‘Do You Ride Horses?’: Discursive Constructions of Chinese Minority ‘Mongolian University Students’ Subjectivities

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University’s Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Abstract

The idea of what it means to be a Chinese minority ‘Mongolian university student’ is usually explored in Chinese academic scholarship and educational practice within essentialist discourses. This approach not only stereotypes students as being ‘backward’, ‘underachieving’, ‘disruptive’, ‘powerless’ and with ‘low’ intelligence, but adopts a perspective that the researcher is the “author of knowledge” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 494) whose detached observation and rational mind provide unmediated access to students’ lives. In this ethnographic study, utilizing poststructuralist perspectives and drawing upon the analytic framework of Foucauldian discourse analysis and category boundary work, I explore the multiple, fluid and heterogeneous ways in which ‘Mongolian university students’ subjectivities are variably enacted, validated, contested or rearticulated in the continuous constitutive practices of category boundary work – maintaining, reinforcing, contracting and challenging category boundaries. It is a perspective that sees ‘Mongolian university students’ as the discursive category and in within/against which subjectivities are constantly enacted and contested in the process of discursive inclusion and exclusion. I focus on how ‘Mongolian university students’ negotiate the category’s boundaries and what subject positions are available.

Through emphasizing the strategic negotiation of multiple and shifting subject positions, I aim to disrupt the notion of ‘prejudice reduction’ (Banks, 2004) in multicultural education which aims to “help students develop positive racial attitude and values” (p. 5). I argue that this understanding of ‘prejudice reduction’ not only essentializes ‘minority students’ as single, fixed and stable attributes, but perpetuates the stereotypical representation of them. I argue for using Petersen’s (2004, 2007) concept of category boundary work to denaturalize and defamiliarize normative constructions of ‘minority students’ subjectivities. Such a denaturalizing act brings into light how discourses are utilized to make certain knowledge legitimized and what discourses are mobilized to constitute conditions of possibilities of certain subjects. Therefore, my study contributes to the poststructuralist problematisation of the conventional wisdom of essentializing discourses prevailed in minority education and social science research and opens up a promising space for future research to explore how meanings are discursively enacted and contested.
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On the Chi Le plain,
At the foot of the Yin Shan Mountain,
The sky is like a huge yurtlike roof over the wilderness.
The sky is immense, the wilderness infinitely boundless;
When the wind sweeps across the bending grass, one sees cattle and sheep grazing\(^1\) (Khan, 1995b, p. 127).

The red sun,
Slowly creeping out of the sky mountain,
Wind skims over the green grass,
The grass shakes her head.
Riding on my handsome horse and holding the horsewhip up high,
Driving the sheep and cattle down to the riverside,
I am singing a song, brimming with joy like a blossom flower\(^2\) (my translation).

The above narratives are the household classics that I learnt during my childhood and have been deeply ingrained in my memory. The first one is a historical poem written by a Chinese poet who lived a thousand years ago. The poem vividly describes the Han Chinese conception of Mongolian nomadic people in ancient China (Khan, 1995b). This well-known poem has been incorporated into the national Chinese language textbooks for primary school students and has become a famous catchy poem that many Chinese people can recite (also see Khan, 1995b, p. 128). As Khan (1995b, p. 127) comments, this poem has become the typical example of how Mongolians are imagined by the Han Chinese. The second poem is a contemporary folksong about a nomadic grazer child. It has been widely spread through word of mouth. Though not about Mongolians per se, it

\(^1\) The Chinese original is: Chi Le chuan, Yin shan xia, tian si qiong lu, long gai si ye. Tian cang cang, ye mang mang, feng chui cao di xian niu yang (also see Khan, 1995b, p. 127).

\(^2\) The Chinese original is: Hong taiyang, cong tianshang manmandi paqi, fengchui lucao, caoer ba tou yao. Qishang junma yang qi bian, ganshang niuyang xia hetang, changshang yishou ge ya, Xinhua kaifang.
essentializes an ethnic minority subject to living a ‘primitive’ life. What I find in common in these two folkloric narratives are the infatuation with the vast wilderness, the romanticisation of an ‘exotic’ subject and the representational absence of the familiar Han (Khan, 1995b) in the landscape of multicultural China3, celebrating cultural diversity and respecting difference. Whenever I thought of ‘Mongolian students’ and their homeland of Inner Mongolia4, this particular representation always found its way into my mind: on the boundless grassland lives the ‘nomadic horse-riding’ Mongolian, whose ancestor Chenggis Khan, established the largest empire in the world centuries ago. As Khan (1995b) puts it, they are “following grass and water” with the movable yurt, courageous, adventurous, ferocious, unconstrained, broad-minded and honest, but also uncivilized, unsanitary and unintelligent (p. 129).

At the initial stage of this project, I took up the above essentialist discourses that offered me a simplistic understanding and prejudiced ethnic stereotyping of ‘Mongolian students’. As I was very curious about the ‘mysterious’ and ‘backward’ life of ‘Mongolian university students’, during the fieldwork I asked them questions like “Do you ride horses?” I held to these naturalised assumptions about Mongolian students unproblematically, genuinely and literally. I was holding onto notions about them as being ‘primitive’ and ‘alien’ horse-riding people living in the remote grassland areas. This is where the question I asked during an interview comes from: “Do you ride horses?” I have selected this question as the title of my thesis as I intended to capture my changing relations with the Chinese ‘Mongolian’ stereotype and my various concerns attached to that in the different phases of this project. However, as I developed poststructuralist perspectives in my data analysis, I was situated differently in relation to this question and I began to use it ironically. Rethinking this question now, I begin to laugh, laugh at both the question and at myself. My supervisors laugh too. My changing

3 China is a highly pluralistic nation (Postiglione, 2009). As a united multi-ethnic country, China boasts as many as 56 minzu (nationalities) with ‘Han’ as the majority. Other 55 minorities, with a population of 105 million, constitute approximately 8.47% of the total population and are concentrated in 65% of China’s total areas.

4 According to China’s sixth national census, there are 5.98 million Mongolians in China (Office of Population Census of State Council & Population and Employment Statistics Department of National Statistics Bureau, 2010), who mostly dwell in IMAR, which has a Mongolian population of about 4.23 million (National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, 2012).
relations with this question and my act of laughing remind me of Foucault’s ‘shattering laughter’ that initiates his writing of *The Order of Things*:

the laughter that shattered…all the familiar landmarks of my thought – our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography – breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of things (Foucault, 1994b, p. xv).

Rereading this question through a poststructuralist lens makes me laugh though with a sense of discomfort. What is it that is so ironic and troubling about the question? What is spoken into existence and what is being included/excluded? How have I developed that ironic and even shameful relationship with the question “Do you ride horses?” How have poststructuralist perspectives unsettled my embodied and essentialized knowledge about Mongolian students? The following thesis is thus an attempt to speak to these questions.
Chapter 1 Introduction

My initial concern…

Mongolian university students and their marginalized conditions first came to my attention when I was teaching Mongolian students in a Chinese university. At that time I was deeply concerned about ethnic stereotypes that framed Mongolian university students as a ‘special group’ with special characteristics, such as ‘backward’, ‘slow-minded’, ‘less competent’, psychologically ‘sensitive’ and ‘fragile’, ‘underachievers’ and having a sense of ‘inferiority’ (Y. Deng, 2000; Kang, 2006). Within China’s multicultural discourses which extend equality, respect and aid to minority groups (Zhao, 2007a), minority students are granted ‘special treatments’ (Q. Wang & Wan, 2006) such as 10 bonus points out of the possible 750 in the National College Entrance Examination. After they are enrolled, they are streamed into separate classes to suit their ‘special need’ of mother language instruction. But because of their ‘lower’ foundations in every content area compared with Han students, they are often treated with lower expectations and lower requirements from the lecturers and Han peers.

I used to be one of those lecturers who were concerned that Mongolian students were known for being ‘problem students’, being constantly engaged in ‘disruptive’ behaviours and producing ‘poor quality’ assignments which caused them to be academically less valued. As prominent scholars in Chinese minority education are increasingly keen on utilizing the western theoretical lens of multicultural education to address minority students’ marginalization and academic underachievement (Z. Deng, 2007; Postiglione, 2009; Q. Wang & Wan, 2006; Zhao, 2012; Zhao & Postiglione, 2010), I became involved in the global topic of multicultural education which aims to “create equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups” (Banks, 2004, p. xi). I was interested in the dimension of prejudice reduction (Banks, 2004), one of the five dimensions in Banks’ theorization of

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5 Banks (2004) reviews the literature of multicultural education and conceives it as a field that consists of five interrelated dimensions: content integration, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, equity pedagogy and an empowering school culture. According to Banks (2004), content integration focuses on what examples from the diverse cultural groups should be included in the curricula. Knowledge construction describes the processes that teachers help students understand how knowledge, assumptions and bias are constructed. Prejudice reduction deals with students’ racial attitudes and identities and proposes interventions used to help students develop positive attitudes and values. Equity pedagogy suggests teachers use various theories, approaches and
multicultural education. The conception of prejudice reduction (Banks, 2004) encouraged me to explore students’ identity work in order to reduce prejudice and help them establish positive values and identities. As a lecturer operating with psychometric discourses, I wished to know students better and to help students establish positive attitudes. By doing this, I wished to find a solution to students’ marginalization in the culturally pluralistic China, ultimately contributing to the field of multicultural education.

**Psychometric perspectives**

With this purpose in mind I started by reading what research had been done on minority university students. I adopted a strategy of looking for the most frequently cited publications and the most prestigious scholars within the field on the CNKI (China’s National Knowledge Infrastructure) website. CNKI is the most influential scholarly online network (www.cnki.net) in China and is well-known for being the world’s biggest digital library. CNKI “contains over 7,300 Chinese full text academic journals… and 260,000 digital dissertations from more than 305 universities and research institutes” (X. Wu, 2006, p. 41).

In a prestigious journal on minority students found in CNKI, I noticed a highly-ranked study by Tong and Zhu (2008), who utilized Cattel’s (1946) 16PF Scale to evaluate 131 Chinese Mongolian university students’ personalities. Their study ostensibly provided me with an ‘objective’ picture that slots Mongolian university students into the grid of low abstract reasoning abilities, a lack of independence and with negative life attitudes (Tong & Zhu, 2008). They conclude that Mongolian university students are likely to have a high degree of depression, nervousness and psychological pressure (Tong & Zhu, 2008). As I was wondering about what this evaluation might mean for exploring students’ identity work in institutional settings, I found other scholars suggesting that this expression of inner self accounts for the students’ way of interacting with Han peers – lacking initiative in communicating with Hans (Shang & Kang, 2010). According to Bao (2009), this expression of inner self also accounts for Mongolian students’ academic underachievement.
I then looked for how other researchers in this field approach minority students’ identity work. A frequently-cited definition for ethnic identity understands identity as “an important component of psychological attributes” (La, 2003, p. 5, my translation) and “cognitive and emotional attachment to a group” (p. 5, my translation). Based on such a perspective, I found that some studies develop a typology of ethnic identity into ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ identity (La, 2003; Wan & Wang, 2004; Y. Wang, 2002; Y. Wang & Wan, 2003). ‘Positive’ identity relates to affirmative feelings and emotions towards one’s original heritage. La’s (2003) study about minority Hui students concludes that a ‘positive’ ethnic identity leads to the difficulty with adaptation to the majority Han environment (p. 26). ‘Negative’ identity is linked to feelings that devalue their ethnic cultural heritage (p. 38), leading to a sense of ‘inferiority’ and a lack of a sense of belonging when encountering and accepting mainstream Han practices.

As I further explored how ‘positive’ identity and ‘negative’ identity might be determined and the potential significance of such classification, I have found Shi’s (2007) work instructive who argues that minority groups’ ‘aggressive’ behaviors can be predicted and controlled through utilization of the psychometric approach. ‘Positive’ identity towards one’s own group is closely related to ‘positive’ behaviors, while ‘negative’ identity speaks to ‘problem’ behaviors (Shi, 2007, p. 124). This study made me aware that identity is usually considered by factors or characteristics such as a sense of belonging, pride and a positive attitude toward one’s group, which factors were usually determined by survey (Shi, 2007, p. 22). Psychometrical studies attempt to establish close links between psychological well-being and a student’s identity work (La, 2003). ‘Positive’ identity is taken to mean a higher sense of belonging to one’s own group leading to a sense of pride, while ‘negative’ identity means a lower sense of belonging, leading to a sense of ‘inferiority’, isolation and depression. This is seen to be pervasive among minority students. These studies set up opposing discourses about ‘healthy’ and ‘unhealthy’ minority students (La, 2003, p. 26). Based on these findings, researchers argue for the need to establish campus environments that appeal to students, create a sense of belonging, foster emotionally supportive relationships between teachers and students, establish communication systems so that teachers may better care for students’ well-being, improve accommodation management and tighten alcohol availability in order to produce ‘qualified’ and ‘healthy’ minority students (Z. Huang, 2005; La, 2003; Sun, Geri, & Zhao, 2005).
With this understanding of identity as a sense of belonging and attitude, I also read W. Chen’s (2008) study which sees ethnic identity as a sense of belonging in relation to minority language. Chen (2008) reports “the loss of Mongolian heritage in a highly globalized and Hanized era, which highlights the urgent need for Mongolian language education to foster a sense of belonging in order to cultivate qualified minority elites” (p. 1, my translation). Chen (2008) seems to argue for the promotion of Mongolian language education as fulfilling the function of maintaining ethnic bonds and creating a sense of belonging.

Therefore, many of the frequently-cited articles in prestigious journals in CNKI conceptualize identity as a psychological construct consisting of a sense of belonging, attitudes or emotions, which can be measured and explored ‘objectively’ through correlational analysis – correlations between cultural adaptation, adaptive behaviors, psychological well-being, self-esteem and mother language (W. Chen, 2008; L. Gong, 2009; C. Huang & Yu, 2009; La, 2003; Shi, 2007; Wan & Wang, 2004; Y. Wang, 2002). I also noticed these articles on minority students are quantitatively quasi-experimental, operationalized by using measures of scales, surveys and questionnaires. They predominantly focus on describing, identifying and examining the ‘deep structures’ of students to ‘match up with’ the ‘inner law’ of the category. The reason that I found psychometric perspectives particularly valuable at the beginning of my study was that this body of research seemed to have made useful suggestions for institutions to enhance students’ learning through the establishment of a cultural environment that respects minority students, contributes to building culturally relevant curricula, and also strengthens character education designed to help minority students to cultivate their personal sense of well-being, to consider their behaviour, thereby to be better integrated into campus life (Xiaoyong Liu, 2010; Sun, et al., 2005; Xiong, 2001). Reading these studies stirred in me a specific desire and passion to ‘know students better’, to design ‘better support’ structures and to help students out of their marginalization by ‘scientifically’ ‘discovering’ their identity work. Taking up psychometric discourses directed me to a research design that favored essentializing conceptualizations of identity. I classified identity into fixed categories, including ‘positive’ and ‘negative’, ‘assigned’ or ‘asserted’, ‘thick’ or ‘thin’, etc. At that time, I also designed surveys and questionnaires in an attempt to develop a typology of students’ identity project in a
‘detached’, ‘objective’ and ‘neutral’ manner. I felt secure and comfortable with such a framework, aiming to find the accurate ‘truth’ of students’ identity work.

However, attending a productive and inspiring research methodology course⁶ problematized my previous essentialist understanding and fermented a different and more challenging research impetus in me. It offered me a constructivist way of seeing ‘realities’ as multiple, context-dependent and socially constructed. It also led me to reflect on how the interactive and constructional relationship with participants, my interpretative belief and my positionality might govern the way I see the world and structure the research. With a different set of ontological and epistemological assumptions, I began to reconsider the previous essentialist understanding of the world that read human beings as having a single, unified, stable, coherent and measurable nature, which was taken to exist inside individuals and used to explain and determine students’ behaviors (Burr, 1998). I began to question how my previous psychological approach presupposed the pre-given nature of a Mongolian university student to be in some degree the result of an innate genetic make-up that made them ‘backward’, ‘slow-minded’, ‘naïve’ and ‘emotional’. I began to think this generalized version treated identity as a noun that existed inside individuals (L. Gong, 2009; Jin, 2008) rather than a verb, an activity emerging out of participation in social practices (Allen, 2006; Holland & Lave, 2009) and contradditorily caught up (e.g. that one can simultaneously have a sense of belonging and not have a sense of belonging). The essentialist notions of identity created static and context-free stereotypical deficit representations of minority students alienated from the Han and were likely to “break discipline” (Qie, 2002, p. 113, my translation). This way of conceptualizing identity produced an understanding that failed to attend to the complexity of identity as constructed by the wider social-cultural discourses (Holland & Lave, 2009). It upheld that the observer is better able to understand a student’s identity through the ‘objective’ and ‘rational’ mind than the student him/herself (St. Pierre, 2000).

**Structuralist reading**

Problematisation of my previous psychometric stance arose not only out of my exposure to the productive methodology coursework, but out of my readings of structuralist

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⁶ As a first-year PhD student studying in an Australian university at that time, I was required to do research methodology coursework.
ethnographic studies. As I considered it important to explore how popular culture might influence university students’ identity work, I began to read ethnographies that focused on the influence of pop culture on identity performance (Dimitriadis, 2009; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2001). Dimitriadis (1996, 2009) suggests that school instruction is so narrow and formalized that youth turn to elsewhere for identity construction. Conducting a two-year ethnographic study, Dimitriadis (1996, 2009) highlights the ways young people create a sense of self, place and community through pop culture much of which is deeply ingrained in the lives of black youth. By focus group interviews with black youth at a local community centre, Dimitriadis (2009) asserts that pop culture is a resource of survival for young people to draw on to deal with the vicissitudes and their harsh realities of life.

I also read Davidson’s (1996) book which delves deeply and specifically into 12 students’ making and moulding identities in school-based settings. Davidson (1996) conceptualizes identity as “presentation of self in a matrix of social relationships” (p. 2). Through observation and interviews, Davidson (1996) categorizes identities into three patterns – Marbella and Carla’s unconventional identities, Sonia and Ryan’s conformist identities, and Johnnie and Patricia’s transcultural identities. She concludes that ethnic identities “are dependent on the range of cultural and intercultural phenomena that individuals mediate within varied social matrices” (pp. 4-5). Through observation and interviews, Phelan, Davidson, & Yu (1998) conducted a similar study into the worlds of seven youths: Ryan’s smooth transition of congruent worlds; Trinh who manages transitions into different worlds; Patricia’s crazy world; Robert who resists transitions of congruent worlds and Carmelita who passes through smooth transitions to different worlds, etc. Their findings suggest that family support, student-teacher relationships, peer network and academic achievement all play key roles in identity construction. McLaren’s (1993) exploration of youth experience in a school setting points to the relationship between classroom instruction and identity performance. He locates the dynamics of school life both in actions in daily class and in various resistances to formal instruction. While the classroom transmits the dominant authoritative axioms, it is in the playground, the street corner state7 that students break free from the previous shackles and crippling perfectionism, and perform various identities. These studies conceptualise

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7 Radigan (2002) summarizes McLaren’s (1993) notion of street corner state as “the exuberant, physical world of the teenager” (Radigan, 2002, p. 257)
identity as a social construction and the product of social relationships. In this way, these studies cast my theoretical gaze from inner things of personal thoughts or the stable self, to students’ social practices and the interrelationships between ethnic identity and pop culture (Dimitriadis, 2009; Mazzarella & Pecora, 2001), family support, student-teacher relationship, peer network and academic achievement (Davidson, 1996; Phelan, et al., 1998), and classroom instruction (McLaren, 1993). These studies offered me ethnographic examples to explore identity work in ordinary, day to day interactions and experiences within school settings (see chapter 2). Some of these scholars argue that the significance of researching youth identities is to “draw educators closer to the clientele they serve” (Phelan, et al., 1998, p. 19) and to create optimal environments for students which “is crucial if educators are to forge more locally relevant policies, institutions, and curricula for often intensely marginalized young people” (Dimitriadis, 2009, p. 95). Therefore, it appeared to me that these studies aligned with my initial problem-solving endeavour, and helped me “to consider more clearly questions of multicultural curriculum development in school settings” (Dimitriadis, 2009, p. 95).

More importantly, these studies motivated me to pursue a better understanding of the ways minority students navigate their world by conforming or resisting the universal and common structure of domination which were seen to pre-exist and produce students’ marginalization. Although I was interested in the constructivist paradigm that sees ‘realities’ as locally and specifically constructed (Guba & Lincoln, 1998) instead of stemming from a fixed order, I did not know what it meant when it came to practice. Neither did I realize the inconsistency between the constructivist paradigm and what I understood from these studies. For instance, reading these studies, I constructed a single and permanent basis of the dominant structure that constituted minority students’ oppression. So I had already imposed an artificial binary relation between minority culture and mainstream culture, and presumed an internal universality that appeared to structure students’ identities into fixed types (such as the conformist, or the resistant, etc). Although focusing on the concrete social texture in conceptualizing identity, I summarized that texture to a totalizing and decontextualized logical structure (Butler, 1990) which went against the constructivist commitment. Contradictorily taking up this structuralist framing and the constructivist commitment, I was looking for an analytic tool that I could deploy to prepare myself for the fieldwork and for interpreting data.
Gee’s Discourse theory

Because I was required to go through the confirmation at the end of my first year PhD study, I had to settle for something at that time. I was introduced to Gee’s (1989, 1990, 1992, 2000, 2005) (D)discourse analysis which focuses on the role of (D)iscourse and social practices in creating and coordinating identities. Gee distinguishes discourse and Discourse. While discourse refers to language in use, Discourse also involves non-linguistic means in creating meanings and serves as a sort of “identity-kit” (Gee, 1990, p. 142):

A Discourse is a socially accepted association among ways of using language, of thinking, feeling, believing, valuing, and of acting that can be used to identify oneself as a member of a socially meaningful group or ‘social network’, or to signal (that one is playing) a socially meaningful ‘role’ (p. 143).

Gee’s (D)iscourse theory helped me to understand that it is within and among Discourse that we display ourselves as to who we are and what we are doing. Thus, Discourses are ways of displaying membership of a particular group through actions, talking, values, beliefs and props or artefacts (Gee, 1992). A person is apprenticed to a social group that acts, talks, values and believes in that way. At that time, what prompted me to utilize Gee’s theory was his distinction between primary Discourses and secondary Discourses which enabled me to explore how these two Discourses influenced students’ identity work. The former are “Discourses to which people are apprenticed early in life during their primary socialization as members of particular families within their socio-cultural settings” (Gee, 1992, p. 108), while the latter are “Discourses to which people are apprenticed as part of their socializations within various local, state, and national groups and institutions outside early home and peer-group socialization – for example, churches, gangs, schools, offices” (Gee, 1992, pp. 108-109). At that time I felt Gee’s theory further encouraged my departure from mainstream psychological approaches by focusing more on the critical role of social practices and students’ family backgrounds. It directed me to probe questions like: What are the primary and secondary Discourses that students mobilize to construct themselves as a certain kind of person? How do these Discourses “coordinate” (Gee, 1992) particular studenthood? Meanwhile, I was also inspired by Knobel’s (1999) ethnographic study which utilizes Gee’s (1990, 2005) theory. Knobel (1999) argues that “distinction between primary Discourse and secondary Discourse provides invaluable means of explaining, for example, how it is that some students are able to achieve,
among other things, success in school more readily than others” (p. 41). I also read Allen’s (2006) examination of the cultural models of youth ‘connectedness’ in a local school, with her use of Gee’s discourse analysis. Through her study utilizing observations and interviews, she concludes that the construction of ‘connectedness’ in a school setting is understood in terms of the emotional aspect of ‘connectedness’ while the separation between students’ social and academic experience receives less attention. Her findings suggest that students’ identities are produced through the interplay between everyday social interactions, and societal and institutional structures, which mediate who they are as a certain kind of person. Allen (2006) and Knobel’s (1999) application of Gee’s theory not only encouraged me to focus on students’ social practices in my fieldwork, but provoked me to ask further questions: How do primary discourses influence Mongolian university students’ institutional performances? How is it that Han students are able to achieve success more readily than Mongolian students? At that time, I did not think too much about whether my understanding of Gee’s conceptualization fitted well within the constructivist paradigm that I aspired to employ.

With the ethnographic data collected after the fieldwork, I felt anxious and uneasy as I began to develop a number of new interests and concerns. While Gee’s theory enabled me to examine what Discourses constituted and coordinated particular types of studenthood (Honan, Knobel, Baker, & Davies, 2000; Knobel, 1999), I was more fascinated by the way students constantly sought after, maintained, validated, transformed and contested meanings of ‘who they were’ through the use of language. For instance, some students on one hand recognized they were engaged in ‘unruly’ behaviors such as drinking, smoking and yelling, while on the other hand they prohibited me from attending their parties because I was a ‘lady’. How was I able to read the simultaneous acts of doing ‘bad students’ needing intervention, and refusing my participation to surpass what the ‘powerful others’ could have imagined? Since I began to be more interested in the temporary, fluid and multiple ways students played out identities at different moments, I needed to provide a more sophisticated reading of the ways in which they constituted themselves differently and contradictorily, than in my previous constructions. As I became more interested in our daily interactions with each other, I looked for new ways to theorize and see my multiple relations with participants, students’ refusal to participate, the denial of my access to their world and the gendered regulations to me (see chapter 6). How should I provide the readings that I
was baffled by their ‘eccentric’ practices? In what ways were the classification of Discourse and discourse, primary and secondary Discourses useful for making sense of my new interest? Meanwhile I was also concerned about another problem – how was I to represent the data in a way that reflected the ontological assumptions of constructed and shifting ‘realities’? How to write in a way that acknowledged my voices were visible and indispensible parts of the inquiry, that both participants and I were inevitably intertwined throughout the process? I felt my previous focus on Discourse and discourse, primary Discourses and secondary Discourses, the relationship between identity performance, popular culture, peer network, academic achievement, and their family backgrounds suppressed the notion of identity into a static, binary, totalizing and clear-cut structure so that I found myself unable to address these new interests and complicated concerns from this perspective. I needed to further explore methodological strategies and find a new theoretical framing to enable me to capture a different and complicated way of reading the ‘messy’ data.

**Poststructuralist ruminations and concerns**

As my project progressed beyond the fieldwork, I was drawn to poststructuralist perspectives which eventually became the theoretical framework in my data analysis. With the poststructuralist framework, I began to further critique my early structuralist readings on studies of minority youth (Davidson, 1996; Dimitriadis, 2009; McLaren, 1993) that presupposed a universal basis, a singular, discernible structure of domination (Butler, 1990) as the cause or origin of students’ marginalization and identity work. As I mentioned, with my previous structuralist perspectives, I assumed a universal structure that distributed ‘success’ to Han students and a relational and subordinate ‘lack’ (Butler, 1990) to Mongolian students. Contrary to my initial psychometric stance, this structuralist view sees the meanings of Mongolian students residing not intrinsically in the psychological attributes, but in the difference from (Butler, 1990) other social groups, such as Han students. However, it assumes a fixed relationship between the signifier and the signified, and imposes a linguistic totality of structures to generate meaning (Butler, 1990). The terms of hegemonic Han cultural discourse predicated on dichotomized structures was rationalized as the universal ‘truth’, therefore set the limits for further analysis (Butler, 1990). For me, one of the major differences between the structuralist stance and the poststructuralist conceptualization is that the former stance
naturally assumes a binary of minority/majority without further scrutiny and problematisation (Butler, 1990). Instead of taking that binary for granted, the poststructuralist perspectives inspire me to rethink how the uncritical distinction of Mongolian students/Han students has conventionally produced, sustained and rationalized the implicit ethnic hierarchies. How does the naturalization of Han superiority and minority ‘backwardness’ become generated and institutionalized? Is it possible that the dichotomy of Mongolian students/Han students constitutes the exclusionary device where Mongolian students ‘special characteristics’ are identified and decontextualized from the shifting relations of power (Butler, 1990) that frame and form the subjectivities of students, and make the static notion of identity problematic? Or perhaps the structuralist (re)production of a singular structural logic constitutes a “reverse-discourse” (Butler, 1990, p. 13) that uncritically copies the exclusive strategies of the dominant discourse instead of providing a different set of possibilities (Butler, 1990). Another significant difference, therefore, between my former structuralist perspective and the current poststructuralist framing is that the structuralist perspective effectively suppresses the openness, fluidity and multiplicity of the subjectivities of Mongolian students into a unifying field of totality (Butler, 1990). The presumed fixity and universality of the structuralist frame fail to produce shifting positions which effectively contest the universal structure itself (Butler, 1990, 1993). The poststructuralist break with the claims of the totality and closure of structural dichotomies (Butler, 1990) argues meanings carried by language are always temporary, contestable, open to question and “up for grabs” (Butler, 1992, p. 644). Consequently, “the discrepancy between signifier and signified becomes the operative and limitless difference of language, rendering all referentiality into a potentially limitless displacement” (Butler, 1990, p. 40).

Through this emerging poststructuralist lens, I also began to feel troubled by the paradigmatic clash between the constructivist paradigm and the way I utilized Gee’s (D)iscourse theory. Constructivist discourses encouraged me to keep an open mind regarding what happened in the fieldwork instead of imposing any preconceived notions, to explore how students construct identities in everyday practices right there and then. However, when actually in the field site, I couldn’t help but take up essentialist discourses and assumed stereotypes regarding Mongolian students, such as asking the question “Do you ride horses?” Therefore I did the fieldwork aspiring to use
constructivist ‘commitments’ but at the same time I contradictorily slipped back to essentializing students with taken-for-granted stereotypes. Perhaps as a novice researcher, lack of sufficient practice in applying methodological craft skills led me to take up conflicting discourses that were inconsistent with the constructivist paradigm? Or perhaps at that time the way I used Gee’s theory was influenced by my lingering realist thinking, by the way I conceived power as a stable belonging possessed by me and by the way I saw the purpose of research being to predict, control and illuminate the dark places of ignorance with the light of reasoning (St. Pierre, 2000) while positioning myself as the ‘transparent’ observer?

My interest in poststructuralist discourses does not mean poststructuralism has ‘made it’ and Gee’s theory is wrong, but each framing offers different ways in which individuals and social practices can be characterized and interpreted (Honan, Knobel, Baker & Davies, 2000). Honan, Knobel, Baker and Davies (2000) argue that “different analytic approaches radically influence what can be found in the materials” (p. 30). For me, this means that the object under study fundamentally depends on the utilization of particular theoretical tools. The taking-up of certain tools depends on my epistemology and my particular purpose. I see the biggest difference between Gee’s theory and the poststructuralist perspective is that Gee’s theory encouraged me to explore what Discourses constitute and how they coordinate the formation of a particular type of person (Knobel, 1999). It enabled me to see a world fraught with D/discourses, primary/secondary Discourses (Honan, et al., 2000; Knobel, 1999) and how one group possessed totalized power over another, but it was less suitable for the post-foundational research (see chapter 2) aiming to explore how identities are never unified, stable and singular, but multiply constructed and fragmented, constantly in the process of negotiation and transformation (Davies, 1989). Working at different assumptions about discourse and subject from Gee’s theory, poststructuralist discourses focus on the discursive possibilities made available to the subject, how (s)he takes up that discourse to negotiate what is available to her/him and how multiple positionings and shifting relations of power (re)constitute particular subjects in-process (Honan, et al., 2000). These discourses and practices through which individuals are constituted are often understood in tension, providing me a lens to explore the multiple-layered and contradictory constructions which rupture the essentializing quest of meaning (Honan, et al., 2000; Trinh, 1991). This framework is more useful to me because these tensions
and instabilities become visible in the poststructuralist analysis (Davies, 1989) through examining students’ discursive practices. It enables me to explore complex and heterogeneous negotiation processes in which students are subjected to the discourses in relation to the particular constructions of the category, and how students mobilize and move between various discourses (Davies, 1991).

Adopting poststructuralist perspectives compels me to think again, and more deliberately about the naturalized assumptions, and my previous ambitious narratives of ‘knowing students better’. I begin to develop new concerns: In my former psychometric and discourse frameworks, did I assume myself to be an autonomous, triumphant and insightful researcher who could reasonably see the ‘real’ and discover what was being ignored, who could liberate the marginalized students from the darkness and ignorance (St. Pierre, 2000)? Was I positioning myself as the origin and producer of ‘true’ knowledge who managed to overcome overwhelming odds to become the model for other researchers (St. Pierre, 2000)? Did I assume a narrow and negative notion of power that saw power as a homogenous and coherent structure of domination of one group over others (Foucault, 1980)? Did I assume that power operated in a directly coercive and repressive fashion (Foucault, 1978)? Will the power imbalance magically disappear in my previous problem-solving attempts? Or will this ambition effectively reinforce binary oppositions between educators and Mongolian students as the basis of power relations that extends from the top down? In attributing students’ initial refusal of participation to their ‘shyness’ (see chapter 4), did I ever try to preserve an illusion of having an ‘authentic’ and unmediated access to students’ ‘inner’ thoughts? Or, as in the example of being denied from hanging out with students at their parties (see chapter 6), was I haunted by a fear that troubled the composure of my ‘masterful’ gaze, calling into attention a definite space where authority of the researcher suddenly collapsed (MacLure, 2006)?

What I mean is, by taking up poststructuralist discourses, I don’t aspire to offer problem-solving advice which assumes that a ‘better’ framework would produce a more effective solution of the problems (Stronach & MacLure, 1997) as I did in the previous stances. Rather, as I began to laugh at the question “Do you ride horses?”, I expected new ways of ‘reading’ and ‘knowing’ the taxonomic dis/order of the social in the uncertain hope of mobilising issues that are often taken for granted, troubling and
fracturing the discursive familiarity (MacLure, 2006) and generating new questions: Particularly, how did my stereotypical markings of students throughout my fieldwork potentially insulate me from surprising at ‘doing otherwise’? How do particular constructions of ‘Mongolian university students’ take place? I am curious about how ‘Mongolian university students’ do, feel and speak the category into existence. Which ways of being and acting were recognized as belonging to the category and which ways were excluded – how were the category boundaries maintained and reworked in students’ daily social practices, how did particular actions obtain the recognizable and legitimate status and how was such recognition negotiated (Petersen, 2004). Will this ‘knowing otherwise’ generate ‘doing otherwise’ (Petersen, 2004) in the pedagogical practices which so often fall into the trap of reproducing and perpetuating the same classification, hierarchization and exclusion?

Thus, I use the question “Do you ride horses?” as the title of this thesis not only to indicate my shifting relations with it throughout the project, but to illustrate my contradictory concerns and diverse frameworks that have driven me to approach the project at the different phases of my PhD journey. With poststructuralist perspectives, my theoretical and analytic gaze has shifted from the initial passion for verification, classification and liberation to problematisation and destabilisation. I began to focus on the generative force of discursive and social practices, not in Gee’s sense of identifying the primary and secondary Discourses, discourse or Discourse in pursuit of better solutions, but to explore how it is that subjects are materially, gradually and continually constituted through manifold and shifting relations of power, and what the available discourses are that students utilize to constitute and reconstitute subjectivities.

**Conceptualizing ‘Mongolian university students’ as discursive and social practices**

Scholars suggest poststructuralist framing often uses the term of subjectivity to elaborate on a different conceptualization of what it means to be a person (Davies, 1993, 1994; Staunæs, 2005). Subjectivity is defined as “the conscious and unconscious thoughts, emotions of individual, her sense of herself, and her ways of understanding her relation to the world” (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). According to Davies (1994), notions of subjectivity “shift attention away from the unitary non-contradictory selves that we each struggle after as a result of our immersion in humanist discourses and focuses on the shifting, fragmented, multi-faceted and contradictory nature of our experiences” (p.
3). The poststructuralist notion of subjectivity entails a conceptualization of ‘Mongolian university student’ not as a pre-discursive being, but as a discursive category and social practice, always produced and re-produced within power relations (Butler, 1990; 1993). My conceptualization of the discursive category of ‘Mongolian university students’ as social practices draws heavily from the theoretical perspectives developed within the poststructuralist studies of gender (Butler, 1990, 1993). Butler (1990) argues that the ‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of the person are instituted and maintained through regulatory practices that governs the matrix of cultural intelligibility. This means, to be a recognizable member of a certain social group, one must act or speak along the cultural model of intelligibility, i.e. one must behave in accordance with the socially-established forms of behavior or articulation. Put differently, the appearance of the ‘stable’ inner core is produced and sustained by regulatory practices that generate and naturalize the appearance of the coherent and fixed ‘self’ along the culturally established matrix of intelligibility (Butler, 1990). Poststructuralist perspectives “expose the ostensible ‘cause’ of binary categorization as ‘an effect’”, which is created by the regulatory regime to govern and naturalize the norms of cultural intelligibility by placing the reified categories as the basis within the discursive regimes (Butler, 1990, p. 23). Acts, articulations, and bodily performances are performative in that the appearances of inner essence are “fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler, 1990, p. 136). In this sense, drawing on poststructuralist conceptions of gender, I argue that instead of the coherent and abiding substance, ‘Mongolian university students’ has no ontological status of ‘thereness’ apart from various acts which constitute the reality. This means that the category of, or the notion of ‘Mongolian university student’ is conceptualized as a set of repeated acts within the culturally intelligible ways of doing. Butler (1990) cites Nietzsche, when she explains that “‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed – the deed is everything” (p. 25). Therefore, the discursive category of ‘Mongolian university student’(as well as the ‘Han researcher’) is always a doing, compelled by the regulatory practices and is “performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (Butler, 1990, p. 25).

Those ‘incoherent’ and ‘discontinuous’ elements which fail to obey the domain of intelligibility will appear as the culturally deficient or “developmental failures” (Butler,
1990, p. 17). However, the excluded ‘alien’ elements are never truly outside the cultural matrix, but become attached to the intelligible as the constitutive outside (Butler, 1993). Therefore, the construction of subjectivity also operates through exclusionary means (Butler, 1993). The insistence of the constitutive force of the ‘failed’ elements not only provide the critical possibilities to “expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility” (Butler, 1990, p. 17), but function as the disruptive return to subvert the boundaries of the culturally intelligible (Butler 1990; 1993). Butler’s notion of the constitutive force of discursive exclusion is an important concept for me, because it not only foregrounds a construction process through erasure and foreclosure, but provides the theoretical basis for my utilization of Petersen’s (2004) notion of category boundary work as an overall analytic strategy to explore the discursive constitution of subjectivities. To avoid repetition, I will further explore the analytic strategy of category boundary work in the next chapter.

Butler (1990, 1993) argues that the matrix of intelligibility is never singular. This means there are various ways in which the category of ‘Mongolian university students’ is understood depending on how the productive field of power is articulated. Subjectivity of ‘Mongolian university student’ is not fixed, but is transient, contestable, always challenged and struggled for, which opens up possibilities for infinitely diverse meanings and reconstructions. Thus, to understand the discursive category as social practice:

> is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life. Abstractly considered, language refers to an open system of signs by which intelligibility is insistently created and contested. As historically specific organizations of language, discourses present themselves in the plural, coexisting within temporal frames, and instituting unpredictable and inadvertent convergences from which specific modalities of discursive possibilities are engendered (Butler, 1990, p. 145).

This also means the discourses through which our subjectivities are constituted are sometimes conflicting, bringing about “multiple layers of contradictory meanings” (Davies, 1993, p. 11) which are inscribed in our bodies and minds. This enables me to see ‘Mongolian university students’ as social and discursive practices that come in many forms and shapes instead of something fixed and stable, as continuous doings by their taking up available constructions in various culturally intelligible ways. Using the
metaphor of palimpsest, Davies (1993) elaborates on the effects of multiple discourses on subjects that both influence each other while remaining independent:

This is a term to describe the way in which new writings on a parchment were written over or around old writings that were not fully erased. One writing interrupts the other, momentarily overriding, intermingling with the other; the old writing influences the interpretation of the imposed new writing and the new influences the interpretation of the old. But both still stand, albeit partially erased and interrupted. New discourses do not simply replace the old as on a clean sheet. They generally interrupt one another, though they may also exist in parallel, remaining separate, undermining each other perhaps, but in an unexamined way (p. 11).

Therefore, poststructuralist notions of ‘Mongolian university student’ capture the continuous process of becoming rather than being by conceptualizing subjectivities as the discursive production in response to specific relational demands (Butler, 1990; Davies & Harre, 1990; Jackson & Mazzei, 2011; Weedon, 1997). In this sense, similar to Butler’s perspective on gender, the discursive category of ‘Mongolian university students’ is “a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end” (Butler, 1990, p. 33). This conceptualization enables me to explore how ‘Mongolian university students’ are continually struggling for, achieving and re-achieving the cultural intelligibility of (not) belonging to the category through the negotiation of a variety of available discourses. I am interested in exploring how they are disciplined, and incessantly rework category boundaries. As is apparent, central to my conceptualization of ‘Mongolian university students’ as multiply constructed through social practices, is the notion of discourse.

