

Amdo Tibetan Supplemental Education: The Struggle For and Over Educational Value

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A Dissertation

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The Faculty of the School of Education and Human Development

University of Virginia

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Doctor of Philosophy

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by

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## ABSTRACT

How do Amdo Tibetans in China negotiate the influence that formal education exerts on society and the concomitant widespread perception of the legitimacy of schooling to exert this influence. This ‘Education Revolution’ has created new opportunities for social mobility, the actualization of human potential, and the reconceptualization of what is worthwhile and ethical to learn (Baker, 2014). But it has also increased the capacity of schooling to legitimize and reward some perspectives and behaviors while devaluing and marginalizing others. To help students navigate this process, many educators provide instruction outside school time. Scholars and policymakers often conceptualize such programs as ‘shadow education’ insofar as these programs are thought to mimic mainstream schooling in many ways (Bray 2013). The principal research question I address is: How do Amdo Tibetan supplemental educators conceptualize what is educationally valuable and help students acquire it? Ethnographic data gathered at Amdo Tibetan community schools (Tib. *sabjong*) show that such programs fulfill a variety of goals, some incongruent with those of mainstream schooling. Data show that it is sometimes through deviating from, rather than shadowing, the norms of mainstream schooling that these programs foster relationships and environments conducive to helping students acquire what they need to be successful within and beyond schooling. Moreover, data reveal that even when such programs appear to mimic the mainstream, educators impart multiple frameworks for understanding what and why students learn that challenge the rationales dominant in mainstream schooling. Reorienting the goals of education, community members emphasize the ethical dimension of acquiring and transmitting capital. Finally, this research suggests that supplemental programs, by virtue of the legitimacy accorded to them precisely because they resemble formal education, constitute effective platforms for challenging the hegemony of mainstream schooling and the values it prioritizes.

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APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, “Amdo Tibetan Supplemental Education: The Struggle For and Over Educational Value,” has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the School of Education and Human Development in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Dr. Diane Hoffman

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Dr. David Germano

Nov 10, 2022

DEDICATION

To Amdo Tibetan students and teachers,  
Whose extraordinary efforts, knowledges, and insights always remind me  
That we are all student-teachers and teacher-students.

བཀའ་པར་འོས་པའི་ཨ་མ་དོའི་དགེ་རྒྱན་རྣམས་དང་སྣང་ཉེ་བའི་སློབ་མ་ཚོས།  
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# **Part 1: Introduction**

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION: SUPPLEMENTAL EDUCATION IN AMDO TIBETAN AREAS IN CHINA

How do Amdo Tibetan educators in the People's Republic of China navigate the increasing influence that public and compulsory education exerts on the organization of society and the concomitant widespread perception of the legitimacy of such schooling to exert this influence? This 'Education Revolution' has created new opportunities for socioeconomic mobility, the actualization of human potential, and the reconceptualization of worthwhile and ethical pursuits (Baker 2019). But it has also increased the capacity of schooling to legitimize and reward some knowledges and behaviors, while devaluing and marginalizing others. To help students navigate educational institutions that increasingly shape what children learn and what they believe they should learn, many educators provide instruction 'outside school time' in supplemental educational programs, known as *sabjong* (*gsab sbyong 'dzin grwa*) in Amdo Tibetan. Leading sociologists of education generally argue that such activities are best understood as "shadow" education, conceptualizing and studying these programs insofar as they mimic, or "shadow," mainstream schooling (Stevenson & Baker 1992; Mori & Baker 2010) and "provide instruction in subjects taught and tested in mainstream schooling" (Bray 2017, p. 437). However, findings from my principal field site show that some supplemental educational programs, as 'loosely coupled systems' (Weick 1976), comprise several elements that can function relatively independently both from one another and from policies that shape mainstream schooling in China. My ethnographic analysis of how educators at several *sabjong* located on the northeastern edge of the Tibetan Plateau conceptualize what is educationally valuable and inculcate it in students reveals the complex perspectives and practices educators employ to

negotiate the linguistic, cultural, and religious minoritization Tibetans often face in mainstream schooling (Fischer 2002; Fischer 2013a; Zenz 2013). While some activities at even a single *sabjong* can directly reinforce and enhance the knowledges and values prioritized in mainstream schooling, sometimes *sabjong* instruction diverges from the goals of mainstream schooling and at other times *sabjong* educators even critique the methods and goals of mainstream schooling – although this was rarer in contexts, such as this one, characterized by authoritarian governments compared to what others found (e.g. Chevannes and Reeves 1989; Hall et al. 2002). This dissertation explores how these three apparently incongruent processes pursuing divergent goals, rather than being left as contradictions, are ultimately combined in an effort to incorporate but reorient goals of education as they are imagined and promulgated by the Chinese state and transnational institutions and scholars that influence education policy and theory.

This study employs the Extended Case Method (henceforth: ECM) of ethnographic research, a tradition that began with Max Gluckman's (1954) focus on situational analysis during his time as a member of the so-called Manchester School of Anthropology (Evens & Handelman 2006) and remains an important approach to ethnography today (Burawoy 2009; Schritt 2022). This approach differs substantially from perhaps more popular forms of qualitative ethnographic analysis, such as Grounded Theory (e.g. Charmaz 2014; Glaser & Strauss 2014), ethnomethodology (e.g. Gibson 2011), and what Burawoy (2001) calls the Interpretive Case Method of the Geertzian tradition (e.g. Geertz 2000) in a number of ways. Pertinent here is that rather than building new theory directly from emergent themes in data, as does Grounded Theory, the ECM *begins* with powerful and popular theories that are worth testing and refining through the identification and theorization of anomalies (Burawoy 2009; Tavory & Timmermans 2009). By 'beginning with our favorite theory' and identifying *atypical* cases that appear to challenge

the theory, scholars suggest that the ECM produces knowledge, in part, through *theoretical* rather than *statistical* generalization (Eliasoph & Lichterman 1999; Buraway 2001). That is, recognizing that purposive selection of non-random cases will never produce statistical generalizability, the ECM nevertheless builds knowledge by refining and nuancing existing theory such that it can better account for apparent violations and therefore be more useful when brought to new contexts with new phenomena. The ECM accomplishes this, in part, by working with theories that explain social phenomena beyond the particular case at hand and then ‘unbounding’ or ‘extending’ out from the atypical phenomenon under study. In this way, the ECM is well-attuned to examine ethnographically the perspectives and practices found at small, independently organized Amdo Tibetan *sabjong* insofar as practices and perspectives found at these programs can shed light on the structural forces that create the anomaly. I understand the notion of anomalous cases in two related senses: a case under study is anomalous vis-à-vis nearby instantiations of the same phenomenon (i.e. other *sabjong*) and the case is anomalous vis-à-vis what powerful theories predict one would find. Therefore, it is necessary to specify the theories that I use to drive this study’s use of the ECM.

This introduction began by asking how Tibetan educators attempt to navigate the so-called Education Revolution. Popularized largely through David Baker’s (2014) book *The Schooled Society*, the Education Revolution is a term used to describe not only the unprecedented proliferation of (state-sanctioned) formal educational institutions globally but the concomitant expansion of *beliefs* in the value of formal education as a worthwhile human endeavor and its legitimacy as a primary arbiter of opportunities, status, and income. The phenomenon of global educational expansion has been most compellingly theorized by scholars using the ‘world culture version of neoinstitutional theory’ (Carney et al. 2012; e.g. Baker 2014;



Ramirez 2003; Meyer et al. 1997; Anderson-Levitt 2003) to investigate the growth and circulation of so-called global norms and values, i.e. world culture, such as the importance of formal education, its legitimate emphasis on ‘advanced cognitive functions’ over other forms of learning, and one’s human right to a formal education (Baker 2014; Anderson-Levitt 2003). But beyond simply the expansion and adoption of these and other putatively global norms, neoinstitutionalists argue that this process of isomorphic expansion, in which nation-states and the societies they organize increasingly resemble one another in “virtually all of the domains of rationalized social life” such as education, has been “surprisingly consensual” (Meyer et al. 1997, p. 145). Mimicking structures and institutions found in dominant nation-states in search of legitimacy, marginal or dominated societies, in neoinstitutionalists’ view, are often eager to import and borrow policies, assessment measures, technologies, and knowledges from those who claim the authority to speak for ‘world culture.’ As evidence for this claim, Meyer (1997 et. al) point to the fact that classrooms around the world look increasingly similar despite the fact that countries have incredibly varied cultures, religions, languages, and histories, not to mention governance structures and access to resources. To be sure, many scholars (e.g. Anderson-Levitt 2003; Wu 2016) have provided important critiques of this theory, arguing that such isomorphism and mimesis is more superficial and strategically conceived than neoinstitutionalists recognize, and such scholars’ predisposition to use predominantly quantitative methods to analyze large data sets on global trends has led them to miss the variation, negotiation, hybridization, and vernacularization institutions, such as schools, evince in everyday practice (also see Merry 2006). Neoinstitutional scholars (e.g. Wiseman et al. 2014; Wiseman & Davidson 2018) have recognized this emerging imbalance and have called for more small-scale qualitative studies that investigate these processes as they happen ‘on the ground.’ To respond to this call, this study

provides, in part, ethnographic analysis of how globally- and nationally- dominant ideas about what constitutes legitimate knowledge, competent teachers, and, in particular, worthwhile supplemental education programs are worked out in practice. To do so, I focus on Amdo Tibetan communities that attempt to draw from a rich Indigenous<sup>1</sup> tradition of formal education as they navigate ethnolinguistic minoritization in mainstream schooling in China.

The ECM demands that this study be specific from the outset about what it is that may be expanding to and adopted by increasingly diverse communities around the world. My initial response to this is straightforward: notions of what is educationally valuable. There are, of course, numerous claims of what is educationally valuable that I could use ECM ethnography to test and refine, but virtually none are as popular, powerful, and embedded in a comprehensive body of theory as Bourdieu's (1977; 1984; 1986) theory of reproduction, which comprises three central concepts of habitus, field, and capital (Davies & Rizk 2018). In particular, this study of how educators conceptualize what is educationally valuable and assist students in acquiring it uses cultural capital to approach what is considered educationally valuable for three principal reasons.

First, the concept of cultural capital is itself characterized by one's intellectual, cultural, and physical knowledges and ability to use them, which, even on its own, represents a robust conceptualization of what is educationally valuable. Indeed, in the words of many interlocutors and state-issued documents, one's "cultural level" (*rig gnas<sup>2</sup> chu tshad*, Ch. *wenhua shuiping*) is

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<sup>1</sup> On the question of whether or not Tibetans are "Indigenous" see Lokyitsang (2017) and McGranahan (2016). In at least a few cases, both Tibetans themselves and scholars emphasize caution in considering Tibetans Indigenous insofar as, to many Tibetans, the term signifies a smaller, sub-national group without their own country or national identity or governance structures. However, as global discourse on the Human Rights of Indigenous Peoples has grown, some increasingly align their advocacy efforts with Indigenous frameworks. While an ultimate response to the question is not necessary, the term is used here to indicate that Tibetan educational norms, methods, and institutions had existed relatively independently of Chinese or other colonizing influences for nearly a millennium prior to 1949.

<sup>2</sup> Both Tibetan terms used to translate the different (i.e. physical and theoretical) dimensions of culture use the syllable *rig*, which has many meanings and uses but the most basic of which is simply "knowing" or "knowledge." This illustrates the validity of using the concept of cultural capital as an inroad to understanding what people learn

a commonly used phrase, found even in popular dictionaries and websites, to directly index one's standard of education or level of educational achievement (also see Yi 2007). Second, the use of capital helps distinguish analytically between the question of what is educationally *good* (in an abstract sense) and what is educationally *valuable* (which entails a practical, applied dimension). Capital and its associated concepts of field and habitus provide a ready-made (though not unimpeachable) framework for understanding not simply what students should learn 'for the sake of it' but how such knowledges might be recognized and rewarded, materially and symbolically, as having value. And, third, the notion of capital is embedded in a larger theory which already includes a conceptual apparatus for understanding how what is considered valuable and the actions undertaken to acquire it is itself inextricably related to capital-bearers (i.e. habitus) and contexts (i.e. field). This provides an opportunity to examine a philosophical question sociologically. Moreover, this suite of concepts is well-positioned to facilitate an Extended Case ethnographic study that examines notions of educational value (i.e. cultural capital) through ethnographic data collection on educational practices aimed at creating a certain kind of person (i.e. habitus) and then 'extends out' to situate these in the broader context of social forces (i.e. field) which themselves inform what is understood to be valuable and how best to help students acquire it. This study *uses* Bourdieusian theory simultaneously to *challenging* it through the development of research questions situated at the cutting edge of the theory, asking, for example: What actually *does* get counted as cultural capital in Amdo Tibet areas in China? Is it possible for supplemental programs to inculcate desirable alterations in a student's habitus and, if so, what kind of training would it take?

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and know. Perhaps even more in Tibetan and Chinese languages than in English, the notion of "culture" is inextricably related to *knowledges*.

This dissertation addresses these and other research questions in subsequent chapters and I provide a summary of them here. The second chapter outlines the Analytical Framework, which entails how I understand these three concepts-cum-theories.<sup>3</sup> It provides details about how these concepts have been understood by leading scholars up until now, what aspects of the concept represent the ‘core’ and which aspects, as ‘belts’ that encircle the core, remain the subject of debate (Lakatos 1978; Elman & Elman 1997). This chapter leads to the generation of research questions, the answers to which will hopefully impact future operationalizations of these concepts. The third chapter describes the Methodology, which ranges from the earliest stages of research in coming to know the region and determining field sites to the final stages of data analysis, as well as considerations of positionality, social desirability, and other factors that impact how the findings should be understood. The next three chapters use secondary and empirical data to sketch out the contours of the Educational Field(s) that Amdo Tibetan Navigate, which is Chapter 4. Chapter 5 entails a typology of *sabjong*, which consists of almost entirely descriptive empirical data on basic types of *sabjong* and their characteristics. Chapter 6 uses this data and neoinstitutional theory to critique contemporary conceptualizations of supplemental education programs and provide an alternative. Chapters 7, 8, 9 address educators’ perspectives on the formation *habitus* among their students. In particular, Chapter 7 addresses how educators see class impacting students’ dispositions, Chapter 8 addresses gender, and Chapter 9 addresses race, which might be more usefully understood as *minzu*, a Chinese term that has been translated as “nationality” or “ethnicity”, though some suggest it should remain untranslated as it is not

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<sup>3</sup> Though I only use this term here due to its awkwardness, it is important to point out that cultural capital, field, and habitus are perhaps quintessential examples of concept-cum-theories, or, what I describe as concepts sufficiently complex that describing them alone requires the use of theory. I follow Grenfell (2008) and Wacquant (2018) in referring to the overall body of *theory* as reproduction theory, most famously laid out in Bourdieu’s (1977) now-famous *Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture* and several subsequent works. However, scholars regularly refer to “field theory” (e.g. Martin 2003) and even “cultural capital theory” (e.g. Kingston 2001). For consistency and organizational reasons, among others, I generally refer to these as concepts central to Bourdieu’s reproduction theory.

truly equivalent to either (Harell 1990). The final two analytical chapters address, in Chapter 10, the processes by which *sabjong* assist students in acquiring embodied cultural capital, and, in Chapter 11, other forms of capital that *sabjong* may help students acquire. Chapter 11 also then goes on to address other functions that *sabjong* can serve not only for students but also for educators, especially those interested in ‘legitimizing’ their already acquired capital, or, in other words, enhancing their symbolic capital. Ultimately, the dissertation concludes by revisiting the research questions and providing concluding reflections.

## CHAPTER 2

### ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

#### Introduction

A conceptual framework for understanding the different practices and perspectives that characterize supplemental education globally is provided in the chapter titled *The Meaning of Supplementation*. That chapter, through the use of a literature review tempered by a broad analysis of data collected during research, shows that scholars generally understand supplemental programs as pursuing one – and only one – of three principal goals: Reinforcement, Divergence, or Critique. However, data collected through the course of this study suggests that, in some instances, supplemental educators simultaneously pursue more than just one of these goals. Moreover, that chapter shows that educators achieve this through a process of *strategic reorientation* in which various proximate goals are reframed such that they can be incorporated into the pursuit of larger transcendental goals that satisfy a range of demands placed on students by teachers, parents, employers, and the state. Doing so allows educators and students to pursue educational goals that are academically valuable, ethnically desirable, and politically viable – a combination that is often precluded by the highly circumscribed opportunities Tibetans in China have to direct their own educational, cultural, and political activities (Fischer 2013). This chapter, on the other hand, provides an Analytical or Theoretical Framework for developing a more tightly focused analysis of ethnographic data on what participants in this study do and think in the process of pursuing what they consider to be educationally valuable goals.

To examine what *sabjong* educators (and other participants) consider to be educationally valuable and how they attempt to help students acquire it, it is vital to understand the ideational and practical aspects of this process and the deep ways that these are related. Pierre Bourdieu

(1977; 1986; 1992) provides arguably the most comprehensively developed theoretical apparatus for analyzing the co-emergence of perspectives on and practices that produce educational value. This dissertation therefore employs, with substantial critique, his tripartite suite of concepts taken from his theory of Reproduction in Education, Society, and Culture (1977/1990) that provide a way to understand how people, conditions, and knowledges combine to produce educational value that would not be possible if any of these three domains were studied in isolation. The reason for this is that these three domains are mutually constitutive: habitus, field, and cultural capital, respectively, while distinct concepts, depend on and inform each other (Bourdieu 1992). In the sections that follow, I suggest, following Bourdieu (1992; Lamont 2012; King 2000) that these concepts are not static, taken-for-granted claims whose veracity is either demonstrated or not by the results of a given study. Rather, they are theoretical tools scholars can use and refine to identify which data are salient to a study that addresses how social inequalities may be reproduced through schooling (Lamont & Lareau 1988), especially in circumstances where minoritized populations attempt to navigate and avoid the extremes of total assimilation into dominant cultures and exclusion from economic opportunity (see Carter 2005).

The following sections on habitus and capital (and, subsequently, field) explicate both ‘orthodox’ understandings of these concepts and, subsequently, areas in which these prominent understandings of these concepts central to research in the sociology of education appear to remain inadequate and require theoretical refinement or reconstruction, the goal of Extended Case Method research (Burawoy 2004). In other words, the concepts are not used as answers to research questions but to *generate* them (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Thus, the precise nature of each of these concepts and their relationships to one another – e.g. what actually constitutes cultural capital and how might it be differently recognized and rewarded depending on its bearer

– are not something that this study accepts as settled, as quantitative researchers are often compelled to do given the nature of the knowledge they seek to produce through testing theory (e.g. DiMaggio 1978). Rather, how these concepts relate to one another in *this* case is the empirical situation to be established. Proceeding in this way will shed light not only on the principal research question but ways in which immensely influential but widely critiqued Bourdieusian educational theory might be improved in future research.

A final introductory note on the correspondence between the Analytical Framework and Analysis itself is necessary. As is sometimes the case with ethnographic studies, the best way to present the data does not correspond neatly to the organization of the research questions; therefore, the chapters do not each answer one of the research questions. Rather, the three analytical chapters on habitus that comprise Part 3 of the dissertation are organized as responses to the first research question on habitus: Which factors, in addition to class, inform Amdo Tibetan students' habitus and how? The second and third research questions are addressed throughout all three of these chapters in Part 2. They are, respectively: What efforts to educators undertake to attempt to alter students' habitus (i.e. their dispositions)? And: How do participants in this study make sense of 'mismatches' (i.e. hysteresis) that arise between habitus and field? Then, the research questions on cultural capital, namely: From what sources can *sabjong* participants acquire cultural capital? And: What counts as cultural capital in Amdo? are addressed in Part 4 (Chapters 10 and 11). Because fields are not accessible to ethnographic research (Sallaz 2018) but nevertheless must be addressed to some degree in order to make sense of habitus and capital, a framework for thinking about the field(s) that participants in this study navigate and a presentation of this objective situation are offered in Chapter 4 using a review and analysis of existing research. Prior to Parts 4 and 5, the first analytical chapter, *The Meaning of*



*Supplementation*, provides a conceptual framework, which is the “product of qualitative processes of [my] theorization” rather than something ‘found’ in the literature, for understanding the different components of supplemental educational programs that are salient to the practices and perspectives analyzed in this study (Jabareen 2009, p. 50). Finally, a Conclusion is organized to address the research questions directly and explicate the significance of the study.

### **Habitus**

#### *Introduction*

Attending to and revealing to the extent possible participants’ habitus and how it is perceived by educators is integral to analyzing how cultural capital is conceptualized and acquired in Amdo Tibet not only for the axiomatic reason that these three concepts – habitus, field, and capital – cannot be understood in isolation from each other (Grenfell 2008). It is also necessary to explain *why* they can only be understood in relation to one another and how this usage helps organize data on the conceptualization and acquisition of capital. For those interested in how social forces impact academic identities and strategies, a central concern in the social foundations of education (Tozer et al. 2010), students’ habitus matters because it is the “internalization of externality,” the dynamic result (which itself becomes a cause) of a foundational and broadly conceived *educational* process: it is the result of what one has learned of the nature of world without ever being taught it consciously (Dumais 2002; Reay 2004). Thus, one can understand relationship between the field and the habitus through the pith phrase: positions generate dispositions (and predispositions). But they do not *determine* them. Traditionally understood in this research program, the term ‘position’ refers to one’s social class position, and is a product of the total volume and structure of capital one has at their disposal (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Benzecry 2018). That class positions, through numerous avenues,

such as child-rearing strategies, inform dispositions, such as how a child interacts with teachers or responds to punishment, has been explored extensively in empirical research in the sociology of education (e.g. Lareau 2011). Although, more recent research, including the present study, suggests that gender and race, and likely other factors such as religion, language, and perhaps even the elevation of one's hometown, are worth considering alongside class as key in this process. The processes of disposition generation, even if they take place largely outside of schools, are fundamentally educational insofar as they entail Pedagogic Action, either through "diffuse education," "family education," or "institutionalized education," which "is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1990, p. 5). In other words, children learn, through a variety of channels, the extent to which certain unevenly distributed knowledges, dispositions, behaviors, etc. are valued (or not) by those in dominant positions and develop a relationship, sometimes of opposition, to the imposition of these norms. An inquiry into habitus formation then entails an examination of how social contexts shape what people (here, educators, students, and parents) come to see as 'naturally' worthwhile goals of education.

The present discussion of habitus entails a few sections. First, I clarify how I am using the concept. Like the proliferation of operationalizations of cultural capital, there are numerous ways that habitus has been understood over the past several decades (Benzecry 2022) and recounting them all here is not possible. But it is therefore necessary to specify how exactly the term habitus is used in this study. Second, habitus has been 'put to work' in so many ways and invested with so many meanings and uses, it is not obvious that using the concept of habitus is necessarily beneficial, as it may obscure and conflate more than it reveals and clarifies, much

like unspecified analytical usages of “identity” do (Brubaker 1985, 1993; Brubaker & Cooper 2000).

Therefore, I explain the important advantages that attending to habitus affords, justifying its use in this study by discussing some key components of habitus. This section will, on one hand, provide a framework for understanding how individuals’ and groups’ “sense of the game” help clarify what it is they consider educationally valuable and how they adapt to potential changes, opportunities, and threats to these convictions. On the other hand, the goal is clearly not to provide a culturalist explanation of behavior that posits research participants react to the expansion of schooling in the ways that they do *because* they are Amdo Tibetans. As Wacquant (2018, p. 532) says, the habitus is “like a spring” coiled up – a matrix of possibilities and responses, but “not a self-sufficient mechanism for the generation of action.” Keeping this in mind allows me to analyze data on the ethnic, religious, and linguistic influences on the formation of participants’ habitus without asserting that these influences *determine* reactions to a given stimulus, in this case educational expansion: habitus cannot be understood as a protocol or blueprint for the mere execution of responses; it is generative. Here, I am most interested in how it provides ethnolinguistically minoritized students and teachers a framework for navigating the expansion of education institutions that rarely resemble the environments they grew up in.

Habitus is a “dispositional philosophy of action” (Wacquant 2018) developed to transcend both (objectivist) structuralist explanations, which depend on adherence to social rules, as well as (subjectivist) rational choice theories of action that are predicated on actors’ access to knowledge of options and an impartial calculation of outcomes (Grenfell 2008). Habitus lies at the heart of all Bourdieu’s thinking in that it stemmed from his desire to understand “the regularity of human action without adherence to simple rules” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992)

found in structuralist theory (Clark 1978; e.g. Levi-Strauss 1971). Most simply, habitus is “one’s view of the world and one’s place in it” (Dumais 2002, p. 45). If capital can be understood as a valuable resource, the habitus is one’s (pre)dispositions, or “the orientation one has towards using those resources” (Dumais 2002, p. 45). Similarly, Calhoun (2000, p. 292) defines habitus as “the embodied sensibility that makes possible structured improvisations.” The formation of one’s habitus is a largely subconscious process in which the cultures (which include the wide array of values, mannerisms, goals, habits, communication styles, etc.) into which a child is born become inscribed in a child, though not without minor modifications. The two possible emphases of the term enculturation capture this well: children are raised to understand and navigate a culture; and cultures are inscribed into children’s mental and physiological schemata, the latter of which Bourdieu (1993) came to emphasize more and more as he developed the concept. Thus, habitus is a psycho-physiological structure – tastes, preferences, strategies, that is, dispositions – are never just an intellectual or cognitive affair but are embodied, as the term ‘taste’ suggests so well (Bourdieu 1984; Vandebroek 2008). The embodied, pre-cognitive nature of habitus was increasingly emphasized by Bourdieu (1992) as he continued to develop the concept to the extent that he began to describe its role as an impetus for action as *libido*.

Bourdieu defines habitus in a number of instances, and I briefly address the salient aspects of them here. Habitus is the

system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively 'regulated' and 'regular' without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.” (Bourdieu 1990, p. 53; see also Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, p. 72).

The well-known phrase that habitus is a ‘structuring structure and a structured structure’ refers to the idea that habitus is acquired by “internalizing a determinate type of social and economic condition,” and “regarding the strategies which they inform and engender... which find in a definite trajectory within the field . . . a more or less favourable opportunity to become actualized (see Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 104–5). That is, habitus is a matrix of dispositions that is *structured* by pertaining field conditions and, in turn, provides a framework for *structuring* future action.

Importantly, this system of “schemes of perception, conception, and action” are long lasting, if not entirely permanent, and deeply rooted in one’s constitution, if not entirely subconscious. As a structured structure and a structuring structure, habitus aims to overcome the dichotomy between objectivist and subjectivist explanations for action that focus too exclusively on either social or individual factors that shape action, respectively (Bourdieu 1990). Critiquing approaches that were overly social in their in their explanations of action, Bourdieu distances himself from structuralism (e.g. in the work of Levi-Strauss) and functionalism (e.g. in the work of Marx and Durkheim) insofar as the former too greatly emphasized the objectively structured nature of social action as adherence to rules, and the latter thinkers too greatly emphasized the capacity of reified ideologies to structure of social action (Grenfell 2008; Maton 2008). Bourdieu also sought to critique theories of action that relied on an individual’s capacity to make rational choices, for this approach could neither explain the patterns and coordination of human action across populations *or* the continuity within an individuals series of ‘choices,’ (Wacquant 2018) nor, importantly, could it explain the proclivity of so many to continue to act in ways that seem inimical to their self-interest, reifying the very symbolic violence that oppresses them. This theory of practice is therefore useful in conceptualizing how the ‘outer becomes inner’ and the

‘inner becomes outer.’ Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) referred to this potential matching as “ontological complicity” between objective structures (which exist ‘out there’ in society, i.e. the field) and the internalized structures (which consists of dispositions and interests, i.e. the habitus). In sum, habitus lies at the very heart of Bourdieu’s intellectual project in that he was fundamentally concerned with how action transpires with regularities without simply adhering to rules, i.e., how humans appear to exert agency but in ways that are intelligible and predictable within structural constraints (Bourdieu 1984). This foregoing explanation of habitus suggests the importance of three principal components of the concept of habitus. Each are germane to questions that interpreters of Bourdieu have debated for decades (Swartz 2012) and, therefore, provide the grounds on which this study’s Research Subquestions are based. As a reminder, the principal Research Question asks: How do Amdo Tibetan supplemental educators conceptualize what is educationally valuable and inculcate in students? One set of Subquestions that must be addressed in order to approach the Principal Question pertain to habitus, and are enumerated here.

