Living in a Tourism Village: Strategies, Negotiations and Transformations among Upland Tai in Northern Vietnam

Submitted by
Malita Allan
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School of Social Sciences
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
La Trobe University
Bundoora, Victoria 3086
Australia

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Note on language and foreign exchange conversion

Both Tai and Vietnamese are tonal languages. In the thesis, I do not represent tones, rather Tai and Vietnamese terms are italicised. I apologise to linguistic purists for this choice. Both in the text and in the bibliography, Vietnamese authors are listed with a lineage name, followed by a middle name and then first name. All other authors in the text are noted by a family name except in the initial instance they appear, for which a first name is also given. I do not italicise place names in Vietnam, instead they are denoted in plain text and begin with a capital letter.

The people in this study are kept anonymous. While the region in which the ethnographic research was conducted is identified, I use pseudonyms for the two villages that are the focus of the study, as well as for the key informants and villagers. Other villagers are not named.

At the time of field research one Australian dollar was equivalent to ten thousand Vietnamese *dong* (AU$1 = 10,000 VND).

Glossary

an nha (an na)/pha nha (pha na* or *phanya) (Tai) noble of the highest rank, ruler of an important *muang*

anh/chi (Vietnamese) brother/sister

annamites (French) the Kinh or Viet, ethnic Vietnamese

ban van hoa du lich (Vietnamese) cultural tourism village

ban (Tai) village

banh my truong (Vietnamese) fried egg in a baguette

bien che (Vietnamese) socialist system of permanent employment with the Government

ca ne (Vietnamese) disposed to please others and find it hard to say no

ca ve (Vietnamese) prostitute

Cach mang dan chu/Cai cach dan chu (Vietnamese) Democratic Revolution

can bo van hoa (Vietnamese) local cultural cadres

chao ban (Tai) leader of the village

chao muang/chao din/phia muang (Tai) hereditary ruler of a *muang* chosen from the *tao* noble class or rank, or lord, chief

chau (Vietnamese) niece, nephew

chieng (Tai) the capital of a *muang*

Chu nghia Mac-Le Nin va Tu Tuong Ho Chi Minh (Vietnamese) Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought

chu/co (Vietnamese) uncle/aunty

chue dip (Tai) memorising

chuyen doi cay trong vat nuoi (Vietnamese) 'change plants, animal husbandry' government program

co quan chuc nang/quan li (Vietnamese) authority office

com lam (Vietnamese) sticky rice cooked in bamboo

Com Moi (Vietnamese) 'New Rice', festival to celebrate rice harvest, translation of Tai *Khau Mo*

com nep (Vietnamese) sticky rice

con huon/kon huon (Tai) 'people of the house' or domestic servants

con nguoi moi xa hoi chu nghia (Vietnamese) 'new socialist person'

Cong ty du lich Viet Nam (Vietnamese) Vietnam Tourism Corporation

Cu Chinh Lan (Vietnamese) A famous soldier who sacrificed everything, including his life, for the victory of a battle against the French in 1951

dan toc thieu so (Vietnamese) ethnic minority, national minority

dan toc Viet Nam (Vietnamese) Vietnamese nation/national

de dat (Vietnamese) reserved

de ra khong co nguoi day (Vietnamese) 'give birth but do not teach the child' saying

dinh (Vietnamese) communal house in a village containing a shrine of a tutelary deity

doi moi (Vietnamese) renovation or open door policy of the Vietnam government in 1986

doi song moi (Vietnamese) 'new way of life'

dong (Vietnamese) currency used in Vietnam

em (Vietnamese) younger sister, younger brother

Haute Région (French) northern mountainous region

het hieu (Tai) funerary rites

hieu (Vietnamese) filial piety

hong khoan (Tai) personal spirit ceremonies

hoong (Tai) sections and rooms in a house

huon (Tai) household, family

huyen (Vietnamese) district

khai hoang (Vietnamese) wilderness

khap (Tai) a type of Tai music, song, singing

khen (Vietnamese) pan-pipe musical instrument

kho hoong (Tai) room in a house containing the altar

khoan ho (Vietnamese) household contracts

khoy (Tai) 'slave' or domestic servant

ki tinh (Vietnamese) particular, very careful

kuong nok (kuong/cuong) (Tai) slaves of Tai origin

lac hau (Vietnamese) backward

lang (Muong) noble class or rank

le lang (Vietnamese) village law

loong (Tai) wooden rice husking implement

man (Vietnamese) barbarians

manh me (Vietnamese) strong, deep, confident, powerful

me tin (Vietnamese) superstitious

mi khon (Tai) soul

mien nui (Vietnamese) mountains, uplands, highlands

mo (Tai) priest, spirit medium, shaman, medicine man, herbalist, astrologer

moi (Vietnamese) savages

Moi anh den tham ban em (Vietnamese) 'Welcome to my village'

montagnards (French) highlanders, hill tribes, upland minorities

mot, hai, ba (Vietnamese) one, two, three

Mua Ban oi cung xoe vui (Vietnamese) 'Everybody let's dance and be happy' dance

mua giup (Vietnamese) help me, buy from me

mua sap (Vietnamese) bamboo dance

muang (muong) (Tai) principality or princely petty state

muong phai lai lin (Tai) digging canals, strengthening banks, guiding water and fixing water gutters

na (Tai) rice field

Ngay giai phong (Vietnamese) Liberation Day, Reunification Day, 30 April

Ngay Quoc te Lao dong (Vietnamese) Labour Day, International Workers Day, 1 May

nghe van hoa (Vietnamese) cultural performance

nha khach (Vietnamese) guesthouse

Nha Tu Cu Cua Phap (Vietnamese) Old French Prison

Nha Van Hoa (Vietnamese) Cultural House, Cultural Centre

Nhu co Bac Ho trong ngay vui dai thang (Vietnamese) 'Remembering Uncle Ho on the happy Victory Day' song

nomenklatura (Russian) a select list or class of people drawn up by the Communist Party from which appointees for top-level government positions are drawn

ong/ba (Vietnamese) grandfather/grandmother

pay (phrai/phray) (Tai) commoners in relation to nobles, or freemen in relation to slaves

phi (Tai) spirit

phong kien (Vietnamese) feudal

phrai/phray luang (Tai) trained commoner, *phray* of the king

phrai/phray som (Tai) 'fresh recruit', eighteen year old commoner undergoing two years of training in his future duties

piastre (French) silver coin, a former monetary unit of South Vietnam divided into 100 cents and replaced by the *dong* in 1976

quai qhi (Vietnamese) treacherous

Quoc khanh (Vietnamese) National Day, 2 September

quoc ngu (Vietnamese) national language, Vietnamese

rau muon (Vietnamese) green leafy vegetable

Revue de Tourism Indochinois (French) Indochina Tourism Review

ruou can (Vietnamese) sweet rice wine in an urn drunk from long bamboo straws

ruou (Vietnamese) rice wine

sao (Vietnamese) one tenth of a *mau* or 360 square metres

sen chau nam (Tai) water gods ceremony

sen muang/sen ban (Tai) *muang*/village spirit ceremonies

Song Da (Vietnamese) Black River

Song/Su/Chieng/Cha (Tai) first/second/third/fourth notable

Sun Na To (Tai) main spirit house in Chieng Chau

Sun Thong Nam (Tai) main spirit house in Chieng Sai

Syndicat d'Initiative de Chapa (French) Chapa Syndicate Initiative, tourist bureau

tao (Tai) noble class or rank

tat (that) (Tai) hereditary slaves of Tai origin

tay (Vietnamese) west, western, occidental, French, foreigner

Tay Bac (Vietnamese) the northwest

Tay Dam (Tai) Black Tai

Tay Deng (Tai) Red Tai

Tay Don (Tai) White Tai

Tay (Tai) person

Tet duong lich (Vietnamese) New Year's Day, 1 January

Tet Trung thu (Vietnamese) Mid-Autumn Festival/Moon Festival, fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month

Tet (Vietnamese) New Year

Thái (Vietnamese) Tai

Thanh nien xung phong (Vietnamese) youth volunteer group

Then Luang (Luong) (Tai) the Supreme Being or Great Deity

tho cam (Vietnamese) traditional weaving

thuong hieu (Vietnamese) trademark

Thuong Xa Tax (Vietnamese) Tax Trade Centre, in Saigon

Tong cuc Du lich Viet Nam (Vietnamese) Vietnam National Administration of Tourism (VNAT)

Uy Ban Nhan Dan Mai Chau (Vietnamese) Mai Chau People's Committee

Viet kieu (Vietnamese) overseas Vietnamese

xa hoi moi xa hoi chu nghia (Vietnamese) 'new socialist society'

xa (Vietnamese) commune

xe om (Vietnamese) motorbike taxi

xin chao (Vietnamese) hello

xoe (Tai) a type of Tai dance, dancing

xuet (Vietnamese) plot of land

xuoi (Tai) lowlander

Thesis summary

This dissertation provides an ethnographic account of life in two neighbouring ethnic Tai tourism villages in the uplands of northern Vietnam. It examines the desires, motivations and strategies of the villagers and shows that tourism in these villages is a process that is market-driven and state-mediated but also significantly influenced by local place and actors.

The villagers have long been settled in the valley among the surrounding mountains, residing in stilt houses and cultivating rice. Such images of the villagers' lives predominate the tourist literature and commonly shape the gaze of the tourists. Yet the villagers also have a history of engaging and negotiating with translocal and cross-border relatives and traders, neighbours of other ethnicities, French colonisers, Vietnamese state institutions and 'official guests'. Between the 1950s and 1990s the villagers endured and negotiated their way through hunger, poverty and cultural change as a result of two wars and the Vietnam government's attempts to create a unified, multiethnic, socialist country. Since the government's policy of *doi moi* (renovation) in 1986 which is ensuring a more decentralised economy increasingly driven by the global market, and since the designation of the villages as 'cultural tourism villages' in the 1990s, the villagers continue to deal with the reality of their daily existence while simultaneously altering their homes and lives in order to accommodate the tourists' needs and desires.

A common perspective in the literature is that ethnic minorities are victims of both the state and the globalising force of tourism. In a broad sense, this study is an account of the transformations driven by the tourist industry and the state; however, the thesis is that the villagers are not victims but are actively engaged in the tourism process, and that transformations are also driven by internal, local factors.

Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis.

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

All research procedures reported in this thesis were approved by the University Human Ethics Committee, Approval Number 459.

Signature:

Date: 20/12/2010

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Throughout my candidature I have had a number of supervisors whom I would like to thank for their time, encouragement and guidance. I thank Alberto Gomes for introducing me to the topic of the anthropology of ethnic minorities/indigenous people of Southeast Asia, for stimulating me to form my own ideas and for his administrative support. Albert also introduced me to the Institute of Anthropology at the Academy of Social Sciences in Hanoi, which became my host institution for this project. I thank Joel Kahn for providing constant ‘food for thought’ through his constructive feedback and suggested readings, particularly when I was fortunate to have him visit me in the villages during my fieldwork. I am grateful for his facilitation in funding part of my study, under an ARC Discovery - Projects (2003-2007) grant entitled *Asia-Pacific Cosmopolitanisms: Managing Diversity and Identity Politics in a Changing Region*. I thank Philip Taylor, a specialist on ethnic minorities in Vietnam at the Australian National University, for his

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Late in the afternoon, a middle-aged Tai woman is serving bottles of cold water and soft drink to a group of recently-arrived tourists and their guide in the village of Tap, high in the mountainous region of north-western Vietnam. The members of the group, who are talking among themselves about their day of trekking, are sitting around a small plastic table underneath her stilt house in which they will be staying overnight. They are being watched by an elderly man across the path, sitting on a chair underneath his stilt house, where he has handicrafts and textiles on display for the visitors to buy. He makes an occasional comment to two of his grandchildren who are playing around him and to the many villagers who pass by carrying freshly-husked rice, or newly-threshed rice still to be husked, from the nearby rice fields to their houses. Later in the evening, some of these villagers will sing and dance in a cultural performance for the tourists.

Tourism is a part of the daily lives of the villagers of Tap. Several families have registered their houses as guesthouses (*nha khach*), others run handicraft stalls and many individuals, mainly girls and women, produce textiles and participate in cultural performances (*nghe van hoa*) for tourists. Yet the scene above also illustrates that their everyday lives are not wholly consumed by tourism. Living in a tourism village does not mean that villagers are involved only in tourism-related activities; other elements of their lives, such as rice cultivation, are just as important. They juggle their combined responsibilities of hosting tourists and being family members, villagers and citizens of Vietnam.

This dissertation is an ethnography of the Tai living in tourism villages in the uplands of northern Vietnam, with special attention to the historical context in which tourism developed. While much of the tourism literature on host societies focuses only on tourism, this study shows that tourism is just one among many economic, social and cultural activities. This study provides a fuller picture of tourism in the villages of Tap and Noi and thus a more thorough understanding of the villagers' lives.

The villagers have strategies for participating in various tourism-related activities, which are mainly to improve their livelihoods, to consolidate their community and to secure recognition of their identity as a people. They also like having tourists visit their village

because of the enjoyment it brings, the feeling of pride it creates, the opportunity to be creative and their curiosity about others. On the other hand, the villagers are aware that tourism brings noise through the night, an increased demand on resources, unsavoury tourists and jealousy of successful villagers. As a result, the majority of people living in the villages have a vested yet ambivalent interest in tourism.

The villagers' involvement in the tourism process is not passive, then. In addition to consulting among themselves, they have a strong sense of agency, demonstrated in their negotiations with the state and its representatives, external agents such as the tourist industry and its representatives and, to a lesser extent, the tourists. The villagers and surrounding Tai communities have a history of interactions with others since settling in the Mai Chau valley; they have not been isolated from the outside world. Today they have a strong localised and ethnic identity as Tai in Mai Chau, as well as national Vietnamese and transnational, pan-Tai identities. They cannot be considered as a remote ethnic or tribal group passively 'impacted' upon by tourism or the state.

The historical context contributes to the objective of providing a fuller picture of tourism in the lives of the villagers and thus a more thorough understanding of what it is like to live in a tourism village. Villagers' accounts of their history in Vietnam show that despite the upheaval of two wars and the turbulent times of the communist era, villagers have welcomed tourists since the 1960s. Yet it is since the 1990s, when the villages were designated as Cultural Tourism Villages (*ban van hoa du lich*) by the Vietnam government, that tourism has increasingly penetrated the physical and social structures of the villages, and villagers have been able to engage and participate in it, particularly, but not only, from an economic perspective. This is occurring in the context of a country that, since the policy of *doi moi* (renovation) in 1986, has opened its doors to tourists from non-socialist countries. Vietnam has also been transitioning from attempts at a state-controlled national economy involving agricultural cooperatives to an economy more decentralised and increasingly driven by the global market.

This is an ethnographic study that describes and explains the multifaceted lives of the villagers in detail, using anthropological theory to analyse the research findings. This chapter provides a general overview of the study and some contextual information. The

following sections introduce the main bodies of literature used for this research, but this literature is also discussed in more detail, where relevant, in other chapters.

The Tai: an introduction

Tai is a linguistic term used in academic literature to denote the various peoples who speak Tai languages. They are widely spread over the Southeast Asian peninsula and its periphery, including Vietnam, China, Laos, Thailand, Burma and India (Lebar *et al* 1964; Keyes 1977, 1995; Wyatt 1984; Condominas 1990; Tanabe 1991; Dodd 1996 [1923]). They have different names, including: Thai (or Siamese) of Thailand, the majority and most visible representatives; Lao, most of whom live in north-eastern Thailand, fewer in Laos; Shan in north-eastern Burma; Lue and Daikong in the uplands of Yunnan province in China; Chuang in the Chinese provinces of Kwangsi and Kweichow, including the Nung of northern Vietnam; smaller, more isolated groups in north-eastern India and the Chinese island of Hainan; and various upland Tai groups such as Black, White and Red Tai in Laos and northern Vietnam (Wyatt 1984: 2). While there are certainly linguistic and cultural similarities that justify the shared label of Tai, Andrew Walker (2009: 1-3) states that it must be treated with caution; assumptions should not be made about a common identity or a sense of shared history. The same can be argued about the Tai in Vietnam.

Tai people migrated from southern China and established villages in the Mai Chau valley of the north-western uplands of Vietnam in the fourteenth century and today they still make up the majority of the population in the villages. In the Vietnamese language, they are referred to as *Thái*, the term which the villagers themselves use when they speak Veitnamese. However, I refer to the villagers as Tai in order to avoid confusion with the more common meaning of Thai as referring to the people of Thailand. Furthermore, as shown in this thesis, the villagers identify with other Tai people from other countries. It is for these reasons that where villagers use the term *Thái*, I have replaced it with Tai in all citations here.[2]

[2] The exception to the use of Tai is where the spelling *Thái* is used in quotations from published and unpublished texts.

As can be seen in Table 1 below, according to the 1999 Census published by the General Statistics Office (2001), the Tai in Vietnam comprise a minority of about 1.3 million people in a nation of around 76 million inhabitants,[3] forming 1.7 per cent of the total population of the country. Of the 54 ethnic groups classified in Vietnam, the Tai are the third largest group, after the Kinh and Tay, where the Kinh make up 86 per cent of the total population.[4] Table 1 also shows that the Tai are part of the 'Tay-*Thái* group' of the Austroasiatic language family and that other ethnic groups in this (Tai-speaking) group in Vietnam include the Tay, Nung, San Chay, Giay, Lao, Lu and Bo Y (Dang Nghiem Van *et al* 2000: 2).

While members of different ethnic groups are jumbled up territorially and boundary-drawing can be a problem, Map 1 below, shows the broad areas of distribution of the ethnic groups in Vietnam cited in this dissertation. The map shows that the ethnic groups of the 'Tay-*Thái* group' or Tai-speaking group are mainly found in the north of Vietnam, near the borders of Laos and China. The Tai form the predominant population in the north-western uplands. They reside in the upland provinces of Lai Chau, Son La, Yen Bai and Hoa Binh. There are considerably fewer living in the central provinces of Thanh Hoa and Nghe An, and the Central Highlands (Dang Nghiem Van 1972: 143-144; Le Si Giao 1999: 22-23; Trinh Quoc Su 2000: 8). Hoa Binh province comprises ten districts, one of which is Mai Chau where the villages in this study are located. While the majority of Hoa Binh province is inhabited by the Muong population,[5] the Tai make up 60 per cent of the population in Mai Chau district. Other ethnicities residing in the district include the Kinh, Muong, Hmong, Dao, Tay and Hoa.

[3] More recent figures indicate that the total population of Vietnam is over 80 million (The Community Party of Vietnam 2004).
[4] The Kinh are also known as the Viet (ethnic Vietnamese) or *annamites* in French. I use the terms Kinh and Viet interchangeably throughout the thesis.
[5] In 1999 there were 479,197 Muong, comprising 63 per cent of the total population of Hoa Binh province (General Statistics Office 2001: 21-129).

Table 1: Demographics and Ethno-Linguistic Affiliation of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam cited in this Dissertation (Sources: Dang Nghiem Van et al 2000 and General Statistics Office 2001)

Name used in this Dissertation (Vietnamese Ethnonym)	Population 1999 Census (Total Population 76,323,173)	% of Country	Ethno-Linguistic Affiliation (Language Family)
Kinh/Viet	65,795,718	86	Viet-Muong group (Austroasiatic)
Tay	1,477,514	1.9	Tay-*Thái* group (Austroasiatic)
Tai White, Black, Red (*Thái*)	1,328,725	1.7	Tay-*Thái* group (Austroasiatic)
Muong	1,137,515	1.5	Viet-Muong group (Austroasiatic)
Khmer (Kho me)	1,055,174	1.4	Mon-Khmer group (Austroasiatic)
Hoa	862,371	1.1	Han group (Sino-Tibetan)
Nung	856,412	1.1	Tay-*Thái* group (Austroasiatic)
Hmong	787,604	1.0	Hmong-Dao group (Austroasiatic)
Dao	620,538	0.8	Hmong-Dao group (Austroasiatic)
San Chay	147,315	0.2	Tay-*Thái* group (Austroasiatic)
Cham	132,873	0.2	Malayo-Polynesian group (Austronesian)
Khmu (Kho Mu)	56,542	0.0007	Mon-Khmer group (Austroasiatic)
Giay	49,098	0.0006	Tay-*Thái* group (Austroasiatic)
Lao	11,611	0.0002	Tay-*Thái* group (Austroasiatic)
Lu	4,964	0.00007	Tay-*Thái* group (Austroasiatic)
Bo Y	1,864	0.00002	Tay-*Thái* group (Austroasiatic)

Map 1: Broad Areas of Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Vietnam cited in this Dissertation (Source: Dang Nghiem Van et al 2000: 264)

The majority of Tai in Vietnam live in villages in fertile valleys, river basins and beside streams, and specialise in wet-rice cultivation using irrigation networks, the work of which is summarised in the Tai saying, *muong phai lai lin* (digging canals, strengthening banks, guiding water and fixing water gutters) (Cam Trong 1999: 12; Trinh Quoc Su

2000: 10: Social Sciences 2004: 123).[6] They speak Tai and have a Tai writing system. There are many texts written in Tai script detailing different aspects of their lives, such as customary laws, legends, popular tales and proverbs (Dang Nghiem Van *et al* 2000: 126; Social Sciences 2004: 125).

The religious beliefs of the Tai in Vietnam are generally based on the existence of two worlds: the world of living creatures, and the world of supranatural beings, divinities and spirits (*phi*). As animists, they believe that beings and objects have a soul (*mi khon*) all of which are governed by the Supreme Being or Great Deity (*Then Luang*)[7] who dominates a whole hierarchy of *phi* (Trinh Quoc Su 2000: 16). They also practice ancestor worship, the ritual expression of filial piety (*hieu*).

The first 'International Conference of Thai Studies' was held in India in 1981 to bring together scholars specifically engaged in both Thai and Tai studies (Hoang Luong 1999: 14). Since then, the conference has been held every three years in different countries. The conference contents have centred on Thailand, with a lesser but growing focus on regional relationships and 'Research on the Thai outside Thailand' (Nantachukra 1999). Shaped by the nationalist movement within the Thai academic community, there has been an increase in the number of researchers from Thailand conducting research on the Tai in Southeast Asia and China, including Vietnam, driven not only by a nostalgic desire to find those who have retained the 'original Tai' way of life, but also a debate about Tai-ness, in which discourse about the Tai is used to raise questions about the 'essential' characteristics of the Thai in Thailand (see Sumitr 1980; Wijeyewardene 1990; Keyes 1995; Nonthacharkara 1998; Tapp 2000).

Nicholas Tapp (2000: 352) states that combining Thai studies, Tai studies and the studies of other ethnic minorities within Thailand's borders in the international conferences means that scholars are beginning to recognise and acknowledge the interrelated and overlapping local histories that connect the Tai with other minorities and the Thai state, and show a trend towards a more thorough socio-historical interrogation of the Tai people

[6] The Tai throughout the region are known for their irrigation system and their adoption and spread of wet rice agriculture as they migrated, battled and settled in lower-lying fertile valleys of the mountains and the lowlands which could easily be developed into rice fields (Leach 1954: 30; Keyes 1977: 136-141; Wyatt 1984: 8; Condominas 1990: 37, 55; Santasombat 2001: 10).

[7] Once again I follow international scholarship and use the Tai term *Luang* instead of the Vietnamese term *Luong*.

in general. He believes that Tai people, like the Hmong, exist in different areas and states and therefore need to be understood as interrelated and possessing common linguistic and historical roots, yet unique in their respective socio-political situations. This is reflected in more recent in-depth studies on certain groups of Tai people, particularly in China (see for example, Santasombat 2001; Davis 2005).

Scholarship in Vietnam on the Tai has a similar focus to that in Thailand, driven by the aim of researching 'the essence of Thai [*Thái*] culture in Vietnam and in the world' (Cam Trong 1999: 6). Scholars have produced detailed and valuable studies in various compilations (*Vietnamese Studies* 1999; *Vietnamese Studies* 2000; Cam Trong 2002) on the Tai in Vietnam from various aspects such as language and script; history; ethnography; literature and arts; medicine and architecture; and relationships between Tai studies in Vietnam and those in other countries. The compilations are strongly framed by the Vietnam nationalist political project and focused on the Tai as an 'ethnic minority' (*dan toc tieu so*) in Vietnam, rather than on the idea of a pan-Tai identity, which is seen by the Vietnam government as threatening to the nation-state project.

Ethnic minorities in Vietnam

According to a recent article by anthropologist Philip Taylor, who conducted a thorough review of the literature on 'minority ethnicity' in Vietnam, the prevailing image of ethnic minorities is 'carceral' in that they are subjugated, disciplined and circumscribed (2008: 5). They are commonly depicted as once isolated and autonomous, ecologically self-contained societies guided by local knowledge and traditions, that have undergone destruction or unprecedented change as a result of the impingements of outsiders in more recent times, including the US military, the communist state and the market (see for example, Condominas 1977; Hickey 1982, 1993; Jamieson *et al* 1998; Rambo and Jamieson 2003). They are assumed to be 'inescapably part of the national project' and are 'overwhelmingly represented through external frames of reference'; they are subject to a systematic official project of ethnic classification and counting; their ways of life are depicted in development reports as 'poor', 'backward' and 'deficient' in relation to the ethnic majority; their traditional cultures exist largely only in staged performances that satisfy stereotypes about minorities held by lowlanders, the state or tourists; and when they protest, their voices are considered unrepresentative (Taylor 2008: 4-5).

In particular, Taylor (2008: 6) argues that the lens through which minority ethnicities in Vietnam are viewed greatly magnifies the power, the coherence and the voice of the state. He states that many studies focus on state policies that are often said to have had dramatic transformative effects on minority peoples' traditional ways of life, despite the lack of sustained empirical work among ethnic minority populations to explore the consequences of these policies (Taylor 2008: 5). This depiction that assumes repression of minorities is common in other socialist states, such as in China, where Sara Davis (cited in Hillman 2003: 187) asks if we can 'ever see the Tai [an ethnic minority in southern Yunnan] in the diverse ways that they see themselves, or are we doomed to see them through a prism coloured by Chinese national ideology?'.

With little or no agency thus acknowledged, the ethnic minorities are portrayed as victims of the state and the market. It assumes total, uni-directional power and influence of the state and the market, and ignores the dynamics of the relations between ethnic minorities and representatives of the state and market. However, more recently, scholars are starting to focus on the complexities of the relationships between ethnic minorities and the state in Vietnam. For example, Thomas Sikor (2001) explains how the Black Tai share a degree of co-authorship of the changes that are reshaping their communities. He shows that local dynamics entail a complex intersection of state and non-state agency, traditional and non-traditional concerns, and local and extra-local factors. Also, Tran Thi Thu Trang (2004) shows that Muong display forms of local agency that are neither necessarily opposed to state power nor representative of a unified Muong condition. In addition, Taylor (2007) argues that the Vietnamese-Cambodian transborder identity of the Cham is not necessarily threatening to the nation-state project, nor is it unique.

Depiction of ethnic minorities as victims of the state and the market is common throughout Southeast Asia and China. Much of the literature on economic development policy towards the highlands and ethnic minorities, and the anthropology of tourism and ethnic tourism in Southeast Asia and China, involve 'impact' studies which assume that power and influence are wielded only by the state and the market.

The impacts of economic development policy and tourism

There is a large and influential body of scholarly literature that looks at the impacts of economic development policies on the highlands and ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia, treating a wide range of topics such as agriculture, forests, drugs, migration, health, religion and, to a lesser extent, tourism (for example, Barnes *et al* 1995; McCaskill and Kampe 1997; Sponsel 2000; Leepreecha *et al* 2008). The many contributors to these edited volumes raise important concerns about the economic rationale of governments as well as the high levels of poverty among certain groups, uneven access to resources and unequal status in the countries they reside, including Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Burma, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. Yet, like the studies on ethnic minorities in Vietnam, these studies portray hill tribe and indigenous communities throughout Southeast Asia as autonomous, ecologically self-contained societies that are being undermined and endangered by the modern forces of state incorporation, market penetration, globalisation and population mobility. Analyses of them are framed by problematic minority/majority and upland/lowland dichotomies within the countries in which they are found, where highlander identity is defined as being innately different from the ethnic majority and where there are differences between upland and lowland cultures (Tan and Walker 2008; Taylor 2008).

Before I go on, I acknowledge the huge cultural diversity in the Southeast Asian region and that while there are some highlanders, ethnic minorities or hill tribes such as the Tai and Karen who have always had relations with many other ethnic groups, there are other groups, particularly those who practice upland swiddening such as the Hmong, Dao (Yao) and Lisu, who have had very little relations with others in the past. There are therefore radical divergences, in addition to commonalities and resonances, between different upland and lowland people. I do not wish to lump the culturally diverse upland ethnic groups into one. Rather, I am emphasising that we should no longer indulge in oversimplified state-society oppositions between minorities and the state and also that we should pay much more attention to inter-ethnic relations.

Furthermore, I recognise that nation-states throughout the region play an important role in constructing a marginal, 'ethnic minority' identity (Tapp 1990; Tsing 1993; Li 1999; Duncan 2004; Gomes 2007) and that there are people in the uplands of Southeast Asia

that have avoided the state at various historical periods (Scott 2009). Also, different highlanders are unjustly 'excluded' from policy and development programs (Rigg 2003: 139-192). Nevertheless, when scholars refer to the agency of highlanders in Southeast Asia, they limit the highlanders' responses to change to one of two options. As historian Richard White (1991 cited in Tan and Walker 2008: 142) explains, most stories about the uplands generally fit the analogy of the sea battering a rock, where the sea represents the state (or the market) and the rock symbolises the people or tradition. In this analogy, there can only be two consequences: erosion or resistance. This perspective construes lowland culture or central state institutions as 'diffusing' into the hills based on an assimilation/resistance dichotomy (Tan and Walker 2008) and suggests the simplistic notion of an ethnic minority and its traditions being engulfed, to use another analogy, by the machinery of the state. This antagonistic approach reduces complex social realities to overdrawn contrasts between hegemony and resistance (Ortner 1995; Jonsson 2004). It finds 'agency among minorities only in acts that maintain their distinction from the mainstream, or their rejection of the system' (Taylor 2008: 13).

In their comparative study on the uplands of Vietnam and Thailand, Stan Tan and Andrew Walker call for a rethinking of ethnic relations 'beyond the hills and the plains'. They argue that, 'power relations are played out through specific interactions and that human creativity and ingenuity means that there are many surprises in store when we approach these interactions without the conceptual shackles of overused binary frameworks' (Tan and Walker 2008: 148). Following such advice, we may be able to see the different ways in which people respond to change and a range of perspectives, voices and actions, rather than assume that people and cultures are unable to cope with interactions, maintain continuity or undergo change (Taylor 2008: 9). In a recent edited volume by Walker (2009: 1), case studies in Thailand, Laos, Burma and China explore the active creation of what he refers to as 'modern community' in contexts of economic and political transformation – communities that are not undermined by modernity.

Among the studies of the impact of economic development policy on the highlands and ethnic minorities in Southeast Asia, the few studies on tourism development policies add to the knowledge of tourism in the region, however the overall contribution of this body of literature remains weak and undeveloped. As a result of assuming the total power and influence of the state, market, majority and lowlands, tourism is seen as a predominantly

negative force ‘impacting’ on the environment in the highlands and on economic, social and cultural aspects of the lives and identities of ethnic minorities, hill tribes and indigenous people (Leepreecha 1997; Bartsch 2000). Anthropologist Victor T. King (2009: 50) stresses that tourism is a differentiated subject and a ‘complex, dynamic, unbounded and variegated phenomenon’, which single theory frameworks or universal generalisations cannot adequately explain. He argues:

> There are different kinds of tourism and tourists with different priorities and shifting perceptions of tourist sites, just as the character of destinations and host cultures also varies in terms of the power relationship between the different actors contesting a tourist space... (King 2009: 51).

Yet, in addition to examining different types of tourism and tourists, the (negative) effects of tourism on destinations and host cultures is a typical theme in the literature on the anthropology of tourism (Smith 1977; Nash 1981, 1996; Wilson 1993; Lanfant *et al* 1995; Boissevain 1996; Chambers 1997, 2000; Burns 2004; Stronza 2001; King 2009). In regards to economic change, as mentioned above, tourism is seen as introducing new problems, rather than alleviating poverty and so is considered to be at the forefront of neo-colonialism (Nash 1989). At the local level, wage labour opportunities created through tourism are seen to be disrupting subsistence activities of small producers, and tourism is seen to be leading to increased wealth stratification in host communities, ultimately increasing social conflict (Stronza 2001: 269). Regarding social and cultural change, tourism is seen to lead to the ‘commodification of culture’, a process by which things come to be evaluated as goods, in terms of their exchange value in a context of trade, resulting in the loss of cultural identity (Greenwood 1989). Tourism is also perceived as affecting local identity through the ‘tourist gaze’ (Urry 1990, 1996) or the tourists’ expectations that are influenced by the marketing efforts of tour operators (Silver 1993), the popular media (Urry 1990) and the state (Volkman 1990).

Robert Wood and Michel Picard argue that the use of the concept of ‘impact’ conjures up visions of a society hit by billiard balls or touristic missiles, in a passive, receptive manner (Wood 1980: 565, 1993: 66; Picard 1995: 46). The concept relies on dichotomies and ignores the complexity of agency of members of a society and their relationships with others. It also leads to the idea that tourism affects ‘traditional’ and ‘authentic’ cultures,

and to the need for measures of 'cultural preservation'. As Hazel Tucker (2003: 2) argues, these terms are often used by a variety of mediators and commentators as if they are unproblematic. Trevor Sofield (2000: 55) argues that the prevailing stereotypes about tourism's impacts must be re-examined by seeing culture, authenticity, tradition and heritage as processes rather than static objects. He argues that when culture is seen as a static entity, lacking the dynamics of change, the actions, motivations and values of local community members are ignored (Sofield 2000: 50).

Maribeth Erb (2000) brings to our attention recent anthropological work on tourism and culture that draws on literature relating to debates about the invention of culture and the politics of identity, and critiques the idea of culture as a static entity, instead seeing people as 'cultural strategists'. Erb (2000) demonstrates how the Manggaraian people on the island of Flores in Eastern Indonesia try to develop strategies by which encounters with tourists can be beneficial to them and how, in the process, they construct new and innovative ways of understanding tourists at the same time as maintaining continuity with earlier cultural notions of how to deal with foreigners, strangers and the unknown.

Ethnic tourism in Southeast Asia and China

The kind of tourism that is the focus of this study is referred to in the literature as ethnic or cultural tourism. The majority of these studies, too, focus on the 'impact' of tourism, and the state, on the destination or host culture. A number of authors distinguish between ethnic tourism and cultural tourism (Smith 1977; Wood 1984; Graburn 1989; Harron and Weiler 1992). Anthropologist Valene Smith (1977: 2) defines the former as tourism marketed in terms of the 'quaint' customs of indigenous and often exotic people, which includes visits to native homes and villages, observation of dances and ceremonies, and shopping for primitive wares far off the 'beaten path'. They are attractive to a limited number of visitors motivated by curiosity and elite peer approval. In comparison, she (1977: 2) defines cultural tourism as including the 'picturesque' or 'local colour' of peasant culture as a vestige of a vanishing life style that lies within human memory, such as 'old style' houses and homespun fabrics that are often readily accessible in tourist resorts. Large numbers visit for the purpose of observing and photographing the lives of peasants who become objects of study *per se*.

These two types of tourism are also distinguished by Wood (1984) who describes ethnic tourism as involving firsthand experience of the practices of another culture, while cultural tourism involves exposure to culture in an indirect way, more as a backdrop than the specific focus of travel. Yet, while acknowledging that for some purposes it may be useful to distinguish between the two, in a later study Wood (1997: 1) defines them both as 'characterised by the tourist's interest in being exposed to and experiencing some form of cultural otherness'. Following Wood, the terms ethnic and cultural tourism are used interchangeably in this dissertation. Wood (1997: 24) also makes the point that tourism need not be ethnically focused in order to have ethnic consequences. Other types of travel that have ethnic consequences include environmental or nature-based tourism, arts and heritage/historical tourism, and adventure tourism (Harron and Weiler 1992: 85). As shown in Chapter 2 below, these types of tourism are found in the uplands of Vietnam.

Sociologist Eric Cohen's pioneering studies on hill tribe tourism in Thailand (1979/2001a, 1983/2001a, 1989/2001a, 1992/2001a) are concerned with the impacts of tourism on local communities, where the notion of tourism is an external force impinging on them. From this common perspective, ethnic tourism is portrayed as engendering 'staged authenticity' and 'museumification' (MacCannell 1973, 1976, 1992; Cohen 1988a, 1989/2001a) under the 'gaze' of the tourist (Urry 1990). This means that as a tourist-hosting society undergoes economic and cultural change through its intensifying contact with outsiders, efforts are made to stage the traditional cultural rituals and activities that are becoming increasingly both rare and divorced from their original cultural significance (Adams 1997: 310). In the process, hill tribes, highlanders or ethnic minorities are said to become commodified artefacts on display for tourists, particularly in relation to the 'cultural village' or 'living museum' (Hitchcock *et al* 1997; Dellios 2002).

Furthermore, studies of ethnic tourism in Southeast Asia and China magnify the power and coherence of the state. Timothy Oakes (1998: 39) has proposed a 'Southeast Asian model' of tourism development among the country members of ASEAN (of which Vietnam became a full member in 1995) and which he likens to the situation in China, where centralised states are directly involved in all aspects of tourism promotion and development, which they regard as an integral component of a development strategy to achieve (multi)national modernisation. In their study of ethnic tourism development in

Yunnan in China, Erwei Dong, Duarte Morais and Lorraine Dowler link the state to their definition of ethnic tourism as follows:

> Ethnic tourism differs from traditional forms of tourism because it is based on the conflict between the dominating government's intent to control the unassimilated ethnic tribes and the tourists' motivation to experience authentic and marginal ethnic cultures (2004: 165-166).

The direct involvement of the state is certainly apparent in 'cultural villages' or 'living museums' (Hitchcock *et al* 1997; Oakes 1998, 2006; Dellios 2002) as they are in 'ethnic theme parks' or 'ethnographic theme parks' such as Taman Mini in Indonesia and China Folk Culture Villages (Stanley 1998; Dicks 2003; Bruner 2005), where sanitised versions of culture are nationally prescribed or fixed. Such a strategy results in a 'colourful' multinational image of the nation in these multiethnic and newly-independent states that are trying to create a sense of, and commitment to, national unity (Sofield 2000: 46). In the process, some scholars question whether the minority actors 'become merely mechanical performers of a nationally prescribed culture' (Hitchcock *et al* 1997: 220).

There are also cases where state control of and intervention in the lives of ethnic minorities is indisputable, such as those of the Kayan or 'longneck' tribe in Thailand. In a pioneering ethnographic study, Jinranai Ismail (2008: 4-5) explains that the Mae Hong Son provincial government officially opened its doors to tourism and promoted the otherness of the Kayan people when they settled into three villages in the province as refugees from Burma in the 1980s. This occurred even though the Kayan were not, and are still not, officially recognised as citizens of Thailand. Tourism images have made them into a showpiece or 'human zoo' and there has since been an influx of international tourists. According to Ismail, in 2006, the local government relocated them from the three villages into the one centralised settlement, the 'Village for the Preservation of the Kayan Traditional Way of Life and Security of Mae Hong Son', in which they are increasingly frustrated, dissatisfied and disappointed. Ismail (2008: 33) shows how ethnic tourism is harmful when its financial benefits are not equally shared between tourism promoters and people in the destination communities, and when these communities are forced to sell themselves as products for tourist consumption.

In contrast to these studies, the type of ethnic tourism that is the focus of this study is where villagers are actively involved in the process, where tourism forms only a part of their economy and is not their only or dominant means of livelihood. For example, Louisa Schein (2000) takes a more nuanced approach to show how the Miao people in China are actively engaged in the processes that define them as exotic and as objects of tourist consumption gazes, particularly through performance. Similarly, Oakes (1998) looks at how various ethnic minorities in Guizhou province in southern China engage with modernisation processes and 'reclaim the tourist landscape'. Furthermore, Oakes (2006), following Cohen (2001b) and Picard (1997), explains that what happens in tourist villages is that a preliminary phase of 'staged authenticity', in which the villagers separate their daily life of the community from what they present to tourists, soon gives way to 'touristification' or a new form of identity in which the daily lives of the villages become inseparable from what is being presented, rather than any simple loss of cultural autonomy or local identity. Kathleen Adams (1995; 1997) argues that ethnic tourism does not necessary lead to a loss of agency or meaning among the Tana Toraja in upland Sulawesi, Indonesia, who strategically reinterpret and stage 'tradition' to enhance their group status.

While there are serious cases where the combined effects of the state and the market on a community are undeniable, an 'impact' stance need not inform our view of all cases of ethnic tourism in Southeast Asia and China. Indeed, in a more recent discussion on ethnic tourism, Cohen says that

> the complex relationship between three sets of actors – the ethnic groups, the tourist establishments and their clients, and the state and its agencies – is at the heart of the dynamics of ethnic tourism in all Southeast Asian countries, and… the region's countries differ considerably in the particular configurations of the relationship between these sets of actors (2001b: 29).

He explains that the nature of this relationship influences all aspects of ethnic tourism in the region, 'including the politics of representation of the ethnic groups in touristic media, the dynamics of the encounter between tourists and ethnics, the emergence of an ethnic "touristic" culture, and the transformation of ethnic identities in response to tourism' (Cohen 2001b: 29).

Turning back the gaze

In her overview of the anthropology of tourism, Amanda Stronza (2001) calls for anthropologists to 'turn back the gaze' by shifting away from the assumption that tourism is always imposed on passive and powerless people. Anthropologists have argued that host–guest interactions tend to be asymmetrical in terms of power, where guests control how any given encounter will unfold and the gaze of tourists influences how hosts look, behave and feel. Stronza points out that what is missing in these analyses is the possibility that locals can and often do play a role in determining what happens in their encounters with tourists. Also missing is an attempt to learn more about the dynamics of host–guest interactions by observing and talking with people on both sides of the encounter (Stronza 2001: 272). Furthermore, she argues (2001: 273) that even in cases where local hosts are changing aspects of their identity or their lives to appeal to tourists, they may not necessarily be losing their culture or their ability to judge for themselves what is spurious and what is genuine. On the contrary, local hosts may feel empowered by interactions with outsiders to redefine who they are and what aspects of their identity they wish to highlight or downplay.

Stronza (2001: 274) also emphasises that research has overlooked the origins and motivations of tourism from the hosts' perspective, as well as how hosts might affect guests. Finally, she argues:

> Even in cases where the forced and exploitative nature of tourism is irrefutable, we may begin to probe more deeply into understanding how locals themselves are perceiving the imposition, rather than continuing to rely on our own perspectives as anthropologists (Stronza 2001: 274).

A number of recent ethnographies turn back the gaze and examine the perspectives and active participation of locals in tourism. For example, in his ethnography of Maya people in Guatemala who sell handicrafts in the international marketplace, Walter Little (2004: 6) focuses on how they 'strategically use different identity constructions for political and economic reasons to help maintain their livelihoods'. He shows that they are maintaining a specific, community-based sense of Maya identity even as they commodify their culture for tourist consumption in the world market. In Tucker's (2003) research on negotiating

identities in a Turkish village, she demonstrates the implications that community ownership and participation in tourism have for the politics of representation and identity as well as for the nature of the tourist experience. What is unique to Tucker's study is that she includes an ethnography of tourists in her analysis of the tourism destination and community, which she refers to as 'writing tourists into destinations' (2003: 182). She thereby provides a detailed examination of certain tourists, their motivations and the interactions between them and their hosts. In so doing, she develops a dynamic notion of culture and tourism sustainability, and argues that tourism will continue in the Turkish village as long as, 'conditions that allow both tourists and their hosts to play an active role in negotiating and determining their identities and experiences' prevail (Tucker 2003: 180). Her study answers Stronza's call for a more holistic approach in order to explore the ways in which 'eco-tourism and other alternative forms of tourism can generate social, economic and environmental benefits for local communities while also creating truly transformative experiences for tourists' (2001: 261).

Recent ethnograhies set in Southeast Asia that also deal with the more nuanced issues in regards to tourism playing a part in the lives of village people, include Stroma Cole's (2008) research on tourism, culture and development in two villages in Flores, East Indonesia and Andrew Causey's (2003) study on 'hard bargaining' in North Sumatra. Cole (2008) writes tourists in to her account of tourism and socio-cultural change by looking at their perceptions, priorities and attitudes, in addition to those of the tourists, as well as the 'conflicts of tourism' between them. Likewise, Causey (2003) focuses on the interactions between local wood-carvers and tourists in villages on Samosir Island, as well as the construction of objects for sale to tourists.

Following Stronza, the main objective of this thesis is to turn back the gaze and reject the assumption that tourism is always imposed on passive and powerless people. Instead, it positions the villagers as strategic actors, and examines their motivations for active participation in tourism and their understandings of tourism and tourists. It focuses on their livelihoods, social relations among themselves, with tourists and representatives of the tourism industry, and how they represent and construct their identities in the tourist space. It also explores who the tourists are, why they visit the villages and how they perceive the villagers.

By taking an emic or insider approach, this study does not treat tourism as an exogenous force but rather focuses on how tourism may become part of the local reality (Hitchcock *et al* 1993: 9; Picard 1996; Picard and Wood 1997). This does not mean that the parts played by the state and the tourism industry are ignored. Tourism is examined from the perspectives of villagers and tourists, but is also considered here as part of the process of modernisation. I acknowledge the role of the state and the tourism industry in the process, but where the engagements of the villagers are not limited to dualistic and antagonistic analysis. I explore how tourism developed in the villages and, to put this into further perspective, examine the roles of both the villagers and the state in influencing their lives and identity as they have become part of the modern nation-state. The study also illustrates the contradictions between the representations of the 'cultural tourism villages' in the tourism promotional material today and the realities for both the villagers and tourists. As Erve Chambers (2000: 99) argues, people 'might not be able to predict their futures or to act in a wholly independent manner, but they have the wherewithal to play a significant role in participating in those processes that will shape their lives'.

Research that focuses on a similar type of ethnic tourism to this study, that is, in which the community is actively involved and where tourism is a part of the economy of the community but not the only or dominant means of livelihood, tends to treat the community only in terms of that tourism (for example, Van den Berghe 1994; Hiwasaki 2000; Wang 2007). As a result, it tends to present a narrow perspective of the lives of the people. By contrast, another principal objective of this study is to examine tourism in the context of other economic, social and cultural activities, in order to provide a fuller and complex picture of the lives of people living in a tourism village. Another study with a similar focus is Jenny Chio's (2009) ethnography on mobility and visuality in two rural, ethnic minority tourism villages in southwest China, in which she examines how tourism is experienced as an everyday practice and a force of socioeconomic change.

Based on my ethnographic observations of ethnic tourism in the villages, this dissertation adds to the dynamic, socially complex and controversial fields of ethnic tourism in Southeast Asia and China, economic development policy and tourism in Southeast Asia, and ethnic minorities in Vietnam and Tai studies. It establishes that the Tai villagers, far from having their lives destroyed or irreversibly changed by tourism, the market and the

state, are actively engaged in the process of modernisation and the transformations currently shaping Vietnamese society.

Methodology

I stayed in the villages of Noi and Tap for eight months in 2003 and 2004. I also visited the villages for one month in 2005 and one week in 2006. During my main stay, there were few tourists, due to the SARS and bird flu epidemics. More significantly, in 2004, part of the major highway forming the most direct route from Hanoi to the villages was under construction and therefore closed for six months. While some tour agents made use of a boat along the Black River, or *Song Da*, to bring in tourists, most did not want to endanger their clients' lives, nor risk ruining their cars and buses in the haphazard road construction process. This affected the number of tourists visiting the villages, but it enabled me to consider how villagers cope when tourism disappears and highlighted the fact that tourism is not stable, that it can disappear temporarily or permanently for different reasons. Returning in 2005 and 2006 after the highway had opened helped me to more fully understand the role that tourism plays in the villagers' lives.

Residing in the two villages meant I could draw comparisons between them and gain another perspective on the history of tourism in the area. I could also use the method of triangulation and gain Noi villagers' views of Tap and Tap villagers' views of Noi. Making further use of the method of triangulation, I visited the nearby Pu Luong National Park in neighbouring Thanh Hoa province, where a tourism project opened up during my stay and where tourists can travel through the national park whilst staying in homestays in Tai villages along the way. I also visited the village that my field assistant's family is from in Son La province, which has no tourism. Through these short visits I was able to see how Tai villagers live with little or no tourism development, and compare them with the subjects of this study.

My curiosity in this topic was initially sparked when I visited Noi as a tourist in 1998, on a 21-day package tour which started in Ho Chi Minh City and followed the coastline to Hanoi. Travelling in a group of 12 with a Vietnamese tour guide, the last leg of the trip involved a three-day hike in the northern mountains, visiting and staying in ethnic minority villages, where I had my first encounter with the Tai villagers. I remember the

beautiful view of the valley, where the villagers live, from the road on the side of the mountain; the tour guide collecting our passports yet again for a checkpoint near the entrance of the village; disembarking from the air-conditioned bus with our luggage and walking down the dirt path between the rice paddies to the village; and staying in a stilt house, eating on the floor around trays and sleeping under mosquito nets. We did not interact with the family members and I remember wondering, what do they think of us? What is their life like?

In order to gain a nuanced understanding of what it is like to live in a tourism village, I concentrated on trying to understand what people were doing and what they found important to talk about and the ways in which they talked, so as to try to grasp how they experienced what was happening and how their various viewpoints interact with each other (Tucker 2003: 16). For the most part, my fieldwork involved a combination of participant observation and interviews, both being contingent on the variety of relationships that I developed with different local parties and tourists in and around the villages.

Conducting long-term ethnographic fieldwork enabled the locals and me to establish a rapport so that I was able to gain an in-depth understanding of their lives, what matters to them most and the problems they face. It also helped me to gain insights into the behaviours and beliefs of tourists, because I found access to them to be more difficult than I had imagined. There were two principal reasons for this. One was that there were considerably fewer tourists visiting the villages during the time of my stay; the second was the difficulty I had in gaining access to those that did visit. Tourists often remain within the confines of the houses they stay in, because their stay is so short (usually one night), the type of tourism and the layout of the village. I found this private sphere difficult to penetrate and therefore had little access to tourists unless they were staying in the same house as me. I had greater access to tourists as they walked around the village, looking at and buying handicrafts. Access also depended on their openness. Similar to Tucker's (2003) experience in conducting tourism research in a village in Turkey, my ability to meet foreign package-group tourists was limited to a few chance encounters and observations. It was my experience that they were mostly insular and closed and therefore not so welcoming to 'outsiders'.

In each village, I stayed with a family who shared their homes and lives with me. I always stayed with members of the same family in each village: that of Mr and Mrs Tung in Tap and Mr and Mrs Ninh in Noi.[8] While I often moved between these families, I stayed with each of them for the same amount of time in total. These families became my friends and key informants with whom I shared conversations, meals and other everyday living experiences.

Neither family had their house registered as a guesthouse[9] during the time of my stays. Although Mr and Mrs Tung had operated a guesthouse previous to my arrival, it was not economically viable for them when the tourist numbers dropped due to the epidemics and highway construction, so they ceased their guesthouse licence. I paid to stay with both of the families and negotiated a price with each of them separately.

I began my research by conducting a household survey in both villages with households randomly selected in order to meet the villagers. I recorded the names, age, gender, occupation, ethnicity and familial relationships of the household members (see Appendix A). I completed the survey with 20 households in Tap village (out of 111 households in total). I spoke with one person from each household, of which 13 were female and 7 were male and most were 30-50 years old. The majority were married. Of the 18 guesthouses in the village, I visited eight guesthouses. I carried out the survey with 23 households in Noi village (out of 65 households in total). I usually spoke with one person from each household, however in some households I spoke with more than one person. I spoke with 31 people: 16 females and 15 males, most of whom were 30-60 years old. The majority were married. I visited each of the four guesthouses in the village.

[8] Speakers of Vietnamese and Tai, like speakers of other languages in Southeast Asia, use kinship terms rather than personal pronouns in systems of person reference (Benedict 1943; Hy Van Luong 1990). This means that instead of referring to oneself as I/me/you, terms such as uncle and aunty (*chu/co*), brother and sister (*anh/chi*) and grandfather and grandmother (*ong/ba*) are used, depending on who one is talking to and about. These terms highlight the enduring kinship roles of the referents in relation to one another and structure their interactions accordingly (Hy Van Luong 1990: 38). Kinship terms are also used in numerous contexts among non-relatives in order to structure 'hierarchical and solidary relations' among the referents of the kinship terms (Hy Van Luong 1990: 38). For example, in my relations with Mr and Mrs Tung I was niece (*chau*), whereas I was younger sister (*em*) with Mr and Mrs Ninh and I was older sister/aunty (*chi/co*) with their children. However, in order to make it less confusing, I do not use these kinship terms in the dissertation. Instead I refer to the villagers by their first name. Furthermore, these names of the host couples are actually those of their first child – a widespread practice in Southeast Asia known as 'teknonymy' whereby a parent is designated the name of their child (Benedict 1942, 1943, 1947; Geertz & Geertz 1964). Pseudonyms are used throughout the thesis.

[9] The Vietnamese term *nha khach* translates to 'guesthouse' but the guesthouses in the villages are more like a bed and breakfast or homestay where tourists stay with the family in their house usually for one night.

When I carried out the survey I also conducted a semi-structured interview (see Appendix B). I asked them questions in relation to kinship, religion or spiritual beliefs, language, economic activities and relations with other ethnic groups and Tai people. I also asked questions to determine the extent of their involvement in tourism, their knowledge and perceptions of tourists and changes in the villages since tourists started visiting, the history of tourism in the villages and how tourism operates in the villages today.

Many people were extremely welcoming and helpful, some were happy to talk about their lives and proud to discuss their culture, while others were suspicious. We chatted over cups of tea in their stilt houses, or outside while they attended to their handicraft stalls or sewing. I observed the villagers, tourists and others and their interactions. I participated in village society when invited; I ate with villagers, attended parties, festivals and rituals such as *Tet* (New Year), *Com Moi* (New Rice), funerals and weddings. Not only did I meet many people during these occasions, but also my relationships with my host families and their neighbours and relatives strengthened and I was able to get more of an 'insider's' view on their lives. I kept a journal and took photos. I also conducted informal interviews with tourists and tour guides, and more formal interviews with government officials. These included officials working in the areas of tourism and culture at the Mai Chau district level, Hoa Binh province level and the level of the central government in Hanoi. Most of the interviews at the provincial and national levels occurred between July and September in 2005. Such research became easier over time as my language skills improved.[10]

From the villages, I often walked to Mai Chau town (approximately one and a half kilometres away) where I had in-depth conversations with Mr Khinh, a local Tai person who became a key informant and friend. He is introduced in more detail in later chapters.

At times I was accompanied to the villages by Miss Cuc, a junior researcher in Hanoi. She assisted me by translating interviews and texts, but she also participated in the research. Being Tai herself, she helped me to understand what I was learning by explaining things to me, making comparisons with her own life and learning experiences,

[10] While I learnt some local Tai words and phrases I mainly conversed with the villagers in Vietnamese. All villagers, except for a handful of elders, are bilingual and can speak Vietnamese. Some villagers also speak Muong.

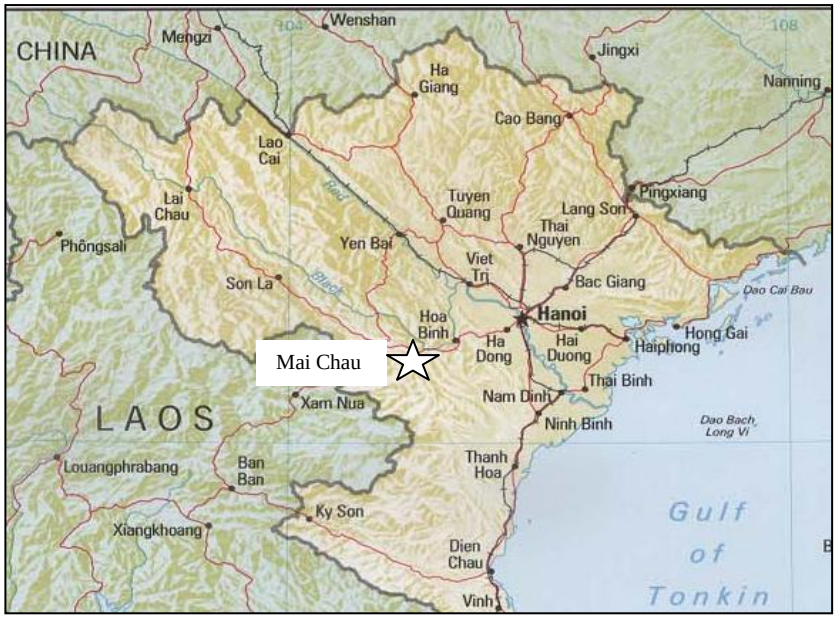
and raising questions. I learnt some Tai from her and she shared her perspective on the Tai people in Vietnam. She became not only a key informant, but also, as we worked and lived in the villages experiencing highs and lows together, a good friend. She spoke a different Tai dialect from the villagers, so she mostly conversed in Vietnamese as she found this easier and it allowed me to be included in the conversations.

The villages: an introduction

Migrating from southern China, Tai people established villages in the Mai Chau district in the 1300s and remain the majority of the population there today.[11] Village law (*le lang*) allows Tai villagers in the district to marry people of other ethnic groups who can move into a house and live in the village. This is different from other Tai communities; for example, in Ba Thuoc district in Thanh Hoa province Tai people may marry people from other ethnic groups but may not live in the Tai community and must move away to prevent cultural exchange. As a result of the village law in Mai Chau, there are small numbers of Kinh people residing in the villages of this study because they have married Tai villagers. In 2004, of the 467 people living in Tap, six were Kinh people, and of the 297 people living in Noi, there were 23.

One hundred and thirty-five kilometres southwest of the capital city of Hanoi, and 40 kilometres east of the border of Laos, the villages are situated in Hoa Binh province (see Map 2 and Map 3 below). As can be seen in Photograph 1 and Map 4 below, they are situated in a valley surrounded by mountains and are located side-by-side. Tap, with 111 households, is larger than Noi, which has 65 households. The villages are in different communes and therefore separated administratively (Tap is in Chieng Chau commune and Noi village is in Mai Chau), however they are also connected. Some of the villagers are related and some households officially registered in Noi are actually located in Tap, so that villagers move between them. The villages are also joined by a concrete road which tourists use, so that tourists staying in one village often stroll through the other.

[11] However it is rare to find 'pure' ('full blood') Tai families. Many families have at least one ancestor who was or a relative who is Hoa (Chinese), Muong or Kinh (Viet).



