

# **On English Language Education for Ethnic Minority Students in China:**

*A Focus on Two Groups of Uyghur  
University Students in Xinjiang*

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## Abstract

Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in order to cope with the opportunities and challenges of globalization, the Chinese people have been showing an unprecedented enthusiasm in learning English, the widely acknowledged international language. Under such circumstances, English education is highly valued in today's Chinese society. However, in a multi-ethnic country like China, there exist great differences between the country's ethnic majority group and ethnic minority groups in terms of receiving English education. Compared with Han, China's ethnic majority group, who speak Chinese (China's national language) as mother tongue and learn English as a second language, most of the ethnic minority groups in China have their own native languages and they learn Chinese as a second language and English as a third one.

In China's far west Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region reside 47 different ethnic groups and more than 60% of which are the country's ethnic minorities. In Xinjiang, Uyghur, the concern of my study, is the largest ethnic minority group in the region who speak Uyghur as their native language. The current study focuses on two different groups of Uyghur university students, namely the *Min kao Min* and *Min kao Han* ones. Before entering university, students from the former group received mother tongue education in ethnic minority schools; while students from the latter group received *Putonghua* (standard Chinese, also known as Mandarin) education in Han schools.

By focusing on these two groups of Uyghur university students, the current study aims to find out how different modes of basic education may influence the English learning situations facing ethnic minority students who belong to the same ethnic group. In addition, using the English learning situations of the two groups of Uyghur students as a point of departure, the current research also aims to analyze how different modes of basic education may shape different cultural capital and cultural identity of members from the same ethnic group. The research findings suggest that compared with their *Min kao Min* peers, the *Min kao Han* students are in a more advantageous position in terms of English learning at university level. However, most of the *Min kao Han* students have to pay a price for their advantage.

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# **Chapter 1. Introduction**

## **1.1 The Significance of English Education in China**

Ever since the implementation of the reform and open-door policy in 1978, with the country's speedy economic development, China has seen increasing commercial, technological and cultural exchanges with the outside world through an English-language medium (Wu, 2001; Johnson, 2009). Under such circumstances, in the past three decades or so, English language education has been greatly valued in China, and proficiency in English has been widely acclaimed as both a national and personal asset (Hu, 2005).

Entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century, China has been facing more and more opportunities and challenges than ever before in a global environment. Moreover, with China's entry into the WTO and its successful bid for the Olympics, the country has witnessed a so-called "English Fever" (Johnson, 2009), as countless Chinese people have been showing an unprecedented enthusiasm in learning English, the widely acknowledged international language. Currently in China, as Gil (2006, p.455) asserts: "English is used more and has a higher status than at any time in the past and there is much activity, both academic and practical, surrounding it."

In today's China, English is regarded as a powerful tool for both national development and personal success; hence, considerable national and individual endeavors and resources have been invested in English language education (Hu, 2005; Johnson, 2009). On the national level, as Hu (2005, p.5) indicates: "English language education has been viewed by the Chinese leadership as having a vital role to play in national modernization and development." As for individuals, according to Silver, Hu & Iino (2002, p.3): "proficiency in English is seen as a key to a host of opportunities:

to enter and graduate from university, to go abroad for further education, to secure desirable jobs in public and private sectors, foreign-invested companies or joint ventures, and to be eligible for promotion to higher professional ranks.”

## **1.2 English Education for China’s Ethnic Minorities**

Despite the fact that at present in China, the Chinese people are experiencing an English learning craze and the proficiency in English is greatly valued in the Chinese society, the English learning situations of China’s ethnic minorities seem to be less covered by both Chinese and Western scholars (Yang,2005; Gil,2006). Compared with Han, China’s ethnic majority group, who learn English as a second language, most of the ethnic minority groups in China have their own native languages and they learn Chinese as a second language and English as a third one.

Ever since the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, there have been various changes in the country’s language policy regarding both ethnic minority and foreign languages (Gao, 2011). Stepping into the new century, China began to promote English language education across the country more vigorously than ever before, which made the situation for indigenous ethnic minority groups in terms of their language education even more complex and diversified (Feng, 2012, p.129). As a matter of fact, regardless of the 2001 policy of enhancing English language education provision in all the regions of China, the issue of foreign language and trilingual education within the country’s ethnic minority schools has received little attention (Gao, 2011, p.148).

In today’s China, “for ethnic minorities, the chance to obtain linguistic skills represents an important opportunity for social advancement and economic

development” (Gao, 2011, p.158). Moreover, in order to participate in international communication under a background of globalization, it is of great significance for members of ethnic minorities to manage personal trilingualism, namely in their native language, *Putonghua*, the standard national language of China, and English, the international language (Ma, 2006; Postiglione, 2008).

It has been widely acclaimed that trilingual education for ethnic minority students may grant them the opportunities to be empowered rather than being further marginalized as the disadvantaged social members. However, trilingual education for ethnic minority students in China is still challenged, and the development of English language provision for ethnic minority groups remains slow in contrast to the speedy progression of that for the country’s ethnic majority, Han. Moreover, there exist vast differences among minority dominated areas in terms of the development of trilingual education for ethnic minority students (Feng, 2012, pp.129-131).

When it comes to English provision for ethnic minority students in primary and secondary schools in China, local policies and practices can be very divergent due to the fact that education authorities in minority dominated areas have adopted their own strategies. While some regions are making concrete plans for the implementation of English provision for the local minority students, others may ignore the state document owing to unfavorable contextual factors, such as remoteness and lack of resources (Feng, 2012, p.131).

As a result, in some of the ethnic minority dominated areas in China, many minority students may have little English competence if they only have a secondary or lower education. As for those few who made their way to tertiary education, they are in a severely disadvantageous position in learning English compared with their Han peers, as most of them have to learn English from scratch while their Han counterparts have learned the language for ten years or more already. What’s worse, most ethnic

minority students have to learn English, their third language, through the medium of *Putonghua*, their second language and they hardly receive any help or guidance tailored by people with their own first language backgrounds (Yang, 2005, pp.561-564).

### **1.3 English Education for Ethnic Minorities in Xinjiang**

In China's far west Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region reside 47 different ethnic groups and more than 60% of which are ethnic minorities of the country. Compared with other ethnic minority dominated areas, Xinjiang is one of the regions with the most limited provision of English in China (Adamson & Feng, 2009). For instance, Olan (2007) conducted a survey at the most renowned university in Xinjiang and found out that 62% of the minority students at the university had had zero English learning experience before they entered the university.

In Xinjiang, Uyghur, the concern of my study, is the largest ethnic minority group taking up 45.9% of the total population in the region (Ma, 2009). However, in spite of the documents issued by the Ministry of Education which stipulate that English education should start from grade three at primary school, in many Uyghur language primary or secondary schools in Xinjiang, the students generally have no access to English education owing to a shortage of educational resources (Adamson & Feng, 2009, p.328). Consequently, for most of the Uyghur students in Xinjiang, English education will be accessible to them unless they manage to enter universities.

As a matter of fact, the Uyghur students in Xinjiang can be classified into two different groups due to the different modes of education they receive at primary and secondary schools, namely the *Min kao Min* and *Min kao Han* ones (more detailed

explanations will be given in the next chapter). The former group refers to those Uyghur students who attend Uyghur schools where Uyghur is the language of instruction, while the latter group refers to those Uyghur students who receive *Putonghua* education in Han schools. Unlike their *Min kao Min* peers, the *Min kao Han* students get to enjoy English education since primary school as Han students do. Every year in Xinjiang, thanks to the preferential policy (detailed explanation will be seen in the next chapter) for ethnic minority students, a certain number of Uyghur students from both the above-mentioned two groups are admitted to universities. However, because of the different modes of basic education they received, the two groups of students will be faced with totally different English learning situations once they enter universities.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The education of ethnic minorities has always been a major issue in the field of Comparative and International Education. In today's China, English provision for the country's ethnic minorities is an important educational issue which is closely related with social equity. However, due to the localized policies of education in China's ethnic minority areas, the issues concerning English provision need to be analyzed case by case (Adamson & Feng, 2009). The matters regarding ethnic minority education in Xinjiang, an area of great significance for the ethnic minorities in northwestern China, have been a continuous concern in both government and academic domains (Ma, 2009, p.188). Therefore, when it comes to the issue of English provision for ethnic minority students in China, the case in Xinjiang could entail great social and academic importance.

By focusing on two groups of Uyghur university students, who belong to the largest

ethnic minority group in Xinjiang, I aim to paint a picture of the current complex English learning situations faced by ethnic minority university students in the region. In addition, I also aim to use the English learning situations of the two groups of Uyghur students as a point of departure to analyze how different modes of basic education may shape the cultural capital and cultural identity of members from the same ethnic group.

With the above-mentioned aims, using a qualitative approach, an empirical study was carried out with 17 participants (11 *Min kao Min* students and 6 *Min kao Han* ones) from five most renowned universities in Urumqi, the capital city of Xinjiang, China, and the study was guided by the following three research questions:

- (1). How do the two groups of Uyghur university students perceive English education in today's society?
- (2). What kinds of situations are faced by the two groups of Uyghur university students in terms of English learning?
- (3). How are the two groups of Uyghur university students different from each other in terms of their linguistic abilities and cultural identities?

## **1.5 The Organization of the thesis**

The thesis is composed of six chapters in total. Following this introduction chapter is chapter two in which some significant background issues concerning the current study will be introduced. In chapter three, some previous relevant studies will be covered

first, followed by an introduction to the theoretical framework for analyzing and interpreting the empirical data collected for the study. In chapter four, the research strategy, research design, the process of the field work as well as the method of data analysis will be explained. Then in chapter five, with the guide of the theoretical framework, the empirical results of the study will be displayed. Finally, in chapter six, the concluding chapter, the findings of the empirical study will be summarized and some limitations of the study as well as some implications and recommendations for future research will also be presented.

