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Dislocated Education: The Case of Tibet

GERARD A. POSTIGLIONE

As the United Nations Millennium Development Goals deadline for education approaches, boarding schools offer one option for providing access to quality education for children from remote communities.¹ Developing countries already make use of them in rural areas to rationalize costs and concentrate resources, as well as to settle nomadic populations. Boarding schools are viewed as especially suitable for remote areas where populations are dispersed. Yet, boarding schools for indigenous peoples are hardly a new phenomenon. Moreover, their establishment has had as much to do with a civilizing mission as with the aim of providing educational access to underserved communities. As globalization's march continues to homogenize through mass schooling, the last populations are among the most culturally diverse. Efforts to provide education for all are inevitably accompanied by national missions to "civilize" minority peoples through boarding schools that dislocate children from their home communities.

The early nation-building experiences of Australia, Canada, and the United States are marked by the establishment of boarding schools to assimilate indigenous peoples.² Such institutional efforts to civilize failed spectacularly, with Australia and Canada having recently apologized for dislocating children from their home communities. Systematic dislocation continues in many parts of the world. Contemporary examples in East Asia include Laos, Vietnam, and China, each with over 50 officially designated ethnic minority groups. China is perhaps the most notable, not only for its boarding school initiative in Yunnan, its most multiethnic province, but also in Tibet and Xinjiang, where an ambitious program dislocates students to schools beyond their regional borders to central China. Starting in 1985, such boarding

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¹ For example, much attention has been given in the popular media recently to Oprah Winfrey's boarding school for girls from poor regions of South Africa.

² See McBeth (1983), Trennert (1988), Adams (1995), Ellis (1996), Miller (1996), Child (1998), Archuleta et al. (2004), Churchill (2004), Lomawaima and McCarty (2006), and Trafzer et al. (2006).

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schools were set up for students from Tibet.³ This so-called *neidi* (inland or hinterland) school policy continues and has remained popular with parents and students for nearly a quarter century.⁴ There is no explanation why China has managed to continue relocating children when many other countries have discontinued the practice, nor is there an understanding of why these schools are viewed as an attractive option for students and their families.

While doing fieldwork on basic education in rural and seminomadic areas in Tibet, I discovered that top achieving primary school graduates headed off to boarding schools in central China. As I began to study these schools, reactions to my topic in North America and Australia tended to evoke what Gita Steiner-Khamsi and Ines Stolpe (2006, 165) call “horrific associations of cultural alienation and forced assimilation.”⁵ In contrast, the view in China was that these schools simply provided a base to train talent that most local schools were unable to match. Yet, I was also aware that the unresolved controversy over Tibet played into the educational intentions of these schools. Therefore, I became interested in how *neidi* schools were perceived by students and their parents, how they were supposed to help develop Tibet, to what extent they acculturated Tibetans, and whether they fit the ominous stereotype of cultural alienation and coercion. As this article shows, I came away convinced that Tibetan students acculturated to the Chinese mainstream, but usually on their own terms. That is, they did not become less assertive in their ethnicity, though the paucity of knowledge about Tibetan language and cultural heritage provided by the schools made this a formidable challenge. I also concluded that this experience resonated with that of African Americans who may have acculturated but remained determined to rediscover their ethnic heritages and reconstruct their historical experiences on their own terms. Furthermore, I was aware that China’s ability to sustain these boarding schools would inevitably depend on whether they delivered what they promised, namely, a better education and a high-status job.

The sociological study of education has broadened our understanding of how schools act as agencies for social and cultural reproduction as well as resist forms of state-sponsored socialization.⁶ Anthropological study has

³ By Tibet is meant the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) of the People’s Republic of China. The TAR is sometimes referred to as “political Tibet” as distinguished from “ethnic Tibet,” a much larger region that includes not only the TAR but also the Tibetan areas of the four adjacent Chinese provinces of Qinghai, Sichuan, Yunnan, and Gansu. Dislocated boarding schools were established for students from Xinjiang in 1999. Xinjiang means the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

⁴ *Neidi* in Chinese is usually rendered as “inland,” a term that refers to the Chinese mainland territory. A *neidi* school generally refers to a school in a major Chinese city such as Shanghai, Beijing, Tianjin, or Qingdao that is staffed largely by Han Chinese teachers and administrators from that host city and follows the national curriculum. China is not unique in the region.

⁵ Steiner-Khamsi and Stolpe drew a different conclusion in their study of boarding schools in Mongolia.

⁶ See Ogbu and Gibson (1974, 1991), Bordieu (1977), Morrow and Torres (1995), and Ogbu (1995, 2003).

demonstrated how responses to schooling by indigenous ethnic minorities create oppositional cultures founded in folk theories—informal, almost intuitive ways of explaining how the world works around them. Empirical study across both fields has provided a number of explanations for the underachievement of ethnic minorities.⁷ Less attention has been focused on the resiliency and sustainability of policies that dislocate ethnic minorities from their home communities. In the case of Tibet, the official reason for the establishment of nonindigenous boarding schools has been to raise talented people for Tibet's economic development. Tibet is, in fact, the poorest provincial-level entity in China, with a severe lack of qualified secondary school teachers, acutely inadequate educational facilities, and the lowest levels of educational achievement (Postiglione et al. 2005; Keidel 2009).

While boarding programs in Australia, Canada, and the United States largely failed in their missions of cultural assimilation, China continues to sustain boarding schools that follow a national curriculum transmitted by teachers, with the exception of the Tibetan language and literature teachers, who are not Tibetan or have not lived in Tibet. This in itself does not mean that China's *neidi* schools are assimilating Tibetans to become Han Chinese, as some observers suggest.⁸ While Tibetan graduates accept a view about the backwardness of their economy, they are less prone to accept one about the inferiority of their native culture. In this sense, there is a fundamental difference between China and the other countries mentioned above. In particular, the cultural distance between the Anglo colonial settlers and native peoples of America, Australia, and Canada was far greater than the one that exists between peoples in the adjacent lands of China and Tibet, who share a Buddhist heritage and have had centuries of contact and interchange. Therefore, cultural distance may be a less useful notion than cultural self-determination in a comparative study of boarding schools for dislocated children. In general, student mobility for secondary education resonates in China, where many students, mostly Han Chinese, are sent away even beyond national borders to secondary schools in developed countries. Moreover, *neidi* schools for Tibetans in the Chinese capital have a history that extends back to the Qing dynasty and republican government eras.⁹ Thus, state-sponsored schooling that dislocates Tibetans is plausibly buoyed by a folk theory of

⁷ These include several explanations, e.g., (1) capital deficiency (Schultz 1963; Becker 1964; Jenks et al. 1979; Bordieu 1986; Fischer et al. 1996); (2) oppositional culture (Ogbu 1978; Suarez-Orosco 1991; Kao and Tienda 1998); (3) stereotype imposition (Steele 1992); (4) peer influence (Sewell et al. 1969; Halliman 1982); (5) social detachment (Tinto 1993; Johnson et al. 2001); (6) ethnic segregation (Steele 1998); (7) social class reproduction (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Willis 1977); (8) school effects (Coleman 1966); and (9) preparation for university (Nettles 1991).

⁸ The unsubstantiated assertion that these schools "forcibly assimilate" Tibetans is found on an official Web site. See China's impact on Tibetan cultural and linguistic identity at <http://www.tibet.net/en/index.php?id=1601&articletype=flashold&rmenuid=morenews>, accessed on April 6, 2009.

⁹ The Tibetans who attended these schools were largely from ethnic Tibet and specifically the area beyond the present-day TAR—which did not exist as a political entity of China at that time.

success. In pragmatic terms, this theory enables Tibetan students and their families to calculate the value of both mainstream cultural capital and ethnic cultural vitality. Their calculations may reflect a strategy to amass cultural capital from the credentials that the boarding schools offer. However, such calculations remain viable only as long as they conform to a folk theory of success. The basis for such a theory exists in a tradition of religious education whereby a son would leave his family at a very young age for the monastery, a departure that would confer cultural capital on the son and his family.

