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# (Re)Embracing Islam in *Neidi*: the ‘Xinjiang Class’ and the dynamics of Uyghur ethno-national identity

TIMOTHY GROSE

*This Xinjiang Class is a four-year, national-level boarding school program established by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the year 2000. The overarching aim of the program is clear: the CCP intends to train a core group of young Uyghurs who have internalized the ideals of the Party. This article, which is based on interviews and regular interaction with over 60 graduates of the Xinjiang Class, casts doubt on whether the boarding schools have been effective in ‘interpellating’ young Uyghurs as compliant members of the Chinese Nation (Zhonghua minzu). This article contends that Uyghur graduates of the Xinjiang Class have instead embraced a non-Chinese ethno-national identity—an identity bound by Central Asian and Islamic cultural norms—and have largely rejected the Zhonghua minzu identity.*

In May 2011, I spent an afternoon with four graduates of the ‘Xinjiang Class’ (Ch. *Neidi xinjiang gaozhong ban*; Uy. *Ichkiri ölkilärdiki shıñjang toluq ottura sinipliri*), a national-level boarding school program for mostly Uyghur students,<sup>1</sup> which was established by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in the year 2000. It was unseasonably hot for Beijing in May, so Murat, a native of Aksu, suggested we find a shady place to chat over tea and watermelon slices. Murat methodically sliced a watermelon into perfect wedges and displayed the pieces on the table. ‘See, it’s as if we were in Xinjiang’, he joked.

The afternoon quickly gave way to evening, but our conversation had yet to lose steam. Knowing that the Uyghur restaurant near the university would soon open for

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1. The Xinjiang Class enrolls students from diverse ethnic backgrounds (e.g. Uyghur, Han, Hui, Kazakh); however, Uyghur students consistently make up 85–95% of a Xinjiang Class’s student body each year; see Chen Yangbin, *Muslim Uyghur Students in a Chinese Boarding School: Social Recapitalization as a Response to Ethnic Integration* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008), p. 83. Some officials have indicated that in the near future at least 90% of all incoming students will be Uyghur; see ‘Xinjiang sends more students to high schools in China’s inland’, *Xinhua*, (5 August 2011), available at: [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/culture/2011-08/05/c\\_131032080.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/culture/2011-08/05/c_131032080.htm) (accessed 11 November 2012).

dinner, Murat suggested that we continue our discussion over a meal. While Murat cleared the watermelon rinds and the piles of seeds littering the table, he paused suddenly and asked his Uyghur companions, ‘Do we need to perform a *du’a*?’ (Uy. *du’a qilishimiz k r kmu?*), referring to the prayer of supplication/invocation recited by some Muslims after a meal.<sup>2</sup> ‘I don’t know’ (Uy. *Uqmaym n*), the others shrugged. A short debate ensued on whether eating watermelon is considered as a meal and would therefore require a *du’a*. The four individuals finally agreed to err on the safe side and offer the short prayer. Satisfied with their decision, my friends reseated themselves around the table, raised their open palms towards their faces, uttered ‘God is great’ (*Allahu  kb r*),<sup>3</sup> and feigned wiping their faces, which signaled the completion of their invocation.<sup>4</sup>

This extended anecdote neatly encapsulates the tensions experienced by many graduates of the Xinjiang Class. On the one hand, these young Uyghurs, educated in Chinese cities and divorced from their parents’ influence, have not always learned with confidence some of the religious rituals and social customs common to Uyghur communities. This observation is reflected in my four friends’ confusion surrounding the necessity to offer a *du’a* after eating watermelon. These particular individuals performed *du’a* after meals, but they hesitated over the religious obligations tied to eating a snack.

On the other hand, the eventual decision to perform *du’a* reflects the tendency for Xinjiang Class graduates to express themselves as Muslim (and, by extension, ‘proper’ Uyghurs<sup>5</sup>) in ways forbidden in the boarding schools they attended. Since Xinjiang Class students are strictly prohibited from engaging in religious practices, the four individuals’ simple act of performing *du’a* suggests resistance to the CCP’s attempts to ‘interpellate’,<sup>6</sup> or subjugate an individual through a dominant ideology, young Uyghurs as minority *minzu* (ethnic group)<sup>7</sup> members of the *Zhonghua minzu*

2. There are several occasions deemed appropriate to recite *du’a*. Some scholars of Islam in Xinjiang, citing Hadith, list ten, one of which is immediately after eating a meal; see Abab kri Qari, ‘Du’a, du’aning sh rtliri, du’a ijab t bolidighan waqitlar, w  du’aning  d pliri’ [‘Du’a, the requirements of du’a, times du’a will be answered, and proper etiquette for du’a’], in Sh mshidin Haji, ed., *Hiday t G lzari [The Garden of Virtuous Guidance]* (Beijing: The Ethnic Publishing House, 2006), pp. 293–300.

3. Before uttering ‘Allahu  kb r’, some of my informants quietly recited Surah Fatiha. Surah Fatiha is the first chapter of the Qur’an, and it is often spoken during *namaz*.

4. Debate within the broader Muslim community ensues over the necessity (and even the appropriateness) of symbolically wiping one’s face after offering an invocation. However, scholars of Islam in Xinjiang, who generally adhere to the Hanafi school of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), have pointed to a Hadith collected by Abu Dawud (d. 889 CE) in which the Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) instructed his followers to wipe their faces after offering du’a (Uy. *du’adin parigh bolghan waqtinglarda qolunglarni y z nglarga s rk nglar*); *Ibid.*, pp. 298–299.

5. Others have written extensively about the ways young Uyghurs in Xinjiang judge each other on their abilities to communicate fluently in the Uyghur language, their commitments to Islam, and by how often they socialize with Han-Chinese; see: Justin Rudelson, *Oasis Identities: Uyghur Nationalism Along China’s Silk Road* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 127–129; Joanne Smith Finley, ‘“Ethnic anomaly” or modern Uyghur survivor? A case study of the Minkaohan hybrid identity in Xinjiang’, in Ildik  Bell r-Hann *et al.*, eds, *Situating the Uyghurs between China and Central Asia* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 219–238.

6. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971).

7. ‘*Minzu*’ is the Chinese term used to describe the PRC’s 56 ethnic (and ethno-national) groups. The CCP identified these ethnic groups using a loose interpretation of Stalin’s four criteria for ethnic identification (i.e. common language, territory, economy and culture). Recent research has exposed the many imperfections of the CCP’s ethnic identification campaign (Ch. *minzu shibie*). In light of the term’s inadequacies, I will not attempt to translate *minzu* into English. For more on the ambiguity of ethnic designations in China see: Dru Gladney, *Muslim Chinese: Ethnic Nationalism in the People’s Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); Stevan Harrell, *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2001); Thomas

(Chinese Nation). These students have instead embraced countervailing, non-state calls or ‘interpellations’ on how to be Uyghur—a non-Chinese *ethno-national* identity that is bound by the Uyghur language and Central Asian and Islamic cultural norms.

## Methodology

This article draws on nearly 30 months of field research conducted in Beijing and several oases of the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) between February 2006 and August 2013. During this seven-year period, I embarked on five separate research trips to China and recruited 61 graduates of the Xinjiang Class as informants. Despite my use of snowball sampling, the participants of this study provide a representative sample of the Xinjiang Class’s student body. My informants included 33 women and 28 men who graduated from 11 of the original 12 Xinjiang Classes.<sup>8</sup> In addition, approximately 71% of my informants (43 out of 61 individuals), were raised in southern Xinjiang (e.g. Kashgar, Khotan, Aksu, Atush) before enrolling in the boarding school program. This figure compares closely with the Xinjiang Class’s widely published enrollment quota, which requires 80% of incoming students to be from southern Xinjiang (see below). Through regular interactions with these young, highly educated Uyghurs, I sought to answer a series of questions about their ethno-national identities, their personal commitments to Islam, and their abilities to navigate between two often distinct sets of cultural practices—Uyghur and Han-Chinese. I collected the majority of data for this study through participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

## The state and ‘interpellating’ national subjects

There is an apparent disjuncture in the current scholarship on *minzu* identity construction in China. Broader ethnographies have insightfully underscored the creative ways by which minority *minzu* delineate and assert their *minzu* identities,<sup>9</sup> but the overwhelming majority of scholarship produced on minority *minzu* education concedes that state-sponsored education has an immediate impact on the ethnic

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*Footnote 7 continued*

Mullaney, *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2011).

