

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In the past few decades, debates on ethnic tourism had been centered on four interpretations. First, the “ethnic touristic space”, as a representational space of “inauthenticity”, transforms local people and their cultures into a commodity which is often decontextualized (Stronza 2001, Suvantola 2004, Gotham 2007, Burns 2008, Lim 2008). Second, ethnic tourist space is a representational space of “ethnic identity” where different groups try to exercise power over tourism, both at national and international interactions (Adams 1997, Meethan 2001, Marques and Lima de Costa 2007, Su and Teo 2008). Third, there is an ongoing debate about the ways local people deal with tourists and tourism and protect themselves from the influences of tourism (Zarkia 1996, Martinez 1996). While the first debate revolves around the notion of “economic rationality of profit”, the second scholarship concerns the “politics of minorities”. Finally, the fourth interpretation revolves around the question of how tourism brings about the changing conceptualization of culture and ethnicity in the contemporary world (King 2008; Hitchcock, King, Parnwell 2009). Certainly, this issue is associated with the interconnections between globalization and localization (Adams 2009).

There are some scholars who attempt to combine these approaches so as to make sense of the political and material relationship involved in ethnic tourism (Fees 1996, Shaw and Williams 2004, Green 2007). But the emphasis is still on the power relation of various actors – how they negotiate meanings of commodity and meanings of ethnic identity in order to claim economic benefit. However, we must keep in mind that we are (as well as the White Tai in Mai Châu) living in a rapidly globalizing market. The cultural economy of ethnic tourism involves overlapping and contradictory processes of both production and consumption of ethnicity in complex and multiple ways. Therefore, the study of ethnic tourism still needs to understand the “complexity of ethnic relations” in the rapid globalizing tourist market: a space where

ethnicity, cultures, authenticity, market, identity are engaged with commodification and consumption processes. Studies on these “complex relationships” by scholars of tourism are still ambiguous. This study makes an attempt to problematize these complex relationships.

This study, like previous studies carried out by other scholars on tourism, articulates ethnic touristic space as a space in which negotiations take place regarding ethnic identity and authenticity; but here I have also focused on other spaces, and other relationships set apart from contestations and negotiations around the meaning of ethnic representation as a “thing” or “cultural commodity”. My study has also attempted to understand what is really happening within the complex field of ethnicity, identity and authenticity. What I have tried to, by investigating the tourism market, is to understand what is happening to such complexities. Using the notion of “cultural economy”, I argue that touristic space can be a “space of redefining relationships”, one in which various new relations are constructed concurrently as part of the process of reconstructing identities and negotiating authenticity, and within the contexts of multi-ethnic relations, relations of domination, a post-socialist Vietnam and a global market. The process of negotiating authenticity and local identity, within the tourist market space, has made White Tai identity and authenticity a complex, ambiguous and go beyond matter, and has helped local people redefine their relationships framework, from a situation in which they were previously dominated, to one containing intimate and equal relationships based on the long term view. This process has also allowed them to bridge a gap that previously existed in terms of ethnic hierarchical relations – leading local people to feel they are now “somebody” and to have improved their quality of life in the contemporary world.

The central concern of this study then, is the effect of the cultural economy (of the tourist market) on the actors and their relations, and the complex dynamics that exist within the relationships between various actors engaged in the tourist market in Mai Châu, my particular focus being the process of construction with respect to the tourist market and the White Tai’s identities, and the negotiations that have taken place around authenticity. Here I have analyzed the ways in which authenticity of culture in Mai Châu has been constructed, negotiated, commodified and

decommodified in the context of a post-socialist Vietnam and a global market, and given the ethnic hierarchical relations that exist. In addition, I have also analyzed the ways in which the White Tai have constructed their new identity during the post-socialist period, both inside and outside the market space, plus located the ways in which the White Tai have struggled with the cultural economy brought by ethnic tourism, discussed their participation in the tourist market. In addition, this study has examined the transformation of host-guest relations and social positions, plus analyzed the ways in which local people have organized their relationship with the outsiders.

6.1 Major Findings of the Study

Contextually, the structure of the ethnic relationships that exist between the majority Kinh and other ethnic minority groups can be viewed as a dominant-subordinate one. As noted in this study, the Vietnamese state employs various strategies and technologies to control the ethnic minority groups; producing discourses which label the ethnic minorities as “other”, as not yet fully Vietnamese or incorporated into the Vietnamese nation. These representations of ethnicity suggest that these people are obstacles to the development of the national economy and thereby should be excluded from active citizenship. Even though the Vietnamese state has grand policies in terms of ethnic minority development, in practice the ethnic minorities are seen as troublesome, as a recalcitrant group opposed to the expansion of state control over productive resources, those needed for national development. In fact, the much touted policy of “selective cultural preservation” has little to do with the state’s admiration of the cultures of the minority people, but should be seen as an attempt by the state to integrate ethnic minorities into the policies of nation-state building. On a more critical note, the state views the “cultures” the minorities as merely “objects” for tourists to engage in, those appended to the agenda of national capital accumulation.

However, even during this post-socialist time, with an uncertain market transition and with market rules not firmly established, local actors have not been

passive but have been innovative and able to handle risk. Within these market spaces, the White Tai have been able to negotiate and engage with their ethnic and cultural authenticity, as essentialized by the state and outsiders, so as to mark out a space for themselves as people to be taken notice of in Vietnam and across the world. That marked out space is a space of self-determination and freedom, and leaves open the possibility for constructing new identities and authenticities. Within that space they have been able to form relationships with outside forces or actors, and their place within Vietnam and the global tourist market. This space represents a stable site for them in the shifting world of flows, mobility and movements. I have also argued that the White Tai have been able to carve out such a space because ultimately the ethnic tourism market is contingent upon their culture existing. Therefore, as long as they can control their culture and how it should be represented – they can control the market. This then is one key characteristic of the cultural economy that exists within the ethnic tourist market, as it empowers the local population - those able to wrestle control from outside forces, including the ubiquitous nation-state. It is in this vein that I will highlight and discuss the major findings of my study.

Generally, I would argue that the tourist market at my case study site has been turned into a space for “redefining relationships”, as it has allowed the transformation of the relations of domination into “authentic relations” and finally to “intimate relations”, based on a long term cycle and because the villagers have engaged with the market actively and turned global forces into a localized process. The redefined relationships formed as part of this transformation have been constructed out of the reconstruction and negotiation of White Tai identity and authenticity, based upon mutual support. This identity and authenticity are situated within the complex relationships formed between the hosts and the guests and under the contexts of a post-socialist Vietnam, global market relations and hierarchical ethnic relations, as well as the relations of domination, which are full of various discourses and representations. Redefining relationships has helped bridge the ethnic gap and positioned the White Tai as people living in contemporary Vietnam and the world beyond the nation state boundary, both as a part of global modernity and their own ethnoscape, as per the notion of Appadurai (1990), aiming to improve their quality of

life in the contemporary world. This study has produced three major findings, as follows.

