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Discontinuity and Reconstruction

The Hidden Curriculum in Schoolroom Instruction in Minority-Nationality Areas

The reason modernity has become a core topic in the field of educational anthropology is because it has caused tremendous changes in education, making the content, the form, and even the concepts and substance of education different from what they were before and creating a historical process that people often describe in terms of “discontinuities” and “reconstruction.” In the history of education in the world, modern education has existed for several centuries, having begun in Europe and North America and gradually spread over the entire world. Although it reached China only a century ago, it represents historical change on a millennial scale. Modernity is changing traditions, sometimes by force, sometimes through enticement, but most often through the subtle, barely perceptible influence of culture and education. Although one may say

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that in mainstream society modernity has already taken shape, in minority areas this process is still in process, and once modern education is “embedded,” cultural heterogeneity will gradually be replaced by uniformity. Rejection of ethnic identity in the schools, of course, is not expressed entirely through the formal curriculum; in fact, the hidden curriculum works steadily below the surface to create discontinuities and reconstruction within cultural traditions and ethnic identity. As far as the minority members undergoing education are concerned, their success or failure in formal education will be determined by whether they can fully complete this process of modernization.

Research on Modernity and the Hidden Curriculum: Wise Counsel from Afar

Precedents among writings in educational sociology are set for discovering modernity in the hidden curriculum and for describing and explaining what modernity is, and the research of those who have gone before us has provided us with a wide range of viewpoints and approaches to research. An example of this is how the scholars of critical theory have proposed and explored the issue of how the hidden curriculum in schoolroom instruction has become a tool of modernity that causes discontinuities and reconstruction to occur within local culture and the identities of individuals.

In order for us to put these theories clearly into context, it is very important to understand early pioneering work in this area. According to what is written on the subject, Phillip Jackson (1968; cited in Xue Xiaohua 2005, 5) first coined the term “hidden curriculum” and first used this term in his book, *Life in Classrooms*. In this study Jackson used an analysis of the social relationships in schoolroom instruction to discover values, customs, and expectations concerning education that were compatible with modernity and that made students able to adapt to life at school and receive good feedback, all of which was determined by the characteristics of the school’s hidden curriculum. Looking at it in terms of value orientations, this study seems clearly intended to provide a functional analysis, which fits in with the functionalist belief that the elements of the hidden curriculum blend into the curriculum, the school and life in the classroom, and as daily life goes on, the curriculum content and social relationships make their way into the student’s system of norms, values and beliefs (Xue Xiaohua 2005). Here the hidden curricu-

lum that transmits modernity is viewed as a holistic process that is perfectly reasonable and accompanies socialization. People generally acknowledge that competition and tracking in schools are like competition and stratification in society, that they adhere to the principle of fairness, and that differentiation is a social necessity, something that exists objectively and naturally has its own rationale. With this functional analysis approach, the differentiation and inequality brought about by modernity are legitimate and reasonable. Subsequently, scholars of conflict theory directed doubts and criticism at the fairness, reasonableness, and latent function embodied in the functional analysts' view of modernity, saying, for example, that there was obvious inequality in the social control function of the hidden curriculum. Although the school proclaimed its role to be that of training students from all cultural groups to adapt to the modern demands of the society of the future, actually members of the mainstream culture had more freedom and options whereas those outside the mainstream had first to accept academic failure because of their cultural difference and then accept status as members of a less advantaged marginal group (Ballantine 1997).

Doubts concerning official social control of the hidden curriculum were raised by Paul Willis (1977) in his research on working-class boys. In his well-known book, *Learning to Labor: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, he gave the following explanation: Resistance on the part of working-class students to authority and the rules imposed on them in school makes them band together and strengthens their identification with working-class values and "shop-floor culture." Ultimately they voluntarily choose to revert to their fathers' class status and return to the factories. Our analysis and explanations concerning whether this hypothesis could be confirmed through application to minority nationality schools follow.

