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Becoming familiar strangers: an exploration of inland boarding school education on cultural wellbeing of minority students from Xinjiang province

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Abstract

The Inland Xinjiang Senior Secondary School Class Policy (Neidi Xinjiang gaozhongban zhengce, hereafter the Xinjiang Class Policy) was implemented by China's Ministry of Education (MOE) in September 2000. It allows and funds middle school-aged students, mostly ethnic minorities from southern Xinjiang's impoverished rural and nomadic regions to attend boarding schools in predominately Han-populated cities located throughout eastern China. The purpose of this policy is to improve ethnic minority students' political, economic and cultural status and to promote ethnic unity and Chinese nationalism. A systematic review of the literature is conducted in order to identify research relevant to the implementation of the Xinjiang Class Policy. Using Michel Foucault's concept of normalisation, the paper examines how the goals of this policy are accomplished by instilling a new set of cultural and political norms in boarding school education. It suggests that while students are resisting integration through their attempts to maintain ethnic identity, better educational achievements and increased employment opportunities are nevertheless positioning minority students as ethnic elites in Xinjiang, and this long-term detachment from their own families and communities have turned them into familiar strangers.

While previous research has focused largely on the experiences of minority students in boarding schools, the systematic review applied here finds that research exploring the cultural significance for parents whose children leave home to study in far-away places is extremely limited. This limitation thus constitutes the future focus of this research study.

Keywords: Xinjiang class policy, boarding schools, ethnic minority education, Uyghur, normalisation

Introduction

China has 55 officially recognised ethnic minority groups, most of which live within China's designated ethnic minority autonomous regions. These regions are highly significant in the ongoing development of China's economic and educational policies both at home and abroad. In

an attempt to cultivate educated ethnic labours as well as unifying China's ethnic minority groups, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has provided minority residents with preferential educational policies including lower university admission criteria, as well as special funds and programs for minority students. The Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (hereafter Xinjiang), home to the sometimes restless Muslim minorities (especially the Uyghurs) and a number of other ethnic groups, was officially founded in 1955 and located in the north-west of China. Covered largely by uninhabitable deserts and dry grasslands, Xinjiang has long been an area of irrigated agriculture. It also constitutes more than one-sixth of China's total territory and a quarter of its boundary length. Over the last decades, with 'The Grand Western Development Program' (xibu da kaifa) and the heightened inter-ethnic tensions, Xinjiang has become more and more important in the political, economic and cultural development of China.

In order to provide minorities with access to higher education in Xinjiang, and as part of a long-term strategy and one of the most controversial concerning its goals, the Inland Xinjiang Senior Secondary School Classes Policy (*Neidi Xinjiang Gao Zhong ban zhengce*, hereafter the Xinjiang Class Policy) was introduced by China's Ministry of Education (MOE) in September 2000. It is a four-year policy that funds middle school-aged students from Xinjiang, mostly ethnic minorities, to attend boarding schools in predominately Han-populated cities located throughout eastern China. The policy also requires that 80% of all the incoming students are from southern Xinjiang's impoverished rural and nomadic regions. According to the legal documents issued by the MOE from January to June 2000, three specific goals are emphasised. Firstly, training quality senior secondary school graduates who achieve overall developments in morals, intellect, physics, and atheism; secondly, boosting economic development and social progress in Xinjiang; and thirdly, enhancing unity and cohesion among all ethnic groups, and ensuring national and border security (MOE, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c). As a result, the number of students enrolled in this program has risen from 1,000 in the year 2000 to nearly 10,000 in 2016, with students located in over 90 schools in 45 cities in interior China (Guo, 2015).