The themes of reproduction and resistance that find utility in neo-Marxist studies of schooling throughout the world tap into the culturally bound logic of Tibetan households. These families live in a world of limited but highly determinate choices about school access for their children. Despite having their own internal logic, folk theories of success inadequately explain how resistance, sometimes couched in terms of oppositional culture, shapes strategies of capital conversion (Bourdieu 1986). Folk theories contain assumptions about these strategies for acquiring mainstream cultural capital, which is then converted into social and economic opportunities. Thus, studies of how boarding school for indigenous minorities is sustained should examine choices made to attend such schools, responses to circumstantial challenges in school, comparative weighing of the education received to the alternative and the outcomes it provides, as well as forms of social resistance and cultural opposition, and the cultural capital trade-offs between minority and mainstream cultures for social status, economic, and community-bound opportunities for leadership.

The next section provides background on the education of ethnic minorities in China, as well as education in Tibet, and is followed by a review of the origin and development of boarding schools for Tibetan students. The rest of the article examines the experiences and reflections of Tibetan students and their families. Data are partially derived from the oral history recollections of Tibetans who graduated from nonindigenous boarding schools. Along with other data about the origin and development of *neidi* schools, the oral histories contribute to an understanding of how the Chinese government continues to sustain these schools, despite the experiences of Western countries.

Background

Indigenous minorities in remote regions of developing countries attain literacy and basic education later than the larger population. Ethnic minority education in developing countries, especially for girls, remains an urgent global challenge. The cultural dimensions of such education, particularly language and religion, increase the complexity of the task. This is true for China, most particularly in Tibet. Tibetan demands for schools to elevate the status of their culture within the national framework are ubiquitous. Yet,

the content of education, especially in boarding schools, reflects the state's view of ethnicity, as represented by Xiaotong Fei's (1989) concept (*duoyuan yiti geju*)—plurality and unity within the configuration of the Chinese nation, which delineates a process for all ethnic group cultures to move toward a unified national culture that is largely defined by Han Chinese culturalism. Thus, schools are saddled with the formidable challenge to conserve ethnic minority cultures within a national context that places a premium on Han Chinese cultural capital.¹⁰ In the case of Tibetans, schools must represent Tibetan cultural heritage by linking the content of schooling to students' values and beliefs, while at the same time socializing them into a Chinese national identity. Moreover, the acquisition of Han cultural capital does not in itself prevent ethnic minorities in China from being marginalized within the national mainstream.

Given China's complex ethnic minority makeup, with 55 culturally unique groups whose total population exceeds the national population of all but 10 countries in the world, the state can hardly respond to minority educational needs as if they were a single entity. Minority educational policies are supposed to account for the unique conditions faced by different regions such as Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia, Guaxi, and Ningxia. Practice, however, is another matter, because policies may easily be interpreted to conform with the agendas of regional leaders. The degree of regional autonomy practiced in educational matters is still an issue for research and investigation.

Within the context of a folk theory, China's civilizing project of national schooling in Tibet and other ethnic regions is challenged by cultural resistance to aspects of schooling that encroach on ethnic culture and identity formation and, at the same time, do not yield promised economic rewards. The school's ability to address cultural and economic dimensions of educational access is crucial to its success. John Ogbu and Margaret Gibson's (1991) work in the United States adds nuance to this perspective, noting the distinction between *voluntary minorities*, or those who emigrate out of choice to a new place, and *involuntary minorities*, or those who are indigenous or are forced to reside in or move to a region. The logic is that voluntary minorities are more disposed to accept the new society and its education system, whereas involuntary minorities may resist state schooling and develop an oppositional identity in the face of pressure to assimilate on unequal terms. Resistance will be particularly strong if indigenous minorities view the education system as a way to strip them of their own culture and identity without giving them equal opportunity in the wider society. If, however, indigenous minorities believe that they can use education to achieve success,

¹⁰ Han cultural capital refers to the broad array of cultural knowledge of the Chinese language, especially how to write it, the ethnic themes of the Han Chinese found in classical and modern literature, and the credentials from Chinese schools. These become a kind of additive knowledge that is intended to confer social status. Regarding Han Chinese views of minority culture, see, e.g., Heberer (1989), Gladney (1991), Dikotter (1992), Mackerras (1994, 1995), and Harrell (2002).

they will often surmount the obstacles posed by cultural distance. When Tibetans associate boarding school attendance with a high likelihood of economic success—success that might improve their status and power in the national mainstream—then the probability of willing participation increases.

Of China's five national autonomous regions, Tibet is the most ethnically homogeneous, intensely religious, geographically remote from Beijing, and economically poor. References to Tibet in this article are to the Tibetan Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China (PRC), sometimes known as political Tibet, a constitutionally designated territory. Cultural Tibet is about as large as the continental United States and extends beyond the TAR and into four adjoining provinces where most of China's Tibetans live. The TAR covers 1.2 million square kilometers, 12.5 percent of the area of China. Tibetans were 95.5 percent of the TAR's population in 1990 and 92 percent in 2000, and they currently constitute a minority of the population in the capital city of Lhasa.¹¹ Located a great distance from China's mainstream cultural center, its residents possess a distinctive culture with a complex religious tradition and writing system dating back over a thousand years. Most Tibetans live at extraordinarily high altitudes, predominantly on plateaus averaging 3,600 meters above sea level and surrounded by mountains. Following Tibet's so-called peaceful liberation in 1950, when the Chinese military entered and declared Tibet a part of the PRC, there were few changes to the traditional theocratic structure of government, the organization of monasteries, and traditional forms of landholding (Goldstein 2007). However, political difficulties led to the Dalai Lama's flight to India in 1958, where he remains in residence a half century later. The establishment of the TAR followed his departure, in 1965.

Between 1913 and 1951, as Melvyn Goldstein (1989, 1997) notes, Tibet had a *de facto* independent polity. Monastery education dominated until 1951, when the Chinese established a school in Tibet and the Seventeen Point Agreement was signed, one provision of which read "the spoken and written language and the school education of the Tibetan nationality shall be developed step by step in accordance with the actual conditions of Tibet" (quoted in Goldstein [1989, 767]). By 1959, shortly after the Dalai Lama fled to India, education in Tibet was brought closer in line with the rest of China. Monastery education, with its emphasis on recitation of scripture, continued to exert a strong influence, although monasteries have become tightly controlled, especially in terms of size. It is impossible to separate Tibetan religion from other aspects of Tibetan culture, and many Tibetan households still aspire to have one of their children enter a monastery. Until recently, monks were often the most literate members of rural and nomadic

¹¹ See the chapter on Tibet and the movement of Tibetans in Irendale et al. (2001, 138–39).

communities, but a wide cleavage between monastery and school has become pervasive (Nyima 1997; Bass 2008).

After the Dalai Lama fled to India, education for Tibetans was put on the fast track by the Beijing government, though it remained about a decade behind more developed areas of China. The Cultural Revolution, a 10-year political campaign aimed at rekindling revolutionary fervor and purifying the Chinese Communist Party, tore into the fabric of Tibetan life with devastating results, including a massive destruction of temples and the monastic system. Class struggle became the order of the day, and the quality of teaching and learning, already low, worsened. Where they remained open, schools became predominantly an ideological arena for propaganda and self-criticism. Class warfare took precedence over academic affairs, and any mention of cultural heritage became associated with feudalism and was severely criticized. Nevertheless, the later part of the Cultural Revolution in Tibet saw an expansion of school numbers. Catriona Bass (1998) provides figures that show rapid growth in elementary school enrollments from 1965, the year the TAR was established, and a leveling off in 1978, when the emphasis of educational policy shifted from quantity to quality and enrollments began a drastic decline. With the 1981 dissolution of communes that collectivized agriculture and pastoral life, rural and nomadic parents began to withdraw their children from school to labor in the new household economy system. The more open policy after the Cultural Revolution initially led more children to pursue formal education in monasteries instead of the poorly staffed schools that lacked trained teachers. The unintended effect of reform era decentralization was to leave rural schools with fewer resources for school buildings, instructional materials, teacher salaries, and especially the reform and localization of school curriculum. Access to education remained a problem because of Tibet's size, remoteness, and population dispersion. Like other ethnic autonomous regions, the TAR's special status came with educational policies that provided Tibetan-language school textbooks and instruction, boarding schools in nomadic regions, and boarding schools in nonlocal regions.