Social control of the hidden curriculum also shows up in the language of class, as shown, for example, by the English sociologist Basil Bernstein (see Xue Xiaohua 2005, 9) in his studies that revealed that the language coding used by students from different family backgrounds was a key factor affecting their academic success. Because formal education is a mechanism for social reproduction, the control and power structure of the school are related to social stratification and the division of labor. Those who control the content that is transmitted through the curriculum are in control of the method of transmission; they also control the materials, organization, pace, and times through which knowl-

edge is imparted and received. What the school requires is the *elaborated code* necessary for success, which maintains a consistency with the language of middle-class homes, whereas the *restricted code* used by the working class makes their children appear linguistically weak and illogical and places them in a disadvantageous position in the school environment. While this is happening, the hidden curriculum does its work, presenting the working-class children with academic failure, driving them into voluntary exile in the lower reaches of society. We attempted to apply the explanations contained in Bernstein's study of the relation between language coding and academic attainment to our analysis of academic failure among minority students in China.

Social control of the hidden curriculum has a certain relationship to *cultural capital*, expressed through Pierre Bourdieu's (1997) concept of cultural capital and his hypothesis concerning it. During the first stage of socialization, students exhibit an extremely large disparity, and when they reach the right age to enter school, each student brings what could be entirely different ethnic customs or local social value patterns to the classroom. These *dispositions* or *habituations* that bear the imprint of family or ethnic group might not be viewed by school authorities as the sort of cultural capital that brings educational success. Moreover, only students with family and ethnic background that provides the sort of cultural capital endorsed by the school or consistent with what the school requires have a chance to be singled out by the school for rewards that will lead to academic success. The occurrence of this sort of phenomenon in ethnic minority schools has been confirmed empirically, and we have tried to apply it in our attempts to analyze academic failure among ethnic minority students.

Academic Failure: From Labeling Effects to Bernstein's Discourse Analysis

Each of the three minority groups we studied (the Yugur, the Sala, and the Baoan) lives in an ethnically heterogeneous area, and so the schools there are culturally diverse. Because of this, the schools cannot set up a curriculum designed for the needs of one particular ethnic group; rather, they must use a uniform approach to education, one that imparts modern knowledge and values to students from various groups. Completely ensconced in this sort of "modernity context," the minority students not only have to receive society's mainstream culture but also must change

their thinking and behavior so they can ultimately pass through layer upon layer of screening in a standardized examination system. This process is such that only a small number of students are able to proceed smoothly over increasingly high “examination barriers,” whereas the overwhelming majority are eliminated from the competition when they reach the senior high school entrance examination level.

Why are so many minority students eliminated from competition at the middle-school examination level, and how is the system as a whole operated? Also, why are some minority students capable of passing smoothly through the middle-school examination level and even on through the college entrance examinations whereas others cannot? With these questions in mind, we intended to probe into the “black box” to get to the bottom of this issue.

In an urban primary school located in Sunan Yugur Autonomous county we carried out intensive observation of classroom instruction at three different grade levels. During that time I conducted a study that included participant observation of teaching in two different first-grade classes. These first graders had just begun school, and some of them were still not able to pay attention to instruction, letting their gazes wander and making furtive little movements instead. When this happened the teacher would call out their names in a very stern voice, and those whose names were called would seem caught off guard and totally at a loss, after which they would calm down. Other students would sit perfectly erect, paying close attention to the lecture and giving good answers to the teacher’s questions, and the teacher would encourage these students with approval and praise. After a few days had gone by, whether during language arts class or other classes, a few of the students who had been unable to listen to the lecture were still unable to concentrate, moved about in their seats, and could not answer the teacher’s questions properly, which prompted the teacher to criticize them by name. The students who were able to follow the lecture would communicate their readiness to answer questions through body language, raising their hands or making eye contact with the teacher, which meant that they had more chances to answer questions and received frequent praise from the teacher. One day an unannounced examination was given with results that were totally predictable: students who paid attention in class did very well, whereas those who did not did much worse. After having been in school for only a few short months, during which time they were tested several times and took several examinations, the students were separated into

three groups: good learners, average learners, and poor learners.

