

## Hui Students' Identity Construction in Eastern China: A Postcolonial Critique

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### Abstract

In this article, we explored Hui students' lived experiences in school in eastern China and the impact of their experiences on their identity construction. We used postcolonial theory as a theoretical framework and narrative inquiry as a research methodology to guide questions that we asked, data collection, data analysis, and interpretation and discussion of the findings in the study. We found that schooling for the two Hui students in eastern China is a process of reproducing mainstream Han ideology; taking away their culture, beliefs, knowledge, and identity; and imposing the mainstream Han culture and knowledge on Hui students as truth. The participants, two Hui students in an elementary school in eastern China, accepted the identity constructed by mainstream Han teachers and were confused about their Hui identity.

**Keywords:** *Hui students; lived experiences; identity construction; postcolonial critique*

### Introduction

Fifty-six nationalities in the People's Republic of China form the Chinese nationality. The majority nationality is the Han, which comprises 90 percent of China's population of about 1.3 billion; the other 55 nationalities, which represent approximately 130 million ethnic people (National Minority Policies and its Practice in China, 2000), are minorities. Most of the Han reside in eastern or central China (Veeck, Pannell, Smith, & Huang, 2007). Most of the minority nationalities, on the other hand, inhabit the inner border regions where there are deserts, grasslands, or mountains (Veeck et al., 2007). Fifty-three nationalities have their own spoken languages; Manchu and Hui speak Mandarin Chinese (Zhou, 1999). About 120 mother tongues are spoken in the minority regions, among which only 30 minority languages have written scripts and 20 languages have fewer than 1,000 speakers (Sun, 2004).

Among the 55 minority groups in China are ten ethnic minority groups who believe in Islam. Most populations of Muslims live in north-western China: Xinjiang, Gansu, Ningxia, Qinghai, and Shaanxi. The Hui, who comprise half of China's Muslim population, are scattered among 90 percent of cities and townships in China (Israel, 2002; Lynn, 2004).

Although the Chinese government officially protects minority language, culture, and knowledge through the Constitution of the People's Republic of China (CPRC) (1982) and the National Minorities

Policy and its Practice in China (NMPPC) (2000), large gaps between laws and practices were reported (B. He, 2005; Wang & Phillion, 2009). Mainstream language, culture, knowledge, and identity are imposed on minority groups through school education, media propaganda, and manipulation (Shih, 2002). Minority culture and knowledge are under-represented or misrepresented in school textbooks in China (Nima, 2001; Qian, 2007; Upton, 1996; Wang & Phillion, 2010). Minority culture, language, and knowledge are regarded as uncivilized, backward, and unscientific (Gladney, 2004; Nima, 2001; Schein, 2000), and minority identity is less important than state identity (Qian 2007; Shih 2002). Some Hui minority people, on the other hand, hope to construct an ethnic identity through sending their children to mosques to receive literacy education (Postiglione, 1999), praying in mosques (Gladney, 2004; Shih, 2002), and embarking on pilgrimages to Mecca (Israeli, 2002). Still, some Hui people have lost their identity and their belief in the process of modernity (Gladney, 2004; Mackerras, 1998). Therefore, it is necessary to examine how the Han interpret minority culture and knowledge, how the Han construct minority people's identity through school education, and how minority people construct their ethnic identity.

In this article, we used postcolonial theory as a theoretical framework and narrative inquiry as a research methodology to study the school experiences of two Hui minority students for the purpose of exploring how the mainstream Han group in China manipulates minority culture and knowledge and constructs minority identity in China.

### **Literature Review: Representation of Minority Groups in China**

#### **Orientalism in China**

The Han have constructed, and are still constructing, the identities of non-Han groups in China, from barbarians to "other" minorities. According to these constructed identities, the Han group is central, and minority groups are peripheral and remote. The Han group is civilized, and minority groups are uncivilized (Gladney, 2004). That is why the Han group dominates and "saves" minority groups with mainstream language (Mandarin Chinese), culture, knowledge, and ideology. The Han group constructs itself and others in a process that Said (1978) called Orientalism, which describes how European colonizers constructed themselves as the centre while the colonized east became the periphery. Even though Orientalism does not literally match the ways in which the Han group treats minority groups in China, the Han group's treatment of minority groups in China resembles the ways in which European colonizers colonized the east as the periphery. We found Orientalism useful to explain how the dominant Han group reproduces the actions of the European colonizers and constructs themselves as the centre and minority groups in China as the periphery.

