensure the right of ethnic groups to use their languages and scripts. The State encourages ethnic minorities to learn the national language, viewing it as a tool to serve the common interests of all groups.

The Party and State have always attached great importance to the training of ethnic minority cadres. This reflects the recognition that ethnic policies are an integral part of the broader policies of a State or political party, outlining principles and measures for addressing ethnic issues within the country. To formulate policies that reflect the realities of social life and to implement them effectively, the Party and State of Vietnam have consistently drawn upon and inherited traditional values from the past. As a result, sound ethnic policies have been developed to enable minority groups to thrive and advance alongside the revolutionary movement. To further refine these policies, it is essential to learn from historical lessons.

Tra Vinh is a coastal province in the Mekong Delta region of southwestern Vietnam. It comprises nine administrative units at the district level (including one city and one town), 106 communes, wards, and townships (85 communes, 11 wards, and 10 townships), and a total of 756 hamlets and residential groups. The province spans an area of 2,391 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of approximately one million. It is home to three main ethnic groups: the Kinh, the Khmer, and the Hoa, with the Khmer accounting for 31.2% of the total population (about 321,000 people). The Provincial Party Committee consists of 13 higher-level party organizations (9 district-level party committees and 4 directly under the provincial Party Committee), 515 grassroots party organizations (196 party committees and 319 grassroots branches), and 2,006 subordinate branches under grassroots or sectoral Party committees, encompassing various organizational types, with a total membership of 46,383 Party members. The province has 23,333 officials, civil servants, and public employees.

## 2. Objectives and Research Methods

This article draws upon various sources including documents, reference books, resolutions, and scientific studies concerning ethnic issues, ethnic policies, and the training of ethnic minority cadres, with a particular focus on Khmer ethnic officials in Tra Vinh province.

Throughout the historical development of the Vietnamese nation, as early as the 10th century, following independence from the Northern feudal regime, the first monarchic dynasties of Vietnam—such as the Ngo, Dinh, and Early Le dynasties—had already implemented policies to regulate relations and address ethnic issues within the country. From the post-Chinese domination period, Vietnam emerged as a unified, multi-ethnic nation. Besides the ethnic Viet (Kinh), who formed the overwhelming majority, there existed dozens of other brotherly minority groups. The term "ethnic minority" merely denotes a numerical distinction about the ethnic Viet majority and carries no connotation of discrimination or inequality. It can be affirmed that policies targeting ethnic minorities have always constituted a significant part of the Vietnamese monarchic state's governance. In particular, during the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1884), especially under Emperor Minh Mang (reigned 1820-1841), the state began to enforce stricter measures, such as abolishing the hereditary chieftain system (known as *Tho quan*) among ethnic minorities and replacing them with state-appointed officials (*Luu quan*). This "*Cai tho*

quy luu" policy (substituting hereditary chieftains with centrally appointed officials) was a major initiative of the Nguyen dynasty aimed at eliminating centrifugal tendencies and local separatism, thereby strengthening the centralized absolute monarchy in 19th-century Vietnam. The minority policies of the Vietnamese monarchic state thus expanded beyond the northern minorities such as the Tay, Nung, Thai, and Dao, to include ethnic groups in Central Vietnam, the Central Highlands, and the South—most notably the Cham, Gia Rai, Ede, and Khmer in Southern Vietnam.

These policies were closely tied to the historical process of Nam Tien (southward expansion), territorial reclamation, and the establishment of national sovereignty across what is now the entire territory of Vietnam. Numerous scholarly works have contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of ethnic minority policies under the Vietnamese monarchic state. However, most of these works have primarily addressed ethnic minorities in the North, with limited analysis of groups in Central and Southern Vietnam, particularly the South and Central Highlands. Given the wide scope and rich content of minority policy—which encompasses nearly all aspects of minority life—this article focuses only on the most essential and characteristic elements, particularly policies relating to Khmer ethnic cadres in Tra Vinh province.