First, I have found that within the tourist market space, the White Tai have been able to transform themselves from primitive peasants into a variety of business persons, whether it be moral entrepreneurs, moral merchants, polite vendors, moral hosts or intimate hosts. First of all, they have reconstructed their identity as entrepreneurs, and this process has led to a redefinition of relations, from the dominant-subordinated form to a more equal form (that is, they are equal with the savvy Kinh). At the same time, they have negotiated their authentic White Tai image with the essentialistic representation, creating a new image - not as primitive peasants, but as entrepreneurs and merchants living in the modern world. “Negotiating the authentic White Tai” is the same process as constructing a new identity.

These processes can be considered as localized, for this new livelihood strategy has been developed through a manipulation of and co-existence with the tourist market. In such a market, local people have played a crucial role in its construction and management. More to the point, during the process of culturally constructing the tourist market, the relationship between global flows and local culture has been a one way tract; they have both constituted each other in a process which Picard (2003) calls “touristification” (or localization). Tourism has become a part of the villagers’ lives, and I would say that by cultural constructing the tourist market, local people have been able to turn global forces into a localized process. I have thus argued that touristification represents a space of localization in the negotiation process and in the construction of identity, and that it has transformed the White Tai’s identity and authenticity from being seen as peasants (*nông dân*), into entrepreneurs (*doanh nhân*). This new identity has led them to become “somebody” in contemporary Vietnam and the world. In contrast, they would be “nobody” if they still held on to their old identity as peasants.

To be entrepreneurs, the villagers have had to organize private businesses in their own ways. Firstly, through their experience of changing relations with outsiders, they have transformed their culture of traditional hospitality (considered a gift) into a saleable commodity or saleable hospitality. Secondly, these pioneer homestay hosts

have been able to convert their social (political relations) and cultural capital (culture of hospitality) into economic capital, allowing them to invest in constructing homestay businesses and market networks. Thirdly, these new business comers have also been able to construct an identity as new entrepreneurs through their ability to spot gaps in the market, interpret and practice their culture, and then create and insert themselves into the appropriate market segment.

It can be said that these new entrepreneurs have been able to transform their social and cultural capital into economic capital, and vice versa, but this transformation process has needed cultural interpretation and practices (as well as entrepreneurship) to take place. So, unlike the notion of political economy, which is used as a technology of power by the state to effect economic progress and which leads to social exclusion, the cultural economy of the ethnic tourist market in Mai Châu has brought about local participation in the market. Under the political economy, government policies, regulations, discourses and representations function as mechanisms for the social exclusion of ethnic minority people from the development process. However, in the cultural economy, local people contest and construct the representation of their ethnicity; they interpret and practice their own culture and they engage with the tourist market in a relatively independent way. Cultural meanings have thus been produced by the White Tai through complex relationships developed in the process of culturally constructing the tourist market and through their negotiation of authenticity. Within the process of the commodification of hospitality, cultural interpretations and practices have allowed the local community to gain access to socio-market networks, meaning they have constructed a business network by establishing connections (e.g. friendships) with the tourists. Interestingly, this transformation has taken place mostly within the realm of the household, as their business style is quite private, rather than collective - they use their own independent management style, one rather free from state control. Also, even though northern Vietnam has been a socialist nation-state for about four decades, socialist ideology and socialist practices seem rather awkward in a market setting.

Furthermore, the tourist market in Mai Châu has been constructed through the cultural practices of the local people, meaning that both tangible and intangible

cultures have been reproduced for the market. As suggested earlier, tourism has neither changed the old pattern of social relations among local people, nor led to conflict among them, as the local culture and their traditions have functioned to preclude conflict or overt competition within the tourism business sector. In general, local people here are not rational (economically) if they see that business rationality as a threat to their social coherence. Instead, their businesses are run based on mutual support among village members, meaning that village life, as well as the villages' network, is a mix of social coherence in the form of friendships, partnerships and economic rationality. This format encourages economic liberalism and individual choice, considered the key goals of modernity, goals which are promoted by the state.

In addition, White Tai culture is not detached from the original community, as the tourism industry and agriculture are mutually supportive of each other. The scenic rice fields are considered to be a rural authentic space, available for the visual consumption of the tourists. Without such a landscape, the possibility of imagining Mai Châu as a tourist delight may seem far-fetched; therefore, the identity of Mai Châu - its invention as a tourist space, is intimately linked to its agricultural landscape; its tourism related economy cannot exist outside of such a landscape.

In theory, in terms of the implications of the relationship between culture and the market, then rather than seeing the tourism market in Mai Châu as a strong verification of the dominant notions of “economic embeddedness” (of Polanyi, 1971(1944)) and “social network embeddedness” (of Granovetter, 1985), it represents more a “mutual constructing” of culture and the economy (Slater and Tonkiss 2001). Thus, I have argued here that Mai Châu's tourism market cannot exist outside of the culture and habitus of the White Tai, for it is the cultural construction of the tourist market (based on friendships and partnerships) which has brought-about a sustainable tourist market. This makes my study different from other tourism studies, because in Mai Châu, the agricultural economy has not been replaced by the tourist market, as has happened elsewhere.

Within the process of constructing a new identity, the authenticity of the White Tai has had to be negotiated, for it is not based on essentialistic ethnicity, such as primitive peasants. Instead, the authentic White Tai can be seen as entrepreneurs,

those who are able to articulate culture and the market to make a good living in the contemporary world; their authenticity is about their new life and way of living. This new idea of authenticity goes beyond the idea of the “cultural commodity” – the focus of many tourism studies in Southeast Asia and Southern China. With their new identity as entrepreneurs and with their new, contemporary authenticity, the White Tai’s way of life has helped them redefine their relationships, and has helped them break free from the controlling discourse of essential ethnicity, that which has portrayed them as a “thing”.

