INVESTMENT AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCITON IN LEARNING CHINESE AND
ENGLISH: A CASE OF FEMALE UYGHUR STUDENTS IN A CHINESE UNIVERSITY

By

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ABSTRACT

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Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is one of the most ethnically diverse territories in China, with the Muslim Uyghurs forming the largest minority group. Given its importance in national unity, stability and economic development, as well as its strategic role in the Belt and Road Initiative, the Chinese government enacted policies to integrate Xinjiang with mainland China. As one of such policies, the government implemented a project that aims to use the educational resources in mainland universities to cultivate ethnic minority talents from XUAR. Compared to Uyghur students, students in mainland China have more access to educational resources. This leads to an education inequity between Uyghur and the majority Chinese students. Additionally, Uyghur students are required to learn Uyghur (i.e., mother tongue) as their first language, Chinese (i.e., the dominant language in China) as second language, and English (i.e., a required language for college graduation) as third language. A lack of educational resources and support to learn these languages in Xinjiang results in Uyghur students' feeling inferior to their Chinese counterparts in colleges. Particularly, Uyghur female students are even more restricted from education opportunities.

Against this wider social backdrop, this dissertation explored female Uyghur students' identity construction, transformation, and negotiation by examining their experiences of multilingual learning and language use from Xinjiang to Nanjing, a socio-economically developed city in the east coast of China. Adopting poststructuralist conceptualization of identity and language learning, this case study explored (1) female Uyghur students' perceptions of learning Chinese and English and their level of investment in learning these two languages; (2) the way multilingual practices shape Uyghur women's identity construction in the host community; and (3) how they negotiate positioning by drawing upon multiple resources afforded.

The fieldwork was conducted at Forest University, Nanjing, between January and December 2017. Multiple data sources, including semi-structured interviews, observations, documents, field notes, and social media data, were collected, transcribed, translated, and analyzed.

Findings revealed that moving from their less developed hometown to a major city, my female participants expanded and enriched their repertoire of symbolic and material resources on which they could rely to effect more powerful social memberships and negotiate their educated Uyghur identities. Their Chinese and English language learning journey and the educational experiences in the host community hence changed the way Uyghur women 'understand their relationship to the world …, and how [people] understand their possibilities for the future' (Norton, 1997, p. 410).

The study contributes to the understanding of intersections between ethnic minorities' identity construction and language learning in the intranational migration process. It advances the knowledge of identity construction through language by bridging the gap between the meso-level of institutional practices, the micro-level of individual learners' investment, and the macro-level of the national language education policy and ideology. The findings bear significant implications for policy makers, host institutions, and ethnic minority students.

This dissertation is dedicated to my father, whose wisdom, inspirations and unconditional support made me what I am

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

x

LIST OF FIGURES

KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

CEE   College Entrance Exam

CET   College English Test

ESL   English as a Second Language

IELTS   International English Language Testing System

L1   First Language

L2   Second Language

L3   Third Language

LPP   Language Policy and Planning

NNS   Non-native Speaker

NS   Native Speaker

SLA   Second Language Acquisition

XUAR   Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation reports on an ethnographic case study of four female Uyghur students who attended a mainstream university in Nanjing, an east coastal city in China. I traced their Chinese and English learning trajectories from Xinjiang to Nanjing and explored their identity construction and negotiation along their respective journeys. In this chapter, I present a general overview of my research topic, the theoretical framework that guided my study, and the need, purpose, and significance of the study.

Situating the study

China is a multi-ethnic country with the Han being the majority ethnic group, and 55 out of 56 ethnic groups being ethnic minorities. Mandarin Chinese (i.e., Chinese characters constituting the written form and *Putonghua* as the spoken form) is the national language, with a variety of dialects spoken by Han people in different regions. These ethnic minorities account for over 100 million (i.e., 8.49%) of the national population and they reside in more than 60% of China's territory (China National Statistics Bureau, 2012). A large portion of the minority population live in the five autonomous regions located in the northern and western parts of China. They speak over 80 different languages (other than Mandarin Chinese), among which 40 have written forms (Gouleta, 2012; Tong & Shi, 2012). As one of the five autonomous regions, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) is located in the northwestern part of China. Bordering eight countries (with Russia and Mongolia in the north; Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in the west; and Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India in the southwest), XUAR occupies an area of 1,650,000 km^2, accounting for 16% of China's entire territory. Xinjiang is one of the most ethnically diverse territories in China, with the Muslim Uyghurs forming the largest minority group (i.e., 10,001,302, National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2011). The Uyghur people have been regarded as having a strong cultural

identity (Chen & Postiglione, 2009). Within the Uyghur community, they use the Uyghur language which is recognized as an official regional language, along with Chinese as the national language (Tsung, 2014).

There has been a long history of conflicts in this area, and tensions between ethnic and religious groups have been high. At the same time, Xinjiang sits strategically at the crossroads of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (i.e., also known as the Belt and Road Initiative) recently launched by the Chinese government. Consequently, the national unity, stability, and economic development in Xinjiang has become a great concern of the Chinese central government.

China's Open Door Policy in the late 1970s has boosted its economy; however, this policy has also tremendously shaped China's social, educational, and linguistic landscape, transforming it from one of the world's most egalitarian societies to one with inequalities both among regions (e.g., east coastal and interior provinces, rural and urban areas) and among social groups (Harvey, 2005). The latest statistics show that while cities like Shanghai and Beijing have entered the post-industry era, the economy of China's western areas, including the five autonomous regions, constitute only a small proportion of the national economy. Xinjiang, for example, accounted for only 1.46% of China's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2010 (Chen, Huang, Lv & Li, 2012). Regional differences also exist in the educational domain, with areas with higher minority populations lagging behind Han-dominated regions (Adamson, Feng, Liu & Li, 2013).

The Chinese government's interest in XUAR's development dates back to 1989. In order to speed up the development of Xinjiang, and to accelerate its integration with the mainland, the Chinese government launched a project called "The Cooperation Plan between Mainland universities and Xinjiang on Training Minority Talents" (《内地高校支援新疆培养少数民族人才协作计划》) in 1989. The purpose of this project was to use the

educational resources at mainland universities to cultivate ethnic minority talents from XUAR, in the hope that these students would (1) return to this region after graduation and contribute to the economic development and socialist modernization process in Xinjiang, and thus (2) consolidate national unity and stability (State Education Commission, State Ethnic Affairs Commission, 1995). Over the past three decades, the Chinese government has focused on accelerating XUAR's integration with the mainland. The cooperation plan has received support from more than 370 universities in 19 mainland provinces and municipalities. The annual enrollment was 2000 in 2010, 6800 in 2015, and is expected to reach 10,000 by 2020. A large number of Uyghur students, therefore, migrate from Xinjiang to study at universities in east coastal cities. Importantly, given the different language learning and cultural background of the Uyghur students, universities have adopted certain preferential policies when admitting and evaluating such Xinjiang students by lowering the requirements to help them overcome academic difficulties.

At the same time, and to better promote Xinjiang's economic development, its integration with the more developed inland areas, and to foster national unity, the Chinese government also implemented a trilingual education policy for ethnic minority students. That is, ethnic minority students, such as Uyghurs, are required to learn Uyghur as their first language, Chinese (i.e., the national language) as a second language, and English (i.e., a required language in mainstream universities) as a third language. It is within this broad sociolinguistic backdrop and issues surrounding identity construction and language acquisition that this study is situated.

Need for the study

Identity research in SLA. It has been widely supported that learning and using a new language involve identity construction (Norton, 2013). Many SLA researchers (e.g., Norton, 1997, 2000; Pavlenko, 2002; Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004; Rampton, 1995) have also

argued that there is a need to understand the complex relationship between language learners and the contexts in which they use the language. It is in these contexts, and in inequitable power relationships, that language learners construct and negotiate their identities and participate in acts of agency. As such, a growing body of research has explored how migrant language learners construct their identities in the process of learning new language(s) and socializing with the host communities (e.g., Miller, 2003; Morita, 2004; Norton, 2000). However, these studies are largely grounded in Western contexts (e.g., Australia, Canada, the United States), and mainly focus on cross-border ethnic minorities' experiences of learning English in the host community. Limited research attention has been paid to the issue of how intra-national migrant ethnic minorities establish their identities in the process of learning the languages other than their first language in their home country. For example, the language acquisition experiences of Uyghur students at Chinese universities has been underexplored. An examination of these experiences is warranted because in China's context, particularly, individuals are often conceived of as social beings who are subordinated to the collective, as Pratt (1992) once pointed out:

> The Chinese construction of self emphasizes continuity of family, societal roles, the supremacy of hierarchical relationships, compliance with authority, and maintenance of stability. In Asian culture, harmony and face are important parameters to guide people's communication with each other (p. 285).

Therefore, it is necessary to understand language learners' individual life stories when exploring their language learning experiences. Given the complex interrelations between identity, second language learning, and migration as shown in previous studies on transnational L2 learners (e.g., Cervatiuc, 2009; Norton, 1997), and the increasing number of

minority students from border regions in tertiary institutions in China, it is vitally important that we investigate how the Chinese and English learning experiences might influence these students' identity construction in the host communities.

Uyghur youths learning Chinese and English in China. Since the open-door policy was implemented in the late 1970s in China, English has been valued symbolically and seen as being closely linked to individuals' education and career opportunities. The learning of English has been designated as the major foreign language in the national education system. Competence in English has been an essential requirement for high-stakes exams such as College Entrance Exam (*Gaokao*) since 1978. Although the trilingual education policy (Chinese, Uyghur, and English) has been long in place in Xinjiang since 2001, it's implementation seems to have progressed slowly primarily due to the "lack of resources" including teaching materials and qualified Chinese and English teachers (Feng, 2012), as well as students' uneven access to Chinese and English learning. Given the varying levels of the provision of Chinese class across local schools, Uyghur students are also provided with different levels of English education. For instance, students from the rural areas often lack proficiency in Chinese so that local schools place great emphasis on Chinese learning; whereas students from the urban areas have some access to English education because they have received a good amount of training in Chinese. As a matter of fact, the majority of Uyghur students receive rather limited English language education prior to tertiary-level study, and English is not a required subject on the *Gaokao* for those Uyghur students in Xinjiang (Tsung, 2014). However, upon entering universities, they are subject to the English education policy each host institution stipulates, resulting in their being usually treated similarly as Han students, irrespective of their limited access to English before tertiary education (Adamson & Xia, 2011). Previous studies have also indicated that their relatively low English proficiency is detrimental to tertiary-level minority students' self-esteem,

personality development, academic performance, and upward social mobility (Adamson & Xia, 2011; Feng, 2012).

Compared with learning English as a second language, multilingual acquisition is a more complicated phenomenon, presenting more fluidity and complexity. For ethnic minority learners in China, this problem is more pronounced because being a national Chinese who have their own ethnic and religious identities may make these learners demonstrate more complex identities when learning additional language(s). Few studies have been conducted on identity construction on such minority students, however. This research gap makes the study of ethnic minority students in China thus significant because they are often marginalized in the mainstream education system.

In recent years, several studies have examined the challenges that Xinjiang students, who are studying in mainland colleges, face in learning English, a required course in Chinese universities. These challenges have been investigated from different perspectives, such as teaching methods, teaching materials, motivation, and learning strategies, and so on. In spite of the recent shift of research attention in SLA to day-to-day contexts (i.e., naturalistic SLA) in which learners use language, the number of studies which focus on language learners outside of the classroom is scarce when compared to the number of studies that focus on learners in the language classroom. For instance, we still have little knowledge of how China's trilingual education policy influences Uyghur students' views of themselves as well as the relationship between themselves and others (Norton, 2000), and how it influences the way social interactions are conducted and subsequently the way people's language identities are constructed and reconstructed over time. We also have little knowledge of what impact this policy has produced regarding the value of each language being used (e.g., Uyghur, Mandarin Chinese, and English).

A few studies have explored Uyghur students' identity construction at the host institutions. For instance, Han, De Costa and Cui (2016) examined the impact of a preferential policy on Xinjiang students through a language ideology perspective. Their findings revealed that, instead of promoting the Uyghur-Han unity, such a policy widened the social divide between Han and Uyghur students in that Uyghur students were positioned as unmotivated and poor English language learners due to their lack of access and inequities of learning opportunities. Such a phenomenon in turn resulted in these Xinjiang students believing that they are inferior to their Han peers. Guo and Gu (2016a, b) explored Uyghur university students' identities constructed through the multilingual practices at a prestigious university in Shanghai, a metropolitan city in China. They found that that the cohort of Uyghur students with whom they worked was able to negotiate an elite identity by capitalizing on a repertoire of available resources including Mandarin Chinese and even local linguistic resources. Those students were also found to negotiate multilingual and multicultural memberships for themselves through their English learning process, which facilitated their adaptation to the host community. However, Guo and Gu also highlighted the problems encountered by Uyghur students that may hinder their upward social mobility. In another study, Han, De Costa and Cui (2018) bridged the language policy and planning (LPP) and SLA research through an identity lens by tracing the Chinese learning trajectory of a highly invested and resourceful Uyghur youth, who was able to negotiate the identity of educated Uyghur and contest the negative stereotypes associated with Uyghur ethnicity through his constant investment in learning Mandarin Chinese.

While informative, the participants in these studies, were however mostly male. To my knowledge, no SLA research has particularly looked at female Uyghur students in educational settings. Coming from an Islamic tradition, Uyghur women encounter restricted educational opportunities. It is therefore important to examine how their identities are

7

negotiated and reshaped after they leave their hometowns and go to school in mainland China, and how it affects their language learning, and vice versa. To fill this research gap, in this dissertation I seek to understand these ethnic minority female learners from a macro (e.g., national trilingual education policy), meso (e.g., language policy implemented at the school level), and micro (e.g., individuals' language learning trajectories) perspective. At the macro level, I expect to understand the policy and practices concerning ethnic minority education in general by examining national discourses. At the meso level, I seek to understand the role of schools in shaping these ethnic multilingual learners' identities. At the micro level, I intend to trace the language learning trajectories of the participants and discuss the construction and negotiation of their multiple identities under the power-inflected relationships.

Significance of the study

The present study focuses on four female Uyghur university students, exploring how their identities were constructed and negotiated in the process of Chinese and English language learning as they moved from Xinjiang to study in Nanjing, a coastal city in eastern China. The study provides insights into the interplay between identity construction and L2/L3 learning for ethnic minorities in the course of intra-national migration, and enhances our understanding of the needs, challenges, and constraints female minority students may encounter in establishing their identities through language learning.

This study also contributes to the growing body of research that examines the language policy and planning and L2/L3 learning through an identity lens. Such research is much needed given the growing importance of the issue of identity in SLA and the need to investigate the identity negotiations of ethnic minority multilingual learners in China. The study also deepens our theoretical understanding of the complex nexus between identity construction and multilingual practices in the context of intra-national migration against the wider social backdrop of tense Uyghur–Han relations. It is hoped that my research findings

will enhance our understanding of the challenges female Uyghur students have in linguistic practice and identity negotiation, and thus provide practical implications for relevant stakeholders on how to address these linguistic problems by implementing proper language programs. In addition to conceptual contributions, it is expected that this study will provoke some reflection on the current policies in relation to ethnic minorities education. Furthermore, the study bears practical implications, especially for school administrators and teachers, as I examine how to better serve this group of learners by understanding their experiences, their challenges and struggles, and how those experiences shape their identity construction and influence their investment in acquiring Chinese and English.

Organization of the dissertation chapters

Thus far, I have introduced the research topic and have explained how this study contributes to the current research on ethnic minority students in China and identity research in SLA.

In Chapter 2, I present the theoretical frameworks that I used for this study, and review the literature with a focus on identity research in SLA from poststructuralist perspectives. I also review research in relation to Uyghur students in China. I conclude the literature review by situating the present study in relation to previous work on identity research in SLA and Uyghur students in China.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the methodology of this study. I begin this chapter with an introduction of the research context (i.e., Forest University in Nanjing) and the four participants—Adi, Mary, Angela, and Babe, by providing their respective demographical information. I also describe the data collection process. Next, I situate myself as a researcher and discuss how my relationships with the participants and my own experience as a language learner have informed my interpretation of the data. The chapter concludes with an outline and description of each of the various data sources and their analyses.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I present the language learning trajectories (Chinese learning in Chapter 4 and English learning in Chapter 5, respectively) for each of my four participants. These narratives feature excerpts (e.g., interviews, journals, online conversations, observation notes, screenshots of social network posts, etc.) to exemplify some of the identity construction and negotiation that occurred in their language learning trajectories. In addition, I also present findings with regard to how participants perceive the learning of Chinese and English as acquiring a form of symbolic capital.

In Chapter 6, I summarize the major findings from this work. While the previous two chapters contain a fair amount of discussion, this chapter continues and narrows down this discussion by linking my findings to prior research and trilingual education policy and practices. In addition, I discuss the potential implications of this study for policy makers, institutions, language teachers and individuals. Lastly, I conclude this dissertation by acknowledging the limitations of this study and suggesting potential directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In this chapter, I describe the theoretical frameworks that I utilized to understand identity and investment as it pertains to second language acquisition (SLA). I used the work of Norton (2000) on identity and language learning to understand how language is inextricably tied to identity construction and negotiation. In addition, throughout the chapter, I provide a review of the research that investigated the connections between language learning, identity, and investment. Next, I give an overview of the language education policy for Uyghur students in China, map out the education system in Xinjiang, and review studies that involve Uyghur students. This chapter helps to understand the frameworks for this study and contextualize the study within a larger body of research in the fields of language learning and identity construction.

Identity construction and language learning

In this section, I explain the theoretical frameworks that I adopted in this study, and review related research.

The present study is informed by poststructuralist conceptualizations of sociocultural identity and Bourdieu's (1986) notion of *capital*. Enlightened by the notion of *subjectivity* (Weedon, 1997), identity is understood as "the way a person understands his or her relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2013, p. 4). Davies and Harré (1990) understand identity in terms of *positioning*, that is, the ways in which subjects position themselves and are positioned by others. Poststructuralists view identity as multifaceted and subject to construction and negotiation, and they conceptualize language as a sociopolitical construct to which different values are ascribed. The notion of *capital* (Bourdieu, 1986) illuminates the possible and specific ways languages with different values shape sociocultural

identities in language learning. Four types of capital are identified and differentiated, including cultural, economic, social, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). According to Block (2007), *economic capital* includes one's financial wealth (e.g., income, acquired property and assets); *cultural capital* is defined as 'the right cultural resources and assets' in the form of 'behavioral patterns' (e.g., accent and attitude), 'association with particular artifacts' (e.g., books and educational qualifications), and 'connection to certain institutions' (e.g., university and professional associations); *social capital* refers to the connection to relations with less or more powerful 'others' (e.g., friends); *symbolic capital* refers to "prestige, reputation, fame and is… the form assumed by different kinds of capital when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate" (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 230).

Different types of capital are mutually convertible, rendering the possibility of identity change through obtaining certain capital. Underpinned by neo-liberal ideology and practice, language has been conceived of as a private commodity and reduced to sets of skills and functions through a set of planning and assessment mechanisms (Block & Gray, 2015; Heller, 2011; Piller & Cho, 2013). Language can thus be viewed as a form of symbolic capital that is ascribed different values in the linguistic market, which may favorably or unfavorably position individuals (Bourdieu, 1991). Also, the interchangeability of symbolic capital and economic capital creates possibilities for contesting disadvantageous social positions and transforming identities (Bourdieu, 1991; Heller, 2011).

Over the past two decades, the fields of second language acquisition (SLA) have begun paying increasing attention to the role of identity in language learning. Identity is viewed as a social construct related to learners' sense of self which they construct, reconstruct and negotiate through social interactions. Miller (2000) argues that an individual can construct an identity by learning a new language and establishing membership in a new community. As people interact with their surroundings, they consciously or unconsciously

make sense of those interactions. This process gradually leads them to modify, change or reformulate their existing identity. For instance, a person who has one type of status in his or her culture may experience a change of status when he or she moves to a new setting and learn the target language. Similarly, learners who are marginalized in one setting may be highly valued in another (Norton, 2013). In this sense, identity is "discursively constructed" (Miller & Kubota, p. 232).

Relatedly, the issue of unequal access to learning opportunities makes Lave and Wenger's (1991) framework of *communities of practice* a particularly useful tool for describing how newcomers to a community find ways for participation and enculturation into the community. While positive experiences can influence learners' interest in language learning, negative experiences as well as structural and cultural constraints can impose obstacles for many language learners. Like newcomers to a community, language learners often experience a tension between social structures, such as race relations or religious beliefs, and their own situated participation in society.

Much research on identity construction in relation to L2 learning experiences has been done with transnational ethnic minorities in their host environments. One line of empirical studies examines immigrant learners' identities constructed across diverse language learning settings, such as workplace, school, and home (e.g., McKay & Wong, 1996; Norton, 1997; Cervatiuc, 2009; Martin, 2009). Cervatiuc (2009), in particular, focused on a group of adult immigrants at a workplace in Canada, and found that non-native speakers countered their marginalization by the native speaker community and built successful academic and professional identities by generating self-motivating inner dialogues, managing access to native social networks, and imaging a multilingual and bicultural membership.

The second line of research focuses on language learning and acculturation experiences for study-abroad students (e.g., Miller, 2003; Morita, 2004; Fotovatian, 2012).

13

This body of studies mainly investigated the ways in which ethnic minority students construct and negotiate their identities through interaction and socialization with other members using L2 in the academic setting. For instance, Morita's (2004) study on six Japanese graduate students in Canada found that while they were positioned as less competent non-English speakers, they struggled through forging the positive role of newcomers, seeking for instructors' accommodation to L2 learners' needs, and adopting a more peripheral position in the host community. Furthermore, Fotovatian's (2012) inquiry on non-English-speaking students in Australia showed that participants resisted the negatively attached label of 'international students' and negotiated a legitimate 'Ph.D. student' identity through different ways of engagement in the out-of-classroom interactions. Findings from these studies indicate that minority learners can be positioned by interwoven discourses in the process of L2 learning, whereby they, on the one hand, were subsumed to marginalized status by those in power; on the other hand, were able to negotiate desirable identities through appropriating available resources and multiple strategies.

It can be seen that a majority of these studies seem to presuppose a form of power relations that are formed on the basis of a NS-NNS dichotomy in relation to the L2 (i.e., English) (Clarke & Hennig, 2013; Graddol, 2006). The issue of identity construction in relation to L2 learning is thus generally discussed within the framework of power relations in a given research context. Within the context of internal migration and L2-as-non-mainstream-language, the process of identity construction and negotiation through L2 learning warrants further examination. A relatively limited number of studies, however, has investigated internal migrant students' identity construction (e.g., Dong & Blommaert, 2009; Gu, 2010; Guo & Gu, 2016a, b). Of this small body of research, Gu's (2000) study on two university students from the countryside is of particular relevance. It was found that English as L2 learning enabled less-privileged participants to 'distinguish their own stance from that of

other members' (p. 149) in a learning community by strategically navigating the oppositions and differences with mainstream values and urban peers. Gu and Guo (2016a, b) examined the identity construction of a group of Uyghur college students through multilingual practices in the host institutional context. They found that these Uyghur students were able to construct multiple identities across discourses and negotiate an identity of "Uyghur elite" by mobilizing a variety of resources afforded to them. This emerging body of work has expanded our understanding of internal migrant students' identity construction pertaining to their language learning and use.

Drawing on poststructuralist views, some researchers have also studied power differentials and their impact on multilingual acquisition. For example, Lam (2007) argued that trilingual education can be a form of empowerment for ethnic minority learners. This kind of empowerment, as defined by Trueba and Zou (1994), refers to "the capacity to function effectively in a given social setting, with active participation in the cultural, political, and economic institutions, and the possession of full rights and obligations enjoyed by other members of society" (1994, pp. 2–3). Zhao's (2010) case study of the Mongolian students in China further suggests trilingual education may help enhance the self-confidence of ethnic multilingual learners, but without structural reforms it can only offer "imagined" empowerment (p. 70).

Identity research on ethnic minority women

Another dimension of poststructuralist perspectives to the study of identity and society is that instead of viewing identity as fixed categories like gender, ethnicity, and race, scholars like Stuart Hall (1996) and Homi Bhabba (1994) have argued that how identity categories are created is more important than what identity categories are, with identity conceived as a process of becoming.

A significant body of research has examined how identity relations, such as race, socioeconomic class, gender, and sexuality, shape immigrant learners' learning experiences (e.g., Darvin & Norton, 2014; De Costa, 2010a, b; De Costa & Norton, 2016; Nelson, 1999; Norton, 1997, 2013; Norton & Toohey, 2011; Pavlenko, 2002; Qin, 2016; Shuck, 2006;), and female immigrants have drawn growing scholarly interest.

Drawing on a poststructuralist framework, a number of studies have been carried out to examine how female immigrants and refugees negotiate structural and material constraints as they intersect with gendered relations. Norton's (2000, 2013) research on five immigrant women in Canada illustrates how learners navigate their experiences between fixed social structures and their own capacity as individuals in order to gain a sense of agency in English. Through her longitudinal analysis of the women's diary entries, Norton described how the women were often silenced due to their marginalized positions and their lack of access to opportunities to use English with the people around them. Norton paid particular attention to the ways in which the women develop varying degrees of investment in English learning as an avenue for claiming "the right to speak" (Peirce Norton, 1995, p. 25).

Relatedly, Kouritzin (2000) conducted a life history study of 19 immigrant women in Canada. She reported that one of her participants could not attend English classes because her husband wanted her to stay at home to take care of the children. It was not a matter of the unavailability of English classes or the unavailability of child care centers. Instead, it was due to the gender identity that was assigned to her from her culture that she was not allowed to have access to such opportunities to learn English. Similarly, some Cambodian women in Skilton-Sylvester 's (2002) study were asked to discontinue their English classes because their husbands felt threatened by their expanding social relations and connections. These two studies illustrate that gendered identity, to a large extent, is influenced by some cultural and social ideologies that close the door for many women even if they migrate to more developed

countries from their original geographical and social spaces. However, it does not mean that women are always restricted. In some other studies, researchers have found that some women can decide whether they wanted to invest in learning a new language or in maintaining their heritage language. In a narrative study conducted by Park (2009), for example, a Korean woman from an economically privileged and well-educated background chose to and was successfully able to retain her Korean identity by constantly practicing her heritage language.

Some researchers have also explored how women participants felt empowered through learning a language. For instance, some Japanese women in McMahill's (2001) case study expressed that they could resist the cultural and linguistic-specific ideologies that are assigned to females, such as using honorific forms when speaking to males, and felt empowered through English learning. In a similar vein, Gordon (2004) explored the English learning of Lao immigrant women in Philadelphia. The participants in this research developed their confidence to communicate with American people in the target culture. They reported that they could even call the police if they were abused by their spouses. Other studies (e.g., Bailey, 2007; Kelsky, 2001; Seargeant, 2009) also highlighted that Japanese women learn English to escape a male-dominated work environment and obtain better career opportunities.

In another study, Mehrotra and Calasanti (2010) investigated how the family unit can be a source of support or a location for oppression for women. Interviewing 38 immigrant Indian women, they found that even if the family structure had changed after moving to a new place, the existing gender hierarchies in families still determined the roles and responsibilities that represent the gendered and ethnic identity. Importantly, Mehrotra and Calasanti's study showed how the family can play a supportive role, and how the family can reshape the gender inequalities prevalent in Indian families. In a related study, Rawal (2015) explored the gendered identity of three Nepali immigrant women in the United States. The

data, collected from interviews, questionnaires, journal entries, observations, and group chats on Facebook, revealed that the Nepali immigrant women were able to reconstruct their initial gendered identity after moving to the US. Her participants considered English as an empowering tool because they gained psychological freedom from the social values and norms placed on Nepali women.

Another relevant research is Menard-Warwick's (2009) ethnographic study of eight adult immigrants (e.g., seven women and one man) from Latin America who were learning English in a family literacy program in California. From the participants' narratives and classroom observations, Menard-Warwick examined how gendered practices and ideologies played a central role in participants' immigration and language learning experiences. The researcher identified how the gender positioning in the participants' daily lives (e.g., mothers, daughters, wives) and their gender responsibilities often times constrained their language learning experience and how the participants exercised agency in confronting those constraints. In the classroom activities, the positioning of students by themselves and their teachers as mothers and homemakers reproduced societal gender ideologies and was rarely challenged because the curriculum did not encourage a critique of the gendered identities that society assigned learners in the program.

Taken together, the studies reviewed above suggest that the identity of women in different parts of the world is shaped by different cultures, beliefs, and social norms. Women may be less valued in their original societies. However, when they migrate to a new place, many of them gain access to education and jobs through learning English as their second or third language. These studies also illustrate how gender is performed discursively in different contexts, and how such gendered identity was maintained, resisted, and co-constructed in different ways. Therefore, from a poststructuralist perspective, gender is seen as a social

construct that is performed and constructed through language learning, and is discursive, relational and existing in a hierarchy of gender dynamics.

From the poststructuralist perspective, ethnicity is also constructed and linked to the broader socio-economic process (Hall, 1992; Heller, 2011). Hall (1992), for example, argued that ethnicity is "essentially a politically and culturally constructed category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed transcultural or transcendental racial categories" (p. 443). What is central to Hall's argument is that it is necessary to view ethnicity as shifting rather than fixed, and as constructed by discourses that join together knowledge, subjectivities, and power relations. However, in reality, ethnic minority groups are likely to be ethnicized in that negative features are often attributed to certain groups based on their culture, ethnicity, or place of origin, producing a hierarchizing effect (Martín Rojo, 2010).

Applied linguistic researchers working on multilingualism and critical ethnographic sociolinguistics (e.g., Blackledge & Creese, 2008; Blommaert, 2010; Duchêne, Moyer, & Roberts, 2013; Gu & Patkin, 2013; Heller, 2011; Martin-Jones, 2007; Martín Rojo, 2010; Patrick, 2007; Pérez-Milans & Patiño-Santos, 2014) have problematized an essentialized understanding of ethnic identity and its assumed connection with languages. For example, Martín Rojo (2010) examined the classroom interactions of immigrant students from different cultural backgrounds in a multilingual Spanish classroom through in-depth interviews with their teachers. Her findings revealed a process of ethnicization whereby negative terms were attributed to students from Latin America and Morocco by naturalizing their culture and national origins, and that such processes were likely to hamper those students' social integration and sense of national belonging. She further linked the process of essentialization to the wider sociopolitical context, particularly the process of colonialization. In her longitudinal ethnographic study of francophones in Canada, Heller (2011) found that ethnic identity construction was shaped by economic interests and ethno-class disparities between

anglophones and francophones. Economic benefits, in a neoliberal era, were pursued through the commodification of their francophone identity, culture, and even accent. The findings from this strand of research indicate that ethnicity is socially and economically constructed by both the dominant majority and the subordinate minority. Focusing on the linguistic imperialism of the Chinese language over minority languages in China, He (2014) posited that modern market forces, which add value to Mandarin Chinese while devaluing minority languages, are even more influential than administrative power in maintaining ethnic stratifications in the autonomous regions where ethnic minorities reside.

In short, a more dynamic view of the interplay between ethnicity and language enables us to avoid stereotyping individuals as bound by the structures of a particular ethnicity, and making claims about ethnic characteristics. In light of these theoretical developments, in this study, ethnicity is viewed as a resource that can be symbolically utilized by both the minority and majority groups to attribute privilege and positive values to ethnic minority students and their cultures, or to reproduce negative values for these subject positions.

So far, I have reviewed the studies that have explored the connections between language learning and identity construction. I also brought up the identity issue particularly relevant to gender and ethnicity. All the studies investigated the identity negotiations of language learners in different settings and all have contributed to move SLA research into a new direction that understands language learners as having complex identities, which are constantly constructed and negotiated in social situations through the language they are learning. Earlier research on multilingual learners in the West and Asia, though informative, leave some geographic areas underexplored. In particular, there are very few studies on ethnic multilingual learners in the mainstream higher education context of China. Also, female learners have rarely been focused on in China's context. This study, therefore, tries to

fill this gap by researching female Uyghur students in a mainstream Chinese university, and to explore how their language learning trajectories and access to the linguistic resources undergo changes after leaving their home culture, and how such experiences help them construct and negotiate their identities.

Investment in language learning

As discussed earlier, research on identity offers the field of SLA a comprehensive theory that integrates the individual learner and the larger society. Identity theorists question the view that learners can be categorized in binary terms as motivated or unmotivated, or introverted or extroverted. These theorists also critique the lack of consideration of affective factors and the failure to account for how identities are frequently socially constructed in inequitable power relations, change across time and space, and coexist in contradictory ways within a single individual. Identity theory highlights the multiple positions from which language learners can speak, and how sometimes marginalized learners can perform more desirable identities with respect to the target language community (Norton, 2013).

In particular, investment has become an important construct in language learning and teaching (Cummins, 2006). Developed by Norton (1997) to complement the psychological construct of motivation in SLA, investment signals the complex relationship between language learner identity and language learning commitment. As Norton (2013) put it, a language learner may be highly motivated, but may have little investment in their linguistic practices. Norton's (1997) exploration of investment offers a means to understand learners' variable desires to engage in social interaction and community practices. Learners' desire for recognition, affiliation and security makes them invest in learning and practice the target language. Norton (2001) and Pennycook (2007) have argued for the need to take into account a learner's investment in acquiring a language. The type of capital (Bourdieu, 1989, 1991) the learners make use of is significant to studying this complex nature of identity construction

through day-to-day interaction. That is to say, if learners invest in the target language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic resources (e.g., language, education, friendship) and material resources (e.g., money, jobs, real estate), which in turn will increase the value of their cultural capital (e.g., knowledge) and power. For instance, a language learner may invest in learning a language that bears more economic or symbolic value to gain access to knowledge, a better job, or a better life, which will in turn give him or her more power and higher status in the society.

