

**SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CROSS-ETHNIC FRIENDSHIPS AMONG MIN KAO
MIN, MIN KAO HAN, AND HAN STUDENTS AT
MINZU UNIVERSITY OF CHINA:
A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines ethnic minority students at Minzu University of China (Minzu) and the ways in which students form social capital and cross-ethnic friendships as strategies to support their academic and career pursuits. Minzu University of China (in Beijing) is selected as the site for the study because it is the leading minority university in China and its mission is to promote educational attainment and social integration among the nation's ethnic minority population. The study calls on sociological work on social capital and schooling as well as work on cross-racial and cross-ethnic friendship formation to guide the theoretical and conceptual analysis. Three groups of students based on ethnic background and primary language spoken form the basis for the interview sample: 1) Han students whose primary language is Chinese Mandarin; 2) Min Kao Han students who are ethnic minorities fluent in Chinese Mandarin and who took the college entrance exam (the *Gaokao*) in Mandarin; and 3) Min Kao Min students representing ethnic minority students who took the college entrance exam in their native language and who may have limited Mandarin ability.

The following research questions served to guide the study: 1) What differences exist among Han, Min Kao Han, and Min Kao Min college students in terms of the observable characteristics of their social connections and relations? 2) How do students form social relationships and connections and to what extent are there observable differences when comparing the three groups of students? 3) How do the students form cross-ethnic friendships and relations and to what extent are there observable differences across the three groups of students? 4) How does *guanxi* influence the formation of social relationships and connections among the three groups of students? Methodologically

speaking, the study borrows from the qualitative tradition and emphasizes the kind of perspective taking critical to understanding the collegiate experiences of ethnic minorities. Field work was conducted during the spring semester 2017 over a five-month period and involved semi-structured interviews with 42 students (14 from each ethnic grouping and equal numbers of males and females), informal interviews, participant observation (mainly in the form of shadowing) and document analysis.

Key research findings point to the fact that Min Kao Min students tend to lack confidence about their pre-college education and their *Gaokao* performance. The vast majority of students appreciated the cultural and ethnic diversity at Minzu University, although some reported shortcomings with the educational environment in terms of the academic quality and the campus infrastructure. Two major forms of social relations constituted students' social capital formation—peer to peer connections and faculty/staff connections. Extracurricular activities and social media/online platforms provided important spaces for students to build social capital and cross-ethnic friendships. *Guanxi*, as a unique form of social capital in the Chinese cultural context, emerged as an important aspect of the collegiate experience and the formation of social connections. In terms of cross-ethnic friendship formation, Min Kao Min students tended to have the most homophilous friendship circles, whereas Min Kao Han students were more likely to have the most heterophilous friendships with Han students falling in the middle. The fact that Min Kao Min students are least likely to form cross-ethnic friendships was seen as an important factor in potentially limiting their social capital formation.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

It was 2009 when I first set foot on the campus of Minzu University, the same year that we celebrated the 60th anniversary of the founding of my country—the People’s Republic of China. One of my first memories was the students at Minzu, as one of the nation’s most significant embodiments of its ethnic diversity, joining the National Day parade at Tiananmen Square. The day was October 1, 2009 and I was a young and naïve freshman excited about being a student at such an important university. Although I was not a member of the Minzu parade delegation, which included 900 students representing all of China’s official 56 ethnic groups, I was so proud when I watched on television and saw students from Minzu participating in the parade, many wearing traditional clothing representing their ethnic backgrounds. I recognized the outfits of Tibetans, Mongolians, Uyghurs, and my own ethnic group, the Manzu (known usually as Manchurians in the Western world).

A few weeks earlier, I had experienced my real taste of college life at Minzu during what is called the Opening Ceremony, or in Chinese, kai xue dian li. The university had arranged for parade participants to perform as part of the university’s Opening Ceremony festivities. The students not only displayed their ethnic backgrounds through their clothing but also performed ethnic-based dances. That was the first time in my life that I experienced all 56 ethnic groups in such a small time period.

Additionally, the student parade participants also engaged in acts of patriotism by piecing together dozens of smaller flags to create as a group a larger five-starred red flag, the national flag of China. Undeniably, this occasion greatly inspired my sense of

patriotism—I felt quite proud to be part of such a diverse university with seemingly such importance to China. While I didn't have this thought at the time, their actions kind of embody the ways in which official institutions such as Minzu University are used in some manner to promote ethnic identity and affiliation, but only in a manner tied to a sense of Chinese nationalism. This is very important it seems from the government's perspective, but perhaps less important from the students' point of view. It was expressed back then by former president, Hu Jintao, and his idea of Harmonious Society or hexie shehui.

After the thrilling performance, the president of the university made a speech in which he encouraged all new students to make full use of our time in college and become someone who contributes to Chinese society. He also expressed hope that the ethnically diverse campus environment would prepare all of us to become more tolerant of diversity and cultural differences in life. The president repeated our school's motto: "Diversity in Unity, Theory in Practice, or in Chinese, mei mei yu gong, zhi xing he yi. The motto basically places emphasis on respecting ethnic diversity and applying our knowledge (theory) to real life (practice).

As a member of the Manzu ethnic group, one mostly integrated into mainstream Han society and culture, I grew up in a town—Ji'An in Jilin Province—where the dominant population is Han, although there also are populations of Manzu and Korean Chinese (my hometown is on the Yalu River which forms the border with North Korea). One might say that I am rather hanhua—the Chinese term that more or less signifies that one "acts Han-like." Many Manzu are rather hanhua and only few speak the ancestral language associated with the Manzu people. Being hanhua though does not mean that one is entirely incorporated into Han culture, as most ethnic minority people who are fairly

assimilated are likely to retain some sense of unique cultural background or life experiences even if it only involves preparing a traditional dish associated with one's own ancestry.

At Minzu University, I was able to better connect with my Manzu ethnic heritage by meeting other Manzu students. But I also came to fully embrace the ethnic diversity of campus life—it felt like I lived ethnic diversity in person. For the first time I deeply experienced real cultural differences in people's appearance, in the language they speak, in the lifestyle they led, and in the religion they subscribed to. I also came to fully embrace building meaningful relationships with ethnic minority classmates in sociology as well as in terms of my seven roommates, five of whom were ethnic minorities from Tibetan, Dong, Dawuer, Shui, and Hui backgrounds (two were Han). These seven roommates became sisters to me and to this day we still share personal news and stay in touch through social media.

When I began study for my Ph.D. in sociology at Temple University in the fall of 2013, I knew I would eventually face the challenge of conducting an extended sociological study in some area. I explored many different topics over my first three years of courses at Temple, but what eventually came to me was the vividness and significance of my ethnic experience at Minzu University as an undergraduate from 2009 to 2013. Armed with a deeper understanding of important concepts related to the sociology of education and inequality, I decided to focus on the experiences of students at Minzu, in terms of comparing the experiences of three different groups of students: Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han (to be explained soon). Also, I wanted to apply important sociological concepts such as social capital and cross-ethnic friendship formation to get a

better sense of whether or not the Minzu experience really serves to help support ethnic minority students. So, one can say that the dissertation that follows is very much tied to my personal life and lived experience, especially in terms of my time at Minzu University as an undergraduate.

Context for the Study

The lack of economic success of large numbers of China's ethnic minority population contributes to tension within the country between minorities and the majority Han population (Ma 2011; Wei 2010). Tension is most prominent among Uyghur and Tibetan populations in the western regions of the country where the pattern of rural migration to the nation's major cities has been greatly resisted (*Economist* 2015). But ethnic tension is not limited to only Uyghurs and Tibetans, as other regions in China comprising large populations of ethnic minorities, including provinces such as Inner Mongolia in the north and Yunnan in the southwest, have also experienced ethnic upheaval (Jacobs 2011; Osnos 2014). Although a concern expressed by many ethnic minorities is their lack of tangible benefits from the nation's rapid economic growth over the past few decades, others worry about the disintegration of ethnic cultures as a consequence of widespread assimilation—both in terms of minorities migrating to Han-dominated urban centers and in terms of the Han majority settling in what have traditionally been minority regions such as Xinjiang and Tibet (Mackerras 2008).

The Chinese government has enacted a variety of strategies to address ethnic tensions as part of its goal of strengthening national unity. Many divergent opinions exist about the degree to which official policies actually aid minority groups or whether in fact

such policies promote ethnic assimilation into the mainstream Han culture as part of eliminating ethnic diversity (Gladney 2009; Postiglione 2008; Postiglione, Zhu and Jiao 2004). Preeminent in the thinking of Chinese political leaders is avoiding the type of nation-state disintegration evident by the collapse of the Soviet Union (Mackerras 2003). One set of government policies loosely described as “preferential policies,” or *youhui zhengce* in Chinese, seeks to support ethnic minority access to higher education with the goal of strengthening their participation in the mainstream economy. A key component of these policies involves the role of the *minzu* college and university system and its support of ethnic minority students.

A central objective of the *minzu* college and university system is to promote educational attainment and social integration among the nation’s ethnic minority population (Tang 1996). *Minzu* in Chinese means “nationality group” (akin to ethnic group) and the Chinese government has officially identified 56 ethnic groups,¹ including the Han majority which comprises more than 90 percent of the total population; hence, there are 55 ethnic minority groups (*shaoshu minzu*) officially recognized by the Chinese government (Fei 1980; Postiglione 2009). The *minzu* college and university system, comprised of 15 colleges and universities scattered throughout the country, was created in the 1950s largely to serve the ethnic minority population, while also enrolling significant numbers of students from the Han majority (Clothey 2005; Tang 1996). The leading *minzu* university is Minzu University of China (hereafter Minzu) (Clothey 2005; Rhoads and Chang 2014; Yang, 2017). Although Minzu is considered to be a huge success in terms of achieving a diverse student body (roughly 65 percent of the

¹ Although 56 ethnic groups are officially identified by the Chinese government, the reality is that there are probably far more than this given that many smaller ethnic groups were included as one larger group; I discuss this point further in Chapter 2.

undergraduate students are classified as ethnic minorities),² what is less clear is the degree to which ethnic minority students form the kinds of important ties and connections needed to become fully integrated into the society, including connections deemed beneficial in advancing one's career and economic opportunities. Further, it is not clear whether ethnic minority and Han majority students have meaningful relationships such as those that may be characterized as "close friendships" or "strong ties" in the sense of Granovetter's (1973, 1983) work. A specific concern then is the degree to which ethnic minority students form important relationships with other students, including cross-ethnic friendships, during their college years. The formation of such relationships is critical in Chinese society as the culture is heavily rooted in the importance of social relationships and personal connections, an idea conveyed in Fei Xiaotong's classic work about Chinese society, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society* (1992).

The Proposed Study

As part of addressing the preceding issues, I examined the patterns of social relationship formation conceptually as forms of social capital and sought to better understand how ethnic minority students acquire social capital through their educational experiences at Minzu, including how they form cross-ethnic connections. My understanding of social capital is informed more generally by the work of Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), but Carter (2005), Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011), and Stuber (2011) specifically shape my operationalization of the construct. The conceptual aspect of my study will be further delineated in Chapter 2 when I focus on the literature review.

² This is a figure that has been noted by some Minzu staff and scholar who have studied the university, but getting the actual data is very difficult as ethnic minority issues (and related data) are highly sensitive issues in China.

In particular, three groups of students are represented at Minzu and formed the basis for my study. These three groups are based on ethnic background and primary language spoken as part of their family life: 1) Min Kao Min (MKM) students are ethnic minority students who took the college entrance exam (the Gaokao) in their native tongue and who may have limited Mandarin ability; 2) Min Kao Han (MKH) students represent ethnic minorities who are fluent in Chinese Mandarin and who took the college entrance exam in Mandarin; and 3) Han majority students are those students who identify as Han and whose primary language is Chinese Mandarin (Clothey 2005). In organizing my study around these three groups, I intentionally recognized the importance of ethnic background and language in the development of social relationships during college.

My study builds on the previous work at Minzu University conducted by Clothey (2005), and more recently, Yang (2017). Clothey explored ethnic minorities at Minzu by focusing on ethnic identity and language differences; Yang focused on the ethnic identity and experiences of Tibetan students. Although the work of Clothey and Yang is helpful in advancing my study (they both studied minority students at Minzu), it is important to note that they did not focus on issues of social capital or cross-ethnic friendship formation; this latter point is not intended as criticism but simply is meant to highlight the difference between my study and their work. Methodologically speaking though, they both employed ethnographic techniques and this offers guidance to my qualitative approach (I borrow from ethnographic methods but would not describe my study as an ethnography).

My guiding research questions may be stated this way: 1) What differences exist among Han, Min Kao Han, and Min Kao Min college students in terms of the observable

characteristics of their social connections and relations? 2) How do students form social relationships and connections and to what extent are there observable differences when comparing the three groups of students? 3) How do the students form cross-ethnic friendships and relations and to what extent are there observable differences across the three groups of students? 4) How does guanxi influence the formation of social relationships and connections among the three groups of students?

What Follows

With the preceding in mind, the next two chapters of the dissertation lay the foundation for my study of Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han students at Minzu. In Chapter 2—the “Literature Review”—I establish the background issues for studying ethnic minority students in China as well as the key theoretical constructs such as social capital and cross-ethnic friendship formation. Chapter 3—“Methodology and Research Design”—discusses the nature of the methodology employed (a qualitative study drawing on ethnographic techniques) as well as how the study was carried out in terms of research design, including how I collected, managed, and analyzed my data.

Chapter 4 introduces my first findings and focuses mainly on contextualizing the students’ pre-college educational backgrounds and then the campus context through their eyes and experiences. Chapter 4 is somewhat descriptive in the sense of setting the stage for the study, whereas Chapter 5 and 6 focus on key conceptual facets to the study.

In particular, Chapter 5 introduces my findings related to social capital, including discussions of students making peer-to-peer and faculty/staff connections, the role of social media in furthering one’s connections, and students’ off-campus connections. I

follow this with an extended discussion of findings relating to *guanxi* as a form of social capital.

Chapter 6 highlights my findings related to cross-ethnic friendship formation. The first part of this chapter focuses on the ways in which students connect with their ethnic identity at Minzu and how the campus environment encourages or discourages students ethnically speaking. The second part of the chapter focuses on ethnicity and its role in building friendship, mainly with other students. This discussion includes the particular kinds of ethnic-related activities that students see as helpful to meeting new people and making new friends. I also examine what I call students' "friendship circles," which are defined as the students' best five friends and their ethnic background. The latter findings are used to compare the patterns of friendship circles across the three ethnic groupings and in terms of three key themes: *included but somewhat isolated* (applied to MKM students), *best of both worlds* (applied to MKH students), and *expanding horizons through diversity* (applied to Han students).

Finally, I conclude the dissertation with Chapter 7—"Analysis and Conclusion." In this final chapter, I provide a summary of my findings by connecting them analytically to the key concepts used in framing the study. I discuss the implications of my findings for research and educational practice. I also address the limitations of my study's design and areas in which future research could provide additional insights. I end the dissertation by offering my final thoughts.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethnic and Linguistic Diversity in China

Ethnic diversity in China is typically discussed in terms of nationality or nationality group (*minzu*), which in Western nations such as the United States is interpreted as ethnicity or ethnic group. Ma (2010) has argued for the use of the Chinese term *zuqun*, which means ethnic group, as opposed to using *minzu*, given that nationality may have political overtones and he believes ethnic identification should be de-politicized in favor of “culturization” (pp. 34-36). But this effort has not entirely caught on and scholars still tend to employ the term *minzu*, seemingly accepting an alternative definition of it as ethnic group. Of course, concepts such as *minzu*, ethnicity, and even race are quite complex and warrant concise conceptualization in order for a study to proceed in a clear and understandable manner. Thus, before expanding on the specific ethnic context in China I devote some attention to these concepts.

Race is of course a key concept in the United States and has received considerable attention from sociologists over the years. Winant (2000) most notably argued that race and understandings of it have changed over the years, moving from a biological notion to recognition of race as a socially constructed idea. As Winant noted, “Contemporary approaches to the race concept have by and large parted with the biologism of the past” (p. 171). A notable exception is the work of Herrnstein and Murray (1994) and their book, *The Bell Curve*. But their work was highly criticized by serious social scientists and in part reflected the ideology of the conservative foundation which funded it—the Bradley Foundation (Fischer et al. 1996). What is highlighted here, and a point that is

stressed by Winant, is that conceptions of race are highly influenced by broader movements, such as trends in migration and urbanization, as well as political movements, including the Civil Rights Movement. For example, Winant highlighted how the center of research on race shifted during the 20th century from Europe to the United States and that key sociologists such as W.E.B. DuBois (*The Philadelphia Negro* was his key contribution) and members of the Chicago School forged a more progressive understanding of race and forms of inequality perpetuated by social forces acting upon marginalized and racialized groups. The Civil Rights Movements also served to advance more sophisticated and empirically informed understandings of race and racism as part of what Winant describes as “racial formation theory” (p. 181).

That race is a socially constructed idea is not to say that it is not real or that it does not have serious consequences for racialized minorities in the form of racism (Frankenberg 1993; Takaki 2008). As Fenton (2010) put it, “Of course, to say that something is an ‘intellectual construct’ is not the same as saying it doesn’t exist” (p. 3). People still attribute qualities on the basis of one’s “perceived” race, based on such physical characteristics as skin color (phenotype), hair texture, facial features, and so forth; but the point is that, biologically and genetically speaking, such features have great in-group variability and thus they cannot be used to delineate separate racial groupings. Along these lines, the notion of race as an objective condition, verifiable through science is seen as “ridiculous, in numerous ways” to sociologists such as Omi and Winant (1993: 6). As they went on to argue, “Nobody really belongs in these boxes [racial groupings]; they are patently absurd reductions of human variation...many people don’t fit anywhere. Into what categories should we place Arab Americans, for example? Brazilians? South

Asians? Such a list could be extended almost indefinitely” (p. 6). Although race should clearly be problematized by sociologists employing the concept, it is not a central issue in my proposed study, as I focused more specifically on ethnicity (or *minzu*). However, I did review some of the literature on cross-racial friendships (later on in this chapter) and so race is implicated in my study at least in terms of the literature review and application of race-related research. Thus I applied such research as part of examining cross-ethnic friendships among Minzu students. But what then is meant by ethnicity?

I employ the Chinese term *minzu* interchangeably with the English term ethnicity or ethnic group; although literally *minzu* may be translated as nationality group, it really implies a meaning quite similar if not identical to ethnicity. Although race has a rather amorphous quality to it, making it quite difficult to actually define, ethnicity in some ways captures a more objective condition, typically seen in terms of a shared culture and way of life encompassing some sense of group consciousness and/or affiliation. Here, Fenton (2010) offers some insight in describing ethnicity as relating in some manner or form to “social identities—typically about ‘descent’ and ‘cultural difference’—which are deployed under certain conditions....ethnicity refers to the social construction of descent and culture” (p. 3). In simpler terms, people attribute social identities to their family backgrounds and how such backgrounds may differ from others. Fenton added, “They elaborate these into the idea of a community founded upon these attributes” (3). The idea of community conveyed by Fenton expresses in some ways the consciousness people may have about their ethnic identity.

Ethnic affiliation may involve a shared geographic location, as well as common linguistic and cultural forms, although as a consequence of migration and immigration

(often linked to globalization), these common facets have arguably been weakened for some ethnicities, as Mackerras (2003) pointed out in his analysis of Chinese ethnic minorities. What is interesting here is that when Mao Zedong first launched the massive analysis of the nation's *minzu* groupings in the 1950s by sending countless field workers (including many ethnologists) into the countryside, a Soviet-based notion of ethnic group pushed by Joseph Stalin was adopted. This notion of ethnic group included four basic characteristics: shared history, territory (geography), language, and economic and cultural life (Mackerras 2003: 23). Obviously, there are some shortcomings with such a definition, including the reality that not all of China's *minzu* groups share a common language, and that, again, because of migration, many no longer share a common geographic locale. But nonetheless one can see the similarity in the Western conceptualization of ethnicity and the Chinese notion of *minzu*. Hence, I used these terms interchangeably throughout my study and adopted a definition of ethnicity similar to that of Fenton (2010) by stressing the community or sense of consciousness aspect of it. For the purposes of my study, ethnic identification is largely about conscious affiliation with a culturally based group as determined by the individual. I left it to the students at Minzu to determine for me their ethnic affiliation and on that basis make appropriate decisions, including decisions about sampling.

Returning to the Chinese context, the Chinese government recognizes 56 official ethnic groups or *minzu*, including the Han majority, which accounts for about 91.6 percent of the overall population (in raw numbers the Han account for 1,220,844,520 or 1.2 billion people). In terms of a breakdown of the largest ethnic groups, the following 10 are the largest *minzu* in China, at least according to the 2010 Chinese population survey

(raw numbers are used below to depict the size of the population of each ethnic group by comparison to the overall population of 1,332,810,869 or 1.3 billion):

Zhuang	16,930,000
Hui	10,590,000
Manchu	10,390,000
Uyghur	10,070,000
Miao	9,430,000
Yi	8,710,000
Tujia	8,350,000
Tibetan	6,280,000
Mongol	5,980,000
Dong	2,880,000

Of the above ten largest minority ethnic groups, only the Zhuang account for more than 1 percent of the overall population. An additional point worth noting is that ethnic minority populations are scattered throughout China, but border regions tend to have the highest concentrations of minorities (He 2008). Although ethnic minorities in China represent approximately 8.4 percent of the overall population, it is important to note that given the size of the nation's population this still amounts to about 112 million people.³

In terms of enrollment in higher education, data regarding enrollment by ethnic minority status is difficult to obtain from the Chinese Ministry of Education, but various scholars have calculated a percentage over recent years, including Wang (2011), who said that ethnic minority participation in higher education by percentage accounted for 6.86 in

³ All the population data reported in this paragraph comes from the document, the "Sixth National Census Data of the Chinese Population, 2010" reported by the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China.

2003, 7.3 in 2004, and 7.25 in 2005. Zhu (2010) differed somewhat in his analysis and offered lower percentages for ethnic minority participation over a comparable period: 5.8 in 2002, 5.9 in 2003, 5.7 in 2004, and 6.1 in 2005. Data reported by Wang is based on a survey, whereas Zhu used data from the *China Education Yearbook*. There is no evidence that Zhu's figures have changed dramatically in recent years, especially because of widespread criticism of and resistance to the nation's preferential policies from the *Han* majority (Ma 2009; Zhu 2010). Just as policies of affirmative action in the United States have attracted a good deal of criticism, so too have China's version in the form of preferential policies.

The preceding provides some sense of ethnic diversity in China, but it should also be noted that Fei (1980) pointed out that when Mao pushed for the classification of the nation's population by ethnicity, some 400 groups applied for special *minzu* status (requesting recognition as a minority nationality). Many of the ethnic subgroups actually have been grouped together into a larger ethnic category, such as the case with the Miao people of southwest China. Postiglione (2009) makes some of these same points, while expressing the significant implications such ethnic diversity has for educational institutions including the challenges of incorporating diverse groups such as Tibetans into the type of harmonious society (and national identity) envisioned by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and government officials (Postiglione 2008, 2009). Postiglione (2009) even used the term "harmonious multiculturalism" to capture the government's intent. Further complicating matters, Gladney (2009) argued that even the Han classification masks additional cultural, linguistic, and ethnic complexities comprising Chinese society.

Studies of Chinese ethnic identity have focused on deep ties citizens typically have with their locale, often characterized by a reluctance to leave their “roots” or “local soil” captured most prominently by Fei’s (1992) key work *Xiangtu Zhongguo* (in English *From the Soil*). But recent and the widespread migration may be altering this fundamental feature of Chinese cultural identity as more and more rural residents leave behind their local ties and move to urban areas. It seems that migration, including both government approved and unapproved, to Chinese urban centers is altering the geographic landscape of the nation’s population leading to larger and larger numbers of rural Chinese settling as temporary and permanent residents in the nation’s major cities (Fan 2002).

Traditionally, ethnic minorities have been associated with the less developed western China as well as border regions such as the provinces of Inner Mongolia in the north, Xinjiang in the west, and Tibet and Yunnan in the southwest (He 2008), whereas the Han majority mainly dwell in the eastern regions of China, including the well-developed costal region. According to Guo (2014), “Along the 18,000 kilometer coastline, minority autonomous areas only take up 9 percent of the national territory. However, along the 22,800 kilometer inland border, minority autonomous areas comprise 85 percent of the national territory” (p. 13). And Zhu (2010) noted, “Most of the minorities—forty-four out of fifty-five—live in China’s west, which consists of six provinces (Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, and Yunnan), five minority autonomous regions (Guangxi, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Tibet, and Xinjiang), and one municipality (Chongqing)” (p. 14). Yunnan province in particular is widely recognized as home to every Chinese minority ethnic group, and Fei (1980) noted that even in the 1950s Yunnan included 260 “of the 400-plus names of nationalities registered with the

government” (p. 97), and Yunnan has been a key locale for ethnic diversity studies (Harrell 2001). Further complicating the Chinese ethnic landscape is the reality that border regions and ethnic-based separatist movements have challenged national efforts to advance unity (Fei 1989; Gladney 2004; Zhu and Blachford 2006). This serves to make the case of Chinese ethnic diversity a highly politicized and sensitive matter requiring cautious steps by researchers (Ma 2007b, 2010).

In terms of linguistic diversity, China is one of the most diverse nations of the world with close to 100 different mother tongues commonly spoken (Clothey 2005). The struggle to create a unified and standardized language in fact has involved complex political processes paralleling the rise of the Chinese republic under Sun Yat-sen (Sun Zhongshan) in 1912 and the rise of communism in the 1950s under Mao Zedong. Given both the diversity of dialect of Chinese Mandarin (Shanghainese or the *Hu* dialect for example is incomprehensible to many Chinese outside of the Shanghai region) as well as the countless distinctive more localized languages, not to mention competition between Cantonese (mostly spoken in the south) and Mandarin, the process to develop a national language has been quite a long and hard struggle (Ramsey 1987).

Chen and Wang (2013), for example, noted that “there are more than 120 minority languages currently being used in China, although they are unevenly in use among minority populations” (p. 16). About 90 percent of minority language populations are concentrated among 15 main minority languages including the Tibetan, Uyгур, Mongolian, Zhuang, and Yi languages (p. 16). China’s linguistic diversity also implicates educational systems, especially in terms of the need to support bilingual education (Ma 2007a). Linguistic diversity and its importance is also why I intend to examine two

groups of minority students at Minzu: those with high levels of *Hanyu* (Mandarin) skill and who take the college entrance exam in *Hanyu* (hence *Min Kao Han*), and those with limited *Hanyu* skill who take the college entrance exam in their native *minzu* tongue (*Min Kao Min*).

The cultural and linguistic diversity of China has posed serious challenges to government efforts to advance a national identity often discussed by former Chinese President Hu Jintao in terms of promoting a “harmonious society” (Ma 2007b). Such efforts have directly implicated educational institutions and their role in supporting Chinese nationalism but also in creating economic opportunities for disadvantaged ethnic minorities and rural Chinese. Thus, it is critical to better understand the role education plays in promoting opportunities for ethnic minorities.

Education and Ethnic Diversity in China

One of the most obvious shortcomings of the Chinese educational system is the disparity of educational attainment across the nation’s regions, with areas of high ethnic minority enrollment exhibiting the lowest levels of educational attainment. For example, Hannum and Wang (2006) reported that geography is a strong predictor of Chinese primary school graduates entering lower secondary school, with high ethnic minority provinces such as Tibet, Guizhou, Yunnan, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Xinjiang revealing the lowest percentages (ranging from a low in Tibet of 55% to a high in Xinjiang of 91%). By comparison, the more developed coastal provinces in the East dominated by the Han majority exhibit much higher primary to secondary school rates, such as Beijing and Hebei at 99 percent and Shandong and Anhui at 98 percent. Zhu

(2010) reinforced the reality of these disparities when he noted that, “Western areas...are weak at all levels of education, falling far below levels found in eastern parts of the country” (p. 14). He also added, “The west is home to 366 of the 592 counties officially listed as ‘impoverished’ in China” (p. 14).

One reason for low and marginal levels of educational attainment within minority regions relates to challenges posed by cultural and linguistic diversity (Ma 2007a; Xing 2001). Clothey (2005) for example highlighted the challenge of educational policy making in China, given the sometimes competing goals of promoting minority attainment through suitable linguistic and cultural flexibility, while at the same time seeking to promote a common Chinese national identity. Such tension has led the central government to legislate Mandarin as the official language of schools while at times limiting bilingual education. Postiglione (2008) also highlighted the basic challenge of Chinese educational policy and practice in terms of seeking some form of balance between state education in service to national identity aimed at building a “harmonious society” in contrast to culturally rooted practices that promote ethnic diversity and multiculturalism (pp. 15-16). Postiglione, Zhu, and Jiao (2004) argued that if minorities (particularly indigenous minorities) “view the education system as a way to strip them of their culture and identity without giving them equal opportunity in the wider society...minorities will respond with resistance” (p. 199). Thus, the Chinese government at times faces a difficult challenge in balancing these polarizing tensions.

Of particular interest to my study is the participation of ethnic minority populations in higher education and what may be known about their experiences. Unfortunately, the Chinese government through its Ministry of Education and the State

Ethnic Affairs Commission (in charge of ethnic minority issues including the *minzu* college and university system) does not make data easy to access. Generally though, as was noted in the preceding section, ethnic minorities account for about 6-7 percent of higher education enrollments, while constituting about 8.5 percent of the overall population. There has been little improvement in ethnic minority participation rates during the early part of the 21st century (perhaps even a decline), something scholars see as a consequence of massification of higher education and the nation adopting a tuition fee system in 1997 (Zhu 2010). Further, there is evidence that ethnic minorities have even lower enrollment percentages at the nation's more elite universities such as Peking University and Tsinghua University (Zhu 2010).

The nation's move toward a mass system of higher education has led to new definitions of what it means to be an educated Chinese citizen, resulting in higher numbers of middle-class families expecting their children to attend a university, while serving as a form of opposition to growth in minority participation rates (Chen 2004). Massification has also required cost sharing and so not only were tuition fees adopted, but they have tended to increase over recent years, adding to the problem of minority access (Liu 2012).

An important facet though to the nation's efforts to expand opportunities for ethnic minorities are the preferential policies, which are similar in some sense to affirmative action policies and practices in the United States (Sautman 1998a, 1998b). Zhu (2010) described the basic facets of China's preferential policies when he noted that one facet includes lowering the required score for select ethnic minorities on the college entrance exam known as the *gaokao* (it literally may be translated as "higher exam").

Another way to think about this is in terms of receiving “added points” (known in Chinese as *jia fen*) to one’s *gaokao* score (Sautman 1998: 93). This is quite a variable practice differing from one institution to the next, from province to province, region to region. Another aspect of preferential policies is developing ethnic minority preparatory courses at certain universities; such programs of study typically last one year with the students eventually moving on to a regular curriculum. These programs have been seen as having a generally positive impact on educational access for ethnic minorities (Zhu 2010).

Sautman (1998a) noted that the central government also has reduced or waived tuition fees for some ethnic minority students from low-income backgrounds (or from impoverished regions). This is also seen as a tool within the range of preferential policies available to institutions but depends a great deal on governmental financial support. Sautman further pointed out that tuition support may also be applied to graduate studies in some instances.

Clothey (2005) noted that preferential policies may also rely on quotas at particular universities wherein the institution may set aside a certain number of admits for ethnic minority populations. She also highlighted the practice of allowing some ethnic minorities who have their own native language to take the *gaokao* in their mother tongue; these students are then classified as *Min Kao Min* and face some limitations in terms of the programs of study they may enroll in. *Min Kao Han* are minorities who take the *gaokao* in the national language and face less restrictions in terms of choice of major. Clothey studied these groups of students at Minzu University by primarily focusing on issues of ethnic identity and consciousness. Her work offers some insight into developing

a project focused on the same groupings of students, but my study oriented more toward the formation of social capital and cross-ethnic friendships (and the potential impact on ethnic identity).

Sautman (1998a) also noted that variation in the awarding of *gaokao* points for making admissions decisions is tied at times to whether the prospective applicant is a Min Kao Han or Min Kao Min student, but of course such designations are based on whether or not the ethnic minority population has its own written language; if the ethnic group does not have its own written script, the students obviously cannot be classified as Min Kao Min.

An important higher education structure relative to ethnic minority participation is the *minzu* college and university system, which as a whole enrolls nearly one-fourth of all ethnic minorities either in degree-granting or preparatory programs (Zhu 2010). This system is comprised of 16 colleges and universities⁴ spread throughout the nation and typically assumes “the primary function of serving the diverse needs of the nation’s ethnic minority population” and “addressing higher education access for ethnic minority students,” while “also serving as centers for research and training in the areas of minority culture, language, and history” (Rhoads and Chang 2014: 47). Although these universities are primarily geared toward addressing the needs of ethnic minorities, little is actually known about the differential experiences students have on the basis of their ethnic and linguistic background, such as in terms of Min Kao Min and Min Kao Han; Clothey’s (2005) work is an exception here, but her focus did not include analyses of social capital and cross-ethnic relationship formation. Further, there is some evidence that recent

⁴ In her study of Tibetan ethnic identity at Minzu University of China, Yang (2017) produced a table listing 16 *minzu* colleges and universities, not counting the former institute that became Minzu University of China (p. 98).

marketization pressures in Chinese higher education (such as stressing academic majors more closely linked to the labor market) may pose a challenge to the traditional ethnocultural development mission of *minzu* colleges and universities (Rhoads and Chang 2014).

More broadly speaking, ethnicity in China appears to carry significance in the lives of many people, including outside of the college environment, in areas such as everyday life and in terms of career and job opportunities. For example, there are studies of how ethnicity influences people's impressions and attitudes toward one another on the basis of ethnic stereotypes. Some researchers argue that both positive and negative stereotypes operate in China and that they influence interactions across ethnic groups (Gao, Dang, and Wan 2013; Zhu 2011). Positive ethnic stereotypes refer to positive qualities ascribed to certain ethnic groups and that may influence the nature of interactions. For example, some people hold the positive impression of Tibetans that they are honest and frank, while Inner Mongolians are often seen to be good at singing and dancing (Zhu 2011). Negative ethnic stereotypes also operate and one example is how some Chinese people may assume Uyghurs to be more violent, potentially viewing them as thieves or even terrorists (Tang 2014). Ethnic stereotypes, especially negative ones, thus could easily induce forms of prejudice leading to missed opportunities in areas such as education and career. For example, some research reveals that ethnic minorities experience forms of discrimination in the job market (Ma 2014). More specifically, Ma (2014) noted that ethnic minorities who practice unique and pronounced religious or cultural traditions face higher rates of discrimination in the job market. This may especially be true for Hui, Tibetan, Uyghur, and Yi ethnic groups (Ma 2014). Similarly,

Liang (2014) in a study of employment justice for ethnic minorities in Xinjiang province noted that nearly 40 percent of respondents believed that “explicit and implicit discrimination on the basis of ethnicity” is one of the main obstacles faced when looking for a job after college (p. 17). The forms of ethnic-based bias and discrimination noted in this paragraph, while not central to my study, nonetheless must be considered as I examine the college experiences of *Min Kao Min*, *Min Kao Han*, and *Han* college students at Minzu University.

Although some knowledge exists in terms of the enrollment of ethnic minorities in the nation’s higher education system, most notably within the *minzu* system, very little is known about their actual experience during college. This is rather striking by comparison to the United States where the experiences of college students are one of the most researched topics among scholars studying higher education, including sociologists of education. Furthermore, educational research conducted in Western nations such as the United States has raised a variety of access and equity issues including the ways in which schooling more broadly may serve to reproduce educational inequities. Part of this research is in the tradition of social reproduction research.

