

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

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

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

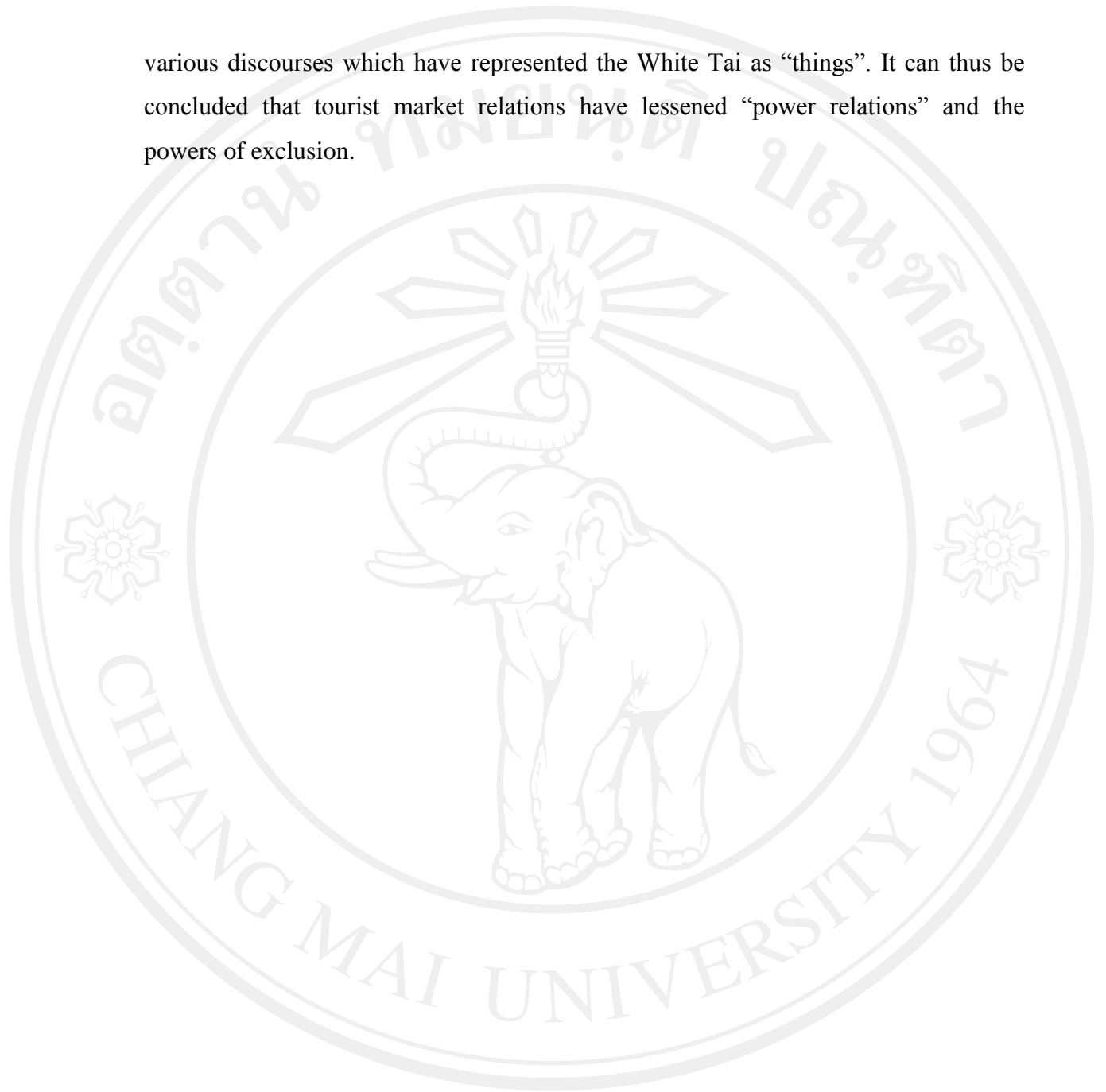
I agree that globalization or the integration of Mai Châu into global market have transformed the cultural economy of this tiny place. But my insistence that local

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

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

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

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



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