**Discourse, subjectification and positioning**

Contrary to Gee’s distinction of Discourse and discourse, Foucault defines discourses as “practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault, 1972, p. 49). Any writing, speech, or image which provides a way of talking about or representing knowledge about a topic is discourse. Discourse produces meaningful knowledge about a subject and modes of subjectivity (Weedon, 1997). Therefore, I understand Foucault’s notion of discourse to be the combination of language and practice (Hall, 1997), shaping and influencing people’s conduct. Weedon (1997) comments as follows on Foucault’s notion of discourse:
Discourses, in Foucault’s work, are ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the nature of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects which they seek to govern. Neither the body nor thoughts and feelings have meaning outside of their discursive articulation, but the ways in which discourses constitute the minds and bodies of individuals is always part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional bases (p. 105).

This conceptualization of discourse reminds me of my previous use of Gee’s Discourse. I understand the major difference between Gee’s notion of Discourse and Foucauldian discourse in the way in which the former sees Discourse as “a deterministic act” (Petersen, 2004, p. 21) which brings into being a certain kind of person. Foucault (1978) on the other hand sees discourse as the constitutive force which operates through the reiteration of norms. As Butler (1993) suggests, “construction … is a process of reiteration by which both ‘subject’ and ‘acts’ come to appear at all. There is no power that acts, but only a reiterated acting that is power in its persistence and instability” (Butler, 1993, p. 9, cited in Petersen, 2004, p. 22). Discursive constitution does not mean that discourse serves as the originator or cause of subjectivities separated from the real world, but discourse constitutes subject, bodies and feelings which have no meanings outside discourse (Petersen, 2004, p. 22). Discourse constitutes reality and if various practices and enactments create the illusion of pre-discursive inner core, then the very pre-discursivity is the effect and function of discourses produced and maintained for the regulation of the intelligible matrix (Butler, 1990).

Foucault (1983) identifies the dual process of subjectification – both as the subject acting upon the existing conditions and being subjected to various discursive practices. Human beings are made subjects through modes of objectification within discourses, a process that shapes, regulates and monitors human behaviors. Meanwhile, human beings make themselves the subjects of discourses, producing themselves by referring back to these knowledges. Subjectification implies “both the becoming of the subject and the process of subjection – one inhabits the figure of autonomy only by becoming subjected to a power, a subjection which implies a radical dependency” (Butler, 1997, p. 83). This means on the one hand, people are subjected to discourses that objectify them and produce certain knowledge in a particular way, and that governs and regulates what occurs within discourses, what should be said, and done. On the other hand, people take
up discourses, experiencing the world, acting, shaping and recognizing themselves according to the rules of the particular discourses. In this way, discourse enables the construction of a particular kind of ‘person’. According to Davies and Harré (1990), the rules of discourse produce particular subject positions. Davies and Harré (1990) propose the notion of positioning:

An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate. Accordingly, who one is, that is, what sort of person one is, is always an open question with shifting answers depending upon the positions made available within one’s own and others’ discursive practices and within those practices, the stories through which we make sense of our own lives (p. 35).

Therefore, subjectivities are temporary, fleeting, even contradictory, and always in process. An individual’s subjective experiences, the sense of who (s)he is, depends on the weaving-together of multiple subject positions within discourses. Utilizing Foucault’s conceptualization of discourse and subjectification, along with Davies and Harré’s concept of positioning, my purpose is clearly not to generalize or exhaust discourses in order to find the pre-discursive beings. Rather, I wish to generate a different reading of the mundane social and discursive practices that I came across in my fieldwork. My ambition is to look at how ‘Mongolian university students’ are “discursified into existence” (Petersen, 2004, p. 8). My questions are: How are particular discursive practices being mobilized and negotiated by students at particular situations? What assumptions, constructions or contradictions are available? How are some sets of propositions constituted as culturally acceptable and taken for granted while others are recognized as illegitimate? What are the available subject positions which students take up to make their own? How do they position themselves and are being positioned differently in constructing the discursive category of ‘Mongolian university students’ as social practices? How do students negotiate different subject positions? Relevant to the discursive act of constituting the subject is the Foucauldian notion of power/knowledge, which I explain next.

**Power/knowledge**

According to Foucault (1980), it is power within discourse that transforms individuals into subjects. Discourses produce particular knowledge which brings with it power (Burr, 1998). It enables people to act one way rather than another with constraint and
regulations. The disciplining practices rule certain ways of being, talking, doing and marginalize alternative ways of acting (Davies, 1993). Therefore power not only constitutes the ultimate principle of social bodies, but power and knowledge imply and reinforce each other, being the two sides of the same process. Knowledge is developed when power is exercised, which engenders and legitimate further exercise of power (Foucault, 1977). Therefore, for Foucault (1977, 1978, 1980), knowledge, the particular view of the world, is intimately bound up with power. Foucault (1978) defines power as:

Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transformations, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions, and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (p. 92).

This means power should be understood as net-like relations, extending and circulating through every aspect of our lives to “advance, multiply, and branch out deeply into social networks” (Foucault, 1978, p. 42). This conception of power “roots [power] in forms of behavior, bodies and local relations of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 201) which permeates every level of social life among people. Everyone is entangled in power relations. From the perspective of Foucault, mechanisms of power bring into operation relationships between people in that one's actions induce, modify and shape the subject’s actions:

It [power] is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions (Foucault, 1983, p. 220).

Therefore power is neither possessed by the powerful, nor exchanged, but is exercised through action (Foucault, 1980, p. 90). The nature of power consists of the ways in which certain actions direct the conduct of subjects, structuring the possible fields of action, “opening up a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions” (Foucault, 1983, p. 220). Therefore, individuals are not the passive target of power, but “always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Following Foucault, Butler (1997) further theorizes that
power produces subjects not only through regulatory means of “forming the subject” (1997, p. 2), but also through exclusion, “the production of an outside, a domain of unlivability and unintelligibility that bounds the domain of intelligible effects” (1993, p. xxix). As a result of viewing power as local, relational and productive, power is always multiple, active and unstable (Foucault, 1980). For Foucault, resistance and power constitute another pair. Prevailing discourses are always under attack from other discourses which can remove them from the status of ‘truth’. This opens up possibilities for change through resistance:

We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourses can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it (Foucault, 1978, p. 101).

As power relations are rooted in social networks, where actions upon actions of others are always ongoing and in-process, the power-resistance pair constitutes another crucial point of power. This means that “at the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and intransigence of freedom” (Foucault, 1983, pp. 221-222). Foucault (1983) uses the neologism “agonism” to refer to this permanent struggle, “incitation” and “provocation” (p. 222). “Agonism” demonstrates the relationship between power relations and the recalcitrant obstinacy of freedom as a permanent political task in all social existence.

With this conceptualization of power/knowledge in mind, I explore how ‘Mongolian university students’ are discursively constituted and regulated as a different category from ‘Han students’, and how they take up certain positions and discourses to constitute themselves and negotiate category boundaries, i.e., how ‘truth’ effects are produced in discourses and through what exclusionary means this occurs. I also examine how ‘Mongolian university students’ are “the vehicles of power”, or “elements of its (power) articulation” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98) in the permanent struggle of “incitation”, and “provocation” and how these struggles are “located in the fine meshes of the web of power” (Foucault, 1980, p. 116).
Main research question:

How do Chinese minority ‘Mongolian university students’ negotiate available discourses to constitute themselves?

Sub-questions:

1. How is the discursive category of ‘Mongolian university students’ produced?
2. How do Mongolian university students negotiate category boundaries and what are the available subject positions?

Organization of chapters:

Having elaborated on my theoretical perspective, in the next chapter I will focus on the overall methodological assumptions including my epistemological stance, data generation methods, analytic strategy and considerations about representation. Utilizing the analytic tool of Petersen’s (2004) category boundary work, I will investigate and illuminate from chapter 3 to chapter 5, how ethnic boundaries of ‘Mongolian university student’ are created and negotiated. Specifically, in chapter 3, I will explore how ethnic boundaries are produced and maintained through various minoritization processes. Given this exploration of the various ways ethnic boundaries are enacted through state policy, material-spatial arrangements and pedagogical practices, the question arises as to how students come to embody the category and perform themselves into existence as (not) belonging to that category. So from chapter 4 on, I shift the focus from policy and institutional regimes to the dynamics of students’ lived experiences to further examine how category boundary work is done by the students. In chapter 4, I focus on exclusionary practices between ‘Mongolian students’ and ‘Han’, exploring the discursive strategies of reproducing and transgressing ethnic boundaries that make the contradictory, ambiguous and multiple positions possible. I examine the various ways participants took up available discourses, such as the discourse of sports, Mongolian wolf, Mongolian masculinity, physical prowess, disciplinary technology, physical appearance and heterosexuality. In chapter 5, I focus on exclusionary practices among ‘Mongolian university students’, exploring the strategies of contracting and rejecting ‘ethnic’ boundaries. Through my analysis I develop an argument that, far from being a unitary or singular structural entity, ‘Mongolian university students’ represents a plethora of groups utilizing diverse discourses to construct themselves. Moreover, what
it means to be a ‘Mongolian university student’ is indisputably uncertain. I will then cast reflexive gazes on the interactive relationships between participants and myself, and how I have come to write my analysis into existence in chapter 6. What connects these chapters is Petersen’s (2004) theorization of category boundary work which conceptualizes the discursive constitution of ‘Mongolian university students’ subjectivities as an ongoing process of category boundary work where processes of discursive inclusion and exclusion takes place (such as producing, reproducing, transgressing, contracting and rejecting ‘ethnic’ boundaries, and establishing new boundaries). This analytic technology enables me to explore multiple ways students perform themselves into existence as culturally intelligible subjects and also how they maintain and disrupt practices (not) belonging to the category. I will provide a discussion of previous chapters in the final part of chapter 7.
Chapter 2 Methodology

What I have suggested so far is a conceptualization of ‘Mongolian university students’ as a fluid construct “discursified into existence” (Petersen, 2004, p. 8) through an ongoing process of subjectification. It is a perspective that highlights the constitutive force of discursive practices through which subjectivities are produced. I am interested in exploring how this construction takes place, how particular forms of acting, speaking, and feeling are legitimized as belonging to the category and how students might position themselves and others differently in this process. In this chapter, I elaborate on how I went about exploring it and why. The chapter consists of four sections: paradigmatic perspective, data generation methods, analytic strategies and representation considerations.

Paradigmatic perspectives – post-foundationalism

When I did my fieldwork, I frequently adopted positivist perspectives in pursuit of certainty and objectivity. Notions of thick description and rapport (I will elaborate on them later) were important for me because of my desire of ‘knowing better’ and my optimistic confidence in the unmediated access to students. As I have developed poststructuralist perspectives, my paradigmatic position changed to post-foundationalism (Lather, 1991). I began to wish to pursue a methodology of disappointment (Stronach & MacLure, 2004; Petersen, 2004). Stronach and MacLure (1997) suggest that the methodology of disappointment “tries to work within, the necessary failure of methodology’s hope for certainty, and its dream of finding an innocent language in which to represent, without exploiting or distorting, the voices and ways of knowing of its subaltern ‘subjects’” (p. 4, original emphasis).

Stronach and MacLure (1997) argue that a methodology of disappointment is “not or (not just) as a state of resignation about the impossibility of escape from the ‘crisis of representation’, but as a strategic act of interruption of the methodological will to certainty and clarity of vision” (p. 4). For me, the disappointment at absolute certainty and clarity of vision suggests a different way of knowing which challenges the realist researcher’s “disembodied vision” (Haraway, 1988, p. 590). “Vision”, a metaphor also used by Haraway (1988), refers to any knowledge claim that is never free from the will
to power. In her words, “vision is always a question of the power to see – and perhaps of the violence implicit in our visualizing practices” (Haraway, 1988, p. 585).

In her essay titled *Situated knowledges* Haraway (1988) insists on the “embodied nature of vision” to disrupt the unmarked positioning of the “conquering gaze from nowhere”. This conquering gaze, according to Haraway (1988), is “the gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claims the power to see and not be seen, to represent while escaping representation” (p. 581). Seeing ‘scientific objectivity’ as the powerful art of rhetoric in the power/knowledge game, Haraway (1988) maintains that the view of infinite and disembodied vision is an illusory myth. As “power and knowledge directly imply one another” (Foucault, 1980, p. 27), all knowledge construction and legitimation are contestable, historically specific and permeated with the operation of power. Haraway (1988) argues for the particular and embodied nature of all vision which implies a “partial perspective” (p. 583) of situated knowledges. However, what do situated knowledges mean? Does the limited location refer to the locations of stable categories such as gender, class or ethnicity? Can I list and assign various labels to myself in accounting for the particular and specific embodiment of vision? Does situatedness mean that I display my locations in order to achieve validity?

A crucial point for me in understanding Haraway’s concept of situated knowledges is the commitment to mobile positioning. “‘Being’ is much more problematic and contingent” (Haraway, 1988, p. 585), Haraway argues. She insists that the preferred image for the epistemology of partial perspectives is “splitting, not being” (Haraway, 1988, p. 586). As Haraway (1988) explains:

“Splitting” in this context should be about heterogeneous multiplicities that are simultaneously salient and incapable of being squashed into isomorphic slots or cumulative lists. This geometry pertains within and among subjects. Subjectivity is multidimensional; so, therefore, is vision. The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another (p. 586).

This means that as subjectivities are multi-layered, contradictory, fragmented and constantly shifting, situated knowledges are always produced from a non-innocent somewhere, never fixed or preordained and never finished. The embodied knower takes
up various subject positions which are always partial and relational. Haraway (1988) uses the term “critical positioning” to denote that situated knowledges require the politics of positioning to remain accountable for any claims of truth. Therefore, it is important to explore the complex vision-generating apparatus and technologies that produce certain patterns of reality for which the knower must be responsible. In this sense, it is the critical positioning, webbed connections, and the mobile locations that made situated knowledges possible (Haraway, 1988). Importantly, this critical positioning is not confined to one place, situated knowledges “is a way to get at the multiple modes of embedding” (Haraway, 2004, p. 71). Therefore, the politics of critical positioning provides a way to rethink situated knowledges as multiple locations. Situated knowledge producers are always viewing from “somewhere in particular”, with continuous finite embodiment, multiplicity and limits of viewing (Petersen, 2004; Haraway, 1988).

These understandings have significant implications for me in that situated and embodied knowledges are not defined by the sum of fixed locations specified by a list of reified social categories, but “about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning” (Haraway, 1988, p. 588). This means on the one hand, being a ‘female, Han researcher’ is constitutive of the ways I construct knowledge from somewhere. On the other hand, as critical positioning is multiple and contradictory, not all ‘female Han researchers’ share the same ‘location’ as I do. There is not a universal ‘female Han researchers’ community. I construct meaning by drawing upon particular knowledge from somewhere. More importantly, my subjectivities kept shifting throughout my project. Sometimes I was positioned by the Mongolian lecturer as a highly-educated researcher losing my ‘Hanness’ because of my overseas experiences (see chapter 6). Sometimes I was excluded by Mongolian students as a Han, unable to speak their language (see chapter 6). Sometimes I was positioned as ‘not a true female’ because I didn’t wear high-heels (see chapter 6). What did my different positions and my different relationships to students produce? Did my move to various positions imply I can choose the ‘best’ vision of the subject to tell a ‘final’ story or did it suggest a disappointed hope for the ‘objective’ knowledge and disembodied gaze from nowhere? Or perhaps, in not settling down to a single answer, does the point of situated knowledge generate an acknowledgement of a state of radically bottomless process of deferral (Lather, 2007)?
For me, recognition of positioning as an epistemological act opens up the possibility of engaging in a reflexive analysis of how variable positioning is constitutive to the production of situated knowledges, and in doing so, critical positioning renders my research radically disappointing in regard to the optimism about authenticity, clarity and certainty (Lather, 2007). I will return to these onto-epistemological issues in the final chapter of this thesis.

**Data generation methods**

**Ethnography**

In the early stages of this project, my understanding of ethnography was heavily influenced by the ethnographic studies I read in order to pass my PhD confirmation (Davidson, 1996; Dimitriadis, 2009; Lareau, 2003; McLaren, 1993). I was initially attracted by Lareau’s (2003) ethnography not only because of the book’s high popularity, but because I was eager to learn how she did in-depth observations and interviews on the mundane daily practices of 12 families, so that I could prepare myself with some practical skills for my fieldwork. Utilizing Bourdieu’s theorization to unpack the invisible but powerful ways parents’ social class influence children’s daily experience, Lareau’s (2003) ethnography makes interesting generalizations about how class impacts children’s lives.

Reading Lareau’s book, I began to develop an understanding that ethnographic narratives should help readers gain a sense of mastery of a social category as a whole, with certain group features. Lareau’s ethnographic methods not only encouraged me to thickly describe fieldwork happenings into my fieldnotes, but I was impressed by her use of the ‘family dog’ principle. This principle suggests that in hanging out with participants, the researcher’s influence can be minimized and ignored as long as (s)he has established rapport with them. Over time, with the build-up of familiarity in relationships and the researcher’s customary presence, (s)he can be treated like the ‘family dog’ as if (s)he did not exert any influence on the dynamics of the interactions. With this premise, I began to feel the importance of building ‘friendly’ relationships with participants to facilitate my observations. I also read other ethnographies, such as McLaren’s (1993) “revolutionary ethnography” (p. Ixii) which explores the school’s “structure of conformity” (p. 81) and the “antistructure of resistance” (p. 145) of students’ everyday experiences. Conceiving that knowledge “is shaped profoundly by
class, gender, and ethnicity” (McLaren, 1993, p. Ixii), the book aims to liberate students because “in the process of breaking the chains of subjugation, needs can be met and human capacities more fully developed through a re-membering, re-cognition, and re-building of structures of human freedom” (McLaren, 1993, p. Ixx). Thus, the author acts as the transparent spokesman who possesses the most impressive power by establishing ‘fact’ unequivocally, which consideration I was not aware of at that time.

Researching the relationship between adolescents’ ‘ethnic’ identities and academic engagement, Davidson’s (1996) ethnography provoked an optimistic confidence in me as a researcher because “teens were generous…. They were eager to talk and full of questions” (p. 10). Davidson (1996) argues that “committed to the concept of triangulation, we did not rely solely on students’ perspectives but also collected data relevant to understanding the disciplinary technology and serious speech acts operating at each of the high schools”(p.8). It was reading her book that I understood for the first time how triangulation was used for verification and objectification. I also read Zhao’s (2007a) ethnography on whether the minority culture is given true respect and value within China’s multiculturalism. Her study explores the cultural representation of ‘Mongolian university students’ in Chinese universities, which utilizes self-reflection as a technique for obtaining ‘scientific’ rigor. This reflexive technique includes ‘controlling’ of ‘Han researcher’s perceptions, stereotypes and values to sustain ‘scientific objectivity’. Reading these ethnographies before my fieldwork, I believed and expected that through entering into close, friendly and comparatively prolonged interactions with students’ going about their everyday lives, I will be capable of adopting the stance of the ‘insider’ to establish facts ‘out there’ for readers ‘in here’ (Clough, 2000). I implicitly assumed that readers might learn not only about the beliefs, motivations, behaviors and experiences of ‘Mongolian students’, but also gain a sense of understanding of ‘Mongolian students’ as a whole with structural characteristics of how they were being oppressed. In this way, these studies provided me a realist desire for my fieldwork to present a seemingly ‘objective’ picture of ‘the captured reality of the other’ (Clough, 2000, p. 163) without me being visibly present and my presence problematised.

Alongside my realist readings of ethnographies prior to my fieldwork, I was also drawn to constructivist paradigms, and happened to read Geertz’s (1993) classic theorization of
ethnography during taking the prescribed methodology course. The constructivist paradigm offered me a new discourse of doing ethnography that included engaging in a dialogic relationship with participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). Geertz (1993) conceives culture as “a context, something within which they [social events, behaviors, institutions or processes] can be intelligibly – that is, thickly described” (p. 14). Geertz (1993) asserts ethnography is to construct an interpretation that is unseverable from the complex particularities and circumstantialities of what goes on, while acknowledging the constitutive nature of the researcher’s presence in creating the interpretation of culture. Therefore, thick description does not seek to objectively comprehend people’s lives, but acknowledges that the ethnographer constructs his/her interpretation of what goes on. Thick description sets people under the banality of everyday life and examines the flow of social action, interpreting social discourse while turning it into the written account (Geertz, 1993).

With Geertz’s notion of thick description, I conducted my fieldwork taking detailed fieldnotes made from observations and interviews. I ‘thickly described’, or thought I did, the mundane social practices students engaged in, and wrote down my personal feelings in my interactions with students. However, at that time, I did not read about the power of critical reflexivity that deconstructs the authority of the researcher. I did not know what was meant by the crisis of representation. I did not have the poststructuralist language to enable me an understanding of how power and discourses operate. Neither did I know clearly how to put the constructivist paradigm and Geertz’s local interpretations into practice. What I had was only a vague idea that my presence and my shifting relations with participants might influence the data collected, which I did not know how to further theorize. As a result, I tended to cast Mongolian university students back into the binary mold of powerful/powerless by utilizing Gee’s notion of primary Discourse to identify the hidden reasons behind the ‘factually’ observed ‘unruly’ behaviors of students. Clough (2000) comments ‘factual’ representations always screen an oedipal desire of realist narrativity to establish the ethnographer’s authority: “You are there, because I was there” (p. 164). In my data collection, I vacillated between the realist discourse which positioned myself as “the heroic subject of knowledge” (Clough, 1992, p. 19) and the constructivist discourse seeking co-constructing data with participants.
Ruminating on my understanding of ethnography after I developed the poststructuralist framework, I found two practices to be problematic among the ‘conventional’ ethnographies I read before. Firstly, the I/eye of ethnographer always remain transparent, unaccounted for and therefore hidden, whereas the researched are disclosed as fully as possible (Clough, 2000). Secondly, there is an uncritical insistence on self-reflection as “the cure for self-invisibility” (Clough, 2000, p. 162). The mobile positioning of ethnographer is thus rendered unscrutinized according to the rules of rapport-building. Taking up poststructuralist discourses now, it seems to me both Zhao’s (2007a) use of self-reflection and Davidson’s (1996) use of triangulation serve as the primary technologies for producing a “culture of no culture” (Haraway, 1997, p. 225), which in Petersen’s (2004) explanation, refers to “a culture insisting on itself as beyond and/or independent of the culturally contingent” (p. 105). Thus the utilization of ‘objective’ methods produces the ethnographer as the modest ‘voice-giver’ whose position of authority in the knowledge production goes unchallenged, skillfully masked by the ‘righteous’ mission of guaranteeing the clarity and certainty of object (Haraway, 1988, 1997). In this sense, the ethnographer resembles Haraway’s figure of “modest witness” (Haraway, 1997, p. 23), the unmarked category whose modest accounts mirror ‘reality’. Ethnographers, in their mainstream iterations, are endowed with all-seeing power to create and guarantee the truth of representation by spending considerable time immersing themselves into the firsthand interactions with the researched in their daily lives. Ethnography is thus reduced to a mere vehicle of facts used to advance an absolute and certain ‘truth’.

What I cannot find in Geertz’s work is how the consequences of actors’ location in the dynamic worlds produce what is understood as knowledge. I think he does not imply critically how precisely the world of the ‘scientific’ anthropologist sustains or crafts new interpretations of culture. I agree with Thinh’s (1992, p. 229) understanding, that the image of the ‘scientific’ and ‘heroic’ researcher remains implicitly reproduced and unproblematised in Geertz’s method of thick description.

As I was developing the poststructuralist framework after the fieldwork, my understanding of ethnography was deeply influenced by Schneider’s (2002) reflexive ethnography whose work is informed by Haraway’s theorization. In my mind, reflexive ethnography renders epistemology the fundamental object of the inquiry. It invites me
to reflect on the question of knowledge and the process of knowing (Schneider, 2002).

As Woolgar (1988) suggest:

The strategic value of reflexive ethnography is that it provides an occasion for reflecting upon, and perhaps reaching a greater understanding of, those aspects of our own culture which we tend to take for granted…. The critical target is our own ability to construct objectivities through representation. These representational activities included the ability to adduce evidence, make interpretations, decide relevance, attribute motive, categorize, explain, understand and so on (pp. 92-93, original emphasis, cited in Schneider, 2002, p. 469).

Therefore reflexive ethnography is fundamentally interested in the knowledge-construction process and the contestability of representation (Schneider, 2002). Thus I cannot remain innocent in the reflexive ethnography of representation, as ‘realities’ are ‘technical’ effects of a particular vision-generating apparatus. Haraway (1997) suggests that “knowledge-making technologies, including crafting subject positions and ways of inhabiting such positions, must be made relentlessly visible and open to critical intervention” (p. 470). In this way knowledge-making practices in doing ethnography must be located and open to critical scrutiny from disparate perspectives. Location, according to Haraway (1997), “is the always partial, always finite, always fraught play of foreground and background, text and context, that constitutes critical inquiry” (p. 37). Thus, a reflexive ethnographer is like Haraway’s figure of “mutated modest witness” who makes knowledge claims from a certain location and for the benefit of some people instead of others (Schneider, 2002, p. 469). This implies that ethnography is a space of risk:

“Ethnography” … is not so much a specific procedure in anthropology as it is a method of being at risk in the face of the practices and discourses into which one inquires…. One is at risk in the face of serious nonidentity that challenges previous stabilities, convictions, or ways of being of many kinds … An “ethnographic attitude” can be adopted within any kind of inquiry … An ethnographic attitude is a mode of practical and theoretical attention, a way of remaining mindful and accountable. Such a method is not about ‘taking sides’ in a predetermined way. But it is about risks, purposes, and hopes – one’s own and others’ – embedded in knowledge projects (Haraway, 1997, p. 190-191).

The ethnographic attitude that Haraway refers to means at least three things. Firstly, instead of telling a final story, making ethnographic accounts is an incarnated and heterogeneous practice. The located heterogeneity is close to Haraway’s metaphor of
diffraction which seeks to effect production of difference patterns as light goes through a prism (Haraway, 1997). This optical metaphor means rather than a mere straight reflection line of sight, there may be diffracted lines which cut away and change directions (Schneider, 2002). This also means that, since there are always multiple and contestable stories, “changing the stories, in both material and semiotic senses, is a modest intervention worth making” (Haraway, 1997, p. 45). In this sense, by a general displacement of binary logic, doing reflexive ethnography is a modest intervention which is worth making to suggest that “we might have been otherwise, and might yet be, as a matter of embodied act” (Haraway, 1997, p. 39). Reflexive ethnography thus becomes the provisional and powerful grounds in moving toward new practices (Haraway, 1997; Schneider, 2002). Secondly, keeping such an ethnographic attitude means no one inhabits the culture of no culture. It means always keeping vigilant regarding how knowledge does its work and refusing to treat it as innocent (Schneider, 2002). Taking up a subject position from which knowledge comes thus, enables accountability for my own witnessing and open engagement for critique. Thirdly, ethnography is risky because the “nonidentity” that Haraway refers to might suggest “an endless displacement of self-same identity” (Clough, 2000, p. 168) and an “indefinitely deferred nonknowing” (Clough, 2000, p. 168). Since reflexive ethnography is constituted by multiplicity, mobility and temporality rather than by an absolute universality (Schneider, 2000), I can never expect to be the ‘transparent’, ‘self-invisible’, ‘clean’, ‘assured’ and ‘neutral’ spokeswoman, nor can I guarantee the fixity, clarity and purity of objects under study. I can never be in the state of ‘final’ control. Writing ethnography reflexively constitutes a doubtful space for me that continuously challenges the essentialist conception of ‘Mongolian university students’ as a structural and stable totality and decenters the all-seeing I/eye of the realist ethnography.

Specific data generation methods

Observation

From April to July 2012, I conducted my fieldwork in the Lake University (a pseudonym). By convenience sampling and snowball strategy, I ended up recruiting 8 participants including Qingqing, Morigen, Beihe, Nabuqi, Wudamu, Hasigaowa, Tuya and Xinjiletu (pseudonyms). I followed the participants and conducted observations as they went through daily routines, interactions and participated in activities. Specifically,
after participants signed the consent forms, we made arrangements about the time to follow them as they went about daily activities. We worked out mutually acceptable times for a range of activities, such as morning reading, classroom sessions, club activities, evening lectures, meals, shopping, etc. I followed and accompanied each participant 8-15 times throughout various activities, which included having class in the classroom, shopping, going to the zoo, taking part in competitions organized by the university clubs, visiting students’ dorms for chats, observing various sports matches (basketball and volleyball playing), attending workshops, having meals in the canteen and so on. Most visits lasted 1.5-2 hours. Sometimes, depending on events, I stayed longer (e.g. I followed students for three consecutive days during the sports meeting and military training.) Sometimes, at their invitation, I went to their dorms in the early morning to see what was involved in preparing for morning reading and I brought some breakfast for them. On average, I spent two to three weeks with each participant.

During my observations I listened to what they said and did, and wrote down fieldnotes detailing these activities on a daily basis. My ‘messy’ fieldnotes consisted of two parts (both in my mother language of Chinese): on the front page I noted what social practices they were engaged in and how they acted and spoke, the other part was the back page where I recorded how I felt – how I understood their particular ways of acting, speaking and feeling. In some situations, such as watching basketball or attending sports meeting, I scribbled in my notebook on the spot about what happened and the surrounding atmosphere. In other activities, such as where I was invited to be the judge of an English Competition or price-bargaining at the shopping centre, taking fieldnotes would have seemed odd and interfered with the ongoing dynamics of our interactions. In these cases, I tried hard to retrieve and record every detail of what happened during these activities immediately after I came back to my place, such as what we did and said, our facial expressions and our body postures. My fieldnotes thus included my observations of students’ engagement in various social practices, and my personal feelings or instincts of what I observed.

My observations also included audiotaped informal conversations as we chatted over particular topics together during my visits to their dorms. Initially I intended to make audiotaped data more ‘structured’ by planning two focus group sessions in a particular classroom where three to four participants got together to discuss particular topics. But
this plan had to be readjusted as my participants suggested that I audiotape more informal conversations as I hang out with them in such a ‘natural’ atmosphere as in their dorms. In this way, I audiotaped about six ‘unstructured’ and informal conversations in my dorm visits with two to six participants (including third party participants) during each visit. Each audiotaped dialogue lasted approximately two hours.

Prior to my fieldwork, influenced by my reading of the ethnographic works, I started my observation with Laraeu’s (2003) ‘family dog’ approach, the naturalistic observation which “does not interfere with the people or activities under observation” (Angrosino & Mays dePerez, 2000, p. 674). This approach asks that the observer be ‘objectively detached’ from participants’ activities to represent ‘faithfully’ the ‘thereness’ in the field. With this approach, I prefigured that my prolonged immersion and rapport-building would make participants so accustomed to my presence that my influence might be ignored and the expected standards of ‘objective’ scholarship could be achieved. Therefore, upon entering the site, I told my participants that I wished to be treated as their close friend, but I would not get involved in their activities because “I didn’t want to interfere in their activities” (Fieldnotes, April 2nd, 2012). In my first observation which was conducted in the students’ physical education class, I refused students’ invitation to play badminton with them because I wished to present what students were ‘actually’ doing without my interference. Perhaps at that time, what motivated my ‘objective’ detachment was the “desire to get as close as possible to what is observed without getting lost in it, without becoming absorbed in what is to be made visible” (Clough, 1992, p. 41). Perhaps by the ‘detached’ position, I wanted to maintain ‘objectivity’ and the ‘authoritative voice’ so that my observation would not be rendered ‘unscientific’. Clough (2000) argues that ethnographic realism continues to undergird the ethnographic observation, “giving it what appears to be its power to pierce through the surface of behaviors and to see quickly the larger structure of which these behaviors are only an effect” (Clough, 2000, p. 164). In this sense, perhaps I was acting like a ‘fisherman’ (Trinh, 1992), selecting a location, positioning myself as being able to see deeply and widely. I then cast a net, assuming I could catch what I was looking for without myself being caught. I felt I could ‘study down’ offering interpretations of the lives of those who were less ‘privileged’ without me becoming lost or being observed in the scene of my observation.
As my fieldwork progressed, I followed students in various daily routines. On these occasions, I found it increasingly hard to merely observe at a distance, maintaining the ‘detached’ position like a ‘family dog’ or a ‘fisherman’ without participation. As I was being called upon to be the judge in the English competition and to sing songs in the military training, as I was invited to go shopping, as I was regulated to wear high-heels (see chapter 6), I started to feel I could no longer claim to be the sole originator of knowledge, operating marginally and insulated from the social settings being studied (Guba & Lincoln, 1998). This reminded me of the constructivist paradigm which viewed it impossible for researchers to remain extrinsic to the data, but researchers’ presence affected what they observed. Therefore, I found myself caught in everything that I tried to capture. However, engaging in dialogic relationships with students, I did not quite understand how to operate according to the constructivist discourse. I did not have the poststructuralist tools available to me and I knew nothing about suspicions of the innocent seeing. Throughout my fieldwork, I developed a relentless insistence on the desire to become ‘native’. I taught myself the popular Mongolian song *Mum in the Dream*[^8] and sang the song during the recess of military training at students’ request. Qingqing then thought ‘highly’ of my efforts, saying “You are ‘something’! It’s not easy for you to learn a Mongolian song!” (Fieldwork, April 23rd, 2012). In the last phase of my fieldwork, when I was walking with Beihe on campus, I came across some Mongolian students whom I knew through my project and we waved to each other with a smile. Beihe turned to me with eyes wide-open, “Now you have become our campus star. It seems almost everybody knows you!” (Fieldnotes, July 2nd, 2012) I felt proud of my ‘skills’ in being able to sing their songs, and the wide interpersonal network that I developed because it made me feel like a ‘hero’ who managed to overcome various obstacles to cross the boundary and ‘penetrate’ their space. Perhaps I hoped that through my ‘sincere’ efforts to develop ‘friendship’ with participants, I could show ‘sympathy’ to the oppressed group instead of continuing an act out from cultural domination and exploitation? I thought to myself, perhaps by ‘becoming native’, I would be in a better position to produce ‘authentic’ knowledge that can represent and speak for the entire voiceless? Or possibly, through a special intimate relationship with participants, I would be granted an ‘inside’ truth and a special insight by a key participant ‘friend’? So in this

[^8]: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzG74-zA3io](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzG74-zA3io)
sense, I exploited my participants for my own gain of the PhD thesis because the data would directly benefit me for my scholarly production (Springwood & King, 2001)

Taking up poststructuralist perspectives after the fieldwork encouraged me to critically scrutinize my very desire of ‘becoming native’ by ‘studying down’ in a state of non-knowingness. On the first day of my entry, the dean announced to the students that I was going to do research ‘on’ them (Fieldnotes, April 2nd, 2012). Thus, like Choi (2006), I was assigned the outsider position by the way I was welcomed. I was granted access to ‘special’ areas for observing institutional activities. For instance, in the sports meeting, while students were requested to confine themselves to the audience seats, being strictly forbidden to move around, I was able to circulate through the athlete and judge areas into the sports field, choosing to observe events from the place I felt desirable, talking to the institutional authorities and taking photos. During the students’ military training, I was able to make inspection tours by moving among the squads before casting my gaze to any squad that interested me. When I saw students striding out their military steps within their squads, I felt a sense of privilege and freedom because of my physical mobility – I patrolled around on the sideline to observe them. I felt my authoritative position was a passport for me to be able to conduct my project.

This position of authority not only enabled me to do observation, but set the limits for my future engagements with students and structured the kind of data collected (Choi, 2006). Though I told students I wished to “establish ‘equal’ relationships” with them and “hope I can become their ‘friend’, whom they can trust” (Fieldnotes, April 2nd, 2012), I found relationships were hardly equal (Choi, 2006). Perhaps by imagining an enactment of an ‘equal’ relationship, I unintentionally created a binarism where I was positioned as a ‘Han researcher’, an outsider different from them (also see Choi, 2006). For instance, no matter how hard I tried to befriend them, I could not access their parties because they said “you can’t drink much” (Fieldnotes, April 20th, 2012), “you don’t understand our Mongolian dialect” (Fieldnotes, May 9th, 2012), “this is not the occasion suitable for ladies like you” (Fieldnotes, June 9th, 2012) (see chapter 6). I was excluded by students as the ‘fragile female Other’ who did not share the same Mongolian binge drinking tradition and who cannot speak Mongolian. When I hung out with participants, they spoke Chinese to me, but when they came across their friends, they switched to Mongolian (Fieldnotes, April 19th, 2012). This switch of language demarcated a clear
boundary between them as ‘Mongolian students’ and me as a ‘Han researcher’. I was thus marginalized as the outsider unable to understand their conversation. When Qingqing and Beihe praised me to be ‘something’ for learning a Mongolian song and commented that I had become ‘an everyone-knows-person’, were they mocking the modest witness’ transcendental, transparent and unrestricted vision (Haraway, 1988) attempting to become an ‘insider’? Would they respond in the same way if their peers sang this Mongolian song or greeted each other like I did? Were they reinforcing a production of me as an outsider? Contrary to somewhat more ‘conventional’ ethnography (Davidson, 1996; Lareau, 2003) that insists on the accomplishment of ‘becoming native’ after the prolonged immersion, long-term interaction with participants did not guarantee me an ‘insider’ position (Choi, 2006) as I had desired. For instance, when after class I approached a group of male students in the corridor, attempting to join their talking, they stopped talking and hurriedly put away their cigarette box upon seeing me (Fieldnotes, June 19th, 2012). When I visited the students’ dorm, they rushed to put in order the books, CDs, accessories, purse, etc. and became busy entertaining me with snacks or tea (Fieldnotes, June 22nd, 2012). Though I told participants on the first day that I wished to observe their ‘natural’ activities (Fieldnotes, April 2nd, 2012), it seemed my participants exhibited ‘planned’ behaviors at my presence and regarded me as a disciplinary figure (also see Choi, 2006). In this sense, my relationship between my participants and me was never power-free. The data were produced by both participants and me and were documented from my situated positioning, never “from above, from nowhere, from simplicity” (Haraway, 1988, p. 589).

What I want to argue so far is that my mobile relations with participants in different situations offered me various limited locations or visualizing tricks (Haraway, 1988; Trihn, 1992) from which I collected data and generated different situated knowledges. Can I leap out of my locatedness to become an ‘insider’ with a disembodied trust in seeing from the vantage point of students? Haraway (1988) reminds me that there might be:

- a serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions. To see from below is neither easily learned nor unproblematic… The standpoints of the subjugated are not “innocent” positions. On the contrary, they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all
knowledge. They are knowledgeable of modes of denial through repression, forgetting, and disappearing acts – ways of being nowhere while claiming to see comprehensively. The subjugated have a decent chance to be on the god trick and all its dazzling – and, therefore, blinding – illuminations. ‘Subjugated’ standpoints are preferred because they seem to promise more adequate, sustained, objective, transforming accounts of the world. But how to see from below is a problem requiring at least as much skill with bodies and language, with the mediations of vision, as the “highest” technoscientific visualizations (pp. 583-584).

This quote is about a radical suspicion that also arose in me later towards my fieldwork desire to ‘become native’. Is my previous effort to observe actions from participants’ viewpoints an illusory view of the infinite vision? Is it possible to become ‘one of them’ given “the particularity and embodiment of all vision” (Haraway, 1988, p. 582)? Are students’ voices innocent and uncomplicated stories that can be ‘better’ represented? Engaging in poststructuralist perspectives for me means that observation is not so much about grasping what was ‘really’ going on there as about presenting myself through my description. By presenting myself I don’t mean expressing my personal standpoint or foregrounding the importance of a self. I am not interested in putting myself under the spotlight, but rather to construct the situated selves, which necessarily mediates my data collection. The reflexive question in my observation is no longer “who am I?”, but “where, when and how am I?” (Trinh, 1992, p. 157). Therefore, observation is more about how I was constituted and, constituting knowledge differently, how my mobile subject positions enabled me to write the situated knowledges which are always non-innocent, partial and multiple. It also means that different observers may evoke a very different set of reactions and interactions, leading to a totally different set of conclusions (Angrosino & Mays dePerez, 2000).