*Component and Question 1A: Which factors inform the generation of Amdo Tibetan students’ habitus and how?*

A first and central component of the concept of habitus that raises questions germane to this study concerns the cultural factors or ‘categories of experience and identity’ (Blackmore 1998, p. 175) that are internalized in the development of habitus. It goes without saying that Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, even sometimes termed the ‘bodily habitus’, is meant to attend to the ways that cultures are inscribed on “the practical operator” of the body itself (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Vandebroek 2014). Over the course of the concept’s development, habitus has

increasingly been seen as necessarily embodied, not simply insofar as individuals physically enact or display their ‘cultures’ (through fashion choices, for example) but that cultures are inscribed into the very way in which people physically exist. The term *bodily hexis* is used to describe this “somatic character” (emphasizing a separation from *ethos*, a moral, ideational entity) (Bourdieu 2001; Benzecry 2018). To put it succinctly, “the body is in the social world but the social world is *in the body* (in the form of hexis...)” (Bourdieu 1990, p. 152, emphasis mine). In educational terms, the palpably embodied aspects of habitus, i.e. *hexis*, consists in, for example, ways that students sit, stand, and move during classroom interactions, the physical postures they take towards educators and other students, and the discipline they exercise (or not) when asked to sit for long hours (a concern central to Gramsci 1922/2011 as well). Lareau (2011) emphasizes how students’ postures are, to varying degrees, explicitly inculcated by parents attempting to ‘cultivate’ in their children dispositions that will be rewarded in mainstream schooling. I bring up *hexis* here to highlight that within the constellation of dispositions that may be more or less rewarded in formal schooling, *hexis* is a key one, particularly in environments characterized by very long days in spartan boarding schools where teachers’ enforcement of disciplinary rules is often perceived as strict and physical punishment is not unusual. Additionally, despite some ethnographic researchers’ attention to the aspects of habitus more readily recognized as embodied, many researchers, such as those (e.g. Dumais 2002; Roksa & Robinson 2017) who operationalize habitus primarily as students’ “aspirations” or “expectations,” often miss out on capturing important data on how students’ experience of formal education is deeply shaped by their physical existence there and the disciplines to which their bodies are subjected.

One of Lareau’s (2011) principal claims in this respect, which builds directly on Bourdieusian theory, is that students’ bodily *hexis*, that is, the way their habitus ‘shows up’ in

how they maneuver their bodies, is most importantly informed by their social class position (Bourdieu 1993; Lareau 2011). That is, the salient groups for Bourdieu and Lareau (and, importantly, she acknowledges that not everyone believes there are necessarily salient groupings in the first place, e.g. Goldthorpe 2007; Kingston 2001) are social classes, membership in which, for the time being, can be considered a product as the aggregate volume and structure of capital a family has at their disposal (Weininger 2004). Lareau (2003) shows that more than gender and even race, class is the salient factor that shapes how parents ‘teach’ students to physically conduct themselves and engage in physical activities (and what kinds of activities). But there remains debate about the most salient characteristics and sources of these cultures that shape a child’s habitus (Reay 2004). Therefore, rather than taking the source of habitus as a given, fraught as it is with potential contradictions or uncertainties, I intend to, by “immersin [sic] in the specificities of an empirical reality (Bourdieu 1993, p. 271), query what cultures appear influential in the ways that teachers (as well as parents and peers) teach, explicitly or implicitly, students to behave in supplemental educational settings that exist at the margins of formal education. As with cultural capital, rather than employing a taken-for-granted notion of habitus, aspects of which have been the object of substantial critique (e.g. Goldthorpe 2007), I instead open the concept up to empirical investigation, taking a *categorical* understanding of the concept and then using empirical data to supply *substantive* meanings. While scholarly attention to a wider array of factors has grown, as has attention to how these factors intersect, for most orthodox Bourdieusians, one’s social class – i.e., economic position – is most fundamental, although even Bourdieu acknowledges that various influences exist and intersect, and do so differently at different class positions (Bourdieu 1984, p. 107; Maton 2008; Grenfell 2008; Dumais 2002). Therefore, the present Subquestion queries the sources beyond ‘classed cultures’



(Benzecry 2018) that inform students' habitus. Leading scholars, such as Jacobs (1996) argue that gender, despite it often being overlooked by Bourdieu in his earlier work (Dumais 2002; Silva 2005; Adamuti-Trache & Andres 2008), remains a principal stratifying factor in society and, therefore, a category of experience that must be understood as key to habitus formation and, therefore, students' capacity to acquire and use cultural capital.

Beyond gender, is it also essential to interrogate how race (or a comparable category appropriately calibrated to the contemporary Chinese context, such as *minzu*) informs the process by which dispositions are inculcated in students and subsequently recognized as valuable or not in more or less institutional settings, as the work of Carter (2005) shows. Discourse on race, or more accurately, racialized notions of valuable behaviors, dispositions, and knowledges are prevalent in China (Tuttle 2015) and the notion of "backwardness" (*rjes lus*, Ch. *luohou*) is commonly used to discuss those *minzu* who differ in language, location, or phenotype from those who grew up speaking Putonghua Chinese in lower elevations in eastern China (Kipnis 1995). In other words, while many scholars, including Lareau (2011) whose study found relatively minor differences across races, recognize the important role that race (or an comparable concept, like *minzu*) plays in habitus formation, the impact of this factor may be even greater in locations, like China, where those of different 'races' (i.e. *minzu*) often evince not only phenotypical differences but also a wide variety of others, ranging from native language and religious background to geographical location and livelihoods. This suggests that even beyond these three principal categories of experience (race, class, and gender), it is necessary to investigate other stratifying factors, such as those general to all societies like native language and religiosity, and some specific to Amdo Tibet such as elevation (e.g. farming or herding backgrounds that shape language and livelihood) that constitute objective conditions that get internalized as habitus.

To summarize: one key task in establishing students' habitus(es)<sup>4</sup> and educators' perspectives on them is specifying the sources or the constitution of the 'objective conditions' that become internalized as the habitus. Scholars who use more orthodox operationalizations of the term have considered class to be the most influential in informing the conditions that manifest in the habitus. However, Part 3 of this dissertation also considers the extent to which other factors are also at work in shaping the habitus (including but not limited to race and gender), which may be especially important to understand in a context in which participants, in their skepticism of Marxist-socialist discourse, sometimes actively resist the Chinese state's emphasis on (non-racialized) social class and instead highlight their race or ethnicity as the most salient identity group to which they belong (Kolas 2003). If this study assumes it is class position alone that generates habituses that are more or less predisposed to success in school, I may miss the multifaceted nature of Amdo Tibetans' strategies for succeeding in schools in which intersections of class, gender, and race, as well as key components of Tibetan sociality, such as native language and religiosity, can produce multiple minoritizations. This discussion has raised a Subquestion that facilitates both interrogating students' dispositions and educators' perspectives on them as well as refining the theory on what forces constitute habitus. Subquestion 1A is, therefore: *Which factors inform the generation of Amdo Tibetan students' habitus and how?*

*Component and Question 1B: How do participants make sense of 'mismatches' between field and habitus?*

Before discussing what educators do to alter students' dispositions in ways that might be beneficial, it is first necessary to inquire how participants make sense of the 'mismatch' that

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<sup>4</sup> See longer discussion in Chapter 7 on the use of this term in the singular and plural forms.

exists when dispositions and strategies seem to be poorly attuned to the environments (i.e. fields) in which they are meant to be successful (Hardy 2008). The next component of habitus on which this framework focuses is therefore the notion of *hysteresis*, or the ‘mismatch’ or disruption that occurs when habitus appears to ‘lag’ behind the field, when one’s dispositions, appreciations, tastes, mannerisms seem calibrated to some other time or place, when or where they may have been more appropriate and valued but no longer seem to be (Hardy 2008). According to Bourdieu (1977b, p. 83), hysteresis is

one of the foundations of the structural lag between opportunities and the dispositions to grasp them which is the cause of missed opportunities and, in particular, of the frequently observed incapacity to think historical crises in *categories of perception and thought other than those of the past* (emphasis added).

Included in the notion of a ‘mismatch’ between the field and the dispositions of habitus, is the mismatch between previously and the contemporarily dominant norms and frameworks (in this case, for thinking about educational value). As always, rather than “applying” a rigid understanding of this concept to the data collected, I use Bourdieu’s ideas to generate a question that is more analytically precise than it would have otherwise been: How do participants make sense of and navigate this potential mismatch? It's necessary to explain more fully the meaning of hysteresis so the significance of this question, and its role in contributing to the overall argument, become clearer.

In a classic example of hysteresis, the habitus’ capacity to produce (in this case, faulty) strategies can be seen in Don Quixote’s mistaken conviction that errantry was an appropriate strategy for winning status and renown. His dispositions, the goals toward which they were oriented, and the strategies by which he pursued them, were anachronistic and mismatched to the emerging structure of the field (Hardy 2008). I use the term ‘conviction’ here to indicate that Quixote’s practice of errantry was neither ‘merely’ the product of a choice, i.e., a rationally made

decision about what might best lead to the acquisition of the renown he desired. Neither was this urge a primordial desire, intrinsic and prior to all enculturation. Nor was it considered a product of the mere execution of social rules, as the very idiosyncrasy of his quest suggests. Thus, this strategy, misinformed as it was, was oriented toward an interest or an investment, an *illusio* in Bourdieusian terms (more on this in Chapter 4), generated by habitus and pursued through strategies. Rather than social practices being conceptualized as governed by individual choice or social rules, understanding action as a strategy is preferable because it “indicate[s] the ways individuals act in orientating their social practice...[how] such practice was based not only on the link between their individual habitus and the field conditions that surrounded them, but on unconscious calculation of profit (ultimately, the improvement of their own position in the field)” (Grenfell 2008, p. 154). In Grenfell’s (2008, p. 154) succinct formulation, “interest is habitus incarnate.” Therefore, in its broadest sense, strategy is *the* primary manifestation of habitus; it is one’s practical sense, a ‘feel for the game’ engendered through experience – and, ideally, mastery acquired through experience – with the game (Bourveresse 1999, p. 49).

When field dynamics shift, especially when such shifts are fast and fundamental as might be catalyzed by war, revolution, colonization, or discovery, habituses that were previously ‘attuned’ to the field can experience *hysteresis* (Bourdieu 2000, p. 160). Demonstrating that it makes little sense to talk about habitus, field, or capital except for in relation to one another, hysteresis is the situation in which a habitus was socialized into a field which no longer exists in the same way; the habitus now ‘lags behind’ the field and, due to this disjuncture, is no longer a generator of ‘reliable’ strategies appropriate for success that field. Bourdieu explains, “As a result of the hysteresis effect ..., practices are always liable to incur negative sanctions when the environment with which they are actually confronted is too distant from that in which they [were]

objectively fitted” (Bourdieu 1977b, p. 78). In interrogating what might lead to changing field dynamics that ‘leave some habituses behind’, the first place to look is in changing geopolitical realities that reshape the state (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) because the state, especially in highly centralized places like China, exerts, through the ‘meta-field of power’ (which is the supreme, political-economic field discussed in Chapter 4) unparalleled influence in shaping field dynamics and the relative value of different forms of capital, for example through mandating the degree requirements for certain employment or incentivizing study in certain fields through national grants. That is to say “when State intervention changes, what is legitimate, the relative values of [cultural and social] capitals, is altered and the interactions between field structures and habitus are dislocated” (Hardy 2008, p. 143). As is usually the case, the better field position one already occupies, the better ‘prepared’ (even if merely by dint of their position) they will be to react advantageously to changes in field-specific dynamics, so that “[i]n a general manner, it is the people who are richest in economic capital, cultural capital and social capital who are the first to head for new positions” (Bourdieu 1996a, p. 262). Individuals of this type will have acquired the dispositions and practices that allow them to recognize the many forms of capital, including symbolic, to be gained from early occupation of the freshly created field positions. That is, those with more capital are better positioned to avoid hysteresis – they have the capital to recognize nascent field positions as they open up and are better prepared to make use of them. Bourdieu’s (1977a) belief in this idea is the reason that he is exceedingly skeptical about the potential for formal education to challenge social reproduction effectively: those in dominant positions are disproportionately capable of reacting advantageously to changes in field dynamics.

Bourdieu’s characterizing this mismatch in only descriptive analytical terms, rather than a prescriptive one that denotes a moral dimension to the mismatch, produces advantages for the

term hysteresis vis-à-vis similar concepts used by previous sociologists, such as *anomie* (Durkheim 1928/2003) or *alienation* (Marx 1844/2016). These two terms, for example, denote both a social process and a moral positionality: not only is there a mismatch but this mismatch is *undesirable* (Hardy 2008). Hysteresis, however, describes simply the state of mismatch. It is important to note here that, in this study, many participants themselves understand this matching and mismatching in deeply moral ways. But it is necessary to postpone the analysis of that moralizing and not approach these mismatches scientifically as good or bad *per se*. The reason, as explained further in Parts 3 and 4, is that participants' understanding of the moral nature of this mismatch is often ambivalent: many interlocutors found it difficult to determine who is at fault for the mismatch and whose responsibility it is to redress it. Therefore, rather than approaching the disjuncture as necessarily bad, this Research Subquestion probes how Tibetans position themselves vis-à-vis the mismatch and what should be done about it. The range of responses in depressingly stark terms (that extend beyond the scope of this study) are as follows: on one hand, some Tibetans attempt to close the gap entirely and assimilate fully into Chinese society; on the other hand, more than 150 Tibetans have self-immolated in what in many cases could be understood as an ultimate refusal of the pressure to bring one's habitus more into alignment with fields increasingly dominated by Chinese people and institutions. That is, there is among Tibetan communities in China an extraordinarily wide array of strategies used to make sense of and address the 'mismatch' between habitus and field. Therefore, rather than attempted to account for how all Tibetans response to hysteresis, this Subquestion probes how Amdo Tibetan educators at supplemental programs make sense of and navigate these mismatches.

In summation: Hysteresis is a vital concept for understanding the ways the habitus and field mutually constitute one another. But it is especially important for understanding those who

occupy non-dominant positions within a field and for those compelled to play in fields that are not of their choosing. For those whose home cultures don't match those in dominant institutions, the mismatch can be painful, difficult to overcome, and, in some cases, one that participants don't always want to immediately overcome, or at least not at any expense. This situation raises the question: How do participants make sense of and navigate this mismatch between (an Amdo Tibetan) habitus and (the Chinese educational) field?

*Component and Question 1C: To what degree do sabjong educators believe that that habitus is alterable and how do they try to alter it?*

A final key question raised by theorizations of habitus, and especially significant for uses of Bourdieu's concepts in educational contexts, is the degree to which habitus is alterable. It is by now almost a matter of course to critique Bourdieu's notion of habitus as oppressively static and deterministic, impossible to overcome or undo (Barrett & Martina 2012). Critics (Alexander, 1995; Butler, 1999; Jenkins, 2014; Shilling, 1997) and even acolytes of Bourdieu often point out that the notion of the habitus seems virtually deterministic, allowing only for minimal alteration or potential to overcome the destiny(ies) that one's initial class positions have ordained. Bourdieu himself (1991) seems rather pessimistic about the possibilities of altering the one's habitus, in large part because the habitus, inculcated largely unconsciously during the earliest and most formative years of life, is unlikely to be susceptible to later efforts, usually conscious, intentional, and discursive, to alter these underlying structures. Thus, rather than rehashing the well-worn critiques that bewail this determinism, I use them as a point of departure to explore the possibilities for conceptualizing the limited alterability of habitus.

Critics such as Goldthorpe (2007, p. 4) understand Bourdieu to mean that “habitus is formed in its essentials by... ‘domestic’ influences, and then is further developed only through the individual’s own subsequent experience of ‘class conditions’,” remaining rather impervious to other influences, even those influential institutions like schooling. Goldthorpe (2007, p. 6) asserts that there is “little place in Bourdieu’s approach for mainstream sociology’s concept of re-socialization.” While habitus must be understood as durable, that is, entailing inertia and continuity, it is also malleable, at least in subtle ways, particularly when subjected to prolonged and persistent influences, of which school is often considered an example *par excellence* (Wacquant 2022, p. 532). However, clearly, Bourdieu himself is quite (completely?) skeptical of mainstream schooling itself to generate these changes because it functions, above all in Bourdieu’s estimation (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977), to make natural, to mask, ‘to obscure and therefore secure,’ the processes of social reproduction (Burawoy 2012). In other words, Bourdieu and other Critical scholars are deeply skeptical about the potential of formal education to assist students in overcoming the limitations their habituses create because schools are those very institutions that unequally reward a ‘middle-class habitus’ to the detriment of other ways of existing in the world (Carter 2005; Lareau 2011; Apple 2001). This raises a fundamental question: What kinds of practices, if any, might have the potential to ‘undo’ the disadvantageous dispositions (vis-à-vis success in formal education) that childrearing practices commonly found in working class or poor families inculcate in students?

Might there be other circumstances that can provide a “counter-training” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 172) that is not only prolonged and comprehensive, in the sense that it engages the entire psychophysical structure of habitus (Bourdieu often uses examples of athletic training), but is also relatively independent of the processes that reproduce social inequalities as that of



mainstream schooling? In a search for such practices one could look to the ‘opposite end of the spectrum’ of institutions, as Wacquant (2004) does in his investigation of the training boxers get in the gym to investigate whether or not such training exerts sufficient influence (in terms of breadth, depth, and duration) to alter one’s habitus. While instructive in its own right, both in what it tells us about boxing gyms and the nature of habitus, this example, drawn as it is from the ‘far end’ of the spectrum differing from formal education, might reveal little about the extent to which specifically *educational institutions*, at the ‘near end of the spectrum’ that look almost entirely like mainstream schools, might be able to accomplish the same habitus-altering work. Therefore, supplemental education programs organized by those who successfully straddle different classed, raced, and gendered cultures, are ideally situated to reveal the potential for educational institutions to impact habitus in ways that don’t simply reproduce symbolic violences of Pedagogic Action in the way that Bourdieu thought mainstream institutions could not help but do. To put it simply: if mainstream schools cannot help but generate social reproduction and the violence and inequalities inherent therein, are programs that “shadow” mainstream schools also resigned to the same fate? Or might they in some important ways resemble boxing lessons or other psychophysical ‘counter-trainings’ that at least have the potential to undo some of the ‘disadvantageous’ dispositions that have been inculcated in children by dint of the role that membership in a dominated class (or gender, race, or also religion, linguistic group, etc.) played in their upbringing?

What framework, then, do Bourdieu and his commentators provide for thinking about the possibility of altering habitus? Wacquant (2018) and Benzecry (2018) emphasize that there are *levels* to habitus. The *primary* habitus, formed during childhood, is the most foundational, in part because all future experiences are themselves filtered through and assimilated by the primary

habitus. But beyond the formation of a *primary* habitus, which takes place almost entirely subconsciously and as a product of ‘natural’ experiences at home and with the family, *secondary* habitus is added to the primarily through “specialized pedagogical labor” (Wacquant 2002), of which the most common example is prolonged exposure to formal education. Moreover, there is no reason, in my assessment, to consider the term ‘secondary habitus’ in the singular: though the ‘grafting on’ of a secondary habitus requires significant time and energy, it is not unimaginable for the diverse fields and institutions one encounters later in life continue to exert multiple, and not always congruent, influences on the continued formation of habitus, which is always in a state of “permanent revision” (Wacquant 2018, p. 531). Arnold Schwarzenegger might be a good example of someone with *multiple* secondary habituses: bodybuilder, actor, statesman, etc. Benzecry (2018, p. 538) explains the forms of habitus as a primary (i.e. one’s ‘classed’ self), a secondary habitus, which develops from one’s (sometimes voluntary) socialization into a particular group, and adds to these a *tertiary* habitus that develops when one “reflects upon themselves as embodiements of a particular practice.” According to Burawoy (2012), it is primarily in this third kind of habitus that the possibility for overcoming the ‘blindness’ and limitations placed on us by habitus is possible. Benzecry (2018, p. 542) notes:

a preponderance of research on habitus in the American context has “either focused on primary habitus and particularly its effects on agents’ practices *or* on the acquisition of a secondary habitus. Few exceptions...[explore] the relationship between primary and secondary habitus and the process of transposition from one to the other.

However, this is necessary if one is to understand how those relatively rich in non-dominant capital attempt to acquire dominant capital. If one wants to understand how teachers and students attempt to overcome the ‘mismatch’ between home and school cultures, attention must be paid to the Pedagogical Work (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) done to facilitate the ‘bridging and buttressing’ work done to facilitate students’ efforts to acquire and use (dominant) capital.

Framing an inquiry along the lines of what kinds of practices and experience conduce to altering one's habitus also suggests the importance of understanding the degree to which this can be undertaken consciously and deliberately. Goldthorpe (2007, p. 5) citing Bourdieu (1990, p. 66-79), describes the habitus as: "the system of socially constituted dispositions that the individual acquires, most effectively in early life, and that determines his or her entire orientation to the world and modes of conduct within it." But, following Lareau (2011) and others, I will (predictably) object to the strength of one key word here: "determines". Rather than determining "entire orientations" and, perhaps even more radically, "modes of conduct in the world," habitus, *qua* dispositions, provides schematas of action, the frameworks for *generating* responses, but it "determines" neither orientations nor actions. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) and Wacquant (2018) later clarifying Bourdieu's position, compare the habitus to a spring, a mechanism loaded with *potential* responses that will respond in ways that are, to a nonreducible degree, responsive to the triggering action rather than merely "executing" a pre-programmed response. That the habitus cannot be considered as a blueprint or protocol for action includes another important distinction: while the dispositions, tastes, and appreciations that constitute the habitus are indeed inculcated, often unconsciously and, therefore, most thoroughly, from the very earliest stages of life, it is wrong to argue that Bourdieu and those using this concepts assume that the habitus is fixed by one's family environment and class position during early childhood. But analyzing educators' strategies for preparing students for future educational and employment opportunities, require attending to the dynamic nature of the habitus because, "as a product of social conditionings, and thus of a history, [habitus] is endlessly transformed" (Bourdieu 1994, p. 7). Bourdieu's life journey itself is often held up as an example of the alterability of habitus.

Therefore, because habitus is not, once and for all, set from early childhood, it follows that “habitus is not necessarily coherent and unified” (Wacquant 2002, p. 6). While a childhood characterized by participation in institutions prioritizing goals congruent with those found in one’s home environment, achievable by logics congruent to those used at home, will result in a commensurately more unified, cohesive habitus whose layers “reinforce one another and work in unison,” a formative experience characterized by unstable or divergent value systems will more likely effect a “splintered” or “cleft” (*clivé*) habitus (Wacquant 2018, p. 532; Ingram & Abrahms 2015). This “generate[s] irregular and inconsistent lines of action” much as Bourdieu recognized in his 1960s research among those experiencing the violent effects of colonization and the tectonic shifts in fields that colonization causes (Wacquant 2018, p. 533; Bourdieu 1977). Using a linguistic metaphor to describe habitus, like Chomsky’s “generative grammar,” Wacquant (2018) describes habitus as providing a generative grammar of action which allows actors to produce action in predictable ways that are nonetheless endlessly inventive. Besides knowing ‘the rules of the game’, a good strategy, according to Calhoun’s (2014, p. 79) understanding, entails “the ability to evaluate strengths of weaknesses of the rival... and to foresee the next move, game, and strike of each player.” Evident in this understanding of strategy is not only the notion of how one might be more or less advantageously positioned in a field with relationship to time or the dynamics of the field – the extent to which their habitus is ‘in sync’ with the changes in and trajectory of the field (i.e. minimizing hysteresis) – Calhoun’s understanding also suggests an increased emphasis on the explicit or conscious nature of strategy. While components of habitus discussed by Bourdieu, such as tastes and dispositions, seem quite rightly ‘pre-conscious,’ processes such as ‘evaluating’ and ‘foreseeing’ seem, at least in part, necessarily the product of conscious and even conscientious deliberation.

The final ambiguity to address is where the formation of habitus, and the strategies it facilitates, lies on the spectrum that, in one direction, extends towards being a completely unconscious process imposed by environments and others (e.g. Auyero 2011) or, in the other direction, which extends towards a fully self-conscious approach to change oneself (and/or invite instruction from others who can facilitate this) in an act of “auto-poiesis” (e.g. Winchester 2008; Benzecry 2018, p. 547). This suggests that rather than merely using habitus as a theoretical construct (used to explain students’ behaviors and aspirations, for example) it is a “target to be de- and re-constructed” (Benzecry 2022, p. 549). Importantly, an examination of this component interrogates the way in which educators *reflexively* address these obstacles. I therefore attend to this reflexive level, querying not only what constitutes Amdo Tibetan students’ habitus(es) but also how educators perceive it and actively attempt to alter it, asking: To what degree do *sabjong* educators believe that that habitus is alterable and how do they try to alter it?

### *Summary*

Ultimately, is there any way to conceptualize the *development* and *implementation* of strategies as a remotely conscious and deliberate process? Perhaps. The habitus can be adjusted in a way that leads to durable changes only through a thorough process of “counter-training” like that of an athlete, that has repetitive and physical dimensions (Bourdieu 2000, p. 172). To this Burawoy and Holt also add an emotional aspect, one that is inculcated through rituals, community, and socially supported cultivation of dispositions. Because the habitus *is* the external world internalized, a structured structure that structures, attempts to ‘re-train’ the habitus are nothing less than attempts at “dislodging symbolic power,” a tall order indeed, (Burawoy & Holt 2012, p. 16).

To summarize this debate in the form of two questions, it is possible to say that there remains disagreement among answers to: 1) What sources contribute to shaping habitus? And 2) To what degree is habitus alterable and how much control does an individual have over doing so? It is not my goal to attempt to solve this debate over the correct interpretation of Bourdieu here, in part because all it would produce, empirically, is a putatively correct reading of Bourdieu. Rather, I proceed by turning these into open, empirical questions to be investigated through ethnographic research (rather than fixed tenets) and provide a framework, drawn from Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) and Wacquant (2018), for considering the malleability of habitus. To shed the intellectual baggage of long-standing debates on proper interpretations of Bourdieu (and the veracity of his claims in the first place), I rephrase the question this way: To what degree do *sabjong* educators believe that that habitus is alterable and how do they try to alter it? Importantly, this includes an inquiry into how *sabjong* educators work to make new array of strategies thinkable and actually available for implementation.

In summary, the three questions raised are: 1) What are the sources of habitus? 2) How do participants make sense of hysteresis? And 3) What do they try to do about it? These can be combined into one Subquestion for this chapter: To what extent can certain kinds of education alter students' dispositions such that they are more able to use a variety of forms of capital?

## Capital

### *Introduction*

At bottom, the value of a species of capital (e.g. knowledge of Greek or integral calculus) hinges on the existence of a game, of a field in which this competency can be employed: a species of capital is what is efficacious in a given field, both as a weapon and as a state of struggle, that which allows its possessors to wield a power, an influence, and thus to *exist*, in a given field (instead of being considered a negligible quantity).

Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 98

I quote this description at length because it raises several points fundamental to understanding capital, its species or forms (which are synonymous here), and what differentiates it from potentially comparable concepts, such as resources, skills, or Becker's (2009) notion of human capital. First, and most importantly, capital is necessarily that which is *valuable*: while "resources" may be conceptualized as a 'raw' form of that which might be transformed into something valuable, capital is necessarily so. However, it need not be (and almost never is) *universally* valuable; its value depends on the existence of those who recognize it: a field. Even perhaps the simplest form of capital – money itself – depends for its value on the recognition of others and their willingness to exchange for it symbolic or material goods (which are never entirely distinguishable). Therefore, that which yields no advantage in competition or over which no one would compete (such as Nepali rupees in a Mexican village – especially a village that is distant from a currency exchange center) cannot be considered capital *in that field of competition*. Elsewhere, in some other field – a Nepali rupee in a market in Kathmandu, for example – the very same instantiation, the same object or possession, is valuable capital.

I hesitate to give a monetary example here, for one of Bourdieu's (1986) principal points is that capital is not exclusively financial and that our increasing proclivity to see it only in this limited, indeed impoverished form is a major and unfortunate consequence of capitalism. Moreover, money makes for an inadequate analogy for others reasons as well, such as the fact that states (and their institutions) outright define the boundaries around where a given denomination is accepted as currency or not, as well as the fact that conversion of one currency to another (e.g. US dollars to Euros) is a straight-forward process (even if exchange rates fluctuate) that requires little conversion effort (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 90-102). Finally, the monetary metaphor is limited because the *logic* of currencies – i.e., how money *works* – is

the same across countries (which, in the current example, are imperfectly analogous to fields). However, even though capital is convertible, fields, insofar as they are fields, have their own autonomous logics that are irreducible to the logics of other fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 90-96). Nevertheless, it is useful to start with a monetary analogy and then complicate it in order to establish certain fundamental characteristics of *capital* that some authors, discussed below, seem to neglect.

However, fields alone do not determine that value of capital; the value of one's capital is also shaped by their ability to make us of it, their dispositions for activating it. Attempting to account for an individual's capital without showing how their habitus facilitates appropriating it (or not) is much like trying to understand a poker player's bets while ignoring how they acquired their chips over time that they have and where/from whom they learned how to play cards in the first place (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Of the many passages available in Bourdieu's oeuvre to highlight the relationship between habitus and capital, I choose a somewhat unorthodox quotation to make the connection between habitus and the activation of capital as strongly as possible:

By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give. This consists mainly of linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship of familiarity with culture which can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture (Bourdieu 1973, p. 80).