## **Chapter 2. Background of the study**

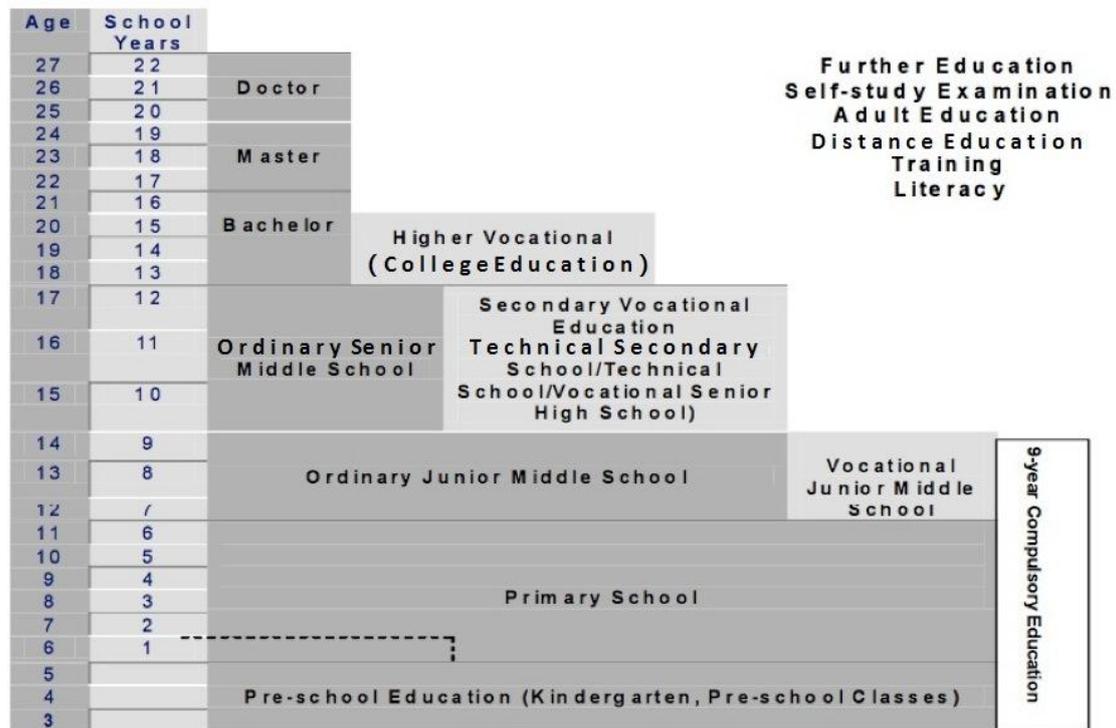
In this chapter, some significant background issues concerning the study will be covered, including an introduction to China's education system, the information about China's ethnic minorities and relevant policies regarding their education, a basic introduction to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region and the education for the ethnic minorities there, together with some important information about the two groups of Uyghur students in Xinjiang who are the concern of my research.

### **2.1 China's Education System**

At present, China practices a schooling system which includes the formal education system consisting of pre-school, elementary, secondary and tertiary education, vocational education system, and adult education system (Ministry of Education of the P.R. China & Chinese National Commission for UNESCO, 2008, p.3). As Figure 2.1 indicates, in China, pre-school education includes kindergarten and pre-school classes; the 9-year compulsory education is composed of 6 years of primary education and 3 years of lower secondary education which can be received either in ordinary or vocational junior middle schools; and the 3 years of senior secondary education can be received either in ordinary or vocational senior middle schools.

The tertiary education in China is constituted of undergraduate education (4 years), associate college degree education and higher vocational education (2-3 years). The postgraduate education includes master degree education (2-3 years) and doctoral degree education (3 years) (National Commission of the P.R. China for UNESCO & National Center for Education Development and Research of the P.R. China, 2008, p.9).

As for China's adult education system, it comprises the adult elementary education (including the literacy classes), the adult secondary education, and the adult tertiary education. (National Commission of the P.R. China for UNESCO & National Center for Education Development and Research of the P.R. China, 2008, p.9).



**Figure 2.1: The Chinese Education System**

**Source:** Ministry of Education of the P.R. China & Chinese National Commission for UNESCO, 2008

## 2.2 The National University Entrance Examination in China

The national university entrance examination plays a pivotal role in the Chinese Education system. In China, the university entrance examination is colloquially referred to as the 'gaokao' and is a main route for the Chinese students to access higher education. Every year, millions of high school students in China take the university entrance examination, and their chances of entering the universities are determined by their exam results (Davey, Lian & Higgins, p.385, 2007).

The university entrance exam also plays a significant role in the Chinese society. In China, the competition on the job market is quite furious and a university education is considered as a major means of increasing a person's life chances. However, due to the fact that the number of university applicants each year far exceeds available places, the university entrance exam can be extremely competitive (Davey, Lian & Higgins, pp.385-392, 2007).

In recent years, in order to meet the demand of China's growing economy, the country has seen a marked increase in the number of students entering universities. Over the years, there has been a considerable change in the number of university entrance exam candidates and their success rates. For instance, in 1998, there were 2,975,000 candidates and their success rate was 36.3%; nevertheless, in 2004, the number of candidates increased to over 7,000,000 and the success rate for them reached to 45% (Davey, Lian & Higgins, pp.385-390, 2007).

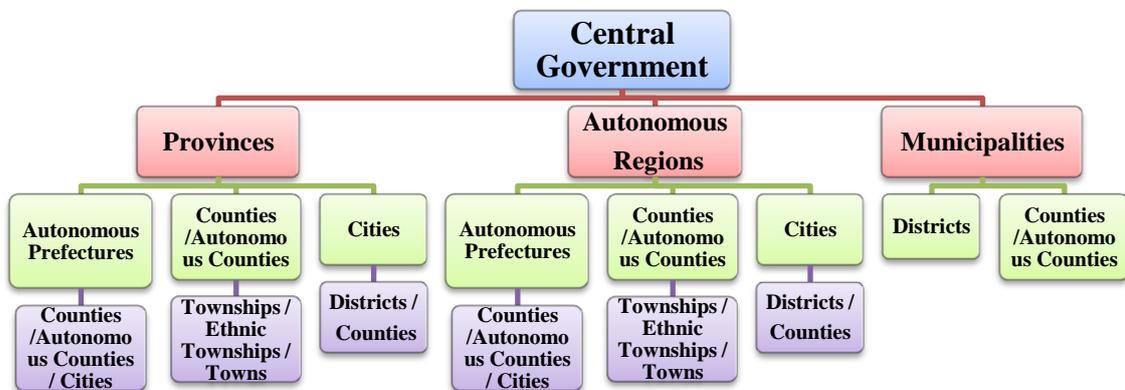
When it comes to China's national university entrance examination, it also has to be pointed out that there are some policies enabling certain groups of students, including ethnic minority groups, sportspeople, children of army personnel, and disabled applicants to enter universities with lower scores. In addition, for certain ethnic minority students in China, they can take a different entrance exam than the standard one using their own native languages (Davey, Lian & Higgins, p.389, 2007).

### **2.3 Basic Information about China's Ethnic Minorities**

The People's Republic of China (PRC) is a unified multi-ethnic country with the world's largest population, approximately 1.34 billion. Among China's 56 different ethnic groups, Han is the majority group, taking up 91.51% of the total population; while the rest 8.49% of the population is composed of 55 other ethnic groups, which

are referred to as the country's ethnic minorities (National Bureau of Statistics, 2011, 28 April). In China, most of the ethnic minorities live in the 155 largely resource-rich but economically under-developed ethnic autonomous areas, many of which are located near the country's frontiers (Adamson & Feng, 2009, p.322).

Among China's 155 ethnic autonomous areas, there are five autonomous regions, which are first-level administrative subdivisions of the country resembling provinces and municipalities (See Figure 2.2). They are namely Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Tibet Autonomous Region and Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region. In addition, there are 30 autonomous prefectures and 120 autonomous counties that are located in the country's 18 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities (Permanent Missions of People's Republic of China to the UN, 2003).



**Figure 2.2: The Administrative Division System of China**

However, in those ethnic autonomous areas in China, besides the ethnic minority residents, there are also Han people who are the country's ethnic majority group as was mentioned earlier. As is shown in Table 2.1, in the five autonomous regions in

China, except for Tibet Autonomous Region, Han people take up a considerable percentage of the total population.

**Table 2.1: The Han People in Total Population in China’s Five Ethnic Minority Regions (%)**

Areas	1953	1964	1982	1990	2000
Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region	85.6	87.0	84.5	81.6	77.2
Tibet Autonomous Region	0.0	2.9	4.9	3.7	2.9
Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region	6.9	31.9	40.4	37.6	39.2
Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region	-	69.2	68.1	66.7	65.4
Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region	62.1	58.9	61.7	60.9	61.6

*Note.* From “Education of Ethnic Minorities in Contemporary China,” by R. Ma, 2006, p7.

As for the 55 ethnic minority groups in China, except for the Hui and Manchu people who speak Chinese as their first language like the Han Chinese do, all other 53 ethnic groups have their own native languages and 22 of them have a written system for their languages. Compared with Han people, the ethnic majority in China, most of the country’s ethnic minorities have their own historical traditions and religious beliefs. As Yang & Wu (2009, p.124) states:

Religion has pervaded their cultures and has played a profound role in shaping their ideologies, lifestyles and social behaviors. Among China’s ethnic minorities, there are many groups that are entirely committed to a religious belief. For example, the Tibetans and Mongols believe in Tibetan Buddhism; Hui and Uygur are adherents of Islam; and Oroqen and Ewenki are adherents of the Shamanist faith.

## **2.4 Education of China’s Ethnic Minorities**

Education for ethnic minorities has been high on China’s education policy agenda ever since the founding of PRC in 1949. Currently in China, the ethnic minority education has made remarkable achievement after more than half a century’s

development, with a comprehensive educational system from kindergarten, primary and secondary to vocational and higher education established in the country's ethnic minority regions (Yang & Wu, 2009, p.117).

Like many other multi-ethnic countries, in China, the language policy in schools is an essential issue regarding educational development. Two facts must be considered when stipulating such policy. The first one is that many ethnic groups who have their own languages wish to keep using it, and the second is that there is an increasing demand for a common language in social and economic development of the country (Ma, 2006, p5).

As Ma (2009, pp189-190) indicates: "According to the Chinese *Constitution*, each ethnic group has the right to apply and develop its own language. In the ethnic minorities' autonomous regions, both the nationally popularized *Putonghua* and the languages of native ethnic minorities are recognized as official and legitimate languages that can be applied concurrently not only for official and social public occasions, but also as languages of instruction at local schools."

Under such circumstances, currently in China's ethnic minority autonomous areas, there is a parallel dual system in education in terms of language of instruction, namely the "ordinary school" system and the "ethnic school" system. In those ordinary schools, *Putonghua* is the instructional language and English or another foreign language is taught as second language. These schools are attended by Han, Hui and Manchu students who all speak Chinese as mother tongue as well as those ethnic minority students whose native languages are not used as instructional languages at schools (Ma, 2006, p6). As for ethnic minority students whose native languages are adopted as language of instruction, they usually go to those "ethnic schools" where they may enjoy mother tongue instruction and they learn *Putonghua* as second language. Nevertheless, some of the ethnic minority students choose to attend

“ordinary schools” even when their native language medium schools are available for them, as their parents wish them to be educated in *Putonghua* (Ma, 2006, p.6).

At present in China, there are 22 ethnic minority groups who have been conducting teaching in their own languages, namely The Mongolian, Tibetan, Uygur, Kazak, Kirgiz, Sibo, Korean, Miao, Zhuang, Buyi, Dong, Hani, Bai, Yi, Naxi, Jingpo, Lisu, Lahu, Wa, Dai, Uzbek and Russian ethnic groups (Yang & Wu, 2009, pp.125-126). As was mentioned earlier, except for Hui and Machu people who don't have their native languages, all other 53 ethnic minority groups in China do have languages of their own. However, among these 53 ethnic minority groups, other than the 22 above-mentioned ones, the rest 31 groups do not have fully-functional writing systems for their languages to date. Consequently, it is impossible for the students of those 31 groups to enjoy mother tongue instruction and they generally attend *Putonghua* medium schools.