Building on the notion of investment, Pavlenko and Norton (2007) also proposed the notion of "imagined community" (p. 669). They argued that language learners' actual and desired membership in an "imagined community" (i.e., a group of people with similar interests) may influence "learning trajectories, agency, motivation, investment, and resistance in English learning". Such imagined communities allow learners to imagine themselves participating in different communities and investing in learning the language in order to achieve their goals. In the case of immigration, for example, if new immigrants have the desire to interact with native speakers of the target language, they may imagine themselves participating in imaginary target language-speaking communities, and they may see the target language as a very important part of realizing their imagined identity. Put differently, if a language learner is driven by the desire of participating in an imagined community, such as a school or a better job, this desire will directly affect his or her investment in learning the language. Understanding the notions of investment and imagined communities is central to my study because these concepts are directly connected to identity construction and negotiation. In this dissertation, I have chosen to study female Uyghur students' investment in learning Chinese and English. How their imagined identity (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton, 2013; Pavlenko & Norton, 2007) has impacted their investment in learning Chinese and English is one of the key inquiries of this study.

The concept of investment has inspired considerable interest in the field of SLA. For instance, in a two-year long study with four Chinese immigrants in California, McKay and Wong (1996) used the construct of investment to explain the participants' English language development, suggesting that the needs, desires, and negotiations of students were integral to their investment in the target language. Skilton-Sylvester (2002) studied four Cambodian women in adult ESL classes in the US, exploring the moments in which the women's investment in learning English shifted in relation to their identities as family members (e.g., wife, sister) and/or workers. The findings revealed that an understanding of a woman's domestic and professional identities is necessary to explain her investment in ESL classes. For instance, some of the mothers in the study invested in learning English because they wanted a better life for their children. In addition, their identities as a worker (or future worker) also had a direct impact on their investment in participating in the English classes.

In a longitudinal study, Miller (2000) focused on language learning, participation, and social identity of immigrant high school students in Australia. Miller followed newly arrived Chinese immigrants and explored how they integrated into the mainstream classroom from their ESL classes. One of the findings was that the ESL students who moved to a regular high school after receiving intensive ESL instruction elsewhere had limited opportunity to use English in the high school. Although they were surrounded by native English speakers, the ESL students and their native-speaking peers had so little in common that the even physical proximity to English speakers did not grant the ESL learners more opportunities to interact with native speakers in English. The fact that the ESL learners remained socially and linguistically separated in mainstream high school undoubtedly impacted their identity construction.

Kinginger (2004) traced an American student, Alice, who learned French as a foreign language, for four years. The study explored the participant's identity negotiation as she was

learning French and described the processes that the participant went through when learning French in the US and later on as a study-abroad student in Canada and France. At the beginning, Alice was intrigued by the language itself because of its prestige in the US and the capital value that was attached to her *imagined community* of French speakers. She was later motivated to learn French by her desire to be a French teacher. Such interest in the French language and culture, Kinginger argued, can be understood by examining the sociocultural context from which it emerged. Born into an ordinary working-class family, the participant overcame several of the personal, social, and material obstacles in order to learn French. It was the prestigious status of French in the US and her imagined community of French speakers that made Alice invest in learning this language. Like Alice, many immigrants to English-speaking countries associate English with prestige and with cultural value, and hope to secure a better future by investing in learning English.

In a critical ethnographic study of a designer immigrant student in a Singapore school, De Costa (2010a) drew on the notion of investment and agency to examine how the participant embraced standard English to inhabit an identity associated with being an academically able student and a future executive in a big international company.

This body of research suggested that language learners invested in learning a second or third language to acquire economic and/or symbolic capital and to embrace certain desired identities. In this study, in addition to understanding how my female Uyghur participants negotiated their identity as they navigated the mainstream higher education in China, I also explored their investment in learning Chinese and English by tracing their language learning trajectories as they moved from Xinjiang to coastal cities in China. I highlighted how their investment in learning Chinese and English had an influence on their identity construction and negotiation and how their negotiated identities, in turn, impacted their investment in language learning.

Having reviewed the theoretical frameworks and related literature, I turn to the multilingual education policies in China and studies on Uyghur students next.

Multilingual education policies in China

As Adamson and Feng (2008) observe, China has initiated educational language policies to "foster trilingualism in ethnic minority areas with three goals: to enhance literacy, to assure internal stability and to allow knowledge transfer in order to strengthen the nation" (p. 9). To achieve these goals, the Chinese government has implemented trilingual policies separately at different historical periods. These policies include promoting Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) and bilingual education since the 1950s, and introducing a third language, English, into the middle school and college curricula in the 1980s.

Starting from the mid-1980s, and following Chinese government's reconsideration of state-building rationale and the nation's needs for rapid economic reform and modernization, China's language policy has also changed from allowing a parallel development of national language literacy and minority languages literacies to the emergence of a linguistic hierarchy, with Chinese as dominant language and minority languages relegated to a secondary level (Adamson & Feng, 2014; Feng, 2005; Zhou, 2005). Literature on minority education also suggests that minority education in many areas is conducted within a national context that prioritizes Mandarin Chinese and the Han culture (Feng, 2005). However, in 1988, Xinjiang passed a regional legislature entitled *Measures on the Implementation of Compulsory Education,* which stated that:

(1) schools should promote Mandarin Chinese, standard languages, and standardized scripts;

(2) minority group primary and secondary schools should use textbooks in vernacular languages and vernacular languages as the medium of instruction;

(3) schools with students from more than on minority community should use textbooks in a commonly used local language and use the same language as the medium of instruction;

(4) students whose communities do not have a written language may choose textbooks in another language (usually Chinese or Uyghur) and use their native languages as an auxiliary medium of instruction (Article 33, see Zhou, 2005, p. 110).

In light of this policy shift, it is not surprising that in Xinjiang, the implementation of the national policy is not without practical problems. Although legislated at the national level, the implementation of such policies is strongly influenced by local factors (Adamson & Feng, 2014). It also implies that bilingual education is interpreted more as an approach, where the native language is used as the medium of instruction at the earlier stage of education and gradually gives way to Mandarin Chinese (Feng, 2005). In essence, this legislation advocated transitional bilingualism, with the main goal of phasing out students' first language in favor of Mandarin Chinese (Feng, 2005).

As China's desire for economic development, modernization, and globalization increases, the status of English and English language learning has also become more highly valued (Pan, 2011). Feng (2011) noted that English has "penetrated … widely and deeply into the hearts and minds of individuals" (p. 7) in China. Accordingly, the central government further put forward a trilingual education policy for ethnic minority areas in 2002. That is, minority students should learn ethnic minority language as a first language, Mandarin Chinese as second language, and English as a third language (State Council, 2002). However, Feng and Sunuodula (2009) found that in Xinjiang, there is a weak link at the regional, prefectural and country levels regarding English language provision for minority students. Inequity in the teaching and use of the three languages also exists. In particular, Chinese is

required in all formal settings, including in meetings and classrooms. A 2004 regional document maintained that Chinese should be the medium of instruction from elementary school onwards and minority languages should be taught as a subject. The document further asserted that local students who finish the 9-year compulsory education should be able to communicate in Chinese (i.e., achieve Level 3 out of 4 in the *minzu hanyu kaoshi*, a standardized Chinese proficiency test designed for ethnic minorities whose first language is not Chinese). On the other hand, English courses, however, are not offered in most of the elementary and secondary schools in minority areas.

To complement the Central government's goal to unite ethnic minorities, and to promote their literacy level, universities also implement "preferential policies" for minority students. That is, minority students are allowed to enter higher education institutions with lower scores in the national College Entrance Exam (Adamson & Xia, 2011; Clothey, 2005; Feng & Sunuodula, 2009); and universities also set admission quotas for minority applicants (Clothey, 2005). Once admitted to college, these students are placed in the same exam system as Han students, and their passing score is found to be significantly lower than their Han counterparts in the College English Test (CET-4[1]). According to Gil and Anderson (2011), "the vast differences between mainland China's rich coastal provinces and poor inland provinces, as well as urban and rural areas, are well known and these differences determine both the opportunities to learn English and the quality of the learning experience" (pp. 39-40).

The pre-collegiate education system in Xinjiang

At the elementary level, two main types of schools exist: (1) *minzu* schools for ethnic minority students, where Uyghur is the medium of instruction; and (2) *hanzu* schools, which are mainly attended by Han students and where Putonghua is the medium of instruction, with English taught as a third language starting from Grade 3. More recently, a third category of

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[1] There are 6 bands in CET. According to the implicit policy at Forest University, college students have to pass the 4th band to get their Bachelor's degree.

schools—*min han hexiao* schools—has emerged. These are primarily Han-dominant schools where Uyghur lessons are offered, or Uyghur-dominant schools where Putonghua is offered. Of these three categories of elementary schools, *minzu* schools have traditionally been considered to be the most poorly resourced (Tsung & Cruickshank, 2009).

At the middle and high school level, the Chinese government established two boarding school programs—*Neichu ban* (inside Xinjiang) and *Neigao ban* (outside Xinjiang)—that provide Uyghur students from peasant families with free quality education. Admission into the *Neichu ban* program is contingent upon the Uyghur students' Putonghua proficiency, given that Putonghua is the medium of instruction in all the school subjects except Uyghur. Upon graduation, these Uyghur students have the option to continue their studies in the four-year *Neigao ban* programs offered at high schools in major cities outside of Xinjiang, which are generally located in the eastern part of China. Like their Han counterparts, Uyghur students who graduate from a *Neigao ban* program (referred to as *Minkaohan*) take the national-level college entrance examination (*Gaokao*), with English being a required subject. Those who choose to continue their high school education in local high schools that offer a bilingual program (*Shuangyu ban*) take the *Gaokao* in Uyghur (referred to as *Minkaomin*), and have to pass the Level 3 (maps onto high school level) in the Chinese proficiency test (i.e., *minzu hanyu kaoshi*[2], see Table 1) for college admission. Their English requirements are waived, however. Before taking courses at the college, all the *Minkaomin* students are required to attend a two-year preparatory program at another institution with other ethnic minority students.

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[2] *Minzu hanyu kaoshi* is a standardized Chinese proficiency test designed for ethnic minority students whose native language is not Chinese (http://mhk.neea.edu.cn/html1/folder/15073/13-1.htm). There is an implicit mapping between the Chinese proficiency level and school education level according to the hours in learning Chinese.

Table 1.

Standardized Chinese language proficiency test levels

Level	Requirements	Education level
1	The beginners who have received training on modern Chinese for 400-800 class hours	Elementary school
2	The learners who have received training on modern Chinese for 800-1200 class hours	Middle school
3	The learners who have received training on modern Chinese for 1200-1600 class hours	High school
4	The learners who have received training on modern Chinese for 1600-2000 class hours	Tertiary level

At the tertiary level, ethnic minority students are expected to develop both professional skills and multilingual proficiency in Chinese and English. However, the language, culture and socioeconomic gaps (as discussed in Chapter 1) between the majority Han and the minority ethnic groups place the latter at a great disadvantaged position.

Research on Uyghur minority students in Chinese context

Two lines of research have been conducted with regard to the language policies on ethnic minority education in China. Some language policy research (e.g., Feng & Sunuodula, 2009; Gouleta, 2012; Zhou, 2005) comprise of detailed text analyses of policy documents and the legislation process for Chinese-minority language bilingual education in ethnic minority regions. Another group of studies has focused on the implementation of the language education policies in minority areas. For instance, Feng and Sunuodula (2009) conducted three case studies that examined the Chinese-native language bilingual education policy of three ethnic communities and the provision of English language education in these areas by interviewing local students and teachers. Feng and Sunuoda also examined a series of official policy documents issued by the central, provincial and local governments. They found that in the case of Xinjiang, the implementation of the policy that prioritizes Mandarin Chinese might be negotiable because imposed by the central government law, the local policy could have ignored a number of issues, such as the diversity of ethnicity, the inequality in education

opportunity, and identity. In addition, Feng and Sunuoda found that the provision of English education in Xinjiang is limited because there were almost no resources to start up English courses in schools, especially in remote areas highly populated by minority groups. Most noticeably, greater emphasis was placed on Chinese learning than on the English. It was evident from the fact that tertiary institutions have policies that require minority students to pass the HSK for admission and graduation but exempt them from taking the CET 4 (Yang, 2005). Interviewees also expressed their high motivation to learn English but felt that this was challenging because Chinese is the medium of instruction. Feng and Sunuodula (2009) also reported that even though minority students were admitted to colleges through a preferential admission policy, upon attending colleges, they often struggled in order to keep up; and upon graduation, they found themselves seriously disadvantaged in the job market.

Adopting an ecological perspective, Tsung and Cruickshank (2009) reported on a case study on two schools in XUAR, one rural minority elementary school and an urban mixed minority/Chinese school. The study sought to examine the education of minority languages, Putonghua, and English in that area at the contextual and environmental level. Tsung and Cruickshank found that there was an imbalance in the distribution of resources in these two schools. Particularly, the rural minority school, which also lacked qualified teachers and textbooks, had limited access to Mandarin Chinese and English resources. Most importantly, even though the bilingual school was intended to provide access for minority students to the dominant language and culture, the Uyghur students were found to rarely interact with Han Chinese students in and outside the school settings mainly because of the language barrier. Some teachers interviewed implied that it is because the current language policy did not accord enough respect to the local language and culture; thus the integration only went one way. Minority teachers were also dissatisfied with the Chinese teaching materials provided because they were politically and ideologically oriented and did not address the needs of

minority students in Xinjiang. In addition, Tsung and Cruickshank reported that even in the mixed school, Uyghur students had no access to English courses at all, which was a core course requirement for Chinese students, however. Their findings revealed structural inequalities between the Chinese and Uyghur students in the mixed school because minority students did not receive enough support in learning Chinese as a second language and the bilingual education seemed to be only one way, with an emphasis on acquiring Putonghua with little or no attempt to preserve Uyghur. Most crucially, these minority students had unequal access to English compared to their Chinese counterparts, which has been found to be a common phenomenon for minority students across China (Yang, 2005).

With the bourgeoning interest in English education in China, the Ministry of Education advocated a trilingual education policy (i.e., ethnic minority language, Mandarin Chinese and English) in minority areas. Adamson and Feng (2009), who examined the tensions behind trilingual education policies, compared the implementation of policies for three minority groups including Uyghur. They found that ethnic minority languages were disadvantaged compared with Chinese and English. These findings prompted Adamson and Feng to point out that (1) additive trilingualism is facilitated by strategies such as supporting the development of not only speaking competence, and (2) literacy development in the minority languages needs to be worked into the school curriculum for all three languages.

In a follow up study, Adamson and Feng (2014) further expanded their study and examined the implementation of trilingual educational policies in 10 minority regions nationwide by administering questionnaires, analyzing policies, observing classroom practices, and interviewing policy makers, teachers, parents and students. They argued that if implemented effectively, trilingual education "can reduce the potential marginalization of ethnic minorities by enabling them to engage in the social and political life of mainstream society, and to accrue economic benefits through national and international trade, while at the

31

same time allowing them to maintain and develop their own cultural identity and language"

(p. 30). However, ineffectively implemented policies, they cautioned, might lead to "a greater

sense of marginalization and economic deprivation" (p. 30).

Yang (2005), who analyzed the status of English as a third language in rural ethnic

minority communities, highlighted a huge gap in English education and English proficiency

between the east coastal regions and west inland areas. Similar to above cited studies, Yang

also found that the development of English as a third language moved slowly in the minority

areas because of a combination of factors that included (1) a lack of funding and material

support, (2) a low perceived value of English Chinese-minority language bilingual education

and Chinese-only instruction, and (3) the challenge of learning a third language, especially

when there is not enough support from their native languages (see also Feng, 2007; Adamson

& Feng, 2009).

To summarize, the above reviewed studies show that Uyghur students encounter a

lack of access to learning English. These issues of access are exacerbated when these students

go to university, only to find themselves having to negotiate a university English policy that

performs gatekeeping functions which influence their life futures. Relatedly, a few studies

have sought to explore Uyghur students' identity construction in the host institution. For

instance, Han, De Costa and Cui (2016) examined the impact of a preferential policy on

Xinjiang students through a language ideology and language regime perspective. Their

findings revealed that, instead of promoting the Uyghur-Han unity, such a policy widened the

social divide between Han and Uyghur students in that Uyghur students were positioned as

unmotivated and poor English language learners due to the lack of access and inequities of

learning opportunities. Such phenomenon in turn resulted in these Xinjiang students

believing that they are inferior to their Han peers. Guo and Gu (2016a, b) explored Uyghur

university students' identities constructed through the multilingual practices in Shanghai, a

metropolitan city in China. They found that that cohort of Uyghur students were able to negotiate an elite identity by capitalizing on a repertoire of available resources including Mandarin Chinese and even local linguistic resources. Those students were also found to negotiate multilingual and multicultural memberships for themselves through their English learning process, which facilitated their adaptation to the host community. However, Guo and Gu also highlighted the problems encountered by Uyghur students which may hinder their upward social mobility. In a more recent study, Han, De Costa and Cui (2018) tried to bridge the language policy and planning (LPP) and SLA research through an identity lens by tracing the Chinese learning trajectory of a highly invested and resourceful male Uyghur youth, who was able to negotiate an identity of educated Uyghur and contest the negative stereotypes associated with Uyghur through his constant investment in learning Mandarin Chinese. In sum, there has been a small but growing body of research on Uyghur language learners from both an SLA and language policy and planning perspective.

Research on Muslim women

In this final section, I review research on Muslim women, which is the focus group of this study. In many countries, girls' access to education is often sanctioned by the community which reproduces, endorses, and reinforces the traditional gender roles of women. Studies show that Muslim parents may opt to choose minority-language schools in order to preserve their cultural and ethnical distinctiveness. For example, Benson (2004) observed that in Xinjiang, even in urban areas, there is a division of labor among Uyghur sons and daughters. While the former attend Chinese-language schools for essential language training, the latter are usually placed in Uyghur-language schools. In fact, the rationale is based on strict adherence to traditional gender roles. Sons, who can obtain necessary religious knowledge from the mosques, are expected to use the Chinese language learned at school to pursue social mobility for the interests of the family. On the other hand, daughters are expected to be

mothers and care givers who will be responsible for transmitting the important Uyghur language and culture to the next generation (Gladney, 2004).

Muslim families actively support and implement a distinctly gendered way of bringing up sons and daughters. The outcome is frequently the legitimization of a daughter's socialization into the subordinate position in both household and economy. Reyila and Jiman (2003) showed how daughters are more likely to be deprived of chances of schooling, and that they are more ready to accept traditional gender roles. In an impoverished rural household, the number of children is often a crucial factor in influencing a parent's decision over whether the investment in education should be extended to the daughter. Finally, it is not uncommon to find female members of a large household monopolized by housework, and daughters required to stay at home to help with domestic chores and to care for siblings instead of completing their education (Mackerras, 2003).

Furthermore, in line with common practices represented by the state as 'characteristic' of minority culture, the legal minimum age at which Uyghur girls can marry is frequently lower than the age limit set for Han Chinese. Early marriage practices are again increasingly common, particularly in the South of Xinjiang (Xu & Jaschok, 2009). These social practices, in turn, affect girls' access to education and parents' willingness to consider the 'value' of their daughter's education beyond acquiring rudimentary formal education.

The 2010 population census of China provides us with literacy rates that illustrate certain ethnic and gender disparities among the population of Xinjiang. While the total illiteracy rates of Han Chinese (5%) compare favorably to that of the Uyghur population (31.8%), Uyghur men are seen to be better off than their female counterparts; whilst the former was attaining illiteracy rates at 12.75%, the latter reached 19% (2010 Population Census of PRC). Constituting the largest ethnic minority group in Xinjiang, a comparison of the illiteracy rates of Uyghur men and women in rural and urban areas can thus be regarded

as a valid indicator of the predicament of girls' education in the conservative cultural milieu of rural society.

Literacy is often measured in terms of a person's ability to recognize a certain number of Chinese characters. A lack of Mandarin literacy undoubtedly has an economic impact on Uyghurs, often limiting their employment opportunities in the wider labor market where interaction with Han Chinese demands linguistic competence. On the other hand, the generally high level of illiteracy present among rural Uyghur women might be interpreted as an expression of their own determination and that of their communities to preserve their 'Uyghur culture' by engaging in acts of resistance to learning the 'language of upward mobility' alien to their own culture.

As a religious system, Islam—its professional personnel, its believers, and their interpretations of its tenets and religious laws—influences all aspects of the daily life of Muslim men and women alike. Education, as a site of cultural reproduction, is thus symbiotically linked to the survival of Muslim faith and identity. However, by the same token, it is also often a state's most urgent priority to exercise control over this same site. Education thus becomes the field of tension where the vested and competing interests of the state and of patriarchal Islamic institutions intersect. In a study that investigated the complex interplay between religion, gender and marginalization among a group of Pakistani girls in Hong Kong, Gu (2015) found that while the Pakistani girls attempted to extricate themselves from the gendered practices in their heritage culture and its customs that marginalized and confine women, they simultaneously sought to establish a Muslim identity that differentiated them from local Hong Kong girls. As Gu argued, although mainstream culture and education have released Pakistani girls from the oppression and pressure of religion and customs to some extent, they have not been provided sufficient guidance to realize their dreams, leaving the release temporary and uncertain. In short, Muslim young women often have an added

35

layer of challenges—that associated with their religious faith and upbringing—to contend with in their pursuit of formal education.

Research questions

As my review of the previous studies in the previous sections show, learners from minority groups often find their identities to be relatively inferior in the new environment. One of the main reasons is the lack of desired language proficiency. Another primary reason includes ethnicity, gender and religious orientation. As noted, there has been a dearth of literature on language learning of female Uyghur students, especially in mainstream higher education in China. To my knowledge, no studies have looked at Chinese minority students' learning of *both* Chinese and English through the lens of investment and identity. Therefore, I situate this study against a wide social context and focus on the language learning of a group of female Uyghur students in a Chinese university (Forest University) in Jiangsu province. The following questions guided this study:

1. How do the female Uyghur students perceive the learning of Chinese and English?

2. What is their investment in learning Chinese and English like, and what influence does such investment exert on their overall language learning process and identity construction? How does their constructed identity influence their access to and investment in learning Chinese and English?

3. How do Uyghur women contest and negotiate their identities by drawing upon multiple resources in the host educational setting?

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I first described the theoretical frameworks that I adopted in this study. Next, I reviewed the relevant literature that investigated the connections between language, identity and investment among transnational migrant learners. I then provided an overview of the language education policy for Uyghur students in China, mapped out the education

system in Xinxiang, and examined studies that involved Uyghur students. Finally, after

contextualizing this study within a larger body of research in the fields of SLA and language

planning and policy, I addressed the research gap, and introduced the research questions of

this study

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I introduce the methodological framework that I adopted in this study. I also describe the research site and the four participants—Adi, Mary, Angela and Babe—by providing their respective biographical information. I also describe the data collection process. Next, I situate my researcher self, and discuss how my relationships with the participants and my own experience as a language learner have informed my interpretation of the data. I also outline the multiple data sources and my coding procedure.

Methodological framework

In this dissertation, I adopt a case study framework (Duff, 2012) to explore how female Uyghur students viewed their language learning experiences, and how they constructed and negotiated their identities through learning Chinese and English as they moved from Xinjiang to Nanjing. As a research methodology in applied linguistics, case studies have the "ability to exemplify larger processes or situations in a very accessible, concrete, immediate, and personal manner" (Duff, 2012, p. 96), and they allow complex phenomena to be researched over time (van Lier, 2005). Case study research provides a rich, in-depth analysis of a phenomenon where "the focus of study is the knowledge, performance, or perspectives of a single individual, such as a language learner or teacher" (Duff, 2013, p. 1). Given the research purpose of this dissertation, an interpretive case study methodology was appropriate because interpretive inquiry is based on the belief that social realities are constructed and changed by the participants when they interact with those realities in different social settings (Glesne, 1999). According to Merriam (1998), "[q]ualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meanings people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6). In other words, the goal of an interpretive researcher is to understand reality from the point of

view of the people who live in it. Creswell (2007) also explained that case studies involve "the study of an issue explored through one of more cases within a bounded system" (p. 73). Therefore, the participants in this dissertation were studied as four separate cases within different contexts in which they learn and use Chinese and English.

Research site

Although China remains a multilingual society, Mandarin Chinese's dominant status has been strengthened by the need to maintain national unity (He, 2014). In the field of education, bilingual education seems to have moved from a model that equally values both Chinese and minority languages to that in which Chinese is institutionalized as the sole medium of instruction across all levels of education, while minority languages are marginalized as a school subject (He, 2014; Tsung, 2014). English, however, parallels the importance of Chinese in education and other spheres of social life. In economically developed regions such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Jiangsu province, English skills are an important prerequisite in the job market. In these areas, students are taught English from Grade 3 in elementary school; in minority regions, although trilingual education policy (e.g., Chinese, ethnic minority language, English) has been put forward for years, it has been yet to be successfully implemented due to a lack of resources (Adamson, et al., 2013). As a consequence, many Uyghur students often have limited exposure to English prior to attending university in the more developed areas. It is in a comprehensive public university (anonymized as Forest University (FU)) in one of the developed areas—Nanjing in Jiangsu province—that this study was conducted.

With engineering being its academic strength, FU is a reputable institution in Jiangsu province, having joined the Cooperative Plan that involved a series of other universities in 2006. By 2017, among the 25,873 full-time students at FU, 92 are from Xinjiang, and they major in Civil Engineering, Geomatics Engineering, Safety Engineering, and Urban Planning.

Of these 92 students, 75 are Uyghur, 12 Kazakh, 2 Kirgiz, 1 Mongolian, 1 Tujia, and 1 Buyi.

There are 39 *minkaomin* (i.e., minority students who received no instruction in Chinese and

English before entering FU; instead, these students learned Chinese and English intensively

through a pre-college preparatory course at another university for two years before coming to

FU) and 53 *minkaohan* (i.e., minority students who received some instruction in Chinese and

English before coming to FU). Uyghur students are admitted to FU with lower scores than

their Han counterparts; *minkaomin* students are further waived for their English requirement.

At FU, Mandarin Chinese is both the medium of instruction and the dominant

language for general communication. English is of paramount importance for both academic

studies and future job opportunities, whereas other ethnic languages, such as Uyghur, were

only limited to intragroup use among ethnic minority students. All the freshmen, including

Uyghur students, are required to take College English-1 course, which covers the four

language skills, in their first semester. According to the *English Curriculum Requirements for*

University Students (Non-English Major), the objective of College English is to develop

students' ability to use English in a well-rounded way, especially in listening and speaking,

so that students are able to communicate effectively in their future studies and careers, as

well as in social interactions. By the end of the first semester, students have to take College

English Test Band 4 (CET-4). Students who failed CET-4 (i.e., with scores lower than 425)

have to enroll in College English-2 in the second semester. Those who pass the CET-4 have

the choice to take advanced English courses that cover a wide variety of topics in culture,

literature, business, and so on. FU implicitly stipulates that students have to pass CET-4 to

graduate, otherwise, the degree will be withheld by the university. However, due to the

extremely low passing rate of CET-4 among Uyghur students, the university, therefore, also

waived the CET-4 requirement for Uyghur students, and had the Uyghur students pass Level

4 in the Chinese proficiency test (i.e., *minzu hanyu kaoshi,* refer to Table 1 in Chapter 2 for more details) instead as the language requirement to graduate.

Besides the lower admission scores and graduation requirements, FU also adopts certain preferential policy for Uyghur students by adjusting their final scores on internal academic courses. For example, the passing score for Uyghur students are 48 points compared to 60 points for their Han counterparts. According to Han et al. (2016), instead of promoting the Uyghur-Han unity, such preferential policies further widened the social divide between Han and Uyghur students and positioned Uyghur students as unmotivated and poor English learners due to the lack of access to learning resources and inequities of interactional opportunities.

Participants

The process of selecting participants was very complicated. Through one of the Vice Deans of the School of Foreign Languages at FU and two male Uyghur students who were involved in a previous research project, I was introduced to a list of 8 female Uyghur students enrolled in FU. After chatting with each of them several times on WeChat, the most popular instant messaging application in China, I selected those who showed interest and commitment to this study and who had a varying language educational background. Before I interviewed them in person, I established contact and subsequently a connection with them through casual online conversations by talking about my life and experiences and learning about their lives, families, and educational backgrounds.

For this study, I interviewed and observed four Uyghur women—Adi, Mary, Angela, and Babe (pseudonyms picked by themselves) in my fieldwork in Nanjing. They all went to *minzu* elementary schools designed for Uyghur students in their hometowns. The medium of instruction in these schools was Uyghur. As required by the Ministry of Education (MOE), they began to study Chinese from Grade 3 in elementary school as a second language. To

improve Xinjiang students' proficiency in the national dominant language and help them socialize into the mainstream society, Inside-Xinjiang Boarding Class (*neichu ban,* in middle schools inside Xinjiang) and Outside-Xinjiang Boarding Class (*neigao ban,* in high schools outside Xinjiang) were created by the Chinese government. In *neichu ban*, the medium of instruction is Chinese, and students start to learn English, mainly through Chinese. In *neigao ban*, Uyghur students are expected to develop proficiency in both languages, and to compete for the university entrance in *Gaokao* (i.e., College Entrance Exam, CEE). After graduating from elementary school, Uyghur students have the choice to continue their middle school and high school education in local *minzu* schools (e.g., *minkaomin*), or attend *Neichu ban* and *Neigao ban* programs if they are admitted (e.g, *minkao han*). *Neigao ban* primarily takes academically successful minority students from Xinjiang (Chen & Postiglione, 2009). There is another type of class called *Shuangyu ban* (i.e., Bilingual class) offered by middle and high schools in Xinjiang where students learn Chinese and Uyghur at the same time. High school graduates from *Shuangyu ban* also attend a two-year preparatory program before going to college as *minkaomin* students.

It is my focal participants that I now turn to. Table 2 summarizes their' demographic information.

Table 2.

Focal participants' demographic information

Name	Age	Major	Status	High school	Middle school	Family
Adi	25	Chemical engineering	*Minkaohan*	*Neigao ban* in Shanghai	*Neichu ban* in Akesu	Scholars
Mary	22	Transportation Engineering	*Minkaohan*	*Neigao ban* in Shanghai	*Neichu ban* in Karamay	Peasant
Angela	23	Construction Engineering	*Minkaohan*	*Neigao ban* in Nanjing	*Shuangyu ban* in Hotan	Peasant
Babe	22	Finance	*Minkaomin*	Xinjiang	*Minzu* school	Peasant

Adi. Adi, age 25, majored in Chemical Engineering at FU when the data collection started, and is currently working as a civil servant in Kuche County in Xinjiang after graduation in 2017. She was born in Kuche County of Akesu. Her parents are academics and can speak Chinese fluently. Adi has a younger sister who is currently pursuing her Bachelor's degree at a prestigious university in Beijing. They used to live in a military camp with a lot of Han children, with whom she had a very good relationship. It was through the interaction with these Han children that Adi developed her proficiency in Chinese. Therefore, Adi had access to Chinese very early in her life, and got enough support from her parents at home. After graduating from *minzu* elementary school, Ada attended *neichu ban* in Xinjiang and *neigao ban* in Shanghai before joining FU. Adi attended a middle school in Changji, which has good teaching facilities and is well known for its teaching quality. It was in *Neichu ban* that Adi started to learn English. After graduating from middle school, Adi was admitted to a high school in Shanghai, which is 2,772 miles away from Kuche County. In 2013, she was admitted to FU in Nanjing to study Chemical Engineering. In her junior year at FU, Adi received an offer from an Italian university for graduate study; however, she gave up on this opportunity because her passport application was denied due to her ethnicity affiliation. Persuaded by her parents, Adi decided to take the Civil Servant Exam and become a civil servant in a local industrial bureau in Kuche County after graduation from FU.

Mary. Mary was born in 1996, and was raised in a small village in *Yutian* County (于田县) in the Hotan Prefecture of South Xinjiang (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1. Map of China

Figure 2. Map of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

Mary was born into a Uyghur peasant farmer family that has four daughters. Her oldest sister is married, and is working as a nurse at a local hospital. The second older sister graduated from a two-year college in Xinjiang, and is working at a local company. The younger sister is studying at a high school inside Xinjiang. Mary is the third daughter, and is the only one who received an education in the inland. Mary speaks Uyghur with her family at home because her parents never learned Chinese, and her sisters' Chinese proficiency is very limited. They often asked Mary for help with Chinese when they encountered problems at work.

Mary attended a local *minzu* elementary school in her hometown in Yutian where she started to learn Chinese from Grade 3. After graduating from elementary school, Mary's father sent her to the No. 3 Middle School Foreign Language Experimental School in Karamay (1,075 miles from Mary's home village) which offers a *Neichu ban* program. The middle school that Mary attended is among the top middle schools in Karamay, with English education being its primary strength. Upon her graduation from *Neichu ban*, Mary was admitted to a high school in Shanghai which offers a *Neigao ban* program. Having spent 4 years in Shanghai, Mary was admitted to the Transportation Science and Engineering department at FU in 2014. When the data collection began, Mary was in her junior year, and was in the process of preparing for the admission exam for graduate study at Xinjiang University. In February of 2018, Mary decided to take the provincial-scale Civil Service Exam after knowing that she failed the admission exam for graduate study.

