

### **CHAPTER III**

## **THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CENTRAL HIGHLANDS OF VIETNAM**

According to several historical and anthropological studies (e.g. Hickey, 1982a,b; Salemink, 2003; McElwee, 2004; Dang Nghiem Van, 1981; Vu Dinh Loi, Bui Minh Dao and Vu Thi Hong, 2000), ethnic peoples in the Central Highlands and the places where they resided have experienced “development processes” by different states since the early twentieth century. The first development process was designed and implemented by the French colonists. The second development process was carried out by the government of the Republic of Vietnam with designs and supports from experts of the “Free World” (Hickey, 1982a: 403). The third development process was designed and run by the Vietnamese communists since 1975. These development processes have brought tremendous changes to the ethnic peoples and their living places. I will provide a pre-text for further discussions on the impacts of the development processes on the everyday life of the ethnic peoples in the next chapters. In this chapter I will briefly review the development processes that the colonial states and postcolonial states had implemented in the Central Highlands. Discussion of the development process under each state will focus on two main aspects. The first aspect is the justification for the development policies used by the states in order to justify the need “to develop” the ethnic peoples and their places of residence. The second aspect concerns the practice of development policies and programs in the Central Highlands.

### **3.1 French Colonial Development Policies for the Highlanders**

After a half of century with great attempts to penetrate into the Central Highlands and its ethnic communities through missionaries, military explorers and ethnologists, the French colonists started to launch their direct policies to ethnic peoples in the Central Highlands in 1895 by a decision to place this region under the

administration of Lower Laos (Hickey, 1982a). Following the decision, military-administrative posts were established in the Central Highlands to control the people and their living places with a justification of bringing ‘civilization and order’ to the ‘primitive and unorganized tribes’. The colonists also established a system of local chiefs to expand their power to control the highlanders along with the construction of the military-administrative posts. In the ethnic villages controlled by the colonists, traditional village headmen became local chiefs and functioned as judges in the new Highlander’s Law Courts that were organized by the French (Hickey, 1982a; Salemink, 2003)

When the colonial administrative system expanded and controlled most of the area of the Central Highlands, the French set up rules of collecting taxes and the corvée labor from the ethnic peoples for long-term exploitation. The policies were justified under the rubric of “public development”, such as the construction of roads or public facilities. Hickey has recorded that:

“Previously, it was noted that highlanders who had been taxed by the Vietnamese were by the end of the nineteenth century being taxed by the French, and now for the first time highland villagers in the more remote interior found themselves subject to taxation. They also were expected by the French to provide corvée for road construction and other public works projects related to the economic exploitation of the highlands ...” (Hickey, 1982a: 191)

At the same time, the French colonists launched various policies using rhetorical concepts such as “ethnic autonomy” or “the highlands of the highlanders” (Vu Dinh Loi, Bui Minh Dao and Vu Thi Hong, 2000: 59). The policies on ethnic autonomy included “official sanction to a system wherein highlanders would be judged by their leaders drawing upon indigenous laws” (Hickey, 1982a: 294) in combination with strict rules to prevent contacts between lowlanders and ethnic peoples, which were said to protect the ethnic peoples and their culture.

Another significant policy, which the French colonists had also made some efforts to achieve together with their construction of administrative system, was to develop a written language for some ethnic groups and establish some primary schools for ethnic children. Written languages were devised for the largest ethnic groups, such as, Bahnar, Jarai and Ede. Meanwhile, as stated by Hickey (1982a), the first school, named Cuenot School, was opened at Kontum in 1908. This school

offered three years of training in reading and writing in Bahnar and in catechism. In 1915, the Franco-Rhadé school was opened in Buon Ma Thuot. The curriculum included training in the French language, history, and geography with some instruction on Rhadé's customs. By 1926, there were around five hundred ethnic children who studied in the Franco-Rhadé school, and the curriculum had been expanded to include literacy in Rhadé language and some technical training.

In the middle of the 1920s, the French continued to set up more policies in the Central Highlands aiming at economic development. By 1925, the French colonists had divided the Central Highlands into three types of zones. The first type called "Reserved Zone" into which no one could penetrate without special permission; the second called "Supervised Zone", access to which could be obtained under certain conditions; and the third was "Free Zone", which was open to commerce and colonization (Hickey, 1982a: 304-305). Following this territorialization, the ethnic communities who lived in the free zones had been moved into the reserved zones in order to create places for the colonists to establish rubber, coffee and tea plantations. It was estimated that thousands of hectares of land, previously considered common property and used for agricultural production by the ethnic communities, had been converted into plantation areas by this policy or ones like it (Vu Dinh Loi, Bui Minh Dao and Vu Thi Hong, 2000).

