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In summary, to deal with fixed representations of authentic White Tai as being primitive, exotic and hospitable perceived in terms of "thing", the White Tai opt to situate their ethnicity and identities through different kinds of relationship in various ways. They are reproducing and situating their ethnicity as strategic essentialism in their relations to the Kinh and the tourists. In the context of their relationship with the more powerful Kinh, they are negotiating their identity in terms of their culture of hospitality and morality. Encountering with the foreign tourists, they are also defining themselves as more moral than the Kinh tour guide who tries to cheat the tourists. In everyday life trading, they are presenting themselves as honest merchants.

However, the White Tai identities are also situated apart from tourist market space which tends to focus mainly on strategic essentialism. To negotiate with their representation of inferiority and backwardness constructed by the state, the White Tai define their identity as modern as the Kinh by emphasizing that they are educated

people in the context of modern world. And in the political space, they can also become the capable official and administrator in their own localities.

#### 4.4. Conclusion

It is clear that the representation of the White Tai by the state, the majority Kinh people and tour agencies, essentializes certain attributes which are considered “authentic” White Tai. These representations are primarily about their primitiveness, backwardness and exotic “other”, based on a dominant-subordinate relationship. Therefore, these representations, formed within the realm of the “state”, place the White Tai at the margins, as “no bodies”, whereas in the tourist market space, they are entrepreneurs to the rest of the world. Negotiating these representations, which they claim as authentic Tai, the White Tai have situated and identified their own identity in a variety of ways. First, they have constructed cultural and ethnic boundaries, to distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups. Though they perceive themselves as Vietnamese citizens, they have also constructed an identity as “civilized people” (by re-inventing their written language, attending international conferences and publishing books), not only at the local but also the international level.

Second, within the market space, the White Tai villagers have used essentialism as a strategy to situate their ethnicities and identities in relation to the Kinh and the tourists. In the tourist market space, the homestay hosts have reconstructed their identity as “moral entrepreneurs”, while the souvenir shop owners have reconstructed themselves as “honest people”, and the *anh lam* vendors as “polite sellers”. In other words, they are moral but in various aspects and in different situations. To apply strategic essentialism effectively in the hospitality space, they form their short term business transactions in order to turn them into long term ones. This means that their authenticity, at the representation level, which at first glance seems to be about “things” (or services), for the White Tai is about “relations”, which can be constructed in varying situations and within different relations. Outside the market space, they have constructed an identity as moral (i.e. honest, modest and hospitable), modern and educated people, plus as capable officials.



These identities have been constructed in order for them to be “somebody” in Vietnamese society and the world. As Vietnamese citizens, they take-up a position equal to the Kinh - as contributors to building the national economy (at the local level), and as White Tai people, they are proud and have ethnic dignity, which they claim gives them the right to rule and manage their land. Theoretically, more or less, and unwittingly or not, this new identity as people who are equal to the Kinh, has been used to bridge the “ethnic gap” between them and decrease the violence of ethnic exclusion at the micro level, plus lessen the ethnic tensions of which the Vietnamese state has never been concerned.

Finally, the practices of the White Tai reveal that the “authentic” White Tai is neither a representation fixed in the realm of essentialism, nor a “thing” (or service) for sale. Authentic White Tainess is fluid and situated in the relations between the hosts, the tourists and the Kinh. These are; therefore, the constructed authenticities of a contemporary White Tai, those situated and varied depending on the identities they wish to use. Thus, when they are engaged in hospitality, the White Tai tend to construct an “authentic hospitality” in term of “relations” instead of “things”. So, the authenticity the tourists and the Kinh consume in this case is the “relations”, not the “things”. The construction of authentic relations is thus used to redefine relationships in order to become somebody in Vietnamese society and the world. For these reasons, the authenticity created is not fixed in terms of both meaning and form, and because it is constructed based on various kinds of (long term) relationships, no one can dominate its meanings and forms.