Other researchers have developed the notion of Orientalism and applied it to different situations. For example, in examining the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s in the US, Allen (2005) claimed that "the black community was politically, economically, and militarily subjugated to white America, much as colonies in Africa or Asia were colonially subjugated and under the direct control of European powers" (p. 4). Similar to the situation for the Hui in China, Allen argued that colonies could be internal and "[w]hat was critical was the colonial relationship and its structures of domination and subordination" (p. 4). Gladney (1998/9) and Goodman (1983) asserted that minority regions in China such as Tibet, Xinjiang, and Inner Mongolia were the internal colonies of dominant Han group.

Schein (2000) used "internal Orientalism" (p. 101), borrowed from Said's (1978) Orientalism, to examine how the Han people consolidate modern Europeans' self-image based on the Han people's interpretation of internal others—minority groups in China. Schein (2000) argued that whoever has

power determines what kind of images would be produced and presented on TV, in magazines, in newspapers, and even on the Internet. The images of minority groups produced by the Han would be consumed by both minority groups and the Han themselves to reproduce self and other, dominant and dominated, or colonizer and colonized. The misrepresentation and hegemony in constructing these "others" silenced minority groups.

### **Subaltern in Minority Groups in China**

In the remote rural minority regions of China, people farmed the limited land and gained little beyond basic survival. Men left their villages to work in the coastal provinces. Girls left villages by marrying men in the wealthier regions (Liu, 2007). Those who stayed in villages were summoned by tourism agencies to wear their colourful clothes, to demonstrate their traditional dances and songs, and to exhibit their exotic or erotic customs such as young people's courtship (Schein, 2000). Furthermore, minority female nudes frequently appeared in Han Chinese paintings and films because minority women's "primitivity" and beauty were exploited for profit (Gladney, 2004). Zhang Yimou, a well-known filmmaker in China and internationally, used minority women's nudity in his films to depict "primitivity," wildness, and inspiration (see also Gladney, 2004). Chinese artists and filmmakers reproduced the Han misrepresentation of minority women as erotic, exotic, "primitive," and beautiful and constructed them as minority "others."

### **Han Chauvinism**

Han chauvinism dates back to thousands of years ago. China, which literally means "central kingdom," considered itself the centre of the world, while people from other cultures were considered "barbarians" (Pelissier, 1963). The dominant Han Chinese, therefore, believed that they had the right to save the "barbarians" and help them to live and speak as those in the "central kingdom" did; the end effect was conquering them. The conquered nations were forced to pay tribute to China to show their devotion to the emperor of the "central kingdom" and their willingness to be subordinate to the "central kingdom." These historical cultural beliefs and practices inform current Han chauvinism.

Consider Muslims in China as an example. The Han group refused to see cultural differences between Confucian ideology and Islam. In the Ming Dynasty, the acculturation and assimilation of Muslims occurred constantly. Inter-marriage between Han and Muslims was encouraged, and newborn Muslims were forced to take Han Chinese names, wear Han clothes, use the Chinese language, and learn Chinese culture and Confucian ideology as well as the Islamic faith (Lynn, 2004). During the Ming Dynasty, the Han used the terms "Hui" or "Huihui"; these terms indicate that Muslims in China had become "Chinese Muslims" (Israeli, 2002, p. 119). Until 1949, before the Communist Party came to power, most of the Hui people resided in the north-western board region—a poor and underdeveloped area— and some of the Hui people were scattered among 90 percent of cities and townships all over China (Israel, 2002; Lynn, 2004). After 1949, most Hui people continued to lose their home language, become confused about their identity, and speak Mandarin Chinese (Bradley, 2004).

