

CHAPTER 2

THE MAI CHÂU POST-SOCIALIST ECONOMY IN TRANSITION

For four decades Vietnam had been moving towards market-oriented economy under the “Đổi Mới” (economic renovation) policy. This has made Mai Châu’s integration to Vietnam nation-state stronger and subsequently converted its community based agriculture into a tourist market economy. Tourism and market oriented economy not only significantly transformed local livelihoods but these sites have become spaces for articulation of culture and ethnicity. In a socialist state how was this transition was made possible? And how did people at local level engage with it? This chapter, while tracing this transition, will argue that within the tourist market space, villagers and their cultures are not just the objects of sign and image of tourist gaze. In constructing tourist market, they actively carve out new social (market) space for local determination and manipulation. Tourist market weaves villagers into increasingly complex socio-business networks, linking them with private/government businesses, middlemen, tour guides, local authorities, ethnic neighbor and so on. This chapter also will show how cultural processes and White Tai habitus construct and develop tourist market.

2.1 Awkward Rural Economy under Socialism (1950s – 1986)

With the end of French colonialism and the victory of Việt Minh army, the “*Mường*” (principality) of Sip Song Châu Tai were integrated as a part of Vietnam nation state. The new Vietnam Nation-state annexed local chiefdom to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The objective was to inculcate among local people loyalty for the new Vietnam Nation-State, a new form of citizenship. Simultaneously during this period, Vietnam sought to transform its monarchal economy into a socialist economy.

Within the socialist economy, the rural economic structure – agriculture based on wet rice and swidden cultivation– continued to be the primary livelihood. Since the 1950s, the beginning of social period, local governments and the villagers were struggling to achieve collective farming cooperatives and to gain a higher level of production. People were integrated into a system called “low-level agricultural production cooperative”. Each household was brought within one organization, pulling together their productive resources, such as land, cattle, and workers. The quantity of work done was graded in the form of points (*Điểm* in Vietnamese) and each member would receive a share of the points. Working in collaboration and exchange of workers in the commune, considered as progressive development, has been the campaign carried out by the government.

In Mai Châu, during socialist period, people continued to depend on subsistence agriculture. There were fewer markets for selling products, such as casava. Products for consumptions came from two sources: household owned small plot of garden and cooperative stores. Bình (2002) points out an example of how socialism changed their way of life. Traditionally, the dam (*phải*) and irrigation canal (*mường*), which were essential part of agricultural life, were protected by customary laws and habits designed to preserve these resources. Public opinion and religious beliefs played important role in guiding and coercing the members to abide by the customs and habits. For example, people must ask permission from the supernatural by means of ritual and ceremony before utilizing resources. Practices deemed antithetical to sustainable use were prohibited by customary law. Such practices, usually discouraged by public opinion, were fined. Customs enjoined all adult members to work for construction of dam (*phải*) and to protect it. Socialism disrupted these customary practices of sustainable local resources management. It introduced new laws and new power centers: Cooperative chairman, irrigation officers and village leaders.

The ways they managed and used water was radically different in the socialist collective farming system. Earlier practice took care of two important requirements: One the management of water by a group of people helped to protect water resources, and assures that the amount of water needed for agriculture and daily needs. Two, it

also helped provide manpower and cover the cost of small canal repairs which are hard for any single household to bear. Moreover, it bore a communal characteristic which is a long-term custom in the village (Binh 2000: 138). This practice was done away with during the period of collectivization. A co-operative committee was put in charge of managing and regulating resources, especially water, through the irrigation team's activities (Binh 2000) instead of aristocratic leaders and customs of the villages. Customs related to supernatural were prohibited. Village aristocratic leaders came to be identified as "exploiting families" in the socialist scheme of things.

Collective farming dented socialist advocacy of fairness as villagers' perceived these changes to be unfair. For they had to put in intensive long labor for the cooperatives and be satisfied with a hard living conditions, with the hope that the cooperatives system would eventually lead to a better, decent life later. But two decades of failure had lead disillusionment and doubt about the efficacy of such a system. Without a fair share of household's benefit, the cooperative's work seemed to exploit villagers' labor too much. Many villagers explained to me that no one was willing to put labor for the cooperatives; rather they were more concerned with their garden plots. The reason was that whatever the cooperatives produce, it was taken by the state. The state hardly left anything for villagers' consumption requirements. Many villagers were hungry. Thus there was no acceptance of local authority. As Kerkvliet (2006) argues, the cooperatives system, at the commune level, had gradually collapsed due to everyday politics. Taking as an instance, a sixty seven year-old-woman, I talked to, bemoaned that in the collective system she worked so hard to take care of her four children. During day time, she worked for the cooperatives. In the evening and night time, she worked at home – gardening, raising pigs and chickens, growing cotton, raising silk worm, and weaving fabric. She would wake up at 4 AM every day and her day would begin by collecting firewood. Her husband stayed at home to take care of children and an old mother whenever she worked for the cooperatives. Her story is perhaps a poignant portrayal of harsh conditions of life within socialist regime and the ways it affected women. In my everyday conversation with villagers no one seems to reminisce about happier times or a secured life under the cooperatives.

As if this was not enough, Vietnamese authorities, through a policy, “to establish new economic areas”, arranged and reallocated laborers and residents to other parts of the country; transferring a huge number of people from the lowlands and cities (such as almost all the Kinh majority), to the highlands, border areas and islands, under the motto, “the lowlander go to establish and develop economics and culture for mountainous areas” (Vietnamese Cabinet Council 1980, Vien 2001). This policy was applied in Northern Vietnam in 1961, and on a nationwide scale when the country was reunified in 1975, lasting until 1998. As reported, this program shifted nearly 1.4 million households, including within and between provinces (Quach and Ninh 2004). In Sơn La, the nearby province of Hòa Bình, the number of Kinh rose from only a few in 1954 to 150,000 in 1994, representing almost one-fifth of the total population (Tran *et al.* 1996, quoted in Sikor and Vi 2005) and replacing the native Tai people, who represented the majority in the northwest highlands. In Mai Châu town, there were also a lot of Kinh people’s resettlement. They mostly came from Hà Tây province. Here again, I saw Kinh houses located between Tai houses. This was the first close encounter between the Tais and the Kinhs. The Tai villagers realized that, unlike the Tais who did only agriculture, the Kinh did many jobs. This was, perhaps, the first impression or perception Tai had about the economic activities of the Kinh.

Whatever their perception, the relationship between them seems to be antagonistic and as well as productive. Taylor (2008: 12) opines that, the impact of that policy on the relationship between ethnic minority groups and the Kinh was quite unpleasant – Kinh were viewed as stingy and deceptive and the native residents were seen as simpleminded and ignorant. Despite this general unpleasant ethnic mistrust, this relationship is generally considered conducive for economy by the villagers I talked to in Mai Châu. For example, in my conversation with three educated old men (retired local authorities), at different places and times, viewed such policy as good for Mai Châu. In their opinion Tai people were familiar with doing agriculture, not merchandise. Kinh’s migration into their region would help develop the district. White Tai people I talked to displayed optimism; they see the benefits of co-existence with the Kinh (even though in the other side, they do not like the Kinh’s habits).

A final point to be made about socialist ideology and its impact on ethnic groups is that, to build a socialist nation the state banned cultural and custom performances. The socialist state prohibited poems, and songs considered to be contradictory to the socialist ideology. But the people who determined if these cultures and customs were contradictory to the ideology were the authorities (see the elaboration in chapter 3). In reality, village economy was a mixed of various socio-cultural aspects as well as the people's feelings of freedom and entertainment. The cooperatives work, by either failing to understand this aspect or refusal accept this point, took out the dimension of human being from their economic policies.

2.2. Articulating with Post-Socialist Market in Transition (1986 – early 2000s)

Throughout last two decades Vietnam facilitated tourism development and developed tourism infrastructures with the hope that they will benefit her people. Mai Châu had been constructed and represented as a tourist landscape. According to **Lonely Planet**, the famous travelling guide book, Mai Châu is one of five highlighted tourist attractions of the Northwest region of Vietnam. Mai Châu represents the beautiful landscape and traditional White Tai stilt house. Four other places are Sa Pa (old French hill-station town), Bắc Hà (ethnic minority market), Fansipan (Vietnam's highest peak), and Điện Biên Phủ (the last battle field of French troop in Vietnam).

White Tai traditional custom and weaving had been well documented in travel articles during the 1990s (Lan 2000: 118). In Mai Châu, government have used tourism as a means of development, which includes promoting villages as handicraft centers. The beautiful landscape, idyllic paddy field valleys, and as well as its traditional stilt houses combined to make it a successful tourist destination. The villagers open their house to welcome tourists to have meals and stay over night. Thus then Mai Châu is known as ethnic tourist attraction and a homestay village. Besides, to foreign tourists, is Mai Châu known as a place for trekking to minority villages.