Theories and Research on Social Capital and Cross-Ethnic Friendships

In this section, I organize my discussion into two key parts: 1) an analysis of research and theory related to social capital and the role of education; and 2) a discussion of research on cross-ethnic and/or cross-racial friendships in college. The first sub-section focuses on social capital and the literature to be discussed derives to some extent from a broader body of research and theorizing loosely described as “social reproduction.” Such

work has been informed both by micro-level analyses employing methodologies such as ethnography and qualitative cases studies (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Khan 2011; MacLeod 1987; Willis 1981), as well as macro-level work relying on large-scale databases and/or national- and societal-level analyses (Blau and Duncan 1967; Bowles and Gintis 1974, 1976, 2002; Collins 1979). Although I call on important concepts such as social capital and note the significance of early contributions by Bourdieu (1973, 1986), I am also mindful of the shortcomings of Bourdieu's work, as has been argued by Goldthorpe (2007), who mostly criticized Bourdieu's notion of capitals (social and cultural capital), but especially culture capital. As I will explain, I find more recent work related to social capital by scholars such as Carter (2005), Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011), and Stuber (2011) to be more clear and helpful. An additional point I make in discussing social capital as a central construct of my study is the Chinese idea of *guanxi*. Thus, as part of my discussion of social capital, I also examine *guanxi* and its potential influence on my study.

My second sub-section focuses on empirical work relating to cross-ethnic and cross-racial friendships (and relationship building more broadly) during college. I see this work as contributing to my study's overall focus on social capital formation in that I imagine that cross-ethnic friendship and relationship building may play an important part in expanding ethnic minority students' social capital.

Social Capital and the Role of Education

Much of the sociology of education research suggests that simply attending higher education does not guarantee social mobility and economic success. There are other

factors besides participation that may also contribute to one's educational attainment and potential social mobility. A key area in which the sociology literature has added insight to questions of mobility and higher education attainment has formed around the concept of social capital, which will serve as a key concept in my dissertation research. Studies of education mostly employing a social reproduction perspective reveal that social capital (and cultural capital as well) may contribute to different life outcomes for students. I believe social capital is an important concept to employ in analyzing the Chinese higher education context and the college experiences of ethnic minorities, especially given the importance of *guanxi* in Chinese society (*guanxi* is similar to the idea of social connections and personal relationships and I will discuss its relevance extensively at the end the social capital section). Being academically successful during college may not ensure one's career or professional success if at the same time students do not build important connections and relationships, whether close friendships or simply through acquaintanceship. Hence, my study seeks to examine the relationships and relationship building among Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han students by employing a variety of ideas associated with the concept of social capital. Therefore, it is necessary to examine social capital more closely, especially as it relates to studies of educational attainment and social mobility.

Social capital is one of the most commonly used sociological concepts that has been broadly extended to other disciplines and has spurred extensive research relating to a number of issues including, "school attrition and academic performance, children's intellectual development, sources of employment and occupational attainment, juvenile delinquency and its prevention, and immigrant and ethnic enterprise" (Portes 1998: 9).

Social capital has been an important concept applied to analyses of educational inequality in terms of attainment, especially in terms of ethnic and racial minorities (Collins 2009; Kao 2004; Maldonado, Rhoads and Buenavista 2005; Perna and Titus 2005; Ream 2005; Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch 1995; Zhou and Kim 2006).

Contributions of Bourdieu and Coleman

The concept of social capital has been advanced to a great extent on the basis of two main theorists—Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988); their theoretical perspectives tend to reflect two slightly different conceptions of social capital. Coleman defines social capital as social norms, control, and trust used to promote conducive behaviors or actions that benefit members of a particular community or social grouping. Bourdieu's interpretation views social capital as access to social and institutional resources that can only be attained within social networks and connections (Dika and Singh 2002; Liou and Chang, 1997; Portes 1998, 2000).

Coleman (1988) argued that social capital takes three forms: obligations and expectations, information channels, and norms and effective sanctions. Social capital in these three forms works together to facilitate the creation of human capital through schooling. For Coleman, parents' material capital and cultural capital are transmitted to the next generation in the form of human capital through schooling facilitated by social capital. However, Coleman also asserted that the amount of social capital in a family rests on the parent-children relation. Hence, indicators of social capital from Coleman's original work mainly include family structure and parent-child interactions, including parental expectation variables (Dika and Singh 2002). An important feature of Coleman's

notion of social capital is that the resources and benefits inherent in the networks among families and communities indicate that social capital may be viewed as a community-oriented attribute and should be considered a public good. Putnam (1995, 2000), operating more from a political science perspective, extends this notion of social capital and argues that it may be viewed as a component or property of cities or even entire societies, especially in terms of a form of civic mindedness reflective of the broader community. This interpretation tends to situate social capital as belonging to the collective. For Putnam, the stock of social capital in American society has been declining as people are less engaged in building relational networks that offer benefits to themselves as a civic-oriented society. A similar point of view is offered by Goddard (2003) who noted the relevance of social capital as shared information, common norms, and relational trust. Although Putnam's collective notion of social capital does not necessarily inform my own interest in studying the educational experiences of minority college students in China, it nonetheless has had a significant impact on conceptualizing social capital.

Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as the “aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition—or in other words, to membership in a group” (p. 8). One important aspect of Bourdieu's conception of social capital captures somewhat of an “artificial” element to it, arguing that social networks (a key aspect of social capital) are not a natural but instead require deliberate and constant investment in terms of material (economic) and cultural resources (Bourdieu 1986; Portes 1998). Different from Coleman's (1988) notion of social capital, which

stresses social capital as a public good, social capital for Bourdieu is seen as a tool through which dominant groups and classes can maintain and reproduce their dominant positions within society, mainly by investing in increasing the stock of social capital (Lin 1999, 2001). Thus, Bourdieu's notion of social capital emphasizes the unequal access to social resources within social structure that imposes constraints along the lines of gender, race and, class (Dika and Singh 2002).

There is a problem though with Bourdieu in that Goldthorpe (2007) pointed to some holes in the social reproduction argument and Bourdieu's deployment of "capitals" (especially his idea and application of cultural capital). Goldthorpe basically argued that more and more of the children from lower and working class families were gaining access to higher levels of education—first in the form of the expansion of secondary education and then through the massification of postsecondary education. In turn, as Goldthorpe maintained, a greater percentage of them were assuming professional and white collar positions within the broader society. Goldthorpe largely interpreted this trend to imply that educational institutions were necessarily providing forms of habitus—a term Bourdieu employed to explain how children acquire their basic understandings and values through socialization mechanisms tied to families and local neighborhoods, typically class-oriented—and that this therefore contradicted the social reproduction argument.

Goldthorpe's argument may be critiqued along two lines. First, while it is true that more lower and working class children have gained access to higher forms of education, there has also been a shift in the level of credentials required for the most privileged forms of work as well as a major shift in higher education institutions becoming more

stratified, with elite institutions being largely inaccessible to low-income and working class populations. Here, the work of Collins (1979) on credentialism offers somewhat of a counter argument to Goldthorpe, as does a large body of work on the ways in which elite universities and institutional practices have served to limit access by low-income and marginalized populations (Armstrong and Hamilton 2013; Dowd 2003; Dowd, Cheslock, and Melguizo 2008; Khan 2011). Second, the mere fact that more people are assuming white collar professional positions does not necessarily reflect an increased opportunity structure (and a rejection of the social reproduction argument), but instead may reflect the shift to the “new knowledge economy” (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004) and more computer and technology-driven industries in what Castells (2000) described as the emergence of the “network society.” Clearly, post-industrial societies have more white collar and “professional” positions, but this alone does not lead to a rejection of social reproduction as a sociological frame for analyzing education and opportunity. Such arguments also need to consider relative income among other factors contributing to social mobility. Despite the shortcomings of Goldthorpe’s argument, he offers valid criticism of Bourdieu’s conceptual vagueness and the need for greater precision in defining and using “capitals,” including social capital. Mindful of Goldthorpe, I prefer to rely on other explanations of social capital beyond Bourdieu.

More Recent Social Capital Research

Given that recent research employing social capital in an analysis of educational settings is most central to my own research purpose, I will review some key empirical studies that utilized social capital as a major theoretical lens. Setting out from Coleman’s

(1988) theoretical perspective, scholars have examined how three forms of social capital—social norms, obligations and expectations, and information channels—contribute to positive effects in terms of student educational outcomes, especially relative to race and/or ethnicity (Kao 2004). Here researchers have tended to examine the relationship between students' educational outcomes and social capital by operationalizing outcomes in the form of college enrollment, chance of academic success, and retention in higher education; they tend to operationalize social capital in the form of parental involvement, formation of weak ties in college, social trust among students, teachers, and parents, and social norms (Goddard 2003; Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista 2005; Perna and Titus 2005). All of these studies came to similar conclusions in noting that social capital is positively linked to students' academic success and/or specific educational outcomes. At the same time, some of these scholars acknowledge that gaps exist in the analysis of social capital research including the fact that great variability exists in conceptualizing the actual concept.

Scholars have also employed social capital to study higher education and forms of inequality. For example, Armstrong and Hamilton's (2013) *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality* examines a public flagship university and how the basic social structure undermines low-income students interested in what they describe as a social "mobility pathway." What they found is that campus life revolves around a sort of "party pathway," in which students from wealthier families, who are in great demand at public universities given limited funding, shape the campus culture in a way characteristic of extensive partying. The rich students do not have to worry as much as low-income students about finding jobs after graduation as they can rely on family

connections (social capital). But for the low-income students, given their limited family connections, they suffer in the context of a compromised educational experience. Such public universities often wind up catering to students from more upper class backgrounds because they are the one's whose families provide the necessary financial support to the university.

Also focusing on the experiences of college students, Stuber (2011) studied working class and upper-middle class students at two universities in the United States. Arguing that extracurricular involvement is a focal point of one's college experience through which one's class destination is likely influenced, Stuber examined the extracurricular activities among students of different class backgrounds by deploying the concept of social capital. Stuber defined social capital in a fashion similar to Bourdieu and Coleman in the sense that it amounts to connections and ties helpful for accessing resources—"social resources" for Stuber (p. 75). However, she also seemed to expand the notion by stressing resources as "sources of information [and] messages about what one should do about this information, and connections that help put this information into action" (p. 75). Stuber comes to the conclusion that social capital helps promote extracurricular involvement, especially among disadvantaged students (in her case working class students) as social capital, "embodied in students' social networks, can provide encouragement to participate, knowledge of opportunities, as well as pathways or connections that solidify involvement" (p. 13). She went on to argue that students accumulate social capital through participation in extracurricular activities, hence concluding that a cyclical relationship of sorts exists between social capital and extracurricular involvement. Stuber's work encourages me to pay great attention to Min

Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han students' involvement in extracurricular activities at Minzu with an eye to the forms of information and connections that are fostered (as social capital). Hence, I intend to observe students at Minzu in a variety of extracurricular settings, while also interviewing them about their extracurricular engagement.

Another key area relating to the research on education and social capital focuses on the educational experiences of ethnic/racial minority students. For example, a study conducted by Perna and Titus (2005) suggested that college preparation programs that required extensive parental effort and involvement were quite promising in terms of increasing college enrollment among African American and Hispanic students. For Perna and Titus, parental involvement was seen as key for these two groups, given that they are commonly seen as the most disadvantaged in terms of acquiring social capital. Another example comes from Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista (2005) in which they highlighted benefits associated with underrepresented students of color intentionally forming informal connections (similar to "weak ties" but they did not use this term) with their professors and others within the respective academic community. They noted how such strategies were a purposeful component of student-initiated retention projects operating at the University of Wisconsin and at the University of California, Berkeley. The research of Perna and Titus and Maldonado et al. further informs my study and may offer some direct insights in developing a study of social capital among Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han students at Minzu University. These works also help to highlight the fact that my study focuses more on ethnic-based groupings and not class-based populations, although these groupings are likely to be influenced by class influences that

arise as a consequence of one's ethnic background (given lower incomes among China's ethnic minority population).

In a review of the literature conducted over a decade ago, Dika and Singh (2002) suggested that the majority of studies at that point in time tended to reflect the theoretical stance of Coleman (1988), operationalizing social capital more or less as social norms, obligations and expectations, and information channels. The latter facet—informational channels in the form of key institutional agents (agents of information)—has drawn some attention. For example, Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch's (1995) findings report a positive relationship between social capital and academic grades with social capital operationalized as instrumental ties with institutional agents. They assessed the instrumental ties among students and institutional agents by students' quest for various "funds of knowledge," which may be understood as information about academic and professional support and other kinds of community resources. However, working class youth and racial/ethnic minorities were less likely to have access to such supportive ties. Further research by Stanton-Salazar (1997) and Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003) continued to stress the operationalization of social capital as access to mentors and role models in the form of institutional agents. Liou and Chang (2008) adopted a similar position in their study of school programs aimed at empowering disadvantaged students. They found that students who actively participated in school programs were more empowered by the social networks they formed given that key program staff had access to all kinds of institutional resources. This latter study confirmed the positive linkage between social capital and educational outcomes.

It is probably not a good idea to summarize the research on social capital in the sociology of education literature without noting the contributions of Granovetter (1973, 1983) and his notion of weak ties. Although I do not intend to adopt Granovetter's framework, especially in terms of what has come to be called "social network analysis," it's hard for the work in this area not to influence my thinking, even in subtle ways. Basically, Granovetter (1973) argued that most analysis of networks had previously focused on strong ties—close connections among dyads typically forming within the context of a close-knit social group. But Granovetter sought to identify and assess how "weak ties" among dyads of individuals not necessarily operating within the same social group. His thesis was confirmed in that he found weak ties to be quite helpful in advancing one's career. Again, although I do not explicitly utilize Granovetter's work, I do at least acknowledge that forms of social capital potentially formed by Minzu University students may be reflective of the sorts of weak ties Granovetter identified, and in this regard cannot be ignored in my analysis of student's social capital.

Carter's Contribution

Perhaps the most important work in helping me to frame the conceptual relevance and application of social capital comes from Prudence Carter (2005) and her book, *Keeping It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*. Carter described social capital as "resourceful social connections" and later as "personal networks [that] not only represent potential access to material resources but also provide sociopsychological benefits to individuals" (p. 137), which serves to call attention to the fact that not all social connections and ties amount to forms of *capital*—meaning that some connections

may not be helpful in exchange (as capital) for “educational and socioeconomic outcomes” (p. 137), such as better grades or increased career opportunities. The fieldwork behind *Keeping It Real* involved studies in New York City (specifically Yonkers) of low-income African American and Latino/a male and female students (in terms of their SES background Carter noted that all of the students’ families qualified for government housing assistance). More specifically, Carter interviewed and surveyed 68 youth for her study.

A central point of Carter’s (2005) study challenges the commonly held view that African American and Latino/a students oppose educational attainment because of their effort to avoid the “burden of acting White” (p. 5), as Fordham and Ogbu (1986) maintained. Instead, Carter argues, “The story of how these youth deploy culture to gain status is complex and varied...and their approaches are better understood as a continuum rather than a fixed, singular cultural narrative” (p. 6). Relying on theories of cultural and social capital, Carter presents a more varied analysis of the educational pursuits of such youth, including placing great stress on “the positive values and functions of these students’ culture” (pp. 8-9). She maintained that simply “acting black” or “acting Spanish” or “acting white” “connotes more about perceived ethno-racial cultural styles and tastes than about an opposition to education and a dejection about unachievable success and socioeconomic opportunities” (p. 9).

A key component of Carter’s overall argument specifically concerns social capital and the importance of mentors and what she describes as “multicultural navigators” in the students’ lives. As Carter explained, “To serve as capital for these students, such role models would have to be accessible and have relationships with them” (p. 140.) Thus,

even though the students mentioned hip-hop, pop, and R&B stars, such as Mary J. Blige, Carter did not define such individuals as sources of social capital, given that the youth had no contact and no real relationship with such personalities. Instead, Carter operationalized sources of social capital as the actual “social contacts” the students had, including asking them to identify their “best friends, five close friends, five adult neighbors, five neighborhood kids about the students’ own age, up to five persons in their household who were older, and five adult kin” (p. 142). Carter further inquired into the nature of the social contacts relative to such matters as job information, college experience, having white-collar work experience, and so forth. In this matter, Carter was able to ascertain that few of the youth had actual daily contact with role models and that “slightly less than one-third of the students possessed some form of what social scientists would dub social capital” (pp. 142-143).

Based on Carter’s work, I thus built questions into my semi-structured interviews that addressed social contacts among my research participations and relative to the role of fellow students, staff, and professors in terms of supporting their academic and career interests. For example, I asked them to list their 5 closest Minzu friends, 4-5 staff with whom they have contact, and 4-5 professors with whom they have interacted the most. I then asked them the extent to which such individuals were helpful in supporting their academic studies as well as their career concerns, including for example finding and serving in an internship. I also built concerns about social contacts into my guides for conducting participation observation, such as noting the nature of topics and interactions in various social settings.

Based on an extensive review of key sociological works employing a social capital framework to examine educational contexts, and following the analytical design employed by Lareau and Weininger (2003) to analyze cultural capital, I produced a “Social Capital Summary Chart” (see Appendix-D). This chart summarizes key points relating to educational studies employing social capital in chronological order, including both journal articles and books. Among these interpretations of the concept of social capital as well as the operationalization of it, I mainly drew on the empirical studies of Carter (2005), Stanton-Salazar (1997), Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995), Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003), and Stuber (2011).

Guanxi and Social Capital

Although much of the research literature informing this study comes from the Western world, attention needs to be given to the possible ways in which Chinese society and culture may differ in significant ways from the West. The idea that Chinese society may reveal some fundamental differences from other societies such as the United States has been explored by Chinese sociologists, including most notably Fei’s (1992) classic work *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society*. Fei explained that the nature of Chinese society is heavily tied to the importance of social relationships and connections (often tied to one’s geographic locale of origin or hometown). While one could say this about all societies, the great stress placed on social relationships arguably defines Chinese social life in ways that are different from other societies and is evident in many ways. For example, public squares in Chinese cities, towns, and villages are central locales for social interaction and maintaining social connections, evident by the ways in

which Chinese people gather after dinner every evening to socialize. Further, the names that exist for various family members reveals the heavy stress Chinese place on personal relationships: while one may have a grandfather or grandmother in the Western world, in China a distinction is made between these two terms depending on whether they are of the mother's or father's side. It is not simply that all these forms of familial relationships have names, but that such naming highlights the stress—and the emotional quality—placed on the closeness of the relationships.

A related aspect of the stress on relationships and personal connections is the Chinese concept of *guanxi*, which has been explored by sociologists as a somewhat similar concept to social capital (Fan 2014; Huang and Wang 2011; Qi 2013). Qi (2013) described *guanxi* in this manner: “In the context of discussions of relations between individuals in friendship and political or economic relationships the term indicates carefully constructed and maintained relations between persons which carry mutual obligations and benefits” (p. 309). Huang and Wang (2011) described *guanxi* as “social connections or relationships based on reciprocal interests and benefits” (p. 120).

Guanxi, like social capital, may provide an individual with benefits such as access to resources. An individual who is said to have high levels of *guanxi* is more or less a person who is very well connected. Given the stress Chinese society places on social relations and connections, *guanxi* then becomes a key vehicle for obtaining or accessing the society's opportunity structure. The importance of *guanxi* compromises at times meritocracy, and hence a college student in China from a well-connected family (having lots of *guanxi*) may not necessarily have to study hard in college to access great career opportunities upon graduation. Of course, as Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) pointed out,

college students from elite family backgrounds in the United States also may benefit from their privileged positions and “party” their way through college without necessarily ruining their career and professional opportunities.

Guanxi is arguably deeply rooted in Chinese society, connected in many ways to the society’s Confucian tradition. As Qi (2013) argued, “There is no doubt that *guanxi* is an important component of the traditional social fabric, often described in terms of Confucian role relations...and significant in twenty-first century China” (p. 310). Additionally, *guanxi* provides basic clues to understanding the very complicated interpersonal and inter-organizational dynamics in China (Perks et al. 2009). Huang and Wang (2011) argued that the Chinese have a “much stronger tendency to divide people into categories and treat them accordingly” (p. 120); people tend to determine the social distance between themselves and others who comprise their social circle on the basis of *guanxi*. Members of one’s social circle with high levels of *guanxi* may be treated differently from those seen as lacking *guanxi*. Furthermore, members of one’s social circle who possess high levels of *guanxi* are seen as having a responsibility to share their resources and connections with friends and family members—and again, the importance of extended familial relations means the greater likelihood of connecting with a family member who possesses *guanxi*. Also, people who have high levels of *guanxi* tend to be considered as closer or more intimate to the center of the social circle and thus are treated by Chinese as their own people (Fei 1992).

Benefits and resources associated with *guanxi* tend to be “particular instead of general” and because *guanxi* operates more “through personal relations rather than formal structures” it has sometimes been associated with “corruption, bribery and malpractice”

(Qi 2013, 311). The ubiquitous presence of *guanxi* and its prevalent use in gaining access to goods derives historically from the fact that Chinese formal institutional practices (such as laws and regulations) ensuring equal access to resources were absent since the late eighteenth century (Hamilton 1990). Further, the adoption of a communist-based system in the 1950s only served to bureaucratize the society and promote a non-transparent allocation of resources. As Qi argued, *guanxi* became a more instrumentalist “means of circumventing managed scarcity” (p. 311). In such light, Chinese citizens are much more inclined to use *guanxi* to mobilize resources given the lack of transparency in the institutional practices that determine the allocation of goods such as educational resources (Fan 2014; Huang and Wang 2011).

What the concept of *guanxi* suggests for my study is the need to explore and examine social capital formation among Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han students at Minzu University of China in light of possible variations linked to *guanxi* and its related cultural forms (hence my research question # 4). Further, given the importance of *guanxi* as a means of accessing resources such as education and career opportunities, I was especially attentive to its influence. I also was open to the possibility that some of the social capital literature in the sociology of education (mainly Western based) may not exactly fit the Chinese context and thus be flexible throughout my qualitative study. I also was attentive to the ways in which relationship and friendship formation may be influenced by *guanxi*, including the formation of cross-ethnic relations.

Cross-Ethnic and Cross-Racial Friendships in College

Related to my interest in social capital is a concern for the degree to which Min Kao Min and Min Kao Han form friendships with students from other ethnic groups, particularly the Han majority. To better understand the relevance of this line of theorizing, I examined the research in the United States on cross-racial friendships. Here it is important to note that campus diversity issues in the United States typically are discussed and framed in terms of race, whereas in the context of a Chinese university ethnicity is the defining issue.

The research literature on cross-racial friendships in college tends to be associated with diversity and the role of campuses in promoting cross-racial and cross-cultural understanding (Chang, Denson, Saenz and Misa 2006). Antonio (2001) argued that this line of research emerged as a consequence of claims that universities had become ethnically and racially “balkanized,” based on a perception “that the racial and ethnic diversity of college environments causes students to self-segregate” (p. 68). In sociological terms, this phenomenon has been discussed as “racial homophily” (self-segregation) and has been studied in contexts such as among Facebook friendships (Wimmer and Lewis 2010), organizational newcomers’ networks (Mollica, Gray, Trevino 2003), and among adolescents (Kao and Joyner 2004). But what is of particular importance to me is the research specifically focused on higher education and racial homophily. Obviously, if colleges are able to achieve structural diversity—meaning demographic diversity—it would be desirable for students of diverse races to interact and form friendships, given research demonstrating the benefits of such diversity (Chang, Astin and Kim 2004; Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin 2002). So the question that was

pursued by scholars interested in such issues was whether in fact college students were forming friendships across racial groupings.

Research on cross-racial friendships in college is relatively recent with much of it emerging in the early 2000s, some of which was aimed at informing national debates about the role of affirmative action in college admissions (Chang, Denson, Saenz and Misa 2006). Antonio's (2001) early research in this area tended to reject the balkanization argument, noting that "at the level of student friendship groups, racial and ethnic balkanization is not a dominant, overall campus characteristic" (p. 75). He concluded this based on a survey of 667 student respondents attending the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). In another study conducted by Antonio (2004) he noted that demographic or structural diversity "does not guarantee that the experience of diversity will be one of mutual enhancement" (p. 571). But in an effort to make sense of cross-racial friendships using qualitative methods (he interviewed two students from each of eight major ethnic groups identified), again at the UCLA campus, Antonio described a process that does not fit neatly into a simple pattern: "The role of race in students' friendships instead appears complex—dependent not only on attitudes and values toward cultural diversity and friendship, but also on students' social patterns on campus (propinquity), their precollege social patterns (diversity of precollege friends), and their perceptions of diversity on campus (the racial campus climate)" (p. 572). This was important for me to keep in mind when I began exploring friendships among Minzu University students.

A portion of the research on cross-racial friendships in college has sought to identify the degree of such relations, sometimes comparing different racial and ethnic

groups. In his study of the UCLA campus, Antonio (2001) found African American students to be the most likely to report racially homogeneous friendship groups, while Japanese American and Filipino students were the least likely to report homogeneous friendship groups. Perhaps most important was his finding that the most common type of friendship group was racially and ethnically mixed (46% of students described having friendship groups of this type).

Another body of research in this area has focused on what strategies or variables best predict or contribute to forming cross-racial friendships. This is an important because as Odell, Korgen, and Wang (2005) reported, simply having a diverse campus does not necessarily lead to reduced social distance. Based on a survey of 505 students, Odell, Korgen, and Wang relied on Allport's Intergroup Contact Hypothesis, which essentially argues that "interracial group contact may have a positive effect in reducing prejudice if the following four conditions exist: 1) cooperation among the groups; 2) a common goal; 3) equal status of groups during contact; and 4) the support of authority, custom, or law" (p. 293). They found that carefully designing a combination of curricular and extracurricular programming may have a greater effect "in reducing racial prejudice than simply adding diversity courses to a curriculum" (p. 303). In a study examining the impact of religion on interracial friendships, and using the National Longitudinal Study of Freshman, Park (2012) found that being Jewish or Protestant was negatively associated with having interracial friendships. Park also noted that students who reported high levels of religious salience and greater involvement in campus religious organizations were far less likely to report having a close friend from another race.

Other studies also have identified potential factors toward encouraging cross-racial and cross-ethnic friendships. For example, and based on a national longitudinal data base, Chang, Astin and Kim (2004) found living and working part-time on campus to be beneficial in promoting cross-racial interaction. Fischer (2008) reported that overall diversity does predict to a degree friendship diversity—something also noted by Pike and Kuh (2006) with regard to “diverse interactions”—and also noted that students who had diverse social networks in high school were “significantly more likely to report having at least one out-group friend in college” (p. 648). Fischer based her findings on the National Longitudinal Survey of Freshmen, which includes nearly 4,000 racially and ethnically diverse students from 28 selective colleges and universities, while employing hierarchical linear modeling. Similarly, and involving a survey of over 2,000 college students, Levin, van Larr, and Sidanius (2003) reported that students who showed greater ingroup bias and intergroup anxiety at the end of their first year in college were less likely to form outgroup friendships during their second and third years. And Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau (2009) found the racial composition of one’s high school social networks as well as one’s residential and extracurricular college activities influence the racial makeup of one’s friendship groups. Schofield et al. (2010) also noted the importance of high school social networks on future cross-racial friendships in college. The findings of Fischer, Levin et al., Stearns et al., and Schofield et al. all point to the need to address the cross-racial and cross-ethnic understandings of incoming college students as part of better preparing and encouraging outgroup relations. Pike and Kuh also pointed to the need to be intentional in preparing students for diverse environments. Finally, Saenz, Ngai,

Hurtado (2007) reported from their study that intensive discussions in classes were predictors of positive cross-racial interactions.

A final consideration in terms of cross-ethnic friendships and relations may be posed by returning to the work of Fordham and Ogbu (1986) and their idea of “acting White.” Given that a good deal of my study seeks to examine how Chinese ethnic minority students may form relations and possible friendships with the Han majority, is it possible that a phenomenon like “acting White” might exist among Chinese ethnic minority students considered in relation to the dominant ethnic group? To put it simply, are ethnic minority students at Minzu ever criticized for “acting Han”? Of course, to answer such a culturally complex question required flexible data collection and data analysis procedures, such as those suggested by qualitative methods.

Theoretical Contribution of the Study

The preceding sections delineate the basic theoretical concepts—namely social capital, *guanxi*, and cross-ethnic friendships (related to the idea of racial homophily). These concepts are proposed and discussed because of their perceived usefulness in making sense of the college experiences of ethnic minority students at Minzu University. Further, they are key to me addressing the basic research questions guiding the study. But there are also some theoretical insights related to these concepts that may arise from my study. Two in particular seem most relevant: 1) the influence of *guanxi* as a powerful cultural influence in shaping the nature of social capital for Minzu students; and 2) the reality of Minzu University as a unique cultural context that is likely to frame the

experiences of students in rather unique ways, given that ethnic minorities account for the majority of the student population.

In terms of the first theoretical consideration—the influence of *guanxi*—I see the context of Minzu, given its location in China, as potentially raising some unique theoretical insights relating to social capital and the formation of social relationships. As I highlight in my previous discussion of *guanxi*, many scholars, including Chinese social scientists, see *guanxi* as a central aspect of Chinese society and culture, stressing the personalized connections and relations that bring benefits to individuals in the form of useful information, valuable resources, opportunities, and so forth. With a proposed research question centered on *guanxi* and its potential influence (RQ # 4: How does *guanxi* influence the formation of social relationships and connections among the three groups of students?), my empirical findings offered some theoretical insights about how *guanxi* alters to some extent the way social capital and relationship building is typically framed and understood in the Chinese context. In other words, my findings suggest that China's unique cultural context may potentially give rise to some different ways of theoretically considering social capital and social relationships as they pertain to Minzu students. Although I did not begin the project with a hypothesis about what potential differences may look like, I maintained a focus on this aspect of the study and generated some modest insights mainly introduced in Chapter 5.

A second theoretical consideration of this study concerns another unique facet of the study's context, namely that ethnic minority students constitute a majority (over 60% of the enrollment) at Minzu, and thus presents a cultural and social context different from other institutions and settings in China. It is clear from my findings that this unique

organizational context influences social capital and relationship formation in unusual ways and can inform how we think about theories and concepts that apply to minority college students, mainly in terms of China but possibly the United States also. Findings and discussion related to the uniqueness of the Minzu context are discussed throughout Chapters 4 through 7 (especially Chapter 4 and 6).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

In this chapter I delineate the basic methodology—qualitative methods that draw from ethnographic techniques and practices—and the research design for the proposed study. Included is a detailed discussion of the specific methods I employed in laying out the study, including processes involved in collecting and analyzing data. I relied on various sociological works related to qualitative and ethnographic methods to support my intended plan. Finally, I end this chapter with a brief conclusion.

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods in sociology involve researchers observing and interacting with (even participating with in the case of ethnographic work) research subjects in a close and intimate way with the goal of understanding their points of view. Gold (1997), in building on Weber (1947) and his notion of *verstehende sociologie*, described the essentials of a qualitative perspective as seeking to “best understand society for what it is—not for what one thinks it might, should, or must be—by studying it from the points of view of its members” (p. 389). Gold went on note, “In effect, he [Weber] required social researchers to become personally and deeply acquainted with their informants’ experiences and views” (p. 389). This type of deep understanding is a quest in some sense to understand culture and the cultural experiences of subjects. Translated to my study, what this suggests is that I need to come to terms with the unique cultural experiences of ethnic minority students in the context of their university environment—Minzu University of China in my study. The process through which I accomplished this

is by interviewing them face-to-face and interacting with them in a variety of campus settings, a general process often described by qualitative researchers as conducting “fieldwork” (Goffman 1989).

Although I describe my study as employing “qualitative methods,” I intend to utilize some of the basic techniques associated with ethnography. The reason that I do not describe my study outright as “ethnography” is that I was not able to spend enough time on site to meet the rigorous expectations of the ethnographic ideal. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that my study is deeply informed by ethnographic practice. Accordingly, the goal of ethnographic inquiry has been described by Geertz (1994) as being focused on cultural interpretation and developing “thick description.” Although Geertz acknowledges that from a textbook point of view, ethnographic work may entail “establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary, and so on” (p. 214), it is much more than simply a list of techniques and procedures; instead, ethnographic fieldwork may be seen as “an elaborate venture in...‘thick description’” (p. 214). Further, although for some social scientists the idealized site for acquiring legitimate scientific knowledge is an experimental setting where possible intervening influences may be controlled and/or limited, the ethnographic perspective instead sees the natural setting as the idealized site for advancing sociological insight and knowledge (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Fieldwork or “field research” is seen as the key activity through which a researcher acquires such insight. As Babbie (2007) put it, “Field research is especially appropriate to the study...of attitudes and behaviors best understood in their natural setting, as opposed to the somewhat artificial settings of experiments and surveys” (p. 287).

Qualitative methodology is seen as placing great value on studying people in their normal locations where they are most likely to engage in their everyday practices. This is why some qualitative researchers often talk about understanding the “lived experiences” of research subjects. Indeed, “hanging out” is a strategy many researchers use to better interact with and get to know their subjects. This is evident in classic sociological studies such as Whyte’s (1943) *Street Corner Society*, Duneier’s (1999) *Sidewalk*, and MacLeod’s (1987) *Ain’t No Makin’ It*. A key objective of such a strategy is for subjects to become comfortable with the researcher and thus exhibit their normal behavior and patterns of interaction. This is one reason qualitative researchers, including most notably ethnographers, often stress time on site as a “participant observer,” typically engaging in informal interactions with research subjects.

Central to ethnographic methodology is participant observation, which Goffman (1989) discussed in terms of a “technique” for “getting data...by subjecting yourself, your own body and your own personality, and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, or their work situation, or their ethnic situation” (p. 125). In essence, for Goffman, the goal of the ethnographer is to subject herself or himself to the “life circumstances” of those being studied (p. 125). He explained, “You’re artificially forcing yourself to be tuned into something that you then pick up as a witness—not as in interviewer, not as a listener, but as a witness to how they react to what gets done to and around them” (p. 126). Applied to the context of my study, then my goal is to become a witness to the lived experiences of ethnic minority (and Han) students at Minzu toward better understanding their cultural

experiences in college. My particular focus was directed toward their lived experiences associated with the formation of social capital (social relations, friendships, etc.), but in keeping with the ideals of qualitative methods I also was open to witnessing other important facets to their lives in college.

Research Design

In organizing my discussion of research design, I focus on the following key concerns: basic focus and research questions, site selection and gaining access, data collection strategies, sampling procedures, data management and analysis, issues of authenticity, and role management.

Basic Focus and Research Questions

As was noted in the introductory chapter, my primary concern centers on three groups of students and their experiences relative to how they form social capital and cross-ethnic friendship during college. I am particularly concerned about how ethnic minorities form social relations and friendships that may be helpful to them in their educational pursuits (and possible future career pursuits). Thus, the following four questions serve to direct my inquiry:

- 1) What differences exist among Han, Min Kao Han, and Min Kao Min college students in terms of the observable characteristics of their social connections and relations?
- 2) How do students form social relationships and connections and to what extent are there observable differences when comparing the three groups of students?

3) How do the students form cross-ethnic friendships and relations (intra, intro or both) and to what extent are there observable differences across the three groups of students?

4) How does *guanxi* influence the formation of social relationships and connections among the three groups of students?

Given that my study is qualitative in nature, and that qualitative researchers do not always know at the start of a study what they may encounter and learn through the research process, I remained open to the fact that I might need to revise or develop additional research questions. It is expected that as researchers engage in fieldwork they will learn new things and that such learning ought to inform the study as it evolves.

Site Selection and Gaining Access

I conducted my qualitative study at Minzu University of China (Minzu) in Beijing because of its leading position in the *minzu* college and university system. Minzu was created in 1951 and was founded to serve the needs of China's ethnic minority populations by preparing graduates to work in minority regions of the country. Its mission has evolved over the years to the point where it now offers degree programs in many areas and serves a broader mission beyond simply training graduates to work in minority regions, although this is still an important part of the university's objectives.