Apart from being seen as entrepreneurs, a number of White Tai identities and authenticities have been constructed through “strategic essentialism” and in various situations, then bringing about redefined relationships. That is to say, the state has essentialized the Tai ethnic group in a fixed ethnic image; as inferior people. To deal with such an image, the White Tai villagers also, at the conscious level, have essentialized themselves but in different ways. Whereas the state’s representations are fixed, in terms of them being a “thing”, the White Tai have decided to situate their ethnicity and identities through different kinds of “relationships”, and in various ways. Firstly, in terms of their relationship with the Kinh and the tourists, they have reproduced the cultural values of *bun* and *báp* (honesty, modesty and hospitality) by mixing them with their entrepreneurship, constructing an identity as “moral entrepreneurs”, plus they have negotiated their authenticity in terms of hospitality and morality. Secondly, encountering foreign tourists, they have constructed themselves as “moral merchants”, as compared to the cheating Kinh tour guides and merchants. Thirdly, during their everyday trade activities, they present themselves as honest merchants, and fourthly, outside of the tourism space, they define themselves as modern people, as modern as the Kinh. All of these relationships, although at first glance based on short term transactions, are bound together by various moral aspects so as to create a long term cycle out of seemingly transient transactions.

As a consequence, this newly-negotiated authenticity is fluid and situated in the relationship between the hosts and the tourists, and goes along the lines of a reconstructed identity. For this reason, the authentic White Tai is not a fixed representation; the authenticity is about moral people who vary in terms of the various

kinds of relationship they experience and redefine. Thus, no one can dominate the meaning and the form of this authentic White Tai.

When negotiating with their ethnic image, the White Tai villagers have never perceived themselves as inferior to the Kinh, and I have argued here that the White Tai's practices, both inside and outside tourist market spaces, and since *Đôi Mới*, have changed their identity and erased ethnic hierarchical relationships. As such, the negotiation and reconstruction process, or the changing of identity, cannot be considered solely a product of the technology of state power. The White Tai are hugely responsible for the shift in understanding that has taken place around their identity and authenticity, in the contexts of modernity and the global tourism market. These new identities and authenticities have also led to a change in the relations of domination, and the position they hold as somebody in the world.

The second key finding of my study is that, to be free from domination and fixed representations, the authentic White Tai have had to be somewhat ambiguous and have had to construct situated relationships. For the White Tai hosts, the more ambiguous their authenticity, the less they are likely to be dominated by outsiders. It is clear that negotiation of the authenticity of the White Tai's hospitality does not represent the negotiation of a fixed meaning in terms of a cultural commodity. Instead, the perspective on authenticity has varied according to the various relationships and situations in place.

In this tourist market, the White Tai's authenticity of hospitality has had to be fluid and complex, but during the process of hybridizing their hospitality, the hosts have had to perform a form of negotiated authenticity. So, in negotiating their authenticity, the hosts have blurred boundaries between the fixed representations of essentialistic ethnicity, modern facilities and ideas, and intimate relationships. That is, they have had to strategically utilize essentialistic culture and reinvented traditions, as well as reproduce their habitus, in order to adapt to their contemporary lifestyle.

In hybridizing their hospitality, homestay type "b" locations have tended to be concerned less with objective authenticity, whereas homestay type "a" locations have seen it more as a commodity or "thing", that existing in a commercially-oriented relationship. Most tourists tend to see as authentic only the fixed ethnic images and

such dichotomies as traditionalism and modernism. For them, the authentic White Tai seems ambiguous and/or inauthentic. But for other tourists, it is authentic, since they like to consume the experience of living with the White Tai, which in itself is a hybrid and is constantly changing. However, such hybridized hospitality is appreciated as authentic by many tourists, those who are not trapped by the superficial tourist gaze.

Thirdly, authenticity can also be seen in terms of “authentic relations”, not only the blurred thing discussed above. Authentic relations occur if the normal host-tourist relationships are transformed into host-guest relationships, so that authentic relations then bring about intimate relations based on a long term cycle. It can be said that authentic relations are based on a lesser concern for the power relations of the hosts and the guests, which eventually become redefined relations. This new form of relationship frees the hosts from the relations of domination, and emancipates the tourists’ perspectives from the world of the locked door - locked by a fixed representation, by various discourses and by hierarchical ethnic relations.

This transformation begins with the dialogic process of host-guest close interactions, one which leads to authentic relations, which are the hosts and guests shared experiences of being in the world. Authentic relations connect the hosts and tourists together, and through these relations the hospitality is decommodified. The underlying factor of commodification is in the practice, as the White Tai’s habitus tends to commodify their hospitality. So, in Mai Châu, the commodification of hospitality is not only the process of objectification, but also the process of decommodification. Homestay type “b” operators tend to engage intensively with this process, while those who run type “a” homestays are concerned more with commercial interests and are more likely to show ambiguous authentic forms of hospitality, as discussed above.

Within such a process, normal host-tourist relations have been transformed into host-guest relations (intimate ones, based on a long term cycle). My field-based data indicates that these host-guest relationships have been transformed into many kinds of relationship at the study site, such as business partnerships and intimate relationships, so that within the process of decommodification, the meaning of the “authentic” White Tai is not the same as the meaning of “things”, as per the notions of

Appadurai (1986). Rather, it is the meaning of an experience shared in the authentic relations, so I would argue that authentic hospitality can be seen both in the commodification and decommodification process. My finding here is different from the findings of many other ethnic tourism studies (constructivism), which have been concerned about how hosts negotiate the meanings of “things” or “cultural commodities” (Wood 1993, Bruner 2001, Taylor 2001, and Cohen 2002).

I have thus argued that the production of tourist space involves not only the production of “signs” as in the post-modern notion, but also the production of a “redefinition of relationships”, relationships that have also transformed White Tai identities, enabling them to reconstruct themselves as moral hosts. Further, through intimate relations they have been able to connect themselves to a world beyond the nation-state boundary, both as a part of global modernity and their own ethnoscape.

Through the dual processes of the reconstruction of identity and the negotiation of authenticity; through hybridizing hospitality and authentic relations, the White Tai hosts and some of the tourists have also been able to free themselves from the relations of domination found in ethnic hierarchical relationships, the various fixed representations and discourses, and bridge the gap of hierarchical ethnic relations. The importance of this reversal, i.e. the overturning of the idea of the White Tai being essentialized by the Vietnamese state, has had enormous social and political implications. The ontology of the White Tai, as inhabiting a spatio-temporality below the Kinh in the linear frame, postulates the difference between the Kinh and the White Tai within Vietnamese society. The Kinh, occupying space-time ahead of the White Tai, produce a dichotomous simultaneity in the “present” of the Kinh and the White Tai, producing a gap or distance between the two ethnic groups, and it is this gap or distance which legitimates state intervention aimed at the unabashed politics of Vietnamization. This approach produces an epistemology of ethnic minorities which is used as a basis for the essentialized narratives of the Vietnamese nation’s “others”. This epistemology normalizes or naturalizes the assimilation agendas of the state and the majority, and it is precisely this gap or distance which the White Tai intend to erase by reinventing and reimagining their ethnic identity. Within the ethnic tourist

market, the invention of their culture and traditions as equal or superior to the Kinh's, consists of developing a different politic of ethnicity.