Although minority groups' rights are stipulated by China's Constitution (CPRC, 1982) and minority autonomy is guaranteed by minority law (NMPPC, 2000), gaps have been reported (B. He, 2005; Wang & Phillion, 2009), and real self-government and autonomy are in doubt because unity is the top national priority and any secession is prohibited (B. He, 2005; Israeli, 2002; Mackerras, 1998). The case of the Tibetan minority, for example, has been well-researched and scholars have found that while rights are theoretically guaranteed, in practice, they are often violated. Tibetan history has been rewritten from the perspectives of the Han group in school textbooks. Upton (1996) argued that

Tibetan history in the school curriculum was far different from the "real history" that the Tibetans experienced or that they learned at home, although the textbooks did contain some contents drawn from Tibetan culture and history. Nima (2001) suggested that Tibetan culture should be integrated into school curriculum so that Tibetan students could construct a Tibetan identity. In addition, some Han officials in minority regions interpreted minority language and culture as backward and unscientific while Han culture and Mandarin Chinese were considered civilized and scientific (Nima, 2001).

Mandarin Chinese was promoted as the official language in 1956 and today is the official language of Mainland China (Zhou, 1999). Children are required to learn Mandarin Chinese beginning in grade three in minority regions. Bilingual education in minority regions actually provides a transition from minority languages to Mandarin Chinese; finally, Mandarin Chinese ultimately replaces minority students' language in minority students' education (Dwyer, 1998). Mandarin Chinese serves as an important tool in instilling Han ideology in and forming national identity in minority students (Nelson, 2005).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Geographical Reconstruction: West and East**

Orientalists depicted the east from their stereotypical understanding of the east and from their perspective of the west as the centre. Because they saw the east as the representation of physical, moral, and political weakness, the west had the responsibility to save the east through invasion and colonization. On the other hand, the east exists so that the west may demonstrate their power, civilization, and culture. This discourse silenced the east and legitimized the invasion and colonization of western colonies. Said (1978), therefore, discussed the importance of examining Orientalism as a discourse, through which European culture and ideology could be critically explored, that made it possible to "manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (Said, 1978, p. 3). Said (1978) argued that the separation into the west and the east is not only a geographical division but also "a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (p. 5).

### **Hybridity and Identity**

Hybridity is a product of the colonization of the east. The western misrepresentation of the culture and peoples of the east and the ideology and knowledge of the west that were imposed upon the east make the peoples of the east doubt their identity and the authenticity of their culture. The intention of hybridity is not to make colonizers out of the colonized but to create a hybrid class who might appreciate, respect, and value the colonizers' culture and knowledge for the purpose of controlling the colonized. As Bhabha (1985) argued, hybridity is "a problematic of colonial representation ... that reserves the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other 'denied' knowledge enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority" (p. 156).

Identity shows who a person is and which cultural group a person belongs to with shared ancestors and history. Hall (1990) used the term cultural identity to refer to shared culture, shared history and ancestry. Hall commented that "our cultural identities reflect the common historical references and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning" (p. 223). Therefore, identity is acquired when one is born, develops

through language learning, culture immersion and construction, and is reinforced through family and community environment.

The construction of identity is related to power. The colonizer or dominant groups construct their identity and at the same time reconstruct the identity of "others" because others' identity is based on "the interpretation and reinterpretation of the differences from 'us'" (Said, 1978, p. 332). The reconstruction of the identity of "others" is based on the political and economic interests of the colonizers or dominant groups with stereotyped understanding and interpretation of the culture and knowledge of the colonized or minority groups. Zhao (2007) reported that Mongol students in colleges were confused with their cultural identity because of the dominant Han culture and knowledge in their K-12 public school education. Mongol students took learning Han dominant culture and knowledge as their means of social mobility. Subaltern culture and knowledge are denigrated; and subaltern identity is distorted and hybridized.