Today, Minzu is considered a comprehensive university in that it has many academic programs and departments at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. For example, Minzu has 23 colleges and 5 independent academic departments all of which

add up to 64 different undergraduate majors, including the following breakdown: 16 social science and humanities fields; 17 management, economics, and law fields; 19 science, technology, engineering, and mathematics majors; and 12 arts majors (dance, music, painting, etc). A total of 27 academic departments award graduate degrees in the form of 140 master's programs and 40 Ph.D. programs. The total enrollment at the university is 16,858, including 11,283 undergraduates, 4,708 master's and Ph.D. students, nearly 700 students from over 50 countries, plus 184 preparatory course students, which are comprised of ethnic minority students trying to get into regular academic study at the university by meeting basic standards.⁵

Minzu university of China has a unique standing among the nation's comprehensive universities, especially when compared to leading universities such as Peking, Tsinghua, and Fudan. First, it stands out because of the makeup of the student body with about 60 percent of Minzu's students being of ethnic minority backgrounds; at most comprehensive universities in China one would rarely find more than 3 or 4 percent ethnic minorities. Second, the faculty and staff at Minzu also are quite diverse with more than 40 percent estimated to be from ethnic minority backgrounds (Rhoads and Chang 2013). Third, and because of the vast ethnic diversity at Minzu, a variety of languages are commonly spoken, both inside and outside the classrooms. As noted earlier in this proposal, students at Minzu are categorized based on their ethnic and language background, in the form of Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han (Clothey 2005).

⁵ Data reported in this section come from documents collected at Minzu University's main website: www.muc.edu.cn. Documents analyzed include the following: Minzu University School Profile, 2017; Minzu University Undergraduate Training, Office of Academic Affairs, 2017; Minzu University School History, 2017; Graduate Enrollment Registration System—China Education Online, 2017; and Minzu University of China—Chinese Scholarship Council, 2017.

An additional factor differentiating Minzu from other comprehensive Chinese universities is its special mission to address ethnocultural development. Indeed, a good portion of the curriculum at Minzu is devoted to promoting the history, language, and culture of ethnic minorities and this fact is reflected in academic programs that generally would not be available at universities such as Peking or Tsinghua. For example, ethnocultural academic programs at Minzu include the Tibetology Research College, the Uyghur Language and Literature Department, and the Mongolian Language and Literature Department. Interestingly, Rhoads and Chang (2013) liken the ethnocultural mission of Minzu University to that of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the U.S. Similar to HBCUs, Minzu faces financial challenges given growing pressure throughout the country to marketize higher education, and just as in the United States, a university with a mission aimed at serving ethnocultural development faces challenges generating revenue in an increasingly competitive higher education market. In terms of Minzu University, Rhoads and Chang noted that majors such as engineering and computer science, which connect more directly to market forces than for example Tibetan Studies, in recent years have received more financial support from the government and the university. However, despite the growing challenge of marketization, as Rhoads and Chang noted, Minzu's ethnocultural focus is still front and center.

An institutional aspect that makes Minzu University somewhat different from other Chinese comprehensive universities relates to the vibrancy of its diverse population and how this shapes the campus environment. Ethnic diversity is visible everywhere on campus; it is common to find ethnic minority students speaking their own language, wearing ethnic-related clothing, or participating in ethnic-oriented festivals and

celebrations. Furthermore, because music and dance are important aspects of ethnic culture in China, they are key academic majors at Minzu and it is quite common to see groups of ethnic minorities practicing in various corners of the campus. In fact, and representative of the importance of ethnic music and dance, at the main entrance to the university (the east gate) sits the university's most important building—the performance hall. This is the most symbolic building at Minzu and it is where ethnic festivals such as the Tibetan New Year or the Yi New Year (Yi is an ethnic group in China) are celebrated.

Another unique facet of Minzu worth noting is its governance structure. While most colleges and universities in China report to the Ministry of Education, Minzu reports directly to the State Ethnic Affairs Commission, an agency concerned with the nation's ethnic minority affairs. However, because Minzu receives additional funding from the Ministry of Education, as part of a special national initiative, the university also must report to this ministry, thus making Minzu's management more complex (and politicized) than most Chinese universities (Rhoads and Chang 2013).

In terms of gaining access, I am a graduate of Minzu and during the past several years have maintained close contact and strong ties with key faculty and academic personnel at the university. Included among my professional and personal ties is the academic administrator in charge of decisions regarding approval of campus research projects, particularly those engaging Minzu students. Unlike U.S. universities that have very formalized human subject regulations and processes for approval through Institutional Review Boards (IRBs), at Chinese universities such decisions typically fall on one key academic administrator (one of my contacts). Furthermore, contacts were also needed for helping to identify possible participants for the semi-structured interviews. I

framed my study initially confident that through my ties I would be able to gain the cooperation of the university and was able to do just that.

Data Collection Strategies

In order to collect data for my study, I spent a total of five months at the research site conducting fieldwork—I was on site from January through March 2017 and then returned again for two months from May through June. In terms of data collection strategies, I relied on four basic strategies: semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, participant observation (mainly in terms of “shadowing”), and document collection and analysis.

Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted 42 semi-structured interviews with a sample of students from each of the three groups studied. The semi-structured interviews lasted 1 to 1.5 hours in duration. The subjects were selected in a manner consistent with an intentional sampling strategy (to be discussed in the next section). Semi-structured interviews allowed for some degree of freedom on the part of the researcher in exploring key themes that arose in the context of the interview, while also offering a degree of structure to the questions and probes (Bogdan and Biklen 2006). Interview participants were considered as “key informants” who are able to provide information and elaborate on their experiences in college, and in relation to the research focus. In using semi-structured interviews, the researcher does not necessarily treat every subject in the same manner since some will have different types of

information to share; such interviews tend to be a little more free-flowing than a more formalized interview format.

I organized my interview questions around major categories related to social capital formation, cross-ethnic friendships and related issues, and the college experience more generally (the interview protocol is included in Appendix A in Chinese and in English). A key step in developing the interview protocol involved operationalizing key concepts such as social capital. Here I mostly relied on the work of Carter (2005), Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2011), and Stuber (2011). Accordingly, I operationalized social capital in terms of the social connections, friendships, and relations the students have as well as the ways through which they go about forming such social relationships (and the extent to which they involve cross-ethnic relations). Related to this is the degree to which students see such relations as helpful to them, either during their present college studies or in terms of future concerns such as those relating to career plans. I also pursued questions aimed at probing their college experience more generally, such as for example: What have you enjoyed most in college and what have been the biggest challenges?

All the interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. They were conducted in Chinese Mandarin and then translated to English at a later point. All interview subjects were informed of the nature of the study and that there are some basic human subject ethical issues that I must abide by in operating with the approval of the Temple University IRB (such as informed consent). The transcripts eventually became a key part of my data along with my field notes from informal interviews, participant observations, and shadowing.

Informal Interviews

Informal interviews were also part of the data collection process. Informal interviews allow researchers to collect data through a variety of informal conversations in diverse settings. Such interviews were recorded as best as I could through taking hand notes, sometimes while interacting with an informal subject and at other times I recorded my thoughts at a later point. Names and identity characteristics were not recorded in a manner that the identity of an informal interviewee could be identified. Such conversations were simply part of my daily interactions while spending time at the site. But such interviews can potentially be quite informative.

Participant Observation/Shadowing

Another key data collection strategy involved participant observation. Hanging out as a participant observer while interacting with Minzu students was critical because it enabled me to listen and learn through the narratives students shared and through what I observed in their daily lives. I believe participant observation was key to gaining an accurate understanding of the students' college experiences, social capital formation, and cross-ethnic friendship formation, specifically in relation to extracurricular and out-of-class activities with other Minzu students, staff, and faculty. Given social capital formation is an ongoing process, this reality offers another solid justification for utilizing qualitative methods, because such strategies are "well suited for the study of social processes over time" (Babbie 2007: 287).

The key aspect of my participant observation involved "shadowing" three students (one from each ethnic category, two females and one male) for a period of time,

typically in conjunction with an activity or event in which they were participating and which held significant meaning in their lives. Shadowing is consistent with the objectives of participant observation and “is a research technique which involves a researcher closely following a member of an organization over an extended period of time” (McDonald 2005: 456). During the process of shadowing the selected participants, I continuously recorded observational and analytical notes aimed at capturing aspects of the students’ experience. Note taking was not limited to conversation but also included efforts to capture attitudes, feelings, and moods such as through notes about body language and other physical gestures. Of special importance was paying attention to how respondents presented themselves when encountering different groups of students, faculty, and staff.

In addition to keeping detailed field notes, I also wrote memos to myself as my study progressed. Qualitative memos are useful not only in capturing key interpretative insights that a fieldworker develops, but also in suggesting futures lines of questioning as well as in developing further theoretical or conceptual insights. Memos also can be used to help researchers process their own emotions and feelings, which may be provoked through the intimacy of the face-to-face encounters with subjects (Bogdan and Biklen 2006)

Document Analysis

In addition to the three previous data collection strategies, I also collected relevant documents such as those that offer descriptions of demographic data, policies, and programs at Minzu University. Also, I searched online and where available consulted

national-level documents relating to information about ethnic minority population characteristics as well as any related policy documents made available by the National Bureau of Statistics of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese Ministry of Education, and China's State Ethnic Affairs Commission (the latter two are agencies that Minzu reports to). These documents, though not part of my formal data base, were used as forms of data to supplement my more qualitative field-based data and to provide a richer context for my discussion of ethnic diversity in China and the campus environment at Minzu University. The following are examples of some of the documents I consulted:

- Sixth National Census Data of the Chinese Population, 2010
- Higher Education Law of the People's Republic of China, 1999
- Regulations on Academic Degrees of the People's Republic of China, 2004
- List of Regular Colleges and Universities in China, Ministry of Education, 2014
- Minzu University School Profile, 2017
- Minzu University Undergraduate Training, Office of Academic Affairs, 2017
- Minzu University School History, 2017
- Graduate Enrollment Registration System—China Education Online, 2017
- Minzu University of China—Chinese Scholarship Council, 2017

Sampling Procedures and Sample

Sampling is primarily an issue relative to the semi-structured interviews. In terms of a sampling strategy, I planned to use stratified random sampling to select respondents from a variety majors and ethnic backgrounds. In the planning stages of my research, I had considered but decided to avoid using snowball sampling because it was seen as

likely to generate a rather limited sample. The reason is quite simple: snowball sampling is likely to render a high degree of homogeneity of research respondents in terms of multiple dimensions such as ethnicity, major, college experiences, and social networks. Hence, a stratified random sample is more helpful in this case in that it allows me to first stratify respondents by grade (third and fourth year students were the preferred class standing but I ended up needing to sample a few 2nd year students and one 5th year student), and then major, ethnic background, and finally gender. But as I will explain below, my idealized sampling strategy was not possible.

My ideal sample was determined to be 14 respondents from each of the three groups (Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han) with equal representation of males and females. This was in fact achieved resulting in a total of 42 interview respondents (for the semi-structured interviews). In China, most college students in the same class are about the same age as they all tend to begin college immediately after completing high school and there is no “stopping out” as is sometimes the case in the U.S. system. Thus, I did not use age as a consideration in selecting a representative sample as one can pretty much determine that a 1st year student is likely to be around 18 years old, a 2nd year student likely is about 19, a 3rd year 20, and so forth.

In terms of sampling, the initial plan was to obtain lists of students from the appropriate Minzu organizational department while requesting information relative to ethnic background, gender, major, and class year. Appropriate groupings (the stratified component of the sampling strategy) of the student lists would then be organized so that random sampling could be used to select candidates for the study. Students would then be contacted by email or telephone and a request made of them to participate in the study.

But this sampling strategy was not workable as obtaining lists of ethnic minority students proved to be overly sensitive in terms of Minzu University policies and practices. Instead, I used Minzu University online social communities to identify possible research participants; I was able to share information about my study and request that students contact me to participate in exchange for a one-time payment of 70 RMB (roughly 10 \$U.S.). Further, I asked interview subjects if they knew of other students who might be interested in participating in my study and asked that they ask the possible candidate to contact me via email or telephone.

The mixture of online recruiting and snowball sampling that I employed is obviously less than ideal when compared to random sampling, but given the circumstances it was the best available option. Further, a limitation of the use of snowball sampling is that a researcher may wind up with research subjects closely related to one another and perhaps tied too closely together through the same social networks, and thus potentially representing a skewed sample of like-minded subjects with limited homogeneity. But this was not the case as the vast majority of the study's participants came through online social media and only a handful were the kind of referrals associated with snowball sampling; the latter participants were necessary nonetheless given the purposeful components of my sample and the need to fill out various categories identified as critical to my study, such as ethnic minority status and/or gender. In the end, I was confident that I had a diverse sample with very minimal social connections shared among my participants. Tables 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 below offer basic background data about my final sample of MKM, MKH, and Han students, including their assigned pseudonym, gender, ethnicity, year in school, and major. I should also note that pseudonyms were

assigned in a manner consistent with names associated with the various ethnic groups so as to be respectful of each student's ethnic background.

Table 3.1 Min Kao Min (MKM) Student Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Year	Major
Arban	Female	Mongolian	2rd year	Mongolian Language & Lit
Güzile	Female	Uyghur	3rd year	Uyghur Language & Lit
Venera	Female	Uyghur	3rd year	Uygur Language & Lit
Pema	Female	Tibetan	3rd year	Tibetan Language & Lit
Rayana	Female	Kazakh	4th year	Kazakhstan Language & Lit
Mina	Female	Korean	3rd year	Korean Language & Lit
Jihee	Female	Korean	3rd year	Korean Language & Lit
Esen	Male	Mongolian	2nd year	Finance
Gyatso	Male	Tibetan	2nd year	Tibetan Language & Lit
Bari	Male	Uyghur	4th year	Uyghur Language & Lit
Mehmet	Male	Uyghur	3rd year	Uyghur Language & Lit
Rinchen	Male	Tibetan	3rd year	Tibetan Language & Lit
Pemba	Male	Tibetan	4th year	Tibetan Language & Lit
Dolma	Male	Tibetan	3rd year	Tibetan Language & Lit

Table 3.2 Min Kao Han (MKH) Student Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Year	Major
Chunhua	Female	Tu	4th year	Financial Management
Binbin	Female	Miao	3rd year	Finance
Xuyan	Female	Tujia	2nd year	Accounting and Business Admin
Hong	Female	Xibo	4th year	Tourism Management
Lingling	Female	Hui	4th year	Politics and Administration
Nan	Female	Mongolian	4th year	Pharmaceutical Engineering
Jieru	Female	Tibetan	3rd year	International Economy and Trade
Adil	Male	Uyghur	4th year	Political Science
Guo	Male	Zhuang	3rd year	Economics
Mengwei	Male	Miao	4th year	Ethnic Minority Language and Lit
Donghui	Male	Mongolian	4th year	Computer Science
Wei	Male	Yi	4th year	Ethnic Minority Language and Lit
Rui	Male	Hui	5th year	Kazakhstan Language and Lit
Cheng	Male	Hui	3rd year	Business Administration

Table 3.3 Han Student Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Ethnicity	Year	Major
Qiaochu	Female	Han	3rd year	Finance
Lin	Female	Han	3rd year	Public Finance
Qingqing	Female	Han	4th year	Biotechnology
Xiaoying	Female	Han	4th year	Advertisement
Ming	Female	Han	3rd year	Japanese
Zhe	Female	Han	4th year	Advertisement
Ya	Female	Han	3rd year	Financial Management
Kai	Male	Han	4th year	Political Science
Chongye	Male	Han	4th year	Economics
Feng	Male	Han	3rd year	Chinese Language and Lit
Yanzhuo	Male	Han	4th year	Environmental Science
Dagang	Male	Han	4th year	Ecology
Shichun	Male	Han	3rd year	Public Affairs Admin.
Li	Male	Han	3rd year	Philosophy

Data Management and Analysis

In terms of data management and analysis, Microsoft office such as Word and Excel was utilized to store and organize my interview transcripts and field notes. I digitally recorded all the interviews and kept in my portable hard drive all data gathered as part of the data collection process. All the data collected from research subjects were encrypted to protect the identity and privacy of respondents.

Data analysis first involved developing data codes on the basis of both deductive and inductive processes. This is consistent with Babbie's (2007) point that qualitative research typically involves moving back and forth between deductive and inductive endeavors. By deductive, I refer to processes shaping the project that are grounded in the assumptions brought to the study—such as various theoretical points relating to a belief in the importance of social capital and cross-ethnic relations and friendships. Inductive refers to processes actually deriving from the “ground up” and emerging from the actual data. Although I began my data analysis with key constructs in mind as I analyzed, organized, and reduced the raw data, I also paid great attention to themes and concepts (the basic data codes) that informed or contradicted some of the deductive elements. Some of my larger deductive-driven concerns—such as how social capital is formed—were greatly informed by deeper themes deriving from the data and that actually helped to make sense of the bigger more deductive ideas. The development of findings involves making connections among various deductive and inductive codes and eventually such connections formed key findings in the final dissertation.

Issues of Authenticity

In research based on the quantitative and hypothesis-testing model of social science, issues of reliability and validity are at the center of ensuring the rigor of a particular research project. But in research relying more on qualitative or ethnographic methodologies, the language and thinking may be slightly adjusted and key terms such as authenticity may be applied.

Authenticity relates to the degree to which an ethnographer can be confident that she or he has adequately represented the group under study and captured in truthful and reasonable ways what is expressed by the raw data. In this sense, authenticity serves as a key issue in assuring the rigor of a qualitative study and in helping to produce an actual benefit for the community or larger society being studied (Given 2008). One strategy for promoting increased authenticity is triangulation, which may be understood as the “mixing of data or methods so that diverse viewpoints or standpoints cast light upon a topic” (Olsen 2004: 3). Triangulation is thus seen as an important way of strengthening the rigor of qualitative research (Bogdan and Biklen 2007). In my study, I include multiple data collection strategies such as participant observation, semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, and document analysis so as to strengthen data triangulation and increase the authenticity of my findings and conclusions.

Member checks are another strategy for promoting authenticity and involve sharing early interpretations and conclusions with those who were studied to gain their insights about the tentative findings. Preliminary findings were shared with three research participants individually. They are Arban, Lingling and Ya, one from each ethnic

category. I gathered feedback and reactions from them and had discussion with them. The reactions and comments from them were used to further sharpen my analysis.

Research Ethics

Research ethics obviously should be a concern of all sociological research projects, but ethnographic work can be particularly troublesome in terms of ethical issues that may arise, as evident by the case of Alice Goffman (2014) and problems she faced relative to her fieldwork in Philadelphia while studying a low-income African American community and males “on the run” from the criminal justice system. Accordingly, I followed Temple University IRB policies as closely and thoroughly as possible. I was approved to conduct social science research through the CITI online training program and I submitted an official IRP proposal for approval to involve human subjects in my project. This was also approved. I was aware throughout my study of the need to protect the subjects in my study as ethnic minority issues are quite sensitive in China. Thus, I went to great lengths in protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of the students who agreed to participate in my research.

Another key ethical consideration concerned my own positioning as an ethnic minority and member of the *Manzu* (Manchurians in Western terminology) ethnic group as well as my status as a graduate of Minzu University. Both of these aspects of my background needed to be considered as I went into the field to collect data. For example, I needed to be conscious of the ways in which my ethnic minority status could potentially influence how others interact with me (my ethnic minority status is not readily apparent physically, but it was something that arose from time to time in the context of discussions

with students). I also needed to consider the ways in which my ethnic background might influence my interpretation of data and the conclusions I drew. I am not arguing that researchers can achieve perfect objectivity, but certainly they should strive for what Day (2012) described in terms of “reflexivity” and the need to understand “the self as a research tool” (p. 70). Day went on to draw on Goffman (1959) and the idea that the research process involves the researcher presenting “the self in particular ways” (p. 70); a reflexive approach to conducting qualitative inquiry therefore involves being thoughtful about the roles played by the researcher and by research participants. Hence, in addition to how my role as researcher may be influenced by my ethnic background, I also had to consider my background as a graduate of Minzu. This required me being aware of the reality that I may knowingly or unknowingly want to present Minzu in a positive light. To avoid this possible design flaw, I constructed my descriptions of the Minzu campus context almost entirely on the basis of comments and findings generated by my research subjects thereby limiting my own inclinations.

Conclusion

The reality is that qualitative studies have much to offer in terms of seeking to capture the lived experiences of a particular population of social actors. This was certainly the case with my study in that adopting a qualitative strategy gave me the flexibility to achieve a good level of depth. From a qualitative perspective, the narrative side to lived experience can be quite informative and shed light on some of the more complex social processes. With this in mind, my research design helped me to develop some important ideas relative to social capital and cross-ethnic friendships and the overall

experience of Chinese ethnic minorities by comparison to the Han majority. The narrative understanding I acquired assisted in informing important debates and policies relative to ethnic minorities in China and the role of higher education. Such a line of inquiry is increasingly important to a world that every day is confronted with wide-ranging human diversity and social problems in search of sound policies.

CHAPTER 4: STUDENTS' PRE-COLLEGE BACKGROUND AND VIEWS OF MINZU UNIVERSITY

This chapter focuses on students' pre-college educational background as well as the ways in which the students view their academic and overall experience. In both cases—looking at their pre-college educational background and their views of the Minzu experience—the students' classification as Min Kao Min (MKM), Min Kao Han (MKH), or Han is considered. Students' pre-college educational background and their impressions of the Minzu campus are important to understand in order to more fully comprehend social capital formation and cross-ethnic friendships. Social context is very important to consider as part of making sense of the ways in which students form social relations, connections, and friendships that make up their social capital. I divide the discussion into three primary sections: students' pre-college educational background, their views of campus life, and a summary of key findings.

Students' Pre-College Educational Background

In order to more fully understand the experiences of Minzu University's Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han students, especially their formation of social capital, it is necessary to have some insight into how they view the campus and their overall educational experience there. Additionally, it is also helpful to understand how students at Minzu think about their experience in college relative to past educational experiences particularly those relating to taking the college entrance exam (known as the *Gaokao*) and the related choices they had that ultimately led them to attending Minzu. The reason

this background is important is that issues related to attendance at Minzu and taking the *Gaokao* come up in the context of my discussions about their college experiences.

Educational Preparation for College

An important pre-college characteristic expressed by students concerned the differential quality of their pre-college education (K-12 in the United States). Generally speaking, Min Kao Min and Min Kao Han students raised issues of lower quality pre-college education when compared to Han students. For example, Chunhua, a 4th year Tu (MKH) student majoring in financial management, commented, “Because I am from Northwest China and I am also an ethnic minority, our pre-college education lags behind other places in China.” She went on to add that she accidentally saw the *gaokao* scores of all her classmates⁶ and that they were all above 500 whereas hers was only in the 400 range. This left her feeling somewhat inadequate academically speaking: “We are not the same in terms of level of academic performance.” Similarly, Adil, a 4th year Uyghur (MKH) student from Xinjiang Province (the far west) majoring in political science also explained the shortcomings of his pre-college preparation: “I grew up in Xinjiang and the educational resources and teaching quality is not as good as that of inland China, especially when compared to schools in very advanced big cities such as Beijing, Guangzhou, or Shanghai.” He added that he was never officially exposed to the four major classical novels in China—*Water Margin*, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, *Journey to the West*, and *Dream of the Red Chamber*—a rather big surprise given that

⁶ In China, a college “class” is not constituted by every student entering the same university in the same year, as is the case in the United States, but instead refers to the group of students in the same major who entered college the same year. These class groupings may vary in size but generally at Minzu a class would fall within approximately the range of 30-60 students depending on the popularity of the major.

knowledge of these novels is a common expectation among high school graduates. He also explained that his English skills lagged behind his Minzu classmates because he did not have very good English training.

Language can prove to be a major barrier for Min Kao Min students given that some may have minimal exposure to Mandarin during their pre-college educational experience. As Venera, a 3rd year Uyghur (MKM) student majoring in Uyghur language and literature, commented, “I was in the ethnic class so most of my classes were taught in Uyghur.” She contrasted her experience with students grouped into the “Han class” in high school, where “their primary teaching language is Mandarin.” Given that nearly all the classes at Minzu University are in Mandarin—language courses being an exception—not having much exposure to Mandarin left Venera struggling in courses outside of her major. Along these same lines, Gyatso, a 2nd year Tibetan student majoring in Tibetan language and literature, noted that almost all of his classes during his pre-college educational experience were in Tibetan with the exception of one Mandarin course. Here, it is important to note that almost all Min Kao Min students are limited to majoring at Minzu only in native language and literature programs such as Uyghur language and literature, Tibetan language and literature, or Mongolian language and literature, among others. Although these students would perhaps be expected to do well in their major courses, the challenges typically come when they take courses as part of their “public electives” or what in Chinese is termed *Gongxuanke* (similar in some sense to General Education in the United States).

Counter to these ethnic minority students, Kai, a 4th year Han student majoring in political science, noted that he attended a very strong high school enrolling mostly Han

students: “My high school was in the city you know, it was the best local high school, so most of the students are Han.” Kai recognized the educational advantages of his high school experience and how that was likely to contribute positively to his time at Minzu. Likewise, Feng, a 3rd year Han student majoring in Chinese language and literature, also spoke of attending a top high school: “The high school I went to is the best Han high school in my hometown. They only teach classes in Mandarin with the exception of an English class.” Feng also noted that many of his classmates were Korean Chinese but that they were very “Hanized,” (to be elaborated in chapter 6) meaning they were well integrated into mainstream Han society and culture. The area of Feng’s hometown is known as *Yan Bian*, the Korean autonomous region in Northeast China, and his comments call attention to the fact that some of China’s ethnic minorities are very well integrated into Han society and are more likely to reap the benefits associated with the Han majority. This is the case with several of the Min Kao Han students in this study. For example, Mengwei, a 4th year Miao MKH student majoring in ethnic minority language and literature, noted how he benefitted from attending a “Han-dominant high school.” As he stated, “Because my high school is one of the best high schools in Hunan province, they are able to recruit students from all over the province. And there are many ethnic minorities in Hunan. So, the ethnic minority students are spread into each class. They don’t form a special class group or anything for minorities. They are just like all the other Han students, mixed in with everyone else.”

Patterns of pre-college educational preparation tend to reveal academic advantages associated with attending predominantly Han-dominated schools, a reality more than not to be experienced by Han or Min Kao Han students. Min Kao Min students

by comparison are more likely to attend minority-oriented schools in which Mandarin is offered primarily as a secondary language course. Even though MKM students in such a situation take the *gaokao* in their native language they generally have fallen behind in overall educational attainment by comparison to their Han and MKH peers; consequently, they are likely to attain lower scores on the *gaokao*. This was noted by several of the MKM students with whom I spoke.

The Gaokao

Although both my formal and informal questions about students' educational background did not specifically inquire about their experiences with the *gaokao*, many students nonetheless could not escape its all-encompassing influence on their lives. As background information, the *gaokao* is China's national college entrance exam given on the same day to all high school seniors every year in June. Many of the stories associated with the importance of the *gaokao* to Chinese students may sound like exaggerations, but they are not. The anecdotes include such things as parents concealing the death of a family member to avoid worrying the *gaokao* student, or girls taking medications to alter their menstrual cycle so as to avoid having their period on the day of the *gaokao*, or students not going outside for weeks so as to avoid any possibility of an accident or illness. A student's score on the *gaokao* pretty much shapes her or his future: A great score means possible acceptance to a leading Chinese university such as Beijing University, Tsinghua University, or Zhejiang University. A mediocre score is likely to lead to attendance at a mid-level university, many of which are vastly underfunded and lacking in high quality academic programs. A bad score and a student is destined to

attend a technical college (somewhat similar to a U.S. community college or technical school) or a *minban*, which is very low in quality with no support from the government (a form of the Chinese for-profit sector). Career options correspond pretty much to the quality of the university from which one graduates, and so the pressure on students to do well on the *gaokao* is immense.

While certainly Minzu University is not among the very top universities, such as the aforementioned Tsinghua, Beijing, and Zhejiang, nonetheless it has a high level of support from the Chinese government and is ranked 114th nation-wide by the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU) in China. What this suggests is that unless a Minzu University student has her or his aim on a university such as Beijing or Tsinghua, getting accepted at Minzu is quite an honor. A MKM Mongolian student, Arban, captured this reality quite succinctly:

Minzu University is considered the top tier—number one tier. It's the best university one could go to, you know, it is a great honor to go to college at Minzu. I mean there are better universities in China such as Beijing and Tsinghua University, but as Mongolian students who are taught in Mongolian, we were not allowed to apply to some of the universities such as Beijing and Tsinghua. They don't have our major, you know, Mongolian language and literature.

Arban's comments also highlight the reality that generally MKM students are limited in their choice of major to only studying language and literature related to their native tongue—in the case of Arban, Mongolian language and literature. This is part of the regulations governing the Minzu university system and ethnic minority access.

Many students made specific reference to the *gaokao*, both in terms of their preparation for it as well as their performance on the actual exam. As Chunhua, a 4th year Tu student noted previously, she was quite embarrassed to learn that all of her classmates

had outscored her on the *gaokao* and she seemed to take it to heart in a manner that could potentially hurt her academic self-confidence.

Several students brought up their *gaokao* score relative to China's preferential policies for minorities in higher education, called *Youhui Zhengce*; underrepresented ethnic minorities such as Tibetans or Uyghurs may receive additional points on their *gaokao* as part of the preferential policies, a practice similar in some ways to U.S. policies associated with affirmative action).⁷ The following two students noted how they benefitted from preferential policies:

I can think of the preferential policy program and how I benefitted when enrolling in college. By being a Zhuang, I was eligible to receive 5 to 10 extra bonus points to my *gaokao* grade. And those bonus points helped me get into Minzu.

Guo, 3rd year MKH Zhuang in economics

I know that students need a very good *gaokao* score to be able to get into Minzu. But, as a Min Kao Min Korean student, our admission grade can be lower than other regular students.

Mina, 3rd year MKM Korean in Korean language & lit

Even Han students who did not receive additional points on the *gaokao* mentioned the importance of this practice. Han student Chongye noted, for example, "Ethnic minority students are able to get into the more advanced majors because they enjoy preferential policies. When they apply to these majors they don't need to have as high of a *gaokao* grade as Han students." Here, Chongye references how additional points on the *gaokao* may enable a MKH student to gain admission to a "regular major" such as engineering or sociology, as opposed to being limited to a language and literature

⁷ Although I note that China's preferential policies or *Youhui Zhengce* are similar in some ways to U.S. practices associated with Affirmative Action, it is important to note that both quotas and applicant scoring systems are commonly practiced in China, whereas such practices have been deemed illegal by the U.S. Supreme Court in the *Bakke* and *Gratz* cases respectively.

program, as is the case with nearly all MKM students.⁸ Although this student is not criticizing the policy, there certainly are Han students at Minzu who see the preferential policies as unfair to Han students more generally; I say this not based on the field work conducted for this research, but based on my own attendance at Minzu during my undergraduate years. For example, I occasionally heard Han students complain of the benefits assumed to have been received by MKM and MKH students. This phenomenon is comparable to the views some majority students in the United States have toward underrepresented ethnic minorities who may be assumed to have benefitted from affirmative action when often times this may not be the case at all.

Students' Views of Minzu Campus Life

Students tended to have a mixed view of the environment at Minzu, especially when it came to academics. Some saw the university as quite rigorous and challenging, while others tended to complain about the level of academic requirements and offerings. But in addition to discussing academic quality, students also noted the importance of other facets of the campus environment, including characteristics relating to cultural diversity as well as campus infrastructure such as dormitory quality, dining hall quality, etc. I highlight points of view about the campus environment relating to three concerns: academics, cultural diversity, and campus infrastructure.

⁸ It is important to note here that students in China do not simply apply to a specific university but they must apply to a specific major at a specific university. Thus, they must earn admission not just to the university but to that major as well and some majors are more difficult than others to gain admission. This reality of being admitted to a major also is one major reason why switching majors is so unusual at Chinese universities.

Views of Academics

About half the students tended to view the academic environment of Minzu in very positive terms. A case in point, Arban (2nd year Mongolian student) was honored by the fact that her major was considered a top program nationally: “My major—Mongolian language and literature—is considered the best in China. The teachers and professors in it are the top researchers in this field in China.” Kai, a Han student in political science, found his academic experience to be quite challenging, but in a positive way: “The most challenging thing is the academic level of the whole university, the quality of education at Minzu.” Kai went on to note that Minzu received funding as part of Project 211 and Project 985—two national projects to support the development of top universities—and that this type of support from the government offered important academic opportunities including the fact that many of his teachers were top researchers in their field. As he explained, “The teaching and academic quality is very much related to the quality of the professors and the overall faculty.”

Another group of students—about half of my sample—found the academic environment of Minzu to be lacking, especially by comparison to Beijing’s leading universities literally just “up the street” (only a mile or two to the north of Minzu on Zhongguancun Street is Renmin University, then Beijing University, and then Tsinghua University). One MKM student in particular, Arban, captured this sentiment quite succinctly: “Minzu does not have a study atmosphere comparable to other universities in Beijing such as Renmin or Beijing University. The teaching quality is not as good, and overall the academic standards the university applies toward students is lower than other universities.” Mengwei—a 4th year Miao MKH student—reinforced such a view: “I

think Minzu has lower academic standards and expectations of students compared to other universities in Beijing. So I feel that I have a lot of free time. I could play the sports I like as much as I want.” A third student, Rinchen, a 3rd year Tibetan student, added, “The workload at Minzu is relatively less than other universities in Beijing. We don’t have too much homework to do or too much pressure based on our schoolwork. It is somewhat of a lax environment.” And Zhe, a 4th year Han student in advertising, maintained that, “Minzu is really lacking in the academic areas and does not offer strong academic training for its students. The academic atmosphere is so so...the students are not very into their academics...all they seem to care about are student activities and having fun.”

Chongye mentioned the reality that Minzu is stronger in less prestigious and less lucrative fields such as the humanities and social sciences, by comparison to Beijing and Tsinghua and their advanced technological and entrepreneurial focus (Tsinghua is more highly regarded than Beijing in terms of entrepreneurial or applied science fields). As Chongye explained,

Our university does not prioritize entrepreneurial education and so they don’t really support or have a system that encourages students to study that. Compared to Beijing or Tsinghua University, these universities encourage studies in high technology and entrepreneurial development. Those universities also have the ability to equip their students with related competencies. You know, the graduates from Beijing or Tsinghua may even start their own businesses, go into such fields as artificial intelligence, robotics, or virtual reality. Those universities tend to have the connections students need or they actually work in collaboration with big companies in China.... But when you look at Minzu, we don’t have the best support or teaching ability in these areas. We lack the financial support.... Minzu focuses on its teaching more in terms of building strength in social science and humanity majors. We lag behind in practical science-based majors.

The preceding student's comments are fairly accurate about the strengths and weaknesses of the curricular offerings at Minzu—it is relatively strong in the social science and humanities and less so in applied sciences such as engineering and computer science.

Although some respondents might be quick to criticize Minzu in terms of its shortcomings in applied science, especially by comparison to a star university such as nearby Tsinghua (the leading high-technology and engineering university in China, often described as the “MIT of China”), Minzu has some unique offerings, perhaps unmatched by other universities. An example of the unique quality of Minzu's curriculum is its strength in music and dance—including ethnic minority music and dance. This was expressed by Ming, a 3rd year Han student majoring in Japanese: “A lot of people say Minzu is very strong in its performance majors such as dancing and singing. Well, as far as I'm concerned, I think it is true. When I watch these performances in person I feel proud of Minzu. I feel proud of myself to be a Minzu student.” A second student, Jihee, a 3rd year Korean Chinese student, echoed this aspect of Minzu's academic and curricular strength: “I know a lot of people who think of Minzu as a good arts school, especially with regard to ethnic music and dance. For the most part, I think it's true. Minzu lives up to that reputation...For me, I really like Korean dances that the students in the department of dance perform. They often have performances that are open to public. Every time I have a chance to go I do.” Further evidence of the high quality of Minzu student dance and musical productions is the popularity of such events and the fact that many Beijing residents seek to attend these productions. The fact that the campus performance hall is located front and center at the main gate to the university is symbolic in many respects.