Origins and Development

The *neidi* schools for Tibetans were established several years after Vice Premier Hu Yaobang's visit to Tibet in 1981.¹² Aside from ordering many

¹² There has been a great deal of confusion about the translation of *Xizang neidiban* from Chinese to English. The government's former translation of "Tibet inland schools and classes" could give the incorrect impression that these schools and classes are held within Tibet. A more recent government English translation is "hinterland schools." In actuality, the *Xizang neidiban* are largely located in major Chinese cities and are basically Chinese boarding schools; thus a more precise English translation would be "dislocated schools." This article uses the term *neidi* schools instead of *neidiban* to denote that it focuses on the schools in which Tibetans constitute all or a major part of the school population rather than the dispersed vocational classes set up for Tibetans in some largely Han Chinese populated senior secondary schools.

Chinese officials to return to China and for those who remained in Tibet to study the Tibetan language, Hu stressed the need to improve education.¹³ Visits followed by other high-ranking central government leaders and led to a call for mainland cities to establish schools and classes for Tibetans.¹⁴ Beijing, Lanzhou, and Chengdu established *neidi* schools in 1985, and by the end of 1986 there were 16 such schools. In 1987, the policy was affirmed. Chinese president Jiang Zemin declared in 1990 that *neidi* schools help Tibetans understand the motherland and widen their worldview. A 1993 working group on Tibet called for long-term support for *neidi* boarding school education. The success of the Tibet *neidi* schools led to the establishment of similar schools for students from the Xinjiang Uyghur Nationality Autonomous Region in 2000 (Chen 2008).

In 1985, 20 percent of Tibet's elementary school graduates were dislocated for junior secondary education (Ying 1984).¹⁵ As the secondary school enrollment rates of the TAR continued to grow, the proportion but not the number being dislocated to China decreased.¹⁶ From 1985 to 2005, 25,000 students went to 89 *neidi* schools in 20 provinces and municipalities (Xiangba 2005). The student cohorts that have spanned the 20 plus years since *neidi* schools were established may be usefully periodized into three groups. The first group completed a preparatory year, followed by a standard 3-year junior secondary school education. After graduation, a small number went on to one of the three *neidi* senior secondary schools. Most of the others either returned to Tibet or, after a short visit home, continued their study for another 3 years in *neidi* vocational-technical classes.

The second group had more opportunities to attend a *neidi* senior secondary school after graduating from a *neidi* junior secondary school; a smaller proportion could still opt for *neidi* vocational classes. Only a small portion of regular senior secondary graduates went on to college, though not without preferential admission policies; these were mostly 2- or 3-year colleges. By 1994, there were 5,081 *neidi* junior secondary students, 2,041 students in *neidi* specialized middle-level (senior secondary vocational) schools, 1,062 students in *neidi* middle-level teacher training schools (senior secondary level), 866

¹³ Hu led urgent discussion about how to improve the living standards of Tibetans. He criticized Han cadres, reduced their numbers in Tibet, and ordered those who stayed to learn Tibetan. It is claimed he said that money sent to Tibet for education ended up in the Yarlong River and that the amount of funding allocated to one school in Tibet was enough to establish two in China.

¹⁴ The main leaders who visited were Hu Qili and Tian Jiyun.

¹⁵ Two key documents pertaining to the establishment of the *neidi* schools were *Concerning Attaining the Target of the Formation of Interior Region Tibetan Schools and Classes for Cultivating Talented Students* (Central Government Document no. 22 of 1984) and *Circular Concerning Attaining the Central Implementation Target of Cultivating Tibetan Talent in the Interior Regions* (Document no. 25 of 1984).

¹⁶ It should also be pointed out that in the 1980s, and despite government restrictions, many Tibetan officials continued to send their children to India for secondary schooling. The *neidi* schools were also viewed as a way to provide a high-quality alternative.

in *neidi* regular senior secondary schools, and 563 at *neidi* colleges and universities, mostly in 3-year diploma programs.

As elementary school education in Tibet began to improve, the third group began to skip the *neidi* junior secondary preparatory year. Also, more students completed their junior secondary school in Tibet before being dislocated to a *neidi* senior secondary school. The vast majority of these students were guaranteed preferential admission to a college or university after graduation from senior secondary school. Although many attend 3-year tertiary programs (similar to community colleges or polytechnics), a number were also admitted to 4-year bachelor degree programs, including Tibet University and other universities in China.¹⁷ Thus, the *neidi* program continually upgraded educational opportunities to accommodate the elevated aspirations of Tibetan households as market forces and competition for nonfarm labor jobs increased.

The Social Composition of Dislocated School Graduates

Gender and ethnicity.—*Neidi* schools maintained a fairly even balance in student gender profile. For example, the *neidi* school in Hubei Province admitted 1,046 boys and 1,222 girls between 1985 and 2004 (Liu 2005). Other schools had a similar gender profile. A major portion of *neidi* school graduates join the ranks of Tibet's elementary school teachers, a profession that has become increasingly dominated by women. Since *neidi* schools are designed to serve the TAR, not just TAR Tibetans, other ethnic groups are also admitted. These include not only the indigenous Luoba and Moinba but also Han Chinese, children from mixed ethnic families, and Tibetans from other provinces who are permanent residents of Tibet. In 1995, 120 places were set aside for the children of non-Tibetan cadres, public officials holding an administrative post in party and government. For their children to secure a place, such cadres must serve for 10 years as permanent residents in Tibet, and their children must score over 120 on the entrance exam, above the mark required for Tibetans. City-level cadres in the TAR must have lived and worked in Tibet for 20 years, and their children must achieve an entrance exam score of 110 (110 in Aba and Naxchu, 180 in Lhasa), a measure that reflects the growing demand for access to *neidi* schools on the part of Han Chinese and other groups not satisfied with the quality of the local schools where they serve as cadres.

Language.—*Neidi* schools' first cohort groupings comprised mostly urban children who had attended elementary schools where the medium of instruction was Chinese, though most still needed a preparatory year of language training when they arrived at their *neidi* school. By 1991, of 1,282 new

¹⁷ The research in this article refers largely to the first and second cohorts, since they have already returned to Tibet in greater numbers; the later cohorts are only beginning to return to Tibet and will be interviewed in future research.

entrants, 997 came from Tibetan-medium elementary schools and 285 from Chinese-medium schools. In 1992, the prestigious Beijing *neidi* school began accepting graduates of Tibetan-medium elementary schools. The Chengdu *neidi* school admitted students from all parts of Tibet who had studied in Chinese-medium elementary schools. By 1993, the number of dislocated students exceeded 10,000, and students were no longer divided according to their language of instruction in elementary school. Their entrance exam contained three subjects: Tibetan, Chinese, and mathematics.

Region.—As the *neidi* school program gained momentum, more attention was paid to the composition of incoming classes. In 1992, Beijing's *neidi* school set an 80 percent quota for rural and nomadic region students from all parts of Tibet. While the early cohorts were dominated by urban children of cadre families, the aim was to shift enrollments in favor of children from rural and nomadic regions. However, students were selected on the basis of examination results, according to quotas set for each district of Tibet. Although there are no reliable figures to assess the outcome of the policy favoring children of families from rural and nomadic regions, my research indicates that at least half of the students were from cadre households. The boarding schools are clearly preparing an elite stratum, with about half of the children already from elite households and the rest aspiring to that category.