**Interview**

As Tanggaard (2009) argues, “interviewing constitutes a specific setting for the dialogical production of personal narratives and social life” (p. 1499). Therefore apart from observation, I designed interviews to assist me in the dialogical production of “how a phenomenon or particular life situation can be discussed, analyzed, and interpreted” (Tanggaard, 2009, p. 1511). Through ethnographic one-on-one interviews, I wished to jointly generate richer and more detailed accounts of the observed participants’ experiences (Heyl, 2001).
To a certain extent, my interview questions allowed me to probe the lived experiences of students. I asked them how they felt about the activities they participated in and why they were engaged in certain behaviors rather than others, such as refusing the competition on the last day of the sports meeting (see chapter 5). However, reading the interview data now compels me to rethink my positioning: When I asked students questions such as “Are there wolves in your hometown?” (Interview, June 2nd, 2012), “Do you live in a yurt?” (Interview, May 11th, 2012) “Do you wear a Mongolian robe?” (Interview, May 11th, 2012), what did I desire to know? What informed that desire? What do I think about myself now? Inspired by Haraway (1988, 1997) and Choi (2006), reflecting on these questions not only shatters the tempting myth of my ‘insider’ position, but opens up a new space to see the interview as a process through which I examine my situated knowledges and my own positioning. What preconceptions I had in posing such questions? No matter how ‘sincere’ I was in posing these questions, students retorted, “Are you from Mars? We have for a long time lived in Han’s ways!” (Interview, April 28th, 2012). Perhaps my questions were so stereotypical to them that they talked back in a defiant way. If I asked these ‘weird’ questions out of my different positioning of students, how can a dialogue between participants and me be possible in these situations (Choi, 2006)? Choi (2006) and Ellsworth (1989) critique the romanticized idea of dialogue, urging researchers to undertake a process of interrogating and problematising themselves in the research process. Choi (2006) argues from poststructuralist perspectives, interview is defined “not as a technique for dialogue but as a deconstructive tool, because from a poststructural point of view a dialogue between researcher and researched is impossible” (p. 447).

My interview questions were originally structured around five topics to characterize students’ lived experiences – family support, student-teacher relationships, peer network, popular culture and academic achievement. I designed these topics out of my theoretical perspectives on Gee’s primary and secondary Discourses and my structural reading of traditional ethnography. For instance, in an interview with Morigen, he talked of his short attention span in class. I then probed:

I: Perhaps you will focus more if the lecturing is interesting.

M: I am the one to be blamed. I lack self-discipline. (Interview, June 28th, 2012)
Like Choi (2006), I had expected my participant to resist the domination of rigid disciplinary categorization (see chapter 3 that minority students are streamed into a separate class) and criticize the grand authority of the lecturer. However, I was disappointedly shocked at his passive subjugation to the disciplinary techniques. I was surprised that he took up the deficit discourse and maintained a production of himself as the inferior. Or perhaps I can read this vignette in another way. Did Morigen blame himself because I was a lecturer? If I were his peer, would he say that in the same way? What discourses were in operation that made him think a normalized answer would sound more pleasing to me? Trinh (1992) suggests that it is difficult to see interview really reflects the voice of participants. This means what emerged out of the delivery was not just ‘anything’ that came across (Trinh, 1992) Morigen’s mind, but perhaps what he wanted me to hear. Trinh (1992) argues, “every representation of truth involves elements of fiction” (p. 145). In this sense, the interview is a situated practice, never divorced from the researchers’ embodied locations. My theoretical framework, stereotypes and my relationship with participants, among other things, can be seen as the “strategies indicative of the carefully constructed nature of the interviews” (Trinh, 1992, p. 192). Perhaps as Trinh (1992) suggests, by making these strategies visible, “interviews are made to look gradually less and less ‘natural’” (p. 193).

**Collecting documentary data**

Apart from observations and interviews, I collected documentary data to explore how ‘Mongolian university students’ are discursively constituted and regulated. The reason for my employment of documentary evidence emerges from the literature review. For instance, Zhu (2007) and Yu’s (2010) findings suggest official written documents, such as state policy and school regulations play key roles in framing minority minzu students’ subjectivities. Zhao (2007a) collected university documents including students’ handbooks, regulations, university newspapers, etc. to examine whether, and to what extent, Mongolian students gain cultural recognition in the university campus (p. 83). The documentary pieces of evidence, according to Hodder (2000), are not static by-products of human life, but actively enact social relationships and “give alternative insights into the ways in which people perceived and fashioned their lives” (Hodder, 2000, p. 705). Similarly, Prior’s (2004) study stresses that documents construct human subjectivities and characteristics. Therefore, I collected documentary data to explore the
minoritization process through which students become minotitized subjects (see chapter 3). However, according to Prior (2004), documents do not merely consist of the official written data, but may take many forms. Prior (2004) argues that “architectural drawings, books, paintings, gravestone inscriptions, film, World Wide Web pages, bus tickets, shopping lists and tapestries can all fall into the category of ‘document’” (p. 377). According to this definition, the documentary data I collected included policies such as the Notice on Regulation of Minority Yuke Ban and Minzu Ban in Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2005), Student Handbook, Institutional Yearbook (2013), Student Work9, etc., and books such as Comparative Study on Multicultural Education (Wang & Wan, 2006). Documentary data also include photos I took during various activities on which individuals are non-identifiable for privacy reasons.

Analytic strategies

Foucauldian discourse analysis

The main analytic tool in this study is Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA). As explained in the previous chapter, for Foucault (1972), discourses are a body of knowledge which allows for, and determines certain ways of talking and thinking, rather than other ways. They constitute objects, both enabling and constraining what can be acted upon and talked about. Therefore discourses are not limited to spoken or written words. Any symbolic system which carries meanings, such as school activities, official policies, rules and regulations, field notes, acts, shoes, facial expressions, statistics, journals, magazines… all constitute source material for analysis (Parker, 1992).

Foucault raises some methodological issues that I found most useful in guiding my analysis. Firstly, Foucault (1972) suggests that analyzing discourse remains reflexive about self-evident ‘truth’ and disrupts natural assumptions:

We must question those ready-made syntheses, those groupings that we normally accept before any examination, those links whose validity is recognized from the outset …

We must also question those divisions or groupings with which we have become so familiar… In any case, these divisions … are always themselves reflexive categories, principles of classification, normative rules, institutionalized types:

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9 This document is not referenced for confidential reasons.
they, in turn, are facts of discourse that deserve to be analysed beside others; of course, they also have complex relations with each other, but, they are not intrinsic, autochthonous, and universally recognizable characteristics (p. 22).

This makes me alert to the way that a particular body of knowledge becomes legitimate and authoritative either through dominant knowledge and established practices or through speech made by academic experts or authoritative figures. For instance, instead of taking for granted the category of ‘minority students’, I read such categorization to be shaped, materially constituted and defined by the operation of power which “produces things, … forms knowledge, produces discourses” (Foucault, 1980, p. 119). Reciprocally, people exercise power through the production of truth. Therefore different from Zhu’s (2007) study which conceptualizes Chinese minority school as the site of reproduction of dominant ideology, I understand the categorization of minority/Han students “evolve, organize and put into circulation a knowledge or rather apparatus of knowledge, which are not ideological constructs” (Foucault, 1980, p. 102). I will further explore this point in chapter 3.

Secondly, analysis should be focused on “real and effective practices, the external visage of power”, “the ongoing process of subjectification” that “subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviors” (Foucault, 1980, p. 97), instead of focusing on people’s conscious aims in speaking in a certain way:

We should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and materially constituted through a multiplicity of organism, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts, etc. We should try to grasp subjection in its material instance as a constitution of subject (Foucault, 1980, p. 97).

Thirdly, power is not only located and therefore should not only be understood in the external domination over other groups. Foucault (1980) suggests that “power should be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain” (p. 98). Power only exists as it is exercised in a “net-like organization” (p. 98) in the mutual relationships of individuals who are the elements of power. Individuals circulate the thread of power, and simultaneously exercise power. In other words, “Individuals are not only its inert or consenting targets; they are always also the elements of its articulation” (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

Foucault (1980) suggests “an ascending analysis of power” (p. 99), i.e. to start with the infinitesimal mechanism. Foucault’s methodological precautions diverts my attention in
analyzing the subjectivity construction for ‘minority students’ from the essentialist discourses or state ideological perspectives as in Zhu’s (2007) exploration of Tibetan students identity construction, towards “forms of subjection and the inflections and utilizations of their localized system” (Foucault, 1980, p. 102) and “a strategy of struggle” (Foucault, 1983, p. 225).

FDA has been utilized in a number of poststructuralist studies in ‘multicultural’ education. For instance, Ketchabaw, White and Almeida (2006) explore official policy of Canadian multiculturalism and aboriginality in British Columbia. Through identifying and analyzing three contradictory discourses (categories for ‘multiculturalism’, ‘all children’ model, and discourse of homogeneity) that inform policies, they propose that policies “need to be critically examined as they were embedded in normalizing discourses that were often taken for granted” (p. 108). Their analysis exposes the way that a ‘regime of truth’ is the discursive effect of power relations. Using a Foucauldian perspective, Cherubini (2011) analyzes Ontario’s Indigenous education policy to make visible the way authorities establish knowledge, create truth and crisis condition in order to be seen as being committed to solving the problems while exercising direct power and supporting control. Utilizing postcolonial and poststructuralist lenses, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Berikoff (2008) identify discourses of colonization and whiteness in exploring the complex positions through which children are positioned. Their work sets an example of deconstructing the “normalized and standardized discourses of difference and diversity” (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Berikoff, 2008, p. 256). Taylor and Richardson (2005) demonstrate the ways children perform non-normative practices that interrupt taken-for-granted heteronormative assumptions of stable categories within the prevailing discourse of developmental psychology in early childhood education. Their analysis provides interesting examples of the fluid and complex ways children construct their gendered selves which disturb the conventional binary orthodox and essentialist fixity of gender relations. Following Foucault’s understanding, they show how things can’t be reduced to clear-cut assigned categories, throwing into question the hegemonic discourse of developmentally appropriate practices. Blaise’s (2010) analysis illustrates how the way children talk about gender and sexuality challenges the dominant discourse that positions children as sexually ignorant. These studies not only open up the possibilities to disrupt and resist the
stabilized and fixed normality, but provide me with useful references and starting points in guiding me how to do FDA.

**Category boundary work**

I also utilize Petersen’s (2004, 2007) conceptualization of category boundary work as a specific form of FDA to analyse the data. In studying the discursive constitution of scientificity (Petersen, 2004) and academicity (Petersen, 2007), Petersen draws upon Foucault (1972, 1978), Butler (1990, 1993), and Davies’ (1989, 1993) perspectives and develops the theoretical-analytic concept of category boundary work. My employment of this analytic tool mainly derives from my understanding of Petersen’s (2004, 2007) theorization.

In my study, category boundary work refers to in/exclusionary practices in constituting ‘Mongolian university students’ as a discursive category and practice. There are three central concepts underlying the framework of category boundary work. Firstly, the subject comes into being through a dual process of subjectification – being subjected and actively taking up certain desires recognizable as ‘Mongolian university student’. To achieve a recognition of legitimate ‘Mongolian university student’ subject, (s)he must subject his/herself to culturally intelligible ways and take up ‘appropriate’ subject positions and not others. Embracing appropriate or normative practices constitute what Butler (1993) refers to as “phantasmatic identification” in forming the subject. This “identification with the normative phantasm” (Butler, 1993, p. 58) requires an ‘Other’ to circumscribe the limit of the subject’s domain. The ‘Other’, which is outside the boundary of a legitimate subject, constitutes the “dreaded identification” against which the subject claims his/her cultural intelligibility and viability (Butler, 1993). This understanding highlights the second key concept – the subject is constituted through exclusionary practices. As Butler (1993) argues, “certain disavowals are fundamentally enabling … and no subject can proceed, can act, without disavowing certain possibilities and avowing others, … certain disavowals function as constitutive constraints” (p. 77). This idea about the “constitutive constraints” means the ‘inappropriate’ or unintelligible practices are never truly outside the subject formation, but are a disavowed domain without which the subject cannot come into being.
Petersen (2004, 2007) further argues that as people occupy a variety of discourses, what it means to be engaged in culturally ‘appropriate’ ways of being and acting is potentially open to rearticulation. She suggests that “there is not only one way of ‘performing seminar’ and not only one culturally intelligible version of the ‘academic’… but multiple and contradictory versions which are open to negotiation, intervention and resignification” (Petersen, 2007, p. 479). In light of her thinking, there are different criteria of intelligible possibilities for doing ‘Mongolian university student’. This not only involves different ways of doing ‘Mongolianness’, but the meaning of ‘Mongolian university student’ is constructed by a subtle interlocking of many culturally available discourses that he/she draws upon in interaction with other people. These discourses are constantly at work constructing and producing multiple boundaries (ethnic boundaries, boundaries of students, see chapter 5). In theorizing how these different discourses contribute to the subjectivity construction, I find Staunæs’ (2003, 2005) notion of “the doing of intersectionality” particularly relevant here. Retooling and poststructuralizing the concept of intersectionality, Staunæs (2005) suggests “concepts of how meanings intersect can be useful for a more specific understanding of the troubledness of some subjects in complex versions of lived life” (p. 152). Staunæs’ (2005) reworking of intersectionality turns my attention to the complexity of category boundary work by exploring the “doing of the relation” between boundaries and between discourses (p. 155). This means category boundary work in my study not only involves producing, reproducing, reinforcing, transgressing and contracting ethnic boundaries, but the negotiation of different boundaries such as rejecting ethnic boundaries, inventing new boundaries and drawing upon multiple discourses (see chapter 4 and chapter 5). In specific situations, students are intersectionally caught up, producing “troubled subject positions” (see chapter 4 and chapter 5). ‘Mongolian university students’ thus construct a nexus of subjectivities as they are continuously engaged in complex discursive exclusionary practices, constituting some acts as ‘appropriate’ and recognizable, and others as unintelligible (Butler, 1990) and unthinkable.

Petersen’s (2004, 2007) category boundary work is inspired by Davies’ (1989) concept of category maintenance work which explores how gender binarism is constructed among preschool children. Based on Davies’ (1989) argument that category maintenance work is done through deviant correction, Petersen (2007) further theorizes
that boundary work not only includes exclusionary practices that produce the deviant, but “takes place to the same extent in actions, statements and positionings that go unnoticed” (2007, p. 480), that “stresses the ‘unremarkable’ as an active and non-innocent boundary constituter” (2004, p. 27). This means category boundary work takes place in daily routine practices. This ‘unremarkable’ practice reminds me of Davies’ (1989) argument that we learn to position ourselves in relation to others based on the obviousness of the perceived category memberships. Davies (1989) suggests that people in the process of becoming a legitimate and recognizable member, must learn to think, act and see the world through discourses available to the shared social group. This knowledge is more than the communication skill people acquire, but implies:

an ability to read and interpret the landscape of the social world, and to embody, to live, to experience, to know, to desire as one's own, to take pleasure in the world, as it is made knowable through the available discourses, social structures and practices... It involves knowing how to position yourself as a member of the group who knows and takes for granted what other people know and take for granted in a number of different settings. Althusser uses the term obviousness to capture this taken-for-granted quality of the discursive categories, and in particular of the concept of ‘subject’ through which we construct our lives (Davies, 1993, pp. 17-18).

Thus, category boundary work involves more than linguistic knowledge, but “legitimization” and inclusion of some forms of knowing, feeling, acting and “delegitimization” (Petersen, 2004, p. 28) and exclusion of others. In accordance with Petersen’s conceptualization, I suggest the construction of ‘Mongolian university students’ subjectivity constitutes a site that maintains, reproduces, contracts and negotiates different boundaries of discursive intelligibility. It highlights the various ways social inclusionary and exclusionary practices constitute and reconstitute the discursive category of ‘Mongolian university student’ as heterogeneous and contradictory and of which the boundaries are multiple, shifting and contestable. I am curious about how ‘Mongolian university students’ speak and perform themselves into existence through discursive in/exclusion. What available discourses they mobilize and what positions they take up. For instance, in some situations, as Mongolian students they were powerfully excluded by Han students, still they were continually involved in reproducing, reinforcing and celebrating ethnic boundaries (chapter 4). As Mongolian students from grazing areas actively abjected sedentary Mongolian students, I think of their subjectivity construction process as a site where ethnic boundaries are contested...
and contracted (chapter 5). As grazer Mongolian students included sedentary Mongolian students and Han students in rejecting the competition rules in the sports meeting, I consider them “doing the intersectionality” (Staunæs, 2005) by rejecting ethnic boundaries and establishing new boundaries of being a student and drawing upon multiple discourses to re-position themselves in certain ways (Staunæs, 2005). In the words of Petersen (2007), the analytic tool of category boundary work allows me to:

zero in on discursive practices that are not (only) directed towards maintaining what is, i.e. maintaining the social order or the meaningfulness of the categories of the ‘maintainer’, but also the boundary work directed towards negotiation for different boundaries, as implicated in resignification (p. 480).

Representation

Traditional ethnography is marked by ‘objectivity’ and differentiation between fact and fiction. It adopts ‘scientific’ methods such as triangulation and member-checking to improve the validity while privileging the “insider’s view”. It produces realist tales that can ‘authentically’ and ‘neutrally’ reflect people’s experience. Such a realist tale “is caught in positivist thinking whose impetus is to supply answers at all costs, thereby limiting both theory and practice to a process of totalization” (Trinh, 1991, p. 31).

The linguistic turn in social science highlights that language is not a transparent reflector or ideological tool of struggle, but language constructs and produces ‘reality’ (Lather, 1991). For poststructuralism, language in creating and deferring meaning points to the fallacy of complete, widely-applicable, accurate and authoritative representation of ‘reality’ (Denzin, 1997). Therefore, representation is always in crisis. As Trinh (1991) observes, “reality runs away, reality denies reality” (p. 43). However, the crisis of representation, as Lather (1993) suggests, “is not the end of representation, but the end of pure presence” (p. 675). This “end of pure presence” reminds me of Richardson’s (1997) suggestion of poststructuralist implications on writing: “First, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times; and second, it frees us from trying to write a single text in which everything is said to everyone” (Richardson, 1997, p. 89). For me, it accentuates the situated, partial and relational nature of knowledge production (Haraway, 1988), which disrupts the researcher’s unmarked confidence of a “conquering gaze from nowhere” (Haraway, 1988, p. 581). It makes me aware of how my writing constitutes the research in specific ways because I am “always somewhere in particular” (Haraway, 1988, p. 590) (also see
chapter 6). Britzman (2000) argues that poststructuralist writings disturb the authority of
traditional ethnography which confirms a prediscursive existence prior to representation.
She analyzes how poststructuralist perspectives encourage her to admit the partiality of
her ethnographic telling and how such telling is governed by discourses available to her
across space and time. This means that “the end of pure presence” not only signals an
impossibility of an ‘objective’, ‘final’ and ‘noncontested’ account of people’s lives, but
carves out a textual space to attend continuously to the politics and epistemologies in
our practices. Put differently, it involves an ongoing reflexive exploration of discomfort
(see chapter 6) to engage readers in a constitutive process of “framing reality” (Trinh,
1991, p. 188). Britzman (2000) suggests that ethnographers are “overconcerned with
experience as a discourse and with competing discourses of experience that traverse and
structure any narrative” (p. 32). Therefore, instead of seeking scientific methods such as
triangulation or member-checking to ensure objectivity to produce an ‘objective’ and
‘accurate’ account of the specific boundaries, I put a “deconstructive emphasis on
writing as an enactment of the social relations that produce the research itself” (Lather,
1991, p. 14). As a situated knowledge producer, I am always seeing, understanding and
writing about how students do the boundary work through which their subjectivities are
constructed from an embodied and non-innocent somewhere. I believe such a
deconstructive move not only troubles textual authority, but has the potential to expose
and resist the dominant epistemological violence. As Trinh (1989) writes:

In writing close to the other of the other, I can only choose to maintain a self-
reflexively critical relationship toward the material, a relationship that defines
both the subject written and the writing subject, undoing the I while asking
‘what do I want wanting to know you or me’ (p. 76).

My following analysis chapters can be seen as an attempt to map out potential
discourses that operate within specific space and time, as a way of “framing reality”
(Trinh, 1992). It opens up a possibility of “validity of transgression” (Lather, 1993, p.
675), “a nonreferential validity interested in how discourse does its work” (Lather, 1993,
p. 675), as opposed to “validity of correspondence” which argues for an accurate
correspondence of fact with account.

In representing data in the following chapters, I have attempted to choose ‘interesting’
vignettes, informal conversations and interviews that can help me explore the research
questions. For instance, in choosing vignettes to present and for analysis, I am interested
in exploring how subjectivities are fashioned as the student participants are engaged in
category boundary work around what is constituted as the desirable, and the circulation
of competing “regimes of truth”:

- How are the regulatory categories of ‘Mongolian university students’
discursively produced and lived?
- How do they maintain, reinforce and challenge or negotiate category boundaries
in exclusionary practices where subjectivity construction takes place?
- What discourses do they draw upon in constructing their subjectivities as
‘Mongolian students’?
- What positions are available in excluding some acts and not others?
- What is it that structures my construction of them?
- What binaries are at play?
- What are my positions as a ‘Han researcher’? Seeking better ways of knowing?

As I explained, I want to go beyond the impetus of representing a ‘real’, ‘complete’, and
‘full’ account of who students are authentically. Rather, taking Foucault’s
power/knowledge and Lather’s “the end of pure presence” seriously, I attempt to
provide a “messy glimpse” (Petersen, 2004, p. 93), which is “an embodied sight, partial,
provisional, situated, never finished or fixed, a contingent moment of looking, which
might very well know that the field is not merely empirically unknowable, but also
theoretically so” (Petersen, 2004, p. 93).

The impulse to borrow Petersen’s (2004) “messy glimpse” results from an ontological
and epistemological loss of certainty for ‘absolute truth’. Never free from the guilt and
anxiety in writing about people’s actions and experiences, I hope such “messy glimpse”
opens up a space to trouble the overconfidence of all-knowing and all-seeing researcher,
to question how particular “regimes of truth” are normalized as the naturalized
knowledge, how the matter of bodies are produced as the effect of a dynamic of power
and how various strategies of power are played out. In the words of Britzman (2000):

> Ethnographic narratives should trace how power circulates and surprises,
> theorize how subjects spring from the discourses that incite them, and question
> the belief in representation even as one must practice representation as a way to
> intervene critically in the constitutive constraints of discourses (p. 38).

**Research Ethics**

Tracy (2010) identifies one major ethical consideration in social research, the informed
consent, which involves participants’ rights to know the nature of research, the possible
consequences and also protection of participants’ privacy. Informed consent, which
according to Bouma and Ling (2004) is the key ethical issue, was sought from participants before observation and interview began\textsuperscript{10}. Participants were told about the nature, time, activity, and possible inconvenience of this research, so that they had a sound understanding in order to make informed decision about whether to participate (Bouma & Ling, 2004). I indicated that I would follow and interview them only after their informed consent. They had the right to withdraw anytime they felt distressed with this research. Because I aimed to describe public events – recurring practices and mobilization of available discourses, instead of inner feelings or private affairs, I was not interested in involving any personal matter. Participants were second-year university students who were about 20 years old, therefore, they were old enough to make independent decisions. In addition, privacy was safeguarded by using pseudonyms and deletion of identifiable details to keep participants’ identities confidential.

Another ethical consideration was the exiting ethics which extends ethical consideration beyond the data collection phase, to the time of leaving the scene and presenting findings to the public (Tracy, 2010). In my fieldwork, I made “a gradual exit” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 91), telling participants about the completion of the fieldwork, providing them with my email along with addresses of the university’s Human Research Ethics Office in case of any complaints regarding the research. I told them the research findings would be included in the PhD thesis, perhaps published in articles, and these would be forwarded to the participants on request.

While transcribing I listened to the audiotaped data repeatedly, and transcribed in Chinese only the sections that I identified as particularly interesting and most relevant to the examining of the negotiation of available discourses. I then translated the transcribed data from Chinese into English. When translating from Chinese to English, I originally did not think too much about the translation. However, with poststructuralist perspectives, I began to feel that in translation, I automatically interpreted what participants said or did according to my ‘situated knowledges’. For instance, as I read my transcription of the vignette about Nabuqi’s comment of ‘nuren’, I began to grapple and still grapple with the translation for the Chinese word of ‘nuren’ which refers to both ‘female’ and ‘woman’. In the vignette, Nabuqi said that nuren who does not wear high heels cannot be counted as true nuren (see chapter 6). When translating, I

\textsuperscript{10}The project was approved by Human Research Ethics Committee of University of Newcastle on March 27\textsuperscript{th}, 2012, with reference No. H-2012-0017.
originally understood her use of ‘nuren’ as a more general term, i.e. in the sense of biological sex. So I translated ‘nuren’ into ‘female’. But with poststructuralist perspectives, I find translating ‘nuren’ into female is not innocent because this translation is not a transparent or neutral reflection of participants’ ideas, but also indicates the discourses that I was operating. By translating ‘nuren’ into ‘female’, I invoked the discourse of biological sex instead of gender discourse. Perhaps using ‘female’ instead of ‘woman’ constituted my confrontational strategy of refusing Nabuqi’s gender regulation of me. In translation, different words such as ‘female’ or ‘woman’ might invoke potentially different meanings and there is no such a thing as ‘accurate’ translations. I believe recognition of non-innocent translation is an ethical act because it allows me to be responsible for what I see, hear and feel from my data (Haraway, 1997).

**Validity**

When I did observation in the field, some lecturers interested in my notetaking constantly raised the issue of the validity of my fieldwork data. “How can you make sure what you wrote is an ‘objective’ account? You need to record faithfully what happened here”, a Mongolian literature lecturer warned me during the class break (Fieldnotes, May 23rd, 2012). So she viewed ethnographic data as something ‘out there’ waiting to be discovered ‘objectively’ and can be represented ‘accurately’. However, as Lather (2007) argues, “in terms of the distinction between viewing ethnographic stories as about ‘found’ versus ‘constructed’ worlds (Simon and Dippo, 1986), the effacement of the referent in postmodern culture has made ‘the real’ a contested territory” (p. 118). In post-foundational research, shifting the sense of the ‘real’ to the “discourses of the real” (Britzman, 1991, cited in Lather, 2007, p. 119) is not a matter of seeing things clearer and more faithfully, but a matter of “spaces of constructed visibility and incitements to see which constitute power/knowledge” (Lather, 2007, p. 119). This, I believe, is the space of “limited location and situated knowledge” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Haraway (1988) argues that for post-foundational research, “objectivity turns out to be about particular and specific embodiment and definitely not about the false vision promising transcendence of all limits and responsibility” (pp. 582-583). Therefore in ‘framing’ the validity of my ethnographic data, I argue that the self-conscious situatedness is the necessary condition of making responsible knowledge claims which
are able to be called into account (Haraway, 1988; Lather, 2007). Inspired by Haraway (1988, 1997, 2004), I believe this understanding of situated validity has great ethical significance in that it enables me to become accountable for what I analyze.

Final reflections

In this chapter, I aim at a less comfortable methodology which casts continual scepticism about the assumed knowing subject, ‘scientific’ method, and the universal foundation of knowledge. However it is important to note that by this attempt I do not mean to annihilate positivist research. As St. Pierre and Pillow (2000) suggest, poststructuralism:

does not offer an alternative, successor regime of truth, it does not claim to have “gotten it right,” nor does it believe that such an emancipatory outcome is possible or even desirable. Rather, it offers critiques and methods for examining the functions and effects of any structure or grid of regularity that we put into place (p. 6).

Echoing this point, in the subsequent chapters, I will explore in detail how poststructuralist discourses offer me an alternative epistemology which potentially unsettles the dependence on the dominant essentialist discourses, how it engages me in a critical analysis on what the “structure or grid of regularity” materially produces, and how students come to maintain and negotiate boundaries of doing ‘Mongolian university students’ in their mundane social practices.
Chapter 3 Official and Spatial Minoritization

Introduction

I was trying to make sense of how students are officially constituted when I came upon Ball’s (1990, 1994, 2012) work. I pondered at his conceptualizations of three kinds of objectifying practices in education:

State policy establishes the location and timing of the contest, its subject matter and the rules of the game (Offe, 1984, p. 104, cited in Ball, 1994, p. 21).

The very idea of the school, its materiality, its imaginary, its articulation within policy and theory came to be centered on and enacted in terms of a machinery of differentiation and classification, and concomitantly of exclusion (Ball, 2012, p. 69).

Dividing practices are critically interconnected with the formation, and increasingly sophisticated elaboration, of the educational sciences: educational psychology, pedagogics, the sociology of education, cognitive and developmental psychology. These are the arenas in which ‘truth games’ about education are played out (Ball, 1990, p. 4).

What Ball highlights in the above quotes are three kinds of objectifying processes by which students are made subjects: objectification of the subject by state policies, by institutional dividing practices and by educational sciences. Policy matters because it produces “general politics of truth” (Foucault, 1980, p. 131) through which students govern themselves and others (Ball, 1994). Students are spoken into existence by policy discourses, and they take up positions made available by policies (Ball, 1994). Institutional practice matters too because educational institutions can be seen as the diagram of disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977) by which students are differentiated, streamed, arranged and excluded. Through these dividing practices, disciplinary institutions not only make possible the subtle and calculated manipulation of the body, but work to increase its productivity and capacity (Foucault, 1977). How do these institutional dividing practices ‘make’ individuals and produce subjected, useful and practiced bodies? If, as Ball (1990) suggests in the third quote, disciplinary methods are closely related to educational sciences, then how do the knowledge and pedagogical practices drawn from educational studies provide modes of classification, correction and characterization? In other words, in my exploration of the official construction of ‘minority university students’, Ball’s conceptualizations of three objectifying practices
inspire me to ask: How do dominant discourses inscribed in government policies constitute ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ about students? How do policy-sanctioned discourses manifest themselves in institutional and pedagogical practices and what are the effects? How are students governed and defined by the institution and pedagogical practices? Bearing these analytic questions in mind, in the following sections, I will use two sources of data – official documents and ethnographic fieldnotes – to explore the three kinds of objectifying practices through which ‘Mongolian university students’ minoritized status is discursively produced: state policy, material-spatial arrangements and pedagogical practices. I will conclude this chapter with a discussion of the effects of these three kinds of objectifying practices.

Minoritization through Ethnic Identification Project and Official Policies

The Ethnic Identification Project

I start with an exploration of the Ethnic Identification Project because “China’s ethnic landscape map is based on a nation-wide ethnic identification program that began in the early 1950s” (Zhao, 2012, p. 49). The Ethnic Identification Project has been extensively explored by Chinese and western scholars (Harrell, 1994; H. Hu & Zhang, 2009; S. Li, 1998; Mullaney, 2010, 2011; Qi, 2010; Schein, 2000; Xiao, 1999). With the original aim of “objectively analyzing and classifying fluid and complex social phenomena” (Tapp, 2002, p. 69), the project may be understood as a scientific and political effort to facilitate the creation of a united multi-ethnic nation (Mullaney, 2010). Many scholars have interpreted Chinese Ethnic Identification Project in diverse ways (Fei, 2003; Mullaney, 2010). While some scholars tend to regard the project as helping minority groups discover their ethnic identity, Mullaney (2010) argues for the greater role that Chinese state and social scientists played in ethnic categorization. My understanding of this project is mainly shaped by Mullaney (2010, 2011) and Schein’s (2000) perspectives.

After the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) took power in 1949, the first national constitution, the 1949 Common Outline states:

All national minorities shall have freedom to develop their dialects and languages, to preserve or reform their traditions, customs and religious beliefs. The People's Government shall assist the masses of the people of all national
minorities to develop their political, economic, cultural and educational construction work (p. 52).

To guarantee regional autonomy and ensure at least one representative for each national minority in the first forthcoming National People’s Congress (NPC), the CCP decided that out of 1200 seats, at least 150 be granted to non-Han groups (Mullaney, 2010, p. 327). To get a clearer picture of the exact number and the name of each minority groups then (H. Hu & Zhang, 2009; Xiao, 1999), in 1953, the CCP conducted a significant census to identify nationalities through peoples’ self-applying for national minority status (H. Hu & Zhang, 2009; Xiao, 1999). The result of over 400 self-identified minority groups unrealistically exceeded the government’s expectation that extended 150 minority seats (Fei, 2003, p. 64; Mullaney, 2010). Therefore in 1954, the CCP appointed a team of Chinese ethnologists and linguists to embark on the Ethnic Identification Project, with the aim of creating a definite ethnotaxonomy (Fei, 2003; Mullaney, 2010). The identification task was based on Stalin’s four criteria of nationality – common territory, language, economy and psychological makeup (Fei, 2003). Among these four criteria, language played a determinant role. With this method, people who spoke the same language were categorized into one group. For those groups who did not have written scripts, the scholars invented writing systems for them (M. Zhou, 2012). In 1950s, 16 minority languages were officially standardized by combining various dialects within the language to “facilitate(s) that language’s eventual convergence to the majority language” (M. Zhou, 2012, p. 23). It was based on the assumption that “linguistic convergence of dialects and languages leads to consolidation and convergence of different ethnic identities into a single (ethno)national identity, and finally various (ethno)national identities into a unified national identity” (M. Zhou, 2012, p. 23). With the linguistic approach, hundreds of self-assigned ethnic categories were able to be compressed to a ‘realistic’ number. Thus the linguistic criterion became the primary identifier of ethnic categorization, complemented by consideration of local customs and folk culture (Mullaney, 2010; Schein, 2000; Tsung, 2009). In this way, these social scientists (mostly Han from Beijing institutions) drew the conclusion that the 400 self-assigned ethnic categories could be reduced and re-classified into much smaller numbers (H. Hu & Zhang, 2009), as argued by the following:

Among the approximately 140 ethnonyms in Yunnan, many are really the same in reality and different in names alone. If one treats the possession of an independent language as our criterion, then these ethnonyms could be merged
Thus, Mullaney (2010) argues that these social scientists worked under the framework that ethnic identity was fixed, stable and clear-cut, based primarily on the linguistic grouping. Minority groups were perceived to constitute “a bundle of immutable features: an ethnonym, a history, a language, a locale, and ethnic custom” (Dwyer, 2013, p. 73). As Mullaney (2010) comments, the “ethno-reductionist view” of “social scientific simplification” (p. 333) is validated by the government’s move of turning to ethnologists to solve the census crisis in 1953-54. In this way, the language-based categorization sketches the contours of the essentialized ethnic status and forms the basis of ethnic identification (Mullaney, 2010; Tsung, 2009).

As an important part of the Ethnic Identification Project, all nationalities were classified according to their stages of social development against a universal social evolution (the primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist and the socialist mode of production) under the Marxist social evolution theory. Most minorities were identified as being still in the stages of primitive, slave and feudal society, implying their ‘backwardness’ (luohou), in contrast to ‘Han’s ‘progress’ (fazhan) (White, 1998). For instance, ‘Yizu’ was classified to be still in the development stage of slave society in Sichuan and feudal society in Yunnan (S. Li, 1998). While only a few ‘Han’ communities were related with the feudal customs, a Han culture was always cast as the higher and more ‘advanced’ stage of social progress and modernization along which minority groups were to follow (Harrell, 1994; Schein, 2000; White, 1998). Such classification of groups was important in order for the ‘centre’ ‘Han’ to plan various political programs or launch developmental projects to raise the civilization levels of various groups (Harrell, 1994). For instance, those groups classified to be at the feudal stage were requested to start class struggles during the Land Reform program in order to get rid of ‘backwardness’ (Harrell, 1994).

By 1979, 56 minzu had been officially recognized, including ‘Han’ as the majority and the other 55 as ‘minority minzu’ (shaoshu minzu), including ‘Tibetan’, ‘Mongolian’, ‘Korean’, ‘Hui’, etc. In China, minzu is used to refer to both Zhonghua minzu (Chinese nation) and 56 minzu (nationalities). Scholars argue (Rong Ma, 2010; Zhao, 2010a) that the Chinese government in the early 1950s borrowed from Soviet Union’s experiences in dealing with minority relations and institutionalized minority groups as “political units” through the Ethnic Identification Project. Following Soviet Union’s practices, the
56 *minzu* was translated into nationalities. Zhao (2010a) suggests that after the fall of Soviet Union, the Chinese government put more emphasis on forging the unified national identity and the emotional bond of common blood. Some Chinese leading scholars, such as Rong Ma (2010), therefore advocates for the “‘depoliticization’ and ‘culturalization’ of ethnic groups” by using the culturally-related term *zuqun* (‘ethnic group’) to refer to *minzu*. Therefore, recent years have witnessed 56 *minzu* is being translated into “ethnic groups” in official documents in China given nationality’s implication of citizenship (Bilik, Lee, Shi, & Phan, 2004). However, nationality as an English translation for *minzu* remains in use today, e.g. the university that is specifically dedicated to minority students remains to be translated as university for nationalities. In the following, I employ the term of ‘minority *minzu*’ to retain its original use to refer to 56 ‘minority groups’ in China (Zhao, 2007a).

Once assigned by the state, an individual’s status as ‘Han’ or ‘minority *minzu*’ is marked on his/her identification card, and becomes the fixed category designated by the state throughout one’s entire life. Such construction reflects the state’s sovereign power in inventing and maintaining the imagined ethnic boundaries and identity, which were simultaneously subject to stereotypical representation. The imagined boundaries create borders which separate ‘Han’ from the ‘minority *minzu*’. With poststructuralist perspectives, I choose to interrogate and disrupt the bounded construction of ‘minority *minzu*’ because such knowledge was not created in a vacuum or social space innocent of power, but came about through a particular power/knowledge relationship in a particular historical context. The term of ‘minority *minzu*’ has been developed to classify people and create hierarchy between groups of people. It authorizes ‘Han’ as the top of the hierarchy and establishes ‘minority *minzu*’ as inferior to ‘Han’. To indicate the problematic and contestable deployment of the term, I put quotation marks to “show that the way their very materiality is circumscribed is fully political. The effect of the quotation marks is to denaturalize the terms, to designate these signs as sites of political debates” (Butler, 1992, p. 19). I will start this problematization in the following part with an analysis of minority education policy.

**Minority education policy**

Sautman (1998) suggests that “China has one of the oldest and largest sets of state-sponsored preferential policies (*youhui zhangce*) for ethnic minorities” (p. 77). A
prominent feature in China’s minority education is the policy endeavour of “special-preferential treatments” (Q. Wang & Wan, 2006, p. 68) such as lowering scores, bonus points, financial investment, monthly subsidy, teacher training, bilingual education, boarding schools, minzu class, etc.. Preferential policies have the ultimate aims of narrowing the gap of educational and social-economic development between ‘backward’ minority regions and Han regions, as well as ensuring national stability and social integration (Clothey, 2005). The Decision to Further Reform and Accelerate the Development of Minority Education (State Council Office of PRC, 2002) states that, in minority education, there exists a “‘backward’ educational ideology” and “low educational development”, which brings about “three ‘backwardnesses’ (i.e. ‘backward’ productivity, ‘backward’ cultural development and ‘backward’ living standard) as compared with Eastern ‘Han’ regions” (D. Li, 2003; Lin Yi, 2007). The discourse of ‘backwardness’ is closely related to the hegemonic discourses of progress which highlight the state concern for socialist modernization and economic development. The discourses of progress produce knowledge that is similar to what White (1998) refers to as the discourses of hierarchy. White (1998) argues the discourses of hierarchy (progress) are the legacies of three epistemological trends: the first one is achieving progress through the development of science and technology, deepening economic reform and flourishing socialist market economy. In the sense of Bakken (2000), it mirrors the state’s commitment to ‘higher’ levels of social and economic improvement, to building a modernized and well-off society. The second one is influenced by the ideology of the former Soviet Union which borrowed Marxist social evolution theory in dealing with minority relations. The theory situates ‘minority minzu’ in the lower stage of ‘backwardness’ in social evolution, a situation which is to be overcome through Han’s assistance of ‘advanced’ technology and science. The third one is the Confucius worldview that sees those tribes living in the peripheral places as ‘the barbarian’ (Yi). The relationship between Han and Yi (normally inhabiting peripheral places) is to raise their cultural level and govern them through advanced Confucian morals (Harrell, 1994; Lin Yi, 2008). The discourses of progress contribute to the construction of an image of “‘socialist big family’, in which all the members are equal siblings but the Han is the “older brother” (lao da ge) who takes it as his natural duty to help the ‘underdeveloped’ minority younger brothers to become ‘advanced’ like him” (Khan, 1995b, p. 139).
Operating the discourses of progress, the *Decision 2002* calls for Eastern Han regions to aid minority regions in order for the latter to ‘catch up’ with Han. The policy also promises further financial support for minority regions in order to “ensure not a single minority university student drops out because of economic difficulties” (State Council Office of PRC, 2002, p. 4). Through the discourse of progress, minorities are produced as ‘inferior’, ‘backward’, ‘impoverished’ and the ‘needy’ (Bulag, 2002, 2003a; Hansen, 1999; Lin Yi, 2007, 2008) unless they rely on various supports to ‘catch up’ with the cultural norms of the ‘Han’ regime. Though the policy may be said to be well-intended in providing necessary assistance for improving the educational and social development in minority regions, discourses of progress produce the exclusionary effect that minorities are devalued and marginalized members of the society who would be left behind unless they receive sufficient intervention or are adequately educated. Minority students are separated as a failure of social-economic and educational development because they are from minority regions marked by three types of ‘backwardness’. Thus it is partly the discourses of progress that marginalize and discriminate ‘minority students’ as the ‘Other’.

