
The Effects of Inland Boarding School Education on Xinjiang Students and Their Families

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Summary

As a significant part of China's long-term strategy for promoting ethnic integration and border security, the Xinjiang class policy has been in operation for nearly 20 years. It encourages and funds middle-school students from Xinjiang, especially ethnic minorities, to attend high schools in predominantly Han-populated cities in eastern China. This study adopts the format of thesis by publication and addresses three main questions. First, how do ethnic minority students from Xinjiang maintain their ethnic identity while also becoming well-educated citizens in a Han-dominated environment? Second, how do the caregivers of students perceive the value of the Xinjiang class education? Third, how does a long period of detachment from one's family and community impact the parent-child relationship?

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with students and their parents or caregivers. The research indicated that Xinjiang class students are strategically shifting their identities to actively navigate between different cultures and that the benefits of receiving Xinjiang class education lie in developing a range of capabilities that will suit their individual, relational, and collective needs. The study shows that Xinjiang class students are caught in a world where they are responding to a variety of demands and desires. On the one hand, they are trying to make decisions that will satisfy their parents, but, on the other hand, they also want control over their own lives in terms of employment and who they can marry. They want to take advantage of their newfound opportunities, but they also want to please their parents and respect ethnic traditions, both of which cause them endless uncertainty and anxiety.

In all, this research reflects how it is time for researchers working in this field to acknowledge a deeper level of complexity in the lives of Xinjiang class students and their families. This research also casts new light on global studies about the impact of educational mobility on parent-child relations.

Candidate Statements

This thesis titled *The Effects of Inland Boarding School Education on Xinjiang Students and Their Families* has not been submitted for a higher or any other degree to any other university or institution. I also certify that this thesis is an original piece of research; all data, references, and other sources of information, including coauthored journal publications and professional editorial support, have been acknowledged.

I declare that the research presented in this thesis complies with requirements of academic ethics. This research was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Macquarie University (Reference number: 5201700055), Appendix A.

Signed _____(Student number)

26 July 2019

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My deepest gratitude also goes to all my participants, the students who reminded me of my own past when I was in boarding school and growing up having all those fantasies of being a "golden child". I could always see myself through my participants as we all continue to struggle to find the true self. Parent participants, at the same time, generously shared with me their life stories of seeing their children move away for study. They gave me their time, their tears, and their hearts. I would never have finished this project without them. I am deeply indebted to all of my participants.

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Preamble

Education is a long, unglamorous, even demeaning process — a nurturing never natural to the person one was before one entered a classroom.

Rodriguez, R., *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982, p. 73)

I received the book titled *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, from a colleague and friend when I started my PhD in Australia, adding that this would be the book that could accompany me along with my academic career. It is about a struggling journey of a scholarship boy whose awkward progress reveals the central mysteries of education, its costs: painful alienation from his working-class past; and its great gains: success as a middle-class man who has his voice heard. Richard's writing resonates powerfully with me as a "scholarship child". I grew up in a small village. Straight after I finished my primary school, at the age of 13, I was sent to a boarding school near home, about 30 minutes away by foot. My parents sent me there because it was the only junior high school in the town. I was later enrolled in one of the most prestigious high schools in another big city. It took me about 3 hours by train to visit my family, and I got two opportunities each year. In 2009, I went to northeast China to pursue my undergraduate degree, at a place that is about 31 hours away from home by train. I then went to southeast China and did my master's degree there, and, at that time, I could manage to go back home overnight. In 2016, I arrived in Australia and started my postgraduate studies. Along this busy and restless education journey, and growing up being a "golden child", talented, obedient, and promising, I never really took the time to think about my experience and my family who were "left behind" by me. It turned out that, as the only one in the family with so many years of education, I moved too far from my past. I am, however, not the only scholarship child. I met a lot of "scholarship children" later in my research.

I chose to study the Xinjiang class policy. On the one hand, I want to keep my focus on socioeconomically disadvantaged populations such as ethnic minorities. On the other hand, this educational model of boarding school intrigues me and reminds me of my past experience as a boarder. The political sensitivity, and the challenges and the risks of conducting research in Xinjiang, did not occur to me, a Han Chinese female researcher,

at that time. Instead, I was attracted to the idea of researching an understudied population and a desire to gain recognition or acknowledgement, and finally, to get a job.

There are, of course, challenges, which I will specify in detail later. But what surprised me during this research is how deeply it interweaves with my own experiences. I could always see myself through my participants when I did the fieldwork, analysed the data, and wrote up the thesis. In spite of that, I noticed a silence that existed between my student participants and their parents, a silence that includes all the untold and unshared experiences of their own, a silence that is so powerful that I could not disregard it. I feel that I am obligated to disclose the existence of this silence and to act as the bridge to reconnect parents and their child. This, has become a major part of my study (See Chapter 6).

Despite the shared experiences, differences exist between my participants and me because I am an “outsider” for most of my participants. I come from the ethnic Han group, which is viewed as the mainstream cultural group and the “oppressor” or the controlling group. I could not really claim to have the same way of thinking as those who are ethnically, socially, and economically different. Although being native Chinese qualified me as an “insider” to some extent, I am familiar with Chinese culture and was educated in mainstream China for over 20 years. As a result, I am familiar with mainstream ideology and lifestyle as a member of the Han people (the mainstream population that comprises 92% of the Chinese population). Although I tried to speak the language of my participants and to be objective, all I can do here is describe my understanding of what I heard, what I saw, and what I felt in a way of thinking that is socially constructed in settings dominated by Han people. Finally, I hope my interpretation of their life experiences can promote understanding of state education and, hopefully, underpin the possibility of social change related to the ongoing government-funded schooling for ethnic minorities.

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Introduction**1.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, a broad research context will be introduced to contextualise the research topic and its significance. The focus of the current research, together with the research aims and specific research questions, will then be presented. This is followed by an introduction concerning the research design, including an illustration of the principles and rules of the thesis by publication. Key terms and concepts will also be defined.

1.2 Background**1.2.1 Xinjiang in China**

Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (hereafter the XUAR or Xinjiang) is located in the northwest of China and borders the countries of Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. Xinjiang connects China with central and southeast Asia, and with Africa and Europe. See Figure 1.1 (overleaf). The world-renowned Silk Road ran through the territory from the east to its northwestern border. Xinjiang is also an important passage of the Second Asia-Europe Continental Bridge. The “One-Belt One-Road (OBOR)” initiative, which was put forward by President Xi as an economic and strategic agenda, is important for China to realise its “China Dream”, including the rejuvenation and revitalization of China in order to make it a rich and powerful country (Callahan, 2015; Ferdinand, 2016). All of this puts Xinjiang at the heart of connecting China and its allies. Xinjiang is rich in natural resources such as coal, oil, gas, and minerals, all of which are of great significance for China’s economy.

Nevertheless, Xinjiang has historically been a source of tension for the Chinese state. It was formally incorporated as a province of China in 1884, and full consolidation of the province was completed in the 1950s. The Chinese state, over the years, has faced resistance to its rule in Xinjiang from the ethnic Uyghur who have called for greater religious and cultural autonomy. In 1944, the ethnic Uyghur, supported by the Soviet Union, established the East Turkestan Republic. It was only in 1949 that Beijing was able to reinstate its authority with the help of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) in Xinjiang (Mehta, 2018). China views the stability in Xinjiang as a determining factor in the success of the Silk Road Economic Belt (SERB; Mehta, 2018) because China envisions Xinjiang

to be an economic hub that could bolster trade with the neighbouring Central Asian Republics (CARs; Clarke, 2011). The area is thus a “Eurasian crossroad” for China (Millward, 2007) and its stability is vital in the context of the country’s relations with the CARs.

The “Xinjiang problem”, a term generated by Fuller and Starr (2003), describes the continuous violence and the Uyghur separatist movement in Xinjiang. As the most populous ethnic group in Xinjiang (47.5 per cent of its total population) and the second most populous Muslim ethnic group in China (only smaller than the Hui; Chen, 2008), Uyghurs are culturally and socially different from the majority Han population in China. Irgengioro (2018) has recently considered the Chinese self-defined national identity, *Zhonghua Minzu*, to be more of “an artificial political concept employed to support minority assimilation into the Han Chinese identity, and provides ideological justification of the current incorporation of other ethnicities inside the Chinese state, rather than a real identity rooted in history” (p. 324). Hence, ethnic integration has become an inextricable part of China’s domestic political discourse and, by extension, its daily practice.



Figure 1.1. The geographical location of Xinjiang

1.2.2 Xinjiang class policy

To support ethnic minorities, the Chinese government has been working hard to narrow the gap between different ethnic groups at the same time as promoting national integration. This may range from economic assistance such as developing infrastructure in ethnic minority areas, to expanding educational opportunities, including the establishment of minority schools, colleges, and universities, a compilation of textbooks in ethnic languages, and training minority teachers in bilingual education (Yi, 2008, p. 47). These initiatives are aimed at facilitating a sense of allegiance to the Chinese state among ethnic minorities (Leibold, 2019). Ethnic minority education in China is viewed as part of the civilizing project, which plays an important role in controlling, transforming, and integrating minority groups that mostly inhabit the border areas (Harrell, 2012). The development of modern education, according to Yang (2017), brings more ethnic minorities under the influence and central authority of Han Chinese culture.

In order to make the educational system more accessible to ethnic minorities, various preferential policies (*youhui zhengce*) are adopted and are “at the centre of the official agenda” (Yi, 2008, p. 47) to improve the educational conditions for minority groups. An example of this is the establishment of the Department of Ethnic Minority Education under the State Ministry of Education (which became the State Education Commission from 1985 to 1998), with corresponding organizations and appointments made at the provincial (*minzu jiaoyu chu*), prefecture (*minzu jiaoyu ke*), and county levels (*minzu jiaoyu gu*). Despite all the promotion and protection policies, minority populations remain significantly behind their Han counterparts on nearly all objective standards of development, including education, health, welfare, and income. This is particularly evident among rural Uyghur and Tibetan communities (Leibold, 2013, p. 8).

A preferential educational policy specifically targeted at the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) since 1984 is widely considered to be a success after years of implementation, and it is known as the Inland Tibet Schools and Classes (*Neidi Xizangban*; Postiglione, Zhiyong, & Jiao, 2004). It is a school management model that utilizes the economic and educational advantages of developed regions to improve the quality of education provided to ethnic minority students of China’s border region (Luo, 2010). It consists the Chinese government “aid system” of supporting the TAR which based on three principals: ethnic equality, Tibet’s speciality and stability as the priority (Xie, He, & Cao, 2014). Although it provides students with quality education, wider

pathway into territory education, and cultivated a large number of culturally and politically conscious Tibetan elites (Yang, 2017, p. 210), the interior Tibetan schools/classes concern some researchers that it may lead to students' alienation of ethnic culture (Postiglione, 2008; 2009; Yang, 2017, pp. 191-194), as well as damaging the local educational ecology (Postiglione, 2008; 2009). Following the successful educational model for the TAR, a similar educational policy was implemented for Xinjiang in 2000, namely the Inland Xinjiang Senior Secondary School Classes (hereafter, Xinjiang classes), which works as a civilizing process to reassert the state's agendas of national integration and solidarity, and to turn students into patriotic ethnic minority cadres.

In short, the goals and related details of the Xinjiang class policy were covered in the documents published by the Ministry of Education (hereafter the MOE), the top governmental bureau responsible for implementing the Xinjiang class policy and the first arm of government to issue documents about the Xinjiang classes. It documents the details for the management of students from daily behaviour to epistemological cultivation, implementation of the curriculum, and teacher appointments. The three key documents relating to the Xinjiang classes were released in 2000:

1. The Implementation Opinions for Establishing the Xinjiang Classes in Senior Secondary Schools in Relevant Inland Cities (hereafter the Opinions), MOE, January 24, 2000;
2. The Meeting Minutes of the Inland Xinjiang Classes in Senior Secondary Schools (hereafter the Minutes), MOE, May 30, 2000; and
3. Administration Regulations on the Inland Xinjiang Classes in Senior Secondary Schools (Trial Version) (hereafter the Regulations), MOE, June 5, 2000.

In the Opinions (MOE, 2000b), the goals of setting up Xinjiang classes are:

To train a large number of ethnic minority talents who adhere to national unity, keep close contact with the masses, have strong enterprise revolutionary quality, and certain professional ability. The policy is of great significance for promoting economic development and social progress in Xinjiang, enhancing the unity and cohesion of all ethnic groups, and ensuring national and border security.

Although the Opinions primarily highlight political concerns regarding the Xinjiang class policy, the other two documents interpret the stated goals in terms of their educational significance. The Minutes (MOE, 2000c) specify:

According to the purpose of improving students' comprehensive quality, Xinjiang classes pay attention to students' creativity and ability, aiming at cultivating high-

quality senior high school graduates and achieving the overall development of morality, intelligence, physics and atheism. Graduates must have ideals, morals, culture and discipline, maintain national unity and devote themselves to the development of the grand western region in China.

The Regulations (MOE, 2000a) also stipulate the following goals in their first article:

Xinjiang classes will train qualified high school graduates for Xinjiang. Graduates must adhere to the rule of the Communist Party of China, love the country and socialism, support national unity and ethnic consolidation. They must also have ambition, morality, culture and discipline. They should universally develop morality, intelligence, sports, aesthetics and labour. Moreover, they must have the creativity and ability to serve modern socialism ... In addition to the normal political process, Xinjiang classes should attach importance to patriotism, national unity, aesthetics, discipline, and legal education; Xinjiang classes strictly prohibit any form of religious activities.

Ever since its implementation, the Xinjiang class policy has ignited widespread criticism from academics, journalists, and human rights groups who have drawn a similar conclusion: The policies of the Han-dominated Chinese Communist Party infringe upon the rights of Uyghur and exacerbate ethnic tensions in the region (Zhang & McGhee, 2014). Students leave home at around 15 or 16 years of age and remain in eastern China for at least 8 years for high school and university education, with only minimal contact with their home communities (Chen, 2019). The distance between students' homeland and the cities in the east where they study is approximately 4,000 kilometers. See Figure 1.2 (overleaf). Despite these, the popular appeal of the Xinjiang classes has remained undiminished, and the number of students enrolled in Xinjiang classes has risen from 1,000 in the year 2000 to nearly 10,000 in 2016. Over 90 schools in 45 cities in eastern China had a Xinjiang class program in 2015 (Yuan, Qian, & Zhu, 2017). Because there is a lack of ongoing focus on Xinjiang class students after they finish high school, the most recent data drawn from Yuan and Li (2019) show that in 2017 there were 36,000 current students and 46,000 graduates of the Xinjiang classes, of which 21,000 graduates had earned a bachelor degree.

1.2.3 Students in Xinjiang classes

Gill (2000) has claimed that spatial issues are a crucial attribute of ethnicity and that territorial dislocation of people from their homeland can heighten their ethnicity. To the contrary, Xu and Yang (2019) discovered that students in educational mobility choose to

“defer” their ethnic identity to an imagined future while adopting a utilitarian way of thinking and behaving when confronted with various worldly demands. Yi (2019) has adopted the position that one’s ethnicity should not be understood from a dualist either/or perspective and that researchers need to focus on the dynamic, nuanced, and complicated process of identity construction because students experience unstable, tumultuous times across their young lives.

In the case of the Xinjiang class policy, the chasm between territory and culture is significant, Wang and Zhou (2003) used the term “dislocated” when introducing this unique schooling system to a Western audience, highlighting how the boarding school system removes students from their native communities and families. Students study “ethnocentric China” (Harris, 1997; Hsu & Nien, 2008), and experience the pervasive practices of Han Chinese culturalism. The cultural distance and discontinuity between their home culture in Xinjiang and the host culture in inland China push students to cope with their daily intercultural contact. The general sense of cultural superiority among the Han Chinese, the undetermined willingness to achieve inclusion, and the development of distinctive minority cultures have together played significant roles in shaping and reshaping the identities of these ethnic minority students. Some argue that the period of time spent in Xinjiang classes has created a resistant culture towards the Han-centric norms among students (Chen, 2010a; Grose, 2014; Yuan et al., 2017).



Figure 1.2. Xinjiang classes distribution map

1.2.4 The perspective of families on Xinjiang classes

Extensive research demonstrates how parents' involvement in students' learning process contributes to their wellbeing (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Goodall, 2017; Jeynes, 2010). Families, especially parents, play a significant role in a student's learning journey. There is, however, limited focus on families of Xinjiang class students, their perceptions of Xinjiang class policy, and the impact of the policy on families. The absence of the family can negatively affect a boarding student's ability to adjust to new environments, so it is recommended that boarding schools encourage families to provide their children with a stable social and psychological support system during their schooling (Epstein, 2018). Although the complex realities of these boarding schools and the conflicted subjectivities of the students, especially the perceptions of Xinjiang class families, is poorly understood both in China and in the west, it is important to find out how this unique schooling model involves parents while also alienating them through distance.

According to Leibold (2018), compared with the forced removal of indigenous children in America, Canada, and Australia (MacDonald, 2015), the inland boarding school program for ethnic minority students is entirely voluntary and popular among parents. This popularity may be due, according to Chen (2010b), to the fact that parents hold high expectations for their children and therefore support them in moving 4,000 kilometers away for education. The economic advantages accruing to children studying in Xinjiang classes and access to better educational resources provided by highly qualified teachers and modern teaching techniques are also highly valued. Because students are selected mainly on the basis of their academic record, visions such as "ethnic elites" or "the future of Xinjiang" lead parents to have high expectations for their children to attend prestigious universities after school. Further, a sense of elitism, which has been constantly forged by the policy narratives and reinforced externally by people around them (Chen, 2019), suggests that parents might view their children with a sense of superiority when compared with those who are not selected for Xinjiang classes. In short, parents anticipate ideal returns in allowing their children to move away from home for education, knowing that they must rely heavily on authorities such as teachers in Xinjiang classes to accomplish their vision.

These decisions to send their children away for a good education exact a heavy emotional toll, with parents worrying about their capacity to ensure their children retain

a strong sense of identity and connection with the home culture. To obtain a comprehensive understanding of the families of Xinjiang class students, especially their perceptions about the policy, it is important to enable families of Xinjiang class students to have authentic discussions about the longer term implications of attending Xinjiang classes.

1.3 Research aims and questions

Implemented in the year 2000, Xinjiang classes have already become integral to the Chinese government's attempts to educate its ethnic minorities (Grose, 2010a). Many questions have arisen in relation to the impact of Xinjiang class policy for students. For example, researchers claim that students have obtained better educational resources (e.g., qualified teachers) and make greater advances through the use of better resources than what would be available at schools in Xinjiang (Grose, 2010b; Yan & Song, 2010). However, students encounter difficulties in attending boarding schools because of changes in lifestyle, language barriers, and psychological problems caused by being away from home (Luo, 2010; Yan & Song, 2010). Students also encounter difficulties concerning national and ethnic identity in cross-cultural contexts (Grose, 2015).

In the growing discussion about current Chinese state-funded boarding school programs aimed at training ethnic minority students, little is known outside the discourse of national integration and the Uyghur–Han minority–majority dichotomy. For example, some researchers have argued that ethnic minority students enrolled into Xinjiang classes are simply objects of the government and its power and are constantly subject to the gaze of the central government's focus on “learning to be Chinese” (Grose, 2010, 2014; Leibold & Grose, 2019). The primary aim of this research project is to explore and rethink the effects of government schooling on the lives of minority students and their parents. In other words, I want to dig deeper into students' everyday struggles and explore what is happening to them, state otherwise, how does this policy influence students' identities after they enrol in Xinjiang classes in eastern China? Moreover, as the decision-maker in this educational process, there is limited research exploring the perspectives from families of Xinjiang class students. What are the views of parents and caregivers about the policy and its impact? Does long-term detachment from one's family and community impact the parent-child relationship? As Chen (2014) demonstrated, “the long-term impacts of this period of detachment from one's family and community have yet to be fully scrutinized and must be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of the policy” (p. 215).

Involving families of Xinjiang class students and enabling their voices is another aim of this study. Overall, the research questions guiding this research are:

1. How do ethnic minority students from Xinjiang maintain their ethnic identity while, at the same time, becoming well-educated citizens in a Han-dominated environment?
2. How do the caregivers of students perceive the value of Xinjiang class education?
3. What are the implications for the parent–child relationship after a student’s period of detachment from their families and communities?

Cutting across each of these questions is the broader concern of this thesis: How could government schooling better support ethnic minority students’ educational progress and wellbeing?

1.4 Design of the study

Conducting social science research in Xinjiang has long been considered sensitive. The Chinese government treats many issues within the realm of the social sciences as sensitive topics and may often forbid them from being studied by academic researchers. Consequently, there is limited research measuring the social and emotional wellbeing of local populations in Xinjiang, especially minority populations. The social and emotional wellbeing, however, is important in order that the government be able to understand its people and adjust its policies to suit social and political needs (Li, 2018). To investigate the above questions, this project involves:

1. an analysis of existing regulations and documents relating to the implementation of the Xinjiang class policy and
2. an analysis of the experiences and perceptions of ethnic minority students and their families regarding the impact Xinjiang class policy on their lives.