### **Hegemony**

Cultural reproduction is one of the ways the west maintains hegemony; subaltern culture and knowledge are devalued and eradicated. Western culture is reproduced through colonization and colonizers' literature. The Orient is depicted as Europe's uncivilized and backward colonies (Said, 1978). Knowledge reconstruction is another way the west maintains its dominance. Western knowledge is regarded as Truth, which must be learned; at the same time, eastern knowledge is regarded as unscientific and not worth learning. Gramsci (1971) argued that material force was not the only power that allows colonizers to control effectively; the subjects created by colonizers through cultural and educational hegemony were also willing to consent to colonial subordination. Therefore, western domination of the non-western world is a conscious and purposive process developed through military force and culture and knowledge reproduction (Said, 1978).

The Han group reproduces the cultural hegemony of European colonists through downgrading minority culture and knowledge as backward and promoting dominant culture, knowledge, and language as scientific and true (Bradney, 2004; Wang & Phillion, 2010 ). Zhu (2007) found that mainstream culture dominated school curriculum and infiltrated Tibetan students through classroom teaching. Similarly, Postiglione (1999) found that Han culture and knowledge dominated the public school curriculum while minority culture and knowledge had been excluded from the public school curriculum.

We responded to the call of postcolonial theorists to re-theorize the experiences and identities of "others" through the specific examination of Hui students' experience in eastern China. We focused on the manipulation by the dominant Han group and its reconstruction of Hui culture, knowledge, and minority identity from a mainstream Han perspective. We also examined how the mainstream Han group dominated and controlled Hui students through hegemony in school curriculum.

## **Methodology**

### **Participants and Data Collection**

We conducted a case study of two Hui girls, Lingling (participants' names and school names are pseudonyms) and Bai Lan, at Dongsheng Elementary School in eastern China to examine their lived experience (van Manen, 1996) in school. In order to better understand the two Hui girls' school experience, Yuxiang, a Han Chinese who was a school teacher both in China and in the US and

received his Ph. D. in the US concentrating on multicultural education, interviewed the two Hui girls, their parents, and their teachers; he also observed their classes.

Mr. Ma, Lingling's teacher, who graduated from a two-year college, teaches Moral Education and Social Science to students in six classes of Grade 4. He is a Han Chinese. Each class has a one-hour lesson of Moral Education and a one-hour lesson of Social Studies per week. He has been a teacher in the school for 5 years. Mr. Wan, Bai Lan's teacher, graduated from a normal school and earned the equivalent of a two-year Associate's degree through independent study and examinations. He is a Han Chinese. He teaches Mandarin Chinese to students in Class 1, Grade 6, two hours a day, five days a week. He has been a teacher at Dongsheng Elementary School for more than 8 years.

Yuxiang transcribed interviews and translated interviews and field notes into English. JoAnn Phillion, a Canadian white, has had a long history of involvement with research in minority education issues and in multicultural education. We coded and recoded interview transcripts and field notes and generated themes under the guidance of the theoretical framework.

The following research questions guided our study:

1. What are Hui students' experiences in school in eastern P.R. China?
2. What are mainstream teachers' views about Hui students' culture and belief in eastern P.R. China?
3. How do mainstream teachers construct Hui students' identity and what impact does that have on Hui students' identity construction in eastern P.R. China?

### **Narrative inquiry**

In order to answer our research questions, we used narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Phillion, 2002) to explore Hui students' experiences. We particularly focused on cross cultural, multicultural narrativ inquiry (Phillion & M. He, 2008) which provided a critical lens to examine students' experiences. Dewey's (1938) philosophy about experience and education provided a solid foundation for us to study Hui students' experience and answer our research questions. As Dewey (1938) stated, "I assume that amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely the organic connection between education and personal experience" (p. 24).

Narrative inquiry focuses on participants' stories and experiences, makes meaning out of their stories and experiences, and understands the participants through their stories and experiences. Often, these stories function as "counter stories" in the literature in that they present perspectives not often dealt with in the research literature (Phillion, 2002). Phillion (2002) summarized three qualities of narrative inquiry: context of participants' experience, immersion in participants' experience, and developing a good relationship for better understanding participants' experience. Phillion's three qualities of narrative inquiry guided us in our exploration of the two Hui students' experiences within a socio-political and historical context; helped us "live" their experiences through class observations and interviews with the Hui students, their teachers, and their parents; and enabled us to understand their experiences through developing relationships with the Hui students and their parents.