## **2.5 The Preferential Policy for the Education of China's Ethnic Minorities**

Since the founding of the PRC, China's ethnic minorities have enjoyed preferential policies which greatly impact many aspects of the lives of ethnic minority individuals. These policies cover from “family planning (exemption from minimum marriage age and one-child strictures), employment (incentives for hiring and promotion of government officials), business development (special loans and grants, exemption from some taxes), to political representations” (Yang & Wu, 2009, p.118).

With respect to education, since the 1980s, China has been promoting preferential policies for minorities so as to decrease differences in education between various ethnic minority groups and the majority group, Han. The ultimate aim of these policies is to ensure ethnic stability, national integration, and economic development

in minority areas (Clothey, 2005, p.389). Of all these policies, the most significant one has been the preferential enrollment for ethnic minority students at university level, which may ensure that a reasonable number of minority students be admitted into tertiary institutions (Ma, 2006; Feng, 2012).

However, in China, the preferential admission for ethnic minority students in terms of higher education may vary by region and change over time. For instance, in some areas such as Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, minority students may receive an additional 10 points when taking the national university entrance exam. While in other places such as Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, a quota system has been applied to guarantee the percentage (about 50-60 percent) of minority students in total university admission every year (Ma, 2006, p.11).

Apart from the preferential policy which favors ethnic minority students, in China's 11 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions, there are 20 so-called nationality universities which adopt special teaching and administrative approaches and only enroll students with ethnic minority backgrounds. In such universities, special disciplines and subjects are offered to meet the actual needs of ethnic minority students. They have played a significant role in accelerating the economic and educational development in ethnic minority regions (Yang & Wu, 2009, pp.121-122).

## **2.6 The Decentralized Education System in China**

Currently, China adopts a decentralized and localized education system which came into being in the early 1980s following the country's economic and educational reform (Zhao, 2009). According to Ministry of Education of the P.R. China & Chinese National Commission for UNESCO (2008, p.5), in China, the management of policies concerning different levels of education, with preschool education,

compulsory education, vocational education and higher education included, is implemented in accordance to the overall planning of the provincial, autonomous regional and municipal people's governments under the guidance of the state council.

Owing to the decentralization in the Chinese education, as Adamson & Feng, (2009, p.322) states: "some provinces and autonomous areas have considerable independence in education policy, which allows them to attend to the needs of ethnic minority groups." Ma (2006, p.10) also indicates: "The Law on Regional Autonomy of Ethnic Minorities of the People's Republic of China was passed in 1984. Article 36 of this Law announced that local government of autonomous areas has the right to decide the educational plans, establishment of schools, and curriculum, types of teaching, content of textbooks, teaching language, and methods of school recruitment of various schools"

Therefore, nowadays in China, each autonomous region may design different policies in respect to minority education (Ma, 2006). As one of the country's five autonomous regions, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the concern of my study, is no exception in doing so.

## **2.7 Basic Introduction to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region**

As was mentioned earlier, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is one of the five autonomous regions in China. Located in the northwestern part, Xinjiang is the country's largest first-level administrative subdivision, occupying about one-sixth of the total territory in China. Being a geographically crucial part of China, as Figure 2.3 shows, Xinjiang shares 5,600 kilometers of frontier with Mongolia in the northeast, then Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the west, and then Afghanistan, Pakistan and India in the southwest (China Internet Information Center, 2004).



**Figure 2.3: The Geographical Location of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region**

*Note.* From “Growing Up Han: Reflections on a Xinjiang Childhood,” by T.B.Watson, 2008.

As Ma (2009, p.191) points out: “Various minority groups constitute the majority of Xinjiang’s population, with Uyghur comprising the largest subgroup. The total population of Xinjiang in 2005 was 20.104 million; the 12.147 million minorities therefore account for 60.4 percent of the total population. 9.235 million Uyghurs make up some 45.9 percent of the total population of Xinjiang; 7.957 million Han Chinese make up 39.6 percent.” The rest 14.5% of the region’s population is composed of the other 45 ethnic minority groups including the Kazaks, Hui, Mongolian, Kirgiz, Tajik, Xibe, Manchu, Uzbek, Russian, Daur, Tartar and so on.

Reflected from the statistics above, it is evident that ethnical composition in Xinjiang is quite complex. Uyghur and Han are the two major ethnic groups in Xinjiang, taking up 85.5% of the region’s total population when combined together. Among all the ethnic minority groups in Xinjiang, except for Han, Hui and Manchu people who all speak Chinese as their mother tongue, all other ethnic groups have their own native

languages. Among all the languages in Xinjiang, Uyghur and *Putonghua* are the two main languages used by the majority of population in the region (Aisha & Sun, 2010).

However, like other parts of China, in Xinjiang, minority languages are of low social status and in a subordinate position in comparison to *Putonghua* (Gil, 2006). Despite the fact that Uyghur is one of two main languages used in Xinjiang, it is mostly only used by the Uyghur population. In contrast, *Putonghua*, the standard national language of China, is the lingua franca among different ethnic groups in Xinjiang. As Ma (2009, pp.215-216) points out, *Putonghua* is now the most significant and the most widespread working language for communication throughout Xinjiang, especially in urban areas. Therefore, strengthening *Putonghua* in ethnic minority education may help minority graduates enter the job market with better prospects.

## **2.8 The Education of Ethnic Minorities in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region**

Among all the issues concerning education for ethnic minorities, the language of instruction at schools has always been the most significant one as it is closely related to the quality of education. As Inglis (2008, p67) asserts: “For education and learning to achieve their objectives, it is critical that students understand the language of instruction. What this language will be, and the provisions made to ensure that all students are fluent in it, are therefore important policy and planning issues.”

Resembling other ethnic minority autonomous areas in China, Xinjiang also practices a parallel dual system in education in terms of the language of teaching. As Ma (2009, p.203) illustrates: “The first system is called “school of minority language system” (minority school), mainly teaching in the local language. The second system is called “school of *Putonghua* system” (Han school), in which teaching and learning activities

are carried out in *Putonghua*.”

Despite the fact that more than 40 ethnic groups live in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, it is impossible to offer education in languages of every ethnic group, considering the tiny proportion of some of them in the area and the fact that some of them do not have proper written systems for their native languages as was mentioned earlier. In reality, as Ma (2009, p.201) indicates, seven languages are applied to school teaching in Xinjiang including *Putonghua*, Uyghur, Kazak, Kirgiz, Mongolia, Xibe, and Russian.

Among all those minority schools in Xinjiang, Uyghur language schools take up the largest share given the fact that Uyghur is the largest ethnic group in the region. Among all minority schools in Xinjiang, as Ma (2009, p.204) illustrates: “Uyghur language primary schools make up 87.3 percent, Uyghur language middle schools make up 74.8 percent. These are followed by Kazak language in corresponding proportion. There are only a few other minority schools such as Kirgiz, Mongolian, and Xibe.”

In Xinjiang, as for those ethnic minority students whose native languages are not applied to school teaching, they generally attend Han schools like Han, Hui and Manchu students do and enjoy their education through the instruction of *Putonghua*. With regards to those ethnic minority students who have their own native language schools, generally, they would go to minority schools; nonetheless, like other minority autonomous areas in China, there are a certain number of such ethnic minority students in Xinjiang who would attend Han schools (except for some minority-inhabited areas where Han schools are not available), as their parents wish them to receive their education in *Putonghua*.

As for those minority students who go to minority schools, they are referred to as *Min*

*kao Min* which means minority students who learn and take examinations in minority language; while for those who attend Han schools, they are referred to as *Min kao Han* which means minority students who learn and take exams in *Putonghua* (Ma, 2006, p11). Although there has been an increasing trend of the *Min kao Han* students in numbers year on year, the number of *Min kao Han* students still takes up only a small proportion of the overall ethnic minority students in Xinjiang. In 2005, *Min kao Han* students only made up 5.8 percent of the 2.262 million minority attendees of primary and middle schools (Ma, 2009, p219).

Moreover, it must be pointed out that it is possible for the minority students to attend different types of schools at different stages of their studies. For example, some students remain within the sphere of *Min kao Min* at primary school, but they may transfer to Han middle schools and ever since become *Min kao Han* student, though the transferees may encounter great difficulties in doing so (Ma, 2009, p205).

## **2.9 The Two Groups of Uyghur Students in Xinjiang**

As was pointed out earlier, Uyghur is the largest ethnic minority group in Xinjiang taking up 45.9% of the total population in the region (Ma, 2009). Uyghur people are Muslim Turkish in ethnicity and they have very distinct physical differences in contrast to Han Chinese. Linguistically, the Uyghur language is an Altaic one which is completely different from Chinese, a Sino-Tibetan language, and the Uyghur people usually have a strong consciousness of their heritage (Adamson & Feng, 2009, p.326). Geographically, in Xinjiang, compared with most of the Han population who reside in the more developed northern part of the region, most of Uyghur people dwell in the less developed southern areas (Howell & Fan, 2011).

When it comes to the focus of my research, the Uyghur university students in

Xinjiang, they can also be categorized into *Min kao Min* and *Min kao Han* ones who received totally different modes of basic education at Uyghur schools and Han schools. Though from the same ethnic group, these two groups of Uyghur students are very different from each other in terms of the competence of their first, second and third language due to the different modes of basic education they received.

For most of the *Min kao Min* students, when at primary and secondary school, they are taught under the traditional teaching mode with which all the subjects are taught in Uyghur and *Putonghua* is taught from grade three at primary school as a language course for 4–5 hours per week (Ma, 2009). Under this mode of teaching, the *Putonghua* competence of these students is often low and they will encounter more problems when entering higher education, due to fact that since 2002, universities in Xinjiang began to apply *Putonghua* to the teaching of all courses except such particular courses as language, literature, and history of minorities (Ma, 2009, p209).

Moreover, due to their relative poor skills in *Putonghua*, the *Min kao Min* university graduates are always confronted with great challenges in the job markets. In order to tackle this problem, as Ma (2009, p.208) states: “From 2000 on, the government of the Xinjiang Autonomous Region began to emphasize *Putonghua* teaching in schools of different levels in order to address the employment difficulties of minority graduates.” Under such circumstances a new kind of bilingual teaching mode came into existence at those secondary minority schools with the establishment of the so-called “bilingual experimental classes” (Ma, 2009).

With the adoption of this new teaching mode, great changes took place in terms of language of instructions compared with the traditional mode. Under this new mode of teaching, as Ma (2009, p209) indicates : “Some of the courses, such as mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, and English, are taught in *Putonghua*, while the rest, such as (native) language, ideology and morality, history, and geography, are taught in the

native languages.” It would not be difficult to expect that minority students taught under the new mode would make substantial improvement in their *Putonghua* skills compared with those taught under the traditional mode.