Prefectures and counties.—The Tibet government also aims to make school access geographically representative. To this end, each district is allocated a quota. However, it is up to the district to allocate quotas to individual counties under its jurisdiction, and it is not unusual for some counties to have few students scoring high enough to attend *neidi* schools. For example, on a 2007 visit to Nyerong, a nomadic county in northern Tibet, it was discovered that while 70–80 percent of the schoolteachers were graduates of the *neidi* schools, none were originally from Nyerong. Most *neidi* schools are paired with specific districts in Tibet for the purposes of student selection. Some Tibetan language and literature teachers and some management personnel are also sent to the *neidi* schools from specific districts of Tibet.

Over the first 20 plus years of the *neidi* school policy, many incremental changes occurred. The number of *neidi* schools increased, selection quotas were modified, rural and nomadic student enrollments rose slightly, partnerships between the host city and Tibet's districts were adjusted, the cost of airfares from Tibet to *neidi* schools was left to households, and students who scored below the entrance exam cutoff were permitted to enroll as self-funded students.

The School Environment

Boarding schools are ethnically segregated.¹⁸ In cases in which host city students also attend, classes are segregated despite a common curriculum

¹⁸ Though there has been some experimentation. Small numbers of academically superior students

except for a Tibetan language and literature class. Thus, while the schools aim to integrate Tibetans into Chinese nationhood, this is not reflected in the composition of the classroom.

Unlike Anglo schools for native peoples, *neidi* schools exhibit ethnic symbols on campus such as mosaics, murals, sculptures, photos, or other representations of cultural artifacts. However, religious symbols are excluded except for the occasional photo on display of the Panchen Lama, the second-highest religious figure in Tibetan Buddhism. There is also an observance of Tibetan New Year with specially prepared meals and visits by Tibetan leaders. Students are required to study the national curriculum, but classes on Tibetan language and literature are also compulsory. Attention to the study of Tibetan language and literature declines rapidly in senior secondary school as preparations are made for the national college and university entrance examinations. Not only does the *neidi* school prepare students ideologically to become citizens of China's Tibet, but it also becomes the formal agent of interpretation for defining Tibet's cultural heritage, values, and traditions. Zhu's research shows that students at nonindigenous boarding schools appropriate the social and psychological "space" that is created between themselves and the school's national socialization program to construct their ethnic identities (Zhu 2007).

Methodology

In order to understand why China's *neidi* boarding school approach succeeds where other countries' attempts have failed, as well as what might make nonindigenous boarding schools ultimately unsustainable, I visited schools and interviewed graduates of *neidi* schools after they returned to Tibet. In 2006–7, recollections were recorded of life before, during, and after dislocation for schooling.

Subjects spoke freely about their experiences before, during, and after the *neidi* school phase of their lives. They were not asked specific questions about their attitudes. In this context, respondents spoke about what was important to them, as well as the specific factors that played a role in their experiences. Each session, lasting 2–3 hours, took place in homes, workplaces, or restaurants. Interrater reliability confirmed that site, time, language, questioning style, gender, and ethnicity of the interviewer and interviewee had no significant effect on response patterns. Understanding such effects was one of the intentions behind the training program for the interview team.¹⁹ I conducted workshops on questioning techniques, accompanied the research teams on selected visits, and conducted interviews on specific points

were sent to neighboring schools to study in integrated classes with Han Chinese students. While this is viewed as a positive step toward mainstreaming, it is also seen by *neidi* school principals as draining off the best talent from the *neidi* schools (in the same way that TAR school principals view *neidi* schools as draining off the best talent from their schools).

¹⁹ This was tested by assigning a number to the interviewer and then comparing data patterns.

with graduates, parents, and teachers. The interview environments were non-threatening, and subjects, graduates of inland schools that have a relatively high status in Tibet, were self-assured.

The oral histories of 172 graduates were recorded, among whom 46 percent were women and 54 percent were men; 62 percent were from urban areas, 31 percent from rural areas, and 5 percent from nomadic areas (plus 2 percent unclassified). Almost half (49 percent) had grown up in cadre families, more than a quarter (27 percent) came from agricultural or nomadic households, 20 percent were from worker or urban resident households, and the remaining 4 percent were from either business, unemployed, or unclassified households. More than half (60 percent) of the 172 subjects entered *neidi* boarding schools in the first cohort (1985–88), 31 percent in the second cohort (1989–92), and 9 percent in the third cohort (1993–96).

Visits were made to nonindigenous boarding schools to better understand how education was organized and conducted and to observe the learning environment and campus life. While there, students, teachers, and administrators were interviewed. *Neidi* school graduates were difficult to locate because they are scattered throughout Tibet. Graduates interviewed for this study were from cohorts that had already returned to Tibet and had jobs. Most returned to Tibet between 1992 and 1993. Therefore, we were able to explore the schools' long-term effects after graduates returned to Tibet. The first round of oral histories took place in three main population centers: Lhasa, Shigatse, and Nakchu. The second round took place at three lower-level counties of these urban centers: Lhundrup, Penam, and Nyerong. In the first stage, oral histories were gathered in Lhasa (54), Shigatse (58), and Nakchu (60) from a total of 172 *neidi* school graduates. Interview data were also gathered from leaders of units that employed *neidi* school graduates, often school principals. In the second stage, oral histories were conducted of *neidi* school graduates who had been assigned jobs further away from urban centers. These included 18 from Penam and 22 from Lhundrup counties. A handful of oral histories were conducted in townships located between Nakchu and Nyerong counties. Oral histories based on guiding questions were tape-recorded and later transcribed. The files were initially grouped into sets of 10 in the order in which the oral histories were recorded, so that key themes in response patterns could be identified, summarized, and reviewed at workshops with the research team at the Tibet Academy of Social Science and the University of Hong Kong.

Considering Dislocation

Reflections about school and home before going to study outside of Tibet are best understood within context. Tibetan elementary school quality generally pales in comparison to that in the host *neidi* city. There are also large differences between the elementary schools students attended in Tibet. Chil-

dren from rural or nomadic areas may have attended a 2-year, one-teacher village school before completing the final 4 years of elementary school in a township school, where they boarded from Monday to Friday. Meanwhile, children from a city or county seat may have attended a full six-grade elementary school with better-qualified teachers for the main subjects of mathematics, Tibetan, and Chinese. Regardless, *neidi* school teachers often remark on the inferior academic standards of Tibetans. Home life before dislocation, especially in rural and nomadic areas, is dominated by traditional Tibetan religious values (Postiglione et al. 2005, 2006; Postiglione 2008). Rural and nomadic households—most monogamous though with a fair share of polyandrous and polygamous marriages—have more children, poorer access to health care, higher rates of illiteracy, and less disposable income. Traditional values weighed heavily on life at home, and child development patterns included strict deference to parents.²⁰ By contrast, urban households had parents with more education and fewer children.²¹ Urban households also had higher levels of literacy. From an analysis of the oral history recordings we were able to classify 45.9 percent of *neidi* graduates who had been from an urban family with a literate parent and only 16.9 percent who had been from a rural family with a literate parent. Aside from 11.6 percent of graduates whose oral histories did not include a reference to literacy, the rest were from nonliterate families.

Students from urban schools are also advantaged in that they sometimes move away together with several classmates. In one case, half of the students from an urban elementary school succeeded in the entrance examination and attended the same *neidi* school. In another case, only four students in an elementary school graduating class were eligible to attend a *neidi* school. Although there were district quotas, education authorities had some flexibility in adjusting the cutoff scores for different schools in a district. However, in the remote Nyerong County, most elementary schools did not have even one student qualified to be admitted to a *neidi* school. Thus, there was an effort to recruit to elite schools students whose parents could understand the potential payoff of Chinese schooling and who were more familiar with life in China from news, television, and other sources. Bass (1998) notes apprehension among Tibetan parents in 1984, just as the program of nonindigenous boarding school education began. However, she also points out a change in attitude over time. As the program became more popular, half the intake of secondary students each year went to China (Bass 1998). Both the quality of education offered in China and the experience of their children at boarding schools had much to do with parental and community change

²⁰ On rural life in the areas where some of the subjects for this research were interviewed, see Goldstein et al. (2003).