Regarding methodology, this article employs both historical and logical methods grounded in dialectical materialism and historical materialism. These methods are applied to analyze the historical context of the Southern region, including Tra Vinh province, and their influence on the formulation and implementation of ethnic minority policies in Vietnam, especially those concerning the Khmer of Southern Vietnam. In addition, synchronic and diachronic approaches are utilized in examining the formation and development of the Vietnamese monarchic state -particularly during the Nguyen dynasty (1802-1884) - about its ethnic minority policies across political, economic, and military domains. It should be noted that the implementation of minority policies by the Nguyen dynasty was not without limitations. At times, policies were inappropriate or unsuccessful, due in large part to the complex historical conditions of 19th-century Vietnam. These experiences now serve as valuable lessons for the Party and the State in formulating more effective and comprehensive ethnic minority policies in the present era.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

#### ***3.1. Guidelines of the Party and Policies of the State Regarding Ethnic Affairs***

In recent years, the Party and the State have promulgated numerous guidelines and policies aimed at developing the nation's human resources in general and building a contingent of ethnic minority officials, civil servants, and public employees in particular. On March 12, 2003, the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party (9th Tenure) issued Resolution No. 24-NQ/TW "On Ethnic Affairs", which emphasized the necessity of effectively implementing the planning, training, fostering, and utilization of ethnic minority cadres tailored to specific regions and ethnic groups. On January 10, 2018, the Party Central Secretariat issued Directive No. 19-CT/TW "On Strengthening Work in Khmer Ethnic Minority Areas in the New Context." Subsequently, on January 14, 2011, the Government issued Decree No. 05/2011/ND-CP "On Ethnic Affairs", in which Article 11 stipulates that ethnic minority officials who are competent and meet the legal standards shall be appointed to key leadership and management positions at various levels. In localities inhabited by ethnic minorities, it is imperative to have ethnic minority

individuals hold key leadership positions. Furthermore, Conclusion No. 65-KL/TW dated October 30, 2019, issued by the Politburo regarding the continued implementation of Resolution No. 24-NQ/TW, affirmed the following directive: "Promote the development of Party members who are ethnic minorities and address the situation of localities lacking Party organizations and Party members, especially in critical, particularly difficult, and border areas..."

In alignment with these Party directives, the Government has continued to formulate, promulgate, and implement legal documents concerning the planning, training, deployment, and appointment of ethnic minority officials and civil servants. These include: Resolution No. 52/NQ-CP dated June 15, 2016, by the Government on promoting the Development of Human Resources Among Ethnic Minorities for the 2016-2020 Period, with an Orientation Toward 2030; Resolution No. 12/NQ-CP dated February 15, 2020, by the Government on implementing Resolution No. 88/2019/QH14 dated November 18, 2019, by the 14th National Assembly on approving the Overall Plan for Socio-Economic Development in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas for the 2021–2030 Period; Decision No. 402/QD-TTg dated March 14, 2016, by the Prime Minister "On Approving the Scheme for the Development of Ethnic Minority Cadres, Civil Servants, and Public Employees in the New Era." At the provincial level, the 11th Party Congress of Tra Vinh Province, for the 2020–2025 term, issued a resolution reaffirming comprehensive development for Khmer ethnic communities. On October 8, 2021, the Tra Vinh Provincial Party Committee issued Directive No. 06-NQ/TU "On Continuing the Comprehensive Development of the Khmer Ethnic Region for the 2021–2025 Period, with an Orientation Toward 2030." On November 17, 2022, the Provincial Party Committee developed Project No. 05-DA/TU "On Creating a Source for Planning and Appointing Female and Khmer Ethnic Minority Cadres in Tra Vinh Province." Additionally, on July 19, 2022, the People's Committee of Tra Vinh Province promulgated Decision No. 1334/QD-UBND "On the Issuance of the Implementation Plan for Government Resolution No. 10/NQ-CP on the National Strategy for Ethnic Affairs for the 2021-2030 Period, with a Vision Toward 2045 in Tra Vinh Province."

### ***3.2. Current Status of the Khmer Ethnic Cadres in Tra Vinh Province***

In recent years, the work of developing ethnic minority cadres has received increasing attention from all levels and sectors. To date, the total number of Khmer ethnic officials and civil servants working across the political system in Tra Vinh province amounts to 4,443 individuals, accounting for 20.8%. Among them, 560 hold leadership and managerial positions, representing 12.6%. This includes 78 at the provincial level (13.92%), 133 at the district level (23.75%), and 349 at the commune level (62.32%). The political and professional qualifications, practical capacity, sense of responsibility, and overall quality and effectiveness of task performance among ethnic minority cadres have continuously improved, meeting the increasing demands of the province's political duties. The contingent of Khmer ethnic officials, civil servants, and public employees holding leadership and managerial positions:

The total number of provincial-level officials, civil servants, and public employees holding leadership and management positions is 794, of whom 78 are from ethnic minorities (accounting for 30.98%). Among them, the Provincial Party Standing Committee includes 2 out of 15 members (13.33%), the Provincial Party Executive Committee includes 7 out of 49 members (14.29%), the positions of Chairperson and

Vice Chairperson of the Provincial People's Council and People's Committee include 2 out of 7 members (28.57%), the positions of heads and deputy heads of provincial departments, agencies, and mass organizations and equivalent levels include 20 out of 207 members (9.66%), and the positions of heads and deputy heads of divisions within departments, agencies, and mass organizations and equivalent levels include 51 out of 538 members (9.48%).