While the state has submitted ‘minority minzu students’ to the transformative process of civilizing them through education to eliminate their ‘backwardness’, the discourses of culture maintenance officially recognize ‘difference’ and ‘diversity’. The discourses of culture maintenance reflect the state’s commitments to respecting minorities’ rights to preserve their cultural heritage and to use their mother languages. For instance, identifying the existing problems of loss of minorities’ traditional culture, the dominant theme in the *Suggestions on Further Promoting and Developing Minority Cultural Causes* (State Council Office of PRC, 2009) is to protect, promote and develop ‘minority minzu’s traditional culture (*shaoshu minzu chuantong wenhua*). The 2009 *Suggestions* defines minority traditional culture as “minority’s language, dietary habit, clothing, architecture, production mode, techniques, literature and art, religion, holiday and customs” (State Council Office of PRC, 2009, p. 5, my translation). With this understanding about ‘minority minzu’ culture, what it means to be a ‘minority minzu’ member “is reified, at least in terms of sanctioning or valorizing linguistic and certain other cultural practices” (White, 1998, p. 14). White (1998) alerts us that it is important to distinguish traditional culture (such as folk practice) within the discourse of culture.
maintenance from the feudal tradition, such as superstition, which is regarded as the ‘backward’ in the discourse of progress.

Chinese scholars argue in the face of increasing encroachment of globalization and mainstream ‘Han’ culture, that minority education is confronted with the urgent task of preserving the traditional cultural heritage (Jin, 2008; Q. Wang, 2004). They therefore suggest that the multi-cultural curriculum be sufficiently implemented to respect ethnic characteristics and sufficiently reflect minority traditional culture. Minority cultures are allocated a reified and minoritized space in the ‘truth’ of ‘Han’ culture regime which claims to mirror them ‘transparently’ and ‘noninnocently’. It removes minority cultures from their everyday vibrancy, flexibility and specificity and renders minority cultures to display their ‘Otherness’ in a “museumified” (Kazmi, 1997, p. 340) space where they are gazed upon as a living fossil. Bulag (2002) suggests that the discourses of culture maintenance produces ‘minority minzu’ as “a foil to the Chinese national state, displayed in the human zoo theme park to illustrate China’s colourful image of minzu tuanjie” (unity) (p. 21). Through essentializing minority cultures and neutralizing the differences, the discourses of culture maintenance render minority cultures fixed and lifeless (Kazmi, 1997) and being led by the dominant ‘Han’ regime.

An important form of special-preferential treatment is bilingual education11, which is closely related to the discourses of culture maintenance. The state encourages bilingual education for the “preservation and promotion of minority culture” (Lin, 1997, p. 195). Such endeavor is based on the assumption that “languages carried important cultural knowledge … that will help students learn about and inherit their cultural values and beliefs” (Lin, 1997, p. 195). While minority language instruction is encouraged, it is always the dominant language that is given the first priority in bilingual education, as

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11 Bilingual education adopts many different forms depending on local conditions. For instance, the local government in the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (IMAR) formulates a dual mode of the bilingual education program: 1) the maintenance type in Mongolian concentrated areas, and 2) the transitional type in Mongolian scattered areas (Q. Zhou, 2004). Specifically, in Mongolian concentrated areas such as Mongolian villages, primary and middle schools are divided into Mongolian schools and Han schools according to students’ minzu status. The maintenance type primarily recruits Mongolian students being instructed in Mongolian with a Chinese course taught as the second language from primary schools till the end of the middle school. Another type of bilingual education – the transitional, is locally called “Chinese as the medium of instruction with the Mongolian subject as an additional course” (Q. Zhou, 2004, p. 52). Specific to the transitional type, in Mongolian scattered areas such as cities, Mongolian and Han students may study in the same school but in different classes: Mongolian students in Mongolian class and Han students studying in Han class. Mongolian students are instructed in Chinese and given additional Mongolian course from the second or the third grade on in primary schools till the end of middle schools (S. Li, 2009)
No effort shall be spared to advance bilingual teaching, open Chinese language classes in every school, and popularize the national common language and writing system. Minority peoples’ right to be educated in native languages shall be respected and ensured. Bilingual preschool education shall be promoted (p. 23).

Though the discourses of bilingual education acknowledge minority language rights, popularization of Chinese language legitimizes Chinese-speaking students as ‘superior’ and ‘normal’ while marginalizing students who speak their mother languages as ‘undesirable’ or ‘deviant’. Scholars argue that the ultimate objective of bilingual education is to achieve the transition from minority minzu’s mother languages to Chinese (Beckett & Postiglione, 2012; Jacob & Park, 2012). This is because of the discourses of progress which postulate that “the backwardness of ethnic minorities can be overcome by stressing the importance of the Chinese language as the means to gain access to Han culture” (Lin Yi, 2007, p. 935). The discourses of progress sanction and effectuate Chinese language proficiency as the desired quality of a ‘normal’ student, or the passport to a ‘modernized’ way of life, thus drawing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Without such quality, they will be placed outside the ‘normal’ and ‘natural’ (Jahng & Lee, 2013). The dual discourses of progress and culture maintenance thus inevitably reinforce Han’s superiority. Though bilingual education aims for social integration, the tension inherent in the juxtaposition of the dual discourses entails the simultaneous exclusion of ‘minority minzu students’ from ‘Han’, and renders minority education a site fraught with complexity and contradictions.

The dominance of the national common language discourse in a multicultural nation is not unique to China. Lippi-Green (2003) identifies that in the United States, “English, held up as the symbol of the successfully assimilated immigrant, is promoted as the one and only possible language of a unified and healthy nation” (p. 217, cited in Jahng & Lee, 2013, p. 305). Jahng and Lee (2013) suggest, “Korean is considered the qualification of successfully assimilated multicultural students and has been the only acceptable language as an official language in South Korea” (p. 305). Citing the example of a Mongolian linguist, Bulag (2003b) proposes bilingual education brings about assimilationism which accelerates the loss of Mongolian language:
Since the Mongolian language is in a social environment in which Chinese occupies an absolutely advantageous position, it faces the danger of natural assimilation every minute and every second. However, under such circumstances, if you still subjectively adopt so called “Mongolian-Chinese bilingualism,” encouraging only Mongols to learn Chinese, but not Chinese to learn Mongolian, it is tantamount to using a covert administrative measure to restrict and limit the development of the Mongolian language, and it can only accelerate the process of the loss of Mongolian (Chuluun Bagan, 1981, pp. 122-123, cited in Bulag, 2003b, p. 759).

The juxtaposition of the dual hegemonic discourses of progress and culture maintenance informs a wider range of state-sponsored special-preferential treatments in minority higher education. For instance, more than 100 nationality institutions12 (14 are nationality universities and the rest are colleges) are established to suit the needs of ‘minority minzu students’ with financial assistance, preferential admission and offers of special ethnic programs. These programs run courses such as ethnology, Mongolian linguistics and literature and Mongolian medicine (Rhoads & Chang, 2013; Zhao, 2012). These nationality institutions are created with a special mission: to produce ‘minority minzu’ talents who are expected to be expert at both minority languages and Chinese (minhan jiantong) to better serve the minority regional development and the state (Zhao, 2012). Another instance of special-preferential treatment to ‘minority minzu students’ is the process of making college entrance examination easier by allowing them to use their mother languages in the exam, lowering scores and through streaming ‘minority minzu students’ into minzu ban and yuke ban (Clothey, 2005). For instance, Item 5 in the Notice on Regulations of Minority Yuke Ban and Minzu Ban in Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2005) defines:

*Minzu ban* refers to those minority minzu students who take part in uniform national College Entrance Examination, being enrolled at appropriately lower scores for higher education (my translation).

Another type is *yuke ban* defined as:

*Yuke ban* refers to those minority minzu students who take part in uniform national College Entrance Examination, being enrolled at appropriately lower scores for a period of preparatory study before formal higher education (my translation).

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12 A nationality institution, in contrast to regular institution, is featured by its ‘ethnic’ characteristics, producing a larger number of minority minzu university graduates though it also recruits Han students (S. Yang, 2007).
Thus ‘minority minzu university students’ are differentiated from unnamed ‘Han’ peers through the establishment of minzu ban and yuke ban. The absence of ‘Han’ in the policy discourses affirms the assumption that ‘Han students’ meet the cultural norms therefore they do not need any intervention. It is the ‘minority minzu university students’ who should be included in the special treatments given their poor academic foundations, therefore they are excluded from Han students. Minority students are thus implicitly marked as deviant, marginal or/and undesirable.

Having examined how the hegemonic discourses minoritize ‘minority minzu students’, I explore how the officially sanctioned discourses manifest themselves at the institutional level.

**Minoritization through material-spatial practices**

In the nationality university where I conducted the fieldwork, ‘Mongolian university students’ were streamed into two types of programs by their language and education background (the language they use in college entrance exam and the scores they get). If students took the college examination in Chinese, they were able to get the 10 bonus points and be streamed into the Regular Program (RP) taught in Chinese, and study together with ‘Han’ peers in that regular stream (*putong ban*). They were known as *min kao han* (minority students who took exam in Chinese) and were called ‘Hansheng’, a term also referred to ‘Han students’. Around 18% of ‘Mongolian students’ were tracked into RP (Institutional yearbook, 2012). If students took the college examination in the Mongolian language, they were streamed into the Ethnic Program (EP) taught mostly in the Mongolian language and studied in the separate Mongolian stream (*minzu ban*). They were known as *min kao min* (minority students who took exam in mother language)(Youhan, 2011) and were called ‘Mengsheng’. In 2012, out of the total score of 750, ‘Mengsheng’’s admission score was 90-117 points lower than that of ‘Hansheng’ (Inner Mongolia Education Enrollment and Examination Centre, 2012). If ‘Mengsheng’ wished to be enrolled in RP majors unavailable in EP majors, they were sorted into the preparatory stream (*yuke ban*) which provided them with a remedial year of preparatory study to improve their Chinese language skills before moving onto the four-year undergraduate study. They remained in a separate class segregated from ‘Han’ peers all through the five years. Around 82% of ‘Mongolian university students’ were streamed into the separate class, including *minzu ban* and *yuke ban*. In my fieldwork, I found that
although ‘Mengsheng’ referred to ‘Mongolian students’ majoring in EP and ‘Hansheng’ referred both to ‘Mongolian students’ studying together with ‘Han peers’ and ‘Han students’, it had almost become an unwritten rule that ‘Mengsheng’ was mainly reserved for ‘Mongolian students’ and ‘Hansheng’ was synonymously used to refer to ‘Han students’ (see also Zhao, 2007a).

Material-spatial distribution

Foucault (1977) argues that disciplinary institutions often organize distributions of complex spaces that are both physical and hierarchical to assure a constant subjection of the body. Spatial distribution uses the technique of enclosure, which is “the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself” (Foucault, 1977, p. 141). The purpose of such an arrangement is to avoid conflict, prevent violence and maintain order. However, in practice, the tactic of enclosure creates mixed spaces in a much more detailed way based on the principle of partitioning and rank (Foucault, 1977). The principle of partitioning ensures “each individual has his own place; and each place its individual” (Foucault, 1977, p. 143). The purpose is to observe his conduct, to know and assess his qualities and to use his abilities. This individualizing technique, Foucault (1977) argues, not only makes it possible to supervise individuals, but to carry out classification and comparison according to the skills and capacities. Individuals are defined by the place they occupy in the classification scheme, or by the technique of rank. Foucault (1977) argues that the art of rank “individualizes bodies by a location that does not give them a fixed position, but distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations” (p. 146). This means that a student may sometimes occupy one rank according to his current performances or behaviors, but may move to another rank sometime later. In this way, the art of rank not only indicates individual’s distribution in the educational order, but marks his/her values in the constructed arrangement of hierarchy.

In the nationality institution where I conducted my fieldwork, streaming students into the category of putong ban (‘Hansheng’ stream) and minzu ban (‘Mengsheng’ stream) associates with the physical enclosure. There are distinct ‘Mengsheng’ stream schedules where ‘Mengsheng’ study together in the separate classrooms. In addition, ‘Mengsheng’ live together with their classmates in the assigned dorms based on class arrangements. ‘Hansheng’ have class in their own classrooms distinguished from ‘Mengsheng’, and
live together with their own circles. Similarly, Zhao (2007a) argues in her exploration of Mongolian cultural recognition in nationality institutions that segregate class arrangement and dorm assignment based on class schedules contribute to the isolation and estrangement between Mengsheng and Hansheng on campus. Disciplinary steaming is not unique to the Chinese minority education context. Davidson (1996) and Allen (2006) also observed similar practices in educational institutions in America. This widespread phenomenon provoked my curiosity – what might teachers and students think of such dividing practices? A teacher from the office of the Student Unit commented:

Mengsheng are different from Han students, with different learning capability and lifestyle, they are also speaking a different language, they need to be arranged into a different class to facilitate teaching and management. This arrangement can also avoid any conflict between Mengsheng and Han students. After all, they are different groups. (Fieldnotes, April 15th, 2012)

Thus, ‘Mengsheng’ are distinguished from ‘Han students’ because they are from different cultural backgrounds. According to the teacher, the multitudes of diverse learning capabilities, lifestyles and linguistic backgrounds need to be transformed into ordered multiplicities (Foucault, 1977). The order and inspection that must be kept and carried out requires ‘Mengsheng’ to be gathered under the same roof so that potential conflicts between ‘Mengsheng’ and ‘Han students’ can be avoided and controlled.

Moreover, streaming for the sake of teaching and management, subjects students to a disciplinary procedure aimed at better training, transforming and subjecting. This disciplinary procedure ensures each category has its own place to eliminate the effects of confused distribution or circulation (Foucault, 1977). Students are divided in such a way that they may be taught and managed categorically, and that each assigned place corresponds to the value and characteristics of each category. Taking a Foucauldian perspective, I suggest that streaming individualizes and characterizes bodies, making it possible to observe each category separately, to compare with one another, to differentiate, and to judge them in terms of different types of intelligence, ability and academic status. Thus, streaming produces an analytical space which makes students knowable, teachable and administrable.

According to the Regulation on the University English Teaching and Evaluation issued by the institution in 2007, ‘Hansheng’ are classified into A grade. ‘Mengsheng’ in the preparatory stream are categorized as B grade students. ‘Mengsheng’ in minzu ban are
defined as C grade. Each grade has different curriculum focuses, textbooks and evaluation standards. For A grade students, more emphasis is put on comprehensive qualities with the textbook of *College English Intensive Reading*, and they are required to pass CET (College English Test) Band 4. B grade stresses improvement of linguistic skills, while C grade focuses on the memorization of basic knowledge. Both B and C grades are only required to achieve Band 3 using the textbook of *College English from Zero Basis*. To stimulate students’ enthusiasm in English study, the regulation clearly indicates those who pass Band 6 should be rewarded with monetary means of 200 Yuan.

CET, a national test supervised by the Ministry of Education, is allegedly an objective and accurate evaluation of English proficiency for university students (National College English Band-4 and Band-6 Committee, 2013). It is used to demonstrate whether university students live up to the standard of college English band 1-4 syllabus. Band 4 is extremely important because throughout Chinese regular universities, there has come into existence the policy of “no CET Band 4 certificate, no Bachelor’s degree” (Adamson & Xia, 2011, pp. 4-5). Ranking students into A, B, C grades advances a pyramidal space (Foucault, 1977) that marks, distinguishes and hierarchizes qualities. It characterizes the qualities of ‘Mengsheng’ (B and C grades) in contrast to the qualities of ‘Hansheng’ (A grade), which belong to the norm of desirable students. However, in providing each category a fixed position in the order of CET (‘Mengsheng’ the lowest and ‘Hansheng’ the highest), the technique of rank also allows circulation among ranks by rewarding those who move up to the highest band. As a result, the technique of rank both hierarchizes knowledge and ability in the constructed ‘ideal’ space, and indicates distribution of merits in the physical material space of Mengsheng or Hansheng classes. Both spaces differentiate and exclude non-normal qualities such as low English competency from the norm, and position ‘Mengsheng’ outside the boundary of ‘good’ students.

**Minoritization through pedagogical practices**

Techniques of disciplinary power are not only able to produce the oppositional category of ‘Mengsheng’/’Hansheng’, but objectify ‘minority minzu students’ as the potential targets of pedagogical intervention that assesses, diagnoses, and normalizes, giving birth to minzu ban students as objects of knowledge for social science research. Knowledge on ‘minority minzu students’ in minzu ban produced by social scientific research
reinforces the disciplinary norm and maintains the binary exercise of ‘Mengsheng’/‘Hansheng’ or ‘Mongolian’/‘Han student’, inscribing them with a hierarchy of knowledge, ability, values or merits. Scientific research unanimously focuses on ‘objectively’ identifying students’ characters (H. Jiang, 2009; P. Wang, 1995; W. Wang, 2008; Yan, 2009), ‘special’ problems and mental health (Chi, 2010; Gou & Lu, 2010; Xie, Long, Zhang, & Jin, 1995; Jing Zhang, Xi, & Tang, 2006), and their ‘abnormality’ (Ou, Wang, Wu, & Dong, 2013; J. Yang, Qin, & Li, 2009), aiming to seek ‘appropriate’ measures to solve their ‘unfitting’ problems and correct their behaviors (Xiaodong Liu & Cao, 2007; Shuquan Bai, Zhao, & Tu, 2010; W. Wang, 2008; T. Zhang, 2010), in order to get rid of their ‘backwardness’ and obtain an air of ‘Han’ ‘advancedness’ (Y. Deng, 2000; C. Huang & Yu, 2009; H. Jiang, 2009; Kang, 2006).

For instance, Chi (2010) suggests compared with ‘Han’ peers in putong ban (regular class), minzu ban students feel ‘disadvantaged’ and psychologically ‘inferior’ because of academic and employment pressure. Shang (2010) proposes that minzu ban students encounter communication obstacles due to their ‘poor’ communication skills when interacting with ‘Han’ peers, and that they are likely to exclude others from their cliques. Jiang (2009) argues that minzu ban students are from poor family backgrounds and social-culturally and educationally ‘under-developed’ regions. This results in their ‘poor’ academic achievement and their highly-stressed and ‘harmful’ mental state with issues such as “anxiety, nervousness, fear, disappointment, shame, loneliness, jealousy” (p. 96, my translation). Jiang (2009) further suggests that minzu ban students’ ‘extreme’ ways of thinking and ‘irrational’ tendencies can be easily revealed in their ‘outward hostile behaviors’ which then lead to vicious circles in their lives. Jiang (2009) identifies four specific measures targeted to this ‘special group’ of students. Firstly, class teachers should develop separate curriculum and teaching plans, organizing study groups consisting of Han and minority students, “strengthening the practice of one-to-one tutoring, so that they may feel they are valued in the same way as Han peers” (Jiang, 2009, p. 97, my translation); or teachers should design career development plans for students to overcome their perplexed mental state and to assist them to establish correct life goals, thereby transforming them into all-round developed students. For instance, in the university, there is the employment guidance office which provides special counseling services particularly to minzu ban students, helping them devise study and
career plans to better prepare them for the employment competition after graduation. Secondly, institutions should provide more economic aid such as various types of study loans. For instance, the university offers various forms of financial assistance exclusively to minzu ban students, such as the monthly subsidy or preferred opportunity for qingong zhuxue (part-time job), constituting them as the economically deprived, welfare-dependent and the needy.

Thirdly, to better manage the ‘special group’ students, class teachers as well as student cadres play key roles in developing students’ moral and political qualities by gaining knowledge about individual students, their situations and difficulties (Jiang, 2009). For instance, in this university, I observed three procedures in relation to this measure – surveillance, acquisition of knowledge through the student cadre team and the regular class meeting. The class teacher assigned, from among the well-behaved students, a student cadre team whose role was to supervise ordinary students. This team consisted of 7-10 ‘officers’ with positions such as study representative, the life representative, the monitor, the propaganda representative, the discipline representative, etc. responsible for recording students’ daily problems, class absences, unruly behaviors and improper conduct, or serious offenses. While the student cadre supervised the mass of students, they also supervised all other ‘officers’. This ‘officer’ team ensured the policing functions of surveillance by recording disobedient activities so that orders and knowledge about students would be gained. Surveillance was further reiterated by the pedagogical role of the class teacher in the regular class meeting. The class teacher organized class meeting every 2-3 weeks to summarize the recent student performance (biaoxian), correcting the ‘impure’ acts or disruptive behaviors dissonant with the moral norm, warning the trouble-makers who had been marked down by the student ‘officers’.

Fourthly, institutions should strengthen psychological health education to overcome their ‘solitary’, ‘feeble’ mental state and their ‘extreme’ ways of thinking (Jiang, 2009). Jiang (2009) argues that, as a group prone to ‘mental problem’, they deserve ‘special care’. Student cadres and teachers should show ‘sympathy’ in talking to them, and update information on their psychological state on a timely basis (Jiang, 2009). This is best manifested by the university’s practice of establishing individual student’s psychological archives for the first year students in 2011. Attending to university students’ psychological problems has become a popular practice in higher education.
institutions in China, especially for the ‘special groups’, such as students from the rural area (G. Li & Zhang, 2013) or the ‘minority minzu students’ (Chi, 2010; Gou & Lu, 2010; Ou, et al., 2013; J. Yang, et al., 2009; Jing Zhang, et al., 2006). It is assumed that by evaluating the status of students’ psychological well-being through psychometric testing, the regularity and characteristics of their psychological development will be known ‘accurately’, in order to help them prevent a psychological ‘crisis’ (G. Li & Zhang, 2013). Read from the perspective of Rose (1999), psychometrics, made in terms of judgment of ‘normality’, enables psychological archives to:

establish its claim as the appropriate authority to adjudicate upon the lives of individuals, to administer them in such a way that would maximize their social utility and minimize the social danger their difference might represent … a science of the soul was combined with a strategy for the government of the individual (p. 144).

Within this understanding, the ultimate irony is minzu ban students who are supposedly assisted by this remedial process are the most watched, classified, monitored and measured. Through adopting remedial practices and separating ‘special groups’, normative qualities are legitimized and perpetuated.

W. Wang (2008), having years of experience being the class teacher of minzu ban, summarizes his ‘success’ as relying on four approaches: Firstly, class teachers may use the combination of collective and individual approaches to deal with students, becoming well acquainted with every student’s mental state, developing knowledge about their family and growing-up experiences, combined with efforts to hold collective activities, such as class meetings. In the university where I conducted the fieldwork, the collective activity of class meetings, along with the individual approach of having personal talks to ‘problem’ students were both widely used to ensure articulated and detailed monitoring. These approaches thus constituted “a laboratory where development could be watched, monitored and set along the right path” (Walkerdine, 1990, p. 21). Secondly, according to W. Wang (2008), class teachers establish a capable class cadre team of high academic achievers with high moral standards. Thirdly, class teachers enforce strict discipline to establish a correct collective atmosphere which fosters collective thinking, and fourthly, moral and political education and CCP’s patriotism should be prioritized (W. Wang, 2008). In her study, Zhang (2011) explores English lecturers’ questioning strategies in English class by comparing regular class students to minzu ban students. She finds lecturers in minzu ban tend to use more concise and
simple language and, more encouragement than *putong ban* (regular class) lecturers. This coincides with what the English lecturers told me about their ‘scientific’ pedagogical practices in *minzu ban*. This pedagogical practice, in the words of Bernstein (1971), adopts the restricted codes in the classroom reaching. In a sense, such streaming practice draws some similarities to those found in Singapore secondary English classroom which sorts students into Express class and Normal class (Albright, 2008). One of the English lecturers that I observed revealed that different from *putong ban* students, more patience and attention was needed because *minzu ban* students were ‘slow’ learners, ‘weak’ in psychological capacity, and ‘sensitive’ to harsh remarks though well-intended (Fieldnotes, April 21st, 2012). At the time when I did the fieldwork, this university held a 2012 *Teaching Quality Year Activity*. The main purpose was to enhance teachers’ pedagogical responsibilities through improving teachers’ nurturing roles with patient teaching, requiring teachers to immerse themselves in students’ lives to learn their problems and predict their psychological development. In the sense of Rose (1999), through the teachers’ psychological scrutiny of students’ bodies and souls, students are caught up in the pedagogical arrangements that transform them into visible, knowable and administrable objects “to the extent that he or she may be differentiated from others and evaluated in relation to them” (p. 143). In this way, teachers are able to carry out diagnosis, and chart out divergence. P. Wang (1995), in exploring education theory used in *minzu ban*, affirms *minzu ban* is distinct from *putong ban* in terms of the former’s special curriculum progress requirements. He therefore advocates making proper curriculum and administrative adjustments to suit students’ ‘special characteristics’. Requirements of English band 3 for ‘*Mengsheng*’ and their lower curriculum standards are examples of the outcomes of such educational interventions.

**Discussion**

This chapter analyzes the minoritization processes through which ‘Mongolian students’ become minoritized subjects from the perspectives of state policy, disciplinary material-spatial arrangements and pedagogical practices. While both the Ethnic Identification Project and minority education policy essentialize ‘minority *minzu* students’ as a ‘backward’ ‘special group’, I provided an alternative reading that the very concept of
minority ‘backwardness’ with distinctive ‘ethnic’ cultural characteristics is discursively produced in a way that naturalizes and stabilizes the false ‘minority minzu’/’Han’ distinction in the interest of dominant regime. Material-spatial arrangements carve out a normative hierarchical space in the nationality institution that is dichotomized into ‘Hansheng’ and ‘Mengsheng’, or ‘Han students’ and ‘Mongolian students’. It produces “identities based in an attribution of difference that yields opposed status groups” (Verdery, 1996, p. 94). ‘Mengsheng’ are thus positioned as the negatively valued pole characterized by ‘lower’ levels of intelligence, and being ‘incapable’ of rigorous academic work due to ‘poor’ educational foundation and ‘backwardness’ with ‘ethnic’ cultural characteristics etc. in contrast to ‘Hansheng’. This binary gives rise to the essentialized construction of subject for scientific discourses that objectify ‘minority minzu students’ as ‘slow-minded’ and ‘needy’. Scientific discourses not only spend a great deal of effort on defining ‘Mengsheng’ as having a homogenously unique, unchallenged and smooth inner core that all ‘Mengsheng’ are assumed to share and which makes them who they are, but mask the normalizing processes by individualizing the ‘abnormality’ of minzu ban students that could be overcome through special educational intervention. Scientific discourses also assume that deviation from the norm can be corrected by remediation through counseling and other therapeutic regimes, as well as the application of particular pedagogies.

My task in analyzing the material-spatial arrangement is not to show such division as being oppressive, nor do I understand power as being repressive or prohibitive in negative terms. Foucault (1980) argues “disciplines were bearers of a discourse” (p. 241), that speaks a rule of normalization. “Discipline makes individuals” (p. 170), and “produces domains of object and rituals of truth” (p. 194). Disciplinary practices produce the universal and prevailing normal paradigm that materializes categories through forceful reiteration of norms (Butler, 1993). In doing so disciplinary practices hide the normalizing processes that privilege certain social relationships as ‘natural’ and ‘normal’.

Lin Yi (2008) identifies the normative discourse of ‘Han’ culturalism in China’s minority education. This means people should be educated according to’ Han’ cultural values and beliefs (Lin Yi, 2008, p. 15). She argues that the belief in the superiority and centrality of ‘Han’ culturalism “pervades the education of ethnic minorities in China”
(Lin Yi, 2008, p. 15). Some Chinese leading scholars, such as Rong Ma (2010), argue that there exists “a sense of cultural superiority” (p. 35) in dealing with minority relations, which refers to China’s cultural tradition that aims to “turn barbarian into true subjects of the heavenly kingdom by means of education and cultivation” (p. 35). While Rong Ma (2007; 2010) proposes viewing ethnic difference in terms of cultural difference rather than ‘racial’ or political difference, Foucault (1980) reminds me that “everything is political” (p. 189) in that any set of relations of force already constitute the domain of the political. Informed by Foucault (1978, 1980) and Butler (1990, 1993), I additionally suggest that signification of ‘Han’ culturalism take ‘Han’ and ‘minority minzu’ differences (in terms of linguistic, spatial and cultural practices) as a presupposition of its own intelligibility. Thus, ‘minority minzu’ and ‘Han’ denote divergent positions that need to be categorized, differentiated and assessed. The forcible and reiterative practice of the regulatory regime of ‘Han’ culturalism operates to circumscribe the categorical ‘materiality’ of ‘Mengsheng’ and ‘Hansheng’ and constitutes ‘Mengsheng’ with ‘ethnic’ status. Given this exploration of the various ways ethnic boundaries are enacted and students are constituted as minoritized subjects, an interesting question would be how they come to embody the category and perform themselves into existence as belonging to that category. This will be further explored in the next chapters.
Chapter 4 Reproducing and Transgressing Ethnic Boundaries

Introduction

Having discussed how ‘Mongolian university students’ minoritized status is discursively produced by the dominant objectifying practices, I am curious to explore how Mongolian students negotiate ethnic boundaries in their lived experiences. As I read through my data produced during observations and unstructured interviews and written in my fieldnotes, a particular kind of practice kept re-emerging. It seemed particularly persistent and interesting to me in diverse ways and across many contexts. For instance, both ‘Mengsheng’ and ‘Han’ were continuously engaged in discursive in/exclusion in their mundane social interactions with each other. I became increasingly interested in how both ‘Mengsheng’ and ‘Han’ included some acts or articulations as belonging to the category of ‘Mongolian university student’ while excluding others, and in doing so they reproduced ethnic boundaries. I was also intrigued by the ways ethnic boundaries were challenged and made problematic in ‘Mengsheng’ s interactions with me. However, my aspiration in figuring out the potential readings of the discursive exclusion between ‘Mengsheng’ and ‘Han’ is not to sketch a boundary, determining whether students are subversive enough, nor to offer a generalized hierarchized position and a definite reading of them. My focus in this chapter is on the discursive exclusion through which ‘Mengsheng’ reproduced and transgressed ethnic boundaries. In the following, utilizing poststructuralist perspectives informed by Foucault (1977, 1980), Butler (1990, 1993) and Davies (1989), I provide some possible readings of the ways students reproduce, reaffirm and challenge ethnic boundaries – the ways that make possible contradictory, ambiguous and multiple subject positions. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the discursive strategies of exclusion utilized by both ‘Mengsheng’ and ‘Han’ in their mundane social practices.

Reproducing ethnic boundaries

Today, while I had dinner with two Han male students, I complained about the difficulty of getting male Mengsheng’s consent to participate in my research and talked of their special characteristics. At this time, Shuiyuan furrowed his eyebrow, “You know, they are not like us Hansheng, they don’t know to study hard, but only know to make lots of trouble! My upstairs are Mengsheng. Last time I went upstairs to hang posters, I passed their rooms. Their rooms were dirty with bad smell. They were not hygienic at all… They drank heavily at
night outside. When they came back, they sang loudly, so annoying to us that we could not sleep. When there was football match, they talked loudly in Mongolian and threw steel washing bowls even at the dorm. We could hear clearly the clanking noise at night! They were so barbaric that they didn’t know any civilized behaviors! Those Mengshen, because they are from remote places, they lack self-control and are so uncultured!” Shuiyuan complained with flaring nostrils and eyebrows pulled down.

“Have you tried to talk to them?” I asked.

“We don’t dare to go outside the room after they came back from drinking! They will beat us up without reason! It’s impossible to communicate with them! They are so brutal, wild, violent and ignorant! We all shut our door after 11.30pm! It’s not worth it fighting them because they are so good at fighting! When we had a little unpleasant encounter (you guojie) with them, we all tried to keep silent and keep a distance with them. You see, they are so arrogant and rude”, Shuiyuan sneered with frowning eyebrows.

“To be honest, your study will be more significant if you focus on how to effectively educate and manage them!” Heyi added. (Fieldnotes, May 1st, 2012)

In this vignette, the two male ‘Hansheng’ were reproducing ethnic boundaries through a forcible reiteration of the binary opposition between ‘Mengshen’ and ‘Hansheng’.

Both ‘Hansheng’ identified with the commonsense perception of wen student ideal prescribed by ‘Han’ Confucianism (such as academic-oriented, courteous and genteel-like), and disavowed other identification such as wu (closet to the expression of macho man). In the book Theorizing Chinese Masculinity, Louie (2002) explores the competing discourses of masculinity in China and identifies the wen/wu matrix. Louie (2002) argues the macho man or ‘real’ man type of toughness, adventurousness, tendency for military violence with brutal physical force and brawny male power is not predominant in Chinese masculinity discourses. Instead, the caizi (talented man) and wenren (cultured man) type of wen man (cultured male) is considered as the ‘normal’ in Chinese context (Louie, 2002). This is due to the Confucian preference for wen over wu in which wen takes the most supremacy (Louie, 2002). Louie (2002) discusses the tension between competing discourses of Chinese masculinity and argues though wu man is exalted as yingxiong (hero), throughout China’s history it is wen male who is considered as the elite, more elegant form of Chinese masculinity while wu corresponds to the working class ideal of male. The Confucian advocating of qianqian junzi (the genteel and courteous man) and wenwen erya (Chinese chengyu, meaning gentle, elegant, respectful and refined way of speaking and acting, an etiquette advocated by Confucianism) are closely linked to wen personhood who is considered highly educated,
with high literacy skills and is seen as the pioneering guide of the society (Louie, 2002). While *wu* masculinity is mostly concerned with “male loyalty, solidarity and brotherhood” (Louie, 2002, p. 77), *wen* is linked to “competition, chauvinism and self-centredness” (p. 77). According to Louie (2002), throughout Chinese history, the *wen/wu* matrix where *wen* ideal of masculinity is able to take primacy over *wu* discourse is officially sanctioned by the disciplinary mechanism of examination. Examination confers privileged position on the cultured *wen* man, while the robust warlike *wu* man is seen as the non-elite masculinity. The *wen* person is considered as intellectual elites who gain supremacy, privilege and domination over other lower class *wu* man. Louie (2002) therefore proposes the discourse of *wen* with its whole range of knowledge on literary and verbal skills, civilized behaviors and culturedness becomes the dominant and powerful discursive regime.

In this reading of *wen/wu* matrix, the male ‘*Hansheng*’ attached normality and validity to *wen* and associated it with ‘*Hansheng*’ (“they are not like us *Hansheng*, they don’t know to study hard”). Shuiyuan positioned being a ‘*Mengsheng*’ within the essentialist discourses of coming “from backward places, they lack self-control, they are so uncultured!” This characterization constitutes the category of ‘*Mensheng*’ as a pre-discursive and singular entity applied to a group of students belonging to an assumed group based on some common denominators. Butler (1993) argues “the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produced a constitutive outside to the subject, and abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation” (Butler, 1993, p. 3). Thus Shuiyuan was also engaged in an active construction of himself through radical exclusionary means. The hierarchical opposition through which ‘*Hansheng*’ were formed required the simultaneous productions of abject beings. He positioned ‘*Mengsheng*’ as ‘less human’, a “threatening spectre”, the constitutive ‘outside’ (Bulter, 1993, p. 3) instead of the absolute ‘outside’. Constructing ‘Self’ through abjection thus not only carved up a boundary between ‘*Hansheng*’ and ‘*Mengsheng*’, but foreclosed the cultural intelligibility for ‘*Mengsheng*’ (such as ‘uncivilized’, ‘brutal’, ‘wild’). Shuiyuan then utilized this intelligibility matrix to achieve himself as an ascendant element of the dichotomy of ‘*Hansheng*/’*Mengsheng*’. The necessary dependency of the ‘*Hansheng*’ subject on the ‘*Mengsheng*’ ‘Other’ might expose its essentialized ‘superiority’ as illusory. Heyi’s version of knowledge production thus naturalizes dominant regimes of
power by excluding other possible discourses, e.g. the wu discourse, equally valid forms of knowledge. Foucault (1977, 1978, 1980) argues that knowledge production is a power-laden process which results in some versions being labeled as a ‘fact’. Foucault suggests that we must be suspicious of any knowledge produced, since it is not the subject that produces a corpus of knowledge, but “power/knowledge, and of which it is made up, that determines the forms and possible domains of knowledge” (Foucault, 1977, pp. 27-28). Thus any statements should be understood as less a discovery of ‘truth’ than as an excise of power (Seidman, 1994).

Davies (1994) argues that “we are positioned and position ourselves moment by moment as we make our way through the everyday world” (p. 4). In this case, if the very male ‘Mengsheng’ that Shuiyuan referred to were present when our conversation took place, would these two male ‘Hansheng’ construct ‘Mengsheng’ in this way? Would ‘Hansheng’ define ‘Mengsheng’ in terms of the universal core?13 How do ‘Mengsheng’ position themselves and ‘Hansheng’ as they make their way in their daily social practices? I focus on how ‘Mengsheng’ negotiate ethnic boundaries in their daily interactions with ‘Han’ in the following sections.

**Discourse of “Descendant of wolf”**

4.00pm: This afternoon, I was invited by Morigen to watch the basketball game. On the basketball court, Morigen was dribbling the ball between legs as he moved forward. He span nimbly, tossing, faking and steering clear of the defensive players’ stealing of the ball. He then swiped the ball over to his team player, Tuliguer, while yelling, “get the ball!” The ball was intercepted suddenly by Husileng, the defensive player. Morigen immediately deflected his passes and grabbed back the ball vigorously from Husileng … He kept dribbling, threatening to Husileng and Hanggai, the defensive players who were trying to steal the ball from him. The moment he swatted the ball and the opponent came up to deflect his pass, he dribbled the ball to somewhere else … As the defensive players went to great lengths to take the possession of the ball from him, Morigen cheated them by making a left turn gesture. While they were turning to the left, Morigen switched back, passing the ball forward, running for about 3 big steps rapidly, before jumping up in a high bounce. He shot the ball right into the hoop from one meter away. “Brilliant shot!” the crowd immediately burst into thunderous applause …

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13 If I didn’t initiate the topic of ‘Mengsheng’ by describing them as having ‘special characteristics’, if I didn’t complain in front of ‘Hansheng’ because I had difficulty getting consent from male ‘Mengsheng’ for participation on that day, would ‘Mengsheng’ be represented in this way? I felt guilty with my own behaviors and thought it was my fault for initiating an essentialized construction of ‘Mengsheng’.
On our way back to the dorm, I asked Morigen how he felt about the game. His eyes were immediately lit with a twinkle, “I like my teammates’ description of me as baqi (aggressiveness and toughness). I felt myself the ‘smell of wolf’. As I told you, I am the ‘descendant of wolf’ (langde chuanren).

“Can you be more specific?” I asked.

“You know, it’s from wolf that Genghis Khan learnt military strategies. For us ‘wolf descendants’, you are supposed to run faster, jump higher, shout loudly, attack toughly. We’re different from most Hansheng, they have a cute feminine hairstyle, wenwen erya (Chinese chengyu, meaning gentle, elegant, respectful and refined way of speaking and acting). They always focus on study!” Morigen replied.

“What do you get most out of the basketball match? You seemed so crazy about basketball!” I asked him.

“Well (thinking), by playing, I can think actively with my brain, to improvise strategy to win quickly, to work together, to threaten, to challenge, to take risk, with physical strength and speed” Morigen argued.

“Can’t you ‘think actively’ in class too?” I asked, noticing he used the phrase ‘thinking actively’.