To conduct the research project and the analysis, different data were collected, translated, and transcribed. These processes comprised:

1. analysis of significant documents related to the implementation of the Xinjiang class policy,
2. audio-recording and transcription of interviews with Xinjiang class students and family members of Xinjiang class students, and
3. observations of interactions between students and their families while in the field.

In contrast to previous research, I take multiple perspectives to interpret the data from a range of different angles to explore a diverse way of understanding. In Chapter 2, I adopt a Foucauldian perspective in analysing the existing literature and argue that institutional arrangements such as the school setting and curriculum are designed to normalise ethnic minority students from Xinjiang. Although “top-down government” has prompted a bottom-up resistance toward the central government by Xinjiang students (Chen, 2010a), walking awkwardly between different social norms can turn students into “familiar strangers” at home and in mainstream society.

In Chapter 4, the data analysis begins with me focusing on the experiences of six Xinjiang class students and how they strategically shift their identities to actively navigate between different cultures. The multilayered identity framework of Sedikides and Brewer (2001) is applied to define identity at different levels of inclusiveness, namely the individual, relational, and collective identity. The data show how the identity of Xinjiang students shifts according to context and expectations that come from oneself, relations with others, and the community.

Chapter 5 explores how caregivers, including parents and siblings, perceive the value of Xinjiang class education, along with their motivation for allowing their child or sibling to move far away from home for education. The capability approach of Amartya Sen (Sen, 1992, 1993, 1999) is employed to analyse the value of Xinjiang class education from the perspective of parents, and how parents, as the agent, have the potential to bring about changes to this policy. In the research, I find that the benefits of receiving Xinjiang class education lie in developing a range of capabilities that can suit their individual, relational, and collective needs. I also argue that parents are disempowered in this education journey because they have difficulty in understanding the experiences of their children once they enrol in Xinjiang classes. This is mainly due to parents’ limited understanding of mainstream education, and hence they must rely on the “authorities” to make decisions for their children.

In Chapter 6, the relationship between Xinjiang class students and their parents is analysed, in the context of students have been away from home for at least 4 years. A Lacanian perspective (Lacan, 1977) is applied to examine students’ struggles with self and identity. Xinjiang class students are caught in a world where they are required to respond to a variety of demands and desires. Students want to take advantage of their

newfound opportunities as well as control their own lives in terms of employment and who they can marry. But they also want to please their parents and respect ethnic traditions, both of which cause them endless uncertainty and anxiety.

1.5 Thesis by publication

This thesis uses the format of a PhD by publication. According to the Higher Degree Research Thesis Preparation, Submission and Examination (2017a) at Macquarie University (Appendix B), “a thesis by publication may include relevant papers, including conference presentations, which have been published, accepted, submitted or prepared for publication for which at least half of the research has been undertaken during enrolment”. Most theses by publication are between two and eight papers in combinations of sole and co-authored papers. These papers will normally form thesis chapters and the chronological publication order may be quite different from the way they are sequenced in the thesis.

This thesis contains four co-authored journal articles, with the candidate as lead author in each case. These articles have been either published or submitted for review. As important and connected parts of the thesis, they address a series of different yet interrelated research questions that underpin the overall thesis. These four publications are framed within the format of a traditional thesis. The literature review chapter consists of a carefully organized and updated literature review, and one published review article. Separate introduction and methodological chapters precede the journal articles, and conclusion chapters are placed subsequent to them. Together, the chapters constitute an integrated and coherent dissertation. Because the journal articles are reproduced in their entirety, only references that appear outside of those publications are listed at the end. For consistency, articles are presented in journal article style, and only minor adjustments have been made to conform to features elsewhere in the thesis and to assist examiners.

Currently, one of the four articles has been published and three have been submitted and are under review. For details of the articles, see Table 1.1. These four articles are co-authored with the candidate’s supervisors, A/P. Neil Harrison and Dr Robyn Moloney. Each author met Macquarie University’s (2017b) authorship criteria by participating in “conceiving or designing the project, analysing and interpreting the data on which it is based, or writing or critically revising the intellectual content in the output”. As the PhD candidate and the first author, I am responsible for the conceptualisation of each article,

pinpointing its focus, selecting a suitable theoretical framework and method of analysis, and deciding on its organisation, with the assistance from my supervisors. I collected, transcribed, and analysed all the data, I also wrote the first draft and carried primary responsibility for the revision of each article. I also contributed substantially in order to revise and prepare the final draft of each article for submission to a targeted academic journal. I then responded to and addressed the peer reviewers' comments and advice with the help of my supervisors. My supervisors assisted with the overall conceptualisation of the articles, offered detailed, critical advice for revisions, and supported me in revising segments of each article until it was ready for submission to the targeted journal.

1.6 Key terms and concepts

In order to facilitate understanding of the proposed research, the following concepts need to be borne in mind.

1.6.1 Inland China

In this study, Xinjiang refers to the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region. In Chinese, "inland Xinjiang class" is called *neidi Xinjiang gaozhong ban*. According to Postiglione, Jiao, and Tsering (2009), *neidi* is usually rendered as "inland", a term that refers to the Chinese mainland territory from the vantage point of special regions such as Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and Tibet or "inland and coastal regions, compared to frontier and border regions like Tibet" (Wang & Zhou, 2003, p. 95). Chen (2008) also explained that inland areas normally refer to the east and coastal Han concentration areas that are in contrast to the western minority inhabited area. This may confuse English readers because inland areas in English are understood to be away from the coast, in or near the middle of a country. In this study, I have used inland China and eastern China interchangeably to represent the areas where Xinjiang class hosting schools are located.

1.6.2 Ethnic groups

In Chinese, the term *minzu* is very often used in academic research in various areas and can be interpreted as nation, nationality, ethnicity, and ethnic group. On the one hand, it represents China's 56 distinct *minzu* or ethnic groups (formerly nationalities) and, on the other, it represents the collective, shared identity of the Chinese nation or race, known as *Zhonghua Minzu*. In order to separate this combined idea, a different concept *zuqun* has appeared in recent literature, introduced by a famous Chinese sociologist Rong Ma. According to Ma (2007), *zuqun* refers to the English "ethnic group" (or ethnicity). He

suggested using “ethnic groups” or “ethnic minorities” to refer to the 56 “nationalities” when these groups are referred to as a whole. In the current research, ethnic groups are more of a concept in line with the term “*zuqun*”, which refers to each of China’s 56 distinct ethnic group. In this sense, ethnic minority (*shaoshu minzu*) refers to the non-Han Chinese population, that is, the 55 ethnic groups within China. By definition, these ethnic minority groups, together with the Han majority, make up the greater Chinese nationality known as *Zhonghua Minzu*.

1.6.3 Ethnic Uyghur

Ethnic Uyghur is the most populous ethnic group in the XUAR (47.5 per cent of its total population) and the second most populous Muslim ethnic group in China (only smaller than the Hui; Chen, 2008). Most Uyghur live in the far north-western border region which is the hub of the Eurasian Crossroads (Mahmut, 2019). They are culturally and socially different from the major Han population in China. Uyghur identities are firmly established and have been created by historical influences from both Central Asia and China (Bellér-Hann, Cesàro, Harris, & Finley, 2007). In recent times, the Uyghurs have been claiming meaningful recognition of their identity and autonomy in China (Li, 2018). The notion of Uyghur is also recognised as “Uigur”, “Uighur” or “Uygur” in the literature, but I have used the word Uyghur because it is commonly accepted in recent literature (Bovingdon, 2010; Chen, 2019).

1.6.4 The capability approach

The human development capability approach (HDCA), or simply capability approach, is largely credited to the pioneering work of Amartya Sen (Sen, 1992, 1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2001). This approach is helpful in that it addresses the intangibles that play a role in individuals’ lives. Capabilities are the “alternative combination of functionings that are feasible for a person to achieve”; they are “the substantial freedom” a person has “to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value” (Sen, 1999, p. 87). In other words, the capability approach asks what valued functionings individuals find possible to achieve and how the achievements influence the social arrangement around them. In this research, capabilities represent student development as well as wellbeing after attending Xinjiang classes.

1.6.5 The imaginary

For Lacan (1977), the founding moment of subjectivity happens in the period from 6 to 18 months of age, when a child begins to look in the mirror. Lacan noticed that, although babies cannot control their bodies at an early age, they have a sense of “recognition” when they encounter their own image in a mirror. This is to say, our sense of self or the “ideal ego” is connected with external recognition. In addition, the gaze of the other serves as a mirror in which the child seeks recognition for its existence, for instance, through the observation from the mother or the authority role of the father. All provide the space for self-recognition.

Because the subject is constituted through the internalisation of an external ideal, the founding moment of the coherent ego is also a moment of alienation around which future experiences are oriented. The imaginary becomes the space where we are constantly split between our own self-image (where I paint myself as I should be) and how I am seen by others (Harrison, 2012).

1.7 Significance of the study

The significance of this research can be illustrated from the perspective of students, caregivers, and policymakers in China. For students who have attended the Xinjiang classes, this research reveals their learning and living experiences in inland China and how they deal with their daily lives in various contexts. A relatively small sample may not represent all students enrolled in Xinjiang classes, but readers can gain an understanding of how this group of students manages to negotiate their identities in different contexts. My aim is to enable the voices of the parents and caregivers, as well as the students who attend the Xinjiang classes, to provide readers with a detailed picture of the value of the Xinjiang class policy and the motivations for sending students away for education. The potential challenges revealed by interviewing students and the caregivers together may improve school practices and assist the government to amend policy in order to better inform parents of processes and systems involved.

For policymakers, the ongoing development of ethnic minority education, particularly the government-funded preferential education policies for ethnic minorities, requires more “insider information” that could provide reliable evidence for improvement of practices in schools. As indicated by Chen (2006), the existing report concerning the inland Xinjiang boarding schools mostly covers the positive side, whereas the concerns

of parents and caregivers behind the scenes may be neglected. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the ongoing development of boarding school education for ethnic minority students.

1.8 Summary

In this chapter (Chapter 1), I contextualise the research project. The aims and research questions are presented, together with the design of the research project. This is followed by a brief introduction to the format of thesis by publication, along with key terms used in this study. The connection between the research and its practice demonstrates the significance of the project.

In Chapter 2, I present a more detailed review of research literature relevant to this study, followed by a peer-reviewed research journal article that was published in November 2018. The review reveals that after 17 years of implementation, there is a lack of analysis of the role of parents in this boarding school educational program.

In Chapter 3, I introduce the qualitative methodology for this study, it comprises the research design, field site, participants information, methods, and procedures of data collection and analysis.

Chapters 4 to 6 consist of three journal articles, and each has been submitted and is currently under review. These articles explore the research questions addressed in this thesis. All four articles and the research questions they address are presented in Table 1.1, along with the reference for the published article.

Chapter 7 provides an overall synthesis and discussion of the key findings and the implications of these findings for research, theory, especially policy practice. This chapter also provides a brief summary of the findings, contributions, and limitations of this study, as well as recommendations for further research.

Table 1.1

Publications Included in This Thesis

Corresponding research question	Data collected and analysed	Thesis chapter	Publication details
How the goals of the Xinjiang class policy are accomplished by instilling a new set of cultural and political norms in dislocated boarding schools?	A systematic review of the literature is conducted in order to identify the research relevant to the execution of the Xinjiang Class Policy, and altogether 16 academic studies were analysed	2	Su, X., Harrison, N., & Moloney, R. (2018). Becoming familiar strangers: An exploration of inland boarding school education on cultural wellbeing of minority students from Xinjiang province. <i>Australian and International Journal of Rural Education</i> , 28(2), 1–12.
How ethnic minority students from Xinjiang, maintain their ethnic identity, while at the same time becoming well-educated citizens in Han dominated environment?	Interview with six students who attended the Xinjiang classes	4	Su, X., Harrison, N., & Moloney, R. (Submitted). Negotiation of identities in cross-cultural contexts: a case study of Xinjiang class students, <i>Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education</i> .
How parents of ethnic minority students from Xinjiang perceive the value of the Xinjiang class policy?	Interview with nine parents/siblings who had a family member in Xinjiang classes	5	Su, X., Harrison, N., & Moloney, R. (Submitted). The value of Xinjiang class education to ethnic minority students, their families and community a Capability Approach, <i>The Qualitative Report</i> .
What are the long-term impacts for the parental-child relationship after this period of the detachment of one's family and community?	11 households, including six students and nine family members	6	Su, X., Harrison, N., & Moloney, R. (Submitted). Students of the Imaginary: interpreting the life experiences of ethnic minority students from Xinjiang classes, <i>International Journal of Bias, Identity and Diversities in Education</i>

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I review literature from a variety of perspectives to facilitate an understanding of the Xinjiang class policy and the component issues of this policy. This chapter locates the research study within the research literature and serves to clarify the research questions.

The chapter contains three sections. In the first of these, Section 2.2, I review the literature relating to the roles of government, schools, family, and students to illustrate how Xinjiang class policy is understood. In the second section, Section 2.3, I present the first of the submitted journal articles for this thesis, *Becoming Familiar Strangers*. This co-authored article presents a systematic review of the literature published on the Xinjiang class policy. This contains available research relevant to this research topic between 2000 and 2017. Applying Michel Foucault's concept of normalisation to the systematic review, the literature suggests that students have been immersed in schools, which has the effect of normalising students in cultural and political perspectives. However, students also resist the technologies of normalisation in their own way, such as speaking their own language or conducting religious practices on campus. This period of time in which students strive to live in two diverse cultural groups turns them into familiar strangers both to their Han peers in inland China and to their parents and Uyghur peers back in Xinjiang. My co-authors and I conclude the article by arguing that the separation brought about by the boarding school education produces significant feelings of anxiety and separation for both parents and their children. In the last section, Section 2.4, I conduct a synthesis of the review, in which I clarify the gap in the research field that leads to the focus of my thesis.

2.2 Understanding the Xinjiang class policy

As indicated by Thum et al. (2018), the academic world has seen a rise in Xinjiang studies since early 2000. One of the reasons is that there has been growing Xinjiang-related academic interest after the reopening of access to Xinjiang in the 1980s and accumulated language resources. In addition, "the political resonance of a China-controlled, Muslim majority region in the post-September 11 world made Xinjiang books attractive to

publishers” (Thum et al., 2018, p. 7). The Xinjiang class policy, to some extent, has become one of the most controversial yet interesting research topics attracting academics from China and abroad in diverse fields. Most of the research studies focus on the power dynamics between the government authorities and the response to those authorities, especially by the Uyghurs. Nevertheless, as I noticed during the research reported in this thesis, a growing number of research studies began to move their focus away from constraints on the Uyghur students’ school experiences, and to pay attention to other prominent issues such as interethnic interactions, post school experiences, and ethnic identity constructions over an extended period, all of which present new approaches to assessing the impact of the policy. In this section, I briefly overview the literature from four different aspects including the government, schools, families, and students, which shapes a broad understanding of the Xinjiang class policy.

2.2.1 Government schooling and the purpose of ethnic integration

State education in China, especially ethnic minority education, is viewed as part of the civilising project. As Harrell (2012) stated, it plays an important role in controlling, transforming, and integrating minority groups who mostly inhabit the border or peripheral areas of China. In the same vein, Yang (2017) pointed out that “the development of modern education brings more ethnic minorities under the influence and central authority of Han Chinese culture” (p. 11). For instance, by analysing three types of elementary textbooks used in China, Chu (2015) argued that the dominant Han centric ideology and unequal power relations favouring the Han are reflected and reinforced through a Han-centred view in current education, while ignoring the minorities’ perspectives. Zhao and Postiglione (2010) argued that university newspapers’ portrayal of minorities and Han is characterised in terms of two categories: minorities are distinctive, potentially separatist, and visible, and Hans are normative, patriotic, and invisible. Bulag (2003) analysed the decline of Mongolian language and culture in China to conclude that, although China affirms the right of different nationalities to determine their own development, it also creates an “ideology of contempt” for minorities and their cultures and languages, creating an impression that minorities are “backward”. This binary division, of course, would result in alienation and distrust between the “educated” and the “uneducated”.

The Xinjiang class policy, as part of the government’s endeavour to integrate ethnic minorities from Xinjiang, has received increasing attention from scholars. It deals with one of the most politically sensitive multiethnic areas where there exists a heightened

sensitivity over issues of social stability and security in China. Despite all the priorities, the literature about Xinjiang classes is replete with references to moral and political education, with a stress on patriotism to shape behaviour and national identity of ethnic minority students, stating that the Xinjiang class prioritise its political goals over its educational goals (Chen, 2008; Grose, 2010b, 2014, 2019). Many claim that Xinjiang class education works as a civilising process in which to reassert the state's agendas of national integration and solidarity and turn students into patriotic ethnic minority cadres (Grose, 2010a; Leibold & Grose, 2019), which consequently, impact on students' perception of their national and ethnic identity (Guliziyipa, 2011). Although many of China's ethnic minorities willingly support state legitimacy, the Han-centric ideology is never free from contestation and resistance.

2.2.2 School as a space of everyday politics

Yuan, Qian, and Zhu (2017) utilise the notion of space to assure readers that the school space shapes the everyday politics of the Xinjiang class students and plays an active role in structuring and conditioning multiethnic interactions. From their point view, those who implement the policy at the school level produce a "space of prescription" in which they use the dominant norms such as curricula, textbooks, and everyday schooling to serve a dominant pedagogy as well as cultivating loyal subjects. In response to this situation, minority students in the Xinjiang class create "spaces of negotiation" to keep their ethnic and religious practice alive. Students negotiate the policy in tune with three concerns comprising achieving upward social mobility, preserving their ethnic culture, and defending Islamic identity. For example, the corridor or the dormitory can sometimes turn into spaces of negotiation for minority students to reinforce communal solidarity and reclaim their identity. They would greet each other in Uyghur style in the corridor or don their headscarves, and pray and read the Qur'an under the cover of night in their dormitory. Furthermore, cyberspace which helps students to transcend the physical confinement of the campus, has become a new space of negotiation in which they can connect with the Muslim world and conduct religious practices such as reading the Qur'an online. Yuan et al. (2017) also noticed that mutual interaction between local Han students and ethnic minority students have indeed been substantially enhanced, adding that "most local Han students are indeed familiarising themselves with the cultures of ethnic minorities" (p. 14).

Moving beyond the frequently discussed Han-Uyghur dichotomy in state education, Yuan (2018) raised an interesting question in terms of the interethnic interactions in the space of Xinjiang classes. He found that even though Xinjiang classes have largely promoted ethnic interactions, new hierarchies and tensions among Uyghur and non-Uyghur students emerge. Yuan suggested that the interethnic politics are an ongoing construction and are shaped not only by the power dynamic between Han administrators and ethnic minority students but are also defined by the majority of Uyghur students and those from other ethnic backgrounds. Hence, the purpose of ethnic integration continues to be uncertain owing to the tensions between different ethnic and religious groups.

2.2.3 Family involvement in education

Parents, of course, influence the development of attitudes, opinions, and interests of their children in the family (Berger, 2000). Numerous research studies have shown that the involvement of parents in their children's learning process translates into their wellbeing, especially academic achievement (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Boonk, Gijsselaers, Ritzen, & Brand-Gruwel, 2018; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Goodall, 2017; Jeynes, 2010). Although parents' direct involvement may subside as students grow older, parents still play a significant role in fostering academic success for students by setting high expectations and creating a comfortable space for students to develop academic motivations (Boonk et al., 2018). In addition to academic success, developing life and social skills, optimising life chances and quality of life, and enabling future employment and economic wellbeing feature strongly in parents' expectations in sending their children to school (Widdowson, Dixon, Peterson, Rubie-Davies, & Irving, 2015).

Despite the parents' significant roles in education, there is evidence that parents' involvement exerts a negative influence. The research of Ward and Geeraert (2016) suggested that the cultural distance between the heritage/home culture and settlement/host culture impacts students' experience of acculturation. Some propose that ethnic minority students in their educational mobility may experience a cultural disconnection, or even a conflict, between families and schools, and this sense of cultural discontinuity may cause confusion among those students (Cholewa & West-Olatunji, 2008; Taggart, 2017). This is supported by research from Yoon et al. (2017), who focused on 13 adolescents from East-Asian immigrant families, and suggested that students experience cultural discontinuity between the two worlds of home/ethnic community and school/society in general. Although the students appreciated parents' high expectations of

academic/occupational success, they felt pressured in the face of a desire to have space and independence. As a result, the cultural discontinuity between home and school, together with students' aspiration for independence, impact the parent-child relationship, resulting in students' negative behaviours in schools.

Parents' choice of involvement depends not only on the perceived advantages they think they can make for their children but also on the chances they are "permitted" to make by the school (Bæck, 2010). This is supported by the research of Xie and Postiglione (2016), who suggested that the Chinese state, schools, and teachers provide few formal and routine channels for rural parents to be involved in schools, and that rural parents, particularly those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, are less capable of building a partnership between school and family and less able to become involved in their children's learning. In the context of the Xinjiang class policy, students move from their homelands and immerse themselves in mainstream society in order to become the desired "ethnic elites" who could bond with their native homelands while simultaneously upholding nationalism and learning Han-centric norms through government schooling. In this process, little has been found in terms of families' responses and experiences, especially from the perspective of parents. An exception is the research of Chen (2010), who interviewed students in the Xinjiang class and found that parents support their child's boarding school life through setting high expectations, hoping their child can obtain a university education after attending Xinjiang classes, despite the distance.