When I asked a teacher which of the children in these classes were good students and which were poor ones, the teacher would answer without the slightest hesitation. Then when I asked whether categorizing them as good and poor so quickly was sound practice, the teacher would give an answer based on classroom performance and academic record. While I believe that the teachers have an objective view of the students and categorize them objectively as well, I have a nagging suspicion that identifying them as good or poor students as early as their first year of primary school may give them an identity that clings to them throughout their time in school. Does identifying students as being good during their first year of primary school predestine them to be candidates for senior high school and university? A number of teachers tell me, "That's right! We can usually tell in their first year how they'll do at higher levels. A student's performance during first grade determines his future educability and the direction of his education." How is it that these words are so familiar to our ears? It seems after all that the old Chinese saying "One's old age can be seen in one's childhood" fits this situation perfectly.

Somewhat later I noticed that the teacher's attention had begun to focus on the "good" students, who also happened to be those who gave the teacher the greatest feeling of accomplishment. There were forty students in a class, but there were only seven or eight whom the teacher considered—and I observed to be—really good. Over half of these good students were ethnic minority children, but they almost all had parents who worked in the county government offices or as high school teachers in the county seat, whereas the poor students were also ethnic minority children but with parents who worked in the pasturelands or on farms or who ran individual private businesses in the county seat, which indicates that family background may well explain the difference in performance. Family cultural capital seems to have played a major role in the preparation of the children, with a particularly important element for creating the thirst for success in school being guidance and aspirations inculcated by the parents early in the child's development.

The most important factor in determining whether a child will be a good student, of course, is the function of the teacher, because guidance, attention, hope, and critiquing from the teacher can make a child a good student, yet it can also can turn him or her into a poor one. This phenomenon has been demonstrated sociologically and psychologically. In psychological terms, this phenomenon is an instance of "expectation effects,"

with the teacher's expectations of the student and the student's expectation of him or herself ultimately becoming the same, so that the student fulfills the expectations of the teacher. In sociological terms, this is an instance of "labeling effect," through which one gains a certain identity and status from having a label affixed to him or her. If someone is labeled a poor student, then subsequently even if he or she successfully passes examinations, others will think of the success as "pure luck," "hitting it just right," or some similar sort of coincidence.

I feel that the academic failure of minority students is not something brought about by a congenital difference in intelligence but possibly by labeling or the effect of low expectations. These children undergo long-term neglect in school, getting only criticism or negative public commentary from the teachers, and eventually these students, among whom one finds a majority of minority students, become the academic poor performers of the school. No wonder the minority parents complain that "our children aren't being well taught in school, and they're losing their self-confidence, too. The children don't learn well and so they don't pass exams, but the teacher is always right, or the kid is stupid, or the kid has never been a good learner." The fact that most minority students have problems learning has to a certain extent made parents mistrustful of formal education and has affected the willingness of minority parents to send their children to school, which may explain the high nonattendance and dropout rates among minority students.

After observing and conversing with minority students, we began to attempt an analysis using Bernstein's concept of language coding. Each person enters the environment of his or her mother tongue at birth and gradually learns to use the mother tongue to speak, become involved, and interact. During this process of growth the child acquires the thought patterns of the mother tongue and the thoughts and behaviors that are characteristic of his or her people. Once the child enters school, he or she comes in contact with the relatively strange standard language that is current in mainstream culture and is presented with a complex writing system and unfamiliar pronunciation and grammar. Rarely or never do such children have the linguistic aptitude to understand and absorb what the teacher is delivering in the standard language, and so they have no choice during their first to fourth years but to spend their time trying to familiarize and adapt themselves to the linguistic environment of the school, an effort that not only interferes with their early development of intelligence but also affects their academic performance and progress.