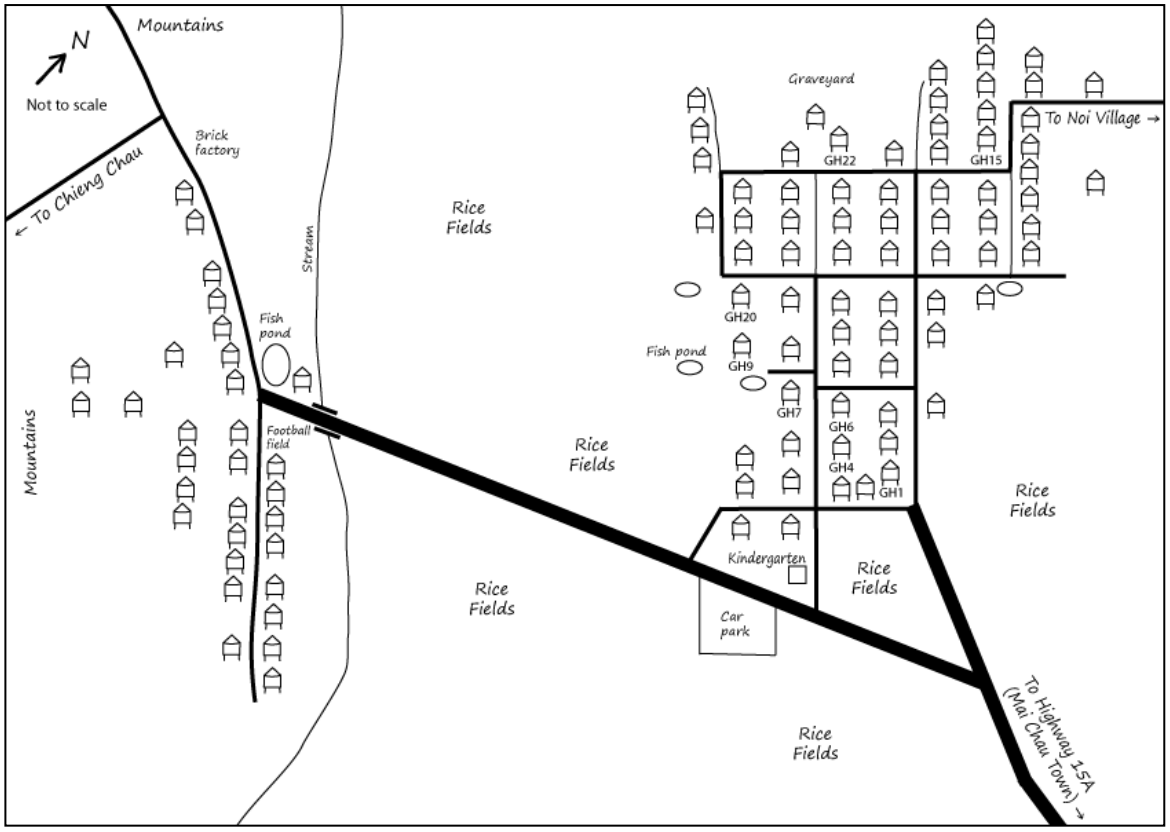
Map 2: Northern Vietnam (Source: www.yale.edu/seas/VietnamMap.html, accessed 19/10/2010)

Map 3: Mai Chau district in Hoa Binh province (Source: http://www.vietnamtravels.vn/Vietnam-travel-information/Vietnam_files/Hoa-Binh-map.gif, accessed 19/10/2010)

Photograph 1: Mai Chau valley showing Mai Chau town

Map 4: Mai Chau valley showing the villages side by side (source: Google Earth, accessed 19/10/2010)

Tap village is physically divided into two sections. The main settlement, Tap 1, in which I stayed, comprises 80 households. The remaining 31 households form Tap 2, located at the base of a nearby mountain and connected to Tap 1 by a road (see Map 5).



Map 5: The village of Tap

As can be seen from the map of Tap, the houses form compact settlement clusters. They are in orderly rows, separated by concrete paths and dirt tracks as well as two small concrete roads and concrete canals, which form a grid-like pattern. Some houses are also separated by brick walls and fences. There are 18 licensed guesthouses in the main settlement. While the houses are not numbered, the guesthouses are, from one to 25, although numbers 17, 21, 23 and 24 are not used by the villagers.[12] Guesthouse Numbers Two and Three used to be registered but discontinued when tourists stopped coming. The guesthouses are numbered in order to make it easier for tourists and tourism companies to recognise and remember them.

After the archway at the main settlement of Tap (see Photograph 2) the first dwelling is Guesthouse Number One, where the small concrete road splits into two branches. One branch continues straight through the settlement and leads to Noi, the other runs to the east of and parallel with this road. The majority of the guesthouses line these roads forming the hub of the village. This is also where the leader of the village lives.

[12] The guesthouses shown in Map 5 are the ones that I visited.

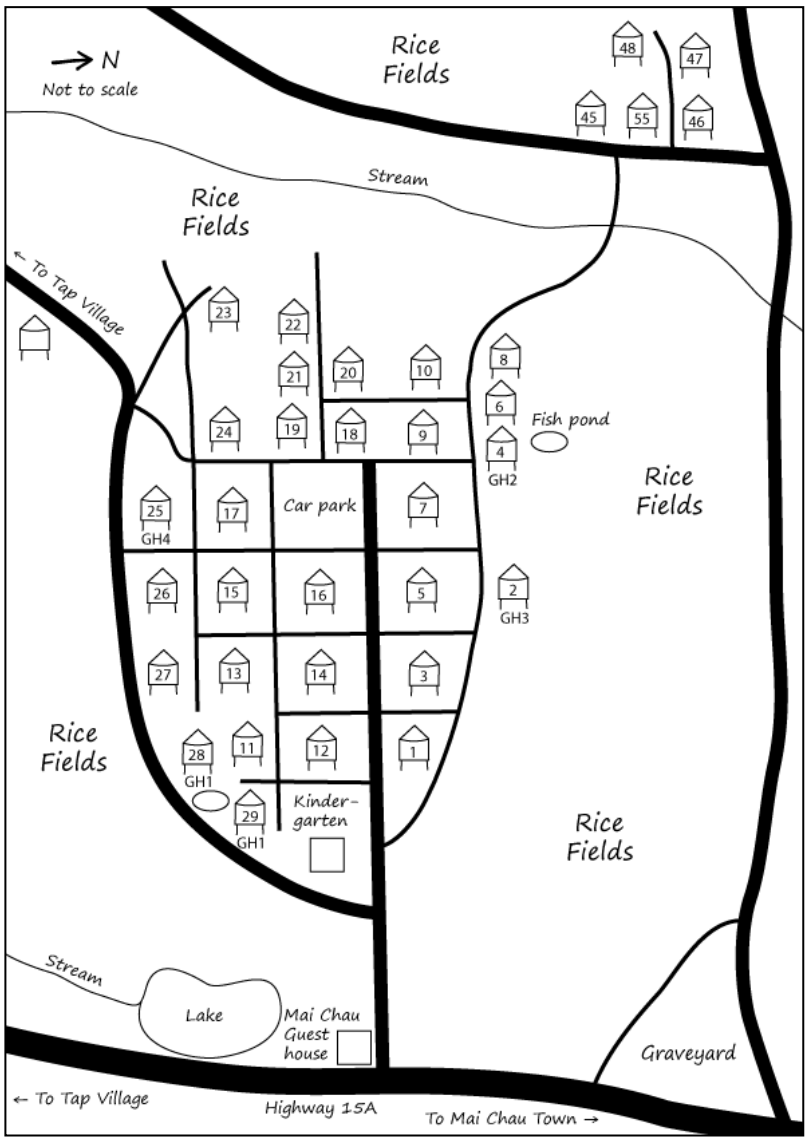
Photograph 2: Entrance to Tap

Towards the back of the settlement is a village graveyard. Among the trees and bamboo forest in the graveyard are small stilt houses. About the height of a person, these are replicas of the stilt houses in which the villagers live. They are built over the buried bodies to house their spirits temporarily before they ascend to heaven. There is also a village kindergarten, from which I heard the squeals of young children as they play. It is located on the road that runs between Tap 2 and Tap 1. Opposite the kindergarten is a large concreted area that serves as a car park but also as a volleyball court and working space at rice harvest time.

The road to Tap 2 is approximately 500 metres long. The bridge over the stream was built in 1998, jointly funded by the Vietnamese and Japanese governments. It ends at a T-intersection that turns into dirt tracks lined with houses, situated along the base of a mountain. To the left of the intersection is a soccer field and to the right is a large lake, after which there is a sugarcane field and a brick factory. The track then leads into a clear opening surrounded by more mountains. While I was there, the government started a silkworm project and the villagers transformed half of this space into a mulberry tree grove.

The village of Noi is nearly half the size of Tap. It is physically divided into four sections. The main settlement, in which I stayed, comprises 29 households (see Map 6); the others are located in surrounding settlements. There are 15 households in Tap 1 settlement, five

in Na Kinh in Na Phon commune (shown in the top right hand corner in the map below) and 14 in Tieu Khu IV in Mai Chau town. There are also two small dwellings in the rice fields near the main road between Noi and Chieng Chau. Unlike in Tap, each of the houses is numbered, from one to 65.



Map 6: The village of Noi

After passing under the archway at the main settlement of Noi (see Photograph 3), the small concrete road, stretching from the main road, splits into two: one branch continues straight into the main settlement, the other veers left, skirting the main settlement and leads to Tap. As the road runs into the main settlement there are two tall, old trees, one on either side of the road, planted in the past to indicate the entrance to the village.

Immediately to the left is a village kindergarten consisting of a small dwelling, a slide and a large area enclosed by a brick wall with a gate. It was being renovated and was therefore unused when I was there. There is no graveyard in the village. The residents bury their dead in a graveyard in neighbouring Chieng Sai.

Photograph 3: Entrance to Noi

In Noi, as in Tap, the houses are built close together in a compact settlement cluster. They form orderly rows, separated by a small concrete road as well as concrete paths and smooth dirt tracks that form a grid-like pattern. Many of the dirt tracks were laid over with concrete in 2002 and later during my stay in the village. The concrete road leads to the middle of the settlement where there is a concreted area that simultaneously serves as a volleyball court, car park, a space for festivities and an area for drying freshly harvested rice. There is another car park on the side of the road running along the outskirts of Noi to Tap. Houses surround this space, including the house of the leader of the cooperative, where village meetings are held. The leader of the village built a house and moved from Mai Chau town into the main settlement during my stay. Of the 29 households in the main settlement, four are registered guesthouses. They lie on the outskirts of the main settlement with scenic views of the rice paddies and surrounding mountains. Like the houses, each of the guesthouses is numbered.

Map 6 also shows the Mai Chau Guesthouse situated on Highway 15, at the turnoff to Noi village. This is a government guesthouse and is different to the guesthouses in the villages. While the guesthouses in the villages are more like a homestay where tourists

stay with the family in their house, the Mai Chau Guesthouse is a hotel with a reception desk, restaurant and individual guest rooms with bathrooms.

House blocks in both of the villages usually consist of a stilt house, a well, a pen for livestock and a small number of fruit trees. The stilt houses have two levels: the top level is indoors and the bottom level is outdoors in most cases. The top level of the main structure of the house is a large area with no internal walls (see Photograph 4). Stilts or piles run the length of the house to help support the roof rafters and timber beams. The large space appears to be one of open living, however it is divided into two: the 'higher' section and the 'lower' section, running lengthwise. As is implied in the naming, the higher section is of higher status than the lower section. This is because it is the side where the family altar is situated, and where the most revered household members live, the ancestors on the male side of the family. Within the higher and lower sections of the house are rooms (*hoong*), separated by stilts/poles and sometimes by curtains. Beside and opposite the room containing the altar (*kho hoong*) are the bedrooms of family members. The front of the house serves as a dining/lounge/guest room and the kitchen is at the rear. These distinctions in the layout of the house are very important to the social organisation of the Tai, not only in these villages but also in northern Thailand, as is detailed by Richard Davis (1984) when he discusses 'the household' in his study of 'Northern Thai Myth and Ritual'. I explain the layout and use of household space regarding the age and gender of household members, in daily life and when hosting, in Chapter 6.

Photograph 4: Inside the stilt house

Figures 1 and 2 below show the layout of the houses of Mr and Mrs Ninh and Mr and Mrs Tung, the two families I stayed with. While Mr and Mrs Tung have two adjacent houses, the layout inside is the same.

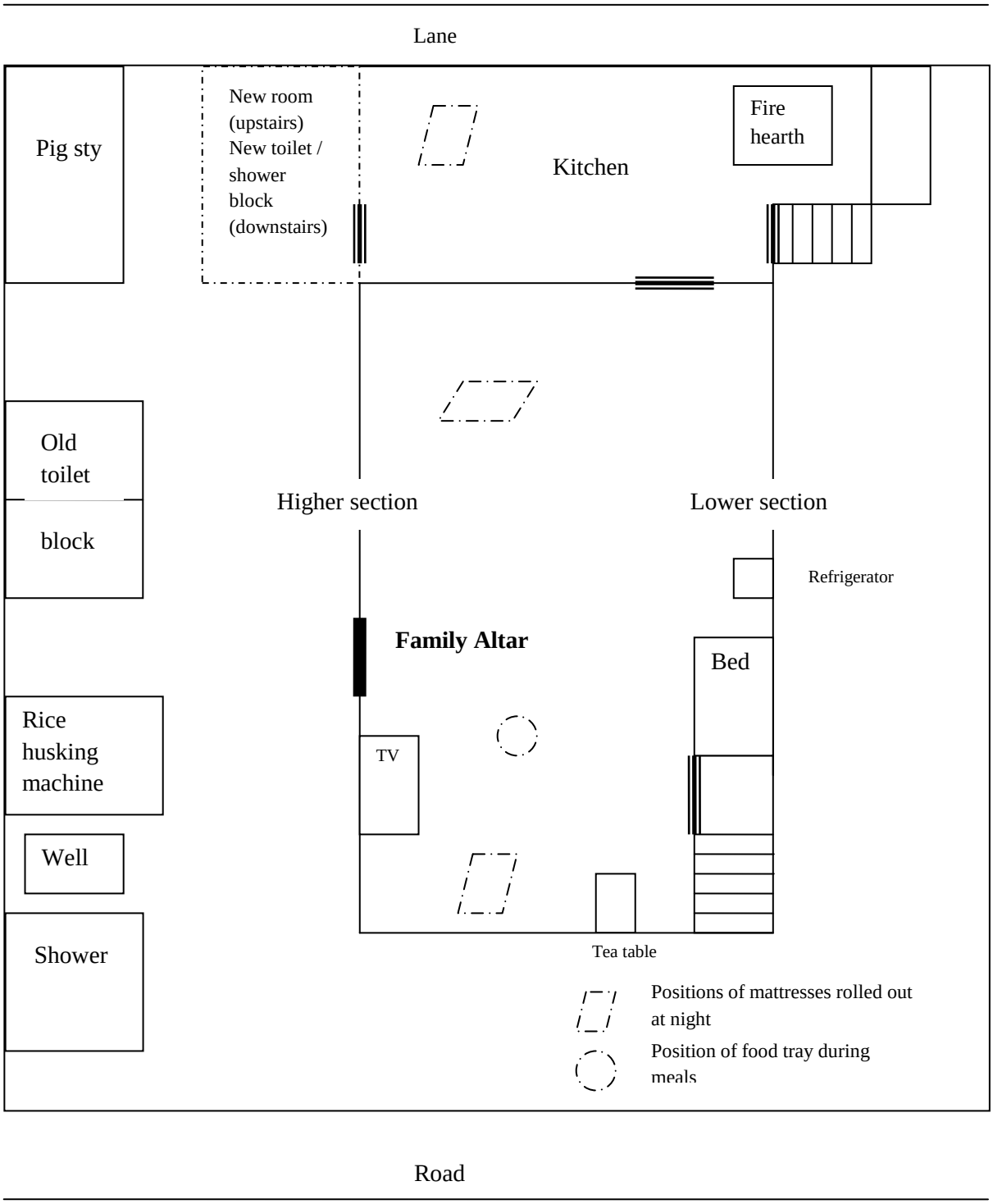


Figure 1: Layout of Mr and Mrs Ninh's house

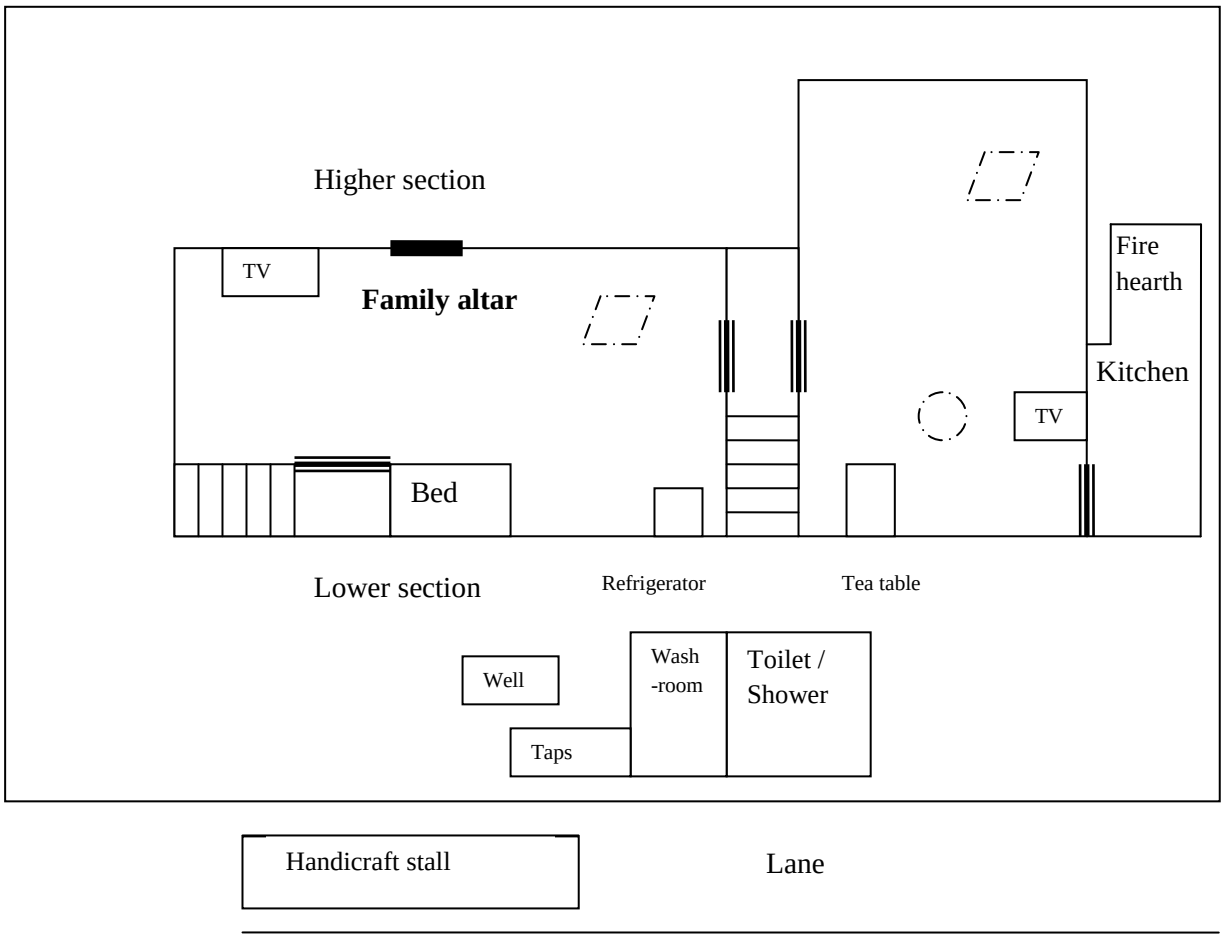


Figure 2: Layout of Mr and Mrs Tung's house

As can be seen from Figures 1 and 2, house sizes differ. Owners of guesthouses, in particular, have made their houses larger in order to accommodate tourists. The most successful households have two, even three, adjoining or separate houses on their house block. Some guesthouse owners have enclosed the space underneath their house to use as bedrooms for household members or for tourists to stay in, as handicraft stalls or as extra kitchens. For these reasons, they also tend to concrete or pave the earth underneath their house (see Photograph 5). All licensed guesthouses in the villages have flush toilets, either squat or sit-down, and a concrete bathroom block, with either hot or cold water showers on the ground level, usually separate from the house. Rain water is stored in a tank on the roof, but they also occasionally pump underground water from their well into the tanks (see Photograph 6). Used water from the taps and showers runs through pipes onto the ground outside. Water from the well is also used for toilets. Effluent is flushed through underground pipes into the rice fields.

Photograph 5: Underneath the stilt house

Photograph 6: Bathroom and well

Generally, the families that do not receive tourists and are located towards the back of the villages, off the main roads and paths, have smaller houses. Some have no adjoining kitchen and the main structure is smaller. Walls can be made of bamboo mats and there are larger gaps in the walls, floor and roof (see Photograph 7). They have electricity, although fewer light bulbs and appliances; for example, they have no rice cooker or fans. They have fewer material objects in their houses too, no furniture and enough bedding only for the number of members of the household. There are usually no decorations or posters on the walls, except perhaps a calendar. These houses usually have earth, not concrete, underneath and around them. These houses do not have concrete bathroom blocks and toilets, nor do they have piped water. Instead, they have a hole in the ground

for a toilet, surrounded by plastic sheeting, or a more solid wooden structure, for privacy. People fetch water from the well next to the house for washing dishes and clothes, and for bathing, or they carry out these tasks in a nearby stream. Some people in Tap carry out these functions in the irrigation canals running through the village.

Photograph 7: Smaller house in the village

The above descriptions of the various houses in the villages indicate economic household differentiation. The economic importance of tourism is greater for households running a guesthouse and parallels can be drawn between the households that run guesthouses and the households that are more wealthy and powerful in the villages, the details and related issues of which are looked at in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. While households are engaged in multiple livelihood activities, including agriculture, livestock-rearing, aquaculture and tourism, and while households participate in these activities to varying extents, all households rely on rice production as their staple. Yet households potentially generate a lot of income from tourism-related activities, such as hosting tourists overnight or selling handicrafts, which many consider to be easier work than working in the fields. As tourism is more established in Tap village, in which there are more licensed guesthouses and where tourists have been visiting for a longer time, the (socio-)economic importance of tourism is greater in Lac village than in Noi village.

While I argue in this dissertation that the villagers are active agents in tourism development and in contributing to change, I also acknowledge that the more wealthy households are more fully involved in the tourism industry and are indeed more active participants in change; they have more opportunities and are less constrained by circumstances. In comparison, poorer households have fewer options and less room for manoeuvre. This point is relevant for the discussion in Chapter 7 on 'cultural strategists'.

Chapter outline

The dissertation begins with a history of tourism in the uplands of Vietnam, including the development of tourism in the villages, followed by an introduction to the Tai villagers and their history in Vietnam. The rest of the study concentrates on the present day, focusing specifically on the villages as cultural tourism villages, and the livelihoods, social relations and identities of the villagers. Each chapter illustrates my argument by providing a close-up perspective on the ways in which national and global processes of tourism are experienced, negotiated and mediated, particularly by the villagers, but also by the tourists.

Chapter 2 deals with the genesis and development of ethnic tourism in Vietnam. The focus here is on the development of tourism, particularly in the uplands, during the colonial era, communist era and today. The chapter compares and contrasts tourism activities during these eras, but then also describes the development of tourism in the villages since the communist era. The chapter emphasises that ethnic tourism is a new form of tourism in Vietnam, in which the power and influence of the state is becoming decentralised.

Chapter 3 focuses on the history of the Tai in Mai Chau and their incorporation into the modern nation-state of Vietnam. It includes local histories of Tai people in Mai Chau and their contact with others since their settlement in the Mai Chau valley, seven centuries ago, but with a focus on the tumultuous times, since the 1940s, of revolution, war and the building of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. The chapter demonstrates the complexities of the relationships between the Tai and the state, and argues that while the Tai are being 'fixed' by the state, they are also 'self fixing'. It shows that the villagers have a mainly positive view of their lives today and in the future. The chapter also

provides context for the motivations and engagements of the villagers in the tourism process and with tourists.

Chapter 4 introduces the villages today as 'cultural tourism villages' (*ban van hoa du lich*) by analysing the primary 'tourist gaze', or the representations and myths of the villages and Tai life in the tourism promotional material. It also introduces the kinds of tourists who visit the villages. My analysis highlights the contradictions between the representations and the realities of tourism 'on the ground'. The contradictions are drawn out by focusing on the patterns of everyday life in the villages as well as on a second 'tourist gaze' or the *actual* perceptions that tourists have of the villages and their inhabitants. It makes the point that while the villages are increasingly becoming tourist 'landscapes', they are also simultaneously Tai and Vietnamese villages, and that while cultural tourism is promoted in the promotional material, both domestic and international tourists go to the villages for varying reasons.

Chapter 5 is centred on a livelihoods analysis of village tourism. The chapter introduces the villagers as economic agents who selectively embrace diverse activities and not just tourism in order to make their living. It draws out the complexities of the livelihood decisions and income-generating strategies of the villagers by looking at different tourism-related activities such as running guesthouses, concreting and widening of roads and car parks in and around the villages, and the female-dominated production and trade of textiles. The chapter also presents the strategy of selective diversification of livelihood practices and embracing of various commodity markets by the villagers in historical context, which helps to explain their responses to the decline in tourists during the SARS, bird flu and highway closure episodes in 2003-2004. The chapter emphasises that the multifaceted aspects of livelihood decisions are acted out through a combination of local practices and larger economic forces that are dynamic and fluid, and mutually influencing.

Chapter 6 explores the experiential aspects of running a guesthouse and their implications for relationships between the villagers and tourists, and among the villagers, not only between households but also among household members, in the continuing context of old and new, local and external factors. It asks three main questions: what interactions occur between the household members and tourists? Are there tensions between guesthouse

owners and non-guesthouse owners? And does tourism result in household transformations, particularly in regards to gender relations? The chapter draws out the continuing, complex dynamics among household members and villagers in the context of ethnic tourism, and shows that social relations are not thereby significantly altered.

Chapter 7 focuses on the villagers as cultural strategists. It shows how they construct and shape 'tradition' for themselves, the tourists and the state through processes of negotiation. I do this by looking at the multiple identities of the villagers in the 'tourist space' as ethnic and localised, national and transnational, which the villagers use in different contexts. I explain how these multiple identities are salient to the villagers, by describing them as 'nested identities', and how villagers essentialise these identities, by examining the 'local gaze' of the villagers. The chapter highlights that underlying these multiple and situational, nested and essentialised identities are the pragmatics of everyday life in a tourism village.

Chapter 8 summarises my analysis of life in a tourism village and highlights the inevitability of change. I argue that, while tourism is a shifting situation, as long as the villagers continue to have a say in the process and still have viable economic alternatives, then tourism in the villages may be sustainable. If tourism ceases, then the villagers will continue with their farming and textile production and trade, as they are not entirely reliant on tourism for their livelihoods. The chapter also draws some general conclusions about the theoretical themes raised throughout the study.

CHAPTER 2: Vietnam's Uplands And Tourism: A Historical Perspective

The uplands or highlands (*mien nui*) of Vietnam are situated in the centre of the country, in the Central Highlands (Trung Nguyen), and in the north. They form part of, what Jean Michaud (2000; 2006) refers to as, the 'Southeast Asian Massif', or what James C. Scott (2009: ix) refers to as, 'Zomia' – all the lands at altitudes above roughly three hundred metres in Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Burma, India and China. In addition to its ecological diversity, 'Zomia' contains about one hundred million minority people of tremendous ethnic and linguistic variety (Scott 2009: ix). The diverse minority people who live in the mountainous regions of Vietnam have done so for centuries, while some of the inhabitants of these highland regions are also lowland migrants who have settled more recently, particularly during the 1960s and 1990s (Hardy 1998, 2000, 2003; Tan 2000; Michaud and Turner 2000; McElwee 2004, 2008).

There were various different forms of tourism in Vietnam throughout the colonial and communist eras, as there are today. The main forms in the uplands now are resort tourism, nature-based tourism – including adventure tourism – remnants of 'socialist tourism', heritage tourism, and ethnic or cultural tourism. This chapter looks at the history of tourism in Vietnam with a focus on the uplands, in order to provide the context for a discussion on ethnic tourism today.[13]

The chapter begins by exploring tourism in the French colonial era, which involved the development of hill stations in Da Lat in the Central Highlands and Sa Pa in the northern mountains. The forms of tourism were resort tourism and nature-based tourism, including adventure/hunting tourism. This is followed by a description of tourism in the communist era, including attempts at centralised control of tourism by the state, through 'socialist tourism' and heritage tourism. Tourism in Vietnam today is then examined, first by introducing the tourists and then focusing on the blend of socialist and capitalist ideals. There is a discussion on the recent emergence of ethnic tourism where the highlanders, variously referred to as *montagnards*,[14] hill tribes or upland minorities, are the central

[13] While ethnic tourism also occurs in the lowlands of Vietnam, particularly where Hoa (Chinese), Cham and Khmer reside in the south, this thesis focuses on ethnic tourism in the uplands.

[14] *Montagnards* is a French word meaning mountain people. Michaud (2000: 74) explains that in early French literature on Indochina, as well as in a growing number of recent English language publications, the

‘attraction’ – at markets, in cultural performances and in villages in both the Central Highlands and the northern mountains. The chapter ends with an examination of the development of tourism between the 1960s and the present, in the villages of Tap and Noi in the northern mountains.

The colonial era: hill stations and a fanciful ‘far-west’

In the nineteenth century, Vietnam attracted international tourists from Europe while under French occupation – from 1858 until the famous battle at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Beginning with their conquest of southern Vietnam and the establishment of a protectorate over Cambodia in the 1860s, the French brought under their jurisdiction the new entity of Indochina that eventually comprised Tonkin (northern Vietnam), Annam (central Vietnam), Cochinchina (southern Vietnam), Cambodia and Laos. Indochina bordered Siam to the west, Qing China to the north and British Burma to the northwest (Michaud 2000; Keyes 2002). In 1887, the French moved the centre of administration for the three divisions of Vietnam from Hue in the centre to Hanoi in the north (Logan 2000: 70).

The most common tourist destinations in Vietnam were Saigon and Hanoi. Annabel Biles, Kate Lloyd and William Logan (1999), who studied French tourism in Vietnam from the late 1930s, through examination of French tourist images of Vietnam, explain that at this time Air France and several passenger liners travelled along different routes via Saigon and Hanoi. In Saigon, there was comfortable accommodation and good European food in several hotels near the municipal theatre, and the *Revue de Tourism Indochinois* provided details of the city’s attractions (Biles *et al* 1999: 209-210). In Hanoi, tourists could stay in the Hotel Metropole, described by Biles *et al* (1999: 211) as one of the most reputable hotels in the Far East at the time. Principal festivals and religious and civil events, both French and Vietnamese, were advertised for tourists’ enjoyment. From Saigon, tourists keen to see more of the colonies could hire a car and journey to the coast at Cap St. Jacques (present day Vung Tau), or take tourist buses with French- or English-speaking guides to go sightseeing or hunting. For trips further afield, tourists could catch the

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term is understood as encompassing the minority populations living in all of the Indochinese (Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) mountainous areas, the *montagnes* in French.

Indochinese Railways express trains to Phnom Penh and Battembang, or along the coast to Hue, further north to Hanoi and on to Yunnanfou (Biles *et al* 1999: 210-211).

Malcolm Cooper provides a tantalising glimpse of tourism in the uplands during this period. He writes that 'a limited amount of international adventure and resort tourism developed, based on hunting wild animals, escaping the summer heat of the lowlands and observing the lifestyles of local people', and that 'a small amount of domestic tourism had developed amongst the "leisure classes"' (Cooper 2000: 168). Such modes of tourism in the mountains developed around hill stations built within easy reach of major lowland cities. From Saigon, tourists could travel to stay in hotels at the Langsa or 'French town' (present day Da Lat) hill station (Jennings 2003: 165). From Hue, they could go to hotels at the Bach Ma and Ba Na hill stations, and from Hanoi, in Chapa (present day Sa Pa), Tam Dao and Ba Vi hill stations (Reed 1995: 46).

The history of the development of the hill stations in Da Lat in central Vietnam and Sa Pa in the north, in particular, have been researched by Robert Reed (1995) and Eric Jennings (2003), and Jean Michaud (2001) and Jean Michaud and Sarah Turner (2006), respectively. They explain that after numerous expeditions into the highlands by military parties and missionaries, French military administrators developed the hill stations because the cooler climate in the mountains there provided a healthy retreat from the relentless heat and humidity of the lowlands. The colonial administration developed a French space of resort tourism, promoting the climate and contact with nature, in particular. Yet, while the colonial administration aimed for luxury in Da Lat, in order to appeal to the most affluent members of society including rich adventurers and big game hunters, the intent of the administrators in Sa Pa was to attract those with more average incomes. The Da Lat hill station was also larger than the one at Sa Pa, with a greater population and higher levels of urbanisation.

In Sa Pa there was first construction of a military sanatorium and barracks, as well as official villas for the upper ranks of the military and colonial administration, and company and private villas for wealthy corporations and colonists. Such development was followed by construction of three or four small hotels by French national private entrepreneurs who jointly set up the *Syndicat d'Initiative de Chapa*, a tourist bureau aimed at promoting Chapa to slightly less affluent colonists as well as well-off

Vietnamese vacationers (Michaud and Turner 2006: 788). In comparison, Da Lat developed into an urban centre with a dual purpose, designed primarily as a European health and recreation resort, and secondarily as an instrument for regional administration, eventually becoming a provincial centre (Reed 1995: 51). The famous Lang Bian Palace was built, which functioned as 'the nerve centre of proper Western colonial society in the highlands' (Reed 1995: 51), and urban infrastructure was expanded, including roads, an electric power plant and improved hydroelectric facilities, a large hospital complex and a Pasteur Institute, a municipal water system, a convalescent camp for army and navy personnel, summer retreats for the upper ranks of colonial administration, schools, parks, an artificial lake and a railway station (Reed 1995: 52). Such developments were supported by local, regional and national government authorities. Furthermore, individual colonists, Western companies and charitable institutions contributed to the process of urbanisation, as well as French settlers and summer sojourners, through independent and collective investments in hotels, restaurants, and other tourist enterprises, various commercial undertakings, professional offices, clubs and social organisations, and summer homes and villas (Reed 1995: 53). Numerous Vietnamese and Chinese migrants from the lowlands, as well as a small number of highland people, took up associated employment opportunities.

In addition to resort tourism, adventure tourism in the form of hunting was promoted in Da Lat (Reed 1995; Jennings 2003). An online conversation among members of the Vietnam Studies Group,[15] in February 2008 provides sketches of big-game hunting in French Indochina. Charles Keith (Vietnam Studies Group 2008) points out that the son of US President Theodore Roosevelt (also named Theodore), went on at least one hunting expedition, accounts of which were published in the 1930s. Liam Kelley paraphrases a story from a book entitled *On the Mandarin Road*, by Roland Dorgeles, published in 1926, about how hotel staff in Da Lat would leave meat in the jungle to attract tigers and, when successful, interrupt the European 'hunters' who were waiting in the hotel having their after-dinner drinks. The 'hunters' would then drive into the jungle and step out of the car to shoot the tiger in the headlights (Vietnam Studies Group 2008). Some French tourists often hired highlanders as hunting guides (Jennings 2003: 173).

[15] The Vietnam Studies Group is a sub-committee of the Southeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies. It runs a website to provide resources and information for scholarly research, study, and teaching about Vietnam and is administered from the University of Washington (Vietnam Studies Group 2010).

Jennings (2003: 164) argues that Da Lat served as a French 'Far-West' with French journalists and authors making parallels with the American Wild West in their writings. Not only was Da Lat in an area teeming with wild game but it was also inhabited by so-called 'savages' or 'primitive' people, whom the French compared with native Americans (Jennings 2003: 164). The highlanders or *montagnards* were largely represented and promoted through romanticised images and as exotic spectacles to view. The market at the Sa Pa hill station and its 'colourfully dressed Meo [Hmong] and Man [Yao]' highlanders who traded and socialised there were highlighted in tourism promotional material as the main local attractions (Michaud and Turner 2006: 789). Images in the Lang Bian Palace (today known as the Da Lat Palace Hotel) less subtly portrayed highland minorities as the 'noble savage'. Jennings (2003: 175) elucidates the delicate balancing act involved in marketing the highland minorities as fierce warriors to appeal to colonial curiosity, while simultaneously reassuring the everyday traveller of their harmlessness to tourists. These romantic images, based on the idea of the primitive and the noble savage, are still prevalent today in the tourism promotional material (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 below). The Lang Bian Palace offered tours or 'ethnographic visits' to nearby villages of the Lat and Koho highland minority groups (Jennings 2003: 176). However, Jennings (2003: 176) points out that the highland minority presence was irritating to some travellers, who preferred a replica of France over a so-called Far West. This legacy is reflected today in the Da Lat Palace Hotel and the Victoria Hotel in Sa Pa.

In the mountains of Tonkin, political problems for the French mounted as Vietnamese nationalist and communist unrest grew. The Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) was founded in 1930 by Nguyen Ai Quoc, later known as Ho Chi Minh. In order to resist French rule, the ICP formed the revolutionary organisation called the Vietnam Independence League, known as the Viet Minh from 1941 onwards (McElwee 2004). After the August Revolution in 1945, Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence from France but failed to receive recognition from the international community (Vasavakul 2001:372). His revolutionary army began a long struggle against the regrouping French. War between Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)

and France followed.[16] The latter formed strategic alliances against the ethnic Viet with the highland people in Da Lat (Jennings 2003: 165), as well as in Sa Pa (Michaud 2000), along with many highlanders who resided in the northwest of the country (McAlister 1967; Duong Bich Hanh 1999; Michaud 2000; McElwee 2004). Such alliances proved crucial, not only to the French but also to the Viet Minh, in the lead-up to the battle at Dien Bien Phu which saw the French ousted.

The communist era: 'socialist tourism' and 'friendship exchanges'

With the French ousted, this era was characterised by 'socialist tourism' (Hall 2001: 95). This included domestic-incentive tourism as Stalinist-Leninist nationalist ideology on work and leisure spread throughout the country, as well as 'friendship exchanges' between members of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON).[17] In addition to nation-building with a socialist focus, this period was characterised by war and extreme poverty for the masses until economic reform measures were implemented in 1986. From 1945, but particularly after the war with the French in 1956, under the rubric of the Revolution, Ho Chi Minh's Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) in the north adopted a socialist-inspired model similar to that of the Soviet Union and China. It aimed to extend this model into the south, after the DRV defeated the Republic of Vietnam (RVN) and allied US forces in 1975, resulting in the subsequent unification of the country as the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) (Vasavakul 2001; Hardy 2003; Hy Van Luong 2003; McElwee 2004).

During this era, the movement of the local population was restricted. Locals had to obtain transport coupons, petrol rations and permission papers from the police before they could move around the country (Hardy, 2003: 261). Yet domestic tourism was promoted by the socialist state among its (usually urban industrial) workers and their families, whose recreation trips were subsidised to provide cheap accommodation and transport (Hall

[16] This war is otherwise known as the first Indochina War. The Indochina Wars can be divided into three phases: 1945-1954, 1954-1960 and 1960-1975. The villagers refer to the first Indochina War as the 'French War' and the third Indochina War as the 'American/US War' (otherwise known as the 'Vietnam War').

[17] COMECON was active between 1949 and 1991, for the coordination of economic policy among certain nations then dominated by communist parties pursuing centrally-directed development policies. These included Bulgaria, Cuba, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Mongolia, Poland, Romania and the Soviet Union. COMECON was formed under the guidance of the Soviet Union in 1949 in response to the formation in 1948 of the Committee of European Economic Cooperation in western Europe. In 1991 it was renamed the Organization for International Economic Cooperation (Brine 1992).

1991: 84). With the duty of keeping the proletariat's spirits high (Michaud and Turner 2006: 794), the state developed facilities for domestic, group-oriented tourism and recreation in coastal resorts, upland areas, mountains and rural spas (Hall 1991: 84). Such facilities were sponsored by economic enterprises, trade unions and youth organisations. For example, the Labour Union owned the biggest guesthouses and associated facilities (P. Taylor, personal communication, 13 May 2009). As such, there were no privately owned hotels in the communist era, echoing key elements of Stalinist economic policy including the minor role of service industries, centralised state control of economic life, and rapid economic growth based on heavy industrialisation (Hall 2001: 95).

A characteristic of socialist tourism is 'collective consumption' (Hall 2001: 95) and it can be compared with tourism during the French colonial era, which consisted mainly of smaller groups and family holidays rather than large work-group holidays. However, there were also smaller groups of domestic tourists who were prize winners and recipients of rewards (P. Taylor, personal communication, 13 May 2009). Despite its collective constituent, this trade union- and enterprise- supported activity tended to exclude a significant proportion of the rural population, leaving them unsubsidised and relatively immobile (Hall 1991: 94).

At the same time as recovering from war with the French and focusing attention on mounting tensions with the RVN, the DRV established a tourism sector. On 9 July 1960 the Vietnam Tourism Corporation or *Cong ty du lich Viet Nam* (later to become VNAT, Vietnam National Administration of Tourism) was set up under the former ministry of foreign trade in North Vietnam (VNS 2008). The head of the travel department of VNAT in 2004 stated that 'until 1982 travel activity was considered a separate professional branch due to the establishment of the Travel Managing Division, and later the Centre for Travel Management' and that its focus was 'limited to the task of receiving international tourists to Vietnam' (Vu The Binh 2004: 2). In an interview in July 2005, the deputy director of the Institute of Tourism Development Research (ITDR) of VNAT further explained that Vietnam's tourism was under the surveillance sector rather than the economic sector of the government. In other words, the government did not have an economic tourism policy per se. Under tight surveillance, tourism mainly involved receiving international tourists from the COMECON countries (Hobson et al 1994; Cooper 2000).

Although most of Vietnam's tourism flow was to and from the COMECON countries, there was more inbound than outbound tourism. Derek Hall (2001: 95) explains that paralleling the growth of international economic aid and cooperation within the Soviet bloc, the more developed societies generated the most tourist outflows. Low living standards and other structural constraints in Vietnam, as well as in Cuba and Mongolia, largely excluded outbound tourism (Hall 2001: 96). Furthermore, outbound tourism from the Soviet bloc was socially and spatially distorted, being dominated by exchanges of 'friendship groups' between the countries (Hall 2001: 94). For example, until 1989 it was easier for Czechs and Slovaks to travel several thousand kilometres to holiday in Vietnam or Cuba than to cross the Czechoslovakian border into West Germany (Hall 2001: 94).[18] Nevertheless, members of the *nomenklatura* in Vietnam went to other COMECON countries to study and work, to learn Stalinist-Leninist nationalist ideology and to maintain ties with these countries. Likewise, official delegations from these countries visited Vietnam to inspect development conditions, exchange ideas and maintain relations.

Vietnam's entry points were via Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, and permission had to be obtained from the police to travel outside these areas (Taylor and Jonsson 2002: 246). Nevertheless, prior to 1975 the RVN, and particularly the fertile Mekong delta, was still incorporated into the capitalist world (Taylor 2001; Hy Van Luong 2003). This, coupled with the presence of US troops during the war, influenced the development path of tourism in the south. Seaside resorts developed along the coast from the old French resort of Vung Tau up to Hue in the centre just before the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ), offering spa-like tourism. For example, during the war, US soldiers were airlifted to China Beach near Da Nang for 'rest and relaxation'. It is not surprising then, that after 1975, the new SRV established travel agents in these areas, including Ho Chi Minh City, Da Nang, Hue, Vung Tau and Lam Dong (Vu The Binh 2004: 2). These were controlled by the central state, as were all hotels in the country.

[18] Few citizens from the COMECON countries or socialist bloc were permitted to travel to the capitalist world. Currency inconvertibility, restricted access to hard currency and stringent entry and exit visa policies prohibited most forms of extra-bloc tourism. However, Hall (2001: 94) goes on to say that members of the *nomenklatura* with access to convertible currency were able to travel to the capitalist world and to profit from the patronage and privileges flowing from such access.

With the demise of French colonialism and the following period of hostilities in the north, most of the colonial buildings in the Sa Pa hill station were destroyed as the majority of the town's population fled and the town lay dormant (Michaud and Turner 2006: 789). However, while urban development of the Da Lat hill station slowed, the city's infrastructure remained comparatively undamaged during the wars and the settlement was never completely abandoned (Reed 1995: 54). Instead, it remained a resort centre, continuing to provide a mix of health and recreational activities for the elite. Big-game hunting was still promoted internationally. As Joe Hannah told the online conversation among members of the Vietnam Studies Group, he found a tourism brochure in a second-hand book shop in the US, put out by the RVN in 1965, in which there is a section on big-game hunting in the jungles of Vietnam, that ironically, considering the times, encourages tourists to go to Vietnam to enjoy the hunting but admonishes them to register all firearms with customs at the airport upon arrival (Vietnam Studies Group 2008). Oscar Salemink mentioned in the online conversation that Emperor Bao Dai (leader of the RVN) was known for his interest in hunting and owned hunting lodges at various places in the Central Highlands (Vietnam Studies Group 2008). It seems that the Vietnamese elite had replaced the French elite. Reed (1995: 54) explains that after the French retreated, the Americans came and went, and then the Vietnamese claimed Da Lat as their own vacation centre. Furthermore, it began to attract increasing numbers of ordinary people.

At the same time that the French depicted the *montagnards* as savages and primitive people, the premodern view in lowland Vietnamese courts of these cultural Others who lived in the inhospitable mountains and fringes of civilisation was that they were barbarians (*man*), savages (*moi*) and uncultured beings (Taylor 2008: 17). Yet, as the DRV (followed by the SRV) began to build a modern nation-state based on socialist principles it incorporated these others as subjects of the 'imagined' and 'bounded' nation (Anderson 1987). This involved a classification project that 'fixed' diversity, based on the theory of social evolution (discussed further in the next chapter). As a result, the ethnic groups in the uplands of central and northern Vietnam were visited by Vietnamese government officials and scholars, influenced by the work of Marx, Morgan and Engels, to inspect their 'younger brothers'' development, and to conduct fieldwork involving

counting, labelling, evaluating and tutoring (Pelley 1998: 382).[19] At times they were accompanied by members of the *nomenklatura* or their compatriots from other COMECON countries on friendship exchanges. Semi-professional groups sang and danced in cultural performances for 'socialist workers, collective farmers and socialist intellectuals' at which culture and heritage was promoted in order to endorse a sense of (implicitly national) identity and solidarity (Salemink 1997: 517-518), another feature of socialist tourism (Hall 1991: 100).

In 1979, Vietnam occupied Cambodia, which resulted in conflict with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and a border war with China (Vasavakul 2001:373). In 1980, a new socialist constitution for the entire country was drawn up. However, combined with the persistence of wars, ten years of socialist development was not working. The strong resistance of cultivators, mainly to collectivisation but also to the command economy model, had considerably deepened the state's procurement crisis and aggravated the food shortages in urban areas in the late 1970s (Hy Van Luong 2003: 13). The leadership was forced to implement reform measures which culminated in the official endorsement of the policy of *doi moi* (renovation) at the Sixth National Party Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) in 1986.

[19] In addition to Vietnamese scholars, French and American scholars including Georges Condominas, Jacques Dournes and Gerald Hickey, visited and conducted prolonged ethnographic research among the highland minorities in the Central Highlands. In addition to documenting the devastation of the environment and the lives of highlanders during the US war and its aftermath, they paint a romantic picture of people who once lived in timeless harmony with nature (Condominas 1977; Dournes 1980; Hickey 1993).

Tourism today: the tourists

The decision of the SRV to open the door to foreign investors and traders as part of the *doi moi* reforms, kick-started international tourism beyond the faltering communist bloc (King and Fahey 1993; Kennedy and Williams 2001; Lloyd 2003; Michaud and Turner 2006). Between 1986 and 1989, the number of tourists from countries other than COMECON countries began to climb, as shown in Table 2 below, despite shortages of suitable infrastructure, accommodation facilities and skilled staff and difficult travelling conditions (Lenz 1993; Kennedy and Williams 2001).

Table 2: Tourists in Vietnam, 1986-1989 (Source: Hobson et al 1994: 43)

	Annual Growth			
Tourists	**1986**	**1987**	**1988**	**1989**
COMECON countries	6,300	6,600	16,028	31,723
Other foreign countries	4,581	7,581	17,865	40,966
Vietnam (estimate)	43,472	59,182	76,497	114,844
Total	**54,353**	**73,363**	**110,390**	**187,533**

Today, the definition of tourists in Vietnam is based on the United Nations World Tourism Organisation's (UNWTO)[20] definition of tourists, that is, 'persons travelling for purposes of holiday, business, attending conferences and meetings, visiting friends and relatives and study' (VNAT 2001: 5). Table 3 below shows the number of tourists and their origins, from 1991 until 2010.

[20] Vietnam became a member of the UNWTO in 1981. The UNWTO is also referred to as the WTO, which I am avoiding as it can be confused with the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which Vietnam joined in 2007.

Table 3: Tourists in Vietnam, and Total Earnings from Tourism, 1990-2010 (Sources: General Statistics Office 2005 and VNS 2010)

Year	No. of international tourists in Vietnam	By nationality/market (in order of highest no.)	No. of domestic tourists in Vietnam (approx.)	Total no. of tourists in Vietnam (approx.) (millions)	Total earnings (thousand billion VND)
1990	250,000	USA, Taiwan, France	1,000,000	1.25	1.35
1991	300,000	USA, Taiwan, France	1,500,000	1.8	1.68
1992	440,000	Taiwan, France, Japan	2,000,000	2.44	2.83
1993	669,862	USA, Taiwan, France	5,100,000	5.76	5.25
1994	1,018,244	USA, Taiwan, France	6,200,000	7.2	8
1995	1,351,296	Taiwan, USA, France	6,900,000	8.25	8.73
1996	1,607,155	China, Taiwan, USA	7,300,000	8.9	9.5
1997	1,715,637	China, Taiwan, USA	8,500,000	10.2	10.06
1998	1,520,128	China, USA, Taiwan	9,600,000	11.1	14
1999	1,781,754	China, USA, Taiwan	10,000,000	11.8	15.6
2000	2,140,100	China, Taiwan, USA	11,200,000	13.3	17.4
2001	2,330,050	China, USA, Taiwan	11,700,000	14	20.5
2002	2,627,988	China, Japan, USA	13,000,000	15.6	23
2003	2,428,735	China, USA, Japan	13,500,000	15.9	22
2004	2,927,876	China, USA, Japan	14,500,000	17.4	26
2005	3,467,757	China, USA, Japan	N/A	N/A	N/A
2006	3,583,486	China, USA, Japan	N/A	N/A	N/A
2007	4,171,564	China, South Korea, USA	N/A	N/A	N/A
2008	4,253,740	China, USA, South Korea	20,000,000*	24.3	N/A
2009	3,772,359	China, Japan, USA	25,000,000*	28.8	70*
2010[a]	3,731,919	China, Japan, South Korea	N/A	N/A	N/A

[a] Statistics for the first nine months of 2010

* Statistics from VNS (2010)

The large leap in the number of tourists from 1989 to 1990 (between Tables 2 and 3) raises questions about the accuracy of the statistics.[21] Nonetheless, the tables show that

[21]Estimates of tourists entering Vietnam should be understood as approximations rather than precise figures. There are discrepancies between figures cited by researchers (for example, Hobson *et al* 1994; Kennedy and Williams 2001) even though these are based on official statistics. Laurel Kennedy and Mary Rose Williams (2001) attribute the variances to discrepancies in the official statistics. For example, the statistics they provide are official ones, published by the VNAT, but which differ from those provided by the UNWTO (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 161). The definition and counting of tourists is also a contributing factor. For example, the UNWTO statistics sometimes represent travellers entering the country on organised tours, visitors entering through the international airports, or categories including tourists, business travellers, and those visiting friends and relatives. While statistics for international tourists are predominantly gathered from records of passengers on airplanes and ships, and border crossings to Vietnam, it is more difficult to

the number of tourists, both international and domestic, has dramatically increased each year since 1986. However, there are three exceptions to this steady growth, as can be seen in Table 3. In 1997 and especially 1998, there was a decline in the growth of international tourists, due to the combined effects of a too-rapid expansion of the luxury end of the tourism market, which could not be sustained by the Vietnamese economy, and the Asian financial crisis (Cooper 2000: 176; General Statistics Office 2005). Also, in 2003 there was a drop in international tourist numbers due to the SARS and bird flu epidemics (General Statistics Office 2005); there was also another decrease in 2009 as a result of the global financial crisis.

Since the US travel ban was lifted in 1991, the majority of tourists and international visitors to Vietnam have come from the US. They were and continue to be predominantly *Viet kieu* or overseas Vietnamese. Having fled Vietnam as refugees in the 1970s, they and subsequent generations are returning in increasing numbers, mainly as 'pilgrims' to visit family and friends, but also for holiday and business purposes (Nguyen Thu Huong and King 2002: 222). This pattern is similar to that of the *Viet kieu* from France, although they are fewer in number. Furthermore, tourism agencies package the war for ex-GIs (and Vietnam veterans in Australia) and their relatives and friends, by marketing war veteran's tours, promoting 'wartime heritage' and selling war-related souvenirs such as Zippo lighters and combat fatigues (Walters 1990; Biles *et al* 1999; Henderson 2000; Alneng 2002a). Travel to Vietnam for them may also be about 'pilgrimage', but into the past (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 143). Tourism agencies also market the extravagant French colonial past and design tours to sites of significance, which appeal especially to tourists from France and other European countries, including *Viet kieu*, nostalgic for colonial history (Biles *et al* 1999; Kennedy and Williams 2001).

More recently the most numerous group of international visitors are from East Asia, generally seeking 'culturally anonymous destinations' such as beaches, golf resorts and

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obtain numbers on domestic tourists. Numbers of passengers on domestic flights can be used, just as statistics gathered from bringing together records of visitors serviced by accommodation establishments and/or travel agencies, but not all tourists use these services. However, it should be noted that statistics on tourism in Vietnam since *doi moi* are more reliable and readily available. During my fieldwork in 2003-2004 I gathered relevant assorted statistics not only through visits to various offices of the government and international organisations, but also from books and reports found in bookshops and libraries in Vietnam. Since then many statistics have been made available on the internet, as has a lot more information on Mai Chau, both by the state and the tourism industry.

duty-free shopping (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 143). The majority of tourists are from neighbouring China, mostly entering Vietnam through land border crossings, especially to go shopping and sightseeing (Vu The Binh in Runckel 2005; Thuy-Huong Truong and King 2009), but also for gambling and sex (Wah 2008, 2009). Many are also well-heeled tourists from Taiwan, Japan and more recently South Korea. This trend not only reflects the rise of a middle class due to recent economic growth in these countries, but also a focus on strengthening regional development in the form of foreign investment, and multilateral and bilateral aid (Hobson *et al* 1994).

Tables 2 and 3 also show, however, that the majority of tourists in Vietnam are domestic tourists, the number of whom has also steadily increased each year. From the 1980s, government restrictions on movement within Vietnam for Vietnamese people were lifted so that, if they could afford it, they were able to move around the country without first obtaining transport coupons, petrol rations or permission papers from the police (Hardy, 2003: 261). Since the implementation of *doi moi* and in the context of relatively stable political conditions, Vietnam generally has achieved remarkable successes on the economic front, bearing fundamental similarities to the Chinese reform experiences and diverging from the paths of transformation in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (Hy Van Luong 2003: 11).

Doi moi has provided new employment opportunities in the private sector in Vietnam, giving rise to new groups of affluent urbanites (Nee 1989), particularly in the largest cities. Their newly-emerging lifestyles characteristically include expensive pleasure pursuits, such as tourism, involving high levels of consumption (Drummond and Thomas 2003; Michaud and Turner 2006). Interested primarily in leisure and recreation, they are similar to international tourists from East Asia. In addition, less affluent Vietnamese but with money to spare, including older couples and families with children, undertake package tours around the country (Michaud and Turner 2006: 793). The collective consumption of tourism and recreational activities by government workers still occurs as it did in the communist era (Michaud and Turner 2006: 794), and domestic tourists continue to attend festivals, religious events and pilgrimages, and civil events around the country, as they did throughout the French and communist eras (Malarney 1996; Taylor 2004a; DiGregorio and Salemink 2007; Salemink 2007).

Table 3 demonstrates that the dramatic growth in the number of tourists in Vietnam since *doi moi* has been coupled with a steady increase in earnings gained from tourism. It is primarily for this reason, according to Ms Vo Thi Thang, director-general of VNAT, that the government has given priority to the development of a tourism industry as part of its national development strategy since *doi moi* (*Viet Nam Cultural Window* 2001: 2-3). Indeed, in 1994, tourism's contribution to GDP was 3.5 per cent, which grew to 4.4 percent in 1995 (Cooper 2000: 170) and was planned to increase to 15.4 per cent in 2010 (IBP USA 2009: 74).

In the interview with the deputy director of the ITDR of VNAT, he explained that the government's focus has mistakenly been solely on international tourism and not on domestic tourism. He said:

> Up to now, the Institute has not looked at the domestic market. There has been no research done. This is a mistake [by] us. Domestic tourism is very important for the future, especially in the case of a crisis, such as SARS, bird flu and the regional economic crisis. Domestic tourism is important because international tourists do not come.

Tourism today: a blend of socialist and capitalist ideals

Tourism in Vietnam today is characterised by the marketisation and expansion of the industry as well as consistent growth in tourists in the country and of earnings gained from tourism, since *doi moi* was officially endorsed in 1986. Occurring in the context of an ongoing market formation process (Ljunggren 1993; Fforde and de Vylder 1996; Dang Phong and Beresford 1998), *doi moi* has involved a range of reforms that have permitted decollectivisation, the growth of a multisector economy, private ownership and the liberalisation of foreign trade and investment (Hy Van Luong 1993; Michaud and Turner 2006). It has involved a transition from the command economy model of which the northern Vietnamese population generally had more experience than the southerners (Hy Van Luong 2003: 13), towards a neoliberal market economy, while maintaining a socialist state.[22] It is in this context that tourism in Vietnam today is described as 'post-

[22] This transition is described as being gradual, similar to that in China (Kumssa and Jones 1999: 194).

communist' or 'post-socialist' (Hall 1991; Michaud and Turner 2006) and as characterised by a blend of socialist and capitalist ideals (Lloyd 2003).

Compared with the communist era, tourism in Vietnam today is different because tourism facility providers are marketised again, as they were under the French. The state no longer determines the flows of people within Vietnam. Rather, who gets to go where is a market proposition where people take responsibility for their own choices. Business entities are no longer solely owned and run by the government as they were in the communist era. While the state is still present, it is now less visible. For example, the state-run organisation, *Tong cuc Du lich Viet Nam* or VNAT was established in 1992 and is officially responsible for implementing the government's policies on the tourism industry, from central to local organisations (Cooper 2000: 175). A special unit of VNAT, Vietnam Tourism, is responsible for promoting travel to the country and offering tours (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 140). However, in the early 1990s when the government was placing significant emphasis on a perceived 'safe' and 'non-intrusive' luxury tourist market, which promised lucrative financial benefits combined with minimal political and security risks,[23] a small group of entrepreneurs in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi took it upon themselves to establish businesses, now known as traveller cafes, which provided services for a new budget clientele of backpackers (Lloyd 2003: 355).