During the past few years, the growth of these bilingual classes had been tremendous. As Ma (2009, p.212) claims: “up to September, 2005, there were 4 505 bilingual classes in Xinjiang with 145 138 students, which were 4 times in the respective numbers in 2004 (when there were only 35 948 students in such classes).” Nevertheless, in spite of the growth, it should be pointed out that the proportion of the students taught in those bilingual classes in the total number of the *Min kao Min* students in Xinjiang is still small, for instance, in 2005, the number of students taught under the new mode only accounted for 6.6 percent of the total *Min kao Min* population (Ma, 2009).

In comparison with their *Min kao Min* counterparts, those *Min kao Han* students studied alongside Han Chinese classmates in *Putonghua*-only schools and they do not have any formal training in their own ethnic language. Consequently, most of these students may have bilingual spoken skills in *Putonghua* and in their native language, but monolingual literacy skills only in *Putonghua*. For these students, whether or not they themselves speak *Putonghua* at home, their *Putonghua* skills are usually equal to that of a native *Putonghua* speaker (Clothey, 2005, p.398).

For both *Min kao Min* and *Min kao Han* students, when applying for universities, they may get the preferential policy-awarded points at the University Entrance Exams. For instance, according to Ma (2009, pp.200-204), in 2006, the admission requirement of humanities and social sciences in key universities for *Min kao Min* examinees was 119 points lower than that for Han examinees; while the admission line of *Min kao Han* examinees for key universities in humanities and social sciences was 77 points lower than that for Han examinees.

However, as Ma (2009, p.216) points out, *Min kao Han* students may have a wider range of options when applying for colleges and universities both in Xinjiang and other provinces in China; while *Min kao Min* students will by no means be admitted to most of the ordinary universities of other provinces, except for some nationality universities that specialize in minority language teaching as was mentioned earlier. In addition, Ma (2009, p.208) also points out that, upon entering university, *Min kao Min* students (except for those who were taught under the bilingual teaching mode at secondary school) must attend a one-year pre-college study program so as to be more adept at *Putonghua*, which will be the language of instruction at their following 4-year major studies, while all the *Min Kao Kan* students are exempt from such program.

Furthermore, when at university, the two groups of students have to meet different requirements to be able to graduate. For the *Min kao Han* students, they are demanded to pass College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) like their Han counterparts are. The College English Test, with a purpose to evaluate objectively and accurately the English proficiency of non-English majors at university level in China, is a national examination administered by the Ministry of Education. The CET-4 is designed for second-year university students who have finished the College English Band 1 to Band 4 syllabus. In China, a vast majority of universities implement a policy of “no CET-4 certificate, no Bachelor’s degree” (Adamson & Xia, 2011, pp.4-5).

As for the *Min kao Min* students, they are exempt from taking CET-4 by university authorities in Xinjiang (Adamson & Feng, 2009). Nevertheless, in order to graduate from university, the *Min kao Min* students are required to pass HSK (a Chinese proficiency test for non-native speakers) Band7-8 (Yang, 2005). Currently in Xinjiang, according to the information I attained in the field, instead of taking HSK, the *Min kao Min* students are demanded to take a new Chinese proficiency test called MHK

which is exclusively designed for China's ethnic minorities and they are required to pass Band-3 of this test so as to graduate.

When it comes to those *Min kao Min* students who were taught under the bilingual teaching mode at secondary school, they are exempt from taking MHK; instead, they have to take CET-4 as their *Min kao Han* peers do. However, compared with the latter group, instead of passing the exam, they are able to graduate as long as their scores in the exam reach a certain cut-off point which varies from university to university. However, if they wish to obtain the CET-4 certificate, they still have to pass the test.

This chapter has introduced some significant background information for the current study. In the next chapter, some previously conducted studies concerning the English language education for China's ethnic minorities will be reviewed and the theoretical framework for the data analysis of the current study will also be presented.

# Chapter3. Literature Review and Analytical Framework

## 3.1 Previous Relevant Studies

As was mentioned in the introduction chapter, ever since China's reform and open-door policy in 1978, English language education has been greatly valued in China in the past three decades or so (Hu, 2005). However, despite the numerous literatures covering the English education in China, the literatures about the English learning situations of China's ethnic minorities are very limited, especially English ones.

Among the limited English literatures covering English education for China's ethnic minority students, Yang (2005) shows in his study that the development of English language education for China's ethnic minority regions remains slow, in contrast to the widespread teaching and use of English in the country's developed areas. More importantly, he lists out several primary problems confronted by China's ethnic minority communities in terms of English learning. First of all, he points out that the English language education in minority regions is negatively impacted by the dearth of relevant resources such as proper funding, qualified teachers and minority-friendly textbooks. Secondly, he indicates that most ethnic minority students are less motivated to learn English than their Han peers, in that English, their third language, is considered as a language that contains less social value than *Putonghua*, their second language for them. Furthermore, he claims that the already existing bilingual education mode for many ethnic minority students leaves very little time and energy for them to learn an extra language. Finally, from a linguistic perspective, he points out some practical difficulties faced by the minority students when English is learned as their third language.

Apart from the above-mentioned literature, the ones from Gil (2006), Adamson & Feng (2009) and Gao (2011) painted the English learning situations of ethnic minority students in different parts of ethnic minority inhabited areas in China ranging from north to south, and from northwest to northeast.

Gil (2006)'s study concerning the Korean and Manchu areas in Jilin Province in the northeast part of China and Miao areas in Guizhou Province in South China shows that despite the fact that the presence of English is very limited in those minority areas, the local minorities have showed a strong desire to learn the language. However, the English education for the local minority students remains backward owing to the fact that English education for minority students is not emphasized by the local governments and there is a lack of educational resources such as qualified teachers and proper textbooks. Therefore, the improvement of English language learning and teaching for the local minority students demands the allocation of a considerable amount of relevant resources as well as some significant changes in the local governments' attitude towards English education for minorities.

In Adamson & Feng (2009)'s research, Trilingual Education policies (the indigenous minority home language as first language, *Putonghua* as second language and English as third language) for three ethnic minority groups in China are compared, namely the Zhuang people in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in south China, the Yi people in Sichuan Province in southwest China as well as the Uyghur people in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in northwest China. Their study shows that there exist vast regional differences in terms of policies regarding language education for ethnic minority students in China. Nevertheless, in spite of the regional differences, the language education policies for the three minority groups show that in all the three regions, the minority students' native languages receive what appear to a kind of decreasing attention and English is considered peripheral owing to the lack of relevant resources. In contrast, the minority students' proficiency in *Putonghua* is most

emphasized by the local governments.

Gao (2011)'s study reviews the English learning situation of the local ethnic Mongolian students in the Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region in north China. For the region's ethnic Mongolian students, with English education added to their previous bilingual (Mongolian and *Putonghua*) education at secondary school, they are confronted with an overburden of language education, with approximately 40% - 50% of all their class time spent on language learning, hence leading to a shortage of the provision of non-language subjects. Moreover, owing to a lack of qualified teaching staff and relevant teaching materials, it is impossible to offer English classes for the local ethnic Mongolian students using Mongolian, their mother tongue, as the language of instruction. Adopting *Putonghua* as the medium of teaching English results in a number of ethnic Mongolian students' giving up learning the language, as they fail to understand the lectures due to the fact that they haven't completely mastered *Putonghua* yet by the time when they have to learn their English through the medium of it.

When it comes to the concern of my study, the English education for Uyghur university students in Xinjiang, I only managed to find one research conducted by Sunuodula & Feng (2011) which relates to the topic. In their study, they indicate that, despite their unfavorable positions compared with the Han students, the Uyghur students at the tertiary level are highly motivated to learn English for their future economic and material gains. In addition, their study shows that the Uyghur students are more willing to learn English through the medium of their mother tongue, Uyghur, rather than *Putonghua*. Furthermore, their study suggests that though learning English as a third language is an immense challenge for the Uyghur students, a good competence in English could be their opportunity and gateway to compete with their Han counterparts on the job market as their linguistic capital. However, all the Uyghur participants of Sunuodula & Feng (2011)'s study were *Min kao Min* university

students and the situation faced by their *Min kao Han* peers was not covered.

### **3.2 Theoretical Framework**

For answering the research questions of this study, I consider the following concepts put forward in the literatures by Bourdieu (1977), Norton (1997) and Lee & Anderson (2009) as relevant.

First of all, as Bourdieu (1977) indicates, one's linguistic competence can be considered as one's linguistic capital which is a very significant embodied form of cultural capital and has close ties with a certain market. Therefore, the acquisition of certain highly valued languages in the society may lead one to certain additional resources and may also be transformed into certain material profits. Besides, Bourdieu (1977, p.648) also asserts that: "Language is not only an instrument of communication or knowledge but an instrument of power. A person speaks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished".

Secondly, as Norton (1997) points out, one's investment in a target language can be considered as an investment in one's own social identity which is closely related to one's desires that are inseparable from the allocation of material resources in the society. In this sense, people may learn a target language out of social needs rather than linguistic needs and they hope that their investment in this language may reap returns in the future such as gaining access to a wide range of formerly unattainable material resources in the society.

Thirdly, according to Lee & Anderson (2009, pp.194-195): "Educational institutions reproduce social hierarchies that advantage those who have access to the ways and norms of the dominant group and that marginalize those who do not." Under such

circumstance, “Cultural and linguistic minority students who choose to conform to the norms of the dominant group are likely to gain the social resources needed to succeed academically” (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p.195). Nevertheless, the assimilation of those minority students to the mainstream school norms usually puts their ethnic and cultural identity at great risks, resulting in contempt and even rejection from their co-ethnic peers (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p.195).

Furthermore, as Lee & Anderson (2009, pp.197-198) point out, it is possible for certain minority students, who are referred to as *cultural straddlers* by Carter (2005), to accommodate to the mainstream culture without fully assimilating themselves to it, in that they are able to preserve their own linguistic and cultural heritage when adapting to the norms of the dominant culture in the society. Whilst exploiting the dominant cultural capital they have obtained through their education, these *cultural straddlers* are also capable of using language or other actions to signify their cultural and ethnic identity when being with their co-ethnic peers and thus gaining a kind of cultural affirmation of their identities.

The above-mentioned concepts will be useful for analyzing and interpreting the empirical data collected for this study. The following chapter presents the field work and data collection of the study.

## **Chapter4. Data and Methods**

This study adopts a qualitative research strategy and a case study design to explore the English learning situations faced by the two different groups of Uyghur university students in Xinjiang, China. For the current study, semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection. In this chapter, the research strategy, research design, research site, participants, data collection process, as well as data analysis methods will be accounted in detail.

### **4.1 Research Strategy**

When conducting social studies, both the quantitative and qualitative research strategies are frequently utilized in the processes. However, as Bryman (2009) indicates, the two kinds of strategies are quite distinct from each other when their epistemological and ontological orientations are considered.

In the process of collecting and analyzing data, quantitative research could be constructed as a research strategy with an emphasis on quantification. This strategy entails a deductive approach to the theory-research relationship with a focus on theory testing. Moreover, it has incorporated the practice and norms of the natural scientific model and embodies a view of social reality as external and objective reality (Bryman, 2008, p.20).