The household economy during the market transition period is significantly different from the period of collective farming. The significance of Đổi Mới, by promoting handicraft villages in particular, on the community is profound. It brought

about important structural changes in the economic and social life of the people. There are various and differentiated economic activities that the villagers of Bản Lác and Bản Pom Coọng have made for their engagement in tourism business since 1994.

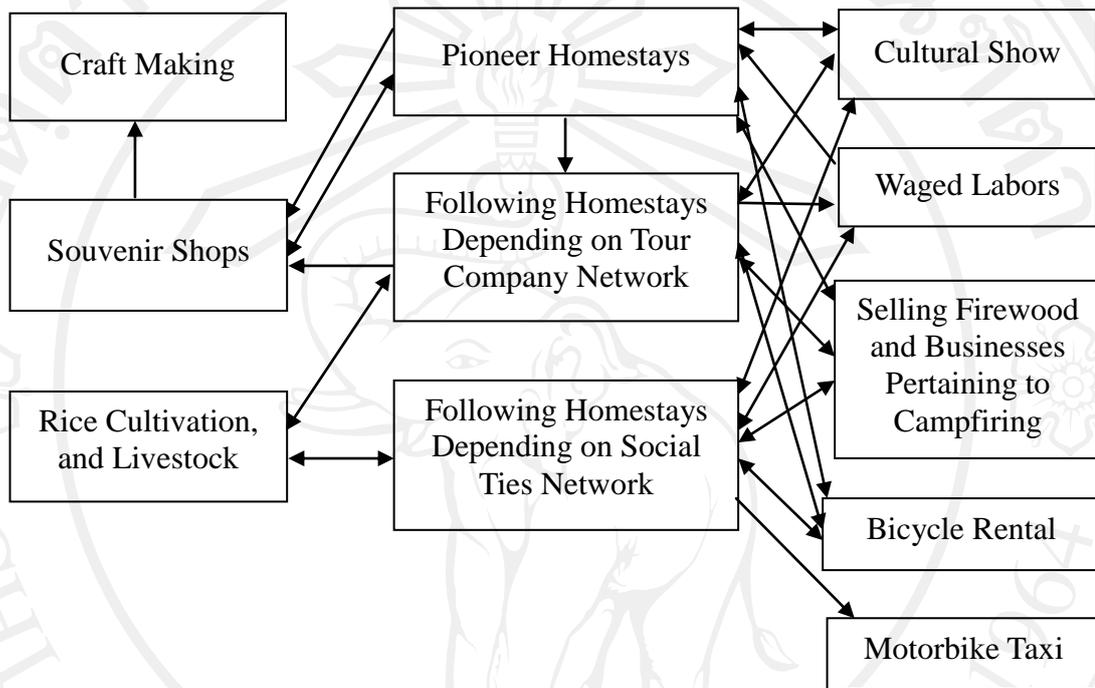


Figure 2.1 Mai Châu Tourism Businesses and Other Economic Activities, plus Linkages

↔ = Mutual Support
 → = One Way Support

Let us first look at the household economy. An educated old man in Bản Lác made this comment to me: “we have to do several jobs, only doing agriculture cannot make us survive”. Now most of their incomes (81.53%) come from tourism activities. At present, tourist business plays an important role in the villages’ economy, in the sense that it has been regarded as the main source of income for nearly all households. Tourist business activities in the villages encompass different services for homestay, cultural shows, local tour guides, campfire, motorbike taxi, and bicycle for rent; the sale of local food and local wine; diverse productions of local souvenirs (such as traditional fabric weaving, embroidering, and wood crafting) and souvenir shops; and hired labors. The tourism related businesses, the wet rice cultivation and livestock are

supportive of one another. Figure 2.1 depicts this mutual support between them. First, the homestay, as a main tourism business, supports many economic activities such as souvenir shop, cultural show, and waged laborers who work for homestay services, sale of firewood and other businesses pertaining to campfire, bicycle rental and motorbike taxi service. Meanwhile the homestay gets support from rice cultivation and livestock, as well as a small amount commission from cultural show, sale of firewood and bicycle rental. Second, souvenir shops help people who are making craft, including weaving traditional fabric and making embroidery.

Almost all households engage in at least one of those activities all year round. There are 30 registered homestays (out of 114 households) in Bản Lác and 16 registered homestays (out of 76 households) in Bản Pom Coọng. There are a few non-registered homestays in both villages. This means that almost one third of the total households in both villages are doing homestay business. Moreover, around 50 households in Bản Lác and 20 households in Bản Pom Coọng, or about 44 per cent and 26 per cent respectively, are running souvenir shops. According to my survey in the two villages, there is only 2 per cent of Bản Lác households and 10 per cent of Bản Pom Coọng that do not engage with any tourism businesses. This preference, among the villagers to engage in business rather than agriculture, is explained by a Vietnamese sociologist as a symbol of being savvy which certainly help them to earn significantly higher income.

The production in village depends on the tourism market. But they continue to do farming. Kerkvliet (2006) offers an insight into the interaction between tourism and agriculture: the market helps villagers to decide what products should be produced. In these tourist villages, subsistence economy is still the main basis of the villagers' livelihoods. Villagers of these tourist villages do not free up land, or sell the use rights of the agricultural lands as what has been happening in the small town of Mai Châu. Presently, villagers still base their livelihood on wet rice cultivation and swidden fields. They do paddy cultivation twice a year for both household's consumption, for earning income, and to support the homestay business since they provide meals for the tourists. Most of the villagers, whose harvest is more than their household requirements, sell their rice.

The land assigned to each household by the local authority is not so large, just 600 m² per person. On this small piece of land they grow paddy, and maintain a fish pond. Both productions are mainly for households' consumption. They do not sell the lands and just a few villagers rent the lands. Unlike in the urban fringe, the small pieces of land are consolidated for many varieties of agri-businesses since it is not worth to do agriculture in the small piece of land for consumption (Thang Long 2011). However, despite many households engaged in tourism business intensively, there are only about 2 percent of the households that rent their land. Normally, villagers cultivate paddy twice a year which is enough for household consumption, and feeding tourists and also for earning a small income.

Both agriculture and tourist business are looked after by family. However, if both jobs need intensive labor at the same time, a family will hire labor for tourism business and as well as for agriculture. Agriculture does not depend much on the machines since it is just a small plot of land. And it is not worth the investment. Most of the villagers employ buffalo for plowing, and they carry out transplantation by their hands. In some exceptional cases, where the entire family is involved in tourism business they rent small tiller truck and thresher. Anyway, by working with such machines, the villagers still utilize their labor intensively. In agriculture, the women work harder than men, both in frequency and difficulty. Except plowing, especially with tiller truck, all the tasks are usually done by the women. They also do other domestic works, such as, collecting firewood, washing and cleaning. However, cooking, sweeping floor, and raising animals are done by both sexes equally. Constructing and repairing the house, and for any other kind of job involving machines are taken up by man. The women are responsible for money and the cost of the household and business.

It can be said that, in order to run some tasks that need intensive labor in doing paddy field, a White Tai family in Mai Châu first exploits their own family labors; secondly, they obtain support from (i) their sibling or children or parents, (ii) close relatives – i.e. grandchildren, nephew, niece, and (iii) the other relatives; and lastly (iv) asking for help from the neighbors. This custom is different from Thai people in Thailand where such tasks are completed by utilizing a big group of neighbors, not

necessarily relatives. This phenomenon shows that White Tai in Mai Châu are more individual (at the family level) than that of Thailand. When the work is finished, the White Tai host family has to invite their laborers for a small party with local alcohols. That is why there are a lot of parties among villagers in the harvesting season. The labor obtained is usually returned by similar form of labor. Those who cannot return their labor, they would usually give some of their production yield to those from whom they have obtained labors. That is a kind of balance reciprocity, which is transferred to managing labor in tourism business that the villagers must pay back the relation in debt to those who help them almost immediately.

The households doing homestay business do not sell rice since it must be reserved for tourists. But those who do not do such business would sell a portion of the yield, keeping enough for their household consumption. Usually they sell around 1/3, or 1/4 of their productions. This means that if they sell rice at 300 – 400 kg, they will get money at around VND 1,050,000 – 1,400,000 (\$US 52.5 - 70) each time. These villages have their own rice-mill; every day we can see villagers bringing their paddy to mill. According to villagers, the price can be bargained and villagers always get a satisfactory price. After harvesting paddy most of villagers do not go out of the villages to find a job, they remain to do handicrafts: the men do wickerwork, while women weave fabric, make blankets, pillows, and on the like for both consumption and sale.

After cultivation, the villagers have to pay tax to the commune cooperatives by their production yield. That is 60 kg unhusked rice per 1,000 m² they occupy if their fields are in the valley, and pay 30 kg per 1,000 m² for the mountainous area. The villagers perceive that such tax is a small amount compared to their production yield. Husbandry in center of Bản Lác is prohibited since it is a tourist village and it is considered unhealthy and dirty for the tourist guests, even though I noticed a few households still keeps animals. But animal husbandry is still maintained in the center of Bản Pom Coọng village. In Bản Lác animal husbandry is usually maintained by those who live on the periphery, nearby the mountain and natural canals. They mostly raise fish, pig, cattle, chicken, duck, and goat.