The total number of district-level and equivalent officials, civil servants, and public employees holding leadership and management positions is 1,793, of whom 133 are from ethnic minorities (accounting for 7.42%). Among them, the Standing Committee at the district level and equivalent positions include 12 out of 118 members (10.17%), the District Party Executive Committee and equivalent positions include 35 out of 380 members (9.21%), the positions of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the District People's Council and People's Committee and equivalent levels include 7 out of 37 members (18.92%), and the positions of heads and deputy heads of divisions at the district level and equivalent levels include 98 out of 1,413 members (6.94%). The total number of commune-level and equivalent officials and civil servants is 2,122, of whom 349 are from ethnic minorities (accounting for 16.45%).

Currently, in several departments, agencies, and localities, the Khmer ethnic cadre workforce remains insufficient. The proportion of ethnic minority officials holding leadership and management positions does not yet meet the requirements of planning frameworks. Their participation in Party committees and leadership bodies at various levels remains limited, and in some aspects, their quality is still lacking. Certain Party committees and leaders have not paid adequate attention to proactively planning, cultivating sources, training, fostering, and assigning ethnic minority officials. In particular, the evaluation and assessment of officials in some units have not been effectively carried out. There is still hesitancy in delegating responsibilities, limiting opportunities for ethnic minority officials to undergo practical challenges, develop, and mature. Furthermore, some ethnic officials, despite receiving training and professional development, still show limitations in competence and practical experience or exhibit complacency and lack of determination to overcome difficulties. Their capabilities may not yet align with the leadership and management positions for which they are being considered in planning.

### ***3.3. Solutions for Developing the Khmer Ethnic Cadre Force in Tra Vinh Province in the Coming Period***

To meet the increasing demands of tasks in the new context, reality requires a set of comprehensive solutions to create motivation and effectively promote the role of the Khmer ethnic cadre force in Tra Vinh province. Party committees and authorities at all levels must continue to pay attention to implementing the following fundamental solutions:

First, it is necessary to focus on leading and directing efforts to meet the requirements of increasing the proportion and improving the quality of ethnic minority officials within the province's political system, ensuring they are commensurate with future responsibilities. The development and appointment of ethnic minority officials to leadership and management positions is an objective requirement, ensuring continuity, inheritance, and advancement within the cadre force. It is essential to continue implementing the renewal approach to personnel work, ensuring democracy, transparency, and adherence to



principles, processes, and procedures to enhance the quality and proactivity in personnel work, avoiding perfectionism. Attention should be paid to recruiting, appointing, planning, training, promoting, and nominating ethnic minority officials who meet the criteria and conditions for leadership and management positions, thereby creating a breakthrough in personnel work suitable to the province's practical situation. Moreover, efforts should be made to strengthen the ethnic knowledge training program by Decision No. 771/QĐ-TTg dated June 26, 2018, of the Prime Minister on the "Approval of the Ethnic Knowledge Training Program for Officials, Civil Servants, and Public Employees for the Period 2018-2025."

Second, a positive and breakthrough transformation in ethnic minority cadre work must be created, with due attention and policies to develop a qualified and competent source of ethnic minority officials to meet the province's development needs. Efforts should be made to appoint ethnic minority officials to leadership and management positions for the 2025-2030 term, achieving and surpassing the target structure ratios set by the Central Government, especially in Party Executive Committees, Party Standing Committees, and among key leadership positions at all levels.

Third, ethnic minority officials should be appointed to leadership and management positions for the 2025-2030 term in line with or exceeding the structural ratio targets specified by regulations, with specific objectives as follows:

At the provincial level, the Provincial Party Standing Committee must have ethnic minority officials accounting for at least 15%. At least one ethnic minority official must hold a position among the standing members of the Party Committee, the People's Council, or the People's Committee. In the Provincial Party Executive Committee, ethnic minority officials must account for at least 15%. Among directors and deputy directors of provincial departments, agencies, mass organizations, and equivalent units, ethnic minority officials must account for at least 20%. For heads and deputy heads of divisions within departments, agencies, mass organizations, and equivalent units, the proportion must also reach at least 20%.