2.2.4 Students' experiences in Xinjiang classes

The educational experience of students, especially Uyghur students, has long been the focus of those who are interested in the Xinjiang class policy. In order to explore how ethnic Uyghur students respond to the political goal of ethnic integration in the context of Xinjiang class policy, Chen (2008) conducted fieldwork over 3 months in one Xinjiang class hosting school in eastern China. He adopted social capital as an analytical tool, which regarded as "an ability to make a process of social interactions as resources for goal attainment", to explore Uyghur students' unique schooling experience and the process of social interaction. Chen argued that Uyghur students in this dislocated boarding school are undertaking a process of "social recapitalisation". That is, Uyghur students develop independent and new social capital, known as "bonding social capital" and "linking social capital", to facilitate their academic achievement as well as school lives in inland China. As a result, Uyghur students' social recapitalisation reinforces

Uyghur ethnic boundaries, increases group solidarity, and creates a resistant culture toward school official ideology of ethnic integration (Chen, 2008; Chen & Postiglione, 2009).

Chen's research provides a balanced and distinct analysis concerning the effectiveness of the Xinjiang class policy on students as well as students' responses toward the political goal of ethnic integration. The Xinjiang class policy has gained popularity among Xinjiang parents, and a shift in the understanding of ethnic minority students can be observed through research articles published in the last decade. Rather than considering ethnic minority students in the government schooling system as pure objects who negatively receive the norms of the mainstream society and interpret Uyghur-ness from a dualist either/or perspective, some researchers have started to focus on the dynamic, nuanced, and complicated process of identity construction of ethnic minority students. Moreover, the postschool experience of Xinjiang class students has been mentioned in some research articles (Chen, 2019; Oudengcaowa, 2014), together with a transition to quantitative research designs (Yuan & Li, 2019).

As evidence of this, Leibold (2018) organised a special issue concerning China's ethnic minority boarding school system in which he considered this educational system, including the Xinjiang class policy, as "China's bold and unpredictable education experiment". In particular, students from Xinjiang are uprooted from their home community and immersed in the more developed eastern China for 4 or more years. They awkwardly move forward, sitting between different social norms and categories, neither belonging to the Han community nor fulfilling their sense of affinity to their own ethnic community. As Leibold (2018) indicated, "the long-term consequences are difficult to anticipate" (p. 12). Students not only conform to the expectations from the central government but also find ways to assert their sense of self-worth and cultural distinctiveness. The major challenge is for students to "find their place within a rapidly evolving Chinese society" (Leibold, 2018, p. 12).

Coincidentally, in their analysis of the cultural and political disciplining in dislocated minority schooling system, Leibold and Grose (2019) discovered that, in order to move forward and succeed in mainstream society, minority students are making their own decisions to strategically navigate in the current political system and "carefully manoeuvre between multiple identities and bureaucratic obstacles" (p. 30). This echoes

what Chen (2019) has observed on Xinjiang class graduates. Chen found that the perception of employment among some Uyghur students is directly related to their experience of “re-ethnicisation” and “de-ethnicisation”. Students are willing to “shake off ethnic boundaries” in order to gain quality employment opportunities in inland China (de-ethnicisation), but they may also activate ethnic consciousness while experiencing discrimination in the job market (re-ethnicisation). In proposing this, Chen (2019, p. 89) suggested that ethnic integration “is not necessarily a linear, one-way process”. At the same time, Grose (2019) claimed that Uyghur graduates from Xinjiang classes make the most of existing opportunities in inland China, and strengthen transregional bonds with other Uyghurs and non-Chinese Muslims, which finally activated their transnational and transregional identities, and connected with the global community of Muslims.

Pages 24-35 of this thesis have been removed as they contain published material. Please refer to the following citation for details of the article contained in these pages.

Su, X., Harrison, N., & Moloney, R. (2018). Becoming familiar strangers: an exploration of inland boarding school education on cultural wellbeing of minority students from Xinjiang province. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 28(2).

<https://journal.spera.asn.au/index.php/AIJRE/article/view/174>

2.4 Synthesis

The aim of this thesis is to consider the impact of the Xinjiang class policy on the lives of Xinjiang class students and their families. The review above presents a selection of research literature that provides an understanding of the Xinjiang class policy. The controversy around the Xinjiang class policy in China is presented in the published journal article.

Students' own experiences sit at the centre of this research, while previous research studies provide diverse ways of understanding the impact of government schooling on ethnic minority students. The published journal article illustrates how many researchers dwell on the government's treatment of ethnic minority students without paying sufficient attention to the perspectives of minority students themselves. Indeed, ethnic minorities have often become objects of the research process, where researchers can pay more attention to how minorities are manipulated by the policy, whilst overlooking the emotional experiences of the students and their parents. This thesis, therefore, focuses on what is happening in the day-to-day lives of ethnic minority students, as they follow their educational journey. Further exploration of the students' own experiences is needed in order to understand their sense of wellbeing, and to account for their own experiences in order to evaluate policy outcomes.

An area that has not yet attracted any significant scholarly attention is the experiences of parents who are left behind in Xinjiang when students begin their education journey in inland China. Although Chen (2010) makes an attempt to use the notion of family social capital in analysing families' involvement in facilitating students' schooling experience, he approached the topic from a student perspective. Having said that, in the course of China's modernisation and development, the modern Chinese family unit, as observed by Huang (2011), takes a very different path to that of the West, politically and culturally, as well as economically and socially. Decision-making in education, for example, is mostly family-based rather than individually-based, especially prior to postgraduate education. The family sometimes shapes and constrains individual choices, and thus "irrational" behaviour for individuals can be quite rational for the family unit. Thus, conflicts between husband and wife, parents and grandparents, or children and parents are very common in the family. Nevertheless, the final decision is often presented in the name of, or for the sake of the family.

Although the distanced relationship with their children might hinder what and how parents express their expectations, the impact of cultural discontinuity is never straightforward, and so an understanding of the motivations of parents in the process of government schooling can dramatically improve our understanding of the impact of the Xinjiang class policy on students and the community more generally. A better understanding of the motivations and involvement of parents in the process of government schooling may also shed light on how the parent–child relationship is impacted by distance and long-term detachment.

In the next chapter, I provide an overview of research methods used in this research project, together with details about participants, data acquisition, and data analysis.

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe and justify the methodology employed in the study. Participants were Xinjiang class students (enrolled and graduated) and families (parents and siblings). The analysis focuses on Xinjiang class students and their families in a rapidly changing society. It delves into their experience and reflections about struggles, decisions, and adaptations they have made after their children move to inland China to study. One of the best ways to find out about the experiences of Xinjiang students is through ethnographic field research to develop a general understanding of the economic and social conditions of the family. In this research, I have adopted an ethnographically oriented qualitative case study for data collection, which mainly involves in-depth interviews and observation.

This chapter has five parts, in which I describe my data collection methods and address the research questions and the main aims of this study. To begin with, an overview of methodological considerations has been introduced. They present an analysis of the logic and rationale for organizing the methodology as well as the rationale for selecting participants and sites. Part three justifies my position in this research. This is followed by a description of the main methods of data collection adopted in this study, namely documents collected during fieldwork, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. After that, I describe how the data were interpreted and analysed and explain how the research questions were constructed in separate articles. The final part addresses the ethical considerations and confidentiality and reliability in conducting this research.

3.2 Methodological considerations

My study embraces the fact that there is no single reality or truth, “reality is not simply to be observed, but rather ‘interpreted’” (Corbetta, 2003, p. 21), and the “subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically, they are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). The epistemological stance of my research is that meaning is not discovered, but constructed, different people may construct meaning in different ways. Besides, “to prepare an interpretation is itself to construct a reading of these meanings; it is to offer the inquirer’s construction of the constructions of the actors one studies” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 222). The

researcher tends to rely upon the “participants’ views of the situation being studied” (Creswell, 2003, p. 8) and recognises the impact on the research of their own background and experiences. As a result, they “generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings” (Creswell, 2007, p. 9) throughout the research process. The philosophical assumptions underpinning this study, thus, informs an interpretive methodology, and an ethnographically oriented qualitative case study was thus adopted “to make sense (or interpret) the meanings others have about the world” (Creswell, 2007, p. 21).

3.2.1 Qualitative case study

As indicated in Chapter 1, this study is intended to answer the following questions:

1. How do ethnic minority students from Xinjiang maintain their ethnic identity while, at the same time, becoming well-educated citizens in a Han-dominated environment?
2. How do the caregivers of students perceive the value of Xinjiang class education?
3. What are the implications for the parent-child relationship after a student’s period of detachment from their families and communities?

In order to address these questions, I present an integrated methodology section that describes how I made contact with participants, outlines methods of data collection, transcription, and analysis. To interpret the impact of the Xinjiang class policy on the lives of both the students and their families, I have adopted a qualitative case study methodology to address the research questions. The nature of the qualitative study, generally speaking, is especially well suited to this study. According to Freebody (2003, p. 35), “qualitative” is a slippery term, carrying a variety of conceptual associations. It differs from quantitative research methods, which leave out many interesting and potentially consequential things about a phenomenon, such as the concerns and understandings of the researcher and the richness of the accounts of the researcher’s experiences.

The objective of a qualitative study, according to Erickson (2012), is “to document in detail the conduct of everyday events and to identify the meanings that those events have for those who participate in them and for those who witness them” (p. 1451). In other words, qualitative research takes place in the natural world, and the principal data for qualitative researchers are gathered directly by the researcher. Therefore, qualitative

research represents a strong fieldwork tradition that requires researchers to spend enough time in those contexts to feel confident that they are capturing what they claim is important. The qualitative researcher adopts “a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 4) to explore a topic, and, consequently, a researcher’s identity is of great significance in the way the research is shaped. Based on the writing of Rallis and Rossman (2012), Marshall and Rossman (2016) have offered a detailed stance concerning the nature of qualitative research and the characteristics of qualitative researchers’ practice. Marshall and Rossman (2016) concluded that qualitative research is “a broad approach to the study of social phenomena. The various genres are naturalistic, interpretive and increasingly critical, and they typically draw on multiple methods of inquiry” (2016, p. 3). Qualitative researchers collect as many details from the research setting as possible, then set about the process of looking for patterns of relationships among the specifics. Sometimes, the act of studying a social phenomenon influences the enactment of that phenomenon. Hence, qualitative reports are usually complex and contain detailed narratives that include the voices of the participants being studied. They build the case for the researcher’s interpretations by including enough detail and actual data to take the reader inside the social situation under examination (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Qualitative methods are applicable in the current research because they focus on human experiences as well as the abundant meanings that underpin these experiences. Silverman (2015) noted that qualitative research is often concerned with a small number of cases that are observed in their natural contexts and that can be analysed in multiple ways depending on the questions. Defining the unit of analysis, and setting boundaries around the case, is important. A case could refer to an individual, a small group, or an intervention (Gillham, 2000; Yin, 2014).

The research questions guiding this project require a detailed description of the Xinjiang class policy as well as a small number of Xinjiang class students and their family members to understand their everyday experiences through fine-grained analysis of the data. Selecting appropriate cases, according to Thomas (2011), is based on many criteria such as the researchers’ familiarity with the case or the case’s intrinsic significance. However, it should be noted that the ability to gain access is also an important criterion for selection. One had to strategically adjust to the situation in the field and identify “cases” within the setting (Creswell, 2013, p. 73).

3.2.2 The ethnographic approach

As a strategy of inquiry, the study was advantaged through the adoption of an ethnographic stance. According to Creswell (2007), ethnography focuses on an entire cultural group and it involves “extended observations of the group” (p. 68), in which the researcher is immersed in the daily lives of the people and conducts observations and interviews with the people within that group (Agar, 1996; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). The researcher is interested in understanding the meaning of the behaviour, the language, and the interactions among members of the culture-sharing group (Rossman & Rallis, 2011). Hence, “fieldwork is the heart of the ethnographic research design” (Given, 2008, p 288).

The current study aimed to investigate the long-term impacts of the Xinjiang class policy on a number of both students and parents, with a broader concern of improving the performance and wellbeing of ethnic minority students who participate in government schooling. It is, therefore, important to provide a holistic and scientific sense of the religion, politics and environment of this particular group. By adopting the ethnographic stance and staying in the field for a certain period of time, I was able to observe how Xinjiang class students and their parents work and live, what they do and say, and what they make and use (Spradley, 1980). Talking with participants in a specific natural and cultural setting, I could gain a contextualized, in-depth understanding of how the structure and culture shaped, constrained and in some cases, defined their actions. As a result, the ethnographic approach enabled the researcher to provide a holistic cultural portrait which incorporated the views of both the participants and the researcher. Within this description, readers learn about this group from both the participants and the interpretation of the researcher. Some could also “advocate for the needs of the group or suggest changes in society to address needs of the group” (Creswell 2007, p. 72).

Nevertheless, it should be admitted that a more prolonged stay in the field could have benefitted the research study and built an even greater rapport with those in the group. Due to time and financial limitation of this research study, I could only spend three months in the field, therefore, this research study cannot be labelled as a typical ethnographic study. Taken from Chen (2008), this research study is an ethnographically oriented qualitative case study.

3.3 Site accessibility and participant selection

Research relating to Chinese minorities, and access to minority areas, remains a significant challenge for those interested in working in this area (Postiglione, 2000). As a specially designed educational program, Xinjiang classes are complex. The program needs to account for curriculum goals and design, the multi-ethnic composition of the class, and the political sensitivity around ethnic minority separatist movements. In sum, gaining access to ethnic minority Xinjiang class students presents a substantial challenge for researchers from China or other countries.

In order to access potential participants, I reached out to some ethnic Uyghur university students through a mutual acquaintance. I soon realized that access to Xinjiang students is extremely limited within the school context, let alone access to parents. According to these university students, students from Xinjiang are managed separately in universities for the purpose of supervision convenience. Specifically, a Xinjiang student is not only supervised by the faculty or department to which he or she belongs, but is also administered by a particular staff member who takes charge of all the Xinjiang students on campus. These specific staff members have established a QQ (social software, similar to Facebook) group where all the Xinjiang students in that university are included, and everything concerning those students is posted there. I was invited to join this QQ group by an Uyghur student leader in that university and was removed from the group some weeks later by the group owner as an “outsider” who had not built a connection with the administrative staff in charge.

Having failed to find participants in this university, I changed my recruitment strategy. I started to broaden my social network and, as a consequence, I was connected with a person by the name of Ming through our mutual friend. Ming is an ethnic Xibe from Qapqal Xibe Autonomous County in Xinjiang province. He graduated from the Xinjiang class in Jiangsu Province a few years ago and was working in Beijing at the time he connected with me. Ming volunteered to help me find Xinjiang class graduates and expressed his interest in this research project. He introduced me to some of his Xinjiang class friends, two of whom the researcher was able to build rapport with. They later introduced other Xinjiang class friends from different host schools in different cities to me. The relationship was then maintained through online social networks (i.e. Wechat) before and after the fieldwork. My Han Chinese friends in college who come from Xinjiang introduced me to a few ethnic minority students who subsequently helped me

find some potential participants. This snowball sampling “helped to ensure [a] greater diversity of participants and source of data” (Chen, 2019, p. 78). I also reached out online and found potential participants, one of whom invited me to her home to conduct interviews with her parents.

I first arrived in Ürümchi, the capital city of Xinjiang on 10th July 2017 and it was my first time there. The temperature can go up to 40 degrees Celsius in summer, and the sun sets around 10 p.m. Due to the long periods of sunlight and the temperature difference between day and night, Xinjiang is famous for its fruits such as honeyed melons and grapes. I was picked up at the airport by a local Han Chinese friend whom I met in Sydney. She grew up in a Han Chinese-dominated city named Shihezi in northern Xinjiang. Because she was on her school break at that time, she promised to take me around in the city.

I had some striking experiences in Xinjiang, most of which were previously unfamiliar to me. For example, all shoppers entering the bazaar had to pass through metal detectors and, one at a time, place their national identification cards on a reader while having their faces scanned. At a large checkpoint where I transferred from one place to another, a policeman ordered everyone off a bus. The passengers’ identity cards were scanned, again one by one. At the city’s railway station, travellers go through three rounds of bag checks before buying a ticket. Restaurants have a similar, but easier security check system. Sometimes the security guard would take a look at us and simply let us in without being checked. My native friend told me that is because we look like Han Chinese and we are female. What is more, some “convenience police stations” (*bian min jing wu zhan*) were situated at street corners, and according to the information they put on the board, it is possible to access certain services inside the station, such as bottled water and phone recharging. The windowless stations, painted gunmetal grey with forbidding grilles on their doors, are part of a “grid-management system” similar to stations being used in Tibet.

As stated before, the rapport between the participants and I was initially built and maintained through Wechat, in which the participants could scrutinize my own background, and we naturally became “cyberfriend”. As a result, most potential participants were willing to share their stories with me, with one or two refusing the request to meet, and the naturally snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013), is “a useful way to pursue the goals of purposive sampling in many situations where there are no lists or other obvious sources for locating members of the population of interest” (Morgan, 2008). The

potential risk of snowball sampling is a biased subset of participants, and this was addressed by beginning with a set of initial participants that was as diverse as possible. A total of 15 participants from 11 families was recruited for this research. Nearly all participants lived in Xinjiang, but some of the student participants attended university in other places and returned home for a summer holiday. Only one informant wanted to be interviewed in Nanjing, eastern China, where she was currently working and living. I spent most of my time in northern Xinjiang, including Ürümqi, Turpan, and Ghulja (Tekes county and Qupqal Xibe autonomous county) where the participants lived. Nine family members of the Xinjiang class students, comprising five mothers, two fathers and two siblings, participated in the research. The remaining six were student participants. Although I intended to achieve demographic representativeness, the data sample does not necessarily represent the Xinjiang class “norm”, yet more than half of the participants came from a Muslim background, which reflects the demographic characteristic of the Xinjiang classes. Table 3.1, in which all names have been replaced with pseudonyms, contains information about the students and their families.

Table 3.1

Students and Family Members Who Participated in the Research

	Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Occupation	Location	Relationship to the student
P 1	Memet	Male	Uyghur	Casual jobs	Ürümqi	/
P 2	Xue	Female	Hui	Civil servant	Ürümqi	Mother
P 3	Sea	Male	Yi	Bank teller	Ürümqi	/
P 4	Shan	Female	Uyghur	University student	Turpan	/
P 5	Jiang	Male	Uyghur	Farmer	Turpan	Father
P 6	Jin	Female	Uyghur	Nurse	Turpan	Mother
P 7	Jia	Male	Hui	Bank teller	Ürümqi	/
P 8	Ping	Female	Xibe	Restaurant owner	Qupqal	Mother
P 9	Paul	Male	Kirgiz	High school student	Tekes	/
P 10	Zi	Female	Kirgiz	University student	Tekes	Sibling
P 11	Jie	Female	Han	Civil servant	Shihezi	Mother
P 12	Yue	Female	Uyghur	Teacher	Ürümqi	Mother
P 13	Gang	Male	Xibe	Farmer	Qupqal	Father
P 14	Qiang	Male	Xibe	University student	Qupqal	Sibling
P 15	Ting	Female	Mongolia	Self-employed	Nanjing	/

* Participants who came from the same family was emphasised in dark colour.

3.4 The role of the researcher

It is important to address the researcher's position before describing and justifying the data collection methods, because that position will influence what information is collected and how the data are interpreted (Bernard, 2006). Being native Chinese, qualified me as an "insider" to conduct research in China because I am familiar with Chinese culture and was educated in mainstream China for over 20 years. I know the mainstream ideology and lifestyle as a member of the Han people (the mainstream population that comprises 92% of the population). However, I am an "outsider" for most of my participants from Xinjiang province because I come from the ethnic Han group, which is viewed as the mainstream cultural group and the "oppressor" or controlling group. I could not really claim to have the same way of thinking as those who come from different ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds. The lack of any direct relations between the participants and me, as the investigator, brought me to consider the parallel relation I could find and rely on. For example, my identity as an international PhD student and the shared experience of being away from home at an early age (I went to boarding school at the age of 13) impressed my student participants who noted my independence and knowledge. We shared the same life journey to some degree, they were curious about my study abroad, and they would ask for my advice on career development or ways to study abroad. Moreover, my age was similar to theirs and this prompted them to treat me like a Han Chinese friend. To some younger ones, I am like an experienced senior who could provide them with useful information.

For the parent participants, I was a friend and acquaintance of their children. Some of the parents showed their respect for my position as a PhD student and said that their children should learn from me. They even wanted to know more about their children through me because they were aware that long-term detachment produces unfamiliarity and alienation between them and their children. In other words, they saw me as an intermediary between themselves and their children. It is true that a longer stay with the participants would have provided a larger body of useful information. Due to the time and financial limitation, I could manage only to visit some of the participants' houses, staying with one family for 2 weeks, during which I was able to make close and detailed observations of their daily interactions. Sometimes the parents would share with me things that they did not want to discuss with their children, such as their worries about

their children's marriage or career development. These issues will be explored in detail in articles.