Now let us look at the ways how market and tourism industry affected the village economy. The villagers tend to see marketization and privatization of land¹ as security (*đảm bảo*) of their life. They do believe that transition into market oriented economy have opened up opportunities for local people. In most cases, in transition period, villagers' quality of living is seems to be quite good. They possess modern facilities such as washing machine, satellite TV, computer and internet. Almost all households have motorbikes and many of them possess two to three motorbikes. One homestay household has a seven-seater car for pick up and drop of tourists. Between 2007 and early 2011, I have visited the villages every year, and economic development in the villages seems to improve year by year. There are some new and bigger houses, souvenir shops, and grocery stores; additionally the Mai Châu market has been enlarged as a response to the growth of tourist market in the district. Tourist market is significantly different from their previous market. Previously, they had produced and traded opium with various Tai groups and highlanders in Yunnan and upper Red River valley which was dominated by French troop (Michaud 2000: 344-5) and monopolized by some elite families which was advantageous for a small number of villagers. But the tourist market spreads wide opportunities to each household.

A pioneer of the homestay business in Bản Lác made this pithy observation to me: those who have many friends and connections outside the village will be prosperous. In fact, Tai people in Bản Lác have been familiar with tourism for nearly half a century (47 years). The year 1963 was a milestone for Bản Lác when it had its first homestay – the first homestay village of Northwest Vietnam. In 1963 Chiềng Châu sub-district of Mai Châu district was chosen to be the case study for revising the elimination of superstition as well as for increasing the yield of rice plantation. At that time, the historical informant was a commune official, a vice chairman of the Chiềng Châu cooperatives. Because the chairman of the cooperatives was not literate, his house was often chosen when district officials held a meeting on the issues. The vice chairman is also an adopted child of the Lord of Mường Mùn. Unintentionally his

¹To follow Land Law 1993 and its revised versions in 1998 and 2003, paddy land is allocated to each household unit for twenty years, counted down from the year 1993. In other words, most of villagers conceive that 2013 will be the year of finishing 20-year-granted paddy land and starting new round of land allocation. In fact, there is unavailable at any authority level on such new land allocation yet.

house became a homestay for staffs from district, provincial and central governments whenever they were sent to work in Mai Châu. Besides them, many international visitors (who worked with the provincial and district officials) found his house familiar and convenient place. His house began to welcome the experts and the foreign ambassadors; notably the ambassador of China was the first group, followed by groups from Soviet Union, Bulgaria, and Rumania. There were so many ambassadors from other countries. By 1976, six ambassadors of various countries have visited and had lunch at his house.

He hosted many international visitors without any compensation from neither the local authority nor even any charge collected from customers for 31 years. In his point of view, it was considered as a political task – diplomacy, which of course he must do. While only selling traditional fabrics was allowed. Rice was cooked for guests to eat as village's rice was a lot. The guests or government officials had to bring the meat, pork or chickens for cooking. However, sometimes they didn't bring anything then the homestay owner, by hospitality has to take their chicken or fish to make a meal for them free of charge. Certainly they recognize that as a loss in terms of economic. The Foreign guests, by words of mouth, came to visit his homestay for vacation. In addition, the government officials usually came to his homestay to eat steamed-fish. Bản Lác and his homestay, therefore, were becoming a famous tourist place. At that time, the bathroom and toilet were in local style; bath was taken next to a stream while latrine was made on the ground. Electricity have not arrive Bản Lác then. However, such atmosphere was a fond of Western tourists. The time during 1993-1994 was a peak of tourists' visit. The homestay of the informant in question received 30-40 tourists staying overnight a day. In view of that, he pressured the local authority to permit him to charge the tourists. Gradually, his political capital was transformed into economic capital.

A second homestay business was constructed in 1982. The owner of the second homestay was quite a visionary. He knew, besides being suggested by the first homestay owner, that tourism in Bản Lác will grow. So he decided to invest in this business. When his daughter went to the university, he oriented her in studying tourism. These two homestay owners were right. Following her university graduation,

she worked for a government hotel in Hòa Bình province, where she was able to build contacts with many tour agencies from the whole country. She suggested the tour agencies to open tours in Mai Châu and stay overnight at her father's homestay. Nowadays this household is considered by villagers as the richest Homestay in Mai Châu.

In fact when this homestay opened for business, after refurnishing his home with modern amenities, it was flooded with guests or tourists. He began to accommodate the guests to his two sons' homes. Therefore, his two sons were also converted into homestays gradually. These three homestays monopolised the market and had contracts with travel companies (public or private). These three homestays belonged to members of the same family. I was told that there was another homestay which belonged to another family, whose sister worked for a state-owned provincial hotel of Hòa Bình. These four homestays were located in the center of village, they were large and comfortable enough, and had modern facilities for receiving guests from the tourist agencies.

This was followed by a boom in homestay business in Mai Châu. Many other villagers, anticipating the market demand, made contract with tourist companies and refurnished their houses with modern amenities. They began to build their own networks from social ties. Noticeably the houses and homestays were built in the Tai style, which is not specifically for the "tourist gaze" but still is part of their normal everyday life. In northwestern Vietnam, almost all Tai keep staying in their traditional house style. Contradictorily, in negotiating with modernity, homestay business has to mix the sense of home (comfortable) and the exotic feeling so that the toilets have been made modern without any element of local style. Perhaps, this mixture of tradition and modernity went well with Vietnam's desire to promote tourism as a means of developing villages as handicraft centers, as place where traditional and modern coexist harmoniously.

By 1997 about 25 households in Bản Lác have become homestays. Most of them are located in the center of the village which makes it easy for tourist agents to contact. In the early 2000, Bản Pom Coọng, the village nearby Bản Lác, entered the tourist market by building connection with tour agencies. While villagers of Bản Lác

could not build connection with many tour agencies at that moment, Bản Pom Coọng's villagers could do. Some households in Bản Pom Coọng have invested in university education (particularly in tourism or business administration) for their children. Their children, after graduation, worked in the field of tourism. For example, I was informed that children of five households were working in Mai Châu lodge. A few are also working for tour agencies in Hanoi. They utilized their positions for making business connection between tour agencies and their homestays.

Most of these homestays flourished after Mai Châu (1994) was allowed to charge the tourist for homestay by the district officials. Initially the district appointed bill collectors to directly take the money and set the standard price for overnight tourists. It was VND 50,000 per head for foreign visitors and VND 20,000 per head for domestic visitors. The district took a share of the money homestay charged the visitors. As such, the homestay could get only VND 10,000 per visitor. However, the villagers did not conform. The office of district, therefore, abolished the charge regulation in 1999, and instead started applying value added tax to homestays.

By early 2000 homestay business peaked. More than 36,000 tourists visited these villages annually by 2007². And by 2010, more than 45,000 tourists visited Mai Châu for sightseeing, recreation and relaxation, of which around 9,000 were foreigners (interview a tourist police of Mai Châu District, April 2011). Only five homestays in Bản Lác have been constructed up to now; Bản Pom Coọng has eight registered homestays. Nevertheless four homestays in Bản Lác have gone out of business.

Presently, the villagers not only open their thatched roofs, stilt houses to travelers for rustic overnight stays, perform traditional dances and songs frequently, but they also produce and sell hand-woven textiles to both foreigners and domestic tourists. Their handicrafts are also bought by shop owners in Hanoi and Hồ Chí Minh City and as well as textile dealers from Laos and Thailand (Lan 2000, Cam 1999). Thirty households in Bản Lác and sixteen households in Bản Pom Coọng (out of 230 households in total) are involved in tourism activities and marketing of these

² Source: Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Vietnam, cited in <http://vietnambusiness.asia/exploring-villages-of-northwest-ethnic-minorities>, 2008

handicrafts. Almost all households in Bản Lác, particularly the main homestays, participate in the tourist market – providing homestays, opening souvenir shops, making souvenirs, and offering cultural shows. This means one fourth of the villagers now earn their main income increasingly from tourism in addition to agriculture.

In doing homestay business, the villagers have generally started their business from building their tourist socio-business networks. An old man, who was the pioneer of homestay business of Bản Lác and former head of the cooperatives, observed that families that have no connections or friends outside the village are hardly making their lives prosperous. Thus the best way to prosper is to have associated business. Homestays that has no access to tourist company's networks have attempted to establish networks by utilizing their own social acquaintances. Currently, homestay networks in the villages can be differentiated into four types. According to the questionnaire survey (with sample made up from 37 homestays or 77 percent of population of both villages) 25 percent of homestays have close connection with tourist companies. The number of networked companies is 5 in average, 1 in minimum and 10 in maximum. Thirty one percent of homestay depend on connection with tourist companies and social networks. The average is 2.44 companies, while 1 company is in minimum and 7 companies is in maximum. The Thirty nine percent of homestay mainly depend on social relation / tied networks; those that has less than 1 tourist company in their contacts. The last one is the other homestays which occupy 5 percent (field survey in 2011).