Next, someone might wonder why, except from the point of view of the White Tai habitus mentioned previously, the commodification process is seen as decommodification, eventually leading to a redefined relationship. The reason is because hospitality per se is not a commodity but rather a relationship based on and also not based on commodity-gift associations. Let me first discuss the association between gift and commodity. During the process of the commodification of hospitality, the relationships between gift and commodity can be seen in various ways. First, the boundary between the two is blurred, because gifts (for instance the bracelet which expresses the friendliness and affection of the hosts, as discussed in chapter 5) bring about a meaningful relationship which occurs in the commodity relations (homestay services). As a result, there is mutual support between the gift and the commodity. Within this process, the hosts commodify the homestay services and then decommodify them through gift relations, leading to a redefined relationship in terms of hospitality. However, in some situations, gifts (giving back money or offering a discount) and commodities mutually interact in order to make the seller-buyer relations more intense; as meaningful relationships (obligations) which bind the two together. However, these gift relations will not be meaningful relations (expressing the affection of the giver) if they are part of the regular relationship, like the relationship between the host and the tour-guides or drivers, because as part of these relationships the hosts have to give free food, drink and accommodation. In those cases where the relationship is not mediated through gift relations, it is performed through close interactions (without any thing used as a medium) once the tourists insert themselves into the interaction (Erb 2004) or in Giddens's term a "pure relationship" has developed. The meaning of the relationship depends on the "moral value" of both the host and the guest. Anyway, the moral value of the White Tai (like friendliness and generosity) can be thought of in the broadest terms as a gift given as part of the commodity (hospitality).

6.2. Theoretical Debate with Cultural Economy of Ethnic Tourism

The cultural economy of ethnic tourism, in the context of rapidly globalizing market, is seen as overlapping and contradictory processes of production and consumption of ethnicity in complex and multiple ways. This section is an attempt to loosen the knotted seams of this complex relation in the tourist market space. This would help us understand the ethnic relations and the way ethnic minority groups redefine and position themselves in contemporary world. This section highlights my critical engagement with various theoretical debates in the study of ethnic tourism mainly in Southeast Asia and Southern China in the context of my major findings underlined above.

The first discussion is centered on the cultural economy related to the production of the commodification of ethnicity. According to the mainstream outlook, ethnic tourism is driven by commodified ethnicity (or culture) as seen within the debate about “if ethnicity and/or culture commodified are authentic”. The dominant paradigm of commodification often appears in studies on ethnic tourism. They merely see “ethnicity” as a “product” or “thing” produced for consumption. For example, tourists who take ethnic tour, especially in Southeast Asia and Southern China, usually search for “authenticity” (Doorne, Ateljevic, and Bai 2003, Johnson 2007: 156-8), the exotic destination (King 2008: 107), the unspoiled native, primitive and natural areas. Because these are absent or destroyed in their own world or space (Doorne, Ateljevic, and Bai 2003).

This dominant notion of “commodification” comes from the famous classical theorists. For instance, Marx’s viewpoint of “commodity fetishism” places its emphasis on products which are sold in the market rather than being consumed by those who produce them. Moreover, the exchange values associated with such transactions are independent from the social relations of production, for their values are dominated in the process of exchange rather than that of production. To be precise, the value, according to Marx, arises from buyers’ and sellers’ determinations, rather than the quantity of labor used to produce that commodity. Accordingly, this relationship of production is based on labor exploitation by capitalists (or sellers), since labor is objectified or commoditized. As such the presence of a commodity

reorganizes people into class-based relation of exploitation (between capitalists and laborers) and alienation (between human labor and human subject). As a consequence, producers are alienated from the commodity, given that people sell their labor for money in order to buy other commodities that they consume for survival.

What this perspective suggests is that villagers are no more than “subjective producers of ethnicity” and are “objects of the tourist gaze” who have no or little control over the production process. Conversely, the “middle mediators”, like tour agencies, tour guides and states, are the ones who hold such power. Meanwhile, the state and tourism development policies play a greater role in creating tourism discourse; they are the sole producers of ethnic stereotypes and representations. The state defines, sanctions and promotes ethnicity (Cohen 2001: 33, Su and Teo 2008: 158); therefore, ethnic authenticity is just a “thing” produced and sold by tour agencies, plus states which are not the first-hand producers. This can be seen, certainly, as a process of humiliation within the ethnic tourist market.

In the Marxist tradition, “ethnicity” appears as something opposed to the relations of production and exchange, due to the separation between the means of production and the means of consumption. Broadly defined, there is an ignorance in the field of consumption development in classical theory in relation to the industrial revolution period in the 18th century. Weber’s protestant ethics made him bias on production rather than consumption. According to Adorno, consumption is still the confirmation of the domination of exchange value over use value (i.e. substantive culture as value). There is subsequently the transformation of culture into commodity through a rationalized process. To this end, it remains only as the reduction of cultural goods in the service of “entertainment” (Narotzky 1997: 165), like cultural performance.

Given the limitations cited above, what I have tried to show is how to reconceptualize culture (i.e. hospitality), ethnicity and identity (of the producer – i.e. villagers), and authenticity in the commodification process. Essentialistic ethnicity (plus other resources) is considered an input in the process of “hybridizing hospitality” (hospitality as a product sold in the tourism market). Ethnicity as an input can be called “strategic ethnicity”, which is the way in which “ethnicity”, which is

seen as a resource, is engaged and managed when constructing “authenticity” (i.e. hospitality) sold in the market, which reflects the “identity of the producers”. So, by this understanding, the hosts in my study (in relation to the tourists) play an important role in converting or integrating various aspects of “essentialistic ethnicities”, plus modern facilities/ideas, in order to produce an “authentic White Tai” which is “ambiguous”; ambiguous because there is a blurred boundary between such aspects. So by this process, the commodity will not be alienated from the producer, as contained in Marxism’s perspective, but rather related to the identity of the producers. Furthermore, the ambiguity of ethnicity brings out the voice of the authentic White Tai, which is about “White Tai life and their way of living rather than a fixed representation. It also leads White Tai to free themselves from the control of the relations of dominations influenced by the essentialistic representations and various discourses that see the authentic White Tai as a “cultural commodity”.