Furthermore, there are state-associated local travel offices that implement VNAT's policies and plans. Located in major cities and provincial centres, the local offices often act independently from VNAT, competing with Vietnam Tourism. Hanoi Tourism and Saigon Tourist, in particular, have substantial independent powers (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 141). In addition, the People's Committees and various ministries, such as the army and Labour Union, still own hotels, control vast amounts of property, and have their own access to official power structures (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 141). Acting as tour operators, they are also centrally important as potential joint-venture partners for the international tourist industry or as liaisons between international partners and entrepreneurs in Vietnam's private sector (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 141). However,

[23] The reluctance of the Vietnam government to facilitate backpacker tourism because backpackers were perceived as spending little money and bringing a 'high risk' of negative socio-cultural effects on local communities (Lloyd 2003: 355), was similar to governments of other developing countries in the region, as shown by Picard (1996) for example. Yet, Hampton (1998) and Scheyvens (2002) present an alternative perspective, whereby they argue that the encouragement of backpacker tourism can promote development, particularly at the local level.

most government hotels are austere and associated services are limited, a legacy of the communist era (King and Fahey 1993). The government still has a presence in the tourism industry but if it is to profit from tourism it must now compete with numerous others, including more powerful private companies, which are 'increasingly becoming large, vertically integrated and internationalised Western and East Asian firms including hoteliers and recreations site developers' (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 142).

Today the state plays more of a supporting role in the tourism industry. For example, it provides and regulates transport, and grants loans for tourism-related activities, but is not the only provider. In particular, the government plays a subsidiary role of regulator. While in the 1990s the government set out to encourage as many international and domestic tourists as possible to travel to and around Vietnam, and to provide adequate infrastructure for this, in the 2000s its attitude towards tourism has changed. The relatively unfettered dynamics of demand and supply in the 1990s resulted in an increase in the number of entrepreneurs and joint ventures pursuing high economic returns from tourism, usually with little regard for their effect on local natural environments and their inhabitants. By the mid to late 1990s, reports began to appear highlighting and warning against the socio-economic, cultural and environmental impacts of such tourism development on ethnic minority communities, particularly in Sa Pa, where mass tourism was fast developing (Witty and Hamilton 1996; DiGregorio *et al* 1997; Nicholson 1997; Dearden 1998; Koeman 1998; Pham Trung Luong and Nguyen Van Binh 1998; Cukier *et al* 1999; Hainsworth 1999; Pham Thi Mong Hoa and Lam Thi Mai Lan 1999; Mai Thi Thanh Thai 2002). In addition, karaoke bars and 'hugging bars' began to proliferate, providing the sexual amenities sought by both international and domestic tourists (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 150).

In order to address these issues, in 2001 the government drew up the *Revised Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development in Vietnam (2001-2010)* with the UNWTO as executing agency and financed by the UNDP with further support from the VNAT (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2001). It included plans for tourism development to the year 2010, in which sustainability is one of the major themes, and explained that the government 'expects tourism to develop swiftly in the next decade, becoming a "spearhead" economic sector of the national economy, while playing an important long-term role in the sustainability of the country's culture, economy, environment and state

security' (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2001: 12). Yet, while the Master Plan provided the orientation of tourism development in Vietnam, the mechanisms for implementing it were only put into place on 14 June 2005 when the Tourism Law was ratified by the government at the eleventh National Assembly (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2005). The law, which consists of 88 articles, replaces the first Tourism Ordinance issued in 1999 with 55 articles. In interview, a representative of the department of legal affairs of VNAT explained that the law marked an important step forward in the improvement of the legal foundation for the tourism domain. She says the law not only improves the effectiveness of the Tourism Ordinance but also improves its content, with new stipulations to regulate the operations of tourism companies. Time will tell what impacts this new tourism law will have on the regulation of tourism in Vietnam.

The government still plays a central role in security matters. In addition to physical security, it still attempts to control ideological security in that it regulates promotional content. Until the policy of *doi moi* was instituted, the Vietnamese media had the role of spreading propaganda and consequently focused less on reporting news than on educating the populace (Drummond and Thomas 2003: 3). David Marr (1998) argues that since *doi moi* the mass media has undergone a radical face-lift and has fuelled consumer interest in new products. These new products include tourist products. In particular, in the post-communist search for identity, combined with a global shift from mass towards niche tourism (Hall 1991: 100), the government continues to promote heritage tourism. It employs 'heritage', a value-laden concept in which economic power and politics influence what is preserved and how it is interpreted (Hall 1991: 199), as a leisure resource, a cultural symbol and a means of reinforcing national identity. Sites around Vietnam that are particularly popular among both domestic and foreign tourists include UNESCO World Heritage sites such as Ha Long Bay in the north (since 1994), as well as Hue Imperial City (since 1993), Hoi An Ancient Town (since 1999), My Son Cham Towers (since 1999) and Phong Nha – Ke Bang National Park (since 2003), all in the centre of Vietnam (VNAT 2005). Tourists consume the feudal past by visiting ancient pagodas and temples. Also, domestic tourists consume nationalism, for example, visiting Ho Chi Minh's mausoleum in Hanoi as if on a pilgrimage.

Tourism in the uplands today still includes mountain resort tourism, particularly in Da Lat and Sa Pa. While the French colonialists to Da Lat were replaced by the Vietnamese elite

during the communist era, today Da Lat is a popular destination for domestic tourists. According to Victor Alneng (2002b: 130), 725,000 domestic and 71,000 international tourists visited Da Lat in 2001[24] and the majority of foreign tourists were *viet kieu* or overseas Vietnamese. Alneng (2002b: 130-134) explains the different gazes and consumption of the hill station by domestic and interational tourists. For Vietnamese from the tropical lowlands, Da Lat, *Le Petit Paris* or the City of Eternal Spring, is a 'highly seductive elsewhereness'; a cold and therefore exotic place with 'rolling pine tree clad hills', a romantic ambiance and 'exceptionally beautiful girls with pale complexion' as a result of the highland climate (Alneng 2002b: 131). For Westerners, the pine trees, the temperate climate and Alp-style villas are pleasant but not very exotic (Alneng 2002b: 132). Most international travel agencies do not include Da Lat in their schedules and Da Lat is declared in the *Lonely Planet Vietnam* travel guide as 'the Disneyland of the central highlands' and 'the final word in Vietnamese kitsch' where the cherished spots are dismissed as 'circus-style tourist attractions' (Storey and Florence 2001 cited in Alneng 2002b: 132). Alneng (2002b: 134) also argues that there is a Western attitude that 'natives-as-tourists' or domestic tourists are inauthentic due to their inability to perform according to modernist ideals. The body of literature that articulates different domestic and international gazes of tourist sites and attractions around the world is growing, which Bruner (2001) contributes to nicely in his paper about the Masaai in Africa.

While Da Lat rapidly expanded during the French era, it has been since the mid-1990s that Sa Pa has transformed from a 'dusty provincial Vietnamese hamlet' into an urbanised modern town, a change largely directed by district and provincial authorities who want the hill station to be seen as another Da Lat (Michaud and Turner 2006: 790-792). Elite foreign and domestic tourists are still drawn to Sa Pa, as in the French era. Parallels can be drawn between the middle-class domestic tourists of today and the middle-class colonial French families and affluent Vietnamese who visited during the French era (Michaud and Turner 2006: 794). Tourists to Sa Pa today also include foreign backpackers and Vietnamese government workers. They have a choice of hotels and guesthouses, the number of which has rapidly expanded over a decade (DiGregorio *et al* 1997). They are either owned privately or by the state, as are the abundant tourist shops.

[24] The *Lonely Planet Vietnam* guide book published in 2007 contains more recent statistics of over 800,000 domestic and 80,000 international tourists visiting Da Lat (Ray *et al*, 2007: 307).

These hill stations are not the only destinations in the uplands. According to *Lonely Planet Vietnam*, 'highlights' in the uplands in the north include, 'discovering the lakes, rivers, waterfalls and caves in Ba Be National Park from the comfort of a boat' and 'exploring the beautiful, remote and little-visited waterfalls, caves and historical sites around Cao Bang on the Chinese border' (Florence and Jealous 2003: 214). The guide also advises 'hitting the "northwest loop" by jeep, motorbike or bicycle to take in some of Southeast Asia's most exhilarating mountain scenery' and 'exploring the foothills – or make the challenging ascent – of Fansipan, Vietnam's highest mountain' (Florence and Jealous 2003: 243). Similarly, highlights in the Central Highlands include 'getting off the beaten track and into the wilds of Yok Don or Cat Tien National Parks' and 'hitting the road on two wheels and following the rugged and historic "Ho Chi Minh Trail"' (Florence and Jealous 2003: 397). While adventure tourism is still occurring in the fanciful Far West of Vietnam, hunting has been banned since the government legislated to promote the conservation of natural resources.

Ethnic tourism: treks and visits to 'highland villages'

An increasing number of tourists are making it to the uplands with the prime objective of 'encountering' highland minorities (Michaud and Turner 2006: 799). These travellers are dominated by European 'hippie travellers' and young Australian backpackers (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 142). They can be described as searching for an 'authentic experience' in contrast to the modern (MacCannell 1973). They undertake 'pilgrimages' that are not explicitly religious but nonetheless involve hope for a conversion of the self by leaving behind the superficiality of modern life as they know it at home (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 143). Thus, the ethnic minorities in the uplands provide the requisite mystic exoticism for them. Yet, unlike Nepal or northern Thailand, the attraction seems unrelated to a search for spiritual meaning, or freely available drugs for that matter, but instead an endless quest for the most remote place with the most exotic people (Biles *et al* 1999: 220).

While tourists are still visiting villages inhabited by ethnic minorities surrounding Sa Pa and Da Lat, as they did in the French era, they now visit an increasing number of villages not only in the immediate areas but also in other parts of the Central Highlands and northern mountains. For example, a highlight of the Central Highlands is to 'visit the

Bahnar and Jarai hill-tribe villages around Buon Ma Thuot, Pleiku and Kon Tum' (Florence and Jealous 2003: 397). Trekking to highland villages is now advertised in the tourism promotional material. For example, in the northwest, tourists can 'trek to highland villages and spend time with hill-tribe communities' (Florence and Jealous 2003: 243). While sleeping over in minority villages surrounding Sa Pa is officially illegal for foreigners (Michaud and Turner 2006: 797), tourists can nevertheless book a short trek through a few guesthouses, hotels and up-market trekking agencies in Sa Pa which provide a tour guide and include overnight stays in the villages.

Similarly, new groups of affluent urbanites in Vietnam may be said to be searching for an 'authentic experience'. However, regarding domestic tourists to the Sa Pa hill station, Michaud and Turner found that:

> Kinh tourists also tend to approach the local minorities in a very set way through cultural performances prepared for touristic consumption in locations and at times fitting the tourist agenda. Very rarely will national tourists to Sa Pa take the trouble to visit a minority village and see for themselves the reality of highland life, as this would be perceived as totally unnecessary (2006: 796).

Ethnic tourism is a new form of tourism in the uplands of Vietnam today for a number of reasons. First, the uplands have been and in some cases still are inaccessible. This is mainly due to the difficult terrain but also the wars. Parts of the uplands are still off limits to tourists today due to the presence of military bases, which were used during the wars, and that are in various strategic positions scattered throughout the uplands. Nevertheless, as one village elder commented, 'Visitors have permission from the government to go everywhere. Now there is no war in Vietnam so the government gives permission to people from other countries to come and go everywhere; even I can go'.

Villages are more accessible due to the expansion of the road and transportation system, so tourists can travel to the more accessible villages by land transport such as motorbike taxis or jeeps with drivers. *Montagnard* markets are usually located beside a road and easier to get to in most cases. For example, in tourism guidebooks tourists are still encouraged to 'enjoy the sights and sounds of vibrant Montagnard markets' in Sa Pa today as in the French era, although they are also encouraged to attend markets in other

parts of the north-western uplands (Florence and Jealous 2003: 243), including another 'colourful' Hmong market in the neighbouring district of Bac Ha (Michaud and Turner 2006: 797). Likewise, cultural performances in hotels and bars are more central and easier to attend.

A second reason for the recent phenomenon of ethnic tourism is that the state has not always regarded ethnic minorities in a positive light. With a predominant view of ethnic minorities as 'backward', 'ignorant' and 'remote', the state, with the aim of industrialisation and becoming the next 'Asian tiger', has not wished to include this image in representations of Vietnam to the outside world. The predominant view of ethnic minorities overlaps with the most influential depiction of ethnic minorities today as developmentally disadvantaged and among the nation's poor and hungry, where the lowland Viet are the centre, the cultural standard and model of development for all ethnic groups (Taylor 2004b, 2007, 2008). In representations of the new Vietnam 'brand' to the global market today (Kennedy and Williams 2001), ethnic minorities are *selectively* included in images of a 'multiethnic' nation whereby the nation is reminded of how far they have come (Taylor and Jonsson 2002).

Finally, ethnic tourism is a new form of tourism in the uplands because the government has been reluctant to open up the uplands to other kinds of tourists due to security concerns. Not only are the minorities largely located on the politically sensitive borders of China, Laos and Cambodia, but they may also criticise the government. The most recent overt examples of oppositional politics against the socialist state were in 2001 and 2004, when the ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands demonstrated against their dispossession and cultural disenfranchisement (McElwee 2004; Taylor 2004b, 2007). At the time, the government restricted the access of foreigners to this region. Furthermore, with a predominant view of ethnic minorities as among the nation's poor and hungry**,** the government is worried that they will steal from tourists. It is also apprehensive about the behaviour of tourists. For example, backpackers have not been encouraged because they tend to venture out, unaccompanied by official guides (Biles *et al* 1999: 227; Lloyd 2003). The government is also wary of missionaries posing as tourists and converting minorities to Christianity, and of cross-border political activists encouraging ethnonationalism.

In an interview, the vice director of the ethnic culture department in the ministry of culture and information explained that there are three ethnic minority villages that the government considers to be model tourism villages: the ethnic M'nong village of Don in Da Lat, the Hmong village of Cat Cat in Sa Pa, and the Tai village of Tap. These are considered as contributing to the government's aim of improving the socio-economic lives of ethnic minorities. According to the deputy director of ITDR:

> Ethnic tourism attracts visitors, especially international visitors. It is very important. It gives them [minorities] more opportunities, provides more jobs, and increases their living standards. They get money from services, homestay, products, handicrafts and food supply.

He went on to say that it is difficult trying to maintain a balance between the economic development of a community and the 'conservation of traditional culture' and that the researchers at the institute are trying to learn from cases in Hawaii, New Zealand and Bali that, he believes, have this balance.

The *Revised Master Plan for Sustainable Tourism Development in Vietnam (2001-2010)* places greater emphasis on the development of eco-tourism and village tourism in the 'remoter' areas (Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2001: 19). With a new focus on sustainable tourism development, the government is working with a number of international non-government organisation initiatives which focus on tourism-supported development, seeking to solve the growth–sustainability dilemma, at both policy-making and community development levels. They use tourism development increasingly in the form of eco-tourism and cultural tourism as a strategy for 'poverty reduction and livelihood enhancement for the ethnic minority poor, including those in relatively remote locations' (Hainsworth 1999: 247). Thus, a new form of tourism is emerging in the uplands that is variously labelled, for example, as 'responsible tourism' by Caritas Switzerland, Caritas Luxembourg and Footprint Travel Vietnam, which advertises responsible tours in Quan Ba district in Ha Giang province; 'community-based tourism' by Lau Cai authorities, Association of Canada Community Colleges and the faculty of tourism of Hanoi Open University, which run a joint project in Ta Van and Ta Phin villages in Sa Pa; and 'sustainable pro-poor tourism' by SNV, a Netherlands development organisation, which runs a sustainable pro-poor tourism program throughout Vietnam.

This is an example of niche tourism that appeals to a small number of mainly international tourists who are concerned about minimising the impact of their visit on local societies and environments.

The academic literature on tourism in Vietnam shows that among studies of tourism in the uplands, most attention has been paid to the Sa Pa and Da Lat hill stations. Furthermore, anthropological studies of so-called ethnic tourism in the uplands have focused on Sa Pa hill station or town. For example, Duong Bich Hanh (2008) shows how Hmong girls engage with tourists in their everyday life in Sa Pa town, not only for economic reasons but also for social reasons. She argues that the girls go through a three stage process of moving from their home villages to Sa Pa town, to live in rooms in guesthouses with other girls, to moving out and renting rooms on their own, to returning to their villages as cosmopolitans with their horizons widened. Also, Michaud and Turner (2006) found that ethnic minorities are not involved in the tourism development process in Sa Pa town, except as an exotic spectacle to view, as during the French colonial era. Nevertheless, they have also found that Hmong women selectively engage in textile production and trade in order to diversify their livelihoods (Turner and Michaud 2008). While this dissertation focuses on similar matters of tourism, such as minority involvement, motivations, everyday life, identity, influences and outcomes, the setting is in two villages and it therefore centres not only on individuals, but also on households and families, as well as the villages themselves.

Development of tourism in Tap and Noi villages: welcoming 'guests'

According to the villagers, tourism began in Tap in the 1960s, during the time of reform and in the lead-up to the US war. In spite of the hardships they were experiencing, they still welcomed guests. The newly-established People's Committee in Mai Chau (*Uy Ban Nhan Dan Mai Chau*) asked Mr Dan if he would accept guests in his house. Mr Dan was both the leader of the Statistics Office and an accountant for the newly-formed Mai Chau Cooperative at the time. When I asked him why the local government had asked him, he replied:

> I don't know. They asked me even though my house was small. Maybe because I had many jobs so I knew a lot of people so that is why the leader of Mai Chau

> chose this house first for the official guests to visit. The president of Mai Chau district was my close friend and the wife of the vice president of Mai Chau district was my wife's cousin. I knew a lot of people in Hoa Binh town, for example, the president and vice president of Hoa Binh province and the leader of the police office in Hoa Binh province.

Mr Dan acceded to the request and was given a pair of mats[25] by the People's Committee with which to greet the guests in his house when they visited the village for a short time during the day.

The guests came from other socialist republics in the world, or country members of COMECON, including the former USSR, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia, Cuba and the former Democratic Republic of Germany. They were mainly ambassadors or government workers from their respective countries. They usually stayed in the village for around three hours and their stay typically consisted of walking around, visiting houses and viewing the daily life of the villagers; many were particularly interested in the women's weaving. The villagers recall that while they saw all foreigners as guests to their village, their capacity to treat them as such was constrained by both the presence of Vietnamese officials and their own poor conditions.

The foreigners were guests not only of the villages but also of the state, on exchange visits or friendship group exchanges. They were therefore accompanied by representatives of the Vietnamese government with the aim of exchanging thoughts on Marxist-Leninist ideas of ethnicity including equality, solidarity and mutual assistance, in addition to ways of implementing socialist transformation among their 'compatriots' in the highlands. However, these 'exchanges' occurred among the visiting government officials and did not include the villagers. The current village leader recalled that the visitors and villagers were not allowed to have contact with one another. The authorities led them around and although they went into houses, only the authorities interacted with the guests. Mr Dan said,

[25] Mats, made from tightly woven bamboo, are an important item in the household and a symbol of hospitality. Villagers do not sit at tables and chairs in their homes, rather they sit on the floor. The mats usually come in pairs especially when given as a gift at weddings – one each for the husband and the wife. They are not only believed to be more comfortable to sit on than the split bamboo floor but also to hold the soul of the people sitting on them.

> They were all ambassadors, so they were very important guests, and the police did not allow me to learn a language. In 1963 I wanted to learn a foreign language but the police did not allow me. From 1987 the police allowed me to learn a foreign language but I was too old to learn.

The village leader explained that the visitors did not stay overnight in the village. He said: 'In the past it was difficult to buy goods from the state shop because we could not afford it, so we had no mats, et cetera'. Instead, the guests slept in Hoa Binh town. It was a time of poverty and the majority of the villagers did not have much food either. The guests sometimes gave gifts of food. A villager remembers an occasion in 1968 or 1969 when people from the former USSR did stay overnight in the village: 'The people in the village killed a pig and cooked a lot of food for them. At that time we took no money from the tourists'. This comment highlights the fact that the villagers did not see tourism in solely economic terms at the time. The 'cultural performance' (*nghe van hoa*) was established in Mai Chau in the 1960s. Performers in both villages represented their village and ethnicity through their participation in 'friendly performances' with other villages and ethnic groups in the district and province, and also with other performance groups from around Vietnam who visited the villages. Furthermore, the cultural performance was performed by villagers in Tap to foreign visitors in order to, according to the choreographer, 'introduce the traditional culture of the Tai people to the guests'. Today, inhabitants of both villages participate in the cultural performance for 'friendly' and competitive occasions as well as for tourism; this is discussed further in Chapter 7.

From the villagers' perspective, both the foreign *and* Vietnamese officials who visited the village were guests and these guests were the first 'tourists'. This can be compared with the story of the vice director of the department of ethnic culture in the ministry of culture and information, who had been a teacher in Mai Chau in the late 1960s, a time of the great Tet offensive in South Vietnam. According to him, 'Tourists from communist countries were not really interested in tourism, just exchange visits. Real tourists were mostly French, in 1968…French soldiers returning to visit their base in the northwest

visited the village[26] along with journalists and aid workers'.[27] He also said that aid workers from Japan visited in 1968-1969.

While he was a teacher in Mai Chau, the vice director had also acted as a guide to these foreigners visiting the village: 'district officials asked for a person with high education to guide the tourists. At that time not many locals knew about Kinh and foreigners. A person like me, with more education and as a teacher of the local people, was very helpful to guide tourists'. Leaving his teaching position in Mai Chau, he became the vice director of the provincial Hoa Binh tourism department in the culture office. Using the newest vernacular for describing tourism in the villages, he said he had contributed a lot to the building of the 'eco-tourism model' in Tap village. While officials at the central and provincial levels are now in the process of trying to promote sustainable tourism and eco-tourism, they had previously promoted cultural tourism in the villages, so that both the representations created by the tourist industry and the narratives of the villagers are centred on cultural tourism today, as is shown throughout this dissertation.

The vice director also highlighted the importance of a new road built in 1968 (currently Highway 6) that redirected the old French built road over Thung Khe mountain (known in ancient Tai texts and locally as the Ai Slope). He said that the road was built for a number of reasons; without it, to travel to Son La and Dien Bien one had twice to cross over the Black River 'which had been very difficult during the war for transportation'. It was also built as part of the preparations for the construction of the Hoa Binh dam. The new road not only made it much easier for people to travel to the uplands but also exposed the Mai Chau valley; it meant that from the high vantage point on Thung Khe mountain, people had a spectacular view of the Mai Chau valley (see Photograph 1 in Chapter 1). The vice director said:

> At first there was no tourism. In the beginning a new road was built. People were curious to see the new road. From Thung Khe you could look down and see the very beautiful valley. It was very interesting and a beautiful view. From Hanoi to

[26] Following the 1954 Geneva agreements, the French paid the Vietnamese to maintain the cemeteries in which French soldiers' remains were buried. From time to time, French veteran groups returned to these military cemeteries for remembrance ceremonies until 1989 when the French exhumed all remains and returned them to France (Schlatter 2011).
[27] There is a disused Red Cross building on Highway 15 in Mai Chau town.

> that place there were no villages that were beautiful like that. From Mai Chau to the northwest (*Tay Bac*) not many places have the same scenery.

According to a member of staff at the tourism office in the department of trade and tourism of Hoa Binh province, the first tourism policy in Mai Chau was in 1974. The aim of this policy, he said, was government investment and incorporation of the local people, and what the government invested in depended on what the locals had. The reason for this investment policy was that the local families were welcoming foreigners to stay at their houses so the government wanted to develop tourism at the time. Significantly, the government body at the district level responsible for overseeing tourism development in Tap village was the culture office, which also oversaw reform of ritual in the villages (described in more detail in the following chapter).

Villagers also speak of their own welcoming attitude, as the following comments testify:

> In the past Tai people were friendly and liked to have visitors so now when tourists come they are happy.

> Everyone in this village likes to have visitors stay in their house. Even if they are not a visitor, if they are just passing through, we are willing to invite them into our house and give them a place to sleep.

When I asked a village elder why the early tourists visited Tap village, he replied: 'Because in the past Tap was the poorest village and the road to get here was very difficult but the people here were good and hospitable'. Another villager explained:

> The Tai in Mai Chau came from Son La province about five hundred years ago and the Tai came to Tap village around four hundred years ago. Only six or seven households settled on this land. They helped and loved each other, they were united and they did not have a landlord to control them. At the time that the Vietnamese government had close relations with Russia and Cuba, the government brought visitors here to this area to visit the minorities here. They saw that Tap village was small and beautiful and that the people were friendly so they wanted to make friends with the Tai people in Tap. Before they left Vietnam to

> return to their country, they told the Vietnam government that it should provide new seeds and run a program here to make Tap village richer. The foreigners talked with their friends about Tap so after that many visitors wanted to come here. The first time Tap had visitors we were not allowed to have guests stay in our houses.

Through word-of–mouth, more tourists visited the village. As previously mentioned, the DRV and then the SRV invested in many industrial projects around northern Vietnam, with help mainly from other COMECON countries. People from these countries visited the region as officials, project managers and researchers, some of whom visited the village. For example, Czech workers from a shoe company in Hai Phong visited, as well as Swedish workers from nearby Bai Bang paper mill in what was then called Vinh Phu province (now Phu Tho province) after the US war, from the late 1970s until mid-1980s.

The construction of the hydroelectric dam on the Black River, two kilometres upstream of Hoa Binh town in what was then called Ha Son Binh province, brought more visitors from the 1970s.[28] The project was constructed with financial and technical assistance from the USSR. Planning for the dam started in 1971, construction commenced in 1979 and the project was completed in 1991. A member of staff at the state tourism office in Hoa Binh province said that he had studied in the USSR for seven years, majored in hydroelectricity and was involved in the construction of the dam. He said that from 1974 to 1994, engineers, technicians and project managers from the USSR visited Tap. He explained that there were not only Russians, but also people from Bulgaria, Poland and Hungary, some of whom worked for the dam, some for the embassies. They went in groups of about eight people to relax on Sundays. He was an interpreter for the Russians and recalled that 'if we wanted to stay overnight we had to ask for permission from the local authorities, but it was very poor, with no toilets, no bathroom, so we did not stay'.

An outcome of the visits to Mai Chau by ethnographers such as Dang Nghiem Van was an edited volume in Vietnamese, entitled *In Search of the Traditional Culture of the Thái in Mai Chau*, published in 1988 on the occasion of the celebration of the 30-year anniversary of Mai Chau commune. The contributors included researchers such as Dang

[28] According to Phillip Hirsch (1992: 10) the Hoa Binh dam was the largest hydroelectric project in Southeast Asia at the time.

Nghiem Van and several Tai and Kinh officials of Mai Chau district. Their aim was to publish on the traditional culture of Tai people in Mai Chau in order to describe them to others (Ha Trong Sinh 1988: 8).

After a number of events, including the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1991 and the lifting of the US economic boycott of Vietnam in 1993, Tap became a destination for international tourists on package tours. The tourists could 'visit a village of the Thai [*Thái*] ethnic minority' on an eight-day trip, for example, which included another visit to a Muong village in 'Ha Son Binh' (present day Hoa Binh) and site-seeing in Hanoi, Hai Phong and Ha Long Bay (Su That Publishing House and Vietnam Tourism 1989: 178). These trips were organised by the tour agencies with Vietnam Tourism in Hanoi. Tourists travelling independently of a tour group within Vietnam also had to book through Vietnam Tourism or one of the numerous cafes in Hanoi that started to spring up from the early 1990s (Lloyd 2003), which provided transportation and a tour guide for the tourists.

All foreigners were covertly accompanied by police. In an interview in August 2005, the sales and marketing manager of the Hoa Binh Tourism Company explained that when travelling to the village foreigners first went to Hoa Binh town as they had to register with the province and pay a fee. They did this at the state-run Hoa Son Binh Tourism Hotel (now Hoa Binh Hotel II) where a 'local guide' was also organised for them. He recalled: 'Up until three or four years ago [2001-2002] there was always a policeman that followed every tour. The policeman went along as part of the tour and told the tourists that he was a local guide'. A barricade across the road in Mai Chau formed another checkpoint, after which the tourists were led around by their accredited tour guide(s) as well as accompanied by the 'local guide' or policeman. At the same time the police stopped accompanying foreign tourists, tour agents no longer had to register foreign tourists at the provincial level in Hoa Binh town, instead they travelled straight to Mai Chau where they registered at the district level.

Funds were provided by the government to build a guesthouse, the state-run Mai Chau Guesthouse situated on Highway 15, at the turnoff to Noi village (see Photograph 8 below, also Map 6 in the introductory chapter). Building began in 1991 and was completed in 1993. The guesthouse was a place for authorities and guests to stay and to hold meetings. A toll booth was also built, which replaced the barricade across the road,

at which all tourists to the village were required to register and pay a fee; however, by the time I arrived in 2003 this toll booth was no longer staffed and tourists travelled straight to the villages.

Photograph 8: Mai Chau Guesthouse and disused toll booth

In 1993, not only did the Mai Chau district government provide the capital to build a road from Highway 15 to Tap village to make Tap more easily accessible to the increasing number of tourists, but it also changed the status of Tap to a Cultural Tourism Village. This official status implied two changes, one of which was that the Vietnamese government endorsed a particular type of tourism in the village, that is, cultural tourism where, according to a number of officials I spoke with, the focus is on Tai people and their culture, customs, habits and life. This means that tourism development in the villages is overseen by the various culture offices at each level of the government. The vice director of the ethnic culture department in the ministry of culture and information said:

> One day, we thought, how can we get more tourists to come? How do we develop tourism? Because we only show buffalos in the rice paddies. This is a very poor service. Then we know how to develop the tourism service; keep stilt houses, weaving and other cultural tourism services.

The new status of Cultural Tourism Village also meant that villagers had permission from the authorities to run a *nha khach* or guesthouse, to contribute to household income and to

charge tourists for their stay. According to one villager, at first guests continued to stay overnight in the state-run Mai Chau Guesthouse, 'because the village was not convenient for guests to stay in as there were no bathrooms or toilets'.

Mr Dan's family, along with another, was the first to run a guesthouse. Mr Dan explained that when he started operating the guesthouse there were tourists visiting from many countries, including Germany, France, Japan, Sweden and America, and from other parts of Vietnam. Vietnamese tourists included students, researchers and official guests. For example, the history department at Hanoi National University began taking groups of ethnology students to the village on field excursions. One of these students who visited with his class in 1995 commented that, 'there may be students who study ethnology that have never met a person from another ethnicity because, for example, they grew up in Hanoi, and they go on an excursion to see their first ethnic minority group'.

Although guests had been visiting Tap since the 1960s and tourism became official in 1993, tourists did not start visiting the neighbouring village of Noi until 1995. Tour groups and tourism companies sought a quieter alternative to Tap; at the same time, Noi villagers also wanted to host tourists. Noi was officially designated a Cultural Tourism Village in 1998, the same year that the SRV's policy of 'selective preservation' of traditional culture came into force in Mai Chau. In 2002, a year before I arrived to embark on fieldwork, a road from Highway 15 to Noi was built, as was one between the two villages. Whereas the government contributed to the funding of these roads, a villager explained that households did not receive financial support from the district or province so the villagers opened guesthouses themselves.

Conclusion

A history of tourism in Vietnam shows that resort tourism and adventure tourism in the uplands during the French era involved capitalist enterprise in a fanciful Far West. While these types of tourism continued into the communist era, particularly in southern Vietnam, socialist tourism and heritage tourism involved attempts at centralised state control of both the economy and culture. Since *doi moi* there has been a steady increase in the number of tourists in Vietnam with different motivations and various attractions to visit. Today, tourism is going through a process of decentralisation involving a blend of

capitalist and socialist ideals of economy and culture, particularly in the uplands. Ethnic tourism, a new form of tourism in the uplands, largely involves tourist treks and visits to highland villages in order to encounter highland minorities.

While ethnic tourism is new in Vietnam, ‘tourists’ began visiting Tap in the 1960s as guests of the state. The visits were initiated by the state yet the villagers welcomed them. Tour groups started visiting neighbouring Noi in the 1990s. These visits were initiated by tourism companies but were also welcomed by the villagers. The motivations of the villagers for welcoming tourists and the development of tourism in the villages are explained in more detail in the following chapter, which focuses on their stories of their history in Vietnam as Tai people in Mai Chau, particularly about becoming part of the modern nation-state.

CHAPTER 3: Planting Villages, Local Histories: Getting a 'fix' on the Tai

> Because of political and economic development, the people's lives have become better and the children obtain higher education levels. They can go to university and get a good job afterwards or learn some work skills so they still have money for their lives in the future (Mr Lai, villager).

The importance of the above comment can only be understood in the context of the influence of the nation-state. Today, the Tai in Mai Chau are modern ethnic subjects of the Vietnamese state and an understanding of them must include acknowledgement of the influence of state expansion. As Hjorleifur Jonsson (2004: 677) argues in relation to 'mountain people' and state control in Thailand, Thai modernity has been about the creation of particular kinds of subjects, who are not only administrable but desire improvement through education, commerce and democracy, each of which implies an aspect of state control. Similar to the Mien people in Thailand whose lives have been affected by the state (Jonsson 2000, 2004, 2005), the Tai in Mai Chau are among the ethnic minorities whose livelihoods and cultural practices have been subject to government approval, or disapproval and forced change, as the Vietnamese state has incorporated the forested hinterlands into administrative networks.

In addition to 'fixing' diversity through the ethnic classification system, the Vietnamese state's vision of the upland minorities can be seen through the policies of sedentarisation and ritual reform in particular, which aim to have communities in 'fixed' settlements (Hickey 1982; Keyes 1987; Jamieson *et al* 1998; Rambo and Jamieson 2003; Nguyen Van Chinh 2008). However, whether these policies are realised on the ground among ethnic minority groups is another matter. For example, the state's implementation of the policy of sedentarisation has not necessarily been successful (McElwee 2004; Taylor 2008). Nguyen Van Chinh (2008) has found that it did not become a reality among the Kmhmu in the north-western mountains, though it did among the Tai. Yet, as this chapter shows, the Tai in Mai Chau were 'fixed' not only by the state but also by themselves. That is, Tai agency has not been erased with their integration into the orbits of the modern nation-state; there are still Tai agendas as well as inequalities. This point was made clear to me one day in a conversation with Mr Khinh, who stated that Tai people have a lot of power in Mai Chau and, 'we [the Tai] live in harmony but we cannot dare to ask

something from our leaders, we only obey our rules'. In this chapter, I argue that the 'fixing' and 'self-fixing' of the villagers as ethnic Tai in the modern nation-state of Vietnam are processes that involve ongoing relations and negotiations, not only between the Tai and the state but also between the Tai and others, and also among the Tai themselves. Furthermore, these relations occur in a certain environment, that is the uplands, and during certain conditions such as war, which also influence outcomes. I elaborate this by looking into the local history of the Tai in Mai Chau.

This local history is presented in the chapter in themes, rather than strictly chronological order. It begins with a discussion of government ethnic classification and the Tai, then explores the settlement of the Tai in Mai Chau in the fourteenth century and ends with the villagers' lives today, so that it is in loose chronological order. However, between the 1940s and today, the local history is presented according to the themes of revolution and war; government economic reform and war; government ritual reform; and government renovation or *doi moi*.

The chapter first discusses the national project of ethnic classification of the Tai. This is followed by local stories of the migration and settlement of the Tai in Mai Chau from the fourteenth century until the 1940s, highlighting a history of engagement with others, and introducing the mode of living and hierarchical society of the Tai. The chapter then focuses on recollections of village elders of the turbulent and dangerous period of the Democratic Revolution and French war from 1945 to 1954. This is followed by a discussion of the migration of *xuoi*[29] to Mai Chau as a result of the DRV's migration and economic policies as well as middle-aged villagers' accounts of hardship during the agricultural reforms of collectivisation and the American war, from the 1950s until 1975. The chapter continues by looking at ritual reform under the DRV from the 1950s and ritual practices today; it ends with the villagers' largely positive views of their lives now and in the future, in the context of the SRV program of renovation introduced in 1986.

[29] *Xuoi* is a Tai term used to refer to people from the lowlands or plains, who were mainly Viet people from the Red River Delta.

Ethnic classification and the Tai

The population of Vietnam is officially classified into ethnic groups. National policy of the DRV was based on Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought (*Chu nghia Mac-Le Nin va Tu Tuong Ho Chi Minh*), which promoted relations with the highlanders based on equality, solidarity and mutual respect (Hardy and Nguyen Van Chinh nd: 6). Yet, equality was conceived of in terms of diversity, which needed defining, hence the national project of classification.

For many years, the DRV, followed by the SRV, actively worked on creating a clear ethnic place for each individual, using the census as a means to place them in boxes on the basis of language, cultural traits and self-identification (Duong Bich Hanh 1999; Nguyen Van Thang 2007). The criteria and categories were based on previous efforts by the French and Americans to classify the peoples of Vietnam systematically into ethnic categories (Salemink 1991, 2003; Phan Ngoc Chien 1993; Keyes 1995; Michaud 2000). Different lists of ethnic groups were drawn up in 1959, 1973 and 1979. Decision 121, *The Nomenclature of Vietnamese Ethnic Groups*, issued by the General Department of Statistics in March of 1979 determined that Vietnam was composed of exactly 54 ethnic groups (General Department of Statistics 1979), which are still officially recognised today (Dang Nghiem Van *et al* 2000; Khong Dien 2002).

The scientific and political project of ethnic classification was based on the universal evolution of social formations schema developed by Lewis Henry Morgan (1985 [1877]) and redefined by Friedrich Engels (1985 [1884]), that was also used in China (Harrell 1995). This ensured that non-Viet highlanders, now referred to as *dan toc thieu so* (‘ethnic minorities’ or ‘national minorities’), were seen by the Vietnamese government as ‘backward’ and ‘ignorant’ savages or primitives who were ‘lower’ than the Viet, or Kinh, because of ecological and cultural differences (Keyes 2002; McElwee 2004; Hoang Cam 2006). In order to raise their living standards then, the Communist Party and the state were to ‘help the highlands catch up with the plains, the highlands and border areas catch up with the heartlands, the ethnic minorities catch up with the Viet’, as it was put by Le Duan to the Third Party Congress in 1960 (cited in Hoang Cam 2006: 178).

The classification project provided the knowledge necessary for a range of government policies and programs governing all aspects of the lives of the country's minorities. Even though the language of each individual principle of ethnic development suggests a healthy multiculturalism, it is not surprising that, considering the vision described above, the state has been making choices about the lives of Vietnam's minorities in the interests above all of the national community (Hardy and Nguyen Van Chinh nd: 7-8).

The Tai in Vietnam are officially divided by Vietnamese ethnographers into two main subgroups: the White Tai and the Black Tai (Dang Nghiem Van *et al* 2000; Khong Dien 2002). Yet these classifications are based on the Tai's own classifications of themselves as *Tay Don* (White Tai) and *Tay Dam* (Black Tai) and are generally based on different histories of migration, different dialects and distinctions in dress. Another group, the Red Tai (*Tay Deng*), are not officially recognised today by the Vietnamese government, though they have been in the past. It is a debated category used to describe various Tai groups living near the border with Laos, including those in Mai Chau, who share similarities and relationships with Tai groups across the border (Vi Van An nd, 2001). The Tai in Mai Chau are classified by the Vietnamese government as White Tai, however the French classified them as Red Tai or mixed them up with the more numerous Black Tai (Michaud 2000: 54-56),[30] to whom some inhabitants are also related. Such classifications reflect the relationships that the Tai in Mai Chau have had with others.

The Tai people in Mai Chau use the label 'Tai' to refer to themselves, as well as referring to themselves as *Tay* in their language, meaning person, and to distinguish themselves from other Tai/*Tay*, mainly according to location. This, as well as their relationships with others, is illustrated further in the following exploration of their history in Vietnam.

Migration and settlement of the Tai in Mai Chau

The stories of the migration and settlement of the Tai in Mai Chau from the fourteenth century until the 1940s indicate that they adapted their lives to the forested valley of their mountainous environment; they were a class society made up of 'nobles' (*tao*), 'commoners' (*pay*) and 'slaves' (both Tai and non-Tai); and that they have never been

[30] It is for these reasons that one finds literature on the Tai in Mai Chau that refers to them variously as White, Black or Red Tai (see, for example, Hoang Truong *et al* 1978; Vu Can 1981; Hainsworth 1999).

isolated. That they were a class society is important in the history of the people and region. Out of the conversations I had with the villagers, two histories emgerged; one from the perspective of the nobles and the other from the commoners.

In addition to talking to various individual villagers about their own histories, I spent many hours talking with Mr Khinh who lives in Chieng Sai (between the villages and Mai Chau town) and who recounted stories of the early history of the Tai in Mai Chau from the fourteenth century.[31] Noble status (*tao*) was hereditary, so it remained with one family, the Ha Cong family. As only members of this noble family were allowed to read and write and therefore produce texts, the early history is essentially a history of the Ha Cong family, of which Mr Khinh is a descendent. In addition to the Ha Cong family in the village of Noi, there are four other family lineages including Ha Van (the second noblest family in Mai Chau), Vi, Loc and Kha, and there are many more in the village of Tap today, including Lo and Mac.[32] Furthermore, a small number of villagers bear Kinh names as they are Kinh and have married into Tai families, still fewer are Muong.

The ancestors of the Tai in Mai Chau are believed to have come from present-day southern China, who then moved to the *muang*[33]of Kha in Bac Ha district in Lao Cai province in northern Vietnam. A story tells of the migration of two brothers starting in the fourteenth century and of their final settlement in Mai Chau. They travelled along the Red (Hong) River to its delta, where they came across Viet people. They then travelled along the Black (Da) River to the 'middleland', now known as Hoa Binh, where they came across Muong people. They continued until they finally settled; the eldest brother in present-day Moc Chau in Son La province and the second brother in present-day Mai Chau in Hoa Binh province. Of the people who settled in Mai Chau, some travelled on to present-day Ba Thuoc in Thanh Hoa province. When the Tai arrived in Mai Chau they encountered the Xa[34] people with whom they had a contest over land. The winner of the

[31] Mr Khinh's wealth of knowledge on this topic is informed by a combination of sources including oral histories, ancient Tai texts and books in Vietnamese by predominantly Vietnamese researchers, in addition to many conversations with Vietnamese and foreign researchers who visit him. I discuss his involvement in the revival of Tai Mai Chau culture and identity in more detail in Chapter 7.

[32] The Mac family has Viet ancestry which they can trace back to the royal dynasty ousted in the sixteenth century (Nguyen Tien Dong and Hardy 1999: 23-24; Hardy 2003: 190).

[33] The Tai spelling in Vietnam of *muang* (principality) is *muong* however throughout the thesis I use the spelling in accord with most of the international Tai literature.

[34] Xa (or Sa) is a Tai word equivalent to the Thai word Kha which came to mean 'slave' in Thai owing to confusion of tone but was commonly applied by all Tai-speaking people to the aboriginal Proto-Indochinese

contest and therefore of the land, was to shoot arrows into the side of the mountain (near Chieng Chau) and have them stick into the stone cliffs. The Xa shot bronze arrows which fell to the ground, whereas the Tai put bees' wax onto the ends of the arrows so they stuck. The Tai settled on the land in the valley and the Xa moved further up into the mountainous areas.[35]

Among the most significant accomplishments of the Tai was development of 'valley culture' (Cam Trong 1999: 11-12) or adaptation to the forested mountain valley; for example, they constructed irrigation networks and employed wet rice or paddy cultivation for their primary food source (Dang Nghiem Van 1988). They used the forests as a resource of food and medicine, as well as of building materials such as bamboo for housing (Hoang Cam 2001: 84). They also built houses on stilts. According to one villager,

> Houses on stilts are very convenient because we do not need beds. The most important thing is that we [the Tai] often build houses on wild land and there was only a small population in the past so there were many tigers and lions which killed the livestock so we could put the livestock under the house. When we wanted to kill the tigers or lions we could stand in the house and throw rocks down at them.

The social and political structure of Tai society was based on the *muang*. By definition a *muang* was a territory of a particular status. It was a principality or princely petty state with many villages (*ban*), a capital (*chieng*), a ruler (*chao muang, chao din* or *phia muang*) and outlying claims to highland territory (Keyes 1977: 28; Davis 1984: 37-38; Wyatt 1984: 7; Condominas 1990: 36, 106). A large *muang* usually comprised several tributary or smaller *muang.* When the second brother arrived in present-day Mai Chau he

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or Austroasiatic people they displaced when they settled (Keyes 1977; Condominas 1990). The Xa or Kha were attached to the Tai political systems in the past at the lowest rungs. Research on the position of the Xa in the Tai political system in Vietnam focuses on the Khmu people (Roux and Tran Van Chu 1927 and Dang Nghiem Van 1973 cited in Condominas 1990: 49, 64-65).

[35] A similar version of this story has been translated into Vietnamese by ethnologist, Dang Nghiem Van (1988: 41), who suggests that these particular Xa were Dao people and therefore not of the Austroasiatic-speaking people. However, this story about original settlement and shooting arrows is a very widespread one among other Tai groups claiming precedence over the Kha, or Xa, who are commonly said to be Austroasiatic (Keyes 1977; Condominas 1990). These particular Xa in the Mai Chau valley might have been Khmu people.

named his principality *muang* Mun, after the Mun stream that ran through the valley.[36] The principality of Mun ended up comprising many villages and included various smaller *muang*, including the centres of Chieng Sai and Chieng Chau.

In all Tai communities, the ruler of the larger *muang* had a greater status than the ruler of the tributary or smaller *muang*.[37] Rulers (*chao muang*, *chao din* or *phia muang*) were chosen from the *tao* class or rank of nobility and are also referred to as lords or chiefs. The name given to rulers of the highest rank was *an nha* (or *an na*) or *pha nha* (or *pha na*) (Condominas 1990: 100, 109). The *tao* organised the production of rice, had control over rare produce from the forest, was in command during war, dispensed justice and worked closely, on behalf of the *muang*, with the divine spirits (Condominas 1990: 67). However, the *tao* did not own the land, including the rice fields they were allotted; rather there was collective ownership of the land and the rice fields. Rice fields were the property of the *muang* (communal rice fields) which members of the community had the right to cultivate if they were allotted to them. The *tao* had the right to share out the communal rice fields according to the law of the *muang*, which protected community ownership of the *muang* (Condominas 1990: 56-57). The same applied at the *ban* or village level where the land and rice fields were the property of the *ban*.

Each *ban* or village within the *muang* had a clearly fixed boundary and included several sectors: forest, agricultural lands, graveyard and water sources (Trinh Quoc Su 2000: 12). Each village was made up of a number of households (*huon*) in which nuclear or extended families lived (Hoang Cam 2001: 84). The leader of the village (*chao ban*) answered to the ruler of the *muang*.

The 'active mass' of the *ban* and the *muang* were the *pay* (or *phrai/phray* in Thai); 'commoners' in relation to nobles and 'freemen' in relation to slaves (Condominas 1990: 60). They had a right to a share of rice fields, participated in communal decisions and in military activity, from among whom officials were recruited, but non-officials were liable to corvee (Condominas 1990: 108). They partook by right in all social and religious

[36] The largest rice field was also named after the stream (*na* Mun) which the parents of the current village elders cultivated.

[37] The actual size of a *muang* varied widely but as a political structure it was identical in all Tai communities from Chiangmai in Thailand to the Shan states and into Laos, Vietnam and southern China (Cam Trong 1978; Institute of Ethnology 1977 cited in Nguyen Huu Thuc & Ha Sum 1988: 13-14; Davis 1984: 37-38; Condominas 1990: 36).

gatherings and had a right to their part of the communal rice field and to everything that lived off the land, such as game, fish and plants, except for products which were strictly reserved for the lords or rulers. In return for these rights they were required to provide some days' corvee labour in the rice fields of the nobles and also pay taxes (Condominas 1990: 60). They had the status of warrior and were subdivided into categories; the *phray som* or 'fresh recruits' who at the age of eighteen had to enter the service of a patron who trained and instructed him in his future duties for a period of two years, at the end of which he became *phray luang* or *phray* of the king (Condominas 1990: 110). Certain commoners also held privileged positions which gave them the right to use the manpower provided by one or several villages. These positions included the *mo* (priests or spirit mediums) who, in addition to religious functions, also acted as the lord's chief advisor in some communities,[38] and the notables (*Song* first notable, *Su* second notable, *Chieng* third notable, *Cha* fourth notable) who were intermediaries with the responsibility of executing the lord's orders, essentially with regard to the organisation of manpower (Condominas 1990: 61-63). The *pay* actively participated in decisions concering the community.

At the lowest level of the hierarchy of the Tai social and political system were the slaves. These were divided into two broad categories: the *cuong, kuong* or *kuong nok* or the slaves of Tai origin and, lower still, the Xa or non-Tai slaves (Condominas 1990: 64). The Tai slaves once were *pay* but, reduced by poverty, made themselves directly dependent on the lords or the village notables. In doing so, they forfeited any right to the communal rice fields and any representation in the deliberations of the *ban* and *muang*. They were subject to the whims of their master who could sell them or free them as he saw fit (Condominas 1990: 64). There were also *tat* or *that* who were hereditary slaves which meant that they inherited this status from their parents. The *con huon* or *kon huon* ('people of the house') or *khoy* ('slave') were Tai slaves specially assigned to domestic tasks in the lord's house (Condominas 1990: 64).

The status of the Tai slaves was superior to that of the Xa or non-Tai slaves. Reduced to slavery by defeat, the Xa formed the lowest category of the peasantry and were the most

[38] The *mo* was the highest position held by a commoner. It also designates a whole range of medical specialists, from herbalist to shaman (Condominas 1990: 61), as well as astrologer to determine the time of auspicious moments such as building homes, burials and other important ceremonies (Santasombat 2001: 112).

exploited. They were given the hardest and most disgusting jobs to do in the *muang* and they had no rights to the communal rice fields (Condominas 1990: 64-65).

A chronicle written by the eldest brother in the Mai Chai migration and settlement story describes the rules of his *muang*. Mr Khinh owns this chronicle and summarised it as describing the rules of farming and conducting business, building houses (for example, there were different rules for the nobles and commoners), classifying people (for example, good, bad, lazy, hardworking), dealing with crime (for example, there were fines involving silver, rice and wine) and of marriage (for example, noblemen could have as many wives as they wished, whereas commoners could only have up to two wives, and there were fines involving buffalo, rice and money for incest and rape).[39] Mr Khinh explained that the *tao* rulers recited these rules to the people at the beginning of the year and the degree of punishment was different between the different levels of *muang*.

Such migration and settlement stories demonstrate that the first settlers were never isolated; they encountered not only the Viet and Muong on their journey to the valley but also the Xa once they arrived in the valley. Moreover, the descendants of the first settlers in Mai Chau had tributary relationships with the Viet. One story tells of a brutal time when soldiers from China (referred to by the Tai as the Yellow Flag soldiers)[40] killed many of the local men in the area, whose heads they cut off, stuck on sticks and hung from a tree in the village of Mo (not far from Noi and Tap), which was the main camp of the soldiers. The king of Vietnam sent his soldiers to fight alongside a local man named Truong Xu to defeat the Yellow Flag soldiers together. Afterwards, a spirit house was built to honour the people who died. In the process the king gave Truong Xu another name, Duc Mai, and provided him with elephants, weapons, money and soldiers. He gained *pha nha* status and ruled a large area including *muang* Mun (renamed after him to *muang* Mai, now Mai Chau), *muang* Moc (Moc Chau) and *muang* Khoong (Ba Thuoc), as well as *muang* Sam (Sam Nua and Sam To) in present-day Laos. Today, Tai people living in Mai Chau have relatives in these places as a result not only of the settlement patterns of

[39] These rules would have also involved the Tai slaves and the non-Tai Xa or Kha people.
[40] The Chinese Empire had suzerainty, not only over northern Vietnam but the whole of the Vietnamese Empire, until the 1880s when suzerainty was transferred from China to France (Michaud 2000: 60).

the brothers in the first three places but also of relationships between people within the *muang*.[41]

In addition to their tributary relations with the Viet, the Tai in Mai Chau sought marriage alliances with the neighbouring Muong people. While members of the same family could not marry one another, the noble Ha Cong family ensured its status by marrying only with other noble Tai families. However, when options were few among the Tai they looked to the ruling or noble families of the Muong.[42] Further to relations with others involving competition and battle over land, and marriage alliances, the Tai in Mai Chau also engaged in trading. In particular, Chieng Sai became a centre for opium trade where the Tai locals traded with people from Laos and as far away as Hanoi, China and Thailand, who arrived by foot or horse. In addition to buying opium the Tai produced and sold opium. The powerful status of the *tao* meant that they controlled the opium trade in the area, from which they profited, further entrenching their supremacy. The family of an elder, Mr Quynh, now residing in Noi, is a case in point.[43] Mr Quynh's father and grandfather were *tao* with such high status that they were referred to as *Then* or great deities. Not only did they rule over a large *muang* but they were also rich. Another resident of Noi, Mr Luan, who was of a similar age to Mr Quynh but whose family were *pay* (commoners in relation to nobles, or freemen in relation to slaves), described the wealth of Mr Quynh's family:

> Mr Quynh's family was very rich, the richest, because his father was *Then* and his grandfather was too. Mr Quynh had American clothes. His family had their own car. Sometimes Mr Quynh's family gave me some food for free but not money... Mr Quynh's family had many servants. Four hundred workers worked in the field. Each day they would drive the workers in the car to Mai Hich to work in fields. His family had four hundred buffalos... The local people looked at his family as stars in the sky. And they never gave me money, only food.

[41] Dao Van Tien (1999) notes that there are Red Tai people living in Laos today who say they migrated from *muang* Mai.

[42] Similar to the Tai, the population of the Muong was divided into classes where the ruling class, *lang*, had supreme rights over labour and natural resources (Institute of Ethnology 1977 cited in Hoang Cam 2006: 182).

[43] Mr Quynh belongs to the Ha Van family lineage. According to him, the ancestors of the Ha Van family are from Phu Yen and Yen Chau (or Huon Puakha) in present-day Son La province. He explained that in the middle of the fifteenth century they invaded the lands of Mai Chau where the Xa were living and who moved on. Today Mr Quynh has an uncle living in Phu Yen, where four families from Mai Chau reside.

Based in Chieng Sai, Mr Quynh's family bought up most of the fields in surrounding villages. The peasants, impoverished by heavy land rents and taxes, had to sell their land to the *tao* family, to work for them for food and money, and to join their private army. One account of Mr Dan's early years shows how the local Tai political-economic system influenced his life and explains part of the history of Tap. Author Vu Can (1981: 28-29) interviewed Mr Dan (with whom I also spoke) and collected a story from him, which I paraphrase here:

> I was not born in Tap but in Pu Bin, fifteen kilometres from here, on a high mountain. Both my parents were very poor and had to hire their services to rich families. In 1915, that is ten years before I was born, my maternal grandfather died. My father had to borrow two silver *piastres* from his boss to arrange the funeral as required by custom. Sometime later, my mother died. So, only my father remained to pay the debt. His creditor was the landlord Then Tinh in Chieng Sai, a short distance from here. He was a big opium smuggler and his trade partners were notorious Lao and Xa Phang smugglers. He was also a powerful dignitary of the region. My father, in spite of back-breaking toil, could not pay the accumulating interest let alone the debt itself. After my father it was the turn of my sister and my brother to become his servants. When I was fifteen years old, that is when the debt was twenty five years old, it was my turn to enrol in his army of servants, and so I left Pu Bin and came here. Had my family not contracted that two *piastre* debt I would have remained at Pu Bin and lived there. Five years later came the Revolution. The landlord died and we were freed from the debt.

Mr Dan, like most villagers, cannot tell with certainty when the village Tap was founded. Locals say that the name of the village means 'strange' in Tai language and that while the people living there were Tai they had moved from different villages in the Mai Chau area, as Mr Dan did, and are therefore not considered natives. In response to my question about when the village was formed, Mr Dan replied, 'I don't know exactly when Tap was formed. A lot of people ask me. When I was born there were two graveyards here, one for children and one for adults, and they were full. So I think there were a lot of people here for a long time'.

While traders from other lands travelled to Chieng Sai to trade with the *tao*, Tai commoners also travelled to neighbouring Hmong, Muong, Dao and Lao villages to trade. In particular, they went to Hmong villages to buy opium,[44] as the following comments by villagers indicate:

> In the past, the Tai went to Hmong villages to buy opium. The old people today used to go. They no longer grow opium because the Vietnamese government does not allow it.

> When I was young I went to Hmong villages... I stayed for around two days... I took some salt to sell and bought opium and sold it to the Muong... In the past, people would try drugs one or two times out of curiosity. Not like today, people have drugs every day. Today it is illegal. It was banned by the government around 1960. Now the Hmong no longer cultivate opium but the Tai in Laos still have it. They can walk to Laos in two and a half days from here to buy drugs illegally.

As indicated in the comment above, people in Mai Chau still have access to and use opium, even though it is illegal in Vietnam. It is clearly seen as a problem in Mai Chau, as indicated by the billboards in the main street of Mai Chau town (see Photograph 9) and the numerous syringes scattered along the paths in the Chieng Sai graveyard.

[44] The Hmong have been living in Mai Chau district for six to eight generations (Nguyen Van Minh 1998: 3; Pham Van Thanh 1998: 4). They reside in Hang Kia and Pa Co, which are Tai words, as the Tai were the first settlers in the area but had moved on by the time the Hmong arrived from Son La province (Nguyen Van Minh 1998: 3). Poppy cultivation has played an important role in the life of the Hmong people but was banned by the Vietnamese government in 1992 (Pham Van Thanh 1998: 5).

Photograph 9: HIV/aids billboards in Mai Chau town

In addition to opium, the Tai traded in food, livestock and textiles, as the following comments by villagers testify:

> Lao is thirty to forty kilometres from here. My father used to go to a Lao village to trade and we have many Lao friends. He took salt, fish sauce and dry fish and sold them in the village and bought traditional Lao textiles. In the Lao village they made special textiles and had a special way of dying clothes which my father sold at the market here because people liked them.
>
> We trade goods with Hmong, Dao and Muong. In the past we sold material, salt, dried fish and fish sauce in their villages, and bought chicken, pigs, buffalo and cows from them. Now we do not take goods to them but some people from these villages come to Tap and ask people here to sell their goods for them. They bring their clothes and textiles to sell here and gain benefits, or they go to the town market where I then buy their textiles and sell them here.[45]

The Tai in Mai Chau had tributary relations with the French as well as with the Viet. Three Tai people attended school to learn French and worked for the government in order to control the Mai Chau area, which was referred to as Chau Mai (mountain district) by

[45] As described in more detail in Chapter 5, trading patterns of the villagers in Tap and Noi have been influenced by the tourism industry, particularly regarding textiles.

the French administration,[46] later renamed Mai Chau by the Vietnamese. Of these three officials, two belonged to the Ha Cong family of which one lived in Mai Ha, which later became a French military base during the war in Mai Chau.[47] The third official was from Lai Chau. Another member of the Ha Cong family from Chieng Sai moved to Cao Bang province to work.[48] French doctors living in Hoa Binh town sometimes visited Mai Chau to help cure smallpox. Present day Highway 6 was inaugurated by the French in 1931. This road extends from Hanoi to Hoa Binh and on through the mountains to Son La and Dien Bien. Although French officials travelled to Chieng Sai to arrest people in the opium business, they too sold and bought opium.