The majority of students in Xinjiang classes grow up in border area ethnic minority regions. Before coming to China's interior regions, they have been immersed in cultures with strong ethnic characteristics, as manifested by ethnic minority languages, writing systems, beliefs, art forms, customs and habits, ways of life, mentalities, and awareness (Yan & Song, 2010). Uyghurs, for instance, comprises a majority within Xinjiang with some 10 million people; they speak a Turkic language utilizing a modified Arabic script, and most are Muslim. Therefore, challenges encountered by ethnic minority students in distant boarding schools are significant. Boarding schools offer students a standardised curriculum with intensive Chinese language instruction for one year before they use the same national standard curriculum as Han students. They are expected to use Chinese as the lingua franca within the school and residential premises for Chinese language immersion and life convenience (Chen, 2008, p. 83). Some evidence (Grose, 2010b, 2015) suggests that students are resisting integration by speaking ethnic languages after classes and avoiding interactions with Han students. And Uyghur students regard learning within the national education system as a strategy for an Uyghur ethnic revival in resisting and competing with the Han population in Xinjiang (Smith, 2000). Despite these attempts to maintain a strong ethnic identity, graduates of Xinjiang classes from inland universities generally have a strong pride in their educational achievements and ethnic culture maintenance, and they are known as 'ethnic elites'(Chen, 2014).

This paper applies Michel Foucault's concept of normalisation to investigate the question: How are the goals of the Xinjiang class policy accomplished through boarding school education and what are the impacts? We first elaborate on the stated goals of the Xinjiang class policy in the official documents. We then examine the ways dislocated boarding school education seeks to instil a new set of cultural and political norms. The paper investigates Xinjiang students' response to these norms. to highlight how students are resisting integration to some extent, but are

becoming 'ethnic elites' in Xinjiang as desired by the policy. Last but not least, this period of time in which students striving to live in two diverse cultural groups turn students into familiar strangers both to their Han peers in inland China and to their parents and Uyghur peers back in Xinjiang.

Power and normalising practices

The guiding theory to be utilised in this study is Michel Foucault's concept of normalisation. It provides us with an understanding of how power regulates one's life (Abercrombie, Hill, & Turner, 2006). According to Foucault, normalisation is accomplished in disciplinary systems in which penalty traverses all points and supervises every instant. It refers to a series of actions combined with comparison, differentiation, hierarchization, homogenisation and exclusion. It first puts individuals into groups in which individual's actions are once at a field of comparison, a space of differentiation and a planetary of rules to be followed (Foucault, 1977, p. 182). Then, those who do not measure up to the rules, depart from the rules, or are viewed as non-conforming are disciplined in order to impose conformity. The disciplinary system adopts punishments that are intensified, multiplied forms of training and several times repeated, which have the function of reducing gaps and correcting behaviour. Following this, all behaviour falls in the field of good and bad marks, good and bad points. Through this process, individuals are ranked based on where they stand in relation to such norms. Finally, an administrator distributes them into different ranked space, and exercises upon them a constant pressure to conform to the same model, so that they might all be subjected to 'subordination, docility, attention in studies and exercises, and to the correct practices of duties and all the parts of discipline'. In short, it normalises (Foucault, 1977, p. 183). And the power of normalisation not only imposes homogeneity; it also individualises by 'making it possible to measure gaps, determine levels, fix specialities and render the differences useful by fitting them one to another' (Foucault, 1977, pp. 177-184). Moreover, as a normative relation always implies an effort to control or influence the behaviour of others, it will naturally lead to the asymmetry and inequality of power relations, and provoke a diverse range of resistance (Foucault, 1990).

It is widely considered that Foucault's work has much to offer education (Bondy, 2011, 2016; Briscoe, 2008; Jardine, 2005; Ryan, 1991). Schools are but one of a number of sites that employ disciplinary technology in the pursuit of productivity, docility and individualism. Like so many other institutions in the modern world that are organised around a Panopticon-like scheme, the power embedded in this model to structure the potential activities of students is used by schools (Ryan, 1991). Thus, it may suggest to some that the efforts the central government exerts on ethnic minority students through boarding school education are, in fact, are directed at the process of normalisation. Boarding schools, as protected places of disciplinary monotony, is 'the most perfect, if not the most frequent', educational examples of this form of discipline and normalisation'(Foucault, 1977, p. 141). They employ components including perpetual observation, evaluation, documentation, and punishment (and reward) - to normalize the minority in order to ensure that they abide by the majority standards. As It is a civilizing project in which a politically and economically powerful centre uses its cultural superiority to raise the peripheral peoples' civilization to the level of the centre, or at least closer to that level in culture, religion and moral qualities (Harrell, 1995, pp. 3-36).