To explain even further, when the minority students are receiving classroom instruction, they not only have to master what Bernstein calls elaborated language coding, but they must also engage in the following thought process: They first think things through in their own language, then translate what they have learned into Chinese, after which they try to think of how to express their thoughts in Chinese (Qian Minhui 2004). Under these circumstances the language barriers to learning mathematics become especially obvious. Lack of familiarity with mathematical symbols and the inability to understand the problems correctly leave the students unable to convert the provisions of the problem and its answer to into mathematical form, and this has a direct effect on the development of their mathematical thought processes. The study of English is similar, because even though a number of high school students are already able to express themselves well in Chinese, the dissimilarity between Chinese and English vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar requires them to make three levels of conversion, which affects their interest and their performance in the study of English. This is the main reason that minority students have relatively low grade averages in mathematics and English. Loss of interest and poor performance in their studies are probably the underlying causes of the high dropout and nonattendance rates among minority students.

Dropping Out and Nonattendance: From Multifactor Analysis to Cultural Capital Analysis

From the standpoint of empirical investigation, students in minority areas have dropout and nonattendance rates that are higher than the national average, and even though we carried out only a few case studies, which gives us no claim on statistical validity, these case studies nonetheless reveal the real reasons for dropping out and nonattendance among these students. To gain a better understanding of the reasons for dropping out and nonattendance among the students we were studying, we carried out a questionnaire survey. Based on what we discovered during fieldwork and in interviews during the beginning stages of our work, we designed questions that dealt with several aspects of the situation, such as reasons for resuming attendance at school and factors that affected dropping out, including the differences and influences among areas, distance between home and school, religious beliefs, cultural environment of the home, social status of the family, and ethnic awareness. A de-

scription of the results of the questionnaire appears below (Qian Minhui 2006a).

Reasons for Resuming Studies

In the questionnaire we first asked (a) whether students had ever dropped out of school. Results showed that 14.2 percent had done so whereas 85.8 percent had not. Although these figures do not tell the whole story of the school dropout issue in these localities, they do reveal that there is a dropout rate that cannot be ignored. If so, then (b) for what reason did those who dropped out resume their studies? Among those responding to choices offered in the questionnaire, 30.1 percent chose getting advice from parents; 25.1 percent, work on the part of the teachers; 13.7 percent, advice from classmates; 16.9 percent, believing they would not have playmates if they did not attend school; and 11.5 percent, concluding that school life was more interesting than the alternative. These data show that the main reason for resuming studies after dropping out was the work of parents and teachers. Concerning this issue, those responsible for managing local schools believed that they should improve both the way teachers taught the students in the classroom and the effectiveness of communication between the school and the parents in order to root out the possibility that the students would drop out again one or more times. Would efforts in these two areas really be able to prevent further dropping out? Actually they would not, because the managers had not come to look upon the students as the real core element of the school but only as objects to be managed and molded. In addition, viewed in terms of factors external to the school, this was a multifaceted situation.

Factors That Influenced Students to Drop Out of School

Concerning this issue we did an intercommunity comparison and multifactor analysis of the dropout rate for selected middle and primary schools in three different minority communities and found the following.

1. Differences between communities in the dropout rate: Results from the three communities showed no statistically significant difference in dropout rate according to gender. Among the communities, however, there was a significant difference according to gender: Xunhua Sala Autonomous county had the highest dropout rate, 36.4 percent (female: 53.7 percent; see Liang Jingyu 2001, 177–78), whereas Baoan Autono-

mous county's rate was 13.4 percent (female: 34.0 percent; see Jian Zhixiang 2001, 128), and Sunan Yugur Autonomous county's rate was 5.3 percent (data related to female absence). These figures confirmed what we had already learned, namely that the Yugur are a people who historically give great importance to education, having been exposed to modern education and set up facilities for it as far back as the 1930s and 1940s, and their relatively long exposure to mainstream culture has affected people from other minority groups who live in their communities. From this one can see that the influence of culture on education is sometimes greater than that of economic factors.