8. The original 12 *neidi* cities designated to host a Xinjiang Class were Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Hangzhou, Shenzhen, Dalian, Qingdao, Ningbo, Suzhou and Wuxi. I will use the term *neidi* (China Proper or Inner China) throughout this article. My informants often distinguished Xinjiang from the rest of China (excluding Tibet) as such.

9. For a brief list, see: Maris Boyd Gillette, *Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption among Urban Chinese Muslims* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000); Gardner Bovingdon, ‘The Not-So-Silent Majority: Uyghur resistance to Han rule in Xinjiang’, *Modern China* 28(1), (2002), pp. 39–78; Gladney, *Muslim Chinese*; Harrell, *Ways of Being Ethnic*; Ralph Litzinger, *Other Chinas: The Yao and the Politics of National Belonging* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Susan McCarthy, *Communist Multiculturalism: Ethnic Revival in Southwest China* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2009); Louisa Schein, *Minority Rules: The Miao and the Feminine in China’s Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); and Joanne Smith Finley, *The Art of Symbolic Resistance: Uyghur Identities and Uyghur–Han Relations in Contemporary Xinjiang* (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2013).

identities of minority students<sup>10</sup> with few dissenting voices.<sup>11</sup> According to this body of work, the CCP's education system, at least in the short term,<sup>12</sup> virtually guarantees students' affinity to the *Zhonghua minzu*.

Louis Althusser's concept of 'interpellation' may be a useful theoretical tool to help intervene in this scholarly debate. Early Marxist treatises stipulate that the state exerts authority through 'violence' via a tightly bound network of institutions (e.g. the government, the army, courts, prisons), institutions that he labels the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). Althusser made an important intervention in early Marxist conceptualizations of the state that, he contended, simplistically identified the state as purely a tool wielded by the ruling class to repress the proletariat.<sup>13</sup> The overlooked components in this blueprint of the state are the myriad institutions (e.g. public schools, the media, literature and the arts) that are connected by and operate through the ideology of the dominant class, institutions Althusser refers to as the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA).<sup>14</sup>

Ideology is the linchpin of this model. It imbues individuals with an understanding about the ways society operates and about how one properly performs his/her role in a given social relationship. Using Althusser's famous metaphor, we can understand ideology as the veiled driving force that subconsciously compels an individual to respond to the hypothetical police officer who is shouting 'Hey, you there!'<sup>15</sup>

Althusser singles out the state-sponsored education system, or the 'educational ideological apparatus', as the most persuasive tool employed by states to 'interpellate' or subjugate, their populace. On the 'educational state apparatus' or, more simply, state schools, Althusser contends:

[State schooling] drums into [students regardless of class] . . . a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology (French, arithmetic, natural history, the sciences, literature) or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state (ethics, civic instructions, philosophy).<sup>16</sup>

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10. Indeed, I am making a general claim with this point, and I do appreciate the nuances of these studies. Nonetheless, the majority of scholarship on minority *minzu* education in China agrees that minority *minzu* students construct their identities within the confines of China's state discourse. See, for example: Dru Gladney, 'The ethnogenesis of the Uighur', *Central Asian Survey* 9, (1990), p. 15; Dru Gladney, 'Making Muslims in China: education, Islamicization, and representation', in Gerald A. Postiglione, ed., *China's National Minority Education: Culture Schooling, and Development* (New York: Falmer Press, 1999), pp. 55–94; Edward Kormondy, 'Minority education in Inner Mongolia and Tibet', *Internationale Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft* 48(5), (2002), pp. 377–401; Jennifer Taynen, 'Interpreters, arbiters or outsiders: the role of the Min kao Han in Xinjiang society', *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26(1), (2007), pp. 45–62; Yu Haibo, *Identity and Schooling among the Naxi* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); Zhu Zhiyong, *State Schooling and Ethnic Identity: The Politics of a Tibetan Neidi School in China* (New York: Lexington Books, 2007).

11. Mette Halskov Hansen, *Lessons in Being Chinese: Minority Education and Ethnic Identity in Southwest China* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1999); James Leibold and Chen Yangbin, eds, *Multicultural Education in China: Integration, Adaptation, and Resistance* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2014).

12. Joanne Smith Finley provides an interesting example in which a *minkaohan* (minority student who is educated in Chinese-language schools) Uyghur breaks away from the *Zhonghua minzu* over her life course. Before this individual 'returned' to Uyghur traditions, however, she was stigmatized by her Uyghur peers for possessing a weak command of the Uyghur language and for her disinterest in Islam, both of which were attributed to her Chinese education; see Smith Finley, "'Ethnic anomaly" or modern Uyghur survivor?'

13. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, pp. 140–148.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 144–145.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Staying consistent with Althusser's language, we can say that schools teach students how to think about themselves as citizens (and subjects) of a particular state, and they instruct students how to act as loyal citizens.

According to Althusser's theory, the CCP is using these schools as a way to 'interpellate' students. Many recent studies have assumed the Party has succeeded in these aims, but my conversations lead me to a different conclusion. Indeed, Althusser recognized that public schools, as direct appendages of the state, indoctrinate or 'interpellate' students. However, Althusser was clear: 'An ideology always exists in an apparatus, and its practice, or practices. This existence is material'.<sup>17</sup> In other words, those ideologies that derive from the state and are disseminated in state schools do not necessarily persist outside of the classroom (i.e. across space) or after a student has graduated (i.e. across space and time). Past research on Chinese minority education has overlooked this important caveat. Although students are 'interpellated' through grading, dress codes, rules and similar formalities, this process only occurs while students are enrolled in state-sponsored schools. Outside the classroom, however, state ideology does not remain unchallenged.

Alternate ideologies surely operate within a given society.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, there are several competing, non-state ideologies available to Uyghurs of the Xinjiang Class. These non-state ideologies originate from and are perpetuated by Uyghur communities in Xinjiang,<sup>19</sup> religious teachings, and even Uyghur nationalist groups in diaspora.<sup>20</sup> Althusser would surely agree that they also 'interpellate' young Uyghurs.

This study departs slightly from Althusser by demonstrating that young Uyghur graduates of the Xinjiang Class subscribe more often to non-state ideologies. Here, I am not arguing that the CCP's ideology has failed and other ideologies have succeeded—advancing this understanding would continue to empower 'ideology' as an impenetrable structuring agent in society—rather, I contend that the young, well-educated Uyghurs who are the focus of this study, although 'always-already interpellated',<sup>21</sup> exercise agency in their *choice* to embrace either the call to be contributing members of the *Zhonghua minzu* or the call to be 'rebellious' non-participants.

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17. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

18. In his critique of Althusser, Pêcheux puts forward the concept of 'unevenness-subordination', which questions whether the Ideological State Apparatus alone can produce (or reproduce) social relationships. Pêcheux argues that 'regional properties' (or specific conditions such as religion and knowledge that are distinctive to a specific locale), 'condition [ISAs'] relative importance'; see: Michel Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious* (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 99–102.

19. Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Routledge, 1985); see also, Ildikó Bellér-Hann, *Community Matters in Xinjiang: Towards a Historical Anthropology of the Uyghur* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2008).