To shorten this passage, "linguistic and cultural competence..." can be replaced with "cultural capital" which is, in any operationalization of the term, meaningfully understood as competence to use that which is culturally valuable (ranging from accents to objects to degrees) to achieve one's goals. Importantly, as discussed below, the latter two conditions of this sentence, i.e., "[that] which can *only* be produced by family upbringing" and "transmits the *dominant* culture,"



are questioned by scholars (e.g. Goldthorpe 2007) and questioned through this research. First: Is it *only* the family that can transmit cultural capital, or are there other institutions, like schools, that transmit it, *as well as* recognize and reward it (Kingston 2001)? And, if so, might there be other institutions, not so bound by the tasks of assessing students and reassuring the public of its meritocratic logic, that can better transmit cultural capital to students, such as supplemental education programs? And, second, as Yosso (2005) and Collins (2014) query: Is only familiarity with *dominant* cultures and contexts intelligible as cultural capital? This seems to some degree contradictory to what Bourdieu himself says insofar as, on one hand, capitals only function in relation to a field, and, on the other, some fields hold positions that are dominant relative to others. Therefore, there must be some instantiations of capital that *are* valuable within a given (non-dominant) field but turn out to be less (or not at all) valuable in a different (dominant) field, as Carter (2005) shows. Of course, there is reason to assume that dominant capital, *qua dominant*, will be comparatively more valuable across all fields, *ceteris paribus*. As this section progresses, perspectives of Yosso (2005) and Kingston (2001) will be used as ideal types to represent two principal critiques of Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital.

I now return to the first half of the quoted passage: "By doing away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone, the educational system demands of everyone alike that they have what it does not give" (Bourdieu 1973, p. 80). Whether or not one agrees with this specific formulation of schooling, it raises two questions: What does an education system demand of students? And what does it (not) give students? For now, I will not answer these questions in more than generalities, for my goal at this point in detailing my framework is not to answer research questions but to show how a study of capital must consider students' habitus. To the former question, a reasonable person could proffer a handful of answers.

Schools demand of students: knowledge (e.g. that which is tested), hard work (e.g. completing numerous tasks), discipline (e.g. sitting quietly and still during class), time (e.g. to complete homework), organization (e.g. to submit administrative paperwork), planning (e.g. to choose classes, majors, and a trajectory), and perhaps some other attributes, such as patience, perseverance, and congeniality. Whether or not schooling *demands* these or whether they are merely *advantageous* is entirely moot; it suffices to say that these attributes lead to success in schooling. To the latter question, i.e., what does school supply or not supply to students, one could also produce a number of possible answers that might, depending on the sociopolitical and educational perspectives of the respondent, vary quite a bit from one another. For now, however, the fact that they vary at all – and that, therefore, this set of responses varies from those to the former question – demonstrates that there is never a perfect correspondence between what schools give students and what schools demand from them. Beyond these *descriptive* answers, there is perhaps equal reason to think that there would be little correspondence between *prescriptive* answers to the question: What *should* schools demand of students and what *should* they give them? As stated, perceptions of the ‘mismatch’ between what schools expect of students and what students expect they will need to succeed in school is an empirical question that will be addressed in Parts 3 and 4. The point of bringing this up here, however, is to show that, whatever actually constitutes this ‘mismatch’ falls almost entirely within the realm of habitus. Students’ dispositions, appreciations, and orientations can facilitate success in schooling – as does hard work, congeniality, discipline – but are, at least to some significant extent (if not entirely), learned outside of and often prior to schooling. Thus, the actual *value* of an instantiation of capital, e.g., knowledge of Greek, skill at playing violin, or a degree from a prestigious preparatory school, cannot be meaningfully understood without considering the

predispositions, appreciations, and orientations that provide the range of possible uses of such capital in the body and mind<sup>5</sup> of its possessor. In other words, it is impossible to know the value of capital without knowing how the possessor is predisposed to using it.

I will return to the analogy of the card game to conclude this point. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 99), in discussing how the contours of the field and volume and structure of one's capital impact one's strategy, say:

The strategies of a “player” and everything that defines his “game” are a function not only of the volume and structure of his capital *at the moment under consideration* and of the game chances... they guarantee him, but also of the *evolution over time* of the volume and structure of this capital, that is, of his social trajectory and of the dispositions (*habitus*) constituted in the prolonged relation to a definite distribution of objective chances.

Thus, strategies for activating (and acquiring) capital are entirely influenced (though not determined) by one's previous relationships to capital and the successes (or failures) they've experienced in acquiring and activating it in different contexts. To put it in the language of the poker game: how one bets is a product not only of what other players are doing (the field) and of the amount of chips one currently has (their capital), but it is also a product of how many chips they are *used to having* in front of them (*habitus*) and, to be sure, how many chips the person who taught them to play poker was used to having. Going all in, bluffing, and making a variety of other moves which are intended to increase one's chips seem more or less reasonable to the extent that one has the (evidentiary) experience to see these not only as advantageous but even viable options in the first place.

In sum, there is, to a greater or lesser extent, an incongruence between what educational institutions provide and what they reward. The nature of this lacuna is the stuff of *habitus* (i.e.

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<sup>5</sup> I say “mind” here simply for convenience and clarity, but I want to emphasize that the range of uses of capital – the array of options one might pursue and the strategies by which one might pursue them – is largely a pre-conscious process, as what is naturally desirable and achievable are inculcated through principally non-discursive means (such as one's class position) and during the formation of the ‘primary habitus’.

dispositions, bodily hexis, implicit knowledges); and, thereby, the stuff of this incongruence (the size of which remains debatable) is often precisely those attributes that allow students to get better outcomes on their attempts to activate their capital and have it recognized as valuable by others. Even if schools do communicate clearly and equally the knowledge needed to answer an exam question, whether or not they do (should? or *can?*) transmit to all students the capacity to *communicate* this knowledge sufficiently compellingly such that, for example, a potential employer is impressed enough to extend a job offer, remains an open question.

Now that a brief introduction to capital is completed, I now turn to two key components of cultural capital that generate questions that occupy the focus of the chapters on capital (10 and 11) and a principal scholarly contribution of the dissertation: 1) From what sources can students acquire capital? And 2) What gets counted as cultural capital in Amdo Tibet? It is worth noting here that, while this inquiry focused on cultural capital, supplemental programs were also found to assist participants in the acquisition of social capital and symbolic, other fundamental species which are “efficacious across fields” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). However, to keep this section a reasonable length, frameworks for understanding social and symbolic capital, and how supplemental programs facilitate their acquisition will be offered when those findings are discussed in Chapter 11.

It is now necessary to discuss the three states of cultural capital can take to further articulate this framework for identifying what specifically I observed and discussed with *sabjong* participants. Bourdieu (1986, p. 243, 252) summarized cultural and social capital as “convertible, in certain conditions,” and, with the cost of “an effort of transformation” it can be converted into “economic capital and may be institutionalized” through credentials or titles. First, and, *ceteris paribus*, most valuable among the forms of cultural capital is its embodied state. Classic

examples of embodied cultural capital include knowledge of a ‘high-status’ classical language, such as Latin, a refined physical skill, such as ballet, or comfort and ease in using formal manners and speech patterns and accents popular among those who have high social status. Embodied cultural capital is most valuable because it is impossible to simply ‘purchase’ it (like one could with objectified cultural capital, such as a painting or book) or delegate another to perform the work of acquisition. Embodied cultural capital is that which is acquired at the cost of personal sacrifices and an investment of time and energy into the improvement of oneself (i.e. the foregoing of one’s raw ‘natural’ proclivities). The time required to acquire embodied cultural capital is an important factor in the recognition of its value, not only because time is “the least inexact of all the measures of cultural capital” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 244), but also because the time spent acquiring embodied cultural capital can be seen as an investment that is necessarily above and beyond the immediate “demands of the scholastic market” (1986, p. 244) and other quotidian tasks that people must do to survive. That is, the possession of embodied cultural capital indicates a ‘distance from necessity’ and, thereby, status (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). In this case, it is, in a quite literal sense, education *qua* enrichment. Embodied cultural capital is “external wealth converted into an integral part of the person, into a habitus,” and, therefore it “always remains marked by its earliest conditions of acquisition... which help to determine its distinctive value” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 244-5). Even more than other forms of cultural capital, the embodied state is “predisposed to function as symbolic capital, i.e., to be unrecognized as capital and recognized as legitimate competence” “because the social conditions of its transmission and acquisition are more disguised than those of economic capital” (Bourdieu 1986, p. 245). Whether or not embodied cultural capital necessitates legitimate competence, or whether it is merely a (misrecognized) symbol of that, is a debated question that is addressed below.

Second, cultural capital can exist in an objectified state, i.e., in objects, such as texts, paintings, instruments and other forms of culturally valued goods. While these are directly transmissible to younger generations in a way similar to (if not better than, because the capital transfer is better disguised) economic capital, unlike economic capital, the capacity to appropriate the actual value of objectified cultural capital is often related to one's embodied cultural capital – does the bearer know how to properly *appreciate* an oil painting or *play* their piano?<sup>6</sup>

Bourdieu goes on to remind his readers that objectified cultural capital is

“effective capital only insofar as it is appropriated by agents and implemented and invested as a weapon *and* a stake in the struggles which go on in the fields of cultural production (the artistic field, the scientific field, etc.) and beyond them, in the field of the social classes – struggles in which the agents wield strengths and obtain profits proportionate to their mastery of this objectified capital, and therefore, to the extent of their embodied capital” (ibid).

This entails three principal points: one, capitals are only valuable insofar as they are valued in fields; two, that there are multiple fields and that not all fields ‘sit’ at the same level of prominence, as some are subjugated, nested, marginalized, dominant, etc. relative to others; and three, objectified capital, in order to be understood as cultural capital (and not simply economic capital), is not only materially but symbolically active and requires an amount of embodied capital to appropriate it. In methodological terms, this means that while at *sabjong* I looked for ways that objects themselves (objectified capital), and the skills to ‘appropriate’ them (embodied capital to the extent it is objectified), were transmitted to students. In general, action of this type

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<sup>6</sup> The relationship between an individual's embodied cultural capital and their objectified possessions can be ambivalent and depict the possessors as part of a dominated or dominant group, depending on whether others perceive a person relying primarily on their embodied capital to ‘make use’ of the objectified capital (confirming that they are not really the possessors of it, but only possessors and sellers of their labor which the objectified capital makes possible). Conversely, others may perceive someone as relying primarily on their possession and use of the objectified capital itself (Bourdieu 1986, p. 247) – as the example of an art history professor and an art gallery owner illustrate respectively. In either case, however, objectified cultural capital “exists as symbolically and materially active,” (ibid.) which conveys, in part, Bourdieu's perspective on the question raised below regarding the extent to which cultural capital is *merely* symbolic.

was rare at *sabjong*, reflecting no doubt the financial limitations many experienced. However, the simple absence of certain objects themselves did not necessarily entail the absence of *talk* about objectified forms of cultural capital; attending to participants' verbalized perspectives on objectified cultural capital still provides a crucial dimension of what they consider educationally valuable. Examples include: Tibetan brocade paintings (e.g. *thangkas*), musical instruments (e.g. Tibetan mandolin, *dranyan*), black tents, livestock (e.g. horses)<sup>7</sup>, books, educational toys, and, perhaps most importantly, computers.

Third, cultural capital exists in an institutionalized state. Most commonly instantiated in the form of diplomas or certifications, institutionalized cultural capital is often used to describe embodied (i.e. learned) cultural capital that is 'consecrated'<sup>8</sup> by institutions, such as those of formal education, generally operating on behalf of the state. These are considered "legally guaranteed qualifications" that are "formally independent of the person of their bearer" (Bourdieu 1986, p. 248). Through *institutionalizing* differences between people – for example, students who did and did not graduate from a given university – this state of cultural capital entails a more or less guaranteed recognition in a field that "simple cultural capital, which is constantly required to prove itself" does not; institutionalized cultural capital on the other hand

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<sup>7</sup> Horses are the best example of objectified cultural capital, as they not only symbolize a certain status, but their appropriation/use requires an embodied cultural capital that must be acquired over years and displays many of the marks of esteem in Tibetan cultures (bravery, daring, athleticism, etc.). But not all livestock are best considered as objectified cultural capital. On the far end of the spectrum are, in my opinion, sheep. These animals are principally for consumption and little else. They are rarely, if ever, depicted in close, 'personal' ways and, rather, are conceptualized as that which can be consumed. Yaks, of course, which are in general referred to by Tibetan word for "wealth" (*nor*) – but not when used in the sense of "meat" – are truly multivalent because they are both economic capital in the most basic sense, but also insofar as their proper appropriation requires significant embodied, 'cultural' knowledge. This ranges from the skill to make tents out of yak hair, to carving their horns, to use of some body parts for religious implements. Unlike sheep, yaks are often depicted in the singular in stories and images, they are invested with personalities (both in life and in art). Unlike sheep, which are much closer to sheer economic capital, yaks are also objectified cultural capital. To me, yaks most common appellation, *nor*, which is synonymous with wealth, covers both the material and symbolic domains and demonstrates aptly the relationship between forms of capital.

<sup>8</sup> Social capital can also be 'consecrated' by institutions, which, through the issuance of durable titles of positions, "produces mutual knowledge and recognition" (Bourdieu 1985, p. 250).

“impose[s] recognition” (ibid). In separating out the holder of cultural capital from the capital itself, this state of cultural capital makes it more possible not only to compare or exchange holders of the same capital (e.g. a certain certification), but also to “establish conversion rates between cultural capital and economic capital by guaranteeing the monetary value of a given academic capital” (ibid). While rates of conversion are never fixed and require additional labor to actualize, the convertibility of different forms of capital is fundamental to their functioning and the development of students’ strategies because “academic investment has no meaning unless a minimum degree of reversibility of the conversion it implies is objectively guaranteed” (ibid). To be sure, *poor* investments can be made: pursuing certain diplomas because their value depends to a certain degree on scarcity, can turn out to yield profits incommensurate than what one’s foundational experiences into the field suggested they would have. But poor investing does not at all prove that forms of capital are inconvertible; it suggests that hysteresis exists.

Finally, the extent to which cultural capital is (merely) symbolic is an open question, though debate on this topic often eschews this explicit framing. Breinholt and Jæger (2020) pose the question of whether cultural capital is best understood as signals or skills. On one hand, there are some, like Kingston (2001) and others (DiMaggio, 1982; Jæger & Breen, 2016; Kalmijn & Kraaykamp, 1996; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999; Wildhagen, 2009), who understand cultural capital as entirely symbolic, which is to say that cultural capital, *qua* arbitrary symbol, is *only* valuable insofar as others appreciate its ‘high-brow’ nature and what it ‘must symbolize’ about its possessor. That is, possession of cultural capital entails or indicates no *actual* competence other than a familiarity with navigating a dominant culture and its signs. On the other hand, Lareau (2011) recognizes that while there are indeed symbolic dimensions of embodied cultural capital (e.g. speaking professionally might not actually indicate a student is



better at performing some task, but it might be interpreted by the teacher as such) it is not *merely* symbolic. Lareau (2015) and others (e.g., Kaufman & Gabler, 2004; Kisida et al. 2014; Lareau, 2011; Sullivan, 2008; Green et al., 2014) argue that ‘knowledge of high-status cultures’ – such as those that prevail in corporate hiring practices or institutional environments like universities – constitute a *real* competency in that students who employ them are able to achieve their ends more effectively even if such behaviors are not understood by others as indicative of ‘high brow’ tastes or a desirable class positions. Collins (2014) and others (Lareau 2015, Yosso 2005) further suggest that cultural capital need not be limited to knowledge and aptitude for *high* status cultural norms but can be conceptualized as skills and knowledges that facilitate navigating ‘interaction rituals’ among any cultural groups (which have their own logics of status and recognition).

A more extreme form of this ‘real competency’ position (i.e., inverse of the ‘mere symbol’) does not exist insofar as it is impossible to argue that cultural capital has *no* symbolic dimension. Capital devoid of any symbolic function would likely be synonymous with Becker’s (2009) notion of human capital, rather than any notions of capital used in this study, which entail a symbolic dimension. In this way, it appears that one’s understanding of the symbolic nature of cultural capital is predicated on how one understands Bourdieu’s notion of arbitrariness: if one believes that it is just institutional gatekeepers’ (e.g. teachers) preferences and rewards that are arbitrary, and there is a ‘real world’ of value, competency, and logic that underlie personal tastes and are ‘scientifically demonstrable’ as superior in facilitating human flourishing, then one may be more likely to dismiss cultural capital as simply classed symbols that have no legitimate place or distinguishing function in modern society, as Kingston (2001) suggests. However, if one takes Bourdieu to mean that the existence of a field (including the meta-field of power) is arbitrary not

in the sense that its contours are subject to the whims of gatekeepers but arbitrary in the sense that ‘things could have been otherwise’ or that there is no ontological necessity that people value what they do (that is, arbitrariness on a much larger scale), then one is more likely to see the possession of cultural capital as ‘real’ (in the sense of actually effective, not in the sense of ontologically preordained as legitimate) competencies that bring ‘real’ value and are worth ‘real’ compensation (in whichever form that takes). It seems beyond question that Bourdieu’s own approach lies much closer to this latter formulation, though the extent to which this vision of the world is correct will of course be the subject of perennial debate.

This question about the extent to which cultural capital is (merely) symbolic applies to cultural (and social) capital as a whole, but it is worth considering it as particularly germane to embodied cultural capital because it is within discussions of embodied cultural capital that this question usually arises. For example, many people may have no problem seeing the possession of an oil painting or a diploma as quite literally symbolic of status rather than guaranteeing any real knowledge or expertise, as critics of the “diploma disease” suggest (Dore 1976).

Nonetheless, it is embodied cultural capital instantiated as, for example, speech patterns appreciated by teachers or the ability to sit still for long periods of time, that most clearly raise the question of whether these are *actual* competencies or *merely* symbols of one’s ‘superior’ upbringing and class position. A few examples of embodied cultural capital will help clarify the question regarding the degree to which embodied cultural capital is actual or merely symbolic: in addition to perhaps the most important instantiation of speech patterns or language use,<sup>9</sup> there are bodily postures (hexis), physical skills (e.g. athletics, dancing), disciplines (e.g. patience), oratory (e.g. poetry recitation), and numerous other instantiations. The foregoing discussion

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<sup>9</sup> That language use is cornerstone of embodied cultural capital seems almost beyond debate, as even Bourdieu’s earliest works on this topic referred to this form of capital as “linguistic” capital.

reveals that it is necessary to differentiate categorical understandings of embodied cultural capital (e.g. physical skill), which can be applied as a *category* for analysis across any field, and the *substantive form* of embodied cultural capital (e.g. ballet) whose recognition as valuable – and therefore its intelligibility *as* cultural capital – is specific to a given field.

As with the other concepts central to Bourdieu’s theory discussed above, a few principal components of *capital* are discussed below to provide a framework guiding the analysis of empirical data and showing clearly how it will refine the body of theory under consideration.

*Component and Question 2A: From what sources can students acquire capital?*

A first, vital aspect of cultural capital<sup>10</sup> to consider is how one acquires it. There are a variety of verbs used throughout the literature to describe this process but few scholars have spent much time analyzing their choice of terminology. I use the term favored by Bourdieu, “acquire,” and explain why. This brief discussion will lead to a clearer articulation of the first sub question of capital: From which sources can students acquire cultural capital? The verb(s) chosen to represent this process are significant because they signal and/or occlude, often implicitly, assumptions about the nature of capital. Rather than other terms sometimes used to describe this process, such as accumulate, transmit, inherit, obtain, and assimilate, the term “acquire” is preferable for reasons discussed below. This discussion is necessary to framing this Subquestion.

Many who are concerned with and/or critique a deterministic understanding of cultural capital describe the process by which one obtains it as one of “transmission” (e.g. Sablan & Tierney 2014; Georg 2004; Devine-Eller 2005; Swartz 1977; Jenkins 1982). In this

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<sup>10</sup> Again, for the sake of building a coherent and manageable analytical framework, I have limited this discussion to cultural capital here. Other forms will be addressed *ad hoc* in the analysis.

conceptualization, which is widely accepted, cultural (and social) capital is transmitted, i.e., given, by those responsible for a child's upbringing to the child themselves. The source of these forms of capital is considered virtually synonymous with the family (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; DiMaggio & Mohr 1985), and so the transmission of capital is conceptualized as an inheritance, something transferred to a child that is beyond (or, better, prior to) the purview of their own agency. Indeed, many of the most fundamental – and, consequently, the most determinant forms of capital (dominant or non-dominant, as the case may be), such as speech patterns or manners – are generally transmitted prior to individual's capacity to recognize that *some thing*, as opposed to *some other thing*, is being inculcated in them, much as one *naturally develops* fluency in a native language, as opposed to *acquiring* it in a second which usually requires intentional study. Those who critique Bourdieu's ideas as too deterministic (e.g. Goldthorpe 2007) concentrate on precisely the limited agency implied by a notion of 'transmission.' Are agents really so passive in the processes of capital acquisition, they wonder. Are they limited to only what the family has to offer? And to be sure, for most scholars using the concept of cultural capital, it is impossible to overstate the amount of influence a family has on structure and volume of capital they obtain. The acquisition of cultural capital (i.e., tastes aligned with what dominant institutions value or 'being sent' to a good college) is thought of as a primarily passive process, much as one might acquire a reputation simply for being the way that they are. This understanding further suggests the central role that the family plays, as they are the only ones close enough for long enough, and with enough at stake, to commit the labor necessary to transmit capital *to* children, who, for their part, expend minimal labor in *inheriting* such capital; they are merely passive *heirs* of capital.

While there is no doubt that those closest to children during their most formative years play an important role in the volume and structure of capital they acquire, the influence of which

is difficult to overstate, some authors more or less implicitly (e.g. Lareau 2015) or explicitly (e.g. Goldthorpe 2007) critique this apparently deterministic understanding of (classed) childhood. They question the extent to which cultural capital, which may be operationalized in ways broader than more ‘orthodox’ formulations (see Lamont and Lareau 1988), can be actively sought and developed by individuals, especially as they grow older and are less confined to the circumstances of their home environments. Here is where the more active sense of “acquire”, etymologically connoting a “seeking” (from the Latin *quaerere*), provides an important second dimension to this process. While it goes without stating that one cannot simply acquire whatever they want, for all sorts of limitations exist not the least of which are economic, this understanding of acquire does include a limited sense of agency. One can, within reason, make choices about what they pursue. In this approach, moreover, there is the addition of important factors of *time* and *labor* that are required for legitimate acquisition. Like an acquired taste, the acquisition of cultural capital takes investments of discipline and attention, which, as outlined, were central to virtually any understanding of embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). And, like an acquired taste, these investments are often initially unpleasant, difficult, and tiring with no immediate reward in sight. In an important sense then, cultural capital, especially the embodied state, is not merely acquired outright (unlike economic capital). It must be *developed*, *refined*, *worked on* – all those terms that apply equally as well to one’s approach to their athletic ability or their vocabulary. If capital were only inherited through families, and agents could do nothing to acquire more or ‘add value’ (or find better markets) to the volume of capital they already possess, then social reproduction would be all but guaranteed. But, as DiMaggio (1982) shows, perhaps the possession of cultural capital can lead to social mobility in addition to/instead of mere social reproduction exclusively, if one recognizes the many ways that students can

acquire cultural capital beyond their family environments. Such efforts have been examined before – museum going, field trips, music lessons, etc. – and the outcomes of these interventions have been found to be mixed at best (DiMaggio & Mohr 1985; Kingston 2001).

The framework presented here, however, provides a new way to identify enrichment activities that may be effective in helping students acquire efficacious cultural capital: successful interventions to help students acquire cultural capital may need to entail substantial time and labor to produce desirable alterations one's habitus and therefore one's stock of embodied cultural capital – hardly something quick exposure to *Hamlet* or *Nightwatch* could accomplish. Identifying interventions that are characterized by time and labor *and* lie outside of the immediate family environment are indeed fewer and farther between; schooling, of course, remains a prime example. But, the capacity of schooling to help students acquire cultural capital remains a topic of debate largely because schools' principal function may be to *recognize and reward* dominant cultural capital, therefore making its equal *distribution* to students logically impossible, particularly among populations coming to school with predominantly stores of non-dominant capital. Therefore, supplemental programs constitute *the* principal places to examine how capital might be acquired by students marginalized in mainstream schooling: supplemental programs include many of the same processes as formal schooling but do not participate as directly or influentially in the process of recognizing and rewarding the possession of cultural capital. That is, *because* their grades and diplomas 'don't count', they cannot reproduce inequalities in the way that mainstream schools can. With this function precluded, supplemental programs represent one of the best possible environments in which one might be able to observe the acquisition of cultural capital outside of the family context. With the preceding framework in

mind, I therefore ask: From what sources at supplemental programs can (ethnolinguistically minoritized) students acquire cultural capital?

*Component and Question 2B: How do Amdo Tibetan sabjong educators conceptualize what counts as cultural capital and help students acquire it?*

Finally, I come to the central question addressed in the analysis and the dissertation more generally. As explained above, using cultural capital is the most robust approach to analyzing the principal research question of this dissertation regarding what *sabjong* educators conceptualize as educationally valuable and how is it inculcated in students. That is, while they are not entirely coterminous, cultural capital (and its associated concepts) provide the most comprehensive framework for investigating perspectives on educational value. I frame the question around educators' perspectives, rather than simply, "What *is* cultural capital?" in order to highlight that notions of value and strategies for achieving it are not only often competing but also do so from positions of unequal power within a field. This approach promises to shed light on the stakes of the global Education Revolution and strategies for navigating it by revealing minoritized educators' perspectives on what counts as capital across different fields with incongruent logics.

When asking "whose knowledge counts," scholars (Yosso, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Bernal, 1998, 2002) question the legitimacy of the disproportionate recognition given to dominant cultural capital and the concomitant value that the acquisition of *these* knowledges wield and symbolize. I use these terms here to build upon a key question, raised above, that is often obscured in critiques of Bourdieu's theory of reproduction, and particularly in debates over the interpretation of cultural capital: It remains an open question as to whether such knowledges *are actually valuable per se*, as Lareau (2003, 2015) argues on numerous occasions. These

include examples such as when students and parents engage in behaviors *eo ipso* that produce beneficial outcomes in schooling, or whether dominant knowledges, commonly glossed as “familiarity with high-brow culture,” are not in themselves inherently useful but ‘merely’ symbolize one’s status and cultural development to institutional gatekeepers. Though there are symbolic dimensions to both these understandings of cultural capital, the latter usage here approaches an interpretation of cultural capital as exclusively symbolic, whereas the former does not allow for this and maintains that cultural capital, at least in part, entails real competencies. That these two interpretations of cultural capital are not ultimately synonymous (with just more or less emphasis on the symbolic nature of capital) is clear from much of Lareau’s (2012, et al., 2018) scholarship which shows parents’ use of cultural capital sometimes has a *negative* effect on institutional gatekeepers’ opinions of their children. When parents activate cultural capital to challenge the school authority, much to the chagrin of educators themselves, the use of this capital cannot, in any meaningful sense, be understood as simply the wielding of a familiarity with ‘high brow culture’ in order to impress educators by *signaling* one’s cultural development (Lareau & Calarco 2012; Calarco 2020). Rather, parents actually *apply* their knowledge of scientific research (e.g. “best practices”), their familiarity with an organization’s administrative structure, or friendships with superintendents (i.e. social capital) to get what they want in ways that, again, annoy teachers rather than impress them. Since such capital could no longer be constituted entirely by other’s *recognition* of it, we can see that, following Lareau, cultural capital can never be conceptualized as exclusively ‘familiarity with high-brow culture’. Thus, one must admit that the symbolic dimension of cultural capital can never be totally eliminated nor entirely exhaustive of what constitutes cultural capital. Additionally, such capital must comprise a set of knowledges and behaviors that facilitate the accomplishment of goals beyond



what would be possible if cultural capital were ‘merely’ symbolic. Therefore, the question raised at the beginning of this discussion must be understood in at least two ways, which are related to the extent that they both consider the symbolic nature of knowledge, but are not coterminous or reducible to one another. When one asks ‘whose knowledge counts’, one is asking both: 1) which knowledge gets recognized by others (and, importantly, *which* others), and, 2) which knowledges actually facilitate pursuing one’s goals even if possession of such knowledges is not ‘culturally impressive’ to certain others. Recognizing these two domains helps to transcend them, allowing this analysis to discard both subjectivist (i.e. arbitrarily recognition of cultural symbols is all there is and people can change this on a whim) and objectivist (i.e. knowledges and behaviors can be valuable irrespective of how anyone perceives them) understandings of social action (Bourdieu 1990). Clearly, there is much overlap between these, as the recognition by others, especially those in institutionally dominant positions, will, by and large, facilitate one’s pursuits. Then again, the question of what constitutes capital is not reducible to a response to what individuals, even institutional gatekeepers (e.g. principals), *decide* to recognize as valuable.