Although all policies of the French colonists were slowly implemented in order to create the "penetration", different forms of resistance by the highlanders were organized throughout the whole region. During the 1930s, many ethnic people had fled to more remote areas. In other places, ethnic people attacked numerous military posts and killed hundreds of French soldiers. They had also attacked estates of the colonists and destroyed plantations in order to prevent the colonists taking over cultivable land of ethnic peoples. Furthermore, many ethnic people had a mode of supports by linking with Japanese soldiers in order to take over the French administration on 9 March 1945 and by support of the Viet Minh led by Vietnamese communists in August 1945 with a hope that they would gain the ethnic autonomy (interview with 90-year-old Bahnar man, who had participated in these supported activities in October 2005).

The French colonists regained their power to control the Central Highlands in early 1946. On the one hand, the colonists tried to secure their control over ethnic people through military pressure. On the other hand, they attempted to win greater support among the highlanders through policies that created ethnic autonomy and economic development. The colonists issued a decree to separate the ethnic peoples and the Central Highlands from Annam (Annam was name of Vietnam during period of French colony) under the control of the Nguyen dynasty. They also constructed a college, improved secondary education and other public facilities (health care station, sport center, etc.). However, the more policies of the French colonists were implemented, the more instances of resistance of highlanders occurred. The resistance of the highlanders was one of the key factors that brought an end to the French colonialism in Vietnam at the end of July 1954.

A few studies have attempted to make some accounts for this resistance. Hickey, for instance, states that strong ethnic resistance originated from the “shameful regime of ferocious exploitation and oppression” (Hickey, 1982: 355) and the employment of a divide-and- rule strategy “to use indigenous ethnic groups to fight one another” (Hickey, 1982: 336) under the rubric of “ethnic autonomy”. Similarly, Dang Nghiem Van (1981) contends that the creation of policies for colonial estates to take away ancestral lands of ethnic peoples and to use ethnic people to control the others were main the causes of ethnic resistance. Another way of explaining the resistance of ethnic people, which I have learnt from the Bahnar people, is that the highlanders had perceived that the colonist rules violated their spirits. Therefore, many of them had resisted the colonists by moving to more remote areas. Others had joined with the Japanese soldiers or Viet Minh (Vietnamese communists) to attack the French posts in an attempt to reclaim their agency.

### **3.2 The Highlanders and the Central Highlands under the Republican Regime (1954 - 1975)**

Following the Geneva Agreements on the Cessation of Hostilities in Vietnam signed on July 21, 1954 by the State of Vietnam (whose head was the former emperor, Bao Dai), the Democratic Republic of Vietnam formed by the Vietnamese Communist party and other related parties, the ill-defined territory of Vietnam that

established by the French, was divided into two parts with a demarcation line at the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel. North of the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel belonged to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (usually called North Vietnam) and south of the 17<sup>th</sup> parallel belonged to the State of Vietnam, which changed into the Republic of Vietnam (known as South Vietnam) in October 1955. Under these implementations, the Central Highlands became part of the territory of South Vietnam and all the highlanders were officially classified with a new category - “ethnic minorities”. From this time until April 1975, the Central Highlands and highlanders were pushed into a changing process developed and supported by the Americans.

As stated by Hickey (1982b), the early government of South Vietnam formed by Ngo Dinh Diem developed its policies for highlanders from a perception that national integration, the most important factor in constructing the southern state, could not be achieved without the attempt to assimilate the ethnic minorities. Hence, the early southern government had made a great effort in the process of assimilation. The first effort of the Diem’s government to assimilate the highlanders was to abolish the policies of ethnic autonomy of the French colonists. The Diem’s government had changed the Central Highlands from Crown Domain directed under Bao Dai into his own national institution. Then a new administrative system was established and replaced the administrative system created by the French. The traditional courts and educational system for ethnic peoples established by the French were destroyed (Hickey, 1982b; Salemin, 2003). Besides these practices, the Diem’s government made no overtures toward allowing the highlanders to practice their customs, speak their languages, and so forth (McElwee, 2004).

Another effort of the Diem’s government was to assimilate highlanders through economic development and modernization. The 1957 Land Development Program was designed to attain the dual goals of developing the highlands economically and modernizing the highland peoples. The first objective of this program was to introduce rational exploitation of the land to the ethnic peoples. The second objective was to bring Vietnamese from the overpopulated coastal provinces in the south of Vietnam to the Central Highlands with the assumption that “the Vietnamese settlers would have a role in the economic development, and they would also bring Vietnamese culture to the indigenous people” (Hickey, 1982b: 8). By 1960,



the Diem's government had resettled 50,000 Vietnamese, including many Catholics who had left North Vietnam after partition, into the Central Highlands; and the number of outsiders reached almost 200,000 by 1963 (Hickey, 1982b; McElwee, 2004).

The Diem's government's effort to erase ethnic boundaries as a means of attaining national integration was unsuccessful. The assimilation of ethnic people through the above mentioned policies was a source for raising ethnic identity and caused great unrest and strife among them (Hickey, 1982b; McElwee 2004). In 1958, there was the appearance of a political movement named "Bajarak", a combination of the key letters of Bahnar, Jarai, Rhade and Koho, reflecting the rise of the unrest and ethnic consciousness in the Central Highlands. On the other hand, there was a reorganization of the communist insurgency. By 1960, this movement had spread throughout the whole region and proclaimed itself to be "The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam" of indigenous people of South Vietnam.