“It’s different. In class, you only listened to teachers. You did as what you were taught. You listened, you memorized, and you were examined. My head is paralyzed! In playing, I got to think by myself!” Morigen looked at me, answering. (Fieldnotes May 9th, 2012)

At the time when our interaction took place, I was incredibly interested in Morigen’s self-positioning as the “descendant of wolf”. Through this positioning, Morigen produced himself as culturally and morally ‘superior’ to the Han group. In describing Morigen’s discursive strategy, I found Wimmer’s terminology of “normative inversion” (2008a) particularly useful. This strategy does not “aim at location of a boundary but try to modify its meaning and implication by challenging the hierarchical ordering of ethnic categories” (Wimmer, 2008a, p. 1031). By this strategy, Wimmer (2008a) argues that minority groups often re-inscribe or reverse the normative ordering of the symbolic hierarchy:

They redefine the meaning of ethnic categories. They see the privilege of authenticity where others perceived the disgrace of minority status; they are proud of the culture of their forefathers instead of being ashamed of how primitive their customs appeared in the eyes of dominant groups; they re-interpreted historical defeat and subjugation into a heroic struggle against injustice and domination (Wimmer, 2008a, p. 1038).
Though I found Wimmer’s (2008a) terminology particularly resonating with me in my analysis of this vignette, Wimmer’s main purpose in describing this mechanism is to develop a typology of boundary making strategies. Wimmer (2008a) claims his typology to be exhaustive and able to cover global cases. Different from Wimmer (2008a), my purpose in utilizing his terminology is to explore the discursive conditions under which the strategy becomes possible and significant. In this vignette, I read one of the possible conditions for Morigen’s engagement in normative inversion is his mobilization of the discourse of sports. Playing basketball might make available the powerful subject positions of being tough and masculine, exhibiting exceptional valor and strength as if in the battlefield (“I felt myself the smell of wolf”). In this reading, I suggest that Morigen’s subjectivity be constituted at the very practice of basketball-playing, through his access to the energetic and aggressive masculine subject position available. The masculine prowess was achieved through the dual process of subjectification. The moment of dribbling, faking, tossing, yelling, jumping up high, threatening, swatting, bouncing, etc. enabled the successful performance of Mongolian wu masculinity, and in doing so constituted the ‘macho man’ subject. When I asked him how he felt about the game, Morigen recognized himself by referring back to the wu masculinity discourse which other students conferred to him (“I like my teammates’ description of me as baqi”). He told me he was positioned as “baqi”, an ultra-masculine word in China closely associated with the masculinized character. Baqi signals the superior strength, male hegemony and extraordinary valiancy. He then situated this construction of masculinity within Mongolian wolf discourses and positioned himself as the “descendant of wolf”. Wolf discourses produce local knowledge about gestures and behaviors of the Mongolian male body that engages in tough and aggressive behaviors according to a set of particular rules inscribed in the body. For instance, the rules regulate the modality of recognizable body movements (“run faster, jump higher, shout loudly, attack toughly”), and exclude other forms of bodily inscription such as the feminized physical appearance (“a cute feminine hairstyle”) and the type of activities (“study”). According to Jiang (2004), the author of Wolf Totem, this construction of the male body arises from Mongolian cultural myth and the glorious historical discourses where Genghis Khan modeled his invincible and fierce cavalry on the wolf pack, eventually creating the largest landholding empire in the world. Within this cultural-historical construction, the ideal Mongolian masculinity is constituted as being wolf-like,
requiring a Mongolian male to be as hyper-macho as forcefully space-occupying, physically hard, strong, intelligent and inexhaustible, therefore invincible. It provides a particular way of representing and talking about what it means to be Mongolian at a particular time. Possibly by taking up wolf discourses and linking his body performance to the “ethnic hero” (Khan, 1995a) of Genghis Khan he was engaged in defining and historicizing a powerfully masculine ‘Self’.

Morigen further explained this position of *baqi* by citing a Chinese *chengyu, wenwen erya*, to position ‘*Hansheng*’. *Wenwen erya*, an etiquette advocated by Confucianism, reflects Confucian discourses that govern what is held to be the desirable way to act, feel and think as students in institutions. It privileges the disciplined, ‘civilized’ and ‘refined’ way of speaking and acting. Perhaps Morigen established a ‘superior’ subject and asserted power through abjection and inversion of the normative *wenwen erya*. He re-achieved the legitimization of himself as the dominant through repudiating the “not I”, the abjected other of ‘*Hansheng*’. With Wimmer’s (2008a) terminology, I read Morigen “reverse[d] the existing rank order” (p. 1037) at this particular moment. In this reading, Morigen’s self-consolidation as ‘superior’ macho man, informed by wolf discourses, temporarily destabilized the seemingly indisputable ‘truth’ about the ‘inferior’ or the ‘needy’ ‘*Mengsheng*’ in the prevailing Chinese academic scholarship and educational practice. This reading of temporary inversion points to the recent discussion of Chinese “national characters” by Chinese scholars (Ai, 2008; X. Gong, 2010; R. Jiang, 2004; X. Li, 2009; Ning, 2009; W. Yang, 2011; Y. Zhang & Fan, 2010; Zhong, 2005). Utilizing Mongolian wolf discourses, these scholars argue for a transfusion of Mongolian ‘wolf blood’ to the deeply-rooted Confucianism to salvage the historically dilapidated Chinese ‘sheepish’ ‘national character’.

However, an alternative and contradictory reading might emerge if I locate Morigen’s establishment of superior ‘Self’ within the official discourse of ethnic categorization. Is it possible to read that Morigen’s performance of his ‘Mongolian wolf’ further reinforced his minoritized status which consolidated ‘Han’s “middle kingdom mentality”’14? Was Morigen unwittingly complicit in reaffirming the state ethnic identification project and reproducing ethnic boundaries? However, while the

14 “middle kingdom mentality” refers to the tendency to consider ‘Han’ as the centre of the world and position non-‘Han’ others as ‘barbarian’ (Xianlin & Sigley, 2000) .
‘Mongolian wolf’ positioning might reproduce hierarchies, it also gives him a sense of power and pride. The point I am attempting to make here is not to mark off a boundary, signaling who is where, or whether students’ performances match up with their ‘Mongolianness’. Rather, my intention is to offer possible other readings of subject positions made available within the discourses through which they mobilize in establishing themselves as intelligible members of ‘Mongolian university students’. Further, potential position such as being ‘inferior’ or ‘superior’ is discursively relative and always shifting depending on the available discourses through which we try to make sense of. For Foucault (1994a), power is “mobile, reversible and unstable” (p. 292) such that individuals are never permanently or firmly placed in one fixed position.

When I asked him what he got most out of the basketball match, he commented that it helped him engage in active thinking as opposed to the passive learning of the classroom (“by playing I can think actively. In class my head is paralyzed”). Perhaps he was objecting to classroom rote-learning to legitimize basketball playing as more meaningful or exciting. By comparing basketball-playing with classroom learning, he might refer to the stifling effect of rote-learning where no thrill was recognized. Perhaps this objection to classroom learning was also informed by the regulatory curriculum discourse which produced lower expectations about ‘Mengsheng’s competency in the classroom. Or reflecting on the fact that I singled out this discourse for analysis – a masculinised, Mongolian low achieving student in the high achieving Han, female researcher eye, I can also read he wanted to resignify or delegitimize classroom discourses about himself to make himself a more desirable subject to a Han female researcher.

*Discourse of physical prowess*

During lunch in the canteen today, I was chatting with Chelegerer, who shared with me an interesting thing that happened this early morning in the dorm buildings.

“Sister Yongxia, you know what? This early morning around 2am, our dorm buildings were very quiet and everybody was asleep. Suddenly, there came the loud ear-piercing alarm sound of the motorcycle from the parking lot outside. The sound was so loud and annoying that everybody was woken up. We all got annoyed as we couldn’t sleep with such continuous and disturbing noise. By then, almost all room lights were on in the nearby dorm buildings. We saw from the window many students of other dorms looking out of the window for the noise. Everybody was complaining. But it seemed nobody was willing to go
outside to do something with the alarm noise of an unknown person’s motorcycle. It’s dark, as cold as -15 degree centigrade. We were just up with half-opened eyes. The alarm sound lasted around 10 minutes before we saw from the window one student coming out of building No. 4, smashing hard the motorcycle with a big stick. As it was dark, we couldn’t see clearly, but we heard the loud battering sound to the motorcycle. After that the motorcycle was silent and we were able to sleep again. We were sure he must be a Mengsheng (As he spoke, I saw a proud smile and excitement on his face)

“How do you know the guy is a Mengsheng?” I asked (I knew building No. 4 was a male accommodation building and there were both Mengsheng and Hansheng there.)

“You know, those Hansheng will never dare to do this sort of things. They are so wen zhouzhou (courteous, genteel-minded)” Chelegeer responded while eating.

“Why not call the security or the guard on duty to settle the alarm noise?” I asked.

“Don’t you know those people can never be relied on? They never do practical things (bu ban shishi). They only know checking our presence or forbidding us to use electronic appliance, or making up various damn rules for us to obey” he said.

“Will this Mengsheng be reported for dealing with the motorcycle with violence?” I asked.

“Not violence, I am afraid. That’s our way. Maybe violence in your eyes. Anyway, nobody reported because people are afraid of us, including teachers!” He answered while looking me into the eye. (Fieldnotes, June 23rd, 2012)

The male student in the episode narrated by Chelegeer, was positioned to be a ‘Mengsheng’ because ‘Hansheng’ were “wen zouzou” and “never dare(d) to do this sort of things”. Chelegeer’s description of the male student spoke into existence a ‘hero’ Mongolian subject through the very action of “smashing” and “battering”. The hero student was identified to be a ‘Mengsheng’ possibly informed by the discourse of Mongolian physical prowess which conceptualizes ‘Mengsheng’ as engaging in aggressive and untamed physical behaviors.

Through normative inversion, ‘Mengsheng’ inverted the hierarchical intelligibility of ‘normative’ behaviors. Specifically, Chelegeer transformed the normative hierarchical matrix utilizing competing discourses to re-constitute what it meant to be an ‘appropriately-behaved’ student. Stopping the noise, even if through bashing the motorcycle, was constructed by Chelegeer as a highly valued ‘heroic’ deed that ‘cultured’ ‘Hansheng’ never dared to do. In a sense, Chelegeer temporarily inverted the
dominant myth of ‘Han’ culturalism and questioned what was ‘normal’ and ‘appropriate’ in the institution. Understood in this way, Chelegeer in this particular context of emergency, afforded ‘Mengsheng’ “positional superiority” (Schein, 2000, p. 128) over those constituted as ‘civilized Hansheng’. Reading further into this positional superiority, I suggest the normative inversion may end up serving the normative regime in that it kept ‘Mengsheng’ in the position to do this ‘dirty’ work without the risk of losing their status too much. ‘Hansheng’ would lose their image but for ‘Mengsheng’ this act fits within the ‘cultural conventions’. In this way, normative inversion is both used in the service of de-normalization and re-materialization of the normative hierarchy (Butler, 1993). Therefore, normative inversion in this case serves as a site of a certain ambivalence, one which both reflects and inverts the power regime by which it is constituted (Butler, 1993).

Chelegeer’s reply to my question on the administrative role, illustrated the ways in which disciplinary practices demanded and maintained hegemonic wen (cultured, civilized) performances. His positioning of administrative personnel as unreliable, with only the knowledge to check presence, forbid the use of electronic appliances or make rules, might point to the supervising functions of the specialized personnel in disciplinary institutions. For Foucault (1977), in institutions there is a coercing mechanism of observation that “functioned like a microscope of conduct” (p. 173), so that all activities could be recorded and serious offenses be intervened or altered. The technico-political register “constituted by a set of regulations and calculated methods for controlling or correcting the operations of the body” (Foucault, 1977, p. 136) makes possible the production of docile and subjected bodies. Perhaps Chelegeer’s positioning of institutional staff as only checking and making rules signaled the very materiality of them as a tool and instrument of power that functioned to supervise individuals, and to neutralize dangerous and disruptive behaviors (Foucault, 1977), enforcing wenized behaviors as the most favored and acceptable form of being a student.

I then asked him if the ‘violent’ way of addressing the issue would be reported. Chelegeer rejected my use of the word ‘violent’ and insisted it was their way. His reply challenged me to begin questioning my own assumptions about the normative ideal. I came to realize how my own understandings of wen paradigms stood in sharp contrast to how ‘Mengsheng’ understood and performed masculinity. He positioned other
students and teachers as afraid of ‘Mengsheng’ by mobilizing the discourse of Mongolian physical prowess. In this reading, this discourse might become the primary venue for ‘Mengsheng’ to take up a discourse of power in the university where ‘Hansheng’ and institutional authorities were positioned by him as ‘weak’, or ‘soft’ at this particular moment of emergency.

If read within the official categorization scheme, Chelegeer’s statement of “that’s our way” might restate their differences and stereotypes as ‘violent’ and ‘cannot be dealt with’. Therefore, the statement constituted another essentializing assumption which did not trouble the ethnic boundaries. Is it possible that ‘their way’ signaled an intensification of minority exclusionism which underpins the fiction of ‘Han’ culturalism? Was Chelegeer inadvertently engaged in keeping the ‘Han’ culture dominant through demarcating himself from ‘Han’? Would Chelegeer’s discursive exclusion of ‘Han’ signal a similar reiteration of the ‘Han’ culturalism deployed by the dominant group to ascertain control over the subjected? Butler (1993) argues that the “exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed thus requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abjected beings, those who are not yet ‘subject’, but who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject” (1993, p. 3). Thus Chelegeer became complicit in the construction of dominant ‘Han’ culturalism because domination of ‘Han’ culturalism needs the very “domain of abjected being” for its intelligibility.

**Discourse of physical appearance**

During a class break, I saw Nabuqi came to the platform to erase the blackboard. She then practiced Mongolian calligraphy on the blackboard. She wrote: “I am a Mongolian” in her mother language while singing Mongolian songs. Other students were chatting loudly in Mongolian to each other. As I was observing her writing, I felt myself a stranger in a strange land. At this time, the classroom door opened gently. A male student came into the room. Nabuqi stopped her writing and stared at the ‘stranger’ up and down. He looked thin, around 1.65 meters tall. He directly went to the back row desk to get a schoolbag and notebook. As he was about to leave the room with his bag, Nabuqi shouted in Mongolian loudly “Wude gei haga, tegunyigalagahuwugei!”, the whole room immediately burst into laughter.

In the gale of laughter, the male student turned red and lowered his head, hurriedly leaving the room with his bag.
I was left confused. When I asked Nuomituya what Nabuqi said that caused laughter and his flushing face, she translated smilingly for me in Chinese:

“Close the door, don’t let him out!”

Nuomituya further added with a wink of eye, “You know, he is a Hansheng!”

“How did you know?” I asked surprisingly.

“Male Mengsheng looked tough and strong, because, mm, we eat meat and drink milk every day. Our cheeks are red, because we are often exposed to strong sunrays and harsh wind in our hometown. Hansheng look very slim, mm, their skins look much lighter and softer (xipi nenrou)! Hansheng are good students, they like to study, they carry a heavy schoolbag everyday!” (Fieldnotes, June 28th, 2012)

In an interview with Nabuqi, I brought up this incident to her, she said:

Oh, that, it’s just for fun (naozhe wande)! (Interview, July 4th, 2012)

Before the male student came into the classroom, Nabuqi was writing Mongolian calligraphy “I am a Mongolian” and singing Mongolian songs. Other students were also engaged in talking in Mongolian to each other. As Mongolian speakers, students spoke their mother language which made me feel being excluded to a peripheral position. As a ‘mainstream Han’ operating within my own cultural discourse, at that very moment faced with the unfamiliar but powerful Mongolian culture, I was produced as a ‘minority minzu’ in an environment dominated by ‘Mengsheng’.

As the male student came into the classroom, Nabuqi stopped writing and stared at this ‘stranger’ up and down. Taking a Foucauldian perspective, this exact observation, or the “techniques that make it possible to see induce effects of power” (Foucault, 1977, p. 170). Power was exercised through her hierarchized and functional observation which rendered him clearly visible. This calculated gaze made it possible to know, assess and judge him. By choosing to leave the room, the male student produced himself not as the passive object (Foucault, 1980) of Nabuqi’s continuous surveillance. Developing an alternative, he escaped the objectification by ‘Mengsheng’. Seeing the male student fetching the schoolbag and immediately leaving, Nabuqi shouted in Mongolian loudly “close the door, don’t let him out!” Judging by his physical appearance, she marked him as a ‘Hansheng’. As explained by Nuomintuya, through contrast, ‘Hansheng’ were perceived to be slim, with lighter and softer skin. They were seen to be good students, and they liked to study carrying a schoolbag everyday. This appeared to reinforce the representation of normative wen man because of the Confucian association of manliness.
with being literary-oriented, disciplined and academically-committed (Brownell & Wasserstrom, 2002). On the contrary, ‘Mengsheng’ were seen to be tough, strong and red-cheeked because of their beef-eating habit and long exposure to sunrays developed from their nomadic lifestyle, all of which reaffirmed the masculinized wu man. Nabuqi twisted the ‘Hansheng’/’Mensheng’ matrix to achieve some political ends to control the conduct of others. By drawing upon the discourses of physical appearance and making contrast between ‘Hansheng’ and ‘Mengsheng’, ‘Mengsheng’ found a tangible and powerful collective self-image. Just as the feminized representation of Chinese southern minorities is essential for the definition of a superior ‘Han’ (Gladney, 1991, 1994; Schein, 1990, 2000), the wenized portrayal of ‘Hansheng’ provided the contrastive position against which the masculinized ‘Mengsheng’ might distinguish and define themselves. ‘Hansheng’ were assigned as a foil for their masculinized position. This physical positioning of ‘Hansheng’ and ‘Mengsheng’ also highlighted how the competing discourses of masculinity made their way into the social fabric of nationality university settings, and were used strategically by ‘Mengsheng’ to invert the order of the conventional hierarchy.

It is possible to read Nabuqi’s choice of Mongolian language at this particular moment as a strategy of the normative inversion and reinforcement of a ‘superior’ minoritized ‘Self’. As suggested by scholars (K. Li, 2013; Taynen, 2006; Zhao, 2007b, 2010b), minority language, though socially marginalized, is sometimes utilized by ‘minority minzu students’ as a means to form a clique and marginalize outsiders. Judging the male student to be a ‘Hansheng’ who might not understand Mongolian language, Nabuqi spoke Mongolian to exclude him and assert domination. The discursive exclusion produced material effects – ‘Mengsheng’ burst into laughter while the “male student turned red and lowered his head, hurriedly leaving the room with his bag”. Understood in this way, not only the male student, but I were excluded as what she said at that moment was totally unintelligible to me. Perhaps the discursive practices that ‘Mengsheng’ were engaged in can also be read within the Mongolian wolf discourses. Mongolian wolf discourses offered the whole classroom of ‘Mengsheng’ the metaphorical position of ‘Mongolian’ ‘wolf pack’ which they actively took up and used to rigorously exclude any potential access of the ‘Other’ from the ‘Self’ to maintain its boundaries, ‘purity’ and ‘cleanliness’.
Paradoxically, when I brought up this vignette to Nabuqi in the interview, she commented on her practices as just for fun. At that moment she seemed to deny any possible positions in the previous vignette and refused any fixed, unitary or stabilized definition of herself. What is significant here is the multiplicity and fluidity of students’ subjectivities constructed from a variety of discursive practices each time they spoke and acted.

However, if read within the discourse of the dominant categorization regime, Nabuqi and her peers’ exclusion of ‘Hansheng’ might call into question whether the strategy of the normative inversion is effective enough to disrupt ethnic boundaries. Since the regime of ‘Han’ culturalism must constantly watch for its boundaries against the ‘pollution’ of the minoritized cultural forms, is it possible that Nabuqi and her peers’ exclusionary practices fortify the regime of ‘Han’ culturalism in its self-sustaining task (Butler, 1990)? Would Nabuqi’s practices inadvertently reinforce that boundary-policing? Is it possible that Nabuqi’s engagement in collective self-representation serves to reproduce and harden the ‘ethnic’ boundaries by defining the common characteristics of ‘outsiders’ or ‘insiders’?

Transgressing ethnic boundaries: Subversive repetition

While many ‘Hansheng’ advised me not to get male ‘Mengsheng’ as my participants due to their potential ‘violent’ behaviors, male ‘Mengsheng’ proved to be the most difficult ones to get consent to participate in the research. For instance, there was one ‘Mengsheng’ in whom I was particularly interested and I would like to have included in my research. I was interested in him because during a classroom observation, I found Morigen exhibited ‘disruptive’ behaviors by continuing to talk to peers about the “Big Mongolia” lyrics he had just finished. He refused to sit down after the teacher had punished him by making him stand up for 10 minutes. After class, at my request he agreed to let me look at the lyrics. His friend Bayi translated it into Chinese for me:

Big Mongolia

Between heaven and the earth, the broad-minded Mongolian, their blood of Genghis Khan; The strong Mongolian warriors, unchallengeable, built the Mongolian world; Under the fight banner, the Mongolian warriors were ready, they ignored the crudeness and strength of the rivals; resourceful Genghis Khan unmatchable, he trained our Mongolian soldiers; Their glorious past, is praised generation by generation; their wolf spirit still encourages his offspring; Big
I was fascinated by the lyrics that positioned Mongolians as the “broad-minded” and “unchallengeable” “warriors” with “wolf spirit” and with a glorious past led by the “unmatchable” and “resourceful Genghis Khan”. It seemed this masculinized representation fraught with the wolf spirit was exalted by Morigen as a key signifier of the glorious historical past of Mongolian military expansions. The lyrics constructed a historically miraculous establishment of a Big Mongolian Empire led by Genghis Khan, their Mongolian ancestor, who created the world-shaking wonder through his aggressive military conquest of over half of the world. This particular way of speaking into existence Mongolian warriors with physical prowess, formed a sharp distinction to my ‘Han’ Confucian moral and philosophical background that advocates wen, i.e. literary art knowledge and courteous appearance in constituting an ideal personhood (Louie, 2002). Possibly these competing discourses on the ideal personhood has the boundary-generating function that contributed to the construction of a robust, military and tough Mongolian subject position as opposed to the ‘cultured and civilized’ ‘Han’. Khan (1995a) also argues that facing the overwhelming presence of ‘Han’, “the symbolism of Chinggis Khan functions as an increasingly salient identity boundary marker that sets them off from the dominant Han group in today’s Inner Mongolia” (p. 248). While I was attracted by my construction of the ‘exotic Other’, Morigen’s subsequent response to my invitation to participate in my research reduced me to frustrating embarrassment:

“My face will easily turn red talking to female teachers!” (Fieldnotes, May 1st, 2012)

When I introduced my project to students to recruit participants for the first time, I felt warmly welcomed by the students’ thunderous and long-lasting applause (see chapter 6). However, Morigen’s refusal to participate, unexpectedly reduced me into wordless embarrassment and frustration. I thought, since I was respected as a researcher, as long as I proposed a request to participate, it would not be a problem for ‘minority minzu students’ to consent. By doing this, I was taking up the institutional discourse as well as the ‘Han’/’minority’ hierarchy that positions me, a ‘Han researcher’, as all-powerful and superior to a ‘minority minzu student’. His response can be read literally within the teacher/student dichotomy that positions him as a ‘shy’, ‘less communicative student’, ‘scared’ to talk to institutionally ‘higher’ positioned people. It’s also possible to read
him within the ‘Han’/’minority’ discourse which produces him as an ‘inferior’ ‘minority minzu student’. Or considering his lyrics fraught with hyper-masculinized representation and his decline of being involved in an ‘intellectual’ research project, I can also read him as a working-class macho man within the wen/wu matrix. In these readings, he had no other form of power, ultimately failing to live up to the expectation of a ‘cultured’, middle-class ‘Han researcher’.

As I was trying to figure out other ways of reading Morigen’s refusal to participate, I found Butler’s (1990) conception of “subversive repetition” (p. 147) particularly useful. Could Morigen’s failure to comply with my request suggest a subversive variation of the normative repetition? For Butler (1990), subversive repetition refers to the ‘strange’ or the ‘incoherent’ repetition which fails to repeat the cultural conventions of naturalized categories. Butler (1993) argues reiteration of materialization is never complete because bodies never act in strict accordance with the regulatory regimes:

   Indeed, it is the instabilities, the possibilities for rematerialization, opened up by this process that mark one domain in which the force of the regulatory law can be turned against itself to spawn rearticulations that call into question the hegemonic force of that very regulatory law (p. 2).

In other words, it is precisely the inability to conform to the normative intelligibility of being a minoritized subject that provides the critical return to expose the bounded limits of such norm. I felt frustrated at Morigen’s refusal because the presupposition I made about his subjectivity as a minoritized student was suddenly and significantly confounded by Morigen’s discursive practices that failed to maintain ‘ethnic’ boundaries, i.e. failed to comply with or reiterate rules of ‘Mengsheng’s ‘minoritized’ status. Therefore, the normative regime “produces the necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated” (Butler, 1990, p. 145). Through subversive repetition, Morigen subverted power relations, and by stressing his difference from me (he was male and I was female), seized power through the take up of heterosexual discourse. Within this discourse, I was made the object of his male sexual gaze. I was cast as the less powerful object of patriarchal oppression, unable to wield power as signified in the institutional discourse. Neither was he uniquely positioned by his institutional or minzu status as an ‘inferior’ minority with ‘low-intelligence’ or being a ‘less communicative’ ‘minority minzu student’. Neither was I a powerful researcher with an all-seeing I/eye.
As he was a male ‘Mengsheng’, I was a female ‘Han researcher and teacher’, he was parodying the institutional and ‘ethnic’ hierarchies through the utilization of the heterosexual discourse to “overrule” (Staunæs, 2005, p. 155) and “transgress” (Staunæs, 2005, p. 155) ‘ethnic’ boundaries. This specific heterosexual deployment of institutional and ‘ethnic’ constructs can be read as a significantly subversive redeployment of precisely those ‘characteristics’ that appear to belong to ‘authoritative’ bodies (Butler, 1990, 1993). Thus it produced the denaturalizing effects that displaced the regulatory distinctions, effectively mocking the pretentions of authoritative discourses, which made me feel embarrassed and frustrated at that time. Not only this, but I was disappointed because I felt like a failed researcher losing power, not even being able to get the participant. Read in this way, the presence of institutional and ‘ethnic’ boundaries “becomes the site of parodic contest and display” (Butler, 1990, p. 124) that deprives conventional norms of their claims to ‘universal truth’ and achieves a “subversive and parodic redeployment of power” (Butler, 1990, p. 134). Morigen’s parodic act of subversive repetition exemplified an understanding of the ‘natural’ world of institutional and ‘ethnic’ categorizations as the fictive one, as the socially regulated, and one that might be alternatively constructed. His strategic redeployment of power signaled his capacity, in terms of Staunæs (2005), of the “doing of intersectionality” (p. 155) of multiple discourses. It transgressed and resignified the very normative constructs and effectively rendered the hierarchical boundaries problematic (Butler, 1990).

Surprisingly, I got Morigen’s consent through reading the book *Wolf Totem*¹⁵. During a class break, I was reading this book when Morigen and his peer Bayi approached me, both commenting it was a good book for me to start with knowing their ‘Mongolianness’. Morigen then expressed his willingness to be my participant, suggesting:

> You can turn to me whenever you have difficulty understanding Mongolian culture. I am from the Qinghai grazing area. There you can find the trail of the ancient nomadic Mongolian. (Fieldnotes, May 5th, 2012)

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¹⁵ This semi-autobiographic book, winner of the inaugural Man Asian Literary Prize in 2007, sold over 500,000 copies within two weeks. By 2007, it had been printed 30 times and sold over 1.13 million copies (Ying, 2011).
Initially I was curious to figure out a definite reason that made him switch his mind suddenly to be involved in my project. Over time I became less obsessed with his reasons but focused more on the discourses we were operating and co-constructing. I was reading that book at that time because it was unanimously suggested by my other participants if I were to better understand their ‘Mongolianness’. By reading the *Wolf Totem*, I was trying to understand the potential storyline in which ‘Mengsheng’ were possibly operating, the Mongolian wolf storylines that might fit inside the discourses with which they were familiar. Perhaps his consent to participate and the ‘generous’ offer to help me whenever I had difficulty were informed by this researcher’s desire. He knew I desired his consent for my research. He knew as a ‘Mengsheng’ from the grazing area he preserved ‘Mongolianness’ better than sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ because in the grazing area one could find “the trail of the ancient nomadic Mongolian”[16]. In this reading he produced himself powerfully, not only as a ‘real’ Mongolian’ by drawing upon the authentic discourse, but as a way to ‘hook’ my fascination by reducing me to depend on him for obtaining any ‘authentic’ and desirable knowledge. In this understanding, Morigen’s consent and the offer to help subjected me to a position of a passive ‘Other’, relying on his ‘authentic’ assistance to ‘mine’ any meaningful data for my research and for my desire. Hence, I became the constitutive outsider, or what he was not, to establish the ‘essential function’ of his ‘Mongolianness’. In this sense, instead of the all-seeing and all-knowing educator portrayed in Chinese minority education practices (Shang & Kang, 2010; Liu Yi, 2010), ‘being’ a ‘Han researcher’ at that moment became a ‘being for’ a ‘Mongolian university student’ subject who actively sought to reaffirm and augment his subjectivity through emphasis of my ‘being for’.

Other possible discourses keep coming to mind when I ponder upon his previous discursive practice of “my face will easily turn red talking to female teachers”. If the heterosexual is one of the available discourses he might be operating in, then is it possible to suggest his discursive act of consenting to participate and offering to help me was an exercise of the male sexual power to flirt with a female, or a student to flirt with a ‘teacher’, or a *Mengsheng* male to seduce a Han female, to ensure a ‘female teacher’’s total subservience to the male student control? If this is the possible reading, then it might imply that agonism for power between participants and I was a permanent

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[16] I will discuss sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ and grazer ‘Mengsheng’ in detail in the next chapter.
political task inherent in my ethnographic encounters, where I had to be constantly engaged in the recalcitrance of the dominant masculine will superimposed upon me (also see chapter 6).

Discussion

In this chapter, I have provided some potential readings of students’ discursive strategies of boundary reproduction and transgression. In some particular situations, just as ‘Hansheng’ utilized the exclusionary practice to reproduce normative hierarchies, ‘Mengsheng’ took up the same exclusionary strategy to re-interpret and reverse the existing ranking order. Under these situations, ‘Mengsheng’ seemed to utilize a variety of discourses to rework the existing stratified order in the normative ethnic hierarchy, such as the discourse of sports, Mongolian wolf, Mongolian masculinity, national character, physical prowess, disciplinary technology, physical appearance and Mongolian language. ‘Mengsheng’ might be read as powerfully positioned within these discourses. However from the perspective of Butler (1990, 1993), one might ask: Does the normative inversion succeed in reversing the hierarchy or is this a reversion in the service of perpetual re-consolidation for the dominant regime? It is possible that the normative inversion is understood as both reproducing and valorizing ethnic boundaries in the process of refusing essentializing claims (Butler, 1990) of ‘Hansheng’s ‘superiority’. Although the normative inversion provides a transient escape from the hierarchical normality, it cannot enter into the dialogic by which the hegemonic categorization scheme rearticulates its power to free itself away from the shackles of essentialism (Butler, 1990).

In my reading of Morigen’s red-faced vignette, I have utilized Butler’s (1990) notion of subversive repetition. As ‘Mengsheng’ are essentialized and naturalized as the ‘inferior’ and ‘powerless’ ‘Other’ by the regulatory regime, the fixity of normative force that hierarchies is called into question by “the very exterior regions of that boundary” which “will constitute the disruptive return of the excluded” (Butler, 1993, p. xx) from within the logic of dominant regime. From the perspective of Butler (1990, 1993), Morigen in this particular situation utilized the subversive repetition intersectionally (Staunæs, 2005) to “rewrite the history of the term and to force it into a demanding resignification” (Butler, 1993, pp. 21-22). He transgressed ethnic boundaries of being a minoritized and powerless subject to construct a powerful male subject position within the heterosexual
discourse. In this sense, construction is a temporary and fluid process that both produces and destabilizes social categories in the process of reiteration of norms (Butler, 1993). Given such reading, my task is not to consider this abjection as a threatening rebellion against the social norms, but to repeat the norms subversively, and in the very process of repetition undo the essentializing effects of the normative regimes.
Chapter 5 Contracting and Rejecting Ethnic Boundaries

In chapter 4, I explored how ‘Mongolian university students’ reproduced and transgressed ethnic boundaries in their social interactions with ‘Han’. This chapter shifts the main focus from exclusionary practices between ‘Mongolian students’ and ‘Han’ to exclusionary practices among ‘Mongolian students’. What I demonstrate is that in the micro-dynamics of constituting the discursive category of ‘Mongolian university students’ as social practices, students are not only involved in reproducing or transgressing ethnic boundaries, but continually engaged in contracting (Wimmer, 2008a, 2008b) and rejecting ethnic boundaries. I will start this chapter with an introduction of “boundary contraction” (Wimmer, 2008a, p. 30) using Wimmer’s (2008a) terminology. Using the fieldnotes, the audiotaped informal conversations and interview data, I will then explore how the boundary contraction and rejection work is achieved, what implicit assumptions or criteria are employed and what effects they potentially produce. I will conclude this chapter with a summary of how students’ engagements in negotiation of multiple boundaries of ‘Mongolian university students’ construct shifting and contradictory subjectivities.

Negotiation of ethnic boundaries – contracting and rejecting ethnic boundaries

Scholars (R. Jiang, 2004; Khan, 1995b) have identified regional discourses of being Mongolian in contemporary China: sedentary Mongolians and grazer Mongolians. Sedentary Mongolians are also called the northeastern Mongolian. They are often considered to be better assimilated to Han culturalism than the western grazer Mongolians as consequences of the flooding Han settlement in the northeastern Inner Mongolia (Jiang, 2004). From early 1900s to 1947, Han peasants from central China flooded Inner Mongolia to avoid civil war and natural disaster (Fei, 2003). After they settled down, they took up agriculture, intermarried with Mongolians and converted vast fertile grasslands into non-sustainable farmland. Meanwhile “the nomadic area shrank, the population expanded and the grasslands degraded rapidly” (Z. Wu & Du, 2008, p. 17). By 1949, two thirds of Mongolian in Inner Mongolia had relinquished the nomadic life and became sedentary Mongolians (Iredale, et al., 2001). After 1949, the region

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17 In 1912, there were 1.5 million immigrated Han in Inner Mongolia. The figure rose to 4.7 million in 1947 (Iredale, Bilik, Su, Guo, & Hoy, 2001, p. 109), 20 times larger than Mongolian population (Z. Wu & Du, 2008).
experienced high rate of Han immigration as a result of government policy for regional constructions and economic developments as well as high birth rates. Since the opening-up reform in late 1990s, especially the well-known state campaign of West Development in 2000, which aimed at modernizing ‘minority minzu’ regions to integrate them social-economically with Han regions, massive population migrations occurred in Inner Mongolia (Rong Ma, 2010). Nowadays, sedentary Mongolians, known as northeastern Mongolian (dongbei mengguzu), connote ‘semi-Mongolian’ who speak mixed Mongolian language and adopt Han lifestyle (R. Jiang, 2004). By contrast, there are relatively fewer Han settlers in western grazing areas in Inner Mongolia, therefore western places are seen as less developed. But grazer Mongolians in west Inner Mongolia are better able to preserve their traditional lifestyle than the sedentary (northeastern) Mongolians (Z. Wu & Du, 2008).

As I read my fieldwork data, I found an interesting phenomenon between grazer ‘Mengsheng’ and sedentary ‘Mengsheng’. Within specific contexts, grazer ‘Mengsheng’ seem to construct themselves as ‘authentic Mongolians’ through social exclusion of sedentary ‘Mengsheng’, positioning the latter as ‘Hanized Mongolian’, thus narrowing the boundary of ‘authentically’ doing ‘Mongolian’. They seem to rework the ethnic boundaries and draw them narrower than the majority ‘Han’ group who lump together grazer and non-grazer ‘Mongolian students’. In describing this discursive strategy, I found Wimmer’s terminology of boundary contraction particularly resonating with me. For Wimmer (2008a), “boundary contraction” is defined as:

Drawing narrower boundaries and thus disidentifying with the category one is assigned to by outsiders. Contraction may be achieved through fission – splitting the existing category into two – or by shifting emphasis to lower levels of differentiation in multi-tiered systems of ethnic classification (p. 1036).

For instance, Asian immigrants of Chinese origin and mainland Chinese in America distinguish themselves from Japanese and Taiwanese by insisting on original place instead of being grouped together under the broader categorical pot of ‘Asian’ (Wimmer, 2008a). Wimmer (2008a) also cites another example of ‘ethnic’ localism of a Mexican indigenous group who separate themselves from the Spanish-speaking elites. Utilizing

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Horowitz’s terminology of “fission”, Wimmer (2008a) further gives an example of African-American elite clubs before the civil rights movement, which subdivide the ‘black category’ by distinguishing between lighter and darker skins and belittling the latter. As Wimmer (2008a) argues, “in all these examples emphasis is shifted to lower levels of existing ethnic divisions” (p. 1036). Therefore I use his terminology of boundary contraction to describe the prevalent strategy used by grazer ‘Mengsheng’ and sedentary ‘Mengsheng’. They seem at some particular situations to shift the ‘ethnic’ boundaries through contraction, disidentifying or excluding each subgroup. Implied in this mechanism of contraction, is the situational process of “categorical fission” (Horowitz, 1977, cited in Wimmer 2008a, p. 1037). However, different from Wimmer (2008a, 2008b) who tries to exhaust the various boundary making strategies for minority groups, I utilize Wimmer’s concept of boundary contraction from a poststructural perspective. Through my poststructuralist move, I wish to highlight that instead of being a unitary or singular structural entity, ‘Mongolian university students’, and the variously assigned and shifting memberships to subgroups, represent a plethora of groups with diverse backgrounds and shifting understandings of what belonging to these groups encompass. The meaning of ‘Mongolianness’, of whom should be included or excluded from the category is an object of controversy within and among ‘Mongolian university students’, though the dominant ethnic categorization scheme insists on ‘lumping’ groups together. It also indicates that what it means to be a ‘Mongolian university student’ is indisputably uncertain.

However, it’s important to point out that my analysis of boundary contraction does not aim to demarcate a divide between students to find out what ‘Mongolianness’ really is, nor to determine who is ‘real’, who is ‘fake Mongolian’, or whose actions ‘actually’ match up with the universal ‘truth’ about ‘Mongolianness’. My purpose is to analyze operating discourses, the discourses students mobilize or deploy as effective and relevant in constructing themselves as competent and intelligible members of the category. In particular situations, they take up discourses that they recognize as legitimate, appropriate and valid, and in doing so they categorize themselves and are being categorized as belonging to a particular social group of which they are recognizable and legitimate members.
More interestingly, there are situations where ‘ethnic’ boundaries or ‘Mongolianness’
are not always emphasized while other boundaries such as being a student are
highlighted. What I suggest is that in the process of constructing their multiple
subjectivities, ‘Mongolian university students’ are continually involved in negotiating
diverse and contradictory discourses, contracting, shifting and rejecting ‘ethnic’
boundaries and inventing new boundaries to “eclipse power with power” (Butler, 1997,
p. 14). In the following, I will explore how ‘ethnic’ boundaries are continually
constructed and rejected, which discourses participants might mobilize in the process of
constituting ‘Mongolianness’ by excluding other subgroups, how they delegitimize
‘ethnic’ categorization and break through the boundedness of ‘Mongolianness’ as
potential strategies, and how they might position themselves in certain ways in these
processes.

**Contracting ethnic boundaries**

**Seat distribution**

In observing Wudamu’s class (‘Mengsheng’ class), I noticed an interesting pattern.
There was a clear space distributional pattern of seats: sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ were
seated in the front and middle. Grazer ‘Mengsheng’ were unanimously seated at the
back. After the day’s foreign literature class, I brought up this peculiar phenomenon to
Wudamu on our way to her dorm. She explained:

That always happens. They choose to sit together with their hometown fellows
at the back. Even if there was an empty seat near us, they would never choose to
sit with us. They are backseat people, they don’t like to study as our sedentary
Mengsheng do. Even though some win the honorable titles, that doesn’t mean
they are good students. Last time, our teacher told us to select “Three Good
Students” and “Excellent Cadres”, but they only voted their Ximeng grazer
Mengsheng! You know, everybody knows we sedentary Mengsheng study better
than them. I even ranked among the top three in my overall scores. But because
we have more Ximeng grazers than us sedentary students in our class, Ximeng
students won the vote. When a surprised teacher in another class asked me why I
had failed, I replied, “it was voted by students, not by teachers.” The teacher
then nodded his head. He knew what happened among us.”

By this time, we arrived at the left side of the fourth floor where her dorm was
located. There were six dorms next to each other for her female classmates. In
each dorm lived six students. (There were 49 Mengsheng in her class, mostly are
from grazer Mengsheng.) While we passed the grazer females dorms, she
watched over the locked dorms and she told me in a lower voice, “these grazers
went out binge drinking again!”. I was shocked at hearing that females did binge drinking!

“Why didn’t you go with them?” I probed.