Refuting this subjectivist approach, this focus on the “arbitrary” nature of capital is often misplaced, in large part because it veers away from Bourdieu’s insistence that capital cannot be understood outside of its relationship to fields, which are

a network, or configuration, of *objective relations between positions*. These positions are objectively defined in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, and their present and potential situation (*situs*). In the distribution of species of power structure (or capital) whose possession of power commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (Wacquant and Bourdieu 1992: 97, emphasis added)

In other words, while individuals may exercise some agency in a given moment to decide whether to reward or not some display of capital (which, for example, might be on the fringes of

what is considered dominant, such as excellent rapping ability), these ‘individual’ choices are nevertheless structurally related in a set of *objective positions* that deeply shape (with *regularity*, not by *rules* governing individual choices) what these individuals (or, better, position-holders) will recognize as valuable. That is to say, there is no room for methodological individualism in this approach: analyzing individual choices to recognize capital or not can never produce an adequate understanding of fields or capital. To put it plainly, capital cannot be (widely, predictably, systemically) recognized merely because an individual wants it to be. When Bourdieu says that the recognition of capital is arbitrary, he is not asserting the adequacy of a subjectivist understanding of value. “Arbitrary” in Bourdieu’s work means that the contours of the field are a certain way, but they need not be necessarily, teleologically so. It does not mean that individuals decide for themselves what they at each moment consciously *choose* what they recognize as valuable, both because these “tastes and appreciations” are deeply inculcated in people through the formation of a primary habitus and because the conditions of their primary habitus were almost entirely beyond their control and even consciousness. More importantly, to be valuable means to be recognized by a sufficient number of (capital-possessing) people such that one’s capital is convertible to other forms of capital, namely economic, or, at least, able to yield specific profits within a given field (Bourdieu 1986). For example, a high school educator who chooses to reward a student’s use of language that would *not* be rewarded by other, dominant institutions in the educational field (e.g. university admissions committees, granting agencies, publication editors) cannot – in this single instance, anyway – be said to be ‘recognizing’ this capital in any meaningful way; this ‘recognition’ would likely be understood by other teachers and parents, and probably many students themselves, as hollow and meaningless, as not aligned with the objective relations between positions in a field. Many might

see this educator rewarding ‘poor grammar’ as merely reproducing the marginalization of their students, not challenging it.<sup>11</sup>

Kingston (2001) and Yosso (2005) provide two well-cited critiques of cultural capital that will be used as ideal types to guide the remainder of this analytical framework. In brief, Yosso critiques ‘orthodox’ conceptualizations of cultural capital as being too narrow, Eurocentric, and static, arguing that they fail to recognize the many forms of “cultural wealth” possessed by nondominant and marginalized communities (Yosso 2005; Anzaldua 1990). Kingston (2001) takes the opposite approach, arguing that scholars have too loosely defined cultural capital and included “too many conceptually distinct variables” in its operationalization such that its effects cannot be found empirically. This difference produces a central question that motivates research and debate on this topic: How should cultural capital be operationalized – what actually counts? I attempt to improve answers to this question by ‘returning it’ to an empirical context that can speak to both Yosso’s and Kingston’s critiques. The ethnographic context of this study is one constituted by marginalized people who nevertheless navigate an education system that rewards a specific and limited set of knowledges and skills.

Despite their critiques waged from substantially different positions, Kingston (2001) and Yosso (2005) struggle to appreciate the specific power of Bourdieu’s theory because they do not take into consideration the *field* (not to mention habitus) from which capital derives its value altogether. With Yosso (2005) and Anzaldua (1990), many readily aver that knowledges like community organization, political activism, and bilingualism *should* be recognized as valuable. But, in the absence of a field (which need not be a “dominant one”) structured by position-holders that reliably recognize and reward these knowledges, it is unhelpful and misleading to

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<sup>11</sup> This phenomenon is similar to ‘shadow capital’ but almost the inverse (Cipollone & Stich 2017). Whereas shadow capital ‘looks like’ dominant capital but doesn’t actually produce the same benefits, the phenomenon I describe here is more one in which someone is too ambitious (and isolated) in their strategy of changing what is valued in a field.

call these *capital*. This approach mistakes the ‘ought’ for the ‘is.’ The history of my fieldwork region demonstrates this clearly: In what sense can dispositions of resistance be considered valuable ‘Resistance Capital’ in Tibetan areas of China, where “oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (Yosso 2005, p. 80) will likely result in draconian punishment that, in some cases, leads to prison, torture, death, or, in my particular circumstances, students being expelled from the education system and thus excluded from opportunities for stable employment?

Asserting that such “Resistance Capital” *is* capital irrespective of a field commits the same mistake for which Critical Theorists have been criticized, including by Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) themselves. Critical Theorists often assume that scholarly *theoretical* logics of resistance and opposition are commensurate with the *practical* logics of those surviving in oppressive conditions, which is the third type of bias that most dangerously vitiates scholars’ work (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Bourdieu 1990; see the section on positionality in the *Methodology* chapter for more). One might respond, as I do later, that “resistance” does not necessarily entail a specific form, e.g., “oppositional behavior,” and that resistance can take a variety of forms depending on the specific context and what is useful there. And this is exactly my point: What is valuable behavior in a given context (i.e., a field) is an *open question* to be established empirically. Some knowledges – of resistance, community organizing, or bilingualism – are very much a form of capital if they facilitate achieving one’s goals. However, there is no circumstance in which such knowledges could be considered valuable in the sociopolitical turmoil and violence that characterized Amdo Tibet in 1958, for example, when resisting, organizing, or maybe even simply speaking Tibetan might get one summarily executed (Weiner 2020). While we can no doubt point out the injustice of such a situation, Bourdieu’s concepts of field, capital, and habitus are not designed to facilitate this sort of moral or normative

critique. To state the obvious and summarize the framework of capital thus far: knowledge of resistance, *or anything, per se*, is not capital until it can be shown that it is rewarded and recognized in a given field. Thus, Yosso's and other's critiques of the white, Eurocentric nature of Bourdieu's work are important, but ultimately misplaced, for Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) themselves argue that the value of a given instantiation of capital, while not a product of individual whims, is also never determined *a priori* to an empirical investigation. My dissertation attempts to undertake one aspect of this project by inverting the usual approach. Rather than inquiring, "what does possession of cultural capital actually produce for students in a given context" (and even this 'given context' is too frequently ignored), Part 4 on cultural capital responds to the question: How do educators conceptualize what actually constitutes cultural capital in this context?

Unlike the critiques offered by scholars like Yosso (2005), which we could group under the heading of "postcolonial critiques of Bourdieu," there are critiques that assert – rather than cultural capital being too thoroughly defined by white, European, upper-class cultures – that cultural capital is the figment of a quasi-socialist imagination that wants to find structurally determined (i.e. class-based) causes of inequality and exclusion where none can actually be shown to exist (Kingston 2001). Unlike those scholars just discussed who critique the narrow and exclusionary way cultural capital is operationalized, Kingston (2001, p. 89, emphasis mine) suggests "*too many* conceptually distinct variables have been labeled cultural capital." Rather than arguing that notions of cultural value are informed by a deeply colonial logic as does Yosso (2005), Kingston falls on the other side of Bourdieu, saying that Bourdieu and scholars using his work have expanded the notion of cultural capital to include so many possible variables (e.g. trips to the museum, parents' education level, number of books in the home, etc.) that we can no

longer find any significant impact that its possession has on students' educational outcomes. My critique of Kingston's (2001) position starts from the same point as my previous critique of postcolonial perspectives on cultural capital: knowledges and behaviors cannot simply be considered valuable *per se*; there is no reason for considering them capital unless they can be shown to be advantageous in a given context. Kingston, like most authors writing on the topic in America, focuses on schooling (Davies and Rizk 2018). As mentioned, Kingston finds virtually no common operationalizations of cultural capital that reliably produce advantages in schooling. Kingston prefers to shrink the array of attributes researchers consider when looking at what produces desirable outcomes in school, generally eliminating all the 'arbitrarily valuable' cultural baggage or array of obscure cultural competences (e.g. knowledge of French playwrights like Racine, ability to play the cello, cosmopolitan speech patterns) and, instead, suggests that success in schooling rests more squarely on skills that simply are more "intrinsically relevant to the demands of citizenship and productive work in a modern society" such as cognitive ability and hard work (Kingston 2001, p. 90).

Kingston appears to make a small concession at this point, recognizing that "an emphasis on logic, reason, and critical thinking reflects a 'cultural bias' of its own," but the acknowledgement is ultimately artificial because, in it, he assumes that what constitutes "logic, reason, and critical thinking" are universally agreed upon and that some groups simply value these more than others. But logic and reason themselves – never mind what constitutes legitimate citizenship and productive work – depends largely, if not entirely, on what a society (or, better, fields within a society, namely a meta-field of power) recognizes and rewards as valuable. Kingston might further rebut this claim by emphasizing the role that the qualifier "*modern*" plays in his formulation, proffering an argument such as the following: while certain knowledges

and skills, such as memorizing scriptures or proverbs, may have been respected and even lucrative in classical Tibet or Qing China, these are less valuable in modern society, where logic, reason, and critical thinking are (justifiably) most valuable.

But is ‘modern society’ actually so devoid of cultural bias? Does everyone living in modern society agree upon the self-evident nature of logic, reason, and critical thinking and upon their value? China provides an instructive case through which to explore this claim. China is both universally acknowledged as a dominant global force, *and simultaneously*, as a country whose propaganda apparatus and thoroughly politicized education system inhibit the development of “logic, reason, and critical thinking” (Zhang 2017). This includes, for example, China’s hesitance to commit to global norms, such as Human Rights, which are sometimes considered the hallmark of modern society (Kanti 2014; Peerenboom 1993). Therefore, it is painfully clear that not all ‘modern’ societies agree on what “logic, reason, and critical thinking” even are, never mind that they are universally the most determinative of success in schooling and society. Finally, even if one were to accept Kingston’s assertions thus far, the scope of Kingston’s argument is not sufficient to refute those who claim that acquisition of cultural capital affects students’ outcomes. At issue here are the domains (or, better, fields) in which cultural capital can be seen facilitate agency (or not). Again, a refusal to even mention fields, never mind specify in which specific ones certain forms of cultural capital may be valuable, vitiates Kingston’s argument, which focuses exclusively on the role that cultural capital plays in “academic success.” But here, Kingston performs a bait and switch: his argument that cultural capital does not matter begins by questioning its link to academic success, then it downsizes to degrees obtained, then again changes to “grades”, then even down to favorable interactions with teachers (citing Broderick and Hubbard 2000). Shifting the scope of how one might identify “academic success”

here is significant. While Kingston's approach is understandable, for he is giving an overview and critiquing research findings thus far, it is impossible to claim that a certain disposition that has not been found to be advantageous for dealing with an individual teacher at one point in a student's career, as Broderick and Hubbard (2000) show, can be said to be ineffective in navigating the institutional environment at large, never mind particularly important transition points on the way to further education or employment (Nora 2004; Richards 2022). Scholars using cultural capital (e.g. Bourdieu 1988; Lareau 2015, etc.) make this point repeatedly: while cultural capital may be activated in given moments (even crucial ones), cultural capital is more appropriately understood in diachronic terms, as a resource individuals acquire, develop, and activate over time to impact their trajectory. Grades alone, let alone a single year of grades, is hardly a robust dependent variable by which to measure the impact of cultural capital. Moreover, as Lareau (2015) shows, grades themselves might be a flimsy indicator of cultural capital, because cultural capital may facilitate success in navigating crucial moments in an educational journey which are precisely those beyond the purview of grades: how to find housing while a college student, how pick an advisor and major, how to look for jobs, prepare applications, and interview successfully (Lareau 2015). Cultural capital may be most useful in navigating educational *transitions* (Nora 2004; Richards 2022), those moments when grades become secondary and one's ability to complete a variety of other tasks become more influential in a students' trajectory (Dumais 2006, 2010).

To put this in more specifically Bourdieusian terms: Kingston fails to specify a field in which certain instantiations of cultural capital could be determined to be valuable or not. While "facility with the elegant phrase" might not be helpful on geometry exams and would "not be... particularly relevant" to achieving high scores on the SAT, as Kingston (2001, p. 90) argues



(with which one could easily agree), can one therefore extrapolate to assume that elegance or eloquence would not be somewhat more recognized as valuable during job interviews and in making connections with potential advisors and colleagues? Ultimately, Kingston argues that the symbolic dimension of cultural capital is not real: that no one actually pays attention to or rewards speech patterns, behaviors, or objects that symbolize a cultured and knowledgeable person. But, of course, he will find that these things do not matter: he did not specify (or even acknowledge the existence) of a field populated by people that would recognize such symbols as the characteristics of a smart, hard-working, polite, ambitious, insightful (etc.) person. In this respect, if one is to continue to look to Kingston and Yosso as representative of two types of critiques directed at those using cultural capital, they make the same mistake, but from opposite directions: they make no reference to any field or habitus through which one could determine if a given instantiation of cultural capital (in a broad form, as Yosso argues for; or in a narrower form, as Kingston suggests) actually exists.

In ignoring the habitus and field and, more importantly, the boundaries that *define* the field that indicate the point at which capital ceases to be recognized as capital (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992), the positions of Kingston and Yosso differ in an important respect.

While Kingston does not even acknowledge that there is a practical struggle over what does or should ‘count’ as cultural capital, Yosso underemphasizes the fact that getting some form of knowledge or skill to ‘count’ as cultural capital takes more than will. However, it is not just that “the knowledges of the upper and middle classes *are considered* capital valuable to a hierarchical society” (Yosso 2005, p. 70, emphasis mine). This formulation seems to assume a subjectivist and methodologically individualist approach in which instantiations of capital become valuable simply because someone (arbitrarily) thinks it is, which Bourdieu specifically argued against. It

is telling here that Yosso uses the passive voice and omits *who it is that* considers these knowledges “valuable to a hierarchical society;” such a formulation leaves out – oddly, for this is the point Yosso ultimately attempts to emphasize – that what capital gets recognized in a given field is *always* a matter of struggle (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 87) and not a taken-for-granted reality, as Yosso seems to suggest with this comment in the passive voice. Yosso seems to compound the error in this line of thinking by going on to state that it is specifically “People of Color” who are seen by schools to lack the social and cultural capital required for social mobility, a finding problematized by Annette Lareau’s groundbreaking *Unequal Childhoods* (2003/2011), published just two years before Yosso’s piece. Lareau (2003) argues explicitly that it is class cultures, far more than race, that predispose students to being more or less ‘prepared’ to acquire capital that is valued (principally because it is widely recognized) in mainstream schools (Lareau 2011, p. 240).

According to Bourdieusian thinking, the principal reason some students have an easier time than others assimilating and activating the capital valued in dominant institutions, like schools, is that they possess a ‘upper/middle-class habitus’ which is more familiar with, and consequently advantageously deployed in, dominant institutions. Indeed, Bourdieusians go as far to discuss the “ontological complicity” that exists between the field and habitus, and the tendency for primary habitus (dispositions, tastes, appreciations, aspirations) to be shaped in concert and harmony with one’s field position. In other words, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) assert that *positions* engender *dispositions*, not as a rule, but nonetheless with considerable regularity. Yosso seems to be arguing here that teachers (and perhaps even Yosso herself) assume that *race* engenders dispositions, thus fundamentally distorting Bourdieu’s framework and unnecessarily ascribing to teachers a logic for understanding student behavior that is at least

culturalist. But habitus – that system of dispositions that makes it possible for one to acquire and activate the very capital that Yosso is so interested in critiquing – is a term that is not mentioned once in her paper.

Yosso continues, saying that schools then try to “help ‘disadvantaged’ students whose race and class background has left them lacking necessary knowledge, social skills, abilities, and cultural capital,” (citing Valenzuela 1999; Yosso 2005, p. 70). However, two confluences exist that impugn Yosso’s framework and argument, especially insofar as it is meant to be a critique of Bourdieusian theory. First, there is the blurring of the distinction between raced and classed cultures. While there is little question that People of Color face poverty at disproportionately high rates (Quillian 2012), this does not mean that race and class backgrounds have the same effect on one’s opportunities to acquire and activate cultural capital, as Lareau (2011) showed. The empirical goal is, rather, to demonstrate which aspects of a person’s cultural repertoire facilitate or hinder success; aggregating “classed” and “raced” behaviors into a single background, in other words “conflating too many conceptually distinct variables” (Kingston 2001, p. 90), obscures the very vectors of inequality researchers of reproduction want to identify. Second, and the key point to understand vis-à-vis this discussion of fields, is that in stating that disadvantaged students are thought to lack the “necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and cultural capital” (Yosso 2005, p. 70), it does not actually specify: necessary *for what?* On one hand, it seems obvious that Yosso might mean necessary for success in schooling, employment, community relationships, and personal development. But, upon closer examination, is it useful to argue that the recipe for success in all these domains is identical for anyone, never mind for students whose home cultures evince distinct differences from mainstream schooling and other institutions?

As Carter (2005) suggests, might the cultural capital that is necessary to build community ties and a sense of belonging be different from the kind of cultural capital necessary for impressing teachers (which might include getting good grades)? And might both of those be different from the forms of cultural capital necessary for successfully navigating a transition to university life in a faraway city? For which “knowledges, social skills, and abilities” seem advantageous in these domains remains an open question and one that requires an empirical answer. Yosso’s admirable desire that various funds of “community cultural wealth” be recognized and rewarded in school is one that I share; but in remaining unclear about whether the recognition of ‘community cultural wealth’ constitutes a descriptive or prescriptive argument, Yosso takes Bourdieu’s theory of what happens as a justification of what happens, i.e., a sociodicy, which he explicitly denied (1991, p. 16). In short, for Yosso’s argument to be taken as more than a philosophical argument about what people ought to consider as valuable, she needs to first specify the domains in which various forms of “community cultural wealth” might increase one’s agency to get what they want, and then show that it actually works. Short of that, these are important avenues to consider in the process of decolonizing preconceptions of what constitutes worthwhile knowledge and also to expand awareness of the domains that minoritized people navigate, but they cannot meaningfully be called “capital” because, in a word, she has not demonstrated that this capital is *valuable* in a particular field. Here is another critique of capital that has neglected to mention the existence of fields, on which the constitution and recognition of capital depends entirely (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 89). But it is not that Yosso’s critique is vapid; it is that directing it at Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital is misplaced. Yosso states (2005, p. 73) that her work using Critical Race Theory “refutes the claims that educational institutions make toward objectivity, meritocracy, color-blindness, race neutrality and equality

opportunity.” Though he obviously focused more on class than race, Bourdieu does not dispute these and indeed explicitly argues that educational institutions make unwarranted claims to being an objective meritocracy. If anything, Bourdieusian theory is criticized by some, like Kingston (2001), for having *too strong* an emphasis on the arbitrary nature of what gets rewarded in schooling! To both highlight the significance (including the utility) of community cultural wealth and to refine understandings of cultural capital that include too many attributes and experiences (some of which are of no help at all in schooling) this research probes educators’ perspectives – rather than scholars’ formulations of cultural capital – to develop empirical data on what minoritized communities recognize as educationally valuable cultural capital.

### **Conclusion**

In sum, this inquiry into cultural capital entails two principal questions: how do *sabjong* educators conceptualize cultural capital and how can students acquire it? This section has used the work of Yosso (2005) and Kingston (2001) as archetypical examples of critiques of Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital and the concept’s subsequent development and operationalization. Using these critiques, I refined my operationalization of cultural capital to distinguish between *categorical* (e.g. accents) descriptions of cultural capital, which are components of the concept derived from scholarly inquiry, and *substantive* (e.g. a Beijing-accented Putonghua Chinese) instantiations of it, which vary across fields depending on what specifically is recognized as valuable. Doing so allows this study to attend to the ways that participants make sense of and act upon potentially distinct and competing notions of value. As cultural capital remains one of the most popular concepts by which success in schooling is scientifically studied (Davies & Rizk 2018), I maintain along with countless other scholars that the concept represents the best inroad possible – in part because it is supported by a

comprehensive theory of the reproduction of inequalities in educational institutions – for studying the perspectives and practices of educators working on the margins of the formal education system.

This analytical framework has developed two lines of inquiry using two concepts, habitus and capital, central to understanding the practices and perspectives of those that participate in supplemental education programs. First, the forthcoming analysis uses the concept of habitus to explore ethnographically the different cultural forces that impact how Amdo Tibetan students develop dispositions that shape their experiences in schooling and educators perspectives on this process. Second, with a portrait of this in place, I analyze how educators conceptualize what constitutes cultural capital and explore the different ways that students can acquire it. It is also important to note that while ethnographic methods do not lend themselves to interrogating field conditions, which are often obscured to those conducting the more fine-grained analysis of ethnography, important background information on both the theorization of fields and the specific conditions that pertain in Tibetan and Chinese educational contexts can be found in Chapter 4. Empirical findings generated by pursuing these inquiries are presented in Parts 3 and 4, organized according to the structure of the data and the salient themes that emerged from them, rather than according to the format of the research questions herein. Ultimately, analyses of both these inquiries will be aggregated to conclude the dissertation by answering the principal research question of how educators conceptualize what is educationally valuable and assist students in their effort to acquire it.

Figure 1: Organization of Research Questions

Question Type	Question	Link to Principal Research Question/ Response to this question is significant because it...
Principal Research Question	How do Amdo Tibetan educators conceptualize what is educationally valuable and help students acquire it?	Sheds light on how cultural capital works at the borders of the Chinese education field and highlights subaltern strategies and frameworks for conceptualizing educational value in the age of the Education Revolution.
First Sub-questions: On Amdo Tibetan students' formation of habitus	1A: Which factors inform the formation of Amdo Tibetan students' habitus and how?	Uses but transcends class, race, and gender as the 'categories of experience' shaping habitus, providing more ethnographic rigor in analyzing students' dispositions to acquire and use capital
	1B: How do participants make sense of 'mismatches' between (an Amdo Tibetan) habitus and (the Chinese educational) field?	Specifically probing educators' perceptions of mismatches socio-historically contextualizes what qualities they think students have and lack, clarifying what they recognize as valuable.
	1C: To what degree do <i>sabjong</i> educators believe that that habitus is alterable and how do they try to alter it?	Distinguishes the possible 'habitus-altering' kinds of trainings (that entail cultural capital acquisition) at <i>sabjong</i> from those that are intended to improve only students' scores, highlighting diverse educational processes.
Second Sub-questions: On Amdo Tibetan students' acquisition of capital	2A: From what sources can students acquire capital and how do <i>sabjong</i> educators participate in this process?	Focuses on the sources outside of the family from which students acquire cultural capital, supplemental educators' role in this process, and what conditions facilitate such acquisition.
	2B: How do Amdo Tibetan <i>sabjong</i> educators conceptualize what counts as cultural capital?	By highlighting the importance of <i>recognition</i> in symbolic forms of capital and probing the ideas of those brokering between two incongruent value systems, the process by which those with non-dominant capital pursue dominant capital becomes clarified.
Third Sub-questions: On the field(s) that Amdo Tibetan students navigate	3A: What are boundaries and continuities between the Tibetan educational field and the Chinese educational field, as well as between these and the meta-field of power?	Clarifies the key institutions that shape what gets recognized and rewarded as capital and provides detail on dynamics of education fields, as well as the relative position of this field vis-à-vis power in contemporary China, a hegemonic force in the Educational Revolution
	3B: What kinds of investments in the educational field are encouraged by the state and by Tibetan communities?	Probing encouraged 'investments' reveals perspectives on how various parties hope to address 'mismatches' between habitus and field tempered by these parties' predictions of how field dynamics may shift and where fields may be malleable and receptive to new strategies.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Methodological Approach

To understand Amdo Tibetan supplemental educators' perspectives and practices regarding what is educationally valuable, I use an adapted form of the Extended Case Method. I will first introduce the method and the way I use to it understand the primary focus of my study and move on to briefly explain how this form of ethnography differs from other popular approaches to ethnographic research before outlining specific details regarding data collection and analysis. The extended case method (ECM) was first theorized by Max Gluckman and the ethnographers of the Manchester School and spent the latter half of the twentieth century under the radars of most anthropologists, especially those in North America working in the Geertzian interpretivist tradition (Evens & Handelman 2006). But sociologist Michael Burawoy oversaw its renaissance in an academy that was becoming evermore oriented towards 'the global' and how to best pursue small-*N* research in this context (Burawoy 1991; 2000). The ECM is designed to examine "macro-level questions through their everyday manifestations in micro-level social settings" (Wadham and Warren 2014, p. 6) making it suited to investigate the claims of grand theories – like a neoinstitutional perspective on world culture or the acquisition of cultural capital in educational contexts – that attempt to explain various aspects of the Education Revolution through small-scale ethnographic case studies.

Burawoy (1991, p. 271) describes methodology as concerned with the "reciprocal relationship between data and theory" and begins from a philosophical perspective that refutes a conception of science that is predicated exclusively on positivist theory building (Burawoy 1990). By pushing past the inductive models of Hume, Mill, as well as logical positivism and Popper's



falsification model, Burawoy recasts the ‘goal of science’ as a historicized search to “establish the logical conditions for the growth of knowledge” (1990, p. 776), a process that oscillates between “normal” and “revolutionary” moments which entail lesser or greater skepticism towards prevailing theories, respectively. According to Burawoy (1990), built into any scientific project is a struggle with the extant theories that characterize a field of inquiry. This takes place not only in abstract theoretical terms but in real history, in which strong theories are not jettisoned each time some confounding data surface. As Lakatos (1978) argues, such data form the battlegrounds on which the “cores” of theories are defended and anomalies refuted, not simply to reduce their number to avoid scientific crisis, as Kuhn suggests, but to “exploit specific [anomalies] in order to increase the explanatory power of the program” (Burawoy 1990, p. 778).

But how does a framework that conceptualizes micro-processes as situated in macro-systems theorize the relationship between agency and structure? Following Eliasoph and Lichterman (1999), I do not conceptualize agency as fundamentally ‘micro’ and structure as ‘macro’. That is, agency is not what exists in the negative space left by structure. Moreover, conceiving of agency and structure in a yin-and-yang type of relationship would be a poor place from which to start analyses of agency in the context of the Education Revolution, a primary characteristic of which is that structures (e.g., school systems) not only *create* cultures and meanings (e.g., belief in the importance of an education that develops ‘advanced cognitive ability’) at least as much as they are responsive to them (Baker, 2014), but also that structure provides the *means* of agency, the tools with which agency is exercised. Insofar as agency interpenetrates structure, it does little good to conceptualize local culture – especially educational culture, no matter how micro – as something formed independently (or in resistance to) from larger and more powerful institutional logics that flow from global, national, or provincial

hegemony. My analysis of agency in this context is analogous to my approach to other “time-honored, reifying conceptual dichotomies, such as micro-macro [or] event-structure;” that is, “to implode them” through research that focuses on action-reaction sequences. Glaeser calls this “consequent processualism” (Glaeser 2005, p. 16), a perspective that characterizes an “object and subject not as things but as accents of perspectives within processes” (p. 27). Because I am primarily concerned with the exercise of agency and have already outlined my ontological approach to agency and structure, I quote at length Glaeser’s (2005, p. 21) formulation of such processualism vis-à-vis the nature of human actions:

The point here is to see actions not only – and perhaps not even primarily – as origins, as expressions of sovereign decision making, but as nodes connecting an often diverse set of other people’s actions...such that these obtain a common thrust in a particular action as reaction... The actor is less a source than a collector and transformer of producing actions of out confluences. The confluences from which actors can produce their actions are contingent on opportunity. Their situational trajectory puts them ‘in the reach’ of some actions to which they could or must react, while it provides them with particular relations, cultural forms, and built environments. How much these actions are the result of poiesis, of creative play with influences, rather than mere habit or other quasi-automatic forms of reaction is...a matter of the plurality and polysemy of relations...of cultural forms, and of the built environment. Agency is neither just there (gracing a sovereign subject) nor just absent (leaving a mere object); instead, building on an innate potential, it is constructed, augmented, or diminished with in the flow of process.<sup>12</sup>

Sticking close to Gluckman’s emphasis on the ‘processual turn,’ I focus on processes and do not assume a coherent, systemic nature that inheres in reality a priori; rather, the goal is “to uncover the systematicity of unsystemic, historically contingent processes” (Glaeser 2005, p. 17). In order to do this, I apply the ECM much in the same way Bartlett and Vavrus (2017) emphasize tracing the inquiry along spatial, scalar, and historical axes in their Comparative Case Study method; that is, my research emphasizes comparing cases with ones located at similar social levels,

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<sup>12</sup> I emphasize this point, in part, to illustrate the consonance between this ontological approach to understanding agency/structure and Bourdieu’s notion of habitus, which was developed to overcome the dichotomy between the objectivism of ‘rules’ and the subjectivism of an unrestricted sense of ‘free will’.

situating cases in relationship to smaller and larger scales (and their related but non-static hierarchical positions), and understanding the cases as temporal moments. All of these strategies ‘unbound’ the case in ways that split from ethnographic traditions that range from the earliest anthropological work conducted in ‘isolated’ societies to more recent scholarship that conceptualizes cases as coherent and “bounded systems,” that almost appear to have a “self” (Stake 2003, p. 135 cited in Bartlett and Vavrus 2017). Rather, where my cases are ultimately delimited is answerable only after an iterative process in which the boundaries as they are perceived by the participants as meaningful emerge.