20. For an interesting look at how YouTube videos are used by Uyghur nationalists to undermine the dominant ideologies of the CCP, see: Matteo Vergani and Dennis Zuev, 'Analysis of YouTube videos used by activists in the Uyghur nationalist movement: combining quantitative and qualitative methods', *Journal of Contemporary China* 20 (69), (2011), pp. 205–229.

21. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, p. 175.

## The Xinjiang Class—a CCP attempt to ‘interpellate’ young Uyghurs

Arguably the most dramatic change to Xinjiang’s education system began as a footnote. Deep within a 1999 policy paper outlining comprehensive strategies for ‘strengthening minority education’ (Ch. *jiaqiang shaoshuminzu jiaoyu*), the General Office of the State Council announced the establishment of the ‘Xinjiang Class’, which would commence in fall 2000. The details of this new program were hazy. One thousand students from Xinjiang were to be selected to complete their senior-secondary schooling in one of 12 designated *neidi* cities. Apart from indicating that Chinese would be the language of classroom instruction, the document offered few other specifics.<sup>22</sup>

The scale of the Xinjiang Class has been expanded several times during its 14-year existence. For the first five years of the program (2000–2004), yearly enrollment stood firmly at 1,000, and these students attended school in one of 12 designated *neidi* cities. By 2005, yearly enrollment jumped to 3,075 students, and the number of participant cities doubled. In 2010, the program’s annual enrollment surged to 6,378 students and the number of schools, which were then spread across 35 cities, increased to 67.<sup>23</sup> In 2012, matriculating classes once again increased, to over 8,000 students. Enrollment in the Xinjiang Class is showing no signs of slowing down. According to projections for the 2014 academic year, the Xinjiang Class will admit 10,000 students, the vast majority of whom will be Uyghur.<sup>24</sup>

The Administrative Office of the Xinjiang Class oversees the recruitment process and selects students based on several criteria. First, students are evaluated on test performance. Second, enrollment is shaped by a comprehensive quota system. A student’s *minzu* status, hometown and financial background are considered in order to ensure that 80% of all incoming students are from southern Xinjiang’s impoverished rural and nomadic regions.<sup>25</sup> Admitting 80% of its students from southern Xinjiang guarantees that the majority of Xinjiang Class students will be Uyghur.<sup>26</sup> Finally, students must satisfactorily pass a complete physical examination conducted at a county-level hospital or higher.

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22. General Office of the State Council of the PRC, ‘Guowuyuan bangongting zhuanfa jiaoyubu deng bumen guanyu jinyibu jiaqiang shaoshu minzu diqu rencai peiyang gongzuo yijian de tongzhi’ [‘Information about suggestions of the State Council’s General Office to the Ministry of Education and other relevant departments concerning the work for strengthening education in minority areas’], (1999), available at: [http://www.xjdr.gov.cn/copy\\_3\\_copy\\_1\\_second.jsp?urltype=news.NewsContentUrl&wbtreid=11118&wbnewsid=122283](http://www.xjdr.gov.cn/copy_3_copy_1_second.jsp?urltype=news.NewsContentUrl&wbtreid=11118&wbnewsid=122283) (accessed 9 April 2012).

23. ‘Ichkiri ölkilärdiki shingang toluq ottura sinipliri on yilda shingangha 30 mingdäk oqughchi täbiyaläp bärdi’ [‘During the past ten years, the Xinjiang Class has educated nearly thirty-thousand students for Xinjiang’], *Xinjiang Education Newspaper*, (30 April 2010), p. 1.

24. ‘Xitay da’iriliri xitay ottura mäktäpliridiki ‘shingang sinipi’ning sani häm kölimini yänä kengäytti’ [‘Chinese leaders will again expand the number of schools and scale of the Xinjiang Class’], *Radio Free Asia*, (2 August 2012), available at: [http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/tepsili\\_xewer/shingang-sinipi-08022012163222.html](http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/tepsili_xewer/shingang-sinipi-08022012163222.html) (accessed 15 August 2012).

25. China Education and Research Network, ‘Neidi Xinjiang gaozhong ban guanli banfa (shixing)’ [‘Administrative Procedures for the Xinjiang Class (trial)’], (2000), available at: [http://www.edu.cn/xie\\_zuo\\_826/20060323/t20060323\\_110910.shtml](http://www.edu.cn/xie_zuo_826/20060323/t20060323_110910.shtml) (accessed 15 October 2008).

26. The vast majority of China’s Uyghurs live in rural areas of southern Xinjiang; see: Stanley Toops, ‘Demographics and development in Xinjiang after 1949’, *East West Center Washington Working Papers* 1, (2004), pp. 20–21.

After arriving at the Xinjiang Class, students engage in an arduous four-year education, and the preponderance of their time is dedicated to studying. The first year of the program is devoted to ‘preparatory courses’ (Ch. *yuke*) aimed at improving students’ Chinese language skills and building strong foundations in mathematics and the sciences. Courses in classical Chinese (Ch. *guwen*) and English are also taught during this intensive first year of study.<sup>27</sup>

The preparatory courses may be extremely challenging for students, depending on the extent a student has studied Chinese. Several Xinjiang Class graduates who completed their junior-secondary schooling (Ch. *chuzhong*) at a *minkaomin* school, or a school where minority languages are used as the medium of classroom instruction, as opposed to *minkaohan* (Chinese-language) schools, remarked about the stress of their preparatory studies. One female *minkaomin* student from Khotan who graduated from the Wuxi Xinjiang Class in 2008 recalled:

Classes were too hard, especially the Chinese classes. My whole day from 7 AM until 10 PM was arranged, and all I did was study. I didn’t have any hobbies or anything. You know, I was a good student in Xinjiang, but in *neidi* I struggled with my classes, and it made me feel very ‘inferior’ (Ch. *zibei*) [to my classmates who knew Chinese].

Individuals who came to the Xinjiang Class with prior knowledge of Chinese, especially those who attended either ‘*minkaohan*’ or ‘experimental bilingual’ junior-secondary schools (Ch. *shiyān shuāngyǔ bān*), where Chinese is used as the language of instruction for math and science, did not experience the same types of difficulties during their preparatory studies. In fact, one female graduate of a Xinjiang Class in Shanghai who completed her junior-secondary education at an ‘experimental bilingual’ school shrugged off her first year as being ‘relaxing’ (Ch. *qīngsōng*).

For the remaining three years of the program, students maintain a tightly structured schedule of coursework (conducted entirely in Chinese) and monitored self-study. Students are expected to work up to 14 hours a day, six days a week, and they study the same curriculum (including textbooks) as local Han-Chinese students.<sup>28</sup> Several of my informants reconstructed a typical day in the Xinjiang Class. Although these individuals attended Xinjiang Classes in different cities, their daily schedules were remarkably uniform and followed the basic routine as indicated in Table 1.

Looking back at his weekly schedule, one Xinjiang Class graduate complained:

The rules at the Xinjiang Class were very strict, and we weren’t allowed to leave the grounds of the school. It was like prison (Uy. *türmä*). Every day was spent studying. A 24-hour day for me at the Xinjiang Class consisted of studying, eating, and sleeping. You could say we were like robots (Uy. *mashina adäm disämmu bolidu*).

Daily schedules changed only slightly on weekends. Saturdays were occasionally set aside for arranged outings to local sites of interests, but students returned in the evening for individual study sessions. Sundays were reserved for laundry and supplemental classes (Ch. *buke*).

27. Ministry of Education of the People’s Republic of China, ‘Neidi xinjiang gaozhong ban gongzuo huiyi jiyao’ [‘Summary of the Xinjiang Class Work Meeting’], (2000), available at: <http://www.chinalawedu.com/news/1200/22598/22610/22752/2006/3/qi5221945111360025013-0.htm> (accessed 1 September 2008).