2. Effects of geographic location of residence: We conducted a survey of students who came to school from home and those who boarded and discovered that students who lived so far away from school they had no choice but to board had a comparatively high dropout rate, 23.9 percent, whereas those who came to school from home on foot had a rate of 10.7 percent. This may be because those who boarded had to pay higher fees or because they became homesick. Around the school in Sunnan county we found a number of "student houses" [*xuesheng fang*] where one or two elderly people take care of seven or eight students, charging fairly modest fees and experiencing a relatively low number of dropouts. Those who board at school in dormitories have higher expenses and experience higher dropout rates, a phenomenon that reflects social reality in poor areas. Elsewhere in our interviewing process we learned that families living in remote areas, especially parents who lived in mountainous regions, were usually not willing to let their daughters attend school, not for economic reasons but rather because of worries about safety. Consequently, in these areas the dropout rate or nonattendance rate for girls was generally higher than that for boys of the same age. Such superficial, observable events prompted our interviewees to tell us that, in addition to attending class at school every day, if students also had to eat their meals and live there, they would not feel comfortable and, as time went by, they would begin to get homesick. What this really meant was that they could not adapt culturally, because the difference in cultural environment between their homes and the schools had a profound effect on them emotionally. Students from the Mountain Eagle Society at Beijing University found this same phenomenon while doing research in Tibet. Their record shows that "We had originally arranged to have a chat with the school principal during the evening, but it became late and he had still not appeared, so we went to look for him and learned that the following thing had happened: Several children

from nomadic families had become homesick and run away, the two principals had gone after them in a car, and it was the middle of the night before they caught up with the children and brought them back” (Likun Wang 2005). This indicates that for students who crave emotional warmth, life at school seems lacking in the emotional closeness they need, and this is probably one of the subjective reasons for which they drop out of school.

3. The influence of religious beliefs: As far as this variable was concerned, we discovered that whether a student had a religious belief made a significant difference in the probability of his or her dropping out. Results of our analysis showed that the dropout rate of students who had a religious belief was higher than that of students who had none. There was also a correlation with participation in religious activities, because the more frequently students went to the mosque or worshipped at temples, the higher their dropout rate became. Even the devoutness of religious belief can directly affect the dropout rate. This phenomenon occurs mainly in the Sala and Baoan communities. Religious belief is an important factor in ethnic identification, because religion is the medium through which people learn, interact, and maintain cultural identification. Members of minority groups can best understand the content and meaning of their own religion if they approach it through their own culture, yet if they approach the content of classroom instruction through their own culture it is difficult for them to understand. Given this context perhaps we cannot simply attribute the dropout rate directly to a clash between religion and schoolroom instruction, but rather we should look for possible causes in the context of cultural difference and cultural understanding.

4. Relation between family cultural level and dropout rate: There was a certain relation between student dropout rate and the cultural level of parents, with children whose parents had relatively low levels of education generally having a greater probability of dropping out. Investigation revealed the following: Students with a room set aside for study were less likely to drop out than those without such a room, and students with their own study desk were less likely to drop out than those without such a desk. The number of books owned by the family had a definite relation to the dropout rate, and although the correlation could not be specifically formulated, generally speaking, students with a large number of books at home did well academically, which meant they dropped out less frequently. However, in some cases the family had a large number of books and the students had dropped out nonetheless. Such situa-

tions might be affected by the books owned and beliefs held and also by the family being able to afford books but neglecting to require the children to study. The dropout rate showed no significant variation in relation to regular participation in certain cultural activities at home, such as listening to parents tell children's stories, and this, according to our research, may be because the stories were told in the minority language, leaving the children unable to effect a "transfer of learning" that they could take to the classroom. Also, some of the minority's children's stories that have been handed down through generations lack such characteristics as universality and the scientific spirit. We explained this phenomenon using Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital: The fact that what constitutes cultural capital at home is not consistent with what constitutes cultural capital at school leads to academic failure and dropping out among these students.

5. Parents' employment and family standard of living: The dropout rate did not vary significantly with parents' employment, a fact that may be related to supervision of compulsory education by the government, the school, and the community. Dropout rate varied somewhat with standard of living, but this variation was not regular, because theoretically students from well-to-do families should have low dropout rates, yet in these three minority communities exceptions were found.