Unfortunately, the Diem's government failed to recognize the issue. After the appearance of the two movements, security in the Central Highlands had become a primary concern. Influenced by the counterinsurgency model developed by some American professors, the Diem's government had launched a program, called "Settlement Program". In the first phase, it was carried out in Dak Lak in the later part of 1961, and then was applied to other places, such as Pleiku, An Khe and Kannat (current district's town of K'Bang district). There was an estimation that the "Settlement Program" carried out during the period of the Diem's government had relocated approximately one-fourth of the highland villages (Communist Party Committee of K'Bang District, 2003; Hickey, 1982b).

What did the "Settlement Program" mean to the local people? The "Settlement Program" carried out at Kannat was essentially a concentration camp in the minds of the ethnic people. As stated in Nguyen Ngoc (1975), thousands of Bahnar people who lived in areas surrounding Kannat were brought into settlements through military campaigns. The settlements were fenced by barbed wires and were under constant military guards with strict administrative management in order to isolate ethnic people from the communist insurgency and Bajarak. In the settlements, all the cultural practices of ethnic peoples were forbidden. Administrative chiefs of the village, who

had been assigned strong power in order to control other villagers by the strong administrative system, replaced the traditional village headmen.

After the collapse of the Diem's government, the successive government of South Vietnam paid more attention to the ethnic problems in the Central Highlands. The successive government had attempted to attain the support of the highlanders through restoring the traditional courts of ethnic peoples and implementing more development projects. However, these activities were aimed at alleviating political movements rather than giving benefit to local people. Hickey's study found that "some social and economic programs were announced, but implementation was slow" (Hickey, 1982b: xix). Other evidence provided by some Vietnamese researchers (see for example, Dang, 1991; Hoang, 1980) was that while the activities alleviated the movement of ethnic people in the towns of the provinces at the Central Highlands, the successive government of South Vietnam had tried to create the "pacification" in the remote areas by military campaigns. Consequently, different from expectations of the government of South Vietnam, the political movements became stronger than they were in the past. By 1964, the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, for instance, became a stronger political organization. It had led ethnic peoples in many places of the Central Highlands to destroy the concentration camps and freed them to return to their homelands.

The destruction of the concentration camps and return to the homelands of highlanders did not mean that they had obtained a better life. Practically speaking, most of them had fallen into new struggles as their homelands became battlefields. Historical documents of the K'Bang district record that when the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam attacked the headquarters of the Southern Vietnamese army located in K'Nat in February 1964, thousands of Bahnar people were released from the concentration camp (cited in Communist Party Committee of K'Bang District, 2003). They returned to their homelands. However, a better life did not come to them because their homelands became targets for attacks on the southern Vietnamese military. The southern military often used Agent Orange to destroy cultivation areas and resident areas were bombed in an attempt to bring the people back to the settlement places.

Given the serious discontent and anger in the Central Highlands, it was not surprising that it was the first area to fall to the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (McElwee, 2004). At 2:00 A.M. on the morning of March 10, 1975, members of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam opened fire to attack Ban Ma Thuat. In the evening of March 12, 1975, the communists had complete control of *Ban Ma Thuat*. On Sunday March 23, 1975, the entire area of the Central Highlands was in the hands of the Communists. By April 30, 1975, the Republic of Vietnam became a historical name.

When their homeland was brought under the control of the communists, many highlanders had thought that their dreams would come true: the war would end and they all could obtain a better life. The war had ended. However, the better life did not come to the highlanders. A few months after the reunification of the country, many highlanders had found that they and their living places had been brought under a new development process, which was designed by the communists in accordance with the ‘development theory developed from Marxism-Leninism’.

### **3.3 The Socialist State and Development Process for Ethnic Peoples in the Central Highlands**

#### **3.3.1 Constructing the Socialism and “New Socialist Men” (1975-1986)**

Since the reunification of the North and the South was completed in 1975, development for ethnic peoples in the highland areas has become the primary concern of the Vietnam’s socialist state. Different from the previous states, all development initiatives and development practices for ethnic peoples of the socialist state are scientifically justified under the rubric of the Marxist-Leninist theory of universal linear progressive growth. The underlying rationale of these initiatives and development practices, written in many political and academic papers (see for example: Central Department of Propaganda and Training, 1964; Ho Chi Minh Academy, 1983; Le Duan, 1976), is that the social differences between the different societies are generated from a social progression. In particular, all the societies progress from backwardness and underdevelopment to one of being developed and civilized. Also, the development of human societies is considered to be a historical



development that encompasses a series of five sequenced modes of production that correlate to five hierarchical social forms, which are: the primitive, the slaves, feudal, capitalist and socialist society (see model given in Figure 3.1).