Homestays have close connections with tourist agencies in Hanoi and Hòa Bình province. Usually the first homestay owners in Bản Lác are more “professional” and tend to receive most of foreign tourists. The ways the first four homestay owners have linked with tourist companies has been discussed in the previous section. This evident confirms that the first stage of building a tourist market in the villages came from personal networks, which linked villagers to private and government businesses as well as government officers. Accordingly, whoever had beforehand a relationship with business and government sectors has taken the opportunity to engage with tourist market. Some years after entering into tourist market, only two homestays in Bản Lác and eight in Bản Pom Coọng were able to build business network with tourist

companies firmly. The reason being some of their children studied at the universities in Hanoi, and/or worked for tourist companies. Every week these homestays received foreign guests. Their market structure depends on some middlemen like tourist agencies. For this reason, these homestays can be seen as participating in a “vertical structure”, where the interrelationship between hosts and guests are distant. In addition, they are in a position of disadvantage in relation to tourist companies; at least they cannot determine the amount of the share between them and the companies. A homestay owner said to me, although he gets a lot of guests (from tour agencies) and almost every day, he could not save money. If he gets a lot of independent tourists, he will be richer, he said. So this case demonstrates that to be secure (in firm connections with tour agencies), villagers have to pay (getting less share from tour agencies) a lot.

Even though the homestay business opened up in 1992, it was much later when they began constructing the souvenir shops at the first floor of their stilt houses. In fact, in the late 1980s the villagers sold their traditional fabric at their house, more precisely in the living room on the second floor. They did not know that their traditional fabrics could be sold. When their visitors asked for buying they didn't know how to set the cost of such fabrics. After many years of selling, they have just known that the prices they sold were pittance. Customarily, White Tai has to stock some pillows, blankets, fabrics, and seat mattress for their (non-market) guests staying overnight at the houses, or for preparing for marriage of their daughters, or even for giving gift. Once engaging in the tourist market, they are active sellers. When they found the tourists stroll pass their house, according to their customs, they liked to talk with them and to invite them into their house, drank tea and talked if they were compatible. The fabrics could then be sold, but it depended on the interaction and emotion of the guests rather than commercial intention of the hosts. This means that they had never convinced tourists to buy. In terms of business, some households hanged their fabrics on the windows so that they are easily visible to tourists. Then they are saleable. Then many shops weave traditional fabric, do carpentry, embroidery, and wickerwork by themselves since they have not much money to buy any goods from the suppliers, or try to save cost. For weaving, the raw material silk

thread is produced by villagers in Bản Lác, but cotton thread is bought from “Kinh” merchant in the Hòa Bình or Hanoi province. For carpentry and wickerwork, the raw materials are from the village. Thus they rely much on their natural resource management.

These days some of souvenirs are made in factories. Even though there are the modern making, they are presented in the traditional style. Especially, the products from Đồng Xuân Market, the biggest wholesale market of northern Vietnam located in Hanoi and Lạng Sơn Market, near the China border line. For these products, there are middlemen, mostly Kinh from Hanoi and the former Hà Tây province. These middlemen carry such products by motorbike to the villages and sell at wholesale price to the souvenir shop owners. In the mid-1990s and early 2000s, a few middlemen from Samnua, Hua Phan province of Laos were engaged with this trade. Due to lack of capital for investment, most of villagers use the barter exchange system. They would exchange their local products with the souvenirs made from outsiders or factories. In barter exchange, to estimate the prices, people depend on trust and help from each other. It indicates that even in the modern trade, villagers depended on old exchange system. This makes possible for many to do business, especially those who do not have much capital to invest. However, as the villagers accumulated money this barter system is bound to disappear; there is no more barter system in souvenir exchange.

Another mode of cultural-economical articulation in the post socialist market is the cultural show. The pictures used by tour agencies to advertise (or sell) Mai Châu are taken from cultural shows. The cultural show is the only thing managed by cooperation among villagers. Unlike the history of constructing souvenir shop, cultural show is really invention. It has also been related to building nation state since the communist period (see chapter 5 for more details). Generally, the cultural show is performed in the homestays when the guests makes request. There is no common place for the show. The price of one show costs around VND 400,000 – 500,000 (US\$ 20 – 25). Each dancer and musician gets around VND 20,000 – 30,000 (US\$ 1-1.5) per a show time. The show takes about 60 minutes. Each team has some common and different dances depending on the trainers. Since there are five and three culture teams

in Bản Lác and Bản Pom Coọng respectively, the way the homestay hosts choose the team is different. My host usually chooses her son's team even though her son does not dance in his house because of shyness. But sometimes she would choose a teenager's teams if most of the guests are Vietnamese men. My former host selected cultural show team turn by turn. Anyway, generally, the homestay hosts are likely to choose their children's or close relatives' team. Despite the cultural show teams are set by cooperation among villagers, their performance, and the way homestay hosts select cultural show team indicate that villager like to manage business privately, not collectively. Thus, it may be interpreted that the socialist ideology has not influenced this particular business of performing cultural dance.

The success in emerging tourism businesses is not from the outsiders. It comes from the way the villagers articulate the old living and new one: agriculture and tourism. Tourism in Mai Châu begins with utilizing the local capitals such as household labors, rural atmosphere, and agricultural products. Also culture of hospitality in particular and ethnic heritage, such as, the backdrop of Tai stilt houses. Therefore, tourism is not external culture penetrating into community. After Đổi Mới, the villagers see the demand and opportunities of engaging with market. As Buyandelgeriyn (2008) argues, during the post-socialist transition, the economy has been built upon cultural values and relationships, rather than market rules. They realized that their cultures have been valuable for both economic and social aspects. They construct the cultural products.

2.3. Intensive Engagement within Cultural Constructing Tourist Market (Early 2000s – 2011)

There is no denying the fact that a lot of local entrepreneurs are actively engaged in building the tourist market. To me, the market is not dominated by outsiders – i.e. state and tour companies. By this I do not mean outsiders have no role in the making of Mai Châu a tourist site. After all what is a tourist village without “outsiders” who come to visit it. What I want to point out is that, the variety of connections made by local entrepreneurs, in cooperation with tour agency and the

tourists, illustrates the abilities of local people to manipulate, in their own limited capacities, the global market into local process. The first four homestay owners, who built their business by connecting to tourist agencies (mentioned in section 2.2) can be designated as the “pioneer homestays”. And the other homestays which emerged later, comprising about nineteen homestays in Bản Lác and Bản Pom Coọng, had to contend with contact with small tourist companies, and build their network through social ties. I classified them as “social-tie homestay”.

The “social-tie homestays” usually built their networks before investing any capital in constructing homestay houses. To play safe, they have to make sure that they have their own customers or market. As mentioned earlier, because of their position of disadvantage in relation to tourist agencies, the entrepreneurs may end up putting lots of money and getting less profit. In addition, because of their late entry into the tourist market, these homestays have no or little connection with tour agencies. For these reasons, they have to mainly organize their business from networks of social ties/relations. A few of these homestays are located in the center of the village. The rest are located at the periphery of the villages. Their target customers are Vietnamese. However, unlike the pioneer homestays, the timing and number of guests coming to these homestays cannot be predicted. For that reason, their business is rather unstable. This case indicates that in a time of uncertainty and rapid transformation, economic anxiety and instability, culture and intimate relationships have been used to operate the economy (Buyandelgeriyn 2008).

So as to intensively engage with the tourist market during the transition period, this group started expanding their network with the help of their Vietnamese friends and their children’s friends or even friends of Vietnamese visitors/guests who came mostly from Hanoi. Their modus operandi is same as the pioneer homestays. But they try to get hold of foreigners by making business connections with motorbike and taxis drivers in Mai Châu town. These drivers bring backpackers to their homestays. A few of them have connections with bus drivers on the Hanoi - Mai Châu or Hanoi - Son La road. The drivers would inform the homestay owners about on-board tourists. The homestay owners would then wait to pick the unsuspecting tourists at the drop point or bus terminal. The number of guest/backpackers a motorbike taxi

driver would take to a household depends on connection and compensation the homestay pay to them.

One example of successful “social-tie homestay” that impressed me is the one owned by a middle age woman living at the periphery of a village. She put in much effort to acquire tourist guests through face-to-face communication. She taught herself English and practiced the language by talking to foreign tourists. She did this by acting as a local guide, taking tourists for trekking around the nearby villages. Sometimes, when tourists strolled pass her house she cordially invited the tourists (and tourist guides) to sit inside her house. She would then strike up conversation with them, offer them tea. At the end she would offer them her name-card and also present them with small souvenirs. This way she hoped to expand her network. Surprisingly, all of her guests actually come from recommendations by such tourists or their friends. Apart from this, what I found interesting was the way she bind the tourists to her. On most occasions she would tie the wrist of her guests with thread. It can be interpreted as a (mind) commitment between her and the guests. This practice is usually followed when villagers like the guests.