Even though these phenomena show a direct relationship between economic capital and dropout and nonattendance rates, the relationship is not a decisive one, because the factors involve cultural and educational concepts. Studies by the Mountain Eagle Society of Beijing University reveal the following:

The customs and habits of the simple pastoral life are such that local people take the practical skills that have relevance to their lives seriously, but the mathematics and the knowledge of literature they receive through formal education are considered of no use to them. They need for their children to understand how to herd livestock, do the milking, and make the utensils and items of food the family normally uses rather than making sketches or reading ancient Chinese prose and poetry. (Ren Mingyuan 2005, 35–38)

If people are going to approve of their children going to school, it will be because they see the real benefit and hope it brings. Perhaps, however, they have not thought far ahead enough to realize that there is a price to pay for that benefit.

Cultural Identification: From Modern Context to Global Interpretation

What the hidden curriculum imparts is modern concepts and information, which in today's world should be global in nature. The core system of this sort of globalism determines individuals' preferences, their organizational interests, and the behavior that will allow them to survive (Xue Xiaoyuan and Chen Jiagang 2004). With modernity already accepted throughout the world, people are simultaneously changing their previous identities and forming a sort of identity that can be related to and accepted across a very broad spectrum. This process, we believe, begins mainly through schoolroom instruction. In order to confirm this contention, we carried out a questionnaire survey and interviews that focused on this issue (Qian Mingyuan 2006b).

We first surveyed the teachers concerning their attitudes toward modern culture and lifestyles in modern society: 49.4 percent of respondents approved strongly, 43.0 percent expressed relative approval, and 7.6 percent had no feeling on the subject. This shows that virtually all teachers approve of modern culture and modern lifestyles. Our explanation for this is that, even though the teachers live in ethnic minority communities and themselves are members of ethnic minorities, while they were going through many years of formal education and acquiring specialized knowledge they gradually took on the lifestyles and values of modern society, which were continually reinforced and reproduced in later life and work. From this standpoint it is possible to explain how a majority of teachers have the psychological orientation that makes them able to accept and approve of modern living and modern culture.

For high school students, modern society and modern culture are overwhelmingly large and abstract concepts, and questions concerning them would be difficult to answer, so we elected to use two fairly concrete variables—the study of English and Chinese and movies that depicted modern lifestyles—to frame multiple-choice questions scaled to four levels of response. Concerning how much the students liked the study of Chinese and English, 43.9 percent of the total indicated that they liked it very much, whereas 33.3 percent indicated they liked it fairly well, 16.3 percent thought it was all right, and 6.5 percent did not like it. These figures show that a majority of the ethnic minority students like studying Chinese and English. Some students expressed greater enthusiasm for studying English than Chinese or their own language, because En-

glish is a form of cultural capital that is useful for making one's way into mainstream society and finding employment, which shows that these students feel a strong need to become part of mainstream society. When it came to gauging how much students liked seeing movies that reflect the lifestyles of modern society, 22.0 percent indicated they enjoyed seeing them very much, whereas 36.0 percent enjoyed them fairly well, 26.2 percent thought they were all right, and 15.7 percent did not enjoy them. These figures indicate that almost 60 percent of the students like seeing movies that reflect modern lifestyles and can appreciate and understand the way of life of modern people. This survey allows us to see that students from minority communities are basically able to identify with modern culture. We asked those who did not enjoy these movies why, and they replied that they were unable to understand what was going on. Whether they liked these movies or not, a majority of the students felt that the lives of modern people, especially foreigners, were different from theirs, particularly when it came to parent-child relations, because in Western society parents did not force their children to study and did not beat and scold them harshly, which was very different from what their own parents were doing. Some parents also permitted the teachers to beat and scold (discipline) them, saying that this way (the strict way) did them good. Perhaps simply because what has become familiar seems most natural, a majority of the students thought that it was normal for parents to beat and scold their children and that it was right for the teachers to be strict. So even though students may identify with or long for a modern lifestyle, the fact that they live in a different environment leads to thinking and behavior that is not totally compatible with the modern way of life. This prompted us to do further research into ethnic identification and religious belief as described below.