By contrast, in the process of data collection and analysis, qualitative research could be constructed as a research strategy which stresses on words instead of numbers. This strategy emphasizes on an inductive approach to the theory-research relationship with a focus on theory generation. In addition, it rejects the practice and norms of the natural scientific model but highlights the individual interpretations of their social

world and objectifies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting property of individual's creation (Bryman, 2008, p.20).

In the domain of social investigations, both quantitative and qualitative strategies have their distinct strengths. The quantitative approach can facilitate comparison and statistical aggregation of the data by means of measuring the reactions of a great many people with limited questions and thus give a broad and generalizable set of findings presented concisely. Differing from quantitative approach, the qualitative strategy can produce rich data and detailed information about a smaller number of people and cases and therefore increase the depth of the cases and situations studied (Patton, 2002, p.14).

As for the current study, the qualitative research strategy seemed to be more feasible than the quantitative one due to the fact that I planned to obtain detailed information from a limited number of participants. When it comes to the two groups of Uyghur university students, the concern of study, I intended to find out the differences in terms of their English learning situations and also get a clue of how different modes of basic education may influence their cultural capital and cultural identity through their individual interpretations of their personal experiences.

## **4.2 Research Design**

A case study design is utilized to guide the current study for three major reasons. First of all, the concern of the study is a typical education-related issue for which case study design fits very well. As Zainal (2007) states, case study is considered as a robust research method especially when a holistic in-depth investigation is required and has become a more prominent research method when issues such as education, sociology and community-based problems are involved.

Secondly, a qualitative strategy is adopted for this study and a number of qualitative data will be collected in the process. According to Zainal (2007, p.4): “detailed qualitative accounts often produced in case studies not only help to explore or describe the data in real-life environment, but also help to explain the complexities of real-life situations which may not be captured through experimental or survey research.” Bryman (2008, p.54) also indicates that: “With a case study, the case is an object in its own right, and the researcher aims to provide an in-depth elucidation of it.”

Thirdly, China is a vast multi-ethnic country in which there are 55 ethnic minority groups residing in the country’s 155 ethnic minority autonomous areas; hence it would be problematic and impractical to conduct such a research at the national level. Besides, as was mentioned earlier, owing to the localized policies of minority education in China’s ethnic minority areas, the issues concerning English provision need to be analyzed case by case (Adamson & Feng, 2009). Under such circumstance, the case of the English learning situations of the two groups of Uyghur university students in Xinjiang will be of great significance in terms of understanding the English education for China’s ethnic minority students at tertiary level.

### **4.3 The Field Work**

The field work of the current study took place in Urumqi, the capital city of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in China, which started from September 16th and ended on November the 5th, 2012. As a matter of fact, the fieldwork was quite tough and so different than I had expected and my original plan was dislocated due to the unexpectedness.

### 4.3.1 Research Site

Originally, I planned to conduct a case study of University A, one of the most important and renowned universities in Xinjiang, for my research. However, when I was actually visiting University A, the university authorities declined to cooperate with me for my study after I presented them with the reference letter from University of Oslo and explained to them the significance of my study. They told me that the topic of my study was somewhat sensitive at the region due to that fact that the focus of which was about ethnic minority students, just as Yang & Wu (2009) point out, currently in China, multiethnic education remains a sensitive issue. Consequently, they declined to give me the university statistics I needed and even suggested that I should change my topic.

Feeling so disappointed, I felt that there was no way for me to carry out my research through official channels as I originally planned. Fortunately for me, an unexpected encounter with a warm-hearted Uyghur girl on the campus of University A led me to a local private English training school where all the trainees were Uyghur and most of them were current university students. With the help of the principal, eight students there expressed their willingness to be my participants. All the eight of them were *Min kao Min* students who were studying in five most significant and best-known comprehensive universities in Urumqi, Xinjiang, namely University A, B, C, D and E. In addition, I found out that there were no *Min kao Han* students at the training school because all the courses there were tailor-made for *Min kao Min* students who prefer Uyghur as the language of instruction.

Under such circumstance, I decided to pay a visit to all the five universities for my research and also try to find my *Min kao Han* participants from the five universities respectively. Therefore, the research site of my study expanded from University A to University A, B, C, D and E. I found this change better than my original plan, in that

when dealing with the issues of the English learning situation of the local Uyghur university students, the data to be collected from five of the region's most prestigious universities would be much more comprehensive and illuminating than that to be gathered from one single university.

### **4.3.2 Sampling and Research Participants**

When it comes to the sampling for the current research, there are no better options than purposive sampling. As a non-probability form of sampling through which the involved participants have been sampled for a specific purpose rather than on a random basis, purposive sampling is strategic in essence and is a highly recommended sampling method in qualitative research based on interviews, which may bridge a good correspondence between research questions and sampling (Bryman, 2008, pp. 415-458).

As was mentioned earlier, in spite of the unexpected dislocation of my original plan, I managed to find eight *Min kao Min* participants for my study at the English training school. Among those eight students, there were three from University A, B and C respectively; two from University D and the rest three from University E. However, out of the three students from University E, two of them withdrew from my research for personal reasons. As for the other six students, they all partook in my research.

I made schedule with each of the six students and then set out to interview them one by one at their universities so as to collect the data I needed. Meanwhile, I still needed *Min kao Han* participants for my study, at least one from each of the five universities. However, finding the *Min kao Han* participants was no easy task at all. Originally, I had hoped that I could find some *Min kao Han* students from the five universities through those *Min kao Min* participants of mine. However, this was not the case due to the fact that they hardly knew any *Min kao Han* students in their social circles.

Consequently, I had to repeatedly go to the self-study rooms and the libraries of those five universities just trying to find proper *Min kao Han* participants.

Despite the great difficulties I came across in the process, I finally managed to find six *Min kao Han* participant from the five universities. Moreover, during my trips of searching for those *Min kao Han* students, I found five more *Min kao Min* participants from University A, C, D and E. Furthermore, out of these five participants, two of them were taught under the bilingual teaching mode at secondary school as was mentioned in the background chapter. As a result, as Table 4.1 shows, I finally had 17 participants in total for my study with 11 *Min kao Min* students and 6 *Min kao Han* ones.

**Table 4.1: The Composition of the Participants**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Major</b>	<b>University</b>
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.1	Female	4 <sup>th</sup> year	History	University A
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.2	Male	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Physics	University A
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.3	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Biotechnology	University A
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.4	Female	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Information Management	University B
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.5	Male	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Tourism Management	University C
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.6	Female	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Computer Science	University C
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.7	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Civil Engineering	University D
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.8	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Food Engineering	University D
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.9	Male	5 <sup>th</sup> year	Seed Engineering	University D
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.10	Female	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Nursing	University E
<i>Min kao Min</i> No.11	Male	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Clinical Medicine	University E
<i>Min kao Han</i> No.1	Male	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Remote Sensing	University A
<i>Min kao Han</i> No.2	Female	4 <sup>th</sup> year	Electronic Business	University B

<i>Min kao Han</i> No.3	Female	1st year	Biological Science	University C
<i>Min kao Han</i> No.4	Male	3 <sup>rd</sup> year	Zoological Science	University D
<i>Min kao Han</i> No.5	Female	1st year	Zoological Science	University D
<i>Min kao Han</i> No.6	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup> year	Anesthesiology	University E

### 4.3.3 Data Collection Method and Procedure

Semi-structured interviews were adopted as the data collection method for my study. As Bryman (2008, p.36) asserts: “The interview is probably the most widely employed method in qualitative research.” Nevertheless, unlike structure interview which generally reflects the researcher’s concerns in a quantitative research, semi-structured interview is type of qualitative interview which greatly concentrates on the interviewees’ point of view.

Before conducting my interviews with the two groups of students, two interview guides (See Appendix) were worked out. All the interview questions were open-ended and quite flexible. Despite the differences of the two groups of students in terms of their *Putonghua* competence as was pointed out in previous chapters, all interviews were conducted in *Putonghua*. However, when I was interviewing those *Min kao Han* students, I spoke very standard *Putonghua* at a normal speed; while when I was doing interviews with those *Min kao Min ones*, I would naturally reduce my speed and try to speak *Putonghua* with a little bit Uyghur accent so as to make my participants feel relaxed and at ease.

During the interview processes, some questions in the guide were re-worded and sometimes the order of the questions had to be adjusted as well according to different circumstances. Moreover, there were times when some new questions were formed from the participants’ answers to some of my questions, which would often lead to some unexpected information which also counted for my study. However, there were

also times when a whole series of questions had to be cut because it would be impossible for some participants to answer them. For instance, some *Min kao Min* students informed me that they never learned English at their universities because they were not offered any English courses, then it would be totally pointless to ask them how they felt about the English courses offered by their universities. Furthermore, when conducting the interviews, I would constantly repeat what I heard from my participants so as to see if I understood them correctly and also to let them feel that the interview was more like a casual chat rather than an interrogation.

All the interviews were conducted during the free time of my participants in those vacant classrooms on the campuses of the five universities and the average length of each interview was usually between 25 to 30 minutes. After each interview, as a way of showing my appreciation to those participants of mine, I would spend another hour or so answering their questions concerning English learning and also sharing with them some of my own learning experience which they found very helpful. All of the interviews were recorded with a digital recorder and other key information which I found helpful for the data collection was also noted down such as the interviewee's body language, facial expressions, and emotions.

#### **4.3.4 Ethical Considerations**

In the realms of social studies, ethical issues may arise at different stages and they cannot be ignored by the researchers due to their direct relations to the integrity of a piece of research and the disciplines that are involved in the process (Bryman, 2008, p. 113). When I was in the field conducting interviews with my participants, I was very cautious about the ethical issues in order to make sure that no harm would be done to any of my participants.

Before each interview, I would present the interviewee with the reference letter from

University of Oslo as well as a translated copy in *Putonghua* to let him/her read it through. Afterwards, I would explain to him/her the purpose of my research and then ask for his/her consent to record the interview with a digital recorder. Moreover, I also clearly informed all of my participants that every one of them would be anonymous in my study so as to protect their privacy and all the recordings as well as the relevant data would be destroyed after my research is finished.

#### **4.4 Method of Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data gathered from interviews usually means a large amount of unstructured textual materials which are not straightforward to analyze. Besides, unlike analyzing quantitative data, when conducting qualitative data analysis, there are few well-established and widely accepted rules (Bryman, 2008, p. 538).

For the current study, the processing of the data collected from the fieldwork started since late December, 2012. All the interviews I recorded during the fieldwork were first transcribed into written Chinese texts which were then translated into English. Subsequently, all the data relating to my research questions were coded and categorized through the reading of the English transcripts and field notes.

## Chapter 5. Results of Analysis

With the relevant theoretical concepts listed out in chapter three adopted, the current chapter presents the empirical results of the study, which follows the sequence of the three research questions.