Needless to say, students in Xinjiang classes will be forced to take on at least some, and probably all aspects of the wider society in some form or another to facilitate their development. The effect of the normalizing process varies not only with the degree to which students become 'normalized' but also with the degree and nature of their complicity in the normalizing process.

Methodology

In order to conduct a comprehensive review of the enormous body of literature devoted to investigating the Xinjiang class policy, this research employs a systematic literature review. A systematic literature review, according to Kitchenham (2004), is a means of identifying, evaluating and interpreting all available research relevant to a particular research question, or topic area, or phenomenon of interest. It uses transparent, structured and comprehensive approaches to search and review the literature, and produces a synthesis of available evidence in answer to a focused research question (Bearman et al., 2012). The following describes the procedures for conducting a systematic literature review.

This research utilised three search platforms based on the availability and effectiveness including ERIC, EBSCOhost and China National Knowledge Infrastructure (hereafter the CNKI). The CNKI was adopted because the research question relates to a Chinese context. Search terms such as Uyghur, ethnic integration, ethnic minority education was used in conjunction with variations of common search phrase ('Xinjiang class') to ensure all possible sources were considered. The reason we use the term 'Xinjiang class' instead of the official translated name 'Inland Xinjiang Senior Secondary School Class' was that the prior is more commonly used among scholars.

A set of inclusion and exclusion criteria were developed to select peer-reviewed studies. Studies were included if they 1) focused on students in senior secondary school stage, 2) were published after 2000 and 3) concentrated on students from an ethnic minority background, who attended high school in inland China. Papers were excluded if they 1) had a specific focus on Xinjiang classes in university level or junior secondary level, 2) were published before the year of 2000, and 3) focused only on curriculum design and teaching in Xinjiang classes. These studies were excluded because the key findings are outside the limits of this research study. It is notable that a lot of studies on this topic were found in the CNKI produced in domestic China. Among them, only limited numbers are from the Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (hereafter, the CSSCI) program and are included by the author. Therefore, the combined searches culminated in the inclusion of 16 studies. The limited number of studies underlines the fact that research on the Xinjiang class policy in the English language has just emerged. A careful review of these studies reveals that analyzing the Xinjiang class policy from a parental perspective is not a major focus for any of the researcher or research groups. To expand the research, boolean operations were adopted, and the reference lists of these articles were also used to identify additional relevant sources. A review of the abstracts of those additional sources was used to determine inclusion as well.

Xinjiang class policy and its goals

Ever since the implementation of the Xinjiang class policy, it has become one of the most controversial policies in minority education and has triggered intense debate among researchers domestically and internationally. Some firmly believe that students obtain better educational resources (e.g., qualified teachers) and make leaping advances through the use of better resources (Grose, 2010b; Yan & Song, 2010). However, criticisms from academics, journalists, and human rights groups alike have drawn a similar conclusion that the policies of the Han-dominated Chinese Communist Party infringe upon the rights of ethnic minorities and exacerbate ethnic tensions in the region (Zhang & McGhee, 2014). It provides intellectual aid for cultivating talents for the development of border areas on one hand but is imbued with political and ideological consideration by the state on the other (Postiglione & Jiao, 2009; Wang & Zhou, 2003; Zhu, 2007a, 2007b). Next section will present how the objectives of Xinjiang class policy is read in official documents.