The delimitation of the case’s boundaries is one example of the ways I use a constructivist approach to knowledge production. More broadly, it is the meaning that participants in the study assign to their experiences and actions that characterizes my study as constructivist. That is not to say that I am disinterested in the real, material circumstances that participants in this study confront, but that their frameworks for understanding them – rather than just their actions within them – constitute a primary focus for inquiry. Thus, my methodological approach is more constructivist than Marxian applications of the ECM usually allow, for two reasons: First, while I take seriously social forces of domination, I do not assume that these forces are perceived to operate along the lines that Marxist critics such as Burawoy often argue they do (and, indeed, in a socialist country like China where Marxist Thought is a compulsory school subject, Amdo Tibetan perceptions and articulations of exploitation often deviate markedly from Marxian formulations, even if primarily symbolically). Second, although I enter the field with a theoretical framework and hypotheses developed during two pilot studies, I will invert Eliasoph and Lichterman’s (1999) injunction to ‘begin with our favorite theory’ – and instead retroactively consider the theory that I end with to be my favorite one (meaning the

powerful theory that this project's data suggests needs refining). Taking constructivism seriously means that I cannot begin with my theoretical approach already fully determined. So, while theory on the diffusion of educational norms and the practices that achieve capital and legitimacy have emerged during pilot research as effective frameworks for understanding the work of *sabjong* educators, my research methods remain tethered to them only insofar as they have prompted me to care about and ask the research questions I have developed. I am therefore not engaged in theory testing in the sense that I head into the field with only a single theory (e.g. world culture) and looking for anomalous cases. Rather, I engage (central, important) existing theories and collected data in an iterative process in which I am continually honing theory and searching for apparent violations and reconstructions to it. This brings me somewhat closer to a Grounded Theory approach insofar as I am not preoccupied with the reconstruction of just a single body of theory. But I never quite aspire to the Grounded Theory standard of developing a new, generalizable theory from this research project. To put this in specific terms: I use Bourdieusian concepts and theory to explore the empirical claims made by those who study the expansion of supplemental education programs, a key consequence of the Education Revolution.

### **Preparation**

This study is based on several years of preparatory work that began in 2012 when I first began teaching in a Tibetan Nationalities Senior Middle School (i.e. High School) in Serjong, the seat of the Guchu Prefecture<sup>13</sup> in which the majority of this study takes place. During my years managing an intensive English language program for Tibetan students from all over the

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<sup>13</sup> Prefectures (*khul*, Ch. *zhou*) are administrative areas that are smaller than provinces (*zhing chen*, Ch. *sheng*) and larger than counties (*dzong*, Ch. *xian*). Most prefectures in Qinghai, the province in which this fieldwork took place, include 4-6 counties. More on administrative organization is offered in the sections dealing with the field of education in China.

prefecture, I was introduced to the vibrant culture of summer and winter supplemental classes, known as *sabjong*, in this area of the Tibetan Plateau. In addition to having the opportunity to support and participate in some *sabjong*, I also developed familiarity with the Chinese education system, its norms, and how they were experienced by Tibetans enrolled in “Nationalities” schools, where curricular instruction is frequently delivered in Tibetan (rather than exclusively in *putonghua*<sup>14</sup> Chinese, which it is at Han Chinese schools which all students in China are permitted to attend). Over the three years I spent as a teacher in Serjong, I had the opportunity to develop a number of skills and connections that would assist in making this study possible. In addition to living and working at a Tibetan Senior Middle School, I was responsible, with the Assistant Principal of the high school, for recruiting students into the English program. This allowed me to visit over 20 Lower Middle Schools in Guchu Prefecture, observe classes, and meet teachers, students, and even some parents. I was also able to develop advanced proficiency in literary Tibetan and spoken Amdo Tibetan (which differ significantly) through studying with several Tibetan tutors during this period. Some of these tutors continued to play important roles throughout this study, either as research assistants, helpful friends, or participants themselves. Second, I was able to create a large network of friends and colleagues who appreciated my intellectual interests and played integral roles in introducing me to *sabjong* educators throughout the area. Third, and most important logistically, I was able to develop familiarity and trust with the local Public Security Bureau (Ch. *gong an chu*), which exercises virtually unilateral control over all logistical issues concerning foreigners in the region. Despite the tense political environment, especially on the heels of the 2008, 2010, and 2011 protests (de Varennes, 2012),

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<sup>14</sup> *Putonghua* Chinese is employed in this dissertation as synonymous with so-called “Mandarin Chinese” spoken in the People’s Republic of China. I use *putonghua*, literally “common language,” rather than the more common English term “Mandarin” to reflect the principal terms used by participants in this study and in China more generally. More generally, *putonghua* can be thought of as Mandarin as it is spoken in written in China using simplified characters, whereas the “Mandarin” used in Taiwan uses traditional Chinese characters.

officials from the Public Security Bureau and I developed sufficiently amicable relationships: they continued to renew my residence permits and allowed me to live and travel relatively freely in Guchu Prefecture, a privilege that is not easily granted.

Upon beginning my graduate studies at the University of Virginia in 2015, I returned to this region during the summers of 2016 and 2017 to conduct pilot studies in preparation for this research project. Pilot studies included meeting various educators from throughout the region, visiting different educational programs and projects, honing interview techniques and constructing protocols, and extensive Tibetan language lessons. As I settled on ethnography as the most useful method for understanding the perspectives and practices of Tibetan educators, I began to conduct interviews and observations in various educational settings. While my decision to focus on *sabjong* was ultimately the product of many factors, three reasons – nearly determinative in themselves – became apparent immediately. First, despite my decent relationship with officials in the Public Security Bureau, conducting research in mainstream schools would have brought innumerable obstacles that would have greatly limited the feasibility of such a project. Second, because my pilot studies took place during summer holidays, mainstream schools were out of session and impossible to observe anyway. And, third, my research design, focusing as it does on how *Amdo Tibetans* make sense of and respond to educational expansion, seeks to highlight what these students and educators do when given the opportunity to exercise comparably more agency than they can in mainstream schools, where not only surveillance and accountability measures are far more present, but also where the teachers themselves often feel highly pressured to follow the standardized curriculum and ‘teach to the test’ in preparation for the National College Entrance Exam (Ch. *gaokao*). Thus, *sabjong* became an ideal setting in which to explore how Amdo Tibetans develop responses to educational

expansion, so I decided to conduct research at these projects, which seems to avoid many the obstacles that research in mainstream schooling would entail.

It is finally important to note how my positionality and preparation limit this study's scope: My own history and experience, as well as the limitations of time and travel, meant that I spent time only at *sabjong* in the central areas of Guchu Prefecture. While this region includes both lower-farming and higher-herding areas traditionally linked in their support of a monastic community, I have limited experience in Tibetan areas outside of this particular region. While personal research, short pilot trips, and casual conversations revealed that, among all areas, Guchu Prefecture may have the most developed network of *sabjong* education, I cannot speak the prevalence and purposes of supplemental programs elsewhere on the Plateau. While some participants who had come from Kham or U-Tsang confirmed that educational opportunities were more robust in Serjong, I have never lived in Kham nor have I ever even visited U-Tsang. Therefore, my lack of experience in those places and non-random sampling design eliminate the possibility of generalizing to the Tibetan population at large or even to other areas of Amdo Tibet in Qinghai or Gansu Provinces. Tibetans elsewhere, who speak different languages and dialects, practice religion differently, maintain different livelihoods, have different histories, and, vitally, who navigate different political climates and institutional arrangements, likely have different experiences with supplemental education programs (or none at all, as they are routinely prohibited, which seems to be the case beginning in 2021 after the conclusion of fieldwork).

### **Research Assistants**

Four research assistants were integral to the successful completion of this project, all of whom are native speakers of Tibetan and have attained native or near-native proficiency in

*putonghua* Chinese and English. The process of recruiting and working with research assistants was exciting, informative, and sometimes frustrating, though not through the fault of any individual. My primary research assistant was Dorje, who conducted 65 of the 98 interviews with me and spent the entirety of two Marching Together sessions (summer of 2018 and 2019) on the campus teaching Chinese and assisting me. However, as I had expected would be the case based on the difficulty I had experienced trying to find a full-time librarian to work at our high school program a few years prior, it was not possible for Dorje to assist on all stages of the project because, in addition to his own MA courses, he had extensive familial responsibilities to which he needed to attend. Dorje's degrees are in Tibetan literature from prestigious *minzu* universities, where he also diligently pursued English language classes leading to near-native proficiency. Moreover, his background in an influential religious family in the high grasslands of northern Guchu Prefecture meant that he was very familiar with religious texts, figures, and norms that arose in conversations throughout the study, helping me make connections where I did not see them and providing ancient or contemporary backgrounds that helped contextualize events or ideas. Secondary research assistants were Naba and Luri, both of whom majored in English language education at the provincial Teachers' College. I knew Luri because she was one of my students during 2012-2015 and we had developed a nice relationship during that time. I had also worked with Naba previously during pilot studies, where he served as a research assistant while teaching at one *sabjong* that was ultimately included in this study. Naba assisted in conducting roughly 20 interviews and 15 days of observations, whereas Luri assisted with 13 interviews and five days of observations. It was Luri who first introduced me to Aku Cheeden, the principal of Marching Together, who she knew through her network as her hometown is near the location of that *sabjong*. All three were instrumental in helping me develop the Interview Protocol and



contacting *sabjong* organizers, as well as a host of other tasks, such as booking cars, finding accommodations, and dealing with police or officers from the Public Security Bureau. Because of their help and my experience in the area, we were able to complete the study without major incident. However, I was requested to talk with local law enforcement officials on a few occasions and, when necessary, I declined to visit *sabjong* and conduct interviews, principally during the winter and New Year holiday in January and February of 2019 during which political tensions were heightened as is usually the case around anniversaries of uprisings and protests.

For their time, effort, and expertise, research assistants were paid a flat rate of 200RMB (*sgor mo*, Ch. *yuan*) per day, irrespective of how long the activities took, although days with fewer activities meant that we could spend some time translating and analyzing interviews or other data. 200 *yuan* per day is slightly more than I was paid as a full-time teacher at the Tibetan Nationalities Middle School, so I believe this was a fair rate. Bringing gifts on the numerous visits I made to each of my assistants' homes also gave me an opportunity to show them how much I appreciated that time and expertise. As the next brief paragraph shows, finding someone with trilingual fluency willing and able to help a foreign researcher is not an easy task and their assistance in this project was utterly integral. I am forever grateful for their help.

Upon the conclusion of my affiliation with Qinghai Normal University in December of 2019, I planned to return home for the winter and activate my Fulbright-Hays (DDRA) grant and enroll as a graduate student at Southwest Nationalities University in Chengdu. However, the onset of Covid-19 made returning to China impossible. This meant that I still had a substantial number of interviews that remained untranslated. During Covid-19 shutdown, I searched for someone who had the capacity to translate interviews and engage in the demanding task of analyzing them with me, at least in the early stages. I was unwilling to complete this work via the

Internet with my research assistants who were still in China. Finding another research assistant was even harder in the US, but I was eventually able to work with Drolma. Given a variety of obstacles, we decided ultimately not to attempt to translate some of the remaining 30-plus interviews because each one had become such a significant undertaking, in part because she had not conducted any interviews or observations and was largely unfamiliar with the project until I introduced it to her in the summer of 2020. Nevertheless, she too provided invaluable assistance in translating key interviews. In all, research assistants comprised four young adults, two men and two women. Three are from herding areas and therefore speak a nomadic dialect of Tibetan, whereas Drolma speaks a variety of Tibetan dialects due to living in various areas of the Plateau. All the research assistants had at least Bachelor's degrees at the time of their service and all of them are now enrolled or finished with graduate degrees.

While the background and expertise of my research assistants provided many advantages, it is important to note some of the limitations we faced in this respect. For one, all three assistants I worked with in Amdo were from herding areas and spoke Amdo Tibetan as a native language. This meant that, by and large, they were unfamiliar – at least personally – with the discrimination that is sometimes embedded in the perspectives and practices of those who support the Pure Language (*pha skad gtsang ma*) movement which discourages, sometimes aggressively, speaking mixed language (*sbrags skad*) and incorporating Chinese or other vocabulary into Tibetan speech. Similarly, we were not able to effectively research language politics within Serjong, where it is often Tibetan that threatens to displace *other* minoritized languages spoken in villages around the Serjong valley (rather than *putonghua* Chinese that threatens to displace Tibetan, as is the case across much of the Plateau). Similarly, that a Tibetan is trilingual almost necessarily indicates that they have spent significant time in formal

educational settings. This may have limited our capacity to see critiques of formal education that those who were not so schooled might have been making implicitly. While the research assistants all had many unschooled family members, all assistants and I have spent the majority of our lives in formal education settings, which may have made it harder for us to connect with those who had different experiences with schooling. Though, this was not usually the case.

In sum, research assistants shared very much in common with many interlocutors in this study: they were of similar ages; they were university students or recent graduates; they had taught in *sabjong* at some point themselves; they were familiar with different areas of Guchu Prefecture and Xining city; and they shared many other experiences, ranging from favorite music to despised teachers that gave them many opportunities to build rapport and friendships. However, such similarities may have sometimes impacted interviews such that interlocutors made assumptions about the projects and my interests that were unwarranted, such as on the unassailable value of *sabjong*, the reasons for Tibetan students' "achievement gap" compared to national averages, or the value of being multilingual. Nevertheless, having the opportunity to review translations with Drolma back in the United States provided valuable perspective on understanding my research assistants' impact on the project, ranging from a few mistranslations to moments when they offered a perspective that Drolma challenged.

### **Site Selection**

Pilot studies allowed me to create a database of the various supplemental education projects that were taking place in this region during 2016-2018. This database was crucial in both recording data that I would later use to recruit *sabjong* educators for the actual study and developing a general picture of the variety of programs that existed. In creating brief descriptions

of each program, including information such as teaching personnel, materials used, location, number of students, and years running, I was able to begin to see different patterns and similarities among the *sabjong*. The next task at this stage was determining which programs were eligible for inclusion in the study. As mentioned, perhaps the broadest term with which one could describe the wide variety of activities intended to support children is “outside school time” activities (Noam & Shah, 2013). From these, I was interested only in those that attempted to support children *qua* students, and therefore I honed my focus to educational programs. In this dissertation, the term ‘educational outside school time programs’ is synonymous with supplemental education programs. As described in Chapter 6, where possible I avoid using terms that attempt to qualify or describe the nature of the supplementation offered students because, I argue, such terms often do not accurately capture the wide array of meanings and activities these programs have. I therefore decline to use popular terms such as “shadow education” or “cram school” and keep labels as neutral as possible and not conflate scholars’ labels with practitioners’ ideas about what they do. Within supplemental education programs, I then excluded from consideration any that were not Tibetan. This was not initially straight forward, as some of the programs I visited during pilot studies featured some Amdo Tibetan students and teachers, but all communication and instruction was delivered in *putonghua* Chinese (or English). While I recognize that this too constitutes one strategy that some Tibetans take to navigate educational institutions, I reasoned that these practices did not attempt to provide an education that could be described as Tibetan in any appreciable way.

Therefore, rather than focus my inclusion criteria on the mere ethnic identity of some participants at a supplemental program, I instead focused my study on those supplemental educational programs that attempted to provide some form of Tibetan education. This was

ultimately operationalized as supplemental programs that teach Tibetan language or teach some other courses *in* Tibetan language (though ultimately, there were no programs that taught using a Tibetan language medium that did not have a class directly pertaining to Tibetan Language Arts). It is only these Tibetan supplemental programs that I refer to using their common Tibetan name, *sabjong*, though their full name using the Wylie (1959) transliteration system is *gsab sbyong 'dzin grwa*, which literally means “supplemental study class.” I then defined *sabjong* as voluntary educational initiatives that teach Tibetan and happen outside the times of mainstream schooling and respond, at least at some moments, to the goals of mainstream schooling. I ultimately limited my sample frame to *sabjong* that were located in the closely-related farming county of Serjong and pastoral county of Gangthang in Guchu Prefecture, Qinghai<sup>15</sup> – one of the most educationally ‘Tibetanized’ prefectures in China (Zenz 2013). I also focused on this area because, despite its relative cultural unification as a single polity under the religious and (formerly) political jurisdiction of the powerful local monastery, Serjong and Gangthang are often conceptualized as increasingly divergent and thus likely to produce the greatest possible variety of supplemental programs within a single policy environment and ethnographically coherent context (Vavrus and Bartlett 2016). By analyzing descriptive data on 38 different supplemental programs identified during initial pilot studies led to 35 semi-structured pilot interviews, 90 days of participant observation at 18 different supplemental schools and educational events, and analysis of documents produced by supplemental schools (e.g. advertisements) conducted from June 2016 – May 2018, I identified Marching Together as the most unique, making it a crucial case that “can illuminate the workings of a social system in the

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<sup>15</sup> For reference: Serjong County is roughly 1200 square miles. Gangthang County is roughly 2500 square miles. Guchu Prefecture is about 7,000 square miles, or a little smaller than the state of New Jersey.

way that a series of morphological statements [about the general array of the education initiatives] cannot achieve” (Gluckman 1961, p. 9; Mitchell 1983).

Heading into the summer of 2018, the first summer of proper dissertation field work, I had a “Pilot Database” of roughly 40 different supplemental programs and projects. I began to contact via WeChat, text, or phone (or in person when possible) different *sabjong* organizers and teachers to determine if they were running their program again that year and would be interested in discussing it with me. Political sensitivities required me to remain relatively vague over electronic communication, though I was able to set up meetings with a number of educators in the spring of 2018. Simultaneously to arranging meetings and site visits, I continued to hone my use of the ECM. This resulted in my searching for the most unique *sabjong* because atypical cases are best positioned to highlight potential violations of prominent theories, which can lead to their improvement (Burawoy 2004). I quote Flyvberg (2006, p. 233) at length who articulates well the value of atypical cases:

When the objective is to achieve the greatest possible amount of information on a given problem or phenomenon, a representative case or a random sample may not be the most appropriate strategy. This is because the typical or average case is often not the richest in information. Atypical or extreme cases often reveal more information because they activate more actors and more basic mechanisms in the situation studied. In addition, from both an understanding-oriented and an action-oriented perspective, it is often more important to clarify the deeper causes behind a given problem and its consequences than to describe the symptoms of the problem and how frequently they occur. Random samples emphasizing representativeness will seldom be able to produce this kind of insight; it is more appropriate to select some few cases chosen for their validity.

I defined atypicality in two ways, which are related: atypical vis-à-vis other *sabjong* and atypical insofar as it appeared to violate prominent theories about the phenomenon in question. The theoretical frameworks for understanding what might constitute a ‘violation’ are described in in the Analytical Framework and addressed throughout this dissertation, but at present it suffices to

say that this study interrogates how cultural capital functions in contexts where the expansion of educational institutions and the logics that accompany them confront populations who do not necessarily share the same educational values and philosophies. In short, this study looks to use and thereby improve neoinstitutional theory on educational expansion and theory on educational reproduction. Analysis of pilot data, preliminary interviews, experiences over the past five years, and the recommendations of trusted colleagues lead me to identify Marching Together *sabjong* as the most unique and worthy of attention. Nevertheless, I visited numerous other *sabjong* and conducted interviews with nearly 40 educators who were not affiliated with Marching Together.

### **Research Questions**

To clarify the explication of specific methods used, I restate and label the research questions here. They are broken up into three sections, each pertaining to a central concept from Bourdieu's (1977; 1984; 1986; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) theory of reproduction in education, which provides an unparalleled and comprehensive approach to understanding the principal research question this dissertation answers: How Amdo Tibetan *sabjong* educators conceptualize what is educationally valuable and help facilitate students' acquisition of it?

The three principal concepts I use to explore educators' perspectives and practices that enable them to navigate the educational expansion that characterizes the Education Revolution are field, habitus, and capital. Because ethnography does not lend itself to the analysis of fields, which requires data collection and analytical methods beyond what ethnography can provide, I do not attempt to address these questions exclusively through the analysis of original data. However, questions of the field are addressed throughout the dissertation where possible as well as in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, which provide a topical literature review, a typology of *sabjong* in

Amdo, and an analysis of their putative functions, respectively. Research Sub-questions' labels will be used in these sections to refer back to the questions for style and brevity. Included here is a truncated form of the table listing the research questions:

Question Type	Question
Principal Research Question	How do Amdo Tibetan educators conceptualize what is educationally valuable and help students acquire it?
First Sub-questions: On Amdo Tibetan students' formation of habitus	1A: Which factors inform the formation of Amdo Tibetan students' habitus and how?
	1B: How do participants make sense of 'mismatches' between (an Amdo Tibetan) habitus and (the Chinese educational) field?
	1C: To what degree do <i>sabjong</i> educators believe that that habitus is alterable and how do they try to alter it?
Second Sub-questions: On Amdo Tibetan students' acquisition of capital	2A: From what sources can students acquire capital and how do <i>sabjong</i> educators participate in this process?
	2B: How do Amdo Tibetan <i>sabjong</i> educators conceptualize what counts as cultural capital?
Third Sub-questions: On the field(s) that Amdo Tibetan students navigate	3A: What are boundaries and continuities between the Tibetan educational field and the Chinese educational field, as well as between these and the meta-field of power?
	3B: What kinds of investments in the educational field are encouraged by the state and by Tibetan communities?

### Data Collection

I conducted participant observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to answer research questions. I sought to “capture the lived experience of [the] participants [and] depict and deconstruct tacit and embodied knowledge” (Jerolmack & Kahn 2014, p. 196, also see Katz 1999) to understand *sabjong* educators' perspectives and practices. As in virtually all ethnography, my units of observation are interactions. In participant observation, the interactions were primarily between differing combinations of teachers, students, and parents. In interviews, the interactions were between interlocutors, a research assistant (if present), and me. On the other hand, in creating a rigorous ethnographic portrait of Amdo



Tibetan *sabjong*, I toggle between individuals and *sabjong* themselves, principally Marching Together as units of analysis. Doing so allows me to see where individuals' lines of action intersect in a collective act (Jerolmack & Kahn 2014; Becker, 2004). This also allows me to prioritize the ways that actors locally produce social order (Blumer 1969; Goffman 1983) through the "dispositions and repertoires of thought and action [they] bring to a social situation or reveal to the interviewer" (Jerolmack & Kahn 2014, p. 197). Through interviews, both as reflections on situations and as situations in themselves, I fleshed out the ways in which actors make meaning of the collective acts, i.e., *sabjong*, in which they participate. In this way, my approach borrows from ethnomethodology a prioritization of situations as the unit of observation, but, in eschewing that method's exclusive attention to micro-processes (Garfinkel 1967), I situate them in the structural contexts that shape them. My focus on situations is therefore rooted not in the disavowal of macrostructures but in my emphasis on *process of meaning-making* in answering my research questions.

Throughout analysis, I attended to understanding collected data *in context*, which warrants an explanation of what I mean by that term. Context, following Bartlett and Vavrus (2017), is not merely the spatial and temporal locale of the action – "the world around here" (Geertz 1996, p. 262) – and the history and politics that affect it, though this dimension is vital. Rather, my notion of context is quite different than the 'case' or its setting *qua* "container for activity; it *is* the activity" and the activities all around it (Bartlett and Vavrus 2017, p. 12), which is to say that the context is the 'field' (drawing on the Bourdieusian sense of the term) which is made through social activity and interaction and enables sense-making and position-taking. This also supports my skepticism towards holistic ethnography because, while fields can overlap, their logics and capital often assume different, incommensurable forms, and the ethnographer must

select (not necessarily arbitrarily) the sense-making context/field they will examine. It would be difficult to reveal the nature of capital in reference to more than one field context simultaneously because these fields have different logics of recognizing value and currencies for representing it. The notion of context includes space and time – a setting – but one that is imbued with changing and unbounded social meanings that are confined neither by locale (e.g. Wechat communication with relatives in India) or scale (e.g. many ‘community members’ also belong to other communities, at different locations hierarchically and geographically, a point particularly salient in the Amdo Tibetan context and reinforced by trends of urbanization and government employment and their perceived connection to Sinicization, a point discussed in Chapter 7). Latour (2005, p. 177), makes this point when he argues “the macro is neither ‘above’ nor ‘below’ the interactions but *added* to them as another of their connections”.

Context therefore includes dimensions of intersubjectivity. In this case, this refers to the primacy of socially produced meanings and frameworks that precede individual actors (Prus 1997, p. 11), and power, which refers to not only the way that the state (or structures, more generally) enforce norms or bestow legitimacy (i.e. *A*’s interest dominating and displacing *B*’s interests) but also the ways the *A* shapes what *B* sees as possible to obtain, and, most pervasively, what informs *B*’s interests in the first place (Lukes 2021). Extending this perspective with a Foucauldian (1980) notion of power, my methodological approach emphasizes the process-oriented exertion of power – the examination of *how* it is exercised – rather than what it might look like as a static capacity. Thus, I examine the exertion of power (rather than power *per se*) beginning from its smallest and most dispersed instantiations, asking questions about how power is realized through networks of relations, such as:

Is it operating as part of a strategy that divides or incorporates, legitimizes

or de-legitimizes decisions, homogenises views or increases their diversity?  
Does it build conflict or consensus, amplify protest or seek to amputate it?  
Is power being exercised through tactics of coaxing, persuasion, refusal,  
persistence or evasion? (Gallagher 2008, p. 398).

By starting data collection and analysis of power “from its infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics,” (Foucault 1980, p. 99) I will conduct an “ascending analysis of power” that foregrounds educators’ actions and frameworks as they are produced in lived situations rather than assuming a static capacity called power, defined *a priori* by a foreign researcher and most commonly envisioned in Tibetological research as simply ‘the state.’

### *Participant Observation*

Participant Observation (PO) is one of the two principal research methods used. I will first explain my approach to participant observation and specific techniques I used throughout my research and then describe tailored strategies I employed at different *sabjong*. PO is founded on cultivating a spatial, social, and affective proximity to the educators with whom I worked with. Because I also used interviews to pose my own questions directly to participants, I emphasize the practice of ‘situated listening’ (Sanjek 2014) during PO, where I did not attempt to control conversation topics, flow, or parameters. Knowing that I would often become the center of attention by default, either through my foreignness or during those times when I was asked to teach class, I sought to conduct PO specifically in situations where my presence had minimal possible impact. I accomplished this by spending long stretches of time at my principal field site so participants became as accustomed to me as possible and by seeking out situations that had a clear organizational structure and leadership where others controlled the space and tempo.

Ethnographic work in organized school-like environments can lend itself well to this directive, as classroom instruction, school staff meetings, ceremonies, and teacher workshops, for example, all had both clear leaders and agendas which meant I was able to observe others' practices and perspectives that were likely minimally impacted by my presence. These situations were also some of the most important situations for me observe because it is in these social interactions where norms are interpreted, power negotiated, and frameworks articulated publicly and applied.

When taking and analyzing running-record field notes (Emerson et al. 1995), I was most interested in the frameworks educators used to communicate what they believe is valuable and why, which often entailed a process of negotiation. I operationalized negotiations of value as: quasi-public actions undertaken, in communication with other parties, to obtain a more or less specific goal, where each party believes in good faith that they have a reasonable chance of achieving the goal, are unwilling to engage in extra- or illegal actions to attain the goal, and do so on behalf of a cohort that is wider than an individual's private affairs. One important difference between my use of this term and some conceptualizations drawn from strands of negotiated order theory (Strauss 1978) is that I am significantly less interested in private negotiations (e.g., an employee negotiating their salary behind closed doors with their boss) because these do not entail the negotiation of a *social order*, for example minoritization through the education system, which is a publicly apprehensible process. However, this conceptualization of negotiation was a starting point; in practice, PO focused on much more than educators' attempts to negotiate (with students or others) and articulate educational value.

Across field sites, I focused participant observation on the patterns that emerge in actors' ways of being in and communicating about the world. I developed a series of 'time-stamped' situational analyses (Gluckman 1940; Mitchell 1983) that identified key moments or interactions

and locate them along the three axes of space, time, and scale (Bartless & Vavrus 2017).

Subsequent analysis used descriptors of individuals and situations to probe the histories of the actors and their programs, to include policy directives, media capabilities and the like (Latour 2004) involved and the diverse lines of action that led to their intersection at this time and in this way. This includes, borrowing from Durkheim's model of social morphology, a display and analysis of "the mass of individuals who compose the society, the way in which they occupy the land, and the nature and configuration of objects of every sort which affect collective relations" (Mauss & Beuchat 1979, p. 3).