Angela. Born to a peasant family in a village in Yutian County with an older brother with disability and a younger sister who is currently attending a normal university in Xinjiang, Angela received her elementary school education at a local *minzu* school where she started to learn Mandarin Chinese at Grade 3, and continued her middle school education at a local school that offers bilingual class (i.e., *Shuangyu ban*). In her final year of middle school,

Angela watched a video clip about *Neigao ban* program, and was deeply attracted by the resourcefulness of schools in the inland. Also in her final year in middle school, Angela's father arranged a marriage for her to someone from the same village. Therefore, even though she was admitted to a *Neigao ban* program in Nanjing, Angela was constrained from attending by her father who insisted on Mary's getting married after graduation from middle school. Inspired by her grandfather who was highly respected in her village and with the support of her mother, Angela fought fiercely for the opportunity to study in the inland at the risk of being cut off from the family and managed to be matriculated by FU in 2014. As the oldest daughter in her family, Angela is expected to take the responsibility of supporting the family due to her older brother's illness. Bearing such an obligation in mind, Angela had set her goal of working as a civil servant in her hometown since she joined FU. When the data collection began, Angela was in the process of preparing for the Chinese proficiency test (i.e., *Hanyu Shuiping Ceshi*, PSC), which stipulates a threshold for working as a local civil servant, and was also in the midst of preparing for the national-level Civil Service Exam. During the winter holiday of 2018, Angela was offered a job from a local private-owned company, however, she still decided to take the provincial-level Civil Service Exam in April 2018 after learning that she had failed the national level exam.

Babe. At the time of data collection, Babe was a sophomore majoring in finance at FU. Babe was born to a peasant farmer family, and she had two brothers and a sister. Different from Adi, Mary, and Angela, Babe was a *minkaomin* student who took the College Entrance Exam in Uyghur, and received education from elementary through high school inside Xinjiang. Before coming to Nanjing for college education, she attended a two-year preparatory program at Ningxia University where she was taught Mandarin Chinese, basic English, and courses related to the political ideology of China. In spite of Babe's lack of formal instruction on Chinese and late start in English learning, Babe attached great value to

these two languages and considered them as empowering tools that would open up a variety of possibilities for her future. Being the oldest sister in her family, Babe envisioned herself as the role model for her younger twin brothers and sister. She hoped to learn Chinese and English well and continue studying German or French to study abroad. She described herself as an obedient girl, but after attending college and having conversations with her Han friends, she hoped to challenge herself by exploring different possibilities available to her. She wanted to show her siblings that languages can change a person's life and enable individuals to broaden their view of the world.

Researcher positionality

Friedman (2012) called for researchers to consider their own backgrounds and interests in their research because researchers "have an orientation to research and a sense of personal ethics and political stances that inform their research" (p. 51). In other words, researchers should acknowledge that their own experience shape their perspectives and interpretations, and thus, "position themselves" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25) in the study, and develop their interpretation based on their own historical, social, and cultural background. In an ethnographic case study of a male Hmong refugee, De Costa (2010b) found himself in three researcher positions: researcher as outsider or insider, researcher as resource, and researcher as befriender (p. 524). Similarly, in Norton and Early's (2011) analysis of narrative data, they found four researcher identities most commonly recurring: researcher as international guest, researcher as collaborative team member, researcher as teacher, and researcher as teacher educator. In this study, I see myself possibly in two positions: researcher as resource and researcher as an outsider and insider.

Ethnically, I am a Korean who grew up in a small town, Mishan, in the northeastern part of China, which borders Russia. In my hometown, there are 16,000 ethnic Koreans, accounting for 3.6% of the town's population. Korean is considered as one of the higher

valued ethnic minority languages because of the linguistic capital attached to it. In Mishan, there is an elementary school, middle school and high school that are especially designed for this group of people. Korean students who choose to take this education track will learn Korean as their first language, Chinese as a second language, and Japanese as a third language. However, high school graduates have limited options when choosing college majors because there are only a few universities that admit students who learn Japanese as a foreign language. Instead of sending me to the Korean *minzu* schools, my parents sent me to the Han school where I was always the only ethnic minority student in my class. I tried to hide my ethnic identity in school because I thought that I was different from the others. I was quite embarrassed to let people know that I was of Korean ethnicity because I was afraid that people would look down upon me. I felt that I was no different from my Han classmates because I received the same education as them and knew nothing about Korean script. I left my hometown for Shanghai, a cosmopolitan city that is 1,707 miles away from Mishan, to pursue my high school and college education in mainstream schools. After high school, I started to pick up the Korean language and continued my study of Korean into my MA study in the US.

Therefore, as a female ethnic minority myself who resides on the physical and cultural borders of China, I share some of the language learning experiences with my focal participants, such as feeling inferior and being marginalized in Han dominant schools, encountering limited learning resources and opportunities available in my hometown, and feeling empowered through making investment in learning English. Attending high school and college far away from my hometown, I also empathized with some of my participants' affective experiences, including loneliness, being marginalized, the uncertainty of our identities and the dissociation with friends back home. These common experiences may have helped make me attain semi-insider status within the Uyghur student community and

48

afforded me the opportunity to elicit in-depth data. However, given our different life experiences, cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs, I also consider myself as an outsider. At the same time, being a trilingual and specializing in language education, I also served as a language resource, offering as much help to my participants as I could, and thus worked to build a close rapport with them. However, my connection with the Vice Dean of the English department and my involvement in previous research projects and the English volunteer group may have impacted my participants' perception of my relationship with FU and with their teachers because my participants addressed me as *laoshi* (i.e., teacher), which might have influenced what they would like to share with me during the fieldwork, and how open they could be with me.

Data collection

I obtained the approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB, see Appendix A) at Michigan State University in December 2016, and started my year-long fieldwork at FU in early 2017. I gained access to the Uyghur students through the Vice Dean of the School of Foreign Language and Literature at FU, who is also an associate professor in applied linguistics. He taught College English to undergraduates from a variety of majors, including Uyghur students. The Vice Dean attended to Uyghur students' needs in their English learning given their relatively low proficiency, and provided extra assistance to these students. He formed a study group in which Han students or Uyghur students who are proficient in Chinese and English tutored Uyghur students who had difficulties in language learning on a regular basis. I also worked as one of the volunteers and offered help with their English learning.

Multiple data sources were collected in this study. The dataset (see Table 3), which consisted of audiotaped interviews, observation notes, policy documents, journal entries, and archived social media data, underwent ongoing, cyclical analyses.

Background questionnaire. I used a questionnaire to collect the demographic information and language learning experiences from the participants, which also gathered information about their education and family background (see Appendix B).

Semi-structured interviews. In this study, I used interviews as "social practices" (Talmy, 2010) because the meanings are negotiated and co-constructed between the researcher and participants. Interviews serve as important ways of eliciting participants' accounts of their 'life trajectories and social positioning' and 'allow glimpses into the beliefs and values and ideologies that inform what they do and why they do it' (Heller, 2011, pp. 44–45). Besides interviewing my focal participants, I also interviewed male Uyghur students, the participants' Han friends, their EFL teachers and other content teachers, as well as the school administrators who are in charge of the ethnic minority student affairs. The individual interviews, which were guided by semi-structured guidelines (see Appendices C-F), were conducted with my participants every one or two months while I carried out the fieldwork in 2017-2018. Three to six rounds of interviews were conducted with each participant, with each lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. All interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, audiotaped, and later transcribed and translated. This, however, may bring potential limitations to this study. Given that Chinese is the participants' second language, they may occasionally encounter some difficulties expressing themselves. In addition, the interview data was analyzed based on the English translation, which could have missed out some information during the translation process.

Interview questions included but were not limited to participants' formal and informal Chinese and English language learning experiences, motivations, investment, challenges, and needs in learning Chinese and English. In-depth questions regarding their multilingual practices were also explored; for example, their views towards the role different languages played in their academic study and socialization, the experiences of using Putonghua, Uyghur,

and Chinese within Uyghur community and across communities were sought and examined. During the interviews, I drew on my identity as an ethnic minority woman and a language learner to constantly reduce the distance between the researcher and the researched. For instance, I reflected on my developmental trajectory as I moved from my hometown to Shanghai, then to the United States. I also shared my feelings about being an ethnic minority woman, my language learning experiences (i.e., Mandarin Chinese, English, Korean), as well as my struggles and achievements. My participants were also encouraged to share their language learning experiences, life stories, and feelings with me.

Besides interviewing my focal participants, I also invited their Han friends and male Uyghur friends for interviews. I also approached the administrative officials, EFL teachers, and content teachers at FU for their insights on ethnic minority students on campus.

Focus group interviews. To further discuss the topics that were relevant to the research questions, I conducted two focus group interview sessions with my participants. The discussion questions for the two group interviews were based on the information gathered during the individual interviews and the journal entries. The questions were about common themes that arose from the data (see Appendix H for sample questions). The informal and relaxed focus group discussions served both as a way for participants to elaborate on the common themes and for the researcher to clarify some points that came up with the preliminary analyses of the data. Moreover, it provided an opportunity for my participants to make face-to-face interactions and voice their opinions. The interviews were audio-recorded.

Journals. My participants were asked to write journals (see Appendix G for sample prompts) once a month in which they kept a record of their reflections on their interactions with their friends, classmates, teachers, and Han students. They were encouraged to write about any of their feelings toward learning Chinese and English as they occurred, or any intriguing moments that generated a sense of success or failure regarding the

51

(un)intelligibility in their interactions, and how they felt about that. The main purpose of keeping a journal was for the participants to express what they did, what they thought, and how they felt in different situations where they used or communicated in Chinese and English. The journal entries took different forms and varied in length. Some of them were in traditional word document format, and some of them were sent to me over WeChat as a text message.

Observations. I observed my focal participants' in-class interactions in both English course and major courses, and got involved in their extracurricular activities, such as studying in the library, dining at a café, and gathering on Uyghur holidays. Due to the classroom size and the number of students in class, I merely sat in the classroom and observed what was going on in the classroom during the observations. I also took notes on my notebook during the classes, which informed my interview questions and casual online chats with my participants.

Texts and artifacts. During my fieldwork, I gathered policy documents regarding ethnic minority student education, especially that of Uyghur students, from the national and school levels. I also collected the College English course curricula and the textbooks used at FU, teachers' lesson plans, as well as some of my participants' final course projects and study notes.

Media data. I became friends with my focal participants on WeChat (i.e., the most popular social media application in China where users can chat with friends, post and repost to a closed group of friends). I archived our informal conversations, their postings related to their lives, language learning experience, their use of emoticons, and the online interactions among themselves.

Table 3.

Summary of data sources

Data source	Participants	Date	Number
Interviews	Focal participants	January-December 2017	Adi: 3 Mary: 6 Angela: 5 Babe: 4
	Han students	May 2017	3
	Male Uyghur students	May 2017	2
	English teachers	March 2017	3
	Content teachers	March 2017	2
	Administrative officials	March 2017	3
Questionnaire	Focal participants	January 2017	4
Focus group	Focal participants	June 2017	1
	Focal participants	December 2017	1
Observations	In class	March 2017 May 2017	English course: 2 Major courses: 5
	Out of class activities and events	March 2017 May 2017 September 2017 December 2017	4
Texts and artifacts	Policy documents	March-May 2017	12
	Final projects	June 2017	3
	Language learning materials (notes, textbooks)	January-June, 2017	
Journal entries	Focal Participants	March-December, 2017	Adi: 5 Mary: 5 Angela: 6 Babe: 5
Social media	Online conversations	December 2016-	
	Posts on WeChat	January 2017-	200+ entries

Coding and data analysis

The data analysis was an ongoing process. The interviews were transcribed and translated to English. The categories and themes emerged inductively from the data (Friedman, 2012). I first went through the transcribed interviews and the audio files several times and commented on their speech samples in the field notes, which served as the foundation and criteria of my codes.

For each transcript, I identified and coded significant strings of words, phrases, or sentences that related closely to the research questions. I then grouped the formulated meanings into major categories under the two broad categories: Chinese learning and English learning. Those emerged categories included "Uyghur language, culture, and sense of belonging," "Putonghua as resource," "language intuition," "Putonghua as key to academic success," "advantages in English learning," "women and empowerment," "limited resources in learning English," "*Neigao ban* experience," "educated Uyghur," "same as the Han dominant", and so on. Categories were then synthesized by grouping, analyzing, regrouping, to see how they were related to my participants' identity construction. After the themes were identified, I went back to the transcribed data again, reorganized and reflected on the findings. Therefore, data analysis in this study combined both inductive and deductive reasoning and was an emerging and iterative process (Merriam, 2009). NVivo software was used to analyze the data.

Data validation

For this study to be as valid and reliable as possible I used the following strategies to ensure trustworthiness: (1) data triangulation, (2) member checks, and (3) detailed description of the study. According to Merriam (1998), triangulation is used as the process of using multiple data sources to confirm emerging themes in the data. To summarize, in this study, data were collected using individual and focus group interviews, observations, journal entries, WeChat posts, and relevant documents in order to ensure data triangulation of the findings. Member checking is another strategy that was used to enhance internal validity.

Throughout the data collection process, I checked my understanding of the participants' experiences with them in the individual interviews, in the focus group interviews, or in the casual interactions we had after a round of fieldwork. Providing a detailed description of the study is another strategy which can enhance reliability. Merriam

(1998) explains that the researcher "should explain the assumptions and theory behind the study, his or her position vis-à-vis the group being studied, the basis for selecting participants and a description of them, and the social context from which data were collected" (pp. 206-207). In this chapter, I undertook all these efforts with an intention of strengthening the trustworthiness of this study.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I described the research design, gave a detailed account of the methodology that used to address the research questions. I used a variety of methods of data collection, such as interviews, focus groups, oral journal, and observation inside and outside of the classroom. I have also described the setting, the study participants and myself, the primary investigator. I also explained how I analyzed the data and the steps that I took to ensure the validation of the study.

CHAPTER 4: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION THROUGH LEARNING CHINESE

The previous chapters introduced the background of the study and reviewed the relevant theories and empirical studies on ethnic minorities' identity construction in relation to language, followed by an integrative theoretical framework for the study. The research methodology, comprising participants, data collection and analysis procedure were presented next. Thus far, I have also mapped out the complex dynamics of language learning and language policy surrounding my focal participants: Adi, Mary, Angela, and Babe. In the following two chapters, I trace the four Uyghur women's Chinese (Chapter 4) and English (Chapter 5) language learning trajectories from elementary school through university.

Having managed to navigate and succeed in China's mainstream education system, the Uyghur women in this study regard Mandarin Chinese (i.e., Putonghua) as an important form of linguistic capital that is associated with symbolic value (Bourdieu, 1989, 1991). Although positioned as disadvantaged in a curriculum that values Mandarin Chinese, by investing in learning Chinese in various ways, the participants contested their ascribed identity as incompetent Putonghua speakers and negotiated an identity as Uyghur elites, capitalizing on a repertoire of available resources including Mandarin Chinese and other linguistic resources in social media communication (e.g., internet buzzwords, emoticons). Moreover, they developed an awareness of and utilized the symbolic value of their ethnic resources to empower their fellow Uyghurs and to promote intercultural communication. Despite the legitimate social positions that they negotiated and imagined, due to their ethnic affiliation, my focal Uyghur elites faced potential challenges when attempting to translate symbolic resources into economic capital.

The operational definition of identity for this study defines Uyghur female students' identity as the way they position themselves and others, how they are positioned in relation to

the emerging social context, and how their positioning is constructed, shaped and transformed in learning and using multiple languages across time and space. The data that are analyzed in this chapter are mainly from interviews, participants' written journals, and documents collected during fieldwork. In the following sections, I present the findings.

Investment, legitimacy, and changing identity

In her seminal work on second language learning identity, Norton discussed "investment" and "good returns" associated with second language acquisition (Norton, 2000). She argued that "if learners invest in a second language, they do so with the understanding that they will acquire a wider range of symbolic and material resources, which in turn increase the value of their cultural capital" (p. 10). The language learning trajectories of the participants involved in this study revealed how investment in learning Mandarin Chinese brought them "good returns" and expanded their opportunities for a good possible future (Norton, 2013). It is to my four focal participants, Adi, Mary, Angela, and Babe, that I now turn.

Adi. Adi, age 25, was majoring in Chemical Engineering at FU when the data collection started, and is currently working as a civil servant in Kuche County in Xinjiang after graduation. She was born in Kuche County of Akesu. Her parents are academics and they can speak Chinese fluently. They used to live in a military camp with a lot of Han children, with whom she had a very good relationship. It was through the interaction with these Han children that Adi learned Chinese. Therefore, Adi had access to Chinese very early in her life, and also got enough support from her parents at home, as the following excerpt shows:

Excerpt 1:

My mother helped me a lot with my Chinese learning when I was young. I often

asked my mom how to say, for example, *jump* in Chinese. After she told me the pronunciation, I would know how to ask my Han friends to play and jump outside. I have many Han friends. They all liked to play with me. (Adi, Interview 1, 02/21/2017)

In order to socialize with her Han friends living in the same neighborhood, Adi sought help from her mother, which, in turn, enlarged her vocabulary pool and widened her social circle. After graduating from a *minzu* elementary school, Adi attended *neichu ban* inside Xinjiang and *neigao ban* in Shanghai before joining LU. Adi attended Changji No. 7 Middle School, which has good facilities and is well known for its teaching quality. At *neichu ban*, Adi's Chinese proficiency was higher than that of her classmates, and she was often asked by the teachers to serve as the interpreter for the class. When Adi's classmates were struggling with basic Chinese, Adi was already able to communicate fluently with her Han teachers in Chinese. She served as a language broker in Chinese class, and her interpretation experience created a lot of opportunities for her to use Chinese to communicate with proficient Chinese users and made her very confident about her Chinese proficiency.

Excerpt 2:
My teachers often asked me to do a lot of things in the office. I helped them manage the class and communicate with my Uyghur classmates. If they were to organize a party, I would definitely be the hostess. (Adi, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

After graduating from middle school, Adi was admitted to Chongming High School in Shanghai, which is 2772 miles away from Kuche County. Founded in 1915, Chongming

High was selected as one of the 17 experimental and model high schools in Shanghai. In 2006, the school established *Neigao ban* program and started to recruit Xinjiang students. Now it has eight *Xinjiang ban* and has enrolled more than 300 students from Xinjiang. Immersed in a Chinese-speaking environment, Adi found her speaking and listening skills improved significantly, and moreover, it was in high school that she started to appreciate the beauty of Chinese passages, which was a big leap in her Chinese study, as she wrote in her journal:

Excerpt 3:

When I studied Chinese back in Xinjiang, I only focused on vocabulary and meaning. I thought that Chinese is a tool for communication; as long as I understand the meaning, it will be fine. However, my high school *Yuwen* teacher (teacher who teaches Chinese language and literature) told us, as an educated Chinese, we should learn to appreciate the beauty of written Chinese, such as the rhetoric aspect. … When teaching traditional Chinese poems, he always taught us how to analyze the most delicately written parts, sometimes it was a word, and sometimes it was a phrase. I really learned a lot from him, and more importantly, it helped to enrich my expressions in Chinese. (Adi, Journal 2, 01/20/2017)

Influenced by her high school Chinese teacher, Adi expanded her linguistic repertoire and started to appreciate Chinese prose and poems, which often made her feel proud because she "was able to speak such a beautiful language". The library of Chongming High also afforded Adi with opportunities to "interact with the great souls". Unlike many other Uyghur students who lacked in listening and speaking proficiency in Mandarin Chinese, Adi made a good transition to high school where all the subjects were taught in

Chinese, which spared extra time for her to read extensively. Such "interactive" opportunities further deepened Adi's understanding of the Chinese language and culture, reinforced her language development, and continued to benefit her at Forest University.

Excerpt 4:

I made many Han friends in university. … I think my reading experience made me be able to discuss in-depth topics with my Han friends, such as meaning of life… We also shared our understanding of literature and movies sometimes. … I don't feel I'm disadvantaged. I like such discussions. (Adi, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

As Excerpt 4 revealed, Chinese became a means of thought-provoking discussions of the classical literature and popular movie between Adi and her Han friends, which was, otherwise, impossible when she was with her Uyghur peers. In short, Adi benefited from her investment in learning Chinese through (1) acquiring cultural capital accorded to Chinese literature, (2) enlarging her pool of Han friends, and (3) contesting a 'disadvantaged' image in learning Chinese and negotiating an identity of a legitimate Chinese speaker in the mainstream context.

Mary. As one of the 4 female students majoring in Geological Prospecting at the College of Transportation Science & Engineering, Mary was admitted to Forest University in 2014 after having spent 4 years in a *Neichuban* program (i.e., boarding middle school inside Xinjiang) in Karamay inside Xinjiang and 4 years in a *Neigaoban* program (i.e., boarding middle school in the inland) in Shanghai. She was in her junior year when I began my data collection.

Elementary school in Hotan. Mary attended a local elementary school in her hometown in Hotan (South Xinjiang), which is a 6-year *minzu* school with all the students

being Uyghur. Mary started to learn Chinese from Grade 3. At that time, her classmates and she only learned *pinyin* (i.e., the phonetic form of Chinese to denote pronunciation) and had Chinese class only once a week. Their Chinese teacher was a Uyghur, and taught Chinese mostly in Uyghur. Recounting her Putonghua learning experiences, Mary shared:

Excerpt 5:

We only had Chinese class once a week. I felt that I learned nothing in elementary school because I couldn't speak Chinese. … It was in my Grade 6 when I was preparing for the *Neichu ban* admission exam that I started learning Chinese seriously. Our local Education Bureau requested that all students who planned to apply for *Neichu ban* must go to a training course to study Chinese. … After the course, I think my Chinese improved a little bit, and I passed the admission test, but I still couldn't speak Chinese well. … When I read Chinese texts, sometimes I felt I got it, but I was never completely sure. (Mary, Interview 2, 04/08/2017).

The excerpt above showed that Mary only acquired basic Chinese proficiency at her elementary school. The intensive Chinese program, while effective in preparing Uyghur students for the *Neichu ban* admission examination, offered little help in improving students' oral proficiency in Mandarin Chinese. According to Mary, her Chinese teacher of Uyghur-ethnicity in elementary school mainly taught them how to read words and the passages in Chinese, and had the students repeat them again and again. Lacking proficiency in Putonghua herself, the teacher lectured mostly in Uyghur in class. Given the minimal class time (i.e., once a week) assigned to Chinese lessons, students paid very little attention to learning Chinese. When asked what she has learned in elementary school, Mary noted:

Excerpt 6:

We basically learned from textbooks and the teachers…. I felt that I didn't learn

much from the textbooks because there were too many words or expressions that we

don't often use in daily life. The contents were kind of outdated. If we don't have the

opportunities to use the language, we are not motivated to learn them, right? … I

think what the teacher taught us was just very limited. (Mary, Interview 2)

It can be seen from the excerpts above that the fact that Mary was thus introduced to

basic Putonghua through her Chinese teachers, the textbooks and the school curriculum.

According to Mary, the teachers in her elementary school were not professional and "were

often absent and let the students learn by themselves". Mary's description of how she learned

Chinese and what she had learned corroborates with the findings of Yang (2005) and Han et

al. (2016) which underscored the general lack of qualified Uyghur teachers who are

proficient in Chinese and learning materials in local *minzu* schools, especially the ones in less

developed areas, in Xinjiang. In accordance with the *Measures on the Implementation of*

Compulsory Education that was passed by XUAR government in 1988, *minzu* schools use

vernacular language as the medium of instruction to educate ethnic minority students with

their native languages and cultures; by contrast, and to respond to the national policy that

promotes Putonghua, Chinese was introduced to the school curriculum from Grade 3 in

elementary school. However, as the interview excerpts demonstrated, Chinese was treated

merely as a foreign language and was taught minimally in Mary's school. Consequently, the

curriculum failed to motivate Mary and her fellows to invest in learning Chinese and to

prepare them to communicate in the language.

Neichu ban in Karamay. In spite of these educational constraints, Mary was a top student in her elementary school. In her 5th year, the Karamay (a prefecture-level city[3] in North Xinjiang) government started to develop the *Neichuban* program. To better acquire the linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Darvin & Norton, 2015) associated with Mandarin Chinese and to obtain a quality education, Mary's open-minded father decided to send her to the No. 3 Middle School Foreign Language Experimental School in Karamay (1,075 miles from Mary's home village) which offers a *Neichuban* program inside Xinjiang, upon her graduation from elementary school. The middle school that Mary attended is among the top middle schools in Karamay, with English education being its primary strength. While still located within Xinjiang, Mary's new school exposed her to an educational setting where Putonghua was the medium of instruction. At this school, Putonghua was promoted over minority languages, which were considered to be backward and to have less cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Overall, Mary appreciated her *Neichuban* experience very much because the school was well-resourced with advanced learning facilities and equipment such as computers and well-trained teachers. More importantly, the self-disciplined and hardworking students formed a supportive and conducive learning atmosphere which she hardly experienced in her elementary school. In addition, the school offered a good immersive Chinese-speaking environment with many of the Chinese teachers being of Han ethnicity and the student body being a mix of Uyghur and Han from the Karamay area. Given the better learning resources available to her and environment, Mary made great progress in her Chinese learning, as she disclosed in the following excerpts:

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[3] The administrative regions of the PRC can be divided into four levels: Provincial-level regions include municipalities (e.g., Beijing, Shanghai), provinces, and autonomous regions (e.g., XUAR); prefecture-level regions include provincial capital cities (e.g., Urumqi), prefecture-level cities (e.g., Karamay), regions (e.g., Hotan, Akesu), autonomous prefectures and leagues; county-level regions include municipal districts, counties (e.g., Yutian County, Kuche County), and autonomous counties, etc; town-level regions include towns which administer local villages (e.g., Qiangge).

Excerpt 7:

The Chinese course was taught exclusively in Chinese in *Neichuban* because we also had Han students in our class. It was the first time that I had formal Chinese instruction. The experience was very special because we were not allowed to read and speak any Uyghur in class. Our textbooks were all written in Chinese, and the classes were all taught in Chinese. (Mary, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

Excerpt 8:

Because everyone was speaking Chinese, at least in class, the language learning environment was very good. For example, when I just entered middle school, I could hardly follow the teacher, but as I listened more, I felt more comfortable listening to Chinese. … I just listened to teachers' lectures in class and my Han classmates' conversations after class. … It was just like, I didn't need to learn something on purpose, I just immersed myself in the environment, and I could pick up the language a lot more than learning the language in the classroom. … It was like, the more you use Chinese, the better your Chinese proficiency will be. It's a natural process. (Mary, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

As noted, Chinese was the medium of instruction in Mary's middle school, and Uyghur students were not allowed to speak and read Uyghur in class. Mary considered it a unique experience which laid a solid foundation for her subsequent Chinese learning. Given her relatively low proficiency in Chinese, Mary struggled with her school work in the first year of middle school. With limited exposure to spoken Chinese in elementary school, she could hardly understand spoken Chinese; however, Mary strategically took advantage of being exposed to spoken Chinese in and out of class in her *Neichuban* program by paying

64

attention to her teachers' lectures and Han friends' conversations. Such investment complemented her formal Chinese instruction and helped her get used to spoken Chinese "naturally".

What made Mary's middle school experience even more challenging was that English was introduced to the curriculum. Mary had to learn English as a third language through Chinese, a second language that was still in the course of being developed. To enhance her Chinese proficiency, Mary seized every possible opportunity to study Chinese. When asked what efforts she had made, Mary shared:

Excerpt 9:

I just followed the teachers' requirements and did whatever the teachers asked us to do, and it worked well for me. For instance, our Chinese teacher asked us to recite Chinese passages because we could practice our pronunciation that way. … I remember our school finished at 10pm every day, and we were required to go to bed by 10:30pm. The school would black out the power in the dorm building, and there was a supervisor who walked around the corridor to check if we were in bed or not. After she left, I often wrapped myself in a blanket and used a flashlight to read and recite Chinese. (Mary, Interview 4, 06/26/2017)

One might question the pedagogical value of recitation to acquire a language. However, such a pedagogical practice enabled Mary to exercise her Putonghua pronunciation and to develop a better "语感" (*yugan*, language intuition) in Chinese. Mary attributed her success in language learning to her "语感" to a large extent, which enabled her to excel in Chinese tests and to "pick up the language" from the surrounding environment quickly. Remarkably, Mary managed to successfully navigate her middle school by complying with

the school curriculum that prioritizes Putonghua and by following her teachers' guidance which she believed would help enhance her linguistic capital associated with Mandarin Chinese.

Neigao ban in Shanghai. Mary's investment in learning Chinese in and out of class, as well as in other subjects, subsequently qualified her to apply for a *Neigaoban* program. Upon her graduation from *Neichuban* in Karamay, Mary was admitted to a *Neigaoban* program in Shanghai, a cosmopolitan city in East China, which is 2818 miles away from her hometown. It was in Shanghai that her investment in acquiring Mandarin Chinese was further elevated. Like her middle school in Karamay, the high school that Mary attended was very well resourced, with 80% of the teachers obtaining an intermediate-level professional certificate (with 2 out of the 120 teachers obtaining a superior-level certificate, and 53 obtaining an advanced-level certificate), with many of them having won awards for their outstanding teaching and research abilities. Unlike her middle school, where students were still used to communicating in Uyghur after class, being immersed in a classroom and high school context where she was constantly interacting with Han teachers and students from other ethnic minority groups who did not share the same mother language (i.e., Uyghur) by using Putonghua further reinforced Mary's Chinese language development. Coming in with a fairly good knowledge of Putonghua, Mary did not encounter major communication barriers at her high school where Mandarin Chinese was the dominant language. In addition, the Chinese courses, in particular classic Chinese, she took further increased her linguistic capital, as revealed in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 10：

In high school, we learned many ancient Chinese poems and prose, which was a bit challenging for me. We had to understand the contents of the prose and memorize

66

many of the passages. You know, a lot of words were used differently in ancient times, and I had to memorize them one by one. … I learned from my Han friends that they did the same thing when they were learning ancient Chinese, and many of them hated this part. But I liked it because I think it improved my literacy level in Chinese. … Knowing the history of a word helps with my understanding of its current meaning. It made me feel like a well-educated person. (Mary, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

As seen from this excerpt, Mary sought to establish a common ground with her Han counterparts by emphasizing that they also needed to make efforts to study classic Chinese, for the purpose of contesting the marginalized position of Uyghurs' knowledge in Chinese. Moreover, although the learning process was challenging, she considered the knowledge of ancient Chinese and classic Chinese writings as elite knowledge which helped her construct herself as a "well-educated" Uyghur intellectual.

Although Mary had spent 4 years in Shanghai before she joined FU, she did not have the opportunities to explore the city. Her only contact with native speakers of Putonghua were mostly at school because the school limited the off-campus activities of Xinjiang students to protect their safety. To compensate for their lack of extracurricular activities, the school organized a movie night every weekend, which exposed Mary to a variety of movies, both in Chinese and in English. Lacking opportunities to interact with native speakers of Mandarin Chinese, Mary regarded movie-watching as a resource to improve her language proficiency because she was exposed to "standard Putonghua" and a variety of dialects of Chinese.

Excerpt 11:

Yaqiong: How did you like the movie night?

Mary: I liked it very much. … Chinese is not my mother tongue, so I felt happy when I found I could understand the movies. It was good for my proficiency in Putonghua because the actors mostly speak standard Putonghua in the movie. But you know what, the movies were not always in standard Putonghua, there were many cases that the actors use a dialect to project a certain image. I think that's very interesting, and I felt that I'm communicating with real people, people with different dialects and accents.

Yaqiong: Did you need subtitles?

Mary: I didn't need subtitles for Chinese movies, but for English movies, I often refer to the Chinese subtitles for comprehension.

(Mary, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

The conversation above illustrates that Mary not only invested in learning "standard Putonghua," but also expanded her linguistic repertoire by exposing herself to a variety of dialects and accents of Chinese through the activity of movie-watching. Notably, Mary was also able to capitalize on her Chinese literacy to gain access to English movie, the learning of which further increased her linguistic capital. In short, through watching English movies, Mary positioned herself in a way that gave her access to linguistic resources that were not available in language classroom.

University in Nanjing. Mary's investment in learning Chinese continued to her university education. Although Chinese was not taught as a school subject in universities, Mary's Putonghua learning journey continued after she joined FU. Being a competent Chinese speaker, Mary seldom encountered communication problems in a university

68

community. However, when asked if there were occasions when she thought her Chinese proficiency was insufficient, Mary shared:

Excerpt 12:

When my Han classmates were chatting, they may use some new Internet words and expressions. I couldn't get the meaning immediately. I had to ask my classmates or *baidu*[4] for the meaning. … I'm an active and humorous person. I also like using the funny Internet words and 段子 (*duanzi*, jokes) myself after I learn their meanings. … They are so funny, and I sometimes share them on WeChat[5]. … It's more like, I'm learning the new words and expressions in Chinese to stay on the same page as my Han friends. (Mary, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

It can be seen from the excerpt above that Mary regards her acquisition of new words used commonly on the internet and expressions in Chinese as a way to socialize with her Han counterparts who had better access to such linguistic capital, for the purpose of constructing identities as a competent Chinese speaker and a legitimate college student. Impressively, Mary was also an agile learner who is good at utilizing the internet and friends as resources to acquire the most popular words and expressions in Chinese. As she shared, whenever she encountered problems in learning languages or in other aspects of life, she turned to *Baidu* or her friends for assistance. As WeChat gained prevalence, more and more people chose to post on WeChat friends circle to a closed group of friends for socialization purpose. Mary is an active WeChat user, and posts mostly in Chinese. That WeChat is utilized as a way to socialize with her friends who speak Chinese, and thus who often served as a valuable resource is illustrated in the next excerpt:

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[4] Baidu, like Google, is a searching engine, enjoying the largest Chinese netizen population.
[5] WeChat is the most widely used instant messaging and networking application in China.