Finally, I understand that my ethnicity and my identity as a Han Chinese PhD candidate studying abroad meant that our relationship was never completely equal or free from a sense of difference. Therefore, all I could do was describe my understanding of what I heard, what I saw, and what I felt, in a way of thinking that had been socially constructed in settings dominated by the Han people and the western world.

3.5 Data collection methods

According to Hatch (2002), the principal data collection methods for qualitative research:

usually include field notes from participant observation, notes from or transcriptions of interviews with participants, and unobtrusive data such as artefacts from the research site or records related to the social phenomena under investigation. Even mechanical or electronic devices were used to support qualitative work (p. 7).

Yin (2018) has stated that four principles should be observed in the process of data collection. These include using multiple sources of evidence, creating a case study database, maintaining a chain of evidence, and exercising care when using data from social media sources. Furthermore, according to Yin, case study evidence can come from many sources, including documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artefacts (p. 111). The data for this research project consisted of three types: documents, in-depth interviews, and participant observation.

3.5.1 Documents

Documentation, such as agendas, announcements, and minutes of meetings and other reports of events is useful even though it is not always accurate and may be biased. For case study research, the most important use of documentation is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Yin, 2018). Documents are powerful indicators of the value systems operating within institutions, and they can provide a behind-the-scenes look at institutional processes and how they came into being (Patton, 2002). According to Hatch (2002), "they can give the researcher a sense of history related to the contexts being studied". This research concentrates on the impacts of one government-designed educational policy for ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, China. Hence, in terms of the Xinjiang class policy, the major official documents that I collected for later analysis were documents that had been released by the Ministry of Education (MOE). These included

The Implementation Opinions for Establishing the Xinjiang Classes in Senior Secondary Schools in Relevant Inland Cities (hereafter *Opinions*), *The Meeting Minutes of the Inland Xinjiang Classes in Senior Secondary Schools* (hereafter *Minutes*), and *Administration Regulations on the Inland Xinjiang Classes in Senior Secondary Schools (Trial Vision)* (hereafter *Regulations*). These were issued in January, May, and June in the year 2000, respectively. Although *Opinions* mainly highlight political concerns regarding the Xinjiang Class policy, the other two documents interpret the stated goals in terms of their educational significance. Other documents included news releases from the official website of the Xinjiang classes from October 2016 to May 2017 and photographs provided by participants in reference to their life experiences. As shown in Figure 3.1, one student participant showed me a picture of his summer holiday activity in his hometown.

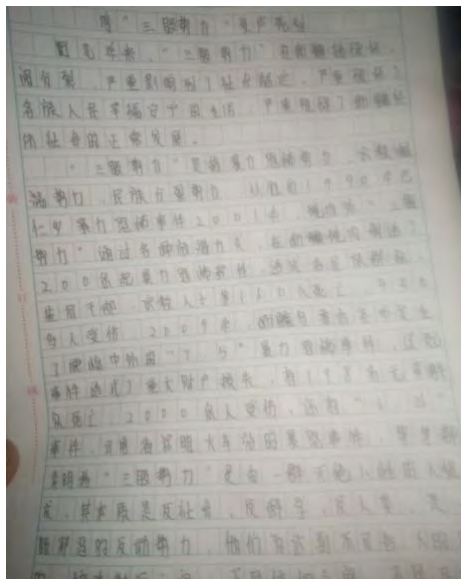


Figure 3.1. Picture provided by one student participant. The picture shows a speech he gave to his peers back home, titled “Facing and fighting the three evil forces”.

3.5.2 In-depth interviews

In-depth interviews encourage and promote participants to talk in detail about the topic under investigation without the researcher’s use of predetermined, focused short-answer questions. Cook (2008) has stated that “the researcher is not required to prepare an extensive list of questions; rather, the researcher is required to be aware of the major

domains of experience likely to be discussed by the participant and be able to probe how these relate to the topic under investigation” (p. 423). Moreover, although pursuing a consistent line of inquiry, the actual stream of questions in a case study interview is likely to be fluid rather than rigid (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). In this research project, I followed “the leads of my informants and probed into areas that arise during interview interactions with guiding questions” (Hatch, 2002, p. 94). To specify, the interview started with general questions in terms of their early perceptions of the Xinjiang class policy in the hope of gaining an overall impression. I would also probe into significant incidents that happened to students in inland China, and explore the inside information. I presented myself as a good listener and consequently, the participants would share their feelings and experiences with me while I was content to absorb the positive as well as negative aspects of their lives. Some of their experiences reminded me of my own boarding school life. The parent participants were more than willing to share their motivations for sending their child away for education, as well as their feelings and life changes after their children enrolled in Xinjiang classes. The interview process was full of tears and laughter. For example, one of the parent participants shared a funny experience. She was told that the local Han Chinese students would willingly use their seafood in exchange for Xinjiang nan bread (a food commonly found in specially designed Xinjiang class hosting school canteens), since they never saw this particular kind of food before. They even named the nan bread as pizza due to the dinning differences and cultural innocence.

The student participants who had left the Xinjiang classes some years previously had more distance from their experience, and could, therefore, be more objective when they looked back at their experience. In this research, I was not focused on identifying the “truth”, but on looking at lives and experiences of ethnic minority students and their families, as they “see” their lives and those experiences. All interviews were conducted in Chinese, with the exception of one parent who could not speak fluent Chinese. Her university-level daughter helped translate during the interview. The duration of each interview was 1 to 2 hours, and interviews were audio recorded. The interview data were then analysed in the participants’ original language to maintain the subtle meaning, and the results were subsequently translated from Chinese to English.

3.5.3 Participant observation

Participant observation, as Corbetta (2003) stated, is used to comprehend the point of view of the insider as well as bringing out perspectives that the participants themselves

did not notice. It is a special mode of observation in which the researcher is not merely a passive observer. Instead, the researcher may assume a variety of roles within a fieldwork situation and may actually participate in the actions being studied (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2010). Hatch (2002) observed that “the idea is to be there in the social setting, to make a careful record of what people say and do, and to make sense of how the participants make sense within that setting” (p. 73). Participant observation permits a better understanding of the contexts in which phenomena occur and allows the researcher to be open to discover inductively how the participants understand the setting. More importantly, the researcher has the opportunity to see things that are taken for granted by participants and would be less likely to come to the surface using interviewing or other data-collection techniques. Some sensitive information that the participants may be reluctant to discuss in interviews could also be learnt through observation, and the researcher can add his or her own experience in the setting to the analysis of what is happening (Patton, 1990, pp. 202–205). The level of involvement does not have to be either nonparticipation or complete participation. The researcher needs to consider how his or her participation in the context influences the natural flow of events in that context (Hatch, 2002, pp. 73–74).

For example, invited by Ming, I had been a resident in the neighbourhood for 2 weeks during my fieldwork in Xinjiang. Ming’s family owned a small holiday resort which consists of dining, accomodation and informal ethnic culture experience tour. Lots of visitors are attracted by its reputation of authentic ethnic food and culture. Since his mother is my interviewee, Ming’s family is happy to host me while I was in Xinjiang, and I automatically became a “casual helper” in the dining section. As a “participant” in this particular setting, I tried to observe the work through the eyes of my participants, and in so doing I made my observations “carefully in an effort to acquire members’ knowledge, and consequently understand from the participants’ point of view what motivated them to do what I had observed them doing, and what these acts mean[t] at the time” (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p. 8).

When conducting an interview with one of my participants at her place, I noticed that she had two grandchildren, one of whom spoke Mandarin when communicating with others, while the younger child consistently spoke the ethnic language. I asked the reason for this, and the participant told me that the elder child went to a primary school where they offer limited time for ethnic language learning, he used to speaking Mandarin after immersed in a single-language environment for a certain period of time every day. The

family gave extra attention to creating a language environment for the younger one so that he could master the family's ethnic language before attending kindergarten. On other occasions as well, I noticed that even in family settings, participants unconsciously speaking Mandrain with their family members. Except for one participant, who switching Uyghur and Mandarin during the interview since her mother cannot speak Mandrain, and she acted as the translator. Participant observation was conducted over the three months of my fieldwork, in both formal (i.e. houses) and "informal" spaces (i.e. dining areas, backyards, streets) in order to uncover the interactions between students and their families. Figure 3.2 and 3.3 also show the ethnic culture protection in "private space" and Chinese culture indoctrination in "public space".



Figure 3.2. The picture was taken by the field researcher. The picture shows traditional handmade shoes presented and protected in an ethnic Xibe family.

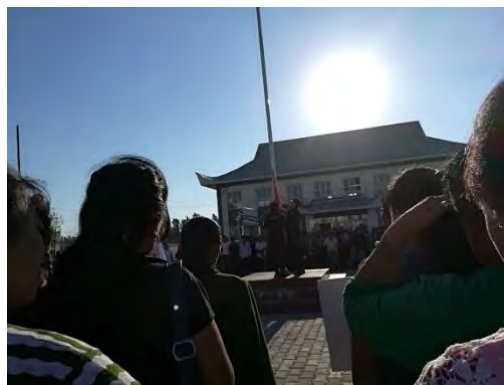


Figure 3.3. The picture was taken by the field researcher: community event. The picture shows an event organised by the local council, raising the Chinese national flag.

To summarise, documents, in-depth interviews, and participant observation were the major sources of data. Hatch (2002) reminds researchers that informal but essential data

analysis happens from the first moment of data collection, and researchers should “keep track of their impressions, reactions, reflections, and tentative interpretations in field notes and/or research journals as studies unfold” (Hatch, 2002, p. 149). The following section discusses the processes of data analysis.

3.6 Data analysis

Yin (2014) proposed that the starting point for data analysis is to “search for patterns, insights, or concepts that seem promising” (p. 135). In this section, I present brief descriptions of how data were analysed using different strategies.

Initially, the data were organized into three groups:

1. Xinjiang class students
2. Families of Xinjiang class students
3. The relationship between parents and students

The student data, including the policy discourses, school experiences, current situations, future planning, and family interactions were examined so that I could understand how remote schooling influences Xinjiang class students’ identities and sense of belonging to family and community. The data from families, including the in-depth interviews with the parents and siblings of Xinjiang class students, and participant observation in their family settings are examined. The motivations that underpin family decisions to allow their children to move away for education were explored. The relationship between parents and students were used as a means of studying the impacts of long-term detachment from one’s family and community. I evaluated students’ understanding of themselves, and how that contrasted with family and community expectations of them.

3.6.1 Treatment of documents and observation data

Official documents, news releases, and photographs in this study were used to reveal the social setting of Xinjiang class policy. The content analysis of the documents collected in this study offers an overview of Xinjiang class policy. The “setting, people, activities, events, apparent feelings”(Gillham, 2000, p. 53) in participant observation were recorded and field notes were taken for further analysing. Analysis and participant observation is indispensable, along with a “thick description” of each case.

3.6.2 Thematic coding of interviews

Interview data, as I understand, are the main source of data analysis to discover the “realities” behind the scene. Each participant was assigned a numeric identifier in order to keep the data confidential. Although transcribing is often difficult and tedious work, I have transcribed all interviews. During the transcription process, I added context, nonverbal information, and bracket notations from my notes and memory (Woods, 1986). Sometimes I was able to recognise words that could not have been recognized by a transcriber and I could also learn from my participants. The qualitative thematic analysis was used to extract, categorise, and systematise participants’ concepts, beliefs, and philosophies (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). It involves identifying and classifying themes such as abstract concepts in a collection of data. Coding facilitates the development of themes, and the development of themes facilitate coding.

Rapley (2011) suggested that a four-steps data coding procedure starts from identifying initial categories based on the reading of the transcript, then writing codes alongside the transcripts, after that, reviewing the list of codes, revising the list of categories and deciding which codes should appear in which category and looking for themes and findings in each category. After reading the data several times, based on the coding scheme from Rapley (2011), I used the software QSR NVivo 12 to categorise the data for the first time and recategorise it manually to ensure that I obtained a full understanding of the data. The overall focus was on the extraction of themes and the relationship between them, in order to build an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of students and their families within this distanced schooling system. For example, to answer the research question “how do parents of ethnic minority students from Xinjiang perceive the value of the Xinjiang class education?”, I explored the motivations behind parents’ choice to send their children away for education. On reading through the sections of the interview about families’ experiences and perceptions for all nine participants, I became aware that the initial categories appeared to be the following:

1. the benefits that Xinjiang class education could offer for students themselves,
2. the benefits of Xinjiang class education could offer for families and communities, and
3. the benefits of Xinjiang class education could offer for the wider society

After deciding on the initial list of categories, I started to write the codes alongside the interview transcripts, and kept reviewing and revising in the process of data analysis.

Table 3.2 contains a brief summary of the coding procedures for analysing some of the family data.

Table 3.2

Coding Themes for Analysing Family Data

Abstract coding	Coding	Themes
Having stable jobs	Employable	Individual functional capabilities
Gaining more useful information, care for the whole society, travel a lot	Knowledgeable	
Take care of selves, self-discipline and ambitious	Independent	
Better to go back after graduation and marry the same ethnic member	Belonging	Relational functional capabilities
Empower the whole family financially	Financially helpful	
Recognized by people around, influencing others in a good way	Respected and inspiring	
Teaching others Mandarin during school break, possible change-maker for the whole city	Social changemaker	Collective functional capabilities

3.7 Methodological challenges

Researching ethnic minorities, especially those in Xinjiang, is extremely sensitive. As a researcher in this area noticed, “ethnic relations in China are a sensitive topic. If questions are too direct, fear of political incorrectness may make respondents hide their real answers” (Yee, 2005). Further, Postiglione (2000) asserted that “national minority education is still the most difficult area of research within Chinese educational studies...Access to minority areas is often restricted and contacts are usually managed through Han mediators” (pp. 54–55). The “sensitivity” is, therefore, the first challenge I needed to face in conducting this research. Together with my supervisors, I met with the ethics committee from my university for the first time to ensure I could provide sufficient proof that my participants would be safe both physically and psychologically through their participation in my research project. They also wanted to ensure that my safety was assured in relation to the 2009 Ürümqi riots in Xinjiang. After that, a second meeting was organized to suggest I obtain oral consent instead of written informed consent from my participants, as well as devising appropriate methods for protection of data. This process, although

protracted and time-consuming, strikes a balance between keeping people safe while pursuing necessary research in a tense political context.

The next challenge was recruiting participants. I realized it was not a topic that one could openly discuss. My request to access Xinjiang ethnic minority students was refused several times, for sensitive reasons. Nevertheless, previous research has shown that social relations have always played a vital role in gaining access to the research field in China (Yu, 2009; Zhao, 2010; Zhu, 2007). I managed to get to know one Xinjiang class graduate through my personal network, and through him, I was able to make contact with other participants.

The third and most severe challenge was a sense of safety in the field. Growing up as a Han Chinese, I had never been to Xinjiang, although I was familiar with its reputation for natural beauty. I arrived at Ürümqi, the capital city of Xinjiang, where I had to pay extra attention to how I behaved. For example, wherever I went, the security would check my identification card and belongings, and sometimes they would require me to take out the water bottle and have a sip before letting me in the mall. On my transfer to another city, the special police (*Tejing*) demanded that everyone get off the bus and then present our identification card and walk through a scanner. On one occasion I was buying fruit in a small street shop when I heard a harsh whistle. The owner dropped everything immediately and walked inside the shop, took out a long, thick stick, and then moved towards a group of people who armed themselves in the same way. I was both terrified and shocked, as an old lady near me whispered, “Do not worry, they are just conducting a practice in case riots happen again. It is common here.” As an international student, researching a sensitive topic, I was warned by senior academics from a similar research background to watch my behaviour in Xinjiang. I was a little terrified, and I decided to keep all my official documents with me wherever I went, hoping that these documents could prove that I am a “submissive” Chinese citizen.

3.8 Ethical considerations, research reliability and validity

3.8.1 Ethical considerations

As a researcher, I had to bear in mind that my first responsibility was to the participants. This research project was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Macquarie University (Reference No.: 5201700055). Appendix 1 contains the ethics letter issued by the committee. All participants received an information sheet describing

the research program before they were interviewed, and all participants completed a consent form. I used recorded rather than written consent to protect the participants' anonymity considering the sensitivity of this research (Chen, 2008; Yang, 2017). All photos taken in the field had the consent of participants and some were offered by participants themselves. The participants were also offered a chance to read the transcriptions to ensure the accuracy of the contents. Above all, information about the students and their families that contributed to recruiting participants, including their names, were kept strictly confidential. All identifying details were anonymised in the accounts of the research. All of which ensure the ability of this research study to recruit participants, collect data "freely", and provide a safe ground for participants to share.

3.8.2 Reliability and validity

The reliability of this research has also been considered. According to Miller (2008), the notion of reflexivity sits in the centre of those who want to embrace reliability in qualitative research and who see themselves as "visible, unbiased integral player" in the process of data collection and analysis. The idea of reflexivity is that "researchers' background, interests, skills and biases necessarily play unique roles in the framing of studies and in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data" (p. 754). Therefore, the unique identity of the researcher is transparently identified and purposefully centred in this chapter.

Creswell (2007) considers validation "an attempt to assess the 'accuracy' of the findings in qualitative research" (p. 206). He proposes eight strategies for qualitative researchers and encourages them to engage at least two of them to document the accuracy of their studies. These include prolonged engagement in the field, triangulation of data of sources, methods, peer review for external check of the research process, refining working hypotheses as the inquiry advances, clarifying researcher bias, member (participants) checking of the credibility of the findings and interpretations, thick description and external audits. In this chapter, I have described the processes and methods for data collection, as well as the strategies in analysing the research data, in order to provide readers with sufficient information to evaluate the reliability and validity of this study, and the accuracy and credibility of research findings.

In the following chapters, I will present the results of data analysis through three journal articles that have been submitted for review. Each article in the findings section

was treated as a separate case study, interpreting a specific research question. Table 3.3 contains the details of each article, including themes, data, and methods of analysis.

Table 3.3

Research Topic, Data, and Method of Analysis for each Article

Article	Topic	Data	Method of analysis	Chapter
Negotiation of identities in cross-cultural contexts: A case study of Xinjiang class students.	Students' experience after enrolling in Xinjiang classes as well as the change of their perceptions toward families and communities.	Interviews with six students who attended the Xinjiang classes	Thematic analysis	Chapter 4
The value of Xinjiang class education to ethnic minority students, their families, and community: A capability approach	The motivation of allowing children to go away for education through the lens of capability development, and how parents' agency performed in this process	Interviews with nine parents/siblings who have/had a family member in Xinjiang classes	Thematic analysis Content analysis	Chapter 5
Students of the imaginary: Interpreting the life experiences of ethnic minority students from Xinjiang classes.	The impacts for the parental-child relationship after a period of detachment from one's family and community	Interview data Observation; Documents	Thematic analysis	Chapter 6

Students' Experience in Xinjiang Classes

4.1 Preamble

As indicated in Chapter 1, I aim to explore the influence of the Xinjiang class policy from both the perspective of students and family in this thesis. I have presented in Chapters 2 and 3 a review of relevant literature and a description of the methodology. I now present the first of three journal articles in which the initial findings are considered in response to my first research question:

How do ethnic minority students from Xinjiang maintain their ethnic identity while, at the same time, becoming well-educated citizens in a Han dominated environment?

In order to address this question, I analyse the educational experiences as well as daily life changes of ethnic minority students after they enrolled into Xinjiang classes. This research focuses on the changes that Xinjiang class education has brought to students' identities. The study has adopted an interdisciplinary methodological way of thinking and analysing to reveal the changes that government schooling has brought to students' levels of identities, including individual, relational, and collective identity.

The individual identities refer to students' own goals, values, and beliefs that have changed after the students attended Xinjiang classes. Students' relational identities, that is their role as a child in the family, have changed in the ways they communicate with their parents, while the traditional values of being a responsible and reliable child remain the same. Collective identities manifested by students' ethnic identities have changed for some after they attended Xinjiang classes in inland China. Specifically, some choose to construct their identities in a more flexible way or even to revise the norms for the benefit of future development, for example, changing their dietary habits. Others retain their limited representations in a totally different cultural environment.

This article addresses the problem of how students strategically adjust their lives in mainstream society while also maintaining their own ethnic identity. The research data reveal that identity is rich and complex and that Xinjiang class students interpret changes in their ethnicity in diverse ways. For example, participants talked about a range of

influences on their identity, emphasising that individual decisions were not as important as decisions based on the environment and their different roles in that environment.

4.2 Article 2: Negotiation of identities in cross-cultural contexts: A case study of Xinjiang class students. Submitted to *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*.