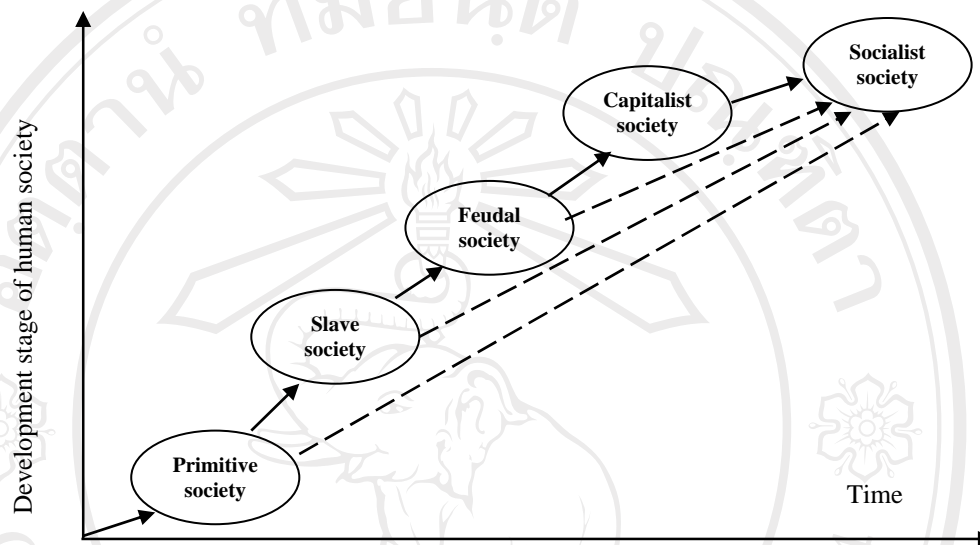


Figure 3.1 Development stages of human society

The mode of production, as it has been advocated by modern social theorists and policy makers of the Vietnam's socialist state (see for example: Central Department of Propaganda and Training, 1964; Ho Chi Minh Academy, 1983, 1985; Tran Ngoc Hien *et al.*, 1999), is the means by which people produce products to meet their requirements during a certain historical period, and includes the relationships between people and people, and people and nature that are generated from this production process. The mode of production is a key element to promote and to measure the development standard of a society or group of people. The key element is a unity of two parts, which are the production force and production relation.

According to the Marxist-Leninist Political Economy Handbook written by a number of Vietnamese social theorists (Tran Ngoc Hien *et al.*, 1999), the first part of the mode of production or production force is an organic unity of the means of production (which includes instruments and materials for production process) and labor force (which includes workers and their working skills for production process). The development of the production force is one of the most important criteria used to analyze and measure the stage of development of one society in a certain historical

period. The development of the production force is represented through six elements. The first element is the enlargement of the labor force. The second is the development of instruments for the production process (from using simple working instruments to machines or technical tools). The third is the technology of the production process (from non-technological production to high technological production, from agricultural production dependent on the natural conditions to industrial production). The fourth is the development of the skills of laborer (from unskilled laborers to technical laborers). The fifth is the division of labor (high specialization in the production process). And, the final element is the scale of production (from small-scale for self-consumption to large-scale that provides for the national demand).

In the development of society, development of instruments or, for better, technology to produce the instrument is the key factor in order to speed up the development of the production force. It is said that the instruments play the most crucial role in producing more products for a society, promoting the division of labor within a society, and improving the ability to organize a labor force at a large-scale and to use efficiently utilize the natural resources within a society. Since science has contributed to the great development of working instruments making new production technologies and improving the productivity of the worker, it is also the most important element of the production force and a decisive factor with which to change a society from a lower development stage to a higher development stage, for instance, from the feudal to the capitalist society or from the capitalist to the socialist society.

The second part, namely the production relation, is “a set of basic relations between people and people, people and the nature to be generated from the production and reflected social aspect of the production” (Tran Ngoc Hien *et al.*, 1999: 47). Production relation is manifested specifically through the possessive relations of the productive materials, relations in managing and exchanging activities, and relations of product distribution, in which the possessive relations of productive materials hold a decisive role with respect to the other relations. Possessive relations of productive materials also formulate a fundamental ground that is used to determine social position and social relationships among the different groups of people within one society. In a capitalist society, because production materials are private property and held by a small number of people while other people have very few production

materials or no production materials, people in the society are divided into two classes, the dominant and the dominated, and relations between people and people are dominant and exploitable. The separation of social classes is a major source of social conflicts and class struggles. On the other hand, if the production materials are public property and everyone has an equal right to use the production materials, then there are no dominant and dominated classes in the society. The relations between people and people are co-operative and interdependent. Under this context, the production will be advanced; the standard of living of everyone will be improved, and hence the society will be more developed.