However, the tragedy is that, in general, tourism studies are not concerned with the hosts’ role in the realm of production, which is implicated in the commodification process and as well as in the construction of the identity of the producer. I have also pointed out that the hosts play an important role in the process of constructing authenticity, and this has implications for commodification. In essentialistic representation, ethnicity can also be seen as a “resource” to be engaged and managed (Wood 1998), which is the concern of my research. This notion implies that villagers have the right to draw their own ethnicity as well as culture. In ethnic tourism, managing ethnicity and culture begins when the local people realize that their ethnicity and culture are threatened and they are in an inferior position in the relation to the dominant. As a consequence, they play an active role in managing their ethnic and cultural resources, rather than let them lay in the hands of outsiders, such as states and tour agencies. However, according to most of the ethnic tourism studies undertaken in Southeast Asia and Southern China, this notion can still be applied to the realm controlling a “thing” (if it is authentic).

Similarly, over the past ten years the marketing paradigm, in the mainstream business management studies, has changed dramatically. It moves beyond creating advertising strategies, in terms of marketing mixture of 4Ps (i.e. product, price, place,

and promotion). Rather, the “relationship management” is encouraged, particularly the interaction between host communities and tourists (Jamrozy 2007: 120-1). Thus, the strategy of tourist market has to be certainly a “relationship-based” (Law, Lau, and Wong 2003: 53), which is relevant to creation (Law, Lau, and Wong 2003: 53, Jamrozy 2007), communication (Proctor and Kitchen 2002: 152, Law, Lau, and Wong 2003: 53, Jamrozy 2007), connection and delivery of value among stakeholders in a complex system (Jamrozy 2007). About this relationship-based strategy, Law, Lau, and Wong (2003) points out the reciprocal relationship as a starting point for “co-creative approach” – where meaning is co-produce between the tourists and the guests. For these scholars, on reciprocal relationship, both the host community and the tourists/guests are willing to “develop relationship” with each other that goes beyond the “transient transaction” of product exchange.

The second discussion is based on the presumption that the consumption process is a space for producing signs (cultural commodities). The debate on consumption in ethnic tourism studies is dominated by postmodern idea. In the late 19th century, the relation of consumption changed with the entry of postmodernists (in the debate) who categorized postmodern society as a consumption society. Notably the practice of consumption is acknowledged for its more complex than simple utilitarian satisfaction. According to Baudrillard, who is a postmodernist, products are produced not only immediately for exchange as commodities but for encoded signification as sign. The meaning has been embrace the commodities, whether commodities or services, going beyond the economic exchange or use value.

This notion implies that everything is reduced to a form of “material”, where ethnic authenticity is considered as an “object”, as modernists or realists like MacCannell (1973) have argued. Thus, consumption here is about consuming “tourist object” or “thing”; yet “thing” is almost disassociated from producers and contexts. At this point, the meaning of objective authenticity is fixed and can be referred to as a standard for making judgment on what is authentic (Reisinger and Steiner 2006: 68). The latter then relies on outsider-defined “ethnic fixed representation” (Fees 1996: 124) as point of reference rather than on ethnic history and culture (Adam 1984).

Furthermore, tourists' fixed representations are theoretically transmitted to the locals through what Urry (2004 (1990)) calls, "the tourist gaze". This is the process by which tourists wield their power, by gazing (even object is constructed through sign) at the local people. In that course of action, tourists look at local people and expect them to appear and behave along the lines of their perceptions. Taken as a whole, despite the promotion of diversity and authenticity by producers/brokers in production side, it is still just a "reduced-form" of "object" - objective authenticity in consumption side.

Postmodernist alleged that, the practice of consumption has become a defining cultural element. It signifies that the process needs to transform objective product by adding meaning to it. Of course, it is the "social production" of sign values. Consumption therefore, can be considered as meaningful from a semiological perspective: as a system of information about social relations that can create self-expression. Appadurai (1986) sees social relations of consumption as mutually constructive process of culture and identity creation, since consuming of goods involves both sending and receiving social messages. This means that via consumption, consumers can express and/or constructs their identity. For this reason, consumption plays an increasingly vital role in social life. Consumption rather than production should become dominant; and the commodity attains total occupation over social life – known as "the social life of things" (Appadurai 1986). Conceptualized in this way, social lives are patterned or even created by the acquisition and use of things. This point suggests that Appadurai evidently rejects Marx's notion of commodity fetishism. In sum and without a doubt, consumption in postmodern societies must not be understood as the consumption of use-value, a material utility, rather it should be primarily understood as the consumption of signs (Sharpley 2002: 312).

These dominant notions, in the studies on ethnic tourism in Southeast Asia and Southern China, lay too much emphasis on the identity of "consumers" consuming the production of signs (cultural commodities), whereas the producers, who also play an important role in the consumption process, are absent. For this reason, I would suggest that it is worth considering the complexity of the consumption process

involved in ethnic tourism – and the blurred boundaries that exist between the relations of production and consumption, and between things and relations – in order to reveal what is really happening in the ethnic tourist market consumption process.

To see the complexity of consumption, first of all we have to acknowledge that the host communities, who no longer live their old ways of life, have recently inserted themselves into new relationships, such as tourism relationships, in the context of a global market beyond the nation state boundary. Thus, local “identity” is inevitably actively engaged in the process of the negotiation of ethnic authenticity, in both the production and consumption processes. As seen in the findings of this thesis, under some conditions the White Tai hosts, in negotiating their authenticity, have played a crucial role in both the production and consumption processes, which in this case have not been separated. The hosts have thus played an active role in blurring the boundaries between production and consumption, things and relations, and have developed an ambiguous authenticity. But in some conditions they have constructed authenticity apart from “things”, like “authentic relation”. In authentic relations, the boundary between the production and consumption process is also quite blurred and much overlapping.

Nevertheless, the tragedy for ethnic tourism studies in Southeast Asia and Southern China is that consumption relations are presently still considered as separated from production relations, because the studies focus too much on consumer identity (consumers are active in reproducing the meanings of a tourist product) instead of constructing the identity of the hosts. This approach also presumes that the “ethnic group” is passive – the object of a tour’s gaze. The notion of “tourist gaze” also determines the pattern of consumer behavior often referred to as “relation of power”, in which the gazers focus on the objects as part of a one-way interaction. Afterwards, it may turn to be the failure of the objective/constructive authenticity to engage in “complex and multiple social relations” of consumption which overlaps and integrates with the relations of production. I would argue that, even though the post-modernists place too much significance on culture and the power of consumption rather than production, the relations of production and consumption do not exist on different planes, especially in the case of ethnic tourism in Mai Châu. This is because

some tourist products, especially the homestay type “b” form, are not based on the commercial exchange of a “thing” but of “host-guest relations” (i.e. authentic relations). This tourist product is co-produced by the hosts and the guests while they consume authentic relations, and it is also accepted that consumers play a direct role in the production process. For these reasons, the realm of production is actually almost on the same plane, rather than being separate and distinct from the realm of consumption. Within the processes of production and consumption, the consumer co-produces the product; the product is not truly completed until the consumer purchases it, customizes and personalizes it. Therefore the processes of production and consumption are integrated.