Xin Su, Neil Harrison & Robyn Moloney

Abstract: The Inland Xinjiang Senior Secondary School Classes Policy, since its implementation in the year 2000, has promoted and funded middle-school students, mostly ethnic minorities from southern Xinjiang, to attend boarding schools in predominantly Han-populated cities throughout eastern China. The purpose of this policy is to improve ethnic minority students' political, economic, and cultural status, enhance ethnic unity, and promote Chinese nationalism. This article draws on the work of Sedikides and Brewer to define identity at three different levels of inclusiveness, namely individual, relational, and collective identities, and to provide a multi-layered understanding of identity formation and change. The findings show that the identity of Xinjiang class students shifts according to context and expectations that derive from multiple sources including self, others, and community. Finally, this study highlights the need to pay close attention to the impact of this policy from the perspective of parents.

Keywords: individual identity; relational identity; collective identity; Xinjiang class policy; ethnic minority students

Introduction

The People's Republic of China (PRC), as with many multicultural countries, is a unified country with diverse ethnic minorities. The formation of the modern Chinese nation and the view of the relationship between the majority Han and ethnic minority groups is based on China's famous sociologist Fei Xiaotong's (1988) theory of "plurality and unity in the configuration of the Chinese nationality" (*Zhonghua minzu duoyuan yiti geju*). According to Fei's framework, the 56 ethnic groups are united and unified into one Chinese nation while also maintaining their own culture, religions, languages, and customs. Fei further explained that there are two levels of identity among Chinese people, the identity of the Chinese nation at a national level and ethnic identity at a local level (Fei, 1997).

As a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual province, Xinjiang is situated in the far northwestern border area of China and is the hub of the Eurasian crossroads. Home to 13 major ethnic minority groups such as Uyghur, Kazakh, Hui, Kirghiz, and Mongolian, Xinjiang has a total population of 20.9 million, among which ethnic Uyghur makes up around 46 per cent, outnumbering the 40 per cent of Han who live in Xinjiang. In recent years an increasing number of riots have occurred in Xinjiang. Ethnic minorities, especially the Muslim Uyghur, have actively sought recognition of their identity, forcing the Chinese government to pay more attention to its strategies for national integration and border security. At the same time, the academic world has seen increasing interest in Xinjiang studies because of wider academic interests in borderlands and identity (Thum et al., 2018), and “the political resonance of a China-controlled, Muslim majority region in the post-September 11 world made Xinjiang books attractive to publishers” (Thum et al., 2018, p. 7).

Increasing interest in Xinjian studies is fundamentally linked to the efforts of the Chinese government to enhance national integration and border security. Specifically, in the area of education, a state-designed educational program for Xinjiang students, the Inland¹ Xinjiang Senior Secondary School Classes Policy (*Neidi Xinjiang Gaozhongban Zhengce*, hereafter the Xinjiang Class Policy)”, continues to trigger intense debates among researchers domestically and internationally. The Xinjiang class policy was implemented by the Chinese Ministry of Education (MOE) in 2000, and is a government-funded four-year educational program for middle-school students from Xinjiang, mostly ethnic minorities, to attend boarding schools in predominantly Han-populated cities located throughout eastern China. The policy aims to cultivate a large group of ethnic talents who could achieve overall developments in morals, intellect, physics, and atheism, contribute to economic and social development, and enhance national unity and cohesion. An additional main aspect of the policy is to ensure national border security (MOE, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). Students are required to finish a one-year preparatory course that focuses on Chinese, English, mathematics, physics and chemistry before continuing their studies in high school. They are encouraged to practice Mandarin outside the classroom (Chen, 2010) and are funded by the government to undertake a return trip to Xinjiang once each

¹ In Chinese, ‘inland Xinjiang class’ is called ‘neidi Xinjiang gaozhong ban’. Chen (2008) explained that inland (neidi) areas normally refer to the east and coastal Han concentration areas that are in contrast to the western minority-inhabited area.

year to visit their families. The number of students enrolled in Xinjiang classes has risen from 1,000 in the year 2000 to nearly 10,000 in 2016, with over 90 schools in 45 cities in eastern China involved in the Xinjiang class program in 2016².

Students from Xinjiang are immersed in their own ethnic culture including language, writing systems, and way of life before they arrive at boarding schools in eastern China. The logic behind the Xinjiang class policy, according to Leibold (2019), is to remove students from their home culture and “school them in the language, culture and values of the Han ethnic majority” (p. 3) in eastern Chinese cities, seeking to guarantee student affinity with the Chinese nation by constructing their identities within the confines of state norms. Leibold (2019) highlighting how students in the boarding schools not only conform to the expectations from the central government, but also find ways to assert their sense of self-worth and cultural distinctiveness. Some students resist if they feel that their own ethnic culture and identity is not being supported by the schooling system (Ogbu, 2008). In this sense, the experiences of Xinjiang class students offer a unique example of how one’s identity is personalized, dynamic and open to change. Based on this assumption, we explore the complicated, negotiation of identities in the education of Xinjiang class students.

Government schooling and Xinjiang class students’ experiences

The Xinjiang class policy has been in-place for nearly two decades and has become an integral piece of the Chinese government’s attempt to educate its western minorities (Grose, 2010a). It is argued that these students will become “a loyal and docile corps of ethnic elites who are fluent in *Putonghua* and possess politically correct thinking as well as affinity with Han-centric norms” (Leibold & Grose, 2019, p. 18). Substantial research has been devoted to examining the Xinjiang class policy, most of which has focused on the interplay between the institutionalized authority of the state agenda and the responses of ethnic minority (especially Uyghur) students. For example, Uyghur students bond with their peers and speak Uyghur in their spare time, thus engaging in a form “resistance” to mainstream Han society and its aims for national integration (Chen, 2010; Chen & Postiglione, 2009). Grose (2008, 2010b, 2014) argues that ethnic minority education in China functions merely to assimilate ethnic minority groups to a Han-dominated culture,

² Data are available on the Xinjiang Class website
<http://www.xjban.com/xjbxin/hmzc/negb/jbqk/2015/92283.htm>.

and a top-down national identity would perhaps trigger a bottom-up resistance and weaken reaction against the purpose of national integration. Moreover, Chen (2019) proposes that Uyghur graduates struggle in everyday life in eastern China to maintain their own identities.

Beyond the focus on Uyghur, research has been conducted in the area of multi-ethnic interactions within Xinjiang classes. For example, Yuan, Qian, and Zhu (2017) found that Xinjiang classes have largely promoted ethnic interactions. In addition, the interethnic politics are an ongoing construction and are shaped not only by the power dynamic between Han administrators and ethnic minority students but are also defined by the majority of Uyghur students and those from other ethnic backgrounds (Yuan, 2018).

Students from Xinjiang are uprooted from their home community and immersed in the more developed eastern China for at least four years. They exist in a world between different social norms, neither belonging to the Han community nor fulfilling a sense of affinity to their own ethnic community. Although the long-term consequences are difficult to anticipate, as indicated by Leibold (2018), students in these boarding schools not only conform to the expectations from the central government but also find ways to assert their sense of self-worth and cultural distinctiveness. For instance, in order to move forward and succeed in mainstream society, the students “carefully maneuver between multiple identities and bureaucratic obstacles” (Leibold & Grose, 2019, p. 30). Chen (2019) focused on the employment of Uyghur graduates, and discovered that some students may experience de-ethnicization, suggesting that they may be prepared to relinquish part of their identity in exchange for quality employment opportunities in eastern China, yet they may also experience re-ethnicization when encountering discrimination in the job market, and thus quietly resist Chinese rule.

It is argued here that issues of cultural maintenance and identity are far more complex than the simple cultural dichotomies that have previously been applied to studies highlighting the impact of Xinjiang class policy on minority groups in western China. The Xinjiang class policy could open the door to exploring the complicated yet dynamic process of student negotiation of identities. Yet, research about Xinjiang class students has largely emphasized similarities among all Xinjiang class students while overlooking the diversity of participants. The focus of this research, therefore is to look at some of the

subtleties in the students' experience and to explore how minority students from Xinjiang maintain their ethnic identity as well as becoming independent citizens in Chinese society.

Researching identity in Xinjiang classes

Schools have long been the context within which researchers study the effects of schooling on the identities of ethnic minority students (Chen, 2006; Hansen, 1999; Zhao, 2007). For example, Yu (2009) revealed that ethnic Naxi students managed to maintain their Naxi identities while embracing a Han identity through the influences of the state and the school, the Naxi intellectuals, and the local community. The experiences and identities of ethnic Tibetan university students, according to Yang (2017), have been constantly shaped and reshaped by social interactions in the campus context. More recent research by Xu and Yang (2019) indicated that students choose to downplay their ethnic identity to an imagined future while adopting a utilitarianism way of thinking and behaving to secure an advantaged place in an environment full of pressure. From this research, identity is revealed as emerging out of individuals' lived experience; it is complicated, dynamic, and exhibits multiplicity that can be formed and reformed in different contexts.

In this article, we have adopted a psychological understanding of identity based on the work of Sedikides and Brewer (2001). Sedikides and Brewer (2001) propose that the diversity of identity can be best captured by three distinct components: the individual self, the relational self, and the collective self. Drawing on this model, Vignoles, Schwartz, and Luyckx (2011)) put forward an integrative view of identity to suggest that identity can be defined at several different levels of inclusiveness and is "simultaneously a personal, relational and collective phenomenon" (p. 8). People personally value their individual-self most, their relational-self less, and their collective-self least (Nehrlich, Gebauer, Sedikides, & Abele, 2018; Sedikides, Gaertner, Luke, Mara, & Gebauer, 2013). We have applied the hierarchy of Brewer and Sedikides in order to account for all three levels of identity formation, namely individual, relational, and collective identity. Individual or personal identity refers to aspects of self-definition at the level of the individual person. Relational identity reflects individuals' roles as well as how their roles are defined and interpreted by others (Vignoles et al., 2011). Collective identity can be understood as "people's identification with the groups and social categories to which they belong" (Vignoles et al., 2011, p. 3). Viewing identity through a lens of hierarchical

ordering (Sedikides and Brewer, 2001) allows us to understand the full richness and complexity of what identity means and how it changes according to place and time.

We therefore diverge from the existing research to illustrate the uniqueness of participants' life experience and how their identities are influenced and sometimes transformed through attending the Xinjiang classes. In recounting the stories of students' identities, we aim to provide a fuller picture of identity that represents a complicated, dynamic, and open system. Specifically, we are going to highlight how individuals' identities are multi-layered and dynamic, develop over time according to changes in their personal values, and their shifting roles in the family as well as in the community.

Research methods

The current study draws on three months of field research conducted at several sites in Xinjiang including Ürümqi, Turpan, Ghulja (Tekes county and Qupqal Xibe autonomous county), and in Nanjing, northwest of Shanghai, between July and September 2017. Participants were recruited before and during this time through the use of snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013). During this period, the first author conducted 15 in-depth interviews with students and family members from Xinjiang classes. Of the 15 participants, six were Xinjiang class students and nine were parents or siblings of the Xinjiang class students. Because this is a large research project constituting a series of articles, the perspectives of the parents and siblings are addressed elsewhere (authors forthcoming), in which the authors explore the motivations of families who permit their children to move away for education. In this article, we investigate the life experiences of the students, so the six student participants constitute the major data source. These students were interviewed about their learning experiences, relationship with families, and the impact of the Xinjiang class policy on their daily lives.

To create a safe environment for participants to speak freely, the interviews were conducted in places such as a quiet café, Dicos (similar to MacDonalds, but they provide Halal food for special needs), or at the participant's home upon request. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin, lasted for 1 to 2 hours, and were audio recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis. For the purpose of anonymity, the participants are identified by a number and pseudonym (see Table 1). Although the Uyghurs are the majority group in the Xinjiang class (two Uyghur students were interviewed), this article presents the views of minority students from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Table 1

Students Who Participated in the Research

Participant number	Name	Ethnic identity	Position/job
P 1	Memet	Uyghur	Casual jobs
P 3	Sea	Yi	Bank teller
P 4	Shan	Uyghur	University student
P 7	Jia	Hui	Bank teller
P 9	Paul	Kirgiz	High school student
P 14	Qiang	Xibe	University student
P 15	Ting	Mongolia	Self-employed

There is no doubt that a longer stay with the participants would have provided more extensive data, but with time and financial constraints on this project, the interviewer could manage to visit only some of the participants' houses, staying with one family for 2 weeks, during which she was able to make close and detailed observations of daily interactions between the student and his or her family members. Other data sources include documents that had been released by the MOE, news reports by official entities, and photographs provided by participants. Thematic analysis was used to extract, categorise, and organise participants' concepts, beliefs, and philosophies (see Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

It should be noted that in this research we did not endeavor to generalize the findings to ethnic minorities in China. Rather, we intended to highlight the unique identities of the six student participants and hope that in doing so we can stimulate further debate and scholarly attention. Moreover, we do not claim to have the same way of thinking as those who are socially and economically different from the researcher, who comes from the ethnic Han group. Instead, we endeavour to present our understandings of the lives of these participants, in settings dominated by Han people.

Findings

In this article, we map a terrain where the learning and living experiences of six participants intersect, in order to show how the Xinjiang class policy has influenced their life paths and identities. The following three sections present the experiences of the six

participants to describe and highlight changes in their individual, relational, and collective identities. The first section below identifies how individual identities, such as personal goals, values, and beliefs have changed for these six Xinjiang class students. In the following section, we argue that the students' relational identities have changed in their communication with their parents. In the final section, we identify how the students' collective identification with certain groups and social categories changed after they attended Xinjiang classes in inland China.

Changes to individual identity: feeling different

Interviews with six student participants revealed that their personal lives have all changed in different ways after attending Xinjiang classes in predominately Han-populated cities. The hosting schools of Xinjiang classes are strictly selective and are considered modernized and advanced by the MOE. One participant, Shan, had a gleam in her eyes when mentioning future development, noting:

When I started high school, I planned to attend a college and to go back to Xinjiang, get married and have kids. However, one day I stood at the Bund in Shanghai, seeing all those shining buildings at night. It was so amazing and attractive. I made up my mind at that time that I would eventually work at one of those shining buildings and go wherever I want.

The life path and personal beliefs of some participants change after studying and living in eastern China for a few years. For example, Shan became more ambitious and set herself clear aims and boundaries for her life. Instead of making decisions based wholly on her family and community, she became more independent and planned to study abroad after finishing university. Her aim was to become a higher degree researcher. When asked about the impact of Xinjiang class education on her ethnic culture, Shan admitted that “some aspects of our ethnic culture are severely Sinicised (*han hua*), such as our Uyghur language. However, as my mother puts it, “the left behind stuff should be abandoned”. This is not to say that Shan totally gave-up on her identity as an ethnic Uyghur. Instead, her motivation to immerse herself in mainstream society and realise her life goals became her priority.

Receiving an education in inland China has also changed participants' personal goals and values. Sitting in a quiet café after work, Jia recalled the early days when he needed

to make a decision about whether to attend the Xinjiang class. Looking back at his decision without any hint of regret, he said:

I was really young when I decided to attend the Xinjiang class. All I can say is that I was lucky enough to make the right decision. Otherwise, I cannot imagine how my life would be now. By saying this, I mean in a bad way.

Jia's classmate and friend, Sea, also mentioned positive prospects in that "if I did not attend the Xinjiang class, I would not be able to go to NH University [one of the top universities in China]". Trained as an English professional, Sea aspired to work in finance, and after several interviews, he picked one of the commercial banks in Ürümqi as a place to work. His prestigious educational background greatly benefited the development of his career and he has since been allocated to a promising department instead of working as a bank teller. Memet, who, for multiple reasons, dropped out of university after one semester, said in the interview that "I would have dropped out of high school to learn some practical skills or, get married, if it wasn't for that policy. My life would have been like the elder generation in my hometown, who farm their whole life and never get a chance to look around".

Interactions with Ting, a young female ethnic Kazakhs and Mongolian also suggest that long-term immersion in inland China has influenced her individual identity in terms of personal goals and values. According to Ting, the original plan was to return to Xinjiang and work as a civil servant, which was deemed a stable job for a girl. This path would have also abided by her mother's request. After experiencing a difficult time when her father died during her second year at high school, Ting became more independent and decisive in terms of her goals. She graduated from university and worked as a private English teacher for one and a half years in Nanjing, after which she started running her own educational institution, much to her mother's disappointment. Her mother had hoped that Ting would return home. Ting admits that more job opportunities and most of all, better pay persuaded her to remain in eastern China, because "I am the guardian of my family".

In many cases, participants expressed their gratitude for the learning experiences provided through the Xinjiang classes. These experiences had provided them with relative advantages, a privileged education, and higher academic achievement. And they all generally perceive those changes in a positive way. Their individual identities, including

personal goals and values, have changed over time as they embrace a new education in eastern China, along with the possibilities for a brighter future. They now feel different from who they were before.

Changes to relational identity: familiar strangers

Changes in relational identity are manifest in two ways. As Vignoles et al. (2011) noted, relational identities reflect how an individual perceives his or her role, as well as how their role is defined and interpreted by others. That is to say, relational identity cannot be established by the individuals themselves, his or her identity, for example, could also be created and reinforced through parental expectations. Identity needs to be recognized by others as well as self. Many believe that identity is defined and located within the interpersonal space of the family (Grotevant, Dunbar, Kohler, & Esau, 2000; Manzi, Vignoles, Regalia, & Scabini, 2006), and it only exists in and is validated/recognised by family members. In this study, our focus was on Xinjiang class students' relational identities as the children of their parents. The changes in their relational identities as children can be seen as two-fold. First, the ways that participants communicate with their parents change due to a lack of shared topics and a sense of "guest" at home. Second, there are no changes to their traditional values in terms of being responsible and reliable children.

Changes to communication

Student participants described how being away from home and family for extended periods of time brought changes to their lives, noting in particular a lack of close connection between themselves and their parents. Ting highlighted the nature and extent of this personal isolation while sitting with me in a cosy and inviting cafe:

I was so grateful that you were researching us even though there aren't a big number of us. Sometimes we were homesick and desperately in need of love and care from our families. Our families misunderstood us and thought that we could look after ourselves after all those years living away from home. Some of my friends get married as soon as they graduate because they want to build their own families and obtain the warmth they have been longing for.

For Ting, her role as a child who needs to be taken care of has vanished after this long-term detachment from her family and community. She has grown accustomed to being self-reliant because "I have no one to rely on, and more sadly, I do not know how to rely

on others now". In a similar vein, another participant, Jia, reported how he felt like a "guest" when he returned home for holidays. Immersed in mainstream society for almost 10 years except from one or two months each year when they return home, participants identify how communication can gradually break down in their absence. Jia lamented:

I did not realize I no longer have my own bedroom until I came back home, because my parents had turned it into a storeroom. It feels like I am not a member of this family anymore. People may think that you just leave for study for a few years, but that's not true. I do not know what to talk about with my parents and I am still trying to integrate myself into my family. I pay extra attention to avoid annoying my parents at home since I have forgotten how to communicate with them.

The feeling of isolation from one's own family was common to five of the six participants, with an exception of Pala who had just left home to begin his Xinjiang class life. Shan complained about her feeling of being a "guest" at home where she no longer felt familiar with life there:

Each time I came back home, I spent a long time tidying up my room and familiarizing myself with everything at home, going through the run-in period with my families, and then after a short term, I had to leave again. This experience is repeated over and over again.

"Limited contact" (Grose, 2016, p. 208) between students and their families during this period of time has resulted in a disruption in their relational identities. Participants perceived a loss of belonging and close family connection. Nevertheless, a strong sense of obligation towards their families and the larger community persists.

The responsible child

The initial experience for parents of sending a child to boarding school may bring feelings of guilt, stress, loneliness, and sadness. For some, this emotional toll does not diminish for many years. Moreover, student participants also reported a sense of regret over being the 'absent child' and not being able to reciprocate with support for their parents. For them, going back to Xinjiang seems like an unconscious choice to regain a sense of belonging at home. Student participants also believed that as the only child, it was their responsibility to return to Xinjiang and take care of the elder at home. The male graduates in particular complied with this feeling of responsibility. Jia told me:

My university degree did not put me in a privileged position back in Xinjiang since we did not have many qualified companies here. But I am the only child at home and my parents are getting older. I want to take care of them. I can still go back to eastern China in the future since I am still young.

Growing up as the only child and staying away from home for most of the time, Jia had a strong feeling of duty and obligation to his family. In order to 'make up' for his absence of eight years, he relinquished his ambition to find better employment opportunities in inland China, thinking he could return to inland China when he was ready. Moreover, he decided to comply with his parents' wishes, and agree with an arranged marriage if this would make his parents happy. As an ethnic Hui, Jia reflected:

I feel bad if I do not listen to my parents on the marital issue because I want to please them. After all, I have been away from home for eight years. I do not want to disappoint my parents by marrying someone who does not belong to our ethnic group.

However, it is not always the case that participants follow their parents' wishes concerning job selection and choice of marital partner. For example, Ting chose to stay in inland China after graduation and refused her mother's request to marry an ethnic Mongolian and to break up with her Han Chinese boyfriend. She said, "I made it very clear to my family that no one can interfere with me on my choice of marital partner". However, this did not undermine her role as a reliable daughter, or her relationship with her mother. She took her mother travelling with her and continued to support the whole family economically.