28. *Ibid.*



**Table 1.** Xinjiang Class weekday schedule<sup>a</sup>

6:30 AM: Wake-up	5:00–6:00 PM: Self-study
6:45 AM: Morning exercises	6:00–6:30 PM: Dinner
7:00 AM: Breakfast	6:30–7:30 PM: Self-study
7:30 AM: Morning reading	7:30–7:50 PM: Watch national news broadcast
8:00–11:20 AM: Class	8:00–9:30 PM: Self-study
11:30 AM–1:00 PM: Lunch/break	9:30 PM: Return to dormitory
1:00–5:00 PM: Class	10:10 PM: Lights out

Note: <sup>a</sup> For another example of a typical weekly schedule in a Xinjiang Class, see Chen, *Muslim Uyghur Students*, pp. 192–193.

Certainly, the rigorous academic schedules of the Xinjiang Class schools are not unlike boarding school programs attended by Han-Chinese students.<sup>29</sup> Yet, CCP officials and school administrators give primacy to political indoctrination before educational goals, which sets the Xinjiang Class apart from otherwise similar regional boarding schools attended by Han students. The ‘Administrative Procedures of the Xinjiang Class’, one of the program’s governing documents, is explicit about the political importance of the boarding school program. Article One announces:

In order to train qualified senior-secondary school graduates in Xinjiang who support the Chinese Communist Party’s leaders, love China, love socialism, defend the unity of China, [and] uphold [the principle of] ‘*minzu* unity’ . . . and are determined to dedicate themselves to socialist modernization, the Xinjiang Class must fully carry out the national education policy, *minzu* policies, [and] quality education.<sup>30</sup>

Article Ten adds:

Schools hosting a Xinjiang Class will adhere to the socialist direction for managing schools; [they will] emphasize moral education work, Marxism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory and the Party’s *minzu* theory as guides. In accordance with the overall goals of moral education, the [general] growth of students, as well as the [special] characteristics of minority students, courses and teaching activities, inside and outside of the classroom, will be guided in the context of political and ideological work. In addition to requiring the organization of political classes . . . special attention will be placed on strengthening support for the Chinese Communist Party, on loving the socialist motherland, on upholding the unity of Chinese patriotic education, and on strengthening education on *minzu* unity—i.e., Han are inseparable from ethnic minorities, ethnic minorities are inseparable from the Han, and every ethnic minority is inseparable from one another.<sup>31</sup>

Finally, the ‘Summary of the Xinjiang Class Work Meeting’, another guiding document of the program, urges:

While improving the overall quality of students, a high-degree of emphasis should be placed on education work; in particular, [we should] place Marx’s theories on

29. Andrew Kipnis, ‘Subjectification and education for quality in China’, *Economy and Society* 40(2), (2011), p. 299.

30. China Education and Research Network, ‘Administrative Procedures for the Xinjiang Class (trial)’.

31. *Ibid.*

nationalities and religion as well as the Party's *minzu* and religious policies at prominent positions [in the school's curriculum] in order for students to establish unwavering socialist convictions.<sup>32</sup>

There has been an unmistakable doubling down on the political objectives of the Xinjiang Class. In 2005, Wang Lequan, then-Party Secretary of Xinjiang, announced that in order to more effectively counteract the 'three evil forces' (Ch. *san gu shili*; Uy. *üch xil küch*) threatening Xinjiang,<sup>33</sup> ideological and political education would be placed at the 'forefront' (Ch. *shouyao weizhi*) of the program.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, Tao Jiaqing and Yang Xiaohua, administrator and teacher, respectively, of a Xinjiang Class in Jiangsu Province, confirm that beyond providing classroom instruction, teachers 'more importantly help [students] identify themselves with the culture of the *Zhonghua minzu* ... and [help] enhance their awareness of national solidarity'.<sup>35</sup>

School officials go to great lengths to reorient the identities of Xinjiang Class students to align more closely with the Party's values. Teachers are instructed to 'infiltrate' (Ch. *shentou*) their students' minds with the 'four identifications' (Ch. *si ge rentong*): identification with the motherland (Ch. *zuguo*; read: PRC), the *Zhonghua minzu*, Chinese culture (Ch. *Zhonghua wenhua*) and socialism with Chinese characteristics (Ch. *zhongguo tese shehuizhuyi*).<sup>36</sup>

In an apparent attempt to accelerate this process, the CCP has decided to educate Xinjiang Class students on campuses and in cities where Han-Chinese constitute a majority. In fact, Article 3.3 of the 'Summary of the Xinjiang Class Work Meeting' predicts that establishing Xinjiang Classes at schools where the student body is predominately Han will help 'promote friendships between Xinjiang minority students and Han students'.<sup>37</sup> Although currently Xinjiang Class students rarely share learning spaces with local Han students, the Xinjiang Class is designed to eventually integrate its classrooms. Article Five of the 'Administrative Procedures of the Xinjiang Class (trial)' instructs that 'when conditions ripen (Ch. *tiaojian chengshu hou*), Xinjiang Class students will be "mixed" (Ch. *hunhe*) with local Han students in the same classroom'.<sup>38</sup>

32. Ministry of Education of the PRC, 'Summary of the Xinjiang Class Work Meeting'.

33. The so-called 'three evil forces' in Xinjiang refer to 'terrorism' (Ch. *kongbuzhuyi*; Uy. *térrorchiliq*), 'separatism' (Ch. *fenliezhuli*; Uy. *bölgünchilik*) and [religious] 'extremism' (Ch. *jiduanzhuyi*; Uy. *ékstrimizm*). The phrase 'three evil forces' was coined in the early-mid 1990s to specifically describe Islamic terrorism, separatism and extremism and is frequently used in discussions on counterterrorism by members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). For more on China's involvement in the SCO, see: Yuan Jing-Dong, 'China's role in establishing and building the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)', *Journal of Contemporary China* 19(67), (2010), pp. 855-869.

34. 'Sixiang zhengzhi jiaoyu shi neidi xinjiang ban de shouyao renwu' ['Ideological and political education is the most important task of the Xinjiang Class'], *China Radio International*, (24 June 2005), available at: <http://gb.cri.cn/3821/2005/06/24/1385@596748.htm> (accessed 12 April 2012).

35. Tao Jiaqing and Yang Xiaohua, 'Our good Han mothers', *Chinese Education and Society* 43(3), (2010), pp. 64-72.

36. Zhang Shiyi, 'Ban hao neidi xinjiang gaozhong ban, ba minzu tuanjiu jiaoyu luodao shichu' ['Effectively managing the Xinjiang Class, implementing ethnic unity education'], in Li Yi, ed., *Minzu tuanjie jiaoyu gongzuo jingyan xuanbian* [Selected Work Experiences on Ethnic Unity Education] (Beijing: The Ethnic Publishing House, 2010), pp. 125-136.