²¹ Xiang level is a designation between a village and county.

in attitudes and perspectives. Initial apprehension about sending a child to a *neidi* school gradually wore off.

Families generally received information about *neidi* schools from classmates, relatives, and friends or were shown photographs and letters by those who had already been to China for education or training. Still, parents were not completely at ease, such as those who worried that their 11-year-old daughter was too young to take care of herself. Other families, especially those who were illiterate or nomadic, did not understand much or had little information about *neidi* schools. Students or graduates who spoke about the decision to attend *neidi* school indicated their parents believed that *neidi* schools offered a good education.

Question: How did you decide at that time to study at a *neidi* school?

Answer: I was influenced by my father. He supported my study at a *neidi* school, because he wanted me to eventually go on to attend university, and to him the *neidi* school was the best pathway.

Question: In 1991, before you went to the Tianjin Hongguan middle school, what was the situation at home?

Answer: At home, my mother and father were cadres and hoped that I would test well for the *neidi* school entrance, because everything was better there, and after I returned to Tibet, I would have a solid foundation.

Although they had the most to gain in relative terms from a boarding school education, parents in rural and nomadic areas knew less about the *neidi* schools than urban parents. As students graduated and returned to start their own families, the policy became more widely known. In some cases, a local teacher or principal of an elementary school returned students had attended would tell parents about why it was worthwhile to attend a boarding school. Students, whether from cadre or farming families, were persuaded by the possibility of getting a good job after graduation as well as by the living standards and learning conditions at *neidi* schools.

One graduate recalled the envy some students felt toward those attending school in China, and several spoke of their wish to “see the world.” Still, at 11 or 12 years of age, permission of their parents was essential if they were to attend a *neidi* school. A substantial number of students were from rural and nomadic regions, where we had encountered the preference of parents to keep children at home to labor in the household economy after primary school rather than send them to the county seat for a junior secondary education of doubtful quality and poor job-related outcomes. However, gaining access to a *neidi* school meant an opportunity to attend an elite school of high quality and with good job prospects.

Question: So there were three children at your home. Was it a consideration of your parents that if you left, there would be a loss of labor, an influence on your family income?

Answer: No, I left with my second brother. We were in the same cohort and graduated at the same time. At that time, my parents didn't think about it at all. For them, it was a happy thing that we were able to pass the examination. They said if you go there for school, no matter how poor and how difficult it is at home, you needn't worry about the work at home.

Question: Did your parents know anything about the school where you were sent?

Answer: No, we lived in a village, so all they knew was that their children were going to attend a good school and they should go to the school. My parents didn't know anything else. My father had been to *neidi* for training several times when he worked in a factory. He had been there, so he knew *neidi* was a good place. He was happy to let us go, but my mother didn't know about *neidi* at all.

Children who gained access to *neidi* schools attended free; otherwise most families could not have afforded the expense. As the schools gained in popularity, the government continued to bear tuition costs but not students' transportation expenses between Tibet and the schools. Households with children who scored below the required level on the entrance examination could also gain access as fee-paying students.²² As more information about life and learning in *neidi* schools made its way to Tibet, prospective students and their parents became persuaded of the value of the trade-off of leaving Tibet for several years and returning with a good education.

Data about predislocation suggest that decisions to attend *neidi* schools are less informed by oppositional culture than by a folk theory that calculates gain and risk. Gains in mainstream cultural capital through credentials, potential to expand social capital networks, better job prospects, and quality of education are set against the loss of household labor in the case of agricultural and nomadic families, separation from children for an extended period, and risk of safety. Especially for rural and nomadic-area children, attendance guarantees a link with urban life, not only in China but also when they return to and are allocated a job in Tibet. For Tibetan urban households, social capital is bound up with links to China and the assurance of jobs that can reproduce parental cadre status. The cultural capital gained through knowledge of the Chinese language and mainstream culture grooms students for middleman status in relations between Tibet and the mainland. For both urban and rural parents, there are few alternatives. Their children attend secondary school either in Tibet or in China, the latter offering the higher-quality education.²³ The third alternative, popular even with urban cadre families until government regulations changed in the late 1980s, was to send children to India for secondary school. This alternative, which offered an English-language education and the familiar surroundings of a Tibetan com-

²² According to interview L11, the students with a score beyond 170 had a chance to study in *neidiban*, whereas the students who further scored beyond 200 were able to go to *neidiban* in Shanghai.

²³ The exception is the Lhasa Number One Secondary School, whose education quality is often preferred to that in *neidi* boarding schools.

munity, is no longer an option. While students could still find their way into India and secondary school with the aid of the exile community, it is highly doubtful that a good job could be found upon return to Tibet. For example, such graduates were once in demand as tour guides owing to their English proficiency. However, this demand has dwindled with the increase in Chinese tour guides who have English as a second language.

Like schools elsewhere in Chinese urban areas, the state-sponsored and ethnically segregated boarding schools for Tibetans have introduced market principles and competition in their recruitment activities. The education bureau arranged a venue where each school representative has a display booth, not unlike boarding school student recruitment fairs run by European and American schools in major Asian cities. Tibet boarding school exhibitors provide colorful school literature, photographs, videos, student essays or art projects, brochures, and statistics about the school. Schools can also display commemorative books that review their many years of operation. Despite its market-oriented appearance, this is a state-sponsored event not unlike others that would fall under the banner of a socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics. The government has increasingly come to encourage competition among schools, including public and private (*minban*) schools and those run by a combination of state and what it calls social forces. The boarding school for Tibetans in each province remained insulated from this sea change in school reform; now there is an effort to move them in the same direction. Secondary schools in the TAR continue to improve their conditions and may recruit teachers from China, including graduates of *neidi* schools. *Neidi* schools also compete, albeit to a small degree at present, with the growing number of private *minban* schools in Chinese cities, some of which will recruit Tibetan students who can pay their high fees.

Dislocating

Climate, low altitude, local foods, and separation from family and friends led to illness for some Tibetan students in the first weeks of school. The adjustment was made easier by older students and teachers who looked after the new students. Some schools group students according to their home regions to help newcomers cope with school life. Some schools provide milk for breakfast, as a substitute staple for the butter tea that Tibetan students were used to drinking at home. Students found some comfort in the stark contrast between Tibet and Chinese urban life, though they also noted that the air was cleaner and clearer in Tibet, and the water tasted differently in their hometowns. However, all agreed that they were able to adjust within a month or two.

Boarding schools for indigenous people in other countries were often located away from major urban areas, but Tibet's *neidi* schools are located in major cities such as Beijing, Shanghai, Wuhan, and Tianjin. Students were

generally impressed with urban life in China and conditions associated with the popular meaning of “modern.” When students are off campus, they enter a relatively urban part of China, though leaving the school grounds is restricted to a few hours per week, usually on Sundays. While this restriction could be perceived as harsh, Tibetan parents did not object since it ensured a higher level of safety in an urban environment away from home and curtailed the amount of spending by students. When students did spend extended time off campus, it was usually part of a cultural outing or summer tour organized by the school.

Schools placed a strong emphasis on discipline and patriotism. Corporal punishment is frowned on and would not sit well with Tibetan parents, even though it is a common method of discipline in many rural Tibetan schools. Any perception that Han Chinese teachers mistreat Tibetan students at *neidi* schools would have a deleterious effect on the willingness of parents to have their children leave Tibet. Yet, schools did view Tibetan children as coming from a rugged mountain lifestyle and in need of socialization into more “civilized” ways and habits of urban Chinese children, with a stress on hygiene, dress, and Chinese-language skills.