This is one instance of how imaginative homestay entrepreneurs are trying to explore other techniques of expanding their business network outside the traditional methods of social ties and contract with tour agencies. Another such example is: a few homestay owners, with help from Kinh friend living in Hanoi (with home profit is shared) market themselves via internet. The choice of advertisement is usually kept secret among villagers. Another example is the practice of offering discount to tourists. Homestays which cannot get in touch with any network outside village can get tourists transferred from homestay which are full. Some homestays, even if they already have well established networks, occasionally accept tourists transferred from other homestays.

There are, therefore, some homestays in Bản Lác which have established networks with social ties and travel agents. These homestays may be categorized as mixed network homestay (mixture between tour agency tie network and social tie network). These homestays are much smaller than the first group of homestays. They are also located at the center of the village and near pioneer homestays so that they

have easier access to tourist agencies and guests. They were not the relatives of the first group homestay owners; some of them may share a family name yet they are not at all close relatives. This second group receives both foreign and domestic tourists from Hanoi and other provinces. However, the companies they connect with are the small ones, some of which are not located in Hanoi.

There are multiple ways in which these homestays built their network through social ties and social relations. First, a few of them are local authority at village or district level. By virtue of their position they can easily connect with other officials and people who can be guests of their homestays – a clear case of how political power leads to social and business networks. Second, they may strike up friendship with guests of nearby homestays when they walk through their house or take a look at their souvenir shop. Third, visitors are sometimes welcomed into their house for tea and to explore White Tai lifestyle. Some of these guests may recommend their friends to stay at these homestays if they find the ambiance and hospitality there to be better than the homestays they stayed. Fourth, the children who study at the universities or work in Hanoi and other provinces recommend their friends and lecturers to their homestay. Fifth, the former guests may introduce/recommend their friends the homestay they stayed in.

It may be pointed out that though one's political position affords him/her easy access and connection to the tourists, some of their descendants may fail to maintain that social relations. Then they gradually lose guests. This means that the business skill of building connection is something new even though its root is in their hospitality. Some homestays, which take in only few guests, may have connection with small tour agencies. But they have to provide free accommodation to the tour guide and driver. Since the tour guide and the driver are taken in free, the amount of money charged from tourists is expected to cover these costs. This may result in homestay losing money or whatever profit they make may be too little. It all depends on how much beer the tour guides and drivers drink and how many guests they bring and the how many the homestays can take in. Anyway, according to the culture of hospitality, as mentioned, the hosts do not think much in terms of loss. The loss suffered initially can be compensated when they get big/medium groups of tourists

whether or not taken from tour companies or their social networks, or even sometimes, from back packers. So by dealing with such networks, homestay hosts cannot always expect to make a windfall at all the times.

The homestays which depend on this type of networks are: (i) a homestay connecting with backpackers and potential customers and (ii) alliance homestay which get guests from other homestays when they are full. Because they are the new comers, they have to mix various ways of building business connections. This ingenuity may be seen in the way a new homestay owner built his network. This owner entered the market in 2009 by building a homestay on the periphery of Bản Lác or one kilometre far from the center of the village. Prior to this business venture, he lived in a hut. He would ferry backpackers headed for social tie homestay and mixed network homestay on his motorbike taxi. He then raised a loan from an agricultural bank and pooling it with his savings built a homestay. From then on, he brings tourists to his own homestay. He additionally built business connection with bus drivers in Hanoi - Mai Châu and Hanoi - Sơn La. He would offer commission to drivers if they call and tell him about any on-board foreigners. He would wait for the foreigners at the bus terminal and offer them to take right away to his homestay.

I also came across another case where the homestay owner built his business by putting together all types of networks. He is a Kinh, who married a White Tai villager. The couple used to rent a space of the first floor of the wife's brother so that they can do a souvenir shop. For ten years they managed the souvenir business. The husband gradually made friends with tour guides and visitors by circulating his name card. When he ventured into homestay business, he alerted his contacts to bring their guests to his homestay in return for a commission. It is important to note that, in White Tai culture making friendship with tour guides is not necessarily designed with the objective of cutting into the tourist market a share of tourist for their future business. Many White Tai contends that, in their culture, making friends with the guests of villages is because of their status as "guests" rather than as potential customers (though I am suspicious that this distinction might have become a little blurred within the tourist market). In view of that, the social network that may be

linked to homestay business is the by-product of the social relations. Consequently, most of White Tai people feel embarrassed to make a business-like acquaintance.

Table 2.1 Type of Homestay Networks

Type of Homestay Network	Frequency	Percent
1. Pioneer homestay (Tour company network)	9	25.0
2. Social-tie homestay	14	38.9
3. Mixed network homestay	11	30.6
4. Others (connecting to motorbike taxi and/or transferred guests from other homestays)	2	5.6
Total	36	100

Source: Field Survey in 2011

Well coming back to the case in discussion, while he struggled for business network the same way as other homestays (Social-tie-homestay and Mixed-network-homestay) have done. He built connections with motorbike taxis for sure. He has appeared as a new comer in the tourist market of the villages but succeeded in that business. His homestay regularly gets big loads of guests despite the low season. As a result he has enlarged his homestay by building two more houses. His homestay, which takes in between 150-160 guests, tends to disturb other villagers owing to the noisy late night parties. His guests are mostly university students coming for their semester break. It appears that many villagers dislike him.

In sum, building relationship between hosts and guests may be interpreted as building tourism business. These market structures are affected by the kind of relationship that exists between host and guest. The homestays that get tourists from tourist agencies engage in a vertical relationship with their guests, and with the tourist agencies. However, the relationship between other homestay owners and their guests is more or less based on expectations found in traditional relationships; they treat tourists as their guests who not only bring money to them but also bring friendship and a long-term relationship (both in business and social aspects).

Homestays mostly have been constructed through horizontal relationships where friendship plays an important role. The following table provides an overview of type of homestays (with sample made up from 36 homestays or about 74 percent of population of both villages). The social ties and mixed network Homestay types are about 2/3 of Homestay networks while the pioneer Homestay type getting guests from tour agencies is 25 percent.

During one of my several field trips, I found the villagers to be intensively engaged in souvenir business. This may be because by means of self-employment in weaving, woodcraft, and embroidery they have acquired economic power. Thus, they are utilizing traditional skill in producing souvenir products. Around a half of households of Bản Lác and twenty of households in Bản Pom Coọng own souvenir shops. Most of them are located at the center of the villages. They sell White Tai and Hmong traditional fabrics, cloths, factory scarves (which look like handmade), and many small pieces of souvenir, mainly. Most souvenir shops buy some local products, particularly Tai scarves, from villages nearby. The souvenir shop owners do not pay cash to the producers immediately; they pay when the product is sold. That practice is financial good for souvenir shop owners, but bad for the suppliers. This is why suppliers prefer to sell their products only to the shops that can make spot payment or pay a higher price later. Moreover, souvenir shop owners do not want to owe the suppliers, except only when they are very close relatives such as parents and children, or siblings. For these cases, the networks of relatives and friends play an important role only under conditions of a good financial management for both.

The strategy employed by souvenir sellers in Mai Châu tells of interesting facet of White Tai ethnic tourism. In order to get customers to buy their products, most villagers do not call out to the tourists and offer to sell their products directly, as sellers in the city do. At a glance, they would appear to be passive sellers, but they would generally strike up friendship first and use their friendship as a medium in the selling process. For example, in 2007, on my second visit as a tourist, they invited me to sit in their shops and we engaged in conversation. During the conversation, I had a feeling that, for them selling is their second purpose; friendship is more important. In Bản Lác, one can see sellers extending invitation to prospective customers. The

invitation is extended either for the given day or any day the customer is free or comfortable. Whenever they offered me discount on certain souvenirs, it would usually be with proclamation that “I give discount for my sister”. In their opinion “Thai” in Thailand and (White) Tais are of same origin, especially because I can say “hi” to them in their local language. On one occasion, an old woman charged me high price for four antique pillows. I showed her my purse that I do not have enough money and as such would be able to buy only two pillows at the rate she mentioned. Then she offered me back some money despite my refusal to take them back. Eventually, she took the money and gave me one more pillow for free. By this I do not mean one would not come across a few who do not care to make friends, mostly the elderly ones. May be because they can use their body (oldness) as a medium to complete their selling by saying that “help me by buying these goods”. By this phenomenon, I have learned that market engagement here is concerned into social relations as well as economic rationality. It seems that social relationship supports for making profit and constructing market in the long run.