The act of going back to Xinjiang and serving their own ethnic people may rightly fall within the state's original goal of cultivating professionals for the economic prosperity of Xinjiang, but for some, it is a choice without options. Participants perceived that they had to stay near their parents, expressing guilt over being absent from work and other family duties for so long. There were other reasons for them returning to Xinjiang including a different diet and greater life pressure and stress in inland China. Analyses of the students' relational identities as responsible children revealed a compromise between students' ambitions towards future development and the reality to conform to family pressures and obligations.

Relational identity was defined at the beginning of this section as to how we see ourselves as well as how others see us. The development of relational identity takes place

through a negotiation between self and family as it the case in this study. We observed above how these negotiations (largely in the minds of the students, rather than with their parents) were fierce on occasion because of the felt need to conform to family values on the one hand, whilst also wanting to pursue their own path. The experience of attending boarding school had a significant impact on family relations for these participants. Some participants became distanced, even alienated from their family, while the pressure to be responsible and reliable children was reflected in the trend of three participants to return home to Xinjiang. “Familiar strangers” (Jonathan, 1997) can best describe their current relationship with the family. They are still the beloved ones in the family. However, the familiar mutual connection within the family has diminished in their absence, and will take time to repair. The data provide just a small hint of major social change to come in China, and specifically how the family affection is currently open to change in the context of educational mobility.

Changes to collective identity

According to Vignoles et al. (2011), collective identity can be understood as “people’s identification with the groups and social categories to which they belong, the meanings that they give to these social groups and categories, and the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes that result from identifying with them” (p. 3). This includes ethnicity or small face-to-face groups such as families and workgroups (Haslam & Ellemers, 2011). In the following section, we analyse how these participants identify with a particular group, and changes to collective identity will be explored through an explicit focus on religious identity and preference for Halal food. Although we attempt to avoid repeating previous research about Muslim Uyghur students, five of the six student participants came from a Muslim background and their attitudes toward Halal food represent the major changes to their collective identity.

Muslim Uyghur students comprise a large part of Xinjiang classes. According to data from July 2017, more than 70 per cent of the enrolled students came from remote areas of southern Xinjiang³, areas that are inhabited mainly by ethnic Uyghurs. Most of the students maintain their identities through language, religion, and food preference. Some follow strict diet rules, so not having access to Halal food was one of the major reasons

³ Xinhua net. http://www.xinhuanet.com/2017-07/05/c_1121267390.htm. Retrieved on October 16, 2018.

that two of them returned home from inland China after graduating from university. Memet mentioned that not having access to Halal food in university was one of the reasons he quit university after the first semester. He said:

It is absolutely true that we could access better opportunities in inland China since it is more advanced economically and socially compared with Xinjiang. However, I need to have Halal food, I had to have beef noodles for one semester while I was in college because that's the only Halal food I could find and afford.

For Muslim Uyghur students like Memet, it was difficult to maintain their ethnic clothing, festivals, and religious activities in the Han-dominant schools of the east. As a result, dietary restrictions function as the last, inner boundary of their sense of ethnicity. However, the challenges associated with Halal food did not emerge until they went to university, worked, or encountered local society because they no longer had a separate Halal canteen. Like Memet, Jia encountered challenges in university when his teacher brought him pork rice dumplings by mistake although it is generally known that Muslims do not consume pork. Jia added: "The rules surrounding Halal food are complicated. Those packages that have a Halal tag do not really mean it is Halal. Some businessmen do this only for money."

Students such as Jia maintain strong expectations concerning Muslim food, such as sources of food, the ethnicity of food, and the style of dining. Therefore, practical food issues are likely to remain a big problem for those who seek to develop their career in the east. Some choose to change dietary habits if they live in inland China. For instance, Ting admitted that her attitude toward Halal food had already changed but she did not tell her peers or parents. She remarked:

I started to have Han (non-Halal) food after high school. I did not tell people around me because I do not want to upset them and create barriers between us, but I am totally assimilated into the Han community now.

According to her, the food that was available for her in high school and college was not satisfactory, so she had to adapt to the environment. It usually happened after students graduated from Xinjiang classes because they had their own dining restaurant and were provided with Halal food in high school.

These participants walk in two worlds and face a variety of challenges. Belonging to one group implies exclusion from other comparable groups, and sometimes the norms and beliefs are specially set for the Xinjiang class students to fulfil a collective identity. Some choose to construct their identities in a less defined way or even to revise the norms for their own personal opportunity and development, as Ting did. Others, for example, Memet and Jia, retained their limited representations in a totally different cultural environment. In contrast to existing research, which focuses on the collective side of ethnic minority student identities (Chen, 2008; Grose, 2014), we have taken the position that identity is of full richness and complexity and that Xinjiang class students each provide diverse responses to changes in their ethnicity. We have observed how these participants have identified with the collective identity in quite different ways. These identifications have governed their future relationship with the group, several have decided to reinforce their links with the group while others have decided to follow their own path.

Discussion

In this study, we have explored how the personal goals, values, and beliefs of Xinjiang class students have changed over an extended period of time. As they learned to take care of themselves in boarding school, they began to develop a desire for better educational outcomes and to become more independent. These changes were part of a developing individual identity. Their relational identities also changed in terms of communication with their parents although their essential values remained the same. In other words, the roles of a responsible and reliable child continued to be the dominant values guiding the lives of these students. For example, while some of the students found it difficult to talk with their parents after long absences from family, they never lost sight of their ongoing responsibility to take care of their parents. Three out of six participants believed that meeting the expectations of their parents with regard to choice of profession and marital partner is a good way to show their obedience, and it is worth noting that these participants were all males. Four of the five Muslim participants maintained their limited religious representation in inland China by eating Halal food only, with the exception of one participant who gave up Halal food because of the restrictions of dining choices in high school and after graduation.

Previous research has acknowledged that people personally value their individual-self most, their relational-self less, and their collective-self least (Nehrlich et al., 2018; Sedikides et al., 2013), while also admitting that all three selves are vital and meaningful to the identity of the person. However, in analysing the identities of these Xinjiang class students, we noticed that instead of embracing a hierarchical identity system, students' personal, relational, and collective choices could influence and shape their actions under certain circumstances. What individuals put first in terms of identity will shift according to their contextual expectations, relational others, or the community (see Figure 1).

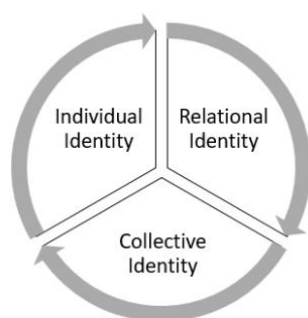


Figure 1. This figure shows how the identity of Xinjiang students shifts according to context and expectations that come from oneself, relations with others and from the community.

That being said, in reflecting on the nature of individual identity, to be successful at their new schools, Xinjiang students need to adapt to the natural environment, the administration system, learning processes, and social interactions. In this process, students are faced with a difficult choice of prioritizing their individual identities in order to gain a better position in mainstream society (for example, Shan and Ting). For three of the students, while their individual identity acted as the source of change, expectations of parents meant that these students overlooked their own individual needs and goals, in order to satisfy their parents. For example, when faced with decisions relating to families, such as future employment or choice of partner, the relational self, that is their role as son or daughter was dominant in the process of making a final decision about their future, whilst the individual self played a secondary role. We have attempted to demonstrate above that the process of making such a choice was an anxious one for these students. Collective identity was also important. The majority of participants (five) maintain a

group membership as a Muslim. Some protected and maintained a positive membership of their Muslim group by eating Halal food despite the sacrifice required (for example, Memet). This contrasts significantly with the finding of Bulag (2003) who suggested that “minorities are often forced to turn against their collective interest and pursue an individual survival strategy” (p. 760).

Conclusion

Using identity as an analytical construct, we set out to explore the impact of the Xinjiang class education on ethnic minority students' identity construction, and to understand how students maintain their ethnic identity as well as becoming independent citizens in Chinese society. By focusing on the uniqueness of each participant's life experience, we presented a variety of responses toward the policy, responses that are rooted in students' identity. As a result, we found three patterns of identity change specified as individual identity, relational identity, and collective identity. We have identified how the long-term detachment from one's family and community has presented students with significant personal and relational challenges.

Students strategically navigate between different identities to make the most of the existing opportunities as well as meeting the expectations that come from both themselves and others. We noted that families, especially parents, are central to the wellbeing of Xinjiang class students in inland cities. Yet, the crucial role of parents in the wellbeing of their children in the context of the Xinjiang class policy has not been investigated in previous research. We also note that most parents are not given sufficient information in order to make sound decisions about sending their children away for education in eastern China. In rare cases, schoolteachers would play the role of sharing information with parents so that parents could learn more about the Xinjiang class policy. Moreover, some parents are too busy or do not have the economic means to visit their child during the four years that he or she is away from home. Although the Chinese government is working on this issue by offering more opportunities to fund parental visits to inland China, the funding is insufficient considering the growing number of students enrolled in Xinjiang classes. None of the participants reported on receiving a visit from their families during their four year stay in inland China, although one participant did report on a family relative who dropped in while she was in eastern China. In most cases, parents rely on the school authorities to gain information about their children's performance.

In the context of the ongoing development of Xinjiang class policy, we do suggest that the development of a pre-transition program, focusing on the parents of prospective Xinjiang class students, be delivered prior to the commencement of senior secondary school education. It would promote a sense of preparedness for parents, and prioritize dialogue between parents and staff at prospective boarding schools to discuss strategies that would positively support students' transition as well prepare the staff to meet the needs of incoming students (Mander, 2015). For instance, a one-week pre-school information seminar for Xinjiang students may present an ideal opportunity for parents to meet and talk with staff members who work in inland Xinjiang classes. This would promote familiarity with a new boarding school context and identify the contributions that parents could make to prepare their children for the personal and social changes associated with boarding school life. Such an information seminar or workshop would also raise awareness about the potential impact that boarding school may have on families and their children, as well as on the parents' own feelings of self-worth.

Conflict of interest statement

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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4.3 Postscript

In this chapter, I have answered the first research question through exploring the life experiences of six Xinjiang class students and describing in detail how students dance carefully within the constructs of different identities to maintain a double consciousness. A “double identity” is rationalised in the context of maintaining their ethnic identity as well as making the most out of the opportunities provided through living in mainstream society. Having observed students forming and reforming identities in their daily lives, I have noticed that family affections, especially the relations with their parents, sit at the centre of students’ relational identities. Furthermore, despite the trenchant and persistent criticisms of government schooling for ethnic minorities in China, the popular appeal of the Xinjiang classes has remained undiminished. The growing number of students enrolled in Xinjiang classes highlights the need to better inform the families of Xinjiang class students about the process.

This article indicates that it is time to provide a holistic picture of the impact of Xinjiang class policy by involving the families of Xinjiang class students in the analysis. In the next chapter, Chapter 5, I tend to answer the second research question, and focus on the perspectives of families of Xinjiang class students. I demonstrate how families, especially parents, understand the opportunities of boarding school education that underpin their decision to allow their child to leave home for education, but at the same time, they lack basic knowledge and understanding of the Xinjiang class policy.

Familial Perceptions of the Xinjiang Class Policy

5.1 Preamble

In the previous chapter, I examined students' experiences after they had been enrolled in Xinjiang classes. I found that students strategically move between different identities and make the most of the existing opportunities to balance their desire to become ethnic elites in the mainstream society while at the same time maintaining their ethnic identity. Nevertheless, the lack of their parents' engagement in this particular educational process is found to be a prominent issue that deserves attention. Therefore, in the article presented in this chapter, I investigate the motivations of families, especially parents, in allowing students to move away for education, and examine parents' agency in this education process. This article addresses my second research question:

How do the caregivers of students perceive the value of the Xinjiang class education?

I combine the capability approach developed by economist and philosopher Amartya Sen (Sen, 1992, 1999), with the concept of functional capabilities synthesised by Walker (2008), along with the self-concept model of Sedikides and Brewer (2001) to address the above question. The results show that families of Xinjiang class students perceive the value of receiving Xinjiang class education in terms of 1. Individuals' functional capabilities, which refer to capabilities that add to students themselves, which include independence, employability, and knowledge; 2. Relational functional capabilities, which are associated closely with benefits to family or ethnic community, including respect and inspiration, financial contribution, and belonging; 3. Collective functional capabilities, which refer to an individual's role as a social change maker, specifically, the value of receiving education in eastern China that represents the possibility of changing the environment of the local area or even wider society for some participants.

Despite the capabilities fostered in the Xinjiang classes, parents' agency was another important theme to emerge from the interview data. This article reveals that parents lack knowledge about government schooling and are not familiar with or have never been to inland China. Distance prevents them from getting first-hand information in terms of the

environment in inland China. Moreover, some parent participants are undereducated or did not train in the mainstream education system, so they are not able to understand the curriculum taught in schools. Most importantly, the ways in which the Xinjiang boarding schooling system is structured does not support teachers to provide parents with sufficient information about their children's wellbeing. As a result, communication between parents and their children is poor. Additionally, this article extends my review of literature to address the role of parents in their children's education.

Pages 83-103 of this thesis have been removed due to copyright restriction. Please refer to the following citation for details of the article contained in these pages.

Su, X., Harrison, N., & Moloney, R. (2020). The value of Xinjiang class education to ethnic minority students, their families and community: a capability approach. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(11), 3847-3863. [5].

<https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol25/iss11/5>

5.3 Postscript

In this chapter, I have investigated the motivations of families, especially parents, in allowing their children to move away for education. In doing so, I used the analytic tool of functional capabilities. I found that the benefits of receiving the Xinjiang class education accrue not only to the students but also to their family and the wider society, which explains the growing number of enrolments as well as the popularity of the Xinjiang class policy among parents in recent years. Notably, this chapter has revealed that parental decision making in the educational process of their children is limited because of financial constraints or a lack of contact with the school. This supports the findings presented in Chapter 4 that some parents lack knowledge of the Xinjiang class policy. A significant fact that also emerges from the data is that there is a silence between students and their families. On the one hand, students are detached from their home and community for at least 4 years and they have to move strategically between different identities to maintain integrity in terms of their “double life”, which made them familiar strangers both at home and in schools. On the other hand, parents have high expectations in allowing their children to go away for education, despite the fact that some lack understanding of their children’s lives in inland China due to internal and external limitations. How, then, did the education mobility experiences influence the parent-child relationship, in the context of dislocated boarding schools as well as the discontinuity of home and host culture.

In order to explore the complex relationship between students and their parents, and their life realities behind the Xinjiang class policy, in the chapter that follows, Chapter 6, I will focus on the bond between parents and their children following absence of a child from home for at least 4 years.

Parent-Child Relations and the Xinjiang Class Policy

6.1 Preamble

In this chapter, I address my final research question:

What are the implications for the parent-child relationship after a students' period of detachment from their families and communities?

This question is addressed through an analysis of data collected from parents and students. The data demonstrate that Xinjiang class students in this study have an imaginary image of themselves as being independent and self-disciplined, possessing the autonomy to do whatever they want. But they also have an imaginary image of themselves as being compliant and dutiful, and this is internalised as social norms through everyday language (the symbolic order). It is their responsibility to share family duties and respect ethnic traditions, and they are well aware of these family and community pressures. Students move between the life they want for themselves and a life others want for them, strategically balancing the expectations from the inside and the outside in order to make their own choices about how to navigate the complexities of the current social system in China.

The following article demonstrates how the participants of the study are faced with significant decisions in the lives, decisions that are not necessarily connected with the impacts of Xinjiang class policy.

6.2 Article 4: Students of the imaginary: Interpreting the life experiences of ethnic minority students from Xinjiang classes. Submitted to *Journal of Philosophy of Education*

Xin Su, Neil Harrison & Robyn Moloney

Abstract: This article applies the work of French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, to interpret the experiences and struggles of students who attend Xinjiang classes, a Chinese government-funded ethnic minority boarding school program. The psychoanalytic domains theorized by Lacan are used in this article to argue that the decisions made by Xinjiang class students are subject to the desire of parents and ethnic community customs, as much as they are to government policies. Students want to take advantage of their newfound opportunities in eastern China, but they also want to please their parents and respect ethnic traditions. They oscillate between the desire of others and what they want for themselves, both of which cause them endless uncertainty and anxiety.

Keywords: Xinjiang classes, minority students, parents, imaginary, anxiety

Introduction

In order to cultivate desirable citizens for the ongoing development and stability of Chinese society, and to promote national integration, the Chinese government is working to produce a new generation of “ethnic elites” (Chen, 2014). Talented middle school students from ethnic minority border areas, for example, Xinjiang, are recruited to attend boarding schools in predominantly Han-populated cities located throughout eastern China, to “school them in language, culture and values of the Han ethnic majority” (Leibold, 2018, p 3). Attendance at these schools, unlike the forceful removal of Indigenous children in North America, Canada, and Australia (MacDonald, 2015), is entirely voluntary. It is either free of charge or heavily funded by the central government, additionally, the policy provides quality education and access to territory education for Xinjiang students, it is thus well accepted and quite popular among families in Xinjiang.

Xinjiang, characterized by multiethnicity and multilingualism, has historically been a source of tension for the Chinese state. Ethnic Uyghurs have sought to gain meaningful recognition of their identity and autonomy in China over the past decades (Li, 2018). The Chinese state has promoted national integration by implementing this unique schooling system under the Inland Xinjiang Senior Secondary School Classes Policy (*neidi Xinjiang gaozhongban zhengce*, hereafter the Xinjiang Class Policy⁴). The policy, introduced by China's Ministry of Education (MOE) in September 2000, has three specific goals, first, in training quality senior secondary school graduates who achieve overall development in morals, intellect, physics, and atheism; second, in boosting economic development and social progress in Xinjiang; and third, in enhancing unity and cohesion among all ethnic groups, and ensuring national and border security (MOE, 2000b, c, a).

Students are selected on the basis of their test performance and sociocultural background. This includes their ethnic status, hometown and family financial status, to ensure that 80 per cent of all incoming students is from southern Xinjiang's impoverished rural and nomadic regions (MOE, 2000a). In addition, students must pass a comprehensive physical examination conducted at a county-level hospital (Grose, 2014). For the convenience of management, students are based in a closed campus and their daily activities are restricted to campus. Xinjiang students are separated from local Han students, and they are provided with independent teaching areas, separate dormitories and different canteens. According to official rules, students are allowed to sign out for several hours of off-campus activity once every two weeks, usually to shop for daily necessities using money sent from home. Students connect with their family members via telephone and written letters, but family visits are rare because of the expense and time required (Chen, 2010).

State education, especially ethnic minority education in China, has long played an important role in controlling, transforming, and integrating the minority groups who mainly inhabit the border or peripheral areas (Harrell, 2012). Existing research, both in Chinese and English, on the impact of Xinjiang class policy has focused on analyzing the relationship between students and the schools, or students and the government,

⁴ In Chinese, 'neidi' is usually rendered as 'inland', a term that refers to the east and coastal predominantly Han populated area (Chen 2008).

emphasizing the power dynamics and interplay between the institutionalized authority of the state agenda and the resistant responses of ethnic minority, especially Uyghur students (Yuan, Qian, & Zhu, 2017; Grose, 2014, 2016; Chen & Postiglione, 2009). Researchers have stated that students enrolled in Xinjiang classes have become subject to, and disciplined by, the gaze of the government policy (Leibold & Grose, 2019), and this whole schooling system is “China’s bold and unpredictable educational experiment”, a “sophisticated set of disciplining apparatuses” (Leibold, 2018; Leibold & Grose, 2019). This is an easy approach to take given the apparent restrictions that are placed on minority students studying in eastern China. However, we argue here for a more complex picture that can account for the continued influence of family and community in the lives of Xinjiang class students. It becomes apparent that students are making some decisions about their own lives rather than being simply the objects of the government policy.

The psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan are applied to examine how individual identities are formed and how individuals can craft their personal experience from socially generated discourses. Based on two of his psychoanalytic orders, the imaginary and the symbolic (a third order, the real, will be addressed in a future article), we take the position in this article that Xinjiang class students follow imaginary images of themselves that are often in conflict with other images coming from the outside, that is the symbolic order. Ultimately, students are caught up in these imaginary ideals that seemingly come from others. The data presented here shed new light on the relationship between individual aspirations and social aims while demonstrating how confusing it can be for students to negotiate a path between what others want for them and what they want for themselves.

We will first introduce the readers to the Xinjiang class policy, then Lacan’s three psychoanalytic registers, the imaginary, the symbolic and the real. By using the psychoanalytic orders, the article strives for an understanding of the nature of human subjectivity and how beliefs in its prescriptions are accepted for implementation by individuals, particularly the public discourses for what defines a qualified Xinjiang class student and a good child. Applying Lacan’s work to Xinjiang class policy has the benefit of offering a different lens on the aspirations of students beyond the simple argument that students are being constructed as mere objects of government policy. The data will show how the social demands from home and community are complicating factors in the futures

of these students. Thereafter a discussion is presented, followed by a conclusion in the final section.