The Tai people in Mai Chau saw both the French and Viet presence increase in the late 1940s when war broke out between French and Viet soldiers in the Mai Chau valley, and the French were ousted in 1950. Rather than fighting with the Viet soldiers against soldiers from the Chinese kingdom, as Duc Mai had done in the past, the Tai in Mai Chau were now fighting with the Viet soldiers against the French colonial army.[49]

The Democratic Revolution and French war: imprinted on the village elders' memories

The August Revolution in 1945 involved the seizure of administrative power from the colonial French by the Marxist-led Viet Minh movement in virtually all Vietnamese provinces (Hy Van Luong 1992; Marr 1995; Kleinen 1999). It was followed by the Democratic Revolution (*Cach mang dan chu* or *Cai cach dan chu*). This meant that at the same time as waging war on France, Ho Chi Minh was busy building the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in the north, an important component of which was abolishing

[46] Chau, a Tai word, was the term employed by the French in order to designate the administrative district in the northern mountainous region (*Haute Région*) equivalent to the *huyen*, a Viet word, in the lowlands of the Red River Delta (Cuisinier 1948: ix).

[47] This official joined the French Army and after the war in Mai Chau followed them to Saigon. After the war with the US he returned to Mai Chau. Today he sells bananas at the market in Mai Chau town and uses his French language skills to sell to foreigners.

[48] This man was an ancestor of Mr Khinh. He also followed the French soldiers but died in the south. He had six wives and no sons. He had one adopted daughter who now lives in America.

[49] Relations with minorities, but especially the Tai, were extremely important for both the Viet and French (McAlister 1967; Duong Bich Hanh 1999; Michaud 2000; McElwee 2004). Using French sources, John McAlister (1967) details the complex interactions between the Tai, French and Viet Minh during the French war. He draws attention to the internal conflict not only between the White Tai and the Black Tai, but also among the Black Tai themselves. He also points out that whereas the French took advantage of the conflict between the upland Tai and the lowland Viet, the Viet Minh took advantage of the internal conflict among the Tai. This latter point was the case in Mai Chau.

‘feudal’ systems and establishing democracy. Although the DRV established the ‘*Thái* – Meo’ Autonomous Zone, renamed the Tay Bac or Northwestern Autonomous Zone (Nguyen Duc Hop 1968: 152), among ethnic groups in the north, the Tai and other ethnic groups in Mai Chau were not incorporated.[50] Instead, the administrative structure of the Tai *muang* was replaced by the Viet model of the commune (*xa*), which was equipped with administrative organs, including the Party, the local government (or People’s Committee) and the mass organisations (Hardy and Nguyen Van Chinh nd: 24). Today, most people in the villages are members of one or more of the Elderly People’s Club, Women’s Union, Youth Union or Farmer’s Union, for example. Mai Chau fell under various local administrative areas that expanded and contracted; for example, it was a part of Mai Thuong commune in 1945, after which it, along with Da Bac, was a part of Mai Da commune. In 1957 it separated to form Mai Chau commune.

The DRV labelled the socio-political structure of the Tai ‘feudal’ (*phong kien*) and the local ruling *tao* as evil landlords, who were stripped of their power and status as lords of the land, and some were imprisoned. Mr Quynh’s family, ‘contributed gold and silver to the Democratic Revolution so that the members of their family were not imprisoned’. However, Mr Xien of Chieng Chau was not so lucky. His father had the noble status of *pha nha* (or *an nha*), which led to his imprisonment. Regarding his family’s status, he explained:

> My father was *pha nha* and ruled over the whole area of Chieng Chau, Mo and Tap, which included the biggest field called *na* Mun. He had a house that was bigger than this house now. There were small houses around the main house that the servants lived in and there was a bamboo fence around the whole area to keep out the tigers. The family hired people to work in the fields. Some of these people were from around the area. Others did not have a house so they stayed in the landlord’s house and slept and ate there. Sometimes there were fifty or sixty people living in the house at one time. They slept on mattresses in a row.

[50] The Autonomous Zone covered present-day Yen Bai, Son La, Dien Bien Phu and Lai Chau provinces. For more information on the Autonomous Zone, see Viet Chung 1968, Nguyen Duc Hop 1968, Duong Bich Hanh 1999 and McElwee 2004.

During the August Revolution, Mr Xien's father gave his seal, thus relinquishing his power, to the Vietnamese government. He had been *pha nha* for 60 years. He died in 1951 when he was 73 years old. In 1963 Mr Xien went to jail. Concerning his experience of imprisonment we had the following conversation:

> Mr Xien: I was there for six years, two months and fifteen days. I was released in 1969. The government's policy was to send landlords to jail to teach them how to work. Whilst in jail I worked in the fields and learned the Vietnamese government's policies. I was not punished, I just had to work. The jail was in Ha Giang province but during the US war we had to move. There were two thousand five hundred people in jail. There were many *xuoi* [lowland Viet]. There were people from different areas in Vietnam and of different ethnicities including Muong, Man [Dao] and Meo [Hmong]. We were given three tops and three pairs of pants per year. We slept in bunks and were given food. Six people sat at a food tray but we were given individual servings. There were thirty cooks...
> MA: Did you make good friends?
> Mr Xien: No I have not seen them again. We were all friends because we all ate together. There were beautiful women with long hair in the jail. They were separated and lived in the dark and they sang beautifully. I think they were spies.

Some people were also sentenced to death for selling opium. According to Mr Khinh, if the August Revolution had not happened then maybe there would be many rich people in Mai Chau.

In addition to freeing him of his family's debt when the landlord died, the August Revolution elevated Mr Dan to a position of power. In 1945 he became the leader of the police of Mai Thuong commune, however this role was short-lived as war broke out two years later. French soldiers tried to capture and kill the likes of Mr Dan; as a result, while he was stationed in Mai Chau from 1947 to 1949, he spent a lot of time in Laos with a family he remembered from when they had once visited Mai Chau to sell opium. He explained this time of his life as follows:

> During the war time I stayed in Laos and went there three times per month. A family gave me food and allowed me to stay with them... The French captured me

> because I was the leader of the police and I was tied up by rope all day with no food. They wanted to kill me but I gave them one cow so I escaped and ran to Laos... From then I lived with the family in Laos. I stayed for only one month and then went back and forth and the Laos family had no children. They wanted to adopt me as their child and wanted to find a wife for me but I refused. I was twenty one years old. I wanted to return to my family even though they were poor. I always missed Mai Chau. The Laos family was richer than my family, they had many horses and they showed off a big box of coins. The Laos couple were beautiful but unlucky because they did not have any children. I often rode a horse around the village and I was happy at the time... After the liberation of Mai Chau I came back. If I was strong I would like to visit them again.

As Mr Dan suggests, life back in Mai Chau during this period was difficult as well as precarious. From 1947, it had become a battle ground between the French and the Vietnamese which the Tai villagers could not escape. Their houses were razed, including in Chieng Sai, which is why Noi village was subsequently formed. The French had invaded Mr Quynh's house, so to lower the chances of the locals communicating with the French, the Vietnamese soldiers had the locals move out, after which they burned down the houses. While some people's houses were burned by the Vietnamese, others were burned by the French; yet others were set alight by the locals themselves so that the French could not live in their houses and eat their food. The residents of Chieng Sai moved to the nearby mountains, caves and forests to seek refuge, as did many villagers in Mai Chau. Some moved to their outlying paddy fields. When the government called the people back to Chieng Sai, two or three families chose to remain next to their fields, thus forming the current village of Noi.[51]

Some of the local Tai people worked for the French during the war. One hot day in the middle of summer, I sat with Mr Luan, who explained how and why they had done so.

> Who worked for the French depended on how many rice fields they had. If a family had many rice fields then one person in that family had to follow the French, even if the family only had one child. If they did not follow the French,

[51] The residents of Tap village also relocated to the nearby mountains during the war, which is the reason why the village is divided into two sections today, as described in Chapter 1.

> the French would take their rice fields. If a family only had a few rice fields they did not have to follow the French. They were poor people. They were not strong enough to join the French army. They were very difficult times.

In other words, members of the *tao* families worked for the French. Another village elder recounted his experience, 'I used to work for the French, I used to carry rockets. It was very horrible. I knew nothing about the French language but they came here and forced me to work for them. I was not paid or given food. If I did not go to work I would be hit'.

Living in the forests and mountains, the locals watched as French airplanes flew overhead, to and from their military base in Mai Ha, where an area of land was cleared and used as an airstrip. Some French soldiers also stayed near the mountains and sometimes the French pilots dropped food via parachute to the French soldiers. When I asked Mr Luan if the locals stole the food, he replied:

> Of course we wanted the food drops but we could not keep them. My parents and many other old people must carry the food drops for them [the French soldiers] and they were difficult to carry because the food drops were in the forest. Some people did not want to do it so they hid themselves in the graveyard but the French soldiers kidnapped their children so the parents had to get them back and then they must work for the French soldiers.

Mr Luan recounted what life was like for himself during this period. He was ten years old in 1948 and he and his friends sometimes visited the French base:

> In the war time some Vietnamese people had to join the French army and some Laos people too. Sometimes I and my friends visited the place where the French army stayed, who gave us some bean cake. But I did not talk with them because I could not speak French. But I could speak with some of the Laos soldiers. I asked them why they joined the French army. They replied that they must join the army and that they did not want to.

He spoke of the difficulties of attending school:

> During the war time we had a mobile school. Sometimes I went to school at night. When I did not have to go to school I transferred information from one place to another place. The classrooms were in the middle of the forest. We had to cover the roof with leaves for camouflage. We only had one book each. There were four male teachers from Ha Tay and Hanoi. They were *xuoi* [lowlanders, mainly Kinh]. They are all dead now. It was a dangerous job to teach during the war time.

When not at school Mr Luan worked for the Viet, as a messenger. He explained what this involved:

> During the war I carried information because there were no telephones [then]. We would take some information sent from Hanoi from the Mai Chau post office and send it out to many districts. In the post office, to symbolise 'hot' information they stuck a piece of charcoal or a red chilli to the envelope so we had to send it out immediately, at any time... I did not open the envelope. If someone opened it they may get arrested... We travelled by foot, bare foot. There were seven people in Noi who delivered the envelopes. There were other people in other districts who also did this. Each group had seven people and one person was the leader and his duty was to get the mail from Hanoi to the post office. The other six people must deliver it. Each time we delivered an envelope we had another person accompanying us because there was not only mail; there was also the People's Newspaper which was published every day, so we had to carry it; also some banners for meetings. When a meeting in one place finished we had to carry the banner to the next place. We went to many places, including Da Bac, Tap and Mo. I had to send it out in the evening but I was not allowed to use a torch because we were afraid of being seen by airplanes. It was very difficult. We had to carry all these things through the forest. We did not have much food or clothes. My clothes were torn.

After extensive bombing in February 1950, the French soldiers left Chieng Chau. In 1954, when Mr Luan was 16 years old, every man had to join the Vietnamese army and go to the battlefields further north in Dien Bien, however Mr Luan was not strong enough. Instead, once again he couriered information. He explained that when the revolutionary movement adopted a new policy, he had to disseminate the information to groups in the

area. He also helped to transport rice to the soldiers in Dien Bien.[52] Not only did he have to stop going to school, but he also did not have much rice to eat:

> It was hard work because all people had to pay tax to buy food for the soldiers. The taxed amount depended on the productivity of the rice but it was not enough for the soldiers so the state made the local people sell their own rice to the state for a cheap price.

When the French were beaten in the infamous battle in Dien Bien, Mr Luan marked the momentous occasion by getting a tattoo:

> When the victory occurred at Dien Bien I was very happy so I got a tattoo... [rolling up his sleeve and pointing to his tattoo which says '1954' in black ink]... I have a tattoo on my forearm to remember the DB victory.

In 1955 and 1956 Mr Luan was a member of a youth volunteer group (*Thanh nien xung phong*). He described the work he did as a member of this group:

> During the war time all healthy people had to go and work for the nation. There were youth volunteer groups and I was in the one called *Cu Chinh Lan*.[53] I was in this group for two years in 1955 and 1956. As a member I built roads. The roads were too narrow and we had to widen them. They were all earth roads, not concrete. We made roads to carry rockets to Dien Bien, from Hoa Binh to Dien Bien. After the victory we still had to carry rockets to Dien Bien. The rockets were long and big and heavy. It is funny that when we were tired we sang songs, because we were all young people. I wanted to join the group even though my family only had three people. My parents were very angry and cried a lot but I still wanted to join.

[52] A large part of the supplies used during the battle at Dien Bien were transported across the mountains by some 80,000 minority people working as porters to support operations of the Viet Minh main force units (McAlister 1967: 829).

[53] Cu Chinh Lan is the name of a famous soldier who sacrificed everything, including his life, for the victory of a battle against the French in 1951 (Hoang Chung, personal communication, 21 July 2011).

French soldiers who survived the battle at Dien Bien fled south, via Mai Chau. One man in Noi remembers seeing his first foreigner (*tay*)[54] as a young boy; he remembers being both scared and intrigued by the big, white French soldiers in the rice paddies:

> When I was eight years old in 1954 it was the war between Vietnam and France. It was a disaster. Some French soldiers from Dien Bien who were defeated by Vietnamese soldiers came here to this village. It was the first time I saw a foreigner. The French soldiers stayed here in May, it was very hot, and then they went on to Thanh Hoa. The soldiers had to walk on foot and carry backpacks. They slept in the fields, two to three thousand soldiers! Even in the graveyard. I did nothing. I was a little afraid of them. I sat under a tree and watched them. I was very curious, and afraid. The solders looked strange because they were taller and bigger than Vietnamese soldiers. Some French soldiers could not sleep.

Xuoi, collectivisation and the US war: continuing hardship

With the French ousted, the DRV could focus on building the democratic republic in the north. Local stories of the migration of *xuoi* or lowlanders to Mai Chau and collectivisation from the 1950s demonstrate that the tumultuous and adverse conditions of the villagers' lives continued, particularly with the US war from 1969 to 1975.

While there had only been some *xuoi* or lowland traders living in the Mai Chau area before 1945, the *xuoi* population in Mai Chau increased after that, as part of an immigration policy of the DRV. This policy, which resulted in the mobilisation of Viet migrants from the plains to the highlands, was implemented along with a new economy policy (Hardy 1998, 2003).

From the 1950s, the Vietnamese government conceived a policy of 'new economy' for its mountain hinterland. The new policy sought, in the words of a Politburo resolution, to achieve a 'gradual transformation in the mountains, from the economics of self-sufficiency to a complex commodity economy, ceaselessly improving the people's living

[54] The villagers use the Vietnamese word, *tay*, to refer to foreigners. Although *tay* literally means west, and also means western, occidental and French, the villagers - as all Vietnamese - use the term today to refer to any foreigner.

standards and serving the country's socialist industrialization' (cited in Hardy and Nguyen Van Chinh nd: 9). This was demonstrated in the policy of sedentarisation that aimed to ban shifting cultivation in the uplands (Hickey 1982; Keyes 1987; Evans 1992; Salemink 1997, 2000; Jamieson *et al* 1998; Rambo and Jamieson 2003). The desire for modernisation in the uplands meant that people of the mountains were to be settled in villages with lowlanders who had migrated to the hills to 'Go and build a new village' (Hardy, 2003: 148) and create 'model villages' for them all to share (Hickey 1982; Hardy 1998, 2003). The national minorities were not expected to understand the complexities of the new system and so they received support in this endeavour from their 'compatriots' on the plains. According to the Constitution of 1946, Article 8, 'Besides equality in rights, national minorities (*cac dan toc thieu so*) receive help in all areas in order to keep pace with the general level of the country' (Nguyen Van An 2003: 15).

More than one million people from the lowlands and delta villages were persuaded to move to the highlands between 1954 and 1975 as part of what Mr Khinh refers to as the 'Discovery Movement' of the DRV. Within 14 years, from 1960 to 1974, the government was successful in transferring 384,000 Kinh people to the northern mountain regions and from 1975 to 1979 the number of settled immigrant Kinh in this area was 280,000 (Khong Dien 2002: 82).

The Kinh population first arrived in Mai Chau under the government's program in the early 1950s and by 1972 they made up 13 per cent of the region's population; that increased to about 15 per cent in 1995 (Hardy 1998: 416). According to Mr Dan, 'before 1964 Mai Chau was ninety per cent Tai but now it is eighty per cent Tai'. Today the majority of Kinh in Mai Chau district reside in Mai Chau town which straddles either side of Highway 15, next to the old Tai centre of Chieng Sai, and is the district centre and an administrative, commercial and social hub.

Mr Khinh explained that the majority of the Kinh migrants arrived in Mai Chau from Xuan Truong district in Nam Dinh province, and that some officials and soldiers were sent to Mai Chau to work and live, whilst others were farmers. They were sent to set up farming cooperatives, where lowland farmers set to clearing the wilderness (*khai hoang*), and agriculture was collectivised, requiring 'farming households to pool their lands, draught animals, and labor and then work together to raise crops and livestock' (Kerkvliet

2001: 256). In Noi and Tap, the wet-rice fields were collectivised and much of the property previously owned by individual families, such as buffalos, cows and farming tools, were labelled 'means of production' and thus became property to be shared by all people in the cooperative.

The reforms occurred in Noi village around 1950-1951. In addition to the 'four hundred kilograms of silver coins the government took from Mr Quynh's family' which kept them from being imprisoned, Mr Luan explained that the government also took their land and redistributed it.[55] Mr Hiep, who also lives in Noi village, described what this was like for his family:

> In the past, people had their own land and people who came here first had a lot of land. Since around 1950, the government introduced the land reform policy and the people gave all their land to the cooperative so they did not own much land anymore. My family had had a lot of land so since around 1950 we had less and life was harder. The government also took our livestock, which went to the cooperative.

Contrary to Mr Quynh's family's experience at this time was the experience of most others among whom the land was redistributed. For example, Mr Luan explained that poor people, like his family, got land and more money, and that Mr Quynh family's buffalos were also redistributed. Also, during the reforms in Tap in 1956, Mr Dan's family was allotted half a hectare of rice field, 'enough to plant six hundred bundles of rice seedlings' (Mr Dan cited in Vu Can 1981: 29).

Villagers who had previously been mere commoners took on leadership roles and, in addition to the lowland migrants, worked for the government. As already mentioned, Mr Dan worked for the police but spent a lot of time in Laos during the war. When he returned to Tap after the French had been driven out of Mai Chau, when he was 25 years old, he became a leader of the 'democratic renovation' for the following two years. He was then the leader of the statistics office from 1954. For this job he had to compile a statistical report every month for the police, which involved counting the population and

[55] Recently the government returned 70 million *dong* to Mr Quynh's family. Mr Luan believes this is a small amount of money compared with the amount of property they once owned.

the number of households, detailing household composition, including sex and age, as well as counting livestock such as chickens and pigs. In addition to locals, he counted guests. He held this position for 43 years, until 1997. In 1959 he also became an accountant for the cooperative that was established in Mai Chau, at which time he began receiving tourists or 'guests' in his house. He was integral to the beginning of tourism in Tap (as discussed in the previous chapter). He was vice president of the cooperative from 1964 to 1985, after which he was the leader of the village for two years. From 1988 he concentrated on tourism.

The lowland migrants ensured that Mai Chau district was first sprayed with DDT in 1959 to combat malaria (Hardy 1998: 275) and over time the government established administration offices, schools, a hospital and the state shop in Mai Chau town. Public transport also started, as Mr Khinh explained: 'Each day a truck carried people from Mai Chau to Hoa Binh and from Hoa Binh to Mai Chau. But there was only one truck and people had to queue up for a ticket so some people had to walk'.

Prior to the war, only Ha Cong family members were allowed to attend the school in Hoa Binh town. During the war Viet teachers from the lowlands attempted to run classes for the commoners in the forests; after the war, in 1958, the DRV had a movement for teachers to go to the mountainous areas or highlands to teach. Thus, the children continued to learn the Vietnamese langauge[56] and to learn about socialism and democratic reform. The children of the noble families who fought with the French were not allowed to go to school. This was explained by a villager whose family was in this situation:

> My father fought with the French so I was not allowed to go to school. After Dien Bien, the government had a policy to beat the upper class. Because my father had a lot of land, they called him a landlord, they asked him to give his land back to poor people... After that day, the people here hated landlords and did not allow their children to go to university, even if they passed the exam. Even if they wanted to get into the army the government refused because they thought they would go to the south because at that time the south was under US control. Around 1978 the Mai Chau People's Committee wanted my brother to join the

[56] The Vietnamese language, called *quoc ngu* or national language, is written in a romanised script devised in the mid-seventeenth century by Portuguese missionaries.

> army so they reduced the title of landlord to 'rich farmer'. After he came back from the army he joined the Trade Company in Mai Chau and they sent him to university in Hanoi. Now he has finished his study and works at the Trade Department of Mai Chau district... Today the education program of the government is different. If someone who is a good student from grades one to twelve they can go straight to university without taking the exam. This is the case for all in the country, including my brother's daughter in 1998. Now his children can go to university, not like in the past. His daughter went to the Social Sciences and Humanities University and studied in the history faculty.

The story of the villager's brother indicates that those who had been members of the nobility, despite being punished at first, nevertheless made their way into state jobs eventually. For example, Mr Quynh of Noi became an accountant for the credit office in Mai Chau and when Mr Xien was released from jail and returned to his home in Chieng Chau he worked for the government and became the vice director of the Mai Chau district People's Committee. Today, he owns a large area of land, including *na* Mun (the original Mun field from early Tai settlement), and lives in a large house, though both are smaller than when his father was *pha nha*. Surely they were being strategic by siding with the government, but the locals also explain this in terms of the continuation of the socio-political system of the Tai. Mr Khinh and a couple of village elders stated that the Ha Cong family is still noble today. Mr Khinh said:

> Intelligent people were from the Ha Cong family because only people in the Ha Cong family were allowed to study. There is a saying that one noble person is equal to ten commoners. Today there is still a difference between members of the Ha Cong family and other people. There is a difference in behaviour, the way they observe and speak. Not all Ha Cong people but most. They study well at university.

In addition, Mr Dan explained the following:

> I studied when I was ten years old because I was born in the Ha Cong family. Only my family was allowed to study. Even today Ha Cong family members have more intelligence than other people. The leader of a village must be a person

> living in the village so villages that do not have a leader from the Ha Cong family may be because there are not many Ha Cong people, so people from other families are the leader.

Regardless of their position in the community, most villagers remember this period as a very difficult time in their lives. As part of the cooperative system of farming, all products from the land had to be sold to the state company and no matter how hard the villagers worked, they still only received 800 grams of rice per working day. As rice was allocated according to the number of contributing labourers in the household, this meant that some households had very little, despite working hard in the fields. Life was even more difficult for the villagers in 1972 when their crops were devastated by an insect plague and they faced a severe food shortage as a result. In order to have more to eat, households grew maize and cassava in the surrounding mountains. From the statement by Mrs Ninh below, we learn that although cultivating maize and cassava in the mountains was difficult work, some villagers were more motivated to do that than to cultivate rice because they still owned the land in the uplands and had more control over production and distribution:

> My family are farmers so land allocation from the government affected my family strongly. I was born in 1962. When I was young I cultivated rice in the paddy fields and cassava and maize in the mountains, and collected firewood from the mountains to sell in town. My family had so much land in the hills so I could cultivate a lot of cassava and maize to sell in the market. In the morning I went to the forest, I took food with me and would eat at noon inside the forest. I worked in the mountains until night time. It was a difficult time… The paddy fields belonged to the cooperative so no one cared and had less rice, but they owned land in the mountains so they cared because when they cultivated maize and cassava it was theirs to eat and sell. They were hard times, especially when Nhon [her second eldest daughter, born in 1985] was three months old. Nhon remained at home with her grandmother. Nhon could not have milk and Nhon's grandmother had to give her rice. I still remember.

While Mai Chau fortunately did not become another battleground, the villagers were nevertheless affected by the war with the US-backed Republic of Vietnam, what they call

the American war, mainly played out in the south of Vietnam. The fit and healthy men who were in the army, including four families in Noi village, went to battle again.

While the north of Vietnam was fairly safe from bombing, the north of Laos was not, and the relatives of the Tai in Mai Chau who lived in Laos sometimes sought refuge in Mai Chau. The leader of the Mai Chau Farmer's Union recounted his experience:

> During the American war when I was a little boy some soldiers from Laos stayed in my house. I often chatted with them and they asked me to buy food for them... They lived in my house and helped my family to feed the pigs and grow vegetables. Our way of living is similar.

Mr Khinh was a policeman in Pu Bin at this time. He explained that the duty of the local policemen in the lead-up to, and during, the war was to protect the villages from the allied forces, including American soldiers and to find southern Vietnamese or 'Vietnamese spies'. He said:

> Sometimes when the planes flew over their duty was to shoot their guns at the planes... From 1954 to 1964 there was no war in the north so my duty was to find Vietnamese spies up here in the north... Mr Diem was the president in the north, and the south was against Mr Diem, so he wanted to build a stronger soldier fort in the north.

While times for the villagers had been difficult as a result of the collectivisation system and cooperative farming, their lives were even more disrupted and life only got tougher during the war. This was expressed by many Noi and Tap villagers as follows:

> I was very poor when I was young, especially during the French and US wars. In the French war I was very young and do not know too much about it. In the US war the people here had to contribute rice, about twenty five tons per crop, to the soldiers to beat the Americans. So the people here were hungry all the time.
>
> During the war between Vietnam and America, all households had to contribute rice to the soldiers. If a household raised any livestock they must sell it to the

> cooperative or the state shop. If any households wanted to kill a pig they had to get permission from the commune committee. The strong men of the village had to join the army, for example, my husband did in 1972. At that time my mother was ill and I was pregnant with my first child. So my husband had to join the army. After ten days my mother died and I could not do anything, only cry all the time. So my life at the time was very horrible. So when people ask me about then I want to cry.

Because of the adverse conditions, only a few children attended school, while the majority worked in the fields to ensure that their families had enough food to eat. They also travelled with their families to trade with people in other villages, such as Hmong, Dao, Muong and other Tai. One woman mentioned that they 'even worked for them [other villages]. We helped cultivate rice and maize and prepare the land'. The stories of middle-aged villagers are sadly similar to the stories of their elders. Some villagers also participated in the frontier war against China from 1978 to 1982. Since then the villagers have enjoyed a period of relative peace and stability.

Ritual reform

The establishment of cooperatives by the DRV from the 1950s also showed people how to be a 'new socialist person' (*con nguoi moi xa hoi chu nghia*) and construct a 'new way of life' (*doi song moi*) in a 'new socialist society' (*xa hoi moi xa hoi chu nghia*) (Viet Chung 1968). This had an immediate impact on many aspects of the cultural and religious practices of upland minorities (Hoang Cam 2002: 28): they were encouraged, and forced, to discard their 'old way of living' and eliminate 'backward' (*lac hau)*, 'superstitious' (*me tin*) or unscientific modes of thought and practices (Malarney 1996: 542).

The Tai in Mai Chau were animists who practiced ancestor worship. As mentioned in the introduction to this study, as animists they believed in *phi* or spirits where the spirit world was a replica of the world of the living and their daily lives were strongly intertwined with the environment around them. Many traditional practices, such as funerary rites (*het hieu*), personal spirit ceremonies (*hong khoan*), *muang* and village spirit ceremonies (*sen muang* and *sen ban*) and the water gods ceremony (*sen chau nam*), were branded 'superstitious' and strictly suppressed (Hoang Cam 2002: 30). In addition, many religious

practitioners were labelled 'evil people' and placed directly under the surveillance of local cultural cadres (*can bo van hoa*) (Hoang Cam 2002: 30). Forests and other places such as spirit houses[57] were destroyed or abandoned. As Mr Khinh explains:

> The Tai here only maintain their stilt houses. But the forests around here and the spirit house for worshipping by the first Tai who came to Mai Chau were lost. So when people come to visit Mai Chau they think the Tai in Mai Chau are very new, that they came to this land recently. So the Tai people here want to ask the government for permission to re-build the spirit house. In the past, there were many small spirit houses and two main spirit houses: one in Chieng Sai (*Sun Thong Nam*) and one in Chieng Chau (*Sun Na To*). They were destroyed during the wars with the French and the US but also at the time of land reform. The government had a policy of beating the landlords and [those of] landlord lineage, and the government thought some of their customs were superstitious, so they destroyed the spirit houses. This occurred in all rural areas of Vietnam, the government also did this to Kinh spirit houses. The government changed the spirit houses into places to store fertiliser, or offices for officials, or for soldiers to camp in. At that time, the spirit house was very sacred and anyone who had lost something, or had been stolen from, could go to the spirit house and worship there to find out where they lost something or to make the thieves crazy. But during the time of land reform, each commune only had one spirit medium who was under the control of the Peoples Committee. Now, whoever wants to be a spirit medium can learn but there are only a few spirit mediums in this area now.

How the villagers responded to such ritual reform is reflected in the following comment by one of them:

> In the past, when people got hurt or dizzy they would call for the gods to help. In the 1930s, they had a house, similar to this house but smaller, in which they worshipped the gods of the land, heaven and village. Only the spirit medium knew which god could help and he would call them. Around 1950, the government

[57] Spirit houses were similar to family houses – they were on stilts with steps leading up to the house and contained rooms – yet they were a sacred place in which spiritual practices were carried out at the *muang*, village and individual levels. Mr Khinh likened them to the Vietnamese *dinh* or communal houses containing a shrine of a tutelary deity.

> thought it was not good so they destroyed it and the local people followed it without argument. After that the government built a clinic and looked after their health so they think it is good, so if they get dizzy they have help.

Aspects of Tai customs were banned because they were not only 'superstitious' but also 'wasteful'. According to another villager:

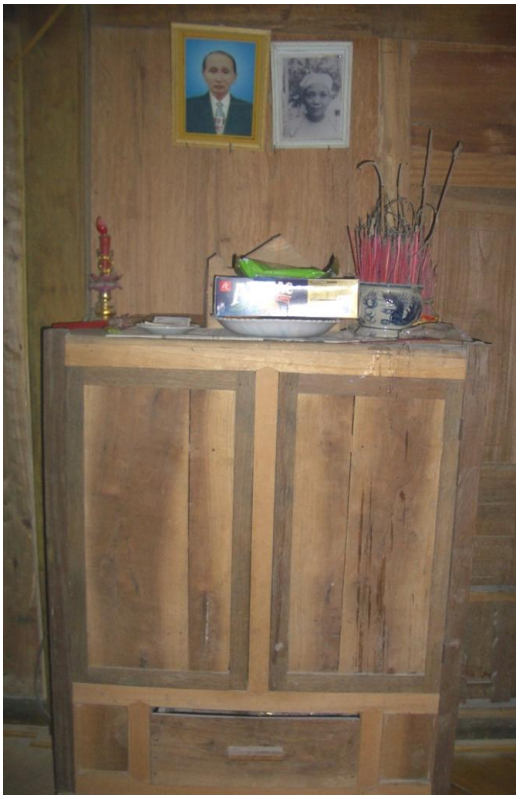
> Some customs have changed a little, for example, the funeral. In the past we had a very big funeral and had so many rules to follow, but since 1960 it has changed and it is simpler. In the past there were so many rules. For example, we must worship for the dead to go to the ancestor world and then worship for the dead to go up to the sky and we must kill so many pigs in order to do that but their feeling was good because they could send the dead to the destination they had to go to. But the government said that it costs a lot of money so they asked the people to try to make it simple so they can save money. So they killed fewer pigs to worship the dead to meet the ancestors. When it changed in 1960 my feeling was not good but for a long time we saw nothing bad happen to them so we followed it and now we think it is fine.

As these two comments show, while the villagers did not agree with the reforms at the time, they nevertheless followed them. However, villagers also indicated that they also acted in resistance. For example, in relation to the stilt house, a village elder referred to the villagers' resistance to USSR officials' suggestions for socialist transformation, or attempts at 'cooperation'. He said, 'Some USSR people wanted to cooperate with the people here to build concrete houses, but the people here refused because we were afraid of losing our ethnic characteristics. We wanted to keep our stilt houses'.

This was the same villager whom I quoted in the previous chapter as saying that the villagers had killed a pig and cooked a lot of food for some guests from the former USSR. This highlights that the villagers carried on feasting despite it being considered a 'wasteful' practice and banned by the government, and even though the guests would have been accompanied by Vietnamese government officials of some sort.

Furthermore, in addition to stating that Kinh spirit houses were destroyed by the government, as well as Tai spirit houses, Mr Khinh explained that, 'some *xuoi* people, who had moved to Mai Chau during the Discovery Movement, wanted to build a village altar but they were not allowed'. He continued to say, 'the *xuoi* here are a minority, they must follow the villagers'. In addition to the lives of the Tai being influenced by state reform and lowland culture, the lowlanders had to adapt to Tai ways.

Today families still practice ancestor worship which is is a common practice throughout Vietnam. A family altar faces the main entryway, and holds incense, offerings and portraits of ancestors (see Photograph 10). Villagers worship and honour the spirits of their ancestors on a regular basis, especially during *Tet* (New Year), *Com Moi* (New Rice festival) and the anniversary of their death, and some follow the Kinh practice of worship on the first and fifteenth of each lunar month (see Photographs 11 and 12). They request intercession for success in business and health and inform their ancestors on occasions of family sorrow or joy. Many villagers I spoke with laughed at the idea of spirits, a common comment being that they cannot be seen. Nevertheless, they seem to follow ritual practices with hope. In regards to their health, villagers will try to raise the money to go to the hospital first and take medication, but if there are no signs of improvement they will then see a spirit medium.



Photograph 10: Family altar

Photograph 11: Offerings to ancestors during *Com Moi* (New Rice) celebrations

Photograph 12: *Com Moi* celebrations

In regards to weddings and funerals, even though they are still encouraged to make the rituals simpler and cheaper for both hosts and guests, the villagers follow their customs today. I witnessed this, and it was explained to me by various villagers, during the one wedding and two funerals that I attended in the villages. As one villager explained, 'the Tai have their own customs and do not want to change these... we do not follow the rules, we follow Tai customs'.

Doi moi and hope for a better future

> The country is still developing so life in the future will be different. In the past we ate cassava and maize, now we eat rice. In the future life will be better (Mr Nam, villager).

During the last two decades, villagers have witnessed an increase in agricultural productivity and economic activity. Through *doi moi* the government introduced various institutional changes regarding the ownership and management of resources and stressed the important role of non-state sectors in economic development (Turley 1993: 1-2; Kerkvliet 1993, 1995: 20; McNicoll and Durst 1995: 107). In 1988, the government implemented Resolution 10, which introduced household contracts (*khoan ho*), allowing cooperatives to distribute land to households, while retaining the right to adjust landholdings according to demographic changes. Agricultural land and other means of production were distributed equally to all peasants, based on the number of household

members, with some variations in implementation between localities (Tran Thi Thu Trang 2004: 114). The household contract system marked the completion of decollectivisation in rural Vietnam. The household I stayed with, in Tap, has 2,400m^2 of land on which they cultivate wet rice. There are four household members, each of whom was allocated a 600m^2 plot (*xuet*) with a 20-year lease. They produce 500 to 600 kilograms of rice per crop. The household I stayed with, in Noi, has 3,200m^2 of land to cultivate wet rice. Each of the household members was allocated a 400m^2 plot (*xuet*) with a 20-year lease. Since the land was allocated, one of the members has died but the household still has the *xuet* of the deceased.[58] They produce around 800 kilograms of rice per crop.

Households are free to decide on the organisation and marketing of their agricultural production, while the cooperatives now play a supporting role and collect taxes. For example, the role of the cooperative in Tap changed from managing the land, the work and rice distribution, to providing fertiliser, new seeds and information on irrigation, and teaching new techniques for cultivation. The leader of the village explained the changing attitude of people:

> In the past people only followed what the cooperative told them to do and the cooperative paid them eight hundred grams of rice per working day. People did not want to work hard in the fields. It did not matter how much work they did, they still got eight hundred grams, so they did not want to learn about new techniques, but since *doi moi* they have their own land and want to know.

The cooperative collects tax from the villagers in the form of rice according to the productivity of their land. The land is divided into three levels and households must pay accordingly; 25 kilograms, 23 kilograms or 18 kilograms of rice per 1,000m^2 per crop. They cultivate two crops per year. The villagers, whether previous members of landlord or peasant families, prefer the freedom and ownership they now have in agricultural production, as well as trade and investment. Mr Hiep, whose family originally owned a lot of land which the government redistributed, said:

[58] When a woman marries into a different household her *xuet* goes with her and so belongs to her husband's household.

> Since around 1986 the government had a land allocation policy and they divided the land for farmers so their lives have been better after that. Now the government allows people, if they have money, to organise a company or do anything they want. Now it is freer. I like and prefer this.

Other villagers stated:

> In the past the government had an economic planning policy to not allow other people, even if they had the capacity, to trade and have a business. Now people are free to do their business if they have the capacity. No one forces them or stops them.
>
> My family are farmers so land allocation from the government strongly affected our family. The Open policy had an effect. After *doi moi*, visitors came here and we get more income and even if visitors don't come to the house we can sell them stuff.

As can be seen from the villagers' comments above, they were ready to participate in *doi moi* by the time the Vietnamese government introduced it. They wanted to unleash their economic potential and get involved in economic processes, not only in rice but in other activities such as tourism.

Conclusion

Since the 1940s, the villagers have had a turbulent time. In the 1940s they were engaged in the Democratic Revolution and the French war. From the 1950s they continued to participate in various programs of the DRV, welcoming *xuoi* migrants and partaking in collectivisation and ritual reform until *doi moi*. In the last decade or so, the turbulent times have become more settled so that the villagers now have an overall positive view of their lives and future.

This chapter has shown that the process of becoming part of the modern nation-state of Vietnam involves both 'fixing' and 'self-fixing' of the Tai in Mai Chau. They have been 'fixed' by the state, not only through the project of classification but also through the

policies of collectivisation and ritual reform. Yet they have also 'fixed' themselves; for example, they were already settled in the Mai Chau valley and living in a fixed settlement practicing wet-rice cultivation before the Vietnamese government came along. Also, the Tai had a hierarchical society and when the commoners were offered leadership roles working for the Vietnamese state with a vision of democracy, they accepted, and those who had been members of the nobility nevertheless eventually made their way into state jobs. It is not surprising then that these villagers welcomed guests of the state, as described in Chapter 2.

The chapter has also shown that after 50 years of war, hunger and failure of the implementation of the cooperative farming system, the villagers welcomed decollectivisation and the ability to once again run a household economy (the details of which are described in Chapter 5). So it is also no surprise then, that they see tourism predominantly from an economic perspective, and why, when Tap and Noi were officially designated 'Cultural Tourism Villages' in the 1990s , the villagers wanted it. In addition, because their lives have improved recently, they also view tourism in a positive light. Yet, they do not see tourism only from an economic perspective; as shown in Chapter 7, tourism is also providing spaces in which locals can construct and revive their multiple identities through continuing processes of negotiation.

The next chapter introduces the 'cultural tourism villages' of Tap and Noi today. While the state and the locals, as well as the tourism industry, continue to fix the Tai in Mai Chau through certain representations in the tourism promotional material, there are nevertheless contradictions between these images and the realities, for both the villagers and tourists.

CHAPTER 4: Cultural Tourism Villages Today: Representations, Tourists and Realities

The type of tourism promoted for villages by the tourist industry and the Vietnamese state is cultural tourism, as mentioned above, in Chapter 2. Photograph 3, in the introductory chapter, shows a sign attached to the archway at the entrance of Noi saying '*ban van hoa du lich*' (cultural tourism village). This chapter introduces the cultural tourism villages of Tap and Noi today, analyses their representations in the tourism promotional material, or the 'primary tourist gaze' (Urry 1990), and highlights the contradictions between such representations and the realities of tourism there.

Examination of these state and industry representations shows how tourism images and myths (Selwyn 1996) associated with the villages are formed. A key contention in this chapter is that, along with the influence of Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought on how the Vietnamese state thinks about ethnic minorities, ideas behind the myths also come from the Romanticism that developed in the West during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and can be defined as the 'cultural reaction to and a critique of modern capitalist industrial civilisation' (Wang 2000: 86). In particular, I draw parallels between Romantic ideas of 'the noble savage' and 'the primitive', and how the villagers are represented in tourism material. The images and myths make up the primary tourist gaze, according to John Urry (1990), because the industry and the state thereby establish what should be seen as extraordinary and therefore worthy of the tourist gaze. Yet, as Dean MacCannell (2001: 24) notes, although the guidebooks and brochures decide for us what is worth viewing, 'we remain free to look the other way, or not to look at all'. Taking Tucker's (2003) approach, this chapter attempts to write tourists into destinations and discuss a second tourist gaze, or the *actual* gaze of the tourists.

The contradictions between the representations and realities are drawn out by focusing on the patterns of everyday life in the villages as well as the actual gaze of certain tourists on the villages. While the villages are increasingly becoming tourist 'landscapes', they are also simultaneously Tai and Vietnamese villages, and while cultural tourism is promoted in the promotional material, both domestic and international visitors go there for reasons other than just cultural tourism.

The chapter begins by considering the content of some of the current tourism promotional material about the villages in order to examine the myths and see what the tourist industry identifies as exotic and worth viewing. The chapter introduces the tourists visiting the villages, provides a snapshot of daily life in the villages and discusses how tourism actually occurs in the villages, including its contradictions. By focusing on the patterns and realities of everyday village life, a more accurate picture of the villages can be drawn. Finally, the chapter shows that various types of tourists with different perspectives visit the villages.

Cultural tourism village model: representing the villages

Advertisement 1

An example of part of an advertisement published by an international tour agency for a 21-day package tour around Vietnam, including Mai Chau:

> Day 11-12: Hanoi/Mai Chau/Hanoi
> Today we travel by coach through scenic countryside to the village of Mai Chau, the tribal home of the Tai people. As one of the highlights of the tour, experience warm traditional Vietnamese hospitality as a guest of one of the village families in their simple, comfortable and clean homes. On the following morning we visit the local school and traditional weaving house in the village and from there proceed back to Hanoi for an overnight stay.
> Facts
> Comfortable tour
> Ideal for the first time visitor with a perfect combination of the finest Vietnam has to offer
> Includes exploration of the Northern Highlands and an overnight hill tribe home stay in Mai Chau
> Utilises air, coach and 3 overnight train journeys in soft sleeper compartments including the famous Re-Unification Express
> Great value 21 day tour
> (Wendy Wu Tours 2004 Vietnam Highlights, *Indochina, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar 2004-2005*, p8)

Advertisement 2

An example of the attractions in Mai Chau written for Vietnamese and English speakers in a brochure published by the provincial Hoa Binh government. The English version is as follows:

Mai Chau From Hoa Binh township, after covering 60 km through passes and hills, you will get to Mai Chau, a valley for a long time has been a frequent address for both Vietnamese and foreign tourists. This is the dwelling place of the Thai [*Thái*] and H'mong ethnic minorities and the villages of Tap and Noi well-known for their pure beauty and identity. From there, tourists can trek through the imposing primeval forest of Mai Chau to explore the cultural tradition, customs, festivals of these ethnic groups, and particularly, admire brocade weaving with sophisticated and meticulous patterns by mountainous girls there. (Hoa Binh Trading and Tourism Department n.d. Mai Chau, *Welcome to Hoa Binh*, pp12-13)

Advertisement 3

An example of a two day tour from Hanoi to Hoa Binh province, including Mai Chau, in a booklet published by a Vietnamese tour agency (my translation):

Day 1: Ha Noi – Kim Boi – Mai Chau

6.30: The tour guide will meet guests and leave Hanoi by bus

10.30: In Kim Boi guests are free to bathe in mineral water, have lunch, rest

14.00: Guests travel by bus to visit Mai Chau, watch how traditional weaving [*Tho Cam*] is made, buy souvenirs…

18.30 Have dinner

19.30 Guests watch or take part in bamboo dance [*mua sap*] with *Thái* girls, light bonfire, sing songs, get drunk with rice wine [*ruou can*], spend the night in a stilt house.

Day 2: Hoa Binh – Ha Noi

6.30: Guests are invited to have breakfast

7.00: Leave Mai Chau by bus and visit the Hoa Binh Hydro Power Plant. Guests have lunch in Hoa Binh town.

13.30: Guests return to Hanoi by bus.

15.30: Arrive in Hanoi, finish trip.

(Khanh Sinh International Tourist Company n.d. *Travel Programs, Discover mysterious Nature*, p12)

These representations of the Mai Chau area, including the villages, show how the tourist industry provides particular images of the place and its inhabitants. The content of the representations becomes part of the tourist imagination and hence form the tourists' images of and myths about the villages. According to Tom Selwyn (1996 cited in Tucker 2003: 26), tourist images are linked to myths that simultaneously reveal or 'overcommunicate' some features of a place or people while concealing or 'undercommunicating' others. Thus, those features of the villages deemed exotic and unique are overcommunicated, and others are omitted, such as those considered to be mundane and ordinary. Similarly, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins (1993: 2) argue, the images in tourism promotional material serve to reinforce 'shared understandings of cultural difference', therefore villagers are represented as an 'other' people and only those elements of 'other' cultures that are different from those of the tourists' cultures are emphasised (Said 1978; Buzard 1993).

Numerous researchers, including Biles *et al* (1999), Ning Wang (2000) and Laurel Kennedy and Mary Rose Williams (2001), argue that the characteristics specific to the myths and the 'tourist way of seeing' are that they are 'apoliticised, decontextualising, simplifying, ahistoricising and romanticising' (Wang 2000: 161). These characteristics can be seen in the myths created out of the representations of first, the place in which the villages are found and second, the people or inhabitants of the villages.

In the tourism promotional material, including in the examples above, the place or the environment surrounding the villages is romanticised. A pristine image is created of the 'scenic countryside' of the 'Northern Highlands'. The mountainous terrain, containing valleys, streams and 'imposing primeval forests', is described as a scenic landscape of spectacular and gorgeous 'beauty'. Such an image reflects one of the manifestations of the Romanticist 'cult of nature' (Mumford 1934 cited in Wang 2000), a yearning for 'natural nature', which 'acts as the "green" dream-place in contrast to the "grey" urban nightmare' (Wang 2000: 87). This yearning is repeated in rural and nature tourism, where 'landscapes' and 'wilderness' are constructed for tourist consumption (Tucker 2003: 27). In the tourism promotional material, particularly brochures endorsing cycling and trekking tours to the villages and surrounding areas, tourists are prompted to 'observe' and 'explore' the mountains and valleys.

The inhabitants of the villages who live in this 'natural' environment are also romanticised. There are two ideas behind the images created: the myth of 'the noble savage' associated with the work of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Conroy 1998; Cranston 1991) and that of 'the primitive' (Kuper 1988; McGrane 1989; Torgovnick 1990; Rossetti 2006). Rousseau, an Enlightenment philosopher, depicted the noble savage as 'man' in nature; innocent, even childlike, free and happy living a simple life among abundance (Conroy 1998: 19). One of the central debates among Western intellectuals during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries concerned the question of whether civilisation was good or bad for human societies. Rousseau's participation in this debate led him to imagine the transition from the state of nature to civil society, when: 'Nature was made subject to the Law' (Conroy 1998: 19). Rousseau saw society as inherently destructive. Believing 'man' in nature was more equal and happier than 'man' in society, Rousseau condemned society as he glorified and idealised the state of nature. This myth of the noble savage is embedded in the images created in the tourism promotional material about

the villages. While the representations in the above examples do not appear to condemn society or civilisation, they imply it in the images of happy 'man' in nature. The romanticised, idyllic image of the noble savage continues in the representations of the 'villages of Tap and Noi well-known for their pure beauty and identity' and of 'village families' who live in 'stilt houses', who are friendly and extend 'warm traditional Vietnamese hospitality' to 'guests' who 'are invited to have breakfast'.

The intellectual debate about civilisation versus the state of nature came down firmly in favour of civilisation in the nineteenth century. While still regarded as childlike and close to nature, the savage became 'the primitive', a debased creature. Evolutionary thinking created a theory based on progress, where 'the resource of "progress" authorises the transformation of the "different" into the "primitive"' (McGrane 1989: 99). This transformation was achieved through the idea that existing 'savages' could be compared with the past evolutionary history of 'civilised' Europe, where Europeans had also been savages but through evolution they had advanced along a scale to become barbarians and finally, civilised. This creates a hierarchy which 'implies a time dimension as well as a scale of value' (Kilborne and Langness 1987: 14).

This theory was also important in questioning ideas about humanity and what separated human from animal, conceptualised in the dualism of culture versus nature. The 'primitive' appeared to symbolise a problematic point at which humanity began to differentiate itself from nature. Being lower down the historical scale, 'primitives' were closer to animals and thus closer to nature, and were therefore irrational, had simple religion and society, lacked morality and were uncivilised. Those who were 'civilised' were culturally, socially, historically and genetically removed from animals and thus nature, and were therefore rational, had high culture, advanced religion and morality.

Another manifestation of Romanticism, 'the cult of the primitive' (Mumford 1934 cited in Wang 2000: 87) is the search for people still living a simple, natural life associated with premodern times. MacCannell (1976) put forward a similar idea in relation to the tourism industry. He argued that tourists are alienated by the conditions of contemporary life and thus search for authenticity in other times and places, in an attempt to recreate the structures that life in the modern world appears to have demolished. This search gives rise to ethnic or cultural tourism (Tucker 2003: 26). The image of 'tribal' and 'ethnic

minority' people who still dwell in 'stilt houses' meets this search for a simple and premodern world, and is compounded by descriptions of 'traditional hospitality' and 'traditional weaving', indeed anything 'traditional', given that the term implies timeless, unchanging practices.

The tourism promotional material about the villages and Mai Chau also create timeless, decontextualised images. It implies that the inhabitants live in isolated and remote communities, and omits the local history of the villagers and their relationships with others. This is common in the tourism promotional material about Vietnam in general, where the tourism industry uses nostalgia as a marketing strategy to create a so-called 'real' Vietnam – which is really a 'new' Vietnam – with 'timeless picturesque scenes of ancient mystery and colonial charm' (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 151). The villages are presented with a 'muted and angerless history' (Kennedy and Williams 2001: 136) where 'timelessness dehistoricises Vietnam's turbulent past and the disturbing social conditions of its people' (Biles *et al* 1999: 208).

Although not highlighted so much in the examples above, the predominant image in the tourism promotional material is of 'Thai [*Thái*] stilt houses'. Those people who inhabit the timber and bamboo stilt houses become part of the 'scenic' landscape itself, so that there develops what Tucker (2003: 34) calls a 'cultural landscape' that is aesthetically valued and appropriated for tourist consumption. This is reflected in the literature that describes tourists staying in an 'overnight hill tribe home stay' as guest[s] of one of the village families in their simple, comfortable and clean homes' and who 'can trek through the imposing primeval forest of Mai Chau to explore the cultural tradition, customs, festivals of these ethnic groups, and particularly, admire brocade weaving with sophisticated and meticulous patterns by mountainous girls there. Repeatedly seeing the visiting tourists' fascination with the stilt houses, the villagers have gradually come to appreciate the value of the houses and the opportunity to sell tourists the chance to become stilt house-dwellers themselves. Many families have a computer image of a stilt house on their business cards (see Photograph 13) to promote 'stilt house tourism'. They promote the services they offer to tourists including the opportunity to stay in a stilt house that 'specialises in serving food and drink', to experience 'authentic' and 'traditional music and dance' and to buy 'Thai [*Thái*] silk clothing and weaving'. With numerous stilt

house guesthouses in the villages, tourists can, for a time, become villagers and part of the cultural landscape themselves.

Photograph 13: Business card of a household running a guesthouse

The photographs used as illustrations in all of the Vietnamese and international tourism promotional material, including postcards (see Photograph 14), depict the same key features of Mai Chau and the villages that are emphasised in the text. Views usually show either the stilt houses in the village with the surrounding rice paddies and mountains in the backdrop or the rice paddies in the foreground with the villages and mountains in the background. The rice fields are also marked out in the promotional material; such markers are also found in tourism promotional material on the Internet, as well as in travel stories and photographs by the tourists themselves.

Photograph 14: Postcard of Mai Chau (photographer: Minh Loc)

Photographs in the literature include the villagers, who are usually female and typically wearing so-called ethnic or traditional dress. This feminised and 'traditional' image is also depicted in the Vietnamese tourism promotional material in descriptions of 'mountain girls' and '*Thái* girls' who are weaving and dancing, and thereby being defined as the makers of tradition (Taylor and Jonsson 2002: 245). The Vietnamese promotional material also represents '*Thái* girls' themselves as an attraction, as illustrated in the comment, 'Guests can watch or take part in *mua sap* (bamboo dance) with *Thái* girls'. I examined English and Vietnamese language tourism promotional material as well as local accounts in the media and came across a number of texts by Vietnamese authors mentioning the beauty of Tai women; for example, an entry by a journalist for the locally-produced *Timeout* magazine that has an international, English language audience, states that 'among Vietnam's ethnic minorities, *Thái* girls are well-known for their natural beauty' (Viet Hung 2005: 11).

The primary gaze manufactured by the tourism industry and the state also contains an alternative image of the villages. The international tourists to the villages commonly carry a guidebook, the most popular of which is the *Lonely Planet* guide. Besides its advice on where to go, what to do and see, and a limited amount of state-sanctioned information on the national history and multiethnic cultures of Vietnam, this guidebook, like others, highlights the exotic features of the villages. Also, as the following excerpt shows, it refers to the modern and commercial aspects of the villages according to an assumption of the aesthetic nature of poverty,[59] as well as to the Vietnamese state:

[59] According to Jan Nederveen Pieterse (1992) both the western media and the established aid organisations produce and maintain an 'aid assistance imagination' of poor, southern, underdeveloped or third world countries. This approach, which has been labelled 'the pornography of poverty' (Smillie 1995), is aimed to induce emotions of pity and guilt on the part of potential donors through depictions of material poverty and imgages of helpless 'others' in the third world (Plewes and Stuart 2007; Cameron and Haanstra 2008). Such images, when continuously repeated year after year, outweigh reality and become realities of their own (Lamers 2005). In a more recent article entitled 'Development Made Sexy', John Cameron and Anna Haanstra (2008) argue that a departure is being made from this strategy to one whereby development organisations in the northern, developed or first world are instead using sex appeal to generate awareness and funding for their work.

If you are anticipating an exotic Indiana Jones encounter (sharing a bowl of eyeball soup, taking part in some ancient fertility ritual, etc.), think again. Overnighting in Mai Chau's minority villages is a very 'civilised' experience. The local authorities (the same people who collect a 50% tax on any tourist dollars that may flow into these villages) made sure that they brought the villages up to 'tourist standard' before allowing in any foreigners.

Electricity flows, modern amenities abound and hygienic western-style toilets are there for your defecating pleasure. While this is not a bad thing per se (some prefer not to have to relieve themselves into a hole dug in the ground), it won't live up to the 'hill tribe trekking' experience you might have had elsewhere. Lamentably, the rival Hanoi tour operators are not helping the situation much either. Somehow, they cannot seem to resist slapping up their oversized advertisement stickers wherever their groups stop to eat or drink, even if that happens to be on these lovely wooden stilt houses! Nothing is sacred.

But modern amenities and commercialism aside, the majority of people come away feeling pleased with the experience. The Tai villages are exceedingly friendly and when it's all said and done, even with the TV and the hum of the refrigerator, it *is* a peaceful place and you're still sleeping in a thatched-roof stilt house on split bamboo floors.

One traveler wrote:

There is *nothing* to do in Mai Chau. It is fantastic. Take a camera, cards, book or whatever. Annette Low. (Florence and Storey 1999: 265)

A broad overview of the tourists

There has been a steady increase in the number of tourists visiting the villages since the 1990s. The number of tourists is mostly dictated by certain factors, including the Vietnamese state, the tourism industry, marketing, the global market and the tourists themselves. Yet there are always unpredictable forces such as global epidemics, affecting the number, too; during my stay, there were fewer tourists than usual, because of the SARS and avian flu.

Table 4 below shows the annual number of tourists who visited Mai Chau district and the consequent income generated between January 2003 and August 2005. The statistics are from the economics office of the Mai Chau District People's Committee; they are based

on people who visited the area and stayed the night with a household, whether the household ran a licensed guesthouse or not. They do not include those who visited but did not stay overnight. Their reliability relies on households and guesthouses in the district accurately recording the information. During my stay, I learned that only households running licensed guesthouses consistently registered the tourists that stayed with them. Households that did not run a licensed guesthouse but had tourists stay with them, although considerably fewer, may or may not have registered them. Also, the village police were more concerned about households registering foreign tourists than domestic tourists, as foreigners yield a higher tax. The figures in the table below therefore are approximate and are used to give a general picture of the scale and trend of tourists to the area.

Table 4: Tourists in Mai Chau district, and Total Earnings from Tourism, 2003-2005[a]

	2003	**2004**	**2005[b]**
Total no. of people	15,719	15,000	8,085
Vietnamese	14,164	13,766	6,409
Foreigners	1,555	1,234	1,676
Total no. of groups	3,631	1,623	1,679
Vietnamese	3,174	1,321	1,363
Foreigners	457	302	316
Total income	1.4 billion VND	1.3 billion VND	1.3 billion VND

a Source: Economics Office, Mai Chau District People's Committee.

b Statistics until 21/8/2005.

Table 4 shows that the total number of tourists to the district decreased between 2003 and 2004, and that by August 2005 there had only been 8,085 tourists. According to the *Annual statement on socio-economic development and defence security in 2003 and Plan for 2004* (Mai Chau District People's Committee 2004), the number of tourists to Mai Chau district in 2003 declined by 9.4 per cent over the 2002 figures. The reduced number, particularly of domestic tourists, was a result of a combination of factors: the SARS epidemic; road closure and construction of National Highway 6; and the bird flu epidemic (see Photograph 15). This decline may have been to the village's benefit, because prior to

this, the number of visitors to Tap was becoming unsustainable. According to Mr Dan, from 1997 onwards, many large groups of students from Hanoi visited the village, so that at times 'there were five hundred or six hundred guests per day'. This is why tour companies started going to Noi instead.

Photograph 15: The view of the construction of National Highway 6 from Mai Chau town

While the total number of tourists to the district has declined, the income thereby generated has remained fairly steady; there was a slight decrease, from 1.4 billion VND in 2003 to 1.3 billion VND in 2004, and in 2005, 1.3 billion VND had already been generated by August, implying another slight increase. This is because while the number of domestic tourists decreased each year from 2003, the number of foreign tourists (who spend more money than the former) has increased.

On average, there were approximately 1,000 tourists per month or 300 per week staying in Mai Chau district. According to the *Annual statement on socio-economic development and defence security in 2003 and Plan for 2004*, there are 37 households running guesthouses in Mai Chau district (Mai Chau District People's Committee 2004). Approximately 76 per cent of the visitors to Mai Chau stayed overnight in the villages: approximately 65 per cent in Tap village and 11 per cent in Noi village. While at least one

household in each of the villages hosted tourists every night in 2003 and 2004, by 2005 numerous households did so; the majority of the guests were foreign. Tourists returned to the villages along a faster, smoother and straighter newly-laid road after the highway reopened and the scare of SARS and avian flu abated.

Most tourists stay in the villages for one night, sometimes two, hosted by a family. They relax around the house, reading, drinking, eating and chatting among themselves. They walk around the villages and surrounding rice paddies, taking photographs and buying handicrafts. They have the option of paying for and watching a cultural performance. They may also go trekking, cycling or motorbike riding to view the surroundings or to move on to the next destination. Some tourists only visit the villages for an hour or two, between destinations.