### **Description of the School and Community**

The setting for the study was Dongsheng Elementary School in Dongsheng Township. Dongsheng Township is located in eastern China, about a 20-minute drive from the municipal city of Hefei, the

capital city of Anhui province. Two old factories in the township—Dongfeng Cast Factory and Chunguang Textiles Factory—were bankrupted in the early 2000s because of both domestic and international competition that increased in the late 1990s. Many workers lost their jobs. Some changed their careers to service work in the town, and some went to the southeast coastal areas to find employment. Lingling's and Bai Lan's mothers had worked in the Chunguang Textiles Factory. After the bankruptcy, Bai Lan's mother found an hourly job in a department store, selling clothes. Lingling's father went to Shanghai and worked hourly in a factory. Lingling's mother started working hourly as a maid for a local wealthy family; meanwhile, she took care of her daughters' daily lives. Bai Lan's father was a school teacher in a different school district. Bai Lan's parents are Hui; Lingling's father is Hui, and her mother is Han Chinese.

The annual average income per person was 4,800 Chinese yuan (equal to \$738) in Dongsheng Township. An annual family income below 7,200 Chinese yuan (equal to \$1,107) was regarded as poverty level. At Dongsheng Elementary School, 50 of the 2,554 students were from families who lived below the poverty line. These students from low-income families were not required to pay for their textbooks and other educational resources such as field trip fees and extracurricular program fees. Lingling and Bai Lan were not from the low-income families. There were 2,554 students in grades K-6, among which ten students are Hui and five students are Manchu, which are two of the 55 minority groups in China. There were 51 teachers in the school, all Han.

## Findings and Discussion

### Cultural Hegemony

Lingling's and Bai Lan's culture, knowledge, and belief were ignored by the teacher and the school. Mr. Wan stated during the interview,

*"I have been her [Bai Lan] teacher since she was a first grader. I haven't seen any differences between her and Han girls. I don't teach culture in my class. Because she is a good student, I haven't provided any culturally related approaches to help her." (interview, 2008)*

Mr. Wan claimed, "I saw no difference between Han girls and Lingling in my class and I knew little about Hui culture except that Hui people do not eat pork" (interview, 2008). Mr. Ma and Mr. Wan expected their students to follow mainstream rules and regulations in their classes, to respect the teacher, to work hard at their class assignments, and to earn high scores on standardized tests (field notes, 2008). Mr. Wan told me his expectations of his students:

*"My students know my expectations of them. They set their goals of going to Dongsheng No.1 High School and finally go to a better college. They have to work hard and complete all assignments before entering the class. Otherwise, they will be in trouble". (interview, 2008)*

In a social studies class, Mr. Ma was teaching the lesson "Zheng Chenggong recovered Taiwan from Holland's colony" in a chapter entitled "Unified multi-ethnic country." Yuxiang found that neither Mr. Ma nor the textbook mentioned the ethnic identity of Zheng Chenggong, who was the only Huihui that appeared in the textbook. After class, Yuxiang talked to Mr. Ma about Zheng Chenggong and asked him which nationality Zheng Chenggong was. He said, "It seemed that Zheng Chenggong was Huihui. However, I didn't tell the students that he was Huihui because the text didn't state that he was Huihui" (field notes, 2008). The textbook and Mr. Ma hid the fact that Zheng Chenggong was Huihui,

but emphasized that Zheng Chenggong was a hero who protected the sovereignty of China from the invasion of Holland.