### 5.1 English Competence as Significant Cultural Capital

During the interviews, all the participants were asked how they perceived English education in today's society. The following answers are representative:

I think leaning English is very important in today's society. First of all, I think every excellent student plans to apply for postgraduate program after graduation, and we must learn English well if we wish to do so. Besides, if we want to go abroad to study, we also have to learn English well. Even if we can't go abroad, English is very important for job-hunting. (*Min kao Min* No.2, male, third year in physics)

I think learning English is very important for us. Everyone can speak *Putonghua* now and for our major, it is hard for us to find jobs if we just get a bachelor's degree. In order to further our study, English is a must. Besides, for our major, there are more resources in English than in Chinese. (*Min kao Min* No.3, female, second year in biotechnology)

Of course learning English is important. For my major, it is a Combined Bachelor's and Master's Degree Program and we have to write our master's thesis in English. Moreover, we have to do many projects for our program, and most of the available materials for us to refer to are English ones, so we must learn the international language. (*Min kao Min* No.11, male, second year in clinical medicine)

Learning English is very important. First of all, I wish to study abroad in the future. Secondly, English is important for my major and I'm very interested in learning it. Besides, I think English would be helpful when we look for jobs. (*Min kao Han* No. 1, male, second year in remote sensing)

I think learning English is very important. You know, in China, if you want to get first-hand information, you have to understand Chinese. As for English, if you wish to get first-hand information in the world, you have to know it. You will waste lots of time if you wait for someone to translate the information into Chinese. (*Min kao Han* No. 2, female, fourth year in electronic business)

As was mentioned earlier, Bourdieu (1977) points out that one's competence in certain socially valued languages may be regarded as one's cultural capital which may enable one to access certain resources and material profits. The answers above show that both groups of the Uyghur students consider it very important to learn English in today's society. Both groups view English competence as very significant cultural capital for themselves. Without this capital, they may not have access to certain important resources such as first-hand information in the world, English materials advancing their studies or the opportunities to continue their education to a higher level home or abroad. Furthermore, they also believe their English competence may lead them to some future opportunities and economic gains such as finding a good job.

In addition, although the *Min kao Min* students in Xinjiang are exempt from taking CET-4 (Adamson & Feng, 2009), when asked if they wish to take CET-4 during their time at university, all my *Min kao Min* participants, with no single exception, gave me positive answers despite the fact that it would be extremely difficult for them to pass the exam considering their much later start in learning English compared with their *Min kao Han* peers. Among my eleven *Min kao Min* participants, only the two who

were taught under the bilingual teaching mode had learned some English at high school, all the rest nine had not learned any English at all until they went to university. The following are two typical answers from my *Min kao Min* participants about their attitude toward taking CET-4:

I will take CET-4 and I think CET-4 certificate should be useful, especially when we look for jobs. Those who have the certificate would be in more advantageous position than those who don't. On the other hand, I will be more motivated in learning English when I have the pressure to take CET-4. (*Min kao Min* No.3, female, second year in biotechnology)

I will definitely take CET-4 and I think it's a kind of evaluation for our English competence. Since I have learned the language, I need to know on what level my English is. Besides, in the society, many employers take the CET-4 certificates quite seriously. It seems that most employers these days would ask their applicants whether they have CET-4 certificates or not, even if the jobs hardly have anything to do with English. So I think it's necessary for me to take the exam. (*Min kao Min* No.6, female, fourth year in computer science)

It is evident that these students are aware that English is more than just a communication tool in the current Chinese society. They are also fully aware that English competence is considered as a great superiority for job-hunters in today's society. In the second quote, "It seems that most employers these days would ask their applicants whether they have CET-4 certificates or not, even if the jobs hardly have anything to do with English" shows that English competence is currently regarded as a means to distinguish talents and those with better English competence are viewed as more able one than others. This coincides with Bourdieu (1977, p.648): "Language is not only an instrument of communication or knowledge but an instrument of power. A person speaks not only to be understood but also to be believed, obeyed, respected, distinguished".

## 5.2 Different Modes of Basic Education Result in Different English Learning Situations at Tertiary Level

From the fieldwork, I found out that there exist considerable differences between the two groups of students in terms of their access to English education at university. For the *Min kao Han* students, they generally have equal access to English Education on campus as Han students do. During their four years at university, they are offered two years of English courses (first and second year). They sit in the same classroom with the Han students and they are quite used to the way their English is taught owing to their excellent command of *Putonghua*. Though being extremely small in number, some of the *Min kao Han* students even outcompete their Han classmates at their English classes. For instance, one of my participants said: “My English teacher likes me a lot, because my English competence is on the top level at my class. She thinks I am a very promising student.”(*Min kao Han* No.6, female, second year in Anesthesiology) Another participant said: “My English teacher really pays attention to me, but not because I am an ethnic minority student in my class, but because my English is better than that of many Han classmates of mine, especially my oral English”. (*Min kao Han* No. 1, male, second year in remote sensing)

When it comes to *Min kao Min* students' access to English education at university, it is a completely different picture. First of all, it was a total surprise for me that some of my *Min kao Min* students had no access to English education at all at their universities. For instance, a participant from University B said to me “Currently, our university does not offer any English courses to *Min kao Min* students. If we want to learn English, we have to learn by ourselves or go to those private English training schools off campus.” (*Min kao Min* No. 4, female, third year in information management) Another participant from University A informed me: “The *Min kao Min* students at our department are not offered any English courses and the university has no

requirement for us in terms of English competence. I do wish we could have English classes. I heard that our department used to offer *Min kao Min* students English courses, but somehow the department cancelled the courses afterwards and I don't know why.” (*Min kao Min* No. 2, male, third year in physics) In addition, another participant (*Min kao Min* No. 6, female, fourth year in computer science) from University C also told me that the *Min kao Min* students at her department weren't offered with any English courses though she thought English was extremely important for her major.

Secondly, for those *Min kao Min* students who have access to English education at their universities, they are only offered one year's beginner level English courses during their third year. Despite that such courses could be taught either by a Han teacher or a Uyghur teacher, *Putonghua* is the only language of instruction. When my participants were asked to share some of their thoughts on the English courses at their universities, the following are some typical responses:

I think we should have had more English classes, we only learned English for one year and four 50-minute classes per week was not enough at all. Although it was beginner level class, sometimes, the teacher was too fast for us to follow. (*Min kao Min* No.1, female, fourth year in history)

I think our English classes are far less than enough for us, and it's really difficult for us to follow the teacher sometimes since she teaches in *Putonghua*. If possible, I wish our English classes could be taught in Uyghur. (*Min kao Min* No.5, male, third year in tourism management)

Our teacher was not English major but just a PhD student in economics whose pronunciation was awful. Besides, I didn't like his mechanic teaching style since he hardly interacted with us at his lectures. I really wish our teacher could have been an English major. I also think

there should have been some improvement about our textbook. (*Min kao Min* No.9, male, fifth year in seed engineering)

From these responses, it can be seen that at present in Xinjiang, there exist many problems in the English education for *Min kao Min* university students, such as inadequate time allocated to English classes, unsatisfactory textbooks and unqualified teachers. In addition, using *Putonghua* as the language of instruction in English teaching is still problematic for some *Min kao Min* students even when they have finished the one-year pre-college *Putonghua* study program.

Furthermore, for those *Min kao Min* students who wish to take CET-4, though not necessary for them, they still have to pass their Chinese proficiency test in order to graduate. During the interviews, almost every *Min kao Min* student complained to me that they were under so much pressure having to study English, Chinese and their major courses at the same time. However, for their *Min kao Han* peers, they only need to worry about their major courses while learning English.

From the above mentioned, it can be evidently seen that compared with their *Min kao Min* counterparts, the *Min kao Han* students are in a more advantageous position in terms of English education at the university level, owing to the fact that they have chosen a mode of basic education which have assimilated them to the norms of the dominant group in the society and hence leading them to better educational resources at tertiary level. The different English learning situations faced by the two groups of Uyghur students are in perfect accordance with the concept that “Educational institutions reproduce social hierarchies that advantage those who have access to the ways and norms of the dominant group and that marginalize those who do not” (Lee & Anderson, 2009, pp.194-195).

### 5.3 Learning English as an Investment

From the interviews, I found that both the two groups of students were willing to invest in their English learning. As for the *Min kao Min* group, all my eleven participants had had experiences of attending courses offered by private English training schools outside the university, despite whether they had English courses offered or not by at their universities.

It is quite understandable for those *Min kao Min* students who are not offered any English courses at their universities to go to private English training schools, since it is their best alternative option to access English education. However, for those who do have access to English courses at their universities, they still feel very necessary to pay for and attend the English courses at those training schools. When my *Min kao Min* participants were asked to compare the English courses offered by their universities and the training schools, they gave the following answers:

The courses at the training school were very interesting, the learning atmosphere was very good, the Uyghur teachers there were excellent and they shared learning experience with us. In contrast, the courses at our university were quite boring and I was not interested at all. (*Min kao Min* No.1, female, fourth year in history)

I'm very interested in the courses at the training school and I like the atmosphere there a lot. Besides, it is really good that our teacher teaches us in Uyghur. (*Min kao Min* No.5, male, third year in tourism management)

The atmosphere at the English training school was extremely good. The teacher there was very excellent. Compared with our English teacher at the university, his oral English was way better and he also had a very large vocabulary. Besides, I liked it a lot better when

English was taught in Uyghur, since it was much easier for me to understand. (*Min kao Min* No.9, male, fifth year in seed engineering)

All the teachers at training schools are Uyghur and they teach us English in Uyghur which is much easier for us to follow. While at the university, the teacher teachers us in *Putonghua* and sometimes I couldn't follow. When listening to the English lectures at our university, I have to first of all translate the *Putonghua* into Uyghur and then translate Uyghur into English in my mind. (*Min kao Min* No.10, female, third year in Nursing)

It is clear that there is a general agreement among these students that the English courses at those English training schools are much more attractive for the *Min kao Min* students than the ones offered by their universities. Not only do those students feel that the teachers at those English training schools are better and more qualified, but they can also receive English education there in Uyghur, their mother tongue, which they feel most comfortable with as the language of instruction. As Yang (2005) indicates, Uyghur, as an Altaic language, differs sharply from Chinese, a Sino-Tibetan language and English, an Indo-European language, in terms of syntax and morphology. Under such circumstance, Learning English through their second language can be extremely tough for the Uyghur students. Feng (2012) also asserts that using mother tongue as language of instruction is more effective in the third language teaching for ethnic minority students.

When it comes to the *Min kao Han* students, they do not attend private English training schools as much as their *Min kao Min* peers do, in that they are quite comfortable with the English courses offered at their universities. Among my six *Min kao Han* participants, only two had had experiences of learning English at private training schools which, unlike the ones attended by the *Min kao Min* students, offer their English courses in *Putonghua*, which the *Min kao Han* students feel most comfortable with as the language of instruction. For those *Min kao Han* participants

who did not go to private English training schools, they also made much investment in their English through buying extracurricular learning materials and spending a large amount of time in learning the language, with some of them confessing that they even spent more time on English than on their major courses.