In practice, this meant documenting *sabjong* activities and who participates in them, when participation happen, where they take place, what materials they use, and so on. This also included taking field notes on *sabjong* location, physical layout, schedules, and teaching materials. To avoid representing *sabjong* as static organizations, field notes of this nature were taken at least once per week so that changes (e.g. teaching staff, lesson plans, etc.) were be documented so that the strategies of the *sabjong* revealed by its trajectory could be made more evident upon rereading the log of field notes after returning from the field. The earliest of these situational analyses provide something like a baseline sample – not in the sense that the *sabjong* ceased to exist before I arrived but rather simply to put markers at regular intervals over the course of the fieldwork that facilitated the identification and analysis of changes. Using such baseline samples and subsequent snapshots allowed me to glimpse the apparent arrangement of actors and their positions, issues and their histories, materials and their sources. With this background laid out, I can now move onto to describe precisely what I looked for and saw when conducting this research. Though this section is written in a list form, each lens was used mostly synchronically during research.

I now describe the specific process of Participant Observation at my principal field site, Marching Together (MT), at which the vast majority of observations were made and for the longest duration but providing a summary of the main opportunities for observations reflections on them. I note where procedures differed at other *sabjong* or events. One of the three research assistants was present with me during roughly 75% of the observations, though we may not have been sitting together and able to share notes at that time.

PO at *sabjong* and similar educational activities was the primary method used to answer questions 1A, 1C, and 2A, which focus on practices that educators' attempt to inculcate in students, though this necessarily entails the use of interview data to elicit educators' perspectives on students' behavior. By way of an overview, I was able to conduct extensive PO during *sabjong* classes that took place on 113 days during the course of fieldwork, though not all observations lasted a full day. I conducted observations at Marching Together on 48 separate days, which entailed staying at Marching Together for the entirety of two summer programs (roughly 25 days each) and a one-day visit in February of 2019 during the graduation ceremony. There were four other *sabjong* at which I was able to spend more than two days, and there were 21 other *sabjong* or activities at which I spent just one or two days. In many cases, a "day's visit" was not a full day but an afternoon visit, followed by dinner and sleeping at my contact's house, and some observations the following morning before moving on. My decision to pick one principal field site and spend the majority of my time there was further supported by the fact that driving distances between *sabjong* are sometimes significant. Moreover, gaining trust and invitations was not always easy, especially given political sensitivities, staying in one place with one community was a preferable strategy. And, finally, the majority of these *sabjong* run only

during summer and winter breaks which means that they all are running simultaneously. Other than three *sabjong* (the two in Xining and one Serjong), none held classes throughout the year, and the *sabjong* in Serjong that did so only began operation during my final winter in Amdo.

There were a few venues in which I was able to conduct PO at Marching Together and other *sabjong*, and I go through them here using MT as the ‘default’ procedures and mentioning any important adaptations or differences when necessary.

PO during *sabjong classes* generally consisted of sitting in the back of class at a desk with an open notebook and, if the instructor and organizer had agreed, a running voice recorder. In addition to jotting down notes, I often recorded times of interesting events or interactions, which enabled me to return to the recording more easily with a research assistant and re-listen to whatever had transpired. When observing classes, I focused a) course content and pedagogy, b) the kind(s) of participation in class encouraged by instructors, and c) instances in which students did or did not meet teachers’ expectations and the consequences. To gather data about which I could later ask *sabjong* educators to answer questions such as 1A, I attended to how often and confidently students spoke up in class, either after raising their hand or not, how energetically they followed educators’ instructions, and how diligently they worked at their desk and paid attention during lectures. Regarding the educators, I took notes on the forcefulness with which they communicated with students, either by offering directives, suggestions, or negotiations, which, as Lareau (2011) points out, characterizes different child-rearing strategies. I looked especially for instances in which educators praised or scolded students and the ways they framed these reactions to the remainder of the class (if any such work was done at all). I tried my best to jot down what I knew about students who participated, including their hometowns, genders, mainstream school, grade, etc. These helped me discern patterns both for my own analysis and

for forming questions that I could later ask in interviews. I also took notes on the specific materials used, such as textbooks, workbooks, other visual aids (such as pictures, graphs, etc.). To respond to the question of what types of capital are made available to students, I carefully recorded all the different objects present in *sabjong* classrooms and the extent to which they were accorded any value (as indicated, for example, by the way participants handled them), and the extent to which this value was understood as educational. In most cases, there were very limited amounts of such objects, the most common being small library collections that students could access.

I also conducted PO during other organized activities, such as assemblies, graduation ceremonies and parties, and similar events. At these, I recorded, digitally if possible, the different goals that educators set out for students and the types of behaviors that educators explained would help actualize these goals. In analysis, these frameworks were later compared with educators' in-class instructional methods as well as the ideas they articulated during interviews. During assemblies and especially graduation ceremonies, I noted which kinds of behaviors were extolled, especially focusing on moments in which educators discussed role models or ideal futures. These instances also provided the principal time I was able to watch educators interact with parents. This interaction either happened as full gatherings or, less commonly, with *sabjong* teachers addressing their 'homeroom' students' parents in small groups. In these cases, I was still interested in how educators framed the goals of education to parents, what types of practices they encouraged parents to undertake with students, and how they explained 'what it takes' to succeed in mainstream school and navigate the transition to college. I noted any materials, such as study



books, contact information, or, in the rare case, gifts (such as *katak*<sup>16</sup>, but never money) that were passed back and forth between parents and teachers. During activities organized outside of class, I also paid attention to the level of participation, organization, and duration of the activities. Analysis of these included, but did not necessarily focus on, how these tempos compared to those of mainstream schooling. I paid special attention during ‘down-times’ and interstices between activities, which revealed relationships between students and teachers outside of interactions structured by relatively formal instructional settings. Especially in these instances, I used my voice recorder to take field notes for myself, which usually involved me stepping aside and whispering into my recorder so I could take notes ‘on the fly’ in a way that would not draw extra attention to myself or disturb the process at hand. There were a range of other activities at which I was able to conduct observations, including but not limited to: teaching planning sessions, exam correction sessions, picnics, fundraisers, and down-time between activities outside of the *sabjong*. In these instances, I was most willing to withhold a specific focus on some particular category of activity (e.g. teachers’ reprimanding of students) and instead allowed themes to emerge from the data as organically as possible in the tradition of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), whereas during most other observations, I let theoretical frameworks guide my observations as is encouraged through the ECM (Burawoy 2001).

Finally, for each site, I attempted to develop an “audit trail” (Halpern 1983) or a record of all the documents and research processes used. However, this was not always possible due to the sometimes-hectic nature of crowded classrooms and busy teachers. Nevertheless, Lincoln and Guba (1985) summarize an audit trail as:

- 1) *compiling and organizing raw data*

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<sup>16</sup> *Katak* are ceremonial silk scarves that are given to express respect, auspiciousness, etc. However, it’s worth noting that *kha btags* includes the two syllables for “mouth” and “bind/tie” and some etymologies of the term suggest that these are often given by those who oblige others into service, usually in a guest/host relationship.

- 2) recording *processes of data reduction and analysis products*, such as analytical memos and hunches for future research
- 3) recording *data reconstruction and synthesis products* (e.g. the structuring of categories, making findings and conclusions, final reports at conclusion of site visits)
- 4) taking *process notes*, including methodological notes and changes, concerns about trustworthiness, credibility, political issues
- 5) noting *information about intentions and disposition*, entailing personal moods, dispositions, frustrations, reflexive and iterative considerations of proposal, conceptual and theoretical framework, etc.
- 6) recording *instrument development information* such as how interview questions change or different documents are used for analysis, etc.

### *Interviews*

Semi-structured, in-depth ethnographic interviews in were the second principal method I used to collect data. Such interviews are ideal for eliciting educators' frameworks for how they make sense of the educational system and the strategies they develop to navigate it successfully. In total, I was able to conduct 98 interviews with students, educators, parents, clergy, and local leaders, though some were of better quality than others and not all were ultimately translated given obstacles discussed above. I was able to interview several educators two or three times over the course of 18 months. All but one of these are staff members at Marching Together and the other is a lama (*bla ma*), a Tibetan Buddhist religious leader. Interviews lasted between 45 and 150 minutes, though the majority were about 60 minutes long. One interview was conducted in *putonghua* Chinese, and roughly 20-30 interviews were conducted in English, although an

exact count is impossible to give because many of these interviews included significant switching between English and Tibetan, and all interviews included at least some Chinese terminology, often around policies or features of the education system. Most of the interviews were conducted in participants homes, *sabjong* classrooms, or outdoors in the vicinity of the *sabjong*. Some were conducted in my hotel room or a restaurant, most of which in Serjong have separate rooms or vestibules for guests to ensure a degree of privacy. Because of the busy nature of *sabjong*, I was not always able to interview educators during their actual session. Many interviews took place during the academic year or later during the summer when there was more time to schedule a meeting. However, I conducted interviews as close to the *sabjong* as possible both in time and space. In pilot and early stages of research, I did not notice any significant patterns between the responses of those who were interviewed prior to my conducting observations and after conducting observations, so I did not attempt to systematically control this, but I did note when each interview took place and any noteworthy circumstances at that time. The interview protocol containing the core list of questions and their translations into spoken Amdo Tibetan are included in Appendix B. Interviews were structured to include an introductory section followed by four general lines of questions that proceed from general to specific back to general. Interviews were the primary method of answering questions 1B and 2B, as well as the Subquestions on field to limited extents. I now describe the process undertaken during most interviews.

After consenting the interlocutor and explaining the nature of the study and how I would use their ideas in my research, I asked about the interviewees' own educational history and life experiences. Doing so allowed me to understand the background from which they approach educational issues. Not only did this introduce me to the scope of their thoughts on their

educational trajectories, but it also revealed their evaluations of their childhood experience and the reasons they give to support their claims. During the introduction, I jotted down names of people from their life, influential teachers, colleagues, etc. to return to during the final stage of the interview and to potentially add to my theoretically-informed snowball sample. This step included asking about their experience with *sabjong* about the origins and nature of their participation in this *sabjong*. Asking about the origins of their participation also helped me develop a history of that *sabjong* in particular and *sabjong* more generally.

Following the introductory questions, I sought to elicit and assess interlocutors' framework(s) of educational value and obstacles to acquiring it. This entailed asking for participants' motivations for participating in the *sabjong*, the functions that *sabjong* serve, and the problems they see local Amdo Tibetan students confront. I then asked about how *sabjong* could address these issues, and what addressing these issues would lead to. This transitions into the second stage of the interview, in which I sought interviewees' perspectives on what constitutes a good/bad or un/successful *sabjong* program. This also included questions asking interviewees to distinguish their program from other *sabjong* and mainstream schools and relay the most unique or pertinent features of the *sabjong* at which they worked. Interviewees' evaluations of other programs gave me a direct window into what they conceptualize as the core values of their own *sabjong* and the purpose of such supplemental programs altogether. This then included asking about what changes they hope to make to the *sabjong* if possible and what would be necessary for those changes to happen. When asking for evidence of what makes a program good or bad, I took careful note of the evaluative frameworks they are using to judge programs, e.g. while almost everyone said that increasing students' standardized tests scores makes a program good, the reasons they give for why it is important to have strong test scores and go to a good

university revealed the ways in which they interact with the norms of the ‘schooled society’. This then also gave me an opportunity to ask educators explicitly about other practices I had observed or witnessed elsewhere, such as hosting monastic-style debates or giving prizes for high exam scores, and get feedback on whether they think such activities are valuable. The question included at this step that provided the most interesting responses was when I asked educators to tell me about their students at this *sabjong*, eliciting educators’ opinions on what students’ home lives were like, their parents level of education and participation in schooling, and other factors that would contribute to a student’s attainment of success. Probing educators’ opinions about what their students needed was often more helpful in revealing educators’ philosophies of education than was asking directly about their philosophies of education. This also gave me a clearer picture of their priorities and provided useful background information and research leads.

Third, depending on the extent that educational philosophies were covered in the previous question, I then asked educators about their philosophies and educational values: what should students learn and why? I then included further questions about their educational philosophy and the sources they used to inform it. I often found myself asking either hypothetical questions or relaying *other* interviewees’ responses and using them as points of departure for discussion, in the model of: “I heard some educators say X. Do you think that is a good approach to education?” Usually, these were actual quotes I had heard and wanted to follow up on, though sometimes I would frame hypothetical questions similarly primarily for the sake of clarity and sometimes to normalize certain responses that I thought educators may have but feel hesitant to offer. Finally, I asked interviewees about their outlook on the future through querying their role models, aspirations, and expectations – both those they had for themselves and those they think are appropriate or beneficial for current students. Though not all interviews proceeded this way, I

preferred to ask about other specific people and ideas, such as role models, plans, and predictions toward the end of the interview because, on the few occasions that interviews started with these topics, participants sometimes became *too* anchored in current situations, recounting, for example, who went to which schools or what other people said or did. However, I was not using interviews primarily to collect data that would be viewed *positivistically*: interlocutors' reports on who achieved what, what this or that educator said, or what plans they made or will make are just that – reports, which are can be *post hoc* rationalizations or wishful thinking. While descriptive data like these were useful for piecing together networks of influence or finding new leads, I wanted to spend the bulk of interviews discussing participants' philosophies, frameworks, and values rather than eliciting only information that could simply later be verified as true or not. Additionally, putting questions about other individuals towards the end allowed me to follow up on these potential introductions in real time without sidetracking the interview.

### *Documents*

Document analysis supported observations and interview data. The principal document type I analyzed is texts produced by *sabjong* themselves, such as advertisements of the program, newsletters, or similar publications (which were generally few and far between at *sabjong* other than Marching Together, Town Heritage Museum, and a few others). I focused on the frameworks used for describing and marketing the *sabjong*, looking for how organizers argue that the program is worthwhile. While I prioritized examining texts from Marching Together, I collected documents from all *sabjong* to triangulate interview data, particularly in instances where *sabjong* were being compared and distinguished, in order to situate Marching Together in the array of educational initiatives in Amdo. Secondarily, I analyzed the writings of Tibetan

education scholars, many of whom have been *sabjong* organizers themselves, for normative Tibetan perspectives regarding the purposes of education and the role that *sabjong* could play in achieving this. Texts of this type include shared WeChat posts, newspaper and magazine articles, and other pieces. Such publications and resulting commentaries often become an important part of the contemporary intellectual landscape, grounding future educational efforts (Hartley & Schiaffini-Vedani 2008). Document analysis of flyers also provided important data on the *sabjong* programs themselves, such as pricing, class structure, dates, and times. It was, in part, through analyzing these that Marching Together was identified as the most atypical case.

Finally, comparison between state-issued documents and data gleaned during interviews and PO will also reveal the boundaries of what is politically possible to say and to do – and the extent to which policies can be interpreted creatively or even resisted so long as they are not contradicted outright in writing. Policy documents and legal directives, such as those distributed by national or local governments and posted around town or in schools, were used to analyze “objective” social forces, rather than the interactional *processes* that I studied ethnographically (Burawoy 2003). This separation is based both on practical and theoretical considerations raised by the ECM: I cannot study everything, so at some point my inquiry into social process will stop and I will need to accept the conditions of social forces, or fields in the Bourdieusian sense, that lie beyond the realm of ethnographic inquiry. Though I am principally interested in how educators *understand* the problems they encounter and their responses to them, analyzing ‘official’ perspectives on what exactly is up for negotiation, and where state authorities draw hard lines, is an important aspect in this study insofar as it illuminates the possibilities available to educators.

*Security*

All data were stored in two places: on an encrypted (password-protected) external hard-drive and on my personal password-protected laptop computer, both of which used hidden folders to keep information as private as possible. Data were never uploaded to the Internet while in China, and, when they eventually were, they were uploaded only to secure sites, such as the Qualitative Analysis software Dedoose, which was used for this study. Abbreviations of names, hometowns, and other identifying information were used from the earliest stages of research to protect participants should this information be seen by others, which it ultimately was not (other than research assistants). These were changed to code-names as soon as all of the data was compiled and the codebook containing these names exists only in my files. Participants agreed to all of these procedures to during the first stages of interviews or in seeking permission to conduct participant observation. Verbal consent, rather than written and signed consent forms, were used because written forms often suggest a greater degree of political sensitivity than was necessarily the case. I assured participants that they could withdraw from the study at any time and left them multiple ways to contact me if they decided to do so. No participants ultimately decided to withdraw or make alterations to the data they shared, although several did request that their names not be used (which is the case anyway) or that they not be recorded, requests I was happy to follow. All of this was done in accordance with the approved UVA IRB protocol #2613.

*Analysis*

All but 20 interviews were recorded on a small analog recorder without Internet capabilities that was roughly the size a USB thumb-drive. I generally did not take extensive written notes during interviews, other than jotting down quick terms I wanted to ask secondary



questions about. Instead, I opted to listen as carefully as possible to keep up with the conversation, which required all my attention and, even then, it was not always enough if the interviewee spoke quickly or used complex grammatical structures or vocabulary with which I was unfamiliar in Tibetan. During interviews that were not recorded, a research assistant and I both took notes and compared them afterwards. Whenever possible, which was roughly 50% of the time, immediately after saying goodbye and stepping out of the interview, I would start another recording and my research assistant and I would recount on the voice recorder as much as we could remember from the conversation itself, which ideas they offered that seemed puzzling or particularly interesting and other notes that we wanted to make. This practice was particularly useful for the interviews that were not recorded. In ideal cases, my research assistant and I were able to recount nearly thirty minutes of spoken summary notes after a roughly one-hour interview. The ensuing stages of analysis, however, were more difficult.

I initially requested research assistants to work together with me to transcribe interviews from spoken Amdo to written Tibetan. However, this proved extraordinarily difficult, even for native speakers of the language. The principal reason for this is that spoken Tibetan (*bod skad*) and written Tibetan (*bod yig*) differ greatly, not just in vocabulary but in sentence structure and the use of grammatical particles. It took several days simply to transcribe, let alone translate, a single hour-long interview so, after the first summer of field work, we decided to take a different approach and simply translate the interviews directly into written English into an MSWord document, which was still a time-consuming process. I relistened to each interview at least once while reading along with the English translation to ensure that my understanding of the interview matched the research assistants'. This was sometimes undertaken with the fourth research assistant, Drolma, while back in the US. When they did not match, the research assistant and I

revisited the section in question and worked out any confusions. This usually successful, although on a few occasions neither of us could ultimately understand that point the interlocutor was trying to make or see how it related to the question asked. It is important to remember that spoken Amdo Tibetan not only varies from the written form, but it also varies greatly from place to place, even within the same Prefecture. The two general dialects of Amdo Tibetan found in this area are ‘herding’ (*‘brog skad*) and ‘farming’ (*rong skad*) dialects which are spoken by people at higher and lower elevations, respectively. Because my three main assistants came from herding areas, as did roughly 75% of participants, this was not usually a problem. But in a few cases, we had difficulty understanding what some Tibetans from farming areas said, though Drolma was especially helpful in working on these translations with me.

When reading through the translated interviews, I identified particularly important passages that spoke to the Research Questions and worked with an assistant to transcribe them into a written form of spoken Tibetan. For Tibetologists, this explains appearance of ‘non-standard’ grammar when direct quotations are given in the text (such as *yod gi*), although I have minimized the use of Tibetan directly in the dissertation given that I am writing primarily for an audience of education scholars. Highlighted and transcribed passages were included in the MSWord document just underneath the English translations. However, because Dedoose could not support Tibetan scripts, it was necessary to do some of the analyses directly in MSWord. My procedure for analyzing is as follows.

First, I uploaded English transliterations into Dedoose. Because I am using the ECM, I did not proceed first with “open coding” (also known as “initial coding”) in which I used participants descriptions or words to create codes (Thornberg & Charmaz 2014), a method popular in Grounded Theory to highlight emic terms that drive analysis. In the colorful language

of Timmermans and Tavory (2012, p. 180), the ECM “purposefully eschew[s] methodological ‘cookbooks,’ worried that they would result in a fetishization of methods and crass empiricism.” Taking seriously Wacquant’s (2002) claim there is no such thing as ethnography that is not guided by theory, I developed theoretically driven codes derived directly from the theories I am and using and testing. In this sense, my theoretical codes are different than Glaser and Holton’s (2005, p. 1) usage of this term, which they describe as “abstract models that emerge during the sorting and memoing stages of grounded theory analysis.” Rather, my theoretically driven codes correspond to what the theoretical framework suggests should be salient themes in participants’ conceptualization and explanations of the phenomenon under examination (i.e. the role of *sabjong* in educational expansion). However, I do use one particular emic locution – “to accept or reject” – to frame all my codes (explained just below). Ultimately, I read through the data a final time using ‘open codes’ and temporarily ignoring all the theoretically driven codes. Inverting the process common in much qualitative research in this way allowed me to use ‘open coding’ as a *final* procedure to potentially find new themes that I had not seen before because I was only interested in the codes generated by my theoretical framework. This allowed me to both search for alternative/contrasting interpretations of data and highlight any salient themes that I simply may have missed.

As stated, my theoretically driven codes were framed by a common term used in both literary and contemporary spoken Tibetan, especially in educational contexts: one must distinguish between that which is to be “accepted [or] rejected” (*blang dor*). This framing, used extensively by participants and in analyzed documents, was represented in the coding process by using “+” and “-” signs. I interpret participants’ use this common locution to distinguish that which they considered valuable. Again, rather than beginning directly with participants’

articulation of examples of these and then searching for a body of theory to which they might apply, I instead begin with Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and, in particular, the concepts of capital and habitus to derive my set of initial, theory driven codes. Thus, in this stage of analysis I coded for those attributes (i.e., forms of capital) that Bourdieu and his commentators already suggest *are* valuable – or not, in the case of Kingston (2001) and Goldthorpe (2007). I therefore coded interviews and participant observation data for perspectives and practices that addressed the potential educational value of certain: Aspirations, Expectations, Habits, Language Uses, Moral Orientations, Bodily Hexis, Familiarity with Dominant Cultures, Familiarity with Non-Dominant Cultures, Skills, Objects, and Diplomas. These codes cover all the major components of habitus and capital. However, this list was quickly expanded to include potential instantiations of economic capital, e.g., Money, Equipment, and social capital, i.e. Connections. Networks. Then, to each of these was added a 'positive (+),' 'neutral (n),' or 'negative (-)' designation so that, for example, if an interlocutor mentioned that “knowing how to ride a horse is not particularly important in today's world” this would be coded as “Bodily Hexis (n)” among other possible codes, such as “Familiarity with Non-Dominant Cultures (n).” The purpose at this stage was to, first, break up data into the categories through which capital and habitus are conceptualized. In order to ensure that my codes were providing genuine analytical purchase, I eliminated any codes that did not have at least two instances of at least two of the three (i.e. positive, neutral, negative) qualifiers. For example, if “Familiarity with Dominant Cultures” had *always* been referred to positively, it could then only be understood as a *substantive* instantiation of cultural capital, rather than a *categorical* one. This means it is also the case that in some instances interlocutors think having (too much) money or having the (wrong kind of) connections is educationally detrimental. In other words, if *everyone* agreed that something was

educationally valuable, I considered it a *substantive* instantiation of it, rather than a category (as outlined in the Analytical Framework). This first stage of coding was designed to lay out the categories. For this reason, obviously beneficial (i.e. substantive) instances of educational value such as “good grades” are not included in this set of codes because they provide no insight into how participants distinguish between what is valuable and not. I designed the codes around *categories* in this way in order to test the assumptions embedded in (orthodox versions of) theory using cultural capital and challenged by its critics, ranging from Yosso (2005) to Kingston (2001). If everyone agreed that something, such as “being smart,” was educationally valuable then there would be no analytical or theoretical reason for including it in this study because it would reveal nothing new about what educators might be able to do for students and, therefore, lead to building no new knowledge.

A second stage of coding highlighted the *explanations* that participants gave for their ideas that were coded in the first stage. These codes help answer the question of: What frameworks are participants using to determine if the previously mentioned potential instantiation of cultural capital is valuable or not? In the process of completing this stage of coding, however, I realized that explanations of ‘why something is valuable’ and explanations of ‘why things are they way they are’ overlapped greatly. Therefore, I developed a more comprehensive list of codes to analyze participants’ explanations. They include: Class, Gender, Race/Minzu, Geography, the State (i.e. the laws and policies of China), the World (global norms and transnational power), Religion. These secondary codes of participants explanations reveal how participants understand the connections between, for example, *class* and *language use*, which is a central aspect of social reproduction theory but not necessarily one that has been explored in other contexts to see if the connections ‘work’ in the same ways as the do elsewhere

(i.e. in other fields). For example, Lareau (2011) shows that students from middle- and upper-class are taught by their parents to exhibit confident, outspoken dispositions in schools which are ultimately advantageous. However, educators in Amdo Tibet see dispositions as primarily the product of one's upbringing in rural or urban areas rather than most determined by family income. While this study obviously does not attempt to control for these variables, it does nevertheless reveal what educators see as important influences on students' lives, which in turn conditions how they conceptualize what kinds of educational value students need to acquire.

Through this two-tiered approach, I attempt to let participants in this study, i.e., an example of the ethnolinguistically minoritized peoples that on whose behalf Yosso (2005) waged her important argument, speak directly to the intellectual debate themselves. After completing these two rounds of coding, but before aggregating them (as I just demonstrated) I reread the data set one final time, temporarily ignoring the codes I had already applied, looking at the interviews as narratives rather than the highly segmented bits of data into which my coding process rendered them. In this final round of coding, I paid closer attention to the style, organization, and emphasis of the interlocutors' thoughts themselves, highlighting what seemed to be the message *they* wanted to convey through our conversation, rather than simply the ways in which their answers responded to my interview (and, thereby, research) questions. For example, Aku Rigzen's thoughts, examined at length subsequently, were certainly intelligible given the theoretical framework I was using. However, it seemed that what he wanted to convey above all was that connection to elders was, ultimately, the most important value that there was and that, in its absence, all other pursuits – e.g., a good education, the maintenance of culture, environmental sustainability, and the accumulation of wealth – were ultimately unable to

generate *good* socioeconomic development. In this way, he reframed what many Bourdieusians see as the connection between capital acquisition and socioeconomic development.

Ultimately, the writing process adheres as closely as possible to using and, in many cases, problematizing core concepts of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. I organize the data in this way so that my relatively unorthodox approach to testing this theory nevertheless forms an intelligible narrative that attempts to account for the three principal components of this theory: what conditions exist (i.e. the field), how these conditions inform what is seen as valuable (i.e. capital), and what kind of education is necessary to produce people (i.e. habitus) who can succeed in these circumstances.

### *Positionality and Social Desirability*

Conducting ethnographic research (especially as a foreigner who has benefitted from numerous forms of institutionalized inequality and exploitation) raises several issues that threaten to both reinforce structures of domination and impugn the validity of the research. While positivist approaches to knowledge production are limited by context effects (e.g., how does survey question wording impact participant responses?), my reflexive approach brings four of its own potential limitations – the effects of power: domination, silencing, objectification, and normalization (Burawoy 1997). Domination refers to the struggle for control over the research process and the nature of my intervention, no matter how unobtrusive I hope to make participant observation; silencing refers to the way in which I represent the interests of those I work with and must inevitably focus on some voices to the detriment of others; objectification refers to ways my decisions of what to research necessarily focuses on certain processes and leaves others outside my purview as taken-for-granted, external and natural social forces; normalization refers

to the way my research interacts with existing theories insofar as field sites are reduced to cases and the world into categories, which can then normalize oppressive structures and discriminatory practices simply for enhanced theoretical purchase (Burawoy 1997, p. 56-61).

While the ECM is not a panacea to the problems inherent in reflexive research, it does represent one of the first efforts of white scholars to reflexively include their positionality in their work (Burawoy 1991, p. 362) by displaying and limiting the effects of power. Displaying the effects of power means being explicit about the decisions I make of what to include at different stages of my project and how I arrived at them, a process I tracked by keeping daily field notes of the interactions I have with interlocutors and the research leads I don't follow up on (and why). Moreover, I limited the effects of unequal power by working closely with strategically selected research assistants, continually member checking findings, and arranging to conduct interviews with people at various positions in the social hierarchy so that a variety of concerns are voiced and viewpoints represented. Although my background and positionality do bring certain privileges, my research entails both 'studying down' and every attempt at 'studying up' (Nader 1972), as many of my potential interlocutors were connected, educated, and relatively wealthy. Clearly, this does not mean they are exempt from the effects of power – either those I exert through research or much more significant consequences of transgressing political norms and laws in China – but I employed several strategies for working with diverse participants.

One way I accomplished the 'displaying and limiting' of power is by extending my inquiry from practices and interactions to frameworks and processes to policies and social forces – or across space, scale, and time in Bartlett and Vavrus' (2017) formulation – so that prevailing social arrangements are not taken as a given but as the product of particular and investigable circumstances. For example, I can better understand my positionality in this research by



foregrounding the macro-systems of power (i.e., the global schooled society) in which micro-processes of my case are situated (Evens 2006 p. 58). Gluckman and Burawoy modeled this by exploring the forces of colonialism and global capitalism, respectively, that brought them to their field sites. In my case, so-called “foreign experts,” commonly hired to teach English in China, is analogous. Because foreign teachers (especially those who are white and “look American”) are often the means by which Chinese schools demonstrate their quality (i.e., ‘first-worldliness’) and gain legitimacy (Jin & Cortazzi 2002), my positionality, as a former English teacher in Amdo, is highly implicated by – if not a blatant product of – the same forces I intend to analyze.