Further, several of the professors in the fields of music and dance are or have been significant professional performers in their own right.

Views of Cultural Diversity

Respondents mentioned consistently that a positive aspect of the Minzu campus environment was the obvious cultural diversity evidenced throughout the entire campus. Such cultural diversity was seen as more welcoming and supportive to ethnic minority students. For example, Arban, a 2nd year Mongolian MKM student, explained, “There are so many ethnic minorities at Minzu...and the living environment is very diverse. So, I feel it is more friendly.” Likewise, Dagan, a 4th year Han student majoring in ecology, bragged about the diversity of the campus: “The major thing at Minzu is the cultural diversity. It is what Minzu is known for. So, here you can meet students from all ethnic backgrounds...they come from all over China. You see things and experience culture you otherwise would not experience. I think that is what I really like about Minzu. It is an eye-opening experience! A really good thing.”

Like Dagan, other Han students consistently noted the positive influences of being exposed to a culturally diverse student body. Kai, a 4th year Han political science major, had this to say: “I think a great quality is the cultural environment at Minzu. I mean there are many cultures due to the ethnic diversity on campus. So, I feel that during the past four years it has really enriched my knowledge, my experience, it really opened my eyes to many horizons.” Kai went on to add that when he started at Minzu, he was afraid of Tibetans—based on stereotypes. “But after I came to Minzu and had real contact with Tibetans, I found they were actually very nice. In one of my classes there were three

Tibetan students and they were very simple [in a positive way] and very kind people.”

Lin, a 3rd year Han student majoring in public finance, offered a similar take on the value of exposure to ethnically diverse students: “Contact with diverse students gives you a better chance to know what they really are like. Meaningful contact is quite helpful for eliminating uninformed stereotypes.” Lin further explained how even her understanding of geography was influenced by conversations with students from Xinjiang. “Before I came to Minzu my impression of Xinjiang was that it is mainly desert and that there is not much else to see. However, after I actually met someone from Xinjiang I realized Urumchi [the capital city of Xinjiang Province] is a metropolis not so unlike Beijing or Shanghai.” And Xiaoying, a 4th year Han student in advertising, offered that, “The most exciting part of Minzu is its diversity. I get to live with a lot of different ethnic minorities. This diversity largely influenced and changed my views of things.... Before I came to Minzu, I had many stereotypes about ethnic minorities and generally thought they were unfriendly and poorly educated. But after I came to Minzu and had real contact with them, I found that they are really nice and friendly, and most are well educated.” The preceding four students support basic “contact theory” first advanced by Allport (1954) and later applied more extensively to the diversity experiences of U.S. college students. Findings related to this theory have been used by scholars to support diversity initiatives as well as well as affirmative action (Gurin, Dey, Hurtado, and Gurin 2002).

For many students, cultural diversity was manifested in numerous ethnic-related activities and events seen as beneficial to the overall student experience at Minzu. This quality at times seemed to override some of the negative views about half the students

had regarding the academic environment. The following comments all speak to the wide range of ethnic-oriented activities on campus:

Because of the diversity of the student body, we have lots of recreational activities such as evening parties or other gatherings and celebrations tied to ethnic festivals and stuff like that.

Mengwei, 4th year MKH Miao in ethnic language & lit

Every Friday in front of the tennis courts there will be a group dancing with all kinds of ethnic minority and Han students. They mainly perform a Guozhuang, a type of Tibetan dance.

Donghui, 4th year MKH Mongolian in computer science

I think the most exciting thing about Minzu is that there are a variety of student activities...we have many things going on every day and Minzu also is a very good environment for students of different ethnic background to meet and get to know each other. I made some friends who are Korean, Mongolian, Hui, and so forth.

Bari, 4th year MKM Uyghur in Uyghur language & lit

The thing I like about Minzu is its diverse cultures. We celebrate all kinds of ethnic festivals. You cannot see this at other universities. I did not even know that a lot Guangxi people celebrate San-Yue-San (3rd month, 3rd day) until I came to Minzu.

Yanzhuo, 4th year Han in environmental science

I like the festive and celebratory cultural atmosphere at Minzu. Because we have so many ethnic groups and they have their own festivals and traditional holidays, when they celebrate them on campus the whole campus is very merry and happy.

Nan, 4th year MKH Mongolian in pharmaceutical engineering

The preceding students affirmed students see value in ethnic diversity and reap the benefits on a regular basis. Appreciating the diversity of the campus did not seem to be tied to whether a student was MKM, MKH, or Han.

In addition to appreciating various experiences related to ethnic or cultural diversity, there are also times when the cultural diversity of the campus contributes to ethnic minority students further exploring their own ethnic identity. Lingling, a 4th year MKH Hui student majoring in politics and administration, captured such a sentiment: “Most of my roommates are Han. Thus, they are very curious about me as a Hui student. So sometimes they ask me questions about my ethnicity and religious background. I then realized that I didn’t have a good answer for them and so I had to ask my parents and Hui upper-classmates...I even did a little research on my own by reading books and various literature about Hui people. It really helped me to better understand myself.”

Despite all the positives associated with Minzu’s cultural diversity, there were some concerns expressed mostly by Han or Min Kao Han students. As Binbin, a 3rd year Miao MKH student surmised: “The most challenging part is also the culture and ethnic diversity on campus. Because there are so many ethnic minorities, sometimes you need to be very careful.” Binbin saw all the ethnic-based activities as potentially isolating: “What I am saying is that the kind of activities Tibetan and Xinjiang students love to participate in are very ethnic-based and require a lot of cultural understanding that other ethnic groups are unlikely to have.... Hence, other students won’t have the same interest in attending them—it is not their culture, it is not something they are familiar with. So, culture and language differences to a great extent may determine that we will not have much opportunity to start any contact or relationship with other diverse students.” Here, Binbin alludes to the potential influence of ethnic identification (and openness) on the ability of students to expand their social capital through cross-ethnic relationship building, specifically in terms of how one’s comfort level with others’ cultural

expressions may limit the ability to meet new people and build new relationships. This of course is a central point of Chapter 6 and its focus on cross-ethnic friendships.

Examples of Cultural Diversity through Shadowing

As I noted in Chapter 3, one way to better understand the lived experiences of the students in my study involved shadowing three students—one from each ethnic category, two females and one male—for a period of time during a normal day in their life. In what follows I share field notes (edited) to highlight two specific students and unique cultural aspects of their experience at Minzu. In one case, I highlight Adil, a 4th year MKH Uyghur student majoring in political science and aspects of his college life as a Muslim student. In the second case, I focus on Ya, a 3rd year Han student majoring in financial management. In Ya's example I highlight her involvement in a traditional ethnic minority game called *Tuoluo* (or “Spinning Top” in English).

Notes on Observing Adil:

After engaging in a study session for about an hour and half, Adil wanted to meet one of his Uyghur professors in his office, just to catch up with him. Adil told me that he was the one who initiated the meeting with his professor, who was a very well-known and popular professor at Minzu; many students, including both Han and ethnic minority students, hold him in high regard. I accompanied Adil to his professor's office on the 14th floor of one of the classroom buildings and the largest building on campus. The professor is the party secretary (*shuji*) for the Department of Uyghur Language and Literature and Adil explained that he enjoys “catching up” with him from time.

When we walked into the professor's office, I noticed right away several paintings on the office walls of Uyghurs—I knew they were Uyghurs by their facial features (more European features than Asians), clothing style, and the traditional Uyghur hat, a square-ish skull cap referred to as a *huamao* in Chinese or a Doppa in some English locales. His desk was stacked with papers, files, and books and it was there that I saw an exquisitely designed red covered Koran (Adil later informed me that Muslims are supposed to keep the Koran at a high and clean location).

We waited in the professor's office for about 10 minutes, when he finally walked in. Adil immediately rose to his feet and he and the professor shook their right hands with thumbs interlocked and then each grasped the other's right hand with their left hand, forming a two-handed hand shake. As they shook hands, they greeted each other with, "Salaam," the universal greeting among Muslims all over the world. I had witnessed this form of greeting many times during my undergraduate years at Minzu and during some of my fieldwork. Adil told me afterwards that this way of greeting is typical for Muslim males, but that Muslim women do not greet one another in this way.

After their greeting, the professor quickly turned to acknowledge me, having recognized me from several years ago when I had been a student there. The professor also knew of my research and so it was no surprise to see me there

accompanying one of my research participants. The professor directed us to sit back down and then he took a seat at his desk. A conversation between the two quickly ensued as they employed a mixture of Mandarin and Uyghur (I could only comprehend the Mandarin). As best as I could tell, their conversation focused on Adil's schoolwork and catching up about Adil's recent activities.

After about twenty minutes, during which I sat quietly and observed, Adil and the professor stood up (I quickly followed their lead) and said good bye: Adil said, "Bye, bye," and the professor countered with, "*Zuoba, zuoba!*" (meaning "go on" or "take off" in English). Once outside the office, Adil and I headed for the elevator and then parted ways outside the classroom building. I thanked him for his time and for agreeing to participate in my study.

Notes on Observing Ya:

It was 8 pm when the Spinning Top (*Tuoluo*) team of the School of Management met to practice at one of the basketball courts on campus. Spinning Top is a game (or sport) involving a wooden top about the size of a large grapefruit (the size of the top can vary greatly). The top is wrapped with rope attached to a stick. The player holds the top in one hand and the stick in the other, then tosses the top toward a round plastic mat while letting go of the top and maintaining a grip on the stick. If successful, the top lands while spinning on the mat and spins for a while. The game can be played as a competition in which a second team would

toss their top onto the same mat hoping to knock the other team's top off the mat—hence, a winner.

According to Ya, *Tuoluo* is a traditional ethnic minority game popular among minorities such as the Yi, Yao, and Lahu people principally of southwest China. Ya told me that it was very hard to master the skills in terms of throwing the top and being able to have it land while spinning; to add to the challenge, the top must land on the circular mat with a diameter of not much more than about one meter. I watched Ya try several times but she had not yet learned to master the technique; she was able to spin the top, but could not get it to land on the circular mat. She was not surprised by her limited skill in *Tuoluo* and laughed after most of her attempts. As she explained, “I told you earlier I’m not very good.”

Tuoluo is just one example of an ethnic minority sport that some Minzu students such as Ya participate in. Ya reminded me that Minzu has a special day every year (known as “Sports Day”) in which a variety of ethnic minority sports or games are organized at the recreational fields and track. These games are an important vehicle for students meeting other students from a variety of diverse backgrounds. This seemed to be the case with Ya, given that as she played *Tuoluo* most of her attention was not so much focused on the game but instead centered on chatting with students she had known through the *Tuoluo* team.

As one can see from the experiences of Adil and Ya, an ethnic minority (MKH, Uyghur) and a Han student, there are many opportunities for students to experience cultural diversity at Minzu in many forms, including through cultural or religious practices as well as through participating in activities or sports such as *Tuoluo*.

Views of Campus Infrastructure

It should not be surprising that when you ask college students about their day-to-day experiences in college they resort to some of the most basic aspects of campus life—such as eating, sleeping, or taking a shower. This was certainly the case with my study.

In the United States, students may share bathroom facilities as part of a same-sex hall or suite, but in China the experience is far more variable and students may even have to walk beyond their residence hall to take a shower. Such is the case at Minzu and many students were quick to point to the less than stellar conditions of the public showers. For example, Qiaochu, a 3rd year Han student in finance, complained of the “small shower room” and the fact that she had to wait in “long lines sometimes” only to experience a “lack of privacy.” As she explained, “All the female students are naked in the same room and take showers together.” This student is from Taiwan and found such conditions difficult to accept and so she often showered at her friend’s apartment.

Female students also complained about their dorm rooms and the fact that many had seven roommates (eight students to a room) in the case of larger rooms while those in smaller rooms had three roommates (four students to a room). The students in the male dorms tended to have five roommates (six per room). These are conditions that U.S. students likely would find unacceptable—especially the reality of having to walk outside

in the middle of winter to go to the shower building. As Xuyan, a 2nd year Tujia MKH student majoring in accounting and business administration, explained, “I wish our dorm room was a little bigger...I have seven roommates now...it would be great if only four people had to share a dorm room.” The women were not alone in criticizing the campus’s infrastructure—specifically the dormitories—as Guo, a 3rd year male Zhiang student, highlighted: “I have some complaints about the infrastructure at Minzu, especially the male dorms you know, we have a very small room...And all my roommates like playing video games. They often play video games until late into the night or early in the morning. That makes it really difficult for me to sleep in my room.” Yanzhuo, a 4th year male Han student, highlighted related concerns: “The only thing I have a complaint about at Minzu are the physical facilities. I lived in my dorm room with five roommates. It is not only crowded, but also poorly equipped. We’ve lived in our dorm room now for four years without internet.”

Other students pointed to the limited sports facilities and the fact that the Minzu campus seemed to be under-funded relative to the number of students attending it. For example, getting on one of the few basketball courts to actually participate in a game could take hours. As Gyatso, a 2nd year Tibetan student, commented, “We don’t have very many sports facilities. We don’t get to use the big football field, we can only use the small football field, because so many other students need the big football field for their physical education classes.” Xiaoying, a 4th year Han student said it best: “I think one concern I have about Minzu is that the campus is too small and too crowded. The infrastructure lags behind most other universities.”

On a more positive note, several students noted the excellent new classroom building and the opportunity to use classroom space for studying late into the day. But the reality of many students lined up in front of the library early in the mornings in the hope of getting a study space seemed to offset any conclusion that Minzu has an abundance of study spaces.

Another positive noted by students—and consistent with my own experience as an undergraduate several years back—is the high quality and diversity of food prepared and offered by campus dining facilities, including three separate Muslim dining halls (two for students and one for faculty/staff). Nan, a Mongolian MKH 4th year student commented, “I like the dining halls at Minzu because of the ethnic diversity. We have all kinds of good food that other universities might not have.” Rui, a Hui MKH 5th year student, explained that the only thing about Minzu’s facilities that he appreciated was “the dining facilities at Minzu. That is the only thing.” And Mengwei, a Miao MKH 4th year student ate most of his meals in the Muslim dining hall with his Hui roommate and enjoyed the food immensely. During my time at Minzu I heard many stories about other Beijing college students visiting Minzu to enjoy the diverse cuisine and even some of my roommates invited friends from other universities to dine there. The quality of the diverse cuisine is also complemented by many neighboring restaurants including ones specializing in Muslim, Xinjiang, Mongolian, and Dai dishes. Based simply on the crowds lined up at the many restaurants adjacent campus, the food district surrounding the campus is popular with many Haidian District residents.⁹

⁹ Haidian is the district in Beijing where Minzu is located and where more than 50 other universities reside, including four major world-class universities--Beijing, Beijing Normal, Renmin, and Tsinghua; the city of Beijing itself includes 84 colleges and universities according to Chinese Ministry of Education “List of Regular Colleges and Universities in China, 2014.”

Generally speaking, views about the infrastructure of the campus were not tied in any way to the students' ethnic background or status as MKM, MKH, or Han. Almost all of the students described experiencing crowded dorm rooms and they all were frustrated by slow internet speeds and outdoor lines to the shower building—a particularly big problem during Beijing winters. Although some students occasionally spoke of classrooms and classroom buildings as sources for learning, most of their remarks about campus facilities centered on their living arrangements, most notably dorm rooms, showers, and dining halls. This is not surprising given their prominence in the daily lives of students.

Summary

A key contribution of this research study is to understand the collegiate experience of Chinese college students, especially for an English-speaking audience. The reality is that very little qualitative research exists that explores in great detail the lived experiences of Chinese college students. A recent exception is the work of Bregnbæk (2016) and her book, *Fragile Elite: The Dilemmas of China's Top University Students*. Bregnbæk's work explores the college lives of Chinese students at the nation's two leading universities: Beijing and Tsinghua. She does so using ethnographic methods. Bregnbæk focuses on what she describes as the "Oedipus Project"—"the universal existential need to establish some degree of separation from the will of parents and, by extension, the will of the state" (pp. 3-4). Her analysis focuses attention on the "struggle between parental determination and self-determination" (p. 38), specifically among elite college students in China. She does a good job of highlighting the significant stress that

such students face in light of the tension between traditionalism relating to family obligations (such as taking care of parents later in life) and the changing context of a rapidly modernizing nation where the college educated need to lead the country. There are many insights offered by Bregnbæk but her study does not concern the ethnic diversity of Chinese college students. This is an important area that this dissertation seeks to fill and the present chapter is an important part of better contextualizing Chinese student life in a manner that is inclusive of many ethnic minorities and their lived experiences. In subsequent chapters, I will pay more attention to the primary theoretical perspectives that were brought to this study, in the form of research on social capital and cross-ethnic friendships.

The goal of this chapter was to provide important background information and context about students' pre-college educational backgrounds linked to perceptions of their preparedness for college-level work at Minzu. Included as part of this discussions are comments and thoughts students have about the *gaokao*. That the *gaokao* came up in conversation about their pre-college educational experience is hardly surprising given its dominance as a determining factor in the Chinese college choice process. A particular finding worth reiterating is that MKH and Han students tended to speak in more positive terms when discussing their preparedness for college, where MKM students were more likely to express concerns about their inadequate educational training, particularly in the area of Mandarin language acquisition and usage. This is not too surprising given that MKM—by the very nature of being classified into this category—signifies that the student took the *gaokao* in their native language, presumably in most cases because of their limited Mandarin ability. And, of course, the vast majority of MKM students are

limited in their choice of major by having to select language and literature study in their native tongue. Although these findings could not directly relate to social capital and cross-ethnic friendships, one can already see the potential implications of ethnic minority students being grouped into the same majors and classrooms primarily with others from those same background. And although this may prove to be a source of support for these students in terms of their comfort level with college—being among their ethnic peers—this may also serve to limit their opportunity for expanding their social capital and building more cross-ethnic friendships. These issues will be further examined in Chapters 5 and 6.

Another aspect of this chapter focused on students' perceptions of the Minzu University campus, specifically in terms of the academic environment, cultural diversity, and the infrastructure of the campus life (mostly facilities). Although not central to the work to be presented on social capital formation and cross-ethnic friendships, a certain amount of background information about the campus better contextualizes the students' experiences in the areas of social capital and making friends.

Regarding academics, it is important to note that about half the students in my study saw Minzu's educational experience as rigorous and challenging, while half complained about its low-level of quality. Although there is not a strong pattern between one's view of the campus's academic quality and one's status as MKM, MKH, or Han, it certainly is the case that MKM tended to view the campus as academically challenging, whereas MKH and Han students were more likely to criticize the academic standards. This does not seem overly surprising in that MKM students also were more likely to question their preparation for college, whereas MKH and Han students were more likely

to report having had a pretty strong pre-college experience. Clearly, a pattern appears to be emerging that seems to suggest that the MKH students may be more likely to identify in academic ways with the Han students, whereas the MKM students stand out in terms of their self-perceptions of academic deficiencies.

In terms of perceptions of the campus' cultural diversity, nearly every student—regardless of ethnic status—described the campus in glowing ways noting the pleasures and joys they took from being exposed to so much ethnic diversity. Only a few students expressed some apprehension about being faced with such diversity—typically in terms of having to be careful about saying the “right” things. The biggest pleasure students experienced with regard to ethnic diversity was the many social activities and festivities celebrating various ethnic groups and their special occasions; students were generally thrilled to be exposed to such events and they tended to cherish this facet of the Minzu experience. They also enjoyed the advantages of observing and even participating in ethnic minority music and dance performances—a key facet of the Minzu experience.

With regard to campus facilities at Minzu, students mostly described the campus negatively, viewing the campus as underfunded relative to the number of students attending Minzu. This resulted in crowded dorm rooms, long lines at the library and the shower building, and long waits to use sports facilities such as basketball courts. On the positive side, students appreciated the ethnic diversity of the cuisine prepared on campus in the dining facilities.

CHAPTER 5: SOCIAL CAPITAL AND GUANXI AMONG MKM, MKH, AND HAN STUDENTS

This chapter focuses on the ways in which students talk and think about social connections and their relevance to forming social capital as a means primarily to support their academic and career pursuits. The findings in this chapter address three research questions in my study (RQs # 1, 2, and 4):

- 1) What differences exist among Han, Min Kao Han, and Min Kao Min college students in terms of the observable characteristics of their social connections and relations?
- 2) How do students form social relationships and connections and to what extent are there observable differences when comparing the three groups of students?
- 4) How does *guanxi* influence the formation of social relationships and connections among the three groups of students?

Contextualizing Social Capital

Social capital is a complex sociological concept often used to address forms of inequality associated with education and social mobility. Although there are varying definitions of social capital, most tend to suggest that it relates in many ways to social connections (also discussed as social ties) and how such connections may serve to assist

an individual in various life challenges, such as doing well in school or finding a good job.

In Chapter 2, I summarized some of the key scholarly work on social capital, mostly in terms of the work of sociologists, but also including work from other types of scholars such as educational researchers. I especially found the sociology literature that adopts a social reproduction perspective to be helpful in examining social capital and issues of social mobility and education. For these scholars, social capital serves as an important construct in understanding differential outcomes for students. Along these lines, two major perspectives in understanding the concept of social capital were introduced in the work of Coleman (1988) and Bourdieu (1986).

Coleman (1988) viewed social capital as the obligations and expectations, information channels, and norms and effective sanctions that govern social behavior and that may benefit members of a particular community or social grouping. He argued that social capital has a community-oriented attribute and should be considered as a public good. In contrast to Coleman, Bourdieu (1986) framed social capital as the potential resources and benefits inherent in the private possession of enduring social networks and connections. For Bourdieu, access to productive social networks is limited to only members of certain social groups, and hence social capital was to be viewed as a form of class markers. Another important attribute of Bourdieu's social capital is that the building and maintaining of social capital requires deliberate efforts. Thus, it is crucial to understand that for Bourdieu, the social relations among members within the same network need constant investment and maintenance in order for one to keep benefiting from them.

Although both Coleman and Bourdieu inform my thinking about social capital, it is primarily the work of Carter (2005) and the idea of social capital as “resourceful social connections” and “personal networks” that represent both potential access to benefits in the form of resources as well as “sociopsychological benefits” (p. 137). Her work calls attention to the fact that not all social connections and ties result in the formation of capital, given that some may be counterproductive in their support of education and career outcomes for students. A specific feature of Carter’s argument that I bring to my study is her view of the importance of mentors in helping students navigate the challenges of schools and life more generally. Thus, in my analysis I looked at the social connections Minzu students formed with an eye to the ways in which various friends, classmates, roommates, professors, and staff shared resources and guidance typically offered by mentors. To put it another way, I mainly view social capital as the potential benefits, tangible or intangible, embedded in social networks and connections with people in one’s environment; in the case of my study, that environment is primarily the Minzu University campus. Social capital thus is mostly about the value of social relations, especially about relations among diverse actors at Minzu—peers, faculty, staff—and others outside of Minzu such as Beijing residents, online contacts, and family. The effects of social capital function through these social relations in the form of useful information, valuable opportunities, norms and solidarity, and so forth. What is more, social capital is fundamentally about how people interact with one other as part of a social structure in which interdependence is the reality of daily life.

Types of Campus-Based Social Connections Contributing to Social Capital

In this section I focus on the types of social connections students form as part of seeking support for their various endeavors linked to academic and career pursuits. Of course, students also make connections and friendships just for the fun and for healthy human contact, but the focus of my study primarily centered on how such relationships might help students to pursue academic and career interests—as forms of social capital. In stressing the benefits of social connections, I do not mean to represent students as overly mercenary or overly pragmatic in their relationship building, but instead simply want to capture the value students see in their social connections as forms of social capital. Nearly all the students easily elaborated the importance of their connections and how they helped them in their endeavors. Along these lines, relationships with two different groups of people were stressed: 1) peer-to-peer connections, and 2) connections with faculty and staff.

Peer-To-Peer Connections

The first type of social connection stressed by students is best described as peer-to-peer connections. These included relationships with roommates, classmates, friends, and upper-class students. The students tended to describe these relationships as primarily serving as sources of information and/or resource channels through which students could more easily navigate college life. They saw social connections with peers as quite helpful in pursuing academic success, getting career advice, and seeking part-time jobs or internships.

For example, Yanzhuo, a 4th year Han student majoring in environmental science pointed out that “I mainly get information from my friends, people around me.” Another 4th year Han student, Zhe, made a similar comment by saying that, “The simplest and traditional way is to get information from your friends, the people who you interact with on a daily basis—the ones who live in your life.” Sometimes the friends that students rely on come from campus clubs and organizations that students joined. Kai, a 4th year Han student, highlighted the importance of campus out-of-class engagement as a way of making friends: “When it comes to knowing and having contact with more people, interest-based clubs and organizations are very important, because people at those places are students from all majors and all ethnic backgrounds.... Basically, my friend circle in college mostly contains people I know of from my involvement in these activities and organizations.” In all, 36 out of 42 students who participated in the semi-structured interviews stressed the importance of participating in extra-curricular activities, including joining campus organizations, as a means to making social connections and friendships. Some of student organizations mentioned include the following: Chinese Communist Youth League, China’s Traditional Culture Study Group (a bit academic), the Tibetan Culture Association, the Western Practice Club, Ocean Wave (a dance club), the Minzu Bicycle Club, the Basketball Association, and department-based Student Unions.

Several male students in particular mentioned making friends while playing sports such as basketball, volleyball, and biking. Others noted the role that key campus events such as dance performances and concerts play in providing students with outlets for meeting new people and making friends. Venera, 3rd year Uyghur MKM student in Uyghur language and literature, spoke to this issue: “I usually participate in some of the

events such as the traditional Uyghur dance performance or the tambura concert. At those events I've met some upper-classmates in my department and we exchanged WeChat numbers and became friends.” The extracurricular interests expressed by Minzu students do not seem much different from those of students studying in the United States, at universities such as Temple University: culture, music and dance, sports, academic enhancement.

Beyond friends met through a variety of campus activities, including clubs and organizations, sports, and campus productions, classmates are a critical source of social connections for Minzu students. Here, it is important to keep in mind that in the Chinese context a “class” is typically a cohort of about 30-60 students all in the same year of college and the same major; hence, class “mates” (as in classmates) are those “mates” in the same year and major. So, the typical Chinese college student takes many of her or his college courses with the same classmates throughout college years and obviously gets to know them quite well. This is true at Minzu regardless of whether a student is MKM, MKH, or Han. The following students all offered insight into the importance they place on the role classmates play in supporting their college endeavors:

I usually team up with my classmates who share the same interest with me. We help each other out and work on the same projects as a team...we work well together as a team.... My roommates are nice to me...and sometimes when I need money they will generously lend it to me.

Chongye, 4th year Han in economics

My roommates and classmates all help me with small things in life. I remember once when I was really sick, my roommates took me to the hospital and took care of me at the hospital the entire time.

Jieru, 3rd year MKH Tibetan in international economy and trade

I recall when my class monitor [a class monitor is a classmate selected to be a leader for the group] went to me and said that he knew about family background and that we are very poor. He told me he would apply to get extra funding for me as a poor student. In the end, I was able to get a subsidy for being a poor student and it included an extra 185 RMB subsidy for cellphone usage.

Chunhua, 4th year Tu MKH in financial management

My classmates offer me help in life, such as when we do homework together. We help each other. We proofread each other's work and remind each other of deadlines.

Donghui, 4th year Mongolian MKH in computer science

Sometimes when I'm not motivated enough to study they will encourage me by dragging me out of my room and go study with me.

Güzile, 3rd year Uyghur MKM in Uyghur language & lit

My roommates and I will help each other with our Mandarin. If any of us can't say a full sentence in Mandarin, then we will ask for help from someone in our doorm room...we work together. Sometimes I may not be able to express myself very clearly due to my limited level of Mandarin, but they try hard to understand my language...they also help correct my Mandarin if I say something in the wrong way.

Venera, 3rd year Uyghur MKM in Uyghur language & lit

The preceding students' comments highlight how important the cohort model is to the undergraduate system in China, including the key role classmates and roommates play in supporting one another. The connections formed from the class cohort model clearly offer Chinese students an important source of social capital helpful in navigating the challenges of college life.

There can however be some negatives associated with being so tied to one's classmates. For example, Mina, a 3rd year Korean MKM student, noted that, "All the

people that I have contact with are my classmates...the people in my department, my roommates [roommates are almost always from the same class cohort], they are all Korean. So, my social network at Minzu can be rather limited. I don't know many people outside of this circle." This was more of a problem for MKM students, given that their specific language and literature major, such as Tibetan, Mongolian, or Korean, is limited to only students from the same MKM ethnic background; Han and MKH can major in Tibetan language and literature, for example, but it is a separate degree program from that offered for MKM students. And although MKM students take public courses with other students, including both Han and MKH, language barriers may limit their ability to make friendships and social connections with students not from their same ethnic group. This is, of course, a very important matter and will be thoroughly addressed in Chapter 6.

What came across powerfully from the data is the important role that upper-classmates play in the students' lives. In fact, 35 out of 42 students participating in the semi-structured interviews noted the importance of upper-classmates as critical resources and sources of support. It is safe to say that nearly every student expressed much gratitude about their upper-classmates for sharing experiences with them, including passing along course-related materials (such as books or course notes), sharing their knowledge of the best methods for studying, and offering advice regarding course taking. Upper-classmates also offered guidance in terms of what extracurricular activities one might consider in terms of investing their time. The importance of this form of social connection cut across all three ethnic group categories. Comments from students such as the following three were fairly typical:

They shared their textbooks with me so when I take the class everything is easier...And they also told me about what they know about professors in

my department, what the professors are like, what they are looking for in terms of exams and so forth.

Lin, 3rd year Han in public finance

If any of us have questions with regard to our coursework or exams, upper-classmates are the people we talk to in order to get some study material or study experience.

Mina, 3rd year MKM Korean in Korean language & lit

They would tell us what are the good student organizations we should try to join. What are the good courses we should take? They will share their college life experience with us, including academic life, social life, and so on...if any of us wants to take the graduate school entrance exam, they will share with us their experience studying for the exam and stuff like that.

Nan, 4th year MKH Mongolian in pharmaceutical engineering

Students noted that upper-classmates also help to support younger students by offering insights into internships and career possibilities. Lingling, a 4th year MKH Hui student in politics and administration, stated, “For my internships, I did not have to look hard for these valuable internship experiences...I was at one time interning at a research center at Beijing Normal University—it was a research position introduced to me by an upper-classmate of mine at Minzu. Another internship was at [a well-known publishing company] and it was introduced to me by an upper-classmate as well.”

Students also mentioned having career-oriented discussions with upper-classmates and borrowing from upper-classmates’ experience in developing their own career plans. Ming, a 3rd year Han student in Japanese language and literature, explained that she was highly influenced by the upper-classmates in her same major. She was now planning to go to graduate school in Japan and switch to photography, something she

really enjoys. This was a re-fashioning of her career plans in part because many of her upper-classmates (in her major) had gone on to graduate school in Japan and were quite successful now. Zhe, a 4th year Han student in advertisement, described a similar experience in that her goal of going to graduate school had been inspired by “enlightening conversations” with upper-classmates who were now entering top graduate programs at prestigious universities in Beijing such as Peking and Renmin; she described such classmates as “role models” for her to follow.

One slight difference based on the MKM, MKH, and Han ethnic categories is that those students with serious fluency in an ethnic language such as Korean, Tibetan, Uyghur, or Mongolian—typically MKM students—could take advantage of opportunities to either intern or work part-time at magazine and newspaper publishers doing translation work. Usually these types of job opportunities were passed along by upper-classmates who previously had held such work. Jihee, a 3rd year MKM Korean student explained, “Upper-classmates also helped us younger students find part-time jobs. Because Korean students can do some translation work, given the language advantage we have, upper-classmates sometimes refer us to well-paid translation jobs.” And Rayana, a 3rd year MKM Kazakhstan student in Kazakhstan language and literature, added to this point by stating, “The part-time jobs doing translation work were introduced to me by my upper-classmates. And an internship at a magazine publisher [also doing translation work] was introduced to me by an upper-classmate and a professor of mine in my department.”

Faculty and Staff Connections

A second key type of social connection stressed by MKM, MKH, and Han students are the relationships they build with Minzu professors and administrative support staff, all of whom were typically described by students as *laoshi* (meaning teacher).¹⁰ Students tended to describe their social connections with professors mostly in terms of obtaining support in academic-related matters such as schoolwork or gaining research experience. They described their relationships with staff mostly in terms of getting valuable advice and opportunities related to specific extracurricular activities and/or options. Social connections to staff were only highlighted by a few of the students during the semi-structured interviews. However, 38 out of 42 students made significant comments about their interactions and/or relations with professors with the vast majority of the commentary being quite positive—there were a couple negative comments, such as faculty “not being so helpful” sometimes.

Lin, a 3rd year Han student in public finance, described visiting one her professor’s offices regularly to discuss academic-related issues as well as working on a research project supervised by this professor. Even when her school work was not specifically linked to this professor, she still sought his advice and direction. And Lingling, a 4th year MKH Hui student in politics and administration, benefited a great deal from her social connections with professors. For example, she has a close relationship with one of her professors because she worked for her as a research assistant.

¹⁰ Here it is important to note that Chinese students do not always make a clear distinction between faculty who teach courses and administrative staff who offer other forms of mentoring and guidance; both of these two categories of university employees in China may be referred to by students as *laoshi*, meaning teacher. I have separated the students’ comments in this section based on the somewhat ambiguous distinction between *laoshi* who mostly teach classes (and do research in some cases) and *laoshi* who mostly work in administrative type support roles. In the United States we might think of this as the difference between faculty and student affairs or academic support professionals.

Lingling explained that she “loves doing social science research” and expressed her hope of someday going to graduate school. In fact, her professor was looking into possible graduate programs for Lingling: During a trip to give a talk at Nankai University, her professor had actually made some inquiries about possibilities for graduate study for Lingling. Although Lingling believed that her family’s financial situation was likely to keep her from attending graduate school in the near future, she nonetheless had great appreciation and respect for what her professor had done for her.

Students also described professors helping them in terms of advancing their careers or finding jobs upon graduation. For example, Bari, a 4th year MKM Uyghur student reported that two of the more resourceful professors in his department informed him that they could help students in Bari’s class (his year and major cohort) to find jobs in Xinjiang as well as in more inland cities such as Beijing. Bari noted one professor in particular: “Professor [family name] has some connections in Beijing since he has worked in Beijing for about 30 years. He told us if any of us are interested in working in Beijing or in other inland cities, he will refer us to a company in Beijing that he has ties with.” Bari went on to explain that another professor “actually helped a lot of my upper-classmates find jobs through his connections with the Uyghur periodical office and TV stations. So, sometimes this professor will talk to me about what kind of job he thinks I would be good at and I found that very helpful.”

Careers and internships seemed of particular importance to students and they consistently expressed the need to rely on faculty connections. The following three students captured sentiments expressed by many:

My class adviser [a faculty member assigned to the entire class cohort] is a very responsible teacher. She told us that we just need to focus on our

schoolwork, our academics. Then, when the time comes that we need connections or job opportunities, she will do whatever she can to help us.

Jihee, 3rd year Korean MKM in Korean language & lit

More private and personal conversations often happen between me and my professors and include experiences in terms of career planning, job-hunting, and other things. They will tell me what they have seen in the students they have taught before, what they have done well and what they have not done so well. So, I can learn from their past experiences. They will also share their own experience with me.