The MOE in China is the top governmental bureau responsible for carrying out the Xinjiang class policy and was the first arm of government to issue documents on Xinjiang classes. Three key

documents regarding Xinjiang Classes were issued in 2000 by the MOE, in which the goals of setting up Xinjiang classes are illustrated by Chen (2008) as follows:

> *To cultivate a group of minority talents who could maintain national unity, closely affiliate with the masses, and possess strong enterprising revolutionary qualities and certain professional capabilities. The policy is significant for boosting economic development and social progress in Xinjiang, for enhancing unity and cohesion among all ethnic groups, and for ensuring national and border security (Chen, 2008, p. 44; MOE, 2000b).*

While the above document mainly highlights political concerns regarding the Xinjiang classes, the other two interpret their educational significance:

> *In light of the tenet of enhancing students' overall quality, the Xinjiang classes focus on students' creativity and capabilities. They aim to train quality senior secondary school graduates, who achieve overall developments in morals, intellect, physics, and atheism. The graduates must possess ideals, morals, culture and discipline, uphold national unity, and are dedicated to the great Development of the Western Region (Chen, 2008, p. 45; MOE, 2000c).*

The goals are also stipulated as:

> *The Xinjiang classes will train qualified senior secondary school graduates for Xinjiang. The graduates must stand up for the rule of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), love the nation and socialism, support national unity, and ethnic consolidation. They must also have ideals, morals, culture, and disciplines. They should be generally achieving development morals, intellect, physical education, aesthetics, and labour. Moreover, they must have the creativity and capability to serve the socialist enterprise of modernization (Chen, 2008, p. 45; MOE, 2000a).*

In the context of program objectives, these documents also regulate curriculum arrangements in Xinjiang classes. This four-year program includes a one-year preparatory course focusing on Chinese, English, mathematics, physics and chemistry. The MOE arranges the teaching plans and materials, among which the Chinese and Math textbooks are compiled by the Department of Education in Xinjiang, Education Commission of Wuxi in Jiangsu province is responsible for compiling English textbooks. Unified teaching materials are used the same as local high schools in the following three years. The class arrangement is not unified, instead, the education administrative department and the schools in host cities can decide according to the actual circumstances. Nevertheless, the arrangement should be conducive to students' comprehensive development and overall quality. Students go back to Xinjiang once every year according to the regulation. Collectively, the stated goals of the Xinjiang class policy include cultivating ethnic elites to develop Xinjiang and to achieve ethnic integration and national unity through a strong and effective boarding school education.

Schools as technologies of discipline

Ryan (1991) emphasises how 'schools are but one of a number of sites that employ disciplinary technology in the pursuit of productivity (and docility)'. Schools' daily practices to structure the potential activities of students provide real examples of Foucault's theories of Normalisation. School personnel promote certain school standards and ensure continual and individual observation of each student, then meticulous records and evaluations of students' performance characterize students with respect to their relations to these standards are made by vigilant school staff. Discipline and punishments are applied to those who do not measure up and rewarded to when they convert with pressure to conform (Briscoe, 2008). For the Xinjiang classes, there is no doubt that the deployment of all resources, including school locations,

teaching materials and personnel, is arranged for the purpose of cultivating a group of ethnic elites as well as qualified patriots by those with centralized authority. In this section, the authors investigate in detail how the cultural and political norms are instilled in Xinjiang classes and effectively normalize ethnic minority students.

Instilling cultural norms in Xinjiang classes

Xinjiang students studying in predominately Han populated cities, which are considered as modernized and advanced. Students from Xinjiang are immersed in their own ethnic culture including language, writing systems, ways of life and habits before they arrive at boarding schools in inland China, and therefore experience the challenges of attending boarding schools far from home. For example, changes in living environment and lifestyles, poor foundations in social capital, language barriers and psychological problems result from being away from home (Wang, 2012; Wang, 2013; Yan & Song, 2010). To be successful at their new school, students need to adapt to the natural environment, administration system, learning processes and social interactions in hinterland China. In other words, they need to behave in accordance with the norms defined by those with organizational power.