Excerpt 13:

	Translation:
Mary 哪位仙女或者上仙有老汤（汤家凤老师）2018年的视频课资源？求分享😳 给点资源吧 Mary, WeChat Post, 06/10/17	Who has Lao Tang's (Teacher Jiafeng Tang) 2018 online course videos? Begging for sharing (a blush face). (Emoticon: a beggar says "please give me some resources" with an eager face)
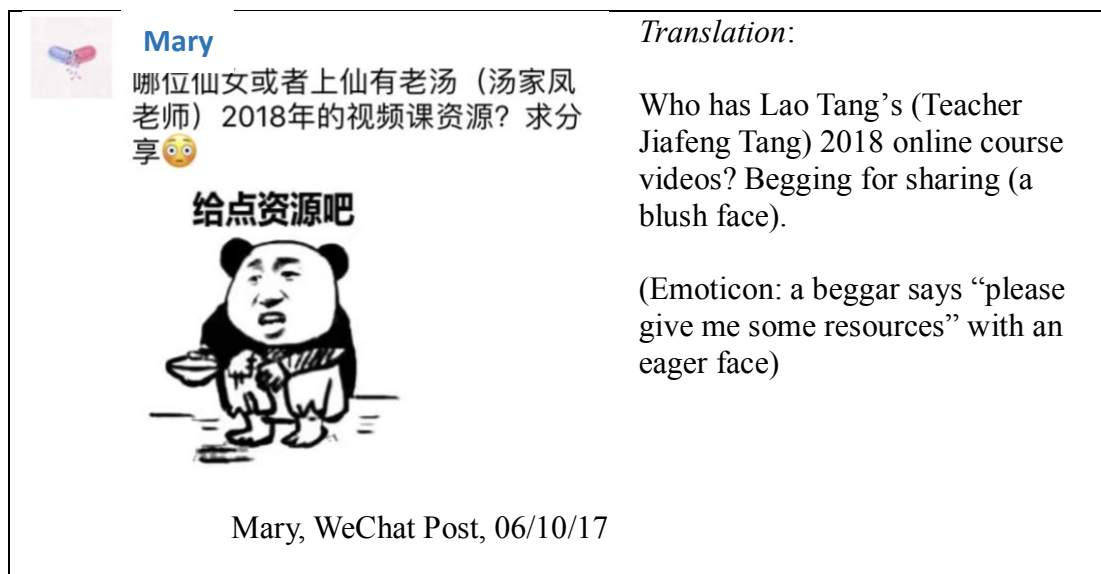
Figure 3. Excerpt of Mary's use of resources in social media

Mary wrote the above post to ask for an online course video to prepare for her graduate school admission examination, which shows that she was able to effectively mobilize the resources available to invest in her academic future. Out of class, Mary also strategically positioned herself in her cohort by volunteering to be one of the class chat group mediators on QQ[6], as the following excerpt revealed:

Excerpt 14:

I'm one of the most active students in our class, so I volunteered to be one of the group mediators. As you know, we only have four girls in our class, and the boys are too shy to take the initiative to talk to us. We four girls always sit in the first row in class, no boys sit next to us unless the instructor called someone to sit in the first row,

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[6] QQ is an online chatting platform which used to enjoy the largest user population before WeChat became popular. Developed by the same team, there is one unique function, however, that only applies to QQ. That is, in group chatting rooms, QQ has an online storage where group members can upload and share materials. Many people use both types of software to communicate and collaborate with each other.

haha. I didn't like it so I often turned to them to initiate the conversations. After several interactions, I gradually became friends to many male students in my class. … We had lots of fun! We went out for a barbeque party and had a Karaoke night last Friday. (Mary, Interview 4, 06/26/2017)

From Mary's perspective, the interactional opportunities afforded by these casual exchanges, such as classroom chatting, online chatting, and recreational activities, between her and her male classmates inspired her to approach Han students in the hope of enhancing her linguistic capital and extending her social circle. Thus, Mary positioned herself in a way that gave her access to linguistic resources that were not available in classrooms, thereby contesting the marginalized position of Uyghur students and further projecting herself as a competent Chinese speaker and a legitimate participant in her academic community.

Angela. Born to a peasant family in a village in Yutian County with an older brother and a younger sister, Angela received her elementary school education in a local *minzu* school where she started to learn Chinese at Grade 3. Recalling her Chinese learning experience in elementary school, Angela revealed:

Excerpt 15:

Uyghur was the medium of instruction when I was in elementary school. Chinese was just a subject. I started learning Chinese from Grade 3. We only learned some basic Chinese, like "Hello, my name is what what, what's your name," things like that. I couldn't speak much Chinese when I graduated from elementary school. (Angela, Interview 1, 02/22/2017)

Shuangyu ban in Hotan. Similar to Mary, Angela started learning Chinese from

Grade 3, and only acquired basic Putonghua when she finished elementary school. Unlike Mary, Angela continued her middle school education in a local bilingual school instead of attending a *Neichuban* program. There were three types of program in her middle school: normal class, bilingual class, and intensive class. Students in the normal class learned all the subjects through Uyghur; in other words, Uyghur was the medium of instruction. By contrast, students in the bilingual class and the intensive class learned all the subjects through Chinese. To better acquire Chinese, Mary attended a bilingual class. However, she was not exposed to more spoken Chinese, as she suggested in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 16:

Although we were supposed to learn all the subjects in Chinese, we seldom spoke Chinese in middle school. Our school was just a local school in the countryside, and our teachers were all Uyghurs who didn't have enough professional training. They often taught us in Uyghur. The textbooks, however, were written in Chinese. I remember in my first year, we studied 11 Chinese books. There has been a leap in my Chinese proficiency, at least in my reading ability. (Angela, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

The excerpt above shows that even though Angela did not have more opportunities to speak Chinese due to the lack of well-trained teachers, she increased her literacy level by extensively reading Chinese books. Inspired by her grandfather who was respected as the most knowledgeable person in her village, Angela believed that girls should be educated and that education could change people's lives. In her junior year in middle school, Angela watched a video about *Neigaoban* program, and was deeply attracted by the resourcefulness of schools in the inland. Suppressed by her traditional father who had arranged a marriage

for her, Angela had to fight for the opportunity to study in the inland. Her father even warned that he would cut Angela off from the family. However, with her grandfather's firm social and intellectual support, Angela managed to go to Nanjing for her high school education.

Neigao ban in Nanjing. Living far away from her family and the Uyghur-dominant culture for the first time, Angela was faced with unprecedented challenges from both life adaptation and school work. The high school Angela attended was the only school that offers *Neigao ban* program in Nanjing by the time she was admitted, therefore, she experienced unprecedented hardship and loneliness. To keep up with her academic performance in other subjects which were taught exclusively in Chinese, Angela's practice with spoken Chinese, however, was rather limited in her high school even though she was immersed in a Chinese-speaking environment in Nanjing. This is because other than speaking Chinese with their teachers, those Uyghur students had very few opportunities to communicate with Han students because they studied and lived separately from the Han majority on campus. Such a lack of opportunities to speak Chinese is further elaborated in the following excerpt when I asked Angela if Uyghur students tried to communicate in Chinese with their fellow Uyghur roommates:

Excerpt 17:

We tried to speak Chinese among us. We were like, 'okay, we should speak Chinese all day long from today', but the practice only went for three days. We were so used to speaking Uyghur that we didn't need to think too much before we spoke out. But for Chinese, we had to think over before we said something because our Chinese proficiency was very low. … And we actually didn't need Chinese to communicate. … Sometimes it was kind of a waste of time because your

73

communication got slowed down, and you may find the communications less effective, especially when you encountered some urgent occasions. (Angela, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

From Angela's perspective, the fact that there was no need to speak Chinese after class and the pressure from school work left her no extra time to further invest in Chinese learning, particularly speaking, in high school. However, Angela's Chinese learning in class was supported by affordances that took the form of extra reading materials that were provided by her Chinese teacher.

Excerpt 18:

We were faced with great pressure to be admitted to college, so we worked very hard in high school. I did pretty well in 语文 (*Yuwen*, Chinese) and English. … I enjoyed learning Chinese in high school because it is something that I have a knowledge of, and our Chinese teacher was awesome. She asked us to recite selected passages and classical Chinese prose. She also gave us extra materials to read out of class, like short novels and proses written by famous writers. (Angela, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

Having received elementary school and middle school education in Xinjiang, Angela lacked proficiency in both Chinese, the medium of instruction in high school, and English, a required subject in the College Entrance Examination (CEE). Although ethnic minority students benefited from the *Neigaoban* program, the policy of using the majority language—Putonghua—in the CEE, to some extent, marginalized ethnic minority students, whose Putonghua was not well developed and whose mother language was not valued. This

74

policy, however, could either reduce their access to tertiary-level education or if admitted, put them in a disadvantaged position, as one of Angela's high school teachers pointed out:

Excerpt 19:

Our *banzhuren* [i.e., class supervisor who takes charge of the whole class] encouraged us to use Chinese as much as possible. She said if we kept using Uyghur, we might not have the sufficient Chinese proficiency to deal with our major studies in college, let alone to compete with Han students. We might not even get the chance to go to college… She often reminded us that we were selected to come to the inland for education, so we should work really hard and try to integrate ourselves into the mainstream culture and to excel in the mainstream education system. She always reminded us that we can do as well as Han students. (Angela, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

The excerpt above showed that although the *Neigaoban* program provided students like Angela a good platform to receive quality education and to achieve social mobility, the current hegemonic curriculum in Putonghua did not recognize the ethnic minority talents. Coming into high school with a weak foundation in Chinese and English proficiency, these ethnic minority students had to deal with the school curriculum that prioritizes Mandarin Chinese and English, a second and a third language for them, respectively, and strive for college admission. They were expected to "integrate into the mainstream culture," which was believed to make these ethnic minority students competitive. The strengths of those students, such as multilingual proficiency and intercultural awareness, however, was rarely recognized in the current education system or in job market (Wang, 2016).

University in Nanjing. After attending Forest University, and immersed in a Chinese-speaking environment and surrounded by Han students, Angela experienced

another leap in her Chinese proficiency. Different from the goal of Chinese learning in her middle school and high school to score high in tests, Angela attached more value to communicative competence. The next interview excerpt underscores Angela's conceptualization of language learning:

Excerpt 20:

Now I'm learning Chinese more from daily life and by using it. I think after I entered college, I got more opportunities to use Putonghua in my daily life. As I said, I usually hang out with my roommates who are all Han, so my Chinese, particularly speaking, improved a lot. … You know what, in the beginning I still unconsciously spoke Uyghur with them, haha, but now I'm very used to speaking Chinese. … As you can tell, my pronunciation is not perfectly accurate, especially the tones, but I have no problems in understanding others and making myself understood. I think that's very important. … I can also follow the instructor in class and understand the textbooks. … I also like watching Chinese movies and TV dramas, and share what I watched with my friends. … I think that's enough for me. (Angela, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

Although happy with her achievement in Chinese learning, Angela indicated that there were occasions when she thought her Chinese proficiency was inadequate, especially when she was sick as she found it difficult to accurately explain her symptoms to the doctors. Such communication breakdowns made her very upset. These successful and unsuccessful communicate episodes underlined how Angela viewed learning Putonghua as a means to communicate effectively with others, to keep up with her major studies, and to solve the problems in her daily life. These communication opportunities afforded not only

helped Angela increase her linguistic capital, but also helped her construct an identity of a competent Chinese speaker. In the interview with Angela's best friend, Guo, who had known her for 3 years, Guo endorsed Angela's increased proficiency in Mandarin Chinese, and also noticed a growth in Angela's confidence:

Excerpt 21:

Yaqiong: Do you think Angela's Chinese proficiency improved?

Guo: Actually I didn't realize it because I have been with her almost every day, you know. But yeah, maybe. There should be some improvements. I remember when she just entered college, her Chinese was okay, but she was very quiet back then, and seldom took the initiative to talk to us. … Now I'm sure she won't have any problems in using Chinese to make herself understood. After all, she is almost using Chinese every day. … What's more important, I think she has become more and more confident in expressing herself.

(Guo, Angela's friend, Interview)

Being immersed in a Chinese-speaking environment and being able to use Chinese to communicate every day helped Angela construct an identity of a competent Putonghua user. As a Uyghur-Chinese bilingual, Angela also capitalized on her linguistic capital and served as a language broker (De Costa, 2010b) by helping her Uyghur fellows communicate in Chinese, such as reading documents and writing letters in Chinese, as well as serving as an interpreter when needed. Such linguistic capital also brought her economic benefits. To alleviate her parents' financial burden, Angela also took up a part-time job as a Uyghur-Chinese translator in her freshman and sophomore years. She worked for a Uyghur-run

company and earned 0.5 RMB for translating each sentence.

To further invest in her Putonghua learning for future career opportunities, Angela took the *Putonghua Shuiping Ceshi* (PSC, standardized spoken Chinese proficiency test; see Table 1 for more information of PSC). After completing the final exams in the Spring of 2017, Angela spent several days preparing for the proficiency test. However, she was not confident in obtaining the desired score (e.g., at least 80) in one trial, as she disclosed:

Excerpt 22:

When I was taking the test, I was totally at a loss. … I was so nervous that I couldn't control my pace of speaking. I spoke very fast. I kept telling myself 'slow down, slow down' because I could articulate more accurately when I speak slowly. I didn't even know what I was reading. … I know I couldn't get 80 points this time. I think I need to take it several times. (Angela, Interview 4, 06/26/2017)

Table 4.

Levels of Putonghua Shuiping Ceshi (PSC)[7]

Level	Grade	Score	Requirements
Level 1 (*Standard Putonghua*)	Grade A	97-100	Test-takers demonstrate accurate pronunciation, word choice and grammar, articulate naturally and fluently in reading and conversations.
	Grade B	92-96.99	Test-takers demonstrate accurate pronunciation, word choice and grammar, articulate naturally and fluently in reading and conversations with occasional errors in pronunciation and intonation.

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[7] Information retrieved from
https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E6%99%AE%E9%80%9A%E8%AF%9D%E6%B0%B4%E5%B9%B3%E6%B5%8B%E8%AF%95/406638?fr=aladdin

Table 4. (cont'd)

Level 2 (*Relatively standard Putonghua*)	Grade A	87-91.99	Test-takers generally demonstrate accurate pronunciation, word choice and grammar, articulate naturally and fluently in reading and conversations with a few errors.
	Grade B	80-86.99	Test-takers demonstrate a slight dialectal pronunciation, intonation, word choice, and grammar in reading and conversation with many errors.
Level 3 (*Ordinary Putonghua*)	Grade A	70-79.99	Test-takers demonstrate an obvious dialectal pronunciation, intonation, word choice, and grammar in reading and conversation with a lot of errors.
	Grade B	60-69.99	Test-takers demonstrate a distinct dialectal pronunciation, intonation, word choice, and grammar in reading and conversation with intelligibility issues.

As seen from Table 4, PSC places great emphasis on test-takers' pronunciation and intonation, which is a challenge to Angela due to her weak foundation in Putonghua. Talking about how she prepared for the test, Angela recalled:

Excerpt 23:

I read through the guidebook[8] and searched the internet for additional practice materials. The only way to prepare for the test is to read it out loud. I marked the unfamiliar words with the right pronunciation and tones, and I had my roommates correct me if I made mistakes. … Right before the test, we were given 10 minutes to prepare. I looked through the test items and tried to figure out as many unknown words as I can either by looking them up on my smartphone or by asking others. But

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[8] The PSC guidebook provides practice items for each section, including vocabulary, reading passages, and free-talk topics.

you know, we didn't have a solid knowledge of the Putonghua pronunciation and

tones at the first place, so even though you got everything prepared at the last minute,

you may forget once you are under stress, especially the tones. (Angela, Interview 4,

06/26/2017)

The two excerpts above showed that Angela acknowledged her weakness in

Putonghua, and worked hard to improve her pronunciation and accent. Although Angela

attached more value to intelligibility, she invested time in practicing Chinese pronunciation in

order to obtain a Putonghua certificate, a form of cultural and symbolic capital (Block, 2007),

which is also a prerequisite to securing a decent job in Xinjiang and across China. Having

known that she would fail her first trial in PSC, Angela looked frustrated and stressed out, but

she was still determined to take it one more time because of the economic and symbolic value

associated with the certificate. As one of the graduation requirements for ethnic minority

students in FU, the PSC certificate, which places great emphasis on pronunciation and serves

as a major gatekeeping criteria for future job opportunities, further placed linguistic minority

students like Angela in a disadvantaged position.

Babe. Unlike Mary and Angela, Babe was situated within a Putonghua-speaking

environment only after she was admitted to university in 2015. Being a *Minkaomin* who

took the CEE in Uyghur, Babe received education from elementary through high school

inside Xinjiang, and Chinese was learned only as a foreign language. Before coming to

Nanjing, she attended a preparatory program in Ningxia University which is located in a

major city (i.e., Yinchuan) in the west part of China (see Figure 1 in Chapter 3 for the exact

location) where she was taught Chinese, basic English, and courses related to the political

ideology of China. Recounting her Chinese learning trajectory, Babe noted in her journal:

Excerpt 24:

I started learning Chinese from Grade 3 in elementary school, a local *minzu* school

in my village—Qiangge. Chinese was a subject, and we just learned very basic

Chinese little by little, until Grade 6. I attended a local middle school in my village

and the situation was very similar to my elementary school. Chinese was a subject

and all the other subjects were taught in Uyghur. I remember we had a Chinese

teacher who used to be a *Minkaohan*, and she had perfect *Putonghua* pronunciation.

I wish I could speak Chinese as well as her one day. … After middle school, my

parents sent me to Kuche County for high school education because that school

offers better learning environment and more qualified teachers. I'm a *Minkaomin*, so

we learned all the subjects and took the CEE in Uyghur. Chinese was learned as a

foreign language. … Our Chinese teacher was Han in high school, and that was my

only contact with native speakers of Chinese before college. (Babe, Journal 1,

04/20/2017)

Although Babe had limited formal instruction on Chinese, her investment in learning

Chinese started in elementary school when her parents sent her to an intensive Chinese

training program in Kuche County (22 miles from Qiangge, her home village) during

vacations for three years. When asked about her opinion on learning Chinese, Babe attached

great value to it and saw Chinese as a capital that would bring benefits to her life in the

future, as the following excerpt reveals:

Excerpt 25:

I like learning Chinese very much, since elementary school. My father often told me

that I should learn Chinese well. He was very supportive and even read Chinese

along with me. He also bought a book, which inspired me to study hard. My father

hopes that I could study hard, find a decent job in the future, and live a happy life.

He thinks that mastering Chinese is the basis for all of these. He believes that

learning Chinese well is good for my future. (Babe, Interview 1, 05/26/2017)

As seen from the excerpt above, Babe's father served as a source of inspiration,

instilling in her the importance of learning Chinese and of education, and even granted

support to her by reading Chinese along with her. Babe's father further enhanced his

investment by sending Babe to an intensive Chinese training program in the county, which

laid a good foundation for her development in Chinese proficiency. From his perspective,

Mandarin Chinese was associated with economic and symbolic value which would help Babe

"find a decent job, and live a happy life" in the future.

Although Babe was not exposed to a Chinese-speaking environment until college, she

optimized the opportunity of being surrounded by Putonghua-speaking people at FU and took

the initiative to communicate with Han students, which has "become a part of [her] life." By

interacting with her friends, Babe also got feedback from them on Chinese, such as correcting

her pronunciation and the use of vocabulary. Her friends were "so generous and warm-

hearted to [her] that they offered [her] whatever help when needed" (Babe, Interview 3).

When asked what they talked about on a daily basis, Babe explained:

Excerpt 26:

We talk about everything, mostly about the hottest news, gossips, and what's

happening recently. You know, girls like to gossip, … When we read a book, watched

a movie, or listened to some music, we also like to share among us. I have a friend

who loves reading novels and she often keeps us posted on what's going on in the novels. I really enjoyed it. (Babe, Interview 2, 06/26/2017)

With the help of her friends and the interaction opportunities available to her, Babe's proficiency in Chinese increased greatly. Although she claimed that she had no major communication problems in Chinese after having spent two years in Nanjing, Babe kept investing in learning Chinese, especially in spoken Chinese and in developing the ability to "think in Chinese":

Excerpt 27:

I almost have no problems in daily conversations, and I can read Chinese books. But I think I still need to practice my speaking skill because sometimes when I was talking with my counsellor, I couldn't make myself completely understood. This made me anxious because I really wanted to let the counsellor know about my real feelings, which was very important because only if she knows my feelings could she figure out how to help me. (Babe, Interview 2, 06/26/2017)

Excerpt 28:

I think I'm very introverted and reserved when speaking Chinese because I have to think over a bit before I speak up. I need to make sure I can make myself understood. … I think I also need to read more Chinese books. When I read books in Chinese, I usually have to go back and forth to read the contents, trying to figure out what the author is really conveying here. As I told you, I have a friend who loves sharing the novels that she was reading. I hope I can do that one day. … I hope I can think in Chinese. That is, I want not only to understand the literal meaning, but also

be able to read between lines and to grasp the deep meaning. I can read fast and think

deeply when reading Uyghur, and that's my goal for learning Chinese. (Babe,

Interview 3, 09/18/2017)

It can be seen from the previous excerpts that Babe acknowledged her weakness in

speaking Chinese, and she was able to utilize her life counsellor as a resource to practice her

spoken Chinese and to cope with her psychological problems. What is striking in Excerpt 24

is that Babe regarded the ultimate goal of learning a language to be the ability to think in that

language. She sought to establish common ground with her Han friends by reading novels in

Chinese and by sharing what she had read among them, for the purpose of contesting the

marginalized position of Uyghurs in the university community. Babe also constructed herself

as a legitimate Chinese speaker by developing the ability to "think in Chinese," which

distinguishes superficial and deep learning of Chinese.

Although she was still in the process of developing her Chinese proficiency, Babe

sought the opportunity to turn her linguistic capital into educating talented Uyghur youth in

her former middle school who were enrolled in a summer intensive Chinese training program

for one month. These youths were selected by the local Education Bureau. The program was

designed to train those who wanted to have extra instruction on Chinese, and the course was

taught in Chinese. Babe was assigned to a class with more than 50 students who had some

basic knowledge of Putonghua. She was very excited about this experience and felt proud of

herself when the students called her 'teacher'. When asked how she taught the course, she

recalled:

Excerpt 29:

Babe: There were two parts. One part in the morning, and one in the

afternoon, with each part lasting for three hours. In the morning

section, we taught vocabulary and reading passages; in the afternoon

section, we did exercises.

Yaqiong: How did you teach the reading passages?

Babe: I started from the vocabulary by explaining the meaning, and then I

had the kids make a sentence using the vocabulary. I usually directed

the students to the vocabulary in the passages so they could better

understand the meanings. After going through the new words, we

read the passages together. I usually had the students read after me,

sentence by sentence. Then I explained the meaning of each sentence

and introduced the main idea of the passage. … If they still had

questions regarding the vocabulary or some sentences, I would go

through them one more time.

(Babe, Interview 3, 09/18/2017)

It can be seen from the previous excerpt that Babe adopted a rather traditional

approach to teach Chinese, starting with vocabulary, followed by guided passage reading, and

ending with exercises. As mentioned, to better learn Chinese, Babe's parents sent her to an

extracurricular training program in Kuche County since Grade 6 in elementary school till

Year 2 in middle school. When asked if her Putonghua learning experience had an impact on

her pedagogy, she noted:

Excerpt 30:

I think my way of teaching was somewhat influenced by my teachers in the Chinese

training program. … At the beginning, because of our low proficiency in Chinese, the

teachers often asked us to write down the new words 5 times or 10 times, and to make a sentence for each word. That was the homework. From middle school, the teachers required us to recite some passages. The students I taught were very good. They were all smart kids, so I also required them to recite some passages. I have to admit that recitation is pretty challenging; you can't recite something that you don't know the pronunciation and that you don't know the meaning, right? This method is for someone who already has some knowledge of Chinese, and I think it's the best method for my students. It's good for their pronunciation. … I also asked them to write a diary, recording what happened on each day, and I read all of them and gave feedback. (Babe, Interview 3, 09/18/2017)

It was interesting to learn from the previous two excerpts how Babe capitalized on her newly acquired linguistic capital and transferred her Chinese learning experiences to teach her fellow Uyghurs, and thus cast herself as an expert and educator. She was also able to critically adopt and modify her Chinese teachers' way of teaching to better suit her students' needs by encouraging them to recite passages and to write diaries, which she believed were valuable practices for these children to develop their Chinese proficiency. By reiterating the importance of learning Chinese to her students, and by acting as a role model to inspire them, Babe enjoyed the rewards of her investment in Chinese learning and felt "a sense of achievement."

As the analyses thus far have revealed, the participants reported that they invested in Chinese learning in various ways, and their Putonghua proficiency was improving in different aspects. By immersing themselves in a Chinese-speaking environment and by constantly interacting with Putonghua-speaking people, they appeared to be expanding their opportunities for a successful possible future (Norton, 2013). In short, in keeping with Darvin

86

and Norton's (2015) model of investment which looks at the intersection between ideology, identity and capital, the four girls' ideology towards Putonghua solidified their investment in learning the language and led them to position themselves as good Chinese language learners. Also noteworthy is how their personal language ideologies with respect to learning Chinese aligned with the ideologies that circulated at the school-level and the macro national level. The four women's Chinese learning trajectories also present a picture of how a young female Uyghur managed to achieve identity reconstruction by exerting her respective agency. In sum, Mary, Angela and Babe moved from being a marginalized and incapable student to a competent and legitimate participant (Wenger, 1998) of FU, a Chinese-dominant community, by investing in learning the dominant language to accumulate adequate knowledge and skills. Given the importance of Chinese in their lives, I turn next to the role it played in their academic futures.

Chinese as a key to academic success

Nine percent of the population of the People's Republic of China (PRC) is composed of ethnic minority people. Ethnic students in the PRC, like ethnic students worldwide, face considerable obstacles to getting a good education in general. Apple (2004) argued that "Education... is... a site of conflict about the kind of knowledge that is and should be taught, about whose knowledge is 'official' and about who has the right to decide both what is to be taught and how teaching and learning are to be evaluated" (p. vii). As observed by Apple, power inequalities exist in education, that is, the role of education is often to serve the will of the majority and the culture of the dominant group. In this hegemonic discourse, ethnic minority learners are often cast in a disadvantaged position. They generally have no voice in determining the content and form of the curriculum, and have to follow what is stipulated for them in terms of what kind of knowledge is to be learned. Despite the existing power relationship, a tiny percentage of Chinese minority youth did successfully complete high

school and were admitted to college. Although some may benefit from the preferential policies for university admission, they discovered ways to function effectively in a dominant culture, using a language other than their native one. Complying with the national language policy that promotes Mandarin Chinese, the participants in this study regarded Chinese learning as being key to their academic success.

As mentioned, Adi attended *neichu ban* with good speaking and listening abilities in Putonghua, which helped her easily stand out on all the school subjects:

Excerpt 31:

My Chinese was very good. I studied all the courses easily because those courses were taught in Chinese. I was the top student in my school. Unlike my Uyghur classmates who had to spend a lot of time learning Chinese, I could devote my time in learning the school subjects. (Adi, Interview 1, 02/21/2017)

Mary's first transitional year in middle school was challenging. Apart from the fact that she had to cope with a curriculum that was primarily in Putonghua, English was introduced to the curriculum, which she had no previous knowledge of. When asked about her learning of English, she recalled:

Excerpt 32:

I attended *Neichuban* in which I learned Chinese and English at the same time. In my first year, I struggled a lot. My Chinese was not good at that time either, and English was taught in Chinese. I couldn't understand anything [of English]. … I remember everyone else did very well in the first English exam, with an average score of 90 or so. Only I scored 80 points. I felt very bad. … From my second year in *Neichuban*,

my English got a little better as my Chinese proficiency also increased. (Mary, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

Excerpt 33:

When I think back, it may be because of my low Chinese proficiency that I couldn't learn the English grammar well at the first place. When we started learning English, I couldn't understand what a clause was and what preposition means in Chinese. I learned English mostly out of my intuition at that time. … So a good command of Chinese is the foundation of everything, not only of English learning, but also of the other subjects, because we learned everything through Chinese. (Mary, Focus group interview 1, 06/28/2017)

The excerpts above revealed that Mary associated her improvement in English with her increased proficiency in Chinese. From Mary's perspective, competence in Putonghua is the prerequisite linguistic capital for competence in other languages, in this case, English. The importance of learning Chinese was further elaborated in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 34:

I didn't do well in my first and second years in middle school because of my low Chinese proficiency. As I told you, all the subjects were taught in Chinese, and I couldn't understand what the teachers were saying. I was very frustrated at that time. Then I figured out that if I wanted to do well in school, I had to learn Chinese well first. So I worked really hard on Chinese, and caught up gradually and finally became a top student in my class. (Mary, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

As seen from the excerpts, Mary attributed her academic success to her increased proficiency in Chinese. Being reflexive on her poor performance in school, Mary started to realize that to excel in the curriculum that promotes Chinese, she had to make strong efforts to improve her Chinese proficiency. More importantly, by investing in Chinese learning, Mary was able to develop effective learning habits that had a profound influence on her subsequent language learning:

Excerpt 35:

I think my middle school experience helped me develop some good learning habits. … For example, my Chinese proficiency was very low at the beginning. My Chinese teacher asked me to go to her office every day and to write down the Chinese vocabulary again and again until I memorized them. She also asked me to read them out while writing. I think it was a very good habit. Before that, I just did rote learning and it didn't help with my learning very much. I realized that the more I write and the more I read, the better I will remember them. … This way of learning languages has a great influence on me. I'm still using this method to memorize English words. (Mary, Interview 5, 09/18/2017)

Mary's investment in learning Mandarin Chinese facilitated her academic progress in other school subjects, which led her to navigate China's mainstream education system successfully. Being a receiver of an academic scholarship as a result of her strong academic performance, Mary commented on some of the *Minkaomin* students' poor performance in school:

Excerpt 36:

I know some *Minkaomin* students from *Yuke ban* [the two-year preparatory course].

When I spoke Chinese with my Han classmates, they [*Minkaomin*] could hardly understand, and they couldn't say the most basic thing in Chinese. I think communicating in Chinese with them is very difficult. … What is more difficult is that they learned all the subjects in Uyghur so that they don't know what the teacher talks about in class. For example, they only know the Uyghur words for some academic terms, and can only figure them out if you write down the formulas. This has made their academic studies extremely difficult. … I feel very sad for them because many of them do want to learn something but they can't because of the language problems. … Many of them just gave up, making minimal efforts to score 48 in exams and graduate with a college diploma. (Mary, Interview 1, 02/21/2017)

In Mary's opinion, one factor that impacted *Minkaomin*'s poor academic performance was their "language problems". That is, not being able to understand and speak Putonghua restricted their access to academic knowledge, and the "48 points as passing score" policy further demotivated them to invest in learning Chinese and their major. Babe made a similar point during the interview. Given her late immersion in a Chinese-dominant context, Babe encountered challenges from many aspects. Aside from the need to adapt herself to the unfamiliar environment, the biggest challenge came from her academic major. Different from many other *Minkaomin* students who made little effort on their major study, Babe made a considerable investment in improving her Chinese proficiency and managed to overcome the "language problems," trying to construct herself as a good Chinese learner.

Excerpt 37:

Yaqiong: What was the biggest difficulty that you have encountered?

Babe: I think the biggest challenge is my major study. As you know, I'm *a*

            Minkaomin, and all my textbooks were written in Uyghur, and I

            learned all the subjects and academic terms in Uyghur. After I came

            here, all the books were written in Chinese, which was very difficult

            for me. My Chinese proficiency was not high, so I struggled to make

            sense of everything, let alone the terminology in our major. It was

            really difficult at the beginning. I was not used to reading Chinese.

Researcher: What did you do if you couldn't understand the textbooks?

Babe: I looked up in the dictionary and asked my roommates for help. …

            It's been 2 years now, and I almost have no problems in following the

            instructor in class and in reading the textbooks.