The psychoanalytic domains of Jacques Lacan

Jacques Lacan (1901–1981) was one of the most influential French intellectuals of the 20th century. His psychoanalytic domains of the imaginary, the symbolic and the real, were original contributions to the academic world. The imaginary refers to the ways that the subject is constituted through images and identifications, real and imagined (Roberts, 2005), that is, the fantasy of oneself. The symbolic is the domain of language. For Lacan, the core of the psychological conflict is the “radical incommensurability between the biological human organism and the socially, linguistically constructed human subject” situated within a symbolic network constituting society (Bracher, 2000, p. 190). The real is the third registry, one that “we are born into before developing as growing infants the abilities to recognize images or the symbolic ... we biologically exist but cannot articulate” (Gunder 2003, p. 284).

The imaginary

As a post-Freudian psychoanalyst, Lacan pursued the work of Freud in a different way concerning how human subjects are constructed. In contrast to a pre-existing subject in a Freudian way of thinking, Lacan insisted that any sense of essence or foundation to the self is achieved only through identifying with a mirage, just as babies first identify with a mirror image of themselves, an image that is nevertheless different from itself. For Lacan (1977), this is the moment of subjectivity where one’s sense of self or the “ideal ego” is connected with external recognition, the mirror image. Lacan noted how the gaze of the other also serves as a mirror in which the child seeks recognition for its existence, for instance, through the observation from the mothers’ eyes or the authority role of the father. All provide the space for self-recognition, the point being that we learn to recognize ourselves through others.

The subject is constituted through a misrecognition of oneself as having autonomous control in the mirror, the internalization of an external ideal. It is “the armour of an alienating identity” (Lacan 1977, p 4). Thus, the founding moment of the coherent ego is also a moment of alienation around which future experiences are oriented. Author (2012) claimed that the imaginary becomes the space where we are constantly split between our

own self-image (where I paint myself as I should be) and how I am seen by others. We will see below how students indeed oscillate between these various identities.

The symbolic

The *I* in the imaginary is the fantasy self, the delusory image the baby encounters in the mirror, a misrecognition and alienation of the self. The symbolic order introduces the subject to language. As a consequence of language, children recognize the need to obey social structures and restraints and to recognize themselves in social settings. A child thus becomes subject to greater social order. In the course of socialization, the body is progressively written or overwritten with social discourses, and hence with the desire of others. One takes on the desire of others through everyday symbols such as grades, diplomas, success, marriage, children, and, according to Fink (1997), these are “all the things that are usually associated with anxiety in neurosis” (p. 87). As a result, the subject becomes an outcome of what others want for him or her, desiring what they want, even repeating the discourse of others.

The real

The real emerged as the third of Lacan’s psychoanalytic registers and is linked to the symbolic and the imaginary. Žižek (2009) regarded the Lacanian real as not referring to any positive entity; rather it is the gap or difference between positions. Brown (2008) renders the real as the gap that lies outside the fantasies I have of myself and others (my fantasy of the world). Lacan focused on what can be learnt through making successive substitutions of the stories told, and, through this, that we learn something about the real (Brown, 2008). Due to space limitation, this article does not give an exhaustive account of what the real is for Lacan, as the focus in this article is on the domains of the imaginary and the symbolic.

Methodology

Conducting research in Xinjiang, especially social science research, has long been considered sensitive. The Chinese government may restrict studies being carried out by academic researchers. Consequently, there is limited data recording personal sentiments and perceptions of the educational program by the local ethnic minority population in Xinjiang. These feelings and opinions, however, are important for the government to understand its people and adjust its implementation (Li, 2018). This research study draws on 3 months of fieldwork between July and September 2017 at five sites in Xinjiang

province including Ürümqi, Shihezi, Turpan, Tekes county and Qupqal Xibe autonomous county, and in the city of Nanjing, northwest Shanghai. Participants were recruited through the use of snowball sampling (Creswell, 2013), “to pursue the goals of purposive sampling in many situations where there are no lists or other obvious sources for locating members of the population of interest” (Morgan 2008, pp. 815–816). The potential risk of snowball sampling is a biased subset of participants, and this was addressed by identifying a diverse group of participants at the outset. In all, 15 participants from 11 families were recruited for research purpose. This consisted of six Xinjiang class students (four had finished university after graduating from Xinjiang classes, one dropped out of university after the first year, and one was attending the Xinjiang class at the time of interview), seven parental participants and two siblings of Xinjiang class students (see Table 1).

Table 1

Students and Family Members Who Participated in the Research

Participants	Name	Ethnic identity	Position/job	Relationship to the student
P 1	Memet	Uyghur	Casual jobs	N/A
P 2	Xue	Hui	Civil servant	Mother
P 3	Sea	Yi	Bank teller	N/A
P 4	Shan	Uyghur	University student	N/A
P 5	Jiang	Uyghur	Farmer	Father
P 6	Jing	Uyghur	Nurse	Mother
P 7	Jia	Hui	Bank teller	N/A
P 8	Ping	Xibe	Restaurant owner	Mother
P 9	Paul	Kirgiz	High school student	N/A
P 10	Zi	Kirgiz	University student	Sibling (elder sister)
P 11	Jie	Han	Civil servant	Mother
P 12	Yue	Uyghur	Teacher	Mother
P 13	Gang	Xibe	Farmer	Father
P 14	Qiang	Xibe	University student	Sibling (younger brother)
P 15	Ting	Mongolia	Self-employed	N/A

*All names have been replaced with pseudonyms

In-depth interviews and participant observation were used to collect data, together with an analysis of government documents related to the implementation of the policy. In-

depth interviews, according to Cook (2008), “encourage and promote participants to talk in depth about the topic under investigation without the researcher’s use of predetermined, focused short-answer questions” (p. 423). It can especially help in suggesting the explanations of key events as well as the insights reflecting participants’ perspectives. Student participants were questioned regarding their aspirations for attending Xinjiang classes, that is, what they expected to gain from their education, and the experience was like. Families, such as parents and siblings, were also interviewed in terms of their expectations of students. By asking these questions, the authors wanted to know the real challenges that persist in the wellbeing of individual students and the struggles that endure in students’ minds. Each interview lasted for one to two hours and audio recording was used during interviews. This provided more accurate accounts than taking notes while conducting the interviews. In some cases, a second interview was conducted for more detailed information.

Participant observation, on the other hand, permits a better understanding of the contexts in which such phenomena occur and allows the researcher to be open to discover inductively how participants understand a particular setting. “The idea is to be there in the social setting, to make a careful record of what people say and do, and to make sense of how the participants make sense within that setting” (Hatch 2002, p. 73). For example, the interviewer became a resident in the neighbourhood for two weeks and took on a functional role in a family restaurant during the fieldwork in Xinjiang. As a ‘participant’ in this particular setting, the interviewer was able to observe through the eyes of the participants, and “observe carefully in an effort to acquire members knowledge and consequently understand from the participants’ point of view what motivated them to do what one has observed them doing and what these acts mean at the time” (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p. 8).

Finally, it is worth noting that the ethnicity and identity of the interviewer as a Han Chinese qualified her as both an “insider” and an “outsider”. Because she is familiar with Chinese culture and was educated in mainstream China for over 20 years, she knows the mainstream ideology and lifestyle as a member of the Han people (the mainstream population that comprises 92% of the population). However, for most of the participants from Xinjiang province, she comes from the ethnic Han group, which is viewed as the mainstream cultural group and the “oppressor” or controlling group. Therefore, the researchers understand that the relationship was never completely equal or

free from a sense of difference, all they could do was describe the understanding of what the interviewer heard, saw, and felt, in a way of thinking that had been socially constructed in settings dominated by the Han people.

Findings

In this section, we will present data from interviews with Xinjiang class students and their families. The interviews commenced with students being asked to reflect on their time in Xinjiang classes. They recalled how they had high expectations of their future prospects, believing that they would go to universities in larger, more prestigious cities, and would be in an ideal position to start their career. Sea recalled:

We were told by our teachers that once you enrolled in Xinjiang classes, one of your feet has stepped into the university, and the only thing you need to do is to decide which university you want to attend.

Shan, who was now a university student and planning to pursue a master's degree abroad or a PhD after graduation, added to the recollection from Sea:

I was so happy when I was accepted by one Xinjiang class in Shanghai. I like big cities and I am planning to pursue my master's degree abroad or a PhD after graduation ... I stood at the Bund in Shanghai, seeing all those shining buildings at night. It was so amazing and attractive. I made up my mind at that time that I would eventually work at one of those shining buildings and go wherever I want. I like big cities.

In this study, students from nine of the eleven families attended prestigious universities in eastern China after four years of hard work in Xinjiang classes. Sea and Shan's high expectations of themselves reflect their desire for an ideal self, with both holding strong ideas about who they imagine themselves to be. As indicated by Chen (2019), students "rationally" expect an ideal return in relation to employment and are "indoctrinated" with visions that they would have a bright future in the more advanced eastern China. They imagined themselves as deserving because they had endured more hardship during their study in inland China, including a longer study period of four years compared with their counterparts back home who normally study for three years.

Although students are driven by an image of autonomy in their own lives through their enrolment in Xinjiang classes, they are constantly reminded of their obligations to home and how they should return to take up family responsibilities. The obligation to be a

dutiful family member and to recognize one's responsibilities to the family is reflected in the following comment from another student's mother, Xue:

My daughter was planning to work in Shanghai after finishing her master's. She likes southern China. We do not agree and constantly require her to return back. She is the only child at home. We cannot spare time to look after her since we have to take care of her grandparents. Besides, we could never afford to buy an apartment in Shanghai considering the housing price there. She is quite sensible and obedient and returned back to Xinjiang after graduation.

Parents, of course, are proud of their child's success in enrolling into Xinjiang classes and regard them as role models for younger children, even though most parents do not get sufficient information before allowing their children to move to eastern China, nor do they have an opportunity to visit their children during their four-year study mainly due to economic restrictions. They consider their children as mature, independent, self-disciplined, and in Xue's case, obedient. Students are thus divided and confused by these two sets of images, the former as independent and the latter as showing obedience to family.

Drawn by a desire to satisfy their parents, several students accept that they must return home after graduation to attend to family and to take care of the elders. One of the student participants, Sea, lamented:

Since graduating from a relatively well-known university, I believe we are privileged in the job market in eastern China compared with the opportunities available in Xinjiang. Besides, Xinjiang does not have many working opportunities in private sectors that I am specialized in since I majored in English literature. Quality job opportunities are normally available only in public sectors, such as schools, banks and hospitals. I come home mainly to fulfil my duty as the only child at home...But I am quite young, I could still go to eastern China if there are opportunities...

Jia experienced similar disappointment:

I never thought I would return to Xinjiang and work in a bank after graduation. I think what I learnt in university is of limited use in Xinjiang. But ... I left home at the age of fifteen ... I am kind of losing the skills to communicate with my parents, you know ... they dismantled my bed and turned my room into a storeroom. I do not have a closet at home ... I just feel like I am no longer part of the family. Now I am trying hard to narrow the gap by talking to them, attempting to satisfy their expectations ... including the marital issue, I feel bad if I do not follow their instructions.

Both Sea and Jia returned to Xinjiang after graduating from well-known universities in eastern China and working in different banks in Ürümqi, the capital city of Xinjiang. Sea is still looking for opportunities to work in eastern China while at the same time he has decided to become an expert in finance and was actively attending training sessions offered by the bank at the time of interview. Jia, on the contrary, lived a simple home-office life, trying to regain a sense of belonging to his family and to his peer group back in Xinjiang as well.

Previous research (authors, 2018) reveals that the risks of attending boarding schools far from the student's home reside in the creation of "familiar strangers". Students walk between two different sets of values and beliefs, and this can result in them being alienated from both their own culture and the dominant culture. In the current study, a sense of ambivalence occurs in the relationships between students and their families. More specifically, opposing emotions and desires are confusing for students in terms of who they want to be and who they think their parents want them to be. As Xinjiang class students, they hold high expectations for their future. However, these high expectations are unsettled through a choice to return to Xinjiang or to remain in inland China after graduation. The data analysis also suggests that marriage decisions and employment options create a strong sense of anxiety and confusion for these students and their families, particularly for the female participants.

Marriage decisions

In his research, Chen (2019) found that female participants intended to move back to Xinjiang because of the traditional values and the weak social roles they have, while male participants should "dare" to leave home and consider all possible career options. In contrast with Chen's findings, we discovered in this research study that returning to Xinjiang was common among the male participants, while female participants, although small in number in this research, were more ambitious about their future in eastern China. This is partly due to males, in the traditional culture, being firmly committed to maintaining family traditions and taking responsibility for family duties. Yet, in conventional thinking, a female would eventually marry someone else and become a member of another family. For that reason, it is also a preference for parent participants in this study to have their children, especially the male, marry someone who shares the same ethnic heritage, such as speaking the same language, sharing similar lifestyles, even having a similar appearance. This was illustrated by one of the parent participants, Ping:

I want my son to marry someone who belongs to our own ethnic community. The population of our ethnic Xibe is far behind compared with other ethnic groups, I would love to see our ethnic Xibe flourish.

Participating in the child's marriage would demonstrate the parents' authority and self-worth. Apart from the ambition to enlarge the size of the ethnic group, for some, the perceived norm of marrying the "right" person was shaped by social discourses, especially for those who practise Islamic customs. For these people "same-faith marriages are more stable than interfaith marriages" (Bahr 1981, p. 260). Accordingly, some students are inscribed as objects of their parents' desire and learn how to interpret the expectations to ensure that as a child, they correspond with what parents want. Students accept the expectations of their parents, constantly internalizing their parents' desire, to the point where it can become their own desire that is marrying the "right one". As suggested above, one student participant, Jia, felt obligated to give up his right to find his own partner, accepting this as the correct way to fulfil his family obligations, adding "I feel bad if I do not follow their instructions [on marital issues]".

Parents worried about their child's ethnicity being diminished after years of living in a Han-dominated environment. They considered that marrying someone from the same ethnic heritage is the solution for students to regain this sense of ethnicity. For instance, one parent participant, Xue reported that her daughter was dating a half-Hui boy whose mother is a Han Chinese. This situation was disappointing for both parents. But the parent comforted herself that "at least she is not dating a totally ethnic Han". Sometimes an apparent dissonance exists between students and their families in terms of marital issues. One female participant, Ting, told how she refused her mother's request that she breaks up with her Han Chinese boyfriend in order to marry an ethnic Mongolian:

I knew my mom wants me to marry an ethnic Mongolian, but I made it very clear to all my families that no one can get in the way of my marital choice. I met this boyfriend a few years ago and he is really a nice guy.

Maintaining their obligations to family and community is in conflict with the students' desire to be "cool dudes" who have control over their own lives, including marital issues. Some might be stigmatized as disrespectful and carry a hefty emotional toll until they find a way to redefine their subjectivity and a comfortable self-image in which their sense of anxiety and uncertainty can be negotiated. In short, the social demands from home and community were sometimes complicating factors in the futures of these students.

Employment options

In addition to the geographical struggle between returning to Xinjiang or staying in eastern China, and confronting issues concerning marriage, students are faced with the additional challenge of whether to work in the private or public sector after graduation.

Although the private sector creates most employment, it is deemed to be highly competitive and stressful, and could easily be affected by recent instability fuelled by ethnic conflict in Xinjiang. Thus, quality employment opportunities are considered more accessible in the public sector in Xinjiang (Chen & Postiglione, 2009). Parents, in particular, have a deeply rooted idea that working in the public sector, such as at hospitals, schools and public service is both stable and decent. They often encourage, or even push their children, into seeking this employment path (Chen, 2019). This was demonstrated by one of the parent participant, Xue:

I asked my daughter to stay at home for a few months after finishing her master's. I wanted her to prepare for the National Civil Servant Examination and find a job in the Educational Bureau of Xinjiang, or at least work in "the system" (*tizhi*). I think it is suitable for girls since it provides job security and a steady income, which is truly an "iron rice bowl".

Working in the private sector may be seen as more rewarding compared with working in the public sector. However, as highlighted by Sea and Jia above, suitable jobs that match their years of education and are secure are hard to find in private sectors. As a compromise, they both ended up securing a position in a relatively stable sector, the banking sector. The struggle between employment in the public sector or private sector was addressed by another student participant, Ting:

We have to submit our application before the National University Entrance Examination (*gaokao*) in Xinjiang classes, and I chose the Chinese language and literature as my first preference for a major. I always considered that returning to Xinjiang and working as a civil servant is the right choice for me, as expected by my mother at that time. I could lay a good foundation for that by studying Chinese literature. But deep in my mind ... I know I could do more than that ... I was really struggling after graduation because my mother kept persuading me to return by saying that my peers had a good life after returning to Xinjiang and working in the public sectors, but I want to stay in eastern China and be economically independent.

Ting was hesitating between working at Nanjing and returning to Xinjiang and her family after graduation. Like others, she perceived that there would be more and better working opportunities in eastern China. She started her career as an English teacher in a

private educational institution in Nanjing, where she gained a lot of experience. She later founded her own educational institution, and according to her, it was “tiring but rewarding”.

The data presented show that students in this research study oscillate between the desires for autonomy on the one hand and being a dutiful family member on the other. They are faced with the dilemma of returning to Xinjiang or remaining in the “big city”, marrying the “right” person or choosing a partner of one’s own. What is more, while they want to work in the private sectors, they also know that the public sector provides them with an “iron rice bowl”. They are caught between the attraction of security on the one hand, and a sense of grandeur on the other, an image facilitated by the prospects of a fulfilling job in the “big city”. It became clear as the interviews progressed that this group of minority students, and their parents are facing difficult and turbulent times as well as an uncertain future. We have argued that these pressures of life do not emanate merely from government policy. Family and community pressures also play a significant role in their “dilemmas of life”.

Discussion

The above data have demonstrated that Xinjiang class students in this study have an imaginary image of themselves as independent and self-disciplined, possessing the autonomy to do whatever they want. But they also have an imaginary image of themselves as being compliant and dutiful, and this is internalized as social norms through everyday language (the symbolic order). It is their responsibility to share family duties and respect ethnic traditions, and they are well aware of these family and community pressures. They swing between the two images of self, both of which cause them endless uncertainty and anxiety.

The MOE in China is responsible for carrying out the Xinjiang Class policy and was the first arm of government to issue documents on Xinjiang classes. Documents and related regulations issued by the MOE have shaped the curriculum content and the educational goals for Xinjiang class students. The current climate of cultivating “ethnic elites” has resulted in school development being understood more in terms of examination results and moral education. The recent intense discussion around national integration drives schools to force a further emphasis on the cultivation of patriotic students. As a result, the deployment of resources in host schools, including teaching materials, finance

and personnel, is also arranged according to the basic purpose of the Xinjiang class policy. There is, however, very little detailed guidance concerning policy implementation. Besides, the policy narratives, such as overall development, cohesion and unity, intellectual aid for Xinjiang, together with the public discourses in host schools, successfully instil a sense of elitism among students as demonstrated by the participants above. It is not surprising that students are indoctrinated with a vision that they are the agents of social change and the future of Xinjiang, with the power to control their own lives.

Students in Xinjiang classes have obtained better educational outcomes (e.g. becoming qualified teachers) and have made substantial advances through access to better resources. They are privileged in university admission as well as in the job market. There is a cohesive image of themselves in the imaginary (such as “I am an elite” or “I would definitely go to the top universities”). This coherence begins to break down, however, when considering their obligations toward family (such as “I am so irresponsible if I stay in eastern China instead of being with the elders at home”). As a result, students are caught between a sense of privilege and obligations to family. Their anxiety is constituted as they swing between a sense of what they want for themselves and what others want for them. Lacan saw the human subject as caught in a never-ending attempt to capture an understanding of him/herself in the context of this ongoing anxiety (Brown & England, 2004, p. 72). This constitutes the ongoing difficult knowledge for these students: their continued desire for other things in life.

The internalization of self-images allows for a coherent sense of self, yet our new experiences are often compared against these internalized images (Fink, 1997). As a result, “I” am forever trying to complete the picture I have of myself in relation to the world around me and in relation to the others who also inhabit it. I respond both to the fantasy I have of the other and to the fantasy I imagine the other has of me. Students in this study, therefore, move between an ideal life for themselves and another life that also represents the desires of others. They internalize the external ideal (what others want them to be) from the government and schools for the benefit of their future development and upward mobility. They accept Xinjiang class education and become a “model student” of the broader society. Nevertheless, this self-image of the model student who is in control of his or her own life is frustrated by their obligations to perform their family duties including returning to Xinjiang to look after the elders. They carefully move between the

life they want for themselves and a life others want for them, strategically balancing the expectations from the outside and the inside, and they make their own choices of how to navigate the complexities of the current social system in China.

Although some research studies have positioned minority students as objects of policy and institution, the data presented here demonstrates how this is not the only narrative at work for these participants. Most students in this study saw their education as providing an enormous opportunity in their lives, socially, professionally and economically. It gave them the chance to break out of a small community and to access opportunities that they would not otherwise have encountered. But as they enter this imaginary world, they find themselves oscillating between various demands and expectations. Their immediate problems stem not so much from the government (according to them), but from an imaginary domain that inserts them into a discourse of past and future, of life back home and a new life in eastern China, a life of stability or a life of privilege. We are not supporting the dominance of this discourse of progress, but we do suggest that Xinjiang students face significant dilemmas in their day to day lives, dilemmas that should be recognized and addressed in the literature and in our views of ethnic minority families in Xinjiang.