37. Ministry of Education of the PRC, 'Summary of the Xinjiang Class Work Meeting'.

38. China Education and Research Network, 'Administrative Procedures for the Xinjiang Class (Trial)'.

Meanwhile, Xinjiang Class students are immersed in a school-regulated culture where Han-Chinese cultural norms are valorized. For instance, students are required to observe major holidays usually celebrated by Han people. These holidays include Qing Ming, Mid-Autumn Festival and Chinese New Year.<sup>39</sup> In celebration of the Qing Ming Festival,<sup>40</sup> Xinjiang Class students in Tacheng visited Martyrs Park (Ch. *lieshi lingyuan*) to tidy the graves of Chinese revolutionaries.<sup>41</sup> The purpose of organizing ‘grave sweeping’ outings on Qing Ming, according to the Xinjiang Class’s official website, is to teach students two important principles: (1) without the CCP, New China would not exist; and (2) backwardness needs to be beaten away (Ch. *luohou jiu yao aida*).<sup>42</sup>

To be sure, activities are also arranged for Eid al-Fitr (Uy. *Roza héyt*) and Eid al-Adha (Uy. *Qurban héyt*), two major holidays celebrated by Muslims worldwide. However, unlike Muslim minority students in Xinjiang who receive three days of vacation for *Roza* and one day for the *Qurban* festival, Xinjiang Class students are only granted one day of recess for each holiday.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, these celebrations are entirely secular, usually consisting of song and dance performances. Given the state’s perennial preference for secular material culture of minority *minzu*, it is evident that these activities are not organized to celebrate Muslim culture.<sup>44</sup> In fact, school officials in Shanghai instruct,

During these happy occasions [*Roza* and *Qurban*], [we should] allow students to feel the loving care (Ch. *guanhuai*) of the government, the school, and Party members; and remember: as long as it is a festival of the *Zhonghua minzu*, we will all be happy.<sup>45</sup>

Some school officials even coerce students to attend class during the two major Muslim holidays. Graduates of the Wuxi Xinjiang Class recalled the ‘option’ they were given to attend class during *Roza*. As one former student explained:

All of us went to class on *Roza*. Even though we had the day off, the teachers still came in and taught class like normal. The pace at which things are taught at the Xinjiang Class was so fast, we would be so far behind if we missed one class. Plus, the teachers wouldn’t be willing to reteach a lesson. We would be crazy *not* to go to class.

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39. ‘Qiantan neidi xinjiang gaozhong ban minzu tuanjie jiaoyu de youxiao tuijin’ [‘A brief discussion on the Xinjiang Class’ effective channels for “ethnic unity” education’], *The Xinjiang Class Online*, (2012). Available at: <http://www.xjban.com/kanwu/dysxyj/2012/50523.htm> (accessed 19 November 2012).

40. Qing Ming Festival is celebrated 15 days after the Spring Equinox. On this day, it is customary to visit the grave sites of deceased relatives, sweep their graves and make offerings (Ch. *jisao*).

41. ‘Tachengshi tianjiabing zhongxue zuzhi xinjiang ban shisheng qingming jie jisao geming lieshi mu’ [‘Tacheng’s Tianjiabing Middle School organizes Qing Ming activity for teachers and students of the Xinjiang Class to sweep the tombs of revolutionary martyrs’], *Jiangsu Ethnic Religions* (official translation), (2011), available at: [http://www.jszmzj.gov.cn/art/2011/4/6/art\\_14\\_13273.html](http://www.jszmzj.gov.cn/art/2011/4/6/art_14_13273.html) (accessed 19 November 2012).

42. ‘A brief discussion on the Xinjiang Class’ effective channels for “ethnic unity” education’, *The Xinjiang Class Online*.

43. General Office of the Ministry of Education. ‘Guanyu neidi xinjiang gaozhong ban xuesheng guo guerbang jie he rouzi jie youguan wenti de tongzhi’ [‘A notice about questions related to how Xinjiang Class students will celebrate the Qurban and Roza holidays’], (2000), available at: [http://school.sjyz.sjedu.cn/yz/Article/Article\\_Print.asp?ArticleID=12509](http://school.sjyz.sjedu.cn/yz/Article/Article_Print.asp?ArticleID=12509) (accessed 19 November 2012).

44. Gillette, *Between Mecca and Beijing*.

45. Shanghai Fengxian Middle School, ‘Fengxian zhongxue xinjiang ban qing kuang’ [‘The conditions at Fengxian Middle School’s Xinjiang Class’], (2006), available at: <http://www.fxzx.fx.edu.sh.cn/xjbfm/open.asp?articl eID=2732&classid=162> (accessed 10 September 2012).

Although Xinjiang Class students are ‘officially’ permitted to celebrate the *Roza* and *Qurban* holidays, in reality, students have little choice but to attend class on these important occasions.

Indeed, students are required to abide by strict rules. According to the Xinjiang Class’s official ‘student handbook’ (Ch. *xuesheng shouce*), students are prohibited from arguing, swearing, spitting, littering, stealing, smoking, drinking alcohol, viewing pornographic material and singing ‘unhealthy’ songs (Ch. *bu jiankang de gequ*).<sup>46</sup> The most serious punishments are reserved for those students who engage in religious practice. Actions resulting in a student’s immediate expulsion, in the order they are listed, include:

- (1) participating in any form of ethnic separatist activity or illegal religious activity;
- (2) engaging in feudalistic superstitious activities (Ch. *fengjian mixin huodong*), religious activities (including prayer) (Ch. *libai*),<sup>47</sup> especially if the student has been reprimanded several times and has not changed the behavior;
- (3) leaving campus without permission; staying off campus; missing more than three days of class;
- (4) instigating trouble or disturbing classroom order; or
- (5) stealing the property of others, smoking, drinking and gambling.<sup>48</sup>

According to my informants, these rules, especially those pertaining to religious practice, are strictly enforced. As recently as July 2011, two male Uyghur Xinjiang Class students in Hangzhou were reportedly expelled for attending prayer at a local mosque.<sup>49</sup>

Restrictions on religious practice are not limited to prayer. Muqäddäs, a female graduate of the first cohort of Xinjiang Class students, vividly recalled her school’s abrupt decision to ban headscarves. After their arrival at the Hangzhou Xinjiang Class, many Uyghur girls continued to wear head coverings. Unaware of the religious significance of headscarves, school officials initially permitted female students to wear them on campus. As the semester continued, however, school officials discovered that wearing headscarves served as a form of religious expression and

46. Xinjiang Department of Education, ‘Neidi xinjiang gaozhongban xuesheng shouze’ [‘Xinjiang Class student regulations’], (2011), available at: <http://www.dhxx.net/xjb/gzgd/201104/20110426141617.html> (accessed 12 November 2012). Although documents do not clarify what is meant by ‘unhealthy songs’, it may be a direct reference to the Uyghurs’ use of music to disseminate messages about Uyghur independence; see: Nimrod Baranovitch, ‘From the margins to the centre: the Uyghur challenge in Beijing’, *The China Quarterly* 175, (2003), pp. 726–750; Bovington, ‘The Not-So-Silent Majority’; Rachel Harris, ‘Cassettes, bazaars, and saving the nation: the Uyghur music industry in Xinjiang China’, in Timothy Craig and Richard King, eds, *Global Goes Local: Popular Culture in Asia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2001), pp. 265–283; Joanne Smith Finley, ‘The quest for national unity in Uyghur popular song: barren chickens, stray dogs, fake immortals and thieves’, in Ian Biddle and Vanessa Knights, eds, *Music, National Identity and the Politics of Location: Between the Global and the Local* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 115–141.

47. This document does not discern between Islam’s obligatory prayers, which are normally performed five times a day (Uy. *namaz*) and prayers of supplication (Uy. *du’a*). According to my informants, all forms of prayer are forbidden.