                                                            (Babe, Interview 1, 05/26/2017)

As a *Minkaomin* herself, Babe also recognized her limited proficiency in Chinese as a big challenge in pursuing her major. During the interviews, Babe expressed her concerns about *Minkaomin* students who held a playful and negative attitude toward studying in inland China. More importantly, the lack of language support encountered by them further exacerbated their situation. When asked what the school could do to help *Minkaomin* students engage in academic activities, Mary suggested:

Excerpt 38:

I hope the school could make some efforts to help these *Minkaomin* by arranging extra training courses for them. You can select several Uyghurs whose Chinese are good to take turns to teach them Chinese regularly. Knowing Chinese is the basis of everything else, seriously. (Mary, Interview 1, 02/21/2017)

Both Mary and Babe revealed that whether one has sufficient competence in Putonghua is a determining factor that impacts an Uyghur student's academic achievement and identity in dominant culture. This is consistent with previous finding (e.g., Chen & Postiglione, 2009). While schools are often designed to offer people from all backgrounds a route to social mobility, they are also considered sites for social and cultural reproduction (Lee, 2001). As one element of social structure, schools value the dominant language and cultural norms, which reinforce what it means to be a "good student," and advantage those coming from the dominant culture and disadvantage those from the minority backgrounds. Ethnic minority elites therefore face the pressure to become new members of society by taking on new identities. Research on acculturation patterns of immigrant students has shown that immigrant students who choose to conform to the dominant culture are more likely to develop a school identity and to gain social resources to achieve academic success (Bartlett, 2008; Davidson, 1996; Martínez- Roldán & Malavé, 2004). By contrast, studies on immigrant students found that oppositional identities are associated with academic disengagement and academic failure. For instance, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argued that involuntary immigrant students develop oppositional identities as they realize the injustice and limited career opportunities for them after graduation. In an ethnographic study on Mexican American students, Valenzuela (1999) made a similar argument. She found that the uncaring pedagogy and curriculum in the school, coupled with the Mexican American students' recognition of the structural barriers and the unequal treatment they receive at school, contributed to the development of their non-school identities. These oppositional identities led to students' disengagement with academic activities. Admittedly, whether immigrant students develop compatible or oppositional identities is not the only path to academic success (Davidson, 1996; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gandara, 1996); however, the female Uyghur students in this study attributed their success in school to their active

accommodation to the mainstream expectations by improving their proficiency in Mandarin Chinese.

To conclude this section, the minority students involved in this study regarded the learning of Chinese as an essential part that ultimately led to their academic success in the dominant culture. Graduating from college in the inland means a better job, a higher salary and an increased ability to provide for family members, especially in ethnic minority areas. By constantly investing in Chinese learning in various ways, the participants managed to construct themselves as competent Putonghua speakers and legitimate college students.

Multilingual development and negotiation of Uyghur elites

Rather than holding consistent attitudes towards learning Mandarin Chinese, the Uyghur women involved in this study were found able to mobilize repertoires of linguistic resources and other symbolic capital to facilitate their identity negotiation across diverse communities.

For example, being a Uyghur-Putonghua bilingual allowed Mary and Angela to translanguage between the two languages, as the following excerpts revealed:

Excerpt 39:

Yaqiong: Do you have problems switching between Uyghur and Putonghua?

Mary: Not really. I use Uyghur naturally when I meet Uyghur friends, and use Chinese when meeting Han friends. I feel very comfortable speaking Chinese. But sometimes I mixed the two languages with Uyghur friends. For example, there are certain words that we don't know how to say in Uyghur, we will use Chinese words instead.

(Mary, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

Excerpt 40:

You know what, we often mixed some Chinese words with Uyghur, haha. For example, we don't have a word for *cesuo* [restroom] in Uyghur, so we often said '[in Uyghur] shall we go to *cesuo*?' … It has become a habit. I often mixed Chinese and Uyghur with my younger sister at home, so even our parents have no idea what we were talking about. … Most of my Uyghur friends here talk like that. (Angela, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

By switching between Uyghur and Putonghua, Mary and Angela seemed to take on a new identity— that of an educated Uyghur—that allowed them to capitalize on their linguistic resources to communicate effectively with youth from their hybrid identity group, which excluded people who had little knowledge of Putonghua. This point invites comparison to Guo and Gu's (2016) finding that their Uyghur participants rejected using Putonghua with Uyghur peers to preserve the purity in their use of the mother tongue. While the participants in Guo and Gu's study considered code switching between Uyghur and Putonghua as betrayal, the informants involved in this study tended to construct themselves as an educated Uyghur by translanguaging between the two languages. Also noteworthy is that my informants communicated mostly in Chinese among themselves in their online exchanges, as shown in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 41:

Figure 4. Excerpt of Uyghur students' online exchanges using multiple resources

As seen from the WeChat post above, a wide-ranging linguistic repertoire, including both Chinese and other semiotic resources, was appropriated to perform their desired hybrid identities. Furthermore, by bringing into play the emoticons, the participants sought to forge an identity that aligns with the majority, while also allowing them to preserve their Uyghur identity. In the following excerpt, Mary expressed her keen interest in using emoticons:

Excerpt 42:

Yaqiong: I noticed that you use emoticons a lot.

Mary: Haha, they are funny, and can express my feelings better than words.

Yaqiong: What is your favorite emoticon?

Mary: I like this emoticon series [show the emoticon to the researcher]. This

               series is very funny, and you can add whatever facial expressions and

words to express your feelings.

Yaqiong: I see a lot of people use this series.

Mary: Right. It's very famous. When I saw funny emoticons on Weibo[9] or

             my friends' WeChat, I would save them and use them later.

Yaqiong: Who generally comments on your postings?

Mary: Mostly Han friends and Uyghur friends who are in the inland.

Yaqiong: What about your Uyghur friends in your hometown?

Mary: They sometimes asked me what I said in the post in Uyghur, and I

             replied in Uyghur too. But they usually couldn't get my point. They

             had no idea why the emoticons were funny.

                                                    (Mary, Interview 5, 09/18/2017)

This dialogue reveals that although Mary kept her Uyghur identity by communicating with her Uyghur friends in their mother language, she aligned herself more with the dominant culture, which could not be translated into her native language. Therefore, she developed a 'local identity' and contested the position of 'non-local' by using semiotic resources that are only accessed by a certain group of people.

Another example of my participants' attempting to seek common ground with the mainstream college students is their use of internet buzzwords and popular expressions. Although Angela is perceived as a proficient Putonghua speaker, there were occasions where she still had communication difficulties. She gave an example to illustrate in the following excerpt:

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[9] Weibo, also called Micro Blogs, is a Chinese version of Instagram.

Excerpt 43:

I sometimes had difficulties in understanding newly created words, like Internet

words. … In my freshman year, I was talking to a child on the train. She said a word

奇葩 [*qipa*, used to mean 'outstanding work', but now is used more often to refer to

'freak'], and was very surprised that I didn't know the word. I felt embarrassed. There

were some words and expressions like this that I didn't know. I had to ask my

friends. … I learned quite some popular words and expressions, either in face-to-face

interactions or online. … I don't want to sound outdated. (Angela, Journal 2,

03/01/2017)

The excerpts above showed that through translanguaging and using emoticons, the

Uyghur women engaged in this study were able to mobilize their linguistic and semiotic

resources to communicate their feelings and more importantly, to contest their marginalized

position in the dominant culture, while also maintaining their Uyghur identity.

Thus, in spite of my participants' positive attitude towards Mandarin Chinese, they

valued their ethnic identity as Uyghurs. Framed within the modernist perspective of nation,

Uyghurs' ethnic identification and religious belongings seem to have been interpreted as

forms of 'non-conformity' (Martín Rojo, 2010, p. 263), threatening the nation's

homogenizing agenda (He, 2014). Furthermore, in response to the Urumqi riots of July,

2009 which involved Uyghurs rebelling against the Han Chinese government, and

subsequent violent events, overt expressions of Islamic belief, such as wearing a headscarf

or worshiping at a local mosque, might be constructed as symbolic support for violent

actions or ethnic separatism. A set of negative values (e.g., violence and separatism) was

thus attributed to and essentialized as part of Uyghur identity. When asked how important

belonging to a minority nationality group was to them, Mary, Angela and Babe reported that

being a Uyghur is their ethnic identity, and as educated Uyghurs, they hoped to do their best to make a good image for their nationality and to end the separation activities and misunderstandings between Uyghur and Han people.

It usually takes two to three days for Uyghur students to travel from Nanjing to their hometowns during their school break. To kill time during such a long journey, Angela used to borrow several Chinese books from the school library so that she could read them on the train or even at home. She was particularly interested in reading about how Han people perceive of and write about Uyghurs, as shown in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 44:

Most of the books just introduce the basic information of Uyghur, like what we eat, what we wear, where we live, the climate, our religious traditions, and stuff like that. I really hope that Han people can know us beyond these things. … Many of my Han friends said something like: 'I know you don't eat pork", or "You Uyghurs are good at singing and dancing!" I also read from the news that Uyghurs are often described as 'dangerous' people and 'separatists' in the inland. Many Han people also see us as pocket-pickers. I'm very sad about these comments and at the same time, I feel disappointed with the current situation of Uyghurs. I hope that Han people could know about our thoughts and that not all Uyghurs are separatists. We are not different from you guys. … I wish that my ethnic group could be respected by people in Xinjiang, and by people of our country one day. (Angela, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

This excerpt reveals Angela's concerns about the current situation of Uyghurs and her hope that Han people could understand them beyond superficial things such as food. It

also indicated her wish to subvert the negative image Uyghurs sometimes projected. When asked what she would do to change the current situation of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, Angela further commented:

Excerpt 45:

I hope to let my folks know more about the outside world and non-Muslims. I have been studying in the inland for 7 years and I know that misunderstandings exist between us and Han people. For example, Han people often think Uyghurs are dangerous and are pocket-pickers; Uyghurs often think Han people eat everything and we shouldn't dine with them. ... Whenever I go back home, I often talked about what happened here, the good things that my Han friends did to me, and especially the help that my best friend [Guo] offered to me. I always told my parents how nice Guo is, and how friendly my Han friends are. … My maternal grandparents used to object my decision to study in the inland, but now their thoughts have changed after I told them what I saw and experienced here. … I have to acknowledge that when I just entered this school, I behaved differently from the others. I wore scarf and never dined with my roommates. Whenever they ate inside the dorm room, I would leave. I went to classes on my own. I didn't communicate with anyone. I was very distressed at that time. I often asked myself, 'why did I come here?' It was Guo who offered me a lot of help to get me integrated in the new environment. I myself have changed a lot. Now my good friends are all Han, and I don't think I'm different from them anymore. I also hope that my Han friends can know more about Uyghurs through me. (Angela, Interview 4, 06/27/207)

Being a Uyghur-Putonghua bilingual, Angela enjoyed the privilege of speaking two

languages in a Chinese-dominant context. It is interesting to note that while she enjoyed free choice in terms of language use, she also seemed to play a positive role in facilitating communication and understanding between Putonghua and Uyghur speakers when misunderstanding occurred or was likely to occur. As this value of her bilingual competence as linguistic capital was realized in such a role she played, identities of communication facilitator were also constructed. Angela used to dream of becoming a teacher since she was young because she had seen how lagged-behind Uyghurs were due to lack of education. Although she decided to work in the area of her major—sewage and drainage engineering—after graduating from college, she kept open the possibility of being a teacher in the future. In Angela's mind, Uyghurs are smart but are in need of formal education. It is the lack of such education that made some Uyghurs easy prey for foreigners who manipulated and brainwashed them into becoming religious extremists and separatists.

Casting herself as a member of the Uyghur elite, Angela sought to educate her fellow Uyghurs by sharing what she had seen and experienced in the inland, in the hope of promoting intercultural communication between Uyghur and Han people:

Excerpt 46:

I'm very proud of myself. Compared with my relatives and friends who stay in my hometown, I managed to come to the inland for education, which is like studying abroad in their eyes. Also I can speak Putonghua and a little bit English, which is like a foreign language to them. My parents are very proud of me. I think I've broadened my vision and have seen a lot of things that they had never and would never see in their lives. ... I hope to bring back what I've seen and what I've experienced in the inland and to educate my Uyghur fellows. I wish to do my best to dissolve the misunderstandings between Uyghur and Han people. I also hope that

Han people could learn more of Uyghurs through me. I wish that eventually Han people would see us as an educated and literate group who stick up for national unity. (Angela, Journal 1, 02/01/2017)

As shown in her interview excerpts and journal episodes, Angela kept thinking about and made deep reflections on the severe situation encountered within Uyghur society and its people. Such ethnic tensions and the social problems that plagued Uyghurs may have aroused a sense of responsibility and commitment to her fellow Uyghurs within Angela.

Trueba and Zou (1994) observed that "the process of empowerment…seems to be rooted in their [students'] commitment to help their villages… to acquire knowledge, and through knowledge, prestige, status, honor and power to make changes" (p. 147). By intending to educate her Uyghur fellows in her hometown, Angela constructed herself as an elite Uyghur intellectual who was responsible for empowering her own people through helping them project a positive image as educated individuals who "stick up for national unity".

It was also heartening to learn about how Babe used Putonghua to help educate Han students about their religion, Islam. Putonghua subsequently became a means of stirring thoughtful discussion with her Han friends, many of whom knew little about the religious beliefs of Muslims, as disclosed by Babe in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 47:

I often celebrate our religious holidays with my Han friends. For example, on this year's Eid al-Adha that has just passed, I told them about what kind of holiday that is, how we celebrate the holiday, the origin of the holiday, and so on. … I don't mind talking about religion with my Han friends. It's a type of philosophy, and I welcome

102

this kind of discussions. (Babe, Interview 2, 06/27/2017)

In addition, my participants sought to contest Uyghurs' negative image as separatists by posting patriotic contents on WeChat during key national events. One such event was the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, whose opening ceremony on October 18, 2017 attracted world-wide attention. Both Angela and Babe shared the Congress-related information on WeChat to show their support to the Communist Party and the Chinese government, as seen in the following two WeChat posts:

Excerpt 48:

Angela

Translation:

[in Uyghur] Wish the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China a great success!

Angela, WeChat Post, 10/18/17

Figure 5. Excerpt of Angela supporting the government

Excerpt 49:

Babe

中国共产党第十九次全国代表大会开幕会

Translation:

[Thumbs up][Thumbs up][Thumbs up]

Reposting video clip of the opening ceremony of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China

Babe, WeChat Post, 10/18/17

Figure 6. Excerpt of Babe supporting the government

As data revealed, multiple linguistic and semiotic resources are appropriated and creatively used, which allowed participants to fit in with the local linguistic landscape. In the era of digital technology, mediated communication has constituted a critical site for social and recreational life (Gao & Tao, 2016; Thorn, Black & Sykes, 2009). The unprecedented linguistic diversity presented in media spaces creates the new means for identity representation and expression (Androutsopoulos, 2007; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Duff, 2015; Lam, 2004, 2009). The digital space affords Uyghur students a safer space for performing relationships and affiliations across communities, drawing upon multimodal resources and generating rich interactional means (Androutsopoulos, 2007; Lam, 2004, 2009; McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg & Saliani, 2007). As Lam (2004) contended, ethnic minorities in online communications are afforded "freedom in expressing an array of political and personal points of view with a lesser degree of self-censorship than they would be pressured to adopt in their respective societies' (p. 60). In the study, my participants expressed multiple affiliations and identities through multilingual practices, drawing upon various linguistic and semiotic resources, which might otherwise be constrained in face-to-face interactions. They expressed their patriotism and affiliation to the current and previous schools to contest the imposed stereotypes as terrorists and separatists associated with Uyghur. They distinguish themselves from other Uyghur members in using Chinese and adopting translanguaging practices to exhibit their identities as educated Uyghur and cosmopolitan ethos (Lam, 2004, 2009; McGinnis et al., 2007).

To conclude, this section shows that the participants sought to establish a common ground with their Han counterparts by using popular emoticons and learning newly created words and expressions, for the purpose of contesting the marginalized position of Uyghur's linguistic knowledge in the community. On the other hand, being Uyghur-Chinese bilinguals allowed them to capitalize on their linguistic resources to promote intercultural

communication between Uyghur and Han people.

Pennycook (2003) argues that "[i]t is not that people use language varieties because of who they are, but rather that we perform who we are by (amongst other things) using varieties of language" (p. 528). Therefore, we should be cautious of viewing Chinese in terms of linguistic hegemony, but view it as a local and situated performance operated with local languages and identity construction (Pennycook, 2004). As Canagarajah (2013) argued, good English performers are open to diversity and learn English from practice, whereby they consider the language learning and using opportunities as shared by all, and language use and learning are not separate processes. Similarly, my participants are well aware of the repertoire of resources they bring with them and those they acquire in the host context and are able to consciously appropriate the resources to contest their perceived lack of proficiency in Chinese, and to place themselves in desirable positions in interactions. In this sense, they were attempting to appropriate valuable symbolic knowledge to position themselves as educated Uyghur elites and to project a positive Uyghur image and an identity as successful language learners.

Future aspirations, restrictions, and dilemmas

The analyses so far have showed that the language learning process and their education experiences in the Chinese inland region provided the educated elites in my study with access to a wide range of symbolic and social resources. On the one hand, this empowered them to expand their understanding of their possible future (Norton, 2013); on the other hand, it presented them with a series of constraints and challenges to translating those symbolic resources into economic capital that could facilitate their upward social mobility.

With the Chinese government's decision to develop the economy of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) and the strategic role of Xinjiang in the Belt and

Road Initiative, an increasing number of Han people have moved to Xinjiang to seek development opportunities. To comply with the national language policy and to accommodate the needs of the rapidly growing Han population in Xinjiang, increasingly more documents and paperwork are written in Chinese. In Angela's words, "In my hometown, almost 50% of the public service is Sinicized, and it is very difficult for a farmer who doesn't know Chinese to get things done". The participants conceived of their future as being tightly associated with the linguistic capital that they have acquired.

As mentioned, Mary's father supported her attending *Neichuban* to help her better acquire Mandarin Chinese, a language that he believed could "make [their] life better":

Excerpt 50:

My father thinks that knowing Chinese will be very convenient in Xinjiang. There are many Han people living in Xinjiang nowadays, but not many Uyghurs can speak Chinese well. For example, my father does small business for a living. When he went to Urumqi where there were not many Uyghurs, he felt very inconvenienced because he found it difficult to communicate in Chinese. If people would like to make a deposit or withdraw some money from the bank, they might need help with the forms because the forms are all written in Chinese now. So my father thinks there should be someone in our family to learn Chinese and to make our life better. (Mary, Interview 1, 05/26/2017)

Similarly, Angela attached great value to Chinese because she foresaw the usefulness of Chinese in Xinjiang when she graduates and finds a job in her hometown. As noted by her:

Excerpt 51:

Knowing Chinese is very powerful, and people like us who are educated in the inland

are especially popular. We have attended college in the inland, and we are considered elites in Xinjiang because we can speak Chinese. … I would like to work on my major after graduation, such as a position in the local Institute of Planning. I'm preparing to take the examination, which is in December. But there are few related positions available in Hotan, and it's going be very competitive. If I couldn't get the position, I would work as a teacher in local schools. I think I know Chinese and some English, and I received my education in the inland, I will have many job opportunities in Xinjiang. (Angela, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

Knowing Chinese and being educated in the more developed east coastal area constructed Angela as an elite by her fellow Uyghurs in Xinjiang, which expanded her opportunities to securing a decent job in the future (Norton, 2013). The two-year experience of studying on the east coast of China also changed Babe's perspective on life. Through constant interactions with her Han friends, and friends of their friends who were studying abroad, Babe was inspired to explore more opportunities for her future:

Excerpt 52:

I have a dream. I hope to study abroad after graduating from university, either Germany or France. That's my goal of life. … I'm studying in the inland and can take care of my life without my parents' help, which is an achievement already. If I could go study aboard, that will be the best a girl can do. … I used to be an obedient girl, but now I want to challenge myself. I want to know my limits; I want to see how much I can achieve. … After I came here, I realized that there are many other options for my future. I know Chinese and English, and maybe German, I plan to study German, there are a lot of possibilities for the future. (Babe, Interview 1, 05/26/2017)

Excerpt 53:

Nowadays, most of the students in the inland are learning English, and most of the students in Xinjiang are learning Chinese. I think the fact that I know both languages can bring me benefits in the future. In my opinion, people who know Uyghur are at the base level, people who know Uyghur and Chinese are at a higher level, and people who also English are at the top level. (Babe, Interview 1, 05/26/2017)

In the latter excerpt, Babe perceived herself as a trilingual who is competent in Uyghur, Putonghua and English, and imagined herself as an elite who is at the top of the social hierarchy. Babe considered Mandarin Chinese and English as bearing higher value linguistic capital, which can "bring [her] benefits in the future".

The excerpts above show that one's language background has a considerable influence on people's social life in multilingual contexts, and confirms with previous research that competence in the language of a higher status, whether as a native or second language, brings advantages in both functional and symbolic terms (Brown, 2005), as well as opportunities for a successful possible future (Norton, 2013).

FU, as a host community, seemed to serve as an empowering space that offered the Uyghur women a pathway to realizing their imagined roles. Despite the multiple identities participants contested, negotiated and aspired to, their future possibilities seemed limited by a series of constraints, and they appeared to be caught between their hometown and the eastern cities:

Excerpt 54:

I want to live in Urumqi after graduation because it is the political, cultural and economic center of Xinjiang, and offers a better space for my future development,

well, compared to my hometown. … Although Nanjing is attractive, and I'm very used to the life style here, it's very inconvenient for my family to visit me. They don't know Chinese well and it's too far away from my hometown. If they come, I have to bring them here, and escort them back, otherwise they may get lost. Eating is another problem. … My parents are getting older now, so it's better that I stay closer to them. (Mary, Interview 4, 05/26/2017)

Aside from the physical challenges such as long distance, language, and food problems for their families. For example, Paier, a male Uyghur friend of my participants who was on the job market at the time of data collection, highlighted a more important reason for moving to back to their hometowns after graduation:

Excerpt 55:

It's very difficult for Uyghurs to find jobs here. I heard that if the companies know you are a Uyghur, they just throw your CV away. I think, for one reason, it's because of our religious beliefs. They don't want to get into trouble. Another reason, which is more important, is that we are considered as disadvantaged in language and in other abilities. There are thousands of Han college graduates who are proficient in Putonghua to compete for jobs each year, why would they choose us? (Paier, Interview, 05/26/2017)

The excerpts above suggest that Uyghur graduates' future career choices and their possibilities of finding a proper job were limited by both self-imposed and socially determined positions. On the one hand, their religious traditions tied them to the place where they were born and grew up; on the other hand, in the market economy, Putonghua has been conceived of as the gatekeeping standard and thus functions as a 'linguistic penalty'

(Roberts, 2013, p. 85), as minority graduates are denied opportunities because of their lack of linguistic competence in Chinese.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I traced my participants' Chinese learning trajectory from elementary school to university, and explored their perceptions of learning Putonghua as an ethnic multilingual student. In particular, I illustrated how the top-down Chinese language policy and the other circulating ideologies, which constructed Adi, Mary, Angela, and Babe as successful language learners, influenced how they positioned themselves and how they in turn were positioned by others. Their stories reflected some pains and gains that ethnic minority students experience while they strived to excel in the mainstream education system in China. Rather than resisting the dominant mainstream curriculum, my Uyghur participants adopted a collaborative and positive attitude toward the system. They overcame difficulties, and successfully negotiated their multiple identities in the dominant context. Significantly, these Uyghur women benefited from their investment in learning Putonghua by enlarging their pool of Han friends and by promoting intercultural communications between Uyghur and Han people. Analysis of the interview data and corroborating written data yielded the following key finding: Uyghur women invested in learning Chinese to achieve academic success in school and further secure a decent life in the future. The varied acts of positioning influenced by language and circulating ideologies, which collectively formed the Uyghur women's imagined identity as Uyghur elites, worked in potent ways to ultimately influence their language learning experience and their identity construction.

CHAPTER 5: ENGLISH LEARNING AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

In Chapter 4, I traced the four Uyghur women's Chinese language learning trajectories from elementary school through university. The findings revealed that having managed to navigate and succeed in China's mainstream education system, the Uyghur women in this study regard Mandarin Chinese (i.e., Putonghua) as an important form of linguistic capital that is associated with economic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1989, 1991). In this chapter, I explore how these female Uyghur students constructed and negotiated their identities in and through English language learning experiences as they moved from XUAR to study in an east coast university in China. Findings revealed that although positioned as disadvantaged learners in a discourse that valued English ability, through investing in learning English in various ways, my participants contested their ascribed identity as 'lagging behind' English learners and developed powerful identities, that of a positive heritage identity who negotiated within the academic community, and that of a 'good' English learner. The favorable identities thus forged were found to facilitate their participation in the host institution. However, these minority women also confronted a series of problems in learning English compared to their Han counterparts, which hindered their socialization into the mainstream society and upward social mobility. Moreover, despite the favorable positions in the host community that they negotiated, constructed and imagined, their perceptions of future possibilities were restricted by their ethnic affiliation and identity as women. They also faced potential challenges when attempting to translate their symbolic resources into economic capital, which, in turn, restrained them from further investing in English learning.

The data that are analyzed in this chapter are mainly from interviews, observational data, and documents collected during fieldwork. The following sections present the findings

generated from the data analysis.

Investment in learning English and identity construction

In this section, I briefly trace my participants' English learning trajectories and connect their respective experiences to their identity construction. The four female participants—Adi, Mary, Angela and Babe—had different levels of access to English and all followed different tracks due to their varied education backgrounds.

Adi. As introduced in Chapter 4, Adi was granted access to Chinese very early in her life by playing and interacting with Han friends in the military camp where her family used to live. Similarly, Adi also had an early exposure to the English language when she was in elementary school, as she recalled in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 1:

It was my uncle that inspired my interest in English. He just started a job when I was in elementary school. … I remember one day, he got a phone call so he went outside to answer it. I followed him out and found that he was speaking something that I couldn't understand at all. I just thought my uncle was so cool and I could see a halo around him. … After he hung up, he told me that I have to learn this language [English] well because it is an international language, and that it can open up a whole new world for me. He also said that this language is not difficult to learn as long as I work hard, and once I can use this language to communicate my thoughts, I would find it a *piece of cake*. … I didn't totally understand what 'international language' meant, I just wanted to become someone like my uncle. (Adi, Journal 1, 04/13/16)

Inspired by her uncle, Adi was intrigued by the idea that English is an "international language" that could "open up a whole new world" for her; such a concept seemed vague to

her when she was young. In her mind, however, being able to speak English makes one look "cool" and charming. More importantly, Adi's uncle placed great emphasis on being able to "use this language to communicate," which, to some extent, alleviated the stress associated with learning a new language and also cultivated a communication-oriented approach in her mind. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Adi attended *neichu ban* (i.e., boarding middle school inside Xinjiang) and *neigao ban* (i.e., boarding high school in east coastal cities) programs, and it was in *neichu ban* that she was officially introduced to English. She described her first English class as follows:

Excerpt 2:

The teacher came into the classroom without saying anything. Instead, she wrote something on the blackboard, and then asked each of us to pick an English name. It was until then that I realized that the teacher wrote 68 English names for 52 students, hoping that we could pick an English name that we like. I chose Maria. We did nothing for the rest of the class except for remembering our classmates' English names. Therefore, when the class ended, I could call all my classmates by their English names, even though I still couldn't tell what their Uyghur names were. I could tell, oh he is David, instead of Mamat [an Uhgyur name]. … The first class was so unique that I would never forget. (Adi, Journal 1, 04/13/16)

Impressed by her first English class, Adi became highly motivated to learn this language. Interestingly, she enacted a new identity by picking Maria as her English name, and she also started to recognize her Uyghur classmates by their English names. Also important to note is that Adi was equally invested in learning English in middle school, as the following excerpt reveals:

Excerpt 3:

I can say confidently that the reason why I learn English well comes from my interest and love for it. Everybody has his or her favorite course in middle school. Mine was English. I always finished English assignments first. Even with some seemingly unimportant steps in learning, like preview and review of each lesson, I always finished them first, as long as they are related to English. (Adi, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

Adi treated English seriously and has laid a solid foundation in English since middle school. As she recalled, her "love and interest" for English always made her prioritize English learning over the other subjects and motivated her to constantly invest in learning English. As a consequence, she did very well in every English test, which placed her as the top student in school. It turned out that the better she did in English, the more she liked it. This became what she alluded to as "a virtuous cycle". Her constant investment in learning English and other school subjects was vindicated because she subsequently gained admission to Chongming High School, a prestigious and well-resourced school, which offers *neigao ban* program, in Shanghai.

Despite a rather solid foundation in English, Adi still fell short of English vocabulary and comprehension ability compared to local students in her Shanghai high school. As Adi disclosed, the first year in *Neigao ban* was very challenging because she had to deal with the pressure associated with the dislocation and the stress from academic studies. In particular, the students from *Xinjiang ban* (i.e., class for students from Xinjiang) shared the same English textbooks with local students who "are very good at English and have a large vocabulary". Therefore, the English textbooks were very difficult and "seemed intimidating," which contained a lot of vocabulary that she had never seen before. To have a better

understanding of the textbooks, Adi had to "look them [vocabulary] up in the dictionary one by one," which was "very time-consuming and sometimes annoying." Nevertheless, Adi's interest in English did not fade away; rather, she continued investing in learning English by giving her full attention in class, finishing all the English-related assignments, and doing extra exercises. Noticeably, Adi was also able to take full advantage of the resources afforded (van Lier, 2004) in her high school. The following two excerpts highlighted Adi's appreciation of the language lab and the library in high school:

Excerpt 4:

My high school was very well-resourced. I remember that besides taking regular English courses, our teacher often took us to the language lab where we could practice listening skills. I had never seen a language lab like that. We only had public radio back in middle school. But in the language lab, each of us had access to one computer, and the teacher could monitor our performance on a host computer. … I liked that software program very much because the exercises were very interactive. There were many visuals, which could help with my comprehension. (Adi, Interview 2, 04/08/2017).

Adi described the language lab in her high school as eye-opening and expressed her preference toward the "interactive" exercises, which provided multimodal input in English. Besides making use of the language lab, Adi also capitalized on the resources in the school library. Encouraged by her English teacher who highly recommended students to read authentic English novels, Adi chose to read Jane Eyre's *Pride and Prejudice.*

Excerpt 5:

I was surprised by the English book collection in our library. I was very excited at my first sight of so many English novels. I wanted to read all of them! But honestly, I had no idea of what to read. Our English teacher suggested *Pride and Prejudice* because it was written by a female writer. … You know what, I didn't really like that novel at the beginning because the language was very different from what we have learned in class. There were a lot of detailed description of the scenery, a lot of description of clothes, and a lot of strange sentences, which scared me away. … I even questioned, is it real English? (Adi, Interview 2, 04/08/2017).

According to Adi, the language in the novel was "very different from what we have learned in class," and was not totally accessible to her at the beginning. The seemingly "strange" use of English in the novel even made her question the authenticity of the language. Given the academic stress and the challenges involved in reading the novel, it took Adi two years or so to finish reading the book. Along the way, she gradually expanded her vocabulary size and learned to appreciate the beauty of the writing. The most obvious benefit Adi gained was that she developed a better intuition for English. As she conceded, "although it was painful at the beginning, and I made up my mind to continue reading the novel for several times, it was worthwhile because I got a better sense in English". The intuition, or what Adi calls "sense", played an important role in her language learning and seemed to shape her conception of learning English, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

As seen from Excerpts 4 and 5, Adi was aware of the abundant English resources available to her and tried to exploit these resources to improve her English. Being positioned as incompetent English learners who lacked English vocabulary at the beginning of high school, Adi managed to exert her agency in taking advantage of the resourcefulness of the

high school in Shanghai and subsequently excelling in learning English. She later matriculated at Forest University with a grade of over 120 points (out of 150) for her English *Gaokao* (i.e., College Entrance Exam).

Adi's investment in learning English continued into her college education. In line with the national English education curriculum, all the freshmen at Forest University (FU) are required to take the College English course for at least 4 credits, which spans up to 2 semesters. As a *Minkaohan* student (i.e., students who took College Entrance Exam in Chinese) who received her high school education in Shanghai and had laid a good foundation in Chinese and English, Adi did not encounter any problems in making transitions to college life at FU and in coping with the College English course. By the end the first semester, Adi passed her College English Test—Band 4 (CET-4), which is a requirement for all the FU graduates except Uyghur and Tibetan students. She also passed CET-6 at the end of her freshman year, which made her English ability stand out among her cohorts. Stressed by her major study, which was Chemical Engineering, Adi stopped taking additional English courses because she had met all the requirements and wanted to better focus on her major coursework, which she thought was more important for her future development. Her passion and enthusiasm for English learning, however, still lingered, as she explained in her journal:

Excerpt 6:

On one night in my sophomore year, I was wandering around the campus with a friend. I talked about my experience in high school, and said that I missed the times when I could read English novels and study English. I told her that I kind of regretted that I didn't work hard on English in my sophomore year due to the heavy course load and limited opportunities to use English. My friend then asked me, "why don't you take IELTS or TOEFL? If you get a good score, you can apply for graduate study

abroad." I was very excited about her suggestion and decided to take international English tests. (Adi, Journal 1, 04/13/2016).

Having realized that she failed to make full use of her English ability, Adi decided to take the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and therefore made great investment in the preparation process. The following conversation took place after she received her scores on the IELTS:

Excerpt 7:

Yaqiong: So you spent your entire summer holiday in Nanjing to attend the IELTS training course?

Adi: Yes. In the summer of my sophomore year when all my Uyghur friends went back home. I was like '自讨苦吃' [*zi tao ku chi*, look for trouble for oneself], and stayed alone on campus for the whole summer.

Yaqiong: Why was it '自讨苦吃'?

Adi: The biggest problem was to feed myself. You know, we can't dine anywhere, and our on-campus Muslim canteen was closed during holidays.

Yaqiong: That was difficult.

Adi: Yes. The training center was very far from our school. I had to leave my dorm at 6:30am every day, otherwise I would be late. I got back to my dorm around 8pm, and I continued finishing the assignments and reviewing the lectures after eating some fruits as dinner.