As can be seen in Table 4, many more domestic tourists visit the villages than foreign tourists. There are three types of domestic tourists. First and most numerous are university students, mainly from Hanoi. As previously mentioned, they can be ethnology students, as well as art students, for example, from various universities who are on education-related excursions with their teachers. They now also visit for holidays together, without teachers, to get out of the city. They pay for themselves and usually travel to Hoa Binh province, including Mai Chau, as it is close to Hanoi and cheap. They visit the villages during school holidays and usually stay for one night, as part of a trip that also includes visiting the Hoa Binh dam and Kim Boi springs. They hire buses with drivers and can travel in very large groups. Second are groups of workers who go on free collective trips organised by their employers who take them away for a few days somewhere in the country. They most commonly include state workers at various government levels and branches who belong to the socialist *bien che* system and are therefore in permanent employment (Phuong An Nguyen 2002; Michaud and Turner 2006: 794). They also include employees of private and joint-owned companies, particularly tourism companies. The majority of these tourists are from Hanoi or Hoa Binh town, but they also come from the nearby provinces of Son La, Lai Chau and Thanh Hoa. They do not necessarily stay the night, instead visiting the village only to eat a meal and watch the cultural performance.

The third group are ‘post-doi moi newly affluent consumers’ (Michaud and Turner 2006: 792). In the 1990s, Vietnamese households, particularly in the lowlands and cities, became richer and more now have disposable income that they can spend on travel. They mainly come in their own cars from Hanoi and Hai Phong. Family groups and, less commonly, small groups of friends and couples, visit for weekend and long weekend get-aways, particularly on public holidays (see Photograph 16).

Photograph 16: Domestic tourists, family group

International tourists include people from France, Spain, Switzerland, Sweden, the Netherlands, UK, US, Australia, China, South Korea and Japan. The majority visit the villages as part of a tour group. Other international tourists include backpackers, expatriates and, less commonly, groups of students. They travel with or without a tour guide. Today, tourists are allowed to visit the villages independently, that is, without a tour guide (see Photograph 17).

Photograph 17: A small tour group of international tourists with tour guide and an independent traveller

The majority of foreign tourists visiting the villages today travel in tour groups. They mostly organise and book the tour in their home country, either directly through a travel agent or online. Fewer organise it through one of the many tour cafes in Hanoi. The tour may be within Vietnam only or also include travel to neighbouring countries China, Laos, Cambodia and Thailand. Some tour groups travel the so-called northwest loop within Vietnam, a seven-day trip usually incorporating Son La, Dien Bien Phu, Lai Chau and the old French hill station in Sa Pa. Many French groups stop in Mai Chau on their way to the famous battle site of Dien Bien Phu. The border crossings from northwest Vietnam into northeast Laos and southwest China have become easier due to Vietnam's involvement in the regional tourism development programs of the Mekong and ASEAN. Most of the tour groups travel from Hanoi and back, some turning it into a small loop incorporating a third stop at Cuc Phuong National Park, spanning parts of Hoa Binh province and neighbouring Ninh Binh and Thanh Hoa provinces. A tour can involve hiking to other villages in the area, or visiting the villages on a motorbike or bicycle tour. Tour companies book in advance and most tour groups stay one night, some two nights.

Other international tourists who are not part of a package tour usually travel in small groups, pairs or individually, by local bus, bicycle or motorbike, or they hire a car and driver. They may or may not book in advance and typically stay for one or two nights. They rarely stay for longer as in order to enter Vietnam they must obtain a tourist visa that has time restrictions and they usually wish to see as much of the country as possible. The most common, cheapest tourist visa lasts for one month. Backpackers, who tend not

to plan where they are going to stay and for how long, also tend to move on because 'there is not much to do' and as a 'guest' in a family's house they do not have the privacy and freedoms they are used to, particularly in other places on the backpacker trail in Southeast Asia. There are infrequent exceptions to the short stays of foreign tourists to the villages. During my time in the villages, I met four Australian volunteers teaching English in Noi for three weeks and an American expatriate in Tap who has been regularly visiting the village for various lengths of stay since 1999.

It is important to note that tourists are not the only visitors to the villages and that the villagers differentiate other visitors from tourists. The villagers are also visited by artists, members of the media, and researchers who ask them questions about and document different aspects of their lives, but with a focus on origins and traditional life. While not nearly as frequent as tourists, professional and amateur artists, including painters and photographers, journalists and television crews, and students and researchers show up at the villages to document various aspects of their lives, just as I did.[60]

During my stay, a couple of Vietnamese artists, who had been returning to the villages for a number of years, visited one of my host families with gifts in hand. While I did not meet him, a foreign travel writer for a popular guide book stayed with another household. Also, when I returned to the villages in 2006, one of my host families gave me a copy of a DVD that a crew from the national Vietnam Television (VTV) station had recorded, of one of the village dance troupes singing and dancing in one of the houses. I did not meet any other researchers during my time in the villages, however I learned from the villagers that a range of researchers visit the villages to conduct research into their culture and lives.

> Villager: Besides tourists and students there are some researchers from universities and also officials from Lac Son or Ho Chi Minh City and other districts. They come here to do research or come for a weekend holiday. When they come here they often dance and sing songs with the local people.
> MA: Can you tell me more about the researchers?

[60] Two days after the start of my fieldwork I observed a funeral. My host family had introduced me to the grieving family, who allowed me to stay. However, some people who were digging the grave asked who I was; the other villagers there assumed I was a journalist.

> Villager: Sometimes maybe ten or twenty come but they only stay for one night. They only observe, dance and sing with the people. At night they have a big fire. Sometimes one or two researchers come here to study the economy and cultural heritage to preserve Tai culture.
>
> People on an ecology project stay here, they are an Australian man and his Thai wife. They have come here two or three times already. They came here to do a survey about tourism, Tai culture and the environment and they brought visitors to the village.
>
> A Vietnamese researcher studied for her doctorate in France. Two years ago she often came to Chieng Sai commune to visit Mr Khinh because he knows Tai writing. No one in this village knows clearly about Tai culture. Mr Nhiem, the secretary of the Communist Party, is now learning Tai writing and knows about culture. The leader of the commune told me that you are staying here to learn about Tai culture.

With this constant flow of artists, journalists and researchers interested in their culture and lives, particularly since the villages were branded cultural tourism villages it is also not surprising that the villagers believe that tourists also visit their village to learn about their lives and culture. As one villager put it, 'This village is a cultural tourism site, so people who want to learn about Tai customs and culture come here'. The significance of this perspective of the villagers and for the villagers is addressed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Daily life in the villages and contradictions with the images

The following is a description of a typical day for one of the families with whom I stayed in Noi:

> The family stirs to the call of the roosters in the distance at around five in the morning. It is the eldest daughter's job to feed the pigs. She quietly rises from the bed she shares with her sisters, adjusts her clothes and reties her hair in the dark. The split bamboo floor creaks minimally as she lightly moves across it, out the

kitchen door and down the stairs. Most mornings she is up before the pigs start to stir. Some mornings when the pigs are squealing she moans as her mother calls out to her from bed to get up and feed the pigs. Squealing, snorting and grunting, the pigs devour the food.

In the meantime, the other family members rise. They get their own breakfast, usually leftovers from dinner the night before. The eldest daughter washes the dishes and sweeps underneath and around the house, while her younger sister and brother tease one another as they get ready and go to school. Riding bicycles, they pass their neighbours, who are also pottering around their houses, sweeping and tending to their livestock. Some are setting up handicraft stalls outside their houses. Families with tourists staying with them are preparing and cooking breakfast for their guests who are stirring, washing and sitting at a table underneath the house, taking in the surroundings. The siblings on their bikes pass more neighbours walking along the road and tending to their rice fields. They are also passed by neighbours on motorbikes travelling to and from town; going to work, buying breakfast from the market or taking children to pre-school. On Highway 15 they join their friends travelling into town to school from outlying villages. They cycle slowly as they talk, bantering and laughing with one another. Taking up most of the space on the road, they look like a school of fish, standing out in their uniform of white shirt and blue pants.

It is now quieter back in the village. It is grandpa's job to look after the family's buffalo. In the morning and late in the afternoon he takes the buffalo to graze, simultaneously cutting the grass between the rice paddies. He stops to chat with neighbours. After tending to the buffalo, he rests and drinks tea at the tea table in the house, looking out of the open window watching any passers by. He may call out to a neighbour or watch a group of tourists go by.

Mother carries out tasks around the house, involving a continuation of housework, weaving and tending to the mushrooms she is currently growing underneath her house as part of a provincial government initiative which the Women's Union is organising at the village level. She also tends to the rice fields. Father has gone with other male villagers to help build a house in a neighbouring village. He is not at

home much during the day, seeking work outside of the village and drinking with friends. When he is at home he may potter around the house fixing tools and doing repair jobs.

The children return from school around 11am. The youngest and only son attends Mai Chau Secondary School where the hours are 7am until 10.30am and his older sister, the youngest daughter, goes to Mai Chau High School.[61] If mother has not zipped down to the market in Mai Chau town, one and a half kilometres away on the motorbike, her daughter will. They prepare and cook lunch, usually consisting of a meat or fish dish, a tofu or egg dish, a vegetable dish, soup and rice. The family sits around the food tray, eating and chatting. The eldest daughter cleans the dishes and joins the rest of the family resting in front of the television watching a Vietnamese romantic soap series and napping on the floor. Despite the sound of the neighbours' televisions, it is usually quiet in the village during siesta time.

They start to stir around 2pm to the sound of a couple of motorbikes as neighbours carry on with their daily activities. A mini-bus with a tour group rumbles into the village. Neighbours look on as the hosting guesthouse members greet the tourists. Mother continues with her chores as her youngest daughter does her homework, after which she continues making cotton bracelets and mobile phone holders to sell to tourists for pocket money. Her son leaves to play with his friends who pass tourists walking through the rice paddies.

Late in the afternoon, some female villagers start playing volleyball on the court in the middle of the village, which doubles as a car park. They are practicing for the upcoming district volleyball competition. A couple of tourists walking through the village stop to watch and then join in. As dusk approaches, the drum is beaten so that the villagers know that the tour group has requested the cultural performance that night. There are two dance troupes in the village; the rhythm of the drum beat tells which one will perform.

[61] Even though children go to secondary school (grades six to nine) for six days of the week, they only attend for half of the day due to overcrowding. High school students (grades ten to 12) do have some full days. The daughter attends for a full day on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays (8-10.30am and 1-5.30pm). She usually goes home for lunch before returning to school again.

> Mother has been to the market. As for most villagers, it is usual for at least one of the family members to buy fresh produce from the market for each meal. While some households have a refrigerator, they will typically only use it for cold drinks for tourists. Mother and the girls prepare and cook dinner as father returns and washes. The television is turned on and the family sits around the food tray, eating and chatting while the national and local news is on in the background. The youngest daughter eats quickly and leaves the family in order to prepare for the cultural performance. She applies make up and puts on her 'traditional' outfit. Father visits some friends and the oldest daughter cleans the dishes. Mother, grandpa and the children settle in to watch a romantic Korean movie. The same show can be heard on other televisions in the village. Rhythmic sounds of an accordion, flute, drums and gongs peal out across the village as the cultural performance begins. The background din lasts for about one and a half hours. The children fall asleep in front of the television. Mother sets up the beds and mosquito nets. They turn off the lights and go to bed with the sound of a neighbour's television still audible in the background.

This portrait of everyday life shows how cultural tourism is played out in the villages today, including its contradictions. While tourists are a part of village life on a daily level, the extent to which each household is involved with them varies. To a certain degree, the villagers decide how much they wish to participate in tourism. The household represented in the narrative above wants tourists to stay with them and although they did not run a licensed guesthouse then, they had plans to do so in the future. I discuss the requirements for households to obtain a license in the following chapter. It can also be seen from this example that, as mentioned in the introductory chapter above, the villagers participate in other income-earning activities and therefore do not rely solely on tourism. Of the 18 guesthouses in the two villages, only one owner identified himself as a guesthouse owner. The others identified themselves as farmers, as non-guesthouse owners did.

There is a daily pattern or cycle in the villages: the majority of tourists usually arrive mid to late afternoon. They eat a meal prepared by the household and many watch one of the local dance troupes perform for them. They stay overnight and the next morning, after eating breakfast prepared for them by the household, they leave. It is usually quieter in the villages during the middle of the day. There is also an annual pattern or cycle in the

villages. The peak tourist season for both domestic and international tourists is from October/November to March/April, during the winter and spring seasons.[62] This period includes the popular four-day long weekend of the public holidays of Liberation Day (or Reunification Day, *Ngay giai phong*) on 30 April, and Labour Day (or International Workers' Day, *Ngay Quoc te Lao dong*) on 1 May.[63] The period also includes the holiday time surrounding Christmas and New Year of the Gregorian calendar, as well as Easter. New Year's Day on 1 January is now also a public holiday in Vietnam (*Tet duong lich*).

While the peak tourist season includes the holiday time surrounding *Tet*, Vietnamese New Year according to the lunar calendar, it is the quietest time of the year in the villages for tourists. *Tet* is the longest public holiday in Vietnam (one week) and the biggest celebration of the year for the majority of the population. Domestic tourists, tour guides and operators are busy celebrating *Tet* themselves, while tourism agents and guidebooks warn visitors not to travel around Vietnam at that time and if they do, to make sure they stay in international chain hotels and resorts. I experienced one *Tet* celebration in the villages, during which there were no tourists for the week. *Tet* is also the biggest celebration of the year for the villagers, for which they stop business, pray to and worship their ancestors, cook and eat, and visit family and friends for two weeks (see Photograph 18). It was the only time of the year when I did not see any handicraft stalls set up in the villages for more than two consecutive days.

Photograph 18: Praying to ancestors at *Tet*

[62] This is contrary to the domestic tourist peak season in Sa Pa which occurs in the summer season when people from the lowlands leave for the cooler environs of the mountains, a trend started by the French social elite (Michaud and Turner 2006).
[63] In 2007 a new public holiday was declared entitled 'Hung Kings Commemorations' on the tenth day of the third lunar month of every year (around April).

A Vietnamese public holiday that brings tourists to the villages is National Day (*Quoc khanh*) on 2 September. I also witnessed a large Vietnamese student group as well as a Japanese student group from Hanoi in Tap on the same night for the Mid-Autumn Festival (Moon Festival, *Tet Trung thu*) on the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month (late September/early October in the Gregorian calendar).

The villagers must balance the hosting of tourists with the cultivation of rice, and village and family events. As mentioned in Chapter 3 above, the villagers grow two crops per year. Based on the rice cycle, the busiest times of the year are harvest time, in May/June and October (see Photographs 19 and 20). The peak tourist season overlaps with the October harvest. This does not cause problems for households who take in a small number of tourists; family members continue to work in the fields, while one stays at home tending to the guests. Whether there are tourists present or not, households may have relatives and neighbours to help in the fields.

Photograph 19: Harvesting rice

Photograph 20: Drying rice and rice straw

Yet, when hundreds of tourists descend on the village at one time, households not only help one another but also call in help. They hire relatives, neighbours and people from surrounding villages to work both in the house, cooking and cleaning for tourists, and in the fields, harvesting rice. The villager I spoke with who identified himself as a guesthouse owner does not work in the fields; he remains at his house to tend to the guests. There are occasions when villagers have festivals or events and, as with the volleyball game described above, they invite tourists to join in. Most of the time, however, tourism is kept separate from village events mainly because of the tourists' structured, usually short, stay. Tour groups, especially, have a schedule that means they are not around the village much during the day. Once again, family members juggle their responsibilities so that the tourists are fed and the family is represented at village meetings, weddings and funerals.

There are contradictions between the realities of everyday life in the villages and the images of the villages in the tourism promotional material. There is only one mention of tourists in the examples of the representations of the villages in the promotional material, presented earlier in this chapter: 'a valley for a long time has been a frequent address for

both Vietnamese and foreign tourists'. The representations of the villages largely ignore the presence of tourists in the villages as well as the existence of signs, facilities and services for tourists.

Not only are the villages named in the tourism promotional material but there are now also signs along Highway 15 giving directions, locations and distances, as well as signs indicating where there are caves to explore. In addition to the archway that tourists pass through to enter each village, households running licensed guesthouses have small signs on their houses indicating the number of the guesthouse, and other households have homemade signs advertising the sale of rice wine.

Today, tourists can stay with any household in either of the villages, so long as the household wants them. The household need not be registered as a guesthouse, although those that are have contracts with tourist companies. The business side of tourism is ignored in the industry's representations of the villages. Instead, tourists are led to believe that they are 'invited' as 'guests' by the villagers to stay with them; I discuss village business and economics in more detail in the following chapter. In addition, the stilt house guesthouses are bigger than other houses and have been altered to accommodate tourists, so some villagers have concrete housing, bathrooms and kitchens. These details, as well as the fact that villagers use 'modern' items such as motorbikes, televisions and electric rice cookers, are left out of most tourist images. Furthermore, through experience, villagers have learnt how to greet, perform and shape the tourist experience to different tourists' likings. In the tourism promotional material, such calculating behaviour is passed over for the noble savage myth behind the image of a naturally 'friendly', 'warm' and 'hospitable' 'tribal people'.

In both villages, there are more handicraft stalls than registered guesthouses. Any household that wants to can run a handicraft stall. Most set up their stalls beneath their stilt houses so that tourists can walk into them from the path or the road. Others set up along the side of the path or road. At first, households only sold weaving that they had made themselves or had traded with their relatives in Laos. Now, they also sell handmade scarves, clothing, wall hangings, book marks, mobile phone holders and woven reed/bamboo items that they have made themselves or have traded with other ethnic groups in the area, including other Tai, Hmong, Muong, Lao and Dao. Many households

also travel to Hanoi, including to 'silk village' in Ha Dong, and buy scarves, bags and purses to sell in their stalls.

Tap, as well as being larger, having a longer history of receiving tourists and receiving more of them, is also more commercial than Noi. In addition to handicraft stalls, households run cafes and sell other products such as rice wine (*ruou*), orchids, bamboo items such as buffalo bells, and bow and arrows, and whittled timber ornaments, tables and chairs. When many tourists are staying in Tap, including large students groups, villagers become more entrepreneurial and line up along the main road selling freshly-made bamboo rice (*com lam*) and locally grown fruit and vegetables. Whereas households in Tap set up their handicraft stalls and cafes routinely every morning, households in Noi are more spontaneous, reacting when tourists show up. When one of the four licensed guesthouses in Noi has a tour group staying, not only do the owners of the guesthouse show their wares, but also other households display their products along the paths outside their houses. Girls aged between three and their teens also line up outside the guesthouse, each with a small wooden stool on which they display their handmade wares such as cotton and beaded bracelets, and mobile phone holders.

Representations in the Vietnamese tourism promotional material allude to this commercialism. For example, the representation of the villages in *Advertisement 3* above says, 'watch how *Tho Cam* [weaving] is being made, buy souvenirs', but only in regards to 'traditional' weaving. Not one of the other products is mentioned. The alternative image created by the *Lonely Planet* guide referred to earlier, mentions the 'modern' and 'commercial' aspects of the villages, but these are explained as occurring as a result of the impact of the state and tourism, a reductive representation that ignores the agency of the villagers and their active participation in tourism. It also ignores the tourists and their actual gazes upon the villages.

Actual tourist gaze

It is valuable to examine the tourists' real motivations for visiting the villages and to compare how and what they see and experience with the representations in the tourism promotional material, particularly as there are contradictions between the latter and daily life in the villages. As MacCannell (2001: 32) suggests, a second tourist gaze involves 'a

drive to provide narrative accompaniment to what is seen', which 'always goes beyond descriptions of the visible'. The following examples provide an idea of the motivations of tourists for visiting the villages:

A young couple from England who were travelling with a *Lonely Planet* guide book said they had chosen Mai Chau because they did not have much time in the north and that they decided they did not have enough time to go to Sa Pa, 'so this sounded like the next best thing to getting out of Hanoi'.

A young Vietnamese couple from Hanoi said their friend had been to Tap and recommended that they visit. They said they had 'wanted to visit an ethnic minority village close to Hanoi'.

A Vietnamese colleague from Hanoi said that today, young people and students visit Mai Chau 'because Mai Chau still maintains its natural beauty'. Young couples who are getting married hire a professional photographer and travel to Mai Chau to have photos taken. Also, young people and students who have an interest in photography take their new cameras to experiment with 'because of the contrast between the landscape and the colourful ethnic dress'. They go to Mai Chau 'because Mai Chau has a beautiful landscape and traditional Tai culture, traditional Tai food, *ruou can* (rice wine) and *com nep* (sticky rice). Also it is close to Hanoi but still in the mountains'.

These three examples show that tourists visit the villages because they wish to see and experience the countryside and mountains and an 'ethnic minority village' or 'Tai culture'. Common to all of the examples is that tourists choose the villages because of their proximity to Hanoi. These reasons accord with how the villages are represented in the tourism promotional material, in particular, the 'ethnic minority villages' and their '*Thái*' inhabitants and 'culture', which are the predominant markers and attractions highlighted. The young couple from England could have chosen to go to a number of places outside of Hanoi, but considered either Mai Chau or Sa Pa, destinations both well-known and marketed for their 'colourful ethnic diversity'.

Yet not all tourists go specifically to see 'ethnic minority' villages and people. Rather, they use the villages as a stopover, simply for food and accommodation, while travelling around northern Vietnam. For some foreign tourists in particular, the attraction is that they are hiking or cycling, not whether they are in an 'ethnic minority village'. Some tourists, particularly those on package tours or student trips, do not necessarily know or care where they are. They are in the villages because it is part of the trip that has been organised for them.

Other tourists, including both middle-aged groups and younger backpackers, predominantly French, travel the northwest loop to see the base of the colonial French. While there is no mention in the tourism promotional material of the French presence in the villages and Mai Chau area, tourists can visit the famous battle sites at Dien Bien Phu and the 'Old French Prison' (*Nha Tu Cu Cua Phap*) in Son La (Florence and Storey 2001: 266). They stop in Mai Chau as it is too far to travel directly between Son La and Hanoi in one day.

As tourists have different motivations for visiting the villages in Mai Chau then it is not surprising that how they speak and what they say about the villages and inhabitants once they are there also differs. To a certain degree their comments reflect the images presented in the tourism promotional material, yet others are more pragmatic in their views. Furthermore, how they see the villages and inhabitants also depends on what happens during the trip and on what and whom they encounter along the way. Based on their comments on and behaviour with the villagers, and following Cohen who has made various attempts to differentiate different tourists (see for example 1972, 1984, 1988b), I see at least six different types of tourists who visit the villages:

The search for the authentic

The majority of tourists like the surrounding environment, the villages and inhabitants. They like the 'beautiful scenery' that is the focus of much of the tourism promotional material. The English couple quoted above said of their trip that they were 'impressed' and glad they had come. They said that they had seen 'a real difference, between city and country'. A middle-aged Vietnamese man from Hanoi, who had been to Mai Chau three times with his friends, said that he likes the fresh air. The majority of visitors to Mai Chau

stay in the villages rather than the state-run Mai Chau Guesthouse, as they consider the villages to be more 'exciting, attractive and exotic', that is, more 'other'. Some also said that they prefer their money to go directly to the local, ethnic minority people. Tourists also mention that the villagers are 'very friendly'. The Vietnamese man from Hanoi said that the people are 'honest' and that 'they are not like people in the big city'. A French backpacker liked how the villagers 'lived close to nature and with the environment'; a typical comment recalling the myth of the noble savage.

Tourists expect the romance depicted in the tourism promotional material. How they react when they arrive in the villages differs. Many are surprised that the villages are so comfortable, yet they enjoy and prefer comforts such as cold drinks, fans and hot showers. The active tourists who have been hiking or cycling do not mind getting dirty, but they also appreciate the comforts, especially if they have been through remoter areas before arriving in the villages. Some comments that one tour guide has received from tourists include, 'How did you find this village? It's in the middle of nowhere!' and, 'Hot shower, cold drinks, what a treat!'. Nevertheless, some do not like the villages, as they find them 'too touristy'. As one middle-aged Vietnamese tourist from Hanoi said, 'this is not a real village, life is affected by tourism'. A middle-aged Australian tourist commented that he did not like 'staged performances'.

The pragmatic tourists

Other tourists have a more matter-of-fact attitude. A middle-aged Australian woman on a package tour stated that she 'expected the village to be more tribal'. Another person in the group commented that 'progress is inevitable' and they all agreed that intervention for education and health was a good thing. I encountered a middle-aged tourist from the US taking photographs of the villages, who told me he was 'loving' his stay. I had met him the night before in the guesthouse where he was staying, as Miss Cuc and I had gone over to watch the performance they had requested. He was a podiatrist and had been visiting Vietnam for five years with a team of specialists based in Da Nang. He had also visited Ho Chi Minh City but it was his first time to northern Vietnam as the group had wanted to see Ha Long Bay. He said that he preferred the north to the south, that there was 'too much bustle in Saigon'. He also said that when he sees photos of Vietnam, 'this is what they're like', as he waved his arm around indicating the cloud-topped mountains in the

background. He thought it was similar scenery to that in Madagascar, 'except the mountains here seem to have more foliage'. He stated that the French were also in Madagascar and that they denuded the land through logging so the mountains are red from the red soil which then flows down into the rivers and valleys which he said, 'is very sad'. He went on to say that, 'it's hard because people want to develop but at the same time you can't tell them what's good and what's bad, you just hope they can learn from our mistakes'. When I asked him how he had liked the performance the night before, he replied, 'after the performance we were asking about their education prospects. We mentioned MTV and were surprised when they laughed. We can't believe they know it'. I told him that many households have televisions, and explained that many young adults are now leaving the villages to study, to which he replied: 'the traditional culture will be lost'. He then commented, 'what I am after, as a tourist, is the traditional life, the backward life, but it is hard because people want to develop. It's progress'.

The reflective tourists

Some tourists also reflect on the impact of tourism and of their own behaviour on villagers. Two young women from New Zealand, who were cycling around northern Vietnam, stayed in Noi for two nights. They enthusiastically greeted the household members with whom they were staying with the Vietnamese words for hello, *xin chao*. They went for a full day's ride away from the village and back. They commented that the people outside the village behaved differently, that they stopped and stared at them. One of them said that she did not want to say hello to the people in English. She said, 'I didn't want to have an impact on them'. They both agreed that they loved the people's lifestyles here. One of them said, 'I would rather work here than in an office job', although she went on to say, 'I suppose the people here work hard and do everything by hand, whereas we have machines'. The other said, 'everyone wants things but I suppose it's different for us because we have choices'. They agreed that they do not want tourism to destroy the villagers' lifestyles.

Tourists wanting higher standards, more services and attractions

Other tourists, however, particularly those using the villages as a stopover and therefore primarily for food and accommodation, complain about the conditions and the costs. City

folk complain about sleeping on the floor, the mattresses being too hard, the blankets too scratchy, the insects biting, the dirty surroundings and the bathroom being too far. The elderly or injured complain about having to climb the stairs, sit on the floor to eat and lie on hard beds. One middle-aged woman from Thailand was particularly unimpressed with the prices charged, 'fifteen thousand *dong* for breakfast for a packet of instant noodles! They only cost one or two thousand *dong* each. Fifty thousand *dong* per person per night to stay in poor accommodation! That's one hundred thousand *dong* for the two of us. And the food is so expensive!'. Of her stay in the village, she complained that 'the blankets smell' and commented, 'I hate going to the toilet in the middle of the night and waking everyone up'. She preferred staying at the Mai Chau Guesthouse where, 'We pay seventy thousand *dong* per night for the both of us. We have more space and a bathroom and toilet'. A Vietnamese tourist from Hanoi I spoke with made both complaints and compliments. She complained that she had not slept well, the mattress was too hard so she had a sore back. She also said, 'the Tai are gentler and nicer than the Kinh', and that she surprisingly felt safe in the village.

Some people have expectations of the villages as tourist sites, that they will provide more entertainment and activities for the tourists. The same Vietnamese woman from Hanoi complained that Tap was 'small and boring'. The young Vietnamese couple from Hanoi, quoted in the box above, a couple of hours after arriving in Noi had already found it boring. They were staying for one night and could not believe that Miss Cuc and I were staying in the village for three weeks. They asked us, 'what is there to do? Is there anything interesting here?'. These remarks can be compared with the comment quoted in the *Lonely Planet* guide, 'There is *nothing* to do in Mai Chau. It is fantastic. Take a camera, cards, book or whatever.'

Superior tourists

As explained in Chapter 2 above, the theory of evolution was adopted by the Vietnamese state in the communist era along with Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist and Ho Chi Minh ideology on diversity and nation-building. The significance of this theory in forming preconceptions of ethnic minorities as 'primitives' among Vietnamese today is reflected in the way that many domestic tourists see, speak about and behave with the villagers. When I joined a group of Vietnamese students from Hanoi who had booked the cultural

performance, one student took it upon herself to 'introduce the Tai ethnic minority culture' to me. She explained that 'the Tai are an ethnic minority group in Vietnam. There are fifty three ethnic minorities in Vietnam'. She also explained the house layout according to her view, and told me that the songs and dances were 'traditional Tai culture'. She mentioned that 'ethnic minorities are poor and backwards'. A Vietnamese driver I had hired in Hanoi to drive to the villages had said something similar. They made these comments about the Tai and ethnic minorities, underpinned by the idea of the primitive, in front of the household members as if they were not there.

Tourists on the move

Some tourists have expectations of the villages created not from the tourism promotional material but from their previous travel experiences. A backpacker from Holland said that he was expecting dorm-like accommodation and liked staying in the stilt house. Having already travelled around Thailand and Laos, he commented that he has 'stayed in many houses lately, including much smaller ones, with a large family crammed in. This house is more spacious and clean. The other houses had dirt floors'. One evening, I met two expatriates living in Hong Kong who were in Vietnam for a holiday and travelling around the northern region on motorbikes with a tour guide. They asked more informed questions about the history and politics of the Tai and ethnic minorities in Vietnam, based on what they had learnt from living in Asia.

How tourists see the villages and inhabitants also depends upon their experiences in the villages. For the most part, interactions between villagers and tourists are minimal (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 below). Nevertheless, a number of factors influence tourists' experiences in the villages, including what the villagers are doing at the time of their visit, how many other tourists there are, and in which household they stay.

When a tour guide told her group that their hosts had a new-born baby so they had to move to the next door neighbour's house to watch the cultural performance, the tourists did not mind the inconvenience. It was a spontaneous occurrence related to the everyday lives of the villagers, which for the tourists made the village and their experience seem more 'authentic'. When villagers carry out their everyday chores such as farming and working in the rice fields, or when there are meetings, weddings and funerals in the

village, it enhances the experience for some tourists. This is why some tourists prefer Noi to Tap. Tourists usually walk between the two villages and one morning in Noi, I overheard a tourist say to her fellow travellers and tour guide, 'I like this village better. There are less shops'. Others, after cycling through Tap, stated that they 'prefer Noi village because there are less tourists'. However, as already alluded to, this scenario can also be 'boring' for some.

Visitors' experiences in the villages are also influenced by how many other visitors are in the village at the same time. When an Australian expatriate first went to Mai Chau in 2003 she 'hated' it. She said, 'there were too many people [tourists], and they have no respect. They sit around and drink beer and men take their shirts off and have their big guts hanging out. And they talk about their lives back home, what colour house they have, what new car they have, and compare'. However, she said the second time she went, there were fewer tourists and she liked it. By contrast, other visitors like the fact that there are many tourists in the village because 'there is more happening' and 'it feels like a big party'. Domestic tourists tend to travel in larger groups, where the focus is on having fun through mixing with many people. They are more inclusive and happy for others to join in, particularly foreigners, who are as big an attraction as the villagers.

Experiences of the villages are also influenced by which household tourists stay with. As already mentioned, tourists can stay with any household in the village providing the household wants them. They may, therefore, end up in licensed guesthouses, or may not. Those running licensed guesthouses have more knowledge of and experience in offering services to tourists, and often behave more professionally and have more facilities. The household tourists end up staying with is explained in the following chapter.

Conclusion

The 'primary tourist gaze', by highlighting certain aspects of Tap and Noi villages, their surroundings and inhabitants, is made up of images that romanticise both the environment and the people. In particular, the images that the tourists have are fed by the myths of the noble savage and primitive other. The tourist industry manufactures timeless images that dehistoricise, decontextualise and simplify the history and the politics of the people and places. Describing the patterns of everyday life in the villages, this chapter has shown that

the representations usually omit the tourist presence and influence, such as the presence of signs, guesthouses and handicraft stalls in the villages. Nevertheless, while increasingly becoming tourist ‘landscapes’, the villages are simultaneously also Tai and Vietnamese ones, in which villagers juggle their combined responsibilities of hosting tourists and other livelihood activities, as well as those associated with being family members, villagers and citizens of Vietnam. When quiet, which depends on the time of the day and year, the villages are Tai and Vietnamese villages.

By examining the actual gaze of visitors to the villages, we see that while cultural tourism is promoted, both domestic and international tourists go to the villages for other reasons too. They therefore have differing expectations of and reactions to the villages, some of which reflect the images produced by the tourism industry, while others do not. How tourists view the villages and their inhabitants is also influenced by their experiences, which depend on tourist numbers and the household they stay with. The next chapter looks further into the lives of the villagers as economic agents. It examines tourism in the villages from the economic perspective of the villagers and shows how they strategically and creatively engage in tourism as a way of diversifying their livelihoods.

CHAPTER 5: Economic Agents: Livelihoods and Strategies of Tourism Villagers

The villagers have diverse livelihood practices on and off the farm, and in and out of the village. This chapter examines how they earn a living from tourism, by focusing on the complexities of the livelihoods of the villagers of the upland tourism villages. These complexities occur through a combination of local practices and larger economic forces. By selectively embracing various commodity markets, the villagers mainly combine rice cultivation and other agricultural activities with tourism-related activities. These are nearly all household-based enterprises, in which the allocation of work duties and outputs is arranged by kinship.

With relatively little capital investment from outside the villages, tourism has developed in a pattern of small businesses that are mostly locally owned, so tourism in the villages can be regarded as an example of 'community-based' tourism. This is also because state regulation of local ownership of tourism businesses in the villages ensures villager profit-making by insisting that professional outsiders do not move into the villages, buy land and operate tourism businesses.

In an attempt to understand individual and household income-generating strategies or livelihood decisions, the chapter focuses on assets (capital), how individuals and households deploy or exploit them, and how they gain access to them through institutions, social relations and economic opportunities (Turner and Michaud 2008: 164). These various elements are dynamic and can change 'from season to season or from year to year as assets are built up and eroded and as access to resources and opportunities change' (Hapke and Ayyankeril 2004: 232). Livelihoods are fluid and constantly being reworked, particularly when the wider economic context changes (Bouahom *et al* 2004: 615). This chapter also explores the livelihood strategies of the villagers in the context of historical traditions (Taylor 2006, 2007; Turner and Michaud 2008).

The chapter begins by describing the diverse livelihood practices of the villagers and their selective embracing of various commodity markets. Different tourism-related activities are used to draw out the complexities of the income-generating strategies. First, the multifaceted requirements and strategies involved in setting up and running a licensed guesthouse are discussed. Second, power differentials are highlighted through the

example of negotiations among villagers regarding the concreting and widening of roads and car parks, in and around the villages. Third, the different processes of market formation, including market creation, expansion and penetration, are shown by examining the female-dominated production and trade in textiles. Finally, the strategy of selective diversification of livelihood practices and embrace of various commodity markets is explained in historical context and further shown in responses to the decline in tourists due to the successive events of SARS, bird flu and highway closure.

Diverse livelihood practices: selective embrace of various commodity markets

While all households in both Noi and Tap rely on rice as their staple food source, most are involved in diverse livelihood practices, the number of which varies between households and changes for any one household over time. In their article on livelihood economic strategies among Hmong in northern Vietnam, Turner and Michaud (2008: 164) explain that individuals and households often try to diversify strategies in order to provide sustainable livelihood opportunities and enhance security while mitigating risks, resisting shocks and stresses, and increasing their resilience. Such diversification in a rural context is, according to Frank Ellis (1998: 4), 'the process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in their struggle for survival and in order to improve their standards of living'.

The combination of agricultural, livestock and off-farm activities by households in both of the villages illustrates such diversification. As a result of a government program called *chuyen doi cay trong vat nuoi* (change plants, animal husbandry) an increasing number of households participate in the husbandry of pigs, chickens, ducks, cattle and buffalo, in aquaculture, a male-dominated activity, including fish ponds among the paddies (see Photograph 21); and in the cultivation of vegetables such as mushrooms underneath their houses (see Photograph 22), *rau muon* (green leafy vegetable), cabbage and corn in the fields closest to the village settlements, and maize and cassava in their upland fields (though the majority of households do not use their upland fields except to collect firewood). Households consume the various vegetables they grow, or feed them to their animals, as well as sell them to neighbours or at the Mai Chau market. Likewise, animals are used for both household consumption and trading although buffalos are used to plough the fields (see Photograph 23).

Photograph 21: Fishing from, and draining, fish ponds

Photograph 22: Cultivating mushrooms

Photograph 23: Using buffalo to plough fields

The diverse livelihoods also include female-dominated industries such as weaving, sewing and embroidery (see Photograph 24); sales and services such as local and regional trade, the male activity of driving a *xe om* or motorbike taxi, buffalo hire to plough rice fields, rice-husking machine hire, tractor hire and credit provision; government employment and pensions; retail sales in house-front stalls; hunting and gathering of a variety of forest resources; male-dominated industries such as house and loom construction; and labour for rice cultivation.

Photograph 24: A woman weaving on her loom

The engagement of households in new income opportunities such as those created by tourism, is another example of diversification. Most households undertake tourism-related activities, although to different extents. Activities that include direct involvement with tourists include operating a guesthouse (either within the family's house or in a purposely built adjoining or separate house); guiding tourists on tours around the area and to neighbouring villages; running a house-front stall; buying and making textiles and handicrafts to sell in the stall; running a house-front café selling drinks and snacks; running a house-front orchid stall; bicycle and telephone rental; participating in cultural performances; and making local specialties such as *ruou* (rice wine) and *com lam* (bamboo rice) to sell to tourists, as well as vegetables, in makeshift stalls (see Photograph 25). Activities that include indirect involvement with tourists include making textiles for owners of house-front stalls and traders; providing domestic work for guesthouses; and making local specialties for guesthouse owners to sell to tourists.

Photograph 25: House-front café and handicraft stall

Household members make conscious choices to get involved in, or withdraw from, such tourism-related activities, as they do with the other livelihood activities. Certainly, villagers wish to earn more money and improve their standard of living for now and the future, which they can, and do, as a result of getting involved in tourism, particularly running a licensed guesthouse and/or a textile business. Yet some households in the villages do not, and indeed do not wish to, engage in tourism. That is, villagers *selectively* participate in diverse livelihood practices and embrace various commodity markets (Sikor 2001; Turner and Michaud 2008).

Of the many individuals I spoke with in both villages about their income-earning activities, only one identified his main occupation as a guesthouse owner; all others said they were farmers.[64] For the majority of households in the villages, the income gained from tourism-related activities supplements rice cultivation and other farming incomes. Villagers undertake tourism-related activities as another way to earn a living, in combination with agricultural, livestock and off-farm activities. Other responsibilities take priority so that their involvement in tourism is 'intentionally undertaken so as to fit in with the pluriactivity that makes up their livelihoods' (Turner and Michaud 2008: 179). As a case in point, households focus on their fields during the more labour-intensive

[64] As well as identifying as farmers, villagers that had government employment stated their position. Children identified as students. Young adults identified themselves either as students, farmers or government employees, elders as either farmers or retired.

periods of crop cultivation. They will also choose not to participate in tourism at particular times because of the priority they place on other livelihood activities, as well as changing family circumstances, such as the number of household members who are around to do the work. Instead of opening a licensed guesthouse or running a textile and souvenir stall, a family member may decide to have tourists stay in the house overnight, or take the opportunity to weave or sew items to be sold in stalls run by others.

Furthermore, the motives and aspirations of the villagers for participating in the tourism economy are not just based on 'notions of modernisation conceived only as economic growth' (Turner and Michaud 2008: 180). Like the Hmong women in Turner and Michaud's study, the villagers of Noi and Tap participate in tourism-related activities for various reasons. The work is considered easier than farming and several different purchases are facilitated by the money earned from tourism (see Chapter 6). Villagers also participate in tourism-related activities out of curiosity, the enjoyment of being creative and socialising, and for identity purposes (discussed in Chapter 7 below).

Earning a living from tourism: requirements and strategies for running a guesthouse

Receiving visitors and guests has always been a part of village life and villagers have been receiving tourists for about half a century now. However, running a guesthouse and making money from hosting tourists is new. As mentioned in the previous chapter, all households in the villages can have tourists stay with them if they wish. At the same time, as some households run licensed guesthouses, others do not but still have tourists stay with them. While a small number of households with a licensed guesthouse make this livelihood strategy a priority, others, whether they run a guesthouse or not, are opportunistic in that they have the odd tourist or group stay with them.

Tap became a cultural tourism village in 1993 and a guesthouse licensing system was introduced in 1994. The licensing system in Noi began when it became a cultural tourism village in 1998. This system requires that households wishing to run a guesthouse must register with the Mai Chau district government for a license. Households undergo a check, overseen by the chairman of the district committee. The main purpose of the check is to verify that they are financially able to run a guesthouse as a business, including the

payment of taxes. They must also be able to provide clean food and accommodation services. Members of the household who cook are required to pass a medical examination at the Mai Chau district hospital. If successful, the household must pay for the license. In addition, the local government has set prices for households to charge tourists who stay overnight; 50,000 *dong* per night for international tourists, 20,000 *dong* per night for domestic tourists and 10,000 *dong* per night for Vietnamese students. The amount charged to foreigners has not always been this much. As one villager sarcastically exclaimed, 'from 1998 tourists had to pay thirty thousand *dong*, now they must pay fifty thousand *dong*. It is cheaper to rent in Hanoi!'. Nevertheless, the price that tourists end up paying for accommodation fluctuates as it is determined either by the household, or between the household and tourists, as is the price of food. The actual cost depends on a number of factors.

The amount that households charge foreign tourists depends on whether the tourists are part of a package-group tour, in which case it depends on the contract made between the household and the tour company. As an illustration, one guesthouse charges independent travellers 50,000 *dong* per night but charges tour companies 40,000 *dong* per night per person in the tour group. Furthermore, households charge domestic tourists according to their occupation, namely whether they are students or not. Mrs Ninh informed me that she charges cadres 30,000 *dong* per night and that the price for students depends on different factors. She usually charges 10,000 *dong* per student per night. However, if there are fewer than 30 students then she charges 15,000 *dong* per night, and if they are rich students – for example, if they arrive in a car – then she charges 20,000 *dong* per night, 'because they require many things'.

The actual price tourists pay also depends on whether they bargain or not. As Mr Tung said to me one day, 'there are no set prices in Vietnam'. He went on to say that 'Vietnamese bargain more than foreigners'. However, another villager stated that '[foreign] visitors from the road are very clever and bargain'. Most households try to lower the price for tourists to get their business, to compete with other households so, 'if tourists bargain they can usually get a lower price'. So, foreigners end up paying anywhere between 30,000 and 50,000 *dong*, Vietnamese pay between 15,000 and 30,000 *dong*, and students pay between 5,000 and 15,000 *dong*.

Households with licensed guesthouses are required to pay two kinds of tax to the Mai Chau district government. They pay ten per cent of the total money earned through accommodating tourists, which may be paid per month or annually. Households must also pay a certain amount per tourist, or a turnover tax. The amount depends on the type of tourist: 10,000 or 15,000 *dong* per foreigner per night, 5,000 *dong* per Vietnamese per night and 2,000 *dong* per student per night. Households that do not have a licensed guesthouse but have tourists stay with them are also required to pay the turnover tax. Households that have tourists stay with them, whether licensed or not, must inform the village police in order to register the tourists and to pay the tax.

On the one hand, licensed guesthouse owners complain about the amount of tax that is charged: 'All people who have a guesthouse in this village must pay a lot of money for the business license which is not equal to their way of life, which is based on agriculture. The district sets the rules which are equivalent to those for big hotels in town'. On the other hand, villagers appreciate the fact that the local government supports the people by providing infrastructure such as building concrete roads and car parking, as well as providing electricity in the villages. One villager who does not run a guesthouse said, 'The government supports the village here for new concrete roads, concrete dykes and car parking also. Electricians are here right now working on wires outside my house. They came from the province and started work here in May this year'.

In fact, the Mai Chau district government sees tourism as the main source of income for the district, so it is providing financial support not only for Tap and Noi but also for tourism development in the district. This is evident from the fact that it is providing funding for the building of roads to other tourism villages and for better access to certain caves in the district. It is funding the development and maintenance of minority culture, such as stilt houses and traditional clothes. It is also planning to invest in new tourist sites in the district in the future. The Mai Chau district government is being financially supported by the Hoa Binh province government, which has contributed to the building of concrete roads and the elevation of certain caves, which they are restoring, to national heritage status.

In order to prove that they can financially commit to running a licensed guesthouse, households must have at least one tour company backing them up and therefore the

promise of a steady and consistent flow of tourists. It is therefore imperative for households to establish connections with tourist companies. As one villager said, 'If houses have a tour company backing them up then they can apply for a license'.

Mr Dan's household was one of the first two in Tap to be registered as a licensed guesthouse, in 1993. As explained in Chapters 2 and 3, Mr Dan held many official positions and was well connected to the state. The state had been bringing official guests to visit his house for around 30 years before Tap became an official tourism village. As the tourism industry in Vietnam was still controlled by the state at this time, he made connections with different tourism companies and had a steady influx of tourists visiting so that he was able to register early. Mr Sang's was the other household that was first to register. Not only is he a relative of Mr Dan, but also his daughter works for Hoa Binh Tourism Company. When foreigners began visiting the village, they had to register at the provincial-level, state-run Hoa Binh Tourism Company. Her exposure and contact with tourists and tourism companies through this work has meant a steady influx of tourists to their guesthouse.

It is clear from these stories that the first households to run a licensed guesthouse were able to do so thanks to their connections to the tourism industry, and that the creation of a network was influenced by the connections these villagers had to the state. This is still apparent today as the leader of Tap runs a licensed guesthouse; his family receives many official guests and groups of Vietnamese students, as well as foreigners. Also, during my fieldwork period, the leader of Noi moved from Mai Chau town into the main settlement. His family bought land between two existing houses, on which they built a new stilt house with plans to run a guesthouse. Furthermore, the creation of a network between villagers and tourism companies is influenced by kinship. For instance, in Noi, as well as having connections to the state, all of the four households with licensed guesthouses are related to one another. The first household to register was Mrs Choi's. Mrs Choi had access to tourists because she used to work at the state-run Mai Chau Guesthouse and as a result of her exposure and contact with tourists and tourism companies through working there, she was able to get a license and run her own guesthouse in her family's home. She has a steady influx of tourists; indeed, she has the busiest guesthouse in the village. Mrs Choi worked at the Mai Chau Guesthouse because the manager was her uncle, whose

family also runs a licensed guesthouse. Likewise, another relative was the security guard at the Mai Chau Guesthouse and his family also runs a licensed guesthouse.

In contrast, households with licensed guesthouses in Tap do not necessarily have direct connections with tourism companies. Instead their relatives do and when they receive too many tourists at one time, these relatives send tourists to stay with them. As one villager explained:

> Villager: I have this shop and the guesthouse but I get little money because some days there are guests and some days there are none.
> MA: So why open a guesthouse?
> Villager: We have no contact with a company but we have relatives with a guesthouse who do and sometimes they get a lot of guests so they share them with me so I opened a guesthouse.

This is also why some households that do not have a license still have tourists to stay with them. They receive tourists to help their relatives, or neighbours, when they do not have enough space in their own house. It is also why official guests are shared among the village leader's house, licensed guesthouses and other households.

Some households with licensed guesthouses, in addition to gaining tourists through their relatives, have been able to tap into the tourist market on their own. Mr Bay in Tap, who is Mr Dan's son, has made connections with tour companies through his past experience as a soldier. He said, 'I used to be a soldier. In 1974, I came back here and worked in the fields… I have friends from when I was a soldier… I have so many friends who now live in Hanoi and sometimes they introduce us to tour companies who bring tourists here'.

The fourth licensed guesthouse to open in Noi was that of Mr An, who is related to the other families running licensed guesthouses in the village, but he describes how he met his first tour company:

> The first visitor in this house was in 1998 or 1999. A couple from France saw my wife collecting firewood in the mountains and followed her back to the house and they wanted to stay here. We cooked for them and they stayed four days. At that

> time we did not have a convenient toilet for them but the French couple liked it very much. When they went back to France they kept in contact and they are still in contact, but they are too old to come back here. After the French couple, a Vietnamese-French man came here. He came here and liked it a lot and discussed with me that he would open a tourism company in Hanoi and if the house does not mind he will bring tourists here. He still has the company today and he brings tourists by motorbike or car. He always brings tourists to this house, nowhere else.

Another important requirement for running a licensed guesthouse is labour. When larger groups of tourists stay, a lot of cooking and cleaning is required. Households that run a licensed guesthouse typically have more family members living in the house. If not, they hire relatives to help out at times. The age of household members is also a factor. Mr Quynh stated, 'If I were younger I could run a guesthouse'. His children have moved out of home, out of the village, to other parts of the country to work. Even though families may be large, it is important that they still live in the household or the village, or in a village nearby. The gender of household members is also important. Activities that villagers believe to be women's work include child rearing, housework, weaving and sewing, which they describe as 'light' work that takes place in and around the house. Alternatively, men are expected to carry out 'heavy' work such as fishing, building and carpentry, which takes them away from the house and village. Female family members therefore carry out the majority of the work required to run a guesthouse.

For the households in the villages that do not run a licensed guesthouse but would like to, making connections with the tourist industry is difficult. Compared with when the first guesthouses opened in the early 1990s, today, while there are a lot more tour companies operating in Vietnam, there are also more households running licensed guesthouses in the villages and more tourism villages in the area. Competition can therefore be stiff and expectations high. For example, some owners go to Hanoi to advertise their guesthouses to tour companies in order to get more business, and tour companies visit the villages to compare houses in order to choose those they think their customers will be happy with. Also, tour companies might conduct surveys on the household it is doing business with. Mr An stated that, 'The people from the tourism company did a survey about the house and the people's health here to ensure guests will feel comfortable in the house'.

One household gained a business contact when a relative who is a licensed guesthouse owner passed up a business opportunity and handed it to them, as the following story by Mrs Ninh explains:

> A few months ago there were two tourists, one Vietnamese, one foreigner. They wanted to visit Tap but the road was under construction so they were stuck in Noi. Mr An invited them to stay with him. But Mrs Inh's husband asked Mr An for the tourists to stay at his house. Mr An is the younger brother of his mother, so [he] agreed. The two tourists were looking for a guesthouse for their company to use in the future to bring foreigner tourists to.

Aside from the expense of obtaining a license, there are other costs involved in running a guesthouse. A village and district rule is that all houses in the tourism villages must be stilt houses. This means that all households, whether engaged in tourism or not, need wood. Licensed guesthouses, which are generally larger, require more wood. While not a rule, villagers believe that they must have a certain sized house in order to run a guesthouse. One villager stated, 'I do not have tourists stay in my house because it is too narrow'. In 1991 when Mrs Ninh's family built their current house the cost of one stilt or pile was 80,000 *dong*. Now piles cost three million *dong* each. As can be seen in Photographs 5 and 7 in the introductory chapter, the piles run from the ground to the roof and are of varying widths; the wider piles are older and are kept within the family whereas the thinner ones are newer and incur the above-mentioned cost. Cutting down trees in the surrounding forests is controlled by the local government and is discussed towards the end of Chapter 7.

There are also expectations of the facilities a guesthouse should provide, such as a bathroom and toilet, as the following conversation between me and a villager demonstrates:

> Villager: I sell textiles to visitors, no guests stay in my house. How much I earn depends on each day. The highest I earn is 100,000 *dong* per day but some days I have no money. Because of the bad roads few visitors come here.
> MA: Would you like to have guests stay in your house?

> Villager: Yes, but my house has no bathroom nor toilet for visitors, so I do not dare to accept visitors in my house. It is not a rule, it is just what I think. So guests come here and want to stay but I think they do not have good conditions so I refuse. I do not have a bathroom and toilet because my family is so poor so we have no money to build it. When visitors come here I feel embarrassed if they need to go to the toilet and I do not have one.
>
> MA: But you live without a bathroom and toilet, why can't the tourists?
>
> Villager: My house still has a bathroom and toilet but it is not as nice as bathrooms other people have here.

According to my host families, the estimated cost of setting up a guesthouse, including a stilt house, bathroom and toilet, is 300 million *dong*. There are further expectations of what a guesthouse should look like and the services it should provide, which incur greater spending. For example, households have deliberately chosen to have a thatched roof, as they believe tourists prefer it, even though it is more expensive than clay tiles. Thatching also provides better insulation. Furthermore, households with guesthouses prefer to spend money on concreting the area under and around their house as they believe it looks cleaner. Guesthouses also need more bedding, including mosquito nets, mattresses, blankets, sheets and pillows, as well as more cooking implements such as pots, pans, utensils, chop sticks, crockery, glasses and serving trays. They also have installed more lights, ceiling fans, electric hot water services for the showers and bought refrigerators to provide cold drinks. It is also handy to have a telephone to organise bookings.

Households that wish to run a licensed guesthouse therefore need to raise the capital to set it up, not only to pay the registration fee but also to meet assumed standards and to be competitive in the tourism market. Pre-existing wealth helps, but they also draw on the diversity of their livelihoods in order to save money. For example, families take out loans for capital to buy more livestock. Sometimes they are not successful and go into debt. Sometimes they are successful, sell the livestock for enough money to pay back their loan and make a profit. Mr An explained how his family raised the money to improve their house for tourists to stay with them:

> Some people ask us if we get money from any organisation or from the government. When many tourists started coming to our house we had to build a

> toilet and expand our house by ourselves. We expanded and repaired our old house to look more comfortable and beautiful. We must sell pigs and chickens to get the money to do this.

As mentioned in Chapter 3 above, households used to keep their livestock in pens underneath their stilt houses in order to protect them against tigers. However, in the 1970s a government policy had households move their livestock out from underneath their houses for health reasons, for the benefit of both the locals and tourists. Today, most households running guesthouses either make arrangements with their relatives living in other villages to keep their livestock so that the animals are not on their house block, or they simply do not have livestock, believing that the noise and smell of animals are an inconvenience and deterrent for tourists. Another reason why households have no livestock might be that they do not have the required household labour to raise them. While the household of the above quoted guesthouse owner kept chickens and pigs in the past in order to raise money to make improvements to the house, in 2003 they did not raise pigs as the adult children had left the village to study and so could not help.

Another strategy of households for raising money to run a guesthouse is female household members making and selling textiles. One woman commented that, 'I invite guests to come into the house and have tea. I like to meet foreigners. They see me making textiles and after that give me some money and I saved it, as well as my husband's salary, and built this house in 1996'. I discuss the complexities of textile production and trade in more detail later in this chapter.

Households may also earn capital for improvements by having tourists stay with them. In addition to making a profit from charging tourists for accommodation and food, and selling the woven products or souvenirs, or guiding them on a tour in the local area, households may get lucky with the tourists. Visitors might end up working for a tour company or a souvenir shop and be searching for long-term business and therefore invest in the house, as was the case in the example mentioned above of relatives 'sharing' tourists. Ms Inh ended up receiving funds from the representatives of the tour company to build a new toilet.

As these households do not have contact with tour companies, they rely on getting tourists who have travelled to the villages independently. As is apparent from the following comment by a villager, whether households have tourists stay with them depends on whether they can establish connections with tourism companies and also with *xe om* (motorbike taxi) drivers:

> Tourists do not stay in my home because the first visitors who came to Noi always came with a tour guide who was organised by a tourism company so they only stayed in the house the company had relations with. If they don't come with a tour guide, they follow a *xe om* driver and stay where the driver stops. Because I do not know any *xe om* drivers or tourism companies no tourists stay here. I would like to have tourists stay in my house.

Some male household members therefore become *xe om* drivers in order to get these tourists to their house. Independent tourists travel to the villages by bicycle, motorbike, public transport or car: as Mrs Ninh said, 'Foreigners mostly come here by motorbike. Vietnamese come by their own car'. Most tourists come from Hanoi and some from the northwest, in which case they must turn off Highway 6 onto Highway 15 and travel through Mai Chau town before they get to the villages. *Xe om* drivers are waiting for them at the junction of Highway 6 and Highway 15, as well as outside the market and the bus stop in town. The *xe om* drivers hang around these places whether there are tourists or not, as they also give lifts to and make money from locals and others visiting the Mai Chau market. The market-goers provide a steady income for *xe om* drivers, whereas tourism is a bonus especially because they can charge more money.

The drivers work for themselves as well as for other households from who they gain commission. Mr Ninh, who is a *xe om* driver, explained:

> Mr Ninh: Some people want to go to Tap so I drive them there and some want to come to Noi so I drive them to my house.
> MA: Do you take tourists to a particular guesthouse in Tap?
> Mr Ninh: Yes, guesthouse numbers one and two. I make 5,000 *dong* per person. Maybe the tourist will pay me or the leader of the guesthouse. The polite way here

is the *xe om* takes the tourists to the guesthouse and the guesthouse pays the driver 5,000 *dong* per person. Then the tourists pay the guesthouse.

The *xe om* drivers not only come from the tourism villages but also from the surrounding area. Only drivers who belong to one of the communes in which the junction and market are situated are allowed to wait for tourists. When drivers from other communes and the next market, Co Luong, try to work in Mai Chau commune, or when Mai Chau commune inhabitants try to work in other communes, or districts for that matter, fights erupt among the drivers and the police can become involved, which results in fines being issued. Nevertheless, there has been an increase in *xe om* drivers since tourism started. As Mr Ninh stated, 'In the past there were only around ten people (drivers). Now it is crowded, I can't calculate'. Conflict has ensued: Mrs Ninh explained, '*xe om* drivers from Mai Chau town bring tourists to Noi but they ask for 10,000 *dong* per person. Sometimes drivers take them to a different house than the one requested'.

The drivers compete for the tourists, rushing to them as they arrive, using their limited English skills to entice them to go with them to a guesthouse. If the tourists are on the local bus, the *xe om* drivers surround the bus as the tourists alight and when successful give the tourists a ride on the back of the bike. The driver may wedge their luggage at the front of the bike between himself and the steering, or the tourists may juggle it on the back. If the tourists are on bicycle or motorbike, the drivers will ride beside them, trying to get them to follow them. Once they have delivered the tourists to the house, which may take a while because sometimes tourists do not choose the first house they encounter, they collect their commission and return to their post. If the tourists slip through the cracks and manage to miss the *xe om* drivers (usually because they arrive in the middle of the day when the drivers are having lunch and a siesta) they arrive in the villages on their own. It is then up to the households themselves to compete for the tourists, sometimes by offering lower prices. One villager stated, 'We charge fifty thousand *dong* per foreign tourist, but we try to charge less so we get the visitors'. At the end of the tourists' stay, a household member may give them their business card and invite them and their friends to return.

At least one member of the household must be at home in order to get these tourists. This is harder for families with members who are government workers or who rely on trading for an income, so households that are already running a guesthouse or handicraft stall or

have a weaving contract are more able to pick up these tourists as they are more likely to be at home. Positioning of the house in the village is also important. Those with a house at the entrance to the village, or along the roads within the village, will see the tourists first. The importance of the location of a house, or a textile stall, is reflected in the following comment by a stall owner:

> My life has changed a little. Not all, but some households have changed. People like me, who have a shop or a guesthouse, have a better economic situation. But those who do not have a shop, or guesthouse, or land near the road to put their textiles on, their lives have not changed.