“They never tell us when they are out drinking! They think they are real Mongolians, we are Hanized. But you know, we live in such Han areas that we have our own way of being Mongolian! What’s more, drinking is not allowed. When they sneak back at night, their faces are all very red!” Wudamu said while looking at their locked door.

“Why didn’t they tell you?” I asked.

“They have their own hometown clique! You see, they are now in our areas (zai women dipanshang), but they are so arrogant! (Fieldnotes, May 10th, 2012)"

I will provide a possible reading of the boundary contraction in the above vignette by identifying Foucault’s (1977) technologies of disciplinary power: distribution, classification, surveillance and normalizing judgment. While Foucault (1977) argues that institutions operate disciplinary technologies to produce docile and appropriate subjects, these technologies seem to be deployed by students themselves. For instance, Wudamu recognized the classroom distribution. Sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ chose to sit in the front and the middle while the grazers sat in the back. For Foucault (1977), the technology of distribution constitutes material-spatial enclosure or “the specification of a place heterogeneous to all others and closed in upon itself” (p. 141), effectively and insidiously marking off a division between the world of sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ and that of the grazers. By using the pronoun of “they” in contrast to “us”, she might be engaged in maintaining the boundary so that both worlds may appear utterly distinct in this particular situation. Being a sedentary or grazer ‘Mengsheng’ thus seems to be associated with the specific geographic location in the classroom. She then commented that “they are backseat people, they don’t like to study as our sedentary Mengsheng do”. The material-spatial distribution thus implies rank, which is “the place one occupies in a classification” (Foucault, 1977, p. 145). Wudamu utilized the disciplinary location to characterize, assess and hierarchize students’ academic performance. Thus, the material-spatial distribution in the classroom makes it possible not only to mark place, but to “express the distribution of values or merits in material terms” (Foucault, 1977, p. 147). While this distribution might be culturally and contextual conditional, Manuel and Llamas’s (2006) exploration of university students’ subjectivity construction implies ‘good’ students tend to sit in the front to get as close to the lecturers as possible, while ‘unruly’ students choose back seats to avoid the teacher’s attention for any potentially
‘disruptive and inappropriate’ behaviors. Understood in this way, I suggest Wudamu judge grazer ‘Mengsheng’ to be academically ‘inferior’ by the seating location they chose to occupy.

Wudamu then narrated the story about the election for honorable titles in which grazer students overtook her despite her better academic performance. The reward of “Three Good Students” and “Excellent Cadres” can be read as a normalizing standard which places individual actions into a space of comparison, differentiation and normalizing principles to be followed. It quantifies students’ behaviors and performance, differentiating and hierarchizing good and bad students with ‘precision’ according to the arithmetical calculation of students’ natures, values or levels (Foucault, 1977). Through reward, normalizing judgment exercises over students a constant pressure to conform to norms and rules that must be observed (Foucault, 1977). These disciplinary techniques and knowledges, which “‘make’ us certain kind of people” (Danaher, Schirato, & Webb, 2000, p. 50), seemed to be utilized by Wudamu to hierarchize sedentary and grazer ‘Mengsheng’, marking distinction and assessing their values. Through the technology of normalizing judgment, she appeared to legitimize herself as ‘model minority’ student (“everyone knows we sedentary Mengsheng study better than them”, “I even ranked among the top three”), defending herself against grazer ‘Mengsheng’ s biased voting decision and justifying her claim to the honorable titles. Since the normalizing judgment “compares, differentiates, hierarchizes, homogenizes, excludes” (Foucault, 1977, p. 182), it also works to produce, characterize and sustain a domain of abject, i.e. the “unviable” (Butler, 1993, p. 188) grazer ‘Mengsheng’, as the category’s threatening ‘outside’ through a production and repudiation of the ‘Other’. Wudamu then cited an authoritative figure (the teacher) whose tacit response produced the effect of maintaining and reinforcing the artificial appearance of the grazer/sedentary division which was established through exclusion (“The teacher then nodded his head. He knew what happened among us”).

This production of grazer ‘Mengsheng’ as the spectre of abject beings reminds me of recent academic discourses on grazer ‘Mengsheng’. For instance, Siriguleng (2008) argues, “compared with independent-thinking and diligent Han peers, grazer Mengsheng lag far behind because they lack independent thinking and do-it-yourself ability, relying on passive rote-learning to acquire knowledge” (p. 4, my translation).
He explains that the reason for grazer Mengsheng’s “lack of good education is because they are from remote grazing areas where basic education is poorly-equipped and cultural life is relatively backward” (p. 7, my translation). By exploring grazer Mengsheng’s psychological attributes, Siriguleng (2008) summarizes special characteristics for grazer Mengsheng: “anxiety, puzzlement, inferiority, dependency, closeness and contentedness” (p. 3, my translation) attributable to their ‘special’ way of thinking and ‘backward’ home environment. Similarly, Liu, Siriguleng and Siqintuya (2010) argue that, because they are from remote, underdeveloped and backward grazing places, grazer Mengsheng facing the market economy are characterized by a sense of group enclosedness brought about by inferiority, anxiety and consumerism. Gerilegu (2010) also diagnoses grazer Mengsheng to have special psychological problems that urgently need to be remedied. In discussing the ‘problems’ of grazer ‘Mengsheng’, this body of current literature effectively establishes grazer ‘Mengsheng’ as the ‘problematic’. Perhaps by drawing on the well-established ‘truth’ of these discourses, a similar reasoning might have provided another discourse for Wudamu to normalize sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ as ‘better’ than the grazers (“everyone knows we sedentary Mengsheng study better than them”).

When we passed the grazer students’ dorms, Wudamu observed their locked doors and told me that they went out binge drinking again. Through her careful surveillance, Wudamu was able to observe, know and assess the conduct of grazer students, exercising disciplinary power in a subtle and silent way. As drinking is strictly banned on campus, Wudamu and also scholars diagnose some grazer ‘Mengsheng’ to exhibit ‘problematic’ behaviors (See for example Siriguleng, 2008). As Siriguleng (2008) further categorizes this as “useless consumption” (p. 9, my translation), grazer ‘Mengsheng’ are not only constructed as ‘problem students’, but also as ‘inappropriate citizens’ based on their consumption choices.

At that time, hearing Wudamu speaking, I was shocked because I had thought that females in general were less ‘unruly’ and less ‘deviant’ than males. I was operating on normative gender discourses that stressed female compliance, passivity and submission (“I was shocked at hearing that females went binge drinking!”). After I learnt that even grazer females engaged in binge drinking, I also took up the reified mainstream
construction of grazer ‘Mengsheng’ and positioned female grazers to be ‘disruptive’ and ‘less-feminized’.

As I asked Wudamu why she didn’t go with them, she demarcated two distinct imagined communities where grazer ‘Mengsheng’ were considered to self-crown with ‘real Mongolianness’ while sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ practiced their own way of being ‘Mongolian students’. It seemed she constituted the position of sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ as legitimate by formulating and enacting important reasons (“we live in such Han areas that we have our own way of being Mongolian!”). Her construction of sedentary ‘Mongolianness’, in a sense, produced the anti-essentializing effect of breaking through the hegemonic, static and rigid definitions of being ‘Mongolian’. However, her discursive use of the pronoun “they” as opposed to “we” seemed to suggest a naturalized identification with sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ and simultaneous exclusion of grazer ‘Mengsheng’, producing a similar bounded imagined community that constructed itself through the closure of discursive differentiation. She then exercised disciplinary power over grazer ‘Mengsheng’ through deploying a coercing apparatus of surveillance, observing that their red faces usually resulted from heavy drinking (“when they sneak back at night, their faces are all very red”). Her surveillance effectively made those ‘separated’ grazer ‘Mengsheng’ clearly visible and subject to her gaze.

When I further interrogated such a division between them, she drew upon the regional discourse to exclude grazer ‘Mengsheng’ as ‘arrogant’ non-sedentary ‘outsiders’ (“They have their own hometown clique! You see, they are now in our areas, but they are so arrogant!”). In this reading, being a sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ might point to the capacity of wider social contacts and local knowledge, underlying grazers’ relative placelessness and powerlessness for living away from their familiar environment, and with little local network. Perhaps by taking up this regional discourse, she was able to refute the validity and usefulness of hegemonic pastoralism constructed within the dominant discourse of cultural maintenance and achieve a temporarily powerful construction of sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ through abjection of the grazer as non-sedentary ‘outsiders’. Perhaps her use of the word “arrogant” served as a form of delegitimization of grazer ‘Mengsheng’s ‘authentic Mongolianness’.
Dorm chat

As arranged, today I went to Nabuqi’s dorm to have a chat with her. Nabuqi and her roommates were all grazer Mengsheng students in the school of Mongolian Studies. She asked me if I had been used to the canteen food here. When I told her I was about to return the canteen card to a student who would graduate in July, she and her roommates looked at each other, smiled and said, “He must be a Han. It’s only a matter of five yuan! What’s the point of asking it back! Only Han can be such a miser! We Mengsheng are more broad-minded (dazhang)!” Nabuqi commented.

Their reactions aroused my curiosity, prompting me to ask further questions, “What else makes a ‘Han’ different from Mengsheng?”

“We Mengsheng are pure and simple (chunpu)! They are cunning! Last time, I went to the library. I saw a Hansheng didn’t bring her library card, so I lent her my card. She told me she would return it to my dorm the next day. But two months passed, she didn’t return it to me at all! It cost me 300 yuan to open a new library card! Hans are not to be trusted!” Chaoriya stressed.

“We Mengsheng are more reliable (zhide xinlai)! We are not as talkative (bushan biaoda) as Hansheng, but our actions speak louder than words! In the election of student union member, those Hansheng were silver-tongued in promising what they were going to do for students. But after the election, they didn’t fulfill the promise. We Mengsheng spoke only a few words, but we ended up doing more practical things!” Nalan said.

“We have different ways of life from Hansheng. For us, knowledge is not only limited to books. When I was in my hometown in Ximeng, I never spent time studying books in spare time. I made Mongolian milk tea, I grazed cattle and sheep, sheared sheep, milked cows, made Mongolian robe, Mongolian dairy product, etc. I learnt to play horse-head violin with my grandpa. Before I played, the camel stayed far away from its children. When I played, the camel moved to tears. It then began to come closer to care for its children. I mean, we have more real life knowledge! (eyebrows up) I have never been to the extra English or math class like those Hansheng do (eyebrows down). My grandparents told me that life is short, we need to spend time making us happy instead of studying for exams all day!” Nabuqi added.

“Yes, that’s our grazer lifestyle! I began riding horse and camel when I was seven (I was astonished her riding a camel!). When I grazed sheep to faraway places, I visited nearby herder’s house for a meal and nap. When my clothes turned dirty, they gave me their clothes to wear, even though sometimes I didn’t know them. My grandma told me helping each other, learning to be honest is more important than studying well! We Mengsheng are loyal to friends. But to Han, a good student is a high score person. They turn to you when they need your help, but ignore you when they don’t need you. They are so narrow-minded, they only care for themselves.”

“But it seems what you are talking about is more about being a grazer Mongolian” I clarified.
“Yes, that’s what I am proud of, real ‘Mongolian’ (smiling)! When people talk about grazer Mongolians, they say that we were backward in economy, social and cultural development because we lived in remote areas. But to say we are backward means you are already without knowledge (meiyou zhishi), you are not cultured at all, you don’t know the least about Mongolian. Just imagine, how can a backward minzu create so many rich knowledge? How could Mongolians produce nutritional dairy products that can even cure the SARS disease if we were backward? You know, even the so-called advanced technology can do nothing about SARS! How could our Mongolian yogurt detoxify snake bite if we were backward? How could we invent the scientific Mongolian yurt, so environmental-friendly centuries ago if we were not cultured? Now people use coals, only to pollute the environment and cause sand-storm!”

“Yes! We real Mongolians are very conscious of environmental protection, because we have rules to respect nature. In our hometown, you can’t see garbage on the grassland. We never throw things carelessly on the grassland. We never spit, never dig holes. Hans always litter garbage everywhere. Here you see the broken glass, empty bottle on grass everywhere!”

“We even have different ways of greeting. When real Mongolians meet each other, they say “How are the sheep?” When Hans meet each other, they say “Have you eaten?” Nalan further added.

I noticed their obvious contempt of Hans. As a Han myself, I felt their comments upgraded to repudiation! Meanwhile I noticed they seemed to construct the meaning of being Mongolian students within the subgroup of grazer Mengsheng, so I asked, “What do you think of sedentary Mengsheng?”

“It’s true sedentary Mengsheng study better than us. But they are very much Hanized. You know, many of the interesting campus activities were organized by us grazer Mengsheng, like last Sunday’s wrestling game, Mongolian performance show, etc. We grazer Mengsheng were resourceful with creative ideas, because we, we are uninhibited (haofang), we just didn’t think much about all sorts of rules, or whether the teachers liked it or not. As long as we worked out the plan, we do it! Sedentary Mengsheng don’t dare to do. They are hesitant, always constrained by whether the teacher would be happy or not!” Nabuqi said.

“Yes, we like taking risks, we like trying new things!” Every time we organized class activities, we grazer Mengsheng put forth fresh new ideas, like visiting schools for the old, to see how they live their life, etc. We thought going outside would be better than just staying in the classroom, we would know more about the outside world. But the class teacher, a sedentary Mongolian, didn’t like our ideas. He insisted on activities inside the classroom. He claimed the school principal would not be happy if we went outside for collective activities. He said staying inside the classroom was safer and less business! How boring! We need to go outside the ivory tower, to see some non-student groups!” Qinggele said. (Audiotaped informal conversation, May 20th, 2012)

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19 SARS stands for Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome. It’s officially reported 349 people in mainland China died of SARS (Associated Press, 2004).
Looking at the vignette from the perspective of qualitative research as “a transactional process between and among” participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 111), I have come to see how my subjectivities and the dialogical relationship with participants in this particular interaction set the tone and the limit of the data collected. For instance, my presence as a non-local researcher triggered Nabuqi to question if I was used to the canteen food since I was far away from my familiar environment doing research there. Her question about canteen food reminded me of the canteen card that I needed to return to a graduate. This unwitting response immediately prompted her speculation of the minzu status of this graduate. The natural flow of interaction between and among us set off my subsequent question on the ‘Mongolian’-‘Han’ difference. Therefore, in a sense, the discourses that my presence mobilized led to the discursive production of their ‘Mongolianness’.

As participants talked about the ‘Mongolian’ – ‘Han’ differences, they were engaged in normalizing ‘Mongolianness’ by drawing on “the ‘synecdochic’ dominance of the pastoralist in the public identity of today’s Mongols in the PRC” (Khan, 1995b, p. 143). They also excluded sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ from the category of the ‘Mongolian’, thus drawing the ‘ethnic’ boundaries narrower. For instance, as participants cited the event of lending her library card to a ‘Han student’, and the election of student union members to construct the simple, pure and reliable ‘Mongolian’, they invoked the cultural construction of what grazer ‘Mongolian’ entails – “pure and simple” (Khan, 1995b).

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20 In the essay, Khan (1995b) elaborates on the symbolic dominance of pastoralism in the public image of minority Mongolian in Inner Mongolia. In post-Mao Inner Mongolia, 84% of the total population in the region are ‘Han’ and 82% of the ‘Mongolian’ population are non-grazers, the majority of which are sedentary ‘Mongolians’. However, the public image projected from mass media, architecture, official functions, restaurants are predominantly full of the imagery of the grazer ‘Mongolian’ (Khan, 1995b). According to Khan (1995b), TV shows and documentaries convey the constant theme of a grazer life with “immense sky, boundless wildness, sweeping winds across the grassland, making visible herds of cattle and sheep” (tiancangcang, yemangmang, fenchui caodi xianniuyang). Textbook covers are featured with ‘Mongolian’ images of people wearing traditional deel and boots. Official functions witness ‘Mongolian’ waitresses wearing ‘Mongolian’ dress or women in deel and boots holding hadag (Khan, 1995b). The conspicuous pictures in the train station of the city where I did the fieldwork portray the woman in ‘Mongolian’ robe looking into the distance outreaching her hands holding hadag. In the city where the university was located, I witnessed various ‘Mongolian’ cultural and sport activities held to revive traditional minzu culture under the sponsorship of commercial companies such as China Mobile or China Unicom. Khan (1995b) argues that the symbolic dominance of pastoralism reflects the hegemonic state discourse of cultural maintenance which results in the imagined creation of ‘minority minzu’ tradition as a commodity “displayed in the national cabinet of curiosities” (Khan, 1995b, p. 145), isolated from its cultural and historical specificity. White (1998) also adds that within the dominant discourse of authenticity, what it means to be a minority member “is reified, at least in terms of sanctioning or valorizing linguistic and certain other cultural practices” (White, 1998, p. 14).
1995b, p. 148), “broadminded and uninhibited” (p. 148), “free-spirited, and honest” (p. 129). In doing so, they reproduced and maintained the culturally intelligible contour of the ‘Mongolian’ body. As they talked of the grazer pastoral lifestyle such as making ‘Mongolian’ milk tea, grazing cattle and sheep, milking cows, wearing ‘Mongolian’ robes, playing the horse-head violin to move camels to tears, horse-riding, being friendly and protecting the environment, and commented about their greeting styles (“When real ‘Mongolians’ meet each other, they say “How are the sheep?”’, When ‘Hans’ meet each other, they say “Have you eaten?”), they reworked the already established convention of the grazer ‘Mongolian’ through the signifying chain, and in that invocation reconstituted ‘Mongolianness’. In this way, they were re-citing and echoing the authority of the hegemonic norm of ‘Mongolianness’. Participants enacted themselves ‘powerfully’ by seeking the authoritative symbolic convention of pastoralism that preceded them. The authority of official discourses here establishes ‘Mongolianness’ but not as a primary source of something original and fixed. For Butler (1993), “it is precisely through the infinite deferral of authority to an irrecoverable past that authority itself is constituted” (pp. 70-71). Butler (1993) argues “for discourse to materialize a set of effects, ‘discourse’ itself must be understood as complex and convergent chains in which ‘effects’ are vectors of power” (p. 187). This means to me that students’ performance of ‘Mongolianness’ relied on the repeated invocation of pastoralism to produce the materializing effects of ‘Mongolianness’ that concealed its own operation. It also means that performing ‘Mongolian student’ into existence may be understood as the resulting consequence of the rule-governed discourse of pastoralism that inserts itself in the ordinary discursive practices (Butler, 1990), where cultural intelligibility of ‘Mongolianness’ is historically variable, continually produced and contested. A specific example may be an understanding of the historicity of the normative pastoralism which establishes the power of discourse to produce what it names. Both Khan (1995b) and R. Jiang (2004) contend that in the early years of the founding of the PRC, and during the cultural revolution (1967-1977), sedentary ‘Mongolians’ were highly regarded by ‘Mongolian’ intellectuals and ‘Hans’ in general, while pastoralism was considered as a “barrier to modern independence, and therefore something to be drastically reformed” (Khan, 1995b, p. 150). Khan (1995b) explains further:
the attractiveness of the grazer is nothing essential; it is realized and motivated in a mutually defining Self-Other relationship informed by history and contemporary politics between the Mongols and the Han … it is the changes in the power relationship and the consequent dissolution of traditional structural boundaries between the Mongols and the Han in the PRC era, …, that have motivated the need, on the part of Mongol intellectuals, to attribute significant sociocultural values to the sign of the grazer and attach “repulsion” to the figure of the peasant, a figure that traditionally signifies the Han, but that has now come to signify an alarmingly real possibility for the “disappearance” through wholesale sinification of the Mongols as a group (p. 150).

Thus, as participants spoke themselves into existence, the discourse of pastoralism becomes a site for reconstitution and resignification of ‘Mongolianness’. By drawing upon this discourse, students took up the position of ‘authentic’ ‘Mongolian’ as a discursive strategy or the (re)signifying practice.

Embedded in this construction of ‘Mongolianness’ is the assumption of a domain of constitutive constraints that enables and sustains such construction (Butler, 1994). This means that while the regime of pastoralism operates to circumscribe, produce and normalize ‘Mongolianness’ in its intelligibility, it also engages in the production of the ‘unviable’ in its symbolic normativity. This operation to produce a domain of the ‘delegitimated’ bodies of sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ and ‘Han’ is achieved through barring them from cultural intelligibility – rendering culturally unintelligible those who exceed the regime of the normative pastoralism. This means the ‘abjected’ figures of ‘Han’ and sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ must be debunked for the ‘authentic’ ‘Mongolian’ position to be taken up. For instance, in constructing their ‘Mongolianness’, grazer students produced ‘Han students’ as ‘misers’, ‘cunning’, ‘silver-tongued’, ‘confined’ to book knowledge, ‘individualistic’ and ‘narrow-minded’, and littering everywhere. They positioned themselves as ‘resourceful’, ‘creative’ and ‘uninhibited’ in organizing various campus activities, while ‘othering’ sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ as being ‘Hanized’, ‘hesitant’, and the sedentary ‘Mongolian’ teacher as being ‘rule-bounded’ and ‘boring’ (“But they are very much Hanized”, “We grazer Mengsheng were resourceful with creative ideas, because we, we are uninhibited …we like taking risks, we like trying new things! They are hesitant, always constrained by whether the teacher would be happy or not!”).

Therefore, from the perspective of Butler (1990, 1993), I read this production of ‘Han’ and sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ as “the repetitive compulsion” and “abiding repudiation” (Butler, 1993, p. 59), which is required for the citation of pastoralism. The discourse of
grazer ‘Mengsheng’ contracts the boundary through the productive exclusion of ‘Han’ and sedentary ‘Mengsheng’.

As previously mentioned, the symbolic dominance of pastoralism in China is informed by the hegemonic discourse of cultural maintenance (Khan, 1995b). With this understanding, the ‘remote’ grazing hometown areas which are constructed by the discourse of progress as ‘backward’, are also the domains of the discourse of cultural maintenance possibly because the spatial isolation ensures purity – preservation of traditions (“When people talk about grazer Mongolians, they said we were backward because we lived in remote areas. But to say we are backward means you are already without knowledge (meiyou zhishi), you are not cultured at all. Just imagine how could Mongolians produce nutritional dairy products that can even cure the SARS disease if we were backward?”). Perhaps grazer ‘Mengsheng’ at this particular moment mobilized the discourse of cultural maintenance and pastoralism to exempt themselves from the ‘backwardness’ positioned within the discourse of progress. This reading not only reflects the intrinsic contradictions of the dual hegemonic discourses – discourses of progress and cultural maintenance in state minoritization policies (White, 1998), but reflects the way students negotiate changing positions by moving within and between discourses through which they are being constituted.

**Rejecting ethnic boundaries**

*Sports meeting: the first day of the opening ceremony*

Today I went to the Olympic Sports Centre to attend the three-day sports meeting. When I arrived at the Sports Center at 8.30am, students were already seated in the audience areas. The Sports Centre was a circular stadium. Different schools of students were assigned different audience areas. It is a university-wide activity, around 15,000 students from 43 schools were required to be present. The opening ceremony started with the introduction in both Chinese and Mongolian. Government officials and the university leaders were invited to attend. They were seated in the chair area… The broadcasters then announced the various parading groups – the first to come was the guards of honor. Six students wearing military uniforms were escorting the national flag while the broadcasters explained: “national flag symbolizes 1.1 billion Chinese people united as one…” Then came another ten students who were marching in military steps holding the university flag. “… The university flag is like a beautiful minzu flower, embedded in the gorgeous Kerqin pasture”, the announcer explained. The following four students wearing white suits were holding the post of university symbol. “The university symbol represents minzu

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21 I introduced this point in the state policy section in chapter 4.
unity and our university’s ethnic characteristics! ...” said the announcer. The last six students wearing military uniform were holding the sign of the sports meeting axiom: “Exercise the body, contribute to the motherland (duanlian shenti, baoxiao zuguo)!”

Then came the parading groups of various schools, marching in military steps in unison around the circular sports field. In each group, the leading student holding the school flag with the school name on it, was followed by two male students in black suits. Behind them were the main body of the group consisting of nine rows, with each row having eight students in sports suits marching in upright postures without bending their backs.

I was sitting in the Mongolian Studies audience area. When the Mongolian Studies marching group approached, Mongolian Studies students sitting in the audience areas all burst into loud cheers. Nabuqi and Hasigaowa who sat beside me stood up and cheered enthusiastically. I saw on the field the first female in a red Mongolian robe. She was followed by two male students in brown Mongolian robes holding the school flag. They were then followed by six female students in pink Mongolian robes presenting the white Hada. After them forty students in five rows wearing yellow, white and red Mongolian robes were marching in uniform military steps, throwing back the shoulders. The announcer explained, “The School of Mongolian Studies is a united community, positive and aspiring. They represent the image of minzu unity. They are determined to strive hard to achieve high!”

Then came the marching group of the Mongolian Medicine School. It was led by a female in a red Mongolian robe. The following two male students were wearing Mongolian wrestling clothes and were marching in big strides, their heads held up high. After them were eight rows of students wearing brown, orange and green Mongolian robes. They were holding the blue Hada in both hands while marching in bold military steps with feet facing outward. They looked straight ahead without moving the head. The broadcaster announced, “The School of Mongolian Medicine has made marvelous achievements in preserving traditional minzu medicine … Under the correct leadership of CCP, our motherland flourishes, 56 minzu are united together. We lead a harmonious, safe and healthy life!” (Figure 1)
After the reviewing of various parading groups (Figure 2), the university leaders declared the rules for “Spiritual Civilization Reward (jingshen wenmingjiang)” intended to award to the desired school: 1. Students of the school must wear uniform, enter the audience area together on time. The school’s parading groups must march in military unison. Students must have higher presence rates. Student audiences are strictly forbidden to enter the sports field. 2. Teachers and students in the school must obey the commands. 3. Athletes must obey the sports rules. 4. Keep clean. 5. Submit high-quality papers to broadcasters, reporting ‘good’ events in the sports meeting. 6. Remain united and helpful. Fight against harmful trends ...

Then the security chief announced the rules for both audiences and athletes: strictly observe the regulations, absolutely obey commands. Each school arranged the collective entry. No individual entry or exit is allowed … Each
school organizes order, and class teacher must regulate students well. Trouble-making is forbidden …

At this time Nabuqi interrupted my listening, “these rules are boring, why not listen to some popular music?” She took out an iphone from her handbag and handed me one piece of earphone, saying that “it’s a very beautiful Mongolian song. Just listen to the melody. It was released yesterday from our Mongolian popular website Paradise Pasture. You know, in our circle, you will be very popular if you have more updated knowledge about our cultural trends!” …

At 10.10am. The first show started. Around 500 students were performing group calisthenics of yoga, aerobics and roller-skating … Loud cheers filled the immense stadium when presented with the large-scale performance of the horse-head violin by around 700 students. They were playing the popular Mongolian music Father’s pasture and Mother’s River, Watching Pasture with You, Pasture Mongolian Family … Nabuqi put away her iphone and started watching the performance with eyes open-wide. She and her friends broke into excitement, screaming, waving hands and jumping up as they watched. As if realizing something, she then pointed at the performers and turned to me suddenly “see, the male Mengsheng wearing the brown color robes, that is our grazer Ximeng style! Didn’t you bring a camera? You need to take photos for your data!” (Fieldnotes, June 11st, 2012)

…

The third day of the sports meeting

At 3.30pm. The competition was going on (Figure 3). I was sitting with Nabuqi and her friends in the audience seats preparing to cheer for her grazer classmates Hugejiletu, one of my participants, who joined the decathlon. Now came his last item – 1500 meter running with other 12 competitors. To our surprise, they didn’t compete with each other but were running arm by arm. They reached the destination line together shoulder by shoulder, with some jumping high in the air with arms resting on the neighbors’ shoulders and some holding arms of the athletes on both sides. The audiences were like erupted volcanoes, going wild, yelling, screaming, jumping up and down. Nabuqi and her friends were hollering with high pitch. She then turned to me, “They are our heroes!”

Judges in the sports field scowled and came to gather around them. I was later told their scores were cancelled … (Fieldnotes, June 13rd, 2012)

After the sports meeting, I interviewed Hugejiletu asking him what made them decide to refuse the competition. He smiled while answering:

“We were rivals at the start on the first day, but through two days of competition, we formed friendship! We didn’t want to see the first, or the last, we wanted to run together!”

“But your scores were cancelled. Two days’ sweats are in vain!” I commented.

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22 http://www.ttcy.com/
“Not really. It makes us feel THIS IS OUR sports meeting! It has nothing to do with teachers or judges!”

“Are you all from grazer areas?” I was trying to fit his ‘disruptive’ behaviors to the categorization framework.

“I don’t know. Some of us are Hans. But who cares?” (Interview, June 13rd, 2012)

Figure 3. Competition was going on

The opening ceremony of the sports meeting illustrated a choreographed public spectacle where ‘Han students’ were arrayed to wear black suits and sports suits while ‘Mongolian students’ appeared in colorful ‘Mongolian’ robes and wrestling attires. Possibly such a grand ceremony was informed by the hegemonic discourse of cultural maintenance which advocates valorizing cultural practices (Bulag, 2002, 2003a; Gladney, 1994; Harrell, 1994; Litzinger, 2000; Schein, 2000). Scholars (Gladney, 1994; Litzinger, 2000; Schein, 2000) critique ‘Han’ Chinese need such symbolic imagery of minority cultures to create a cultural dichotomy where ‘Han’ self-consolidate their civilized and superior position (e.g. ‘Han students’ wear suits in the parade) in sharp contrast to the ‘exotic’ minorities who are considered to be engaged in ‘primitive’ cultural activities made explicit through wearing traditional robes. Following these scholars, I read in this opening ceremony ‘minority minzu students’ “were treated as ethnic automatons, expected to produce folk practices” (Schein, 2000, p. 122). Thus, the discourses of cultural maintenance produce the valorized image, which renders
‘minority students’ as custom-bound, innocent or romanticized subjects free from centuries of social and historical change. This reading therefore produces a minority marginality which never fits with the normalized pulse of life in China’s mainstream cultural practices (Schein, 2000). Following Foucault (1977), I further suggest such parading ceremony produced panoptic effects which were “to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (p. 201). As Foucault (1977) suggests:

The theme of the Panopticon – at once surveillance and observation, security and knowledge, individualization and totalisation, isolation and transparency – found in the prison its privileged locus of realization…its task was to constitute a prison-machine with a cell of visibility in which the inmate will find himself caught as ‘in the glass house of the Greek philosopher’ (Harou-Romain, 8) and a central point from which a permanent gaze may control prisoners and staff (pp. 249-250).

Thus the ceremony functioned as individualizing observations, making it possible to characterize, classify, assess performance and differentiate individuals at a distance. For instance, the parading students were grouped in such a way that distinguished those wearing uniform attire from those who have not, also each individual in the parading groups was arranged into a grid or an analytic space where they were perfectly individualized and constantly visible to spectators. It enabled government officers, university authorities, staff and student spectators to watch over at a glance, manage and monitor their behaviours. As students marched in military steps in unison, they held the head up high, throwing out the shoulders without bending the back. While being made the potential target of the authority’s gaze, the public spectacle of parading induced among marching students a state of consciousness that ensured and sustained the disciplinary functioning of power. Following Foucault (1977), the parading bodies can be read as the target and object of power. Specifically, through subjection to disciplinary power, the bodies responded to discipline, obeyed the rules, improved forces and became skillful (Foucault, 1977) in performing the military like drill. The body was thus “directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs” (Foucault, 1977, p. 25). Here, both ‘Mongolian students’ and ‘Han students’ bodies were caught in a power relation of which they themselves became the bearers (Foucault, 1977).
Facing such a public spectacle with its visibility as part of the ‘prison-machine’ of discipline, it’s interesting to read how students might mobilize and negotiate potential discourses at different spaces and times to ascribe themselves specific positions. When the Mongolian parading groups approached us, Nabuqi and her friends stood up to cheer enthusiastically. When the horse-head violin playing was performed, she and her friends broke into excitement, screaming, waving hands and jumping up. Upon seeing that the Mongolian robe worn by the performers was of the pastoral grazer style, she commanded me to take a photo of it for my data. Perhaps at these moments she was drawing upon the pervasive discourses of cultural maintenance to wield power because ‘Mongolians’ for ‘Han’ at these moments became the highly prized objects. She knew at this moment indulging in a kind of cultural essentialism which sees culture as “a deeply sedimented essence attaching to, or inhering in particular groups” (Wedeen, 2002, p. 713) or as “self-contained super-organic reality with forces and purposes of its own; that is, to reify it” (Geertz, 1993, p. 11) would enable her to mark off a boundary between her and ‘Han’ to constitute her as distinct and powerful. Possibly, through appropriating the discourses of cultural maintenance and positioning herself within the discourses, she was able to share in the privilege and power that were officially sanctioned through the institutional support for this ‘truth’. In other words: “To actively promote the imagery of the pastoral in response to the desire of the Han Other is a way to situate the Mongols as a subject, a way of capturing the Other by reducing them to the position of a passive receiver” (Khan, 1995b, p. 151).

This reading seems to echo some scholars (Khan, 1995b; Litzinger, 2000; Schein, 2000) who argue that different from what Said (1978) describes in *Orientalism* where the ‘exotic Other’ are silenced and the power to speak is denied, Chinese minorities “whose images were being produced also acted to shape the process – by resisting, complying, taking up their own image-making practices” (Schein, 2000, p. 105). Understood in this way, Nabuqi’s discursive practice of commanding me to take photos for my data collection was a powerful positioning. She knew my research interest and was there to teach me. It demonstrated the ways in which she was frustrated by the dominant appropriation of her culture, signalling only she can decide which practices were appropriate for my data, reducing me to a passive receptacle.

While the disciplinary figure (the security chief) announced the competition rules, Nabuqi responded by listening to the Mongolian popular music and inviting me to listen
to its melody (I can’t understand the Mongolian lyrics). She said the music was recently released from the popular Mongolian website and “you will be very popular if you have more updated knowledge about our cultural trends!” Perhaps she was counter-posing the ‘traditional and fixed culture’ represented in the parade with the dynamic culture that she lived, disrupting or contesting the relevance of the traditional culture to students’ everyday lives. Maybe she was also shifting ethnic boundaries in a dynamic way – at one moment Nabuqi asked me to take photos of ‘authentic’ Mongolians and identified with it, while at another moment she distanced herself from it – perhaps not modern enough.

Perhaps I can also read her mobilization of this cultural discourse to produce a boundary between her and me as a ‘Han researcher’. She was busy with and keen on constructing a much-admired ‘Mongolian’ subject position by catching up with the recent cultural trends, while I cannot even understand the lyrics. I had little knowledge about this Mongolian website. Her very practice of handing me one of the earphones and asking me to “just listen to the melody” effectively produced me as a marginalized ‘outsider’.

It is also interesting to examine what the authorities’ announcement of rules for reward and discipline produced. Through rewards, discipline made it possible to define and hierarchize behaviors on the basis of the desired standard, such as wearing requested uniforms, entering the area together on time, marching in military unison, higher presence rates for student audiences, obeying commands and competition rules, etc. According to Foucault (1977), ranking behaviors through rewards both differentiate and homogenize individuals. It distributes students according to their conduct and performances, while imposing upon them a uniform standard to observe, so that they may all behave compliantly (Foucault, 1977). Announcement of rules also produced the self-surveillance effect of the panopticon. By naming the rules students were reminded that they had to observe themselves. For Xinjiletu and his decathlon peers, this conformity and self-monitoring seemed to be well achieved and maintained by being properly subjected “to a whole field of comparison, a space of differentiation and the principle of a rule to be followed” (Foucault, 1977, p. 182) (“We were rivals at the start on the first day”). The disciplinary rules and panoptic techniques are thus formative, as they constitute students into the subjected status of the student subject.
However, while the conformity and uniformity of behaviors were expected, the
disciplinary rules also produced disobedience and refusal that troubled those authorities
who created them. For instance, on the third day of the sports meeting, instead of acting
according to the competition rules, Xinjiletu and his ‘competitors’ insisted on running
together arm by arm, which made them feel “THIS IS OUR sports meeting” with
nothing to do with teachers. As I further interrogated if this “OUR” referred to grazer
‘Mengsheng’ like him, I was engaged in the boundary contraction work by
presupposing a categorical fission of grazer and sedentary ‘Mengsheng’. By assuming
they were ‘Mengsheng’, I was also drawing upon the mainstream categorization scheme
which subjected them to the hierarchical minzu relations, thus uncritically extending and
further legitimizing ‘ethnic’ categorization as a power/knowledge regime. I also called
on the stereotype of ‘unruliness’ which belonged to ‘Mengsheng’. However, his
response of “who cares?” seemed to throw into radical doubt the very validity of
‘Mongolianness’ as the predominant marker of identification and differentiation. Or
perhaps this response can be read as a performativity of ‘Mongolianness’ in that it
reconstituted ‘Mongolianness’ by distancing from the ‘old’ way of being ‘Mongolian’
which students needed to perform religiously? Or perhaps as they were participating in
the sports meeting open to all university students, and being subjected to disciplinary
rules, other signifiers such as “students” became the most legitimate discourse and new
boundaries were evoked and promoted, while rejecting the available ethnic boundaries
at this particular moment. In this sense, by rejecting the boundaries between sedentary
‘Mengsheng’ and grazer ‘Mengsheng’, between ‘Mengsheng’ and ‘Hansheng’, Xinjiletu
seemed more to emphasize the element of being a student, rather than my invited
‘ethnic’ positioning. However, one might ask, what does it mean to produce himself as a
student? What did he evoke here? Could it be a connection between a student and a
‘Mongolian wolf man’? If there was, what did he achieve in terms of positioning
himself? Could it be that Xinjiletu took up the Mongolian wolf discourses23 “that
produce subject positions [he] finds more desirable or because [he] gains pleasure”
(Staunæs, 2005, pp. 162-163)? So Xinjiletu intersectionally managed to shore up the
rebellious construction of ‘Mongolian male’ as the desired features of student, which
was also supported by Nabuqi who identified strongly with and confirmed that form of

23 In chapter 4, I introduced Mongolian wolf discourse which constructs Mongolian male as formidable
and aggressive, uninhibited, adventurousness, fearless, courageous, tough, with free, obstinate, solidarity
and fighting spirit.
doing ‘Mongolian student’: anti-authoritarian, adventurous, tough, fearless, invincible, aggressive, tricky, unbound by disciplinary rules (“They are our heroes!!”). Or could it be that he also mobilized the discourse of solidarity enacted by the socialist construction of the sports meeting (e.g. the slogans, rituals and performance) since solidarity is an accepted socialist value in the competition? Were ‘Mongolian’ traditions legitimized in this setting? So by rejecting my ‘ethnicised’ positioning, by the solidarity between the ‘Hansheng’ and ‘Mensheng’ and by taking up the grazer ‘Mengsheng’s rebellious ‘nature’ which was constructed within their tradition, Xinjiletu reestablished himself as a heroic ‘Mongolian male student’, and successfully went against the panoptic techniques and subverted the official power. Read in this way, I can further suggest the disciplinary call to produce obedient subjects also produces consequences that exceed and challenge authorities’ intentions. Following Butler, I suggest Xinjiletu and his peers at this moment “eclipse[d] power with power”(Butler, 1997, p. 14). As Butler (1997) suggests:

The subject is itself a site of ambivalence in which the subject emerges both as the effect of a prior power and as a condition of possibility for a radically conditioned form of agency. The process of subordination may in itself provide the condition for the possibility of agency. As power subjugates, it may be that at some point, a reversal and concealment occurs … the power that forms the subject, may in that very formation, be transformed – be different from the power that is/can be exercised by the subject (p. 15).

Thus, Xinjiletu and his peers’ subordination as students to the disciplinary rules and punishment on the first day of the sports meeting might provide the very possibility of exercising power differently from the prior constituting power. Following Butler (1997), I interpret Xinjiletu and his peers’ actions as “a site of ambivalence” at this particular moment in that they were not only formed by and subjugated to disciplinary power, but also a “conditioned form of agency” by reversing and exercising power through the very action of ‘choosing’ to ignore punishment and choosing to ignore official victory (“It makes us feel THIS IS OUR sports meeting! It has nothing to do with teachers or judges!”). This reading illustrates the contingent situations of rejecting ‘ethnic’ boundaries where ‘Mengsheng’ intersectionality (Staunæs, 2005) evoked different discourses to de-legitimize the significance of ‘ethnicized’ ‘Mongolianness’ as a principle of categorization in complex social relations to “eclipse power with power” (Butler, 1997, p14). In other words, regardless of one’s minzu status, ‘Mengsheng’ took up the shared discourses to mark off a boundary between students and institutional
authorities to “transform” the power that “forms” them (Butler, 1997, p. 15). This reading highlights that there are multiple boundaries and multiple intelligible versions of doing ‘Mongolian university students’. The category boundaries of ‘Mongolian university students’ are discursively constructed depending on the contextual necessity and the specific task. Therefore category boundaries must be constantly and strategically (re)created and (re)negotiated through “organization and regulation of the time, space and movements of our daily lives” (Bordo, 1990, p. 14). This understanding will allow to “unlearn” (Ang, 2001, p. 50) submission to the ‘ethnicised’ ‘Mongolianness’ as the ultimate signified, allowing to think of ‘Mongolian university students’ out of the bounded prison of ‘ethnicised’ ‘Mongolianness’ to construct deferred meanings of their subjectivities.