Yaqiong: Oh wow. I had that experience too, and I know it's very difficult to manage.

Adi: Yes. I almost gave up by the first week, but I got used to the pace after several weeks. It was my own choice, so I won't complain. I had to hang in there to achieve my goal.

(Adi, Interview 2, 04/08/2017)

Planning to study abroad after graduation, Adi decided to further her English study by taking the IELTS. To achieve her goal in English learning, Adi was highly invested in preparing for the IELTS. Besides commuting to the training center, which was a 3-hour-round-trip by bus, every day during the summer holiday, she also immersed herself in the studying room during national holidays when all her friends went downtown for recreation. Despite all the challenges involved in the process, what Adi gained was more than just good test scores. In addition, she got the chance to "explore [her]self along the way". On this personal journey, Adi envisioned her future self as a competent English speaker who could use the language to travel around the world and to communicate with different people. It was not until then that she began to understand what her uncle meant by English as "an international language" (Excerpt 1). Adi was very well aware of the essential role that English played in realizing her imagined self—an international graduate student who uses English to achieve her academic goal—and was therefore strongly invested in learning English. Adi ultimately received a score of 7.0 on the IELTS, and applied for overseas study and successfully received an offer from one university in Italy. Although she ended up not going because she was denied a passport due to her ethnicity, her imagined identity was found to be key to her investment in learning English.

Inspired by her uncle who speaks fluent English and motivated by her English teacher in *neichu ban*, Adi became interested in learning English. By constantly investing in learning this language, she further improved her proficiency in English and increased her linguistic capital, which in turn brought more learning opportunities and possibilities for herself.

Mary. Like Adi, Mary also started learning English while enrolled in *Neichu ban*. What made them different from each other, however, was their early access to Mandarin Chinese, a language through which English is taught in Xinjiang. As mentioned in previous chapters, Mary was from a peasant farmer family who had little access to Chinese before joining *Neichu ban*. Obviously, it was challenging to start learning a third language when her proficiency in Chinese, her second language, was still limited. Mary recalled that experience in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 8:

I attended *Neichuban* where I learned Chinese and English at the same time. In my first year, I struggled a lot. My Chinese was not good at that time either, and English was taught in Chinese. I couldn't understand anything, really! … I remember everyone else did very well in the first English exam, with an average score of 90 or so. Only I scored 80 points. I felt very bad. (Mary, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

As seen from the excerpt above and the analyses in Chapter 4, Chinese serves as a gatekeeper for Mary to acquire a wider range of linguistic capital. Compared with her investment in learning Mandarin Chinese, Mary did not seem to show particular interest in learning English. When asked what motivated her to learn English, Mary shared:

Excerpt 9:

Mary: Honestly, I didn't have a specific reason to learn English at the first

               place. It was just that the school asked us to take English course, then

               I took it. It was just this simple. … I didn't know how important

               English was back then, I just followed the teacher so that I could get a

               good score in the exams.

Yaqiong: What did the teacher ask you to do?

Mary: Like … memorizing the new words, doing grammar exercises, and

               reading the textbooks. Something like that. … Oh right, she also told

               us if we know everything in the textbooks, we will be fine in the

               exams.

Yaqiong: Was that helpful?

Mary: Yes. I … read the English textbooks repetitively. I just learned

               English this way, and I did quite well in English exams since my

               second year in middle school.

                                                    (Mary, Focus group interview 1, 06/28/2017)

As shown in the conversation, in spite of her lack of interest in learning English, Mary managed to successfully navigate her middle school by complying with the school policy that puts forward trilingual education for Uyghur students and the school curriculum that introduces English as a required course. Moreover, she strategically followed her English teacher's suggestion by making full use the English textbooks, which always helped her secure a good score in English tests. One may argue that Mary's English learning experience was very test-oriented and question the value of English education in her middle school. However, Mary developed a basic knowledge of English by working closely with the

textbooks, and further negotiated the identity of a 'good' English learner by gaining high scores in English tests. Such an ideology profoundly influenced Mary's English learning trajectory afterwards and determined her level of investment in learning English.

After joining *Neigao ban* in Shanghai, Mary immediately sensed the gap in the English proficiency levels between local and Uyghur students, as she recalled in the following excerpt:

Excerpt 10:

… there was about a 30-piont difference in English score between us Uyghur students and local Shanghai students in the first semester. You know, even if you were the top student in Xinjiang, you still couldn't compete with Shanghainese. They started learning English very early, and are really good at English. (Mary, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

Lacking early access to English and the English learning resources available to local Shanghainese, Mary and her fellow Uyghurs were positioned as disadvantaged English learners by the school curriculum which treated Uyghur students similarly as Han students regardless of their limited access to English education in Xinjiang. To contest such an unfavorable positioning, Mary worked extremely hard on English. As she recalled, she spent a lot of time memorizing English vocabulary and textbooks every day. Her English teacher, who was also their *Ban Zhuren* (i.e., their homeroom or form teacher), also took every opportunity to have the students do English grammar exercises and model tests. He frequently organized Q & A sessions in which the class could discuss about the exercises whenever possible. Placing great emphasis on vocabulary and grammar study, Mary's

English teacher also taught his students practical test-taking strategies, which can be seen from the following conversation:

Excerpt 11:

Yaqiong: What kind of strategies? Can you give me some examples?

Mary: For example, he taught us to read the comprehension questions first and try to find the answers in the texts. This can save us some time in the exam. He also taught us to read the first and the last paragraphs, as well as the first sentence of each paragraph for the main idea. Things like that.

Yaqiong: Do you think those strategies are useful?

Mary: Yes. I think they are very useful, especially when taking tests. I'm still using these strategies when doing reading exercises.

Yaqiong: What about writing? How did he teach writing?

Mary: He gave us some format to follow and had us recite some phrases, like, "in my opinion", "every coin has two sides," "least but not least", etc. … Those are very useful skills that we could use immediately.

(Mary, Interview 4, 06/26/2017)

It can be seen from the interview excerpt that Mary thought highly of these test-taking strategies, which further reinforced her test-oriented ideology toward English learning. It should be acknowledged that the test-oriented language learning, while strongly influenced by the neoliberal discourse of language as skills, might also be embedded in traditional Chinese culture, which attaches great value to exams (Chen, Warden & Chang, 2005).

Bearing such an ideology, Mary defined a "successful language learner" as someone who receives a high score in tests, which, as a result, also influenced her investment in studying English. Such a stance is clearly articulated in the following conversation:

Excerpt 12:

Yaqiong: Why did you invest so much time in learning English in high school?

Mary: For tests. Because English is a very important subject in *Gaokao* [College Entrance Exam], and our English level was very low when we just entered high school. We had to work really hard to get into college.

Yaqiong: Just for tests?

Mary: Yes.

Yaqiong: What about to communicate with foreigners, or to learn about their cultures?

Mary: No.

Yaqiong: What about studying abroad?

Mary: No.

(Mary, Interview 4, 06/26/2017)

Putting herself within the education system that values test scores, Mary strategically capitalized on the resources that she thought would be helpful to make her excel in English tests. Accordingly, Mary constructed herself as a "successful English learner" because she "didn't encounter any big problems in English exams". The following journal entry also highlights Mary's pride in being able to contest a negative Uyghur image by narrowing the gap in English test scores between Uyghur and local students in the final year of high school:

Excerpt 13:

In our final year, we were just about 10-point below our Shanghainese cohorts, which was quite an achievement. Our teacher was very happy with the outcome. … I'm kind of proud of us because we didn't begin learning English at the same ground with Han students, and I believe that if we study hard, we can do as well as Han students. (Mary, Journal 1, 03/01/2017)

Mary was admitted to FU with a score of 114[10] on the English part, which placed her on an equal footing with the majority of the Han students in the College English course that is required for all the freshmen. Table 1 shows the English courses offered at FU. As mentioned in Chapter 3, at FU, all the freshmen are required to take College English-1, which covered the four language skills, in their first semester. At the end of the first semester, all students took CET-4. Students who failed CET-4 (e.g., with scores lower than 425) had to enroll in College English-2 in the second semester. In short, CET-4 served a key gatekeeping function.

The content of College English-2 is similar to that of College English-1. Students who passed CET-4 (e.g., with scores equal to or higher than 425) can choose to take College English-2 or Expansive English courses. Put differently, passing CET-4 determined whether students had the option to move on to take more advanced English courses (i.e., Expansive English courses). In total, 26 expansive English courses were offered at FU. From the third through the seventh semester, students can take any of the Expansive English courses to earn up to 12 credits, which were counted toward students' GPA values. College English is taught in accordance with the English Curriculum Requirements for University Students (Ministry of Education, 2000). The primary objective of College English is to develop students' communicative competence; the Expansive English courses, however, are offered with an

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[10] The average score in English in the 2013 Shanghai *Gaokao* was 97.86.

intention to further and diversify FU students' English learning out of their interests and needs. The Expansive English courses are considered bearing more symbolic values because (1) the courses are mostly taught in English; (2) only students who passed the CET-4 have access to these courses; and (3) these courses bear credits that can be counted toward students' GPA. In other words, the Expansive English courses were discursively constructed as a place that can make a distinction between 'good' and 'less competent' learners of English.

Table 5.

English courses offered at FU.

Semester (hrs)	Credits	Courses	Requirements	Content (hrs/week)	GPA
1 (64)	4	College English-1	Required	Reading/writing (3hrs/week) Speaking/listening (1hr/week)	No
2 (64)	4	College English-2	Required for students who fail in CET-4	Reading/writing (3hrs/week) Speaking/listening (1hr/week)	No
3-7	Up to 12	Expansive English	Elective for students who pass CET-4	Topics on interpretation, literature, culture, and business, etc.	Yes

Mary did not claim to benefit much from the College English course and passed CET-4[11] by the end of the first semester without any preparation with a score of 481 out of 760. According to Mary, the College English course was taught in a similar fashion as the English course in her high school, as the following excerpt suggests:

Excerpt 14:

Yaqiong: What was the English course like?

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[11] According to the data released by the College English Test Center affiliated to Ministry of Education, while 87.01% of the students at FU passed CET-4 that was administered in June 2015, the passing rate of the Uyghur students was extremely low, however.

Mary: It is pretty similar as in high school. The teacher went through the vocabulary and had us do exercises. Then she went through the main text, and had us do some translations and listening exercises.

Yaqiong: What do you think of College English course?

Mary: I don't think I learned much from this course. As you know, my goal in studying English is just to pass the test. I passed CET-4 by the end of the first semester, so I was not motivated to learn English. Also, the College English course was not counted toward GPA. It's not important compare to my other major subjects, for example, Physics, which I almost had no knowledge of.

(Mary, Focus group interview, 06/28/2017)

When asked about what she did not like about the College English course in particular, Mary continued to comment:

Excerpt 15:

Well, besides attending classes, we also needed to do web quizzes for each lesson. I really hated these exercises because the grading system was very strict, especially for the translation exercises. The answers were pre-designed, and we had to write the exact answers to gain the score, otherwise we would lose the points. … You know, there is not always only one answer for translation exercises, right? We all hated this part. It's not helpful! (Mary, Interview 5, 06/26/2017)

Excerpts 14 and 15 suggested that Mary considered College English courses as inefficient in improving her English ability because of their similarity to the English practices

that she had in her high school, and thus to some extent restricted students' English development by having students do word-by-word translation that allowed little or no space for variations in the web quizzes. Hence, the English learning experiences helped Mary develop new linguistic capital, and at the same time, hone an ability to question the current educational practices that only tap onto students' basic English knowledge.

In one of my observations of a College English course which enrolled over 90 students, I noticed that only 70% of the class were present in the classroom, and only about 20 students were paying attention to the teacher's lectures. The rest of the class were either sleeping, reading other books, or playing with their smart phones.

Mary's comments regarding the College English courses and my fieldwork observations demonstrated that overall, students showed less motivation to this course and that they made limited investment in learning English. Mary suggested several possible explanations. Firstly, the College English course was discursively constructed as a less valuable course, especially in science and technology universities, with test scores bearing no numerical value and only being indicated by pass or fail. Secondly, as Adi also suggested earlier, Uyghur students were under huge pressure in language and academics in the first year of college, so they felt the urge to invest more time in their major studies, the scores of which counted toward their GPA. Thirdly, this course did not seem to help Uyghur students improve their English ability and to prepare them for the more advanced elective English courses which was endowed with more symbolic value, a point to which I will return later.

Confident in her English ability, Mary also took the CET-6 by the end of her freshman year with only 2-day's preparation but failed. Having met the requirement for graduation, Mary did not further invest in learning English until she decided to apply for graduate study in University of Xinjiang as English is one of the required subjects in the

admissions test. Although she finally failed on the admissions test, she received a very high score in English.

Driven by a test-oriented ideology toward learning English, Mary strategically mobilized the resources afforded by the school, especially by the *Neigao ban* program, to achieve her goal. From Mary's perspective, the English tests serve as a gatekeeping function that allows her to move onto the next stage of study, which constantly contributes to her negotiation and construction of the identity of a legitimate participant in mainstream higher education system and that of a good English learner.

Angela. As mentioned, Angela attended a *Shuangyu ban* program (i.e., Uyghur-Chinese bilingual class) in middle school inside Xinjiang and did not start to learn English until high school. Angela attended a *neigao ban* program in Nanjing and the medium of instruction was all in Chinese. Despite a late start, Angela showed a genuine interest in learning English, and was highly invested in high school, which can be seen in the following two excerpts:

Excerpt 16:

Although I started learning English late, I really liked learning this language because the pronunciation of English is similar to that of Uyghur, I think. … I studied English very hard in high school. … I have a very good memory, so I memorized almost everything in English. I believe that's the best way to master English in a short period of time, and it worked. I scored about 93[12] [out of 120] in *Gaokao* [College Entrance Exam]. I'm very happy about it given that I just studied English for three years. (Angela, Focus group interview, 06/28/2017)

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[12] The average score in English in the 2013 Jiangsu *Gaokao* was approximately 60 points.

Excerpt 17:

My English teacher in high school was very good. She was very knowledgeable and knew everything. I sometimes wondered why she could speak such fluent English and has such a wide vocabulary … I paid close attention to her speaking in class and noted down almost everything she said. (Angela, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

Having graduated from *Shuangyu ban*, Angela had little exposure to English during middle school, but finally caught up through extraordinary efforts and by appropriating the English language learning resources in her high school in Nanjing. Acknowledging a late start in learning English, Angela was able to construct herself as a good English learner by (1) making connections between Uyghur and English pronunciations, (2) making use of the English teacher as a resource of linguistic input, and (3) managing to obtain a 'satisfied' score in *Gaokao* within a relatively short period of time. Angela's investment in learning English not only comes from her interest in English, but was also highly driven by the school curriculum and the competition for college admission. As discussed in Chapter 4, having received elementary school and middle school education in Xinjiang, Angela lacked proficiency in both Mandarin Chinese and English. What made this situation worse was that she also had to compete with Uyghur students who attended *Neichu ban* and came to *Neigao ban* with a higher proficiency in Chinese and a basic knowledge of English. Although placed in such a disadvantaged position in the hegemonic curriculum that prioritizes Chinese and values English, Angela managed to navigate college because of her her strong investment in learning English and other subjects. Notably, Angela's investment in English from high school enabled her to further contest the disadvantaged position of Uyghur students in English learning at college.

As Han, De Costa and Cui (2016) noted, Uyghur ethnic students are often marginalized in their study of English and disadvantaged compared to Han students in English courses. However, Angela, like Adi and Mary, was able to capitalize on her *Neigaoban* experience to negotiate an identity as a good English learner in College English course. The following conversation highlighted how Angela considered her College English course as a platform to negotiate a positive Uyghur identity at university.

Excerpt 18:

Angela: I took College English when I was a freshman, that was a required course. I really enjoyed that course. I was very concentrated in class and never played with my cell phone.

Yaqiong: Why?

Angela: Because I like the feeling that I'm learning things. You know, I didn't like my major very much at the beginning. Compared with my major subjects, I feel that English is way easier. English is something that if I work hard on it, I can get a reward.

Yaqiong: That's interesting.

Angela: Also, I feel that I don't lag behind my cohorts that much in English, but I have that feeling in other subjects.

Yaqiong: Can you tell me why?

Angela: Many of them chose this major out of their interest, but I was not. Some others can get the points right away in class, but it took me a whole year to understand some of the difficult concepts.

(Angela, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

As seen from the excerpt above, the College English class becomes a place where Angela contested her disadvantaged position as a student who is lagging behind. The subject that Angela was majoring in was not her first choice. Starting university life with little knowledge of what she was going to study placed Angela in an unfavorable position that made her feel academically inferior. Fortunately, however, it was the College English class that made her feel that she was "learning things," and also brought her "rewards". Angela passed CET-4 in her freshman year as Adi and Mary did, which encouraged her to further invest in English learning. She continued to take College English-2 and an elective course on English movie and culture. The increased linguistic capital that Angela obtained through attending English courses at FU granted Angela access to English films, which enabled her to have discussions with her friends. These interactions in turn helped her socialize into the Han-dominant culture in which great symbolic value was attached to English films.

Angela frequently posted on WeChat about the movies or TV dramas that she had watched or the English songs that she was listening to. For instance, she wrote a post after watching an Indian movie *Secret Superstar*.

Excerpt 19:

Translation:

Cried from the beginning to the end. [Movie poster]

Comments:
Mary: Because the movie is awesome.

Angela@Mary: *Ada* [Uyghur, meaning "sister"], I cried for 2 hours, couldn't stop [LOL]

Mary@Angela: Why are you so easy to cry? [Face palm]

Angela@Mary: Haven't you watched this movie?

Mary@Angela: I had. I wanted to cry in the end, but my tears didn't come out [Face palm]

Angela@Mary: You've got me[13], really [LOL]

Figure 7. Excerpt of Angela's reaction to an Indian movie

Angela also wrote in her journal that:

Excerpt 20:

I was deeply moved by this movie [*Secret Superstar*]. … What impressed me the

most was that Insia's mother gave her unconditional support to help to realize her

dream. This reminds me of my mother who always loves me and supports me

_____

[13] Some translanguaging is happening here. "I 服了 you" is literally translated as "I surrender you".

irrespective of my father's authority at home. … I think Insia and her mother are brave. I hope I could be that brave to protect my mother and to fight against my father, but this is just movie. … I hope more and more girls and women in Xinjiang could watch movies like this. (Angela, Journal 5, 03/28/2018)

Angela is a fan of Indian movies not only because the English is easier to understand, but also because she could relate some of the stories to her own life. The English movies and TV dramas not only provided Angela with abundant authentic language input, but also exposed her to a world that "values equality, persistence and dream". She once confessed that knowing English brought her into a new world that she did not know before, which endowed her with a sense of mission to make changes to her fellow Uyghurs. Therefore, Angela constructed herself as a good English learner who passed CET-4, took advanced of English courses, was able to appreciate different cultures and values, and intended to empower women of her ethnicity. However, such a constructed identity did not increase her investment in furthering her English study; rather, her investment was restricted by the heavy school coursework. From her junior year, the number of major courses increased dramatically and the difficulty level doubled, which put Angela under great pressure. After considering her situation carefully, Angela decided not to take CET-6 and more advanced English courses:

Excerpt 21:

Angela: I think I have to learn my major well because that can secure me a job in Xinjiang.

Yaqiong: Why not English?

Angela: Well… English is more like a tool. … I've passed CET-4, that can prove my English ability. People just want to see this certificate.

Yaqiong:	Does CET-6 have a higher value?
Angela:	Yes, but only if you want to be an English teacher. I actually tried CET-6 twice but all failed. I won't try anymore because first of all, CET-4 is enough for me; also, I'm getting busier and busier. I need to focus on my major studies and prepare for the National Civil Service exam. I don't think I will have extra time to study English.
Yaqiong:	I see. Do you see yourself use English in Xinjiang?
Angela:	That's the most important point that I was about to say. I've talked to several 学姐 (*xuejie*, senior sisters) who went back to Xinjiang to work after graduation, and they suggested that I should focus on my major studies and the Civil Service exam. There is no space for English there.

<div align="right">(Angela, Interview 4, 06/26/2017)</div>

As shown in Chapter 4, the majority of the Uyghur graduates from FU, especially Uyghur women, chose to go back to Xinjiang to work. Many Uyghur women opted to take the Civil Service exam and work in their related fields. According to Adi, who is currently working as a civil servant in Kuche County in Xinjiang, there is a growing need for Uyghur students who are educated in inland China to take up government jobs. Although Angela recognized the symbolic value that English bears, and despite her interest in learning English, she decided to invest more time in other aspects that can bring her economic capital in the future. At the time of writing this dissertation, I learned that even though Angela failed the national Civil Service exam, she got a job offer from a local private-owned company. However, she finally decided to register for the Civil Service exam at the local level given the

expectations from her family and the great values attached to these 铁饭碗 (*tie fanwan*, iron bowls) jobs[14] that are offered through the Civil Service system.

Angela's case thus illustrates that the symbolic value that English bears could hardly be translated into economic capital when Angela returned to Xinjiang after graduation. Such a difficulty comes partly from the family's expectations on these Uyghur women, and largely from the unequal economic and social development between Xinjiang and the east coast. This gap made it difficult for Uyghur students to connect their constructed identity as a multilingual and multicultural educated Uyghur to the context that places little value on their multilingual and multicultural competence.

Babe. Among my participants, Babe was the only *Minkaomin* (i.e., ethnic minority students who took the *Gaokao* in their native language) student and she had the least experience with English education. As a *Minkaomin*, Babe did not receive English education until after graduating from high school and enrolling in a two-year pre-university preparatory program. Having learned English for only four years, Babe related their initial English-learning experience like this:

Excerpt 22:

I was never exposed to English before *Yuke ban*. In *Yuke ban*, we started with ABC, just like kids learning a new language. … When I finished *Yuke ban*, I could only speak some simple English, like very basic daily conversations, *hello, my name is… what's this*, just as elementary school students. (Babe, Interview 2, 06/27/2017)

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[14] Iron-bowl jobs mean jobs that cannot be easily broke, which often include positions in all levels of government, state-owned enterprises, and public institutions. Iron-bowl jobs are still considered as decent and stable in most areas in China.

Designed specifically to prepare the ethnic minority students for university life, the two-year preparatory program (*Yuke ban*) before university, however, was not regarded as sufficient in preparing them for the English requirement in the university, as exemplified in the excerpt below:

Excerpt 23:

We only studied English in class, and never reviewed it after class unless the teacher gave us homework to do. We were quite laid back and the teacher didn't invest much time teaching us, and nobody told us that English would be this important in college. If I had spent more time in learning English back then, I think my English would be as good as other Han students. I regret that I didn't work hard on English in *Yuke ban*. (Babe, Interview 2, 06/27/2017)

As seen from the excerpt, the two-year preparatory program failed to provide ethnic minority students like Babe with enough knowledge in English to survive the College English course, which placed her in a very disadvantaged position in the English course at FU:

Excerpt 24:

When I came here, I felt that there was huge gap in English proficiency between me and my Han classmates. When I took College English 1 in the first semester, the instructor spoke English very fast. I could hardly follow her in class, but all my Han classmates could understand what the instructor said. It made me very upset, but it's reasonable I think, because they have learned English for a lot more years than I did. (Babe, Interview 2, 06/26/2017)

Due to her relatively limited English language education, Babe fell behind their Han peers in terms of English language competence. This was also reflected in the English language policy on the admission, course evaluation and graduation requirements for Uyghur students. In terms of proficiency-wise admission, and in light of their basic English level, no English requirements were placed on the *Minkaomin* students at FU. While the English proficiency of the *Minkaohan* students was better than that of *Minkaomin*, the former group was also admitted with lower test scores than the required score for Han students from the same region. For example, the minimum admission score for Han students from Zhejiang Province at FU was 631 in 2014 compared to a minimum score of 380 for *Minkaohan* students. In short, a preferential policy was applied to Uyghur students who were allowed to enter the college with lower *Gaokao* scores.

Similarly, Uyghur students can pass their internal FU courses with a score of 48 (as compared to 60 for the Han majority) and graduate without passing CET-4. Such preferential policies, although designed to grant Uyghur students with more access to college education, constituted a form of "positive discrimination" (Feng, 2005, p. 543). In other words, while these preferential policies did offer Uyghur students with opportunities to receive quality education as Han students, it also amplified the gap between Uyghur and Han students by placing Uyghur students at a less favored position in the host community. This finding is consistent with that of many other researchers such as Adamson and Xia (2011), Clothey (2005), and Feng and Sunuodula (2009). The academic shortcomings of ethnic minority students were also well acknowledged by many faculty members. It was believed that since the "starting point" of ethnic minority students was lower than that of their Han peers in terms of English learning, they were bound to undergo more challenges, as the following excerpt reveals:

138

Excerpt 25:

I think only a small number of ethnic minority students can start their college education at the same level of the Han students. They are not at the same starting point in terms of their education background as their Han cohorts. … Some *minkaomin* students didn't start learning English until 2 years ago, … so there is a huge gap between ethnic minority and Han students in terms of their English proficiency. (Interview, School administrator, Sun)

Frustrated by the College English-1 class, Babe often read other books that interest her in class or just skipped classes, which resulted in her failing this course. However, influenced by her Han friends, Babe was able to develop a strong motivation to learn English outside classrooms. Through her interactions with her roommates who have friends studying abroad or have plans to study abroad, Babe started to realize the importance of English. The motivation also came from her longing for social mobility as the result of mastering an international language, as she wrote in her journal, "I'm very envious of them [those who are studying abroad], and I want to be one of them. I think English can lead me to a wider world". Realizing the high value attached to learning English and the opportunities it opens up in the inland, Babe was determined to acquire symbolically valuable linguistic capital. Having encountered difficulties with the College English textbooks, she borrowed easier English textbooks from the library and studied by herself. When asked how she studies English on a daily basis, Babe shared:

Excerpt 26:

I usually set aside 2 hours in the evening when I finish all the other school work. I prefer evening because it's quiet so I can better focus. … I borrowed this English textbook from the library that is more suitable to my level. I read vocabulary first,

and repeat them again and again. … After that, I read the texts, and highlight the places that I don't understand. Then, I do grammar exercises, and go back to the texts and review the places that I didn't understand. If I have more time, I will recite the texts. (Babe, Interview 3, 09/18/2017)

Being aware of her limited English proficiency, Babe resorted to using a much easier English textbook *New Concept English* to begin with. Her use of the library is further shown in the following journal entry where she also noted down the resources available at the library of a more prestigious university in Nanjing:

Excerpt 27:

I really enjoy the moment when I finish other tasks in the day and settle down to study English. I like to read something that interests me, such as science fictions and proses in English. … I can find a lot of English materials in the library. I often spend a whole afternoon in the library during the weekend, borrow a dictionary and read some English. … Today I visited my friend at Nanjing University[15]. … Their library has way more English resources than ours, which makes me think of applying for graduate studies there. (Babe, Journal 2, 09/10/2017)

Besides adopting a rather traditional way in learning English, Babe was also able to take advantage of the online resources and her native language—Uyghur—to learn English. She subscribed to many podcasts on Netease Cloud Music, a website that offers millions of music, one of which was Shayira, a Uyghur host who frequently presents live shows on a variety of topics using Uyghur and English, with occasional use of Chinese words. This

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[15] Nanjing University is the most prestigious university in Nanjing, ranked top 5 among Chinese universities.

morning program was entitled "Wake up", with an intention to bring in valuable insights to "wake up" people in the morning and fuel the listeners with energy. Babe downloaded these online resources to her smart phone and listened to them whenever she got a chance. She also subscribed to a public English learning platform named "NJ English" on WeChat, followed the updates regularly, and used the free English learning resources available. The instructional language in this program is primarily Uyghur, however. The teacher who is also an Uyghur was very encouraging and enthusiastic about teaching. The following excerpt shows the screenshots of the online resources to which Babe subscribed:

Excerpt 28:

Wake up by Shayira at NetEase Cloud Music	NJ English by Nijat Hesen at WeChat

Figure 8. Excerpt of Babe's online English learning resources

Strikingly, it was found that Babe relied upon these significant figures who have made great strides in English learning and were subsequently successful in renegotiating ways in which to place members of the ethnic group in positions of power. These "significant figures" could include peers in their social network (e.g., Uyghur students in the same university, previous classmates, or family members), and influential Uyghur figures across various fields. In this regard, Babe considered Shayira (i.e., host of *Wake up*) and Nijat Hesen (i.e., founder of NJ English) as role models that serve as source of aspiration which keeps her constantly investing in learning English. As seen from the analyses above, Babe took every chance to improve her English and proved to be able to overcome the disadvantages by exploiting a variety of multimodal resources and capitals afforded to her.

By constantly investing in English learning for 2 years, Babe considered her current English ability as "pretty good" because she was able to follow the teacher in Business English course, a required course by her major. Although she still fell short in terms of English vocabulary skills and had to spend more time than her Han classmates in reading the textbooks and finishing the assignments, she was confident that she could pass the course and was ready to retake the College English course and the CET-4.

Besides aiming to pass the CET-4 and even CET-6, Babe paid more attention to the symbolic and cultural values that are associated with learning English. For instance, during the fieldwork, Babe emphasized the importance of learning "authentic English" by reading original English books and watching English movies. When encountering difficulties in comprehension, Babe often looked up the words in the dictionary and took notes for later review.

Apart from the purpose of learning the language *per se*, Babe also valued different cultures and people by exposing herself to English readings and movies. In the following

conversation, she talked about how the TV series *Friends* deepened her understanding of American culture:

Excerpt 29:

Babe:	I'm currently watching *Friends*. I really like this TV drama.
Yaqiong:	*Friends* is also one of my favorites. I've watched it for several times.
Babe:	Yes! I watched it twice. For the first time, I just focused on the language, which is very different from our textbooks and is very…live. In the second time, I focused more on the culture aspect, for example, what American life is like, how Americans celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas, etc. It was also my first time to know about baby shower and bridal shower, and bachelor's night… it's very interesting. It's a good way to learn about different cultures and people.

(Babe, Interview 4, 10/15/2017)

As seen from the previous excerpts, Babe sought to project an image of being a learner of 'authentic English' and therefore placed herself in a positive position by demonstrating high reflexivity and critical awareness in countering the discourses which reduce language as a set of skills and conceive of individual as bundles of skills (Cameron, 2000; Duchêne & Heller, 2012; Holborow, 2015; Park, 2010; Park & Lo, 2012; Urciuoli, 2010). This was mainly manifested in her close interaction with English movies and TV series, and her appreciation of different people and cultures.

Notably, for Babe, the process of learning English and other languages was seen as a way to open up possibilities, enabling her to imagine a pathway to a better life and to conceive of alternative identities, as she disclosed in the following excerpts:

Excerpt 30:

I have a dream. I hope to study abroad after graduating from university, either Germany or France. That's my goal of life. … If I could go study aboard, that will be the best a girl can do. … I used to be an obedient girl, but now I want to challenge myself. I want to know my limit; I want to see how much I could achieve. … After I came here, I realized that there are many other options for my future. I know Chinese and English, and maybe German, I plan to study German, there are a lot of possibilities for the future. (Babe, Interview 1, 05/26/2017)

Excerpt 31:

Nowadays, most of the students in the inland are learning English, and most of the students in Xinjiang are learning Chinese. I think the fact that I know both languages can bring me benefits in the future. In my opinion, people who know Uyghur are at the base level, people who know Uyghur and Chinese are at a higher level, and people who also English are at the top level. (Babe, Interview 1, 05/26/2017)

In the latter excerpt, Babe perceived herself as a trilingual who is competent in Uyghur, Putonghua and English, and imagined herself as an elite who is at the top of the social hierarchy. Babe considered Mandarin Chinese and English as having greater linguistic capital, which can "bring [her] benefits in the future".

Joining FU with a very basic knowledge in English, Babe was placed in a

disadvantaged position in her College English class. Unlike the many other *Minkaomin* students depicted in Han et al. (2016), and Guo and Gu (2016b), Babe managed to exert her agency and mobilize the multimodal resources available to her by FU and by the internet, thereby contesting the negative image associated with *Minkaomin* students and constructing an identity of a 'good' English learner and a positive Uyghur identity.

Negotiation of a positive heritage identity in learning English

By tracing my focal participants' English learning trajectories, I learned that my female participants were all able to negotiate a positive identity in English learning by taking up investments in a variety of forms. Adi, who has the highest English ability, constructed herself as a 'successful' English learner by having an equal footing with Han students in English courses and by taking the IELTS which bore great symbolic value. Capitalizing on their boarding school experiences in east coastal cities, Mary and Angela negotiated a positive identity in learning English by passing the CET-4 with little difficulty and taking higher-level English courses to which very few Uyghur students had access. Moreover, having graduated from *Neigaoban* in Shanghai and Nanjing, Adi, Mary and Angela were able to distinguish themselves from others who lacked such a background with respect to English language educational experiences and outcomes.

Given her very limited experience with English before college, Babe also strived to construct herself as a 'good' English learner by mobilizing the linguistic capital and the multimodal resources afforded to her. More importantly, Babe viewed learning English as a path to other possibilities for her future, which further intensified her continuous investment in learning English and other languages.