The Marxist theory of universal linear progressive growth is also employed in the state's construction of social acknowledgement that:

“All social differences among different people or societies are simply natural products correlative to different modes of production and reflecting development standards that a group of people has achieved in the evolutionary ladder at a certain historical period”. (Ho Chi Minh Academy, 1983: 192-193)

In particular, differences in knowledge, cultural practices (religion, ritual worship, etc.) of ethnic peoples in highlands of Vietnam, according to the state's rationale, are products correlating to their primitive mode of production and reflect their lower stage of development, namely the “primitive stage” in evolutionary terms. All of these social differences will be abolished when people obtain the same mode of production, which is the socialist mode of production. Ethnic people can shortly obtain the socialist mode of production or, put in another way, they move up quickly in the evolutionary path and have a better life, if they learn more about ‘scientific knowledge’, new “modes of thinking”, and apply “new ways of life” and “new culture”. Furthermore, the more advanced groups and the Socialist state have a duty and right to transform the ethnic peoples and their society in conformity with the natural order of evolution or to obtain higher stages of development. In Vietnam, the more advanced group is unquestionably the majority of Kinh, who have experienced the more advanced modes of production, the capitalist modes of production that were implemented by the colonists, and who held power to control the nation after they had gained victories over the French and the Americans.

Based on its justification of Marxist theory of the modes of production, the socialist state has classified its fifty-four ethnic groups into four hierarchical stages of development. Under this classification, the Kinh ethnic group is ranked at the first or the highest developmental stage, and the fifty-three other ethnic minorities are ranked at lower developmental stages. Among the ethnic minorities, the highest developed ones, whose position stands right bellow the majority of Kinh, are the Hoa (Vietnamese Chinese), Cham and Khmer. The reason to assign these ethnic groups at the highest stage of development in comparison with other ethnic peoples is that such groups of people have lived in permanent living places, cultivated wet-rice, and used ploughs and buffalos to prepare land for their agricultural production. In other words, these ethnic groups have possessed stable living places and “better” production with more ‘advanced’ working tools, and therefore they must be at a higher stage of development in comparison with the shifting cultivators and nomads (Dang Nghiem Van, 1981; Bui Minh Dao *et al.*, 2003).

The groups, whose developmental stage is thought to be below the Hoa, Cham and Khmer, are the Thai, Tay, Muong and Nung. As stated by some researchers, for instance Phan Huu Dat (2004) and Dang Nghiem Van (1989), the society of these ethnic groups achieved a mode of production equivalent to what Marx and Engels would term “slave’s political economy”.

For the *Tay* and *Nung*, it is the *quang* or *tho ti* political system. Principally, each *quang* consists of several villages, headed by the ruling class *tho ti*. According to La Van Lo and Dang Nghiem Van, the *tho ti* “owned all land, forests, mountains, and rivers ... of the *quang*. Each *tho ti* possessed from 50 to 60 slaves who lived in *tho ti*’s house and were responsible for all housework and cultivating wet-rice fields” (La Van Lo and Dang Nghiem Van 1968: 79-80; cited in Hoang Cam, 2006: 5).

For the *Thai* people, this system is the *muong*. Like the *quang* of the Tay and Nung, the population of a *muong*, as described by Can Trong (1978), was divided into four hierarchical classes including: *Tao*, ruling people; *pay*, free farmers or commoners; *con huon*, people of the house; and *pua pai*, the serfs of non- Thai origin. Each *muong* had one *tao* - the hereditary ruler, who dominated the political, economic and social life of *muong* people.

The Muong ethnic group who were assumed to be separate from the Kinh as a distinct ethnic group only as late as in the tenth century is also ranked equally with the Tay, Nung, and Thai. This is because of the political economic system of the *Muong* called *lang dao*. Like the systems of the Thai, Tay and Nung, the “*lang dao* population was principally divided into classes, in which the ruling class, namely *lang*, possessed supreme rights over the labor and natural resources of its population” (Institute of Ethnology, 1978; cited in Hoang Cam, 2006: 6).

The remaining forty-eight ethnic minority groups, because of their subsistent shifting cultivation and their social and political organization that is equivalent to Marx-Engel’s notion of ‘primitive society’ (in Vietnamese terms: *xã hội nguyên thủy*), are categorized into the lowest stage of development or the “primitive peoples”. Moreover, it has been argued that these ethnic peoples are classified as primitive and pre-scientific because they lack the ability to learn about new logic, and their knowledge is simple, such as knowing how to tame the jungle with the machete and stick.

Under the “scientific classification of developmental stages”, the developmental programs of the socialist government are defined as the “principal means and vital ends” “to bring progression, prosperity and happiness for all Highlanders” (Vu Khieu, 1986: 26). Development policies defined as key components to help the ethnic peoples to attain the development targets quickly were sedentarization, collectivization, and transmigration of the lowland’s labor, constructing socialist large-scale production and constructing new socialist men. At the local level, those development policies were manifested in five correlative developmental programs, namely “Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Settlement”, “Collectivization”, “Constructing Large-Scale Production for Socialism”, “Constructing New Ways of Life and New Culture”, and “Constructing New Economic Zones”.

In the Central Highlands, the program on ‘Fixed Cultivation and Fixed Settlement’ (FCFS) was implemented right after the national reunification. Specific purposes of this program as they were advocated in the mass media, policy texts or academic papers were to create stable living places, to abolish backward cultivation, and to protect the land and forests. Furthermore, it was considered to be easier to



improve living standards for ethnic people through providing provisions and developmental goods.