Discussion
In this chapter, I have offered possible readings on the ethnic boundary contraction between and among ‘Mongolian students’ and the boundary rejection between ‘Mongolian students’ and ‘Han students’. This analysis emphasizes that category boundary work not only involves processes of maintaining, reinforcing and transgressing the ethnic boundaries, but also processes of contracting, reconstituting and rejecting ethnic boundaries, and negotiating different boundaries.

For instance, Wudamu, a sedentary ‘Mengsheng’, utilized disciplinary techniques such as distribution, classification, surveillance and normalizing judgments to characterize, assess and hierarchize grazer ‘Mengsheng’, and to mark off a boundary between sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ and grazer ‘Mengsheng’. Mobilizing the construction of normative pastoralism, grazer ‘Mengsheng’ took up the position of ‘authentic’ ‘Mongolian’ through signifying practices. Grazer ‘Mengsheng’ contracted ethnic boundaries by the discursive exclusion of ‘Han students’ and sedentary ‘Mengsheng’, abjecting sedentary ‘Mengsheng’ as the ‘Hanized Other’.

Additionally, grazer ‘Mengsheng’s strategic utilization of symbolic pastoralism to position themselves ‘powerfully’ can be read as the “tragic mistake” (Butler, 1990, p. 128) of boundary contraction work. In this reading, constructing such ‘powerfullness’ through the same exclusionary means of repudiating the constitutive relationship with ‘Han’ might serve to initiate the very dependency it aims to debunk (Butler, 1990): pastoralism requires ‘Han’ culturalism. Inspired by Butler (1990), I suggest further that
when grazer ‘Mengsheng’ specify their subjectivities in radical opposition to ‘Han’ and sedentary ‘Mengsheng’, they lose the very capacity to resignify ‘Han’ culturalism by which it is constituted and the possibility of producing alternative discourses of doing ‘Mongolian’. Therefore, the risk in the social abjection is that “contingent regulatory mechanisms of subject-production may be reified as universal laws, exempted from the very process of discursive rearticulation that they occasion” (Butler, 1993, p. 142). As a result, the strategy of boundary contraction might possibly attribute a fictive unity and strengthening valorization to the symbolic pastoralism in its regulatory regime.

Boundary contraction work among ‘Mengsheng’ also suggests that ethnic boundaries are sites of contestation and negotiation where ‘Mongolian university students’ subjectivities are never essentialized in homogeneous or fixed terms. For instance, the sports meeting witnessed such moments when ethnic boundaries were shifting in dynamic ways. Nabuqi, the grazer ‘Mengsheng’, at one moment asked me to take photos of ‘authentic’ ‘Mongolians’ and identified with it, while at another moment she distanced herself from it by passing me the iphone to listen to popular music, producing ‘authentic’ ‘Mongolianness’ not modern enough. By emphasizing the notion of ‘student’ over his ethnic positioning, Xinjiletu possibly managed to shore up the construction of a ‘Mongolian male’ with the desired features of being a ‘student’: risk-taking, aggressive, fearless, obstinate, unrestrained, tough, anti-authoritarian with a free-fighting spirit. It seemed he did not need the ‘ethnic’ position that I offered to him, but at the moment of holding arms together, he took up the discourse of ‘student’, possibly ‘Mongolian wolf’ discourses and discourses of ‘solidarity’ to subvert the official power, to reinstate a desired construction and to “gain pleasure” (Staunæs, 2005, p. 163) from being a ‘Mongolian male student’. Rather than a fixed and singular reality, ‘Mongolian university student’ is a discursive construct, depending on the contextual necessity of interactions with others. These readings suggest that multiple category memberships render ‘Mongolian university students’ as “a site of a shifting nexus of possibilities” (Davies, 1989, p. 12). Understanding the category of ‘Mongolian university students’ this way allows the rejection of the illusory mode of bounded belonging and the singular normative ‘truth’, to construct contextually-based and deferred meanings of doing ‘Mongolian university students’ in China.
Chapter 6 Enduring Dilemmas: Reflexive Practices of Discomfort

The “core” of representation is the reflexive interval. It is the place in which the play within the textual frame is a play on this very frame, hence on the borderlines of the textual and extra-textual, where a positioning within constantly incurs the risk of de-positioning, and where the work, never freed from historical and socio-political contexts nor entirely subjected to them, can only be itself by constantly risk being no-thing (Trinh, 1991, p. 48).

As I was thinking how to approach the discursive exclusionary practices between participants and I in our daily interactions, I became interested in Choi’s (2006) work which encourages researchers to utilize Pillow’s (2003) “uncomfortable reflexivity” (p. 188) to make visible researchers’ positionality in his/her engagement with participants in the research journey. Pillow (2003) observes that within qualitative research, reflexivity has been increasingly deployed as a methodological tool to examine and trouble the knowledge production process. Pillow (2003) and Choi’s (2006) work not only challenged me to continually reflect on how participants and I negotiated meanings in our mutual relationships, but provoked me to problematize the familiar knowledges and assumptions that I brought to the fieldwork and the texts (Pillow, 2003, p. 189). In this chapter I utilize Pillow’s uncomfortable reflexivity not to obtain scientific objectivity and validity that it once was said to enhance, but to recognize my positioning “as both constructed and constructing of knowledge” (Richardson, 1997, p. 108, cited in Petersen, 2004, p. 15).

I start this chapter with a theorization of reflexivity. Utilizing the notion of reflexivity of discomfort, I then reflect on my own positionings in my ethnographic encounters with participants. I also discuss how reflexivity becomes a useful methodological tool to help me remain “vigilant about our practices” (Spivak, 1984-85, p. 184) and speak to the crisis of representation. Through my reflexive practice of discomfort, I aim to call attention to my semiotic technologies in offering multiple ways of knowing, and contribute to the poststructuralist problematisation of researchers as “disembodied and ‘objective’ knowers” (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. xvi).

Theorizing practices of reflexivity

While the main tenets of traditional positivist paradigm “are the notions of objectivism, empirical realism, objective truth, and essentialism” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 125), with the
Poststructuralist turn, the absolute, objective and universal knowledge waiting to be discovered, and researcher’s authority in knowledge production, is thrown into radical doubt (Britzman, 2000; Denzin, 1997; Lather, 1993). Poststructuralism not only denies interpretivist notions of validity, but denounces its textual authenticity, for it seeks not to produce complete, widely-applicable and accurate texts using well-formulated instruments over a large representative mass of participants by the unbiased researcher, but aims to make visible the way power touches people’s lives (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994). Poststructuralism utilizes the methodological tool of reflexivity to deconstruct power relations and question the researcher’s unmediated access into people’s lives (Choi, 2006).

Lather (1991) warns us “that we must abandon attempts to represent the object of our investigation as it ‘really’ is, independent of our representational apparatus, for a reflexive focus on how we construct that which we are investigating” (p. 11). A reflexive focus is a self-reflexive process of analyzing one’s own writing and discussing how accounts are constructed (Burr, 1998). Charlotte Davies offers a general definition of reflexivity:

Reflexivity, broadly defined, means a turning back on oneself, a process of self-reference. In the context of social research, reflexivity at its most immediately obvious level refers to the way in which the products of research are affected by the personal and process of doing research (C. Davies, 2012, p. 4, cited in Pillows, 2003, p. 178).

Within the current debates on the differing uses of reflexive practices, there are two common trends (Petersen, 2004; Pillow, 2003): first, using reflexivity to produce better, accurate and less distorted accounts (Hertz, 1997); and second, using reflexivity to interrupt the absolute truth and provide multiple interpretive experiences (Chaudhry, 2000; Davies, et al., 2004; Pillow, 2003; St. Pierre, 1997; Villenas, 1996, 2000). For instance and as the representative of the first trend, Bourdieu argues for a reflexive turn in the social sciences to examine social inquiry (Petersen, 2004). The objective of such reflexive practices is to achieve objectivity and validity understood as the “need to control the relationship between the researcher and the object of inquiry, including controlling for values, dispositions, attitudes, and perceptions (i.e. the habitus) that the researcher brings from his or her social background to the object of inquiry” (Swartz, 1997, p. 271-272, cited from Petersen, 2004, p. 14). Pillow (2003) traces four broadly-adopted practices of reflexivity in line with the first trend, such as reflexivity as
recognition of self, recognition of other, reflexivity as truth and reflexivity as transcendence. What is common among these practices is the relentless pursuit of realism which presumes direct access to reality and extensive reliance on traditional notions of truth and validity (Pillow, 2003). Denzin (1997) also observes that reflexivity is often used in a realist fashion in an attempt to provide authentic accounts of everyday life. This trend of practicing reflexivity therefore never quite departs from the positivist research in its presupposition of the essentialist subject who is knowable and stable (Trinh, 1991).

Through examining the work of three authors (Chaudhry, 2000; St. Pierre, 1997; Villenas, 1996, 2000) who disrupt the linear practice of reflexivity, Pillow (2003) argues for a critical trend of living with an “uncomfortable reflexivity” (p. 188), or “reflexivities of discomfort” (p. 187). Such use of reflexivity challenges us to consider “how we think we know what we know is neither transparent nor innocent” (Pillow, 2003, p. 189), resisting the tendency to see the world in simplistic dichotomies. It not only exposes and disrupts the representation of the ‘Other’, but continually pushes the reader to analyze and rethink normalized assumptions (Pillow, 2003). Thus reflexivities of discomfort:

Calls for a positioning of reflexivity not as clarity, honesty, or humility, but as practices of confounding disruptions – at times even as a failure of our language and practices … what I am advocating is the necessity of an ongoing critique of all of our research attempts, a recognition that none of our attempts can claim the innocence of success (even in failure) – with the realization that many of us do engage in research where there is real work to be done even in the face of the impossibility of such a task. This is a move to use reflexivity in a way that would continue to challenge the representations we come to while at the same time acknowledging the political need to represent and find meaning. (Pillow, 2003, p. 192)

For me, the objective of casting reflexive gazes of discomfort onto how I write knowledge into existence enables me to see the constitutive force of discourses through which particular practices were made possible (Davies, et al., 2004; Davies & Davies, 2007).

Flipping through the scribbled fieldnotes and transcripts with reflexive gazes of discomfort, I have come to realize how poststructuralist perspectives open up dilemmas which I was never aware of when I did my data collection. For instance, in this chapter, I illustrate that one of my fieldwork dilemmas is the disappearance of an essentialist
subject who is stable and fixed, and who can be ‘scientifically’ accounted for through appropriate methods of prolonged engagement, persistent observation and neutral immersion into his/her life. A reflexivity of discomfort is similar to what Denzin (1997) terms the “messy text”, an important methodological tool for me that makes me sensitive to my own narrative devices in constructing reality. It situates me as “a part of the writing project” (Denzin, 1997, p. 225) to sketch multiple discourses that are operating. This means I can never expect to find or know eventually and completely a pre-discursive researcher or participant independent of our interactions or interviews, but I speak myself into existence through the very act of narrating and interacting. In the words of Lather (1993), it makes me alert to “which discursive policy to follow, which ‘regime of truth’ to locate one’s work within, which mask of methodology to assume” (p. 676). It thus encourages me to trouble my complicity with the ‘Han’ chauvinistic power and the unmarked assumptions. Through such practices, “reflexivity opens new ways of addressing old long-standing questions of how and what we can legitimately take ourselves to know and what the limitations of our knowledge are” (Davies, et al., 2004, p. 364).

Another closely related dilemma opened up by the reflexive practice of discomfort is the realization of how my subjective investment and the shifting power structures involved in the fieldwork are relevant to the knowledge produced. For instance, reading Butler (2004a) reminds me that “the narrating ‘I’ has to take account of how that ‘I’ comes into being, and so it must account for the emergence of the ‘I’ who speaks, who tries to tell its story” (p. 95). Delgado-Gaitan (1993) explores the relational nature of her study and how her contradictory subjectivities challenge her to reexamine the direction of the research. Drawing on Pillow’s (2003) notion of “a reflexivity of discomfort” (p. 192), Choi (2006) unfolds a poststructuralist analysis of how researchers’ multiple and shifting subjectivities impact the data collected and its interpretation, and the contingent nature of stories constructed. This literature encourages me to utilize Pillow’s (2003) uncomfortable reflexivity to move away from the simplistic self-conscious process of self-scrutiny, to critically explore how my changing positionalities during and after the fieldwork transform and shape the ways I represent, organize and interpret data. This body of literature also inspires me to examine how the binaries between the researcher and the researched, subject and object are re/produced and might be disrupted. By doing this, I attempt to subject my own process of researching and knowledge production to a
reflexivity of discomfort, in an effort to deconstruct the researcher’s authority, to
“illuminate the workings of the crisis of representation, and the politics of discursive
production” (Choi, 2006, p. 441).

Encountering participants…

Negotiating entry: Illusory construction of ‘rapport’

Today I went to the dean’s office in the Mongolian Studies department. From
her long name, I can tell she is a Mongolian. After my introduction of the project,
she asked me if I have some questionnaires to hand out. After my explanation,
she revealed: “There had been a few scholars coming here to research students
handing out a large amount of surveys or questionnaires before you, but you are
the first to do this kind of research” (I knew she referred to the research without
a survey), “Researchers like you, receiving overseas education, are really
different”, she smiled while commenting. She then introduced me to a class of
76 second-year Mongolian medicine students among whom I conducted an
information session. Despite my repeated explanation beforehand that I wished
to build an informal relationship with students, the dean started with special
emphasis of me as a researcher receiving education from Australia, a lecturer
from a Chinese institute:

“From today on, we will have a lecturer from a Shenyang University coming to
do research on you. She is doing PhD in Australia. You must behave well to
show the world through her research what Mongolians are like. Let’s welcome
Teacher Zhang!”

No sooner had the dean finished her description of me than all the students cast
their eyes on me. I was startled at the manner she introduced me as if I were a
distinguished institutional guest coming to inspect students’ behaviours. I didn’t
like that. It’s too formal for me to enable me to start from an equal relationship
with them as I had planned. So I told them I wished they would never regard me
as a teacher, but a friend, whom they can trust. I noticed the dean who
introduced me to students frowned at my remark. I felt vaguely she might think
me strange. She might think why I had to ‘condescend’ to be so close to
students … After my information session, I received a warm welcome from the
students with their thunderous and long-lasting applause. They looked at me
with surprised and curious eyes. After introducing my project in a friendly
manner, and giving them enough time to acquaint themselves with my research,
I was waiting for their questions and responses. It seemed they wanted to talk to
me but appeared hesitant as one of them whispered something with his
neighbour who immediately looked up at me but stopped asking me questions
when I asked him if there was anything he wanted me to make clear … Despite
their warm welcome, I was embarrassed to receive no consent papers today…
(Observation, April 2, 2012)

At the time when I wrote these fieldnotes, I did not theorise the shifting power relations
in everyday encounters with students. I felt power was something I possessed which I
needed to make conscious efforts to eliminate, so as to build equal relationships with students. For instance, I was totally unprepared for the way I was introduced given my previous commitment to establishing equality between us as if I were a distinguished inspector. My commitment to equality between the researcher and the researched came from my understanding of ‘rapport’ dominantly constructed by government documents and prevailing ethnographic studies. For instance, as I read carefully the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research 2007 (Australian Government, 2012) before my data collection, I was drawn to the six core values in researching Aboriginal people. At the same time as producing Aboriginal people as an ‘ethnic minority’, it also demanded “reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection, spirit and integrity” (p. 69) in relations with them from the researcher. Based on the ethical construction of these core values, I started reading other ethnographies in pursuit of more knowledge of productive research relationships in accessing the world of study participants (see chapter 2). Therefore, I wrote in my research proposal about the ‘empathetic’ approach to which I had thought to devote myself:

I will endeavor to put myself on an equal footing with participants, showing enthusiastic interest and patience in observing, listening and interacting with them, to respect and describe their point of view as accurately as possible ... This will hopefully lead to breaking away the hierarchical divisions between participants and researcher (Heath, Brooks, Cleaver, & Ireland, 2009, p. 48). Some scholars (Heath, et al., 2009) reason that young people appreciate talking to researchers who show strong orientation in their lives or a genuine interest in listening to them speak. Others point to the researcher’s informal interaction with participants, while showing empathy, thoughtfulness and profound respect for their perspective. This approach leads to highly informative research findings and contributes to achieving reciprocity (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, pp. 73-78). Following these findings, in this study, I devote myself as a sincere listener, interested in their lives, empathetic and considerate in interacting with them and co-constructing research findings.

Taking up this commitment to an ‘empathetic’ ethnographer, I went to great lengths to balance the hierarchical relations, such as adding a sense of humour, using rhetorical linguistic devices to make my statements more convincing and resonating with students. I naturally assumed that showing ‘empathy’ automatically engendered ‘mutual trust’, ‘equality’, and ‘friendship’ so that obtaining students’ immediate consent would be no question. However, receiving no immediate consent catapulted me from a position of

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24 As a PhD student, I was required to submit the research proposal at the end of the first year for confirmation. The rule is that one cannot start the fieldwork until she passes the confirmation and ethics applications.
‘spokeswoman’ of the entire group to the marginalized failed researcher. I felt embarrassed and insecure when receiving no consent because it broke down all my previous implicit fantasy of an ‘empathetic’ and effective researcher. The problem with the ‘empathetic’ commitment is that it presupposes and reinforces a binary opposition between me and students as the basis of our relations that extends from the top down to the marginalized. Making conscious efforts to show ‘sympathy’ and build ‘equality’ with students serve to shape me as a ‘protector’ of the ‘disadvantaged’ students, and further widen the powerful researcher/powerless participants binary.

Casting reflexive gazes of discomfort also encourage me to think about multiple ways in which the dean might have positioned me. The way I was introduced produced me as the ‘Other’, perhaps a more ‘objective’ assessor of what was going on than a ‘Han’ because I might have lost some of my ‘Hanness’ overseas. Or this different positioning was indicated that I was not doing the usual surveys as previous Han researchers did (“you are the first to do this kind of research”, “Researchers like you, receiving overseas education, are really different”). I might have been positioned as an advocate on behalf of Mongolian culture to the global readers (“you must behave well to show the world through her research what ‘Mongolians’ are like”).

The reflexive text on myself as the ‘other’ researcher brings into surface an uncomfortable tension for a Chinese doing poststructuralist study overseas. On the one hand, I am a Chinese citizen subject to the disciplinary and regulating body of the Chinese government that requires reverence and obedience. On the other hand, doing a poststructuralist thesis, I am subject to another kind of governing regime of poststructuralism that requires a certain kind of irreverence. While I am bound by the nationalistic and ideological veneration, I have to take the risk of enacting poststructuralist irreverence in doing this project. Throughout the thesis, I have been grappling with this tension and I am still not sure how to solve it…

As I failed to receive immediate consent papers, it was suggested by the teachers that I start with attending classes with them, and participate in students’ activities to get to know each other. On one occasion I was invited to attend students’ English Competition: Tonight at 7.30pm, I went to the English Competition with Qingqing at her invitation. I had thought it was a great opportunity for me to observe behaviours of students from different schools … Later, as we entered the room, I was
surprised by the way Qingqing introduced me to the Chair of the Student English Association as if I were an honoured and well-established expert guest. More shockingly to me, the Chair, a postgraduate student, asked me to be one of the judges and sit in the judge seat area in the front. He smiled, led me to the judge sitting area and pulled the chair for me with a slight bow as a gesture of offer to sit down. It was reserved for me to sit next to other judges. They were either professors or deans from the English department. It was hard for me to resist such a courteous offer at that time. Qingqing was standing beside me and talked to me: “just sit down here!”, pointing to the seat offered by the Chair. Other judges were already seated and they were staring at me. Sitting beside them in the judge area with my back facing the student audience made me very uncomfortable. I turned around and glanced at the back area where students were sitting. I wished to go to the audience seat and sit together with other students. But Qingqing asked, “Why do you have to go to the student audience seat with all your qualifications?” (Observation, April 20th, 2012)

The dilemma recorded in this fieldnote after initially participating in students’ activities with Qingqing, who later became one of my participants, captures my unsettled feelings. At that time being allocated the judge seat produced me as an ‘authoritative expert’ which went against my ‘determined’ pursuit of building and maintaining ‘rapport’. I was desperate for opportunities where I could be equal with the students. But with all my ‘qualifications’, the Chair politely offered the judge seat, and Qingqing persuaded me to “just sit down here!” I found it difficult to refuse. I felt myself like an ‘uncomfortable expert’ because by sitting there I was not able to create the equal relationships with students.

Reflecting on this part of the data now, I surprisingly found that not only the Chair but Qingqing, one of my participants to whom I had been especially ‘sympathetic’ because of her lower English level, requested me powerfully to sit in the pre-arranged location. I was ‘regulated’ not by physical force but by spatial enclosure (“why do you have to go to the student audience seat with all your qualifications?”) that she utilized to direct my conduct and have me sit in the ‘proper’ space. According to Foucault (1977), this technology of disciplinary power utilized by Qingqing immediately situated me in a space of comparison and differentiation, heterogeneous to the student area and closed in upon itself, effectively excluding me from the students’ world. Though I might be positioned as a ‘powerful expert’, such positioning ascribed ‘powerlessness’ to me, making me feel impotent (“uncomfortable expert”). With Foucault’s conceptualization on power in mind and Kondo’s (1990, p. 11) further explanation, now I understand that
being a researcher is more like “a living oxymoron” (Kondo, 1990, p. 11), being someone potentially powerful and powerless at the same time.

Indeed, most of the time, my fieldwork was replete with discomfort and frustration when I struggled to be included due to “the actual difference of power, knowledge, and structural mobility [that] still exist in the researcher-subject relationship (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 577). I found it hard to enter my participants’ world as a result of unstable power relations between us. Though I followed students on some occasions, I was not able to go to all the parties:

You’d better not come tonight, as we will drink a lot, we would have lots of fun by getting drunk. You can’t drink much so you won’t get fun out of the party. (Observation, April 20)

You will appear weird because you are the only Han at the party, and you don’t understand our Mongolian dialect. Will you feel comfortable by that? Well, I won’t. (Observation, May 9)

Today’s party is about our bad guys drinking, smoking and talking about our affairs together, this is not the occasion suitable for ladies like you. (Observation, May 9)

We will be staying at the internet café overnight playing computer games, there would be so much rude yelling, dirty words and choking smoke in the bar, it’s not a place for you! (Observation, June 9)

I felt very frustrated facing their ‘deficient’ and ‘devalued’ positions that they themselves actively took up, because this powerful positioning blocked me outside their world. Since they closed the door so ‘bluntly’, how could I expect to build ‘rapport’!

The sudden collapse and disillusionment of ‘trust’, ‘empathy’ and ‘friendship’ made me nervous and concerned: how could I do thick description without their collaboration? I not only felt they were unruly and deficient, but I found myself being excluded, instead of being an ‘authoritative’ ethnographer who became proud in the genuine emotional bonds with participants that I had expected and determined to forge in my fieldwork. In despair, I was tempted to think that perhaps it was out of their ‘strong’ sense of ‘inferiority’ that they denied access to me to their parties (they are a ‘special’ group speaking a different language from me. They drink, smoke, hang out in internet cafés yelling with dirty words, which were practices I was rarely engaged in). This way of knowing students that I have deployed that time comes from the prevailing construction of them by minority education research in China which puts tremendous efforts on how
to improve ‘minority minzu students’ self-esteem and basic interactional skills after diagnosing them (see chapter 1 and chapter 3). Minority education research seeks solutions to their inability to think reasonably, to remedy their weak psychological constitution, low intelligence and low cognitive levels. As the mainstream research produces ‘minority minzu students’ as ‘incompetent’ and ‘problematic’, perhaps it was due to their sense of ‘inferiority’ and their ‘impoliteness’ that made ‘rapport-building’ so difficult, I reasoned. This essentialist thinking was more attractive to me at that time because it produced a sense of security about my ‘power’ and skills as the researcher.

Developing a Foucauldian perspective after my fieldwork compelled me to problematise my lingering essentialist positioning of participants. Was this positioning a way of “normalizing” and “insidious objectification” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 35), aligned with dominant institutional expectations? Or was I complicit in normalizing students by drawing on the institutional discourses? Was this positioning a way to avoid fretting about my marginalized position produced by participants’ refusals of me? Should a critical scrutiny of our relationships be obscured under the dress of students’ ‘deficiency’? Or did ‘rapport’ become an idealized fantasy as I inserted myself in the uneasy fieldsite where “evasion, concealment, and lying about one’s opinion, [and] identities” (Kulik, 1995, p. 11) became the constituent features of our relationships? If participants, as Springwood and King (2001) argue, “may author their own forms of control of, power over, or resistance to research encounters” (p. 406, original emphasis), then can the most ‘desired’ construct of ‘rapport’, the taken-for-granted tenet of the research endeavour, which includes notions of ‘mutual trust’, ‘empathy’, ‘understanding’, ‘loyalty’, ‘friendship’, and ‘respect’ (Springwood & King, 2001), sufficiently address the changing and uneasy nature of my ethnographic encounters?

Springwood and King (2001) argue that “engaging others critically rather than empathetically does or should shape ethnographic inquiry” (p. 404). For me, this not only means the impossibility of an idealized notion of ‘rapport’, but an impossibility of disentangling ourselves from discourses through which we constitute ourselves and are being constituted. Focusing on identifying and recognizing the circulating discourses that students mobilized in formulating their denial to my access, I ask myself: Is it possible that students mobilized the discourses of Mongolian traditional binge drinking as an exclusionary device to produce the boundary between us – students were having
fun, they were enjoying life by engaging in ‘dangerous’ activities such as binge
drinking, yelling and speaking dirty words, while I was produced as boring, ivory tower
person, courteous, cultured and respectful? By announcing I was the only Han at the
party, not able to understand their Mongolian dialect, was I excluded from their
‘Mongolianness’? Was I minoritized and marginalized as a ‘minority minzu researcher’
in this ethnographic encounter? Was students’ positioning of me in their denial of me to
come to the party gendered? I was produced as an untouchable and valorized female
like a decorative vase or a greenhouse flower. Students positioned me as an ‘indoor’
‘lady’ sealed in the comfort zone without embodied contacts with the outside world,
which was an exclusionary device to marginalize me as an outsider, a submissive
female subject to the hegemonic patriarchal power. At this very moment of my
reflection, I felt a swell of troubling discomfort washing over me so that I could no
longer find a secure place of being the researcher …

“Do you ride horses?”

In my initial encounters with the students, I was very curious about their life, so I asked
questions like “Do you ride horses?” I felt disappointed when I heard Tuya saying:

When you Hans speak to us Mongolians, you always ask ‘Do you go to school
by horse?’ In fact, these are what the media propagates, as if we are still living a
primitive life. We are Mongolians, but we live in such a Han environment. We
live and eat like Han do. We are now the same as Han. (Observation, April 20,
2012)

The reason why I asked the question “Do you ride horses?” was because I had been
much uncritically influenced by the hegemonic construction of ‘Mongolians’ in Chinese
mass media, which homogeneously constitute ‘Mongolians’ as ‘primitive’ people living
a nomadic pastoralist lifestyle on the vast Mongolian grassland. At that time I was
operating under the totalizing assumption of Mongolian pastoralism that distinguishes
‘Mongolians’ from ‘Han’. Re-reading this question with Foucault’s perspectives pushes
me to contest my subjective investments in framing questions and producing ‘truth’. It
engages me to identify and recognize the circulating discourses that I mobilized in
formulating this and other stereotypical questions. In hindsight I ask myself, with what
discourses did I position Tuya? This involves recognizing what discourses I was drawn
to at that particular moment and what discourses I marginalized or silenced.
Khan (1995b) argues that the cultural assumptions of pastoralism are actively promoted by the Chinese nation-state out of three considerations. The first consideration is the need of reifying cultural practices and neutralizing difference in order to achieve assimilation. The second consideration is the state’s desire for a superior ‘Self’, which means a “process of self-consolidating” (Khan, 1995b, p. 147) “by fixing and promoting (Nei)Menggu (Inner Mongolia) as merely pastoral” (Khan, 1995b, p. 147). The third consideration is the demonstration of a desire for the ‘marvelous’, the one which the ‘Han’ is not. Therefore constructions of ‘Mongolians’ such as having warrior qualities, uninhibitedness, robustness and toughness (Khan, 1995b), etc. are often romanticized by ‘Han’.

Re-reading my question of “Do you ride horses?” with the available cultural assumptions, I find it privileged and situated me at the favoured side of the minority/majority dichotomy. I represented the unmarked norm casting curious eyes on the ‘exotic Other’. Framing question in this way made me complicit in colonizing and othering students (Villenas, 1996), objectifying them and rendering them different or primitive, inferior to ‘Han students’. This positioning troubles me now because it has become evident how at that time, I was taking up the colonizer position (Schein, 2000) which sent the implicit message that all ‘Mongolian students’ should be engaged in the tradition-bound ‘ethnic’ practices.

Tuya’s reply can be read as a protest against the distilled, mythical and idealized representation of the horse-riding ‘Mongolian’ constructed by ‘Han’ (“When you Hans speak with us Mongolians, you always ask ‘Do you ride horses?’”). Discursive categories such as ‘Mongolian’ or ‘Han’ are “abstractions forcibly imposed upon the social field, ones that produce a second order or reified ‘reality’” (Butler, 1990, p. 114). Tuya knew how this externally imposed ‘Mongolianness’ subjected her to an abjected position and how it functioned in the service of perpetuating ‘Han’ supremacy and ‘Mongolian’ marginalization (“as if we are still living a primitive life”). Tuya then explained that “we live and eat like Han do. We are now the same as Han”. Possibly she refused the minority/majority binary by declaring herself as unbounded by the hegemonic binary and embraced multiple positioning that included what we understood as ‘Han’ and ‘Mongolian’ ways but without excluding one from the other. She was behaving both ‘Han’ and ‘Mongolian’, or neither. However, at that time, I was
operating the dominant discourse unreflectively that expressed a yearning for the strangely fascinating, and abjectly different ‘Mongolian’ subject. Butler (1990) argues, the presuppositions we made about social categories:

are suddenly and significantly upset by those examples that fail to comply with the categories that naturalize and stabilize that field of bodies for us within the terms of cultural conventions. Hence, the strange, the incoherent, that which falls “outside”, gives us a way of understanding the taken-for-granted world of [sexual] categorization as a constructed one, as one that might well be constructed differently (p. 110).

With Butler’s perspective, looking back at that particular fieldnote now, I begin to feel anxious: did not my disappointment towards Tuya then signify dismay at her failure to keep the boundaries intact? Would not this positioning manifest a problematic assumption that ‘Mongolians’ who are not engaged in ‘ethnic’ practices were relegated by me as ‘unnatural’ and ‘boring’ from the start because of their ‘failure’ to comply with the naturalized categories (Butler, 1990) and being the object of research that I desired? More disturbing thoughts suddenly occurred to me after I read Butler and Foucault: if ‘Han’ culturalism takes the constructed minzu difference as a presupposition of its own definition, then is it possible that my disappointment to her implied an ethnocentric desire to keep ‘Han’ dominant and to seal the permeable ‘ethnic’ boundaries? I come to realize now it is this very disappointment to her answer (“We are now the same as Han”) that I need to question and counter.

Military training

Military training is the compulsory course for all Chinese university students according to The Military Service Law of the People’s Republic of China and The Decisions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party about Education System Reform. I still remembered the official aims announced by the university secretary yesterday at the Mobilization Conference of Military Training – training students to “absolutely obey commands, comply to instruction”(juedui fucong mingling, tingcong zhihui), “strengthen collective and discipline notions” (zengqiang zuzhi jilu guannian), “foster thrifty and revolutionary spirit”(peiyang jianku fendou de zuofeng), “forge strong willpower”(molian yizhi), and “build strong body”(qiangzhuang shenti).

When I arrived at the drill field at 7.30am, students had already started marching. Male and female students were separated into different squads, each squad of about 60 students. Altogether there were 4920 second-year students participating in the training. There were around 80 squads wearing university uniforms in the drill fields … I walked along the fields passing the drilling squads. While students were marching with erect heads, they shouted loudly the slogan in unison “loyal to
motherland, loyal to the people, unite and strive hard, embrace spirit of hardship” (zhongyu zuguo, zhongyu reming, tuanjie pinbo, jianku fendou). Students counted 1, 2, 3, 4 in a thundering chorus repeatedly in their marching steps. As I approached a male-student squad, the training officer was instructing them in basic requirements:

“Put hands along the center of the outside part of your legs. You are strictly forbidden to look around. When I order ‘look to your right’, you must turn your neck to the right immediately along a trajectory of a straight line. You can’t do it along a curve. You must remain motionless until I give the order to move. This is discipline… You must obey my order, if you don’t respect the collective, I don’t respect you either. If you come back to the squad late from the recess, the whole group will be punished because of you. The interest of the collective can’t be jeopardized because of the individual … Now the first row march out first! All footsteps must be the same!” (Figure 4)

Figure 4: Military training

8.40am. I was deeply impressed with the strict rules and students’ uniform demonstrations. As I wondered around the field, I heard the beautiful silky voice of a female singer coming from the neighborhood squad, so I traced out the source of singing into the female squad where Qingqing’s classmates were located. Their squad was in recess, with students sitting down on the ground, looking up at the singing girl standing in the middle of the squad. Seeing students relaxing and smiling, I approached and sat with them at the end of the formation, preparing to join them listening to the songs. The girl was singing a popular Mongolian song named Father’s Grassland and Mother’s River which praised the beautiful Mongolian grazing grassland and parents’ love. Noticing my sudden appearance, students greeted me with raising hands and welcome smiles. I made a silent gesture signaling I didn’t want to interrupt their fun and her performance, and would like to undertake my ‘objective’ observation in an unnoticeable corner… As I was prepared to wait for the next performer, a highly-spirited voice came from the front row, “Sister Yongxia, sing us a song! A Mongolian song!” I was shocked to find the request coming from Qingqing, one of my Mongolian medicine participants who asked me for advice on passing English band 4 a few days ago. At her loud request, other girls began pressing for my singing with loudly warm applause and cheers in
unison. The request seemed so urgent to me that it was hard to resist such an ‘invitation’ at that applauding moment. As it was the break time, everybody was relaxing in a friendly atmosphere. I thought to myself, “ok, no big deal. I want to be their friend anyway. It is our interaction that shapes the data!” So I stood up to go to the centre of the sitting squad to sing the newly-learnt Mongolian song – *Mum in the dream*[^25]. I received a warm applause after my singing, feeling smug that it was a great opportunity to become closer to students. However, in the wake of long-lasting applause, I also noticed Qingqing and the training officer whispering to each other and occasionally looking up at me from their murmuring. Obviously they were discussing something about me. Somehow, I vaguely felt myself being exposed to the public gaze, the gaze made possible by Qingqing’s powerful request. (Fieldnotes, April 23rd, 2012)

Military training for university students is of far-reaching significance in producing the collectivism-conscious and disciplined body (Ximao Li, 1994; Xia Li, 2010) with strong sense of *minzu* unity (J. Hu, 2011). The official purpose is to cultivate the spirit of absolute compliance to the demand through the training (Cai, 2010) and through the break time entertainment of singing ‘red’ (‘red’ means communist) patriotic songs (Yaping Yao, Xu, & Hu, 2001). At the time when I was ‘patrolling’ their training, I felt a sense of privilege because of my official status of a researcher that enabled me to circulate among and through different squads to observe their marching. Compared with students who were subjected to the disciplinary practice to march in the fixed place, mobility gave me a sense of ‘superiority’, able to gain access to any particular groups that drew my gaze. I also positioned myself outside the situation of being observed, hidden in an inconspicuous corner ‘silently’ recording their actions into my fieldnotes. I listened to the girl’s ‘exotic’ Mongolian songs in a ‘lofty’ manner, feeling smug in myself to be able to enter into an analytic space by means of hierarchical observations. As a fieldwork observer, I needed such ‘detached’ space to write down my fieldnotes because it was me observing to study the discursive constitution.

As I now reflect on myself as being a ‘privileged’ researcher, I cannot help asking further questions: Did the smug feeling have something to do with the dread of ‘going native’ (Tedlock, 2000)? Though declaring myself to be a constructivist in my research proposal before the fieldwork, and considering the lingering discourse of a realist ethnographer, I keep asking myself: Did the take-up of the ‘detached’ observer come from a fear of losing the distance from students, or more ironically, the fear of losing the ‘authoritative’ position?

[^25]: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fzG74-zT3io
Because of this discourse of the ‘detached’ observer that I was operating from, Qingqing and the other girls’ sudden request for me to sing a song jolted me out of the position of the observer who participated marginally, producing an unexpected wave of shock upon me because I was so immersed in taking my fieldnotes that I was totally unprepared for such a request (I will elaborate on how their address to me changed from “teacher Zhang” to “sister Yongxia” in the later vignette). As the call for my singing was immediately picked up by the rest of the girls, with their loud welcome applause in unison, it was hardly possible to resist the call at that particular moment. After all, I also desired ‘being one of them’, ‘blending into’ their circle to ‘go native’! I remembered the constructivist discourses which saw the dialogical relationship as constitutive of the texts. What’s more, it was the relaxation break, singing for me was no big deal. I took up their request readily by singing a newly-learnt Mongolian song.

However, unsettled and disturbed feelings begin to develop as I re-think this vignette: Is it possible that Qingqing and her peers’ request for me to sing produced the transgressing effect of disrupting the ‘authority’ of ‘powerful’ researcher, who pretentiously believed she had access to students’ thoughts and actions? Is it possible since I, as a ‘privileged’ researcher, was able to record their behaviors through continuous surveillance, they were wielding the same supervising and analytic techniques upon me (considering the fact that in the wake of their long-lasting applause, Qingqing and the training officer whispered to each other and occasionally looked up at me from their murmuring)? So they were exercising disciplinary power “by means of general visibility” (Foucault, 1977, p. 171) over me. Doesn’t this reading further suggest a rejection of the binary logic of the researcher and the researched? Or perhaps the students’ request to sing a Mongolian song could be understood as category maintenance work through which they ‘othered’ a ‘Han researcher’ as a reflector of ‘well-described’ ‘Mongolian’ subjects. Possibly taking up the hegemonic discourse of cultural maintenance, they might have assumed that for a ‘Han researcher’ a display of ‘Mongolianness’ constituted a highly valued prize. By requesting a Mongolian song from a ‘Han researcher’, they were asserting the obviousness of their ways of being, bringing to the foreground the very lack in me due to my ‘Hanness’, and in this very lack, establishing the privileged subject position (Butler, 1990) of ‘Mongolian university students’. Thus Qingqing and her peers were engaged in clarifying their social competency by maintaining a set of self-evident meanings of category
membership (Davies, 1989), and mocking the fictitious ‘powerfulness’ of a ‘Han researcher’. Perhaps I might further say that in making the strong category membership claim and keeping the category intact, students were engaged in “strategic essentialism” (Ang, 2001, p. 197), the essentializing strategy of self-identification. It is a strategic use of essentializing claims in that the assertion of a coherent and unambiguous Mongolian identity claim did not exist in a power-free situation, but was founded on a strategic claim framed within a particular distribution of power and in a particular situational context to accord them with the apparent legitimate power (Ang, 2001).

In a discussion with my supervisors, they read the students’ request for me to sing in the military training differently. They added that this request also produced me as a sort of a ‘clown’ as I became the students’ spectacle and they successfully turned the observer / observed positions skillfully around. Caught in multiple and contradictory discourses, I felt myself both ‘detached’ and emotionally involved, both a realist and a constructivist, both a ‘friend’ and a ‘clown’… I felt my fieldwork journey and my subjectivities too ‘messy’ to pin down into definite terms. Engaging in a reflexivity of discomfort has never freed me from uncertainties, anxiety and doubt because I struggled and am still struggling with multiple and contradictory positions that continuously deconstruct the essentialized subject and the researcher’s ‘authority’. I feel as if my “uncomfortable reflexivity” (Pillow, 2003) just began because these fluid multiplicities seem to have become much messier and more complex again and again each time I reflect …

*English band 3:*

On our way to the next class in another building, Beihe asked me which English band I had passed. When I told him band 8, he was open-mouthed and astonished, holding up his thumb in approval: “You are something! Can you teach me English? My other courses won’t be a big problem for me, just recite during the final days of the exam, but it doesn’t work for English. We are required to pass band 3 during the university. I don’t know how to pass it. Oh, how I admire those who study English well!”