Kai, 4th year Han in political science

One time I participated in a college student enterprise program and the professor I worked with was very nice to me. She even recommended some internship opportunities to me...and then included me with a group of students she led to a pharmaceutical factory in Tianjin.... And I participated in a Beijing biology and pharmacy contest and my professors served as my advisers...one of them took me to an academic conference with two of her master's students...we all worked on her research project together.... We would talk about my career plans and my overall goals in life...she gave me a lot of advice when I was thinking about switching majors [not an easy thing to do in China]. She told me about the career outlook for each major and shared some of her experience...ultimately I decided to stay in my major.

Qingqing, 4th year Han in biotechnology

The above comments all offer insight into the relationships between Minzu students and their professors and reveal some basic insights into the nature of these connections and how they offer forms of social capital to students.

Minzu students also described various staff playing key roles in their lives and the importance of having social connections with them. A 3rd year MKH Miao student in finance, Binbin, stated that by working with staff at Minzu's Job and Employment Office (similar to a career center at a U.S. university), she often times got important job related information from them: "The staff [*laoshi*] there also share much valuable information

and guidance with me...They have very updated and useful information on the job market...this is what they do.” Given that the staff at the Job and Employment Office have the responsibility of sharing job and career information throughout the campus, Binbin found it quite advantageous to have connections with them in that she could always get information ahead of other students. Another student, Hong, a 4th year Xibo MKH student in tourism management, recalled her class counselor visiting her and her roommates in the dorm, something that the counselor did several times during Hong’s time at the university. “She just came to our dorm room and had a regular chat with all of us, asking us if we had any problems with school work or with life in general... Sometimes, during ethnic festivals, she would visit us again and bring us fruit.” The examples noted by both Binbin and Hong revealed an important role that *laoshi*, in the form of student affairs staff, play in the lives of Minzu students in terms of the important source of support they offer.

It is not hard to see that social connections with peers as well as faculty and staff were seen as quite important to Minzu students regardless of their ethnic grouping. The social connections described in this section largely benefited students in terms of their academic and career pursuits and offer evidence of why social capital—in the form of social connections—is so valuable to students in their pursuits. Although all students—MKM, MKH, and Han—expressed fairly similar views about the importance of peer-to-peer and faculty/staff connections, there were some notable differences specifically with regard to MKM students. On the one hand, and as a positive, it was pointed out that MKM students may benefit in terms of internships or part-time translation work relating to their advanced language skills and that such opportunities often were conveyed to

students by upper classmates. Although this is not a major finding, it does in some way counter my initial hypothesis that MKM students would generally face more barriers in forming social connections (and in forming social capital), and therefore reap less of the benefits associated with college participation. On the other hand, it was noted that MKM students, by the structure of their major and the reality that more times than not most if not all of their classmates are of the same ethnic background, have limited opportunities to form cross-ethnic relations; such a reality may be interpreted as also leaving them less likely to fully take advantage of a wide range of social connections and related social capital. As noted, this latter point will be a key part of the discussion in Chapter 6.

Social Media and Online Connections

In addition to making connections through their majors and coursework as well as getting involved in a variety of extracurricular activities, students also made social connections through online platforms such as WeChat (a Chinese social platform for connecting with people). Feng, a 3rd year Han student in Chinese language and literature explained that when he started college he didn't spend much time on WeChat. "Before, I participated in all kinds of activities and organizations. I didn't use WeChat too often and I did not have many followers on my WeChat. But right now...I cannot go one day without WeChat and I have about 2,000 followers." Ming, a 3rd year Han student majoring in Japanese, uses WeChat to get information and stay in touch with friends and family, noting that "most people I am friends with on WeChat are friends or relatives, family members or schoolmates, these are the people you trust and believe."

Minzu students also described using online platforms for making connections with other people and students, who in turn helped them identify resources or information they needed, either for course work or in relation to personal interests and/or needs. Two favorite sites were WeChat and IMinDa (a Minzu University online portal). The following comments from three students capture this facet of the student experience:

When you want to dig deeper for further information [for a research project], you will need to use the Internet to collect more direct information yourself. I tend to use WeChat, WeChat Group Chat, and IMinDa, the Minzu online portal. So, I often browse the Internet for more information.

Kai, 4th year Han in political science

I think my main information channel is WeChat Friend's Circle...Sometimes I don't even have to look for stuff online myself. I may also go to the Minzu portal for some information. Other Minzu students would already post all kinds of things on Friend's Circle. I think WeChat is more immediate and instant than anything else.

Qiaochu, 3rd year Han in finance

The good thing about having more WeChat friends is that the Friend's Circle on WeChat becomes a very powerful information tool. For example, if I need anything or anyone to help with certain things, I can easily post questions to Friend's Circle. I remember the last time I lost an important document and then I posted my information on WeChat in a lost and found ad. Pretty soon my Friend's Circle...is filled with my information and my lost and found ad. Not too long after that, I found my lost stuff with the information people provided me through WeChat. So, I think this can be very useful social network—it serves as a type of resource.

Adil, 4th year Uyghur MKH in political science

Similar to the preceding students, Min Kao Min student Arban, a Mongolian in her 2nd year, uses online platforms to get help with coursework. For example, she used WeChat for getting help with her calligraphy from her professor: “And sometimes I talk to her on

WeChat about my own work. I will send her a picture of my work and ask for advice and guidance on how to do it right [she's talking about calligraphy]. And she also replies by sending me a video showing me how to write a specific character.”

Online platforms are also used for enhancing one's career and employment options. The following comments from Chongye, a 4th year Han student in economics, captures this point: “Our class also has a group chat on WeChat and so our class counselor often times shares useful job information there...Normally, what he shares to the group chat is very reliable, such as job opportunities offered by his colleagues or his friends. For example, he might say that, “This position is in a professor's son's company.” Or, “This position is a good one since a lot of my former students have worked there before.” Using online communications to identify possible part-time work opportunities is also common, as Pema, a 3rd year Tibetan MKM student in Tibetan language and literature explained, “Usually part-time job information will be shared within the group chatroom on WeChat. There is a lot of job information posted by upper-classmates.”

Online platforms, from a social connections and social capital perspective, tend to serve at least two purposes: 1) they help students to maintain and strengthen their already close relationships, and 2) they help students to further build more social connections with new people they meet. Here, Granovetter's (1973, 1983) work on weak and strong ties comes to mind, as one might think of the first function—maintaining and strengthening already close relationships—as contributing to furthering strong ties, whereas the latter serves more to expand one's weak ties. The idea is that strong ties are reflected by the fact that many social connections are shared, whereas weak ties represent

fewer shared connections and relationships. Hence, someone only known through an online platform is more likely to share fewer connections than someone met in a face-to-face encounter as a result of daily lives intersecting, such as the case with two students from the same campus meeting and forming a relationship. But as Granovetter (1983) pointed out, weak ties have the potential to offer new resources because mere acquaintances, unlike close friends characterized by strong ties, are more likely to move in different social networks and thus possess different forms of knowledge, such as new job leads. This suggests that Minzu students likely take advantage of weak ties by utilizing online social platforms.

In terms of the numbers, 31 out of 42 students who participated in the semi-structured interviews described their extensive use of social media and online platforms for maintaining and building social connections. Of the 11 who did not emphasize such platforms, no clear pattern emerged, although there was a larger number of MKH students (6) by comparison to the Han (3) and MKM (2) students. That of the 8 ethnic minority students who did not report extensive use of online platforms, all would be more or less categorized as facing educational challenges associated with pre-college education, based on their ethnic background and the relationship in China between ethnicity and pre-college education. Here is their ethnic breakdown: Hui, Kazakhstan, Miao (2), Mongolian, Tibetan, Tu, and Uyghur. One student, Adil, a 4th year Uyghur student majoring in political science, made note of this pattern relative to MKM students: “I have a Min Kao Min friend who is the class monitor.¹¹ He said his classmates hardly

¹¹ A class monitor is a class leader or informal teaching assistant typically selected by the faculty because of their superior academic performance. It is considered a great honor to be selected as class monitor and they take on a number of important responsibilities.

ever, maybe they don't even know how, go to the university's online portal to get information. My friend had to do that for them and then spread the information to his classmates. These are the students in the Department of Tibetan Language and Literature...they don't have the habit of browsing the portal. I think these Min Kao Min students may not be confident in their language ability.”

Off-Campus Sources of Social Capital

Another key finding, and somewhat surprising, was the heavy influence of off-campus sources of social connections that contributed to their social capital. Three primary off-campus sources were stressed: social connections associated with Beijing ethnic ties, hometown connections (in Beijing), and the ongoing role of family connections.

Beijing Ethnic Ties

In terms of Beijing ethnic ties, this phenomenon was almost entirely associated with MKM students with the exception of one MKH Tu student (Chunhua). Of special note here is the fact that the Tu people have their own oral language but there is not a commonly used written script; hence, Tu high school students aspiring to attend college must take the *Gaokao* in Mandarin resulting in their classification at Minzu as MKH.

Arban, a 2nd year Mongolian MKM student, explained that her friendship circle extended beyond the Minzu campus and included Mongolians she had met in Beijing through involvement as a volunteer in planning Mongolian Zulu Festival activities. “Because of my involvement in Zulu Festival, I got to know many people, including

Mongolian adults who are currently working and living in Beijing and other Mongolian students who are at other universities in Beijing.” She explained that over one of her winter breaks she stayed in Beijing and a Mongolian family invited her to dinner at their home. Similarly, a 4th year MKH Tu student, Chunhua, discussed how celebration of the Tu Ethnic Association led her to meet many Tu people in Beijing. “It was nice to meet these people and hear their stories. I mean they were just like me...from the poor rural countryside and then they made it in Beijing...it was encouraging. I also met many Tu college students from other universities in Beijing at the Ethnic Association meetings.”

Given the number of universities that exist in Beijing—close to 100—it is not too surprising that Minzu students often meet ethnic minority students from other universities. In the preceding paragraph, both Arban and Chunhua noted this. Other students, too, mentioned meeting ethnically diverse students from around the city. Venera, a MKM Uyghur student, discussed making friends with other Uyghur students at a Muslim celebration in Beijing. “I met many Uyghur students from other universities in Beijing. Some of them are even from my hometown, which makes me feel more much comfortable around them. I actually have many friends like that. Every year they come to Minzu and we participate in the celebration of Eid al-Adha [the “sacrifice feast”] together. Then we will have dinner at a Muslim restaurant near Minzu.” Some students benefitted financially from ethnic ties to residents of Beijing, such as was the case for Mina, a 3rd year MKM Korean student, who received support from an outside agency in Beijing that offers grants funded by Korean “entrepreneurs or CEOs who like to support Korean youth.”

Hometown Connections in Beijing

A unique and very important aspect of Chinese culture and social life is the strong social and emotional attachment Chinese people have for their hometown—or their home “soil” in the sense of the classic work by Fei Xiaotong¹² and his famous book, *Xiangtu Zhongguo*, translated as, *From the Soil: The Foundations of Chinese Society* (1992). Fei captured the importance that Chinese people attach to their social relations and especially those connected to their families and place of birth. For many Chinese, letting go of one’s hometown social attachments is an extremely difficult task. Hence, in many cities throughout China, hometown social groups exist so that urban migrants might maintain their social ties to members from the same hometown. This is true of Beijing as well and many Minzu students noted the importance of such social connections. The following comments from two Minzu students capture aspects of this facet of Chinese culture:

One thing I need to mention is the townsmen association. We have a townsmen association that consists of people from Liangshan [the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Region] and so the people in the association are all Yi. When new students arrive each year, the townsmen will go to every dorm room to contact students who are Liangshan Yi. They then will introduce the association and explain what it does and stuff like that. Once they are able to find all the new students from the same home region, they will organize a welcome dinner for the new students.

Wei, 4th year MKH Yi in ethnic minority language & lit

We have this townsman association...sometimes some upper-class friends in this townsman association will spread some information about part-time jobs or lend us some textbooks...sometimes they share their experience with certain class, they tell us what are the most commonly seen questions in the exams and so forth.

Qingqing, 4th year Han in biotechnology

¹² I am very proud to note that Fei Xiaotong, perhaps China’s greatest sociologist and anthropologist, once served on the faculty at Minzu University.

We have a townsmen association and related to it is a WeChat group for students from Xinjiang who are in Beijing. I met lots of people from this network and extended my *guanxi* [a type of social capital to be discussed later in this chapter] that way.

Rui, 5th year MKH Hui in Kazakhstan language & lit

Numerous student organizations at Minzu are based on townsmen associations and thus offer additional sources of social connections. Although such entities are on-campus and may be treated as a type of student club and organization (and as a source of extracurricular activities), their ties to students' hometowns and connections to Beijing-based townsmen associations make them something of a unique source of social capital.

Family Connections

Although many of the students in my study are physically separated from their families—especially the MKM students who come from far away provinces such as Tibet and Xinjiang—they nonetheless stay as connected as possible to their families. They continue to see their family connections as important sources of support in a variety of areas, but especially in the area of career interests. Fourth year Han student Qingqing noted this: “My parents and even my parent’s friends give me guidance about my career goals. A friend of my dad, he is the head of a university in Hainan, he thinks that me becoming a faculty member at a college is a good and stable job for a woman like me.” Dolma, a 3rd year Tibetan MKM student, highlighted the role her mother plays in directing her career endeavors: “My mom actually agrees with my idea [to be a journalist] as well. She thinks it will be great if I can find a job at a newspaper or magazine company and be a reporter there.” Dolma also noted how her cousin influenced her career thinking: “The most important person who influenced my career goal is my

cousin. She went to Renmin University and she got me really interested in writing and editing. After she graduated from college, she was able to get a job at CCTV [China Central Television] in Beijing as a reporter. She is a very successful person and so she is a role model to me.”

Chunhua, a Tu MKH student, described how her brother helped to guide her and keep her on track career-wise: “My brother just got a job—he is one year ahead of me. He took a look at my resume and scolded me, saying my resume was so poorly designed...I even had the address wrong...He then helped me correct it.... So my brother is actually the one who helped me in many significant moments in my life. He is always a step ahead of me...he gives me lots of career guidance.” Finally, Mehmet, a 3rd year Uyghur student, described his rather unique situation and the role his parents play in his academic life:

My parents own a chain of bookstores in Xinjiang and so I grew up in an environment in which Xinjiang intellectuals and elites always show up and hang out...they are my family’s connections. My dad runs his own bookstore, and he is also a somewhat famous free-lance poet. So, he has many intellectual friends in Xinjiang, such as professors at Xinjiang University. When my dad’s friends come to Beijing or to Minzu for an academic lecture, they will always invite me to dinner with them.

Mehmet’s comments also remind me of an important aspect of social capital in the Chinese context—and that is the role of *guanxi*. *Guanxi*, as a form of social capital, is an important facet of Chinese culture and is a central point of analysis for my study. In the next section I will delve more deeply into the meaning and role of *guanxi* in the lives of students at Minzu.

Guanxi as a Form of Social Capital

As I note in the literature review in Chapter 2, Chinese scholar Qi (2013) discussed *guanxi* in terms of “friendship” as well as “political” or “economic” relationships and how one must “carefully” construct and maintain those relations because they carry “mutual obligations and benefits” (p. 309). Similarly, Huang and Wang (2011) detailed the meaning of *guanxi* as types of social connections carrying “reciprocal interests and benefits” (p. 120). Clearly, these views of *guanxi* suggest an element of Chinese culture that is in many—but not exactly—a representation of a form of social capital. In fact, I would say that *guanxi* is a type of social capital, but that not all forms of social capital are *guanxi*—there must be present some common notion, shared by parties, of a sense of mutual obligation and potential benefit. This is not true of all forms of social capital; for example, there may be no expectation on the part of a mentor that a protégé will offer benefits to the mentor. Such a relationship does not seem to convey the kind of norms and expectations associated with *guanxi*, and yet mentors certainly offer forms of social capital, as Carter (2005) and Stanton-Salazar (2011) have demonstrated in their studies of social capital and the role of mentors and institutional actors.

What was curious to me, at the start of my study, was the possible ways in which Minzu students see *guanxi*, and whether they might discuss it as a form of social capital, not necessarily using such technical language as “social capital,” but in a manner that might be interpreted as social capital. My research question relating to *guanxi* and social capital was framed in this manner: How does *guanxi* influence the formation of social relationships and connections among the three groups of students? In what follows I

focus on the ways in which student conceptualized *guanxi*, their discussions of how it is formed, and then the significance of *guanxi*.

Conceptualizing and Forming Guanxi

Nearly every student in my study—40 out of 42—had a fairly easy time discussing *guanxi* and its significance in their collegiate lives. Several offered helpful views in terms of defining or conceptualizing *guanxi*. Arban, a 2nd year Mongolian MKM student described *guanxi* in terms of “the embodiment of one’s ability and capacity...what that person is capable of.... If someone is not resourceful, then he has no *guanxi* to use.” She went on to add, “I think *guanxi* is a reciprocal process...you know I give you money or something you want, then you give me what I want...help, information, or whatever.... On campus, it is more like what I can do for you as a favor and then what you do by helping me with something.” Other students also spoke of *guanxi* in a transactional or reciprocal kind of way. For example, Lin, a 3rd year Han student in public finance, said, “*Guanxi* works two ways in that it is an interaction between two people—you give the other person something he or she wants, and he or she gives you something back that you want.” Qiaochu (3rd year Han student) seemed to agree:

Guanxi is about favors friends do for each other....[It is] about helping each other, you know, among good friends. For example, I had to design a poster to promote an event to be held by the Basketball Association. I didn’t have much experience with designing posters, I didn’t know how to use any of the computerized tools for designing posters. The first thing I thought about was to find a friend who is an art or design major. I knew they would know more about it and be able to help me with this. So, *guanxi* to me is about the small favors people do for each other. You help me this time with the things you are good at and the next time I do you a favor by doing something I am good at.

Clearly, Minzu students saw reciprocity at the core of the nature of *guanxi*, but there was also a sense that one must have something (skills, talents, commodities) in order to be able to exchange resources with someone. This is what Arban seemed to be saying when she noted that *guanxi* involves “one’s ability and capacity” and that someone who is not resourceful may not have much *guanxi*.

A few students made the point that *guanxi* is more a part of small, informal relations (small towns perhaps) than the kind of social relations one might find in a large modern city such as Beijing. For example, Rinchen, a 3rd year Tibetan MKM student, said, “My hometown is very small and secluded and I think small far-off places like that emphasize *guanxi* even more. If you want to build your life and career in places such as Beijing or Shanghai, I think they are relatively more meritocratic.... Whereas in my hometown, everything is related to *guanxi*, if you have *guanxi* then your career will be very smooth compared to those who do not have any.” And Yanzhuo, a 4th year Han student in environmental science, offered a similar take: “The thing is that *guanxi* is helpful if you want to go back to your hometown and pursue your career at home. *Guanxi* becomes very important then because it operates better in small towns or small places where acquaintances may matter more.” Rinchen and Yanzhuo are not arguing that *guanxi* doesn’t matter in Beijing, or at Minzu University, but only that it may not be as strong in larger cities when compared to smaller towns.

Students alluded to a variety of ways through which *guanxi* may be formed or acquired, including enhancing one’s knowledge or talent (as a means of exchanging special information or a special service), building one’s social network, and gift giving. Esen, a 2nd year Mongolian MKM student in finance, stressed *guanxi* as enhancing one’s

knowledge; he mentioned the importance of having insightful or valuable information and how one might be able to use it in exchange for something else, arguing that it was important for students to acquire as much information as possible, given that knowledge increasingly is “a very significant type of resource in modern society.” Esen went on to add that *guanxi* can also be partially derived from a talent or skill one has developed: “The premise of using *guanxi* is that you have to be somewhat good at something yourself.” Wei, a 4th year Yi MKH student, stressed *guanxi* as a kind of social network, as one’s “social circle, your friend circle.... For example, for some very motivated students, the more people they know, the more helpful it is for them in terms of getting scholarships and honors.” Finally, Arban (2nd year Mongolian student) highlighted the gift giving aspect of *guanxi*, although she rejected that version for building deeper relationships: “As for how to build *guanxi*, I think I just make lots of friends with a true heart...I offer them help when they need help. I will not use the brazen way to make friends and build *guanxi* like other people do, you know by purchasing expensive gifts or even giving money to build *guanxi*. I don’t like that and I don’t have money to give out or money for fancy gifts.”

The Significance of Guanxi in the Lives of Minzu Students

Students also discussed how they grew up being taught about *guanxi* and how important it is in life. Kai, a 4th year Han student elaborated: “I think *guanxi* is very very important. For example, in some key moments in life, it may not be apparent that *guanxi* is helping you but it may be hidden, it may be an invisible factor that is helping you—such as a professor giving a student the benefit of the doubt on a borderline exam

answer....We grow up believing that *guanxi* is very important, that is what my parents, my teachers, my friends have been telling me.” Kai went on to offer some examples, such as when students are active in their department’s Student Union or the Communist Youth League and then they come up for some kind of promotion or scholarship and they get it. “Basically, if you have a strong relationship with key people who have the final say in who gets the promotion or who gets the scholarship, then it will be very helpful to you. If *guanxi* is not the determining factor, at least I can say, that holding all other variables constant, *guanxi* is likely to be a deciding factor.” Lingling, 4th year Hui MKH student in politics and administration, also noted that in China one “grows up learning about the importance of *guanxi* and how to build *guanxi*. Even in children’s cartoons or comics, you might see how characters try to build strong *guanxi* with key persons.”

A few students pointed to some of the unfairness associated with *guanxi* in that it seems to offer benefits to people who may not really deserve them, based mainly on their social connections. Chunhua (4th year Tu MKH student) saw negative aspects to *guanxi*: “I think *guanxi* is a barrier...you know when other people have *guanxi* and use it, but I don’t have it and can’t use it....Then, it becomes a barrier for me. Although I acknowledge *guanxi* is very important, but I think it is unfair to use it for advantages. For example, when I had job interviews for a position at a bank, I felt like the entire process was completely about *guanxi*....But they make it look like it is fair, that all the hiring is based on merit.” And Lingling (4th year Hui student) spoke about her and her best friend, both from very poor families, share the perception that *guanxi* is often used to “cheat” them out of opportunities that they’ve earned on the basis of merit. For example, they both achieved very high scores on a civil service job exam but neither was offered the

position: “We just thought everything was pre-arranged... We are the poor kids who don’t have *guanxi* and we have to play the game with these other people who have lots of it.” These comments from Lingling bring to mind Armstrong and Hamilton’s (2013) *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality* in terms of the way that social class standing may benefit upper class students more so than poor students and that the social capital of the former may enable them to be less concerned about achievement and merit. What results is that low-income students such as Lingling may work hard in the hopes of attaining social mobility only to see their dreams limited by their lack of social capital, in this case discussed as *guanxi*. Instead of the “party pathway,” there may be a *guanxi* pathway.

Lin (3rd year Han student) saw a similarly negative side to *guanxi*, suggesting that it “means a shortcut, a form of convenience” unavailable to others. She went on to note another negative facet that she associated with *guanxi*—greater expectations placed on a student seen as having higher levels of *guanxi*:

But sometimes I think it could be...something not very good....For example, last semester I had a course in which I got a really bad grade. I felt I earned a better grade. I asked the professor why I deserved such a low grade; she told me she expected the president of the Student Union to have a much high academic performance...sometimes if you make yourself known to other people, meaning you have more connections, more *guanxi*, it may bring the pressure of higher expectations, higher standards applied to you.

But other Minzu students noted the opposite: That being a student leader and being seen as actively engaged on campus typically results in greater *guanxi* with professors and more often than not enhances one’s grades.

In terms of making use of *guanxi*, professors were prime targets for students, especially those seeking to improve their grades or get recommendation letters for

graduate school. Güzile, a 3rd year Uyghur student, spoke to this facet: “If I have better *guanxi* with a professor then I think my grade will be higher. It brings you benefits.” Lin, a 3rd year Han student in finance, explained, “I know of some students who will always talk to their professors when they have the chance...they want to get recommendation letters for graduate school. They try to use their *guanxi* as much as they can for those important things.” And Esen (2nd year Mongolian MKM) commented, “There are some students who try every way they can to make friends with professors. So, when there are some good opportunities or some limited resources, these professors will first think of the students who come to visit them all the time.... This is *guanxi*, this is how to use *guanxi*. Because these students who have such close contact with their professors—they appear in their professor’s life so often—that the professor would not think of anyone else when something good comes along.”

Summary

The findings in this chapter reflect a combination of a deductively driven research project framed by key work in the area of social capital in conjunction with inductively driven findings arising from my data. In terms of the theoretical influences, Stuber’s (2011) work on social capital and extracurricular activities led directly to my decision to ask questions about the various extracurricular activities Minzu students are involved in and the extent to which such activities provide them with key sources of social connection. The data were overwhelming in this regard. Minzu students—across all three ethnic categories—benefit in numerous ways from their engagement in extracurricular activities. Students consistently noted how the friendships and contacts acquired through

involvement in campus clubs and organizations, campus sporting activities, and participation in a variety of productions and performances associated with music, dance, and art served to advance their social connections. The latter activities associated with campus performances were particularly noteworthy and capture to some extent the importance of fine arts in the Minzu student experience.

In addition to the campus extracurricular activities, students also experienced other sources of social capital such as their engagement in social media and online platforms—and 31 out of 42 students described extensive use of social media and online platforms for maintaining and building social connections. Students also noted their involvement with a variety of Beijing-related events and activities, and their connections to various hometown associations—both on and off campus. Through these various activities, students were able to expand their social connections and take advantage of the related social capital. Here, the work of Carter (2005) and Stanton-Salazar (1997) and Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003) and the stress they placed on “mentors,” “role models,” and “institutional agents” as sources of social capital strongly influenced the findings in this chapter. This came out quite significantly in the discussion of “types of campus-based social connections contributing to social capital” in the form of two categories: peer-to-peer and faculty and staff.

In terms of peer-to-peer social connections, Minzu students stressed the great importance of classmates, roommates, and upper-classmates especially in terms of helping students to advance their academic work, gain career knowledge, and identify and acquire part-time jobs and/or internships. Of special note is the significant role of upper-classmates, who in many ways served as mentors and role models for the younger

students (their role seems rather significant with 35 of 42 students noting their importance). Like mentors, role models, and institutional agents, upper-classmates were key resources for sources of support including information relating to job and internship opportunities.

Faculty and staff also played critical roles as key institutional agents meeting some of the needs associated with mentors and role models. Although students did not always make a clear distinction between faculty and student affairs staff, for example, using such terms as “*laoshi*” (teacher), the context enabled me to decipher who in fact were assisting them as faculty members and who on the other hand were likely to be student affairs administrators. Obviously, faculty were more likely to offer forms of social capital helpful to students’ academic and career pursuits, while student affairs staff met a variety of student needs and interests.

Another key aspect of this chapter centered on the Chinese cultural concept of *guanxi*. I conceptualize *guanxi* as a form of social capital, one that places a heavy emphasis on reciprocity in a manner that one might consider transactional—A does X for B, and B does Y for A. The findings relating to *guanxi* tended to revolve around conceptualizing and forming *guanxi* and the significance of it in the lives of Minzu students.

In terms of conceptualizing and forming *guanxi*, students tended to discuss it in a transactional way based on reciprocity. They also saw *guanxi* as being more influential in small towns by comparison to large cities such as Beijing, and hence associated it with more personal relations. Students discussed the formation or acquisition of *guanxi* in conjunction with three basic processes: based on special talent or knowledge one might

have that could be exchangeable, the expansion of social networks and connections, and gift giving as a form of *guanxi*.

In terms of the significance of *guanxi* to students, they tended to note that since childhood most had been taught the importance of *guanxi* and they pretty much saw it as indispensable for living a successful life. It was seen as an important tool, for example, in dealing with the challenges of college life, such as enhancing one's grades by building relations with professors. A few criticized fellow students for trying too hard to build relations with professors in order to take advantage of *guanxi*. But such students tended to benefit nonetheless by always being around their professors and being the ones typically selected for special perks or benefits such as an excellent internship opportunity.

There was an important negative facet to *guanxi* that was raised in particular by one of the poorer students and that being the possibility that less financially needy students could take advantage of their connections, their *guanxi*, in a manner that undermined the social mobility possibilities for low-income students, especially for those relying more on merit to make something of their lives.

CHAPTER 6: ETHNICITY AND CROSS-ETHNIC FRIENDSHIPS

Ethnicity or *minzu* is a key construct in Chinese society as it tends to signify important information about someone such as family background, language preference, cultural practices (e.g., clothing style, food preferences, etc.), religious affiliation, and so forth. This is especially true in the campus environment at Minzu University where there is tremendously rich ethnic diversity, including many students who are classified as *shaoshu minzu*.¹³ One cannot help to avoid the question: What is your ethnic background? This question may be asked directly from time to time or it may be pondered in one's own head when meeting someone new.

Based on my own experience at Minzu as an undergraduate student, questions of ethnicity came up almost every day in one setting or another on campus. When I met someone new, the first question I might ask is their name but the second question was often related to their ethnic background, sometimes asked in terms of: "Where are you from?" Where someone comes from in many cases might reveal the ethnicity of the student, such as when someone says Xinjiang Province, then I might assume they are Uyghur or Kazakh. Geographic origin though does not always tell the story and so frequently one must be more direct by asking the question: "What is your ethnicity"?

In classes, when students are first introduced at the beginning of a new course, the professor may ask everyone to introduce themselves and as part of that introduction, the students are often asked to share their ethnic background. Not only does ethnicity come

¹³ *Shaoshu minzu* means ethnic minorities, whereas *minzu* simply refers to ethnic group. So the Han are a *minzu* but not a *shaoshu minzu*.

out in classrooms, but nearly every official form used at Minzu asks students to identify their ethnicity.

Ethnic identity is so important at Minzu that many students give intentional cues about their background and as a student one must become fairly skillful in reading the signs of ethnic identity. But what are the ways in which students actually convey their ethnic identity and what do students look for in making interpretations about one's ethnic background? In what ways does the environment at Minzu support students and their many ethnic identities? And what role does ethnicity play in the everyday lives of students and especially as they go about making friends with other students? These and other important questions are part of making sense of the cultural life of students at Minzu and are pursued in this chapter.

With the preceding in mind, this chapter focuses on the significance of ethnicity in the lives of Minzu University students, and most importantly, the ways in which it plays a role in students' friendships. The data reported in this chapter primarily address the third research question in my study (RQ # 3): How do the students form cross-ethnic friendships and relations (intra, inter or both) and to what extent are there observable differences across the three groups of students?

In the first part of the chapter, I explore the relevance of ethnicity at Minzu University. First, I highlight the ways in which students identify with their ethnic background, including the role the diverse environment at Minzu may play in encouraging or discouraging students. I also discuss how students typically identify other students' ethnic backgrounds as part of their social interactions. I follow this discussion

by focusing on perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages associated with being an ethnic minority student at the university.

In the second part of the chapter, I focus on ethnicity and the role it plays in students' friendships. First, I explore how students go about making friends and the role of ethnicity. I then explore the kinds of ethnic-related social activities in which students participate as a possible means of building cross-ethnic relationships. I then turn to the actual formation of cross-ethnic friendships and how students talk about and interpret such relationships. Finally, I look at what I call students' "friendship circles"—that is their five best campus friends. In particular, I focus on the ethnic makeup of such friendship circles and make comparisons across the three ethnic categories of students. Three themes relating to each ethnic group are highlighted and discussed: the theme of *included but somewhat isolated* is discussed relative to MKM students and their tendency to mostly form same-ethnicity friendships; the *best of both worlds* theme is discussed in terms of MKM students and their ability to forge friendships with other ethnic minorities as well as Han students; and finally the theme of *expanding horizons through diversity* is employed to help explain the tendency of Han students to have at least one cross-ethnic friendship (13 of 14 Han students had at least one cross-ethnic friend among their five best friends).

Ethnicity and Minzu University

In discussing ethnicity at Minzu University, I focus on three key concerns: 1) how students identify with their ethnicity, 2) how students interpret another student's

ethnicity, and 3) perceptions students have about ethnic-related advantages and disadvantages.

Identification with One's Ethnicity

The strong emphasis on ethnicity in the Minzu environment influenced many ethnic minority (MKM and MKH) students to take a new look at their ethnic background. Some had grown up in towns or communities where most of the residents were of the same ethnicity and so being Miao or Tu or Dai was simply about living one's normal everyday life. It did not seem so special. But in the context of Minzu where ethnicity was often seen as something to be voiced, or celebrated, this sometimes produced a change in students. For example, several students talked about how coming to Minzu strengthened their awareness of their ethnicity. Mengwei, a 4th year MKH Miao student noted, "I did not really have a strong sense or feeling of my ethnicity when I was in my hometown...But here at Minzu, I am much more aware of my ethnic background. Ethnicity becomes very potent and obvious because everyone asks that question when they are first introduced."

Similarly, Lingling, a 4th year Hui MKH student, commented that she felt a strong sense of ethnic belonging at Minzu because the social interactions and relationships at Minzu helped her strengthen her sense of ethnic identity. As she explained:

I did not identify with my ethnic identity or religious identity before I came here. I was even a little bit resistant about identifying as Hui. But when I came to Minzu, things changed for me...I participated in a Muslim Intercommunications Club and the upper-classmates in the club were so friendly, they led me to understand more about my ethnic and religious identity. From communicating with them and exchanging thoughts with

them, I gradually came to understand that my ethnic and religious identity, especially my religion, is not against science, it actually is consistent with modern science, and what we learn in school. Then, I more strongly identified with my own ethnic group, Hui. Now, I am proud of being a Hui and a Muslim.”

Lingling stressed that it was the culturally diverse environment at Minzu that inspired her to want to know more about her ethnicity and religion. A key factor, though, was the reality that a sizeable Hui and Muslim community existed at Minzu to enable a student such as Lingling to find support—support for her ethnicity and religion.

Wei, a 4th year MKH Yi student also talked about a sense of belonging he felt on campus related his ethnic background. Wei talked about how he joined the Torch Festival¹⁴ Association (a Minzu student organization based on Yi culture), because he wanted to better connect to his ethnic background and meet similar people so as to encourage a sense of ethnic belonging. Wei pointed out that he “felt this sense of friendliness and intimacy” when he was with members of the Torch Festival Association “as these people were mostly Yi.” Wei also stated that by participating in activities and events organized by the group, he was able to appreciate his own ethnicity more. This led to a sense of obligation to spread his ethnic culture by helping organize other Yi activities and “inviting more and more people from other ethnic groups to learn about our culture and our traditions.”

The narratives of Mengwei (Miao), Lingling (Hui), and Wei (Yi) all call attention to the reality that they experienced the diverse environment at Minzu in ways that positively reinforced their ethnic backgrounds. Here it may be worth noting that all three

¹⁴ The Torch Festival is one of the main holidays of the Yi people of southwest China. It is usually celebrated on the 24th or 25th day of the sixth month of the Yi calendar. It commemorates a legendary Yi leader who drove away a plague of locusts using torches made from pine trees.

students are MKH students and so it is entirely possible that their ethnic communities may be in the process of becoming more integrated with the Han majority, and that potentially, the Minzu experience enabled them to retain (or build on) in some way a sense of ethnic identity. This is perhaps less likely to be the case with MKM students, especially in light of the fact that MKM maintain a unique ethnic-based language that they still practice and which likely serves as an ethnic marker for them; having one's own language may instill a stronger sense of ethnicity perhaps by comparison to MKH students whose dominant language is most likely to be Mandarin.

