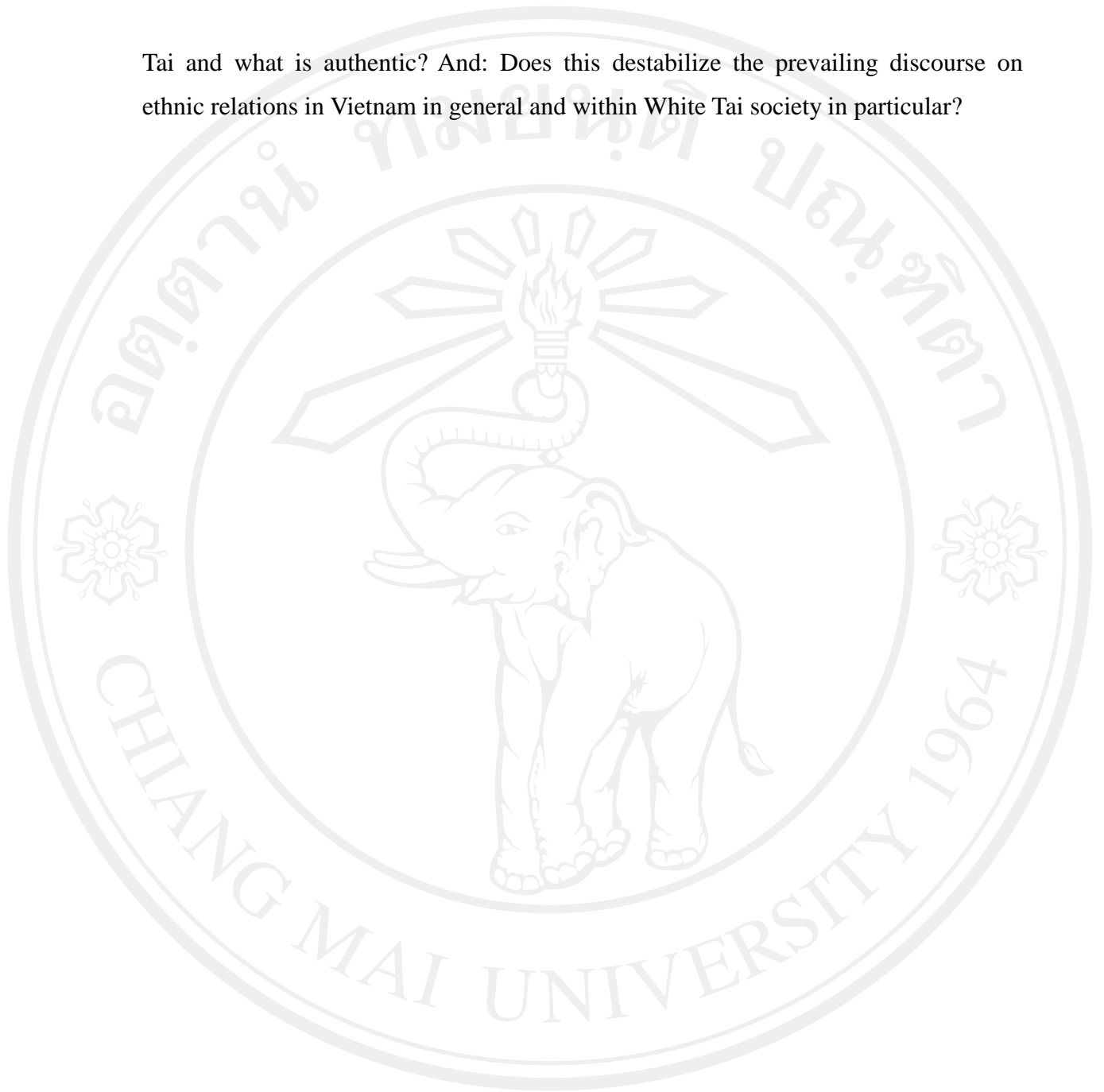


In contrast to Walker *et al.* (2001: 301), this study concludes with the assertion that local people can shape, define and manage the tourist market. Entrepreneurial ability leads those villagers who are local entrepreneurs or business persons to negotiate with the market, to an extent bypassing the state. Thus, the tourist market is relatively free from the control of the local and state governments, and as a result, the resulting dignity and feeling of being free from state control mechanisms has empowered them. This phenomenon is in contradiction to the normal representation of ethnic minority groups in highland areas, who are seen as being apart from the national economy and as being backward farmers. This supports what Fforda and Vylder (1996) have argued; that market reform in Vietnam is largely a bottom-up process. However, it is also evident that the global process itself is contradictory. On the one hand it is widely acknowledged as a threat to indigenous cultures, whilst on the other it can lead to the construction of local identity – as a part of the wider world (Friedman 1990) and as a recognized spot on the Vietnamese tourist map, certainly in the Mai Châu case. Thus, the negotiation of White Tai authenticity with global market forces has actually reinforced local culture and allowed local people to understand themselves and their position in relation to others in the world.

Finally, the authentic White Tai is not necessarily the “essential White Tai” in terms of the vernacular language or an ethnic/unique culture, as further elaborated upon in Chapter Four, or a cultural commodity to be sold in the marketplace. The White Tai have not frozen themselves in a primitive world, hence, we should see them as being part of the contemporary world. Explicitly, they have negotiated their “White Tai authenticity” as part of the process of constructing their identity within the tourist market space. Thus, the “authentic” White Tai in the realm of the cultural economy can be seen as entrepreneurs able to articulate their culture and market and as a result make a living in the contemporary world. If they were just simply primitive, they would be nobody in the modern world, so the fact that they have a presence is because they are entrepreneurs. The villagers do not cage themselves in, in terms of being “authentic White Tai”, sitting behind a locked door and taking a primitive perspective. In the next chapter, I will make an attempt to analyze the ethnicity and self-identification strategies used by the White Tai, asking the questions: What is White

Tai and what is authentic? And: Does this destabilize the prevailing discourse on ethnic relations in Vietnam in general and within White Tai society in particular?



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