Going further, there is little reason to halt the inquiry into my positionality at the moment I showed up in Amdo to teach English in a Tibetan Nationalities High School. My desire and preparation for that position is itself based on several other processes: my knowledge of Tibetan languages and cultures was honed during my years as a Buddhist Studies MA student in New York and Kathmandu; my grappling with the oppressive and liberative potentials of schooling was piqued during my year teaching in a Freirian study abroad program; and my interest in organized extracurricular activities’ relationship to and impact on ethnic and national identities grew (mostly unbeknownst to me) during my protracted participation in domestic and international soccer cultures and competitions.<sup>17</sup> Such experiences have shaped my project more or less directly, influencing the people who have taught me about the research context, the questions I have developed as a result of my experiences there, and the people with whom I collaborated in answering them. Displaying and limiting the effects of power, then, is a process in which I situate – in space, scale, and time – my research questions, my methods for answering them, and the collaborators with whom I do it so that the embedded motivations, assumptions,

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<sup>17</sup> The link to sport, and specifically soccer, is perhaps less tenuous than it seems: some national identities seem revolve around soccer or are at least imagined that way by many participants in nation-making practices. See Foer (2004), Lechner (2007), and Kittleson (2014).

and methods of both myself and other participants are made explicit. In other words, I engaged in a process of theorizing my research itself – namely interviews and participant observations – as a situation to be investigated (DiMaggio 2014). This process is reinforced by a constructivist approach to knowledge in which I do not assume I am discovering some pre-existing truth ‘out there’ but building knowledge in moments of interaction.

Interactions, which include participant observation and interviews, raises the issue of social desirability bias: might interviewees give responses or act in ways that they perceive as socially advantageous to offer (for a variety of reasons) even if they are not true or genuine? How can I be sure the interviewees aren’t simply ‘telling me what I want to hear,’ ‘what makes them look good,’ or responses that they feel pressured into giving, especially when the effects of power are felt through my positionality?

First and most importantly, interviews are only one of three types of data I collect. Participant observation, the hallmark of ethnography, allows me to see ‘what *actually* happens’ rather than mere accounts of it. Much has been written on the utility and, pertinent here, the deficiencies of interviews as a method. A principal concern especially of symbolic interactionists can be summarized as the attitudinal fallacy – that interviewees’ attitudes expressed in conversation are a valid source of data for inferring behavior (Jerolmack & Khan 2014). Vaisey (2014) has refuted some of these claims, showing the utility of using interviews and surveys in this way, but this tension highlights the way I do and don’t use interview data: my research is not designed to make inferences of behavior based on what people said they ‘would do’ in a certain situation. Participant observation is the method by which I will gather data on what people do. Interviews are the method by which I will elicit people’s frameworks for making sense of it.

While this ameliorates many of the problems noted by scholars of ‘attitude-behavior consistency’ concerned with the discrepancy between what people say and what they do, it does not address how interlocutors’ responses might have been altered or idealized (or “untruthful”) when compared to what they ‘actually’ think. However, this approach to truth is inconsistent with my constructivist approach insofar as it assumes interlocutors do, in fact, hold some stable perception of reality inside their mind and that it is the job of the researcher to access it. It assumes that meanings belong to people rather than to situations (Blumer 1969). Again, by theorizing the interview (and my positionality in it) *qua* negotiated interaction itself, interlocutors’ partial truths, idealized descriptions, or performative identities (Butler 2020) become data I’m interested in (although it may be less tractable insofar as I may not immediately know they are partial, idealized, or performative, etc.). I am not using interviews to find out what people report they might do in a given situation or what is the ‘real’ story behind some set of circumstances but to “assess actors’ life histories, stated beliefs, and folk theories of social structure; [this method] offer[s] a window into the normative and cognitive frames that actors use to explain their actions and anchor their identity (Jerolmack & Khan 2014, p. 189, also see Lamont 1992; Swidler 2001; Young 2004). In other words, while interviews are meant to access the interlocutor’s picture of the world “as he sees it,” the way in which a respondent presents his views to a researcher constitutes an important but non-total window into the way he sees it (e.g. “that it is important for me to say a culturally-relevant Tibetan curriculum is key to students success even if I do not necessarily believe so”).

Social desirability in many instances in this study also works in favor of the research, and using ethnographic methods to analyze participants’ practices and perspectives – rather than the reality of some objective situation (i.e. the field) – is relatively unproblematic in this case.

Because I am interested in what participants believe is educationally valuable, the way my presence as a teacher-researcher at a *sabjong* may impact students' behaviors often made participants *more* readily reveal the data I was interested in. For example, if students or educators went out of their way to 'impress' me (which was rarely the case after spending two days at a field site), then these aberrations are themselves valuable data on what participants' think is educationally valuable (or, possibly but less likely what they thought I thought was educationally valuable). In other words, the ways in which participants may have changed their behavior because of me were likely an attempt to make more explicit what they think was the 'right' thing to do. And, because I am principally interested in what they think is the 'right' thing to do in educational settings, relatively small alterations or aberrations in participants' behavior was not a major threat to validity and, if anything, may have increased the visibility of such practices.

Importantly, I addressed the safety of my interlocutors and the possibility that they are unable to share politically problematic perspectives through techniques honed during the pilot research and previously. First, my interview protocols are informed by topics I've heard discussed in Amdo and elicit Tibetans' perspectives of what is educationally valuable, which can include moments of resistance but are unlikely to include politically dangerous opposition because the more fraught actions or opinions become, the less likely they are to be valuable. Second, I prioritize interviewing *sabjong* organizers (i.e., educators and particularly engaged community members) because they have experience navigating politically sensitive situations, which *sabjong* themselves often are. Third, my relationships with community members are characterized by a long history of trust and respect, and I kept to protocols regarding consent, recording, encryption, and confidentiality. Therefore, I am provisionally justified in assuming that interlocutors offered honest perspectives on what is educationally valuable: if an idea was

too politically sensitive to mention in an interview, it likely wouldn't be much value in navigating the Chinese institutions. That is, I focus on how Tibetan educators come to value what they do, not simply how they resist power (cf. Lukes 2005).

## **Part 2: Sketching the Field**

## CHAPTER 4

### MACRO-FOCES: THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD(S) AMDO TIBETANS NAVIGATE

#### Introduction

This chapter serves two purposes. First, it builds on the analytical framework presented in Chapter 2 to describe fields, the final component of Bourdieu's theory of reproduction and integral to making sense of habitus and capital. Fields are addressed here because, as ethnography, this study cannot empirically approach research questions on the field(s) of Chinese and Amdo Tibetan Education. However, it is nevertheless important to sketch the general history, contours, and positions of the field(s) in question, which constitutes the second purpose of this chapter. I first describe the nature of fields in general theoretical terms, then I describe the educational field(s) that Amdo Tibetans navigate. Doing so provides vital context for understanding not only the general context, terms, and institutions that will be referred to throughout this dissertation but also the analyses and their significance.

#### Fields

Field, as one of the three key concepts of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, is essential to understand in a study focusing on cultural capital because "in empirical work, it is one and the same thing to determine what the field is, where its limits lie, etc. and to determine what species of capital are active in it [and] within what limits" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 98-99), which makes immediately apparent the tight interconnection between fields and capital. As this section explicates, it seems one principal reason that studies of cultural capital have produced such apparently contradictory results is that they have given more or less effort (or sometimes none at all) to establishing the nature of the field in which a given species (which is

synonymous with “form”) of capital is hypothesized to be at work. But much more than a static, fixed index that provides values of given instantiations of capital, fields are a dynamic context in which capital is differentially recognized, rewarded, and struggled for, often in an attempt to change the conditions and configurations of the field itself. As a dynamic set of objective positions that is inscribed in habituses through a particular kind of socialization that reflects the values that characterize one’s social position in the field, fields enable revealing the relationship between the availability of positions to be taken (and their potential for success) and the actual strategies of actors; field provides the context in which the material and symbolic dimensions of actions can be understood in a way that would not be possible if the meaning of actions and intentions were thought to belong to actors alone: the field not only shapes action but also provides a matrix for others’ interpretations of that action. Thus, “to think in terms of a field is to think relationally” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 96). In this way, fields allow the analysis of apparent consonance of collective action (e.g. similar curricular choices at numerous supplemental programs across China) without presupposing that they directly interact or are intentionally coordinated. By “break[ing] with [a] realist representation which leads us to reduce the effect of the environment to the effect of direct action as actualized during an interaction” (ibid.), I am able to investigate the extent to which goals, strategies, and values are shared (or not) as a product experiencing similar circumstances. This sheds light on the nature of that larger environment rather than primarily on the smaller context of some interaction (as ethnomethodology might emphasize). Finally, it is worth restating that fields are, as well, an “open concept.” Fields cannot be assumed to exist in a certain way, and, therefore, the concept “does not provide ready made answers...” but it “has to be rethought anew every time” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 102). That is, different fields have different logics, and different



‘rules of the game’ (e.g. practices appropriate for gaining others’ respect in the business world are not those useful for gaining the respect of others in the artistic field). It forces one to *raise* questions about the limits of the universes under investigation and how it is articulated. “Field offers a coherent system of recurrent questions that saves us from the theoretical vacuum of positivist empiricism and from the empirical void of theoreticist discourse” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 91). This exemplifies the conceptual-cum-theoretical framework that I use here in the sense that one of the main goals of this study is to answer what field, habitus, and capital actually entail for Amdo Tibetan educators and students rather than ‘applying’ operationalizations of these terms from elsewhere which would only produce an understanding of Tibetan educational practices on terms that are not their own. Rather, this ethnography does the opposite: by reopening questions of what constitutes capital and how educators perceive and respond to students’ habitus, I interrogate educators’ perspectives and practices by situating them in the fields that provide frames of reference and meaning. This is also consistent with my use of the Extended Case Method, in which I study micro-situations to ‘extend’ out to clarify the macro-forces that shape them.

Here I briefly introduce the concept of field before outlining two key components of fields that raise questions to be addressed in this chapter by explicating scholarship on the Tibetan and Chinese educational field(s). Most generally, a field may be “defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 97) in which the positions are “objectively defined,” that is, not merely a matter of subjective perception. Fields’ functions can be seen

in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, [which can be] agents or institutions, by [agents’ or institutions’] present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands

access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relation to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.). (ibid.)

Thus, fields can be understood through comparison to a game (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992).

Fields are sites of competition, or relatively “autonomous social microcosms<sup>18</sup>” between players (in the sense that not all fields/game ‘work’ the same way or need be directly ‘answerable’ to one another). Fields entail the strategic use of capital, both ‘master’ forms – which Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 97) call ‘trump cards’ that work in *any* field, namely economic, social, and cultural capital conceived broadly – as well as *field specific* capital that on some fundamental level must be convertible to other species of capital but not necessarily in a direct way. In other words, capital, to be capital, must be convertible, but the *logic* of a given field is not reducible to that of another (ibid.). What makes trump cards ‘master’ forms of capital is that “these species are valid, efficacious in all fields, they are the fundamental species of capital” (ibid). However, this is not to say that a given instantiation of capital is equally valuable everywhere or at every time, but rather, “their relative value is determined by each field and even by successive states of the same field” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 99), which Wu (2008) skillfully shows in charting the dynamic value of cultural capital during and after the Chinese Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). This serves to remind readers that *fields are dynamic* and what was recognized as valuable capital at one state of a field may not always be so.

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<sup>18</sup> Bourdieu adds here that this takes place in “highly differentiated” or “advanced capitalist” societies. In societies that are not highly differentiated, the idea of fields – which are by definition to some degree autonomous – seems to break down, as the central structure of the polity might have a hand in the (material or symbolic) engendered from any would-be field. However, this declaration seems to violate one of Bourdieu’s own axioms against ‘mid-range theories,’ which I take to mean theories that do not purport a universalism, which he says is the hallmark of any legitimate theory in physical or other science. Mid-range theories are something that social scientists must deny themselves, he says. So, one is left with the question: Does the existence of fields depend on an advanced capitalist, highly differentiated, “modern” society? If so, does this greatly reduce the utility of this concept because by predicating its value entirely on one’s ability to coherently theorize what constitutes a highly differentiated society from some other type?

Players compete in the field/game through employing strategies (not always understood as deliberate, conscious choices) inscribed in the habitus that, ideally, employ their possessed capital advantageously so as to gain both more capital and recognition/status and, if particularly successful, a sufficient amount of capital to facilitate taking positions (and therefore wielding an influence) in other fields, namely the meta-field of power, which exerts influence on all fields through determining their relative values, e.g. the extent to which cultural capital, such as an educational credential, is convertible to economic capital, such as a salary. Finally, fields are like games in that they exist only to the extent that the players concur in the belief of the existence of the game, its importance, and the value of its stakes – that is, their belief in *doxa*, to which “they grant a recognition that escapes questioning” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 68) These shared beliefs generate agents who are invested in the game and the profits it promises, what Bourdieu refers to earlier as an *interest*, but later as *illusio* (an investment in the game) or even *libido*, when he emphasizes the ways in which this interest emerges from the preconscious appreciations and dispositions of the habitus and is deeply embodied (Grenfell 2008). Fields and games exist because agents are compelled to play them and succeed in them, (but the extent to which fields can ‘impose’ goals on agents remains a question to be explored). One on hand, one cannot assume that agents are ‘free’ to choose their own goals, as *illusio* and *doxa* are precisely some of those externalities that are internalized in the habitus; on the other hand, to what degree does the development of secondary and tertiary habituses provide agents with a critical reflexivity that provides some measure of intention in choosing the games they play? To continue to use the analogy with sport as Bourdieu often does (along with gambling), *doxa* are beyond question in the same way that soccer players never ask: Why do we want to score goals? In pursuit of wins and ultimately trophies (i.e., the *illusio*) the notion of developing a strategy that does not lead to

scoring more goals than opponents is, in this field, unthinkable. Simply put: If one is asking such questions, they are no longer playing the same game as everyone else. These ‘rules of the game’ which might better be described as ‘regularities of the game’ are precisely those which are internalized, to a more or less effective degree, in agents’ habituses such that they are accepted as natural and indeed desirable. When Lareau (2011) speaks of familiarity with the “rules of the game” as being central to the success students produce in navigating institutional environments, she is speaking about the familiarity one has with the field, with its configurations and positions, with possible ‘position takings’ and how these might be understood and rewarded by others; it is a familiarity with what gets recognized as *valuable*.

Conversely, it is also important to note two ways in which fields are not like games. First, fields are not a “deliberate act of creation” or constructed through “an act of imposition.” That is, there is no ‘creator’, and they are almost never delimited by a “juridical frontier” such as the borders of a Chinese province, “even though they are always marked by more or less institutionalized ‘barriers to entry’” and indeed have a physical/spatial aspect (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 100). Second, fields exhibit regularities rather than rules, the latter of which are “explicit and codified” like a sport. Moreover, action in fields is undertaken in part to shift the configuration of the field itself to one that is more amenable to the species of capital one already possesses. There are no tactics or strategies one could develop within a soccer game, for example, that could shift the *rules* of the game (but, as is well known in both fields and games, one could play in such a way that the style or course of game developed into one that was better suited to the strengths one possessed). That is, at a fundamental level, at stake in any field is always the configuration of the field itself and, therefore, the capitals that agents in it recognize as valuable.

Ultimately, fields are a useful analytical concept in ethnographic research that aims not to capture the essence of specific interactions, such as ethnomethodology, but to reveal how social forces engender certain situations. Doing a “Bourdieuian ethnography” that attempts to include fields (which *is* necessary, after all) is, according to many, an impossible task because fields are not ethnographically *visible*; their contours emerge primarily through quantitative analysis (Correspondence Analysis being Bourdieu’s preferred method) that is able to show collective orientations and regularities among actors who never interact. Ethnographers, because they must *physically observe* something, cannot help but use *interactions* as the unit of observation. This appears to present an intractable problem: it seems that a field is not a type of ‘situation’ open to ethnographic analysis (Sallaz 2018); and, worse, Bourdieu explicitly cautioned against ethnography of fields (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 113), arguing that, despite his ‘kinship’ with ethnographers, the ‘up-close’ view that ethnography provides threatens to obscure the very advantage that the concept of field provides – an analysis of the coordination and co-orientation that actors evince without ever actually coming into contact. But there are, Sallaz (2018) suggests, ways to mitigate the invalidating dangers which have been dealt with explicitly in the methodology chapter. It suffices to say here, though, that the centrality of field analysis here is subordinated to a focus on capital and habitus, which are available to an ethnographer but nevertheless cannot be understood outside of its reference to fields.

However, does this mean that every attempt to probe perspectives on what is culturally and educationally valuable requires setting out the complete field as a precondition? Some, like Bourdieu, may very well argue that it does. But, for one, highly cited and influential research on cultural capital (e.g., DiMaggio 1978; Kingston 2001; Yosso 2005) *does not even mention the existence of fields*, never mind account for their dynamics exhaustively, so I cannot accept that a

full field analysis is a prerequisite for having something meaningful to say about capital or habitus. Nonetheless, and more significant in methodological terms (rather than in terms of the actual academic subfield of sociology of education), is my approach that recognizes, as Bourdieu himself suggests, fields are difficult if not ultimately impossible to fully define *per se* because they are in a constant state of flux; they *are* the game that different agents and institutions continually attempt to redefine and reconfigure. Therefore, this dissertation or this section should not be understood as an ethnography of a field; rather, it is an ethnography of a particular group of people that occupy a particular space within a field such that analysis of their perspectives on the field (in addition to background information on the field as is presented in the second half of this chapter) can reveal something about the specific field(s) in which they participate and about fields more generally. Bourdieu recognizes the potential value of this approach saying it is “knowledge of the field itself in which [participants] evolve that allows us best to grasp the roots of their singularity, their *point of view* or position (in a field) from which their particular vision of the world (and of the field itself) is constructed” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 107). For these reasons, it is clear that the Subquestions pertaining to field are the most general and the least dependent on newly collected empirical data. Ethnography is clearly better suited to probing habitus than field, so rather than trying to address these equally in a study that uses a methodology which is ultimately not able to address them equally, I do not attempt to ‘account for’ fields as the same degree as habitus and capital and, therefore, fields do not receive the same empirical attention. Nevertheless, I offer two Subquestions, which are answered through empirical and secondary data that clarify the environments that influence the relative values of capital and provide necessary context for this study.

*Component and Question 3A: What are boundaries and continuities between the Tibetan educational field and the Chinese educational field, as well as between these and the meta-field of power?*

The first question that using the concept of field in this (or any) research raises is this: What exactly is the field(s) under consideration? As mentioned above and explicated below, this is a crucial question because without addressing it, it is impossible to specify what constitutes (valuable) capital, because, as Bourdieu and Wacquant specify (1992, p. 91) “a capital does not function except in relation to a field.” In responding to principal questions about Amdo Tibetans’ cultural capital, it is necessary to address the field(s) in which it can be conceived.

One way to address this is by recalling the idea that the boundaries of a field lie at precisely the point where a certain instantiation of capital ceases to be valuable. This is to say that there is no “trans-historic laws of relations between fields” (ibid.) or substantive answer that can be given to the questions such as ‘what defines a field and where does it end’? While one can say that necessary components of fields are *doxa* and *illusio* shared among players, it is virtually impossible to identify these prior to actual empirical investigation in large part because fields cannot be *imposed*, even by the state, and fields are never delimited by straightforward juridical or administrative boundaries (ibid). Therefore, the boundaries of fields are fundamentally impossible to fully define because the boundaries of the field – i.e., what capital is to be recognized or not – are precisely the boundaries that those at the margins of the field struggle over in an attempt to have their capital recognized vis-à-vis others’ (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). Are knowledge of Tibetan proverbs, possession of black yak-hair tents, or graduation diplomas from a Buddhist monastic institute instantiations of cultural capital? The effort to get them recognized as valuable (e.g., as being respected, financially remunerated, seen as beneficial on

applications, etc.) is synonymous with the effort to enlarge or shift a field; resistance to recognizing these as valuable is synonymous with the effort to maintain or police the boundaries of the field. This is a way of articulating Lamont and Lareau's (1988) notion of 'exclusion' in a way that focuses on the nature of fields rather than on capital, which they do in their article. Clearly, those with more central, institutionally-embedded positions within the field engage in this struggle from comparatively advantageous positions, but the battle over the boundaries, even in the most authoritarian states says Bourdieu (1992, p. 110), is never decided once and for all.<sup>19</sup> Still, the those with dominant positions in the meta-field of power by dint of their possession of 'statist' capital wield an influence over all fields, which highlights two crucial points necessary to understand the ways in which this study probes participants' perspectives on the boundaries of fields. First is the relationship between different domains which could, on one hand, be considered (genuinely) autonomous fields or, on the other hand, be considered *sub*-fields or "stages of division" within a field. Bourdieu's example of this is the Literary field, which is then 'divided' into drama, poetry, etc., which are largely homologous insofar as their configurations regarding dominant and dominated positions resemble one another, though every subfield has its own "logics, rules, and regularities" and moving from one to another entails a "genuine qualitative leap" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992). That is, even subfields are not reducible to one another; they are to some meaningful degree autonomous. These considerations are important for analyzing how to understand the relationship between the Chinese educational field and the Amdo Tibetan educational field. To what degree do they sit 'side by side' as autonomous fields

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<sup>19</sup> This is so for two reasons, the second of which may sound like mere semantics. The first reason is that there will always be some in non-dominant positions, so even within an authoritarian state, there will be struggle over what gets included as legitimate capital/positions within a field; struggles over how to be the 'right kind of' Chinese citizen towards the end of the Cultural Revolution demonstrate this kind of phenomenon. The second reason is that, as discussed briefly below, if any struggles of the boundaries of the field truly cease, then there is no longer a field but an apparatus or a system – that is, a (social) mechanism that executes tasks rather than the generation of positions and logics.



in their own right? Or to what extent does the Amdo Tibetan educational field exist as nested within, as one (non-dominant) sub-division of, the Chinese educational field or a meso-level pan-Tibetan field? Or, are there *no* Tibetan educational fields at all, and the case is that Tibetans simply inhabit generally similar positions within the Chinese educational field? Again, these are not questions that can be definitively settled by any research, and certainly not by this ethnographic study. For example, if one were to consider Amdo Tibetan education as entirely subsumed within the educational field (of China), what sense then could someone make of Tibetan educators and authors working abroad, who are not beholden to Chinese norms but still exert a significant impact on what Tibetan educators in China think and do? His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, of course, represents a quintessential example of someone who could be understood to be occupying a dominant position in the field of Tibetan education but would likely not even be considered part of the field of Chinese education by any reasonable measure. The exact nature of an Amdo Tibetan educational field – if it exists as an autonomous field at all – and its relationship to the Chinese educational field is ultimately impossible to settle because “Every field constitutes a potentially open space of play whose boundaries are dynamic borders which are the stake of struggle within the field itself” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 104), but Bourdieu’s concepts provide a framework for probing how participants see these domains interacting. It also provides another framing that potentially clarifies that claims contemporary Tibetans attempt to make on the Chinese state or, in some cases, in the UN or other trans- or international venues. Perhaps one dimension of the “autonomy” Tibetans both inside and outside China make claims for is the autonomy of fields of cultural production, rather than for political independence which is, according to most, not currently in the realm of possibility (Sautman 1999). Indeed, this often appears to be the case, as critique and resistance to Chinese educational

policy and practice in Tibet often is framed by the question of who holds the power to determine what is rewarded as valuable within Tibetan schools (Gyamtzen 2010).

What, then, governs and provides a logic for understanding the relationship between fields? In a word, the meta-field of power. The concentration of a variety of different forms of power (economic, military, juridical, etc.) in the state goes “hand in hand” with the rise and consolidation of the various corresponding fields. Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 114-115) explain:

The result of this process is the emergence of a specific capital, properly *statist capital*, born of their cumulation, which allows the state to wield a power over the different fields and over the various forms of capital that circulate in them. This kind of *meta-capital* capable of exercising a power over other species of power, and particularly over the rate of exchange (and thereby over the balance of power between their respective holders), defines the specific power of the state. It follows that the construction of the state goes hand in hand with the constitution of the field of power understood as the space of play in which holders of various forms of capital struggle in particular for power over the state; that is, over the statist capital that grants power over the different species of capital and over their reproduction (via the school system in particular)

Key to understanding this extended description of what constitutes the meta-field of power and the state’s role in it is that it is the state (rather than a “ruling class”) that possess the power to ‘set exchange rates’ between different forms of capital. This process may be done directly (e.g., through requiring certain educational credentials to enter employment tracks) or indirectly (e.g., through providing funding for certain types of projects rather than others). Rather than conceiving of the dominant positions as a ruling class whose membership is closed, the state is a field itself, although one whose occupants possess incomparably more capital than those in other, smaller fields or subfields. Bourdieu highlights that even the meta-field is characterized by conflict, position-taking, and struggles over which species of capital are to be recognized as valuable and influential. Therefore, while the state, dominant in the meta-field as it is, exerts a virtual monopoly over legitimate power, it is not as if there are not struggles with or within the

state over this “division of the work of domination” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 115). That these struggles exist even in the most dominant sections of society, though they may be completely inaccessible to many, is what differentiates Bourdieu’s fields from “systems” or an “apparatus” that has a determinate function which executes a task rather than constituting a terrain on which struggles are waged over many things, including *which* tasks should be prioritized. Indeed, the state, and those in power, often work hard to depict the field as a mere apparatus because “the appearance of an apparatus, in fact, conceals a field of struggles in which the holder of “absolute power” himself must participate” (Bourdieu 1981, p. 307). But, as is obvious *even within* the dominant portion of the Chinese field of education, which occupies an increasingly dominant place in the meta-field of power in China (Zhao 2014) there is no consensus on which knowledge is valuable, which credentials count for what, or – to put it categorically – which instantiations of cultural capital are most valuable.

To summarize, fields are essential to a study of how cultural capital is acquired and used because “the strategies of agents depend on their position in the field, that is, in the distribution of the specific capital and on the perception that they have of the field, depending on the point of view they take *on* the field as a view taken from a point *in* the field.” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, p. 101). Though I do not attempt to conduct a ‘field analysis’ which could only be undertaken using quantitative methods, I base later analysis on participants’ “perception[s] that they have of the field” and this chapter’s analysis of this question is answered using a topical literature review for the second half of this chapter. The question to respond to is: What are the boundaries and continuities between the Tibetan educational field and the Chinese educational field, as well as between these and the meta-field of power?

*Component and Question 3B: What kinds of investments in the educational field are Amdo Tibetan students encouraged to make?*

If fields are analogous to a game, as described above, *illusio* can be understood as the investment in a game, the “fundamental belief in the interest of the game and the value of the stakes” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 11). That is, “each field is characterized by the pursuit of a specific goal” and taking part in the *illusio* that orients a given field means “taking seriously...[the] stakes which, aris[e] from the logic of the game itself” (ibid). The *illusio*, the interests, the “libido” that informs strategies and motivates actors out of ‘tranquility and indifference’ is best conceived of as deeply rooted in the habitus, in the sense that it “does not belong to the order of explicit principles, theses that are put forward and defended, but of action, routine” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 102). This investment, because it is generated from a shared belief in the game and its stakes, usually “carries on without crises or conflicts,” which is to say that even debates between orthodox and heterodox are still predicated on the same shared underlying beliefs (*doxa*) about the existence of the game. However, “this does not mean” that investments in the game are made “without psychological or physical suffering, which is part of the conditions of development of the *illusio*” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 165). This draws attention to the processes of *illusio* (re)production – the work, often pedagogical, that *is* the investment in a game and the inculcation of these investments by others, namely educators, in an attempt to compel students to make the *right kinds* of investments. This second component focuses on the game that participants perceive themselves as playing and their practices for making and realizing investments in the game, drawing my attention to the physical labor as well as the discursive or ideological formations that indicate educators’ and students’ investment in certain strategies oriented towards certain goals.

Closely related to *illusio*, i.e. the investment in the game and its stakes is *doxa*, the “belief in the [existence of the] game and its stakes” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 98), a belief in the existence of the game and its ‘rules’, such that it rarely appears as a *game* but, rather, is taken for granted as the natural order of things. *Doxa*, then, are the “set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma” in part because an acceptance of the “inseparably cognitive *and* evaluative presuppositions” is “implied in membership” to the field itself (Bourdieu 2000, p. 100, emphasis mine). To be exact, *doxa* are not only (largely unconscious) beliefs or assumptions about the ‘way things work’ in a given field, but they are judgements and evaluations of the way things work – that it is *good* to go to school and get a “quality education” as defined by some state, a conviction that in the contemporary world is ubiquitous and growing, according to Baker (2014). *Doxa*, therefore, lie beneath heterodoxy and orthodoxy and are, instead, the grounds on which these positions engage. Those in a field, “whether champions of orthodoxy or heterodoxy, share a tacit adherence to the same *doxa* which makes their competition possible and assigns its limits. It effectively forbids questions of the principles of belief, which would threaten the very existence of the field” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 110).