Take the language as an example, both Han and ethnic minority languages are valued in official discourse. Nonetheless, it is believed that schools put a premium use of Han scripts and Mandarin Chinese in Xinjiang classes' curricula in practice. Students are encouraged to practice Mandarin outside the classroom (Chen, 2010). The denial of ethnic minority languages, according to Lin (2016) is rooted in the view of them being less valuable for socioeconomic development or needing to be restricted or excluded to make a safe environment for social development. Consequently, the boarding schools, as the agency of the central government, uproot Uyghurs from their cultural-ecological environment and constrain their culture, language and habitus. This results in the Uyghur becoming an excluded group from the 'normal' social body, where their culture and identities are denied fully legitimate status.

All facilities, which are specially built for Xinjiang students follow the same design as those for the Han students and there is little representation of any Xinjiang culture except for the Halal canteen (Yuan, Qian, & Zhu, 2017). And in order to minimize inter-ethnic conflicts, separate campuses are normally built for Xinjiang students. Immersed in a school-regulated culture where Han-Chinese cultural norms are valorised, Xinjiang students are required to participate in major holidays usually celebrated by Han people (Grose, 2015). Positive interactions with Han students are also encouraged as it 'helps' ethnic students to adapt culturally, to become proficient in Chinese and more importantly, to be part of national integration (Wu, Niu, & Zhang, 2016; Yuan & Xiao, 2016; Yuan et al., 2017).

Instilling political norms in Xinjiang classes

Moral education comprises a significant part of the curriculum in Xinjiang classes. The documents state, 'beside the normal political course, the Xinjiang classes shall pay attention to education in patriotism, ethnic unity, aesthetics, discipline, and the law' (MOE, 2000a). One Han history teacher, according to Wang (2007), was employed by a school that runs Xinjiang class program in Jiangsu province, admits that one of his most important responsibilities is to cultivate nationalism among students. He uses the phrase '*qianyi mohua*', which can be loosely translated as influencing someone without their noticing, to describe his teaching objectives. Han Chinese teachers are instrumental to Xinjiang students' successful transition and acculturation process because they help students overcome struggles from homesickness to study. They gained the love and admirations of minority students and were called 'Han mother' (Tao & Yang, 2010). Therefore, the influences Han teachers had on minority students are quiet and invisible most of the time.

A broader perspective on patriotism education has been adopted by Zhou (2015) who investigated the moral education in seven Xinjiang Neidi schools in Shanghai and analysed the current situation of ideological education. In her major study, Zhou identifies that even though some of the Xinjiang students feel jailed because of the strict regulations conducted within boarding schools, they accept and endorse the Han and patriotism centred education for the benefit of their future development and upward mobility. The author also put forward suggestions to ensure the continuous development of moral education in inland boarding schools. These include establishing a standardised evaluation system on students' behaviour and reinforcing theory research on existing moral education; strengthening the professional training of the assigned teachers and conducting gratitude education among students. Finally yet importantly, conducting continuous political ideological education during school holidays on ethnic students.

Not surprisingly, minority students in Xinjiang classes are willing to receive the Han- and patriotism-centred education, for the purpose of achieving upward mobility (Yuan et al., 2017). Indeed, the process of normalisation in Xinjiang classes that is organized around the Han standards identifies ethnic minority generally with many of those characteristics that are seen as undesirable. And because of their long-term participation in the Han community, increasingly look not to their traditional roots for their identity, but to the dominant society. Many perceive the community itself as less than an ideal place when compared to Han standards. The infiltration of these norms leaves marks on ethnic minority students from Xinjiang in many ways (Ryan, 1989). However, as Foucault observes, 'the norm introduces individual differences' (Foucault, 1977, p. 184), and the exercise of power in normative contexts necessarily entails resistance. Some students become more self-conscious during the process of normalisation and try to resist normalisation through maintaining their own ethnic identity.