The experiences of Mengwei, Lingling, and Wei may be contrasted with some MKH students seen to be potentially “acting too Han,” similar in some sense to a criticism in the United States of a Black student “acting too White,” in a sense ignoring their racial identity as a means of fitting in or socially integrating (Carter 2005; Fordham and Ogbu 1986). In the Chinese context then an ethnic minority student who has the potential to pass as Han may in some cases deemphasize their ethnic identity as a way of fitting in with the majority. Of course, in the context of the rich diversity of Minzu University, this may be challenging for ethnic minority students to pull off and they may feel pressure to identify with their ethnic minority status even when they may not want to. This is mostly a challenge faced by MKH students, as MKM students have much less of a likelihood of fitting in or passing as Han, given their limited Mandarin ability in most cases. For instance, Binbin, a 3rd year Miao MKH student in finance proposed an interesting question to me when I asked about her ethnic identity during an interview: “If I didn't tell you that I'm Miao, would you have known? Wouldn't you have thought that I was Han? I think most ethnic minorities today are very *Hanhua* anyway.” Binbin used

the Chinese word *Hanhua* to essentially say that some ethnic minorities in China are becoming more Han-like or “Hanized,” meaning that they are becoming assimilated into Han culture and society. A similar term is conveyed by Yang (2017) in the form of “Hanified” in her study of Tibetans at Minzu (p. 3).

In addition to Binbin, other MKH students expressed concerns about becoming too “Hanized” to fit in with other Minzu students of their same ethnicity, especially on occasions where ethnicity or ethnic-related festivals were celebrated. Both Nan (Mongolian) and Jieru (Tibetan) touched upon this issue:

Although I am Mongolian, I am very Hanized and I don’t speak Mongolian. I don’t have too much knowledge of Mongolian culture either.... And I don’t have a very strong ethnic affiliation with Mongolians. I also don’t feel that I would fit in very well at Nadam Fair¹⁵ activities, because most people who go there are very traditional Mongolians, and they communicate in Mongolian most of the time. I noticed someone just like me once when I was there and wondered if they ever went back again to the fair. I’m sure that they felt the same way as I do.”

Nan, 4th year Mongolian MKH in pharmaceutical engineering

The first thing I’d say about my ethnicity is that I’m too Hanized. My mom doesn’t even speak Tibetan, she is basically a Han.... I grew up in a Han environment since I was a child. I would feel very uncomfortable if I were to participate in ethnic-related activities on campus. I don’t think I would fit in either...I’m just not very Tibetan at all and so I don’t think I can speak for Tibetans.

Jieru, 3rd year Tibetan MKH in international economy and trade

These and other MKH students spoke of only being a “partial” ethnic minority, either in terms of having a mixed ethnic heritage with their parents having different ethnic

¹⁵ Nadam Fair is a Mongolian celebration covering several days and including many activities and in Beijing is typically hosted at Minzu University.

identities or in terms of having a partial or limited sense of and commitment to their ethnic heritage.

In all, five of the 14 MKH students expressed a rather limited engagement with their ethnic background, making the ethnic-aspect of their experience at Minzu confusing at some points and uncomfortable at other times. Strengthening one's ethnic identity only seems to happen for MKH students who were not very committed to their ethnic identity before they started college. The Minzu environment seems to have less of an effect on commitment to ethnicity for Han and MKM students for different reasons. For Han students, their own ethnicity seems rather unimportant in terms of celebrating or embracing it explicitly. As the most powerful ethnic group and the one that largely defines the norms of mainstream Chinese society and culture, their ethnicity largely becomes normalized and hence less obvious. In this regard, the Han experience in college may be similar to that of Caucasians in the United States in that their culture pretty much becomes normalized and thus may not be so observable. The situation for MKM students is quite different from that of the Han in that the Minzu campus environment may have minimal impact on MKM students' sense of ethnic identity because most seem to start college already having a strong sense of ethnicity, and hence there is less opportunity for the campus environment to impact them, although it is important to note that they felt supported by the campus environment relative to their ethnic background. The findings in this section thus are mostly about MKH students, who seem to be either wondering about their ethnicity and seeking opportunities to better embrace it, or are feeling rather "Hanized" and would rather not be pressured into engaging in ethnic-related activities and identification.

Interpreting a Student's Ethnic Identity

Minzu students relied on a number of cues to identify another student's ethnic identity, including their physical appearance, language, cultural features, and knowledge of where students come from in terms of their hometown.

Kai, 4th year Han student stated that he uses “appearance...and the other one is language” to guess a student's ethnic identity. Chunhua, a 4th year Tu MKH student also relies on “appearance,” because in her words “this is the most direct clue” although she also noted that “sometimes it is not very accurate.” Esen, a 2nd year Mongolian MKM student, also relies on a student's appearance, “mainly through facial structures.” He went on to argue that, “Many people from Xinjiang, they have very strong facial characteristics. It is obvious for most people.” Qingqing, a 4th year Han student, suggested “appearance” as well, but noted “especially their eyes.” And Guo, a 3rd year Zhuang MKH student, felt he could distinguish students on the basis of facial features, noting that, “Tibetan and Xinjiang students are very easily distinguished by their face.” Here though I am reminded that not everyone from Tibet is Tibetan and not everyone from Xinjiang is Uyghur. In all, 25 of 42 students in the study supported the idea that physical appearance was a fairly good marker of another student's ethnic identity, although several specifically noted that it could also be unreliable.

Language was another sign used to determine a student's ethnic background. Several students noted that they rely on a student's language to make a judgement about their ethnicity. For example, Arban, 2nd year Mongolian MKM, said, “I usually use language to determine.” Adil, a 4th year Uyghur MKH student, said, “I believe language

is the best indicator of ethnicity.” Rui, a 5th year Hui MKH student, felt that, “Language is also a rather reliable clue [about ethnic background] because ethnic minorities tend to have a little bit of an accent when they speak Mandarin.” Dagang, a 4th year Han student, explained that anytime he hears someone speaking a language that he cannot understand, he more or less assumes them to be an ethnic minority. However, this strategy does not necessarily help him to identify which ethnic minority the speaker may be. Another Han student, Ming, admitted that she cannot always distinguish which ethnic minority group someone is from, but that she “can tell if someone is an ethnic minority or Han.” I have to wonder if this would be the case for ethnic minorities fully assimilated into mainstream Han culture. Perhaps Ming might struggle in this case.

Some students noted cultural clues such as style of dress or food preferences. For example, Binbin, 3rd year Miao MKH student, noted that, “The main clues I use are the style of dress and clothing...some Muslims will wear hijabs.” Donghui, a 4th year Mongolian MKH student, explained that most students don’t wear their traditional ethnic clothing around campus every day, but on some special occasions you may see students in “different ethnic clothing for activities and events” and therefore be able to draw conclusions about their ethnicity. Nan, a 4th year Mongolian MKH, is better at recognizing Muslim students at Minzu because many “wear a kerchief [or hijab] and also they don’t like to show their skin too much.” At least one student, Li, a 3rd year Han student in philosophy, noted that he can distinguish some ethnic minorities by the food they eat and noted that “Muslim students have special eating habits.”

Many students rely on a student’s geographic point of origin to make determinations about someone’s ethnic identity, but even this can lead to problems at

times. For example, Arban a 2nd year Mongolian MKM student is from Xinjiang Province, an area with a very large Uyghur population, and so she is often mistaken for being Uyghur. She remembered one case of this:

I recall during the opening ceremony at Minzu held for new students each year, I was standing in the line for the Mongolian Language and Literacy Department. There was one guy who walked up to me and said: “Hey, the Uyghur Language and Literature Department is the next line. This is the Mongolian Department line.” I explained to him that I was Mongolian and he laughed.

Although geography can offer clues, it can also throw someone off given that no region in China is only populated by one ethnic group. This raises the issue that when it comes to determining someone’s ethnic background, short of directly asking them, it is probably best to use multiple clues. Pemba, a 4th year Tibetan MKM student, argued for this approach: “It is not always reliable to use one clue.” So, he uses “multiple clues, sometimes their looks, sometimes their language.”

Ethnic-Related Advantages and Disadvantages

In discussing ethnic-related experiences at Minzu, there was quite a range of points made by students, especially with regard to potential advantages and disadvantages associated with being an ethnic minority. Perhaps not so surprising was the fact that on the one hand nearly all students tended to stress that when it comes to the Minzu University context, there certainly seem to be advantages associated with being an ethnic minority. But, on the other hand, those advantages may be much fewer in off-campus contexts. One student, Adil, a 4th year Uyghur MKH student, captured this reality when he said, “If we are just talking about the Minzu campus, then being an ethnic minority is definitely an advantage to me. But when I step outside of Minzu, my ethnicity does not

serve to bring me benefits. When I step outside the campus, I don't want people to notice my ethnicity.”

Advantages Related to Ethnic Status

On a most basic level, ethnic minorities may benefit from their status by receiving bonus points on their *Gaokao* score—as part of the nation's preferential policies for minorities in higher education—and thus they may gain access to a university they might otherwise not get into. This was no doubt the case for some of the Minzu students in my study, although most were reluctant to speak of this benefit. At least one student, Mengwei (Miao MKH), pointed to his status as an ethnic minority as a beneficial factor in getting extra points for the *Gaokao*. “By being a Miao, I was eligible for 5 to 10 extra bonus points to be added to my *Gaokao* score. Those bonus points are what got me into Minzu.” Also, and as part of preferential policies, all MKM students majoring in ethnic language and literature tied to their native tongue (Uyghur, Tibetan, Korean, Mongolian, etc.) have their tuition waived, a point noted by at least one student.

Another advantage associated with ethnic minority status related to various awards and opportunities on the campus. There was a very strong sense that the university was obligated to select ethnic minorities for a number of important awards and opportunities, in keeping with the university's role in serving its ethno-cultural development mission (Rhoads et al, 2014). Kai, a 4th year Han student, highlighted the importance the university places on ethnic minority status: “If there is a big event at Minzu or in Beijing, the university may give quota to each department to select, let's say five students from each department or major. The university is likely to say that ethnic

minorities are preferred in the selection of candidates.” Similarly, Rayana, a 4th year Kazakh MKM majoring in Kazakhstan language and literature, noted that “there are a lot of special opportunities for students in my department [mostly Kazakhs], such as the opportunity to study in Kazakhstan. This opportunity is not available to other ethnic students at all. And also, there are a lot of preferential policies and favorable treatment for ethnic minorities in China at this time.” And Adil (Uyghur) talked about how his ethnic background has proven beneficial to him in terms of being selected for a campus scholarship. “I think my ethnicity actually has brought me a lot of opportunities and benefits.... When I participate in certain contests or public events, I would stress my ethnicity. For example, in the selection of the *Baogang* scholarship [an important award], my theme of the final speech was about representing my ethnic group and speaking for my ethnic group. And then I won the scholarship and I was rated as number one.”

Like Kai, Rayana, and Adil noted in the preceding paragraph, Minzu offers a good deal of support for ethnic minority students and Venera certainly found that to be the case for Uyghur students such as herself. “I can think of lots of advantages associated with being a Uyghur student at Minzu. When it is our traditional festival such as Eid al-Adha, Minzu holds many activities and events to celebrate our major religious festivals. We also have three big Muslim dining halls...The university respects our religious beliefs.” Venera went on to add that, “There are more scholarships and grant opportunities for ethnic minorities.”

One advantage for Han students that Lingling (4th year Hui MKH) pointed to is their potential to benefit from their experiences with so much diversity. As she put it, “I would say maybe Han students are benefiting in this ethnically diverse environment.

They may not know anything about ethnicity before they come to Minzu, they could be ignorant in that regard. So, it is all the ethnic minority students who help them understand the world. It's like a second class for the Han students." I guess though one could argue that such an advantage is a reality for nearly every Minzu student, except for a handful perhaps who during their pre-college years were somehow lucky enough to experience such a learning environment.

Disadvantages Related to Ethnic Status

Students mentioned several disadvantages associated with one's ethnic status and a few Han students even explained that they sometimes feel left out of the campus reward structure, given the focus on serving ethnic minorities.

Esen, a 2nd year Mongolian student majoring in finance, shared this story: "In terms of disadvantages associated with my ethnicity. I would say there are some—mostly misunderstandings people have about us. For example, I knew a girl who is from Xinjiang, when we first met she asked me if my family still lives in a Mongolian yurt (a traditional Mongolian round tent used by nomadic peoples). It was kind of funny because she is from Xinjiang herself. Most of us don't live in yurts anymore."

Rayana, a 4th year Kazakh MKM student, raised an issue about possible jobs she might consider when she graduates from Minzu and the reality that not all parts of China would be supportive of her ethnic traditions and norms:

If we [Kazakhs] want to live in inland China, if we get a job there, we will have a very difficult time compared to Han or other ethnic minorities. For example, there was a job opportunity in Jiangsu Province [on the east coast], but a lot of my classmates [all Kazakhs] were discussing that they probably would not go to Jiangsu and take the job. For us, Jiangsu is so far away from home, and the culture is so different ...and different customs.

We would experience lots of trouble just living there...the food would be one big headache since we can only eat Muslim food.

Both MKM and MKH students talked about forms of discrimination they faced that served as major disadvantages in their lives, both in terms of on-campus and off-campus experiences. One form of discrimination concerned negative ethnic images conveyed by the Chinese media, in this case, revealed by a 4th year Han student, Yanzhuo: “People do get impacted by the public image created by media. For example, when I saw on the news that some Xinjiang Uyghurs engaged in a terrorist attack at the Kunming railway station, I felt a little bit threatened by their presence on campus. You know, you cannot help it if the media keeps creating that kind of image of Uyghurs. Related to this, a female student from Xinjiang relayed a story in which she was working at an off-campus job when a small explosion went off inside the building she worked at. She was so frightened that she almost started crying, but her boss joked that he thought she would be used to explosions, given that she was from Xinjiang—implying that with all the Muslim terrorism there she should be used to it by now.

A few Han students were more likely to point to advantages others had due to being ethnic minorities, whereas on the other hand, ethnic minorities (both MKH and MKM) tended to raise examples of the disadvantages, mainly forms of discrimination (such as was mentioned above). Given the strong efforts by the university to provide as many opportunities as possible for ethnic minority students, it should come as no surprise that sometimes Han students felt overlooked by the campus. Feng, a 3rd year Han student studying Chinese language and literature, expressed such a point of view:

If we’re talking about the Minzu campus, then I think being Han could be somewhat of a disadvantage to some extent. Sometimes my department gets invitations to send some of our students on interview trips outside the

campus. I think it is a great opportunity to give students some professional training. I think it is a really valuable opportunity but the department may first pick ethnic minority students. When they just automatically prioritize ethnic minorities in such a case, then Han students don't even have the chance to try for the opportunity.

Other Han students offered similar criticisms, such as Ming, a 3rd year Han student studying Japanese: "Ethnic minorities have more opportunities to participate in significant school events when compared to Han students. Some big events may only want ethnic minority students." And Dagang, a 4th year Han student in ecology added this: "To be honest with you, if we are just talking about the case at Minzu University, I think being Han might be a little disadvantageous. Because Minzu is an ethnic university, its mission is to provide ethnic minority students with more opportunities and educational resources. For example, some student activities only allow ethnic minority students to participate. So, I think Han students might sometimes find themselves disadvantaged."

One Han student, Shichun, a 3rd year student majoring in public affairs administration, raised the idea of a form of disadvantage Han students face as a consequence of being the dominant group in Chinese society, hence, not having a strong sense of ethnic identity, as is so often the case when one group's culture and norms become normalized throughout the society—kind of like Whites in the United States. As he maintained, "I would say it is a little bit disadvantageous to be Han at Minzu. For example, some student activities only want ethnic minority students to participate. And also, I think ethnic minorities are more likely to be united together, they have this emotional ethnic connection. But there is no such ethnic bond among Han students. They don't feel like Han students should be united together as a group." Hong, a 4th year Xibo (MKH) student in tourism management, offered similar insights in noting the lack of

ethnic ties that Han have. “There is a subtle advantage I feel in being Xibo. As part of being Xibo, I at least have this sense of belonging with my ethnic group. I have my own language and culture and my own group...But I think Han students probably don’t have such feelings, as they belong to no group. Han students don’t think of themselves as part of a Han group—they are just individual Han.”

Offsetting this sense of missing out on celebrating one’s ethnic identity is the reality that Han people more or less control much of Chinese society and in many ways dictate the governing norms. Minzu only seems like an escape in some sense from the more normalized Han domination, at least from the perspective of ethnic minority students such as Adil, who as a Uyghur noted that his life changes dramatically once he steps off campus.

It is certainly the case that disadvantages experienced by Minzu MKM and MKH students mainly were associated with off-campus activities and experiences. One chilling example was provided by a Uyghur student who described being harassed by several Beijing police after renting a hotel room so as to prepare for the IELTS exam. As he explained, “So, I wanted to rent a hotel room nearby the exam office for one night just before the exam...So, I checked in with my ID which shows I am Uyghur and so a little while later several cops came to my door and interrogated me for half an hour. I was very unhappy about this and it almost ruined my night right before the exam.”

Ethnicity and Forming Friendships

I argue that making cross-ethnic friendships is an important way of expanding one’s social capital for the simple reason that ethnic identity is such an important source

of social identification and hence predictive to some degree of social networks and groupings that one might have at their disposal. This is more true of ethnic minorities than Han students, given the latter group lacks a strong identification with their ethnic identity, as the preceding section highlights. So, making friends from diverse ethnic groups theoretically enables one to potentially access different social networks, a point first advanced by Granovetter (1973, 1983) in his work on weak ties and strong ties. As he argues, contact with people outside one's normal or routine social network, in the form of what he described as weak ties, brings one into contact with numerous additional contacts and forms of social capital. While I am not describing members of one's friendship group as constituting weak ties simply because they are of a different ethnicity, but the latter fact suggests that they are likely to bring different connections and forms of social capital to the friendship, in a manner not unlike Granovetter's treatment of weak ties. But close friends do not constitute weak ties as far as I am concerned. So what is first important in exploring cross-ethnic friendships among my sample is the way in which they engage in cross-ethnic activities, then in terms of how they make cross-ethnic friendships, and then finally what those friendships look like. In terms of the last aspect, I focus on students' Friendship Circles, an idea borrowed from Carter (2005) in her exploration of social capital and schooling.

Ethnic-Related Social Activities

Students enjoyed the many campus events that were part of ethnic celebrations, including the Mongolian Zulu and Nadam Fair festivals, the Yi Torch festival, the Zhuang Third of March festival, and the Corban and Eid al-Fitr festivals for Muslims,

among many others. One student, Qingqing (4th year Han student) explained the relevance of such festivals and the related social activities to making friends quite succinctly: “The ethnic festivals are especially important...you can meet people from a variety of ethnic backgrounds.” And Esen, a 2nd year Mongolian MKM student, talked about meeting new people at the Nadam Fair festival: “I extended my friend’s circle. I met people who are younger than me, older than me; people who are currently university students at other universities and people who are currently working in Beijing.” Many students proudly noted that one won’t find such celebrations at other universities in Beijing—only at Minzu. They enjoyed this aspect of campus life.

Related to the preceding festivals are numerous campus-based student organizations that are ethnic-based and that organize a variety of ethnic-related activities. Intersecting with these organizations are the ethnically-affiliated Townsman’s Associations—which are throughout Beijing but also have student-based organizations at Minzu. Adding to the many opportunities for ethnic identification through social activities are the many student performances celebrating ethnic dance, music, and art. All Minzu students have numerous opportunities to observe or participate in such activities, as Donghui, a 4th year Mongolian MKH student, elaborated, “Every Friday, in front of the tennis courts, there will be group dancing with all kinds of ethnic minority students and Han students. They mainly dance *Guozhuang*, a type of Tibetan dance [characterized by singing and dancing in a large circle]. I know some Uyghur students who go as well. Other minorities and Han, they just go for fun of it, to meet different people, and to dance.”

Field notes from shadowing one MKM Tibetan student, Pema, captured to some extent the importance of such students participating in ethnic-related social activities. In this instance, I observed her and two of her friends participating in the Tibetan *Guozhuang* dance referenced in the preceding paragraph. What follows are some edited field notes of my observations while shadowing Pema on a Friday evening in June 2017. The location is a small soccer field near the tennis courts at Minzu University.

Guozhuang dancing usually starts at 7 pm on Fridays and is organized by a Tibetan culture student organization. Student organizers take their sound equipment to a small square next to the campus tennis courts in order to provide the background music necessary for performing the singing and dancing. Student organizers wear traditional Tibetan clothing and they begin the dance with what is initially a small circle that gradually grows as more and more students join the dance. The traditional Tibetan outfit is called *Chuba*, it is an ankle-length robe that is bound around the waist on top of a blouse. Sometimes, the upper portion of *Chuba* serves as a large pocket for small things. The four student dance leaders wear golden, blue, green and pink outfit respectively. The students who gradually joined the initial group of 15 wore regular clothes and if anyone lacked knowledge of how to dance *Guozhuang*, the student leaders helped them, typically by stepping out of the circle for a few minutes, tutoring the newcomers, and then rejoining the circle. Many students who joined the dance were Tibetans, judging by the language they spoke [I was close enough to hear them at different points in time], but the group was also joined by many other students I guessed to be MKH or Han. Eventually, a circle within a circle formed,

and then later an additional third circle was formed. The better dancers, presumably all Tibetans, danced in the smaller most inner circle, whereas novices, most likely MKH and Han, danced in the outer circle, with the middle circle representing somewhat of a mix.

Pema and I sat on a bunch and observed the dance for about 10 minutes or so, as she waited for two of her friends—one male (Friend A) and one female (Friend B), both Tibetan. They eventually arrived, sat down with us, and they started chatting about the day's events, their professors, their courses, their friends. They were all classmates and obviously shared many experiences together. The three of them did not immediately join the dance, perhaps they were conscious of leaving me by myself. But after casually chatting for about 20 minutes, Pema's female friend, B, decided to join the dance. Friend B was really good at dancing *Guozhuang* style; she was confident about her dance since she was brave enough to immediately join the most inner circle. Pema informed me that B was really good at dancing and that she also loved street dancing. Pema also said that B had joined many dance clubs at Minzu; at the same time her male friend, A, pulled out his iPhone and showed me a video of B performing at a Minzu dance contest. Friend A said that he had many videos of B dancing, as they were always hanging out together.

The music soon shifted to a different Tibetan song and Pema said to A, "Hey, it's *Kangba* music. You should dance." Then they both explained to me that there are several types of Tibetan groups, based on where they live and what Tibetan

dialect they speak. My research subject was from Lhasa, so she was classified as *Central* Tibetan. Friend A was from Qinghai Province, so he was *Kangba* Tibetan. Friend B was from Gansu Province, and so she was *Amdo* Tibetan. Because it was a *Kangba* song and Friend A was *Kangba* Tibetan, Pema insisted that he should dance, especially to show me the different style. He was a little shy but finally agreed to dance a little bit to the music—mainly because I begged to see the *Kangba* style *Guozhuang*. Friend A was actually pretty good at dancing *Guozhuang*, but he told me that he did not have time to dance here every Fridays. I did not really notice any major difference between regular *Guozhuang* dance and *Kangba* style, maybe it is too subtle for someone who is a cultural outsider.

The *Guozhuang* dancing went on for about 40 more minutes. Pema and her two friends moved from dancing to sitting, and then dancing again. When sitting they chatted with me about their college lives and how much they enjoyed activities such as dancing together with friends, especially enjoying the opportunity to connect with fellow Tibetans but also appreciating the chance to share their culture with other non-Tibetans. Eventually, Friend B finished her dancing and asked the other two if they wanted to watch the movie—*Pirates of the Caribbean 6*. Pema and Friend A happily agreed and Pema explained to me that the three of them always go to the movies together since Friend A is very passionate about film making and wants to become a movie director or producer someday. They all said good bye to me and I thanked Pema for the opportunity to spend some time with her and her friends.

Clearly, there is no shortage of opportunities for Minzu students to meet and make friends with students from other ethnic groups, although there may be some structural limitations that some students face—such as MKM students mostly taking classes with members of their same ethnic group—that I will discuss later.

Cross-Ethnic Friendship Formation

Minzu students stressed the importance of taking advantage of the preceding forms of social activities as a means of making diverse friends. Kai, a 4th year Han student, noted the importance of getting involved in various clubs and organizations: “When it comes to knowing and having contact with more diverse students, those interest-based organizations and clubs are most important, because people at those places are students from all majors and ethnic backgrounds...So basically, my friend circle in college mostly contains people I know of from my involvement in these activities and organizations.” At least one student didn’t see the relations formed through student activities as very strong and actually referred to them as “weak ties”: she actually explained that she had read Granovetter’s work in one of her sociology classes. As Ya, a 3rd year Han student explained, “Participating in extracurricular activities helped to extend my social network for sure. However, I think these social networks are more about weak ties and are not super deep relationships.” Few other students expressed such a point of view but Ya’s perspective is at least worth noting.

Several male students talked about making friends through playing football (soccer) and basketball, and that by the nature of these activities they were likely to come into contact with many diverse ethnic groups. One thing unique about playing sports is

that language typically is not a barrier to interacting and competing together. Mengwei, a 4th year Miao MKH student, captured this:

I met most of my friends through playing football. It is my favorite sport and I spend most of my free time playing it. So, when playing football or doing anything similar to that such as another type of sport, you don't need a lot of verbal communication. You understand what the other person wants and you know what is their next move or what their response is. Playing sports itself contains unwritten and universal rules and having a common language is not an issue.

And Bari, a 4th year Uyghur MKM student, enjoyed making new friends through playing soccer and even noted the cross-ethnic relationships he formed: "I spend a lot of time playing football at Minzu. I've made a lot of friends this way, friends from other ethnic background, even foreigners.... We will save each other's contact information. Then we will arrange a good time to play together again...over time we've become good friends."

An important pattern that emerged in the comments of the students was a tendency for MKM students to define an expansion of their friendship groups mostly in terms of ethnic ties (obviously with some exceptions), such as those extending beyond their class cohort, typically in two directions: upward on campus toward more senior MKM upper classmates and outward from campus toward Beijing ethnic ties. MKM students seemed limited in their ability and/or opportunity to forge cross-ethnic friendships. Gyatso, a 2nd year Tibetan student in Tibetan language and literature, spoke to this reality: "My friends, they are not only Tibetan students at Minzu, but I also have some Tibetan friends from other universities in Beijing." Gyatso went on to mention that he has "special affinity" for other Tibetans and that he feels "intimidated" trying to socialize with students from other ethnic groups, as "I feel that we have nothing to talk about." A few MKM tried to resist the temptation to only socialize with others of the

same ethnic group. For example, Dolma, a 3rd year Tibetan student, joined the Traditional Chinese Culture group (a study group that reads and discusses aspect of Chinese culture) for the purpose of meeting “Han or other ethnic minority students” from outside his department, the Tibetan Language and Literature Department.

Townsmen Associations seem to play an important role in connecting MKM students to local ethnic-based social networks. Dolma, a 3rd year Tibetan student, addressed this issue: “I have participated in the meetings and activities at the Townsmen Association every year. So, we will have meetings and events two times a year...The event for welcoming new students is very significant and it tends to have a high-level of participation. Usually when new students come to Minzu, they want to bond with others in as many ways as possible. I met a lot of upper-classmates through the meetings at the townsman association.” What is left unstated here is that Townsmen Associations are primarily ethnic-based¹⁶ and so while Minzu MKM students may benefit from the connections they form through such endeavors, and potentially expand their social capital, they also may miss out on other possible connections that could be made with MKH and Han students. But again, when one begins college with feelings of apprehension linked to a sense of belonging—or not belonging in the case of some ethnic minorities—it is only natural to want to associate with people from similar backgrounds who best understand their needs.

Mandarin language ability is one limiting factor in MKM students making more friendships with MKH and Han students. Güzile, a 3rd year Uyghur student in Uyghur language and literature, spoke to this concern: “Sometimes I go to dinner with my Han

¹⁶ Although Townsmen Associations are based on hometown affiliations it must be noted that in the case of many ethnic minorities, especially MKM students, hometowns are often ethnically based. This is less the case with Han students, whose Townsmen Associations are more linked to a sense of hometown affiliation without ethnic overtones.

friends. They are friends I met from playing volleyball. But to be honest, I don't have a lot Han friends. I mean I am usually very nervous and tense when I have to speak Mandarin with other people." Given the stress MKM students sometimes feel in trying to speak Mandarin, it is not so surprising that they might choose to associate more with members of their same ethnic group. Rayana, a 4th year Kazakh student in Kazakh language and literature, mentioned a Kazakh friend of hers who was a music major and thus often had to communicate in Mandarin:

She was the only female Kazakh student in the School of Music one year. So she often came to my department to meet a lot of her social needs. She liked to hang out with us and do things with Kazakh girls in my department...she actually has a lot Han friends at Minzu from her school, but she told us that she sometimes just wants to speak Kazakh and hang out with her own people. She finds it very relaxing to be with us.

The discomfort MKM students experience speaking Mandarin with their MKH and Han school mates may be interpreted at times as them not wanting to be friends with MKH or Han students. One 3rd year Han student, Shichun, seemed to make such an interpretation: "In terms of Uyghur students especially, I just get the impression that they are quite distant. I just feel that they will not respond to you with any enthusiasm." A second Han student, Qiaochu (3rd year finance major), echoed such a perspective with regard to interacting with Tibetan students: "I think maybe Tibetan students are hard to have contact with because they have their own circle.... When it comes to hanging out outside of class, they have their own friends to do fun things with." And a third Han student, Lin (3rd year public finance major), reinforced these views: "I think those students who have very strong ethnic characteristics, such as pure Tibetan students...they tend to make friends with their own people. They speak their own language to each other and I think they are happier and more comfortable that way."

Another limiting factor in MKM students forming friendships beyond their own ethnic group is that nearly all of their classes—especially their major courses—are taken with students from the same ethnic background. This is because MKM students have little option but to major in their native language in the form of language and literature majors. On the one hand, such a structure is beneficial in terms of creating greater college-going opportunities for minority students with limited Mandarin proficiency. On the other hand, it may serve to limit these students to social networks comprised almost entirely of members of their own ethnic group, a reality that itself has positives and negatives. A positive is that it gives students a sense of support. A possible negative is that it may limit the social networks and social capital of such students. Mina, a 3rd year Korean student majoring in Korean language and literature addressed these issues, noting that all the students she has contact with at Minzu are her classmates, all of Korean ancestry. “So my social network at Minzu is rather limited. I don’t know many people outside of this circle.” She added, “Our department is very small and so all the people look very familiar over time.”

A Han student (Chongye, a 4th year economics major) reinforced the degree of isolation experienced by MKM students majoring in native language and literature programs: “It is hard for us [Han students] to meet and interact with students in ethnic language and literature departments...I mean Min Kao Min students are mostly invisible to us...that is how I feel. They have their own circle and their own way of life. So it is not easy to have access to their circle.” Chongye went on to explain that going out of your way to try to make friends with such students may create other kinds of problems. “If make a concerted effort to make friends with Tibetan or Xinjiang students, then the

students might not like it as it may not seem real or spontaneous...it may seem contrived. It might actually start a conflict or problem, generate suspicion...it's an awkward position.”

Sometimes the ethnic differences can be so significant that the idea of celebrating and sharing cultural differences may seem too overwhelming. This was occasionally conveyed with regard to MKM students mainly, but also in relation to some MKH students, particularly in terms of students' religious beliefs—namely, their Muslim faith. As Rui, a 5th year Hui (Muslim) MKH student in Kazakh language and literature, conveyed: “It is a little troublesome at times to really be part of these Min Kao Min Kazakh students [Rui is an exception in that his major is almost entirely comprised of MKM Kazakh students and yet he is a Hui MKH student]. Sometimes when we want to go out for dinner together they need to go to a Muslim restaurant. Or when we get together for fun, they might do things that are very ethnic such as playing the tambura...that is very hard for Han students to fit in with and really have fun there.”

Other students noted some of the challenges in building friends with Muslim students, mainly because of different requirements pertaining to food preferences; here one should keep in mind that in Chinese culture, eating together is one of the most important social settings for making and building friendships. Feng, a 3rd year Han student majoring in Chinese language and literature, alluded to this reality: “I think the ethnic groups that I have a difficult time making friends with are the ethnic minorities who have Islamic religious beliefs. I mean it's just a little bit more difficult making friends compared to other ethnic minorities or Han.” Pemba, a 4th year Tibetan MKM student, reinforced the role religion may play in limiting cross-ethnic friendship

formation, pointing out that Tibetans are mostly Buddhist and “other ethnic minorities on campus such as Uyghurs and Kazakhs are Muslims...and because of religious differences...we are going to have differences in the way we see things, the world views and other stuff. So, I do not have very many friends from Xinjiang.”

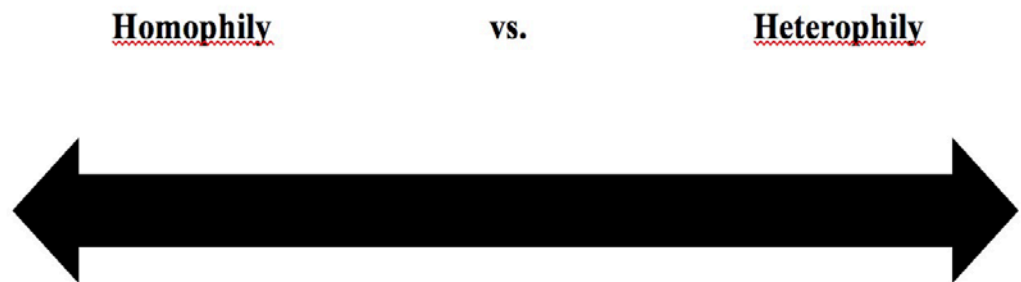
But religion can also be a source of unity. Such as the case described by one 3rd year Tibetan MKM student, Pema (not to be confused with Pemba above), and the friendships among Tibetan and Mongolian students: “We [Tibetan students] tend to have closer relationships with Mongolian students. We like to hang out with them or be friends with them. They are extremely friendly to us and it seems like they are very interested in us or being friends with us. It is probably due to religious ties, because most Mongolians are Tibetan Buddhists and so they believe in what we believe.” Pema offered a second reason as well: “The other reason is historical—Tibetans and Mongolians have had very close and friendly relationships throughout history...it has always been the case.”

Minzu Students’ Friendship Circles and Their Significance

In Chapter 2, I talked about Carter (2005) and her book, *Keeping It Real: School Success Beyond Black and White*, in which she operationalized sources of social capital as “social contacts” students had by asking them to identify their five best friends, adult neighbors, and neighborhood kids. Borrowing from Carter’s operationalization of social capital as social contacts (including friendships), I asked these questions during the semi-structured interviews with 42 Minzu University students: Can you tell me about your five closest friends on campus? And, what is the ethnic identity of these five friends? The goal was to get a clearer sense of the ethnic quality of a student’s friendship circle. The idea is

to explore the degree to which students have homophilous or heterophilous friendships, where homophily refers to having friends similar to oneself and heterophily refers to having friends who are different from oneself, ethnically speaking. In a purely idealized sense, one might think of homophilous and heterophilous friendship qualities in this way—ranging from having friends all from the same ethnic background as oneself versus having five friends all from different ethnic groups and all different from oneself (see Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1 Homophilous-Heterophilous Continuum



Based on the students' ethnic background, gender and the number of their cross-ethnic friends (among one's five best campus friends), Tables 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3 reveal a breakdown of what I describe as their friendship circles with the results being presented by ethnic group status: MKM, MKH, and Han (Appendix E includes tables with raw data for each student by their ethnic grouping).