Since this program began, thousands ethnic households with millions people living in the remote areas had been defined as beneficiaries of this program. The results of this program, according to Vu Dinh Loi, Bui Minh Dao and Vu Thi Hong (2000), were that 577,500 people of 98,000 ethnic households in the Central Highlands had “successfully” obtained stable living places within 15 years, from 1975 to 1989. The people participated in the FCFS program had been allocated land and received technical trainings to apply to new crops with new cultivation skills. Under the support of the program, many households had started to apply wet rice cultivation and industrial trees into their plantations.

Along with the FCFS program, the socialist state had launched a program on agricultural collectivization, which, according to the Vietnamese social scientists, would be “a process of transforming the very poor and backward people into socialist workers, transforming the self-sufficient and unstable economic lives into more stable and prosperous ones” (Nguyen Xuan Man, 1986: 336). Within a decade, the program was quickly implemented throughout the entire region and it had brought almost all ethnic laborers into agricultural co-operatives, as Luu Hung in his paper, “*Examining process of agricultural collectivization of indigenous people*”, claims that:

“At the end of 1987, in Gia Lai – Kon Tum province, there were 151 agricultural co-operatives and 966 agriculture production teams<sup>1</sup> with 149,558 members (or more than 90% of labor force of province) of 70,121 households and managing 59,122 ha of agricultural land. Meanwhile, in Dak Lak province, there had 94.46% of provincial labor force joining agricultural co-operatives, and those co-operatives managed more than 88% of agricultural land of the province” (Luu Hung, 1989: 429).

The qualitative results of the collectivization program for the ethnic people in the Central Highlands were:

“Monoculture and mono-crop had been destroyed through implementation of the collectivization. New crops and animals had been raised everywhere. Division and specialization of labor had increased leading to high increment

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<sup>1</sup> The agriculture production team was a form of production organization for ethnic people in the highlands area before joining the agricultural co-operative. The main purpose of establishing this form of production organization was to teach the people how to co-operate with each other in carrying out the agricultural production.

of productivities, production income, and hence living standard of co-operative members had improved ...” (Luu Hung, 1989: 42)

Following the collectivization, there was an arrival of transmigration of the lowlanders to the Central Highlands or the Program on Constructing New Economic Zones. The objective of the Transmigration Program, as is recorded in the announcement of Le Duan, the former General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party, was to:

“Transfer of hundreds of thousands of people from the plains to the mountains to work in industry and agriculture, building industrial zones, state farms and state forest enterprises, devoting their strength and their talents to the cause of the Fartherland and its growing prosperity. If this work is carried out successfully, the development of socialist economy in the mountainous areas will certainly be guaranteed”. (Le Duan, 1975; cited in Hoang Cam, 2006: 8)

Actually, the transmigration program was established in the North in 1968. It was expanded to the South in 1978. Millions people had been transmigrated from the Red River Delta, Northern Central Coast and Southern Central Coast to ‘a numerous areas of fallow and unpopulatedness’. Within 15 years, from 1976-1990, the program of the New Economic Zones had brought about 810,000 people from the Red River Deltas and the Central Coast region to the Central Highlands, in which 230,000 people had been transferred to Gia Lai – Kon Tum province; 265,000 people had been brought to Dak Lak province; and 215,000 people to Lam Dong province (Vu Dinh Loi, Bui Minh Dao and Vu Thi Hong, 2000). The program of Constructing New Economic Zones, as noted in analysis by Vietnamese modern social scientists (Khong Dien, 2002; Vu Dinh Loi, Bui Minh Dao and Vu Thi Hong, 2000), had provided more than 400,000 laborers to help the “people of lower stage of development” and to change the Central Highlands from a place of abundant natural resources with a small population and “unproductive” patterns of production into an “economic zone satisfying the national demands”.

It was also the program on CNWL&NC that had been implemented at the same time with the three above mentioned development programs. Different from the process of socialist development for the Kinh people, which had seen the program on science and technology as the most important, CNWL&NC had been defined as the most important program for ethnic peoples (Dang Nghiem Van, 1986). The main

objectives of CNWL&NC, as they were written in the Resolution for Constructing the Nation in Transitional Period to Socialism, are “constructions of people with new thought, new ways of life and new ethics” (*xây dựng con người có tư tưởng mới, lối sống mới và đạo đức mới*) or, for short, “Constructing New Socialist Men”; and “constructions of cultural villages and cultural families” (Tran Van Binh, 2004: 49). People were also convinced that “Constructing New Socialist Men” is a strategy of making “suitable people for socialism”, because “construction of socialism in the Central Highlands cannot succeed without new socialist men” (Dang Nghiem Van, 1986: 56). The features of the new socialist men are described in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Characteristics of the new socialist men

