Muslim Uyghur Students in a Chinese Boarding School: Social Recapitalization as a Response to Ethnic Integration Yangbin Chen New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2008 211 pp. \$70.00 ISBN 978-0739121122

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some cases when employers do not treat them well. Such domestic workers are constrained by the triple forces of global capitalism, state socialism and familial patriarchy, and, as Sun argues, they lack "a political language that allows them to understand their experience in terms of such concepts as *injustice* and *exploitation*" (p. 141).

As a scholar of Hong Kong's migrant domestic workers, I cannot resist pointing to three of many striking contrasts. First, whereas Hong Kong's migrant domestic workers are well known for their visible and audible activism, *Maid in China* reveals an apparent but unsurprising absence of grassroots activism among Chinese migrant maids. Despite Sun's mention of meetings at Beijing's Migrant Women's Club, there seems to be a lack of social spaces in which workers acquire or develop a language with which to voice their concerns or demand their rights. If at all, workers' agency is primarily expressed in creative but subtle forms. Second is the contrast between Hong Kong's overseas migrant workers employment contracts and visas that tie them to one employer and thus prevent "job hopping" versus the relative freedom of Chinese maids to leave their employers and take up with new ones, despite the constraints that Sun argues are inherent in China's *hukou* (household registration) system. The third and final contrast is the seemingly innocuous or even positive depiction of Beijing employment agencies (*gongsi* or "companies") by Sun, compared with the scholarly depictions of Hong Kong and overseas employment agencies as highly exploitative of workers, literally marketing them as objects of consumption for employer-clients.

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The Xinjiang riots of July 2009 render particularly timely the publication of a book that examines the Chinese government's efforts to use schooling to tackle enduring divisions between Uyghurs and the country's Han majority. Yangbin Chen analyses the scheme of sending Xinjiang students to boarding senior high schools in "inland" (*neidi*) regions of China, presenting a case study of one particular school. Focusing on the experiences of the students themselves, Chen provides a sensitive, nuanced and critical account that illustrates many of the problems and tensions inherent in current policy and practice.

As his analysis of policy documents and official statements makes clear, the overriding objective of establishing "Xinjiang Classes" in *neidi* schools was political. The scheme aimed to integrate "minority" students into "mainstream" society through providing enhanced educational opportunities (what Chen terms "structural integration") while helping to overcome or bridge cultural barriers between ethnic groups (termed "cultural integration") – thus easing the kinds of inter-ethnic tensions that have contributed to separatist sentiment in Xinjiang. However, Chen argues that, at least in the case of the school he examined, the goals of the scheme, especially

that of "cultural integration," have been subverted by the concern of school authorities and local officials to minimize the chances of conflict erupting between these "minority" students and their local Han contemporaries.

Combined with the generally low academic expectations that Han teachers have for the Xinjiang students, this concern is manifested in an attitude of "safety first and study second" (p. 50) that actually discourages ethnic integration. In terms of their living and sleeping conditions, the Xinjiang students are privileged over their local counterparts – but at the same time they are clearly regarded as culturally and academically "backward." They have their own separate dormitories, their own canteen (catering to Muslim dietary requirements), and are taught in their own classes rather than together with the local Han students. Meanwhile, within these classes they (like the local Han students) are presented with a curriculum that is unbalanced in its treatment of "minority" cultures and extremely Han-centric – in Chen's words, "far from the multicultural education recently called for" (p. 61).

Chen sees the Xinjiang students – and particularly the Uyghurs (who make up over 80 per cent of them) – as responding to this situation by embracing the "structural integration" offered through this scheme, while resisting the attempt at "cultural integration." In other words, the students (and their parents and relatives back home) generally recognize the social and economic advantages of a *putonghua*-medium education seen as superior in quality to the schooling on offer within Xinjiang. However, segregated and largely isolated within their "Little Xinjiang" section of an overwhelmingly Han school, they become fiercely defensive of their culture and customs – in terms of dress and grooming, male and female sociability, their Muslim diet (successfully campaigning to have a local Hui chef sacked and replaced by three Uyghurs), and real or perceived slights on their fellows from those outside their group (e.g. Han teachers). Chen also analyses the in-group dynamics, showing how "bonding social capital" is created or strengthened by senior Uyghur students, who play a leading role in establishing the norms to be observed by the group as a whole – to some extent marginalizing smaller groups of Kazakh, Mongol and other students. The strength of such "bonding" is contrasted tellingly with the weakness of what Chen calls "bridging social capital" – relating to the forging of links between the Xinjiang students and the "mainstream" Han community within the school and beyond.