“Maybe you can reach more than that, say band 4!” I suddenly remembered Qingqing’s ambition of band 4, so I was trying to provoke him.

“All *Mengsheng* are only required to pass band 3! I never dream of band 4!” He argued.

“Why?” I inquired.
“That’s how things are. Everybody knows that. Those Hansheng were higher than us from the start. We were enrolled at lower scores than them. We have different standards. We are not required to reach their level!” He replied.

“Maybe you will reach that high level one day!” I continued the incitement.

“Impossible! We are taught different things in class. In our class, we learn tense, definite articles and indefinite articles, which I have always been confused about. But if you see what Hansheng learn in class, or if you just take a look at their textbooks, you will find a paragraph of 4 lines turned out to be a single sentence! And in it I only know less than five vocabularies! You see the difference?”

Upon his request, I suggested to him a textbook to study, and made a careful plan for him to improve his English level … (Fieldnotes, April 14th, 2012)

Two weeks later:

This morning at the canteen over breakfast, I asked Beihe how he progressed with my plan for his English improvement, and the textbook I specifically chose for him. To my surprise, he said: “Oh, you mean, New Concept English, that book, mm, I didn’t have time to read it yet. I am so busy with physical training, inspection team responsibilities and a volleyball match that I didn’t get time to study English yet!”

Having heard his excuses, I was suspicious as to whether he really wanted to improve his English, or if that’s how they are – lazy, unmotivated and lacking self-discipline when it came to study! Anyway, I felt disappointed! (Fieldnotes, May 4th, 2012)

The first vignette occurred on our way to the next class. Perhaps, at the time when our conversation took place, my presence triggered some potential discourses which positioned me as a high English achiever, and brought forth his question about which English band I had passed. He knew, as I was occupying an institutional status of English lecturer, that I must have achieved a certain higher band of English. He also knew I was a haigui (a Chinese metaphoric slang, meaning sea turtle, a homophone for those who return to motherland after more than one year of overseas studies). Within the haigui discourse, just as the sea turtle the haigui is rare, precious and travelling in the sea for long distances. The overseas returner is well honoured after the experience of long distance study in a foreign country, because of his or her high English skills and professional knowledge (Q. Chen, 2013; S. Chen, 2012; Z. Li, 2013; S. Luo & Yu, 2012; Shen & Liu, 2013; H. Wang, 2013; Yi Yao, 2012).

It is also possible Beihe was drawing upon the hierarchical opposition between minorities and ‘Han’ and positioned me as a ‘mainstream Han’ who is generally understood as academically ‘superior’ to ‘Mongolians’. These possible discourses
offered me a privileged position of a high English achiever while allocating him a position inferior to me. At the moment when Beihe asked me which English band I had passed, maybe he was taking up the available CET (College English Test) discourse which claimed to ‘objectively’ evaluate a person’s English level according to the established category one was able to pass – band 3 (the required level for ‘Mengsheng’), band 4 (the minimum requirement for ‘Hansheng’), band 6 (the preferred requirement for ‘Hansheng’), and band 8 (the highest level for ‘Hansheng’). Such taxonomy and categorization had the normalizing function to mark personal characteristics, attach values, and judge abilities according to the level of English one reached. To form exact knowledge about me and judge me ‘objectively’, Beihe subjected me to the disciplinary practice of category characterization (such as classification according to a CET band) which makes it possible to measure, qualify and evaluate individuals. When he learnt I had passed band 8, Beihe displayed the physical appearance of ‘genuine’ admiration (“open-mouthed and astonished, holding up his thumb in approval: You are something!”) and asked me to teach him English. Perhaps he was influenced by the discourse of English which constitutes English as something to be admired, desirable and beneficial. Within the discourse of English, I, the holder of the highest level of band 8, who had the highly-valued linguistic advantage over him, was positioned by him as someone to be respected with expert knowledge. Such discursive positioning of me might allocate Beihe a disadvantaged position of an English failure in need of expert help, incapable of reaching a higher band, ‘less competent’, possibly informed by the ‘Mengsheng’ discourse that constitutes students as ‘inferior’, ‘lacking’, ‘less intelligent’ and ‘disqualified’.

Or perhaps his positioning of insisting on band 3 was the exclusionary practice of category maintenance work. Beihe produced himself as a ‘Mengsheng’ distinguished from ‘Han’, a haigui lecturer, thus excluding me from being one of them? After I had learnt that his expectation was to pass band 3, I challenged him with band 4. He insisted on the obviousness of ‘Mengsheng’s place of band 3 (“That’s how things are. Everybody knows that”) and denied the possibility of reaching band 4 (“I never dream of band 4”). It seemed he was reinforcing the obviousness of the ‘Mengsheng’ category by signaling the unacceptability of practices that troubled the taken-for-granted knowledge of the category. In CET discourse, between band 3 and band 8, there are grades of band 4 to band 6. Therefore, the difference between band 3 and band 8
appeared to create a tremendously insurmountable gap between us. I was constituted as an achiever of the highest band (band 8), while he occupied the lowest position of band 3, with which he had trouble passing. He discursively referred to himself as “we” (“we are required to pass band 3”), while producing me as one of “those” (“how I admire those study English well”), not belonging to his category.

Two weeks later when I asked Beihe how he got along with his English study and with the plan that I specifically and carefully made for him, I took up the institutional position of a ‘lecturer’ and a ‘Han researcher’. I assigned him a ‘minority minzu student’ position whose progress was subject to my institutional supervision as well as the ‘Han’ gaze. He responded by saying that he was not able to read the designated book because of his various commitments such as “physical training, inspection team responsibilities and a volleyball match”. A cynical reading might be that he fooled me and conned me by finding excuses to get rid of my supervising gaze. By saying “Oh, you mean, New Concept English”, perhaps he conveyed the message that he did not even remember that I had made an English improvement plan for him, disrupting my positioning of him as my student. Perhaps it also produced the effect that reiterated that I was not in an institutional relation with him, undermining the usual power relations between a ‘Han lecturer’ and a ‘minority minzu student’. At that time I drew on the dominant construction of ‘Mengsheng’ as “lazy, unmotivated, lacking self-discipline” to further subjugate his ‘insurbordination’ to my regulatory gaze. Though I knew being constructivist is anti-essentialist and anti-realist, I felt taking up the ‘objective’ researcher’s positioning gave me a strong sense of security because it produced me as an ‘expert’ by focusing on diagnosing his deficiency and engaging in the psychological speculation of whether he wanted to improve English or not (“I was suspicious whether he really wanted to improve English, or if that’s how they are – lazy, unmotivated, lacking self-discipline when it came to study!”). In reflection, I could not help asking myself, is this a position resulting from a fear of losing ‘power’ in front of his ‘obstinacy’?

Because Beihe positioned himself as ‘needy’ and ‘lacking’ while producing me as a ‘Han’ researcher and lecturer with high English skill, I was ready to take up the researcher as ‘savior’ discourse to intervene in his insufficiency. Perhaps I could say that he was provoking me to ‘save’ him and I went into it. I bore in mind his ‘begging’
for help only to find he did not care about his ‘insufficiency’ at all! He successfully established a form of control over me by drawing on the deficit discourses that marginalized him! A sudden gust of uncomfortable feeling overwhelms me as I now feel being used and made fun of …

“But a female who doesn’t wear high-heels can’t be counted as true female!”

“You wear high heels, don’t you?” Nabuqi asked me when five of us (the other four being her roommates) were on our way back from the zoo to the dorm, talking about girls’ stuff. I noticed they were all wearing high-heels of different colours – pink, black, purple, blue.

“Rarely. Sneakers make my feet more comfortable.” I claimed objectively, as I thought this was the right standard by which to choose shoes.

Frowning, Nabuqi commented, “but a female who doesn’t wear high-heels can’t be counted as true female!” (buchuan gaogenxie de nvren bushi zhenren)

Later that day I wrote down my personal feelings about her comments:

No wonder she was an underachiever! How come students putting all their minds on thinking about these outward material things study well? How close-minded she was with such kinds of stereotypes that equated wearing uncomfortable high-heels with being female? What did these silly girls think about all day? I am afraid she lost her sense of self by going blindly after fashion! (Observation, May 15th, 2012)

During that time, as I started getting to know them by hanging out with these female Mengsheng, I found their topics of conversation revolved around eating, dressing or cosmetics, producing me as the only one who was seen to be an academic high-achiever. With their trouble in passing exams, I was inclined to think that their ‘indifferent’ attitudes to study and ‘excessive’ attention to ‘useless’ things were the main reasons for their academic failure. I was constantly and uncritically influenced by the dominant body of literature (Kang, 2006) that criticises the current phenomenon of money-worship and consumerism among some ‘minority minzu university students’. Upon this diagnosis the literature suggests ways to correct and strengthen students’ moral levels and help them to cultivate ‘appropriate’ worldviews, such as plain living, hardworking, observing rules, etc. This normalizing view about what constitutes a ‘good’ university student had become so taken-for-granted that it automatically framed the way I positioned them, especially when I was excluded as ‘a high-achiever’ by their discursive practices of dressing and cosmetics.
An alternative reading from a poststructuralist perspective might focus on the power of the normative femininity in the constitution of subjectivity in that particular situation. Davies (1989) argues that “positioning oneself as male or female is not just a conceptual process. It is also a physical process” (p. 14). Therefore Nabuqi performed herself as a competent member of femininity, knowing the ‘correct’ forms of female bodily practice such as wearing high-heels and making it a predominant feature of female appearances. Perhaps by a rhetorical question about me wearing high heels, she wielded a regulatory and hegemonic power over me, a productive power that formed and brought into being the normalized female subject through being regulated to the normative femininity discourse. As Butler (2004b) argues:

The norm governs intelligibility, allows for certain kinds of practices and action to become recognizable as such, imposing a grid of legibility on the social and defining the parameters of what will and will not appear within the domain of the social (p. 42).

In view of this, Nabuqi’s question “You wear high heels, don’t you?” serves as a normalizing discourse to govern my actions in my daily practice with them. She seemed to be reminding me that wearing high heels was a recognizable social practice for a female, therefore I should be regulated by this norm too. Since I was a female, I needed to comply with the norm in hanging out with them, to perform the very naturalization of the notion of being female in order to become a legitimate and recognizable female subject and a member of her group.

After learning I rarely wore high heels, Nabuqi frowned “but a female who doesn’t wear high-heels can’t be counted as true female!” Butler (2004b) suggests, “to be not quite masculine or not quite feminine is still to be understood exclusively in terms of one’s relationship to the “quite masculine” and the “quite feminine” (p. 42). Since I did not wear high-heels, I was produced by her exclusively as “not quite feminine”, living a not quite ‘viable’ life in relation to normative femininity (Butler, 2004b). For example, as I hung out with Nabuqi and her peers they wore high heels of different colours and produced feminized walking gestures. By contrast, I put on white sneakers, running here and there with them. As analysed, wearing high-heels was constructed as central to her definition of ‘femaleness’, abjecting sneakers to being masculine and dull. Thus, high-heels donot merely represent the exterior appearance, but mark a feminizing process by which ‘femaleness’ is inscribed in bodies (Davies, 1989). Not only could high-heels
“sexualise girls”, but they were utilized by Nabuqi as “a powerful signifier” in successfully positioning and performing herself as an ‘authentic’ female (Davies, 1989, p. 16). Thus not only was I made the object of Nabuqi’s feminised surveillance, but I was also seen by this differential as not ‘feminine’ enough.

In relation to this understanding of Nabuqi’s production of me as the deviant of ‘true female’ (“but female who doesn’t wear high-heels can’t be counted as true female!”), I find Davies’ (1989) elaboration of category maintenance work particularly pertinent:

Thus individuals can deviate, but their deviation will give rise to category maintenance work around the gender boundaries. This category-maintenance work is aimed partly at letting the deviants know they’ve got it wrong – teasing is often enough to pull someone back into line – but primarily it is aimed at maintaining the category as a meaningful category in the face of the individual deviation that is threatening it (p. 28-29).

Therefore through the lens of category maintenance work, as Nabuqi defined what constituted an ‘incorrect’ way of being female, she demonstrated her competence as a recognisable, worthy and legitimate female member (Davies, 1989). She clarified she knew the right codes with convincing authority while producing my way of wearing sneakers as a failure to be ‘correctly’ gendered (Davies, 1989). Thus, producing me as a deviant is “necessary for making stronger boundaries” and maintaining the categories meaningful and distinct (Davies, 1989, p. 29). Butler (2004b) further argues, to deviate from the norm “is to produce the aberrant example that regulatory powers … may quickly exploit to shore up the rationale for their own continuing regulatory zeal” (p. 52). Thus Nabuqi’s discursive production of me as the ‘Other’ female, who went astray from the normative femininity discourse, further foregrounded her operation of utilizing regulatory discourses to condition the cultural intelligibility of me as a female in hanging out with them. Perhaps this category maintenance work produced an implicit exclusionary message: I need to regulate myself by wearing high-heels to be with them, otherwise, I have to leave.

My fieldnotes I recorded during our shopping together three weeks later further demonstrates how this regulatory scrutiny exercised its power over me:

As Nabuqi was trying on her dress, I was waiting for her while looking around for some newly arrived skirts. I unwittingly looked into the fitting mirror, noticing a lady who looked fashionably tall, her tight black dress matched perfectly well with black high heels and natural beige stockings. I drew special
attention to her body gesture: she lifted her head, with chest out and stomach in, the very feminized gesture created by the effect of wearing high-heels. While I was observing this vogue and modern image, suddenly, an uncomfortable surprise flooded over me – for it dawned on me I had caught sight of my own reflection! I was overwhelmed by an unexpected surge of confusion in my heart. Had I, a researcher and a lecturer, become subtly shaped by these silly girls? I never used to wear such high heels, but now within only a few weeks, I began to put on high heels in hanging out with them! (Observation, June 8th, 2012)

With my positioning of Nabuqi and her peers as ‘silly’ girls, I experienced a sudden feeling of surprise and confusion at the realization of my own reflection in the mirror. I was surprised and confused by my change in the way I wore high-heels and exhibited the corresponding feminized gesture. After all, I was a researcher and lecturer! How possibly can these ‘silly’ girls have such power to influence me so insidiously? Was it because of our interactive relationship that it was impossible for the researcher to remain ‘detached’ and ‘neutral’? But did that mean I had to behave like ‘that’? I felt myself torn into pieces, unable to theorize my conforming behaviours at that time.

Re-reading this part of the data with the Foucauldian perspective, I begin to develop an alternative understanding that illustrates how I see my authority troubled and transgressed by these ‘silly’ girls. With Foucault’s (1980) conceptualization of how power operates, now I view my behaviour as the effect of power:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself (p. 155).

Perhaps Nabuqi mobilized the construction of femininity that reversed the power hierarchy. Through this normalization of bodies, Nabuqi exercised regulatory power over me, shaping my conduct, not by the use of physical force or violence, but by her mobilization of the normative gaze and category maintenance work that governed the production of meaningful knowledge of being a female. Nabuqi’s gender regulation for me and my intentional take-up of this position represented a circulating, omnipresent and contradictory relation of force: I grappled between my need to collect the data and my fear of being ‘excluded’ from her group. I also experienced the considerable tension between the way that I knew I ought to be and the way I actually preferred to be.

There were times when I did feel ‘included’ and ‘privileged’ in my fieldwork. Under the support of the institution’s authorities, my ‘privileged’ position as a researcher enabled
me to go into the classroom to observe students and interview them. By intermingling
with students during the meal time and participating in extra-curriculum activities, I was
granted the access to ‘blend in’. In a way, I felt empowered because of this ‘privileged’
position which entitled me the opportunity to interact and research students. However, it
is this ‘privileged’ position that I find increasingly problematic now. For instance,
during the sports meeting I sat beside Hasigaowa, who noticed my newly-bought
earrings and asked me if I could shop with her for similar ones. Through our chat, I
learnt she viewed me as impeccably powerful in many aspects of life – though totally
different from what I thought of myself, as recorded in my fieldnotes:

While I watched the 400-distant running, Hasigaowa, the female student sitting
next to me, started chatting with me about girls’ stuff:

“Teacher Zhang, you’ve got pretty earrings. Are they jade?” Hasigaowa stared at
the earrings, asking me.

Seeing her interested in this kind of stuff, I replied, “Yes. I bought them
yesterday in Darunfa shopping mall.”

“Really? They look nice on you. What’s the brand?” She repeatedly turned her
eyes onto my earrings.

“Zhoudafu”, I said. (an expensive and well-known brand in China)

“Wow!” She raised her upper eyelid while uttering the word. Her shimmery
brown eye shadow on the middle eyelid and deeper shades on both ends drew
my attention. “Why did you choose a longer style instead of a shorter one?” She
asked.

“Cause, I’ve been putting on weight around my face recently. To make my face
appear oval-shaped instead of being round, I needed longer earrings to create
that effect, that’s part of my personal pretty project.” I said with a beaming blink
of eyes.

“That’s a pretty smart tasty logic, I like that!” Her face was lit up with a
smile … (Observation, June 11th, 2012)

Later that day, I wrote down how she positioned me and how my address was
changed from “Teacher Zhang” to “Sister Yongxia”:

After the sports-meeting, we headed for Darunfa shopping centre for dinner
together, and also for earrings. We talked a lot about fashion, jewellery and
cosmetics. She asked me questions like “What do you eat everyday, do you have
a special diet to keep you slim?”… “How did you study English well?”… She
then commented to me: “I like ‘Han’ people who are interested in our culture
like you!”… “You have the strong willpower to do research over the long
distance from China to Australia! You are something!” She also revealed how
she managed to skip classes and never read a single book so far … “I would not
tell you these things if you were my teacher, otherwise I would not pass the exam. These classes and books are boring.” She also talked to me about her trouble with her boyfriend as she said: “I enjoyed sharing with you these things as you are more experienced than me because you are married (nishi guolairen)”…

During shopping, I helped her bargain, which saved her 80 yuan ($15). On our way back, she changed her way of addressing me from Teacher Zhang to Sister Yongxia, and became one of my participants … (Observation, June 11th, 2012)

As I looked back at this data, I found my multiple status, presence and mode of social interactions in particular situations at particular moments, triggered particular discourses such as those related to being a female, a tutor, a researcher, a non-local teacher, a married person and a bargainer upon which Hasigaowa drew to position herself and me. By situating me within these discourses she positioned me as impeccably privileged in her eyes. For instance, my physical appearance, academic work and my research interest produced me to be a person of power in her eyes – the power of being physically fit, of studying English well, of being interested in Mongolian culture and of leaving home to study in a foreign land. Even my marital status made me powerful. She revealed her trouble with her boyfriend as “you were more experienced (ni shi guolairen) than me because you were married.” My status as non-local teacher produced me as powerful too, because I didn’t have the evaluating and grading responsibilities toward her (“I would not tell you these things if you were my teacher, otherwise I would not pass the exam.”) My ability to bargain for her earrings, which saved her 80 Yuan produced me powerful too. Based on these privileged positions that she discursively produced, she changed her way of addressing me from “Teacher Zhang” to “Sister Yongxia”, and eventually became my participant, perhaps feeling that it ‘pays off’ to be my participants and be associated with me.

Because of this change of address, I initially thought my ‘privileged’ researcher position enabled me to start with a certain degree of ‘sisterhood’ interaction with my participant. I produced myself as a researcher with the desire to become the students’ ‘sister’, busy going shopping with participant. But how do discourses get such power over me, shaping my conduct of performing a ‘sister’ role? Could it be the domination of ‘Han’ culturalism which anoints ‘Han’ supremacy and marginalizes ‘minority minzu’? I did not want to continue my participants’ colonisation, so I worked against that colonisation and strived for being a ‘sister’. However, could I really come over the effects of colonization or just shifted its form and at the same time leaving my actions’ power
effects the same? This potential discourse formed my body and fulfilled my desire to be a researcher with particular subject positions longing for being recognized by students.

However, as I reflect on it now, I begin to problematise the very position of ‘sister’: Hasigaowa might use these sweet words to make me feel she was my friend – perhaps she as well as well read the way I intended to position myself with participants, so she engaged in the discursive inclusion of me. As the change of address from “Teacher Zhang” to “Sister Yongxia” produced an ‘inclusive’ effect on me, I felt myself an ‘insider’ who was more capable of uncovering the ‘hidden truth’ about her life than her teachers (“I would not tell you these things if you were my teacher”). I felt like an accepted member of my participant, but I now feel that I am not. I rushed back to my room after my shopping with Hasigaowa to write down the fieldnotes. I desired to go shopping with her to collect data for my own benefit – to graduate with a PhD. I hid my fieldnotes during our interactions because I wanted to ‘fit in’ and be a ‘real sister’, since it was not possible for me to stop to take notes while hanging out with her as a friend (Ceglowski, 2000). These reflections make me uneasy now because of my opportunistic desire to forge this imagined ‘sisterhood’ …

Discussion

Utilizing the analytic tool of positionality in reflecting my engagement with participants in the fieldwork, I intend to call into attention the researcher’s subjectivities in organizing and interpreting knowledge (Pillow, 2003) and deconstruct the researcher’s absolute authority for knowing the ‘Other’ (Gannon, 2006). Contrary to modernist ethnographers who argue that the researcher-researched interactions are shaped by the sum of structural constructs such as race, ethnicity and gender (Choi, 2006), I employed Pillow’s (2003) uncomfortable reflexivity to focus on the micro-practice between participants and myself “as I have lived it as an embodied being [that] provide an immediate and vivid resource for examining the constitutive power of discourse” (Davies, 2000, p. 10). As I make visible the ways discourses operate, I intend to bring into view how the shifting power relations between the researcher and the researched shape the researcher’s multiple subject positions which are constitutive of the ways (s)he produces particular knowledge (Haraway, 1988). Through examining mobile positionings (Haraway, 1988), my reflexive analysis illustrates the ongoing and relational nature of subjectivities constructed out of the discursive possibilities in
relation to the interacted other (Davies & Davies, 2007). My analysis also contributes to postfoundational research that argues that the researcher is always viewing from somewhere in particular, with finite embodiment and limits of view because of the “multidimensional” (Haraway, 1988, p.586) and “contingent” (Gannon, 2002, p. 671) nature of subjectivities.

In a supervisor meeting on my reflexive analysis, my supervisors asked me questions that inspired me to take up another reflexive turn. They asked me to reflect on what my reflexive text produced. My reflexive texts are not just “words on a page” (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 10), but create another kind of data to analyze the effects of my writing practice. In the first narrative of my experience with high-heels, with the reflexive words written on the page, I sexualized Nabuqi and produced myself as a researcher with my particular analysis: Through citations to poststructuralist feminists, I provided a particular construction of Nabuqi (“she demonstrated her competence as a recognizable, worthy and legitimate female member”) and the impact of her gender regulation on me (“I need to regulate myself by wearing high-heels to be with them, otherwise, I have to leave”). Because I also constructed myself as an ‘incorrectly’ gendered female (“I was produced by her exclusively as ‘not quite feminine’”), I read myself as not being able to gain access to Nabuqi’s world. In this way, reading myself as a ‘not appropriately’ gendered subject silenced me and rendered me powerless as a researcher. The second part of my reflexive text on the high-heels experience disrupted the normative femininity boundary between Nabuqi and I. Nabuqi’s gendered surveillance produced my docile body as sexualized as I chose to wear high-heels in order to ‘fit in’ with everything around me to collect data.

If now I turn my reflexivity on the text I produced as my reflexive analysis, I read that I have invented and presented myself as a ‘sexy’ ethnographer. Perhaps this production satisfied my desire to be otherwise, to be another kind of female or to be another kind of ethnographer, perhaps a more ‘sexy’ and therefore out of ordinary kind. Or it could be otherwise, for example that by producing my text I fulfilled my desire to become a ‘real’ poststructuralist ethnographer. Davies & Davies (2007) suggest that reflexive texts “cannot give us a fixed or fixable truth about particular identities or particular categories or particular social worlds” (p. 1157). Any readings we make are fabrications sustained through discursive practices (Butler, 1990). Therefore, none of the reflexive accounts
about participants and me are universally ‘true’, yet, they are constructed with real effects (Davies & Davies, 2007, p. 1156; Gannon, 2006). In constructing the writing self, the texts also produce the very impossibility of knowing a self (Gannon, 2006). In this sense, reflecting on the reflexive texts problematises an ultimate and existing ‘truth’ that can be innocently represented, and troubles the role of reflexivity as a method to produce ‘better’ research. Through my reflexive practices on the fieldwork experience and the reflexive texts, I intend to answer Pillow’s (2003) call of opening up a new space of using reflexivity – disrupting any research attempt which seeks for a definite understanding of people’s lives, while making visible the discursive strategies to construct meanings (p. 192).
Chapter 7 Discussion

Now I wish to come back to the question ‘Do you ride horses?’ that I introduced in the preface. The question makes me laugh because it does not only produce my unmarked ‘Hanness’ which I used to take for granted and the conditioned possibilities for my fieldwork, but also reproduces the Han/minority hierarchy, and Han/Mongolian power relations, and perpetuates the marginalization of ‘minority minzu students’. In the wake of my laughter a disturbing uneasiness arose about how I was complicit in participating in the exotically mundane stereotyping and how I continued the ethnic categorization. Asking this question during my fieldwork, I was uncritically engaged in everyday and official discourses of Chinese multiculturalism and naturalized the hegemony of the dominant Han culture. Feeling differently now about the same question, I decided to place the stereotype ‘Do you ride horses?’ between single quotation marks to show that the discursive familiarity of the category is problematic and to initiate the possibility of troubling its conventional deployments, to denaturalize and defamiliarize the customary stereotypes associated with it and to call for different articulations of ‘Mongolian university students’.

As I mentioned in the Introduction chapter, the thesis arose out of my deep concern about ‘minority minzu students’ and the assumed deficit characteristics and stereotypical representations of them. Drawing upon the available psychometric discourses, I sought for ‘better’ ways of ‘knowing’ students. Banks (2004) suggests, “the prejudice reduction dimension of multicultural education describes the characteristics of children’s racial attitudes and suggests strategies that can be used to help students develop more democratic attitudes and values” (p. 5). Bank’s notion of ‘prejudice reduction’ further encouraged me to explore students’ identity work in order to obtain a better understandings of ‘who they are’, seeking effective solutions for ‘prejudice reduction’. By doing this, I wished to contribute to the benign tenets of multicultural education, such as creating equal opportunities, “recognizing, respecting and including cultural differences as the basis for teaching and learning” (May & Sleeter, 2009, p. 1). Meanwhile, the question that arises is: What is the problem with reducing prejudice, fostering better understanding and respect of ‘minority students’ and their cultural practices? Isn’t ‘knowing students better’ in order to improve ‘minority
students’ academic achievements an important goal? Isn’t seeking solutions to students’ marginalization a worthy cause?

The problem with the notion of prejudice reduction is that it reinforces the normalization process and essentializes ‘minority students’ as a set of static cultural characteristic that can be described, analyzed, homogenized and known with certainty. The notion of prejudice reduction also hinges upon fixing oppositional identities and reproduces hierarchical relationships between the dominant and the subordinate ‘Other’. Taking up poststructuralist perspectives in my thesis, I wished to rupture these fundamental dynamisms of multicultural education. In this thesis I argued that the problem with ‘knowing better’ is that it abdicates the recognition of positionality and partial perspectives in knowledge formation (Haraway, 1988, 1997), the constitutive force of discourses and the power/knowledge nexus in shaping reality (Foucault, 1980). Thus, my initial motive to discover ‘minority students’ identity work for better solutions to their marginalization is problematic because such exploration is not an innocent reflection of the category which is passively waiting for me to discover. Rather, my very quest for that type of knowledge production actively enacted a normalized understanding which categorized ‘Mongolian students’ as the ‘minoritized’ subjects. With the normative understanding of ‘prejudice reduction’, the root of students’ marginalization was viewed by me as their deficit resulting from cultural differences, instead of the strategic deployment of power/knowledge and the operating discourses. Conceiving ‘knowing better’ as a solution to ‘prejudice reduction’ and a remedy to students’ underachievement in a culturally pluralistic society is, as Kazmi (1997) put it, “the consequence of an epistemological strategy by which they are made the object of knowledge, by and for, the dominant culture” (p. 340). ‘Minority students’ are essentialized to appear as an ‘Other’ through the condescending act of ‘understanding’ and ‘respect’ (Kazmi, 1997).

If the benign and well-intended tenets of ‘prejudice reduction’ are far from being unproblematic, then what can my thesis offer to the field of multicultural education? Through my thesis, I argued for using Petersen’s (2004, 2007) concept of category boundary work to denaturalize and defamiliarize normative constructions of ‘minority students’ subjectivities. Educators can utilize the concept of category boundary work to explore how category boundaries are constructed and contested, and how some
knowledges and practices are included as relevant and significant while others are disqualified as inappropriate and irrelevant in constituting subject positions and possibilities of certain subjects. As the in/exclusionary practices are inseparable from the functioning of power (Foucault, 1980), knowledge/power relationships thus make it possible to see the stereotypes of ‘minority students’ as effects of power (Foucault, 1980; Kazmi, 1997) by which students are essentialized and classified. Denaturalizing the discursive category of ‘minority students’ unsettles essentialist assumptions that see the stereotypical representations of ‘minority students’ as their neutral and transparent descriptions of ‘who they are’ free from the tactics of power. Therefore, instead of seeking a more effective approach to ‘know’ students, educators can ‘do otherwise’ (Petersen, 2004) by making visible how discourses are utilized to make certain knowledge legitimized (also see Kazmi, 1997). It also helps to identify what discourses are mobilized to constitute the conditions of possibilities.

Foucault suggests that “people know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do, but what they don’t know is what what they do does” (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983, p. 187). For me, this quote well captures the significant implications of utilizing the concept of category boundary work. Without knowing how power operates, how deficit discourses are normalized, being taken up or negotiated, educators and students might continue to produce ‘minority minzu students’ as ‘secondary’ citizens. The concept of category boundary work makes it possible to see that students are not confined to one discursive regime and that they have the capacity to move between multiple discourses that constitute them (Davies, 1991). Therefore there are always possibilities of shifting and heterogeneous forms of doing ‘minority students’. This perspective will undermine an understanding that sees students as being hegemonically and stereotypically constituted by essentializing claims (Kazmi, 1997). Such a denaturalizing act is an epistemological move that is able to attend to the complexity and negotiation of multiple subjectivities. This perspective enables the examination of ‘Mongolian university students’ subjectivity construction as continuous practices of negotiating multiple boundaries – maintaining, reinforcing, contracting and challenging ‘ethnic’ boundaries, and establishing new boundaries. In this way, it becomes possible to “both produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently” (Lather, 2007, p. 135) in order to work against the essentializing discourses.
Utilizing Foucault (1977, 1978, 1980, 1983) and Butler’s (1990, 1993, 1997) perspectives on subject formation, my thesis is the first study using a poststructuralist lens to explore the discursive constitution of Chinese ‘minority minzu students’. In pioneering this approach, I have been aware that although Foucault and Butler’s discursive theorizations remain classic within the social sciences, they have been critiqued by recent theorists (e.g. Barad, 2003; Boucher, 2006; Wolfe, 2010). For instance, Barad (2003) argues that in the ‘discursive turn’, language has been granted too much power so that matter is reduced to a passive and immutable factor. She proposes a focus on aspects of non-discursive practices as an active factor in the further materialization because she argues that Foucault “fails to offer an account of the body’s historicity in which its very materiality plays an active role in the workings of power” (Barad, 2003, p. 809). While I do not intend to deny the so-called ‘material turn’, I do believe in the central and significant role of discursive practices and category boundary work, due to their generative contributions to my own understanding. My inclination toward the discursive approach shifted my earlier focus on the correspondence between description and ‘reality’, to the productive force of doing/becoming/social practices/actions. Seeing students as discursively constituted enabled a new focus on the multiplicity, contradiction and heterogeneity in students’ becomings and lived experiences. Such constructions are not seen as failures of unified, stable and autonomous thoughts and beings, but as the effects of a production, accumulation and negotiation of multiple discourses (Davies, 1991), such as discourses of traditional culture, sports, the Mongolian wolf, national character, Han culturalism, institutional practices, physical prowess, disciplinary technologies, physical appearances, Mongolian language, popular culture, heterosexuality, pastoralism, normative femininity, and deficit discourses, etc. While I do not intend to exhaust these available discourses, exploring students’ subjectivities through the poststructuralist lens enabled me to shift the psychological or deficit gazes to formulating the possibility of seeing how manifold relations of power which are established within discourses, characterize and constitute students’ conditions of possibility. Therefore, despite some current denouncements against Foucault and Butler’s ‘discursive turn’ (Barad, 2003), I still believe my attention to the discursive inclusionary and exclusionary practices involved in the continuous category boundary work opens up a promising and productive space both theoretically and methodologically, to explore ‘minority minzu students’ as a discursive category that
is continuously constructed through the function, circulation and accumulation of discourses (Foucault, 1980). I believe this discursive approach, which highlights the radical dependency on the constitutive ‘other’ in framing the subject (Butler 1990; 1993), contributes significantly to the problematization of essentialist understanding of ‘minority minzu students’.

Utilizing poststructuralist theorizing, my project is not about discovering ‘new mountains’. What I have sought after is a desire to see ‘mountains’ differently. In insisting on the fluidity and complexity of the social world, my study offers different interpretations of the available tales. My ambition is not to understand ‘better’ or more ‘comprehensively’ or more ‘convincingly’, but to cast in doubt the available constructions of ‘minority minzu students’ and to open up possibilities of seeing social categories not as a fixed end product but as differently produced through each discursive act (Davies, 1989, 1993, 2000). I hope that making visible how discourses operate provides a useful lens to make sense of various discursive strategies of students’ social practices and also to see the continuous process of students’ becoming with different eyes. In doing so, I hope my thesis opens up opportunities to generate new discourses and invoke potentially different practices “not as a permanent contestation of social norms condemned to the pathos of perpetual failure, but rather as a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility” (Butler, 1993, p. xiii).

If my study can be read as a potentially critical resource for the struggle of rearticulation, then what does this resource mean for policy-making? How does my work speak to the Chinese government? What kinds of questions does my work provoke policy-makers to think about in terms of dealing with cultural diversity? If Chinese minority education policy in aiming to unify ‘minority minzu’ groups re/produces the dividing and marginalizing dilemma (Tsung & Clarke, 2010), then is it possible that government policy-makers consider other ways of knowing ‘minority minzu students’? Is it possible to think beyond the ‘Han’/’minority minzu’, ‘advanced’/’backward’, ‘powerful’/‘powerless’ dichotomies as the inevitable? If these different ways of

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26 This metaphor comes from the Chinese Zen (Ch’an) aphorism that there are three awakening moments in human life: the first moment is “mountains are mountains, rivers are rivers”; the second moment is “mountains are not mountains, rivers are not rivers”; the third moment is “mountains are just mountains, rivers are just rivers”.

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Knowing are to be considered, then what are the tactics to problematize and disrupt the taken-for-granted discourses? An approach for policymakers could be to continuously examine how discourses normalize and govern the particular use and production of knowledges and practices. Policymakers can also explore how policies further reinforce the categorization and exclusion that policies (officially) aim to eliminate. Or they can consider that the questions of ‘superior’ or ‘inferior’ and ‘advancedness’ or ‘backwardness’ are discursive creations and that there are multiple ways of doing ‘minority minzu students’ which make ‘ethnic’ boundaries difficult to seal. For instance, they can explore the constitutive force of mundane social practices through which students are capable of positioning themselves and taking up “act of authorship” (Davies, 1991, p. 50) in multiple and shifting ways. I hope this approach of ‘thinking differently’ may engender a hope of ‘doing differently’ in terms of dealing with cultural diversity and provide new possibilities for denaturalizing educational policies and practices.

Writing this chapter, I couldn’t help thinking this thesis is best understood as the beginning of an end. One of the lingering thoughts that remains unaddressed for me is the enduring dilemma of what it means for a ‘Han researcher’ to research ‘minority minzu students’. My status as a ‘Han researcher’ produces me ambivalently both as a colonizer and marginalized. Villenas (1996) argues that researchers produce themselves as colonizers when they claim the authenticity of interpretation and description without problematizing their own subjectivities and ‘privileged’ positions (p. 713), when they “perpetuate othering” (p. 713), when “the professional and intellectual gatekeeping structures (e.g. university admissions to graduate studies, journal publication referees) from which we gain our legitimacy and privilege remain highly inaccessible to those on whose behalf we claim to write” (p. 714), when they objectify research subjects for their domination (p. 713), etc. I am a colonizer because I am an educated ‘majoritized’ researcher recruited in the dominant institutions to research minoritized students. I exercised colonizing power when I was granted access to the special zones in order to better observe students’ behaviours during the sports meeting and taking photos, from which students were excluded. I also acted like a colonizer when I asked students the question “Do you ride horses?” , when I started my fieldwork adopting the ‘family dog’ principle, assuming objective authority in representation. As a researcher, I also participated in the exploitation of students (Fine, 1994; Rosaldo, 1989) by objectifying
and writing about them for the benefit of writing my PhD thesis. My colonizer gaze thus not only constituted something that I cannot escape, but was played out as an enduring theme throughout my data. I was also marginalized as the ‘Other’ as I struggled to access students’ parties, to wear high-heels, to become a friend, to learn the Mongolian language and sing Mongolian songs, etc. As I studied my participants, I was also excluded by them because I was not of my participants’ community and did not share with them the same cultural practices. Students often defined what I could know, feel and record, and to what they needed to give me access. As a ‘Han researcher/university lecturer’ researching ‘Mongolian university students’, I was simultaneously involved in colonizing my participants and in being marginalized by them. On the other hand, my writing has been continuously colonized by my supervisors and by the imaginary gaze of my examiners to prove myself worthy of a PhD. By interrogating my ‘privileged’ and less ‘privileged’ positions, I do not only wish to bring into view how assumptions about a ‘Han student researcher’ shape knowledge production, but to meet the challenge posed by Villenas (1996) who encourages ethnographers to “call upon their own marginalizing experiences and find a space for the emergence of new identities and discourses” (p. 729). What emerges is a scene of great ambivalence and unresolvable tension.

The second lingering thought is my awareness that the thesis produces its own ‘regime of truth’ which generates particular ways of knowing, seeing and feelings with my own “agenda of agglutination” (Cowen, 2014, p. 4) – I am aligned with Foucault and Butler’s perspectives (and not others). Like all knowledge, this politics of knowledge may be critiqued by other ‘regimes of truth’ and some of the readers who read this thesis may not share this same politics. In my efforts to wonder and offer different meanings, can I declare that my thesis has successfully unsettled essentialist discourses? Who decides whether my thesis has successfully produced knowledge differently and produced a different knowledge? Throughout my thesis, I have been aware that ‘unbiased’ and ‘universal’ judgments are a political fiction and the answer to these questions lies ‘in’ the individual reader as well as ‘in’ me.

Another lingering thought is what I have learnt about the students whom I spent time with during my fieldwork. Doing this poststructuralist thesis, I began to see them differently with an ethical commitment to understand the complexity of our shifting and interconnected relationships in forming subjects. As I shift my focus from diagnosing
students to denaturalizing their positions and positionings, I no longer “rush to judgments that foreclose understanding of the conditions of possibility of particular lives and of what it is that makes for a viable life” (Davies & Davies, 2007, p. 1157). I began to see the embeddedness of discourses and pay more attention to how (de)legitimizing practices are done, troubled and negotiated by my student participants.

**What to do next…**

Submitting this thesis, I will go back to China to continue my lecturing to university students (mostly ‘Hans’). Perhaps a next project would be focusing on ‘Han students’; to examine how majoritization takes place, thus problematizing ‘Hanness’ might become my next project in my ‘practice of freedom’ (Foucault, 1989). With the exploration of the majoritization process, the unmarked positions of ‘Han students’ or the ‘superiority’ of ‘Hanness’ as discursively produced, naturalized and become dominant becomes the focus of research, thus the researcher’s focus shifts from the ‘deficient’ to the unproblematically accepted. This proposed research also attends to the operations of power, keeping on asking how the ‘regimes of truth’ are enacted and naturalized. Instead of seeking certainties, in my future pedagogical practices as a poststructuralist reflective lecturer, I wish and attempt to decenter and destabilize the familiar practices that privilege ‘Hanness’ as ‘normal’ and ‘natural’. Perhaps it is only through denaturalizing them that there is hope for minoritised students…
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