48. *Ibid.*

49. ‘Xitay da’irilirli xitay ottura mäktäpliridiki ‘shinjang sinipi’ning sani häm kölimini yänä kéngäytti’ [‘Chinese leaders will again expand the number of schools and scale of the Xinjiang Class’], *Radio Free Asia* (Uyghur Language Service), (8 August 2010), available at: [http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/tepsili\\_xewer/shinjang-sinipi-08022012163222.html](http://www.rfa.org/uyghur/xewerler/tepsili_xewer/shinjang-sinipi-08022012163222.html) (accessed 5 August 2012).

then decided to ban the practice. Muqäddäs and several of her classmates protested the decision. These students insisted on covering their heads because ‘we were Muslim’. According to Muqäddäs, one teacher retorted, ‘No, right now you are not Muslims; you are only students’. This particular teacher’s statement is especially powerful and reflects the CCP’s official policy on the religious practices of students: not only are Xinjiang Class students forbidden to act as Muslims, they are being told they cannot even claim the identity while enrolled in the boarding school.<sup>50</sup>

The political goals of the Xinjiang Class are evident. Party officials intend to instill Chinese patriotism, feelings of ethnic unity and the values of the CCP in young Uyghurs. To this end, the Xinjiang Class enforces a series of policies, from stringent restrictions on religious practice to a Chinese monolingual language policy that limits Uyghur students’ use of their mother tongue, in an attempt to realign Uyghur identity to fit within the *Zhonghua minzu*. These policies are augmented by a Han-dominated learning environment in *neidi*. The next section assesses whether the Xinjiang Class’s political goals are being realized.

### Embracing Islam in *neidi*

The harsh punishments for openly practicing Islam compelled my informants to obey the Xinjiang Class’s policy on religion; however, once these students graduated from the boarding school, many began to cultivate personal piety. As university students in *neidi*, young Uyghurs enjoy a relatively relaxed political climate. They do not risk serious repercussions for attending prayers at mosques; they surf a less-regulated Internet; they have opportunities to meet foreign Muslim students; and they can return to Xinjiang during both winter and summer recess. Graduates of the Xinjiang Class are therefore exposed to several non-state ideologies which also ‘interpellate’ these individuals.

In ways similar to Uyghur youth in Xinjiang,<sup>51</sup> Xinjiang Class graduates regularly communicate their ethno-national identity through Islamic practice. Aynur, a graduate of the Wuxi Xinjiang Class who spent her childhood in Qumul (Ch. *Hami*), never impressed me as being especially religious during extended research in 2010 and 2011. By 2012, however, Aynur’s attitudes toward Islam had changed. Aynur and I agreed to meet for coffee at her campus’s coffee shop, a popular hangout and the spot we had designated as our regular meeting place. Just before our scheduled meeting, I received a text message from Aynur apologizing that our reunion would have to be cut short. Several minutes later, Aynur rushed into the café appearing more dressed up than usual. Aynur’s regular ensemble of a t-shirt, blue jeans and a ponytail had been replaced by a long dress, straightened hair and cosmetics. I asked Aynur about her formal attire, and she replied proudly:

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50. ‘Ordinary’ citizens in China are guaranteed the right to believe or not believe in religion under the constitution. However, Bovington, pointing to CCP documents, uncovers that students are not included under the designation of ‘ordinary’ citizen. Therefore, students are essentially provided with only the freedom to not believe. See: Gardner Bovington, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), pp. 68–72.

51. Smith Finley, *The Art of Symbolic Resistance* (see especially chs 5 and 7).

Today, I am going to the Saudi Arabian embassy to receive a Uyghur-language Qur'an. You know the versions of the Qur'an available in Xinjiang aren't good because the government has translated them incorrectly. The Qur'ans at the Saudi Embassy are real. As long as I present my identification card at the embassy, and they see that I am a Uyghur, they will give me a Qur'an. I am going to get two; one for my parents and one for myself. Since I am a college senior and do not have much coursework, I finally have time to start reading the Qur'an.

Aynur learned from one of her university classmates in Beijing, also a graduate of the Xinjiang Class, that the Saudi Embassy supplied copies of the Qur'an to Muslims. Fully aware of the CCP's tight control of religious publications,<sup>52</sup> I asked Aynur if she had to obtain special permission to receive a Qur'an. She confidently replied, 'No, but I am not going to tell anyone about this either'.

While some young Uyghurs were content reading the Qur'an in translation, others aspired to read the Qur'an in Arabic, which Muslims believe is the literal word of God transmitted to Muhammad by the angel Gabriel. During the 2010 fall semester, word had spread among Beijing Normal University's (Ch. *Beijing shifan daxue* or BNU) Uyghur students that the nearby Beijing Language and Culture University (Ch. *Beijing yuyan daxue*) was offering free public Arabic classes. A group of five female Xinjiang Class graduates from BNU, all of whom spent their early childhoods in either Kashgar or Khotan, regularly participated in the program. Unlike many university students in Beijing who use their weekends to escape heavy loads of coursework, these young women elected to study another foreign language in their leisure time. Over lunch with this group of young women, I asked about their motivations for studying Arabic. They hoped the weekend classes would provide the necessary foundations required for pronouncing Qur'anic verses (*ayat*) correctly. The group of women quickly reminded me that the Qur'an was originally transmitted to the Prophet Muhammad in Arabic.

Räna, a 2010 Beijing Xinjiang Class graduate originally from Khotan, similarly took advantage of Beijing's cosmopolitan population to learn about Islam. During our first meeting in late spring 2013, I was surprised to see that Räna covered her entire head with a hijab. Although wearing hijab is becoming more popular among young women in Ürümqi, especially those living near the Erdaoqiao District (Uy. *Döngköwrük*),<sup>53</sup> the practice is not necessarily the norm for Uyghur women in other regions of Xinjiang,<sup>54</sup> and this style of head covering is virtually unseen in Beijing, especially among Uyghur university students. In fact, Räna told me she had

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52. One of the 23 identified illegal religious activities (Ch. *feifa zongjiao huodong*; Uy. *qanunsiz dini pa'aliyätleri*) in Xinjiang is printing and disseminating religious materials; see Timothy Grose, "'Secular saints" of Xinjiang: Qurban Tulum, Qadir Baqi, and the installation of "ethnic unity" heroes', *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* 12(1), (2012), p. 53.

53. Joanne Smith Finley, 'Chinese oppression in Xinjiang, Middle Eastern conflicts and global Islamic solidarities among the Uyghurs', *Journal of Contemporary China* 16(53), (2007), p. 637.

54. For example, in Pichan County, where I have made several week-long trips, I observed that young women typically wear a thin scarf which only covers the top of the head. One young woman from neighboring Turpan explained to me that beyond containing religious significance, this type of head scarf serves several practical purposes. Since many Uyghur women engage in agricultural labor, these scarves help to keep young women's hair back as well as help to absorb sweat, especially during the hot summer months.

only ‘accepted my *hijab*’ (Uy. *yaghliqni qobul qildim*)<sup>55</sup> seven months prior, shortly after she returned to China from a two-month service trip to Egypt. Rāna’s short stay in Egypt deepened her interest in Islam, which she explained began during her childhood after her grandparents returned to Khotan from a pilgrimage to Mecca. Rāna often spoke at length about the bonds she established with Egyptian Muslims she met on her trip. Rāna desired to form more meaningful relationships with Muslims living in China’s capital, so she began to attend Friday prayers (*jümä*) at the mosque maintained by the Sudanese Embassy, a mosque where Muslims from around the world congregate each Friday.<sup>56</sup> After Rāna performed *namaz* each Friday, she would meet with several other young Muslim women to learn how to recite the Qur’an in Arabic.

Finally, Raziyä, a graduate of one of the Beijing Xinjiang Classes, also began to study the Qur’an in Arabic. Instead of enrolling in Arabic classes or participating in reading groups, Raziyä, who married a Pakistani national, studied under the tutelage of her mother-in-law, a native Urdu speaker who is also proficient in Arabic. Raziyä enthusiastically shared her experiences reading the Qur’an with her mother-in-law:

While I was visiting family in Pakistan, my mother-in-law began to teach me how to read the Qur’an in Arabic. I would never have been able to do this in Xinjiang. It also showed me how closely related Arabic is with the Uyghur language. So many words are the same. Reading the Qur’an also made me feel close to my husband’s family because even though it was hard to communicate with each other, we shared being Muslim.