At the district level, the District Party Standing Committee must include ethnic minority officials accounting for at least 15%, and so must the District Party Executive Committee. In districts where over 30% of the population are Khmer people, the proportion of Khmer ethnic members in the Party Executive Committee must not be less than 15%. Where 20-30% of the population is Khmer, there must be 5-7 Khmer ethnic Party Committee members. For the positions of Chairperson and Vice Chairperson of the District People's Council and People's Committee, there must be at least one Khmer ethnic official. In districts and equivalent-level units with over 30% Khmer population, there must be at least one Khmer ethnic official among the standing members of the People's Council or People's Committee.

At the commune level, in the Party Executive Committees of communes and equivalent units with over 30% Khmer population, Khmer ethnic officials must account for at least 15%. Where 20-30% of the population is Khmer, the proportion must be no less than 10%. Where the proportion is below 20%, there must be 5-7 Khmer ethnic Party Committee members. Among full-time commune-level officials, ethnic minority officials must account for at least 25%. Among commune-level civil servants, ethnic minority officials must also account for at least 25%.

Regarding qualifications at the provincial level: For the 2025-2030 term, ethnic minority officials holding leadership and management positions from the level of deputy head of division and equivalent or higher must possess advanced political theory training and at least a university degree in their field. Within the Provincial Party Executive Committee, 30% should hold postgraduate degrees; among leaders of provincial departments, agencies, and mass organizations, 50% should hold postgraduate qualifications. Officials must also receive training in state management, national defense and security knowledge, and professional skills relevant to their assigned positions. They must be proficient in information technology for their professional duties. Officials working in areas with a high Khmer population must be trained to a level that enables them to communicate effectively in the Khmer language.

Regarding qualifications at the district level: For the 2025-2030 term, ethnic minority officials holding positions in the District Party Standing Committee, District Party Executive Committee, or serving as heads and deputy heads of divisions or equivalent positions must have advanced political theory training and at least a university degree in their field. All must receive training in state management, national defense and security knowledge, and professional skills appropriate to their roles. Proficiency in information technology is required for all. Those working in areas with a high concentration of Khmer people must also be trained to effectively use the Khmer language.

Regarding qualifications at the commune level: For the 2025-2030 term, ethnic minority officials serving in the Party Executive Committee or Party Standing Committee at the commune level must have at least intermediate-level political theory training and a university degree in their area of expertise. They must undergo training in state management, national defense and security, and professional skills corresponding to their assigned positions. Proficiency in information technology is required. Officials working in localities with a large Khmer population must be trained in the Khmer language to a level suitable for daily communication.

Fourth, develop a strategic plan for training and fostering ethnic minority officials, civil servants, and public employees, with a focus on undergraduate and postgraduate education for reputable, outstanding, and high-potential individuals (giving priority to those under 40 years of age). Attention must be paid to improving the quality of teaching and learning at district- and provincial-level ethnic boarding schools (both lower and upper secondary education levels), the Provincial School of Politics, and Tra Vinh University, to build a sustainable and qualified pool of ethnic minority officials. Efforts should be made to ensure the ethnic minority cadre force meets standards in both quality and quantity, and capable individuals should be confidently appointed to leadership positions. The representation of ethnic minority officials in Party Committees, Standing Committees, the People's Councils, and People's Committees should be gradually rationalized, particularly in localities with a large Khmer population. Ethnic minority officials should also be assigned to sectors and areas that regularly interact with Khmer ethnic communities.

Fifth, effectively implement the development of a cadre force that meets both qualitative and quantitative standards, ensuring proper qualifications. A synchronized approach must be applied to all phases of recruitment, evaluation, planning, training, fostering, and assignment. Efforts should be made to rejuvenate the cadre force while maintaining continuity, succession, and advancement. Recruitment policies should include a specified

percentage of ethnic minority representation. In the appointment, transfer, and rotation of cadres, priority must be given to ethnic minority officials who meet the necessary standards. The rotation of ethnic minority officials included in personnel planning should be enhanced, particularly from the provincial level to the district, and from the provincial and district levels to the commune, to hold key positions or serve as heads or deputy heads of district-level departments. This will help improve their practical leadership capacity through on-the-ground experience.