In Tap, most of the licensed guesthouses are located along one of the two main roads running through the village and near the entrance to the village. Which household the tourists choose to stay in also depends on the tourists and their needs and wants, as the following comment by a villager demonstrates: 'Some tourists come by themselves, most stay near the road but others come further, quiet atmosphere'.

In Noi, the licensed guesthouses are located away from the main road running though the village, on the edges of the village with views of the surrounding paddy fields and mountains. I spoke to two tourists who had cycled into the village, who explained that a villager had excitedly invited them to stay at her house. The tourists entered the house but decided that it was too dark and that there was not much space. They got back on their bikes and cycled along the path until they were met by another villager who invited them to stay in his house. The tourists said that his house had more space and a beautiful view so they decided to stay with him. While the first house was not a licensed guesthouse and was located in the middle of the village, the second was, and was situated on the edge of the village.

Another reason why the tourists chose the second guesthouse was the behaviour of the owner. They said that the first person was too pushy; they preferred the second person who was not pushy but calm and pleasant. Mr Bay, a licensed guesthouse owner, explained that his friendly behaviour, in addition to his connections with tour guides, was the reason why he runs a successful business:

> In 1993 visitors came here so I opened this guesthouse and I knew some tour guides from Hanoi and I made the business successful… With people who visit the Tai who are strangers, we say hello and give them tea… My friends help to introduce me to other tour guides and because I like people, even if they are strangers, I treat them well and other tour guides talk with other people so they bring guests to my house.

Villagers require not only financial capital but also cultural capital to be successful. In order to get tourists, for them to enjoy their stay, and to have them return and or advertise the guesthouse through word of mouth, they need to be able to understand what tourists want and need, and how to provide customer satisfaction. This can be difficult, because as shown in the previous chapter, different tourists have different motives for visiting the villages, different views of the villagers and therefore different expectations of their stay. The strategy of having tourists stay with them therefore helps households to gain more experience in dealing with different tourists, and to gain cultural capital as well as financial capital.

It is difficult to obtain a license to be able to run a guesthouse. Households need both financial and cultural capital in order to set up a guesthouse and run it successfully, which are both externally- and internally-driven. How decisions are negotiated in relation to the development of tourism in the villages is also determined by a mixture of external and internal power relations, as is shown in the next section.

From dirt paths to concrete roads and car parks: accentuated power differentiation

In his study of agrarian differentiation in three Black Tai upland villages in north-western Vietnam, Sikor argues that local power relations influence the forms that the negotiations of large-scale forces take. Sikor (2001: 946) explains that political struggles, the outcomes of which vary between places, may develop between different rural groups (Yunxiang 1992), or may take the form of communal resistance (Polanyi 1944) or cleavages between villages, local authorities and the central state (Oi 1989; Bartlett 1995; Gladney 1995). To this, I would add that political struggles may also take the shape of cleavages *within* villages.

The politics behind the widening of the roads from Highway 15 to Noi, between Noi and Tap, and within Noi, illustrate this point. While sanctioned by the government, the widening of the roads was not a government initiative. Instead, it was instigated by the tourism industry, specifically the Hoa Binh Tourism Company, and divided the community between those with licensed guesthouses and those without. The information in this section comes from a conversation with a married couple, who live with their children and the husband's father in Noi, during which they explained the reasons for a gathering at the house of the leader of the village co-operative one evening.

The gathering was a Communist Party Union meeting, a continuing meeting about refunding locals who had lost land due to the road construction. The villagers who had lost land attended the meeting. The husband's father of the couple with whom I was talking was at the meeting, representing their household. In the widening of the road leading from Highway 15 to the village, the family had lost 300 square metres of rice fields. In the work on the road between Noi and Tap they had lost pond land and coconut trees, and from the widening of the road within Noi, they had lost house land and three longan trees. They were one of the worst affected households in the village.

The affected households were supposed to be compensated 4,000 *dong* per square metre for pond land and 6,000 *dong* per square metre for rice fields. They were also meant to receive 20 million *dong* per square metre for the land they lost on their house blocks. The family of the couple I was talking to had already received compensation of about 400,000 *dong* for the approximately 40 square metres of pond land they had lost, but two years later were still waiting for the rest of the money owing to them. However, one positive outcome of the road construction was that since the roads were built, local people were able to drive tractors between Noi and Tap.

Before the roads were built, some tourist cars and mini buses had fallen into the rice fields as they travelled along the narrow dirt track between the fields from Highway 15 to the village. Representatives of the Hoa Binh Tourism Company pushed not only for this path to be widened and concreted but also for the concreting of the volleyball area so that it could be used for parking. A meeting was held in the village at which the village leader asked the household representatives for permission to widen the roads. At first, some villagers agreed and some did not, including the representative of the household of the

couple I was speaking with. The wife of the couple explained why they changed their minds:

> Wife: The leader said that building a new road was useful for us and that we did not have to pay for it, that the Tourism Company will pay. In a community, if some people agree, then you should agree even if you do not like it. So, at the end of the meeting all the local people signed a contract. I feel destitute.
> MA: Were you promised reimbursement at that time?
> Wife: In the contract it said that if people give away their land the Tourism Company would provide money. At the meeting, there were many people running guesthouses who agreed immediately and they did not lose land. My family has never had any tourist cars park at my house but I must agree with the contract.

The villagers no longer receive money from tour companies and tourists parking their cars and buses in the village. Before the Hoa Binh Tourism Company paid for the concreting of the volleyball court, it had to pay 5,000 *dong* per car and 10,000 *dong* per bus for parking. The leader collected this money for the Noi village fund; when they parked outside a house, the household collected the money. However, the Tourism Company no longer has to pay. Also, before the roads were widened, when cars fell into the rice fields the driver and tour guide had the local people to help pull them out, for which they were paid 200,000 to 300,000 *dong* per car. After a tour guide complained to the director of the Hoa Binh Tourism Company, asking for the company to compensate the tourists, the company then built the road. Even though the Tourism Company considers some families who have lost land and gives them a little amount of money, the families affected cannot ask for more.

There was some talk among the villagers that the village leader did not care as he was living in Mai Chau town at the time and did not lose any land. The local people 'did not dare' to talk with the leader on the matter, the behaviour of which was explained by the wife of the couple as part of 'the traditional behaviour of the Tai here'. This reflects the sentiment of Mr Khinh whom I quoted in Chapter 3 above as saying, 'we [the Tai] live in harmony but we cannot dare to ask something from our leaders, we only obey our rules', and explains why many villagers believe that village relationships have not changed since the advent of tourism.

Cleavages within the village are not new. Certainly the 'positional power' (Sikor 1999) of the village leader played a part in the negotiations. Yet it is also evident that the 'old' (pre-1945) village elite have political power, just as John Kleinen (1999) found in his study on social change in an ethnic Vietnamese village in the Red River delta.

Even though all households in the village were represented in the decision-making process which concerned the whole village, the four households that ran licensed guesthouses and therefore had more to lose by not agreeing with the Hoa Binh Tourism Company, had more power than those that did not run licensed guesthouses. As previously explained, positional power influenced who owned licensed guesthouses, in that members of the three households had connections to the state-run Mai Chau Guesthouse and the members of all four households belong to the Ha Van family. In fact, all households that run licensed guesthouses in the village are related to Mrs Choi, the first person to obtain a license. Mrs Choi's father is the leader of the Ha Van family lineage. The political functions of this former landlord family were stripped after 1945 and, 'were taken over by "basic" labouring families as spearheads of the grass-root revolution led by the communist state' (Kleinen 1999: 194-195). However, with the advent of *doi moi* in the late 1980s, the family has been able to take advantage of the new economic opportunities presented by tourism while holding on to their political power in a space of negotiation opened up by the reforms.

Another example of guesthouse owners having access to power is their involvement in reducing the amount of tax they must pay. Guesthouse owners in Tap have challenged the authorities and been successful in reducing the amount of tax payable for their guesthouse license each year. Taxes were reduced across the country under the *doi moi* reform, nevertheless guesthouse owners drove the change within the village. Mr Dan said:

> Since 1999 we have had to pay VAT. Even if we do not have tourists we must pay it. In 1999 we paid eight hundred thousand *dong* per month. In 2002 we paid five hundred and fifty thousand *dong* per month. Now we pay three hundred and thirty thousand *dong* per month. It has decreased because we complained a lot. Even now the tax is still high.

Mr Bay explained:

> Around the 1980s, more visitors came to this village and the district took fifty per cent for tax and paid fifteen per cent back to the village and a small percentage to the commune. The local people here said that the tax was too high so they reduced it to ten or fifteen per cent. District officials came here and took each guesthouse's notebook to see how much money they got in three months and divided it into twelve months and decided how much money to take from that guesthouse. Each month, the local people had to pay around five hundred or six hundred thousand *dong*. I used to pay six hundred and thirty seven *dong* per month. In the past, even if no visitors stayed in the guesthouse, the guesthouse had to pay tax every month. The tax was too high. The current conditions were introduced in June this year. The tax officer comes here to see how many visitors come and takes ten per cent tax from us.

Today, guesthouse owners also pay fewer fees, as another guesthouse owner stated, 'There used to be an environment fee. In the past, houses near the road had to pay twenty thousand *dong* per year and houses away from the road had to pay ten thousand *dong* per year, but now this has stopped'.

Such decreases have occurred in the context of a declining communal fund. While it was unclear how the money from these taxes and fees was spent in the past, it is evident that since the roads were widened and concreted, less money is being put back into the local community. As explained earlier, before the paths were widened and concreted, Noi villagers earned money from car parking which was put into a village fund. The money was then spent on village infrastructure projects, such as renovating the kindergarten, and on visiting people who were ill and giving them gifts. It was also used to celebrate Veteran's Day on 27 July each year. However, the Noi village leader explained that since the roads were concreted, the village fund had stopped and the money now goes to the state through taxes. He did not know how the state spent this money though he knew it was not spent directly on the village.

Female-dominated textile production and trade: market creation and expansion

A relatively more accessible economic opportunity for households than running a guesthouse is the female-dominated activity of textile production and trade. Due to the limited land available for growing paddies or wet rice, as well as restrictions on land use further up in the mountains, households and individuals can earn an income through the production and trade of textiles.

The blending of local practices and larger economic forces has created heterogeneous processes of market formation in the tourism villages, just as Thomas Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Vi (2005) found in an ethnic Vietnamese uplands village (not a tourism village) in Son La province, further northwest along Highway 6. The development of tourism is compatible with 'externalist' or 'impositionist' notions of 'market penetration' (Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Vi 2005: 414) in that the villagers have little or no influence on whether tourists visit the villages or not. Nevertheless, they make conscious choices to become involved in, or withdraw from, tourism-related activities. Furthermore, villagers are also actively involved in processes of 'market creation' and 'market expansion' (Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Vi 2005: 415).

Villagers have created demand for hand-woven scarves and (though to a lesser degree) for other items, such as clothing and bags made from the same material and bags, pillow cases and wall hangings sewn and embroidered using different materials (see Photograph 26). These items, the scarves in particular, can now be found not only in the villages but also in tourist shops throughout Vietnam and in markets overseas.[65] Through the production of weaving and textiles, as well as other souvenirs, the villagers fashion demand from tourists, traders, wholesalers and retailers who visit the villages. Some villagers also travel to the Mai Chau market, neighbouring villages, Hanoi and smaller cities around the north of Vietnam to trade these items. In these processes of market formation, the villagers are not passive victims of markets penetrating the uplands from outside. Instead, 'as the villagers react to new opportunities they become agents of market

[65] I saw these items being sold not only in tourist shops in Hanoi and throughout the north of Vietnam, but also in Pham Ngu Lao Street and the shops in the Saigon Tax Trade Centre (*Thuong Xa Tax*) in Ho Chi Minh City. Upon returning to Australia after fieldwork, I have noticed the scarves being sold in various markets around Melbourne, including at La Trobe University. As discussed later in the chapter, the villagers outsource or employ other women in the villages and surrounding villages to make the quantity of scarves needed.

formation' (Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Vi 2005: 415). This can be shown through the example of my host family in Tap who run a successful weaving and textile business.

Photograph 26: Handmade textiles for sale

Explaining the development of her business, Mrs Tung said that when more foreign tourists started coming to the village, she worked a lot weaving scarves and made money from selling them to the tourists. She explained:

> In 1988 or 1989, before I had the stall, French tourists came into my house to buy scarves. I had few scarves. They watched me weaving and drank tea and *ruou*. They really liked the Tai clothes. They took photos and bought scarves and silk material. In the past, there were no stalls so the tourists would come along the road and into my house. People did not have stalls so they entered people's houses. Now there are many stalls and people just walk past.

The family runs a stall in the lane outside their house which they have had since 2001. It is a large stall with a diverse range of products (see Photograph 27). In 2006 the family invested money in upgrading the stall. Formerly, it consisted of products on display over bamboo railings and on a small wooden table underneath a corrugated iron and tarpaulin roof; later, they transformed the stall into a lockable concrete room with lighting.

Photograph 27: Mrs Tung's family's handicrafts stall

Mrs Tung learned how to weave using a loom when she was around 13 years old, like most women in the villages. Her mother and older sister taught her; she in turn taught her daughter when she was around the same age. This female-dominated activity was labour intensive with practical outcomes. Girls and women produced their own cotton and silk, growing cotton plants in the upland fields and keeping silk worms in their homes, which they processed, dyed and then used to weave clothing, material/scarves, blankets, mattresses and pillows for household use. Villagers also travelled to neighbouring Hmong and Dao villages to sell the textiles and to buy livestock, such as chickens and ducks, and other goods, including opium. In addition, the activity had symbolic meaning in that a good weaver was thought to make a good wife, as she provided these items for her new family upon marriage. An elderly man in the village exclaimed that in the past a good Tai woman and wife was a good weaver and not necessarily a good looker. Male relatives, such as husbands and sons, built the looms, as they still do today.

Today, women still weave these items for marriage and household purposes. They also produce blankets, mattresses and pillows for tourists to use while staying in a guesthouse and, as already mentioned, they make material, scarves, clothing and bags for tourists and traders. As a consequence, weaving skills and knowledge have been maintained in Mai Chau, as mothers continue to teach their daughters how to use the loom, and sew and embroider, which does not occur in other places. I met some Tai women in neighbouring Thanh Hoa and Son La provinces and in Hanoi who did not know how to weave.

The process of manufacture and production has changed. A small number of women, at any one time, may produce, process and dye their own cotton and silk, although the majority usually buy them from the Mai Chau market. Mrs Tung explained why she stopped growing her own cotton:

> I used to grow my own cotton. I used to have a cotton garden as big as this house in the mountains. I used to work in the rice fields in the morning, walk to and work in the cotton field in the afternoon, and then weave at night-time. I was very busy. It was very hard work. I stopped because I did not have the time.

Mrs Tung went on to say that the cotton that is sold in the Mai Chau market is not good quality because it is not pure cotton but is mixed with synthetics. Instead, she buys pure cotton from traders in Hanoi, 'as it makes cooler woven tops'. She explained the irony of her business in that she buys cotton from people in Hanoi who often buy it from ethnic minority groups but that the people in Hanoi make the cotton smoother. This situation is similar to the government-initiated silkworm raising project in the village. Although Mrs Tung does not participate in it, she explained that the participants raise silkworms on mulberry leaves to make silk that they sell to people in Hanoi. However, if they then wish to weave silk products, they must buy the silk from Hanoi. In the past, Mrs Tung raised silkworms on mulberry and cassava. She would put the raw silk in rice gruel to soften it. She used natural products to dye the silk, such as the bark from lychee trees for a brown colour. Now she either buys coloured chemical dye from the market or buys material already chemically dyed. While the women in the villages still weave traditional motifs, they make decisions about the colours they use based on what they like themselves and what they think tourists like. They focus on scarves and smaller items because the larger items, such as blankets and mattresses, are difficult for tourists to pack in their luggage.

Mrs Tung does not weave much these days; instead, she acts as a wholesaler. She has a number of weaving contracts with retailers around Vietnam including in Dien Bien Phu. These retailers have come to the village or Mrs Tung or her husband have travelled to them looking for business. Part of the reason they are successful is that they also run a guesthouse, which they largely funded with the money Mrs Tung earned from weaving. Mr Tung said that they have learned how to trade and form business relations from their guests, who contribute ideas for them. The biggest contract is with a woman who buys

scarves for her tourist shop in District One in Ho Chi Minh City. The retailer visited their house and discussed doing business with them, to which they agreed. However, Mrs Tung did not have enough time to weave the required number of scarves, so she bought some from the Mai Chau market to fill the quota. The retailer told her that the tourists did not like them so Mrs Tung stopped buying them from the market and instead hired people from the village and surrounding villages to do most of the weaving for her, enabling her to have more control of product quality. The shopkeeper in Ho Chi Minh City rings when she needs more scarves and they send packages of around 400 to her by post. She is able to meet such demands by outsourcing the work to other women in the village and in surrounding villages.

Mrs Tung also sells scarves in her stall in front of her house, along with many other products for which she acts as a wholesale retailer. Relatives, as well as ethnic Muong, Hmong and Dao traders from neighbouring villages, travel to ask her to sell their handmade products in her stall. Also, on occasion, she or her husband will travel to markets such as 'silk village' in Ha Tay, to buy different scarves and other items to sell in their stall.

Villagers also have woven goods on display made by Tai people residing in other parts of Vietnam, Laos and Thailand. Mr An said that his father used to go to a village in Laos to trade. He said,

> While my father sold salt, fish sauce and dry fish in the village in Laos, he bought traditional textiles. In the village in Laos they have special textiles and a special way to dye clothes, and my father sold them at the Mai Chau market because people liked them.

Mr Tung said that his parents bought a skirt in Laos which they sold in 2000, ironically to a person from Laos, who bought it because it was much cheaper than in Laos. Hanging in another stall was a skirt from Thailand. The woman running the stall said that it was sold to her by a Kinh trader. Through the display and trade of these products the villagers participate in a pan-Tai identity. I discuss the identities of the villagers in more detail in Chapter 7.

That Mrs Tung no longer weaves so much is also common among other women in Tap who focus on managing their business rather than weaving themselves. In addition to selling her handmade scarves from her home, a woman in Noi village said that she also sells them to stall owners in Tap village to sell to tourists, 'because only a few people in Tap weave'.

Mrs Tung mainly runs the stall. She listens and keeps an eye out for passing tourists while carrying on with her household duties. If she hears or sees tourists, she runs from her house to tend to them. When she is busy elsewhere, she has Mr Tung stay at home and keep an eye on the stall. If they are both busy, then their neighbours may see a tourist at their stall and rush over to stand in for them so as not to miss an opportunity. Likewise, when Mr and Mrs Tung know that they both will be out, they might ask their neighbours to keep an eye on the stall. If no-one is available, then they simply abandon their stall temporarily. Many women sit at their stalls sewing.

Running a stall gives women a chance to display their products not only to tourists but also to wholesalers and retailers who visit the villages. Thus, in addition to making potential sales to tourists, they can win textile contracts and thereby gain a more stable source of income, like Mrs Tung. This is the case for Mrs Yen who makes and sells textiles for her stall but also for other retailers and companies in Hanoi, a business in Yen Bai province and a Japanese company. She began trading with them when some of these traders visited the village and saw her motifs and examples on display, while some had heard about her through their friends. Mrs Yen also travels to Hanoi to obtain business. She believes that villagers can earn more money from making textiles than growing rice but that 'the people here think that growing rice is their main income because it is their main work'. During my fieldwork, her small family of husband and child moved from a tiny, one-room house to a new, large stilt house with plans of running a guesthouse. Newly-married couples sometimes engage in weaving as a means by which to move out of their parent's house and build their own house.

More women are winning more contracts to produce larger quantities of textiles and are outsourcing the work that is required. The women who miss out on a business contract with a wholesaler or retailer may be hired by those who are successful, as explained by the following villager:

> There was a foreign man who bought many pillowcases from different houses in the village and then asked the women in this village to sew many pictures with many motifs on them including houses, flowers and birds. I am preparing the current picture for him now. All women in this village who are sewing the same picture are sewing for him. The house over there, where many women are sewing, they are working for him. The man talked with the house and the household hires people to work. He came to my house and asked for a price.

In general, earning money from textile production and trade is easier than other ways of earning a living, such as selling vegetables and having tourists stay overnight, as it is more flexible (comparisons of the amounts of money earned from different activities are given in the following chapter). Many women combine the production of textiles with their household and farming duties. Mrs Yen said, 'in the crop season I work in the fields and when I am free I make textiles'. Another woman described her day:

> I go to work in the fields every day. If there is no crop I collect firewood in the mountains with many people from other households in this village. I am only allowed to collect dry firewood. I am not allowed to cut trees down. In the afternoons I stay at home to sew.

One woman said she weaves and sells her products when she has free time. She also cultivates and trades vegetables, and goes to the market every day although she finds selling weaving easier than selling vegetables in the market. She earns the most money from selling her weaving and the rice they grow. When her family is short of money, they have to sell some of their rice and therefore they do not have pigs as they do not have enough feed. She explained that because there were few people living in the house, there is not enough labour.

The age of women is important in their ability to earn income from textiles. Not only do they start to lose their eyesight as they get older, but they also move around less. One village elder explained, 'when I was young I could trade with other people... Now I am old and have stopped trading with them. I only stay here and raise livestock'.

One day, I was sitting and chatting with three women who were sewing while keeping an eye on their shops. They are around my age and lived in surrounding villages before moving to the village after marrying. They were asking me typical questions: how old I was, what I do, where is my boyfriend, what does he do, am I sad when he is not here, do I have a phone, do we say goodnight to each other, how long have we been together, when will we get married, do I like children, would I like a girl or boy? After replying to the last question that I do not mind but that I would prefer to have a girl they laughed. They each have one son. I asked if they would like girls, to which they replied that it is good to have one boy and one girl. One of the women then joked that it is good to have nine girls so they can sew.

Even though these women were joking, villagers expressed the view that it is important to have daughters in order to make money from textiles. One male elder explained that when his daughters were living in the house they made textiles to sell to tourists but that since they moved out no-one does. Mr Quynh said about his daughter moving, 'if she had not moved we could sell a lot of weaving'. One woman has her daughters stay at home and sell textiles to visitors while she goes to the fields. The more women in the household who weave, the more money they can make. One household owns three looms: one each for the mother, daughter and daughter-in-law.

The money that daughters earn from the production and trade of textiles means that they can pay for an education and clothing, releasing their parents of the burden (see Photograph 28). Mr and Mrs Ninh's third daughter, Miss Nooi, makes money from making and selling her own textiles, and also participates in the cultural performances for tourists. She spends the money on school fees and clothes. When she was younger, her mother gave her money to buy clothes, books and notebooks from the money she earned from cultivating cassava in the uplands which she sold at the market. Miss Nooi highlighted the central role that girls and women play in textile production and trade from a young age when she said, 'only girls sell things to visitors. Boys cannot because they do not know how to make them and they want to go to the mountains and pick fruit and eat it'.

Photograph 28: Girls displaying their textile products (bracelets, mobile phone holders and small bags) for tourists

The location of land ownership in the villages is a factor in whether villagers run a handicraft stall, as it is regarding guesthouses. A woman explained why she does not run a stall:

> I make textiles to sell but because my house is not close to a road I do not run a shop. There is nowhere to hang my textiles for visitors to see and I earn very little. My life is very difficult because I must pay for two children who study in Hanoi and Hoa Binh. I also raise pigs but I get little benefit from them.

Some households run a stall on land that is near a road or path running through the villages, which belongs to their relatives. A nineteen year old daughter of a family who runs a stall said, 'my family has a little shop near the main road on my uncle's land so we sell material, scarves and other products for visitors'.

The amount of money villagers earn from selling textiles and souvenirs also depends on the outcome of bargaining. In general, Mrs Tung charges foreign tourists and traders higher prices than domestic tourists and traders, and charges ethnic minorities and Vietnamese students even less. Then it depends on the tourists' responses. Some are ruthless, insisting on a lower price and not buying until they win, while others enjoy the bargaining, laughing and joking, not minding too much what they end up paying. Others just do not like bargaining and walk away. Mr Tung said that domestic tourists bargain

more than foreign tourists. In general, villagers make more money from selling to tourists than to traders, as the following villager stated:

> I sell textiles to tourists. I earn very little money because there are few visitors, just enough to buy salt and fish sauce. Traders from Hanoi come here to buy scarves, small bags and clothes. I sell to them at very cheap prices. I sell to tourists at more expensive prices, but it depends on the visitor and whether they bargain.

Given the quantities of textiles that come out of the villages and the fact that products are turning up in so many different locations, copyright laws are a problem. There is little or no regulation of textile production and trade. On the one hand, women in the villages are now copying Hmong and Dao motifs, which they sew and embroider for newer products such as wall-hangings. One family has photos of materials with designs made by Tai people in neighbouring Thanh Hoa province and from Laos, as well as photos of wall-hangings made by the neighbouring Hmong in Mai Chau. They said that a person in Hanoi had sent them the photos in order for them to copy the products and sell them to the person in Hanoi.[66] On the other hand, the leader of Tap said that the villagers have difficulty selling their products because they do not have a trademark (*thuong hieu*). He believes that textile production and trade is a good way to develop the economy of the villagers, but that their ability to organise trade is a problem – they lack administration from the authority office (*co quan chuc nang/quan li*). He said, 'we are still spontaneous and we are mostly farmers'.

Through constant production, expanded trade and the notoriety they gain from tourism, villagers have also developed pride in their 'ethnic product'. The leader explained that Mrs Yen and one other woman in the village attended and displayed products at a handicraft exhibition in Hanoi in 2006 run by an arm of ASEAN, of which the women are members and who consider them to be skilful producers of traditional Tai Mai Chau weaving.

[66] The practice of using photographs to produce material culture in the tourist setting is not uncommon; Causey (2003) notes how the Toba Batak wood-carvers in Sumatra use photographs to imitate old carvings.

SARS, bird flu and highway closure: continuing strategy of selective diversification

An historical approach can be used to explain the villagers' responses to a decrease in tourists to the villages in 2003 and 2004 due to the SARS, bird flu and highway closure, as well as further explain the strategies of households to selectively diversify their livelihoods (Sikor 2001; Sikor and Pham Thi Tuong Vi 2005; Turner and Michaud 2008). As was seen in Chapter 3 above, while the villagers did not have enough rice to eat during the tumultuous period of 40 years or so, they nevertheless adapted their livelihoods and relied on a diversity of activities, including cultivating vegetables in the uplands, and trading their labour and goods to neighbouring villages. The combined effects of decollectivisation and *doi moi* meant that households could grow enough rice to eat and even to sell. Old economic activities such as opium trading and sale of timber and other forest products were severely curtailed with the adoption of the Land Law of 1993, but concurrently, new avenues for trade were made possible for both Tap and Noi when they officially became tourism villages. International and domestic tourists appeared in growing numbers, not only visiting the villages but also staying overnight. The tourist trade increased, now following multiple patterns.

Yet, the decline in numbers of tourists to the villages in 2003 and 2004 meant that two guesthouse owners in Tap, including Mr and Mrs Tung, had to cancel their licenses as they could no longer pay the taxes. The other licensed guesthouse owners in both villages stayed open but without earning their usual income. The decrease in tourists also meant that the households in Noi stopped setting up their textile and souvenir stalls every day. Instead only a small number of households did at any one time when tourists showed up. The women in both Noi and Tap who did run a textile and souvenir stall during this time said that because there were few visitors and many stalls open, they earned little income – only enough for subsistence purposes and not for saving. While no household went hungry, villagers nevertheless complained about the increase in the cost of living, including food, and that the guesthouse tax and the cost of medicine was too high. Still, they were aware that the situation was temporary and were confident that tourist numbers would increase again. Some thought that more tourists than before would visit the villages once the highway was reopened. In fact, in August 2005 the leader of Noi village said he was expecting seven or eight households to open up licensed guesthouses in the near future.

In the meantime, the villagers put their energies into the other ways of earning a living and reverted to their customary rural economy. Some women chose to participate in the new government programs of mushroom cultivation and silk production. Women also continued to weave, sew and embroider, whether in contracts with traders or to build up the products in their own stall. Even though Mr and Mrs Tung cancelled their guesthouse license, they still earned an income from their textile business. This is also when women started to copy Hmong and Dao designs. As a result, fewer Hmong and Dao traders now visit the village to sell their wares. Furthermore, *xe om* drivers benefited from the closure of the highway. Instead of road transport, boats were used along the Black River to transport people and produce from Hoa Binh town to Mai Chau. Though the few tour groups that did visit had their own buses organised and waiting for them at the dock, the dock was approximately ten kilometres from the villages so *xe om* drivers were busier and could charge more as, aside from the local bus, there was no other way to travel. Villagers also continued to worship their ancestors during *Tet*, *Com Moi* and on other auspicious days, and pray for the prosperity of their family.

That the villagers do not rely solely on tourism, which can be fickle, for an income is important to their survival. The following conversations I had with villagers highlight the importance of agriculture in their lives:

> MA: How would you feel if there was no tourism?
> Mr An: Sad. I am accustomed to having many friends and tourists stay in this house.
> MA: What would you do?
> Mr An: Farming. Right now I grow vegetables, corn and rice in the fields. If there were no tourists I would continue to raise pigs and chickens and do farming.
>
> MA: Is there an impact on the village because there are fewer tourists?
> Mr Quynh: No, only four families run a guesthouse. Other families earn their money in other ways. The local people here are not too rich or too poor so they can live on whether the tourists come or not.

> Because this is an agricultural village, it is ok. We still have enough food to eat because this village is richer than other villages. We will raise pigs, chickens, grow vegetables, rice. Of course we cannot earn much money but we still have enough food to eat. Last year, I hung up some weaving outside the house but this year only a few tourists have come so I do not do it.

Conclusion

This chapter enhances understandings of the choices made by the villagers in order to make a living from tourism within certain constraints. It illustrates the centrality of women in the economy, not only looking after the tourists but also through textiles. In the process, they fashion a hybridised local economy out of a combination of old and new, local and external factors. The villagers 'reinvent economic space' (Taylor 2006: 248) through local and extralocal tourism activities that draw upon and also sustain their distinct cultural practices and institutions. Furthermore, the chapter has shown that the villagers do not rely solely on tourism and are therefore able to get through lean tourism periods because of their experience and capacity to diversify their livelihoods today as in the past.

Through the examination of the livelihoods of the villagers, socio-economic structures have been revealed in this chapter. These are discussed further in the next chapter, which looks at the implications of running a guesthouse on social relations – not only between households, but also between villagers and tourists, and among household members.

CHAPTER 6: Running a Guesthouse: Implications for Social Relations

Anthropologist Walter Little (2000, 2004) has conducted research on Mayan household transformations in Guatemala in the context of viewing home as a place of exhibition and performance. He explains (2000: 173) that for the Lopez family, a Mayan family in San Antonio who have opened their home to tourists, their house is both home and stage – they welcome tourists into their home wherein they enact their culture through exhibitions and performances for the tourists. Yet the Lopez house is a real home; when it is not transformed into a stage, it is where they live. Little (2000: 174-176) shows that these enactments have changed the economic and social organisation of the household in terms of gender relations, particularly when the Lopezes and their guests swap stories about cultural differences, in which a common comment by visitors relates to how women can be so subordinate to men. This has resulted in the family thinking about the ways in which men treat women. Another family, the Perezes, who are known for having a 'monopolistic grip on the local tourist industry', have provoked feelings of jealousy, anger and shame among locals in San Antonio (Little 2000: 167).

Similarly, many Tai families live in a house that is simultaneously a home and a guesthouse. While the Mayan families do not run guesthouses, Little's research can be used to examine different social relations in the Tai homes and villages in this study. Questions that arise from Little's research and can be adapted to this study include: what interactions occur between the villagers and the tourists?; are there tensions between guesthouse owners and non-guesthouse owners?; and does tourism result in household transformations, particularly in terms of gender relations?

This chapter explores the experiential aspects of running a guesthouse and their implications for social relations between the villagers and tourists, and among the villagers, not only between households but also among household members. It begins with a description of a household hosting a foreign tour group on a package tour, to demonstrate that most interactions between villagers and tourists are minimal, which leads to a discussion of the reasons for this. Matters of language are examined in regards to villager relationships with both foreign tour groups and independent foreign tourists, as are the behaviour of domestic tourists and their preconceptions of Tai villagers' relationships with them. The details of the relative lack of closer relationships between

villagers and tourists are also discussed. The chapter continues with a description of a household hosting a large group of Vietnamese students and a discussion of the effects of the increasing number of tourists on inter-household social relationships, especially the issue of noise. The problems of lack of water and rubbish disposal are also discussed. The implications for inter-household social relations are further examined by looking at accentuated household differentiation resulting from tourism, including jealousy and desire for change. Finally, the chapter examines the gender and generational implications of running a guesthouse.

Running a guesthouse: minimal interactions between household members and tourists

Scenario 1: Hosting a package tour group

Life in the village is quiet during the middle of the day, as villagers rest from working in the rice fields. The silence is interrupted by the rumble of a small bus entering the village. It pulls up outside one of the stilt houses, a licensed guesthouse from which the owners rush to greet the busload. Ten young to middle-aged adults with backpacks, from different countries, a young, male, Kinh tour guide and a middle-aged, male, Kinh driver clamber from the air-conditioned bus as the smiling hosts enthusiastically shake their hands and greet them with 'allo' and 'bonjour'. Helping to carry their luggage, the hosts lead them up the stairs at the front of their house, slip off their plastic sandals and enter the house. The tour guide asks the tourists to take off their shoes before entering. The tourists, adorned with travel and adventure clothing with common brand names, are wearing either hiking shoes or hiking sandals. Hot and flustered, they juggle to climb the narrow wooden stairs, weighed down by their luggage, and take off their shoes. As they enter the large area inside the house, some are worried, so they tread softly and tentatively on the split bamboo floor, fearful that they will be too heavy for it. The host is preparing tea and has put out mats for them on which to sit. As some struggle to get down to the floor, the host provides them with handmade pillows, decorated with colourful designs, to make them more comfortable. Bottles of cold water from the fridge and ceiling fans offer some relief for the sweating tourists.

Pleasantries are exchanged in Vietnamese between the tour guide and host family, and translated to the tourists. There is much nodding and smiling, body language being the main form of communication. Upon request the tour guide tells the tourists the 'happy room', or toilet, is downstairs beside the house. He then suggests the group goes for a walk, so the tourists apply sunscreen, find their hats and cameras and put on their shoes. As the tourists walk around the village, the hosts rush off to the market and start preparing dinner. While the hosts usually choose the dishes to prepare, their decisions are based on previous feedback from tour guides and tourists as well as their own observations. They tend to make dishes using fleshier, more expensive cuts of meat than they are used to eating themselves. The driver, who has visited the village numerous times, visits some people he knows.

The tourists stop to look at the textiles, and bamboo and wooden products on display. The interactions between the tourists and the stall owners are minimal: 'allo', '*xin chao*' (hello), 'how much?', 'you buy this one?' and '*mua giup*' (help me, buy from me). The tour guide helps to translate. Two tourists buy a scarf each. The tourists get their cameras out when they stop to watch a woman weaving on a loom. After harvest in November, it is common to see many women sitting alone or in small groups outside their houses, sewing and embroidering, or weaving at their looms underneath their houses. The woman behind the loom smiles and goes about her business while the tour guide explains how it works while answering the tourists' questions.

The group continues to walk by placid cows in pens, busy chickens scratching among the leaves and dogs flopping lazily on the ground. The tourists stop to take photos when they reach the luminescent green rice paddies, the surrounding mountains creating an awe inspiring back drop. One tourist remarks, 'It is beautiful here. We don't have this anymore. And the people here are happy'. Farmers, with woven bamboo baskets on their backs and carrying sickles, smile at the tourists as they pass, as do locals buzzing to and from the market on their bicycles and motorbikes. An old man leading his buffalo through the fields to graze looks on curiously. There is a loud chorus of high pitched 'allo' as the

tourists pass by children swimming in the dam. Some groups walk to the nearby Mai Chau market and caves in the surrounding mountains.

The group returns to the smoky house, hot and sweaty, and gulp down more cold drink, either water, soft drinks or local beer, after which they enjoy some free time. Some have a wash in the two showers underneath the house. Others sit around drinking and chatting. They fill in their registration forms, a requirement of the local authorities for monitoring and taxation purposes. Suddenly, a loud drum beat captures the tourists' attention. Although the tourists do not understand, it is a signal to inform the villagers that there will be a cultural performance. Still others read, write and talk about the unusual yet appetizing aromas from the kitchen, where the female host prepares the meal on a gas cooker and open wood fire while the rice steams in an electric rice cooker.

The host family brings dinner out on several small, round metal trays. The meal consists of fried chicken pieces, pork, fried sliced potato chips, *rau muon* (green leaf vegetable flavoured with garlic) and steamed rice. Before eating, the male host brings out a bottle of *ruou*, or rice wine. He fills small shot glasses for everyone and invites the guests to drink, by throwing the strong fiery clear liquid down his throat in one hit. The tour guide and some tourists follow his lead, while other tourists politely take a sip and continue with their beer, soft drink, or water. After the tour guide explains the dishes, he and the host leave the tourists to eat. The tour guide and the driver eat with the family in the kitchen and continue to drink *ruou* with the male host. Meanwhile, the tourists are eating and chatting, one of them confiding to another that she was expecting the conditions to be 'more tribal' and 'poorer' than they are.

The hosts clean up after dinner as performers from the village, wearing colourful outfits, gather at the house. The musicians set up instruments inside the house and the tourists settle to watch the cultural performance, a staged show involving singing and dancing acts, which lasts for about ninety minutes. Neighbours also gather around the entrance of the house to watch the performance. The show is part of the tour package and the tour guide pays the hosts for it, along with the food and accommodation. The tourists watch the show, some taking photographs,

until the performers get them up to sing and dance with them. There is a lot of laughing among the performers and tourists, and the show ends with them drinking *ruou can* together from long bamboo straws. Once the performers have left, the hosts help the tourists set up their beds; they roll out handmade mattresses on the floor, cover them with a sheet on which they place a handmade embroidered blanket and a small pillow, all of which they cover with a mosquito net hanging from the rafters. While the tourists sleep in the large room, the tour guide and driver sleep in the kitchen area where the host family is also sleeping.

The tourists wake at different times, some to the sound of screeching, hungry pigs, others to motorbike engines. Three tourists go for a walk around the village and fields. Some households have already set up their stalls from which each of the tourists buy a scarf. The host family, having arisen early and gone to the market, prepares breakfast. *Banh my truong* (fried egg in a baguette), bananas, instant coffee, and tea bags are brought out on trays. After breakfast, the tourists pack up their gear; for most, it includes an extra scarf or bag purchased in the village. They load into the air-conditioned bus to a chorus of 'thank you, bye bye' from the waving hosts, who return to the house and clean away breakfast and the beds.

This account of a package-tour encounter is one of many such encounters in the villages. As can be seen, interactions between villagers and tourists are minimal. Villagers generally see their main role in tourism as providing hospitality, considering this to be a traditional Tai virtue, yet there is little interaction due to the nature of the tour group and lack of shared language.

Language and tour guides

The majority of international tourists do not speak Tai or Vietnamese, and any foreign language the villagers know, such as English and French, is basic. Thus, members of tour groups mainly talk among themselves; interactions with the villagers are minimal exchanges in which the tour guide plays a crucial role. Some encounters can be friendlier, when tourists are more curious about their hosts' lives and there is a tour guide who can translate. According to one guesthouse owner:

> Some foreign tourists who come to my house are very curious. They often ask me many things about the village such as: Which ethnic group lives here? What are our economic activities? What is our culture? Sometimes we talk with each other until one to two in the morning. Most of the tourists that come to my house are foreigners from France, Holland and Australia.

With the help of a tour guide translating, tourists might also ask their hosts about the past. One time, when a tourist asked, through the guide, about the French presence in the area, the host replied that he had been captured by the French. The conversation then moved on to the war with the US. In general, however, the villagers spend most of their time cooking, cleaning and serving the tour groups, with the aim of making their stay as comfortable as possible. The following comment by a villager sums it up:

> My daughter cooks and serves food, I prepare. I do not know English so I speak little, I speak with the tour guide. I boil water for them [the tourists] because I do not have hot water. During the day they [the tourists] go around the village and at night they sing songs.

The tour guides are outsiders; most are Kinh from Hanoi, some from Ho Chi Minh City, and a few are foreigners. As explained in the scenario above, communication between the tour guides and villagers is in Vietnamese. There are some complaints from villagers about not having local guides:

> Villager: Tour guides come from tourism companies in Hanoi and from the south. I would like local guides because when foreigners come here, the local guide can talk with them more easily and have contact with them more easily.
> MA: Do you think the Tai are represented better with a local guide?
> Villager: Yes, because visitors want to learn about the culture of the Tai, which the local people can explain more clearly.

> The tour guides seem not to want to learn about the local people here and therefore interact less with us. There are no local guides. I would prefer local guides because they can explain our lives to the guests more easily and they can

> take them to places around here because they know where they are and why they are important.

According to the leader of Tap, ‘now most villagers who are young, study tourism and hospitality, including a language, in Hanoi such as at the Hanoi College of Tourism and Hanoi Open University’. However, some villagers question the usefulness of such study. Mr Quynh stated:

> The students will come back and not become a tour guide. Maybe they will work in Hanoi or Ho Chi Minh City. It is difficult to find work here so maybe they have made the wrong decision. They study tourism but mainly about how to serve tourists, not how to become a tour guide. It is suitable for them to work in a restaurant, not here. They should learn more about how to become a tour guide, not how to serve tourists. But maybe they do not even need to study this.

Independent foreign tourists and learning English

Interactions between villagers and foreign tourists can be closer when the tourists are travelling independently. These people, the majority of whom are foreign backpackers, are usually more adventurous than those in tour groups and are willing to communicate with the locals through body language and with the help of phrasebooks. They explore off the beaten track, are invited into other people’s homes and sometimes taken by their host on tours to surrounding villages. These tourists usually travel alone or with one or two others, and therefore the encounter can be more personal. They might help prepare food, families might take them for a walk, they might give one another language lessons, and they might eat and drink *ruou* together, which can lead to plenty of laughter, warmth and even arm-wrestling.

However, such interactions between villagers and independent tourists happen only occasionally. It depends on the mood and situation of both the tourists and household members; for example, tourists may prefer to sit around and read, and household members may be busy. Also, as previously mentioned, interactions are limited because of the communication difficulties. At the same time that villagers explained that foreign

tourists sympathise with them when they try to speak with the tourists, villagers also expressed their frustrations:

> It is difficult to speak with tourists because when they talk I cannot understand all the meaning because I have no English. Sometimes when I want to explain something to the guests they do not understand clearly what I am saying.
>
> Mr An: The most difficult thing is the language. Sometimes we want to express our feelings and sympathies and want to ask tourists where they come from. The only thing I can do is look at a map. My daughter studies the culture of tourism and English in Hanoi.
> MA: Do you hope she comes back and helps with language?
> Mr An: Yes. Some tourists have tour guides so I can ask them. But some do not. But if I want to ask lots of questions I am afraid and do not want to disturb the tour guide. When I try to sell weaving the tourists ask questions but I cannot understand and talk with them.

The lack of clear communication leads to misunderstandings between tourists and villagers, as explained in the following comments:

> When I speak English to foreigners I say fifty but they think fifteen so we quarrel about the price. Finally I did not get the money from them.
>
> Two American girls, a twenty-one year-old and nineteen year-old, visited my house at one o'clock in the afternoon so I did not cook a meal for them of course but around three or four they really wanted to go back to Hanoi. They did not want to have dinner here at my house. They did not book a room in a hotel in Hanoi. Their tour guide did not want to go back to Hanoi at night, so they had dinner here but they said they wanted one meal for one person only. The other did not want dinner. When we brought the meal to the tourists both of them ate together. There was not enough for both of them so we had to cook another meal for them.

Villagers wish to learn English, not only to sell more but also to explain their lives to tourists and to learn about the lives of tourists. However, they have few opportunities to do so. One villager explained:

> Visitors who come without tour guides cannot communicate but I want to say so many things. I only know how to say hello and enquire about their health but I cannot explain Tai customs. The people in this village want to learn English but there are few teachers here.

Whereas older adults were not taught English at school, children and young adults now learn a little English at school and university. They are teaching other villagers, who also pick up bits and pieces from tourists, tour guides, dictionaries and short-term English classes. One villager said:

> Tourists walk by and I sell them products. How do you interact with them? Some foreigners come with tour guides, so fine. But some come alone, so I know some common sentences and I talk with them in English, 'Hello, come into house, buy from me, where you come from?'.

The government has allowed English classes to be run in the villages since the late 1990s – however these are short-term and poorly organised. When they had time, some of the villagers attended classes conducted by a local English teacher.

> Mrs Yen: I know a little English. One English teacher, a Tai man who lives in Mai Chau town and who is an English teacher at Tong Dau secondary school, has come to this village and taught English since 1999.
> MA: How often does he come here?
> Mrs Yen: Twice per week but now he has stopped.
> MA: Why?
> Mrs Yen: I don't know, but maybe for many reasons.
> MA: How did you feel when he stopped?
> Mrs Yen: It is not good for people because this is a tourism village and people here interact with tourists and many foreigners want to talk with people here but we don't know English and cannot introduce our customs.

Foreigners have also been allowed to teach English in the villages. One villager said, ‘In Mr Phong’s house some years ago someone in his house taught English to the locals. The teacher was a foreigner and stayed for two to three months. What a pity I could not attend the course. My niece was staying with me so I had no time’.

There has been a volunteer program, run jointly by an international volunteer organisation and a tour company in Vietnam, for foreigners to stay in Noi and teach English. At the time of my stay, it had been running for two years and four 18 year-old women from Australia stayed in the village teaching English to primary school-aged children. The women, who were from Melbourne and Sydney and did not know each other beforehand, had deferred their first year of university studies and used their savings to sign up with the volunteer organisation, with the choice of volunteering in a certain number of countries including Vietnam, Nepal and Peru. They had chosen Vietnam mainly because they wanted to go to Southeast Asia; two of them had been on an ‘adventure tourism’ holiday in Thailand before arriving in Vietnam to begin their volunteering. However, the program had not been well organised. The women were told that they would be placed in a school, but instead they taught English to the children of the village from underneath the guesthouse where they were staying (see Photograph 29). In addition, they were expecting to teach for a few months but ended up teaching only for a few weeks. They began towards the end of the summer school holidays. At first, around 40 children attended, but they stopped turning up when they had to attend to their usual duty of getting their classrooms back in order before the new school year began.

Photograph 29: English class in the village

Domestic tourists

Language is not the only thing determining the level of interaction between the villagers and tourists. Even though the villagers speak Vietnamese, interactions between villagers and domestic tourists can also be minimal. Other anthropologists have found this to be the case in other parts of Vietnam, including between Hmong traders and domestic tourists in Sa Pa (Michaud and Turner 2006; Duong Bich Hanh 2006, 2008).

While some villagers stated that they did not think there are differences in behaviour between foreign and domestic tourists, others complained about the behaviour of domestic tourists, including that they, especially students, are noisy, impolite, disrespectful, demanding, find the villages boring, complain about everything, and they litter. Furthermore, according to the villagers, the majority of tourists who request and engage in 'social evils' in and around the villages are domestic tourists.[67]

> There are no serious problems but it is a little bit noisy and some people who come here to this village say things that are not good about this village. Foreigners are fine, but some Vietnamese ask if we are selling drugs, or if some girls are selling their body, but the people in this village keep calm and say there is no drugs and prostitution. If we did it guests would not come anymore.
>
> MA: When there are too many tourists for the village does this cause a problem?
> Villager: Not foreign tourists.
> MA: Others?
> Villager: Not many but some students played cards and used heroin here.
> MA: How do you know?
> Villager: Some people used it under the house and I saw it. I saw them shooting up.
> MA: How did that make you feel?

[67] In the mid-1990s, government public awareness campaigns focused on the 'social evils', notably drugs, prostitution and AIDS, seen to be associated with foreign visitors (Biles *et al* 1999: 227). However, I only heard two stories relating to foreign tourists and prostitution in Mai Chau; an expatriate living in Hanoi and travelling with his Vietnamese colleagues sought prostitutes and a foreign man who said he was not interested when the Vietnamese man he was travelling with asked a café worker about 'girls' for them. Also, I witnessed two groups of foreign tourists smoke marijuana, which they had brought with them, in the villages.

Villager: It is dangerous. I was afraid that the students would give heroin to other people in the village. They travelled by motorbike, and sometimes students go to Pa Co and Hang Kia [villages] to buy opium from Hmong people.

MA: Have there been any problems with tourists in the village?
Mr Quynh: Only one case, in March 2003. A tour guide from Saigon was not good. He was in Mr Hiep's house. He said to Mr Hiep that if he stays in Mr Hiep's house he wants some young girl and Mr Hiep replied no. So the tour guide maybe stayed in Tap or somewhere else, I do not know. Mr Hiep did not allow him to stay in his house.

Such behaviour can be explained by the motivations and expectations that many domestic tourists have for their stay, as well as attitudes towards the villagers as the 'primitive other'. Furthermore, the request for sex with local females by male domestic tourists can also be explained by the image they have of Tai women in Vietnam. I heard Vietnamese men and women, inside and outside of the villages, talk about the beauty of Tai women. One Vietnamese man explained that Tai girls are beautiful because, 'they have white skin, dark eyes, pointy noses, long hair and beautiful voices'. I also heard a few other myths about Tai women, including when a Vietnamese man very seriously explained to me that, 'Tai women know how to put spells on men with a concoction'. While I did not speak to any Vietnamese tourists in the villages about requests for prostitutes, I discussed it with a number of villagers. One villager said that there were many requests for 'girls', only from Vietnamese men, not foreigners. She went on to say that 'they can find girls in Mai Chau [town], not in the village'.

As mentioned in Chapter 4 above, the female villagers are represented as an attraction in the Vietnamese tourism promotional material. The promotion to tourists as having the opportunity to dance with '*Thái* girls' and get drunk on rice wine adds to the mysterious, exotic and sexualised image of the female villagers. I asked another villager how she feels about the women and tourists dancing and drinking rice wine together. She replied that 'never before have women got drunk, but if some guests are very excited, they invite the female performers to go to karaoke or have a drink [at one of the nearby cafes]'. I asked if their husbands get jealous, to which she answered, 'no, because not only his wife goes but

also many other women go too. When they go, they earn extra money. This situation is normal, that women drink in the performance'.

Vietnamese people assume that women who work in the tourism and hospitality industry are sex workers. These include women working in 'massage parlours', 'saunas', 'karaoke bars' and 'cafés'. A young woman working in the floating café on the lake next to the Mai Chau Guesthouse said that Vietnamese men ask her about 'girls' and that she is asked herself, but she is not interested. When Miss Nooi worked at one of the locally-run cafés in Mai Chau over the summer break she complained to her parents that her friend had called her a *ca ve* (prostitute). Her parents were also worried and lay awake at night until she returned home safely. While 'social evils' cannot be totally stamped out, the local officials and community keep a watchful eye. I saw a woman and her son, not locals, open up a café near the Mai Chau Guesthouse, but it did not last long as the police burned it down after discovering she was running a prostitution racket. While I did not meet any men, domestic or foreign, looking for women in the villages, when the locals speak about tourist requests for prostitution, the focus is predominantly on Vietnamese, not foreign, men.

More personal relationships

While most interactions between villagers and tourists are minimal, a few are nevertheless more in-depth. For example, just as some foreign tourists ask villagers questions about their involvement in the wars, so too do some domestic tourists, as well as *Viet kieu* or overseas Vietnamese. I met one such tourist from the US who could speak Vietnamese and had been conversing about the wars with the family she was staying with. She had learned that the Vietnamese government had discriminated against the family because they had fought for the French. That is, the host family gave her a representation of the villages that was different from the representations in both the tourism promotional material and official national Vietnamese history (see Chapter 4 above). Furthermore, close relationships can develop between villagers and tourists to the extent that some tourists are considered 'friends' by the villagers. The small numbers of foreign tourists who become such friends are those who return to the villages and can usually speak Vietnamese, or less frequently, Tai. These tourists are usually expatriates. One villager said that 'a male Australian dentist is working in the dental department of the Vietnam

German Hospital in Hanoi. He speaks Vietnamese. He has a Vietnamese name, Hai. He was a tourist, now he is a friend because he keeps in contact with us.' When I asked if there were other friends, he replied, 'a Japanese man, originally American, and an English woman'.

Mr Quynh made the following remark:

> In 1993 about twenty French and English people came to play football and volleyball with the local people and stayed in Mrs Ninh's house because Mr The [Mr Ninh] is a footballer. The people here had a meeting to welcome them. They worked in Hanoi. Sometimes they came back... They came here as friends, guests, not as tourists...

During my stay, I met a young expatriate American on a student visa who regularly commuted between Tap and Hanoi, where she was studying Vietnamese language. She first visited the village in a tour group in 1997 and has been regularly returning to Vietnam for longer stays, on tourist and work visas since 1999, doing a mixture of work in Hanoi and photography in the village, with an interest in the rice-growing cycle, rituals and handicrafts. They helped her to improve her language skills while she helped them in their rice fields and with English. In 2002 she stayed in the village and taught English to some of the villagers, at their request. She ran two classes, however she did not gain permission from the government to do so. The provincial government sent her back to Hanoi and she has since had trouble returning to the village. The provincial police follow her around in Hanoi, Hoa Binh and Mai Chau, making sure she complies with the stipulations of her visa. Nevertheless, since her visit in 1999, she has been staying with a family in the village to which she has become close.

While I did not meet any frequently-returning domestic tourists, I witnessed friendly interactions, as if between old friends, between guesthouse owners and Vietnamese tour guides, drivers and textile traders, some of whom have been returning to the villages for over a decade. I met a director of a tourism company in Noi because one of the families had invited him to their daughter's wedding. He had first visited the village in 1992, and after looking at all the houses in the village, he chose this family's house and their relatives' house to take tourists to. As his company became more successful, he hired tour

guides and stopped guiding himself. His company now has five offices; three in Vietnam, one in Singapore and another in Japan. He and his company have brought many tourists and much business to the families over the years. He was at the wedding with his wife, child and neighbours from Hanoi.

I heard of no romantic relationships between villagers and tourists. This can be compared with the situation in a tourism village in Turkey, where Tucker (2003) shows that interactions between villagers and tourists are more complex and intimate, and where long-term relationships between local men and female tourists develop. My questions about relationships between locals and foreigners were met with chuckles and the answer, 'not yet.' These sorts of unions are not inconceivable; there were unions between French soldiers and locals in the region in the past, villagers meet foreign tour guides who are married to locals, mixed couples visit the villages as tourists, and Mrs Ninh had been to the wedding of their family's friend from England who married a Vietnamese woman in Hanoi. Rather, the opportunity for these sorts of unions is hindered by the short, transient nature of the tourist stays. This is also the case for domestic tourists, though it does not stop Vietnamese males from visiting the villages and seeking sex with female villagers.

Having said this, the villagers spoke of three instances, one in Noi and two in the region, of local girls marrying Vietnamese tour guides and moving to Hanoi to live. This occurs in the context where, today, it is not uncommon for local girls to marry Vietnamese boys they meet in Hanoi, when they go there to study. Local boys do not tend to marry Vietnamese girls from Hanoi because, as I was told by Mrs Ninh who laughed at my question, 'local boys cannot afford to rent or buy a house in Hanoi and it is difficult for Hanoi girls to live here'.

An increase in tourist numbers: an increase in villager complaints

Scenario 2: Hosting a group of Vietnamese students

Two buses rumble into the village from which 45 university students alight, chatting and laughing. They are excited as they are away for the weekend with their class mates. They are in their third year at the Finance Academy in Gia Lam in Hanoi and have organised the trip themselves. Most student groups are from

universities in Hanoi and may or may not be supervised by accompanying teachers. They usually do a loop, stopping in Hoa Binh town to see the hydroelectric dam and statue of Bac Ho, and visit the Kim Boi springs in the east of the province to bathe in the mineral water, on their way to or from the village. They choose to come to the village because it is cheap. As one student said, 'We are students and we are poor. If we went to Sa Pa it would cost more'. For example, this group paid 500,000 *dong* in total for one night – 10,000 *dong* per student and an extra 50,000 *dong* to hire the kitchen. For the trip in total, each student paid 130,000 *dong* or 100,000 *dong* if they brought a friend; most of this cost went to the hiring of transport and drivers. The class monitor had collected 10,000 *dong* per month throughout the year from each of the students.

As the class monitor greets the guesthouse owners, the other students hang around, break off into small groups and pairs and walk along the roads looking at the nearby stalls. The villagers can hear them before they see them. Households attend to their stalls, hoping to sell something, but also keeping a watchful eye on the students as they are known to steal. Other enterprising villagers are quick to source and set up baskets of food, particularly fruit, to sell outside the guesthouse in which the students are staying, while others begin to make sticky rice in bamboo (*com lam*); items that the villagers do not display for foreign tourists.

The house is overtaken by students before the majority of them decide to walk to the nearby caves in the surrounding mountains, passing the other village on the way. On their return, the kitchen becomes a hive of activity as female students cook the evening meal. The students have brought their own food. Packed into the large open area of the house, they sit on the floor lined with mats, chatting, laughing and eating. There is excitement in the air as music starts up and villagers perform for a small group of Japanese students in the guesthouse opposite. The Vietnamese students order rice wine and mostly male students swig down the clear fiery liquid to shouts of encouragement, '*mot, hai, ba, yeah! Hai, ba, yeah!*' (one, two, three, yeah! Two, three, yeah!). A small group of female students clean up and wash the dishes. At least one of the family members of the guesthouse keeps an eye on them while most disappear, seeking refuge elsewhere.

This part of the village is all lit up and a hive of activity. Most tourists are inside the guesthouses, eating, drinking and chatting or watching the performance. Some are wandering around looking at the shops in the neighbouring houses, for which these households have installed lights. The lights are also on in the bathrooms and toilets whether they are being used or not. If there is a power failure, the generator is turned on.

Members of another village performance group are getting ready to perform for the students. After getting dressed and putting on their makeup at their homes, they assemble together at the guesthouse. Sitting all around the room, among plates of pomello fruit, the students watch the performers sing and dance. The last act is the bamboo dance for which some of the students eagerly get up. Some drag their friends to join in while onlookers laugh. Others sit and watch and talk among themselves. A small group of male students is sitting underneath the house, smoking.

After the performance, the students continue their festivities around a bonfire in the fields. They noisily gather outside the house and head off together following a local man. This is a welcome relief to most villagers as they prepare to go to bed. A small group of women is still making *com lam*; one woman preparing the bamboo into roughly 30 centimetre lengths, another filling the bamboo tubes with sticky rice and yet another filling them up with water. They will cook the rice-filled tubes in boiling water, the subtle scent of the bamboo infusing the rice. A couple of village girls are watching and an older woman is cutting the bamboo off-cuts into smaller pieces to make twine.

The students must walk along the road, past the rice paddies and through Tap 2 to reach the clearing at the foot of the hills. They carry supplies such as food, kindling, drinking water, *ruou can*, and the bamboo poles from the performance. The sounds of the students set the dogs barking in Tap 2, which echo off the surrounding hills as they enter the clearing. Two male villagers, after chopping some wood, push two carts to the clearing. They, along with the bus drivers and some students, light the fire and then sit back and keep an eye on the students. The

students place bamboo poles horizontally around the fire at a comfortable distance and people sit down on them. Others sit on the grass, which is damp with dew.