Of course it is conceivable that Raziyä’s apparent enthusiasm for reading the Qur’an may have been spurred by familial pressure as opposed to genuine interest. Nevertheless, Raziyä insisted that she would continue studying the Qur’an with her husband.

Instead of questioning the intentions of these young women, it may prove more instructive to tie their actions to similar trends occurring in Central Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. Recent studies have revealed that young, often highly educated Muslim women study Islamic texts (mainly the Qur’an and Hadith) in their leisure time. The motivations of these women are multi-fold. In addition to providing an outlet for religious expression, communal readings of sacred texts build solidarity among female peer groups,<sup>57</sup> and, through activism, these groups help pave avenues

55. ‘*Yaghliq*’ (headscarf) was the general term used by my informants to describe both simple head coverings that are worn on top of a woman’s head (also referred to as *sharpa*) and more conservative head coverings that are tied under a woman’s chin leaving only the face exposed (*hijab*). This designation does not include full veils, ‘*niqap*’ (Uy. *chümbäl*), which expose only the eyes, or *romal*, the burka-type heavy veils more commonly seen in southern Xinjiang.

56. ‘Foreign Muslims in China celebrate Eid-al-Fitr’, *China Central Television*, available at: <http://english.cntv.cn/program/newupdate/20100910/103564.shtml> (accessed 17 June 2013).

57. See, Maimuna Huq, ‘Reading the Qur’an in Bangladesh: the politics of “belief” among Islamist women’, *Modern Asian Studies* 42(2/3), (2008), pp. 457–488; and Catharina Raudvere, *The Book and the Roses: Sufi Women, Visibility and Zikr in Contemporary Istanbul* (Sweden: I.B. Tauris, 2002). For an example of religious solidarity among female Uyghur peer groups, see: Rachel Harris, ‘Sounding Islam in China: the geographies of ritual practice in rural Uyghur society’, *Aga Khan Trust for Culture: Historic Cities Program*, available at: [http://www.akdn.org/musical\\_geographies/rachel\\_harris.asp](http://www.akdn.org/musical_geographies/rachel_harris.asp) (accessed 22 October 2013).

for political and social change.<sup>58</sup> Although the majority of the aforementioned research, by focusing specifically on formal reading groups,<sup>59</sup> is distinct from the informal reading groups organized by my informants, they are nonetheless related; not only do communal readings of Islamic texts serve to strengthen religious ties and social relationships, the practice is also often bound to specific expressions of ethno-religious identity.<sup>60</sup>

A significant number of male Xinjiang Class graduates have also embraced some tenets of Islam. These young men put forth a concerted effort to perform Islam's obligatory five daily prayers (Uy. *bāsh waq namaz*) despite hectic class schedules. Adil, a native of Kashgar and a graduate of Guangzhou's Xinjiang Class, stood out as one of my most devout informants. Although Adil's father worked as a police officer in Xinjiang, and thus was forbidden from openly practicing Islam,<sup>61</sup> Adil learned at a young age how to perform *namaz* from his grandfather. After he graduated from the Xinjiang Class, Adil recommitted himself to the five daily prayers. If his class schedule conflicted with a prayer time, Adil simply prayed immediately after his class. In another example of Adil's commitment to prayer, Adil attended the weekly *jūmā* at a mosque 40 minutes away by public bus.

Murat, the individual from Aksu whom I introduced at the beginning of this article, followed the same Islamic prayer schedule. Murat prayed five times daily in a space he set aside in his dormitory room. The space, which was large enough to allow several individuals to simultaneously perform the ritual prostrations (Uy. *rākāt*) required for *namaz*, was set apart from the otherwise drab concrete room by several vibrantly colored prayer mats (Uy. *jaynamaz*). Murat had hung a large poster depicting Hajj pilgrims circumambulating the Kaaba on the west-facing wall (or *qibla*) of his room, which indicates the direction of Mecca. Several *doppa*, which Murat wore while praying, and a set of prayer beads (Uy. *tāswi*) draped from several hooks which had been fastened just below the poster of Mecca. Although he appeared to execute the prayers without flaw, Murat often doubted his ability to correctly perform *namaz*. In an attempt to refine his prostrations, Murat routinely consulted websites that offered step-by-step instructions on performing *namaz*, and he emulated the photos and videos they provided.<sup>62</sup>

To be sure, these two young men belong to a small group of my informants who prayed five times daily. Most prayed once a day, in the early morning (Uy. *bamdat*

58. Pieternella Van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam: Reading the Qur'an in Indonesia* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006).

59. Huq, 'Reading the Qur'an in Bangladesh'; Raudvere, *The Book and the Roses*; Van Doorn-Harder, *Women Shaping Islam*; and Wendell Schwab, 'Traditions and texts: how two young women learned to interpret the Qur'an and hadiths in Kazakhstan', *Contemporary Islam* 6(2), (2012), pp. 173–197.

60. In his comparison of the Piety Movement and the Ata Zholy, two socio-religious groups in Kazakhstan, Schwab ('Traditions and texts') reveals that Kazakhs, especially those associated with the Ata Zholy movement, are defining a distinctively 'Kazakh' way of being Muslim by promoting certain interpretations of the Qur'an and Hadiths.

61. According to the 'Regulations on Routine Service' document, individuals serving in the People's Liberation Army, other military personnel and police officers are forbidden to 'take part in religious or superstitious activities'.

62. For one example, see <http://www.dewr.org/kutuphana/?namaz/namaz.sureleri>. In addition to containing pictorial guides on performing *namaz*, this website links to downloadable Uyghur fables (Uy. *māsāl*), Uyghur translations of Hadith, elementary Turkish language textbooks and audio recordings of the Qur'an in Uyghur and Arabic.



*namazi*), and only attended mosque on major holidays, a routine typical among young Uyghur men in some regions of Xinjiang.<sup>63</sup> Others, citing a lack of time or conflicts in their daily schedules, admitted that they rarely, if ever, perform *namaz*. These admissions, however, were frequently followed by statements of regret. Bayram, a Xinjiang Class graduate from Turpan, criticized his own religious laxity. At one point, Bayram even questioned whether he was a ‘real Muslim’ (Uy. *häqiqiy Musulman*) since he rarely prayed. Before I was able to respond, Bayram quickly justified his lifestyle, ‘I have no choice (Uy. *amal yoq*). I’m not allowed to pray in Xinjiang, and there is nowhere for me to pray in Beijing’. Ärkin, a native of Kashgar who graduated from Nanjing’s Xinjiang Class, also expressed guilt for not praying. When I questioned Ärkin about the importance of prayer, he sighed, ‘It’s a shame that I don’t, but believing is just as important’ (Uy. *äpsus, bularni qilip kétälmidim, lékin, étiqadi bolush muhimdur*).

To a certain extent, my informants expressed themselves as Muslims through diverse Islamic practices that appear to be determined by gender. Reading the Qur’an, a devotion primarily undertaken by my female informants, and the adherence to Islamic prayers maintained by my male informants attest to this point. The existence of gender-specific forms of devotion is certainly not unique to Xinjiang Class graduates but, in fact, mirrors many Muslim communities, including those in Xinjiang.<sup>64</sup>

Other forms of devotion, however, blur gender divisions in religious practice. The recitation of post-meal *du’a* (or *chay du’asi*), described at the beginning of this article, provides one such example. In the company of other Uyghurs, my informants recited these quick prayers of supplication after every meal, and, as the introduction to this article has shown, sometimes even after eating snacks.<sup>65</sup> Remarkably the recitation of *du’a*, in at least some Uyghur communities, is largely determined by gender, with men less likely to engage in the practice.<sup>66</sup> During my research in Beijing, however, I commonly witnessed groups of my informants, comprised variously of men, women and both genders, performing *du’a* at school cafeterias and in restaurants.