It is important to note that when asked whether they would like the university to adjust the course evaluation criteria for them, all of them responded that they should be treated similarly as their Han peers, and that "preferential policies" should be taken to help

145

those who needed them, such as *Minkaomin* students who have little knowledge of Mandarin Chinese and therefore struggled to pass the courses with 48 points. All four of my participants marked a strong contrast between themselves and those who "need to be treated differently" (e.g., Uyghur students having different language educational backgrounds and having different attitudes towards English learning). This finding joins the findings in previous studies on ethnic minorities who share a common ethnic background but have diverse linguistic and migratory experiences (e.g., Canagarajah, 2013; Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Gu, 2015). Reasons articulated by them further corresponded to the empowered identities they tried to build for themselves.

While the ethnic cultural resources and ethnic identity are often seen as obstacles to language learning and are devalued in the dominant context (e.g., Feng, 2012), my participants attempted to contest the gap in English proficiency between Uyghur and Han students, and to negotiate a positive cultural identity by emphasizing the value of heritage knowledge they brought with them for English learning:

Excerpt 32:

Yaqiong: Do you think Uyghurs are disadvantaged in learning English because you start relatively later than Han students?

Mary: Well, I don't think so. Even though we start later, I don't think I fall behind my Han classmates. On the contrary, I think we have some advantages. For instance, Uyghur pronunciation is pretty close to the pronunciation of English, so we are pretty fast in learning English. … Also our tongues are very flexible. So when we speak English, we sound more natural than Han students, who sound like articulating

English with tones, just like when they speak Chinese [laugh].

<div align="right">(Mary, Interview 5, 09/18/2017)</div>

In the conversation, Mary sought to emphasize Uyghur students' advantages (e.g., dexterity with pronunciation) in learning English. Babe also made a similar comment that English "just comes out from our mouth naturally". Mary and Adi further placed great value on intuition in learning English:

Excerpt 33:

Yaqiong: Are you an active participant in class discussions?

Mary: When I was in high school, I was pretty active. I often raised my hand and answered teacher's questions only if the questions were not about grammar.

Yaqiong: That's interesting. Why not grammar?

Mary: … I was pretty weak in grammar. However, I still did pretty well in exams because I could usually get the grammar right out of my intuition.

Yaqiong: Intuition? That's amazing. How did you manage to do that?

Mary: I've no idea. I think Uyghurs have good intuitions in learning English, haha… So even though I got the grammar exercises right, I didn't know how to explain.

Yaqiong: Really.

Mary: Yeah. I also like cloze tests and reading comprehension because I like reading the contents. It feels like I'm reading stories, which is more

interesting than doing grammar drills.

(Mary, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

Excerpt 34:

I know that knowing grammar is very important in learning English, but I always believe that intuition is important too. I'm not very good at grammar, but I can do very well in grammar exercises. For example, I know what the correct answer is, but I don't know why. I can't explain the grammar rules. Many of my teachers and classmates don't believe in intuition and they didn't think I can learn English well without knowing grammar. (Adi, Focus group interview, 06/28/2017)

As the interview data revealed, my participants emphasized their comparative advantages in pronunciation and linguistic intuition in language compared to Han counterparts. They attributed advantages in those linguistic skills to the proximity between Uyghur language and English (Mary and Babe), the richness of phonemes in Uyghur (Babe), and a gift for language learning that Uyghur people are born with (Mary and Angela). During this process, added values were accrued to the mother language that were also related to its advantages in facilitating English learning. Furthermore, my participants sought to counter the English education curriculum that places great emphasis on grammar drills. All my participants emphasized during the fieldwork how "reading" and "memorizing" English helped to develop their intuition in English, which contested their relative lack of formal English instruction on grammar.

The way ethnic elites legitimated their multiple identities in the process of learning English resonated with previous studies on minority learners' identity formation in Western contexts, in which they tried to resist certain discursive positioning (e.g., McKay & Wong,

1996; Cervatiuc, 2009). For example, McKay and Wong (1996) contended that 'learners' subjectivities are sites of contestation,' in which they 'resist positioning, attempt repositioning, and deploy discourses, and counter-discourses' (p. 603). Furthermore, subordinate social members could draw upon other available identities and symbolic resources to build situated empowering identities (McKay & Wong, 1996). This was also shown in Gu's (2011) study in which rural students in an urban university in China relied upon their religious belief and different values regarding English learning to distinguish themselves from peers. As data from this study revealed, my female Uyghur participants counteracted the position as incompetent English learners by comparing with Han students in selected skills in English, for instance, in pronunciation, language intuition, and in the speed of learning. In the meantime, sets of heritage resources, such as the mother tongue and significant Uyghur figures, were constructed as powerful capital for learning English.

However, comparing with studies conducted with transnational ethnic minorities who learn L2 in their target community (e.g., Norton, 1997; Miller, 2003), participants in this study seemed to be more effective in reducing the power imbalance between themselves and their counterparts relating to English learning, and thus constructing a positive image for themselves. In the Western context in which L2 (i.e., English) is the communicative language on a daily basis, which makes the NS-NNS distinction significant. Previous studies framed within this dichotomy tend to associate 'ethnic minority' versus 'dominant community' with 'NNS' versus 'NS' (e.g., Cervatiuc, 2009; Mortia, 2004). As a result, it seems difficult for ethnic minorities to take on an identity that is beyond the distinction of 'minority' and 'majority' through L2 learning. Such domain of use of English could, however, be taken over by the mainstream language of the host society where English is not for daily use. In other words, the order of English in relation to other languages varies in the two contexts, hence forming different power structures on which learners can exercise their agencies. In this sense,

149

both Uyghur and Han students are 'non-native' speakers of English in China's context, which helps reconcile the imbalanced power relations that would be intense under the NS-NNS dichotomy, and hence grants more possibilities for ethnic minority students to negotiate a favorable position (Graddol, 2006) and to align themselves to majority Han students in the academic community. In short, through skillfully navigating their strengths in English and making positive interpretation of their native language, Uyghur participants negotiated a positive image for their cultural community.

Disadvantaged positioning in English learning

Although my focal participants sought to negotiate a positive identity in English learning and an advantageous membership of being educated Uyghurs, they were found to be placed in a marginalized position by English language policy and practices implemented in the institution. In contrast with the Han counterparts at the university, particularly those who are from eastern cities and who received high-quality English education, limited access to linguistic and social resources, and insufficient opportunities of language learning did consign Uyghur students to a peripheral position.

Being decapitalized by pre-collegiate English education. Data analysis showed that, as a highly-valued symbolic resource, the English language constituted an important terrain over which differences and inequalities were produced and over which a majority of Uyghur students were unfavorably positioned. It was found that Uyghur students were 'decapitalized' (Martin Rojo, 2010, p. 87) by the English language educational policies implemented in Xinjiang, which placed them in an unfavorable position in the China inland context.

Limited access to learning English. Underpinned by one-nation-one-language ideology, the Chinese language was viewed as playing an instrumental role in cultivating Uyghur students' national identity. By contrast, the Uyghur language was deemed to correspond with a Uyghur ethnic identity, and was thus viewed as an impediment to

150

developing a national Chinese identity. Different from the version of Chinese-English bilingual education experienced by a majority of Han students, bilingual education for Uyghur students placed emphasis on Chinese and not Uyghur (Feng, 2005). This situation was exacerbated by the fact that until recently, the English language used to be excluded from the language-in-education policy for minority students. Fortunately, this situation has improved with the recent initiation of China's trilingual policy. Consequently, Uyghur students were deprived of early access to English, a capital of high symbolic and material value in the current society.

Besides a late start in learning English, Uyghur students also had limited access to learning English before college due to the lack of resources (e.g., Feng, 2005; Yang, 2005), which further put them in a disadvantaged position. For example, Angela did not have early access to English learning until she moved to Nanjing. By contrast, her Han counterparts not only started to learn English early but were also immersed into a variety of resources and extra-curriculum activities to study English, as the following excerpt shows:

Excerpt 35:

I heard from my Han friends that they started learning English since elementary school, even earlier. Many of them have been to English 补习班 (*buxi ban*, Tutoring class) all the way through high school, and some of them who are from Jiangsu, Shanghai or Zhejiang even have private English tutors, sometimes native speakers. … I was online one day and read an article about a young girl in Shanghai who started to read English stories since 3 or 4 years old, and her family often took her abroad for sightseeing. … I couldn't imagine. I never had such resources and never thought of having them. (Angela, Interview 4, 06/27/2017)

While in a relatively better position in terms of having earlier access to learning English as a result of being educated in coastal schools where English was introduced when they were younger, the Uyghur *Minkaohan* students also faced limited access to educational and language learning resources. Thus, the language regime, which constructed English as being a neutral tool and ignored differing levels of access to the language (Pan, 2011), did have an affective impact on Uyghur students, who encountered emotional stress and felt themselves to be inferior to their Han counterparts.

Learning English through Chinese*.* Chinese proficiency is considered crucial as a basis for learning English in China given that the medium of instruction of English class is Chinese (Wang, 2016). Not only did Uyghur students started learning English later than Han students, the language through which English was learned also placed Uyghur students in an unfavorable position. As discussed in Chapter 4, most of my participants began to learn Chinese intensively from middle school, and English was introduced at the same time in *Neichu ban* program or later. As Mary disclosed in Chapter 4, her English learning was highly contingent upon her proficiency in Chinese at middle school. As a *minkaomin* student who had no experience in English until *Yuke ban*, Babe and her fellow Uyghurs also encountered many challenges in getting used to the instructional language—Mandarin Chinese:

Excerpt 36:

I think one reason that we didn't learn much (English) in *Yuke ban* was because the teacher taught in Chinese. Most of us didn't have experience learning something through Chinese, which kind of demotivated us. Many of my friends were like, I just give up because I can't understand anyway. (Babe, Interview 3, 09/18/2017)

As seen from Babe's account, the English language policy implemented in mainstream universities and inefficient preparatory language program (Potowski, 2015) further decapitalizes Uyghur students in their English learning, which could also have been harmful to their motivation and self-esteem. Such a rejection to invest in learning English may have been shaped by Uyghur students' (especially *Minkaomin* students') conceptualization of learning English in college that English is for those whose Chinese is good. By foregrounding Chinese proficiency as an explicit category, *Minkaomin* students seemed to take on an identity of less competent English learners.

Besides the issue with intelligibility, Angela raised another point with regard to the challenges associated with learning English through Chinese:

Excerpt 37:

As you know, (in *Neigao ban*) we learned all the subjects in Chinese, including English. Although my Chinese was okay, it took us longer time to study English and all the other subjects compared to Han students. For example, it may take them 5 minutes to understand a grammar point, it will take us 15 minutes, and they can use the time to learn more vocabulary and do exercises. (Angela, Focus group interview 1, 06/27/2017)

From Angela's perspective, learning English through Chinese consumed far more time and energy for her than her Han counterparts. Such time demands in turn reduced the English language investment of Uyghur students accordingly. The same idea was also echoed by Adi who attributed her success in English learning to her advanced Chinese proficiency

compared to her cohorts in middle school because she could "have more time to invest in studying English".

In multilingual educational settings, power can be traced and detected from the communication between the knowledge-rich and knowledge-poor, the school policies and curriculum, and the medium of instruction. Therefore, learning English through Chinese generates a power inequity and thus places the Uyghur minorities at a disadvantaged position in English learning.

Feeling inferior in English learning in college. The gap in terms of English proficiency between Uyghur and Han students became even more evident once admitted to college. According to De Costa (2016) and Kroskrity (2000), language ideologies not only reflect the interests of the dominant social group, but also influence personal use and choices of language, and the course of social order. In the case of the Uyghur students, it was the advancement of the interests of the dominant Han Chinese whose perception of English as a tool for social mobility that resulted in these ethnic minority students being pushed down the social order at the host institution.

Limited interactional opportunities in English. It was found that Uyghur students rarely interacted with their teachers in class. They seldom asked questions, commented on, or added to the ongoing discussion in class. As a Han English teacher noticed, in her class, Xinjiang students "basically don't say anything, and they never offer responses to a teacher's questions and comments." Another English teacher thought that the students came to her class just to be visibly present to the teacher. According to her, "they [Uyghur students] attended and skipped the class as they wished. It's obvious that they couldn't understand my instruction in class." As the data revealed, the English language ideologies of English teachers were tied to their perception of Uyghur students, whom they constructed as poor English language learners and bad students with irregular class attendance.

154

As a result of their limited English, most of the Uyghur students usually kept silent in class. For instance, Babe shared, "in English class, I read the other books, napped, listened to songs. I could not understand the teacher's instruction". Not surprisingly, the Uyghur students rarely took the initiative to participate in classroom discussion. Instead, they appeared to fuel the poor impression of them by engaging in acts of resistance such as sleeping in class, listening to music, reading other books, or just learning English by themselves. When asked if she was an active participant in classroom discussion, Angela noted:

Excerpt 38:

Yaqiong: Are you an active participant in the discussions?

Angela: No. I was almost silent.

Yaqiong: Why?

Angela: Because I'm not used to speaking English and I think my English is not good enough. And sometimes I don't know how to answer the teacher's questions.

Yaqiong: Can you give me an example?

Angela: I can't remember clearly. Like some very broad questions, what do you think of this or that. … To be honest, for those questions, I need to think carefully in Chinese first, and then try to express them in English, which takes a lot of time. During that time, my Han classmates may have already said what I'd like to say.

Yaqiong: Do you ask questions?

Angela: No. I don't know what to ask, you know…

Yaqiong: Because you understand everything?

Angela: The opposite. There is so much that I don't understand so I don't

               know what to ask.

                                                        (Angela, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

According to Mary, English instruction at FU also provided few opportunities for interaction in class.

Excerpt 39:

Even in the freshman and sophomore years when I was taking English courses, I didn't have many opportunities to speak English. The teacher usually did the lecture and sometimes posed a question. For most of the time those who sat in the first row would answer these questions. For the rest of us, we just sat there and listened. (Mary, Interview 3, 05/26/2017)

My findings revealed that students with low English competence were institutionalized as 'less competent' English learners, rather than receiving proper instruction or extra help. Despite their awareness of the difficulties encountered by the Uyghur students, who attended large English classes whose sizes ranged from 60 to 110 students, little attempt was made to accommodate them or their special needs in the English classroom. As an English teacher noted, "We treated them [the Uyghur students] as ordinary Han students, because there were no extra policies as for how to teach them in our university." When asked whether it was possible to slow down the teaching pace for the Uyghur students in class, she further responded, "That's impossible, because there were more than 100 students in a class, how could we slow down the pace of the class for the minority?" Therefore, because of the circulating ideology that positioned English as something that was natural and thus attainable

(Pan, 2011), the Han English teachers at LU often overlooked the challenges faced by their Uyghur students, and as a result, failed to provide extra help to these minority learners.

Restricted access to English learning resources on campus. Finally, it needs to be noted that not only did Uyghur students not have interactional opportunities in English classroom, they also received fewer learning resources than Han students. Such resources include advanced English courses and extra-curriculum activities that are related to English use and learning.

From the analyses above, we can see that my participants seldom sought to enhance their English learning by attending advanced English courses. For Adi, Mary and Angela, such a lack of interest in taking those English courses arose from the pressure associated with their major studies given that they have met the requirements for graduation. For Babe, however, it was her insufficient English proficiency that made it difficult for her to make use of the English learning resources; she was therefore denied access to the teaching materials offered in the advanced courses, which further marginalized her in the English study.

In addition to the classroom courses, multiple extra-curriculum language activities were organized, in an attempt to cater to individual students' needs. Many of them, such as the English corner, English speech contest and debate, and the English literature reading club, seemed very interesting. However, my fieldwork found that no participants reported having had participated in these activities or sought help from teachers. All four participants did not realize that they could ask for help from teachers individually.

Mediated by one of the Associate Deans of the department, many English courses are open for Uyghur students to sit in. However, this information was not widely circulated among Uygur students and very few students took the opportunity to sit in these advanced English courses. As one of the volunteers to help Uyghur students' language learning, I also helped with my participants' language learning. However, during my fieldwork, none of the

participants sought help regarding English study from me; rather, they considered me more as an experienced older sister with whom they shared their concerns about future and asked for advice.

It was found that most of the participants have yet to be able to utilize resources, although they recognized the abundant resources afforded by FU. The interview data revealed a host of challenges, including huge pressure from their major courses; the participants' limited English ability; their prioritized attitude towards Putonghua, a more useful language for job hunting in Xinjiang, and so on. All of these factors contributed to restrict their further investment in English learning at FU.

Ambivalence in English learning

As the above analyses revealed, my participants overall showed interest in English learning and considered English as a higher value linguistic capital. Their experience of English learning seemed to empower these Uyghur women, to some extent, to contest the negative social impacts of their linguistic, religious, and cultural background, which resonate with Guo and Gu's (2016b) findings. However, their investment in furthering their English learning was somewhat constrained by their gender status and the socio-economic situation back in Xinjiang.

In more developed area where the host institution is located, English proficiency can determine a learner's life pathways (Ricento, 2015). Under such a circulating ideology, the matter of proficiency in English can have direct consequences on the social mobility of individuals. In particular, English competence is constructed as a crucial determinant for a secured job in major Chinese inland cities, as one school official of FU mentioned below:

Excerpt 40:

Uyghur students, generally speaking, have to go back and work in Xinjiang. The environment inland is not appropriate for them. It is hard for them to find jobs in the coastal cities. Now the basic requirement of most coastal enterprises is CET-4 certificate, even CET-6. Uyghur students often do not meet these requirements. (Wen, interview with school official)

As revealed in the previous excerpt, Uyghur students' overall poor English proficiency limited the opportunities for them to reap the socioeconomic benefits generally accrued to college graduates. Educated in a public discourse that values English, my female participants increased their English proficiency and expanded their perceptions toward English as associated with different forms of economic and symbolic capital. Despite the powerful identity my Uyghur participants negotiated and the symbolic resources they gained by attending a mainstream university in the developed eastern part of China, they found it difficult to find ways to translate their symbolic capital into economic capital back in Xinjiang. When I was finishing up writing this dissertation, Mary and Angela were on the job market. Having failed the graduate school admissions exam, Mary decided to take the local Civil Service Exam in the April of 2018. Having failed the Civil Service Exam at the state level, Angela also decided to take the exam at the provincial level in April 2018.

As discussed, Angela had a genuine interest in learning English when she was at high school and also when taking English classes at college. Once she realized the limited value attached to English in Xinjiang context, she stopped investing in learning English because: (1) she felt no urge to learn English; and (2) English was deemed to be less useful than Chinese in her future career:

Excerpt 41:

I think Chinese is more useful to me in my daily life because I haven't encountered any occasions in which English was useful except for exams. Yes, I never encountered a situation in which I needed to speak English with others. English is not useful in my hometown unless you want to be a teacher. It is because my hometown Hotan is the least developed area in Xinjiang, there are only a few people can speak Chinese well, let alone English. I plan to go back to Hotan after I graduate, so I don't see myself use English in Xinjiang. (Angela, Interview 5, 09/18/2017)

Although Angela has an older brother who has a disability, Angela was expected to take on the responsibility to take care of her family after graduation because she "had seen the outside world," and "has the ability to support the family". In other words, the education Angela received empowered her to take on the traditional male role in a Uyghur family, but also formed some sort of constraint because she had to find a job near home. Expecting to work in the least developed area in Xinjiang, Angela did not see herself using English in the future, which dampened her investment in learning English. This is consistent with the notion of "linguistic entrepreneurship" (De Costa, Park & Wee, 2016), which is constructed as key to achieve success in the neoliberal educational context, and individuals are expected to take responsibility for self-management, self-advancement and self-performativity by making meticulous analysis of costs and benefits and by making strong investment in valuable capital (Brown, 2005; Harvey, 2005). Consequently, it seems that it is up to individual Uyghur student's 'choice' to invest in learning English or not.

As also mentioned, Adi is currently working as a civil servant in Kuche County back in Xinjiang after graduating in 2017. However, her job hunting experience was not smooth.

While she was searching for possible positions to register for the Civil Service Exam, she published a post on WeChat, complaining about a restriction put on women:

Excerpt 42:

Translation:

No matter how high your education level is, men always win [Face palm]

Comments:
Alim: [Chuckle][Chuckle]

Han: Why are you saying this?

Adi@Han: Because there are several job openings that are suitable for my major in the Xinjiang Civil Service Exam request only male applicants.

Adi, WeChat Post, 03/20/17

Figure 9. Excerpt of Adi's complaining about bias toward women

Before applying for the job as a local civil servant, Adi was already admitted to a graduate program in an Italian university. However, she gave up the opportunity because her passport application was denied due to her ethnic affiliation. Failing the graduate study admission test for Sichuan University, a prestigious university in Southwest China, Adi decided to look for jobs. Convinced by her parents' arguments, Adi opted to take the Civil Servant Exam and move back to Xinjiang after graduation. However, she found that there were very limited options available for female engineering-major applicants like her because most of the positions made a clear request favoring male applications. In this post, Adi expressed her helplessness through the use of 'face palm' emoticon, which has a connotation of "crying and laughing". Adi finally exceled in the Civil Servant Exam due to her highly

proficient Chinese[16] and was selected as a civil servant in the local Industry Bureau, however, she was extremely depressed and unhappy with her current work which, ironically has made her parents proud, and she is undergoing a series of personal struggles and tensions:

Excerpt 43:

Adi: I wanted to apply for graduate study this year, but my parents were strongly against this idea.

Yaqiong: What made you make the decision?

Adi: I'm extremely unhappy here. I feel that I don't belong to here. I feel that if I stay here for any longer, my life will be dull. I don't want to waste what I've learned in college, and I want to learn international commercial law in which I can use my English ability.

Yaqiong: Yes. English is actually one of your advantages.

Adi: English is useless here, which is a total waste.

(Adi, Online conversation, 02/05/2018)

Adi eagerly wanted to go back to Nanjing of which she had fond memories and experiences. Moreover, she has been longing for a more developed socio-economic status, less authoritarian and more equitable environment associated with eastern coastal China as compared to Xinjiang. Moreover, despite the prevalent neoliberal discourse of English language learning that posits a direct and transparent connection between English proficiency and economic returns (Kubota, 2011), the highly-valued linguistic capital that Adi earned did not seem to be economically rewarded in her current job.

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[16] Uyghur students who choose to take the exam in all Chinese can get additional 10-point bonus.

Influenced by the dominant discourse that Nanjing is a big city offering abundant opportunities and resources for youths, these female participants all expressed their hope to take a job in the city. However, it turned out that they were constrained by their identity as women, as a Uyghur, as a Muslim, as well as their overall less competitive GPAs and language proficiency, and the social context which embraces a low tolerance level toward Uyghurs, which all restricted their access to job opportunities in the inland. Having acknowledged this reality, these Uyghur girls had to change their mindset and divert their efforts and investment in things that will guard them a decent job back in Xinjiang, such as taking the Civil Service Exams. Echoing findings from Kubota's (2011) study on female English learners in Japan, in which she found that their English language skills were not economically rewarded, it seemed more difficult for Uyghur students to translate their English competency to opportunities in the market.

Chapter conclusion

In this chapter, I traced my participants' English learning trajectory through tertiary education, and explored their investment in English learning and their perceptions of the learning of English, a third language for them. As noted, English possessed great symbolic value in the neoliberal discourse and when viewed in relation to the trilingual education policy for ethnic minority students. I also examined how English language learning processes influenced Uyghur minority students' identity construction as they moved from Xinjiang to study at an inland university in Nanjing. In particular, I illustrated how the top-down trilingual education policy trickles down to the school level and influenced my participants' investment in learning English, and how my participants responded to such a policy as they negotiated their multiple yet ambivalent identities by positioning themselves and being positioned, in turn, by others in the dominant context. Different from their consistent perceptions of learning Putonghua (i.e., Mandarin Chinese) which was deemed useful in their

future lives, their investment in English education was largely bound by their identities as Muslim women and the social-economic situations in Xinjiang. Their stories reflected some ambivalence toward learning English and their personal struggles when intending to translate the symbolic value attached to English into economic capital upon seeking jobs in Xinjiang.

As a result of decapitalized by their pre-collegiate English education, my participants were placed in a disadvantaged position in college. However, they managed to negotiate a positive identity in the process, constructing themselves as 'good' English learners through optimizing the symbolic capital acquired from privileged high school educational backgrounds. They were able to do this by (1) appropriating and enacting the repertoire of symbolic and linguistic resources relevant to English learning afforded by the host community and the internet, and (2) through constructing differences between them and other Uyghur members who were less educated. Put simply, their powerful identities helped to facilitate their participation in the mainstream education system. Despite the powerful identity which they negotiated and constructed, they still encountered significant problems in learning English, a reality that cannot be overemphasized in this study.

As has been illuminated from the data analysis, my participants' English proficiency on the whole fell behind that of their Han counterparts. As mentioned in their interviews, my participants had limited vocabulary due to a much shorter term of English language education. They also reflected that they were under great academic pressure, thereby having limited time for learning English. Their enthusiasm for English learning was likely to be dampened by institutional practices (e.g., no extra help offered to ethnic minority students, untailored textbooks, or having merely fulfilled the language requirements for graduation), which catered primarily to the needs and abilities of the majority students. As a result of a series of structural problems, their investment in learning English thus may not easily translate into economic capital, especially in given their choice of jobs.

CHAPTER 6: GENERAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In Chapter 4 and 5, I discussed the findings of this chapter. In this chapter, I summarize the major findings, link these findings to previous research, and examine them in relation to my participants' identity construction through language learning. I then draw implications from this study, and conclude with a section on the study's limitations. I conclude the chapter with an outline of desirable future research that may build on the present study and lead to further advances in research on identity and ethnic minorities' multilingual practices.

Summary of the findings

This dissertation set out to understand female Uyghur students' identity construction, transformation and negotiation by examining their experiences of multilingual learning and use from Xinjiang to Nanjing, a socio-economically developed city in the east coast of China. According to Blackledge and Creese (2008), learner positioning depends on the "individual situation, the social and linguistic resources available to participants, and the balance of power relations which sets the boundaries for particular identity options" (p. 546). Moving from their less developed hometown to a major city, my participants expanded and enriched their repertoire of symbolic and material resources on which they could rely to effect more powerful social memberships. The Chinese and English language learning journey and the educational experiences in the host community hence changed the way ethnic minority students began to 'understand their relationship to the world …, and how [people] understand their possibilities for the future' (Norton, 1997, p. 410). Next, I discuss my findings in relation to the research questions that guided my study.

Investment. The first research question sought to understand how female Uyghur students perceived the learning of Chinese and English, what their investment in learning

these two languages was like, and what influence such investment had on their overall language learning process and identity construction. As my data revealed, these Uyghur women constructed Chinese and English as a pathway to academic success, personal development, social mobility, and a ticket to a globalized world.

By tracing my participants' Chinese learning trajectory from elementary school to university, I was able to understand some challenges these ethnic minority students experienced while they strove to excel in China's mainstream education system. Having managed to navigate and succeed in this system, the Uyghur women in this study regarded Mandarin Chinese as an important form of linguistic and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) that has had a profound influence on their academic success in school and their future lives. Although disadvantaged to some extent by a curriculum that prioritized Chinese, by investing in learning Chinese in various ways, both within and outside of Chinese classes, they contested their ascribed identity as incompetent Chinese speakers and negotiated an identity as educated Uyghur elites. They accomplished this feat by capitalizing on a repertoire of available resources including Chinese and other linguistic resources in social media communication (e.g., internet buzzwords, emoticons). Significantly, these Uyghur women benefited from their investment in learning Chinese by enlarging their pool of Han friends; in addition, they developed an awareness of and utilized the symbolic value of their ethnic resources to empower their fellow Uyghurs and to promote intercultural communication.

By tracing these Uyghur females' English learning trajectory, I also found that their stories reflected some ambivalence toward learning English. Different from their consistent perceptions of learning Mandarin Chinese, which was deemed more useful in their future lives, their investment in English was largely bound by their identities as Muslim women, their imagined future, and the socio-economic situation in Xinjiang. As my data suggested, as a result of being decapitalized by their pre-collegiate English education, my participants were

placed in a disadvantaged position in college. Nevertheless, they managed to negotiate a positive identity in the process, constructing themselves as 'good' English learners by (1) appropriating and enacting the repertoire of symbolic and linguistic resources relevant to English learning afforded by the host community and the internet, (2) through constructing differences between them and other Uyghur members who were less educated, and (3) by emphasizing their advantages in learning English (e.g., capitalizing on the positive influence of an ethnic minority language, mastering English in a short time period). However, despite the favorable positions that they negotiated, constructed and imagined, their perceptions of future possibilities were restricted by their ethnic affiliation and identity as Uyghur women. As indicated, in major cities like Nanjing, ethnic minority students' socialization into the mainstream society and upward social mobility were greatly restricted by an overarching neoliberal discourse that was compounded by a general lack of proficiency in Chinese and English among this group of students, which resulted in turn to an overall lack of competitiveness in the job market. As a result of systemic inequalities and their ethnic affiliation, my participants opted to return to Xinjiang after graduation. Such a decision to go back to Xinjiang also posed potential challenges when they attempted to translate their symbolic resources into economic capital, however. Specifically, my participants found that their English ability was rendered useless in Xinjiang. This material reality curbed their imagined future possibilities and dampened a further investment in English learning after meeting the graduation requirement (e.g., pass CET-4). Their enthusiasm for English learning was curtailed even further by their heavy workload at school that left them no extra time to study English.

To summarize, my female participants were invested in learning Chinese and English in and out of class to contest their identity as incompetent learners of Chinese and English and to negotiate an identity of educated Uyghur elites. This notion echoes the idea of

investment described by Norton (2013) where she states that "investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner's own identity, an identity which is constantly changing across time and space" (pp. 50-51). However, the extent of their investment varied, and more importantly, it was dynamic and fluid across contexts. Bound by their future career possibilities as result of their being Muslim women, my participants viewed Chinese as being more useful than English in Xinjiang because they were not able to convert the symbolic capital associated with English into economic capital given that the local socio-economic situation which prefers and values Chinese over English. Therefore, they demonstrated a varying level of investment in these two languages. In short, the varied levels of investment in language learning worked in potent ways to ultimately influence their language learning experience and identity construction.

Multilingual practice and positionality in the host community. The second research question sought to examine the way in which participants were positioned in relation to multilingual practices in the host educational setting. My findings revealed that my participants considered their "ethnic Uyghur identity" to be important and meaningful. In addition, my data demonstrated that my participants' identity underwent contestation and reconstruction in relation to their multilingual practices in the host educational setting. In line with previous studies on transnational migrant minorities in the host context of multilingual settings (e.g. Gu, 2015; Martín Rojo, 2010; Pérez-Milans & Patiño-Santos, 2014), this study revealed that ethnic identity, as a social category institutionalized through political forces, is subjective to socio-economic and political agendas, and can be easily drawn upon by the dominant group to attach negative images. Data from this dissertation suggested that an 'ethnicization' process (Martín Rojo, 2010), through which stereotypical images (e.g., dangerous terrorists) were projected onto Uyghur students in wider Chinese society, is embedded in the changing socio-economic and political discourse in China. The huge gap in

term of socio-economic development existing between the eastern coastal areas and northwestern regions has relegated Uyghur minorities to the periphery in relation to the Han majority, who tend to possess more linguistic and symbolic capital that the market values (Wu & Song, 2014; Zang, 2010).

In accordance with studies on the process of essentialization among transnational minorities, my findings also suggest that minority students can be marginalized by imbalanced power relations constituted by multilingual practices and linguistic hierarchy at regional and national levels (e.g., Heller, 2011; Pérez-Milans & Patiño-Santos, 2014). According to Piller and Cho (2013), driven by the new globalized economy and the neoliberalization of education and language, the English language has been privileged as an important terrain in which the individual's value is assessed. This reality was manifested through the experience of the participants in this study as they were marginalized by their insufficient command of English. More positively, however, my participants managed to negotiate a favorable Uyghur identity and a desirable educated Uyghur identity, drawing upon the symbolic resources they brought along with them (e.g., good pronunciation, significant Uyghur figures) or acquired in the host context. Nevertheless, against the neoliberal discourses of language in the host community, the majority of Uyghur students are still considered to be 'less competent' English learners and excluded from the market, making the situated elite status, a desired identity for my participants, difficult to sustain.

However, compared with studies conducted with transnational ethnic minorities who learn English in the target community, participants in the present study seem to be more effective in reducing the power imbalance between themselves and their counterpart learners when it came to learning English. Such a finding is consistent with what Guo and Gu (2016b) found in some of their Uyghur participants.

Capital. The third research question investigated Uyghur women's negotiation of their identities by drawing upon a variety of resources. From the study, we can see that what presupposes the construction of the 'good language learners' are a set of resources, such as the high-quality education in *Neigao ban* program (i.e., the boarding high school in the developed areas) and the abundant communication opportunities in Mandarin Chinese that were generally unavailable to the local Uyghur students.

Furthermore, the present study shows that intranational migration, as much as transnational migration, is a social process, and that the host context is a dynamic space (Blommaert, 2010; Duchêne, Moyer, & Roberts, 2013). While linguistic minorities can be marginalized, they are also afforded access to resources with high symbolic value (Blackledge & Creese, 2008). In the current study, the host community seemed to afford my participants space to contest disadvantaged positionings. However, their negotiated identities were somewhat self-referent as they were vulnerable to neoliberal market forces that characterized wider society. Bound by their identity as Muslim women, my participants opted to return to their hometowns to seek civil servant job positions in which a good command of Mandarin Chinese was preferred, which made their further investment in English learning ostensibly 'a waste of time'. As a consequence, such an ambivalent situation may ironically further marginalize the ethnic minority students in the host community, and thus hinder their long-term socialization into the mainstream community and upward social mobility.