The students give speeches, sing, chatter and laugh. They rearrange the bamboo poles to do the bamboo dance. As they clap the poles together, the sound echoes off the hills. A couple of girls from Tap 2 set up a little shop on the path. They sell wrist bands and sticks of sugarcane for 1,000 *dong* each and return home when they have sold out. Around midnight, most of the members of the group pack up and walk back to the guesthouse. The remaining students, who are mostly male, start to drink the *ruou can*. One of the local men, who is the village policeman, stays with them.

Back in the village, most of the houses are dark and quiet except for the guesthouse in which the students are staying. The lights are on and the students and household members are still awake. The kitchen is a hive of activity. Some girls cook chickens and another stirs a big pot of broth over the fire while the guesthouse owners sit on the floor watching. The beds are set up; there are mats all over the floor, with a row of blankets and pillows down both sides of the house. Some of the girls put up mosquito nets. While the boys and girls are in the room together, and while some are flirting and others are in couples, their behaviour is innocent. Some students are chatting and laughing softly underneath the house. By one in the morning, all the students are in bed with the lights turned off.

In the morning, there is a row of local women alongside the road outside the guesthouse selling their wares. They each have two baskets, one filled with small handicrafts such as wrist bands, mobile phone holders and small bags, and the other with *com lam*. By eight o'clock the students buy most of the *com lam*. Some have bought a handicraft of some sort; the wrist bands in particular are popular. Pairs and small groups of students walk around the village before they board the buses at 9.30 and depart the village.

As can be seen, hosting a student group is different from hosting a package-tour group. This is mainly due to the behaviour of the students and the larger numbers. The most

common complaint among the villagers about tourism in the villages is that domestic tourists, groups of Vietnamese students, in particular, can be noisy:

> In the past this Tai village was very quiet and now people come here and make noise and some groups of visitors, mostly Vietnamese visitors, sing songs all night so people cannot sleep.
>
> Visitors cannot make noise after ten at night but some students do not follow this rule and make noise until one in the morning. Foreigners do not complain and like a quiet atmosphere, but the Vietnamese complain about everything. For example, they say that when they saw the village on television it looked nice, but when they get here they say it is not as nice. They are noisy.
>
> There is no difference between foreigners and Vietnamese tourists, only the students. They want to play a lot and make noise. It disturbs the people around here and they get angry but my family does not mind.

One guesthouse owner made a point of saying that she does not have Vietnamese students stay with her:

> I have no complaints about tourists in my life. Foreign tourists are very polite. Only domestic tourists are very noisy and untidy. I do not welcome students because they are crowded, noisy and have less awareness. For example, one time when I welcomed students they destroyed two fluorescent lights and two toilets. They were too naughty.

Villagers see a difference between domestic and international tourists in their expectations of their stay in the villages. They say that while domestic tourists enjoy a loud atmosphere, foreigners prefer a quiet one, as is shown by the perceptive observation of 15 year-old Miss Nooi:

> Foreigners only like quiet atmosphere. One man did not like any other visitors to come here. He did not want any other foreigner in the village besides himself

> [laughing]. Vietnamese like to spend a happy time here so they want to be active in this village. They like to sing songs and make noise.

Villagers are also aware that foreign tourists may not enjoy their stay when a large group of students is staying in the village at the same time. Mrs Tung commented:

> A group of five hundred students from the Maths High School in Hanoi stayed in the village for one night. Two hundred students stayed in guesthouse number eight and the rest in four other guesthouses. They did camping activities near the mountains. It was very noisy. I think that if there were foreign tourists they could not stand it.

In response to complaints made by international tourists about the noisiness of Tap, tour companies have looked for other villages to take their business. This is one reason why the number of tourists in Noi has increased. In both villages, a rule has been introduced that all tourists must be quiet after 11pm. While villagers are aware of the rule, they do not know the exact time; some said they thought it was 10pm, others said midnight. Generally the curfew is not a problem as many tourists travel in smaller groups and are tired from their travels and early risings, especially foreign tourists who have hiked or cycled to get to the villages. However, it is clearly a problem with larger groups, such as groups of students, particularly if they are in 'party mode'.

As shown in the above scenario, further measures have been taken to deal with the problem of noise, by offering 'camping activities' in the fields at the foot of the hills away from the villages. A guesthouse owner explained how it works:

> Both foreigners and Vietnamese want bonfires. This village has clear land for bonfires. I ask the village police to take the guests. Guests stay there, sing songs and cook food on the fire. I pay the cooperative fifty thousand *dong*, which includes money for firewood. If I have time I join the visitors at the bonfire.

It is welcome relief for the villagers when the tourists leave the village for the fields for a couple of hours. The students in the above scenario left for the fields at around 10.30pm and most returned to the house around midnight. However, they did not necessarily go to

bed straight away and instead continued to make some noise, as they cooked up a midnight feast and chatted among themselves.

The problem of large numbers of tourists visiting the villages is not just a result of having groups of students visiting. It is also due to a steady increase of tourists visiting the villages since the 1990s and especially in the early 2000s. This gradual increase in the number of tourists to the villages each year, combined with dramatic increases of people in the villages at any one time, mainly due to large student groups, is starting to take its toll. Villagers complain about the increase in sewage and resulting water pollution, particularly of the water in wells for household use, as well as the lack of water for tourists and locals during the dry season.

There are grievances about an increase in rubbish and the problem of its disposal. Not only is there an increase in rubbish due to sheer numbers, but also villagers complain about domestic tourists, in particular, for littering. Villagers are changing their habits through their observation of the practices of foreign tourists. Mr An recalled that one time he watched a little boy in the market buy and eat some fruit and then put the skin in a bag which he put in the rubbish bin when he returned to the house. He also revealed that he felt ashamed when he took an 'old tourist' on a picnic and he threw a cheese wrapper on the ground, which the tourist picked up. He said, 'I think that Vietnamese people can learn something from tourists'. There are two public rubbish bins in Noi, which are cleared weekly by a garbage collector, in a large truck, who works for the district government; much of this rubbish is recycled, as is common practice in Vietnam. In comparison, there are two unused bins overgrown by plants in Tap because the villagers complained about the cost of collection, which had been organised at the provincial government level, so the service ceased.

In 2004 the leader of Tap took these two issues of water and rubbish to a conference on tourism at the Hoa Binh commerce department. In particular he raised the need for more bins and a rubbish tip in order to dispose of the rubbish. In 2006 he said that the water system had improved. Through a district government initiative, a water storage facility had been built in the nearby mountains with the aim of providing clean water to the villages. However, they were still trying to solve the problems of rubbish collection and disposal.

Accentuated household differentiation: income, consumption and jealousy

> Since the government ran the open policy the lives of the people here changed. People in this village who know how to collect visitors can get much money and their economic conditions are better than when they cultivated rice only (Mr Bay, successful guesthouse owner).

A member of one household that does not run a licensed guesthouse in Noi said that since tourism came to the village, his family has more income, more everyday expenditure, his children go to school and his family has a television. He goes on to say, 'Some households become rich because of tourism, they have many facilities and money. Culture has not changed. A negative is that tourists come here but they do not stay in all the houses and some houses have more tourists so they have more money'.

As explained in Chapter 3, prior to the communist period there was socio-economic differentiation among the villagers, between landlords and peasants. The previous chapter showed that tourism accentuates this differentiation in terms of access to power. This section demonstrates that tourism also accentuates this differentiation in terms of access to wealth.

Mr Thay lives with his wife and daughter in a small stilt house on the outskirts of Tap 2 and is not involved in any tourism-related activities. His wife is a farmer; their daughter is five years old and attends the village kindergarten. While he believes his life is better now than in the past, it is nevertheless difficult. He said:

> In the past, life was very hard but now it is a little bit better. We did not have enough rice to eat but now we have enough because now we have our own land. We have five *sao* and each *sao* is three hundred and sixty square metres. We only grow rice. I only earn an income from agriculture. Sometimes I raise pigs, but I do not now; I only grow rice. I use seven kilograms of seedlings and get seven hundred or eight hundred kilograms of rice per crop. I only use the rice for eating, not selling... Sometimes if someone wants to hire me to work for them, I do that. Sometimes I prepare land or build houses. I am paid over ten thousand *dong* per working day. I work for people in Tap Two and other villages.

I asked Mr Thay to describe a typical day for him. He replied:

> After I finish working in the fields, I collect wood in the mountains then come home and rest. In the crop season I spend eight hours in the field. I do all the work like preparing land, transplanting, weeding and harvesting. The first crop runs from the first to the fifth month of the lunar year, the second crop runs from the sixth to the tenth month.

Mr Thay's income and daily life can be compared with that of Mrs Dong, who lives with her husband and two children, aged 26 and 23 years. They are registered in Noi, but live on the outskirts of Tap. They are all farmers, though her daughter is studying kindergarten training in Hoa Binh province. They do not run a guesthouse or handicraft stall, though Mrs Dong would like to. While Mr Thay labours in the fields for his family and others, Mrs Dong trades vegetables in the Mai Chau market in addition to cultivating rice and raising pigs. Of her income she said:

> My family does not run a guesthouse but we can sell things. I would like to run a guesthouse because we could earn more money. Trading is difficult. We buy vegetables from other people and sell them at the market. We have to take things to the market, which is so far from here. Sometimes I buy vegetables for the pigs. I earn twelve thousand to fifteen thousand *dong* a day when I go. It is not much. I have to buy soap, MSG, salt, so I do not save money, I spend it. My daughter just asked me for one million *dong* so she can sit her final exams.

Mrs Dong may raise the money needed for her daughter's exams through a combination of selling some rice and pigs and borrowing money from family. She might also try to sell weaving in other people's shops. She explained that before she left to study, her daughter did a lot of weaving.

The incomes of both Mr Thay and Mrs Dong can be compared with that of Mrs Yen and Mr Bay who earn significant incomes from tourism. As explained earlier, women can earn a substantial amount of money from selling weaving and textile products, particularly if they obtain business contracts with other retailers and wholesalers, or if they sell to international tourists. Mrs Yen, who is well known for her weaving skills and

runs a successful textile business, earns approximately 1.2 to 1.8 million *dong* per month or roughly 40,000 to 60,000 *dong* per day, in addition to selling almost half of her rice produced per crop and growing vegetables to eat. Mr Bay, who has many contacts with tourism companies and therefore has many foreign tour groups stay in his house, runs a successful guesthouse in the middle of the main settlement in Tap. When more tourists were visiting the village prior to the closure of Highway 6, Mr Bay's family received tour groups of an average of four people. At 40,000 *dong* per person, he earned 160,000 *dong* per day. He had guests stay with him on average four nights every week.

The problem is not just about some households in the villages having more money; it is also that they spend it. They not only put it back into their business or livelihood activities, but also have a desire to consume popular culture. They spend their income in various ways including on their houses, themselves, their children's education and land. As explained in the introduction to the thesis, guesthouse owners make their houses larger, build adjoining or separate houses and toilets and bathrooms, and lay concrete underneath their houses (see Photograph 30). They also spend money on facilities in and around the house; install fans, buy rice cookers, gas cookers, refrigerators, cupboards, cabinets, beds, televisions, video compact discs (VCDs) and karaoke machines. Four households in Noi – three guesthouses and that of the carpenter who needs electricity for his power tools – have collectively bought a generator to use during blackouts. Other guesthouses have generators of their own.

Photograph 30: Guesthouse with two houses,[68] a kitchen and four bathrooms

When they do earn an income, household members also spend money on themselves. Not only do they buy more food, drink and clothes from the market, shops or neighbours, but they also buy bicycles and motorbikes. Mr Quynh threw a party at his house because he had bought a new motorbike. They buy sweets for their children, and spend money on drinking and gambling. Household members also become tourists themselves, travelling to various destinations in Vietnam. They hire machines and people to work in their rice fields, lend money to relatives and other villagers, and give money to charity.

All families spend money on their children's education. Today all children in the villages go to kindergarten then to primary school (years one to five), and most attend secondary school (years six to nine) and high school (years ten to 12). Many families also wish to put their children through tertiary education; the majority attend and board in Hanoi. As mentioned in Chapter 5 above, Miss Nooi makes money from making and selling her own textiles, as well as participating in the cultural performance for tourists. She attends Mai Chau high school, where her fees are 298,000 *dong* per year, all of which she pays herself, whereas her parents pay for her younger brother to go to school. Her older sister is studying technology and communications at Ho Chi Minh National University in Hanoi, for which her parents pay and for which the cost is much greater: 350,000 *dong* per month for tuition, 600,000 *dong* per month for food and accommodation and 100,000

[68] The adjoining second house is cut off in this photo. It is to the left of the first house; the stairs and part of the thatched roof can be seen. It is a similar size to, and looks the same as, the first house.

dong per semester for text books. Her mother lay awake at night thinking of ways of raising the money.

The majority of parents want their children to gain tertiary level education in order to be better qualified to apply for government positions, rather than rely on tourism. Government employment provides a relatively stable source of income, including a pension after retirement. They therefore neither have to do the heavy work in the fields, nor rely on the more unstable ways of earning a living through agriculture, husbandry and tourism, particularly when they are older. However, obtaining a government position is difficult and the process is corrupt. When young adults return to the village after study, they do not necessarily get a job.

Some households also rent more land. Since the new land law was adopted in 1993 across the country, households and individuals have been allowed to exchange, transfer, lease, inherit and mortgage their land use rights, although all land remains state-owned. One guesthouse owner in the villages has land in Hanoi as well as in the Mai Chau market where they built a house which they currently rent out to a family operating a pharmacy. Other households have land on Highway 15 between Noi and Mai Chau town. One household (that runs a licensed guesthouse) has built a stilt house café, and the other (that does not have a licensed guesthouse) is planning to build another house for one of their daughters. Such landholdings by villagers since the implementation of the new law defies the trend in other parts of northern Vietnam, which, according to Tran Thi Thu Trang (2004: 114) remain rather equal for a number of reasons, including limited alternatives in the non-agricultural sector and the fact that current landholdings are barely larger than subsistence requirements. The new land law has facilitated a new land market that has reduced the equal distribution of land that was, until then, the basis for political and economic structures in rural areas.

Inequalities in wealth are creating jealousy among villagers. This is directly stated by Mrs Ninh talking about the owner of the most successful guesthouse in Noi village:

> Having a contract with tour companies is very hard for me but for Mrs Choi it is easy because she used to work at the Mai Chau Guesthouse. Then she had an argument with her colleague and she was fired. But it did not matter because she

> knew so many companies so she ran a guesthouse of her own. Her guesthouse is always crowded. Her three sisters live here in Noi. Her younger sister lives in house number thirteen and is richer. They are a very rich family. Mrs Choi gave money to her husband to study. She has bought a house in Hanoi and in the Mai Chau market. Her house near the market is for rent. Now there is a pharmacy there. Her husband and daughter live in their house in Hanoi. I am jealous of Mrs Choi because she is very rich.

Villagers can not only earn an increased income from running a guesthouse but are also given gifts and donations. One guesthouse owner stated:

> I like people to visit because they, especially foreigners, bring something new and I can get money. They bring postcards and children's toys that we cannot buy in Mai Chau even though we have money. When I was young I did not see this [he holds up a plastic toy] but my nephew who is six years old can play with this.

Another guesthouse owner was given money by tourists who were visiting when their daughter was sick. The jealousy of other villagers is shown in the following comment:

> My daughter is studying in Hanoi. She has had three surgical procedures. Some years ago, a French person working for a non-government organisation came here and gave Mr An's daughter a scholarship and every three months she receives three million *dong*. My daughter was sick. She should have had that scholarship.

However, villagers know they are missing out on more than access to money and material wealth; they also want access to certain knowledge and experience:

> I would like to have tourists stay in my house because if visitors stay in my house then I can have more income and meet new people and learn something from them. I can learn the way they communicate with each other. I may not learn language directly from them but I can see how they communicate with each other and learn.

Villagers also consider running a guesthouse or textile business to be easier work than farming, as it does not require hard, manual labour. This view is confirmed when the more successful guesthouse owners hire people to work in the fields with them:

> We prepare land ourselves because we have a machine, but we hire people for transplanting and harvesting, which the family also does. In the past I hired no-one because my husband's sister was still unmarried and she worked in the fields, but when she married I went to the Woman's Union and hired people.

As this comment suggests, villagers do not hire other villagers directly but do so through the Woman's Union, of which they all must be members. When they hire the other members to help work in the rice fields, they pay 70,000 *dong* per 1,000m^2 of land to the Union fund. Those who cannot afford to pay the fund provide labour instead. The main tasks of the members of the Woman's Union are fixing and maintaining irrigation canals, and concrete and dirt roads and paths, around which they cut the grass. This work is done for the village co-operative, which then pays the Woman's Union one ton of rice per crop. The Woman's Union then sells the rice for money for the fund. The money in the fund is used in different ways, including for the members of the Union to go on picnics, to buy food or medicine for people who are ill, and to go on holidays – for example some members and their families have been to Sam Son beach. The fund pays for transport and accommodation, and they have to buy their own food. While poorer women benefit from the activities of the Woman's Union, it means that they spend most of their time working in the fields. This is not very different from in the past, when peasants worked for landlords.

While most guesthouse owners are also farmers and carry out other livelihood activities that may be tiring , they are happy to have tourists stay with them, as the following comments by villagers testify:

> Whilst I am hosting tourists the most I worry about is, is my service good enough? But I feel comfortable when the tourists and I can talk together happily. I may be tired from my work but I am happy because I can have tourists, friends.

> I like tourists staying in my house because the Tai people must work very hard all day, nineteen hours of work and only five hours to rest. So when guests come they bring not only income but also smiles and we feel very happy to see many people around here. We feel that our life is not hard anymore. Visitors buy textiles from us also, and if not, they can see and contribute their ideas to make them nicer.

Just as there are differences in household wealth within the villages, there are also differences between them. More households run a guesthouse in Tap than in Noi and they have been running guesthouses for a longer time. They therefore have more contacts with tourism companies and are wealthier; this difference in economic wealth is apparent in comments by villagers. As one villager said:

> My life is the same because only a few people stay in my house. Those who have many people stay in their house can get a better income and live a better life than other people. Some houses in Tap have the same economic condition as me but many houses there have become richer. The economic condition in Tap is higher than Noi because of tourism.

I had a conversation with a villager whose house is registered in Noi village but is physically located in Tap village:

> MA: Would you prefer to live somewhere else in the village?
> Villager: No because my husband lives here. I want to live near my relatives.
> MA: Would you prefer to live in the centre of Noi or Tap where the tourists go?
> Villager: I would like to live in Noi because in Tap there are rich and poor people. They have some discrimination. For example, if they meet people that they do not know they do not say hello to them. It is different in Noi. In Noi every time they meet people they say hello.
> MA: Is Tap different since the introduction of tourism?
> Villager: Yes, from tourists coming here. Sometimes I pass through Tap village but they never say hello to me.
> MA: Do you think tourism has changed Tap?
> Villager: A lot. Their houses are bigger and the road is cleaner.
> MA: Do you think tourism has changed Noi?

Villager: Maybe in the future. Maybe after the road [Highway Six] is finished.

Divisions of household space and labour: implications for gender and generation?

As shown in Chapter 5, women are central to the village economy especially looking after tourists, and producing and trading textiles. The implications of such involvement in relation to gender and generational roles, and relationships within the household can be seen in greater detail by looking at the household divisions of space and labour.

The layout of the house reflects how space is used by household members, and also their status according to gender and generation. As described in the introduction to this study, the main area of the house is divided into sections and 'rooms' (*hoong*). Where different family members sleep and eat in the house is determined by the family altar. Parents sleep together, closest to the altar, in the higher section, and their children sleep opposite, in the lower section. Households eat every meal except breakfast around a tray in front of the family altar. Although Mr and Mrs Tung's household ate their meals in their second house without the family altar, as it is closer to the kitchen, they still placed the food tray in the middle and near the front of the house, as they would have done if there was an altar. Furthermore, when placing themselves around the food tray, male household members sit closer to the altar in a higher position than the females, who sit in the lower section, closer to the kitchen.

When households host large gatherings such as funerals, weddings and parties to celebrate *Tet* and *Com Moi*, both male and female members participate, and their hospitality practices relate to the layout of the house. While male household members greet male guests using the ladder rising to the front entrance of the house, female household members greet female guests who use the back ladder near the kitchen. The female hosts cook the food that both men and women have prepared, while chatting with the female guests in the lower section of the house, and the male hosts drink and chat with the male guests at the front of the house. Married men and women eat in the guest room, but separately. Men sit around trays closer to the altar in a higher position than the women, who sit around trays near the kitchen. The oldest man of the house and most respected guests sit at the food tray closest to the altar, in the highest position, and the elders sit at trays near the altar. Young men and women, and unmarried teenagers share

food trays. If guests are staying overnight, household members set up beds for the guests in the higher section towards the front of the house. When no guests are present, such strict divisions in everyday household practices according to gender and generation are not followed. Both male and female household members use both ladders and all eat together from the same food tray.

When households host tourists, they alter their use of space in the house as well as their hospitality practices to varying degrees. As illustrated in the scenarios described in this chapter, household members mostly do not eat with tourists and the divisions of space in the house become redundant with large groups. Also, the division of labour according to gender becomes blurred. When male members are at home they not only greet tourists but also carry out jobs that are considered to be women's work such as buying, preparing, cooking and serving food. The kitchen, a space typically used by women in the lower section of the house, is now used by men in some guesthouses. The family also uses the kitchen as a place in which to eat and sleep in order to accommodate tourists. When households have too many tourists and not enough labour, they have their relatives help them out, both men and women of the younger generation. In one guesthouse, the husband attends to tourists, helps with kitchen chores and watches the children, when his wife makes trips to trade textiles. In another household, I observed a man sewing. He and his wife run a handicraft stall and while his wife hand-sews, he uses the sewing machine.

While the running of a guesthouse alters the use of space and blurs the gendered household division of labour, gender roles and relations are not necessarily changing in the villages. This is the case in other tourist sites in Southeast Asia. Gender roles and relations are not altering as a result of tourism among the Kayan long-neck tribe living in a tourism village in Mae Hong Son in Thailand (Ismail 2008: 63), nor among locals living in the vicinity of the Angkor World Heritage Site in Cambodia (Brickell 2008). Ultimately, the Tai villagers follow a patrilineal and patrilocal system of kinship,[69] in which the status of men is higher than that of women.[70] Furthermore, the predominance of girls and women in looking after tourists, and in textile production and trade may

[69] Prior to the communist era, villagers practiced a kind of 'initial post-marital uxorilocal (or matrilocal) residence' common in other Tai communities in Thailand and Laos (Davis 1984: 52), whereby the husband moved in with the wife's parents upon marriage for six months, after which they both moved in with the husband's family.

[70] This is the case with the White, Black and Red Tai upland groups in Laos and northern Vietnam (Davis 1984: 33; Condominas 1990: 73).

continue into the future for a while yet. Not all households are peaceful; in one household run by a successful businesswoman (as a result of producing and trading textiles), the husband has become jealous and abusive. Nevertheless, most villagers laugh at the notion of men sewing and weaving, which they still largely consider to be women's work. Also, the younger villagers who are studying tourism and hospitality tend to be female, as are the participants of English language classes held in the villages. I was told by a teenage girl that there are fewer men interested because 'they do not want to talk with tourists'. This is particularly interesting for the future, as women will presumably be able to interact with tourists more. Daughters are already returning to practice newly-learned cooking, hospitality and language skills.

Conclusion

An examination of the experiential aspects of running a guesthouse shows that relationships among household members and villagers do not significantly alter, contrary to Little's (2000, 2004) research on the gender transformations in Mayan households in San Antonio. Tourism accentuates power and wealth differentiations that *already* existed and, despite the predominant role of girls and women in tourism, gender and generational roles and relationships are not changing. In addition to the minimal interactions between household members and the majority of tourists, mainly due to a lack of shared language with foreign tourists and the general behaviour of domestic tourists in the villages, many other factors determine social relations among household members and villagers, particularly their own social, cultural and political structures. The continuing complex dynamics of social relations are further shown in the next chapter, which focuses on how the villagers represent multiple identities to tourists, which they construct and negotiate among themselves, the state and the tourist industry at local, national and global levels.

CHAPTER 7: Cultural Strategists: Constructing and Negotiating Multiple Identities in the 'tourist space'

In an analysis of plans for a succession ceremony for the 'king of fire' in the early 1990s among the Jarai people in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, anthropologist Oscar Salemink (1997: 529) argues that their involvement would mean them conforming to the official version of Jarai traditional life, leading to the folklorisation of their lives and a commodification of their culture that would reduce them to artifacts on display and standardised shows for national and international audiences. He makes his point in the context of the state policy of 'selective preservation' of traditional culture that was introduced by the SRV in the 1970s, where, he argues, party cadres know exactly what is to be preserved as valuable – including folklore, dances, music and handicrafts, which are to be renovated for presentation to 'the masses' – and what is to be done away with, including 'out-moded habits' and 'obsolete and backward practices', referring to religious practices and feasts, and sacrifices accompanying life cycle rituals (1997: 517-518). Salemink also argues that the motive of the successor of the 'king of fire' in consenting to state involvement in the succession ceremony is to bolster his own religious status, which occurs through official recognition and 'his subordination to Vietnamese cultural politics' (1997: 530).

Yet, among the Tai in Mai Chau another perspective of the dynamics of the relationships between upland people and the state can be discerned, as was already argued in Chapter 3 above, regarding the policies of sedentarisation and collectivisation in particular. This perspective occurs in the context of tourism and uses the notion of 'Tai' as 'a site for the articulation of identity, rights and difference' (Jonsson 2004: 688), and also the notion of those who identify as Tai as 'cultural strategists' who adapt their culture in an ongoing process of 'identity construction' (Handler 1984; Jolly 1992; Wilson 1993; Wood 1993; Linnekin 1997; Erb 2000; Hiwasaki 2000; Wang 2007; Zhihong 2007). Adams' (2006) monograph on 'Art as Politics' is useful here by showing the intersection of art, identity politics and tourism in Sulawesi, Indonesia. A more nuanced view of the involvement of the villagers in the shaping of their culture and identities, including in 'cultural performance', and of the Tai in local cultural politics today, is thereby presented in this chapter. Furthermore, it is shown here that the reproduction and transformation of the Tai identity in the 'tourist space' does not take place entirely within the national space.

This final chapter is about the various conceptualisations the villagers have of themselves as tourism villagers, and how they construct and negotiate their multiple identities in everyday life in the context of the encounters, interactions and differentials of power between the participating actors. Instead of asking whether or not culture has been able to withstand the impact of tourism, the focus is on how tourism has contributed to the shaping of culture. Picard's (1996; 1997) notion of 'touristification' is useful here whereby a new form of identity is created in which the daily lives of the villages become inseparable from what is being presented to tourists.

First, I introduce the multiple identities of the villagers in the 'tourist space' (King 2009: 55) or 'site' or 'zone' of cultural strategy, contestation and image-making and remaking (Erb 2000; Teo and Leong 2006). These include the representation of being 'Tai Mai Chau', a local and ethnic identity; the dramatisation and creativeness of being 'Tai Vietnam', a nationalised and ethnic identity; and of being 'Tai' with other Tai-speaking guests, a transnational identity based on language. After discussion of the construction and negotiation by the villagers of each of these multiple identities, the chapter continues by describing them as 'nested identities' (Brewer 1991, 1999; Calhoun 1994; Medrano and Gutierrez 2001): the Tai Mai Chau identity is nested within the Tai Vietnam identity, which is nested inside the Tai identity. Furthermore, these identities are essentialised by the villagers. By looking at the 'mutual gaze' or 'local gaze' (Maoz 2006) of the villagers, not only on the tourists and visitors to their villages but also on their nearest neighbours, including members of the Kinh and Muong, I show how the villagers, by comparing themselves with others sharpen the boundaries around themselves. Finally, the chapter considers the pragmatics and negotiations of maintaining 'tradition' in the villages.

Representing 'tradition': being Tai Mai Chau

While villagers have a strong sense of identity even as tradition changes, or indeed as they transform tradition, tourists tend to conflate the notions of identity and tradition so that their perceptions of the villagers' identity are intrinsically tied to their own perceptions of Tai traditions. As shown in Chapter 4 above, these perceptions are shaped by a number of factors including representations in the tourism promotional material, their previous experiences and preconceptions, and their actual experiences in the

villages. Although it was found earlier that not all tourists visit the villages for cultural tourism and (in Chapter 6) that interactions between villagers and tourists are minimal, when the tourists do interact with the villagers, they mostly ask about the villagers' lives, and Tai or traditional culture. Villagers believe that this is the reason that tourists visit the villages, as the following exchanges illustrate:

> MA: Why do tourists come here?
> Villager: To see the stilt houses, Tai people, villages and also because they want to learn about Tai customs and see how we live.

> MA: Why do tourists come here?
> Villager: Because my village still keeps Tai cultural characteristics.
> MA: Like what?
> Villager: Stilt house, traditional customs and traditional wine.

Another explained why people visit Tap, in particular:

> When visitors visit Tap they find something very interesting about the history of the village because we are not natives [Vietnamese], and they want to learn about the people's characteristics. For example, our clothes and the way we wear our scarves and use baskets to collect firewood. On normal days, people wear clothes like the Kinh but on special days, like weddings, funerals and *Tet*, we wear traditional clothes.

The villagers are aware that certain aspects of their lives, particularly the stilt house, are what tourists find different and appealing. They also know that the representations in the tourism promotional material highlight such aspects or markers. They are aware of the aesthetic and economic value of, for example, their stilt houses and stilt-house life. In 2000 the heads of every household in Noi had a meeting and decided that every household must build a stilt house. The meeting had been called because of concerns that when a family in the village built a concrete house or a 'house like Kinh people', it 'did not fit the village'. Also some families have deliberately chosen to have a house with thatched roofing again, rather than clay tiles, in order to attract more visitors to their

house. As Mrs Ninh stated, 'In the past the houses had tiled roofs but the tourists do not want to stay in houses with tiles so we have changed our roof to a thatched roof'.

It is clear that villagers seek to capitalise on tourists' curiosity and money. They also believe that in order to attract tourists to their villages they must maintain their Tai culture, so that at the core of their representations of that culture to tourists is the construction and maintenance of 'tradition'. They are therefore not detached from these representations; the representations are not cheap spectacles. Instead the villagers believe that they are expressing their true identity; that they are being Tai.

As shown in Chapter 3 above, in the process of becoming part of the Vietnamese nation-state, villagers experienced changes to different aspects of their lives. Today, villagers and local authorities say that as a result of these changes the villagers are becoming 'modernised like the Kinh', or Viet, and therefore losing some of their Tai cultural characteristics. In particular, older villagers say that the younger villagers want to be like the Kinh; that they want to wear Kinh clothes, for example. Furthermore, they are worried that children are more fluent in Kinh than Tai. There is therefore a further impetus to attempt to maintain their traditions. As Mr Bay explained:

> The Tai here want to learn about Viet customs so their lives and customs are a little bit similar to them. Recently the Tai people changed their clothes to Viet clothes and changed their food to Viet food. In the past, Tai only ate sticky rice but now they eat normal rice. If the Tai learn a lot from the Viet, all their cultural characteristics will be lost. But the authorities of the district and commune said to them that they must maintain their traditional customs to attract visitors.

Attempts to maintain and represent traditional culture for tourists are taking place in the context of a revival and reclaiming of Tai Mai Chau identity occurring in Mai Chau district. This is sanctioned by the central government through Resolution Five of 1998, which aims to preserve and develop the cultural heritage of all ethnic groups in Vietnam, including script, language, customs, rites and festivals. As a result of this policy a Mai Chau Tai Studies Club was being formed in Mai Chau while I was conducting fieldwork there. It was officially established in October 2004 and called, 'The preservation and development of Tai Mai Chau culture'. Mr Khinh, introduced in Chapter 3, who lives in

Chieng Sai near the town of Mai Chau, is its chairman. All club members are Tai people and they include a representative from each commune in the district, as well as members of the district culture office of the People's Committee. Members aim to preserve and revive both material and immaterial aspects of traditional Tai Mai Chau culture, such as folk songs and dances, traditional games, clothes, weaving, handicrafts, festivals, medicines, customs, habits, manners and the words used to worship ancestors during weddings and funerals. This is being done by collating stories and records from both oral accounts and old documents written by their ancestors that have been retained by different people.

In particular, the locals have asked the government for permission to rebuild a spirit house in which the first ancestors used to worship. As mentioned earlier, a spirit house was built in Mo village in which to honour those who died during the brutal battle with Yellow Flag soldiers. This spirit house was destroyed during the French war. Members of the culture department of Hoa Binh province conducted a survey of its history, including the significance of the tree on which the locals' heads were hung by Yellow Flag soldiers; the intention is to rebuild the spirit house and protect the tree. Mr Khinh explained:

> The people here want to expand the roads, make them wider, and they want to cut trees down, but because the trees have history they can move the roads to go around the trees. In the past, even landlords, when they passed near the tree they never stayed on their horse. They got down and walked past the tree out of respect. I do not know if it is true or not, but old people say that if a person passes the tree on a horse then the horse will become crazy and the person will fall off.

The rebuilt spirit house would create an important link to place and the past for the locals. Mr Khinh claims that the tree is also important for some people in Laos, who visit it to worship their ancestors' spirits, because a few of their ancestors also died during the battle. The spirit house would also be symbolically significant and he explained that 'when people visit Mai Chau they think the Tai Mai Chau are very new, that they came to this land recently and not very long ago'. In addition to these plans, another villager said that the Hoa Binh authorities had bought land in Tap village and were planning to build a museum of Tai culture and history.

Actions aimed at preserving and developing Tai Mai Chau culture were already being taken under Resolution 5 before the idea of the club, including the preservation of the stilt houses. Some people in the district were selling their stilt houses to lowlanders, particularly to businessmen in Hanoi or in the south, such as Phu Quoc Island, who were establishing cafés, restaurants and guesthouses with an 'ethnic minority' theme.[71] These locals then used the money to build concrete houses. Concerned locals and officials told the local people to not sell their stilt houses to lowlanders, in order to maintain their identity. Locals have responded positively and they no longer sell their stilt houses, particularly in the tourism villages. Instead, they capitalise on their skills and knowledge, and make some money by building new stilt houses for people who want them. This makes sense in the tourism villages, which must compete in the market and maintain a unique product to draw tourists to the uplands.

Yet there are tensions between club members and the local community, which centre on the revival and development of the Tai script. The villagers speak a Tai dialect that has been influenced by other local languages, Kinh and Muong in particular. Language and script are important to the villagers in defining themselves as Tai because the Tai use their language and script to help differentiate themselves from other people in the area. A couple of villagers informed me that they are proud that the Tai have their own script. One said, 'the Tai are one of three ethnic minorities in Vietnam that have their own script, including the Cham and Khmer, not like others such as the Hmong and Dao who borrow their script from China'. Another said, 'Tai people have their own script and Muong do not and I am proud of this. Muong use some script from China. This is the most important thing. Tai people are more developed'.

As the majority of the population of Hoa Binh province is Muong, the Tai in Mai Chau have lived closely with the Muong and adopted Muong characteristics. As a result, outsiders, but particularly Vietnamese, believe that the people living in Mai Chau are Muong. As Mr Khinh said, 'some people saw a picture of the Tai people wearing traditional clothes and thought they were Muong, not Tai. If tourism did not develop here nobody would know Tai here'. In the context of reclaiming their traditional heritage, the

[71] There are a number of restaurants with an ethnic minority theme around West Lake in Hanoi, particularly lining a section of Nghi Tam Street. Selling 'ethnic food' and rice wine, they are decorated with minority artefacts such as woven scarves, baskets made of rattan and bamboo and tools. Some are stilt houses that people in Mai Chau have sold to the restaurateurs.

Tai in Mai Chau are asserting their ethnic Tai identity against not only the Kinh, but also the Muong. This is reflected in the answer of Mr An of whom I asked where his ancestors were from.

> Mr An: Our ancestors may come from China or from a province in northern Vietnam but not Son La because Black Tai live there. Black Tai wear black scarves on their heads, white Tai wear white scarves on their heads; both wear silver buttons. Our ancestors followed the Da River to come here. They lived next to the Muong people and at this time silver was expensive, so our ancestors changed their clothes like the Muong people with no buttons. Now we try to bring back the traditional clothes.
> MA: Why?
> Mr An: We want to return to Tai characteristics. We want to become real Tai. Black and White Tai came two different ways [to Vietnam]. Some Black Tai may come from Thailand through Laos.

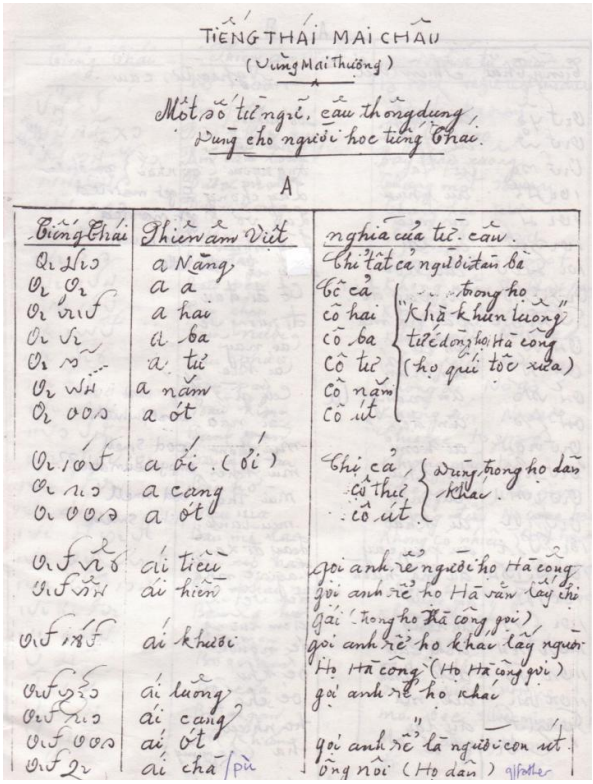
An example of the ways in which the Tai are reclaiming their traditional heritage is through the rejuvenation of the traditional Tai Mai Chau script. Today there are a small number of locals who are literate in the traditional Tai Mai Chau alphabet, including Mr Khinh. Although Mai Chau was not part of the Tai–Meo (Northwestern) Autonomous Zone and therefore not part of the Tai alphabet reformation movement which saw the teaching of a standardised Tai alphabet at public school in the 1950s and 1960s (Y. Mukdawijitra, personal communication, 4 September 2004)[72], private classes were held among Tai Mai Chau locals. While Mr Khinh did not learn the Tai alphabet at this time, as he was busy advancing his career as a policeman and learning Vietnamese instead, upon his retirement in 1996 he took it upon himself to do so.

In the early 2000s, the Mai Chau government ran public classes on the local Tai Mai Chau alphabet in the local community, taught by Mr Khinh. However, the class in 2003/2004 was different because it was organised by the leader of the district and a Tai scholar working for the central government in Hanoi. This scholar is highly educated in

[72] Yukti Mukdawijitra was also conducting fieldwork in 2004 in Vietnam for his PhD on the ethnic Tai. His thesis is titled, 'Ethnicity and multilingualism: The case of ethnic Tai in the Vietnamese state' (Mukdawijitra 2007).

Black Tai literacy and was principally involved in the Tai alphabet reformation movement in the 1950s and 1960s (Y. Mukdawijitra, personal communication, 4 September 2004). Instead of teaching the traditional Tai Mai Chau alphabet, they agreed that that they would teach a standardised Tai script, or the Alternated Tai Alphabet used in the Autonomous Zone from 1962 to 1969 (Y. Mukdawijitra, personal communication, 4 September 2004).

Mr Khinh and others in Mai Chau, like the local communities in the 1950s and 1960s that were part of the Autonomous Zone, prefer to teach and learn their localised script. The Tai Mai Chau script is also based on the Alternated Tai Alphabet, but the spelling and vocabulary follow the local pronunciation and dialect, instead of the standardised script, which favours Black Tai pronunciation, vocabulary and literature. In 2003 Mr Khinh produced a dictionary for the local Tai Mai Chau language (see Photograph 31). He believes the localised script is more appropriate, not only for transcribing pronunciation and dialect, but also for increasing their pride in traditional texts written in the local Tai Mai Chau alphabet.


TIẾNG THÁI MAI CHÂU
(Vùng Mai Thường)
Một số từ ngữ, câu thông dụng, dùng cho người học tiếng Thái.
A

Tiếng Thái	Thiển âm Việt	nghĩa của từ câu.
[illegible]	a Năng	Chỉ tất cả người đi tản bà
[illegible]	a a	Cô cả
[illegible]	a hai	cô hai
[illegible]	a ba	cô ba
[illegible]	a tư	Cô tư
[illegible]	a năm	cô năm
[illegible]	a ót	cô út
[illegible]	a ối (ối)	Chỉ cả, cô thứ, cô út.
[illegible]	a cang	
[illegible]	a ót	
[illegible]	ái tiêu	gọi anh rể người họ Hà công
[illegible]	ái hiền	gọi anh rể họ Hà vẫn lấy chị
[illegible]	ái khuổi	gọi anh rể họ khác lấy người Họ Hà công (Họ Hà công gọi)
[illegible]	ái lường	gọi anh rể họ khác
[illegible]	ái cang	
[illegible]	ái ót	gọi anh rể là người con út
[illegible]	ái chá/pù	ông nội (Họ dân)

Photograph 31: Tai Mai Chau language dictionary, with Tai script and Vietnamese pronunciation and meaning

As a past member of the provincial police and also as the leader of his lineage, Mr Khinh had retained and collected these ancient Tai documents which the local community consider sacred because they were written by their ancestors. However, there was no longer anyone in the local community who could read them. Driven by curiosity, Mr Khinh set about learning the script. He said, 'if I did not study the books then they would be wasted paper', and 'the more I study the more interested I am'. He has some valuable books including one about the *muang* rules and laws used to govern the people, created by the first landlord, and another that explains their world view and stories of creation, as well as family lineages.

Mr Khinh has amassed a wealth of information about the history of the Tai in Mai Chau (some of which was recounted above in Chapter 3), not only from these books but also from legends recounted orally, and other performed textual practices such as memorising (*chue dip*) and singing (*khap*). Mr Khinh explained that the importance of these oral practices is that they provide more detail than the books; he has finished recording them in Tai Mai Chau language and intends to translate them into Vietnamese. However, he has found certain aspects of traditional Tai culture difficult to recover. For example, 'traditional poems are mainly about love but during war times the government did not want people to recite poems or sing songs about love'.[73] They were not recorded and therefore many Tai poems were lost during war. Furthermore, as a result of the government's reform programs, banning practices considered superstitious, there are not many documents containing words for worshipping, just as there are few spirit mediums around today who remember not only the words but also the procedures and the beliefs behind them.

The history of the Tai Mai Chau is based on both oral and written accounts; however, the written accounts have a bias towards the Ha Cong family as only the landlord's line was allowed to learn to read and write in the past. The landlords wrote books for other lineages in the *muang* they controlled, but these books were not as detailed as the Ha Cong family lineages. Today members of some of the other families, such as the Ha Van

[73] This was similar to the practice of the DRV in southern Vietnam of the banning of the playing of 'music of the former regime', as well as music from non-socialist foreign countries, between 1954 and the early 1980s, also otherwise known as 'yellow music' or pre-1975 southern music (Taylor 2001: 39).

family, have gathered in meetings to recall what was written in the books and have rewritten them. Not surprisingly, they can remember more details of recent generations than those in the distant past. This is occurring in the context of a nation-wide effort, of which Mr Khinh is also a part, to generalise the origins of the Ha family, regardless of ethnicity. Not only does Mr Khinh find this work personally interesting, but he also wants to pass the knowledge on to the next generation. He said:

> Tai culture is very abundant, especially the language, but now only some people can read and write the Tai script. Now only me and four or five other men can read and write Tai script. I want to translate the most interesting Tai stories into Vietnamese for my children to read. Last year I taught Tai script to 59 people. I was a Tai teacher. Some of my students can read and write the script now. I gave them some poems and stories to read. If I do not do anything now, then the next generation will not have information about the Tai culture. Nobody told me this. I do it by myself. I find it very interesting.

He believes that people in the community want to learn this information:

> For example, at any happy occasion Tai children often sing Kinh songs. They could sing Tai songs if they knew them but maybe they do not know so I think they should learn Tai songs to have more fun. It is funny that at a wedding where all the people are Tai and there is only one Kinh woman that they all sing Kinh songs (laughing). I asked them why they were singing Kinh songs and they replied that they did not know any Tai songs. Then I sang a Tai song to all the people and everyone was interested. My voice is not good but everyone listened. It means that people want to sing Tai songs but they do not know any. So my work is very important. Even elderly people are interested in listening to Tai songs on the tape recorder, because I have some tapes.

Mr Khinh wishes to collect all of the documents, but they are scattered all over Mai Chau. As part of political reform across North Vietnam, from 1956 to 1966, local communities were required to give old documents to the central government. In Mai Chau, some people in the culture department borrowed some of the old documents, which they promised to return but did not. The culture department still has them. Other documents

have been kept by older people in the Ha Cong family and other families who worked for them, and some have been kept by the few remaining spirit mediums. Sometimes Mr Khinh has been able to exchange valuables and money for these books; one winter, he exchanged a jacket for a document. He would rather have them in his hands rather than in the hands of the People's Committee of Mai Chau. He said:

> The office only wants to keep the documents in order to preserve the information. Maybe they do not read them. They do not care about them. People here do not care much about them, only some foreigners and some researchers from Hanoi, Thailand and Japan.

Yet Mr Khinh has had difficulties collecting the documents; the chairman of the police station has one and another retired policeman has offered the documents he has kept for a price of 200,000 to 300,000 *dong*. Collecting the documents is also costly and Mr Khinh has problems raising funds at both the district and province levels. During the time of my fieldwork, he and the leader of the district cultural office had applied for funding to the leader of Mai Chau district and they were still waiting for a reply. He explained that 'the leader is now a Kinh person who does not care about the Tai script', and that 'even though the majority of the people working in the district office are Tai people they also do not know the Tai script and do not care'. In relation to the difficulties of gaining funds at the provincial level, he said:

> Mai Chau is the only district in Hoa Binh [province] where the majority of the population is Tai. The majority of the population in the other districts in Hoa Binh are Muong people. Tai people have their script but Muong people do not so maybe they are jealous of Tai people. So it is difficult for Tai people to obtain funds [from the provincial government] to print books or to collect information. We have no funds. We do it because we are interested in ancient Tai books.

While there are disagreements among district officials and other members of the community about the reclaiming of some aspects of Tai Mai Chau heritage, particularly language and script, they all more or less agree about reclaiming other aspects to attract tourists and thereby make an income. Officials encourage the tourism villagers not only to maintain aspects of their traditional culture, but to also bring back aspects of culture that

have been abandoned, such as a wooden rice-husking implement known to the villagers as a *loong*. Officials also instruct the villagers on how to behave with guests. As Mr Bay explained:

> The district and commune authorities said we must keep our rice-husking implement because visitors who come here want to learn about the Tai, but it was used in the past and now we do not use it. If they [tourists] want to see machines of other people they can go to Hanoi but because tourists want to learn about Tai customs, the people here must keep them to attract tourists. Also the way to behave with the guests. If guests come into our house, we must put down two mats and invite guests to sit near the altar because it is the highest position in the house. We want to show the guests that we respect them.

Villagers go along with these suggestions because they present the opportunity to earn an income, to reclaim their culture and to be Tai. In regards to the *loong*, one villager explained that:

> Some years ago we had a pounding stick to pound rice to husk it but now I cannot see it being used. Now people in the Mai Chau area earn and save a little bit of money and use [mechanised] husking machines. If people keep the pounding stick then I think more tourists would come'.

Mr An said that he would like to see the *loong* return so that the next generation can know about it.

For the villagers, being Tai means being Tai Mai Chau. Mr Quynh said that he would like to see a spirit house built so that he could go and pray to his ancestors and the first people who settled in Mai Chau. He also said that it would be good to have a spirit house for tourists to visit:

> In Noi and Tap there are no beautiful sites like the museum in Cao Ba Quat and the Perfume Pagoda in Hanoi. Some people only stay here for one or two nights because from Hanoi to Dien Bien, Lai Chau or Son La there are no spirit houses to visit to burn incense or pray at, like, for example, in Hanoi. They can come here to

> see people weaving and to see silk worms. In Dinh Binh province there are many pagodas. Many spirit houses here were destroyed during the French war and now we only have two caves. It is very difficult to reconstruct spirit houses because we must ask for permission from the leader of Mai Chau. There are not many great people to remember to pray to, not like in Phu Tho which has the Hang temple.

Tourists and researchers emphasise the local identity and ask questions about their origins and migration patterns. Although there are no spirit houses to show and therefore prove their connection to the land and the past, there are old gravestones hidden among the overgrown grass and bamboo in the graveyard, to which Mr An has taken guests. He explained:

> We still have tombstones from when the first people came here, about one kilometre from here, and we still have a tombstone that is about four metres high. But there is no writing on them. I took a researcher from Hanoi there, also visitors, to teach them about the origin of the Tai in Mai Chau.

Significantly, tourism serves as a platform for the villagers to proclaim their identity as the Tai Mai Chau. As one villager put it, 'If there were no tourism, no-one would know the Tai here'. His use of the term 'the Tai here', referring to the Tai in Mai Chau, implies that the villagers identify as such whether there is tourism or not. Yet, as demonstrated through the example of the cultural performance for tourists in the next section, the villagers also believe that they are Vietnamese as well as Tai Mai Chau. Their involvement in the cultural performance is not about being puppets of the state but about being proud, creative, artistic and entertaining.

Being Tai Mai Chau *and* Vietnamese *and* creative

The following is a description of a cultural performance for tourists in one of the villages one evening:

> Having heard the drum beat earlier in the evening informing the villagers that group number two was performing that night, members of the group change from their cotton pants, jeans and t-shirts into their Tai clothing before assembling at

the house hosting the performance, Mr An's house. Mr An has a tour group staying at his guesthouse which has paid for the performance. Inside, the musicians set up the instruments (accordion, drum, gongs and flute) at one end of the house, while four middle-aged tourists from California and their Kinh tour guide are talking at the other end of the house after having just eaten, what they refer to as, a 'delicious' meal. It is hot so the ceiling fans are on and Mr An also sets up pedestal fans in front of the hand-woven cushions on which the tourists sit. The nine performers, seven women and two men, are chatting in the kitchen.

The tourists quieten as the three men sitting with the musical instruments start playing. Then one of the female performers, this time Miss Nooi, walks out from the kitchen to the audience and bows. She addresses the audience in Vietnamese, *Moi anh den tham ban em*, welcoming them to her village. Between acts, she walks up to the audience, bows, and introduces each new act in Vietnamese then the tour guide translates into English for the tourists. There are ten acts and each act lasts about five minutes.

The first act is a song, 'Spring has come to the land of Mai Chau', which is a Tai song that is now being sung in Vietnamese. Women are singing and dancing to music, half of them using clapping sticks, half wearing different, brightly-coloured scarves. The Tai dress consists of a long black skirt with a colourful woven strip of material wrapped around just above the waist, held up by a white belt over a top. The female performers are all wearing purple tops. Each woman also wears a white band around her head. Aspects of the outfit are influenced by the Muong living in the area. Although some older women wear the skirt in daily life, women only wear Tai clothing during the tourism performance or when they perform for 'friendly exchanges' and competitions, and during weddings and funerals. Men no longer wear Tai clothing. The men who are performing wear bright blue outfits with orange trim. This is not what they wore in the past, but is what the locals weave and sell to tourists.

More Tai songs and dances are performed, such as 'Cha Chieng' where the performers dance around a cardboard tree in bloom symbolizing their happiness when their crops are successful, 'Celebrate Com Moi' or new rice festival and

‘Motifs in Tho Cam weaving’. They also perform Kinh and Hmong dances. The Hmong outfit is a mixture of Hmong, Tai and Kinh design, put together by a tailor in Mai Chau town.

Mr An, the host, is sitting and watching both the performance and the tourists. There are three locals sitting at the front doorway of the house, also watching. A tourist with a video camera walks up close to the gong player to film him. Another seems more interested in the little girl sitting at the door than in the dancers. She takes a photo of the little girl. In the meantime, village life continues outside the house as people carry on with their routine evening chores. Someone can be heard having a wash in the bathroom.

Towards the end of the performance some performers retrieve six bamboo poles from outside for use in *mua sap*, the bamboo dance. Six performers sit down, three people in two rows, opposite one another. They hold a pair of bamboo sticks with the person opposite them. They move the poles in time to the beat of the music as pairs of women start dancing over them. Some of the performers are now wearing locally woven material tops with their skirts. They get people up from the audience to dance over the poles. The tour guide enthusiastically participates. The tourists are reluctant at first but they start joining in and become animated. They talk and laugh as they attempt the ‘ankle crusher’ dance.

All the tourists become especially attentive when a performer places a small urn of sweet rice wine (*ruou can*) with long, protruding bamboo straws on the floor in the middle of the room. The performers and tourists form a circle around it, hold hands and sing while moving around in a circle. They perform *Mua Ban oi cung xoe vui* (Everybody let’s dance and be happy). They also sing in Vietnamese, ‘A song about Mai Chau’ and *Nhu co Bac Ho trong ngay vui dai thang* (Remembering Uncle Ho on the happy Victory Day). Some dancers drink the *ruou can*, asking the tourists to follow. The tourists have a sip from the straws, some liking it more than others. As the tour guide gives them a bamboo straw each, he says, ‘A souvenir from Mai Chau. You can drink water’, to which the tourists reply, ‘We’ll be drinking wine!’. Mr An also joins in and has a drink. The tourists are very happy now. They are taking photos of the dancers around the *ruou can* as

they compliment them on a 'very good' and 'wonderful' show. The tourists and dancers continue to drink the rice wine together. One tourist exclaims, 'The young one's drinking a lot!'. Another tourist, through the tour guide, asks a younger dancer about her education. The performers gather to sing a farewell song in Vietnamese. One and a half hours after it began, the show is over.

Most of the cultural performances for tourists I observed in the villages followed this pattern, but sometimes with different acts, including dances of the neighbouring ethnic Dao. A few times I heard a dance troupe singing 'Frere Jacques' with some foreign tour groups; sometimes more Vietnamese songs are included in the show for domestic tourists, and the performers get the audience members up to sing karaoke. Some performances I observed in Tap had men playing musical instruments for some of the acts, while recorded music was played for other acts. Aspects of the cultural performance are further illustrated in Photographs 32, 33 and 34.

Photograph 32: Village dance troupe performing a Tai dance

Photograph 33: Tourist interaction in *mua sap* (bamboo dance)

Photograph 34: Performers and tourists drinking *ruou can* together at the end of the performance

While some tourists are sceptical of the cultural performance, which they find 'staged' and therefore 'inauthentic' because the villagers are changing their lives, culture and traditions for the tourists, the villagers, particularly the performers and the choreographer, do not think like this. The performance is a part of their everyday lives to which they are attached; they believe they are being hospitable and entertaining and therefore do not see anything wrong with the performance or the alterations they make along the way.

Miss Nooi participates in the performance for a number of reasons. She can earn some pocket money, she enjoys singing and dancing, and she can 'introduce the visitors to some old customs, some traditional songs about *Com Moi* festival and traditional dress'. Miss Nooi and the majority of villagers I spoke to believe that through the performance the villagers are presenting their traditional identity. However, older villagers in particular comment on some changes. According to one village elder, 'we dance the same dances, we play the same music, but in the past we only sang songs in Tai language but now we sing in Vietnamese. We also sing different songs'. By this she means that villagers no longer only sing Tai songs, which they now sing in Vietnamese, but in fact they also sing songs of other ethnic groups, such as the Kinh, Hmong and Dao. They also sing national songs, such as, 'Remembering Uncle Ho on the happy Victory Day'.

Using Benedict Anderson's (1987) idea that ethnic minorities are incorporated into the space of the imagined and bounded nation as its subjects, Salemink (1997) argues that ethnic minority group identities are modern entities constructed in tandem with the emergence of the nation-state. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, he argues that, through the process, they are folklorised and aestheticised in museum exhibits, festivals and cultural performances, such as in the performance described above, and reflect back to the state its vision of the nation as a multicoloured 'flower garden' or 'mosaic' of ethnic culture (Salemink 1997, 2001). Certainly, when the villagers participate in the cultural performance for tourists they are 'dramatising the geopolitical imaginary of the multiethnic nation' (Taylor 2008: 17), as is common when minority groups in Vietnam sing and dance in the public arena (Nakamura 1999; Taylor 2007).

Yet the villagers identify with the performance on a local level, that is, at the Mai Chau level. The choreographer is a local Tai man living in Chieng Sai, close to Mai Chau town, now retired from the central culture office in Hoa Binh, but who still choreographs these cultural performances. He explained that his aim for the performance is to introduce Mai Chau to tourists and to thereby create a Mai Chau identity through music, song and dance. While Mai Chau district originates from the Tai *muang* and the settlement of Tai people, members of six other ethnicities live there, having moved into the district at various times. In everyday life, then, villagers coexist with people of other ethnicities as neighbours, trading partners, friends at school, work colleagues or even kin. So it makes sense to them to represent these other aspects of Mai Chau. (However, while there is not a large concentration of Muong people in the district, it is interesting that the Muong ethnic group is excluded from the show). It is also important to the villagers that each aspect is authentically represented. The choreographer stated that he never mixes the dances of the ethnic groups represented in the cultural performance because the local people would not be happy with this.

Furthermore, in addition to identifying as Mai Chau, indeed as strong Tai Mai Chau, the villagers are also attached to a Vietnamese national identity. This is not surprising as many villagers' families helped, supported and fought with the North Vietnamese against the French and the Americans, and shared in the suffering. In fact, the district was awarded the title of 'Heroes of the War' during my stay, for its contribution to the French war efforts, for which households in the villages proudly displayed the Vietnamese flag

outside their houses. The villagers also enjoy singing national songs in the performance. I also watched the villages erupt into cheering as they followed the national soccer team into the finals of the 22nd Southeast Asia Games held in December 2003. An example of the fusion of the villagers' Tai identity with national identity is the celebration of Ho Chi Minh's birthday through *khap* music. *Khap* music is a type of traditional Tai rhythm. As Mr Khinh explained, it was used on many occasions in everyday life, including between young girls and boys as a form of communication, for example, 'when they visited each other they talked by *khap* and tried to understand other people by *khap* and they said goodbye by *khap*. Today, while the rhythm is still the same and they still sing in Tai, the words have changed, as has the context.

The villagers see the performance as a reflection of their identities. Through participating in the cultural performance for tourists they are being Tai Mai Chau *and* Vietnamese. Yet, performing is not just about representing their ethnic, local and national identities. For the villagers, particularly the choreographer and the performers, it is also about expressing their creative and artistic selves, as well as entertaining the audience.

The choreographer, Mr Chao, has studied the traditional dance of many ethnic groups for many years. He has considerable experience in both dancing and designing performances. When he was 17 years old he moved to Hoa Binh and started work as a state employee in the culture office. For five years he studied at the Dancing College in Hanoi, where he was taught basic dances of different ethnic groups, after which he visited various ethnic villages and asked elderly people about their dances. He explained that when he was a little boy he was interested in watching old people dance, but that he did not want to learn until after he finished studying, saying, 'maybe it was my responsibility to learn traditional dance'. Mr Chao returned and worked in what is now known as Ha Tay province, for 20 years and then moved back to Hoa Binh where he was a dancer with his wife whom he had met there. He did further study to become a director, after which he composed songs and dances for his office.