Maintaining ethnic identity as resistance to normalisation in Xinjiang classes

Grose (2010b) argues that Xinjiang Class policy is largely failing to promote ethnic unity between Han and Uyghurs. He notes that the political goals seem to be emphasised over educational outcomes. In his research, Uyghurs in Xinjiang classes are resisting integration by avoiding uncomfortable interactions with Han students and teachers, communicating only using the Uyghur language outside the classroom and then return to Xinjiang after graduation to improve their 'home' rather than developing Xinjiang for China. In his following research, Grose (2015) interviewed and interacted with over 60 Uyghur graduates, and found that Uyghur graduates of the Xinjiang classes have instead embraced a non-Chinese ethnonational identity, an identity bound by Central Asian and Islamic cultural norms. This suggests that boarding school education has failed to encourage Uyghur students to become members of the Chinese Nation (*Zhonghua minzu).* Uyghur regard learning within the national education system as a strategy for an Uyghur ethnic revival in resisting and competing with the Han population in Xinjiang (Smith, 2000). The insistence of Uyghur students on maintaining their ethnic dining culture, greeting rituals and dressing customs also indicates their resistant response toward the goal of national integration (Chen & Postiglione, 2009).

Yuan et al. (2017) find that minority students in Xinjiang classes are reinforcing resistant consciousness in innovative, improvisational and contingent ways. They transform the corridor into a space of negotiation, greeting each other in Uyghur style, and reclaiming their Muslim identity under the cover of night in their dormitories by donning their headscarves, praying, reading the Qur'an. They construct a space of negotiation in cyberspace using smartphones in which they can connect with the Muslim world and transcend the physical confinement of the campus.

Chen (2010) holds the view that Uyghur students in Xinjiang classes develop independent and new social capital to facilitate their schooling through norms of speaking their own ethnic language after classes. He asserts that Uyghur students value this educational opportunity for gaining economic benefits and upward social mobility in contemporary Chinese society. However, this policy unfairly scrutinises Uyghur cultural aspects and particularly, Uyghur language to privilege the speaking of Chinese, and putting a premium on Chinese learning. As a response, Uyghur students have to rely heavily on their internal ethnic social network to gain resources and power in their pursuit of academic success and a happy school life. Speaking ethnic languages after class manifests a cultural resistance to, but structural acceptance of, the policy. Research of Sunuodula and Cao (2015) also found that in many situations, Uyghur students actively reposition languages as economic, symbolic or cultural capital for investment and negotiation of identity and power in society.

Discussion

Education is instrumental to empowerment, and the capacity to function effectively in a given social setting, with active participation in cultural, political and economic institutions, and the possession of full rights and obligations enjoyed by other members of society (Trueba & Zou, 1994, pp. 2-3). Schools are usually expected to promote first and foremost the values of academic productivity and docility. However, many researchers in mainland China admit that the main problem for ethnic minority education is that the government tries to politicise ethnicity. That is, the central government has set up a series of policies in favour of ethnic minorities in the administration, economic, cultural, and educational areas, endeavouring to legitimize its authority through the institutionalization of minority affairs (Ma, 2007; Yang, 2015; Zhao, 2010). In the case of Xinjiang classes, central government officials and school administrators give primacy to political indoctrination before educational goals. And there is a tendency among those dislocated boarding schools, to pay more attention to the political goals while neglecting students' academic performances because they are bonded with the purpose of cultivating ethnic elites and 'compliant' ethnic minorities (He, Sun, Su, & Wang, 2016). Consequently, boarding schools highlight the national identity of ethnic minority students' while downplaying their ethnic identity.