#### 4. Conclusion

Throughout the feudal dynasties in Vietnam, the political policies of successive monarchies toward ethnic minorities were characterized by imperial edicts, the conferral of titles upon tribal leaders and local chieftains, and the suppression of uprisings against the court—all aimed at consolidating territorial integrity and national unity. Economically, these regimes primarily implemented policies such as tax reductions and the granting of valuable goods to the minority elites. In terms of cultural and social policies, measures such as *Di Hoa bien Di*" (transforming barbarians through Han culture) and *"Nhat thi dong nhan"* (treating all ethnic groups equally),... were employed to appease and neutralize the resistance of local minority leaders to central rule.

During the process of settling and developing the southern region of Vietnam, the Khmer community played a vital role. Alongside the Vietnamese (Kinh) and Chinese communities, they established villages and hamlets early on, and contributed significantly in terms of human resources, materials, and finances to the Nguyen Lords' efforts to restore national order, ultimately helping to found the Nguyen Dynasty. This historical and social foundation enabled the implementation of flexible, effective policies toward the Khmer community of Southern Vietnam - policies grounded in respect, assurance of limited autonomy, mutual assistance, and a comprehensive, moderate approach that demonstrated the state's prestige and credibility in the eyes of ethnic minorities.

Notably, since the advent of the Communist Party of Vietnam—and particularly under the leadership, education, and organization of the Tra Vinh Provincial Party Committee—the Khmer people in the province have stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the Kinh and Chinese communities. Their struggle evolved from spontaneous acts into conscious resistance, developing in scope and strength over time. From demanding basic civil and democratic rights, they progressed to confrontations against foreign aggressors on all three fronts: political, psychological, and armed resistance, contributing to national independence, freedom, and reunification. In peacetime, they continue to fight against poverty and underdevelopment in the cause of building and safeguarding the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In every period and under every circumstance, the Khmer people of Tra Vinh have consistently demonstrated industriousness, creativity, patriotic fervor, and steadfast revolutionary will and courage. They remain a vital force in the revolutionary movement under the leadership of the Party and an indispensable part of the great national unity bloc.

To inherit and promote the traditional cultural values embedded in historical minority policies of Vietnam's monarchical states, the development of ethnic minority cadres has been clearly emphasized in the 13th National Congress Documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam (Volume II), specifically in sub-section 2.6, which focuses on cadre development at all levels, particularly at the strategic level and among key leadership positions. It states: "Focus on building a contingent of cadres at all levels, especially at



the strategic level, with sufficient qualifications, capacity, and prestige to meet the demands of the tasks; ensure continuous and solid generational transitions within the cadre force. Strengthen political courage, intellect, exemplary behavior, and the spirit of serving the people among officials and Party members, especially key leaders and heads of units at all levels. Emphasize the evaluation of quality, effectiveness, and tangible outcomes according to assigned responsibilities, while upholding the accountability of leaders. Pay special attention to achieving a rational structure and to the early identification, training, and development of young cadres, women, and ethnic minorities at all levels, especially at the grassroots level." In line with this directive, the resolutions, decrees, and guiding documents from the Party Central Committee and the Government concerning Khmer ethnic minority affairs in Tra Vinh province were concretized in the Documents of the 11th Congress of the Tra Vinh Provincial Party Committee (2020-2025 term), which state: "Thoroughly grasp and strictly implement the Party's and State's regulations on cadre work; build a contingent of cadres with firm political integrity, ethical qualities, and strong capabilities, who are devoted to serving the people; pay attention to increasing the proportion of female, young, and ethnic minority cadres..."

The development of the overall cadre force - and in particular, the Khmer ethnic minority cadre force - is a fundamental responsibility of the entire political system, directly involving Party committees, Party organizations, and, most importantly, the heads of these bodies. Advisory and personnel agencies of the Party play a pivotal role in this process. It is a task of profound significance, contributing not only to improved governance but also to the strengthening of the political system, socio-economic development, and the consolidation of national unity. Building and advancing the Khmer ethnic minority cadre force in Tra Vinh must be approached holistically, aligned with broader personnel strategies, and integrated with ongoing efforts to streamline staffing, reduce administrative apparatus, and consolidate a lean, effective, and high-performing political system. This work supports the rapid and sustainable development of the nation and marks Vietnam's entry into a new era of advancement and national rejuvenation. At the same time, it sets the foundation for Tra Vinh to achieve the New Rural Development Standard by 2025 and to become a leading province in the Mekong Delta region by 2030.

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