In all, students are confronted with the sense of “what is missing for me” in the choices they make, and for some, they feel immobilized and impotent. Xinjiang class students are involved in this imaginary duality of loss and gain. They want to take advantage of their newfound opportunities, but they also want to please their parents and respect ethnic traditions. They become increasingly anxious as they try to rationalize the choices in their life.

Conclusion: Students of the imaginary

Xinjiang class policy has received increasing attention from scholars due to its location in politically sensitive multiethnic areas, where there is a heightened sensitivity over issues concerning social stability and security. The Xinjiang class policy has been executed from central to local regions where officials and schools endeavour to carry out the policy in their context. Individual students are increasingly instructed in ways of acting that replicate the “order of things”, and to conform to the desires of others for upward social mobility, and are delineated as “ethnic-comprador elite to serve as proxies for Han/CCP power” (Leibold & Grose, 2019).

The authors have suggested that it is an oversimplification to declare that the government is attempting to normalize its citizens for the utility of governing and to subject individuals to the central power of the Han majority. These assumptions overlook the everyday lives and struggles of minority students. The macro picture does not necessarily fit with what is happening in the real lives of these students. Research has previously positioned minority students as objects of an oppressive regime, but this is not the only perspective. A more nuanced interpretation, demonstrated by this study, is that students are struggling with their own expectations and with the needs and desires of their parents and community. Like most young people, these participants are caught in a drive for imaginary ideals. We have illustrated the confusion and conflict experienced by this group of students in their mediation between apparently contrasting expectations. Students are caught in an imaginary world as much as they are in a world of politics. The disciplinary gaze comes from the students themselves as much as it does from the government.

Images of desirous future make the students who they are in society and in the diverse community (Gunder, 2003). But they also alienate students from who they are as human beings. Students attempt to secure their selves by seeking to make themselves into the object of another's desire and thereby to complete themselves in the gaze of their parents/schools or the wider society. This is the power of recognition, a power made more forceful by the difficulty of discerning just what it is that the other wants and therefore what one must be in order to exist (Roberts, 2005). Schools aim to cultivate students by constituting images that students must then endeavour to internalize, and students craft themselves in such ways that adhere to the desires of the other. We witnessed above how the human subject is a split subject, "something about us is always missing, undefined, lacking..." (Hillier, 2003, pp. 264–267). We have little choice in what constitutes our identifications. "It is always, and particularly in contemporary times, fragmented, agonistic, and problematic" (Beauregard, 1998, p. 95).

This article provides a new understanding of Xinjiang class students in relation to their ideological construction of the world they inhabit. Students here are involved in an ongoing redefinition of themselves and of the world that shapes them. In this account, human identity is never fixed. We are never able to say what we want to say because our language is "full of other people's talk, other people's conversations, and other people's goals, aspirations and fantasies" (Fink, 1997, pp. 9–10). This is a challenge for these

students, and their task is to realize a little of themselves in a world that is both promising and confusing. Further research needs to acknowledge a deeper level of complexity in policy outcomes in Xinjiang graduates and to recognize the reflective skills needed in negotiating the stresses encountered, to fully actualize the outcomes of their dislocated schooling years.

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6.3 Postscript

In this chapter, I have explored the impact of a prolonged period of detachment on the relationship between parents and their children who have attended Xinjiang classes in eastern China. The findings of this chapter answered the third research question of this research study, and highlighted a deep level of complexity when evaluating the outcomes of this government funded educational program.

The analysis and findings of this chapter, together with Chapters 4 and 5, are synthesised in the next chapter.

Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

In this research study, I have focused on the life experiences of Xinjiang class students and their families to explore the diverse and complicated individual life stories of ethnic minority students and their caregivers. The following three issues have been explored:

1. How do ethnic minority students from Xinjiang maintain their ethnic identity while, at the same time, becoming well-educated citizens in a Han-dominated environment?
2. How do the caregivers of students perceive the value of Xinjiang class education?
3. What are the implications for the parent-child relationship after a students' period of detachment from their families and communities?

This research study sheds light on previous understandings of the impact of the Xinjiang class policy. It also uncovers a range of diverse and nuanced individual narratives from the various participants involved. In this chapter, I will present the key findings and significance, together with the limitations of this research. Finally, suggestions for future research will be made.

7.2 Key findings

Three major key findings could be synthesised and contributed to the research field. First, this study has revealed that there is a lack of understanding among parents in terms of the policy context as well as content, and this is partly due to their lack of understanding of the mainstream educational processes and the one-way direction communication between school authorities and families. Parents from a distanced position are less capable of building a relationship with the schools and therefore the limited access to the related information blocked parents from gaining a full understanding of the policy. For example, one of the parents considered the whole project as an indication that “the government looks after my child for me; I do not need to worry about anything”. Moreover, the first preparatory year of bridging courses is negatively perceived by some parents, especially those from ethnic Hui. Parent participants shared different perspectives on the bridging courses, depending on their specific ethnic background and educational foundations. Some consider the first year bridging courses useless and designed for students to learn

Mandarin only, thus it was perceived to be a waste of time for their children's high school education. This could be improved, as I suggest, by providing pre-transition sessions to prepare both the host schools as well as the parents for the challenges that follow after students are enrolled in Xinjiang classes. This issue has been noticed and addressed by the authorities in that a growing number of parents are invited to visit the host schools. It is, however, worth noting that some parents' knowledge concerning this program is limited.

Second, through in-depth interviews, this study enabled families of Xinjiang class students to have authentic discussions about their children's education. For example, parents consider that being educated in Xinjiang classes provided their children with knowledge, independence, and employability. Parents expected their children to become well-respected community members, who could contribute to the whole family financially. Overall, parents believe in the function of education to realise the social mobility of the whole family by allowing their children to move away for education. These discussions facilitated a deeper understanding of the motivations of families, especially parents, behind their decision to allow their children to go away for education. Nevertheless, as indicated before, parents from a distanced and different social context find it difficult to build a relationship with schools in order to promote their children's educational performance. In this case, Xinjiang parents lacked the necessary connections with the authority at the host schools. Their agency to bring change to the policy is disempowered in this process, even though they had some advice and reflections based on their observations and experiences.

Third, this research has indicated how it is time to acknowledge some of the personal difficulties experienced by Xinjiang class students and their families. Cultural discontinuity faces many students after they move away from home to study, and as a result, the cultural distance between the home culture and the school-host culture can turn students into "familiar strangers" in both environments. Nevertheless, students are making some decisions and acquiring new identities despite struggles and confusion. Students want to take advantage of their newfound opportunities, but they also want to please their parents and respect ethnic traditions. I have argued that this gap between the home and host culture causes the students endless uncertainty and anxiety. These personal challenges have often been overlooked in the haste of some to denounce government policy. Rather, this study demonstrates how Xinjiang class policy does have a positive

contribution to make for those living in Xinjiang province, although it is acknowledged that improvements could be made particularly for the benefit of parents.

Fourth, this research has revealed a striking array of social change in terms of family affection and parent-child relations embedded in students' educational motilities in contemporary ethnic China. Students are caught in an imaginary world as much as they are in a world of politics. They are under the gaze of both the government and themselves, oscillate between the desires for autonomy on the one hand and being a dutiful family member on the other. The cultural distance between the home culture and the host culture, and the acquisition, maintenance and change of cultural identities, behaviours, and values, require a more complex and nuanced description in the context of education mobility. Hence, while it is not my intent to generalise the findings in this research study, it is anticipated that this study may enrich our understanding of global educational mobility and its effects on parent-child relationships.

7.3 Significance of the study

Previous research about the Xinjiang class policy has largely focused on the experiences of ethnic minority students, especially the Uyghurs. Examples of these experiences include speaking Uyghur as a response to ethnic integration in Xinjiang classes (Chen, 2008; Chen, 2010; Chen & Postiglione, 2009), the ethnic identity construction of Uyghur students in Xinjiang classes (Grose, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2019), and Uyghur graduates after Xinjiang class education (Chen, 2019; Grose, 2015). Some researchers have extended the focus to interethnic interactions in Xinjiang classes (Yuan, 2018; Yuan, Qian, & Zhu, 2017). While most research on Xinjiang classes is qualitative in nature, Yuan and Li (2019) used large-scale quantitative research to investigate the relationship between identity building and social mobility. This research has contributed to an understanding of government-funded schooling for ethnic minority students, advanced research in the identity construction of ethnic minorities in school contexts, and furthered our understanding of China's endeavour to be socially inclusive of migrant and Indigenous ethnic minorities in an era of social mobilisation and migration. Above all, the tensions and struggles between the majority-minority and Uyghur-Han dichotomy revealed in this research has shown us that "integration is a complex and dynamic process" (Heath & Li, 2017, p. 3).

In this study, I adopted a qualitative case study to explore the impact of the Xinjiang class policy on students and their families. In parallel with existing research, I first explored the experiences of Xinjiang class students and discovered the changes that students undergo during and after attending Xinjiang classes in inland China. This research is distinctive from prior research in that it includes perceptions from families of Xinjiang class students and examines the value of the Xinjiang class education through the perspective of caregivers. Moreover, the current study extends understanding of the influence of the Xinjiang class policy on parent–child relationships, which I found to be a prominent issue during the research process. As a result, this thesis fills a gap in the research field of the government-funded educational programs by involving families’ experiences and perceptions in the evaluation of the policy outcomes. It contributes to existing knowledge about the power relations between the government authority and its actors, and it enriches our understanding of the parent–child relations in a complex yet nuanced way.

7.4 Limitations of this study

The methodological challenge lay in building rapport with families of Xinjiang class students, knowing about their lives in Xinjiang, their day to day experiences and anxieties. As Chen (2014) argued, one needs to involve the long-term impacts of the detachment from one’s family and community when researching the impact of the Xinjiang class policy. This research contributes to our understanding of the impact of this detachment by involving the families of Xinjiang class students. I have tried to augment the sample of participants through the inclusion of students who were attending Xinjiang class at the time of the interview, together with students who graduated from Xinjiang classes and are now attending universities or in employment. My parental participants came from diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as ethnic Xibe, ethnic Hui, ethnic Uyghur, and Han Chinese.

Besides, there are several limitations to this study. First, the influence of my identity as a majority Han Chinese made my understanding of the data in this research project an “outside representation”. As a Han Chinese and a cultural outsider, my understanding of other cultures in China is limited and my elaboration of their lived experience is constructed by my knowledge. For instance, it was difficult for me to understand the interethnic tensions after all the preferential treatment the central government has offered for ethnic minorities to counter the structural inequality. The image of ethnic minority

students as “preferentially treated” and “less capable” (Yang 2017, 239), and that they make little effort but are still able to attend key universities in China is a common perception. In a similar vein, it is also perceived by some that Han Chinese need to compete within an extremely harsh environment in order to win positions in higher education. My interactions with participants in this research, however, revealed that minority students work hard at Xinjiang classes, in part prompted by their lack of experience in the mainstream education system. Despite all their efforts on occasion, they could still miss out on a university place, not because of a poor academic record but because several students might choose the same position at a university which only had one place available for students from Xinjiang classes.

Second, I do not speak any of the ethnic languages of the students and their parents from Xinjiang. This inevitably limited my capacity to build trust and intimate relationship with my participants, especially parent participants. In some cases, I had to rely on my student participants to interpret during the interview, and that may have resulted in me missing some important information.

Finally, my identity as an overseas female researcher led me to care more about the experiences of my female participants, although I interviewed more male than female participants. When my participants talked about future planning, I tended to consider that females should be more ambitious and make decisions on their own instead of meeting the expectations of the family or the community. For example, I tended to support the ontological position of those participants who chose to find their own partner instead of being obedient and following their parents’ instructions, or who chose to secure an occupation following their own heart. Coincidentally, my female student participants in the research, were actually more independent and determined in terms of career planning and marital issues.

7.5 Suggestions for future research

In this study, I have examined the impacts of Xinjiang class policy from the perspectives of both the students and their parents and families. By demonstrating the experiences and perceptions of students and parents, this study contributes to a wider understanding of the complexity of government-funded boarding school programs and the influence of these programs on families in Xinjiang. Further research on several aspects of this topic is necessary to increase the existing knowledge in this research field.

First, more research could be conducted in low socioeconomic areas of southern Xinjiang. Due to time and financial restrictions, I focused on recruiting participants from northern Xinjiang districts, but a relatively high percentage of students came from southern Xinjiang impoverished rural areas, as indicated by the MOE (2010b). A deeper understanding of students' family background, as well as their ethnicity, could be attained in southern Xinjiang. However, researchers should be reminded that southern Xinjiang has been considered as highly risky because of the tense situation and riots that have occurred in recent years.

Second, further research could be conducted in the XUAR internal junior middle school classes (*Xinjiang qunei chuzhongban*). These schools are considered as feeder schools for Xinjiang classes in Ürümqi, Shihezi, Turpan, and other urban centres in Xinjiang. More than half of my student participants attended the *qunei chuzhongban* before they attended Xinjiang classes in inland China. This learning period normally starts from the age of 12 or 13. It would be worthwhile looking back to an earlier age of Xinjiang class students to see how these early experience shape their understanding of their own identity.

Third, involving teachers in the research, would provide a full understanding of the government-funded boarding school programs. Teachers, including both local Han Chinese teachers and Xinjiang ethnic teachers, play significant roles in Xinjiang class students' learning experiences and students' understanding of interethnic interactions. It would also be interesting to observe the differences between Han Chinese teachers and Xinjiang ethnic teachers in terms of their approaches to pedagogy and their interactions with students.

Finally, most academics, including me, have focused on a qualitative understanding of the Xinjiang class policy. Although qualitative study gains its popularity for its in-depth understanding of participants lived experiences as well as including participants' voices, further research could employ quantitative methods, perhaps involving large-scale surveys to maximise the objectivity of the researcher's position as well as produce comparable findings, especially feedbacks from those who participated the Xinjiang classes.

7.6 Concluding remarks

This thesis has contributed important new understandings to the existing knowledge in the field of government schooling on ethnic minority students in ethnic China. The findings offer direction about enhanced practice and understanding of the Xinjiang policy. The findings also hint at a major social change to come to China, specifically how the ancient concept of “family affection” is currently under threat. In addition, as an example of a study of cultural separation of children from families, this study casts new light on global studies about the impact of educational mobility. Above all, I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the families and students who enabled this research and generously shared their pains and gains during this period of their life journey. I am deeply in debt to them. This research could not have been done without them.

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Appendix A (pages 142-143) removed from Open Access version as they may contain sensitive/confidential content.

Appendix B (pages 144-145) removed from Open Access version as they may contain copyright content.

Appendix C (pages 146-148) removed from Open Access version as they may contain sensitive/confidential content.

Appendix D. Sample questions for interview with parents (English and Chinese)

Appendix: Sample questions for interviews with parents

The research study will utilise qualitative semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection. The semi-structured interview has specific topic areas that need to be covered during the interview. However, the order of the questions and the exact wording of the questions are left to the discretion of the interviewer. Any significant changes to this schedule will be notified by an ethics amendment.

1. What are the motivations and perceptions of parents in terms of sending their children to boarding schools in interior China?

- How did you know about the Xinjiang Class Policy?
- Where did you get the motivation to send your children to boarding schools in interior China?
- How often do your children go back home?
- How often do you contact with each other?
- Did you see any differences of your child before and after studying in the interior area, e.g., language usage, religious belief, lifestyles?

2. From the perspective of parents, how is the well-being of ethnic minority students affected by relocating to boarding schools education? e.g., psychologically, physically, socioeconomically, culturally.

- What does wellbeing mean to you?
- How, in what ways and to what extent does the relocated boarding schools education affect your children psychologically from your point of view?
- How, in what ways and to what extent does the relocated boarding schools education affect your children physically from your point of view?
- How, in what ways and to what extent does the relocated boarding schools education affect your children socioeconomically from your point of view?
- How, in what ways and to what extent does the relocated boarding schools education affect your children culturally from your point of view?

3. From the perspective of parents, does a boarding school education improve their children's cultural, social and economic opportunities in Xinjiang?

- Do you think they get a better education in inland China?
- In what way does the relocated boarding schools education help your children get a better education?
- Do you think your children can get a better job than those who did not go to the Xinjiang Classes? And why do you think so?
- How is people around you talking about your child in terms of their education and development?

附件：父母访谈提纲

这一研究将使用半结构式访谈作为数据收集方法之一。半结构式访谈在访谈过程中有具体的话题，但问题的顺序和问题的确切措辞由访谈者决定。对此访谈提纲的任何重大更改将通过道德修正案通知。

1. 把孩子送到内地寄宿学校上学动机与体会是什么？

- 您是如何了解到新疆班政策的？
- 您把孩子送到异地寄宿学校上学的动机是什么？
- 您的孩子多久回一次家？
- 您和孩子联系的频率怎么样？
- 去内地上学之前以及之后，您觉得您的孩子有何变化，如语言使用习惯，宗教信仰，生活方式？

2. 您认为寄宿制学校教育是如何影响您孩子的全面发展的？如心理，生理，社会经济和文化方面。

- 全面发展对您而言意味着什么？
- 在您看来，寄宿制学校教育怎样，以何种方式以及在何种程度上影响您孩子的心理发展？
- 在您看来，寄宿制学校教育怎样，以何种方式以及在何种程度上影响您孩子的身体发展？
- 在您看来，寄宿制学校教育怎样，以何种方式以及在何种程度上影响您孩子的社会经济发展？
- 在您看来，寄宿制学校教育怎样，以何种方式以及在何种程度上影响您孩子的文化发展？

3. 您认为寄宿制学校教育有利于提升您孩子在新疆的文化，社会 and 经济发展机会吗？

- 您认为他们在内地有获得更好的教育吗？
- 寄宿制学校教育如何帮助您的孩子获得更好的教育？
- 相比较而言，您认为您的孩子比没有上过新疆班的孩子有更好的就业机会吗？为什么？
- 您周围的人是如何评价您孩子的教育及发展的？

请新疆内高班毕业生帮助寻找潜在参与者的邮件

亲爱的先生/女士，
您好！

我们诚挚邀请您帮忙寻找适合参与我们的研究项目“玫瑰与刺：从家长视角看寄宿制学校教育对新疆少数民族学生的文化影响”的参与者。此研究由麦考瑞大学教育系苏鑫，为了达到博士毕业要求，在尼尔·哈里森博士和罗宾·莫罗尼博士的指导下进行。

研究的目的是从父母视角揭示送孩子去异地上学的动机及感受，少数民族学生长期与家人及社群分离的影响也将在研究中被揭示。这项研究将有利于加强对当前新疆少数民族异地寄宿制学校教育的理解，揭露父母对这种教育形式的需求及担忧，从而为政府资助下的寄宿制学校提供更好的支持策略，并为新疆及中国的少数民族教育提供有利的理论指导。

我们将十分感激如果您能找到任何年龄在 40 至 65 岁，孩子毕业于新疆内高班的家长，并邀请他们考虑参加此项研究。研究项目组同时向您保证，研究过程中的任何个人信息仅限参与此项研究的小组成员--苏鑫，尼尔·哈里森博士和罗宾·莫罗尼博士接触。

非常感谢您考虑我们的请求以及任何您可能提供的帮助。

如您对此项研究有任何疑问，请随时联系我 xin.su3@students.mq.edu.au。

诚挚的，
苏鑫

Appendix E. Email requesting Xinjiang class graduates to assist with identifying potential participants (English and Chinese)

Email requesting Xinjiang class graduates to assist with identifying potential participants

Dear Mr/Ms X,

Good day!

We would like to request your assistance with recruiting suitable participant for the research project "Roses and thorns: the cultural impact of boarding school education on ethnic minority students in Xinjiang from the perspective of parents". This is being conducted by Xin Su to meet the requirements for the PhD degree under the supervision of Dr Neil Harrison and Dr Robyn Moloney at the Department of Educational Studies, Macquarie University.

The purpose of this study is to delineate the motivations and experiences of parents sending children away for education, the impacts of this long-term detachment on minority students would be addressed as well. This research would contribute to the current understanding of relocated education for minority students in Xinjiang and the concerns and needs of parents would be uncovered to inform better support for state-funded boarding schools and propose guidelines for support services and practices for minority education in Xinjiang and in China.

I would really appreciate it if you could identify any 40-65-year-old parents whose children has graduated from the Xinjiang classes, and ask them to consider participating in the study by sending them a copy of the attached Information and Consent Form for me.

If you choose not to respond to this invitation or if your response is that you are unable to provide assistance, you will not be contacted in relation to this project again. I would also like to assure you that no personal information will be made available to anyone except the research team—Dr Neil Harrison, Dr Robyn Moloney, Xin Su.

Many thanks in advance for considering our request and any assistance you may provide.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at xin.su3@students.mq.edu.au if you would like any further information.

Yours sincerely,
Xin Su