In Mr. Ma's moral education class, students and the teacher were discussing ancestor worship as a superstition. Students were asked to share their views about it and give an example of ancestor worship as a superstition. Lingling also stated her views about it. When Mr. Ma and his students were discussing this topic, Mr. Ma supposed that the Hui people also worship their ancestors. On the contrary, the Hui people do not worship their ancestors, but they are mostly filial to their ancestors. The Hui people believe in Allah, a belief that differs radically from the Confucian ideology of worshipping ancestors (Israeli, 2002; Lynn, 2004). This classroom practice demonstrates that Mr. Ma knew little about Hui culture and that Han culture infiltrated the thoughts of Hui and other minority students in the class through class teaching.

Lingling and Bai Lan also knew little about Hui culture and knowledge. Bai Lan said, "My grandpa told me that we Huihui do not eat pork, but we eat beef and chicken" (interview, 2008). When I asked whether her grandpa talked about the Quran, Bai Lan answered, "Yes. My grandpa mentioned it, but he said that he never read it" (interview, 2008). Lingling said, "My parents did not tell me anything related to Islam. Although I'm Huihui, I know nothing about it" (interview, 2008). Lingling and Bai Lan believed that it was ideal that Hui and Han were a family. Bai Lan said, "I like what I learned in the textbook that states 56 nationalities are a family. I feel that Han girls and Hui girls are equal in the class and in the school" (interview, 2008). When Lingling was asked to give her impression of the teacher and students in the school, she commented, "The students and teachers are friendly and they helped me when I transferred to the school" (interview, 2008). Lingling's mother preferred to teach her two daughters Confucian ideology so that they could adapt to the mainstream society because they lived in the Han region. Her elder daughter successfully moved to Dongsheng No.1 High School (the top high school in the district); she adapted smoothly to the school, and her above average academic performance assured her mother that her way of teaching her daughters was appropriate. Lingling's mother told me, "People don't care who you are but care about your children's academic performance in school. If your children could go to college, people would not look down upon you" (interview, 2008). Nieto (2002) found that the indoctrination in school curriculum has changed minority students' views of their culture and knowledge. The consent or willingness of Lingling, and her mother to accept the dominant group's culture and knowledge makes cultural hegemony possible.

### **Internal Orientalism and Hui Students' Identity Construction**

Bai Lan's identity was assigned and constructed by her Han classmates and her Han teacher—Mr. Wan. Bai Lan, elected as the class monitor (top students are qualified for this position) in Grades 5 and 6, respectively, "is an excellent student and she demonstrates her leadership skills" (Mr. Wan, interview, 2008). Mr. Wan continued to comment on Bai Lan:

*"She works hard at her course work and is willing to help those who asked for help. She is easy to talk to and make friends with. She is a coordinator between the teacher and peers and she is an organizer and leader in leading the class to complete tasks and events assigned by the school". (interview, 2008)*

As mainstream Han ideology dictates, Bai Lan must listen to and respect her teacher, love the school and the country, follow class rules, finish assignments on time, and succeed academically. Bai Lan accomplished all these goals and demonstrated her strong leadership (interview, 2008). Mr. Wan and Bai Lan's classmates constructed Bai Lan's identity—Chinese—through their election of her as the class monitor and her success as the class monitor. This finding is consistent with Schein's (2000)

"internal Orientalism" (p. 101), which was used to describe how the mainstream Han group constructed the identity of internal others based on the ideology of the mainstream Han group rather than that of minority groups. As Bai Lan said, "I'm the same as Han girls and I'm a member of the big family" (interview, 2008). Bai Lan's leadership in her class and social experiences in class and in the school required that she had to make herself understood, which meant that she had to follow the set rules and regulations accepted by the mainstream society and that she had to behave like a Han girl so that she might be accepted by others and she might shorten the distance between her and her Han classmates. As Bai Lan said, "As a class monitor, I have to discipline myself and follow rules in class and in school so that students will trust me and listen to me" (interview, 2008).