As mentioned earlier they sell White Tai and Hmong traditional dresses. To make these dresses, most souvenir shops do it by themselves. They do not depend on dress making shops in the town. They taught themselves the skill of making dress by sewing machine so as not to depend on outside skill. Though for raw materials they depend on buying from outside and barter exchange system. For making Tai dress, the raw materials, such as button and fabric can be bought from Mai Châu market. But for Hmong dress, they buy from Hmongs who come to Bản Lác. White Tai people buy both the completed and incomplete dressed and then modify them again so as to sell at lower price because White Tai know that they cannot sell the completed Hmong dress due to high price. However, almost all tourists do not know which one is the Hmong origin. White Tai also sell Hmong handicraft. It appears that initially, White Tai villagers brought Hmong handicrafts from Hmong people and sold them to the customers. But they learned to make the Hmong cloths by themselves. So now they can buy incomplete dress from the Hmong and complete them or modify them and sell them to unsuspecting foreigners. This phenomena shows that White Tai is creative

in modifying traditional souvenir goods and know how to reduce cost of production even though they have just engaged in souvenir business.

Another point, to note about souvenir shops, is that they are run by extended Tai family. In an extended White Tai family or in one household there are multiple couples. In financial economic activities each couple is separate. They have to fund their separate business. So in case one see many owners in one souvenir shop, located in the first floor of their stilt house, rest assured that each of them have their own private section. This shows that the management is quite individual while resources (space, the seller) are pooled together.

I want to point out that economic capital differentiation exists among villagers. During the socialist period and early period of Đổi Mới, the economic capital did not matter. The commune authorities' houses were acceptable to be a homestay for government's guests. Once Mai Châu is linked to the free market economy, houses which were big and looked comfortable were able cash in on the emerging tourism business without much investment. The pioneer homestays gradually accumulate their profit. Within five years, after the boom (the mid - end of 1990s) in tourism market, the first group of homestays have enough economic capital to rebuild their homestay without or with a small loan from banks. Other homestays have to invest in rebuilding their houses so as to compete with established homestays. They, therefore, raised huge loan from the agricultural bank. To raise this kind of loan, they must meet four conditions – mortgage, income information, occupation information, and project plan. Almost all the later homestays were set up with loan from the agricultural bank. According to my questionnaire survey, the loan accounts for 44 percent of their investment. More than half of their investment comes from their savings.

Usually, White Tai people are afraid of debt, because they fear that indebtedness may make them lose their land. Without land, they have no idea of making a living. Even though they are engaging in the tourist market, they still do agriculture. In addition, they do not want to take risk. So far every homestay owner has been able to pay debt.

For the newcomers in the business, their saving money comes from two main sources. First, the souvenir shops. As discussed, only a few homestays could invest in

homestay business after 1990s. For these few homestays, money accumulation from selling souvenirs, must have been done before the end of 1990s. This would mean that their souvenir business must have started at the end of the 1980s or early of the 1990s. My guess is, the households which possessed traditional fabrics/clothes accumulated before Đổi Mới would have gained maximum benefit from souvenir business. And a family which consisted of large female numbers for weaving and making traditional cloths in the socialist period must be more benefited.

The second source is their old treasures, such as, silver necklaces, bracelets and belts inherited from their ancestors before French colonial period. The last treasure is made of gold. In all probability made from gold dug in mid or end of the 1970s. The villagers (both pioneer and new homestay owners) who possessed the old treasures belong to the category of aristocrat families or government officers. Once homestay investments are advanced, the rest are spent for modern toilet and kitchen enlargement where the owners often stay when guests are taken in.

Moreover, the villagers do not completely invest for business in one time. They would gradually rebuilt their homestay and built the toilet and bathroom. For example, first, they have to collect the mattress, pillow, and blanket. Then they have to build the modern toilet and bath room which were important for getting tourists. After refurbishing toilet and bath room, they may rebuild the house by enlarging it or fixing it with a good quality of woods, or make private bed rooms.

Even though most homestay owners have little economic capitals, they and especially the new investors try to accumulate “social capital” in constructing businesses by expanding their networks. Many of them consider money not as the critical factor for engaging in tourist business; because money can be borrowed from the agricultural bank or the social policy bank run by the government. Instead the most important things for their business are “networks”, “friendship” and/or a “partnership”. Having money without network is meaningless, many said to me. Thus they need a partnership to circulate and accumulate their social capital. This way of thinking for “sustainable” business is similar to what they did for water management previously described. The most powerful networks, according to them, are their former guests who are potential endorsers of their homestay to their friends or acquaintances. They help to publicize

and expand the network. The general opinion is that, “if we give good service to them, the guests will come back to our homestays again or introduce our homestays to others”. In practice, every homestay owner ranks good service and distribution of their name card among the most important things they will pursue to build such a network. Strong social ties make their business plans feasible. In fact proof of these ties help when submitting projects and request of loans from banks.

Labor is another crucial capital. The critical barrier to ethnic tourist market is not social or economic capitals, but labor. In my interview with two poor families, they asserted that they can gradually accumulate blankets, mattresses, and pillows by their own production. Likewise, they can borrow from the agricultural bank to have their homes renovated and fix modern toilets. Building networks, just as finding capital, is also not hard. Networks are established slowly by giving good services to children’s friends (as their guests) and the effects of word of mouth communication will help expand their network automatically. But the only problem is, as pointed out by them, the quantity and quality of labors needed to accumulate all capitals for such as business. The presence of too many dependent members in their family tends to discourage them from venturing into homestay business.

Let me now describe a rare but puzzling phenomenon at Bản Lác. It involves their attitude to English or French. The homestay owners and villagers, at the centre of the village, seem to be to be less concerned with learning either of the two languages. In most case, I had to act as translators between my host and the tourists. My host or his family members never asked me to teach them English, despite the obvious language problem in his family in dealing with tourists. In contrast, when I go to the homestays, souvenir shops or homes located at the periphery of Bản Lác they eagerly asked me to teach them some English. I was puzzled by these two contradictory attitudes towards English language. I asked around. I was told that most homestay owners are offered English training courses by provincial government. Some of them hire school English teachers as private tutor. This is enough to help them interact with tourists. The most important aspects of homestay business are networks, modern toilet and hospitality. Once the villagers get all of these, there is no need for English or French speaking skill. Moreover, it is the tour guides who are

required to talk directly to the guests. It occurred to me, it is not the problem of language as such, but the attitude towards the language. The people at the periphery see it as an asset.

The villagers at the periphery of the village are newcomers or new settlers. Generally they control limited resources compared to the inhabitants at the center. In their struggle, in the tourist market, they see proficiency in the foreigner's language as a resource: a resource untapped by the established homestays. Remember my story about a woman who learned English and used it as a resource in establishing her own network. If we take a broader view, capitals required in homestay business include every resource the villagers occupy, especially labor (both quality and quantity), knowledge, intangible cultures and habits which will be revealed in the way they manipulate and living with tourism in following chapter.

Tourism businesses are small enterprises in terms of scale and investment. Household labors are enough to deal with. So, labor management in tourism business (and other businesses pertaining to tourism) is similar to that of in agriculture, in terms of exploiting household labours mainly. Around 3 – 4 household labours can take care of all agricultural work, domestic work, and homestay business. Sometimes, if homestay get many tourists, it will hire their sibling and/or close relatives to cook, wash dishes, and serve the guests. Just a few homestays, which usually get the tourists almost every day, will hire a few labours permanently. Most of the hired labours are not their sibling or close relative, rather they come from the nearby villages where finding work is difficult.

In terms of gender roles, it is something contradictory and overlapping when we compare their role in agricultural and household works, and tourism businesses works. For agriculture, men plow while women transplant. Both sexes contribute to harvesting. In domestic work, mainly woman clean the house, cook, and wash dishes. Some men do help in cooking. In a homestay business the men are responsible for business transactions and welcoming of tourists. In some homestays women perform these duties, while men take care of tour guides and drivers. Both man and woman take care of shopping needs. I found that women wash clothes and dishes, and men sweep the floor and cleaned the bathroom. There are more female local tour guides

than men. In one of the homestays I stayed, the son takes care of shopping food and cooking for both household's members and tourists. His wife works outside for a company. In a souvenir production shop, both man and women are involved. While some men engage in selling souvenir, most men are engaged in production of knives, swords, crossbows, darts, and basketry. So souvenir producing shops are spaces of male identity as much as that of female. Therefore, what I usually hear from the villagers (that men like to do hard work instead of soft works like transplanting, cooking, cleaning the house) is not true in tourist business activities. Thus such activities can be perceived as a space of negotiating roles between women and men, the old/adult and the young. So, in doing tourism business the women do not really bear the burdens.

By these phenomena, it can be concluded that in doing farm and domestic work, women's and men's duties are separate. However, for homestay business, there are many tasks overlapping, and in many works women and men switch roles. Gender role is flexible in such businesses. It is different from the image of Vietnamese women who bear the burden in domestic work. In summary, whereas labor management in tourism business is really embedded in White Tai culture, labor management in tourism business is hard to be seen as something fixed in the customary gender's role.

2.4. Handling Social Relations in Business Competitions and Alliances

Living with tourist market has not created too much tension among the villagers, probably because, while marketization during a time of uncertainty has brought risk, the White Tai's habitus has helped sustain cohesive social relations among the villagers as part of their economic/market activities. Even though there is economic difference among villagers, their income distribution does not affect the social inclusiveness of equal access to natural resources. Rather it depends on the capitals of each household, such as, labor per se, and the ability for utilizing culture of hospitality to enter into the market.