My next point is that the tragedy is not due only to a simple distinction between the realms of production and consumption, but also due to the fact that scholars’ notions are caged in the realm of “symbolic interaction” and the “social life of things”, as discussed above. The issue is that because in some cases the tourist product is not a “thing” but rather a “relationship” (or in some cases a blurred boundary between the two), the hosts and the tourists both play a crucial role in generating this relationship. Accordingly, I have attempted here to elaborate upon the impasse implied by these interpretations of social relations in ethnic tourism. This impasse arises from the prevailing emphasis on the social life of things, which forgets almost completely the interpersonal relations of itself. Of course, things have meanings and things can express social relations and power struggles; however, we can consume experience through interpersonal actions without depending on things - which have tended to stay at the heart of the research into consumption. Tourists may interact with the villagers by utilizing objects as a base, but this expands beyond that object’s experiential characteristics. Through highly valued experiences, these kinds of interaction are detached from the dependence on things (Sharpley 2002: 315). Mai Châu ethnic tourism also reveals the process of subjectification in terms of consuming host-guest relations. What is constructed is not the meaning of an object, but rather the “authentic relations” or meaning of relations which Goddard (2001) and Dunn (2008) called “meaningful relations”. So, although the boundary between production

and consumption processes is blurred, these processes make a clear distinction between “object action” and “interpersonal action”.

Lastly, production and consumption processes are the key to experiencing new relations, where production is absorbed into consumption (or more radically, production doesn't even exist by the experience of consumption during existential moments. Eventually, we do not know what product we consume, but merely apprehend the highly valued experiences which emerge from the worlds of both the hosts and guests, no matter whether good or bad.

The third debate is centered around the concept of authenticity in ethnic tourism studies. Once again, according to the section “Review of Theories and Concepts” in Chapter 1, the concept of authenticity in ethnic tourism can be divided into three. The first of these is “objective authenticity”, which is related to the concept of “stage of authenticity” as mentioned by MacCannell (2004 (1973) and Urry's (1990) the “tourist gaze”. This concept regards the notion of the globalization of commodification as a response to the discourse of “otherness” (Berghe 1994, Meethan 2001, Taylor 2001) and exoticness – the quest for the other (Berghe 1994, Suvantola 2002). Through these notions, the tourists who want to consume the authentic experience wield power in the way they look at the local people and expect them to appear and behave according to the preceding ethnic stereotypes and fixed images. Accordingly, the local people (and their culture) are treated as the “object of [the] tourist gaze”. This concept is also associated with the tourism discourse on standardization (Suvantola 2002) – it is standardized to make judgment on what is authentic (Reisinger and Steiner 2006). These discourses create a “peripheralization of the other” (Fees 1996, Suvantola 2002), and this determines the pattern of consumer behavior or “power relations”. The second, authenticity, can be considered “constructive authenticity” – authenticity as an image and myth being constructed as in the power of a symbol. This concept is not only engaged with the notion of consuming an “authentic experience”, but also with the “politics of ethnic minority” and “negotiating authenticity”. This means that the authenticity created is not a fixed image, but rather fluid and negotiated. Constructivists characterize authenticity as a

socially constructed interpretation of the authenticity of observable things; the hosts' and tourists' identities are recreated through the commodification of authenticity.

However, what I found in the commodification of hospitality (hybridizing hospitality) in Mai Châu is not the same as these two concepts. In hybridizing hospitality, authenticity is neither based on an object (thing) nor an image (meaning of the thing negotiated), but instead is based on the blurred boundaries between things, images and relations, as well as modern idea/facilities and traditions (essentialistic ethnicity). Authenticity can be ambiguous, and some tourists, who see authentic only as a fixed ethnic image or in relation to such dichotomies as traditionalism and modernism, will be disappointed by the relatively ambiguous authentic White Tai. But those tourists who accept the contemporary White Tai lifestyle will develop a level of acceptance, leading to the experience of new things in this space of negotiated authenticity. So, through this finding I would argue that the notion of authenticity in tourism should not be fixed on things (objective authenticity) or the meaning of things (constructive authenticity) per se, but rather should expand its view to see the real lives and real living of the local people in a contemporary world. This expanded notion will help both the hosts and the tourists to emancipate themselves from the control imposed by various discourses and relations related to things, as well as ethnic hierarchical relationships, and thus to find the true authenticity.

Thirdly, and as introduced by Wang, the concept of “existential authenticity” is beyond the authenticity of toured objects and constructive authenticity. This authenticity can be seen as apart from “things”, whereas the other two authenticities are based on “things”. Despite being subjective or inter-subjective feelings, these are real to the tourists because the tourists feel themselves to be in touch with the world or with their real self (Wang 2004 (1999)). The idea of “authentic relations” can be understood as representing existential authenticity within ethnic tourism (Wang, 2004 (1999): 210-234). Wang draws the idea of existential authenticity by adopting the existential philosophy of Heidegger. Heidegger's philosophy, in contrast to postmodernism, is never concerned with the representation of “things” (Mulhall (2005) 1996: 484). Rather, it is concerned with how humans understand themselves in relation to things, and therefore concerns with how the decision to be authentic or not

is taken in the very existential moment; that is, in a moment of fundamental self-understanding – tourists do not construct the meaning of the object (Reisinger & Steiner 2006: 72 -79, Steiner & Reisinger 2006: 304). Meanings, therefore, lie in experience. Yet Burch (2002) suggests a meaningful process of reflective comprehension of experiences. In this sense, Reisinger and Steiner (2006) believes that, the more tourists can embrace all experiences (good or bad, authentic or fake as the gifts of tourism) and do not travel with a head full of expectations, the more pleasant and enjoyable their experiences will be. Otherwise, they will certainly be disappointed somewhere along the line. “Existential authenticity” is about the achievement of lived experiences that results originally and integrally from the process of experiencing different existential moments. And the experiencing of self towards itself, and to one another, will help tourist and host to relate to each other (Burch 2002). Steiner and Reisinger (2006: 309), therefore, defend the notion of existential authenticity and thereby providing free choices at every step and not simply concerned with the preservation of traditions or the recognition of identity politics. Obviously, this notion goes beyond the usual notions of identity politics and of economic rationality.