Table 6.1 Min Kao Min Students' Friendship Circles (Among 5 Best Campus Friends)

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Number of Cross-Ethnic Friends
Güzile	Female	Uyghur	0
Venera	Female	Uyghur	0
Pema	Female	Tibetan	0
Rayana	Female	Kazakh	0
Mina	Female	Korean	0
Gyatso	Male	Tibetan	0
Bari	Male	Uyghur	0
Pemba	Male	Tibetan	0
Dolma	Male	Tibetan	0
Jihee	Female	Korean	1
Mehmet	Male	Uyghur	1
Esen	Male	Mongolian	2
Rinchen	Male	Tibetan	2
Arban	Female	Mongolian	4
Mean of Cross-Ethnic Friends			0.714
Median of Cross-Ethnic Friends			0
Range of Cross-Ethnic Friends			4

Table 6.2 Min Kao Han Students' Friendship Circles (Among 5 Best Campus Friends)

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Number of Cross-Ethnic Friends
Lingling	Female	Hui	0
Cheng	Male	Hui	2
Chunhua	Female	Tu	3
Donghui	Male	Mongolian	3
Adil	Male	Uyghur	4
Xuyan	Female	Tujia	4
Binbin	Female	Miao	5
Hong	Female	Xibo	5
Nan	Female	Mongolian	5
Jieru	Female	Tibetan	5
Guo	Male	Zhuang	5
Mengwei	Male	Miao	5
Wei	Male	Yi	5
Rui	Male	Hui	5
Mean of Cross-Ethnic Friends			4
Median of Cross-Ethnic Friends			5
Range of Cross-Ethnic Friends			5

Table 6.3 Han Students' Friendship Circles (Among 5 Best Campus Friends)

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	Number of Cross-Ethnic Friends
Li	Male	Han	0
Ming	Female	Han	2
Zhe	Female	Han	2
Ya	Female	Han	2
Chongye	Male	Han	2
Dagang	Male	Han	2
Shichun	Male	Han	3
Xiaoying	Female	Han	3
Qiaochu	Female	Han	3
Lin	Female	Han	3
Qingqing	Female	Han	3
Feng	Male	Han	3
Yanzhuo	Male	Han	3
Kai	Male	Han	5
Mean of Cross-Ethnic Friends			<i>2.57</i>
Median of Cross-Ethnic Friends			3
Range of Cross-Ethnic Friends			5

Included but Somewhat Isolated

In examining the friendship circle tables, a number of key points stand out. For example, when examining the MKM table the following are noteworthy: the average number of cross-ethnic friends for MKM students is only 0.714, whereas the median of cross-ethnic friends is 0 and the range is 4. To be more specific, 9 out of 14 MKM students' friendship circles are comprised of all 5 students being from the same ethnicity as themselves; 2 out of 14 MKM students' friendship circles are comprised of 4 students with the same ethnicity as themselves; 2 out of 14 MKM students' friendship circles are comprised of 3 members of their own ethnic group; only 1 out of 14 MKM students' friendship circles has 4 friends from other ethnic group different from their own (Arban). What is apparent from examining the friendship circles of MKM students is the lack of heterophilous relationships—the average number of cross-ethnic friends is less than 1 (0.714). One should keep in mind that this is just one indicator of friendship diversity and that for example had I asked about one's 10 closest friends, it's entirely possible that the next five in some cases would have been more heterophilous in terms of ethnicity. But the fact is that the interview comments from MKM students also alluded to the tendency to stress friendship formation among other students from the same ethnic background. There were both linguistic and structural forces (their majors included members of their same ethnic group) supporting same-ethnic friendship formation. What is clear is that while MKM students have been included in meaningful ways into universities such as Minzu, as part of the nation's preferential policies, they may still be relatively isolated. Hence, I offer the theme of *included but somewhat isolated* to capture their experience.

Best of Both Worlds

In terms of MKH students, the average number of cross-ethnic friends is 4 with a median of 5 and a range of 5. Specifically, only 1 student by comparison to 9 MKM students had their entire friendship circle all from the same ethnic background: Lingling, a female Hui student listed all five of her closest friends as being Hui. Generally speaking, MKH friendship circles were much more heterophilous by comparison to MKM students, especially by comparing the mean of cross-ethnic friends (0.714 vs. 4). And one MKH student even had five friends each with completely different ethnic backgrounds, that being Wei, a male Yi student with Dawuer, Miao, Han, Man, and Lisu best friends. Perhaps also interesting to note is that one MKH student, Rui, a male Hui student, had all five best friends who were Han, suggesting perhaps a fairly assimilated ethnic minority (*Hanhua*). In general, the MKH students seemed to be the most heterophilous in their friendship circles, a reality that doesn't seem so surprising in that they have benefits that may come with being an ethnic minority, and yet with advanced Mandarin skills that can fit into Han social settings. Hence, in many ways they can straddle both ethnic minority and majority social settings and access the *best of both worlds*.

Expanding Horizons Through Diversity

Han students' friendship circles also revealed some patterns. The average number of cross-ethnic friends is 2.57 with a median of 3 a range of 5. Most notable about the friendship circles of Han students perhaps is the fact that 34 out of the 50 friends listed were Han, a figure comparable to MKH students who listed 29 out of 50 as Han, quite a difference from MKM where only 2 Han students were listed among the 50 best friends:

Rinchen, a male Tibetan student, had a Han friend (best friend actually) as did Mehmet, a male Uyghur student who listed his 5th best friend as a Han student. The Han students more generally were heterophilous in their friendship circles by comparison to MKM, but less so when compared to MKH. Also, 13 out of 14 of the Han students had at least one cross-ethnic friend and the majority of Han students expressed much appreciation for the opportunity to learn from and with ethnic minorities, hence leading to the theme *expanding horizons through diversity*.

Summary

The findings in this chapter mainly revolve around the central concept of ethnicity and how it influences students' friendship formation, especially their cross-ethnic relations. However, before looking into how ethnicity plays a role in students' social experiences, it was first necessary to examine students' ethnic identity and the role of the campus environment. Ethnicity was found to be ubiquitous and very important in the campus environment of Minzu, in part due to the ethnic diversity of the student population but also because of the ethnocultural mission of the university (Rhoads and Chang 2014). Thus, the special and diverse environment of the campus enabled some students who had not stressed their ethnic background in their pre-college years to do so at Minzu, while those who already had a strong sense of ethnicity could further develop their ethnic identity.

This influence of the Minzu campus environment on students' ethnic identification was especially apparent with Min Kao Han students who may have previously lived in Han dominated areas or were educated in Han-dominated schools

(they were kind of “Hanized” in their pre-college environments). These students described finding meaningful opportunities to connect with their ethnic identity in a manner that was not so easy to do in their past experiences. Somewhat surprisingly, the two ethnic groupings perhaps least influenced by the opportunity to explore their own ethnicity at Minzu were the MKM and Han students: the MKM students already had a strong sense of ethnicity and hence the Minzu environment didn’t really offer them anything they didn’t already have (although it enabled them to continue those cultural roots), and the Han students, who basically felt left out because of a lack of clear ethnic sense about being Han (as it is often the case with the dominant group when its culture essentially defines the society).

Another key finding focused on how students identified other students’ ethnic backgrounds. Findings revealed several cues are usually utilized by Minzu students to interpret another student’s ethnic identity, including their physical appearance (facial features and eyes, although it was noted that this was not entirely reliable), language and dialect, cultural features (food preferences and style of dress etc.), and knowledge of students’ geographic backgrounds, such as the location of their hometown.

Discussions of advantages and disadvantages associated with one’s ethnicity also emerged as a key finding related to experiences at Minzu. Comments made about these advantages and disadvantages are twofold. On the one hand, many students, both Han and ethnic minority students (MKM and MKH), emphasized the advantages ethnic minority students enjoy in the Minzu context. Advantages included favorable college admission and tuition waivers as part of preferential policies, more opportunities in

significant campus events and activities, and prioritized consideration in awards and honors, among other benefits.

On the other hand, Min Kao Min students mentioned that they experienced disadvantages and even discrimination related to their ethnic status, mainly in terms of their off-campus experiences, such as being stereotyped in various settings. For Min Kao Min students, their lack of Mandarin proficiency and adaptation to mainstream Han society limits their opportunity to pursue jobs or careers in large inland and coastal cities, which potentially limits their economic outcomes.

Interestingly, Han students also pointed out disadvantages that they perceived because of being Han in the context of Minzu University and its ethnocultural focus; keeping in mind that a primary goal of the university is to address the needs of ethnic minorities and the Han are not a minority. Additionally, as was noted above, the lack of a common ethnic identification among Han left some Han students longing for the kind of strong ethnic affiliation that they saw in many of their MKM and MKH classmates. What is interesting to note here is the lack of discussion raised by Han students concerning the privileges they experience throughout the larger society.

In terms of ethnicity and forming friendships, a central finding concerned the role of extracurricular activities. Of special importance were those activities related to ethnic culture and festivals as well as student clubs and organizations stressing ethnic-related activities as a means of meeting new people from a variety of majors and ethnic backgrounds.

When it comes to cross-ethnic friendship formation, although as mentioned above that extracurricular activities provide space for students to meet, MKM students revealed

a tendency to extend their social networks mostly among people of their own ethnic group, either with their upper-classmates in the same department or their fellow townsmen in Beijing. The Townsmen Associations both in Beijing and at Minzu proved to be important organizations in supporting MKM students and their social needs. One explanation for MKM students' relative ethnic isolation was their limited Mandarin proficiency. They reported feeling less confident about their Mandarin ability and this in turn tended to discourage them from participating in extracurricular activities that might lead them to form cross-ethnic friendships. Related to this is the reality that nearly all MKM students major in ethnic minority language and literature, a major that mostly isolates them from students in other majors. Thus, from a structural point of view, Min Kao Min students in these majors are limited in terms of their opportunity to form cross-ethnic friendships as well. Another factor that impacts the friend-making of all three categories of students is religious affiliation. Non-Muslim Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han students are more likely to have concerns about making friends with Muslim students as there are food restrictions that pertain to their Islamic religious belief. Other than that, Tibetan students and Mongolian students are more likely to have favorable impression of each other due to the fact that they both subscribe to Tibetan Buddhism.

In regard to friendship circles among students at Minzu, I found that the friends of Min Kao Min students are more likely to consist of 5 students from the same ethnic background of themselves. In other words, the friend circles for Min Kao Min students tend to be more homophilous, based on their five closest friends on campus. However, this outcome does not appear to be desired by MKM students—meaning that they want to have cross-ethnic friendships—but rather seems more tied to structural and linguistic

factors. In terms of Min Kao Han students and their friendships, it is obvious that they have the most heterophilous friendship circles compared to students in the other two categories. This result is possibly due to their standing in both the ethnic world and the mainstream world: being an ethnic minority while also having advanced Mandarin skills and cultural understanding of the mainstream Han culture. There are also patterns in the friendship circles among Han students in the study. First of all, there is no doubt that Han students have more Han friends than the other two categories of students. What is more, when it comes to the make-up of friendship circles, Han students stand in between Min Kao Min and Min Kao Han students: their friendship circle is more heterophilous than that of Min Kao Min but less heterophilous than that of Min Kao Han. The preceding findings about friendship circles among Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han and Han students to some degree suggest that Min Kao Min students potentially have less opportunities to form social capital through their friendships in that they have less cross-ethnic friends who are more likely to form weak ties and weak ties usually bring in richer information and resources.

CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

Summary of the Overall Research Project

This project sought to examine key aspects of social capital and cross-ethnic friendship formation among three groups of students at Minzu University of China: Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han, and Han. The central concern focused on to what extent the collegiate experiences of ethnic minorities at Minzu helped contribute to the acquisition of social connections and relationships most likely to foster increased levels of social capital, and hence, greater opportunities to pursue academic and career opportunities. In reality, I did not actually measure social capital but examined the operationalization of social capital in the form of social connections and relations formed by students at Minzu, including their cross-ethnic friendships.

More broadly speaking, this project was anchored in the sociology of education literature that examines the role of education in promoting social mobility or reproducing forms of inequality linked to gender, class, and race/ethnicity. Within this broad body of work, social capital is considered one of the key areas for examining questions of inequality and equal opportunity. Here, I built on the work of key social theorists such as Coleman (1988), Granovetter (1973, 1983) and Bourdieu (1986). But specifically, the work of Carter (2005) supplied a more operationalized notion of social capital in the form of “social connections” and “personal networks” that provide possible access to resources (p. 173).

I also drew from research in sociology and higher education focused on the relevance of cross-racial friendships and connections, extrapolating that these too offer

potential access to the kind of resources described by Carter (2005) as social capital. In brief, friendships may be seen along a continuum of homophily to heterophily, meaning that one's friends tend to be of the same race or of a different race. Of course, when applying this to the Chinese context, race was replaced by ethnicity. Some of the key research that I called on in this area was that of Antonio (2001), Chang, Astin and Kim (2004), and Fischer (2008), among others.

With the preceding in mind, the following research questions were developed and served as a guide throughout my study: 1) What differences exist among Han, Min Kao Han, and Min Kao Min college students in terms of the observable characteristics of their social connections and relations?; 2) How do students form social relationships and connections and to what extent are there observable differences when comparing the three groups of students?; 3) How do the students form cross-ethnic friendships and relations (intra, inter or both) and to what extent are there observable differences across the three groups of students?; and 4) How does *guanxi* influence the formation of social relationships and connections among the three groups of students?

Based on the theoretical concepts I aimed to explore and the nature of my research questions, I determined that a qualitative research project was necessary. I made this decision based on the need to have a flexible design in order to best study the lived experiences of the three groups of Minzu students. I determined that conducting semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, participant observation (mainly shadowing), and document analysis would best serve my goals. In the end, the decision to develop a qualitative design turned out to be a good one as I was able to collect a rich array of data from the three ethnic groups of students. In the following section I introduce all of my

key findings while also connecting them to the theories and research upon which my study was based.

Discussion of Findings and Related Research on Social Capital

I organize an analytical discussion of my findings by the way they were presented in the dissertation, first focusing on those relating to the students' pre-college educational backgrounds and their views of the Minzu campus, moving on to discuss social capital and *guanxi*, and then a discussion of ethnicity and cross-ethnic friendship formation.

Students' Pre-College Background and Views of the Campus

The findings related to students' pre-college educational background and their views of campus life at Minzu (Chapter 4) were not central to the conceptual argument of the overall dissertation but instead served to further develop the educational context for their experiences. Although some of the background about education in China and campus life at Minzu was included in the literature review, it was important to also incorporate empirically based findings so as to provide a rich portrait of the setting for the study.

A key part of my findings relating to educational background focused on students' views about their preparation for college, including their performance on the all-important college entrance exam known as the *Gaokao*. It is not surprising that many ethnic minority students (both MKM and MKH) complained about their pre-college educational quality being lower by comparison to their Han counterparts. They saw the limited quality of their pre-college education as having a direct impact on their *Gaokao*

score, which for several MKM students was expressed as a lack of confidence in their own academic ability.

Students' discussion of campus life tended to focus on one of three areas: academics, cultural diversity, and campus infrastructure (dorms, dining halls, library, etc.). Of special note here is the emphasis students placed on the ethnic and cultural diversity of the campus and the importance such diversity played in their university lives. For the most part, students valued their exposure to diversity both through the formal curriculum and the extracurriculum and saw their exposure as having a positive influence on their views of diversity. This finding is supported by Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau (2009) who reported that the diversity of one's high school social networks was in part influenced by the diversity of the high school context and the value placed on that diversity. The idea here is that representational or structural diversity (the demographics of an educational setting) obviously is likely to have an impact on students having more diverse interactions—called interactional diversity (Pike and Kuh 2006). This seems straight forward but actually educational settings may create conditions that discourage cross-cultural interaction even when structural diversity exists. In other words, even though a campus may be diverse demographically speaking, the educational experiences of students may be constrained in such a way so as to limit cross-cultural interaction. This concern was also raised by Odell, Korgen, and Wang (2005) who noted that simply having a diverse school setting does not necessarily lead to more diverse relationships in that it is also important for the educational setting to express some intentionality in promoting diversity.

An element of this problem (structural versus interactional diversity) exists at Minzu University in the way in which MKM students tend to be grouped together by major (minority ethnic language and literature majors) and by extension class cohorts; and one's class cohort essentially forms the primary network through which one makes social contacts and friendships—even roommate assignments in the dormitories come from one's class cohort. Consequently, although the campus environment at Minzu is rich in ethnic diversity, other factors such as how a student's academic and extracurricular experiences are structured may serve to undermine diverse interactions and leave some MKM students feeling somewhat isolated; at the same time, structural conditions may limit some of the cross-cultural interactions MKH and Han students have with MKM students.

Social Capital and Guanxi

I organize my discussion of social capital and *guanxi* to parallel what is described in Chapter 5, organized into two broad areas: 1) contextualizing social capital and 2) *guanxi* as a form of social capital. In terms of contextualizing social capital, I describe two types of campus-based social connections: peer-to-peer and faculty and staff connections. I also discuss social media and online connections as well as off-campus sources of social capital. My discussion of *guanxi* centers on conceptualizing and forming *guanxi* and then a discussion of its significance in the lives of students.

The findings about social connections on campus and how these connections contribute to social capital among students at Minzu is at the core of my study. Basically, there are two major types of social connections contributing to Minzu students' social

capital: peer-to-peer connections and faculty and staff connections. Peers include roommates, classmates, and upper-classmates. Students talked about connections with peers in terms of them serving as informational channels, offering emotional support and companionship, and sharing resources helpful in navigating university life. Students expressed that they all at some point benefited from peer-to-peer connections as they highlighted things such as academic success, career and internship opportunities, and general quality of life issues. Of particular importance among the peer-to-peer connections are the relations students make with upper-classmates. Most students in the interviews mentioned their upper-classmates as very helpful in their college life, especially when it comes to advancing their career objectives and having role models to follow. My findings here tend to support the work of Ream (2005), who reported that a high level of “peer social capital” was a predictor of positive test scores for Mexican-origin 12th graders in his study. My findings also echo the arguments of Carter (2005), Stanton-Salazar (1997), and Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2003) in which they operationalized social capital as social connections and relations with “mentors” and “role models.”

The role of upper-classmates as sources of social capital may have one potential negative element when considered for MKM students. Keeping in mind that upper-classmates for MKM students are likely to be from the same ethnic background, this source of social capital may further serve to isolate MKM students ethnically speaking and limit their opportunities to build cross-ethnic friendships.

With regard to connections with Minzu faculty and staff, most students in the study had positive comments about these social relations. They tended to see their

relationships with faculty and staff as instrumental in terms of helping them with schoolwork, research projects, and finding part-time jobs or internship opportunities. Students saw building such connections with faculty and staff as highly valuable to their present and future success in life. Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) reported similar finding, noting a positive relationship between social capital and students' academic performance. Here, social capital was operationalized as social connections with "institutional agents," defined primarily as faculty and staff members at a school. It only makes sense that the relationships between students and key faculty and staff personnel would be beneficial, given the specialized knowledge and information such personnel typically possess. Hence, my study tends to confirm some of the previous work on social capital and the role of institutional agents (mainly in the United States), further suggesting that this phenomenon may cut across national landscapes (China and the U.S.).

Some of the more inductive findings relating to social capital point to the importance of social media and online connections. The two most popular social media platforms students mentioned are WeChat and IMinda (the Minzu online portal). Students reported mainly using these online platforms, especially WeChat, to maintain close relations with friends and family members and to build new relations with people they meet in their daily life. Thus, it is apparent that social media plays a big part in enhancing students' social connections with their close friends (strong ties) and new friends (weak ties). Although this finding was not originally anticipated as part of my theoretical framing of the study, it is not so surprising to see social media emerge as a key vehicle in the formation of social capital among college students. I say this because of the

pervasiveness of communications technology (cell phones, lap tops, etc.) and the popularity of social media and immediate messaging among young people today. Other scholars too have noted the ties between social capital and social media. For example, Valenzuela, Park, and Kee (2009) looked at social capital and the role of Facebook reporting a positive relationship between Facebook usage and having social capital. Although Valenzuela et al. defined social capital mainly as life satisfaction, social trust, civic engagement, and political participation (somewhat different from how I conceptualize social capital more or less as people with resources), their findings still note the relevance of online contacts. Similarly, an earlier study conducted by Ellison, Steinfield, and Lampe (2007) found extensive usage of social media such as Facebook to be positively linked to both the formation and maintenance of social capital.

Of further importance is a slight pattern of social media usage among Minzu students: 8 out of the 11 students who did not report extensive usage of social media and online sites as vehicles for maintaining and/or building social relations are ethnic minorities. It is possible that the lower quality of pre-college education, as reported by many ethnic minorities in my study, may result in a lack of familiarity with certain communication technologies, including potentially limited exposure to using the Internet as a resource.

Another finding relating to social capital formation concerns off-campus connections, including Beijing ethnic ties, hometown connections in Beijing, and family connections. One source of social capital in the form of Beijing ethnic ties relates mostly to MKM students and the fact that they are the ones mostly likely to strongly identify with their ethnic background and hence take advantage of ethnic-related opportunities in

Beijing. They have a strong sense of ethnic solidarity and seek to build off that by participating in off-campus ethnic-based organizations and activities. An additional source of social capital comes from hometown associations in Beijing and the Townsman Associations at Minzu. Here, there is no clear pattern among MKM, MKH, and Han students as members of all three ethnic groupings seem to take advantage of such organizations. Additionally, family connections—again across all three groups—continue to be of great importance to students' and their access to social capital. Of particular note is the importance family and family friends play in offering career guidance, information, and job opportunities. This latter finding raises the importance of the work of Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) and their book *Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality*. In particular, they examined the “party pathway” for students from wealthy family backgrounds and noted that such students may not have to work as hard as students from less privileged backgrounds, given that they can rely on their family connections for future opportunities. Although few of the students in my study appeared to come from wealthy backgrounds, it was fairly clear though that their family ties were still quite critical to their success in life, and that some—like the students in *Paying for the Party*—had far more family-related resources than others. Those lacking powerful family ties and connections seemed to recognize the need to work harder than some of their peers. This aspect of my findings also points to the importance of *guanxi* in the lives of the Minzu students.

A central finding in my study revolves the Chinese concept of *guanxi*, which to a great extent is similar to the concept of social capital. Many students emphasized the significance of *guanxi* in Chinese society as it can bring convenience, benefits, and other

advantages in many occasions such as in college or in the job market. *Guanxi* is often discussed by students as the reciprocal and personal relationships between individuals. A similar point is made by Huang and Wang (2011) when they argued that *guanxi* is constituted by mutually enhancing relationships and social connections.

Minzu students tended to point to three major ways of forming or acquiring *guanxi*: making oneself marketable and valuable to others for exchange of benefits and favors, expanding one's social networks and connections, and gift giving as a form of capitalizing on social relations. Although the significance and benefits of *guanxi* were widely confirmed by most students in the study, some also pointed out that *guanxi* is not always seen as something helpful and that it can actually be seen as a negative. As Qi (2013) noted in his discussion of *guanxi*, it typically operates through informal relations rather than more formalized structures and then becomes somewhat vulnerable to corrupt or unethical practices. This may lead to unfair advantages and/or privileges, a point noted by Minzu students who were critical of *guanxi*. It is important to note here that those most critical of *guanxi* tended to come from self-described poorer families and saw themselves as less likely to be able to take advantage of *guanxi*. They saw *guanxi* as favoring people from upper-class backgrounds and undermining merit-based social mobility. Once again, the benefits of coming from privileged family backgrounds, as highlighted by Armstrong and Hamilton (2013), come to mind.

Ethnicity and Cross-Ethnic Friendships

This section analyzes the findings from Chapter 6 related to ethnicity and cross-ethnic friendships. My discussion is divided into two parts. First, I focus on how students

identify with their own ethnic background, how they perceive other students' ethnicity, and whether or not they associate advantages or disadvantages with ethnicity. Second, I highlight and analyze findings related to students' cross-ethnic friendships, including a discussion of students' friendship circles. As part of my discussion of students' friendships, I highlight three analytic themes that tended to emerge relative to the three ethnic groupings: *included but somewhat isolated* (MKM students), *best of both worlds* (MKH students), and *expanding horizons through diversity* (Han students).

In terms of students' identification with their own ethnic background, identifying others' ethnicity, and perceptions of advantages/disadvantages, some interesting findings emerged and may be summarized by the following key points: the cultural focus—what Rhoads and Chang (2014) described as the university's ethno-cultural mission—serves to support the further development of students' sense of ethnic identity, especially for MKH students and some MKM students. The cultural focus of Minzu helps some MKH students who may be rather Hanized or *Hanhua* to better reflect on their ethnicity. Both MKM and MKH tended to see advantages and disadvantages relating to ethnicity in a similar manner, but Han students differed in that some saw ethnic minorities as receiving unfair benefits.

The finding that ethnic minority students take advantage of the college environment of Minzu to further explore or support their ethnic background is not so surprising, given that U.S. researchers studying college students too have reported the importance of the college context in supporting identity development and more specifically ethnic or racial identification. In fact, Rhoads and Chang (2014) have noted that historical Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) in the United States serve a

similar role as *minzu* universities in that they too provide the kind of support suitable for African Americans' cultural development. Freeman and Cohen (2001) highlighted key aspects of the role HBCUs play in supporting student racial identity (in terms of what they described as "cultural empowerment"), a finding mostly supported by Brown and Davis (2001), who also pointed to the social capital advantages of attending a HBCU. An important theoretical finding to draw from my findings and that is suggested by scholars of HBCUs is to confirm the importance that campus environment plays in the support of both ethnic and racial minorities. It may also be worth noting the similarities between racial and ethnic minorities across national boundaries.

Although the campus context of Minzu proved useful to many ethnic minorities in terms of supporting their ethnicity, it also proved to be somewhat challenging for MKH students who had already been fairly assimilated into Han culture. These students, especially those seen as acting too "Hanized," felt some vulnerability at Minzu as their lack of commitment to their ethnic identity was viewed by some ethnic minority students as a negative. This was a point I wondered about in framing my study and that I suggested as a possibility in discussing key conceptual literature. Specifically, I noted that both Carter (2005) and Fordham and Ogbu (1986) mentioned the issue of African American students being seen as "acting too White," as in wanting or pretending to be White. It is important to note though that Carter criticized Fordham and Ogbu's argument that some of the lower educational attainment of Black students can be explained by not wanting to be perceived as "acting too White" and hence avoid being seen as studying too much (they may equate studying hard with being White). However, Carter argued that the stereotypes relating to Black and White educational attainment and racial identity

are far more complicated than argued by Fordham and Ogbu. The point relative to my study is the reality that minority-majority tension captured by Fordham and Ogbu and further explored by Carter also exists in China as well, although instead of acting too White it's about acting too Han (*Hanhua*). Again, the theoretical contribution of this finding is that it points to a potentially universal quality of minority-majority relations across societies and the ways in which such relations support or undermine educational attainment through important avenues such as social capital formation.

My findings relating to perceived advantages and disadvantages of ethnic identity and especially ethnic minority status also sounded similar to perceptions in the United States with regard to affirmative action and perceptions of advantage/ disadvantage associated with that. In the context of Minzu, the issue was not affirmative action but a similar policy captured by China's preferential policies. Although generally, students from all three ethnic groups saw some campus-related advantages for MKM and MKH students, a big difference was that several Han students saw such advantages as unfair to the majority group, seemingly ignoring the larger context of inequality suffered by ethnic minorities in China. Here, my research tends to support some of the findings of Cabrera (2014) and his studies of Whiteness among U.S. college students, including a tendency to view affirmative action as an unfair social practice based on the conviction among some White students that discrimination largely is nonexistent. The theoretical contribution here reinforces the need to further examine minority-majority tensions in relation to social policies such as affirmative action or preferential policies.

Findings relating to students' cross-ethnic friendship formation tended to revolve around the following: that ethnic-related social activities played a critical role in building

social relationships and making friends; that the nature of the friendship patterns (in terms of one's five closest friends) may be analyzed as friendship circles and that some modest patterns are evident; and finally, that the nature of students' friendship circles may influence the formation of social capital.

A key finding centered on the role of ethnic-related activities and how important they were to students having the opportunity to explore ethnic-based relationships. However, the objectives were somewhat different depending on one's status as MKM, MKH, or Han. For MKM and some MKH students, ethnic-based social activities offered them the chance to meet other students who matched their own ethnic identity and thus helped them to strengthen their same-ethnic ties. On the other hand, for some MKH (especially those who were more Hanized) and Han students, ethnic-based student organizations and activities offered the chance to explore cultural differences and potentially build cross-ethnic friendships.

Another key finding of my study concerns the fact that three general themes emerged relating to cross-ethnic friendship formation: that MKM students tended to seek to build friendships primarily with members of their same ethnic group (*included but somewhat isolated* theme); that MKH students tended to build friends among both MKM and Han students (*best of both worlds* theme); and that Han students tended to build the majority of their friendships with other Han students, although many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to interact cross-culturally, given the diverse campus environment (*expanding horizons through diversity* theme)

Included but Somewhat Isolated

MKM students tended to form friendships with others of the same ethnicity. This was attributed to two primary influences: their limited Mandarin ability (or their perceptions of their limited ability, and hence, their lack of confidence) and the fact that most majored in language and literature relating to their primary language and thus took classes almost entirely with members of the same ethnicity. These factors tended to limit the diversity of the friendships formed by MKM students.

Best of Both Worlds

MKH students on the other hand tended to have the most diverse friendship patterns. This is likely contributed to the reality that they have an easier time exploring both ethnic minority social settings and those dominated by Han students, given their ability to speak Mandarin fluently. Many MKH students expressed a comfort level regardless of whether they found themselves in campus-related events or activities that were mostly Han dominated or were comprised mainly of ethnic minorities. The exceptions are those MKH students who self-described themselves as *Hanhua* (or Hanized). These students tended to express some discomfort with being in minority-dominated campus settings, although a smaller subgroup appreciated the opportunity to further develop their own ethnic identity (and become less *Hanhua*).

Expanding Horizons through Diversity

Han students tended to have the most of their friendships with other Han students. Nonetheless, the majority of Han students expressed great enthusiasm for making friends

with ethnic minority students and relished the campus environment and learning opportunities related to ethnic and cultural diversity. It is this group of Han students in my study that led to the development of the theme—*expanding horizons through diversity*. However, a subgroup of Han students were much less enthusiastic about the diversity of the campus and openly wondered why ethnic minority students need to be so “minoritized,” as in defining their identities so much by their ethnicity. The latter group of Han students tended to be less engaged in terms of making friends with MKM and ethnically oriented MKH students.

My findings are supported by some of the U.S. research on racial minorities and their college experience. For example, Antonio (2001) found that African American students have the most homophilous friendship groups (for my study it was MKM students with the most homophilous patterns); again, the racial/ethnic patterns between the United States with regard to race and China with regard to ethnicity reveal some similarities in terms of marginality on campus. It is quite likely that in addition to the structural (majors and courses with members of the same ethnic group) and social factors (Mandarin limitations), there is a psychological dimension to why MKM students tend to seek out others of the same ethnic background: as marginalized members of the society, they feel a strong sense of need to be supported and in turn support one another. Research in the United States has revealed similar notions (Antonio 2001, 2004; Chang, Denson, Saenz and Misa 2006; Hurtado 1992; Rhoads 1998).

Finally, the key to examining Minzu students and their cross-ethnic friendships must be considered relative to the central aim of my study—to better understand the role college life plays in furthering one’s social capital, as a means of creating greater support

(resources) for pursuit of one's academic and career objectives. Here, my work mostly relied on Granovetter's (1973, 1983) argument that weak ties offer potential social capital benefits to those who build them. More specifically, Granovetter argued that weak ties typically are those relations with people outside of one's normal social networks and as such they offer unique forms of information and resources. This is because networks outside of one's typical and immediate social world are likely to be of great heterogeneity, and hence they may offer different perspectives, information and resources etc. Although I am not suggesting that friendships with students of a different ethnicity necessarily constitute weak ties, what I am arguing is that those relationships in most cases are outside of one's usual social network. Thus, cross-ethnic friendships, although they are not necessarily weak ties (they can be in some instances, but they can also be examples of strong ties), they nonetheless offer some of the same benefits as weak ties. And herein is the main problem uncovered by my study: those students (Min Kao Min students) most in need of expanding their social capital, given their marginal place within Chinese society, appear to be the least likely to expand their social capital through their friendship circles. Hence, MKM students' experiences of marginality in society may be further supported by their experiences in college, given structural (take the same majors and classes as members of their same ethnic group), social (experience language challenges), and even psychological influences (need to support one another). This situation potentially contributes to the social reproduction of marginalized ethnic minorities in China even though preferential policies may be designed to achieve the opposite in terms of social mobility. This is perhaps the biggest contribution of my dissertation.

Implications for Research and Educational Practice

There are several implications that my study raises for research and educational practice. In terms of research, several of my key findings support previous research conducted largely in U.S. educational settings and thus my work tends to call attention to the potential universal quality of some sociological conclusions such as the importance of social capital to success in life.

Social capital is mostly defined in my study as connections with others who may be in position to expand one's access to resources. I largely discuss resources in terms of support for academic and career interests. In general, my findings relating to social capital and students' experiences support much of the existing research, especially those that call attention to the relevance of institutional agents and mentors (Carter 2005; Stanton-Salazar 1997; Stanton-Salazar and Spina 2003), including the role of peers (Ream 2005). My research tends to reinforce the idea that concepts such as social capital and educational attainment may have significant application to the Chinese educational context. Similarly, the findings presented about *guanxi* and its relevance to social capital formation aligns well with some of the existing Chinese research on similar topics (Fan 2014; Huang and Wang 2011; Qi 2013). A key to take from my study is that students from self-described poorer backgrounds (mostly MKM students) saw *guanxi* as potentially undermining their pursuit of merit-based outcomes. Some research implications here point to the need to know more about how forms of *guanxi* may be used to benefit poorer students, while minimizing the advantages of elite or privileged students. For example, the work of Maldonado, Rhoads, and Buenavista (2005) specifically focused on how underrepresented minority students in U.S. higher education

organized through student-initiated retention projects to enhance students' social and cultural capital. *Guanxi*, as a form of social capital, could potentially be viewed in a similar manner in that further research could reveal how disadvantaged ethnic minority students might accumulate forms of *guanxi* helpful to their academic and career interests. My research only presents an initial understanding of the significance of *guanxi* but much more is needed.

My findings relating to students' cross-ethnic friendships inform the work in the United States on cross-racial friendships among college students. A major point here is that just as U.S. researchers have found African American students to have the most homophilous friendship patterns, my work highlights the fact that MKM have the most homophilous friendship patterns among the three ethnic groupings at Minzu. There may be several explanations for this but an important one is that ethnic and racial minorities are likely to feel the need for support in light of their marginalized standing, and that such support-seeking behaviors are likely to be linked to interactions with members of their own ethnic group (given natural levels of comfort). The important point here, and related to the theme *included but somewhat isolated*, is that although preferential policies have enabled MKM students to gain access to higher education at universities such as Minzu, there are nonetheless structural features of their experience that may ultimately limit their academic and career pursuits (grouping ethnic minorities in the same major). The implication here is that more research is needed to better understand the extent of structural constraints on MKM students' experiences, as well as what alternative structural conditions may exist at other colleges and universities.

In terms of educational practice, a few important issues immediately come to mind. Most prominent for me is the concern that MKM students may face structural limitations that undermine some of the benefits of college attendance. To be more clear, because most MKM students (exceptions are rare) must study in minority language and literature programs with members of their same ethnic group, they are limited in their exposure to students from other ethnic backgrounds. If this were simply an issue of classroom diversity—or lack of classroom diversity—the structural limitations of MKM students’ cross-cultural interaction might not be so severe. But here we must keep in mind that a student’s roommates are assigned from one’s class cohort and hence for MKM students, all of their roommates are likely to be of the same ethnic background. Arguably, the assignment of dormitory roommates is a key practice in terms of shaping the nature of one’s friendships. Of course, many MKM students are likely to prefer having roommates from their same ethnic background, again, given their comfort level and the need MKM students may feel for support. But is it possible that there are other ways of assigning roommates and structuring the out-of-class experience of students at Minzu such that students have a mix of same-ethnic roommates as well as cross-ethnic roommates? It seems reasonable to believe that a mixture of roommates relative to ethnicity could potentially serve to expand social connections and in the case of MKM students expand their social capital.