Through normalisation technologies such as language and curriculum, ethnic minority students in boarding schools do show some conformity in order to facilitate their future development. They obtain better educational resources (e.g., qualified teachers) as well as making greater advances than what may be available in their hometown (Grose, 2010b; Yan & Song, 2010). The subsequent research of Xinjiang class graduates by Oudengcaowa (2014) revealed that most graduates go back to Xinjiang and work as teachers, police, doctors and civil servants. Compared with peers in their hometown, they are more privileged in job markets considering their outstanding bilingual ability and exceptional personal qualities. Students express pride in their educational achievements and are proud of their ethnic identity maintenance. As Chen (2014) puts it, there is no doubt that these young graduates, who have obtained academic superiority and a strong sense of Uyghur representativeness, will reshape the socioeconomic development and political-cultural status quo in Xinjiang (Chen, 2014).

However, speaking Uyghur after classes and using Uyghur as 'bonding social capital' (Chen, 2010) to produce more group benefits in Xinjiang classes reflects the basic values of Uyghur culture and students' resistance towards normalisation. Moreover, Uyghur norms of greeting, praying and dressing within the 'spaces of negotiation' (Yuan et al., 2017) represents the intention of students in maintaining their Uyghur ethnicity. These resistant behaviours, whether consciously or unconsciously, are a self- defence strategy adopted to respond to the process of normalisation.

Xinjiang students who attend boarding schools far away from home are like 'marginal man'(Park, 1928) walking on the margin of two cultures and two societies, seeking to find a place where they can maintain minority languages, cultures and identities while simultaneously adapt to the mainstream culture and society. One of the consequences of this four- year of detachment from their families and communities in Xinjiang and receiving education in faraway eastern cities is to create a situation in which the individual finds him or herself striving to live in two diverse cultural groups. Hence, they are becoming familiar strangers both to their Han peers in inland China and to their parents and Uyghur peers back in Xinjiang. Despite the possible self-alienation and estrangement from family and peers, the number of students attending Xinjiang classes is still increasing. It is plausible that the rapid expansion of Xinjiang class enrollments reflects the ambitions of ethnic minority students to achieve upward mobility and fit-into into the mainstream Chinese society. It would be interesting, to uncover the experiences and feelings of parents who are 'left behind' in Xinjiang when they send their children away for education.

Conclusion

This paper has conducted a systematic literature review of the research conducted on ethnic minority students from Xinjiang province who move away from home to attend boarding schools in predominately Han-populated cities located throughout eastern China. It applies the theoretical writing of Foucault to cast new light on the impacts of Xinjiang class policy. It has been 17 years since the MOE established this government-funded boarding school program. Hinterland boarding schools have become an integral piece of the Chinese government's attempt to educate its western minorities (Grose, 2010a). Substantial research has been devoted to examining this policy (Chen, 2008, 2010, 2014; Chen & Postiglione, 2009; Grose, 2010b; Tao & Yang, 2010; Yan & Song, 2010). This paper has revealed that the goal of the Xinjiang class policy is partly accomplished through boarding school education. However, students are resisting integration through their attempts to maintain ethnic identity by speaking ethnic languages after classes and avoiding interactions with Han students.

Nevertheless, they are becoming 'ethnic elites' in Xinjiang as desired by the policy since they attain better educational achievements and are privileged in job markets. The long-term detachment from their families and inactive inter-ethnic interactions indicate that Xinjiang students are becoming familiar strangers both at home and in eastern China. Research that explores the meaning of inland boarding school education to families living in Xinjiang remains limited. But more importantly, there is even less research focusing on the perspective of parents. This paucity of research was most recently emphasised by (Chen, 2014) who demonstrated that 'the long-term impacts of this period of detachment from one's family and community have yet to be fully scrutinised and must be considered when evaluating the effectiveness of the policy'. Hence, there is an emerging need to examine how the goals of the Xinjiang class policy have changed and shaped student live from a parental perspective. Parents are instrumental in their children participating in the boarding school program, and they suffer significantly from the separation from their children. Yet we hear very little about what the parents think and feel. This is the future direction in sociocultural research on Xinjiang class policy.

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