The problem then is, without an engagement with real life and real living, existential authenticity can be interpreted as meaningless. To add more to the point, existential authenticity, in Wang’s notion, seems like it can stand alone, but in fact in real life, host-guest authentic relations do not float in the air and act as an end in themselves. Since we are living in a rapidly globalizing market, with an increase in ethnic violence and an increasing level of social exclusion among the ethnic minority groups from productive and market resources, I would argue that the “existential authenticity” should be engaged with real life. According to my findings, the “authentic relations” which lead to “intimate relations” connecting local people to the world, bring about a redefinition of ethnic relations with which the White Tai engage as a means to negotiate their identity as somebody in contemporary Vietnam. At the same time, it erases the ethnic hierarchy of “dominant-subordinate relations”, as well as brings about a level of independence in terms of determining local resource management and local livelihoods. Therefore, based on this discussion, I have found

that the tourist market space is not only a space for signs, images and symbols or “representational space” (Lefebvre 2002), as is considered the case in many tourism studies; but also a space of “redefining relations”.

My final debate focuses on the “tourist market as a space of redefining and transforming relationships”. Starting from the dominant idea of the sociology of the market, I will use an annual review to be found in “The Sociology of Market” (Fligstien and Dauter 2007) as a starting point for my criticism. This review indicates that the realist perspective holds a powerful position in the studies on sociology of the market. Having embraced such a standpoint, the market is seen in its “stable” social form as economic institutions constructed by resources mobilization using social networks (Slater and Tonkiss 2001). A series of alternative views have been subsequently taken in which one can see the process of establishing markets - taking into account social networks, legal and political regulations, and organizational arrangements. These institutional contexts shape market actions in terms of rules, norms, customs, relations of power and certain expectations about the behavior of others. Taken as a whole, Fligstien and Dauter refer to many perspectives on exchange relationships in developing their social structure of the market, these being: (i) institutional theory, (ii) network theory and organizational dynamics, (iii) political economy, (iv) cultural sociology, and (v) performativity.

On the whole, Fligstein and Dauter point to a market that implies a whole back-drop of “social arrangements”, in order to discuss developing the social structure of the market to mediate the problems found in exchange, competition and production. That is social relations are based on trust, friendship, power and dependence, and the term social relations implies the “black boxes” of exchange, competition and production. To talk about these black boxes is to denote social spaces in which repeated exchanges occur between buyers and sellers under sets of formal and informal rules that govern relations between competitors, suppliers and customers. To state this in a different way, it is about what products are produced and where stable markets emerge. As firms figure out how to resolve their problems, these structures will appear. Such an understanding of economic institutions is consonant in

terms of routinized manners of market behavior and interaction, as well as the implicit or explicit rules that govern them (Slater and Tonkiss 2001: 108).

However, what I would like to argue is that the market should not only be considered a social structure - a simply process based on the repetition and institutionalization of market exchange, as in Fligstein and Dauter's view, but rather a space for the negotiation of identity and the redefining of relations. In ethnic tourism studies, there are numerous cases that show the relationships in tourist market spaces between hosts (immediate producers), tour agencies (intermediate producers) and tourists (consumers or ultimate producers). Such relationships go beyond the commoditization of ethnicity, or beyond market relations, and this represents the construction of a new local identity searching for ethnic power and dignity in terms of the politics of the ethnic minorities (Wood 1993, Adams 1997, Bruner 2001, Cohen 2002, Burn 2006, Cole 2007, King 2008).

In the ethnic tourist market of Mai Châu, my findings indicate that the market is a space of transforming and redefining relationships, one in which various new relations have been constructed concurrently with the process of reconstructing identities and negotiating authenticity, and in the context of a rapidly globalizing market, of post-socialism, multi-ethnic relations and relations of domination. Within the market space, the White Tais have transformed themselves from primitive peasants to various kinds of business persons - moral entrepreneurs, moral merchants, polite venders, moral hosts and intimate hosts. In addition, normal host-tourist relationships have been transformed into many kinds of relationship, those which have brought about: (i) business partnerships and expanding market networks, (ii) a reconstruction of ethnic identities; maintaining power to control and manage the tourist market, and especially (iii) the redefining of relationships. All previous empirical cases state that market space is not simply a space for developing a social structure in the market, and that the social relations that exist in the market are not merely "repeated exchange" in the market realm, but also inevitably engaged in the process of the transformation of ethnic identity and redefining relationships. Such transformed identities and redefined relationships help the market actors (i.e. the hosts and the tourists) to emancipate themselves from the world of the locked door, one

locked by various discourses and relations of domination, as well as by nation-state territory.

6.3 Implications of the Study

There are a number of implications of this study. First, in the post-socialist context in which market regulations have not yet been fully established, local people have to be able to handle risk, and this is why the culture and local people's habitus both play an important role in constructing and managing the tourist market. Local people have been able to transform their social and cultural capital into economic capital; however such a transformation has involved a certain form of capital accumulation that has turned social and cultural capital into economic capital and vice versa. This transformation process has required cultural interpretation and practices to be present.

In addition, in the context of the post-socialist framework, there has existed a political economy of violence in terms of the social exclusion of the market. In the political economy, government policies, regulations, discourses and representations function as mechanisms which support the social exclusion of ethnic minority people from the development process. My attempt to view the cultural economy of ethnic tourism as beyond the scope of political economy offers insights previously unrecognized. One such insight is that the cultural economy, unlike the political economy, is relatively inclusive of local people within the economic process, and this brings about local participation in the market; it empowers local people. However, the political economy basically represents an exclusionary process. Second, the prevailing discourse on the cultural economy, rudimentarily defined as how culture affects the economy, places too much emphasis on the globalizing process, and its impacts on culture. My study has tried to move beyond such a simplistic view by focusing on how local people debate, within and without, their culture, in order to locate or position themselves within the globalizing economy. I understand that the global economy is "placeless", but insist that local people in Mai Châu have reproduced their

own place and space – Mai Châu as a site, as a “pause” in a radically mobile and disjunctive geography.

Because the context of a post-socialist market implies a level of risk, villagers have tended to apply “strategic intimacy” when constructing their tourist market. The hosts, especially those running homestay type “b” premises, have established business connections (e.g. with the tourists through intimate relationships such as friendships), so that tourism has neither changed the old pattern of social relations among the local people nor led to real conflict among them, nor has it detached them from the original community. The tourism related industry and agriculture are thus mutually supportive of each other, and even though they are running businesses, the local people have retained their social coherence; their businesses are run based on mutual support amongst the villagers. Thus the villages’ lives, as well as their network, represent a mix of social coherence in the form of friendship, partnerships and economic rationality.