Crucially, the data also revealed that my participants considered Chinese and English, languages that bear higher symbolic values by the linguistic hierarchy and neoliberal discourse, to be an empowering tool. Put simply, they saw English as a "weapon for self-empowerment" (McMahill, 2001. p. 332). In this study, my female participants were able to contest their identity as Muslim women and release themselves from the social values and norms placed on Uyghur women by acquiring symbolically powerful capital, expanding their

social circles, and exploring new possibilities for their future. Collectively, these efforts enabled them to negotiate an identity of educated Uyghur elites. Consistent with what Guo and Gu (2016b) found in their female participants who seemed to be more likely to negotiate a "successful English learner" identity than Uyghur males, my participants also demonstrated a high level of participation in the interactional opportunities afforded by the host community. Compared with the male participants in Guo and Gu (2016b) and Han et al. (2016) who tended to isolate themselves from the majority Han students in and out of class, the Uyghur women in my study were more invested in language learning and more engaged in communication with their Han friends, either in face-to-face scenarios or in digital space. Such social engagement, in turn, enabled the Uyghur women to contest their gendered identity. However, as discussed earlier, a series of socio-economic constraints and their perceived identity as Muslim women restricted their assimilation into mainstream society and curbed their upward social mobility. Nevertheless, through learning Chinese and English, and being educated in the developed areas, these Uyghur women felt empowered by acquiring symbolic and cultural capital, which opened up new possibilities for their future and enabled them to assume social roles and responsibilities that were previously only available to males.

Implications

The findings of this dissertation bear a number of implications, to which I now turn.

Theoretical implications. First, this study contributes to the body of research on identity construction and language in internal migrant contexts in several ways. Theoretically, this study explores the way in which participants' subject positions are constructed and negotiated as participants engaged in and are placed in a complex interplay between different contexts, linguistic practices, and wider neoliberal socio-economic mechanisms. Secondly, findings from the study emphasized the importance of examining individuals' identities as shaped by the discourses in the place of origin and the host context. Such discourses

171

influence identity formation both in the way that the institutional practices shape individuals'

identity construction and how individuals navigate various discourses for identity negotiation.

This study hence further underscores that individual's identity construction should be

examined to see how identities are shaped by these discourses and how individuals

strategically position themselves in these discourses. In this respect, both intranational and

international migrant minorities' identity construction need to be further examined in relation

to the multiple and changing discourses in which these minority learners are embedded.

Finally, as an empirical study that focuses on the intranational migration process, this study

complements the conceptualization of identity and transnationalism (e.g., Duff, 2015), and

adds to the current understanding of identity construction and language learning. The

combination of intra-national and cross-border migration processes allow for a richer and

deeper understanding towards the way identity construction in relation to language is shaped

by local, translocal, and global socioeconomic processes (Guo & Gu, 2016b).

Data from this study also shed light on how education has (re)shaped my participants'

gendered identity. As discussed, my female participants were able to contest their identity as

Muslim women and release themselves from the social values and norms placed on Uyghur

women by acquiring a variety of symbolically powerful capital, expanding their social circles,

and exploring new possibilities for their future. Notably, compared to local Muslim women

who generally receive limited formal education and hold low status within the male-dominant

family, my participants are expected to take on the responsibility to support their families and

act as role models for their fellow Uyghurs of the next generation. Perceived as educated

Uyghur women, my participants have greater access to employment opportunities, which

eventually lead to their self-empowerment (Gordon, 2004). The education they have received,

the vision they have developed, and the capital they have acquired grant my participants

elevated status in the marketplace in which they could draw on their linguistic capital and

exert their agency on their lives and society (McMahill, 2011). As suggested by Pavlenko and Piller (2001, 2007), individuals' language learning trajectories are not shaped by the nature of femininity or masculinity, but rather by the nature of gendered social and economic relations, as well as culture-specific ideologies of language and gender that mediate these relations and assign particular symbolic values to linguistic forms and discursive practices. This study reveals that changes in gender ideologies and relationships in particular communities could influence individual learners' investments in certain languages. Such relations between gendered identity, language learning, and intranational or international migration also merit further investigation.

In addition, this study illustrates that identity research can serve as a useful tool connecting language policy and planning (LPP) and second language acquisition (SLA) research (Han et al., 2018) by linking the micro-level individual learners' material realities, to meso-level of sociocultural institutions and communities (Douglas Fir Group, 2016), and to the macro-level of socioeconomic structures and language policy. Such a connection allows for an in-depth investigation of the material realities of people's lives in which individuals are embedded, with a primary focus on their identity construction and transformation (Tollefson & Pérez-Milans, 2018).

Policy implications. A number of policy implications for different stakeholders can be drawn from the findings of this study. As discussed in Chapter 5, ethnic minorities could develop multiple identities through immersion in English as an international language in college. Therefore, it would be desirable if a proper model of trilingual education in which ethnic minority students' native language and cultural heritage are better valued could be implemented in the minority regions prior to tertiary education. The introduction of such a model could improve the less-privileged groups' access to a symbolically valued language. In the meantime, the ethnic language and resources should be supported and maintained for the

benefit of the minority community (Creese & Blackledge, 2011). Moreover, education for ethnic minority students should aim at cultivating multicultural individuals, with the promotion of national identity not attempting to alienate individuals from their heritage identity. As such, a balance should be struck between Chinese as the national language and multilingual practice, and between market forces and cultural and social needs.

My findings also suggest that although my participants were determined to return to Xinjiang after graduation, it seemed difficult for them to take their desired jobs or career paths because (1) they are placed in a disadvantaged position in the national-level civil servant exam (e.g., Angela) and the graduate school admission exam (e.g., Mary) which are both designed in Chinese and prioritize the Han ethnicity. By the time this dissertation was written up, both Angela and Mary got a job by taking a local-level civil servant exam which offers less privileged government positions; (2) there are very limited job opportunities available to them due to the under-developed local economy and some restrictions placed on women (e.g., many jobs specifies the need of male applicants); and (3) their decisions on jobs are somewhat influenced by their families who are in favor of government or state-owned enterprise jobs as these jobs are, in their opinions, more privileged and secured. Therefore, it would be desirable if future language policies consider affirmative action and market regulation for ethnic minority women as this would create opportunities to have equal access to the market and to translate the symbolic capital they have gained through higher education into economic and social capital. Furthermore, the civil servant exams for minority students should be designed to include Chinese, the national language, and their mother tongue, which is essential to serve the indigenous minorities well. Moreover, to expand Uyghur minority students' job opportunities, it is essential to develop the economy by striking a balance between the eastern and the western regions.

Pedagogical implications. This study also bears pedagogical implications mainly for the English curriculum coordinators, English teachers, and school administrators who are in charge of ethnic minority student affairs at host institutions.

First, ethnic minority students and students from less developed areas who have relatively limited access to English before college are often marginalized in College English courses because the English teachers and textbooks treat them similarly as Han majority students. Such a practice could further place them in a more disadvantaged position and therefore affect their self-esteem and attitudes toward learning English. Acknowledging the existing unequal power relationship and the English learning difficulties that this group of students encounters, I recommend that the freshmen be placed into different levels of College English courses based on their English proficiency at host universities.

As also shown in previous chapters, many Uyghur students, like Babe, attended a two-year preparatory program in another city before attending university. Such programs, however, did not appear to enhance their English competence to meet the requirements placed by the university. Therefore, it is advised that such preparatory programs should be well designed and effectively implemented to enhance minority students' language proficiency, both in Chinese and English, in order to better prepare them for the college education. Alternatively, these preparatory classes could be moved to the target universities, which may help ethnic minority students make better transitions by exposing themselves to the environment where Chinese is used as the dominant language and English is considered to bear great symbolic value.

Second, although the Uyghur students come with a low level of competence in the target language, they have varied linguistic and other semiotic resources in their repertoire, which they can mobilize during communication. Making use of the multiple resources the learners possess can help both ESL/EFL teachers and learners. Minority students also need to

be provided with guidance that will enable them to capitalize on local and community resources, and to release themselves from essentialist views of ethnic identity, language and territory. Such affordances can facilitate their integration and upward mobility within the host society. For example, language- and culture-exchange programs could be set up at the institution to facilitate socialization and deepen mutual understanding between students with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Universities are also encouraged to invite prominent ethnic minority figures to give aspiring lectures on campus.

Third, since the participants in this study were all women, their identity construction and negotiation have a lot to do with their perceptions towards the target language which to a great extent are influenced by their familial, social, cultural, and religious beliefs. After all, language learning is not just learning about the linguistic aspects of language. Instead, it also incorporates learning the target language culture and values, such as freedom and equality which may be perceived differently in their own cultural heritage. Knowledge of the ethnic minority learners' cultural values related to their perceived gender would thus help ESL/EFL teachers and curriculum designers.

Limitations

Despite the study's significance, it has several limitations. First, as a qualitative inquiry, this study only focused on four Uyghur women in one institution. Thus, it might be difficult to generalize the findings to other contexts such as Uyghur women in more prestigious universities, female students who attend universities in less developed areas than Nanjing, or the entire female Uyghur community, for example. Nevertheless, I believe that a case study with "thick description" and in-depth discussions of multiple data sources can help to reveal possible ways the participants navigate the Chinese education systems and to negotiate their identity as educated Uyghurs. Moreover, efforts have been made to make sure that the four Uyghur women recruited in this study vary in their educational background,

176

major, language proficiency, and hometowns. Further studies involving ethnic minority women at more institutions in different locations would present a holistic picture of their language practices and identity construction; in addition, longitudinal studies could be conducted to trace how minority students negotiate their positioning at the workplace after graduation.

Secondly, data collected from multiple sources have indeed provided the opportunity to triangulate emergent themes. However, in a few cases, what the participants said in their interviews did not match their actual behaviors or thoughts when observed in their real-life scenarios or in online communications. Therefore, the recording of their real interactions in and out of their classrooms would bring more insights to the analysis of their multilingual practices and identity negotiation, which in this study was done only on the basis of what the participants said during their interviews and wrote in their journals and on social media. Moreover, although I attempted to collect data from multiple sources, such as interviews, observations, social media use, and relevant documents, my data, to certain extent, were not sufficiently in-depth. For instance, it was difficult to record my participants' face-to-face interactions among themselves or with their friends. For this reason, I collected as many of my participants' interactions and exchanges in digital space (e.g., WeChat) as possible to compensate for this shortcoming. As shown in Chapters 4 and 5, these data indeed illustrated how my participants drew upon multiple resources in online interactions to take on certain identities. In addition, although my occasional observations provided me with some opportunities to see how the participants interacted with their teachers, classmates and friends, the recording of the real interactions would have provided more detailed information. Moreover, almost all the data reflected my participants' individual perceptions towards Chinese and English learning; a visit to their hometowns and collecting data from the

participants' family members would have contributed to the trustworthiness of the data through triangulation.

Third, as mentioned in Chapter 3, given my connection with the Vice Dean of the English department, there might have been some bias in the data collection process because it may have impacted my participants' perception of my relationship with FU and with their teachers. Such a perception might have influenced what they chose to share with me during my fieldwork. Also, due to some social and cultural restrictions and values, I did not ask certain questions related to their ethnicity and religion. Therefore, I acknowledge that the data collected might not represent a complete picture of their gendered and ethnic identities.

Lastly, because I do not speaker Uyghur, all the interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese. My lack of Uyghur proficiency made it difficult to deal with data in Uyghur. However, I resorted to a Uyghur friend to translate the Uyghur data when needed to compensate for this linguistic deficiency. Also, because the analyses were conducted based on the English translation of the interviews, some meanings may have been lost during the process of translation. However, I tried to keep some of the Chinese terms in the excerpts to preserve the originality of my participants' opinions.

Future directions

Based on the findings and limitations of the study, the following directions might be explored in the future research on female ethnic minorities' identity construction in relation to internal migration.

First, as the study focused on only a small number of Uyghur women in one institution, further research involving a larger population of minority learners and more institutions should be carried out to improve our understanding of Uyghur students' identity and language issues. Comparative studies can even be conducted by investigating Han students from Xinjiang by comparing their trajectories of identity construction and

negotiation through language learning in order to have a deeper understanding of the intersections between identity, language learning and socioeconomic discourses.

Second, extended studies can be carried out in the future to explore Uyghur students' identity construction in relation to multilingual practices at boarding schools, in university preparatory programs, and at the workplace (Cervatiuc, 2009). Findings from this study have shown that educational experiences in boarding schools and in preparatory programs influenced ethnic minority students' linguistic practices and their accumulation of symbolic capital, while also impinging on the way they saw themselves and their social relations. Adi (who is currently working as a civil servant in Xinjiang), for example, often shared her dissatisfaction with her current situation and internal struggles with me. During my fieldwork, Alim, a male Uyghur youth who is working at an engineering company in Suzhou, Jiangsu, also had frequent informal conversations and exchanges with me. I found his negotiation of identity at the workplace very interesting and meaningful. Therefore, in the future, studies can be conducted at these sites to generate a real multi-site ethnographic study and to generate a more holistic understanding towards Uyghur students' identity construction and linguistic practices in and during the internal migration process.

Third, the study finds digital space to be a critical site where research can be carried out and where rich interactional and multimodal data are generated, thereby confirming 'digital ethnography' (Varis, 2016, p. 55) as a promising research methodology. The study also indicates that online texts are important sources for identity construction in the information age (e.g., Hine, 2008; Lee, 2016; Vesa & Vaara, 2014). As revealed in the data, my participants used a variety of 表情包 (*biaoqing bao*, emoticon package) during their online interactions, a point that I did not explore deeply in this dissertation, but definitely deserves further investigation.

Lastly, following Han et al.'s (2018) observation, it is suggested that future LPP work

look at Uyghur language acquisition at the meso-level of the school and family to explore

how these two social domains are ultimately influenced by the micro- and macro-level

impulses. Such an ecological perspective will help language identity researchers better

understand the complex dynamics surrounding language acquisition.

APPENDICES

Consent to Participate in Research

IRB# x16-1605e; Application No. i053068

Primary Investigator: Dr. Peter De Costa   Secondary Investigator: Yaqiong Cui
Second Language Studies
B-257 Wells Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824   B-270 Wells Hall
Phone: (517) 353-9776   (517) 974-6768
pdecosta@msu.edu   cuiyaqio@msu.edu

Introduction and Explanation of the Study: You are invited to participate in this research study. This study will look at your language learning experience. If you are willing to participate, we request that you allow us to record interviews with you, conduct observations inside and out of your classrooms, collect your written work, have access to your social media, and gather miscellaneous information from other resources or activities which may provide further insight into your language learning experience.

Risks and Benefits: One potential risk to the subject is breach of confidentiality. This risk is moderate because the information collected will concern completion of academic work. Further, the likelihood of the risk is quite low considering that access to the data will be limited to the PI and the secondary investigator and that the data will be stored securely using password protection. In addition, the data will be coded so that the student cannot be identified during the research or after publication. You may get help with your Chinese and English acquisition, as well as Chinese and American cultures by participating this research.

Confidentiality: Your confidentiality will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. All information collected will be confidential and will only be used for research purposes. The researchers will use a pseudonym to identify your data instead of using your name. Whenever data from this study are published, your name will not be used. All data collected will be kept in a locked cabinet in the PI's locked office at MSU (see the address above) for at least three years after the project closes. Electronic data will be kept on the PI's password protected computer; however, no participant names will be stored on the computer. All data will be collected by the two investigators listed on this application. Only the two researchers will see and use the data, but the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) can also see the data.

Your participation: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate at all, or you may refuse to answer certain questions or discontinue your participation at any time without consequence. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision to participate will in **NO** way affect your course grade.

Researcher's contact information: If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the primary investigator (Dr. Peter De Costa, Dept. of Linguistics & Germanic, Slavic, Asian and African

Languages, Second Language Studies, B-257 Wells Hall, East Lansing, MI 48824, Phone: (517) 884-7728, pdecosta@msu.edu).

IRB's contact information: If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

Subject's consent
I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Your name (PLEASE PRINT):   _____   Date: _____

Your signature: _____

密歇根州立大学研究课题参与同意书

项目负责人: Peter De Costa 博士（语言学系）　　　　研究人员: 崔雅琼（语言学系）

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项目负责人联系方式：如果你对本研究有任何疑问或意见，请与项目负责人(Peter De Costa 博士)联系。联系电话：(517)884-7728，Email: pdecosta@msu.edu.

IRB 办公室联系方式：如果你对本研究有任何疑问、意见或投诉，请与密歇根州立大学人类研究保护办公室联系。联系电话：(517)355-2180，传真：(517)432-4503，Email: irb@msu.edu，通讯地址：207 Olds Hall, MSU, East Lansing, MI 48824.

被试者意向：我自愿参加这项研究。

姓名：_____

签名：_____　　　　　日期：_____

Background Questionnaire

A. General Information

1. Age:

2. University year: 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

3. Major:

4. Where is your hometown? _____

4. Where did you attend elementary school? _____

5. Where did you attend middle school? _____

6. Where did you attend high school? _____

B. Known Languages and Uses

1. Native language: _____ Dialect:

2. Mother's native language: _____ Dialect:

3. Father's native language:_____ Dialect:

4. Language(s) spoken at home during childhood:

5. Language(s) of instruction during elementary school (content courses):

6. Language(s) of instruction during middle school (content courses):

7. Language(s) of instruction during high school (content courses):

8. Other language(s) that you know and proficiency levels

Language	Reading	Writing	Speaking	Listening
Chinese	☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced ☐ Near-native	☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced ☐ Near-native	☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced ☐ Near-native	☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced ☐ Near-native
English	☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced ☐ Near-native	☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced ☐ Near-native	☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced ☐ Near-native	☐ Beginner ☐ Intermediate ☐ Advanced ☐ Near-native

	□ Beginner	□ Beginner	□ Beginner	□ Beginner
	□ Intermediate	□ Intermediate	□ Intermediate	□ Intermediate
	□ Advanced	□ Advanced	□ Advanced	□ Advanced
	□ Near-native	□ Near-native	□ Near-native	□ Near-native
	□ Beginner	□ Beginner	□ Beginner	□ Beginner
	□ Intermediate	□ Intermediate	□ Intermediate	□ Intermediate
	□ Advanced	□ Advanced	□ Advanced	□ Advanced
	□ Near-native	□ Near-native	□ Near-native	□ Near-native

9. Weekly use of Uyghur, Chinese and other language(s)

    a. % weekly use of Uyghur: _____ Context: _____

    b. % weekly use of Chinese: _____ Context: _____

    c. % weekly use of English: _____ Context:_____

    d. % weekly use of_____(language): _____ Context:_____

    d. % weekly use of_____(language): _____ Context:_____

10. In what language(s) are you the most comfortable? _____

背景问卷调查

A. 一般信息

1. 年龄:

2. 年级: 1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9

3. 专业:

4. 家乡: _____

4. 在哪里上的小学? _____

5. 在哪里上的初中? _____

6. 在哪里上的高中? _____

B. 语言实用情况

1. 母语: _____ 方言:

2. 母亲的母语: _____ 方言:

3. 父亲的母语: _____ 方言:

4. 儿童时期使用的语言:

5. 小学时期的授课语言: _____ _____

6. 初中时期的授课语言: _____

7. 高中时期的授课语言: _____

8. 语言水平自评

语言	阅读	写作	口语	听力
汉语	□ 初级 □ 中级 □ 高级 □ 接近母语者	□ 初级 □ 中级 □ 高级 □ 接近母语者	□ 初级 □ 中级 □ 高级 □ 接近母语者	□ 初级 □ 中级 □ 高级 □ 接近母语者
英语	□ 初级 □ 中级 □ 高级 □ 接近母语者	□ 初级 □ 中级 □ 高级 □ 接近母语者	□ 初级 □ 中级 □ 高级 □ 接近母语者	□ 初级 □ 中级 □ 高级 □ 接近母语者

	□ 初级	□ 初级	□ 初级	□ 初级
	□ 中级	□ 中级	□ 中级	□ 中级
	□ 高级	□ 高级	□ 高级	□ 高级
	□ 接近母语者	□ 接近母语者	□ 接近母语者	□ 接近母语者
	□ 初级	□ 初级	□ 初级	□ 初级
	□ 中级	□ 中级	□ 中级	□ 中级
	□ 高级	□ 高级	□ 高级	□ 高级
	□ 接近母语者	□ 接近母语者	□ 接近母语者	□ 接近母语者

9. 每周维吾尔语、汉语和英语的使用百分比

    a. 每周维吾尔语使用百分比: _____ 使用情境: _____

    b. 每周汉语使用百分比: _____ 使用情境: _____

    c. 每周英语使用百分比: _____ 使用情境: _____

    d. 每周_____（语言）使用百分比: _____ 使用情境: _____

    e. 每周_____（语言）使用百分比: _____ 使用情境: _____

10. 你使用什么语言最舒服? _____

Sample Interview Questions for Participants

Interview 1
The goal of the first interview is to gather student participants' background information, including their family, school experiences before joining FU, and language learning experiences.

Background information
1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?
    a. Where were you born?
    b. Can you tell me a little about your hometown?
2. Can you tell me a little about your family?
    a. How many people are there in your family?
    b. What do they do for a living? Where did they go for school?
3. What language do your family speak at home?
    a. What languages do they speak?
    b. What do you usually use this language for?
    c. Who do you usually speak this language with?
    d. Is there a time that you avoid using this language? When and why?

School experiences before joining FU
1. Where did you go for school before joining FU? Can you tell me a little bit about your school? Where is the school located? What does the building look like? What kind of students go to the school? What's the male/female ratio in your class?
    a. Elementary school?
    b. Middle school?
    c. High school?
2. How did you like your school there?
3. Please tell me a little bit about what your school day was like.
    a. Where did you live?
    b. What time did you get up?
    c. How did you go to school?
    d. What did you do in and after school?
4. What made your family decide to send you to that school?
5. Who was your best friend at school?
    a. Describe your best friend
    b. What did you often do together?
    c. Are you still in touch now? How?
6. What has been the most positive aspect about your experience at that school? What did you like most about that school? Please explain.
7. What did you like least about that school? Why?
8. What has been your most difficult experience at the school? Please explain.
9. Who was your favorite teacher? Why did you like him/her?
10. How would you describe yourself as a student in your school before you joined FU? What five words would you use to describe yourself?

Language learning experiences before joining FU
1. Please tell me a little bit about your Chinese/English classes.
    a. When did you start learning Chinese and English?
    b. How long have you been learning Chinese/English?
    c. How do you like your Chinese/English classes? Why?
    d. Do you think your language classes are as important as other classes? Why or why not?
    e. Who were the teachers? Are they Han or Uyghur? How did they teach?
    f. Who was your favorite language teacher? Tell me a little bit about him/her. Why did you like him/her?
    g. How often did you participate in class discussion?
    h. Give me an example of the situation in which you did not feel like wanting to speak Chinese/English in/outside class.
    i. What else do you often do to learn Chinese/English outside class?
2. How do you think about your English/Chinese ability?
    a. Do you feel that you can understand your textbooks?
    b. Can you understand what the teachers say in class?
    c. What do you usually do if you don't understand the textbooks or have problems understanding teachers' lectures?
    d. Do you have problems communicating in Chinese/English?

Interview 2

The goal of the second interview is to gain an understanding of the student participants' life at FU, Nanjing, focusing on how they think about the importance of learning Chinese and English, on their language use and language socialization, and their identities.

Language and the academic learning at FU
1. What is your major?
    a. Do you like this major? Was this major your first choice?
    b. What kind of courses do you take? What's your favorite course? What's your least favorite course?
    c. What do you do in class?
    d. What kind of assignments are there?
2. Please tell me a little bit about your English classes at FU
    a. What are the language requirements for ethnic minority students to graduate?
    b. Who were the English teachers? Are they Han or Uyghur? How did they teach?
    c. Who is your favorite English teacher? Tell me a little bit about him/her.
    d. Do you enjoy learning English in class? Why or why not?
    e. How often do you participate in class discussion?
    f. Give me an example of the situation in which you did not feel like wanting to speak English in/outside class.
3. Have you encountered any problems communicating with cohorts and teachers?
    a. What was the problem? How did you solve it?
    b. How did you feel about that?
4. How do you improve your Chinese now?
5. How important do you think are Chinese and English for your life? What are the motives to learn Chinese and English?

Languages and the socialization at FU
1. Who do you usually hang out? Where do you usually go? What do you often do?

2. What's your favorite place in Nanjing?
3. Tell me a little bit about your best friend(s) at FU.
    a. When did you get to know each other?
    b. Is he/she Uyghur or Han?
    c. Why do you like him/her as friends?
    d. What languages do you speak with your best friends?
4. Did you join any communities/groups/clubs? How do you benefit from being a member of this group?
5. Social media use
    a. How often do you use social media? What do you use most frequently?
    b. What do you use these social media for?
    c. What languages do you use on social media?
    d. Have you subscribed to any public accounts on WeChat? What are they?
    e. Do you often post on WeChat? What do you post? In what languages?
6. How would you describe yourself now? What five words would you use to describe yourself?

Relationship with family members
1. Do you watch TV at home? What are your favorite TV programs?
2. Do you watch TV online? Do you watch TV programs in Uyghur?
3. Do you go to websites in Uyghur?
4. What kind of music do you listen? In which language(s)?
5. Who is your favorite figure? Tell me a little bit about him/her.
6. Besides your family members, who else do you speak your native language with?

Interview 3

The goal of the third interview is to probe participants' opinions on national education and language policies for ethnic minority students, as well as the preferential policies implemented at FU. I would also like to know about participants' views on Muslim culture, and how their previous education experiences have (re)shaped their identities.

Uyghur and Muslim culture
1. March 21st was an important holiday in Muslim culture. How do you celebrate it at home? How did you celebrate it at school? Could you show me some pictures?
2. Could you tell me a little bit about Muslim culture? What do people expect from Muslim girls? Are there any differences between Uyghur girls and Han girls? Who are you more like?
3. How do you stay connected to Muslim culture at FU? Do you attend Uyghur gatherings (e.g., worship, ethnic/religious events, party)?
4. How often do you go back home? How do you travel? How long does it take to get home? Is it difficult to buy tickets? What is it like being at home?

Policies for ethnic minority students at NTU
5. What is it like studying at FU? How do you like your life at FU (Nanjing/Shanghai)? Are you used to the life here? Why or why not?
6. What is it like studying a male-dominant major at FU?
7. Have you experienced/observed any problems of being an ethnic minority student in the inland?
8. Do you have friends who are from other ethnic groups? How much do you know about the national education policies for ethnic minority students?

9. Do you know that FU has implemented some preferential policies for ethnic minority students?
    a. What are they?
    b. Where did you hear about those policies?
    c. What's your opinion on these policies?

<u>Identity</u>
10. Have your previous education experiences changed you in some way? In what ways? Do you like or dislike these changes? What is the most noticeable change?
11. Have your family and friends noticed any changes on you? What do they say?
12. Have you had any arguments/disagreements with your family or friends at home?
13. How would you describe yourself?
    a. Would you say you are _____(Chinese/Uyghur/something else)?
    b. How important do you think it is for you to be a _____? Why?
14. What does speaking Uyghur/Chinese/English mean for you? Do you feel you are a different person when you speak different languages?
15. What's your plan for the future?
    a. Which city would you like to go after graduation?
    b. What job would you like to take? Why?
16. What kind of person would you like to be?
17. How do you picture yourself in 10 years?

APPENDIX D

Sample Interview Questions for Administrators

1. What's the proportion of ethnic minority students at FU? What about Uyghur students in particular?
2. What is your impression of minority students in general and Uyghur students in particular?
3. Could you tell me something about the national-level and university-level policies toward the ethnic minority students? What are the goals of these policies? What do you think of these policies? Have you encountered any problems implementing these policies?
4. How are the Chinese and English proficiency of the ethnic minority students in general, and Uyghur students in particular?
5. What kind of problems do ethnic minority students encounter in general, and Uyghur students in particular?
6. What do you think of the pre-college preparatory program?
7. Are there any measures taken to help Uyghur students who are weak in Chinese/English proficiency, such as offering extra courses?
8. Are there any measures taken to help Uyghur and ethnic minority students integrate into the mainstream society?
9. What is the post-graduate future of Uyghur students like?
10. What are the university's expectations about Uyghur students?

Sample Interview Questions for Instructors

1. What your general impression of the Uyghur students in your class?
2. Are there any preferential policies toward Uyghur students? What are the goals of these policies? What do you think of these policies? Have you encountered any problems implementing these policies in your class?
3. How are the Chinese and English proficiency of Uyghur students in your class?
4. What do you think of their class performance?
5. What are your strategies to deal with Uyghur students in your class?
6. Does the department take any measures to help Uyghur students who are weak in Chinese/English proficiency, such as offering extra courses? Does the department take any measures to help with Uyghur students' major study?
7. Do you pay special attention to Uyghur students in your class? How?
8. Do you think Uyghur students should be treated differently? Why or why not?

Sample Interview Questions for Participants' Friends

Participants' Han Friends

1. How long have you been knowing X?
2. What's your general impression on her? What was your first impression on her?
3. What do you often do together? Where do you often hang out? What do you often talk about? Can you give me an example?
4. Do you perceive any differences between X and Han girls?
5. Does X stay in touch with you during holidays? What do you talk about?
6. Have you noticed any changes of X over these years? In what aspects? What has been the biggest change? Do you think what made her change?
7. What do you think of her Chinese and English proficiency?
8. What was your impression toward Uyghur students before knowing X?
9. Do the teachers and students treat Uyghur students differently? Do they have any prejudice toward Uyghurs?
10. In your opinion, what kind of difficulties do they encounter while studying in Nanjing?
11. Do you talk about topics related to ethnicity and religion?
12. Do you talk about future? Do you notice any changes regarding what she thinks about her future?

Participants' Male Uyghur Friends

Muslim culture & women
1. Family background
   a. How many people do you have in your family? What do they do?
   b. Who has more authority at home? What if there are disagreements?
   c. Do your parents treat boys and girls differently?
2. Muslim women
   a. How are women viewed in Muslim culture?
   b. Do men and women have equal status according to Muslim culture? Do Uyghur men and women have equal access to education? What's your opinion?
3. Women in family
   a. How do you view your mother and sisters?
   b. Are there any restrictions on women after they get married? Are they allowed to receive education after getting married?
   c. What kind of wife are you looking for?
4. Uyghur vs. Han girls
   a. Do you have Han female friends? Do you think Uyghur girls and Han girls are different? In what aspects?
   b. What do you think of your Uyghur female friends?

Future
1. What's your plan after graduation? What about your Uyghur female friends? Why?

2. How was the intern experience? Do people at workplaces treat Uyghurs differently compared to people in university campus?
3. What's the situation of Uyghur students seeking jobs in big cities like? What's the ratio of men to women who succeeded in finding jobs in big cities?
4. Do you think Uyghur men and women have equal or similar level of access to job and education opportunities?

Sample Journal Writing Prompts

Participants were encouraged to note down any incidents that were significant to them. They can write about their feelings in a diary format or on WeChat. They are encouraged to write in any language(s) they are comfortable with (Uyghur/Chinese/English).

<u>Prompts 1 & 2</u>

Please write an autobiographical narrative of your Chinese/English learning journey. You can include the following information in your writing, but you can literally write about anything that is related to your Chinese/English learning experiences.

1. Critical incidents in your past history regarding Chinese/English learning;
2. Interesting anecdotes in your experiences of learning Chinese/English;
3. Your favorite Chinese/English teacher;
4. Your favorite way of learning Chinese/English;
5. Others

<u>Prompt 3</u>

Please write about your interactions/conversations with Han students/teachers or international students on campus. You can use the following points as a guide in your writing.

1. When and where did the conversation take place? With whom?
2. What did you talk about (i.e., the topic of your conversation)?
3. How did you feel about that conversation?
4. Others

Sample Questions for Focus Group Interviews

<u>Focus group interview 1</u>

1. All of you mentioned that you "studied Chinese/English very hard". How did you study Chinese/English? What do you mean by "study very hard"?
2. How do you define "successful language learners"?
3. In your opinion, what is the best way to learn a language? What's your goal to learn a language?
4. All of you have mentioned that learning Chinese is very useful. Can you tell me how do you feel when speaking Chinese? In what ways will knowing Chinese be useful? What about English?
5. All of you have mentioned that you like watching Chinese/English films and TV dramas. What is your favorite movie? What does it talk about? Why do you like it? Can you share how you learn Chinese/English from watching movies?
6. Have you experienced any discriminations because of your ethnicity or being a woman?
7. Have you ever felt discriminated against because of your Chinese/English proficiency?
8. What are your experiences with the College English courses like?
9. How is your university life thus far?

<u>Focus group interview 2</u>

1. I know that all of you worked as a volunteer teacher back in Xinjiang during the holidays. Can you share the experience with me?
2. How do you think your life would be different if you know Uyghur, Mandarin Chinese and English?
3. What would it be like if you didn't come to Shanghai and Nanjing for education?
4. All of you have mentioned that your thoughts and opinions are highly valued in your family. Can you elaborate on your role in your family?
5. What are the major challenges that you have encountered along the way you moved from Xinjiang to Nanjing?
6. When I asked you to use 5 words to describe yourself, you all used a word "change". Can you tell me in what ways your education experiences have changed you?
7. How do you perceive yourself as compared to your Uyghur friends back in Xinjiang, and your Uyghur friends who are educated in big cities?
8. In your opinion, what is the biggest problem in Xinjiang now?
9. How do you envision yourself in 1 year, 5 years, and 10 years?

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205

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