Several factors may help to explain the stark difference between the practice of *du’a* by Uyghurs living in these two geographic regions. On a strictly practical level, performing *du’a* requires little commitment or formal instruction. Although the majority of my informants did not attend religious schools as children in Xinjiang, they had likely learned how to perform *du’a* from their parents or grandparents. If an

63. Jay Dautcher, *Down a Narrow Road: Identity and Masculinity in a Uyghur Community in Xinjiang China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 259.

64. *Ibid.*; Raudvere, *The Book and the Roses*; Nancy Tapper and Richard Tapper, ‘The birth of the prophet: ritual and gender in Turkish Islam’, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 22(1), (1987), pp. 69–92.

65. I documented the instances in which my informants did not perform *du’a*. In most cases, my informants did not perform *du’a* when eating alone or if he/she was eating only with me. The recitation of *du’a* became more consistent when several Uyghur students shared a meal. The example of *du’a*, especially how it is practiced in the company of other Uyghurs, lucidly illustrates the influence of community pressure in Uyghur society; on this, see especially Bellér-Hann, *Community Matters in Xinjiang* and Smith Finley, *The Art of Symbolic Resistance*.

66. Dautcher, *Down a Narrow Road*, p. 262. Although we can assume that some men in Xinjiang routinely recite *du’a* after a meal, there are no systematic studies available on this practice to compare with Dautcher’s account or with this current study.

individual did not know how to perform *du'a*, he/she could easily mimic his/her peers. Even I quickly learned the required hand movements and proper utterances. Due to its simplicity, performing *du'a* provides an opportunity for otherwise non-practicing Uyghurs to publicly reaffirm their commitment to Islam.

On another level, *du'a* appeared to be performed by my informants in Beijing as another form of 'symbolic' boundary maintenance.<sup>67</sup> In Ürümqi, although it is certainly not uncommon for Han to eat at Uyghur-owned restaurants, the patronage of certain restaurants, especially those located in non-tourist friendly Uyghur enclaves, is almost exclusively Uyghur. Moreover, most university cafeterias in the provincial capital are segregated.<sup>68</sup> In Beijing, however, Uyghur-owned 'Xinjiang-style' restaurants attract a mostly Han clientele, especially those upscale restaurants offering song and dance performances.<sup>69</sup> Han students also frequent university halal (Ch. *qingzhen*) cafeterias. Having, in a sense, become a minority of their own food culture in Beijing, Xinjiang Class graduates seek ways to reclaim 'their' culture. Apart from generally receiving better service from Uyghur staff<sup>70</sup> (which, in itself, suggests a degree of trans-regional solidarity among Uyghurs), Uyghur graduates of the Xinjiang Class can reinforce ethnic boundaries vis-à-vis Han patrons through the performance of *du'a*.

Whereas my informants demonstrated a heightened and even exaggerated dedication to religious obligations through the recitation of *du'a*, unlike their non-Xinjiang Class Uyghur peers in Beijing,<sup>71</sup> they exhibited laxity during Ramadan's 30-day fast (Uy. *roza tutush*). During my 2010 research trip, the majority of the 30-day fast overlapped with the academic year, and I asked dozens of Xinjiang Class graduates about their views on fasting. None of my informants observed the entire 30-day fast, and only a group of four men fasted at all—on the last day of Ramadan.

Several circumstances prevented Xinjiang Class graduates from fasting. They pointed to the inconvenience of dormitory life, which did not afford the space to prepare the hearty pre-dawn meal (Uy. *zoluq*). Some students worried that fasting would inhibit their studies. Others still questioned the necessity of fasting. When I asked Aynur, the young woman who received a copy of the Qur'an from the Saudi Embassy, about her reasons for not fasting, she dismissed the injunction to do so:

My parents are teachers and are not permitted to fast, so I never fasted as a child. It's not like it used to be in Xinjiang and women commonly work outside the home. I also want to work and go abroad to study, so I have to study hard. If I fast, I won't be able to concentrate in class. But being Muslim isn't about how many times a day I pray or about fasting. Being Muslim is a feeling in your heart and is about how you treat other people.

67. Smith Finley, *The Art of Symbolic Resistance*. See also, Herbert Yee, 'Ethnic relations in Xinjiang: a survey of Uyghur-Han relations in Ürümqi', *Journal of Contemporary China* 12(36), (2003), pp. 431–452.

68. Joanne Smith, 'Making culture matter: symbolic, spatial and social boundaries between Uyghurs and Han-Chinese', *Asian Ethnicity* 3(2), (2002), p. 166.

69. Baranovitch, 'From the margins to the centre'.

70. At several Uyghur-owned restaurants in Beijing, it was common for Uyghur students to receive significant discounts on their bills.

71. Timothy Grose, 'Uyghurs and Ramadan: challenging the "minkaomin"/"minkaohan" labels', in Leibold and Chen, eds, *Multicultural Education in China*, pp. 216–234.

Aynur's response helps to capture one of the prevailing arguments of this article: although Islam continues to be an essential element of Uyghur identity among graduates of the Xinjiang Class, it is not confined to any one Islamic tenet. Rather, Xinjiang Class graduates navigate through competing ideologies, and whether it is through reading the Qur'an, maintaining a prayer schedule, reciting *du'a* or even an action as simple as professing their faith in Islam, they ultimately choose for themselves how to express the Islamic components of their Uyghur identity.

Variation in the Islamic practices of these young Uyghurs should not be interpreted too quickly as evidence of the diminution of Islamic religiosity in the face of state-encouraged secularism and cultural integration. In fact, the religious practices of Xinjiang Class Uyghurs do not appear to be substantially different from other Central Asian Muslims. Khalid has reminded us that Muslims living in pre-communist Central Asia valued the establishment and strengthening of community bonds over the mastery of religious texts or the proper performance of Islamic rituals.<sup>72</sup> Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asian Muslims, similar to Uyghurs in Xinjiang, emphasize and promote their Islamic heritage in a broader assertion of ethno-national identity.<sup>73</sup> Indeed, graduates of the Xinjiang Class assert a strengthened sense of a distinct (yet fluid) 'Uyghur' identity wherein Islam continues to play a significant role.

### Concluding remarks

In this article I have argued that renewed interests in and reinterpretations of Islam among my informants evidence a strengthening of a Uyghur ethno-national identity. Significantly, the religious practices being preserved by Xinjiang Class graduates are the very deep-rooted cultural norms the CCP, through the Xinjiang Class, attempts to undermine and replace with elements common to mainstream Han culture. Therefore, by embracing Islam, these young individuals are simultaneously rejecting Chinese-state 'interpellations' and embracing a non-Chinese ethno-national identity.

This is not to say that Uyghur graduates of the Xinjiang Class are more 'nationalistic' or more religious than their non-Xinjiang Class Uyghur peers. However, this study has shown that, at the very least, the Xinjiang Class, as an apparatus of the state, has not successfully 'interpellated' Uyghur students as compliant members of the *Zhonghua minzu*. Despite being immersed in Han-Chinese culture and force-fed a curriculum that valorizes loyalty to the Chinese Party-state and the *Zhonghua minzu*, Uyghur graduates of the Xinjiang Class are no more likely to experience feelings of Chinese patriotism or *minzu* unity than their non-Xinjiang Class Uyghur peers.<sup>74</sup> Instead of training a patriotic generation of Uyghurs, this article has shown that the Xinjiang Class has led—or at least allowed—a group of highly educated, socially conscious individuals develop religious sensibility.

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72. Adeb Khalid, *Islam after Communism: Religion and Politics in Central Asia* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), pp. 21–24.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 118–121.

74. Joanne Smith, 'Four generations of Uyghurs: the shift towards ethno-political ideologies among Xinjiang's youth', *Inner Asia* no. 2, (2000), pp. 195–224.