Mr Chao recently retired from the central cultural office in Hoa Binh and moved back to Chieng Sai in Mai Chau, but is still involved in directing and judging dancing activities in the region. Each year there is a dance contest in Mai Chau, at which dances troupes representing the different communes in the district compete. Not only do these troupes

invite him to teach dances, but he also directs the competition by choosing the dance that each group must perform and he is one of the ten judges, the rest of whom are members of the Mai Chau People's Committee. In addition, each office, such as the army, police and the farmers, has its own competition, as do the villagers of Tap and Noi who perform for tourists. He is also sought after by people who are developing tourism in Quang Ninh and Hai Phong provinces on the far northern coast.

Mr Chao sees himself as a creative director. When he designs a performance, he not only wishes to introduce the cultures of Mai Chau district to the audience. He also believes that when there is only one ethnic dance it is boring for the audience; it is more interesting and fun to have more than one type of dance. For example, 'it is common for Tai to dance with fans and scarves, for Hmong to perform with a musical instrument known as *khen* [pan-pipe], and for Dao to dance with small bells'. The different types of dances are briefly introducted to the tourists before they are performed so that the tourists are aware of the variety.

Mr Chao often chooses a Tai dance for the beginning of the performance, 'because this is a Tai area'. He then chooses dances of other ethnic groups, 'maybe some have a sad rhythm and some have a happy rhythm'. He said he makes sure that the rhythm changes so the performance is more interesting. He ends the performance with the traditional Tai dance known as *xoe*, so that the performers and the tourists dance together and then drink *ruou can*. He explained that he uses *xoe* dancing as it is traditionally performed on happy occasions, such as in spring during *Tet*, and there is no limit to the number of people who can join in, so it involves many people who can enjoy the dance. He explained the significance of *xoe* dance in the past:

> In the past, people here would dance overnight around a fire and strangers who visited the village could dance with them hand in hand. So people found it easy to make friends with each other when they danced *xoe*. For example, when people from other villages visited here they could make friends immediately. Maybe when the dance was over they would become close friends. They often drank *ruou can* before they left so they had good memories. There was no discrimination between *tao* and normal people drinking *ruou can*. And now there is no discrimination between foreign tourists and local people.

The choreographer explained that he uses the traditional dance of an ethnic group as a base, to which he adds his own adaptations in order to captivate the audience. Mr Chao sees himself as reviving old dances and developing them; 'the dance is not true if I do not rely on the basics'. So when he creates a new dance that expresses the characteristics of the ethnic group, he and they are happy. He works hard to understand clearly the traditional dance of each ethnic group. He explained this by describing dance as being analogous to language:

> The new dances must express the characteristics of each ethnic group. They must not be mixed. If I create a mixed dance, such as a Tai and Hmong dance, I will be criticized by other people. It is like language. Each ethnic group has their own language. Dance is one kind of language so each ethnic group has their own dance. When I want to create a new dance I must collect documents about every ethnic group, because I need to understand each ethnic group.

As a result of working in the field over such a long time Mr Chao has seen the dances change. For example, whereas in the past there was only one scarf dance, there are now many. He explained that these changes occur as a result of requests for changes from the People's Committee office and the cultural office, 'because they find it boring that we perform the same dances many times'. He finds his job as director challenging and tiring, as he is always being told to change the dances and to have new ones, which he then must teach to the dancers. He contrasted his job to that of a playwright:

> My job is hard and busy and tiring because whenever I think of a new dance I also have to teach the dancers how to dance it. It is different from being a playwright. Maybe, for example, a playwright writes a play and then other people teach the actors and actresses, not the playwright. Tired, busy, hard.

The choreographer also writes the introduction to each dance, which is read out by one of the dancers before it is performed, as occurred in the cultural performance for the American tourists described at the beginning of this section. He said that he writes the introduction so that tourists find it easier to understand the meaning of each dance. He translates the descriptions into Vietnamese for pragmatic reasons as the audience is usually made up of many people from many ethnic groups.

Mr Chao sees himself as not only a creative director but also an artist or a dancer. He said, 'When I dance Tai dance, or Dao or other dances, I want to try my best to express the characteristics of the ethnic group. I am very enthusiastic and concentrate on the content of the dance so I can perform it beautifully'.

He also explained what it takes to be a dancer:

> If you are a dancer you must remember the order of the dance and you must have the ability to listen to the music. If you cannot do that then you are not a dancer… I must remember many things at the same time; to listen to the music, to remember the order of the dances; if you dance with a woman you must smile to show your emotion, and I must remember when it is time for me to turn, run, jump and lie down. It is a hard job… I find the Dao dance to be the most difficult dance because I am tired and am required to twirl many times and I find the lights to be hot and uncomfortable. You must be healthy to be a dancer.

With such experience, knowledge and dedication to his profession it is of no surprise that he instils a sense of pride in the village performers and a desire to dance well. The villagers admire him. Miss Nooi thinks he dances gracefully. She also describes him as strict: 'when we practice a dance we must concentrate on the dance. He does not allow anybody to muck around'. When Miss Nooi first started dancing in the cultural performance she had been nervous; after three years she was no longer anxious. She finds performing 'a little tiring and a little hot but I am happy'. This attitude is also evident among the other performers, reflected by their smiles, chatter and laughter during the performance, on and off 'the stage'. They find participating in the cultural performance enjoyable. It is a social activity wherein members of the different dance troupes meet together regularly, both to practice and to perform. Before the performance there is an air of excitement as they help each other get ready and organise themselves, and during the performance they may laugh about someone turning the wrong way, while 'off stage', between acts, they might help each other with the dance steps, or gossip about their lives or the tourists. They also have the opportunity to sing and dance with tourists, and meet them, albeit with limited contact. Miss Nooi mentioned that 'when the tourists join in with them, I notice that they are happier afterwards'. Many of the villagers want the tourists to have an enjoyable time during their stay in their village.

As mentioned in Chapter 6 above, other villagers also gather around the house in which the performance is occurring. The cultural performance brings together not only the performers and musicians, but also the neighbours who watch the performance, laugh with the performers over mistakes made and chat among themselves. By drawing the community together, it strengthens their relations and identity.

Being Tai with Tai visitors

Just as the villagers are aware of other Tai communities living in other parts of Vietnam, they are also aware of other Tai communities existing outside of Vietnam. The villagers believe that they have an affinity with these Tai communities mainly due to language; they all speak Tai, albeit different dialects.

Their Tai identity is reinforced by an increase in the number of Tai-speaking visitors to the villages since they officially opened as cultural tourism villages. These visitors are commonly from Thailand. This increase has coincided with a recent interest among researchers in Thailand on Tai people outside of Thailand, as explained in Chapter 1. By far the most famous visitors have been the princess and prime minister of Thailand. According to the manager of the Mai Chau Guesthouse:

> The daughter of the king of Thailand was a guest of Mai Chau district and the first guest of Mai Chau Guesthouse. She came to exchange culture with the Vietnamese government... The group from Thailand had heard about a Tai village in Mai Chau so she visited, in 1993. I was working. Some researchers from Thailand have also come here.

The princess of Thailand gave two dolls from Thailand as a gift to the Guesthouse staff to thank them for their hospitality. These dolls are on display in a glass cabinet behind reception. Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn and Prime Minister Chuan Leekpai also visited Mr Dan's house in Tap. According to Mr Dan, 'The princess asked the locals about the origin and culture of the Tai people here. She had collected and had brought many Tai books and family lineages. I do not know where she got them from'.

He explained that though the prime minister of Vietnam had stayed for only 30 minutes, the princess and prime minister stayed for four or five hours. He was also proud to tell me that the prime minister had given him a watch, 'a good watch of the best quality'. He has a photo on his wall of himself with the prime minister, the leader of Mai Chau and some others, sitting around the *ruou can*.

Through such visits, the villagers have become more aware not only of their Tai identity but also of the local influences on their Tai culture, as one village elder explained:

> As a result of tourism we now have more knowledge from outside. Tai visitors from Thailand, Cambodia, Laos and China come here and see similar customs here but they think the Tai in Mai Chau may be influenced by other ethnicities in the area. For example, language. In the past, the Tai in Mai Chau spoke the same as the Tai in Thailand.

The notoriety they have gained from tourism has brought not only Tai-speaking visitors from outside Vietnam to the villages, but also Tai-speaking researchers from within Vietnam, as well as foreign researchers interested in Tai-speaking people. For example, Mr Dan has been visited numerous times by Vietnamese Tai-speaking researchers who discuss their similarities and affinity with other Tai-speaking communities. He explained that with one, in particular, they ran an experiment and spoke 'Tai Thailand' or Thai language with each other over a 180-hour period. They concluded that 'Tai Mai Chau is eighty per cent similar to Tai Thailand, Tai Son La is forty per cent similar to Tai Thailand, and Tai Mai Chau is eighty per cent similar to Tai Laos'. When I asked Mr Dan how he had learnt to speak 'Tai Thailand' or Thai, he replied that he had learned from two women from Thailand who had visited the village many times.

As these examples show, villagers perceive Tai-speaking guests who visit the village as 'familiar others'. They speak Tai with one another and ask about each other's lives, comparing language, migration patterns and lifestyles. Many villagers believe they are particularly closely related to the Thai in Thailand. When I told a small group of villagers that I had been to Thailand, one made the passing comment, 'oh the Tai in Thailand, they are our brothers'. This sentiment was reflected more strongly in a conversation I had with two researchers from Thailand who had stayed in various places around the northwest of

Vietnam as they conducted research on Tai-speaking people. They explained that everywhere they went, including Mai Chau, upon finding out they were from Thailand, the local Tai people reacted quite emotionally, saying they were brothers. The researchers said that the local people looked up to Thailand, describing it as 'the royal kingdom', and believe that they came from there. While some villagers believe they originate from Thailand, others believe they originate from the borderlands of southern China and northern Vietnam, as explained previously, and yet others are not sure. Regardless of what they think their origins are, the villagers believe that they are closely affiliated with the Thai in Thailand.

Nevertheless, they say they do not want to live in Thailand, or any other foreign country, or anywhere else in Vietnam for that matter. They see Mai Chau as their homeland, to which they are strongly attached. For example, one villager explained that her husband is jealous of her for becoming a well-known and successful weaver, singer and dancer, and that they are not getting along, yet she believed that she cannot leave him as then she would have to leave the village, thereby losing her identity, her reputation and the livelihood that comes with it. She said, 'if I move out of Mai Chau I am no longer Tai'. Mr Khinh explained to me numerous times that the Tai in Mai Chau love their homeland. In one conversation he said:

> Mr Khinh: The Tai in Mai Chau like to stay in their homeland and if they have to leave, when they are old they must come back. For example, when someone joins the army and moves to an army camp and marries someone from there, he comes back to his homeland with his wife [laughs]… Recently the government has a policy to relocate people to other areas in Vietnam so some families in this district moved to the Central Highlands. The whole family though, not just some members. The Tai people love their homeland!... Even if officers of the district are asked to move they do not want to leave [laughs]. Me too. I only want to stay in my homeland [laughs].
>
> MA: Why?
>
> Mr Khinh: Because I have a better feeling when I stay in my homeland. When I come to the 'Ai' slope I feel very happy [laughs].

In another conversation seven months later he said:

> When the Tai here meet other Tai they consider them as brothers and sisters, even the Tai from Thailand. So they feel comfortable and relaxed here living in Mai Chau. They do not want to live in foreign countries. Some people go to other places to study and then come back to Mai Chau to work. They love their hometown very much.

Situational and essentialised 'nested identities'

While villagers predominantly see themselves as belonging to a group that they identify as Tai Mai Chau they also identify as Tai Vietnam and Tai. These multiple collective identities can be described as 'nested' in that they are each salient for the villagers. Nested identities are defined by Juan Medrano and Paula Gutierrez in the following way:

> lower- and higher- order identities such that the latter encompass the former. My identity as a resident in city 'a', is nested in my identity as resident of region 'A' – which includes city 'a' – which is in turn nested in my identity as resident of country 'Alpha', and so on (Medrano and Gutierrez 2001: 757).

Accordingly, the villagers' Tai identity as residents in Mai Chau is nested in their identity as residents in Vietnam – which includes Mai Chau – which is in turn nested in their identity as residents of Southeast Asia, and so on.

Medrano and Gutierrez, who look at national and European identity in Spain, base their theory of nested identities on the idea that identities can fulfil different and complementary functions, also argued by Craig Calhoun (1994) and Marilynn Brewer (1991; 1999). Calhoun and Brewer emphasise two roles or dimensions of group identity: differentiation and equivalence (Calhoun 1994) or inclusion (Brewer 1999). According to Brewer, in certain cases each of two nested identities represents one of the two dimensions, 'The superordinate [higher-order] identity satisfies the need for secure inclusion in a large collective, while the subgroup [lower-order] identity serves the need for distinctiveness within the larger social category' (Brewer 1999: 190).

The villagers feel part of a larger Tai collective, while they are distinct from this Tai collective because they are Vietnamese, from which they are distinct because they are

Tai, from which they are distinct because they are Tai Mai Chau. Furthermore, the relative importance of the superordinate, or higher-order, and the subordinate, or lower-order, group identities may shift from one occasion to another (Brewer 1999: 190). Which identity takes precedence is different in different contexts, as indicated by the examples of the villagers being Tai with Tai visitors and performing more Vietnamese songs for domestic tourists. In this sense, the villagers can be seen as 'cultural strategists', adapting their identities to different audiences.

That individuals have multiple, situational identities that are compatible has been illustrated by, among others, Mary Waters (1990) in her study of 'hyphenated identities' in the United States, Juan Diez Nicolas (1999 cited in Medrano and Gutierrez 2001: 758) in his study of Basque and Catalan residents who define themselves as both Basques/Catalans and Spaniards, and by Brewer (1999) in her study on Hong Kong Chinese residents. To this list can be added Vietnam Tai Mai Chau residents.

It is clear that the villagers essentialise these nested identities of 'Tai Mai Chau-ness', 'Tai Vietnamese-ness' and 'Tai-ness'. The process of essentialising can be described with the help of Helen Morton Lee's research on the construction of identity among Tongan migrants, where she found that a gradual 'blurring' occurs between 'cultural' and 'ethnic' identity (Morton Lee 2003). In another piece of her work, under a different name, Morton (1998) defines cultural identity as including non-ethnic and intra-group distinctions that the people themselves use, such as those between rural and urban people, whereas ethnic identity includes distinctions made by outsiders. Her findings show that in 'host' nations, a blurring occurs as a response to the ideology and practice of 'multiculturalism', in which ethnicity is presented in the public sphere primarily by the outward markers of cultural differences such as food, music, dance and clothing:

> By accepting and working with these representations in their interactions with the wider community, 'ethnic' groups can access specially allocated services and resources, and through this, groups can gain a measure of power…. At the same time, this construction of ethnicity can begin to influence people's ideas about 'cultural' identity so that over time it becomes increasingly difficult to distinguish between ethnic and cultural identity (Morton Lee 2003: 5).

A similar blurring of cultural and ethnic identity has occurred among the Tai Mai Chau villagers in Vietnam, where villagers make generalisations about being Tai, such as, 'Tai people live in stilt houses', 'all Tai are hospitable and friendly', 'all Tai know how to do the bamboo dance' and 'all Tai know how to speak Tai'. Thus, the previously imagined boundaries by the state and the public of the Tai 'ethnic' group have become real for the villagers. Moreover, the villagers 'naturalise' their ethnicity (Appadurai 1996: 140; Morton Lee 2003: 4). They perceive their cultural identities in terms of primordial attachments based on connection to the land ('Tai Mai Chau-ness'), blood ties and inherited qualities of 'Tai Vietnamese-ness' and 'Tai-ness'. However, although the villagers regard certain elements as making up the essence of these identities more than others (such as language), in practice even these elements are contested and subject to transformation. Identities are always in flux, responding to both internal and external changes, even if they are still regarded as constant and static.

The villagers conceive themselves as having each of the nested identities, around which they draw boundaries and in the process essentialise themselves. In order to do this, they require 'the other' to compare themselves against. As already mentioned, the villagers sharpen the distinctions between them and their nearest neighbours, especially the Kinh and Muong. They also sharpen the distinctions between them and the tourists who visit their villages.

Returning the gaze: sharpening boundaries

The villagers have an increased self-awareness of their identity because of tourism. They are aware not only of the images of them created by the government, but also of those created by the tourist industry. Furthermore, they compare themselves to the tourists. Villagers have tourists visiting their villages almost every day. While their interactions with many may be limited, they have ample opportunity to 'gaze' upon the tourists. The tourist gaze was analysed earlier; here we discuss the 'local gaze' or the 'mutual gaze' (Maoz 2006) where the villagers take in the behaviour and comments of the tourists, developing their own views and creating their own images of tourists in response to their gaze.

Some villagers do not care too much about the tourists. As Mr Ninh's father said, 'I do not know why they come here but when they meet me on the road they say hello and that is fine with me'. Some have different, individual ideas of tourists, which are based on essentialisms (elaborated below). There are differences in their receptiveness to the kind of modernity that tourists represent and what various tourists are like based on how they look, their nationality and rural/urban distinctions and how they behave.

Some villagers define international and domestic tourists according to their ideas of how wealthy they think they are. Villagers believe that all international tourists are rich, mainly because they pay a lot of money for their travel to Vietnam and because the majority are from 'developed countries'. One villager was therefore very surprised by an incident with one foreign tourist in the village. She recounted:

> Villager: One foreigner was very special. He came here two years ago and liked the ancient life of the Tai people here a lot and he wanted to buy a long knife/sword from my aunt and he wanted to pay one hundred and fifty thousand *dong* but my aunt refused to sell it to him because she wanted to keep it, so he stole it. It is very funny.
> MA: Were you not angry?
> Villager: I was very surprised. It is a strange story because I thought foreigners are polite and never steal from other people. I think that that man was not rich.

Perceptions of tourists' wealth are reflected in the prices they charge tourists for food, accommodation and textiles. In general, foreigners are charged more than Vietnamese tourists. Yet, as already mentioned, villagers also charge domestic tourists different rates; for example, students are charged less than other Vietnamese tourists and those who turn up in expensive cars are charged more.

Some villagers define tourists based on how they look. For example, Mr Thay said, 'I see them walk around here and I like to watch them because they are different from me, some of them are bigger than me'. Some also make assumptions about tourists on the basis of nationality. For example, Mrs Ninh commented: 'Visitors may come from the US and I have a negative feeling about that. My brother died in the US war'. She may have the same attitude towards certain Vietnamese tourists, particularly those from the south.

Furthermore, some villagers define tourists based on rural/urban distinctions. Some refer to Vietnamese visitors as *xuoi*, or lowlander. Mr Dan recounted a conversation he had with some people in Hanoi causing him to reflect on village life:

> I do not like large cities. One time I visited Hanoi and met a nice family. They invited me to have tea and we chatted. The man in Hanoi said that life in Hanoi is not like life in the village. If you want to drink tea [in Hanoi] you have to pay money. But that man had been to the village and knew the village and the way we greet guests.

Many villagers define tourists based on how they behave in the villages and with the villagers. They tend to relate the behaviour of the tourists to their nationality, as the following comments show:

> I feel comfortable with foreign tourists such as English, Australian and French. Cooking meals for Chinese is very difficult and sometimes we do not have enough ingredients to cook meals for them.
>
> MA: Which type of guest do you really want to welcome?
> Mrs Ninh: The behaviour of Japanese people is similar to Tai people. They are disposed to please others and find it hard to say no *(ca ne)* and reserved *(de dat)*. For example, the way they come into the house and sit in the house. We do not have many guests from China and Laos. The Spanish speak very fast and strongly/deeply/confidently (*manh me*).
>
> Australians are talkative and easy to understand. French are particular/very careful (*ki tinh)*. A group of Irish stayed in my guesthouse and some of them smoked and threw their butts on the ground but others were very tidy. Vietnamese tourists are noisy and throw rubbish everywhere. Students come here without tour guides.

As shown in the previous chapter, villagers link the noisy behaviour of tourists, particularly of Vietnamese, to being impolite and disrespectful. These comments about both foreign and domestic tourists reflect, and thereby sharpen, what the villagers themselves believe to be polite behaviour among themselves. I was not only told about

‘traditional Tai’ behaviour by Mr Khinh and other villagers but I also often observed it in the villages. Examples include respecting the host at all times, not causing inconvenience to the host, waiting at the door to be invited into someone’s house, being modest and speaking with a soft voice.

The identities of villagers are also honed by the conversations they have with tourists and the comments different tourists make about the villagers. On the one hand, villagers and Tai visitors compare their ‘Tai-ness’, meaning that they compare not only commonalities but also differences. The villagers are thereby reminded that they are Tai Vietnamese, for example; that the Tai in Vietnam are the only Tai-speaking people in Asia who are not Buddhist; and are reminded that their Tai-ness has been altered by living with other groups of people in the country. On the other hand, with domestic tourists, the villagers are reminded that they are Tai and an ethnic minority, and therefore perceived by domestic tourists as ‘backward’ compared with the Kinh, as well as poor and rural. This is exemplified in the following comments by villagers:

> There is no language problem because all guests have translators and foreign guests are very good people, but some Vietnamese, especially students, say things that are not good about the people here and they distinguish the Kinh from other ethnic groups. For example, they say ‘this village is very poor’ and ‘see that woman she is very ugly’. The villagers of course are poorer than the people from the city and they should not talk like that. Another example is that the language between the Tai and the Kinh is very different and I think that when the Tai speak Vietnamese the Kinh think that we make so many mistakes.
>
> Students are so surprised, they ask, why can people here speak Vietnamese? They also ask, which ethnic minority is here? I am angry they refer to us as an ethnic minority (*dan toc tieu so*) and not as a Vietnamese national (*dan toc Viet Nam*).
>
> The behaviour of foreigners and Vietnamese tourists is very different. The Vietnamese might know little about the Tai and think they are minorities and know nothing. So when they come to the village they ask little about Tai customs and do not respect Tai people. For example, one time I talked with two Vietnamese drivers and they wanted to know about Tai language so I spoke some

> Tai to them and a group of Vietnamese passed my house at the same time and they spoke to each other in slang [using swear words] saying that the language I used was treacherous (*quai qhi*). Foreigners, if they want to know, they ask and they treat the local people well and respect them. The way they act shows that they respect the people here.

As mentioned early in this study, such conceptions are not only perpetuated by the romantic and traditional images of the villagers and their lives in the tourism promotional material, but also by the prevalence of evolutionary thinking in the broader Vietnamese population, which ranks the ethnic groups living in Vietnam, with the Kinh ranking first.

The different gazes of the villagers on the tourists therefore not only sharpen the Vietnamese and Tai identities, but also the Tai Mai Chau identity. No-one can refute their local particularism/localised identity so it is of no surprise that the villagers are attempting to reclaim their Tai Mai Chau identity and represent it to tourists. By doing so they are asserting their difference while proclaiming their unity as a people, as well as signifying their intentions to seek ways to improve their situation (Kleinen 1999; Morton Lee 2003).

Pragmatics and negotiations of maintaining 'tradition'

While villagers want to maintain their traditions, for themselves and to attract tourists, this does not necessarily mean that they can put the idea into practice. In some cases, simply because of the cost; for example, while most houses in the villages are stilt houses, not all are. A young villager said she did not have a stilt house because 'to build a house on stilts takes a lot of timber and because we live separately from our parents we have less money, but we are collecting wood and intend to have a stilt house in the future'.

Discussing his role as a member of the Mai Chau forestry department, Mrs Ninh's brother explained the complexities, time and money involved in acquiring timber to build a stilt house:

> I am a member of the Mai Chau forestry department. My duty is to protect the forest and prevent smuggling by many kinds of people, maybe people from other districts and people in Mai Chau. Every month forty cubic metres of wood is

> smuggled. The traditional Tai house is made of wood; to get wood families need a license granted by the leader in Mai Chau. The forests are divided into many parts and each part belongs to a commune; if they want wood from other areas they must ask permission from the leader of that commune. I am the leader of ten people. Every month they have to go to the forest to check. If a person does not have a license they might have to pay a fee, so the solution is to tell the people about the law and getting permission. They are not allowed to cut the forest to plant something that is not allowed. They are only allowed to get wood to build a house. The license is valid for one year and is two hundred and twenty five thousand *dong* per cubic metre. To build a house you need ten cubic metres so you have to pay about two point two million *dong* for one year.

While villagers are aware that tourists want traditional culture, they sometimes choose pragmatics over the representation of tradition. One villager talked about the dangers of having thatched roofing along with another tradition of having the fire hearth in the middle of the house, rather than having a separate kitchen, as nearly all villagers now have:

> In the past the roof of the house was thatched but now we use tiles, and [in the past] we put the fire in the middle of the house but now we have kitchens and move the fire there. But some visitors who come here like the local people to keep their traditions of thatched roofing and the fire in the middle of the house. But I think this is not good because our houses would be burned. Some households have thatched roofs but no fires in the middle of the house, instead they have a fire in the kitchen, and some have a gas cooker.

Another villager told me that some villagers have a gas stove in case the weather is too hot to have a fire.

Clothing is another example of villagers choosing pragmatics over the representation of tradition to tourists. Despite being asked about, and believing that tourists want to see, Tai traditional clothes, the villagers no longer wear the clothes they used to wear in everyday life because they say they are not practical. As one villager stated, ‘the tourists who come here want to see Tai traditional clothes. The people here wear Kinh clothes, trousers and

shirt'. Another villager explained, 'we don't wear our traditional costume anymore because it is more convenient for us to work in different clothes'. He went on to say that even though they do not wear traditional clothes when they work they do during *Tet* or other special events such as when performing.

The example of clothing reflects the fact that villagers, while wanting to maintain traditional Tai culture, also want to have easier and more comfortable lives. They want and buy phones, motorbikes, televisions, refrigerators, karaoke machines, computers and mechanical rice-threshing machines (see Photographs 35 and 36). They do not hide these modern appliances away from tourists as is done in some other tourist villages in Southeast Asia, such as in 'Iban longhouse tourism' in Sarawak, Malaysia (Yea 2002). They do not think that using such things makes them less Tai. In fact, these things allow them to be even more Tai because they make it easier to maintain basic and special cultural practices, just as Little (2004: 264) found among Kaqchikel Mayas in the tourist market place in Guatemala. Nevertheless, some villagers seem to be torn between what they want and what they have. For example, Mr Dan, one of the most successful guesthouse owners in the villages, admitted to wanting a concrete house, although he finds the stilt house convenient in certain situations, as the following conversation I had with him shows:

> Mr Dan: I would like to build a concrete house but I have not got the money. The tourists say they like staying in a stilt house. They can set up their beds anywhere.
> MA: Stilt houses are different for tourists.
> Mr Dan: Only Tai and Muong people have stilt houses, not Hmong and Dao. I like staying in a stilt house because when my family has a party it is more convenient. Even if I do not have a mat people can still sit down.
> MA: A stilt house is a big room but concrete houses have small rooms.
> Mr Dan: Yes I have held a party with one hundred food trays.

Photograph 35: New television with DVD and music machines in a new cabinet

Photograph 36: Newly-bought computer to aid university study

Villagers also want the tourists to have an easy, comfortable and fun experience in the villages, and to realise this, as already mentioned, they enlarge and adapt their houses. Although controversial, as shown in Chapter 5 above, many villagers want the roads and paths to be widened and concreted, and for Highway 6 to be upgraded, to make it easier for tourists to reach the villages. They also like participating in the cultural performance, which was introduced back in the 1960s when government officials started taking diplomats and dignitaries to the villages, as a form of entertainment for tourists. These

changes also make the villagers' lives easier, more comfortable and enjoyable. Furthermore, villagers take advice from tourists and representatives of the tourism industry. While many stick posters and photos up on the walls inside their house (see Photograph 37), one villager said he does not because tour companies do not like them. Mr Tung said that he had learned a lot from guests regarding the running of his textiles business and store. He said, 'from guests I know how to trade and get business relations so I can sell products to them. Some guests contribute ideas for us'. According to the leader of the Woman's Union in Tap village who also runs a guesthouse:

> When visitors come here I can see them and learn something new from the foreigners that this country does not have. For example, I can learn English and when I know English I can have contact with them, and some visitors told me about their country's history. They said that in the past their country was as poor as Vietnam is now but they supported their children to gain higher education levels and now their country has developed. They say that the people here must give support to their children to gain higher education levels so their lives will be better in the future. Also, the Tai should keep their cultural characteristics and also maintain making textiles by hand because the people in their country like them very much so they can sell a lot.

Photograph 37: Posters on the wall reflecting interest in Vietnamese, Korean and American pop culture

It is not surprising then that some villagers believe that what they see as Tai culture has been changed by tourism, and that some changes are for the better. They believe it gives them the opportunity to develop traditional textiles. As one villager said, 'In the past we only cultivated rice, cassava and maize but since visitors started coming here we have returned to traditional life and make textiles again'. According to another, the villagers 'have more contact with other people and invite them for a meal and they feel closer with other people'. Villagers also believe that they interact among themselves and with guests in a more polite manner. Older villagers believe that tourism has brought new opportunities for young villagers. As Mr An said:

> Young villagers can learn some English and can learn about other lifestyles, and they are now more polite than older people. In the past older people frequently shouted angrily with slang at each other but this has stopped now. Their behaviour has changed.

Villagers have few opportunities to learn English but many want to so that they can interact with tourists more. One even said that she would like to be an English person because then she would learn English. However, another villager stated that if she knew how to speak English fluently then she would not be Tai anymore.

Villagers also believe that some changes as a result of tourism are not necessarily for the better. According to one villager elder:

> When visitors come here, especially foreigners, they bring their own customs and culture, but it is not like Tai culture. It conflicts. But we must accept it. For example, in the past the Tai were not allowed to lie down in front of the altar but now they do because tourists do it.

Another mentioned that some foreign tourists hug and kiss in the open and now some of the locals are doing the same. He also complained that Vietnamese tourists litter, not knowing that it affects the environment, and the locals copy them and now litter where they did not before. One villager alluded to the commodification of their culture and how it changes the behaviour of the villagers:

> When visitors come here so many locals take their textile products to them to sell and charge a high price. It looks like a market and it is not the Tai characteristic. The Tai are very honest and truthful but when tourists come they are a little bit different and try to sell a lot to the tourists at a high price.

Another villager bemoaned the loss of beauty in Tap, more specifically the loss of fish ponds, as a result of the construction of concrete roads, shops and car parks:

> From 1995, eight years ago, each family had a fish pond next to their house but now because of lack of water they can't have fish ponds any more. It meant that each family had a lot of fish to cook. The ponds disappeared because some people filled them in with land to have room to park cars for tourists and to have shops and to widen the road.

He went on to say that apart from stilt houses there are no attractions for tourists, and that perhaps there will be no tourists in the future because the unique ethnic identity of the villagers has disappeared. He believes that because people have more money they have lost their unique ethnic identity. He referred to the concrete and the changed cooking methods, and said that tourists cannot tell the difference between Tai and Kinh because they all wear the same clothes. Yet when I asked him whether he thought all these changes were good, he replied, 'in my opinion it is good, we are able to have a more modern life. It means that some unique cultural characteristics have been lost'. He did not think it was good that they had lost some cultural characteristics but went on to say that 'of course, people do not need to maintain their living from hundreds of years ago but they need to preserve at least seventy to eighty per cent of their traditional characteristics'. He did not specify which aspects should be preserved. He also believed it was good to have more tourists visit the village. When I asked him if this created a cycle, in which having more tourists brings more money and therefore results in the continued loss of unique cultural characteristics, he replied: 'having less unique cultural characteristics depends on personal thought, not tourists'. By this he means that it is up to each villager how to be Tai, whether or not they represent tradition to tourists.

It is of no surprise then, that the vision of the future of tourism in the villages, particularly among those who are heavily involved in tourism, is that the 'modern life' of the villagers

should be kept separate from 'traditional life', which should be maintained for tourism and for themselves. Based on this notion, Mr Bay, a successful guesthouse owner expressed his hopeful views on the future of tourism in the village and therefore hopeful outlook about his own and his children's future:

> I think that if my children still run the guesthouse then their lives will be better and people in this village who know how to develop tourism can have a good life. In the future, life may be more modern than now, but if we maintain our traditional customs we can attract more visitors. In the past, the lives of the people in the village were hard but now they have many paddy fields and tourism and now the economic condition of the village is steady.

When I asked him whether there is a contradiction in trying to maintain their traditions at the same time as becoming more modern, he replied, 'I have no idea but because the people here are only Tai and live united with other people, I think we can continue to keep our traditional culture, not like in town where people come from other places and they change their lifestyle'. The villagers recognise that the villages cannot remain in a sort of static state, protected from change and the perceived homogenising forces of modernity and, especially, tourism. The cultural negotiations that occur between them, the tourists and the various authorities, and the push and pull of ties and contentions among the villagers, as in any rural village, are proof of this (Tucker 2003: 166). As Mr Khinh said, 'the Tai in Mai Chau have been influenced by many cultures. It is the rule of life. We must accommodate modern life. For example, if you watch a Thai movie [i.e., from Thailand] they do not wear traditional clothes'.

Conclusion

> Tourism... has made local residents self-conscious about a thing they possess called culture (Shepherd 2002: 94).

The Tap and Noi villagers construct and negotiate multiple, situational and essentialised identities in the 'tourist space'. They do so with a number of people, including representatives of tourist companies, tourists and among themselves, as well as representatives of the state. This in an ongoing process, so the picture is not as clearly

defined as Salemink (1997) argues: they sometimes, but not always, express official versions of their culture; villagers are participants in, rather than subordinate to, Vietnamese cultural politics; their creative construction of Tai identity does not necessarily take place in the national space; and they express their multiple identities in ways that imbue their lives with meaning, a sense of belonging and pride. The multiple identities are nested ones in that they are each salient to the villagers, yet they are also situational in that the villagers draw on them in different contexts to different degrees, such that they can be seen as 'cultural strategists'. The identities are also essentialised in that the villagers draw clear boundaries around them, which are sharpened by the presence of the other in the form of neighbours, visitors and tourists against whom the villagers can make distinctions. Yet underlying these multiple, situational and essentialised identities are the pragmatics of everyday life and the reality of living in a tourism village.

CHAPTER 8: Discussion and Conclusion

Living in a tourism village

Over the past two decades, tourism has increasingly been woven into the social fabric of the villages of Tap and Noi in the uplands of Vietnam. The Tai inhabitants welcome, host, perform for and gaze upon tourists and visitors to their villages and homes, as part of their everyday lives. Yet, living in these tourism villages is far from being in a 'living museum' or 'human zoo'. As the villages increasingly become tourist 'landscapes' they are also simultaneously Tai and Vietnamese villages. The villagers balance their responsibilities of hosting tourists with other livelihood activities, and with being family members, villagers and Vietnamese citizens. From their perspective, tourism provides a new source of income to select among their various, though predominantly agricultural, livelihood options, as well as a space in which they can be creative and express the multiple identities to which they are attached. Tourism also involves a continuation of the social relations among themselves and with others.

As argued in Chapter 1, the heart of the dynamics of ethnic or cultural tourism is the particular configuration of complex relationships between the ethnic groups, the tourism industry and the state (Cohen 2001b). By 'turning back the gaze' (Stronza 2001: 272) and concentrating on the origins and motivations of tourism from the locals' perspective, tourism, the 'tourist gaze', is not seen as imposed on passive and powerless people. Rather, as shown in this dissertation through an examination of tourism in the context of other economic, social and cultural activities, while tourism in Tap and Noi is market-driven and state-mediated and therefore part of the modernisation process, it is also significantly influenced by the villagers and their surrounding environment – transformations and implications are also driven by internal, local factors. The villagers actively participate in the tourism process as they strategise and negotiate among themselves, with representatives of the state and the tourist industry. Far from having their lives destroyed or irreversibly changed by tourism and the state, they are actively engaged in the process of modernisation and the transformations currently shaping Vietnamese society. The villagers are therefore not to be seen as victims of the state and the globalising force of tourism, but as agents with 'the wherewithal to play a significant role in participating in those processes that will shape their lives' (Chambers 2000: 99).

A history of tourism in Vietnam shows that resort tourism and adventure tourism in the uplands during the French era involved capitalist enterprise in a fanciful Far West. While these types of tourism continued into the communist era, particularly in southern Vietnam, socialist tourism and heritage tourism involved attempts at centralised state control of both economy and culture. Tourism in Vietnam today is characterised by the marketisation and expansion of the industry, as well as consistent growth in tourist numbers and the earnings gained from them, since *doi moi* was officially endorsed in 1986. Tourism is going through a process of decentralisation, involving a blend of capitalist and socialist ideals of economy and culture, particularly in the uplands. Ethnic tourism, a new form of tourism in the uplands, largely involves tourist treks and visits to highland villages in order to encounter highland minorities, including in Tap and Noi.

A more thorough understanding of the motivations of the villagers for participating in tourism and of the nature of their involvement today can be understood from a historical perspective. First, while the Vietnamese socialist state has played an important part in 'fixing' the villagers' lives and endorsing tourism in the villages, villagers have also played a role in 'self-fixing' and have taken part by welcoming guests. Their 'self-fixing' is particularly evident in relation to their own sedentary agricultural lives since settling in the Mai Chau valley and becomes clearer with an understanding of the social structure, the roles and relationships of people in the villages. Also, when tourism in Tap was initiated by the state in the 1960s, the relationship between the state and the majority of the villagers was favourable and so the latter welcomed the 'guests'. Second, from the 1940s until the 1990s, the lives of the villagers were tumultuous. They experienced two wars, poverty and state reform programs that altered their livelihoods and ritual practices. By the 1990s, when Tap and Noi were labelled cultural tourism villages by the state, the villagers wanted tourism.

It is no surprise then, that villagers view tourism today predominantly from an economic perspective, but also from a political viewpoint, that is, tourism can provide a means by which they maintain and revive their Tai identity. They also welcome tourists as they wish to share their culture, 'traditions' and multiple identities with the visitors, and they engage in tourism-related activities because these can be creative and fun. In relatively stable times, the villagers have a largely positive view of tourism and their lives today and

into the future. A historical perspective also shows that the villagers have a history of engaging and negotiating with translocal and cross-border relatives and traders, neighbours of other ethnicities, French colonisers and Vietnamese state institutions, in addition to official guests, tourists and other visitors. The villages and their inhabitants therefore cannot to be considered as insular and cut off from the wider world.

Villagers strategically and creatively engage in tourism in order to diversify their livelihoods. Some households earn a viable income by running guesthouses or textile businesses, while most use the opportunity to earn a little extra money to supplement their largely agricultural livelihood. In particular, women make important contributions to the household economy earning income from tourism and fashioning a hybridised local economy. Nevertheless, whether running a successful tourism business or not, all households in the villages still cultivate and rely on rice as their staple.

The villagers are economic agents in their own right as they continue to diversify their livelihoods by engaging in tourism-related activities. When there were fewer tourists in the villages in 2003 and 2004 and therefore less business in tourism, because of the consecutive events of SARS, bird flu and highway construction, their continuing agricultural practices and experience in flexible and adaptive approaches to earning a living helped them to withstand the lean period.

Tourism creates problems for the villagers, of adequate timber and water supplies, waste disposal, language differences and noise. These problems are embodied in the social relations of the villagers, which in turn are shaped by a combination of local and global factors, and socialist and capitalist ideals and structures. Nevertheless, social relations among the Tai themselves do not necessarily alter – mainly because of minimal interaction between household members and the majority of tourists, but also because many other factors also determine the social relations among household members and villagers. Those who belong to the noble family lineages and have state connections are more likely to have power and money, and to run successful tourism businesses. Furthermore, while women are central to the economy, particularly in the income gained from tourism, they continue to play a subordinate role in the patriarchal kinship system of the Tai. Whether this will change in the future is open to speculation, particularly if the

female-dominated activity of textile production and trade builds, and young women continue to return to the villages with training in tourism, hospitality and language skills.

In addition to the identity of the villagers being 'fixed' in the past by the state and the villagers themselves, it is also fixed by the tourism industry today. The primary tourist gaze and the representations of the villages and Tai life in the tourism promotional material, create myths by focusing on particular 'ethnic markers', therefore essentialising the villagers as traditional, people of the past. The villagers are not only aware of these images created by the tourist industry and the government, but they also compare themselves with the tourists, as well as their neighbours. As a result, they have an increased awareness of their identities due to tourism which is heightened as they gaze on and compare themselves with the tourists.

Just as the tourists have different gazes, so too do the villagers. While some villagers care little about the tourists, others have their own ideas of tourists, usually based on essentialisms. There are differences in their receptiveness to the kind of modernity that tourists represent and what various tourists are like based on how they look, their nationality and rural/urban distinctions and how they behave. Despite these differences, villagers generally believe that tourists visit their villages because they are interested in their lives and Tai, traditional, culture.

Villagers construct multiple essentialised identities in the 'tourist space', which they use in different contexts and with different tourists. At the same time as strategically using tradition to attract tourists, they believe that they are expressing their true identities. They therefore try to hold on to or maintain tradition, whereas in reality that involves negotiations among themselves and with the tourists, tourist companies and state authorities. As a result, as cultural strategists they combine their innovative ways and creativeness with their ties to past cultural ideas and practices, and have identities to which they are attached and of which they feel proud. These include a local, ethnic identity as Tai Mai Chau, a national and ethnic identity as Tai Vietnamese and a transnational identity as Tai. However, just as there is a class element to which villagers are active agents in tourism development and in contributing to change, there is also a class element to which villagers are cultural strategists in contributing to the construction of their identities in the tourist space.

Furthermore, pragmatic considerations and the increased opportunities to meet their desires for certain consumer products, such as televisions, motorbikes and mechanised rice-husking machines, mean that there are contradictions between the representations in the tourism promotional material and how the villagers actually present themselves in the villages. Change is unavoidable partly because people want such items in their lives. Tourism not only makes the villagers more aware of other products that they would like to have but also provides the means for them to have them. Thus, with tourism come more opportunities for the villagers and therefore more experiences of transformation and more need for ongoing strategies and negotiations. Yet, as opposed to how tourists (and many ethnographers) tend to see things, the villagers view the notions of tradition and identity as distinct and do not identify, perceive or define themselves solely according to tradition. As a result, they have a strong sense of identity as they embrace change.

King (2009: 52) makes the point that tourism is embedded in other more general processes of modernisation, which makes it difficult to sort out the effects of tourism development from other processes of change, such as the rapid expansion of international media and electronic communication. These issues have not been discussed in any detail in this study. Though most of the families in the villages had televisions and many, but especially those who run guesthouses, had telephones, some were only starting to get cable television towards the end of my fieldwork, after the infrastructure was put in place. Also, only a couple of families owned computers. There was a new internet café in nearby Mai Chau and five computers in the Mai Chau post office, which were mainly used by boys playing games but also by young people chatting with their friends online. Such developments in the community would make for another interesting study.

By ‘writing tourists into destinations’ (Tucker 2003: 182) the actual ‘gaze’ of the tourists is included, as distinct from representations in the tourism promotional material. Tourists to the villages today are both domestic and international, with the former representing the majority. There are many types of domestic tourists, including groups of students, state workers and ‘post-doi moi newly affluent consumers’ (Michaud and Turner 2006: 792). Likewise, the different types of international tourists include those who travel in package-tour groups, as well as backpackers and expatriates. While most tourists visit the villages for cultural or ethnic tourism, thus reflecting not only the primary ‘tourist gaze’ but also

the villagers' ideas of why they visit, not all of them do. Instead they may be more interested in adventure tourism, nature tourism, getting away for the weekend or using the villages as a stopover.

Nevertheless, tourists tend to conflate the notions of identity and tradition so that their *actual* perceptions of the villagers' identity are intrinsically tied to their preconceptions of Tai traditions. These are shaped by a number of factors aside from the representations in the tourism promotional material, including their motives for visiting the villages, their preconceptions of the villagers and their experiences in the villages, which are in turn shaped by many factors, including how many others they travel with, the length of their stay in the villages and how the villages appear to them. Their experiences of the villages are also influenced by the villagers, how they behave and interact with them, and what else is going on in the villages at the same time. Overall, however, interactions between the villagers and the majority of tourists are minimal.

This study, using a holistic approach, has examined tourism in the context of other economic, social and cultural activities in order to provide a more encompassing and complex picture of the lives of people living in a tourism village. It shows that, on the ground, the villagers are not impotent, suffocated and voiceless victims of the Vietnamese state and the tourist market; they are not empty vessels as commodified artefacts; and they do not replicate hollowed-out performances of culture. Tourism does not destroy social relations among the villagers, nor does it mean the death of culture. Rather, tourism is a live expression of who the villagers are; it is richly lived and it is working in the villages. The villagers have access to a new source of income as they participate, negotiate and strategise among themselves and with others in the tourism process as a continuation of their relationships in their everyday lives, today and in the past. They have strong identities which they are attached to and proud of. Part of the reason tourism is working is that the villages are not just tourism villages but also Tai and Vietnamese villages. Tourism is not the only activity in the villagers' lives, which means that they do not solely rely on tourism as a way of living and also that many tourists are still attracted to the villages.

This dissertation contributes to the study of tourism by making the point that in addition to there being multiple kinds of tourism, there are also different types of ethnic or cultural

tourism, and the type of ethnic tourism that is the focus of this study is where villagers are actively involved in the process and where tourism forms only a part of their economy. This was discovered by 'turning back the gaze' instead of conducting an 'impact' study. The dissertation also adds to the study of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, insofar as it questions the assumption that the traditional worlds of the ethnic minorities in Vietnam have been changed irrevocably as a result of state and market interventions, and that this change has profoundly affected the agency, social space and voice of such peoples. Finally, it contributes to Tai studies by reiterating that the Tai should be seen as interrelated and possessing common linguistic and historical roots, yet unique in their respective socio-political situations. This highlights that there are local, national and transnational ways of identifying as Tai.

The inevitability of change

As the events of SARS, bird flu and road construction illustrated, the tourism industry can be erratic. Tourism in the villages is a changing and shifting situation. Yet, both physical and social changes, short-term and long-term, are occurring in the villages anyway. Indeed, anyone who stays in the village for a prolonged length of time gets a sense of the changes, not only common life-cycle changes such as births, marriages and deaths. There are also deliberate changes involving the transition from a poor past to a more prosperous future; changes in the seasons and the opening, closing, reorganising and renovating of the guesthouses and textiles and handicraft stores.

The inevitability of change in the villages was made more apparent on my return visits to the villages in 2005 and 2006. While there was at least one household in each of the villages hosting tourists every night in 2003 and 2004, by 2005 numerous households were hosting tourists every night. Both foreign and domestic tourists were returning to the villages along a faster, smoother and straighter newly-laid road after the highway reopened and the scare of SARS and bird flu had diminished. When I revisited the villages in December 2006, the village leader of Tap said, 'Now there are many tourists in Tap village. For example, some big groups of tourists have come here on the weekends for the last few months and the number of tourists has been double the number of villagers'.

The ‘cultural tourism village’ signs on the archways at the entrance to each village had been taken down during my initial stay in 2003 and 2004. By 2006 households had newer, bigger and brighter signs on the roads and paths, advertising their guesthouses and cafés, and one household had its own sign on the side of the road in the village advertising ‘eco-tourism’ (see Photograph 38). This reflects the villagers’ grasp of tourism trends and how to take advantage of the opportunities. How they perceive eco-tourism would make for an interesting study.

Photograph 38: New sign in the village for ‘eco-tourism homestay’

A large new market had opened in Hoa Binh town and as a result there were many more products on sale in the villages, including Russian dolls and backpacks. The products in Mr and Mrs Tung’s stall also included key rings, glass wall hangings, wooden toothpick holders and ash trays from Hanoi, and silk liners for sleeping bags, beaded mobile phone holders, silk pyjamas and Vietnam tourism t-shirts from ‘silk village’ and other markets in the lowland province of Ha Tay to the west of Hanoi. A new café complex had been built at the entrance to Noi, near the Mai Chau Guesthouse. It was being run by a Kinh man from Mai Chau who was renting the land from the district People’s Committee.

In addition to such entrepreneurial activity, the villagers wanted to continue to develop and promote cultural tourism. For example, the leader of Tap said that he would like to see some old tools that were discovered by archaeologists in 2002 in nearby caves recognised by the government as vestiges of ancient culture in Vietnam, so that he can expand tourism activities in the village. When I returned in 2006 there were 'cultural houses' or 'centres' (*Nha Van Hoa*) being built in both villages (see Photograph 39), to which each villager contributed 100,000 *dong* in addition to funding from the government. The leader of Tap explained how they planned to use the space: 'We are building a cultural house. In it we will display photographs and certificates and it will also be considered as an office to welcome tourists and tourism companies and other organisations. I think it will be convenient for administration'.

Photograph 39: The new cultural house for Noi

The leader of Tap also mentioned that he was having discussions with district authorities about the idea of building a separate village for tourists in the clearing at the base of the mountains near Tap 2. This idea had come about as a response to the increase in tourist numbers and resulting villager complaints. He also believes that the villagers should be included more in the tourist experience. He said that they should be able to impart their local knowledge to the tourists:

> An important point is that through our knowledge we can continue to develop tourism here. Tourist groups have tour guides, but maybe the tour guides do not

> understand much about the customs, culture, history and ethnic people here. We are local people. We can talk and share this information with the tourists.

His opinion was shared by Mr Khinh, who said:

> The visitors' requirements are higher, they want knowledge. Some tour guides do not have the knowledge of history, culture and society of the village... Here we do tourism ourselves but we are not educated. The tourism here is spontaneous. The authorities do not train the villagers how to do tourism well; they 'give birth but do not teach the child' ('*de ra khong co nguoi day*').

In January 2005, a member of the secretariat of the People's Committee of Hoa Binh province explained that the culture office of Mai Chau district was still the authority overseeing tourism development, but I was told by a Tai staff member in the economics office of Mai Chau district that there were plans to transfer this responsibility from the culture office to the economics office in the near future. If the transfer happens, time will tell if, and how, it will influence the development of tourism in the villages.

What do all these changes in the villages, and the ideas and plans of the villagers mean for the future? If the number of tourists continues to increase then there will certainly be more noise and the demand for local resources will become too onerous. It may also lead to segregation in the villages between tourists and villagers, if the village leader's plans come to fruition. An increase in tourism business is likely to attract more outsiders to open up shops nearby in Mai Chau or on Highway 15. As a result of such changes, tour companies and tourists might leave the villages seeking more exotic and more remote ones, as they did when they moved from Tap to Noi. This would be augmented by the local government's encouragement of visits to other villages around the district and the fact that other villagers are also welcoming tourists.

If tourism in the villages disappears, the villagers would certainly lead quieter lives but they would continue to sustain themselves as they did when there were fewer tourists visiting in 2003 and 2004. They will continue with their farming and textile production and trade, and probably find new, diverse ways of earning a living. They may specialise in textile production and export, which they may further highlight as part of their identity

and thus strategically ‘rebrand’ their image. While ceasing to participate in tourist performances, they might continue to perform at local and national meetings, festivals and competitions. What is certain is that the tensions between the global, national and local will continue to affect the villagers, but in ways in which they will also play a part, actively participating and making decisions about economic and cultural activities and developments within their villages.

Postscript

What is not certain is the extent of the villagers’ participation in, and decision-making about, economic and cultural activities and developments around and outside of the villages. The state-run Mai Chau Guesthouse was transformed into a resort and in September 2007, it re-opened as the Mai Chau Lodge (see Photograph 40). It is owned by Thien Minh Travel Joint Stock Company, a travel agency founded in 1994 and based in Hanoi. With the motto, ‘Live the Culture, Stay in Comfort’, the Lodge advertises the following:

> Discover a haven situated in the lush tribal valley of Mai Chau where history, culture and nature abounds, you will find a sanctuary away from your daily worries.
>
> Mai Chau Lodge is a heavenly world offering you the ultimate in natural relaxation. Swimming pools and a variety of leisure facilities provide something for everyone, whether it’s an adventure you seek, or simply a means to unwind (Mai Chau Lodge 2010).

Photograph 40: Mai Chau Lodge (Source: Mai Chau Lodge 2010)

Aimed at tourists at the higher end of the market, the Lodge contains deluxe rooms with en-suite bathrooms and satellite television, two restaurants and bars serving 'traditional' and international cuisine and drinks, a reading room, business centre with internet connection, and a swimming pool, sauna and 'Roman style jacuzzi'. The Lodge provides credit card facilities, laundry service, transportation from Hanoi and around Mai Chau and bicycle rental. It offers visits to the 'private Mo Luong Cave', market and Sunday market tours, kayaking and boating, cooking, team-building activities, as well as 'ethnic minority walk' and 'home-stay trekking'. It also has a souvenir shop selling handicrafts and textiles, and offers a cultural performance for the tourists (Mai Chau Lodge 2010).

The Lodge also advertises itself as promoting 'sustainable tourism' by providing training and education in hospitality and trade skills to the local community, employing locals, purchasing local products, 'respecting and promoting local culture', planting native trees, and resourcing and financially supporting charity building projects in surrounding villages (Mai Chau Lodge 2010). It boasts that 100 per cent of the staff are local. Whether these local people are villagers from Tap and Noi and whether the Lodge sells handicrafts, textiles and cultural performances made and performed by the villagers, is relevant to this study and invites further research.

The presence of the Mai Chau Lodge raises many questions about the villagers' perceptions of it, their involvement in it, if any, and its influence on their lives. Were they consulted about the development of the Mai Chau Lodge? Will the Lodge take revenue away from the village guesthouses or does it attract a completely different type of tourist? Will more tourists visit the villages? Will the Lodge insulate tourists from the villages through a much more selective and directed form of encounter than what can occur in the more personal setting of the family-run guesthouse? What affect will the Lodge have on local resources and infrastructure, such as water and waste disposal? And will it attract competition? Also, who owns Thien Minh Travel Joint Stock Company?

The presence of the Mai Chau Lodge highlights the inevitability of change and the challenges that lie ahead for the local villagers in the face of the quite rapid growth of tourism in the area. The dissertation has shown that the Tai have actively participated in change in the context of socio-economic and cultural politics at the global, national and local levels. It is yet to be seen how the villagers will engage with, and negotiate, the cultural politics of the expanding tourism activities in the Mai Chau valley.

Appendix A: Household Survey

Date: _____

Commune: _____ House number: _____

Village: _____ Family name: _____

Name of household leader: _____

Members of household	**Sex**	**Age: Date of Birth**	**Occupation**	**Ethnicity**	**Position in family**

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview

(A) GENERAL

(1) Where were you born? If not in Mai Chau, when and why did you come to Mai Chau?
(2) What relatives do you have? (prompt: parents, brothers and sisters) Where do they live?
(3) Who do you pray to? (prompt: ancestors/spirits/who else?) Which spirit/god is the most important? Which spirit/god is the scariest? Why?
(4) What languages do you speak? How did you learn these languages? When do you speak these languages?
(5) What cash earning activities do you do? (prompt: agriculture/livestock/tourism/other) How much money do you earn for each activity?
(6) How have these activities changed over your lifetime?
(7) Of all the people living in Mai Chau district, what different ethnic backgrounds do they come from? How are they different?
(8) What contact do you have with these people? (prompt: marriage/trade/work/school/ friend/other)
(9) How are you different to these people?
(10) How are they the same as you?
(11) There are many Tai people living in the world. Do you have connections with Tai people from other parts of Vietnam or other countries?

(B) DEVELOPMENT & CHANGE

(1) Do you know about any development programs? What? When?
(2) Have you been involved in any development programs? What? When? How?
(3) How did they change things for you, in the past/now?

(C) TOURISM HISTORY

(1) Do you know how and when tourists started to come to the village? If yes, then ask the following questions. If no, then ask Q (7) and move on to next section.
(2) When did tourists first come to the village?
(3) Who were the tourists? Who brought them?
(4) What was it like for you/the local people when tourists started coming to the village? Was it something you wanted?
(5) What did the tourists do? What did the locals do?
(6) Were the locals paid? For what? By who?
(7) Before tourists started coming to the village, who used to visit the village? Why? (prompt: family/officials/devt workers)

(D) TOURISM TODAY

(1) Who are the tourists? Where do they come from? (prompt: domestic/foreign)
(2) What do the tourists do when they come to the village? (prompt: stay in homestays/visit houses/walk around/take photos/watch performance/drink rice wine/buy handicrafts, learn about you and your way of life)
(3) How are these activities organised? Who organizes them?
(4) Why do you think tourists come to your village?
(5) In what way(s) are you involved with tourism or tourists?
(6) What do you do when tourists visit the village?
(7) Do tourists stay in your house? If no, do they visit your house? What do you do? What do they do?

(8) Do you have a licence? If yes, how did you get the license? How much does it cost? What are the requirements of having the license? What are you entitled to? Why did you get the license? If no, why don't you have a license?
(9) Do you pay taxes or fees? How much are they? Who collects them?
(10) What are the rules for having people stay in your house? Your village?
(11) Do you like having tourists stay in or visit your house? Your village? Why/Why not?
(12) What is it like for you when tourists come to the village and [insert activity: eg, walk around/take photos/visit your house/stay in your house/watch a performance/drink wine/buy handicrafts/want to learn about your culture, etc.] How do you feel? What do you think?
(13) Are there times when tourists' behaviour is not good? Tour guides' behaviour?
(14) Are there times when you have difficulties interacting with tourists?
(15) What differences are there between domestic and foreign tourists?
(16) Who are the tour guides? (prompt: local/outsiders)
(17) Where do the outside guides come from? Do they interact with you? How?
(18) Do you know what they say to the tourists about you and your history, culture and lifestyle? Do you agree with what they say?
(19) Who do you prefer to be tour guides? What would you like them to do?
(20) How useful is tourism for the village?
(21) Are there times when tourism is not useful for the village?
(22) Besides tourists, who else visits the village? Why? (prompt: family/media/officials/ development workers/me, ie, researchers)
(23) Do tourists stay in other villages in Mai Chau? Which villages?
(24) Are you happy for tourists to go to other villages? Why/Why not?

(E) NO TOURISM
(1) What is it like when there are no tourists? How do you feel?
(2) Pretend you go to sleep and when you wake up there are no more tourists coming to the village: How would this affect you? How would you feel? What would you do? How would it affect the village?
(3) What changes have there been to the numbers of tourists coming to Mai Chau? What has caused these changes? (prompt: 'terrorism'/SARS/bird flu/road construction/other? Eg, spirits)

(F) TOURISM & CHANGE
(1) Since tourists started coming to the village, what changes have occurred:
For you? For others? The village? Your culture? Your customs? The way you live? Your knowledge? Your relations with other people? The environment?
(2) How would you like tourism to develop in your village? In Mai Chau?

(G) MEMORIES, PROJECTIONS & ASPIRATIONS
(1) When you were a child how was your life different from how it is now?
(2) What do you hope for in the future for yourself? What do you want to do? Where do you want to live?
(3) What would you like your children/grandchildren to be, to do, to have?
(4) Pretend you go to sleep and when you wake up you are doing what you would love to be doing: What would this be? Where are you living? What are you doing?
(5) Pretend you go to sleep and when you wake up you are not yourself, you are someone who you would love to be: Who is this? Why do you want to be this person?

(H) ADDITIONAL COMMENTS & QUESTIONS

(1) Do you have any additional comments you would like to make about: How tourism has affected you. How you would like to see tourism in Mai Chau in the future.

(2) Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

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