Traditional people	New socialist men
1. People with clear attitude to friends and enemies, and they can sacrifice to protect friends. If they enlightened, they would absolutely be loyal to ideal, truth, friend and compatriots.	1. People with clearer thought. Working and fighting for the ideals of the Communist Party, of their social class, and the Socialist State. People have unlimited love of their homeland, ethnicity, country and socialism. People with loyalty to the Party, friends and people.
2. People are truthful, honorable, unselfish, and one for all and all for one within his/her village, area, ethnicity and they live in a simple social organization aiming at protecting the benefits of their family, clan and community.	2. People are truthful, honorable, unselfish, and one for all and all for one within the national boundary, whole Central Highlands, in which the village is an organic part to be managed by scientific system and co-operated with other people.
3. People of collective production, shifting cultivation, nomadic life, simple working instruments, low productivity, depending on the nature, unspecialized, division of labor depending on gender ... unfamiliar to working discipline. Wasted expenditure, unplanned and to be satisfied with simple life.	3. People of collective and large-scale of production, stable settlement, working with skills and high productivity ... following working discipline. Expenditure with a plan, to be familiar with modern life – the socialist life.
4. They are people of personal production, egalitarian; they do not account productivity and production expenditure, time-consuming, and pay no attention to reproduction.	4. To produce products according to plan for national society and regional demand. To pay attention to timetables, production costs and productivity. To be anti-egalitarian. To receive income based on his/her quality of works. To accumulate capital for reproduction.
5. No need of scientific knowledge, working on self-manner and simple technique, to be satisfied with traditional culture ...	5. Need of education, working with high and complex techniques. To require entertainment with modern characteristics, such as party nature, ethnic nature ...
6. Do not believe in his/her capacity, to believe in spirits, destiny; accepting poverty, backwardness; inferiority complex.	6. To believe in personal capacity; to desire a comfortable and cultural life; to live with socialist style and to strive for a better life in the future.

(Source: Dang Nghiem Van, 1986: 57-59)

In practice, the CNWL&NC had tried hard to erase local knowledge, the traditional social organization, customary practices, house style and so forth of the ethnic peoples. During the first period of this program, ethnic peoples had been brought into education classes to learn that their customary practices, modes of production, traditional clothes, house styles, thoughts and behavior were backward and full of superstitious, which was defined as the origin of their sufferings. The education classes also tried to indoctrinate the ethnic peoples that all activities have to follow national laws and national regulations; the customary laws of the village should be abolished; practices of traditional rituals should be seen as illegal activities. Anyone who tried to practice traditional culture would be treated as a criminal.

After the education period, there was a period of change. During the period of change, everything in the village was changed, for example, the traditional communal men's house was no longer a place of common customary practices. Young boys and unmarried men were not required to stay over night in the traditional communal men's house, while the tradition of the village headman was abolished. My informants told me that the local authorities were guided to abolish the role of the traditional village headman within the village. Although the highest positions in the local administrative system (commune, district and province) in such places as the Central Highlands were held by ethnic people, those ethnic cadres had to conform to the guidance of the central government. They had to prevent traditional village headman from making traditional rituals and had to watch over the participation of traditional village headman in traditional activities of the village (see more Salemin, 2003).

Besides sedentarising swiddeners, implementing agricultural co-operatives, migrating lowlanders to the Highlands and constructing new socialist men, the Central Government had launched a program of "Constructing Large-scale Production for Socialism" (CLPS). In the Central Highlands, this program had set up a large number of state-run farms and state forest enterprises, and all the land and forests, which before were common property of the ethnic communities and regulated by customary laws, had been put under management of those organizations. Vu Dinh Loi, Bui Minh Dao and Vu Thi Hong noted that:

“... up to 1980s, Dak Lak province had 64 state-run farms ..., and 28 state forest enterprises ...Total natural area assigned to those organizations was 1.65 million ha, accounting for 80% of natural area of the province...

In Gia Lai - Kon Tum province, in 1988, total natural area assigned for 15 state-run farms, 41 state forest enterprises and army units was 1.5 million ha, accounting for 60% of natural area of the province.” (Vu Dinh Loi, Bui Minh Dao and Vu Thi Hong, 2000: 78-79)

### **3.3.2 Renovation and Integration into the World Economy**

The Vietnamese state has launched its renovation process - *Doi Moi*- at the end of 1980s. Since then, ideas of social development in Vietnam have been a combination of socialist development with market-led economy. Borrowing the advice of experts from international organizations and donors (for examples: WB, UNDP, IMF), market-led forms of production have been advocated as the principal means for economic growth, effective utilization of natural resources, poverty reduction and the improvement of social welfare. The texts on policy and development programs of the state are full of rhetorical concepts of market-led production, such as “self-help-economic units”, “cash crops”, “commoditization”, and “exportation”. In the rural and highland areas, households were referred to self-help-economic units. They were allocated agricultural lands and forests for implementing production in accordance with the market orientation. The state also carried out various support programs to promote the cash crops of householders, such as coffee, cashew nuts, pepper and so forth.