Chen's analysis is enlivened by many anecdotes and quotations from interviews with teachers and students, to which a brief review can hardly do justice. However, his argument is also couched in sociological jargon to an extent that some readers may find off-putting. For example, in recounting an incident when male students found themselves locked in their dormitory and thus prevented from attending compulsory morning exercises, we are told how the Uyghur students (angrily) sought assistance from "the institutional agents who control the resources to open the dormitory gate" (i.e. the men with the keys) (p. 158).

The discussion of the situation of the Uyghur students in terms derived from "social capital theory" also has implications for the balance and emphasis of Chen's argument. The "social capital" paradigm (the key word being "capital") seems to encourage an over-emphasis on the instrumentalist features of social relationships, underplaying the significance of culture, values and identity. The assumptions of this paradigm reflect its American origins, and the literature Chen draws on in constructing his theoretical framework overwhelmingly relates to immigrant minorities in USA schools. There may indeed be some interesting comparisons to be drawn between minority schooling in America and the position of China's Uyghurs. However, the Uyghurs are not immigrants into China; if their situation is comparable with that of any groups in America, it is perhaps with those of Native

Americans or the Latino populations of areas such as New Mexico. The literature that Chen cites hardly discusses these groups, nor does he refer to literature examining the education of indigenous populations in colonial contexts, or in contexts of state-backed encroachment by immigrant settlers.

A fuller discussion of the history and politics of Uyghur relations with the Chinese state and the dominant Han ethnicity might have suggested more appropriate comparisons and alternative theoretical frameworks. However, Chen devotes only one paragraph to the history of the Uyghurs, citing Hoy's claim that "Uyghur ethnicity may be an artificial construct" (p. 34). Gladney – whose work Chen also references – asserts that Han ethnicity is likewise an artificial or "imagined" construct (see *Dislocating China*, University of Chicago Press, 2004) though no reference to that argument is found here. Chen is clearly constrained, or influenced, in his analysis by the very sensitivities surrounding "minority" history and politics in China that he acknowledges in his discussion of the broader context of the boarding school scheme. He also appears to take for granted a number of controversial aspects of Chinese education policy and practice – from eugenicist "health checks" (that resulted in the expulsion from this school of two Uyghur girls and sparked protests from their classmates) and the "harsh military training" undergone by newly enrolled students during orientation (p. 100), to a reference in passing to the cancellation in Xinjiang schools of a Uyghur language course and its replacement with a "politics" course (this in a discussion of the often fraught relations between southern and northern Xinjiang) (p. 108).

Notwithstanding its somewhat sanitized account of Xinjiang history and politics, and of China's broader "minorities" policy, this study is an invaluable contribution to our understanding of the role of schooling in promoting, or undermining, the integration of these "minorities" within Chinese society (another volume to be published in the same series, by Zhiyong Zhu, looks at a *neidi* secondary school for Tibetans). Chen could perhaps have demonstrated more awareness of the way in which his status as a Han male may have affected his findings, both in terms of his own education and prior understanding of the Uyghurs and Xinjiang, and in terms of his relationships with the Uyghur students he was studying (although these seem to have been relatively friendly). The latter was one comment made by a Uyghur postgraduate student of mine after having read this book. However, the same student also remarked that this was "the most balanced work written by a Chinese scholar that I have ever read." This is almost certainly the most balanced and thoughtful study available in English of the impact of Chinese education policies on Xinjiang students, and of their responses to these policies.

EDWARD VICKERS

Education as a Political Tool in Asia
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Education has been used as a political tool across the world and throughout the ages. It has been a force to bolster the political rationale of regimes and to define national identity. In this timely contribution to the political dimension of education, Marie