However, for both the two groups of students, when asked why they were so willingly investing in their English learning, all their answers were related with the opportunities to further their studies or to find decent jobs in the future. It seems that Norton (1997)'s notion of linguistic investment can be applied here, in that the motive power that drives those students to make investments in their English learning is originated from their inner desires for the potential additional resources and material rewards that learning English may bring them in today's society.

Moreover, I was also informed by those participants that their parents were also extremely supportive for their English learning. When my participants were asked how their parents reacted when they were asking them for money to go to private English training schools, they gave the following responses:

They are very supportive, because they know that I must learn English well so that I can apply for undergraduate programs after graduation. (*Min kao Min* No.3, female, second year in biotechnology)

They are very supportive, and they are also supportive for my continuing my education abroad in the future. They think that the money spent on English leaning is worthwhile. (*Min kao Min* No.4, female, third year in Information Management)

They were very supportive, because it was for my future. Actually, it has been many years since my parents got laid off. I have an older brother who also went to university. So in order to support my family, my father opened a food store and the job is really tiring since he

always has to deliver heavy goods. Sometimes, my heart really aches when I see my father has to work so hard at his age. (*Min kao Min* No.6, female, fourth year in computer science)

They are very supportive. Though the financial situation in my family is not very good, my parents are extremely supportive for my English learning. They hope that I can learn English well so that I may find a good job after graduation. (*Min kao Min* No.7, female, second year in civil engineering)

They are very supportive. They have also realized the importance of learning English in today's society and they don't regret spending money on my English learning. (*Min kao Han* No.4, male, third year in zoological science)

They are very supportive. Actually, the tuition at the training school is very expensive, but my parents have one principle that is as long as it's about my education, they would spend any money and they would even sell their blood to support me. They have very high expectation of me. (*Min kao Han* No.6, female, second year in anesthesiology)

The above responses show that the parents of those ethnic minority students are extremely willing to make investments in their children's English learning in spite of some financial difficulties they encounter. They understand that English education in today's society is closely related to their children's future and they hope that their investments will pay off in the future from good jobs or the opportunities to go higher on the educational ladder home or abroad. This also echoes with Norton (1997)'s concept that people may learn and invest in a target language owing to their social needs rather than linguistic needs.

## 5.4 The Choice of Education at a Price of Cultural Identity

As was mentioned earlier, due to their assimilation to the norms of the dominant group, the Han Chinese, in the society through their education, the *Min kao Han* students have more advantage over their *Min kao Min* peers in terms of English education at the university level. However, for most of the *Min kao Han* students, this advantage comes at a price. During the interviews, I was informed by my *Min kao Min* participants that they seldom socialized with their *Min kao Han* peers although they belong to the same ethnic group. They gave the following reasoning:

I think every ethnic group should a sense of ethnicity, so when we see those *Min kao Han* students talking with each other in *Putonghua*, we will get so angry, after all, they are Uyghur and should protect their own language. However, these students suck at their mother tongue, so we dislike and exclude them. (*Min kao Min* No.1, female, fourth year in history)

I really dislike those *Min kao Han* students, I feel that going to Han schools made them live and talk like Han, but not like Uygur. I even came across some *Min kao Han* students who couldn't understand a single sentence of Uyghur. I think it is a felony that one doesn't speak his or her own language. (*Min kao Min* No.2, male, third year in physics)

We feel extremely angry that some of them communicate with their Uyghur compatriots in *Putonghua*. I think it's totally ok if you speak *Putonghua* with people from other ethnic groups, but when you are with your own Uyghur compatriots, you are supposed to speak language of your own ethnic group. If you don't, you will be despised. Besides, we feel even more irritated when some *Min kao Han* students speak a kind of mixed language, like half Uyghur, half *Putonghua*. (*Min kao Min* No.6, female, fourth year in computer science)

I don't have any *Min kao Han* friends in my life, I think different education and different

environment made us so much different, and I feel that they are more like Han in terms of personalities and tempers rather than Uyghur. (*Min kao Min* No.9, male, fifth year in seed engineering)

I feel that the *Min kao Han* students are very arrogant because they have better *Putonghua* competence compared with us. When I hear them mix Uyghur and *Putonghua* together when talking to me, I feel extremely irritated. (*Min kao Min* No.10, female, third year in Nursing)

From these answers, it appears that the first primary reason accounting for the *Min kao Min* students' dislike and exclusion toward the *Min kao Han* ones is closely related to language. For *Min kao Min* students, Uyghur is their primary language of communication in their lives and they do not tend to speak *Putonghua* unless necessary. I was informed by my *Min kao Min* participants that the only time they use *Putonghua* is when they attend classes or go shopping. Even when at classes, they hardly speak the language except when they are asked to answer questions by their teachers. Therefore, the spoken *Putonghua* of the *Min kao Min* students is generally poor and they speak the language with heavy Uyghur accent.

In contrast, as for *Min kao Han* students, *Putonghua* is their major language of communication in their lives and their *Putonghua* competence is almost as good as a native *Putonghua* speaker. However, most of the *Min kao Han* students are illiterate in Uyghur, their mother tongue, and their spoken skills in Uyghur are also poor compared with their *Min kao Min* peers. As Taynen (2006) indicates, *Min kao Han* students often feel more comfortable using *Putonghua*, their adopted language rather than Uyghur, their own mother tongue, and they tend to shift between the two languages when communicating with other Uyghur people. However, it is the inability of the *Min kao Han* students to communicate fully in Uyghur that made them bear a certain blemish among their co-ethnics (Schluessel, 2007).

Another important reason contributing to the *Min kao Han* students' being disliked and excluded by their *Min kao Min* peers is that most *Min kao Han* students suffer from a form of cultural identity loss, as they speak and behave more like Han than Uyghur. As Taynen (2006) points out, the *Min kao Han* students invariably acquire the customs and values of the Han Chinese and are irresistibly influenced by the Han culture owing to their early immersion in Han schools.

Meanwhile, the *Min kao Han* students are totally aware that they are disliked and excluded by their *Min kao Min* peers and they feel sorry for this. For instance, one participant (*Min kao Han* No. 2, female, fourth year in electronic business) told me: "After I entered university, I got to know that the *Min kao Min* students hold great prejudice against us. They once told me in my face that I belong to the 57<sup>th</sup> ethnic group in China. Some of them even refer to us as mental patients and I feel so sad about it." Another participant (*Min kao Han* No.3, female, first year in biological science) said with tears: "I can feel that I am excluded by those *Min kao Min* students. I think the most important reason for this is that my Uyghur competence is no good and they view our personality and thoughts to be more similar to that of Han students, or in other words, they think we are so much "*Hanified*" (*hanhua* in Chinese). They don't consider us as authentic Uyghur. I don't have any *Min kao Min* friends in my social circles, all my friends are Han or *Min kao Han* students"

It appears that the cultural and ethnic identity of the *Min kao Han* students are severely questioned by their own compatriots owing to their assimilation to the Han ethnic culture as a consequence of their choice of attending Han schools for their basic education. As Taynen (2006, p.45) indicates: "Though Uyghur *Min kao Han* are ethnically Uyghur, they culturally and linguistically have taken on many ethnic Chinese characteristics." Moreover, Taynen (2006, p.46) also points out: "*Hanified* minorities find themselves inhabiting an ill-defined and uncomfortable middle ground, and they contend with levels of isolation and discrimination not encountered by

individuals who remain within the linguistic confines of their ethnic communities.” Therefore, the advantage of English learning at university level gained by the *Min kao Han* for their assimilation to the norms of the dominant group in the society does come at price, which is seen by Lee & Anderson (2009) as risking their own cultural and ethnic identity.

## 5.5 The Possibility of Straddling Cultures

As was mentioned earlier, being in a more advantageous position in terms of English education at the university level compared with their *Min kao Min* counterparts, most *Min kao Han* students have to pay the price of losing their native language and being despised and excluded by their co-ethnic peers due to their early immersion in Han schools. However, this is not necessarily true for all the *Min kao Han* students. For instance, during the interviews, one participant (*Min kao Han* No. 1, male, second year in remote sensing) who has excellent oral and written competence in Uyghur, his mother tongue, informed me that he was totally accepted by his *Min kao Min* peers. Unlike the rest of my *Min kao Han* participants who seldom socialized with *Min kao Min* students in their lives, this participant has made many *Min kao Min* friends in his social circles. All is due to the fact that this student, though attended Han school in his basic education, managed to keep the proficiency in his native language throughout:

Actually, I can communicate very well with those *Min kao Min* students and I have many *Min kao Min* friends. The one you saw me speaking to a moment ago was just a *Min kao Min* friend of mine. I know that a lot of *Min kao Han* students are disliked by the *Min kao Min* ones. Because of attending Han schools, many *Min kao Han* students speak less and less Uyghur, even when they are at home. Their Uyghur is not fluent and sounds really wired, and they are totally illiterate in the language. When communicating with *Min kao Min* students, they seem to be very incompatible. This is the drawback of attending Han schools.

My parents were aware of this, so they required me to only speak Uyghur at home. I have a younger sister who also went to Han school, but we speak Uyghur to each other all the time. So I have very good Uyghur speaking environment. Besides, when I was in grade three at primary school, I spent about a month in the summer vacation learning written Uyghur from a Uyghur teacher and after that my parents always made me copy Uyghur story books and even newspapers in my spare time so as to improve my written Uyghur.

Meanwhile, this participant also expressed the advantages he had over his *Min kao Min* peers for attending Han school:

Of course, going to Han school brought me many advantages. For instance, compared with my *Min kao Min* peers, I am in a much more advantageous position in terms of English learning. After all, I started to learn English much earlier than they did. I think that the reason why my parents sent me to Han school in the first place is that they wished I could win at the starting line. When others (referring to *Min kao Min* students) are still learning their *Putonghua*, I have already mastered it. Now I can speak fluent *Putonghua* with you and understand you perfectly. And when others finally solved their problem with *Putonghua*, I was already learning something else. I feel that compared with others, I am always one big step ahead. So I think going to Han school indeed has its advantages.

The above participant's case shows that for some *Min kao Han* students, it is possible for them to straddle different cultures. Attending Han schools enabled them to equip themselves with the socially valued cultural capital, *Putonghua* in their case, which put them in better positions academically compared with their *Min kao Min* peers. However, though being exposed to Han students and Han culture all the way through their education, with the help of their family members and through their own efforts, these *Min kao Han* students manage to maintain a distinct cultural and ethnic identity by keeping their proficiency in mother tongue. For these *Min kao Han* students, they do not have to worry about losing their cultural identity or being despised or alienated

by their co-ethnic peers. In this sense, these *Min kao Han* students are the perfect examples of the so-called *cultural straddlers* (Carter, 2005). Coinciding with what Lee & Anderson (2009) suggests, while enjoying the benefits brought by the dominant cultural capital they have gained through their education, these *Min kao Han* students manage to distinctively indicate their own cultural and ethnic identity as authentic Uyghur by means of an excellent command of their native language.