Another important educational practice issue relates to a lack of intentionality on the part of the university when it comes to actually promoting cross-cultural interaction and contact (not just for MKM students, but MKH and Han as well). Although the university is quite strong in celebrating various ethnic festivals and special holidays, and

students often have cross-ethnic contact in such settings, the university nonetheless could do much more in getting students from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds to actually come together and converse about ethnic and cultural differences. It seems that at Minzu celebrating ethnicity is promoted to a great extent but addressing the difficult conversations relating to ethnic differences is more to be avoided. In some sense, this typifies aspects of ethnic diversity in China and the vision promoted by former president Hu Jintao and his focus on China as a “harmonious society.” Difficult conversations about ethnic and racial diversity are not always harmonious. The kind of “dialogues across difference” so popular at U.S. colleges and universities could potentially offer some direction for Chinese universities, although obviously the different national landscapes must be considered (Gurin, Nagda, and Zuniga 2013). Clearly, Minzu University has achieved high levels of structural diversity but it stands to benefit by paying more attention to interactional diversity.

Limitations and Future Research

I am aware of the limited generalizability of research findings based on qualitative studies, given that such research tends to involve a small number of respondents and cases and that often times random sampling is not possible or is less than ideal. The strength of qualitative research is arguably the ability to more deeply contextualize sociological phenomena and this differs from many quantitative studies using large-scale data bases and statistical analysis. Thus, although it is unlikely that my findings will necessarily explain social capital processes beyond the particularized Chinese university context, or even beyond the *minzu* college or university system, it nonetheless offers a

rich understanding of the students' lived experience in the context of Minzu University. Thus, I argue that the limited generalizability of research findings does not decrease the quality and value of my study. As a qualitative study built on ethnographic practices, my study provides rich details about the student experience, including the ways in which their own ethnicities play out in college life.

Another limitation often associated with qualitative research concerns the issue of researcher bias. Because qualitative research involves the researcher conducting field work and interacting closely with research participants, some might question the degree to which the researcher is actually able to distance herself or himself in the process of gathering and interpreting data. The possibility of being overly subjective thus becomes a real concern in conducting qualitative research. I have sought to address concerns of bias through the use of multiple data collection strategies—data collection triangulation (semi-structured interviews, informal interviews, shadowing, etc.)—so that my data actually serves to confirm or reject various interpretations. This served to weaken any possibility of bias. Further, I employed member checks by sharing some of my preliminary research findings with three of the more knowledgeable research participants in my study (one from each ethnic grouping—Min Kao Min, Min Kao Han and Han). Their feedback, though minimal, served to reinforce most of my early interpretations and further served to limit the role bias might play in shaping the study's findings. Nonetheless, and despite all my efforts, it is unlikely to entirely eliminate bias in qualitative work and hence a minor caution concerning this issue is noted here.

Another limitation worth noting is the reality that my study primarily addresses a particular point in time in that my data collection procedures took place during only one

academic year, mostly during one academic semester—spring semester 2017. It is possible that particular issues may have arisen at Minzu University because of some larger set of actions taking place throughout the country. Imagine doing a study of U.S. minority students and their feelings of campus safety after the 2016 election of President Donald Trump—it would be hard to separate the impact of Trump’s racist views from the experiences of the students. This point seems particularly relevant given the political sensitivity of ethnic minority issues and the role of Minzu University. For example, in previous years there have been significant national events that impacted campus life at Minzu, such as when there were massive protests in Tibet in 2008 and such protests spilled over to the campus in the form of a widespread sit-down protest. Other national events have also impacted campus life at Minzu where at times military personnel have been brought in to lockdown the campus (no one can come or go without an ID card). In defense of my study, there were no obvious national events from January to July 2017 (primary field work period) that served to disrupt or shape campus events in such an obvious or exaggerated way and so the issue of studying Minzu at only one point in time may not be a significant concern as a limitation.

A final note about limitations concerns the sampling procedure that was used. Although I originally proposed conducting a stratified, random sample of MKM, MKH, and Han students, this was not possible because of political sensitivities relating to identifying lists of students by their ethnic background. But the reality is that many qualitative studies do not adopt a random sampling strategy in light of many issues that may restrict a researcher’s access to research subjects. Instead, qualitative researchers often take advantage of alternative sampling strategies such as snowball sampling—a

procedure in which one may start off with a small list of possible research subjects but the researcher works to expand the list as the study progresses by seeking additional subjects who fit the study's criteria. Given the circumstances at the research site, purposeful snowball sampling was the best I could do. This was largely accomplished by taking advantage of Minzu students' reliance on social media, as I was able to connect to many students through various online social networks connected to Minzu University. A concern about purposeful snowball sampling is that the final sample may be somewhat connected, socially speaking, since referrals are a big aspect of the snowball procedure. But the reality is that few of my research subjects were closely tied to one another—this was evident by the fact that very few research subjects listed other members of my sample as one of their five best friends. This somewhat informal test tends to reinforce my claim that the sample for this study is in fact a strong one and is unlikely to be biased in any clear way.

In terms of future research, some of the limitations raised in this section could potentially be addressed by studies yet to be conducted. For example, a future study of the collegiate experiences of MKM, MKH, and Han students at *minzu* colleges and universities could follow a survey format and employ more random sampling as a way of addressing some of the shortcomings of my work. Such a study could shed greater light on statistical differences across the three groupings. Of course, part of the challenge would be gaining the institutional support to conduct such a study—something that is not so easy in the Chinese context. The point here is that in the United States, many comparative studies of college outcomes relating to minority-majority students are done through surveys and that such can also be the case in China.

Another consideration in terms of future research is the need to expand on the Minzu University campus site by studying the experiences of ethnic minority students at other *minzu* colleges and universities as well as at other universities around the country. It is possible that the findings described in my study may vary in some significant way if conducted at another *minzu* college or university. Also, there is a great need to know more about the ethnic minority experience of students at elite universities such as Beijing and Tsinghua universities. There is not a clear sense for the quality of the collegiate experience of ethnic minority students at such universities and so clearly more research is needed.

Concluding Thoughts

I started this dissertation by telling a little bit of my own story, based on some of my earliest experiences as an undergraduate at Minzu University. The reason for placing myself within the narrative was in part meant to convey the close connection I have to Minzu and the significance of this overall research project. Despite my closeness to the study, I worked diligently to keep a bit of a distance as well. Perhaps this is an impossibility but I believe I have achieved such a goal as I have highlighted many positive aspects of the campus context relative to promoting ethnic minorities, while at the same time I have offered a good deal of criticism. Although critical at times, my hope and my overarching goal is to improve the lives of college students in China and in particular enhance the ways in which ethnically diverse students participate in college life for their own benefit and the benefit of others.

The findings from my study hopefully will inform both the sociological research on minority college students as well as the growing work about life at Chinese universities. The fact that my work is in English may be helpful in terms of the English-speaking world's understanding of Chinese campus life and the experiences of ethnic minority students. Although there is a good deal of work about Chinese college students written in Chinese, there is very little that appears in English, and so I see this as an important contribution of my study.

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APPENDIX-A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS (CHINESE)

访谈大纲

汉，民考汉，民考民大学生的社会资本及跨民族交友调查:一个定性研究

孙笑阳, 博士研究生, 社会学系, 天普大学

I. 背景信息

1. 请问您的姓名及年龄分别是什么？【标注性别】
2. 您的民族是什么？
3. 您是几年级的学生？
4. 您的专业是什么？
5. 您的出生地在哪里？您认为哪里是您的老家？【省或市】
6. 您父母的职业分别是什么？
7. 您的父亲或者母亲有没有上过大学？
8. 您是在哪里上的高中？
-您的高中是汉族学生为多数群体还是以少数民族学生为多数群体？
9. 您所在的高中的主要教学语言是什么？是普通话还是少数民族语言或者是双语教学？
10. 您在中央民族大学更喜欢用普通话还是少数民族语言与他人交流？
11. 您的普通话水平如何？您的普通话口语和写作水平分别是什么水平？
12. 您认为什么是您在中央民族大学生活中最令人兴奋的事情？什么是您认为最有挑战性的事情？

II. 社会关系网络和学业以及职业目标

13. 您在中央民族大学的同学是否通过以及过何种方式在您的学业上以及大学整体生活上提供过帮助？
- 这些给您提供过帮助的同学的民族背景是什么？
14. 除了您在中央民族大学的同学，是否有其他个人或群体（组织）在您的学习生活中提供过帮助？他们的民族背景又是什么？
- 您的老师（教授）？
- 学校里的行政老师？
- 您的学长？
15. 除了课堂之外，您是否积极参与到学校的其他活动里？或者说您一般如何度过课余时间？
16. 您是否参与学校里的任何学生组织和社团？您参与或者不参与的理由是什么？
17. 课余活动对您来说在开阔人际交往方面有多重要（起到多大的作用）？
18. 您一般在课余时间与您的朋友或者同学一起会做什么样的事情？
19. 您是否与您的老师（教授）在课外有任何的接触和交往？如果有，这种交往的性质是什么样的？
- 一般在什么场合？
- 一般都会进行什么样的谈话？
20. 您可否描述一下您对职业目标？也就是说，您在大学毕业以后想做什么？
21. 哪些个人或者群体（组织）对您在职业生涯规划方面有过帮助？
- 您的老师（教授）以及学校的行政老师？
- 您的父母？
- 您的同学或者学长？
22. 您是否参加过或者准备参加任何实习或者兼职？

-在您准备实习或者兼职的过程中，什么人给过你什么样的帮助？

23. 您在中央民族大学是通过何种渠道，什么人（群体—）来获取实习、兼职、出国留学以及其他有关学业的信息？

III. 跨民族交友—汉族与少数民族、少数民族与其他少数民族之间的跨民族交往

24. 您在校园里最要好的五个好朋友分别是谁？

-这五位好朋友的民族背景是什么？

25. 您是否能列举出校园里的三到四位您认为可以谈论学习和个人生活的老师（教授）？

-这三到四位老师（教授）的民族背景是什么？

26. 您如何评价您在校园里和其他民族学生的交往情况？

27. 是否有哪些民族群体您认为更容易交往？

-您为什么这样认为？

28. 是否有哪些群体您认为相对来说比较难交往？

-您为什么这样认为？

29. 您认为语言或者文化上的差异对校园里的社会交往方面是否有任何影响？

30. 当您初次与其他学生相遇，您如何判断对方的民族背景？您一般会根据哪些因素来判断对方的民族背景？

-外貌外形上的特点？

-行为举止或者穿衣打扮？

-语言？

31. 一个人的民族背景是否以及如何影响您对他的第一印象？

IV. “关系”的影响

32. 有些人认为社会交往在中国有着特殊的地位因为中国人讲究所谓的“关系”。对您来说，“关系”意味着什么？

33. 您作为中央民族大学的一名学生，您如何建立或者扩大自己的“关系”？

34. 您认为“关系”对您的大学生活有什么样的影响？

-“关系”对您和其他学生之间交往的影响？

-“关系”对您和老师（教授）之间交往的影响

35. 您认为有“关系”对您的学业上的成功有着什么样的影响？

36. 您认为“关系”对您职业生涯规划上的成功有着什么样的影响？

V. 总结性问题

37. 您认为是否还有其他事情对您在中央民族大学的生活有着重要的影响？

38. 您对我或对我的研究有什么问题？

INTERVIEW PROTOCOLS (ENGLISH)

Social Capital and Cross-Ethnic Friendships among *Han, Min Kao Han,* and *Min Kao Min* Students: A Qualitative Study

Xiaoyang Sun, Ph.D. Student, Department of Sociology, Temple University

I. Background Information (and Building Rapport)

1. Can you give me your name and age? [note whether male or female]
2. What is your ethnic identity?
3. What year are you in school?
4. What is your major?
5. Where were you born and what do you consider to be your hometown and home province?
6. What do your parents do in terms of work?
7. Did either of your parents go to college?
8. Where did you go to high school?
 - Is it a Han majority high school or an ethnic high school?
9. What was the primary teaching language in your high school? Mandarin or an ethnic language or bilingual?
10. Do you prefer to speak Mandarin or your own ethnic language when interacting with others at Minzu?
11. How well can you understand Mandarin? How well can you speak Mandarin? And how well can you write in Mandarin?
12. What has been most exciting about life here? And what has been most challenging?

II. Social Ties and Networks Relative to Academic Studies and Career Objectives (RQ # 1 & RQ # 2)

13. In what ways, if any, have peers assisted you in your academic work and your overall college experience?

- What is the ethnic identity of those who have been most helpful?
14. Besides peers, have any other individuals or groups been helpful to you in terms of your studies and what is their ethnic identity?
- Any professors?
 - Any staff?
 - Any older or more advanced students?
15. What kinds of activities beyond your classes are you involved? In other words, how do you spend your time when you are not in class?
16. Are you involved in any student clubs or organizations and why or why not?
17. How important are extracurricular activities to you in terms of meeting new people and friends?
18. What other kinds of social activities do you do with your friends and peers?
19. Do you have much contact and/or interaction with your professors outside of the classroom? If so, what is the nature of the interaction?
- What kinds of settings?
 - What kinds of conversations?
20. Can you describe your career or vocational objectives? In other words, what do you want to do after you graduate?
21. What individuals or groups have been helpful to you in terms of thinking about and preparing for your career objectives?
- What about professors or staff?
 - What about parents?
 - What about peers?
22. Have you participated or do you plan to participate in an internship or a part time job?
- What help have you received in planning an internship or a part time job and has anyone in particular been helpful to you?

23. How have you gone about getting information about internships, part time job or opportunities to go abroad, or anything else related to your academic life at Minzu?

III. Cross-Ethnic Friendships and Relations—both intra and intro ethnic relations (RQ # 3 & RQ # 4)

24. Can you tell me about your five closest friends on campus?

- What is the ethnic identity of these five friends?

25. Can you identify three or four professors with whom you feel comfortable talking about academic or personal matters?

- What is the ethnic identity of these professors?

26. How would you describe your contact and interaction with other students from different ethnic backgrounds from yourself?

27. Are there some ethnic groups that you have an easier time with in terms of building social relationships or friendships?

- Why do you think this is?

28. Are there some ethnic groups with which you have a difficult time in terms of building social relationships or friendships?

- Why do you think this is the case?

29. In what ways do you think cultural or language differences influence your social interactions on campus?

30. How do you determine another student's ethnicity when you meet someone initially? What cues help you in determining someone's ethnic background?

- What about physical characteristics...are they helpful?

- What about mannerisms or dress style?

- What about language?

31. Does someone's ethnic identity influence your first impression of him or her?

IV. Influence of Guanxi (RQ # 5)

32. Some believe that social life in China is somewhat unique because of guanxi. What does guanxi mean to you?

33. How do you as a student go about building or increasing your guanxi?
34. In what ways do you think guanxi influences your college experiences?
- What about in terms of interacting with students?
 - What about in terms of interacting with staff and professors?
35. In what ways do you see guanxi as important to your academic success?
36. In what ways do you see guanxi as important to achieving your career objectives?

V. Concluding Questions

37. Can you think of anything else relative to your experience at Minzu University that you feel is important to share?
38. Do you have any questions for me?

APPENDIX-B

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (CHINESE)

天普大学学术调查

知情同意书

汉，民考汉，民考民大学生的社会资本及跨民族交友调查:一个定性研究

调查者—孙笑阳,博士研究生,天普大学社会学系正在进行一项关于汉，民考汉，民考民大学生的社会资本及跨民族交友的调查。

作为中央民族大学的本科生，您被随机选中为此项研究的参与者之一。您对此项研究的参与完全自愿。

为什么要做这项研究？

此项研究为了能够更好的了解中国大学生社会资本和少数民族族际交友的建立和积累。本研究着重关注三个学生群体：1) 掌握流利汉语的汉族学生；2) 民考汉学生：熟练掌握普通话并且参加普通话高考的少数民族学生；3) 民考民学生：主要掌握少数民族语言并且参加少数民族语言高考的少数民族学生。有一部分民考民学生的汉语能力有限。此项研究的研究设计聚焦在增进对学生大学生活的了解以及他们如何在大学中和其他学生以及老师（教授）建立交往和积累社会资本。

如果我选择参与此项研究，我需要做什么？

如果您选择自愿参与此项研究，研究者将会请求您参与以下活动：

- 参与到一个时长大约为 45 分钟到一小时的，正式的，半结构性的访谈当中（研究者将会对访谈进行录音并且会将访谈记录与您分享）。访谈的问题是于以下四个方面：1) 背景信息；2) 社会关系网络和学业以及职业目标；3) 跨民族交友—汉族与少数民族、少数民族与其他少数民族之间的跨民族交往；4) “关系”的影响。
- 允许研究者在多种公共场合以及时间内观察您并且记录下您的活动（研究者并不会记录下能够侵害您隐私的任何信息）

我需要付出多少时间来帮助这项研究？

此项研究是关于汉，民考汉，民考民大学生的社会资本及跨民族交友的调查，因此此项研究会持续几个月的时间。然而您的参与只包含一个大约 45 分钟的正式访谈以及允许研究者在公共场合下对您进行观察并且记录下您的活动。

我是否需要担心此项研究将会给我带来任何潜在的危险或者不适？

正式访谈将会占用您大约 45 分钟到一个小时左右的时间。研究者对您日常生活或行为的观察将不会占用任何您的私人时间。极少数的潜在危险是存在的，因为此项研究的本质是为了更好的理解大学生和同学以及老师之间存在的友谊和族际交往。另外，在撰写研究结果和出版此项研究的过程中，研究者将通过多种手段对被访者的个人隐私进行保护，包括使用笔名以及格外小心的对被访者信息进行保存。然而对于那些非常了解被访者的人，他们也有可能通过阅读最终的研究结果而认出其中的被访者（这种可能性非常小）。但是需要提醒的是，此项研究的本质决定了对被访者的访谈将不涉及到极其隐私和敏感的话题。

我是否可以通过参与此项研究得到报酬或好处？

通过参与此项研究，您将会帮助其他人更好的理解我们的社会。同时，您还会帮助其他读者深入了解社会资本的积累以及跨民族交往的本质。另外，您还将得到 70 人民币（大约十美元）作为占用您宝贵时间的报酬。

我的个人信息以及我对此项研究的参与是否会被保护？

您在此项研究中提供的任何信息都是受到保密保护的。所有被访者的个人信息只有在经过您的允许下才会被公开；或在美国法律和天普大学的政策要求下才会被公开。个人信息的机密性将会通过通过一下手段被保护：访谈记录以及观察记录将会被记录为 Word 文件并保存在研究者的个人电脑上。只有研究者本人才能持有保存信息的个人电脑，并且保存信息的个人电脑设有密码保护。

在被法律允许的范围内，研究者将尽可能的控制那些有权查看信息的人员对您个人信息的阅读量。然而研究者无法承诺百分百的保密性。IRB（伦理委员会）、天普大学以及这些组织的代表人员有可能会阅读以及备份您的个人信息。

如果我参与此项研究，我的权利有哪些？

- 您可以自愿选择是否参与此项研究，您也可以随时退出此项研究。不管您做出什么样的决定，您将不会面对任何惩罚或者对您个人利益的损害。
- 您将有权拒绝回答任何您不想回答的问题而继续保留对此项研究的参与。

如果我对此项研究有任何问题，我应该联系谁？

如果您对此项研究有任何问题、意见或建议，或者您认为此项研究侵犯了您的任何利益和权力，请拨打电话 3109209127 或者通过发送邮件到 tuf15311@temple.edu 来联系孙笑阳。

此项研究已经通过天普大学 IBR（伦理委员会）的通过。您可以通过拨打电话 2157073390 或者发送邮件到 irb@temple.edu 来解决您的一下问题和诉求：

- 您的问题、意见或建议没有被研究团队所解答
- 您联系不上研究团队
- 您想联系研究团队以外的负责人进行谈话
- 您关于您被访者身份有任何问题
- 您需要进一步获得此项研究的信息或者对此项研究有任何补充意见

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (English)

TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

STUDY INFORMATION SHEET

“Social Capital and Cross-Ethnic Friendships among Han, Min Kao Han, and Min Kao Min Students: A Qualitative Study”

Investigator – Xiaoyang Sun, Ph.D. student from Temple University, Department of Sociology, is conducting a research study.

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an undergraduate student at Minzu University of China, Beijing. Your participation in this research study is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

This study is being conducted to better understand social capital and cross-ethnic friendship formation at a Chinese University. The study specifically focuses on three groups of students: 1) Han majority students whose primary language is Chinese Mandarin; 2) Min Kao Han students represent ethnic minorities who are fluent in Chinese Mandarin and who took the college entrance exam in Mandarin; and 3) Min Kao Min students are ethnic minority students who took the college entrance exam in their native tongue and who may have limited Mandarin ability. Included in the study’s design is a focus on understanding students’ college experience and the ways in which they form relations with other students and with university faculty and staff.

What will happen if I take part in this research study?

If you volunteer to participate in this study, the researcher will ask you to do the following:

- Participate in a formal, semi-structured interview lasting approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour (to be digitally recorded and the transcription shared with you). Questions relate to four basic areas: 1) Background Information, 2), Social Relations Relative to Academic Studies and Career Objectives 3), Cross-Ethnic Friendships and Relations and 4) Influence of Guanxi.
- Agree to allow the researcher to observe you in various public settings from time to time and make hand notes about what she observes (however she will not record any information that compromises your anonymity).

How long will I be in the research study?

This project is a study of *Min Kao Min*, *Min Kao Han*, and *Han* students and will extend for several months. However, your specific participation includes agreeing to participate in a 45 minutes to 1-hour formal interview as well as allowing the researcher to observe you in public and/or more private social settings over the duration of the study.

Are there any potential risks or discomforts that I can expect from this study?

The formal interview will take approximately 45 minutes to 1-hour of your time. Any observations by the researcher would be of or related to your normal routines and/or social activities and thus would not take up additional personal time. There are few risks associated with

this project given that the nature of the study is to better understand the nature of relationships and cross-ethnic friendships with peers, professors and faculties.

Furthermore, in writing up the findings and developing publications the identity of research subjects will be concealed through a variety of anonymization strategies, including the use of pseudonyms for research participants as well as taking caution in presenting various personal identifiers. However, it is conceivable that someone who knows the research participants quite closely and who reads the final publications might be able to identify some of the research participants, although this is highly unlikely. But again, the nature of the subject material is not expected to involve highly sensitive data.

Are there any potential benefits if I participate?

You may benefit from the study in terms of making a contribution to helping others around the world better understand the process of social capital formation and the nature of cross-ethnic friendships among ethnic minority and majority students. You will also receive 70 RMB (about 10 \$) for you time and contribution to the study.

Will information about me and my participation be kept confidential?

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by U.S. law or Temple University policy. Confidentiality will be maintained by means of saving interview and observational data in Word files on the researcher’s personal laptop and only accessible to her and password protected.

To the extent allowed by law, I will limit the viewing of your personal information to people who have to review it. I cannot promise complete secrecy. The IRB, Temple University, and other representatives of these organizations may inspect and copy your information.

What are my rights if I take part in this study?

- You can choose whether or not you want to be in this study, and you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. Whatever decision you make, there will be no penalty to you, and no loss of benefits to which you were otherwise entitled.
- You may refuse to answer any questions that you do not want to answer and still remain in the study.

Who can I contact if I have questions about this study?

If you have any questions, comments or concerns about the research or think the research has hurt you please contact Xiaoyang Sun 310.920.9127 or tuf15311@temple.edu (Email address).

This research has been reviewed and approved by Temple University Institutional Review Board. You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or e-mail them at: irb@temple.edu for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team
- You cannot reach the research team
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject
- You want to get information or provide input about this research

APPENDIX-C CODE BOOK

Deductive Codes:

- These were mostly driven by the research questions and theoretical framework.

1. Social connections/ties/relations as resources (social capital)
2. Social activities (out-of-class activities)
3. Ethnic-related activities
4. Ethnic-related advantages/disadvantages
5. Discrimination experiences
6. Self-identifying one's own ethnicity (mannerisms, dress, activities, etc.)
7. Identifying someone's ethnicity
8. Language background/exposure
9. Language preference and efficiency
10. Friendships formation
11. Friend circle (closest 5 friends)
12. Cross-ethnic Friendship Formation
13. Guanxi defined
14. Significance of Guanxi
15. Guanxi formation (specific activities)
16. Academic and Career Support
 - Faculty support
 - -Peer support
 - -Upper-classmates Support
17. Career/vocational interests

Inductive Codes:

- These were mostly driven by the actual data, as in coming from the “ground” up (“grounded” findings).

18. Family ties/support
19. Academic performance/grades
20. Internship/Part time Job experiences
21. Educational background (growing up)
22. Social media and connections/relationships
23. Competition/college admission/gaokao
24. Minzu campus culture/context
 - Academic environment
 - Cultural diversity
 - Infrastructure
25. Off campus/Beijing influences/experiences
 - Beijing ethnic ties
26. English language efficiency/role of English
27. Dating Activities/Relationships
28. Hometown/Townsmen/Fellowship
29. Religion
30. Personal Hobbies

APPENDIX-D

SOCIAL CAPITAL SUMMARY CHART

Year	Author	Title/Source	Definition of Social capital	Measurement of Social Capital
1988	James Coleman	Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital/ <i>American Journal of Sociology</i>	Coleman's definition of the concept is "a variety of entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain action of actor—whether persons or corporate actors—within the structure" (p.98). Coleman looks at social capital in the family and social capital outside the family.	Social capital in the family is measured with parents' presence, additional children, parents and children, mother's expectation for children' education. Social capital outside the family is measured by intergenerational closure with the indicator of number of times children have changed schools.
1995	<u>Santon-Salazar and Dombusch</u>	Social Capital and the Reproduction of Inequality: Information Networks among Mexican-Origin High School Students/ <i>Sociology of Education</i>	"Social relationships from which <u>an</u> individual is potentially able to derive various types of institutional resources and support." (p.116) And they identify two types of social capital: school based social capital (instrumental ties with institutional agents) and peer social capital.	Number of high-status adults named as likely or current sources of information-related support, number of nonfamily weak ties, number of school-based weak ties (school personnel), average socioeconomic level of students' information network (adults), average socioeconomic level of students' friendship network (peers)
1997	<u>Santon-Salazar</u>	A Social Capital Framework for Understanding the Socialization of Racial Minority Children and Youth/ <i>Harvard Educational Review</i>	"Relationships with institutional agents, and the networks that weave these relationship into units." (P.8)	Same as the study in 1995

1998	<u>Hao and Bonstead-Bruns</u>	Parent-Child Differences in Educational Expectations and the Academic Achievement of Immigrant and Native Students/ <i>Sociology of Education</i>	Borrowing from the definition of Coleman, they identify two types of social capital. Within-family social capital that stresses the parent-children relationships. Between-family social capital that addresses family community relationship.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Within-family social capital: parents' involvement in school learning, extracurricular activities; and parents' involvement in other learning. 2. They used immigrant status and ethnicity aiming to capture the ethnic solidarity, ethnic cultural, modes of incorporation, and context of reception, as a proxy for between family-social capitals.
1998	Sun	The Academic Success of East-Asian–American Students—An Investment Model/ <i>Social Science Research</i>	Borrowing Coleman's notion of social capital, he measured two types of social capital: within-family social capital (parent-children relationship) capital and outside family social capital.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Within-Family social capital: number of sibling, no-intact family, parent-child discussion, helps with homework, parental expectation. 2. Outside-family social capital: number of parents (of their children's friends) known, frequency of moves and PTA participation as indicators.
1999	<u>Kahne and Bailey</u>	The Role of Social Capital in Youth Development: The Case of 'I Have a Dream' Programs/ <i>Educational Evolution and Policy Analysis</i>	Borrowing Coleman's definition of social capital, which argues that component of social capital; include social trust, communication patterns, and behavioral norms and so forth.	Looking at the designs and strategies of IHADs programs that aim to promote social capital for students. These strategies are as follows: building social trust through long-term supportive relationships; relationships and social trust facilitate use of social networks and adherence to social norms; using strong ties to tap in weak ties; relationships enable norms and practices that lead to academic support.

2003	Stanton-Salazar and Spina	Informal Mentors and Role Models in the Lives of Urban Mexican-Origin Adolescents/ <i>Anthropology and Education Quarterly</i>	They conceptualize "social capital as viable social ties to different classes of individuals or agents who could provide access to important forms of social support (e.g. academic assistance, career decision making, and emotional support)." (p.235)	Two types of ethnographic interviews are conducted. "The first entailed open ended questions and probes directly to the adults and peers verbally identified as source of support in the spring survey." (p.236) "The second type of interview involved open ended questions and probes about academic achievement and the influence of various agents and social domains in the school..."(p.236)
2005	Perna and Titus	The Relationship between Parental Involvement as Social Capital and College Enrollment: An Examination of Racial/Ethnic Group Differences."/ <i>Journal of Higher Education</i>	"Social capital consists of resources embedded in social relations and social structures, which can be mobilized when an actor which to increase the likelihood of success in a purposive action (p.489)." Mainly influenced by Coleman's notion of social capital, they conceptualize social capital as parental involvement in school	1) Parent-school involvements measured by parent-student discussions about education-related issues and by parental monitoring of the students' behavior. 2) Parent-school involvement measure by frequency with which parent reports contacting the students' school about doing volunteer work. 3) Parent-to-parent involvement measured by the number of students' friends' parents with whom <u>a parent reports</u> talking.

2005	Maldonado et al.	The Student-Initiated Retention Project: Theoretical Contributions and the Role of Self-Empowerment/American Educational Research Journal	They aligned with Bourdieu's theoretical stance in social capital, defining social capital as those social networks and group identifications that provide each of [their] members with the backing of the collectively-owned capital, a credential which entitles them to credit"(pp. 248-249). <u>So</u> they see social capital as more relates to "benefits derived from one's social connections and networks." (p.610)	Student-initiated retention projects operating at the University of Wisconsin and at the University of California, Berkeley benefit underrepresented students of color by strategically helping form informal connections with their professors and others within the respective academic community.
2007	<u>Kao and Rutheford</u>	Does Social Capital Still Matter? Immigrant Minority Disadvantage in School-Specific Social Capital <u>And</u> Its Effects On Academic Achievement." / <i>Sociological Perspectives</i>	Unlike financial capital and human capita, social capital exists only as a result of our interactions with others (Coleman, 1988,1990)." (p.28)	Two measures of social capital— intergenerational closure and parent-school involvement.
2011	<u>Stuber</u>	Inside the College Gates: How Class and Culture Matter in Higher Education/ <i>Lexington Books</i>	She defines social capital is similar to other scholars' conception of social capital (Bourdieu and Coleman), but she intends to capture something broader. <u>So</u> Penny's notion of social capital includes all types of social resources.	<u>Social</u> resources "include sources of information, message about what one should do about this information and the connections that help put this information into action." (p.75)

2014	Fan	<p>The Impact of Economic Capital, Social Capital and Cultural Capital: Chinese Families' Access to Educational Resources /<i>Sociology Mind</i></p>	<p>He defines "social capital as the aggravate of the actual or potential resources available to them through a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships based on mutual acquaintance and recognition." (p.273) In China, a family's social capital may be represented by the status of the parents' workplace or job and can influence the offspring's education (Lauglo, 2011).</p>	<p>The interviewee's main residence at the age of 14, number of siblings Father's political status, Father's registered permanent residence, Father's employment status at the age of 14, ownership of the father's work organization/company at the age of 14, nature of the father's work organization/company at the age of 14, Mother's political status, Mother's registered permanent residence, Mother's employment status at the age of 14, The ownership of the mother's work organization/company at the age of 14, The nature of the mother's work organization/company at the age of 14.</p>
2015	Zhou and Kim	<p>Community Forces, Social Capital, and Educational Achievement: The Case of Supplementary Education in the Chinese and Korean Immigrant Communities/<i>Harvard Educational Review</i></p>	<p>They borrow the definition of social capital from Coleman and <u>Portes</u>, arguing social capital is the closed system of social networks (Coleman), and the ability to access resources by holding memberships in social networks (<u>Portes</u>). Social capital is the social networks immigrant children and parents can access from social locales such as language school in their own ethnic community, they see that as closed networks with resources.</p>	<p>They measure social capital by examining how immigrant children and parents interact within social locations such as language school and after school programs in their own ethnic community in order to build useful social networks and accumulation social capital.</p>

APPENDIX-E

STUDENT FRIENDSHIP CIRCLES—RAW DATA

Min Kao Min (MKM) Students' Friendship Circles—Raw Data

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	1st friend	2nd friend	3rd friend	4th friend	5th friend
Güzile	Female	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur
Venera	Female	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur
Pema	Female	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan
Rayana	Female	Kazakh	Kazakh	Kazakh	Kazakh	Kazakh	Kazakh
Mina	Female	Korean	Korean	Korean	Korean	Korean	Korean
Gyatso	Male	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan
Bari	Male	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur
Pemba	Male	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan
Dolma	Male	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan
Jihee	Female	Korean	Korean	Korean	Korean	Mongolian	Korean
Mehmet	Male	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Uyghur	Han
Esen	Male	Mongolian	Mongolian	Uyghur	Mongolian	Hui	Mongolian
Rinchen	Male	Tibetan	Han	Tibetan	Tibetan	Tibetan	Yi
Arban	Female	Mongolian	Kazakhstan	Uyghur	Tibet	Ewenke	Mongolian

Min Kao Han (MKH) Students' Friendship Circles—Raw Data

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	1st friend	2nd friend	3rd friend	4th friend	5th friend
Lingling	Female	Hui	Hui	Hui	Hui	Hui	Hui
Cheng	Male	Hui	Hui	Han	Hui	Hui	Han
Chunhua	Female	Tu	Tu	Tu	Hui	Man	Han
Donghui	Male	Mongolian	Uyghur	Mongolian	Mongolian	Dai	Han
Adil	Male	Uyghur	Hui	Hui	Han	Uyghur	Han
Xuyan	Female	Tujia	Miao	Yi	Dong	Tujia	Han
Binbin	Female	Miao	Tujia	Han	Han	Mongolian	Han
Hong	Female	Xibo	Mongolian	Man	Tujia	Zhuang	Han
Nan	Female	Mongolian	Han	Dong	Han	Zhuang	Han
Jieru	Female	Tibetan	Han	Han	Han	Han	Han
Guo	Male	Zhuang	Yi	Bai	Uyghur	Han	Han
Mengwei	Male	Miao	Hui	Dawuer	Yi	Han	Han
Wei	Male	Yi	Dawuer	Miao	Han	Man	Lisu
Rui	Male	Hui	Han	Han	Han	Han	Han

Han Students' Friendship Circles—Raw Data

Name	Gender	Ethnicity	1 st friend	2 nd friend	3 rd friend	4 th friend	5 th friend
Li	Male	Han	Han	Han	Han	Han	Han
Ming	Female	Han	Han	Uyghur	Han	Mongolian	Han
Zhe	Female	Han	Bai	Hani	Han	Han	Han
Ya	Female	Han	Han	Man	Han	Han	Korean
Chongye	Male	Han	Tujia	Uyghur	Han	Han	Han
Dagang	Male	Han	Han	Han	Yao	Miao	Han
Shichun	Male	Han	Tujia	Han	Han	Mongolian	Hui
Xiaoying	Female	Han	Han	Han	Zhuang	Bai	Man
Qiaochu	Female	Han	Uyghur	Sala	Hui	Han	Han
Lin	Female	Han	Han	Han	Hui	Tibetan	Miao
Qingqing	Female	Han	Han	Gelao	Hui	Mongolian	Han
Feng	Male	Han	Han	Korean	Mongolian	Tibetan	Han
Yanzhuo	Male	Han	Dong	Miao	Hui	Han	Han
Kai	Male	Han	Uyghur	Yi	Man	Zhuang	Mongolian