With Bai Lan's help and encouragement, many students in the class took part in singing contests, composition contests, and school level sports games. When Yuxiang asked what they sang in the singing contests, Bai Lan said, "some were popular songs and some were revolutionary songs that praised the Chinese Communist Party and China, our motherland" (interview, 2008). Yuxiang asked whether there were Hui songs or Manchu songs. She answered, "No." Bai Lan won first place in the composition contest last semester. When Yuxiang inquired what she wrote in that composition contest, she answered,

*"The title of the composition was provided for me by the school: 'How shall I make a contribution to the Beijing Olympic Games?' I wrote about how I participated in sports and games in school, helped clean the campus and community, and studied harder". (interview, 2008).*

As Qian (2007) argued, whether a minority student can succeed in the modern educational system in China depended on whether he or she could successfully adapt to the mainstream culture. Otherwise, they could not pass different levels of standardized examinations.

Mr. Ma and Mr. Wan both stated that Lingling and Bai Lan had no problems in their academic studies (interview, 2008). They depicted Lingling and Bai Lan as hard-working and smart students. They did not, however, see how hard Lingling's mother pushed her to reach her potential by doing extra homework; and how Bai Lan's parents provided a supportive environment for Bai Lan's studies: through Internet access at home, trust between Bai Lan's parents, and Bai Lan's hard work at home (interview and field notes, 2008). Furthermore, Hui knowledge and culture were under-represented in elementary school textbooks (Wang & Phillion, 2010), class instruction and other school activities, which sent a message to Hui students that Hui culture, beliefs, and knowledge were not worth learning. Mr Wan emphasized recitation in his Chinese class. He tried to convince me that his practice was appropriate:

*"You know there is a saying "After you recite 300 poems written in the Tang Dynasty, you can use them even though you cannot write a poem." If they didn't learn Chinese well, it would be impossible for them to keep learning higher level courses, let alone going to college". (interview, 2008)*

His emphasis on recitation in learning Chinese demonstrates that he positioned himself as a knowledge transmitter. Mr. Wan expected students to remember knowledge in the textbooks and try to earn high scores on tests (interview, 2008). Students did not need to reflect on knowledge, and critical thinking was not encouraged. This is what Freire (1970) called the "banking concept of education," which is the easiest way of imposing mainstream ideology and values.

### **Subaltern and Identity**

The purpose of schooling is to reproduce mainstream Han knowledge and culture through knowledge selection and transmission. At school, teachers had absolute power over students. Teachers were the authority in transmitting knowledge, and students could not challenge their teachers (B. He, 2005). Knowledge and culture in the textbooks were regarded as Truth in China (Wang & Phillion, 2010), which Lingling and Bai Lan had to learn and were not allowed to criticize. Lingling and Bai Lan had little choice of what the teachers assigned and what the teachers imposed on them. Lingling stated, "I have to complete my homework not only assigned by my teacher but also given by my mother, then I have to review what I learned in school and preview what I am going to learn the next day" (interview, 2008). What Lingling and Bai Lan were expected to do, especially in Chinese class, was to read the stories until they could recite them. Lingling complained,

*"I don't like reciting stories everyday because I have to read them many times. My mother checked whether I could recite them at home. The teacher sometimes asked me to recite in class. Often I was nervous. Sometimes I was too nervous to finish reciting the whole story". (interview, 2008)*

Therefore, Lingling and Bai Lan were dominated by their school teachers in school. The domination from school teachers and the hegemonic control of mainstream Han culture and knowledge made Lingling and Bai Lan believe that they had to learn Chinese, mainstream culture, knowledge, and belief if they want to go to a better high school and a better college for social mobility and that they did not need to learn Hui knowledge.

### **Hybridity and Hui Students' Construction of their Identity**

Lingling and Bai Lan were registered as Huihui, but they claimed there were no differences between them and the Han students (interview, 2008), which is what Bhabha (1985) called in-betweenness. Lingling and Bai Lan demonstrated their appreciation of and respect for mainstream Han culture and knowledge (interview, 2008). Based on Lingling's and Bai Lan's satisfaction with the mainstream Han ideology of "56 nationalities are a family" and their appreciation of the harmony and stability of the state practices (interview, 2008), Lingling and Bai Lan had been hybridized. Hybridity reinforces the domination of the mainstream Han group and guarantees the single voice of dominant authority. The dominant Han culture and knowledge in the elementary textbooks (Wang & Phillion, 2010) and the "banking concept" (Freire, 1970) used in class instruction imposed the mainstream Han ideology without cultivating students' critical thinking skills and convinced Lingling and Bai Lan that Han knowledge and culture were the truth that they had to learn (interview, 2008). Mr. Ma expressed his belief in learning mainstream knowledge and beliefs:

*"Since Lingling lives among Han people and they have to compete with Han peers in the National College Entrance Examination, Lingling has to learn mainstream culture, knowledge, and beliefs. Otherwise, how can she survive in various standardized tests and go to college". (interview, 2008)*

Mr. Wan stated a similar concern for Bai Lan about the importance of learning mainstream culture and knowledge in her public school education: "It proves that the school practice is right because she [Bai Lan] did quite well in the class and in the school. I'm confident that she will successfully go to Dongsheng No. 1 High School next year" (interview, 2008).

The mainstream Han group constructed the Chinese national identity through imposing Han culture, knowledge, and ideology on minority students, and at the same time, the mainstream Han group constructed the identity of "others" through taking away and/or downgrading minority culture and knowledge, the purpose of which was to convince minority students to accept the identity constructed by the mainstream Han group.

### **Conclusion**

The mainstream Han group in China reproduced western colonizers' manipulation of east and west and the identity construction of the people in the east by denigrating minority culture and knowledge and constructing minority identity from the mainstream Han group's perspectives. Hui culture, belief, and knowledge were regarded by the mainstream Han group as unscientific, backward, and not worth learning. Lingling's and Bai Lan's identities were constructed by teachers who believed that they were the same as the Han students. Lingling and Bai Lan, who had no power, accepted the identity their teachers constructed for them. Bai Lan and Lingling claimed that they were the same as Han girls. Furthermore, the mainstream Han group constructed their identity and at the same time constructed Lingling's and Bai Lan's identity. Thus the mainstream Han group demonstrates that mainstream culture, knowledge, and identity are superior to those of the minority and that minority groups should be subordinate to the mainstream Han group. Internal Orientalism must be critically examined and hegemonic cultural, political, and economic policies have to be criticized so that minority students' voices might be heard, minority culture and knowledge might be respected, and minority identity might be constructed based on their culture, knowledge, and historical tradition.

Through the comparison and contrast of the experience of Hui students and minority students in the U.S., we want to demonstrate that minority groups have been constructed by dominant groups as others and that their culture and knowledge are downgraded worldwide. Minority groups are struggling for their identities and the representation of their cultures and knowledge in school curriculum. Minority students in the U.S. are fighting for their language rights and quality education (Soto, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999; Wang & Phillion, 2007) because minority students' identities are taken away by public school education, and minority students' language, culture, knowledge, and identities are under-represented or denigrated by the dominant groups (Spring, 2007). Minority students in South Korea, who received little help from teachers, live in fear of being deported if they are found to be illegal immigrants (Lee, 2008). Maori students, who are required to learn the dominant Pakeha culture and knowledge, suffer from the hegemonic cultural control of the dominant Pakeha society in New Zealand, where school curricula reflect the cultural interests of the Pakeha (Smith, 1990). Martinez (2006), who examined Native American youth opposition to cultural domination in an urban high school, found that Native American youth is still oppressed by "two forms of colonization—one undertaken by Spain and the other by the United States" (p. 138) and called for the integration of Native American culture and knowledge into school curricula. In Brazil, public school curricula are not diverse, and minority culture and knowledge are not respected or valued (Hypolito, 2001). Silva, Barros, Halpern, and Silva also found that "racial prejudice and discrimination, although shrouded, are very strong in public school" (as cited in Hypolito, 2001, p. 171). The above research about the under-representation and denigration of minority students' language, culture, and knowledge in different regions of the world demonstrates the need for more attention and research about global multicultural issues. Therefore, this inquiry of Hui students' experiences in eastern China will contribute to the research and education of ethnic minority students not only in China and Asia but also in the world.

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