## Chapter6. Conclusion

When it comes to the issues regarding English education for the ethnic minority students in China, the case in Xinjiang has its own characteristics because of the localized policies of minority education in the region. The English learning situations of the two groups of Uyghur university students in Xinjiang show that the inter-group differences cannot be overlooked when dealing with educational issues about ethnic minority students. Though belonging to the same ethnic group, owing to the different modes of education they received at primary and secondary levels, the *Min kao Min* and *Min kao Han* students are faced with completely different English learning situations after entering universities. This chapter summarizes and reflects on the findings of the empirical study. Meanwhile, it also shows some limitations of the study and provides some implications and recommendations for future research.

### 6.1 A Summary of the Empirical Findings

Compared with their *Min kao Min* peers, the *Min kao Han* students in Xinjiang are in a more advantageous position in terms of English learning at university level, in that they have totally equal access to English education as the Han students do, with some of them even outcompeting their Han classmates in terms of English competence, in spite of the fact that English is the second language for Han students while the third for them.

However, when it comes to those *Min kao Min* university students in Xinjiang, their access to English education on campus may vary from university to university, or from department to department. A number of *Min kao Min* students at some universities or at certain departments of some universities are not offered English courses at all, though English education is considered extremely important for them.

For these *Min kao Min* students, self-study or going to private English training schools or are their only options to access English learning, with the majority of them choosing the latter option.

As for those luckier *Min kao Min* students who have access to English education at their universities or departments, they are always confronted with various problems such as inadequate time allocated to English classes, unsatisfactory textbooks and unqualified teachers. Besides, some *Min kao Min* students found it problematic that *Putonghua* is adopted as the sole language of instruction in their English classes. In addition, compared with their *Min Kao Han* counterparts, most *Min kao Min* students have to face the heavy pressure of studying English, Chinese and their major courses at the same time, because they are required to pass the Chinese proficiency test in order to graduate.

The above-mentioned points show that the *Min kao Han* students are indeed in a more advantageous position in terms of English learning at university level over their *Min kao Min* peers, and the reason for this is because the former group were taught under an education mode in which they were assimilated to the norms of the Han Chinese, the dominant group in the Chinese society, before they entered universities. This coincides with the concept that “Cultural and linguistic minority students who choose to conform to the norms of the dominant group are likely to gain the social resources needed to succeed academically” (Lee & Anderson, 2009, p.195). Moreover, the completely different English learning situations faced by the two groups of Uyghur students are also a perfect embodiment of the concept that “Educational institutions reproduce social hierarchies that advantage those who have access to the ways and norms of the dominant group and that marginalize those who do not” (Lee & Anderson , 2009, pp.194-195).

Though being in totally different English learning situations, both the *Min kao Min* and *Min kao Han* students perceive English education of great significance in today's society. English competence is considered by both groups of the Uyghur students as very important cultural capital which may enable them to enjoy useful English studying materials concerning their majors, to get the opportunities to further their studies home or overseas, or to be more competitive on the job market after graduation. This echoes with the concept that one's competence in certain socially valued languages may be regarded as one's cultural capital which may enable one to access certain resources and material profits (Bourdieu, 1977).

Being aware of the importance of English learning, both groups of the Uyghur students are very willing to make investment in their English learning and their parents are extremely supportive of them for doing so despite of some financial difficulties they may come across. For the *Min kao Min* students, whether having access to English education at their universities or not, they prefer to attend the private English training schools where tailor-made English course are taught by good teachers and in their mother tongue, Uyghur, which they find most comfortable with as the language of instruction in their third language learning. As for the *Min kao Han* students, with full access to English education at their universities, they are also willing to make extra investments in their English learning by means of going to private English training schools, buying extracurricular learning materials or spending a considerable amount of time in English learning.

Nevertheless, both groups of Uyghur students are investing in their English learning so as to obtain cultural capital for their future social and economic gains, which is a motivation driven by, as Norton (1997) suggests, their inner desires for the potential additional resources and material rewards that learning a highly valued language may bring them in today's society. It is also the same motivation out of which their parents are sparing no effort showing supports for their English learning, in that they hope

that their investments will be rewarded in the future if their children may find decent jobs or attain the opportunities to further their studies home or abroad after their gradation.

Owing to their assimilation to the norms of the Han Chinese through their basic education, the *Min kao Han* students are in a better position compared with their *Min kao Min* peers in terms of access to English education at the university level. However, such kind of assimilation, as Lee & Anderson (2009, p.195) indicates, usually means that these minority students have to pay the price of putting their ethnic and cultural identity at great risks and thus incurring contempt and even rejection from their co-ethnic peers. This is particularly true in the context of the two groups of the Uyghur students, as most of the *Min kao Han* students are strongly disliked and even excluded by their *Min kao Min* peers.

Many *Min kao Han* students are viewed by their *Min kao Min* peers to have lost their cultural and even ethnic identity through the loss of their native language. For the *Min kao Han* students, the majority of them are illiterate in their mother tongue and their spoken skills in their mother tongue are also poor. Their Uyghur is always described by the *Min kao Min* students as weird and unauthentic Uyghur. Moreover, they are severely criticized by their *Min kao Min* peers about their propensity of mixing Uyghur and *Putonghua* together when communicating with other Uyghur people. In addition, due to their early immersion in Han school, the personalities and tempers of the *Min kao Han* students are strongly influenced by their Han classmates and Han culture, which makes them more alienated among other Uyghur students. In the eyes of *Min kao Min* students, their *Min kao Han* peers are “*Hanified*” in their talks and behaviors and they should be categorized to another ethnic group which is neither Han nor Uyghur.

Although most *Min kao Han* students have to pay the price of being despised and

excluded by their co-ethnic peers due to their early immersion in Han schools, there are, however, exceptions. Some of *Min kao Han* students are able to maintain their own cultural and ethnic identity while enjoying their obtained dominant cultural capital. These Uyghur students are able straddle two cultures, both the culture of the dominant Han ethnic group and their own ethnic Uyghur culture. They are totally accepted by their co-ethnic peers owing to their well-developed native language competence while enjoying the advantage brought by their well-developed Han Chinese language skills.

## **6.2 Acknowledgement of Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research**

It is undeniable that the current study has some limitations which should be covered for relevant researches in the future. For instance, the number of participants for the current study is rather small with only 11 *Min kao Min* students and 6 *Min kao Han* ones; hence affecting the generalizability of the findings of this study. Besides, all the 17 participants of the current study were only from six areas in Xinjiang comprised of Kashgar, Ili, Korla, Hami, Artux and Aksu, with some important areas in the region missing including the capital city, Urumqi, where the fieldwork was carried out. In Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the largest first-level administrative subdivision of China, there exist vast differences in terms of educational resources among different areas. When it comes to the *Min kao Min* university students, those who were from more developed areas, Urumqi, for instance, should have had more opportunities to access English education before entering universities than those from less developed areas, thus resulting in their different English learning situations at tertiary level. As for the *Min kao Han* university students in the region, despite the fact that they all started to learn their English since grade three in primary school, owing the different distribution of educational resources in their home areas, there

should also exist some distinctive differences in terms of the quality of the English education they received before their entry into universities. Therefore, future researchers, when conducting relevant studies, should include participants from all the major areas in Xinjiang so as to find out how regional differences may influence the English learning situations of the ethnic minority students in the region at university level.

In addition, as was mentioned in the current study, due to the different modes basic education received by the *Min kao Min* and *Min kao Han* university students, great differences exist between the two groups in terms of their English learning situations at tertiary level as well as their linguistic abilities and cultural identities. Under such circumstance, I was really interested in finding out how their parents initially made the choices for their basic education. However, I failed to obtain the reasonable and convincing explanations from the second-hand information given by my participants. When the two groups of the participants were asked why their parents sent them to Uyghur or Han schools in the first place, most of them informed me that they were not sure why their parents did so since they were really young at the time and they just followed their parents' arrangements. Therefore, if possible, when conducting relevant studies in the future, the researchers should also include the parents of the two groups of students as their participants so as to find out how family backgrounds will influence the education of the ethnic minority students in the region.

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## **Appendix 1: Interview Guide for *Min kao Min* Students**

Demographic information: gender, university, major, grade and hometown.

1. Could you please tell me when you formally started to learn English?
2. Could you please tell me how you think of English learning in today's society?
3. Do you or did you have English classes at your university?

If the participant gives a positive answer, the following questions will be asked:

- (1) For how long did or do you have English classes at your university?
  - (2) How many periods of English classes did or do you have per week?
  - (3) How many students were or are there in your English classes?
  - (4) Was or is your English teacher Han or Uyghur?
  - (5) What was or is the language of instruction at your English classes and what do you think of it?
  - (6) What do you think of your textbook for your English classes?
  - (7) Could you please make some comments on your English teacher and his/her classes?
4. Are you required to pass CET-4 by your university and have you ever taken it?
  5. What do you think of CET-4 and the CET-4 certificate?
  6. Have you ever attended any English courses at private English training schools?  
If the participant gives a positive answer, the following questions will be asked:
    - (1) Why did you choose to attend the courses?
    - (2) What do you think of the teachers and the courses at the training school?
    - (3) What do you think of the tuition at the training school?

(4) What were your parents' attitudes towards your going to the training school?

If the participant also had or has English classes at his/her university, the following question will be asked:

(1) Could you please make a comparison about your English classes at the university and the training school?

7. Compared with those *Min Kao Han* students, do you think if they are more advantaged in terms of English learning?
8. Do you socialize with *Min Kao Han* students often and what do you think of them?
9. Do you know why your parents chose to send you to a Uyghur school when you were a kid?

## **Appendix 2: Interview Guide for *Min kao Han* Students**

Demographic information: gender, university, major, grade and hometown.

1. Could you please tell me when you formally started to learn English?
2. Could you please tell me how you think of English learning in today's society?
3. For how long did or do you have English classes at your university?
4. How many periods of English classes did or do you have per week?
5. How many students were or are there in your English classes?
6. How many *Min Kao Han* students were or are there in your English classes?
7. What do you think of your textbook for your English classes?
8. As a *Min Kao Han* student in your English class, do you think if your teacher would pay more attention to you than your Han classmates?
9. Could you please make some comments on your English teacher and his/her classes?
10. Are you required to pass CET-4 by your university and have you ever taken it?
11. What do you think of CET-4 and the CET-4 certificate?

**12.** Have you ever attended any English courses at private English training schools?

If the participant gives a positive answer, the following questions will be asked:

(1) Why did you choose to attend the courses?

(2) What do you think of the teachers and the courses at the training school?

(3) What do you think of the tuition at the training school?

(4) What were your parents' attitudes towards your going to the training school?

(5) Could you please make a comparison about your English classes at the university and the training school?

**13.** Compared with *Min Kao Min* students, do you think if you are more advantaged in terms of English learning?

**14.** Do you socialize with *Min Kao Min* students often and what do you think of your relationship with them?

**15.** Do you know why your parents chose to send you to a Han school when you were a kid?