Despite the highly disciplined atmosphere of the *neidi* schools, dislocated students who discussed the atmosphere of teaching and learning found it more liberal than in the TAR, where open approaches by Tibetan teachers risked being construed as subversive. One graduate remarked that writing in *neidi* was all right as long as one did not violate general political principles. In contrast, a slight and unintentional expression in TAR might become a big problem.

While *neidi* school teachers viewed Tibetan ways as needing Chinese-style civilizing, they have better access to learning materials and employ more dynamic methods of teaching than most teachers in the TAR. *Neidi* school graduates who became teachers commented that they would like to treat their own students in the way their *neidi* school teachers treated them. Students expressed the view that they were respected more by their *neidi* school teachers than by teachers in Tibet. However, our research was not able to identify any Tibetan graduates who returned to their old *neidi* school and were hired to teach subjects such as mathematics or science, a situation that casts some doubt on the overall success of the policy after more than 20 years.

Each *neidi* school usually had only one teacher from Tibet to teach Tibetan language and literature. Although these teachers formed a close relationship with their students, they usually lacked the training and teaching methods possessed by their peers. They did not integrate well with the rest of the teaching staff, a situation compounded by their 2-year contractual appointments and cultural distance from mainstream Chinese culture. Most, if not all, of the host city’s *neidi* teachers have not been to Tibet. Travel there

is not encouraged or included as part of their training. Still, at least nine out of 10 students who spoke about their *neidi* teachers remembered them as caring and responsible.

It was possible that some of our teachers have never been to Tibet and knew only a little about Tibet. However, they were all excellent and full of a sense of responsibility. They took care of us as if they were our parents when we were ill upon arriving there. They treated us like their own children and taught us carefully in such issues as bathing and cleaning. Some of our girls were beginning to menstruate and needed such things as sanitary napkins and underwear. Our teachers then brought us to the shop and helped us to buy those things after discovering our need.

Our teachers were very good and kind. They treated us as if they were our mothers. Our principal teacher still keeps in touch with us. At the time when I was in *neidi* school, I felt that the teachers were just like mothers. I turned to them when I came across any problem. We had a good relationship with our teachers.

Some schools also had classes for local, mostly Han Chinese, students, but these were separate from Tibetan classes, and local students did not live at school with Tibetan students. Opportunities for interaction between Tibetan and host city students were arranged periodically, usually through sporting competitions, field trips to the theater, or joint academic events. Although contact with host city students was relatively rare, Tibetan students portrayed their Chinese counterparts as hardworking and having good study habits.

Students followed Tibetan culinary customs during Tibetan festivals, such as eating *tugba*, Tibetan-style noodles, and sheep heads. The architecture and environment of *neidi* schools are similar to those of other schools in China, except for the sculptures, murals, ceramic displays, paintings, and photographs of Tibet on the school grounds. *Neidi* schools recognized Tibetan holidays by hosting leaders from Tibet, serving special Tibetan foods, and permitting students to wear traditional dress and sing Tibetan songs. Nevertheless, according to the laws of China, religious practices are not permitted in the schools.²⁴ Although graduates often commented that they wanted to learn more in school about Tibetan history and culture, they experienced no identity confusion about being a Tibetan. The expression of Tibetan ethnicity was not discouraged by the school authorities, but it was also not encouraged within the pervasive civilizational discourse. Nevertheless, it was impossible for students to escape a territorial identity regularly expressed in the curriculum with the maxim “love Tibet.”²⁵ The school stressed the con-

²⁴ This rule seems to be more flexible for Uyghurs and some other Muslim groups. Muslim boys and girls are permitted to wear a hijab (for girls) or a doppa (for boys) on their heads in school. They are also provided with a separate cafeteria in which no pork products are used.

²⁵ “Love Tibet” rather than “love Tibetans” encouraged more identification with “political Tibet” and less with “ethnic Tibet.” The official title of the boarding schools is Tibet Neidi (Inland) School rather than Tibetan Neidi (Inland) School.

nection of Tibet to the Chinese motherland and the need for students to return to Tibet after graduation to develop its economy.

Students wrote letters home, initially in the Tibetan language, but later in Chinese to demonstrate their learning. Most parents needed a translator to read the letters in Chinese.²⁶ Both students and parents refrained from passing on news of a death in the family or sickness at school so as not to alarm the other. In one case, a girl did not learn of her father's death for 3 years.

A main thematic issue and debate surrounding *neidi* schools continues to be the language of instruction. About 70 percent of the first *neidi* school cohort was recruited from elementary schools that used Tibetan as the language of instruction. Chinese language is the main teaching medium in all *neidi* schools, including junior secondary schools. Students are also required to learn a foreign language, which invariably means English.

While most *neidi* schools provide Tibetan language and literature as a subject, there is a lack of will to promote the study of Tibetan language and literature. This situation left students with quite different perspectives. Some did not consider the Tibetan language as a "common tool" of communication in "modern society": "from the point view of social development, the Tibetan language is not going to be mainstream." Another student remarked: "[I] just feel that the Tibetan language is not that useful." However, one graduate recalled a case of a senior secondary school he attended that did not offer adequate Tibetan language classes, and the students reacted to it by refusing to attend classes. Another stated: "I think the Tibetan language class should be put at the same level as the other subject classes. . . . Tibetan language class should gain more attention, after all it is part of our ethnic culture. I think Tibetan literacy is part of a very advanced culture, and many things are carried through the Buddhist texts. If one knew [the knowledge in the Buddhist texts], one would possess a different quality. So I think Tibetan literacy is very important. . . . I would definitely have my child learn Tibetan well."

Feelings toward the Tibetan language were complex and sometimes contradictory. As a general pattern, studying in *neidi* schools did not result in improved or more extensive study of Tibetan language and literature. In fact, many felt that their Tibetan language ability had been weakened. Some regretted not being able to master Tibetan. In such a case, students demanded that the school give more attention to Tibetan in the curriculum, and in another case, students tried to set up a Tibetan-language library on their own.

Tibetan history and cultural traditions are still not heavily emphasized, despite the 1988 State Education Committee notice that it should be the

²⁶ Cell phones are used by some students to call home.

duty of all levels of schooling in and for Tibet to enable the Tibetan people to inherit and develop their history and cultural traditions as well as learn advanced scientific technology and the cultures of other ethnic groups. The notice suggested that educational content, textbooks, and curriculum design for Tibetan children should not copy indiscriminately the experience of schools in the region where the *neidi* schools are located but rather be informed by Tibetan history, culture, production, and economic life. The 1988 notice also prescribed that *neidi* schools should strengthen instruction of the Tibetan language in terms of curriculum and content. Nevertheless, most *neidi* schools simply followed the standard curriculum of the urban schools of the city where they were located. Consequently, more careful attention to parts of the curriculum concerning Tibetan history, geography, and culture was proposed at the 1993 Work Conference on Educational Support for Tibet. English language did not become a compulsory subject until a few years later.

A major challenge for schools has been how to deal with issues of religion and language. *Neidi* schools attempt to separate education and religion. For example, Tibetan students who studied in Beijing visited a nearby religious site, Yunghegong, a Tibetan Buddhist temple founded by an emperor in the Qing dynasty, as part of a school tour, not as a pilgrimage in the typical Tibetan manner. Most Tibetan families do not worship in temples but rather in their homes, where often one room is dedicated for religious artifacts. Religious items were not permitted in school, and many students grew skeptical of aspects of their religion. Yet, students generally did not look down on their parents' religious views. The schools did not deny that religion was part of the Tibetan cultural tradition, but they did convey the view that religion is a stumbling block to modernization and development.