It may be natural for minority groups or individuals to identify with their own ethnic group, but under the influence of modern education people acquire modern knowledge and living habits that lead them gradually to become less involved with the things of their own ethnic group; they may even reach a point where they forget them completely. With this in mind, we carried out a survey of teachers and students in the three ethnic communities. In the course of the survey we posed two questions: one involved the frequency with which ethnic garb was worn, and another dealt with the importance of ethnic identity in making friends.

When we asked students how many times they had worn ethnic garb in the preceding year, 36.1 percent indicated they had not done so at all,

whereas 16.1 percent indicated that they had done so once, 23.1 percent had done so twice, and 24.1 percent had done so three times, with 11.4 percent wearing ethnic garb on holidays, 50.9 percent doing so during their traditional ethnic activities or ceremonies, and 10.9 wearing it on an everyday basis. These figures indicate that only a small number of students wear ethnic garb even when doing so has symbolic significance, whereas most of them do not wear ethnic garb most of the time. Teachers' attitudes toward this are rather complex. Moving a step forward in our analysis, we believe that clothing culture and language are interconnected, and, if this is the case, how firm a grasp do the students have on the language of their ethnic group? To find an answer, we conducted more surveys. When we visited a primary school we learned that students who could say more than three things in the language of their ethnic group constituted only 3 percent of the total, because most had learned Chinese since they were young and had a Chinese-language environment at home as well as at school. In the local area students did not wear their ethnic garb, did not speak their group's language, and rarely identified themselves as members of a certain ethnic group, identifying themselves rather as belonging to a certain place. The feeling of identification with their ethnic group declined as most of them identified with Mandarin [*putonghua*] and modern lifestyles. This phenomenon may be related to the school's decision to emphasize mainstream culture, for example, speaking Mandarin while on school grounds, wearing student uniforms, obeying school rules, and following school customs. Concerning the importance given to ethnic identity when making friends, students and teachers alike indicated that "it makes no difference": as long as the students are able to get along and help each other no one cares about ethnic identity. This is a clear departure from the situation among members of the older generation, not only in the area of making friends but even when it comes to marriage, where some have broken through the prohibitions against crossing ethnic boundaries.

Surveying students for religious beliefs, we found that 56.4 percent of our sample had a religious belief, whereas 44.6 percent did not. Moreover, among students with ethnic minority identity within our sample, 73.7 percent had a religious belief, whereas only 8.3 percent of the Han Chinese in our sample had a religious belief. It would appear that religious belief is related to ethnic identity and ethnic consciousness, and in particular to socialization activities within the home or the community. For example, in the Gansu and Qinghai regions in which we conducted

research, in ethnic minority homes we found the religious aspect of early socialization—mainly factors such as dietary prohibitions—and almost every site where social interaction could take place from the school to the community had a socially defined level of authority, which makes it easy to understand the strength and continuity of religious belief (Jian Zhixiang 2001). Yet for young people it may increasingly be the case that religious form replaces religious belief.

With this in mind, we included questions about how often the students went to the mosque or temple in our questionnaire, because this variable would indicate level of participation in religious activities, and we could definitely say that the greater the frequency of religious worship, the firmer the belief in the religion. Our results showed that among our student respondents 60.5 percent did not go to worship, 35.3 percent sometimes went to worship, and 4.1 percent frequently went to worship. These figures showed that the younger the respondents were, the less devoted to religion they were. During more in-depth interviewing, some students volunteered that they usually went to worship because their parents made them go, and very few went of their own volition.

After analyzing the questions presented above, if we were to observe only local people in this particular locale, it would seem that their ethnic consciousness was fading and they were beginning to accept an increasing number of modern things, with the hidden curriculum in school-room instruction playing an extremely important role. While bringing the reproduction of indigenous culture to an end, the school is continuously expanding the reproduction of mainstream (modern) culture. If some of these “local native people” would come forward, they might be able to call forth a bit of indigenous awareness or ethnic awareness, but under the influence of the “modern context” and the trend toward globalization, people will quickly seek and adopt new identities, because, after all, we are all becoming more and more like each other.

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