The practices of sustaining White Tai relationship shows in many spaces of practices such as (i) the changing of worldview in intensive engagement with tourism, (ii) cultural competition among homestay hosts (other than the pioneer homestays), (iii) sustaining reciprocity and local solidarity, (iv) business alliance based on moral commitment. As mentioned in previous section, because the villagers have paid lots of attention to tourist market, their worldviews pertaining to making a living have been changed dramatically. The former chief of the commune cooperatives opined that, people believed that the most important factor in becoming prosperous is to have business or trade. If a household cannot utilize their labor effectively, they will be poor.

To begin the discussion on the competition among the homestays (not the pioneer homestays) let me begin by narrating the behavior of my new host. On my third visit to Bản Lác I decided to find a new host. This decision was taken with the sole intention of studying the reaction of different homestays: my former homestays and other homestays I did not chose. My new host was the step brother of one of my previous host. He was, at first, uncomfortable in accepting me. I had to explain to him that I was still in touch with my old host and that my friend (who would be arriving in the following few days) will be staying there. This convinced him and he accepted me as his guest.

It appears that a homestay owner would, normally, not take an active role in hijacking the client of another homestay. It is socially embarrassing for them. It can be read as a kind of moral commitment to one another that keeps peace and trust among themselves. A new homestay host cannot or do not act in a cut-throat manner. Apparently, the motto “nothing personal, it is just good business” is not socially acceptable. Of course there are exceptions, a new homestay owner who is married to a White Tai woman employed aggressive market tactics. Hijacking tourists headed for different homestays and making false claim about his homestay are some of his strategies. When I carried out questionnaire survey about conflict among villagers owing to tourism business, fifty three percent of the village population responded negatively. In details, conflict pertaining to market competition in the villagers' perception is very less (43.0%) and less (10.8%) respectively. And the proportion of

villagers seeing the much conflict is only 1 percent. The other proportions are “normal” (32.3%) and no idea/no answer (12.9%) respectively. It is confirmed by what some Vietnamese tour guides and drivers told me that Mai Châu’s hosts are good, state in general, they do not struggle for taking tourist (at least through offering incentive to the tour guides and drivers).

One of the traditional customs responsible for minimal conflict – especially conflicts arising from tourist business – is the tradition of “group chatting entertainment”. There is no local media which play local songs to entertain the villagers. In the evening, members of the village will be busy visiting, in groups, their friends’ place to drink alcohol or to just chat. These visits goes by the White Tai calling “*Pai Inn*” - meaning “visit and chat with friends”. “*Pai Inn*” has enormous social function and plays important role in their personal and social life. It marks out members of village who will be friendly or close to a particular family. Thus, if someone is in conflict with someone else, there is little chance to *pai inn*. In addition, if a member do not *pai inn*, he/she will not be entertained by group chatting, and in his/her social life have few friends. That is why, generally, the villagers will not sacrifice their *pai inn* by making a conflict.

It is characteristics of a White Tai that a feeling of anger (against another homestay owner for hijacking prospective client) is never made public. A character desired for maintain life-long business and cooperation among the community. In such cases where the actions of rival homestay owner become unbearable a small ridicule is tendered. A loud and long quarrel is generally avoided as a sin (elaborated in chapter 4). They will lose what they call in Vietnamese “*tình cảm*” (affection). Those who lose *tình cảm* will be perceived as the bad ones. Therefore, they really attempt to avoid any superficial conflict. But they are easy to remember bad deals. My White Tai teacher tells be about a Tai maxim, “*Kan Tai hú kiệt hưng...sut trua, yong dee yong hu lum, yong hai chừ kun tai*” meaning, “(White) Tai people hate (someone) very long; something good (that) people treat us, we may forget, something bad to us, we cannot forget”. This character of White Tai is so unlike the Kinh. My teacher made this comparison: A Kinh will easily forget after getting an apology, a White Tai do not. I agreed with his observation.

Moreover, by habit, a White Tai finds it hard to show negative feelings and behavior to someone in public. The utmost concern is the need to live communally without any superficial conflict. If this rule is broken friendship is immediately terminated. And after the quarrel, if they can no longer drink together and apologize, they will not talk to each other anymore. They become what they said in White Tai mixed with Vietnamese, “*mật sía tình cảm*” (affection lost between them).

This character of the White Tai, not speaking out, is hard to fathom. Take this case, in summer when there is no electricity, the richest homestays use petrol motors to generate electricity. One of the rich homestays used to set the motor far away from his home, so that, the noise generated by it do not disturb his guests. It annoyed my host and his neighbors a lot. My host also lost many guests owing to that noise. Many elderly people from nearby homes moved to far away relatives. No one complained to the homestay owner. A complain was lodged with the village head. But he does not deal with this case directly. In a meeting he states, in general, that all villagers’ must cooperate to make less noise. Thus the practical way to cope with this problem is just “being patient” as villagers frequently say.

To carry the discussion on White Tai ways of sustaining social relationship further let us look at how they maintain reciprocity and local solidarity. White Tai in Mai Châu likes to party and host party for relatives or/and neighbors. Sometimes, when they get special ingredient for making a special food, such as, dog meat, they generally invite their friends to enjoy food together. They would celebrate by drinking local alcohol. Such occasions have their own symbolic meaning and social functions. There are several meanings in drinking alcohol. According to the villagers, alcohol functions as a medium, to make friends closer – “the more you drink, the closer you become (to those who invited you to drink)”. As a guest, if someone likes you (*quý*) or respects you (*tôn trọng*), they will invite you to drink as much as you can. They may invite you to drink until you are lying unconscious. If so, they will like you very much and consider you as a friend. Among villagers, drinking alcohol make them talk much, let their minds free, and that brings them together to expose their deep or hidden feeling about others.

As mentioned elsewhere earlier, after harvest villagers arrange lavish parties. These parties are considered important social gathering and the existence of reciprocal relationship and solidarity among them. Such solidarity prevents any superficial conflict in doing tourism business (see the elaboration in chapter 3). Following the harvest time, each family also have to celebrate their new rice by conducting what is called in White Tai “*Lao Khao Mo*” (means “eat new rice”) ceremony. During this event, the family invites all siblings, close relatives, and those who help them doing paddy field to take part in the ceremonial party to drink alcohol and eat new rice with special foods. Prior to the party, they have to bring the new rice to the altar and invite the house’s spirit from their ancestors to eat. The villagers do new rice ceremony every crop season. This new rice ceremony is to thank both spirits and the people who help them produce rice. Importantly, besides this, this is the occasion for distribution of their surplus to their relatives and neighbors. Those distribute without hosting a ceremonial party will be perceived as stingy people. Such a family is generally avoided among the villagers.

Their culture of reciprocity does not end here. If there is a wedding party, each household have to send at least one member to help in making arrangement for the party. The host will have to arrange a party for them. When there is a funeral, almost all members of the village have to stop working and attend the ceremony. Members of the villagers generally go to comfort the family of the decease. The bereaved family will hosts a meal for the attendants. Institutionally, any such party, in times of sorrow or happiness is termed in White Tai as “*hét phúc*” (make others happy). This goes with their traditional belief that, if you make someone happy, someone else will return your favor captured in this White Tai phrase, “*Hét phúc ho kan, se man ji me kan hac ma hét phúc ho hao*”. It is like a chain of goodness bound you with it, a local intellectual explained to me.

Many congregate activities create a feeling of togetherness among villagers. As a habitual mechanism, this structure of conscious of togetherness is used in the tourist markets, in terms of labor management in homestay business. Sometimes it is to lessen the problem. For example, once they feel annoyed by guests in other homestays (i.e. – camp-firing, doing party) they are just simply patient. If they

quarrel, with the tourists or the hosts, the whole village will gradually lose guests. It is a cause to not make benefit of tourism from many activities. The whole village economy will be disadvantageous. And yes, because almost all villagers get economic benefit, the villagers will not lose all and take all in any single matter. However, togetherness also makes the villagers regard one another. So they set the rules (and follow it seriously) that every form of noise completely stop after 10.00 PM in the winter, and 11.00 PM in the summer.

In Lunar New Year ceremony, they organize a party different from the Kinh. In Kinh custom, people make party only among their relatives and close friends but White Tai people have to invite at least 60 people in community to join the party. If you are invited from several households within the same day, you have to go to every invitation. Parties seem to be a special moment of their life, whenever they are happy, or in the transition periods from the old to the new life like in New Year day, they always celebrate. They see it as the livings being fulfilled by people and spirits surrounding them, so they thank them. When they need help in constructing house and cultivating rice, they have to call their relatives and neighbor. When constructing a house, especially when setting house's poles, all the men in each family have to help. Then, again when they make roof, their relatives and neighbor have to help them. So after almost completing the constructing of the house, in order to thank the people who have helped, they make grateful parties. The party arranged after making the roof is like a house warming ceremony. To join the ceremony, the villagers will bring any food and alcohol, or even money. That is a kind of reciprocal institution which exists in Mai Châu.