In the end, *neidi* schools adopt a weak and largely symbolic approach to culturally relevant education for Tibetans. Institutionalizing more meaningful education for Tibetans would be enhanced if school norms in China encouraged a learning environment that recognizes and reflects the ethnic diversity of the nation. While schools in some rural and nomadic areas reflect the ethnic cultures of their students, urban schools reflect mainstream Chinese culture. The *neidi* schools attempted to transmit mainstream Chinese culture while showing a token respect for Tibetan culture. Token respect intersected the discourse on national unity through the prescription "love Tibet."

Ethnic minority culture appears centrally in language and literature classes but not as a thematic feature throughout the curriculum. The *neidi* schools offer a relatively high-quality education and reproduce an elite cadre class in Tibet, but they also foster an oppositional culture as a response to the lack of Tibetan history, language, and literature. It is a weak form of oppositional culture since students are willing to make a cultural sacrifice in order to dedicate their time to preparing for the college and university entrance

examinations. From most Tibetan students' point of view, the school can be forgiven for not giving more emphasis to their native language than examination preparation, which is, after all, standardized across China.

Relocating Back to Tibet

Few *neidi* school graduates failed to relocate back to Tibet. Only five out of the first group of 172 subjects we interviewed said they considered staying in other parts of China to work. For the cohorts we interviewed, graduating from a *neidi* school provided a path to stable employment. Some students did not like the weather, missed home, and wanted to return to help Tibet. Others reported that they knew the people and the environment of Tibet better, so they felt it was natural to return home. Fresh graduates came away with the idea that their free education obliged them to work at lessening the development gap between Tibet and China. Nevertheless, the proportion of graduates going on to college has increased in recent years, some continuing their studies in Tibet but many in *neidi* colleges. On school visits, we observed long lists of student names and the colleges they would be attending.

Virtually all graduates internalized the idea from their *neidi* schooling that the purpose of their study was to serve Tibet's future, and many talked about their plans to use the knowledge they learned in China for the betterment of Tibet. This message was emphasized by their teachers, including their Tibetan language teachers. This message was also stressed by visiting Tibetan dignitaries. A *neidi* graduate recalled that the Panchen Lama visited his school in Kunming and told students to study for the "uplifting of Tibet." When oral histories turned to the subject of families, the most commonly expressed sentiment was that graduates wanted to return home to tend to their aging parents, whom they missed and wanted to rejoin. A graduate recollected a sense of belonging to Tibet as a spiritual home. Rarely if ever did graduates express that they felt more at home in *neidi* school than in Tibet. A few noted that their long stay made them feel isolated.

This contrasts with Xinjiang *neidi* school students, mostly Uyghurs, who wish to stay in *neidi* areas after graduation rather than return to their home province (Chen 2008). This may be due to the fact that Uyghurs have been able to integrate in Muslim, especially Hui, communities that exist in urban areas throughout China. Tibetans have no such cultural cushion communities.

In short, few Tibetan graduates looked for jobs in central China. They returned home after graduation, where they experienced a process of readjustment. Several said readjustment took 3–6 months, and a few said it took longer than a year. Those assigned to remote places often said it took time to overcome the physical discomfort of high altitude and Tibetan food, which contains more meat and fewer vegetables. Those assigned to work in Lhasa said it was not very different from a Chinese city, especially in terms

of food and clothes. In short, the readjustment process was not a major difficulty. There were very few aspects of life in Tibet that graduates rejected, although some mentioned poor hygiene, excessive use of alcohol, and the conservative views of the older generation toward the outside world.

Tibetan Buddhism is a main part of the cultural identity of Tibetans, and students' attitudes have been influenced by state ideology to discard so-called superstitious dimensions of Tibetan culture. In this respect, the *neidi* schools seem to have made inroads. However, students did not reject Tibetan culture. On the contrary, it seems that the longer they are away from home, the more they grow to love Tibetan culture. While expressing a strong need to do something for Tibet, they also said they loved Tibetan culture and felt proud of it.

Language has been one of the most contested areas in Tibetan education. Before being dislocated for their education, most Tibetans studied at Tibetan-language elementary schools. Progress in learning the Tibetan language at *neidi* secondary school was slow and not of consequence for the college and university entrance examinations. However, after returning to Tibet, graduates came to recognize its importance as a doorway to ethnic heritage:

If one really wants to learn about it [Tibetan], one must be able to read Tibetan language books. However, my Tibetan language level is not good enough.

After attending *neidi* school, I gave up studying Tibetan, and there are personal reasons and environmental reasons as well. From the point of view of nationality, it is a great loss. . . . There is a certain, special cultural background existing in every ethnic nationality. Being a part of one ethnic nationality, I feel I should carry on the culture of this ethnic nationality.

After students arrived in China for secondary school and found themselves immersed in mainstream Chinese culture, their knowledge vacuum became evident. This "vacuum" led to useful insights about the future potential of Tibet:

Because there was a rise in my knowledge, and I've been more exposed to the outside world, there is a big difference in perspective. . . . Some may say that we were on organized tours, sightseeing in *neidi*, and wasted money, but I think it's not so. For example, when one is in China, and sees a table, we know at the moment that we couldn't produce a table like that in Tibet. But, as long as you saw it, you would think about it. As a teacher, you would compare the teaching methods, and see how students are taught there, and how we are taught here. You saw the difference. Now there is globalization . . . if a product from Tibet is good enough, the whole world is going to use it.

Upon returning to work in Tibet, *neidi* school graduates were held in high regard by their employers. However, school principals viewed *neidi* policy as favoring schools in China over their own schools in Tibet. Whether or not this led to a concerted effort by principals to improve the quality of education in their schools is another question, though resource limitations

in the TAR schools are a formidable challenge. One principal expressed a common view about *neidi* graduates' declining language capabilities: "We were from the 1986 entrance class, or the second of the inland school cohorts to be admitted, and the students of that era had a good foundation, with good Tibetan. But, after that, the emphasis on the Tibetan language declined."

An elementary school principal in Tibet found that graduates from *neidi* schools were unable to teach in the Tibetan language as well as he expected. In Tibet, elementary school teachers are required to be able to teach both Tibetan and Chinese, as well as mathematics. *Neidi* school graduates in this elementary school were unable to teach in Tibetan, nor did they communicate well with the students when instructing them in Chinese. The principal made a suggestion that *neidi* teacher-training programs address these problems and train students to be able to work in rural areas, where Tibetan is the dominant language.

Thus, cultural capital gained through improved capacity in Chinese was offset by a diminished capacity to work with rural people using the Tibetan language. This does not mean that *neidi* graduates were unable to function in rural settings or as rural schoolteachers. I observed a high level of dedication on the part of *neidi* graduates who worked in rural areas. However, their written Tibetan was less than would be expected of a schoolteacher. While they were often the best Chinese speakers in rural communities, their Chinese was by no means equal to that of most urban graduates in China.

The data on relocation show the trade-off between Tibetan language skills that enable closer relationships with the people of Tibet and an education that secures better job prospects. Moreover, many jobs available to earlier cohorts were in urban government departments, where meetings came to be increasingly conducted in Chinese. Urban government jobs have become scarce, and more graduates are employed in counties and at the township level, many as schoolteachers. For the latter group of *neidi* graduates, Tibetan language skills are essential because there are few Chinese speakers in rural and nomadic areas.

Still, the indication is that dislocated students return to Tibet well versed in the curriculum of mainstream China, with its dose of skepticism toward religious beliefs, opportunities for continuing education, and a solid sense of ethnic identity. In this context, the oppositional culture gradually dissipated upon relocation, and the original folk theory of success was reaffirmed except for one aspect. Graduates consistently pointed to the need to learn more about their culture, language, and heritage.