In practical terms, Vietnam has achieved some positive results in socio-economic development after the renovation policy was applied. Between 1986 and 1995, the annual GDP had risen from 2.4% to 9.5%, and the annual capita income increased from 175 US\$ to 300 US\$ (Dang Thi Loan, Le Du Phong and Hoang Van Hoa, 2006: 63). It is said that the rural and highland areas of Vietnam had played a very important role in the achievement of the national socio-economic development. These areas had become places of commodity production and they contributed a large amount of agricultural products for national export. Many people in the rural and highland areas had achieved better lives as result of the renovation policies (Jamieson, 1996; cited in McElwee, 2004).



For ethnic people in the highland areas, however, the renovation process had brought very few benefits to them. According to Jamieson's assessment (cited in McElwee, 2004), since the introduction of the market economy, most of the ethnic minorities had found themselves living under threats of food insecurity, environmental degradation and so on. Moreover, many of them continued to face hardships, for instance disease, lack of clean water or access to the primary education system.

Regardless of these difficulties and the problems of constructing socialism for the fifty-three different ethnic minorities in Vietnam, the state continued to create centralized policies for the development for them. The underlying rationale of these centralized policies was that ethnic people lack the ability to learn new logic as well to adapt to the new environment. In 1993, the state started to launch a development program, named "National Programs on Poverty Alleviation", which was said to provide better conditions for living and socio-economic development for the "nomads" and "backwardness" (Ksor Phuoc, 2004: 22). More than 6 millions ethnic people of 1,1 million households in 1,715 communes, most of them being ethnic households in the highland areas, were defined as beneficiaries of this national program. Each of these communes receives annually around 500 million VND (equal to 31,000 US\$) for the construction of infrastructure (roads, classrooms, healthcare stations, etc.), the provision of extension activities and other social supports for the poor. According to a recent report of the government, the National Program had achieved great results and the small amount of annual investment had helped 671 communes rise out of poverty. The So Pai commune was an example of one of these communes (Committee for Ethnic Minorities, 2006; Government Decision No. 163/2006/TTg, July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2006; Cited in National Political Publisher, 2006).

After two mass ethnic demonstrations in the Central Highlands, the socialist state of Vietnam has formulated some policies on giving cultivable land to the landless and constructing houses for the poor. The state also sent a number of research teams to the Central Highlands to seek for more viable solutions. However, it seems that the development policies and programs for highlanders are not different from the past ones. As I have learnt from my conversation with some members of these research teams, most of their reports are still talking about "laziness" and

“backwardness” of the highlanders as the main causes of their poverty, land losses and ethnic demonstrations. And, the most important solution for the current problems in the Central Highlands, according to suggestions of the scientific researchers, is to formulate more development policies and programs in the living places of the highlanders that include a support mechanism called “giving fishing-rod to ethnic people and teaching them to fish, rather than giving a fish”.

### 3.4 Summary

In this chapter, I have examined three development processes, which have been implemented for ethnic peoples in the Central Highlands of Vietnam in the last century. In particular, I have discussed the processes of development designed and implemented by the French colonists, and the Republic of Vietnam, as well as the current development process carried out by the socialist state. My discussion of each development process focuses on three aspects that included the development justification, the development policies and the practices.

Although the three development processes were designed and implemented by three different states, they were based primarily on the same justification that the ethnic peoples were uncivilized and their societies were unorganized. Their low status was thought to be due to the natural conditions, historical context of living places, production of the ethnic peoples or in some instance, even some cultural practices (ritual practices, traditional social regulation and etc.) of the ethnic peoples were considered to be the cause. The state also was convinced that the ethnic people and their societies would obtain a higher stage of development if they would change their way of life, learn more about scientific knowledge and practice the cultures of advanced people. Additionally, it was the right and duty of the state to help the ethnic people to attain a higher stage of development. The state had employed a range of rhetorical concepts, for instance “autonomy”, “nation-building”, “socialism” and so forth, to legitimize their interventions in the lives and living places of the highlanders.

No matter which state has implemented the resettlement programs, the lives of the highlanders and their living places have undergone tremendous change. Different than what was advocated in the rhetoric, however, the more the development policies and programs came to the living places of the highlanders, the more the people lost

their land, resources and even their lives. There is an estimation that nearly one third of the population of the highlanders in the Central Highlands had been killed during the development processes carried out by the French colonists and the southern regime.

Based on the discussion in this chapter, we can have a general conclusion that the process of defining ethnic people in the Central Highlands, their living place and cultural practices as primitive, backward, traditional, and then implementing “development process” for those people is not simply a process that describes social realities and benefits the highlanders. The process enabled the state to deploy a discourse to justify and legitimize the practices of transforming the ethnic peoples, their communities and natural resources into objects that the state could manipulate in accordance with their interests.



Picture 3.1 A traditional communal men's house in the top of the hill at the central of Plei Ku town for presenting cultural symbol of the province



Picture 3.2 Ethnic people in the Ceremony to receive UNESCO's recognition of the Space of Gong Culture in the Central Highlands





Picture 3.3 Traditional communal men's house of Buon Luoi



Picture 4.4 An eighty-year-old man in his suffering of poverty in front of traditional communal Men house