Moral commitment is also transferred to business realm as the main mechanism. Villagers apply it for their souvenir shop when one or the other is not at her/his shop. They are confident that their neighbors will take care selling goods for them and do not hijack their customers. And in return they will do the same thing for their neighbors. At the night time, some souvenir shops do not keep their goods in order to prevent them seriously since they are not afraid that their goods will be stolen. This is an atmosphere of moral commitment among villagers which tourists

also feel have to respect. So the friendship and neighborliness are not strange things separating from trade. It is the cross-cutting of social alliances (Geertz 1963:85).

In homestay business, sometimes when a homestay is full of guests, the host has to put their guests and/or tour guides and/or drivers to another homestay, which may not belong to their relatives but to the household they trust. That is a kind of business alliance since the size of a homestay is limited to accept too many tourists. Of course, it can be risky that, by getting close the transferred homestay hosts may create business contact with the tour guides and/or the guests. Consequently the transferring homestay owners will lose their regular contacts. For that reason, the transferring hosts have to hold some services to their guests, tour guides and drivers such as catering food and drink, talking and chatting with them, and not let them alone while stay at the transferred homestays. In the other side, this is a responsibility of the transferring homestay hosts to take care of their guests, tour guides and drivers perceived as guests. The homestay hosts has to pretend that the transferred homestay is their homestay as well, and so the guests will misunderstand that they are staying at another house of the same host. Nevertheless, it is not serious to let the transferred homestay to take care of guest completely if there is just a few guests plus a tour guide and a driver. Because it is not worth to strictly take care and keep in touch with the small tourist agencies.

A big homestay host who gets tourists everyday needs to expand their business. One female host who has only limited size of the house with a small number of household labors subsequently needs to contract to her close relatives. By so doing, they share some profits. After that she expands her homestay business by opening the second homestay (as a branch) to her relatives' house. It is going quite well since the allied homestay host do not hiject the guests and business networks of the main homestay. Therefore, the business alliance is the way which no one or even no group of business leaders can completely possess everything on their own (Geertz 1963: 85). They have to share once they get much.

2.5. Conclusion

In this chapter, one of my arguments revolved around the fact that, during the socialist period, people in Mai Châu were more concerned with household economy instead of the collective economy as mandated by the socialist state. I designated this character as awkward rural economy – awkward because within socialist ideology such behavior seems out of place. Post socialist market serves as a springboard for rural people to convert the market as incentive for household economy. In the local level, tourism business was constructed within the realm of the household. These indicated, that, for four decades, socialist ideology have been meaningless in Mai Châu tourist market in transition. During market engagement, socialist values have not resisted market forces, meaning villagers' integration into the market has not been awkward. This is different to the findings of Sikor and Vi (2005), who focus on market formation in the northwest uplands of Vietnam, in a Black Tai village during the 1990s. Their findings are different because at this stage the socialist ideology (of communal land) was still in place to an extent; the market had not yet replaced the collective farms in their entirety, plus market formation was still quite awkward. The case of Mai Châu is also unlike some of the post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe, in which socialist practice was reinvented in marketing (Buyandelgeriyn 2008). In Mai Châu, market engagement has involved a combination of local culture and market forces.

Second, tourism in Mai Châu cannot be perceived as something that substituted agriculture based economy. Rather, it has reconfigured the relationship of people to their land. Through tourism, people accomplished White Tai culture of hospitality, transforming it into a rational businesses platform. Tourism is not really external culture penetrating into community, as many scholars found in other places. It comes from inside-out. The cultures are not objectified and separated from the original community for only tourist consumption.

Third, in engaging with tourism, instead of considering themselves as powerless people coping with global forces (Picard 2003), they try to and at times successfully turned it on its head. They draw from it and change it by integrating their

culture/habits into businesses. As Sikor and Vi (2005) have found, in the 2000s, Black Tai living in the same region negotiated with the market through a combination of local practices and market forces. So in Mai Châu tourism has come to be a part of villagers' life. And it is in the hand of villagers which is called "people community-based tourism". This is different from capital-intensive tourism (Picard 2003: 109, 113). And White Tai culture is recreated through the market construction in the context of marketization which Vietnam government and local authorities do not know how to deal with tourist market at local level. In addition, villagers appear to be proud of being part of a famous ethnic tourist village. I can safely say that they feel confident in doing business. And this obviously brings feeling of ethnic dignity in many of them.

Fourth, Mai Châu tourist market is constructed by cultural practices, entangled networks of actors and agents embedded in network of calculative actions (Fligstein and Dauter, 2007). However, market networks are the networks of power relation which convey a constructive power of local people. Besides, forming tourist market hospitality helps to form social ties. It is based on friendship, kinship and partnership which make market work and sustain in the long run. Similarly, the construction and management of market in Mai Châu is socially defined, resembling the web of social relationships. They have mixed their own interdependent strategies with various kinds of network, in line with Caldwell (2004), whose conception of a "strategic intimacy" is close to the notion of friendship, bringing a sense of stability which helps individuals survive a neo-liberal market economy during uncertain market transformations (Buyandelgeriyn 2008: 238). It can be understood that their market-led life is risky, so they have to apply strategic intimacy in order to cope with the risk.

Nonetheless, villagers generate private businesses in their own way. Thus tourism businesses there are not taken out of the realm of the households and even cultural values. Business style of these villages is quite private rather than collective. Albeit northern Vietnam was a socialist nation-state for nearly four decades, a collective or group management is not used for tourist business activities. They utilize their household's labors to manage their small homestays business. In this sense homestays cannot be expanded or modified beyond the traditions of the White Tais. It

is also difficult for them to enlarge their business, because they mainly depend on household's labor.

Besides this, relationships among villagers in the business-based tasks is more individualistic, when we view in term of economic rationality. However, the village life is a mix between social coherence in the form of friendship, partnership and economic rationality encourages economic liberalism and individual choice which are considered vital to goals of modernity promoted by Vietnam government since Đổi Mới. Even if there seems to be a contradiction between a communal society (considered as having a moral and cultural valuation) and an individualistic economic rationality (immoral aspects in terms of the socialist ideology) (Buyandelgeriyn 2008: 238), it is not contradictory at all. Such a mixture sustains communal peace, while helping them pursue their business in an open market. We can say, may be, people of Mai Châu cannot stand free market without communal and cultural value support.

I also argued that local peoples' encounter and development of tourist market have, so far, not changed the community's social structure. That is different from other tourist places where social relations are diminished (Dogan 1989: 220). The business competition is not severe, at least at the superficial level. Business seems to be not solely money-based or purely based on economic rational thinking. I may be bold in pointing out that local people are not rational, if they see a rational business action as a threat to their social coherence. Instead their businesses run well through mutual relationship among villagers (even with the Kinh entrepreneurs) and on habitus, morality of market. Social ties are still relevant; maintain the age-old horizontal relationships rather than the vertical. They do not like the idea of dependence on tourist agencies and be at the button vertical line of market. New trade relation is not only a matter of a concerned individual but a concern of the whole group, clan or association (Schoenherr 2005: 363). The newcomers are always a challenge to the old network, which is the vertical relation by expanding the horizontal ones. That is why business networks tend to be based on mutual recognition and alliance.

Finally, even though after engaging with tourist market, their world view has not been changed, tourism has not yet or has failed to change its old pattern of power relations among villagers and does not increase conflict of interest. Perhaps, because,

tourism is integrated into their cultures and habitus. By this I do not deny the fact that tourism is seen by White Tais as a mechanism to change the power relation vis-à-vis the dominant ethnic group in Vietnam. A point aptly highlighted by my discussion on White Tai ethnic identity later in the thesis. Simultaneously, I do not deny the underlying intra-village politics of power struggle. Though this politics, currently, seems to be suppressed by the prevailing traditional social and cultural mores.

But until my last field survey, it is quite obvious that tourist market formation interacts with cultural values and social ties as revealed by the ways they build business networks and develop tourism business. Villagers do not accept anyone who does business in very rational way without concern about the community. However, their culture, in the tourist market, is not seen as opposed to free market; rather it supports market liberation. One wonders, what was the reason for Vietnam government to conceptualize minority culture as obstacles to economic development? Tourist market, in Mai Châu, is constructed from the micro relationships where culture play a crucial role. But at the same time, culture is reproduced in the market realm. Both culture and market interplay and (re)construct each other (Slater and Tonkiss (2001). That is to say, for other tourist places, neighborliness, friendship, moral commitment, belief in merit-sin, and hospitality are one things and market is another. But in Mai Châu, the market is not an independent activities; it is integral to the development of White Tai cultures, habitus, and social ties in the contemporary. It is cultural economy, which is built from social practices (Slater 2002: 61). And this defines the identity of White Tai tourist market in Mai Châu.