Rate of Capital Returns and Saliency of Ethnic Identity

Boarding schools for indigenous minorities in Australia, Canada, and the United States are legendary for their efforts to erase indigenous cultural

memories.²⁷ Some East Asian countries see boarding schools as a practical means to move toward the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals. As we have seen, since 1985, China has developed and expanded a system of nonindigenous boarding schools, by which urban centers throughout China host Tibetan students for up to 7 years of secondary school education. After 10 years, the Tibet *neidi* school model was institutionalized for the far western province of Xinjiang. The government has been able to sufficiently popularize the policy of board schooling to urban, rural, and nomadic households such that many households perceive a favorable cost-benefit calculation involving cultural capital in the form of language capacity (Chinese and Tibetan), quality of instruction, graduation credentials leading to jobs, and an implicit capacity to build social capital with non-Tibetans in the TAR and beyond. Recollections also reveal a subtext of opposition culture due to a lack of access to knowledge about cultural heritage. However, these dissipate during relocation in the TAR if good jobs, elite status, or further education is accrued but remain a potential subtext if they do not.

In the case of Australia, Canada, and the United States, many parents were coerced to turn over their children to schools that failed to provide any education about ethnic language, oral traditions, cultural artifacts, or literature. Native expression, song, and dance were prohibited. Behavior was controlled through corporal punishment and fear by reference to religious doctrine. The school building and campus environment were often bereft of indigenous architecture and other cultural symbols. Contact with parents and the home ethnic community was minimized or cut off altogether. At best, these schools were portrayed as providing access to basic mainstream knowledge and work skills. At worst, they were portrayed as institutions for cultural genocide. The evidence is thin on how these schools improved the plight of native children within the larger national fabric or even back home within indigenous communities (Buti 2007). In fact, popular resentment toward these educational institutions lingers even to today. One of the most notorious boarding schools is today a museum to remind citizens of past mistakes. Nevertheless, China's nonindigenous boarding schools for Tibetans have existed over a significant amount of time with as yet little popular resentment (Chen and Postiglione 2009). This is not to say that Native Americans always held boarding schools in contempt, as Edward Goodbird's 1914 story recounts: "We Indians have helped you White people. All over this country are corn fields; we Indians gave you seed for your own corn, and we gave you squashes and beans. On the lakes, in your parks are canoes: Indians taught you to make those canoes. . . . We Indians think that you are paying us back, when you give us schools and books, and teach us the new way" (quoted in Spack [2002, 140]).

²⁷ See Dumont and Wax (1969, 217–26), Wax et al. (1969), Deyhle and Swisher (1997), Reyhner (2001), and Spack (2002).

Another difference between this type of boarding school education for indigenous peoples of Tibet and that for indigenous Australians, Canadians, and Americans is that the former were relocated to urban and the latter to rural areas. Tibetan families do not appear to have been coerced to send their children to boarding schools in China. Some families whose children did not score high enough to gain entrance to these schools had the option to pay an extra fee for admission. Tibetan students were offered classes about their language and literature. To some extent, the schools recognized, albeit through their own definitions as the formal agents of interpretation, Tibetan culture through representations of Tibetan art and architecture, music, and observance of holidays. The schools also actively involved children in learning activities incorporating Tibetan painting and story writing. We found no evidence that Han Chinese teachers used corporal punishment, and there appeared to be a close relationship between Tibetan students and their Han Chinese teachers.²⁸ Such relationships with teachers were not absent from Native American schools. In quoting Standing Bear, Ruth Spack (2002, 102) notes that he was “ready to do anything” for his beloved teacher and that his father supported his choice and was impressed during his visit to the Carlisle school.

Tibet’s boarding school literature is replete with references to moral and political education, with an unmistakable stress on patriotism to shape behavior and national identity (Zhu 2007). Communication with parents is not cut off. Parents are permitted to, and increasingly do, visit the schools. Graduates have so far been able to gain a relatively high status upon returning to Tibet but would have a difficult time if they chose to compete for high-status jobs in the cities where they attended *neidi* schools. While the schools do not prohibit the use of native language on campus, students noted a lack of emphasis on the Tibetan language. It is not surprising that the knowledge and determination to strengthen a sense of Tibetan cultural heritage among their students is absent. Thus, one core component of education, the transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to another, is weak. Some might even argue that the lack of a strong grounding in one’s cultural heritage could stunt the capacity for critical and innovative thought.

While this article argues that nonindigenous boarding schools have not spawned much of an opposition culture, they have awakened consciousness about ethnic heritage within the national context, a risk only if graduates

²⁸ Although the interview atmosphere did lead to students voicing complaints about selected aspects of their education, we did not receive any reports that corporal punishment was used by Han teachers on Tibetan students. Many village teachers in Tibet, usually those who had not received a long period of teacher training, viewed corporal punishment as a necessary part of schooling. However, it is probable that Han teachers in *neidi* schools were told to never use corporal punishment since this would jeopardize the Tibet *neidi* school policy. See, e.g., reports of harsh discipline methods used in Oprah Winfrey’s Leadership Academy for Girls, a boarding school for girls in South Africa. Also among the complaints were that parental visits were denied, and there was “a climate of intimidation and fear” (<http://www.tvguide.com/news/oprah-winfrey-scandal-37280.aspx>).

return to their homelands and begin to discover that high-status, or at least stable, job opportunities are no longer available to them. It is well known that leaders of national movements in some countries have been those whose ethnic consciousness was awakened by the education they received in schools and universities in more developed nations. However, the more urgent issue for Tibetan graduates of *neidi* schools is whether or not their hinterland education has prepared them for the rough and tumble of market economics. The *neidi* school policy was fashioned during a time when Tibet still had enough of a planned economy to guarantee jobs to returning graduates. Once the folk theories of success that undergird the popularity of boarding schools are undermined by unemployment or underemployment, ethnic consciousness could become more salient as dissatisfied youths seek ways to shore up their self-respect amid an increasingly competitive labor market.

Respondents from the earlier cohorts commented that the difference between themselves and their counterparts who studied in the TAR is that being away from home gave them a broader view of the world and made them more independent, self-reliant, and adaptable to different situations and environments. Although these are useful skills for a market economy, most of these graduates received job assignments through government agencies when they returned to Tibet. Stable jobs that continue to be assigned to graduates are in only two or three sectors, including teaching, which absorbs about half of *neidi* graduates. As the government struggled to popularize 6-year basic education with qualified teachers, *neidi* graduates were assigned as teachers to township-level schools in remote rural and nomadic regions. There were and still are few if any Han Chinese speakers in these regions, and those who accepted the posts have the potential to play a key role in school and community development if their preparation is sufficient.

The future of nonindigenous boarding school education in China and other countries, including new programs that have received international visibility, is challenged by a complex set of costs and benefits (Mathur 1994; Kratli 2001; Manynooch 2008).²⁹ While they develop the leadership potential of youths from underserved communities, including girls and ethnic minorities, they also remove the best intellectual resources from the local community school systems. While this may prod local schools to become more competitive by improving the quality of instruction, such efforts continue to be hampered by resource limitations. Success of the boarding school policy will eventually be measured by the ability of local schools to match their quality. It will also be measured by the quality of graduates and their ability to gain competitive employment as science teachers in the boarding schools and to take on leadership roles in civic and community development when

²⁹ Also see Viet Nam News, "Co-operation with Laos Continues to Develop," *Viet Nam News Agency*, November 11, 2007 (<http://vietnamnews.vnagency.com.vn/showarticle.php?num=05ECO110707>); Viet Nam News Agency, "Ethnic Schools to Include Vocational Training," *ThanhNienNews.com*, January 24, 2008.

they return to their home regions. While graduates of boarding schools are expected to remain committed and employ their knowledge and skills to develop their homelands, the measure of the education they receive is also judged by whether it can ensure that they are competitive within the context of national and local labor markets. Finally, boarding schools for ethnic minorities can foster an identity with the larger nation, but their success in doing so over decades can be measured by how long it takes for prominent members of the ethnic minority community to become part of the management team of these schools and to what extent they are staffed on a multi-ethnic teaching faculty. With the global trend in school privatization, there is also increasing space for ethnic minority communities to run their own schools in developed urban areas of the country, where they might also build surrounding communities with close links to the home communities that could transfer talent and cultural capital in both directions.

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