Second, and in the context of globalization, global forces on the one hand may represent a threat to local culture, resources and livelihoods, whilst on the other hand they have allowed a reconstruction of local and place identities, brought about freedom and choice, plus also connectivity. These forces have also encouraged economic liberalism and individual choice, elements considered the vital goals of modernity - goals promoted by the state. Interestingly, during this post-socialist period, the market has been constructed in the realm of the household, and households engage with the global market in a relatively independent way, although they existed in a socialist nation-state for about four decades. So, to deal with the global market, if local people do not actively engage with the global market, they will end up as its victims. Based upon my findings, I believe the local people in my study area have been able to turn global forces into a localized process. I can thus conclude that the relationship between global flows and local culture is not a one way process: they both constitute each other within that process. As I have shown, tourism has become a part of the villagers’ lives.

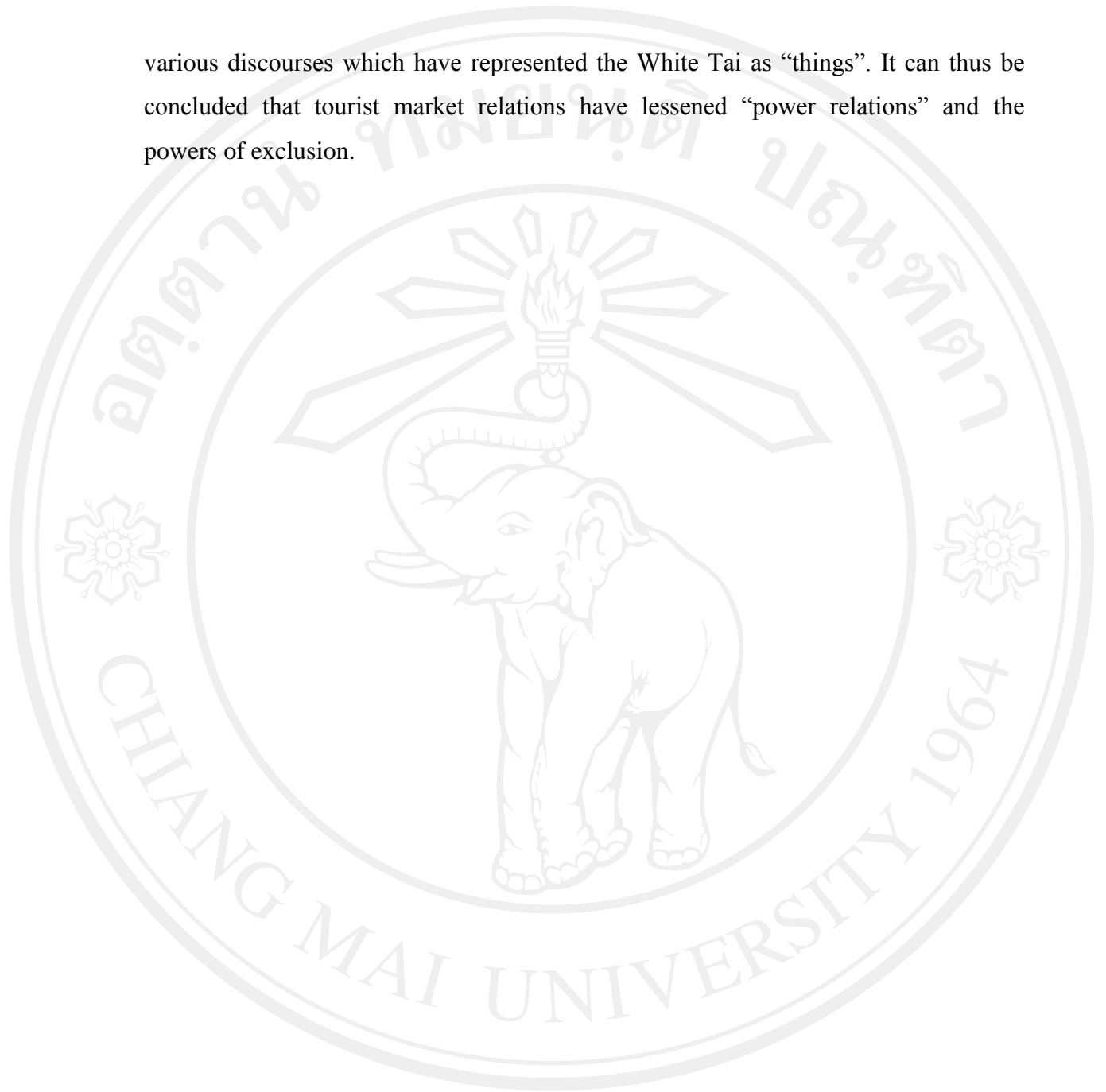
I agree that globalization or the integration of Mai Châu into global market have transformed the cultural economy of this tiny place. But my insistence that local

people actively engage and debate the mode of their integration, though is not a new insight constitute a significant contribution. This is because, by this I do not mean they only debate their ethnic identity, they also debate the very identity of Mai Châu. Ethnic tourism is not only about ethnic identity or culture or traditions; it is also about the idea of a place. The invention of Mai Châu as a tourist space is as important as the invention of the modern “White Tai”. They constitute each other. After all what is “White Tai” without the idea of “Mai Châu” – the idea of scenic rice fields, stilt houses, beautiful landscapes and idyllic valleys. If we destroy these ideas of Mai Châu, we may neither have a Mai Châu nor White Tai. Not at least in the sense that it is an important site in the global tourist market, a pause in a world characterized by geography of flows, mobility and movements.

That marked out space is a space of self-determination, freedom and a possibility of constructing their new identities and authenticities. Within that space they redefine what forms their relationship with outside forces or actors would be and their place within Vietnam and in the global flow of tourist market. That space is their stable site in the shifting world of flows, mobility and movements. I have argued that they are able to carve out such a space because ultimately ethnic tourist market is contingent upon their culture. As long as they control their culture – how it should be represented – they control that market. This then is the character of cultural economy of ethnic tourist market. It empowers local population who are able to wrestle out control over it from outside forces, including the ubiquitous nation-state. It is in this vein I will be pointing out the major findings of my thesis.

Finally, in terms of the relations of domination and multi-ethnicity, I have shown that the market space has allowed ethnic people to reconstruct their identities and negotiate with authenticity. The place they inhabit can thus be considered a space of transformation and redefinition of such relationships - from “the relations with the “Other” to “intimate relations”. Such transformed and redefined relationships have helped the White Tai bridge the ethnic hierarchical gap, have brought them ethnic dignity and feelings of equality with the Kinh, and a feeling of being somebody in Vietnam and the world. This situation has helped the White Tai break free from the control of the relations of domination, the discourse of essential ethnicity and other

various discourses which have represented the White Tai as “things”. It can thus be concluded that tourist market relations have lessened “power relations” and the powers of exclusion.



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