However, one must also notice that, despite the diversity of hometowns, social classes, languages, and ‘cultures’ across Tibet or even China (or the globe) there is, as neoinstitutionalists note, a surprising degree of consensus (Meyer et al. 1997), of *collusion* (i.e., *co-illusio*) between participants in fields in both propping up the field (i.e., instilling it with value, a worthwhileness) and generating strategies for succeeding in it. Though strategies for success certainly include making choices that subsequently distinguish oneself from a competitor, there is rarely an outright search for distinction (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992); rather, strategies in a given field are

‘coordinated’, though not explicitly or intentionally, by virtue of their grounding in an *illusio* and in *doxa* that are shared. “It is because of the *illusio*, which constitutes the field as the space of a game, that thoughts and actions can be affected and modified without any physical contact or even any symbolic interaction, in particular in and through the relationship of comprehension” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 135). Conceptualizing action coordinated across distant spaces (not just places) as shared investment in a certain game, and a ‘way of being’ of competing in that game, sheds light on the nature of that game and the goals that characterize participation in it.

The reason for querying *illusio* and *doxa* through examining “the interventions of professional practitioners” themselves who might be best positioned to challenge, or at least *reveal* the “silent self-evidence of *doxa*” (in this case, what constitutes a valuable education) is that is it the very “*transfer of cultural capital* which enables the dominated to achieve a collective mobilization and subversive action against the established order” (Bourdieu 2000, p. 188, emphasis in original). Thus, in addition to a depiction of the field offered in this chapter, educators’ actions and strategies for navigating the field will be explored in future chapters. By examining the process by which (dominant) cultural capital is transposed into non-dominant species (or, better: to those whose dispositions [i.e. habitus] predispose them to using cultural capital in ways not so clearly aligned with logics dominant in the Chinese educational field) it will make explicit the generally taken-for-granted nature of the game and the approaches to playing it. This sheds light on not only the micro-processes that characterize that work of *sabjong* educators, but also provides a framework for understand how these data bear on classic neoinstitutional claims, such as those describing the “surprisingly consensual” adoption of educational norms across the globe (Meyer et al. 1997). To put this in the form of a question that also queries the claims of Bourdieu’s framework itself: Does an apparent alignment of

(educational) strategies (across national and even global scales) necessarily indicate that participants see themselves as invested in the same game?

In order to understand what constitutes valuable capital in Tibetan educational contexts, it is necessary to understand the participants' beliefs about the nature of the game, its stakes, and the ways they make strategic investments in the game. This immediately raises another question: Do participants see themselves as playing in only *one* game, or do they envision themselves as invested in multiple games that they must try to navigate simultaneously (and with a single body, inscribed, as it is, with a habitus shaped by potentially multiple and competing fields). So keeping in mind that there may be multiple games, I raise the second Subquestion: What kinds of investments are students encouraged to make in their education (and which parties emphasize which kinds of investments)? What do they see as the stakes of these investments? Again, the present chapter addresses these questions of field largely through using data collected by others to survey historical and contemporary forms of education in this region. Where possible in the empirical chapters, these questions are addressed to reveal educators' perspectives on the nature and contours of the field(s) they assist students to navigate.

As an integral component of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, fields cannot be ignored in research that interrogates what constitutes cultural capital and how it is acquired. Perhaps one reason that analysis – or even mention – of fields has been surprisingly absent in studies of cultural capital is that analysis of field(s) requires significantly different methodological tools than are available to the ethnographer. This study attempts to rectify this in two ways: first, through providing a historical survey of key characteristics, dynamics, and conditions that constitute the fields under consideration, and, second, through analyzing, where possible, educators' perspectives on how they experience the field and develop strategies for

succeeding in that. This second task is included alongside ethnographic analysis in subsequent chapters. In presenting the objective conditions that characterize the field(s) of Chinese and Tibetan education in the remainder of this chapter, I also provide details on why this situation constitutes a crucial case to investigate if scholars are to understand the implications of the Education Revolution (Baker 2014) and the significance of an unprecedented proliferation of educational institutions and the logics that guide them and, consequently, society.

### *The Educational Field in Amdo Tibetan Areas*

The People's Republic of China (henceforth, China<sup>20</sup>) is an ideal national context in which to study educational expansion for many reasons, especially those related to its unparalleled growth in enrollments, literacy, and the prevalence of 'high-stakes' testing which has spurred a significant supplemental schooling industry (Vickers & Zeng 2017). Even more important, however, is that while education policy in China has bypassed some Education Revolution scripts (Carney et al. 2012), such as those that emphasize the importance of schooling for participating in democratic institutions and polities, China has fully embraced others, such as the prioritization of formal education as the means for achieving human potential and the most legitimate method of allocating opportunities and resources in society (Wang 2010). Moreover, the expansion of the education system, and related development campaigns such as 'Develop [China's] West' (*Xibudakaifa*), to non-Han Chinese populations is used by China to legitimize its

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<sup>20</sup> It must be noted that the legitimacy of the state of People's Republic of China to administer the territories currently under its control has been challenged on numerous occasions, perhaps most significantly by the Republic of China (Taiwan). So it is with some hesitance that I employ the term "China" as unproblematically synonymous with the People's Republic of China, even if this is common practice in the contemporary era. However, because the Republic of China (Taiwan) no longer makes explicit claims to be the legitimate authority over the entirety of "China," and because the state as well as the vast majority of the country's citizens seem to prefer to refer to their country by its more common name, Taiwan, and indeed generally refer to the People's Republic of China simply as "China" in English, I believe I am provisionally justified in using the term China to refer exclusively to the People's Republic of China.



claim to sovereignty because it ostensibly renders China more isomorphic with nation-states prominent in the world system (Meyer et al. 1997; Yeh 2013). However, the state's growing capacity to assimilate diverse peoples into a national society organized by formal education has resulted in a "total social phenomenon" (Mauss 1967) in which schooling shapes nearly all aspects of life in China and becomes increasingly difficult to resist (Kipnis 2011; Ong & Han 2010). Peoples in China have intermittently resisted the expansion of policies and institutions intended to assimilate populations into national frameworks (Fischer 2013; Bass 1998); such resistance, however, is increasingly quashed or seen as self-defeating insofar as embracing national education norms is necessary for individuals' socio-economic and political security (Hillman & Tuttle 2016).

Of the diverse efforts devised to navigate potentially detrimental education developments, Amdo Tibetan supplemental programs are vital to understand because, since Tibet's 12th century renaissance, Tibetan efforts to organize society and conceptualize a worthwhile life have been deeply shaped by educational values (Kapstein 2006). Long before the emergence of public schooling in what is now China, Tibetans had already elaborated a formal education system that was central to both Tibetan state-making and human development (Bass 1998; Samuels 1998), though oriented towards methods and purposes different from both world culture scripts of the Education Revolution described by neoinstitutionalists (Baker 2014) and the current Chinese state's vision of educational and national development (Tsang 2000). Furthermore, the expansiveness and rurality of the Tibetan Plateau has informed the development of monastic networks and the infrastructures that connect students and teachers within and beyond designated learning spaces (Dreyfus 2003): students have been seeking additional teachings, outside of normal periods of instruction, from more or less institutionally based teachers for centuries in

Tibet (Jinpa 2019). While these networks and cultural patterns were damaged by the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 and subsequent upheavals, the practice of seeking additional instruction – and its widespread approbation – has remained even as students have begun to pursue a diverse set of instrumental and academic goals in addition to more 'traditional' goals of learning Tibetan Buddhist scriptures or history. Thus, social, psychological, and sometimes even physical infrastructures, such as monasteries, for organizing and delivering lessons to students outside designated learning spaces predates the existence of compulsory schooling in Tibet by at least several centuries (Dreyfus 2003). A case study at an Amdo Tibetan supplemental program can therefore complicate assumptions, made by both proponents of the Education Revolution as well as Chinese state policies (albeit from different angles, cf. Baker 2014 and Li et al. 1997) that formal schooling expanded into societies, like Tibet, that were putatively devoid of educational institutions and people who recognized their value for individuals or society. In shedding ethnographic light on current questions, such as the factors that influence parents' choices of supplemental education (e.g., Kwok 2004) or the cultural factors that facilitate or inhibit participation (e.g., Kim and Jung 2019), this paper contributes to neoinstitutional theorization of the cultural – rather than just instrumental – significance of educational expansion in to the "shadow" sector.

Juxtaposing the magnitude of the Chinese government's claims regarding their 'educational miracle' – among them, raising literacy from 20% to 99% in 60 years – with the widespread domestic and international criticism of the Chinese education system (Zhao 2014) often makes research on education in China a "study in contradiction," as the highly touted educational miracle remains an elusive ideal for many (Wu 2016, p. xi). Those likely to be excluded from the benefits of China's rapid development come disproportionately from China's

western regions, where people belonging to one of the so-called “fifty-five minority nationalities of China” are far more likely to live (Fischer 2013). Not only has uneven economic development and eastern-oriented schooling policy hindered access to high-quality education for students living in the more rural western regions, the ideologies, policies, and methods that inform the highly standardized Chinese national curriculum have often been resisted and reinterpreted by members of ethnic groups, like Tibetans, that do not necessarily share the Chinese Communist Party’s vision of national development (Zenz 2014).

Within China, Amdo Tibetan cases are particularly important to understand because it represents one of the very few instances in which an ‘ethnic minority’ had a highly elaborated and institutionalized system of formal education in place prior to Chinese incursions: the structure of Tibetan society of the past several centuries is largely a product of their own educational institutions (that exist within but are not synonymous with monasteries) and, more broadly, the massive turn to formal education that accompanied the institutionalization of Buddhism beginning 2500 years ago (Dreyfus 2003; Kapstein 2002). With highly codified pedagogies and intellectual disciplines, Tibetans have long prioritized the cultural meanings associated with scholarly accomplishment legitimated through formal academic degrees (Dreyfus 2008). Tibetans since their 12<sup>th</sup> century renaissance (Davidson 2009) had not only prioritized the cultural meanings associated with intellectual accomplishment, but did so largely through legitimizing academic processes based on their isomorphic relationship to structural forms in (then Buddhist hegemon) India (Cabezon 1981). The ‘schooled society’ that emerged on the Tibetan plateau and was religio-politically instituted through the Ganden Phodrang government and the hegemony of the Gelug order was in many ways an Education Revolution (Yamamoto 2009; Upton 1999), but one that was oriented towards meanings and purposes

fundamentally different than both the world culture scripts of the Education Revolution described by neoinstitutionalists (Meyer et al. 1997; Baker 2014) *and* the current Chinese nation-state's perspective on the role in education and national development (Vickers and Zeng 2017). By imagining the history of Tibet as one of *competing* Education Revolutions, one can better analyze how the current Revolution described by Meyer and Baker might, in fact, be fully laden with cultural frameworks that facilitate the domination of some peoples by others, rather than the putatively anodyne process connoted by "world culture." Though few could argue that the Tibetan embrace of formal education and Gelug hegemony over the past four centuries had been a "surprisingly consensual" or nonviolent process, one significant difference between the former and current Revolutions is the existence of China as a nation-state. So how did the existence of a nation-state mediate the Education Revolution in China?

Since the founding of the PRC in 1949 and the subsequent invasion and annexation of Tibetan regions during the 1950s, the educational policies of the Chinese state have oscillated between two foci – economic development and national integration – but they have generally followed centrally mandated Han Chinese models of socialization and organization irrespective of whether 'quality education for the elite' or 'nation-building education for the masses' has been prioritized (Bass 1998). One consequence of such centrally controlled and politically motivated education policies has been that minoritized ethnic groups in China, especially those with long-standing political, social, linguistic, and educational traditions distinct from those of the Han Chinese, like Tibetans, have often resisted educational reforms, such as laws instituting nine years of compulsory schooling (Postiglione et al. 2006). As educational institutions in China become evermore robust and high-stakes standardized tests remain the gatekeeper to virtually all forms of higher education and career employment (especially in 'autonomous' minority areas,

see Fischer 2013) sheer resistance to schooling is becoming synonymous with economic and political exclusion, not simply regarding the skills missed if one discontinues school but the all-important credential a diploma represents in such a highly-regulated employment structure (Fischer & Zenz 2018). Nevertheless, “considerable faith remains placed in education as *the* tool for social mobility” even if school is still sometimes seen as a site for socialization into important rituals and ceremonies rather than strictly for the development of human capital (Carney et al. 2008, p. 46; Cheng 2001).

In response to (or to forestall) some of these tensions, the Nationalities Public Education system was established during the 1950s alongside the mainstream Chinese Public Education system, giving minority students the option to enroll in *putgonhua* Chinese-only schools or Nationalities schools, which offer curriculum on or through students’ native language if not *putonghua* Chinese (Clothey 2005). The system remains in place today, with the ostensible purpose of offering the largest of the 55 ethnic minority groups of China access to schooling in their own languages and environments, though the use of the Tibetan language as an instructional medium in all subjects is not guaranteed and village schools are with increasing frequency consolidated into larger boarding schools in more urban (i.e. more Han) areas (Nima, 2008; Wright, forthcoming). The Nationalities schools range from first grade through higher education, but because there are only 12 Nationalities universities across the country (six of which offer coursework in Tibetan<sup>21</sup>), they maintain extremely selective admissions rates and significant popularity despite the many criticisms they face from all sides.

A few terms must be clarified briefly at this point. First is the notion of *minzu*, which is generally translated into English as “nationality” though previously the term “ethnicity” had been

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<sup>21</sup> Several other colleges and universities than these also offer coursework in Tibetan. They are usually Min-Kao-Han schools (i.e. Han Chinese track) in areas with large Tibetan populations. They can range from large universities like Qinghai Normal University in Xining to smaller vocational institutes in prefecture-level cities.

used widely (Ma 2018). However, some scholars (e.g., Harrell 1990) suggest not translating the term at all, as the Chinese notion of *minzu*, or its translation into Tibetan as *mi rigs*, have connotations and denotations that do not fit either of the English terms. *Mi rigs*, the Tibetan term, has been used for centuries to denote different kinds (*rigs*) of people (*mi*), such as those of different castes in India. I generally follow the practice of not translating the term whenever possible. However, today *mi rigs* is used more or less synonymously with the term *minzu* in most discourse and, indeed, Amdo Tibetans in my study often refer to themselves as a *mi rigs*, following the official designation. However, the term *bod rigs*, in the sense of Tibetan people, which, as some scholars (Gyal et al. 1992; Moskaleva 2016; Hartley 2005) show predates the use of “*minzu*” discourse and the founding of the People’s Republic of China. As such, it is generally meant to indicate Tibetans as a people, rather than as one of the officially designated 56 *minzu* of China. It is also important to note that over the past 70 years, far more than 55 groups have applied for an official minority nationality designation, though the vast majority of the roughly 500 applications have been rejected (Yang 2009). The key criteria for determining a separate *minzu*, based on norms developed by Stalin during the era of Soviet state-making that focus on “common language, common territory, common economic life, and common psychological dispositions” (Wu 1990, p. 2; Gros 2004), clearly a set of criteria that may not be able to organize the complexity of ethnicity in China. More on the theorization of this term, and on the degree to which it is synonymous with the term ‘race’ more popular in the sociology of education, is taken up in Chapter 9.

Of the 56 official *minzu* of China, 55 are considered ‘minority nationalities’ (i.e. *shaoshu minzu* in Chinese, *grangs nyung mi rigs* in Tibetan – literally: “numerical minority”). Han Chinese, which make up roughly 92% of the population of China are the majority nationality;

however, the term *minzu* not generally used to refer to Han Chinese people. For example, if someone simply says the term “*Minzu* university,” as many interlocutors did, one could safely assume they are talking about a *Minority* Nationality university. Regarding the use of the term “minority” it is necessary to state that this is the official term used by the Chinese state and, therefore, it will feature extensively throughout this study. However, it should be understood that when I use this term, irrespective of whether it is enclosed in quotation marks or not, I am using the state’s formulation of this concept. On the other hand, when I am speaking on my own behalf, I use the term “minoritized” peoples. Not only does this help distinguish my perspective from that of the Chinese state, but the term minoritized, as Michael Apple (2009; 2012) suggests, indicates a process rather than a static, and therefore permanent, state. By describing dynamics rather than identities, this study aims to historicize the processes whereby many Tibetans have become “minorities” in their homelands and sketch how this process works, rather than merely state the existence of dominant and dominated groups. Geopolitically, over half the land area of the country is designated as an autonomous zone to be administered by the *minzu* whose homeland it comprises (Yi 2008).

Autonomous zones exist on several levels: largest are Autonomous Regions, comparable in size and administrative level to provinces of China, such as the Tibet Autonomous Region and Xinjiang Autonomous Region. The Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR) is roughly coterminous with the Tibetan region (*chol kha*) traditionally known as U-Tsang (i.e. “Central Tibet”) and is quite different and distant from the Amdo Tibetan areas in which the present study was undertaken to the northeast of the Plateau . Next largest are Autonomous Prefectures, which can exist inside of non-autonomous regions. Guchu Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, the principal location of this study, is located in the northeastern section of the ‘regular’ Chinese Province of

Qinghai. And, finally, even within non-designated Prefectures, there can be Autonomous Counties, such as Xunhua Salar Autonomous County, which is in Haidong Prefecture of Qinghai Province or Huari Autonomous County in Gansu, where one participant currently working in Xining comes from. As the title makes clear, Xunhua is designated as an autonomous county of the Salar *minzu*, rather than Tibetan, though many Tibetans live in these areas where languages, cultures, and economies have interacted for centuries (Huber 2002).

According to the 1984 Law on Regional Ethnic Autonomy, minority *minzu* living in designated minority *minzu* zones of China, maintain the right to use their native languages in primary and secondary education if other than *putonghua* Chinese or the ‘common language’ (Clothey 2005; Zenz 2013). Whether or not schools across these regions indeed offer such a curriculum remains a question of both national *minzu* policy interpretation *and* implementation. In many cases, for example, particularly in the TAR, curriculum delivered primarily in Tibetan language is simply not offered at many schools (Bass 2008). Though official statistics on politically sensitive issues such as the language medium of instruction in *minzu* schools are sometimes extraordinarily difficult to procure, literature review and interview data suggest that Tibetan-language schooling is often easier for students to access *outside* of the Tibetan Autonomous Region than within it. Indeed, as subsequent chapters show, some students from different areas of the Tibetan Plateau came to Guchu Prefecture in Qinghai *because* it was one of the best places to study Tibetan language, either inside or outside of the monastery. However, similar dynamics pertain in Amdo Tibet as well, where even at *minzu* Nationalities schools, students sometimes have no choice but to take their courses in *putonghua* Chinese.

Officially, there are two “Models” of bilingual education (Gyeltsen 2012), named simply “Model One” and “Model Two” though in reality they represent ideal types rather than



descriptions of practices. Model One refers to a bilingual education that is offered entirely in the ‘native’ language of the minority *minzu*<sup>22</sup> except for Chinese language class and English language class (which is almost universally taught using standardized textbooks that teach English through Chinese). Model Two refers to the inverse; the entire curriculum is delivered in Chinese except for the minority *minzu* language class, which is taught directly in that language. While some schools that employ Model One or Two as described in official policy indeed exist, my seven years’ experience as a high school teacher and researcher in Amdo Tibet suggest that many schools fall somewhere along the spectrum between these two ideal types, often with no explicit reason for the school’s particular adaptation of these Models. The most commonly given answer to why a school designated as Model One might not teach all of their subjects in Tibetan was that there were insufficient numbers of qualified teachers of these subjects in Tibetan. Very many community members and scholars, however, believe there are more sinister motives at work and the state is actively engaged in a process of minoritizing and devaluing languages other than *putonghua* Chinese (Gyeltsen 2012; Roche & Tsomu 2018; Tournadre 2003), a threat that has prompted public demonstrations, the most recent major protests occurring in 2010 and 2011. Nevertheless, many schools in Guchu Prefecture operate somewhere between the two models, usually as a product of policy shifts and available teachers. Field research and experience indicate that it is common for Tibetan students in Guchu Prefecture to take some classes in Chinese and some in Tibetan and, in general, it is more likely that Science Track (*rtsis tshan Ch. li ke*) classes will be taught in Chinese compared to Humanities Track (*rig tshan Ch. wen ke*). At

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<sup>22</sup> It is necessary to note, however, that many members of minority *minzu* do not have that *minzu*’s ‘officially designated language’ as their first language. Some people who are identified by the state as a member of a minority *minzu*, or who identify themselves as members of minority *minzu*, have *putonghua* Chinese as their first language, but many also speak as their mother tongue languages that are neither Chinese *nor* their officially designated *minzu* language (Roche 2019). To my knowledge, state-supported schools in these doubly-minoritized languages do not exist and speakers of these languages face a number of very challenging obstacles, which cannot be sufficiently explored in this study.

least some interlocutors viewed this division as reasonable insofar as the technical terms of modern sciences are newer introductions into Tibetan and the terms may not be widely used or understood anyway, whereas Chinese terms used in the sciences have much greater applicability across China.

One principal consequence of language tracks is how they impact students' strategies for tackling the *gaokao*, which any explication of the forces faced by students in China must address. The National College Entrance Exam (Ch. *gaokao*, Tib. *mtho rgyugs*) is the notorious test administered to nearly ten million students each year and has been the topic of endless commentary and serves as the sole criterion determining applicants' admission to tertiary education prior to and during the period of field work. A brief review of this process is necessary. First, during the second year of senior middle school (Ch. *gao-zhong*, Tib. *mtho 'bring*), which is roughly equivalent to the three final years of senior high school in the United States, students must choose to pursue either the Sciences or Humanities track and changing the initial selection is difficult for the remainder of their academic and professional careers. From that point forward, students take a decreased number of courses in the other track, although politics (Ch. *zhengzhi xue*, Tib. *chab srid*) classes are still required for all students. Second, Tibetan students in Qinghai and some, but not all, other Tibetan areas have the option to take the *gaokao* in Chinese or Tibetan, irrespective of their choice of focus (Sciences or Humanities) and irrespective of the language-medium through which they learned the subject in school. Moreover, students can choose testing languages individually, meaning that they can, for example, take their Geography test in Chinese and their Math test in Tibetan (though the inverse is probably more common). All Tibetan students who went to a Nationalities middle school, irrespective of the Model they experienced in senior middle school, will take three language tests as part of their battery of

*gaokao* tests, which takes place in early June: Chinese, Tibetan, and English. Third, upon receipt of their scores in late June, students temper their initial ambitions for university attendance with the scores they receive. As of the final day of this study, it was still the case that students could only apply to three universities and their *gaokao* scores served as the sole criterion of admission. However, there is discussion that these procedures may be changing, though even if they do, changes may first be implemented elsewhere before in Qinghai. Each spring, the state distributes to each homeroom of roughly 40 students multiple copies of the College Entrance Information Book. This several-hundred-page volume in Chinese includes brief summaries of each university, as well as the number of openings in each major they have available to students. The number of openings in each major, which students must indicate at the time of application, are different for students from different provinces (e.g., Peking University may have in the Geography major 8 spots for students from Qinghai but 20 openings for students from Gansu Province). The book also lists the minimum score they will accept for admission into their various programs.

As part of an ‘affirmative action’ policy outlined in the 1984 Laws on Regional Autonomy aimed to close achievement gaps and other inequalities, Tibetan students, and those of other minority *minzu*, receive ‘bonus’ points added to their score in an effort to assuage the extra obstacles they have faced during their years of schooling, a policy that not all scholars or citizens of China appreciate, saying that it only encourages inter-ethnic political distrust and conflict that erodes the stability and unity of China (Ma 2018). Critics, popular and scholarly, point out that there are many impoverished Han Chinese communities across the country that do not receive the same bonus points simply because they are Han Chinese. As one might expect, these bonus points are not as effective in securing admission to *minzu* universities, where the vast

majority of applications are themselves from minority *minzu* and therefore all receive points (though not necessarily the exact same amount).

There are two types of universities that students in China can decide between, *min-kao-han*, which are by far the more numerous, and *min-kao-min*, of which there are about twelve (although some *min-kao-han* universities have *minzu* programs or colleges within them). *Min-kao-han*, or, “Minzu-Person-to-Han-Chinese” Track means that students’ university curriculum will be delivered almost exclusively in Chinese (other than foreign language classes like English or Japanese), whereas *min-kao-min* or “Minzu-to-Minzu” track students will have the opportunity to take at least some of the university courses in Tibetan, as well as have more opportunity to study Tibetan topics. If minority *minzu* students apply to *min-kao-han* universities, they get 35 points added to their aggregate *gaokao* score which, at the time of this study, totals 600 total possible points. Finally, minority *minzu* students applying to *min-kao-min* universities do not count their English language scores on the *gaokao* – only Chinese and Tibetan languages are counted. Those minority *minzu* applying to *min-kao-han* programs do not count their Tibetan scores; only their English and Chinese scores are counted. In either case, however, a minimum number of English courses and proficiency is required to graduate from any university and enroll in any graduate studies program. Students that do not score high enough on the *gaokao* to gain admission to a four-year (*ben ke*) university program they want to attend have a few options available. First, they can elect simply to repeat their final year of high school, either at the same school or a different one. During my seven years of teaching and research in Guchu, I saw a few students do this each year – some of whom had scored well enough on the *gaokao* to attend *some* university but not the program of their choice. A second choice available to Tibetan and other minority *minzu* students is to take a *yu ke*, or preparatory year, at the University to which they

were admitted (although with the lower *yu ke* minimum score). This entails one year of preparatory work, usually focusing on *putonghua* Chinese language, after which students will be admitted to their initially intended program if they pass the requisite exams. Comparatively more students, especially those who are very committed to studying in a certain major at a particular university, enroll in this program than elect to repeat their final year of secondary school. Among the participants in my study, more than a dozen had taken *yu ke* years at Qinghai Nationalities University with the express purpose of enrolling in a Tibetan-specific program there, even though their scores would have qualified them to receive admission directly into a bachelor's program at numerous *min-kao-han* university programs across China. Finally, and perhaps most commonly, students whose scores do not qualify them for admission to a university program elect to enroll in one of numerous college vocational programs (*zhuan ke* or *da zhuan*) that typically last three years. It is possible to attend a vocational program and then continue on to graduate school, but because graduate school requires extensive examinations, it is uncommon for students to go directly from a non-academic vocational setting to graduate school.

Unsurprisingly, there are many supplemental education programs across China organized to assist university and vocational graduates in preparing for graduate exams. Whether this nationally standardized process predisposes to structural violence those whose languages, cultures, and epistemologies have been marginalized by national projects and policies is a fundamental question that provides the overarching context of this study and extensive research in general (Bangsbo 2008).

Much of the literature responding to this question falls into two polemicized camps related to geopolitical context and the data available therein. Literature published in China, though it may no longer be characterized by the outright denigration of Tibetan culture (e.g., Li et al. 1997;

Zeng 1997; Zhou 1997), generally approaches educational issues from the Socialist Nation-Building perspective implemented by Mao, or from the Developmentalist ideology popularized by Deng Xiaoping's (1904-1997) subsequent administration (Bass 1998). The prevailing emphasis within China oscillates in relation to political stability. But both these emphases differ markedly from the opposition, mostly published outside of China, which generally focuses on the ways highly centralized curricula and policies might endanger Tibetan language and culture (Dolma 2014). Rights activists, researchers trained in Western universities, the Tibetan diaspora community, a small but growing number of Tibetans and Chinese writing in China, and much global mass media comprise this domain – though the boundaries between camps are becoming more permeable. But even as researchers have begun to apply less politically divisive frameworks, many see it as nearly impossible to easily disentangle state education policy and practice from ethnicity-specific values because schooling plays such a central role in the legitimation of knowledge, the conferral of status, and the affirmation or negation of identity.

Attempting to eschew these entrenched ideologies for practical and potentially ideological reasons, many Tibetans students themselves conceptualize the education-employment nexus as a primary arena in which “Tibetanness” is challenged, expressed, and reimagined (Zenz 2014). Questions of schooling – where to attend, which language track to pursue, what to major in – are for Tibetans increasingly seen as the playing field on which they confront the prospects of assimilation and exclusion, development and backwardness (Fischer & Zenz 2018). And because economic and geographical mobility are so tightly correlated with educational credentials and the concomitant exams that control entry into virtually all stable and lucrative career paths in politically sensitive areas of China (Grant 2022), “ethnic theories of making it,” as Ogbu (1991) puts it, have become both more closely related to educational attainment and often less ethnically

essentialized (some of my participants, for example, are both Chinese Communist Party members and insist on attending Minzu Universities). For these reasons – national ethnic integration, educational equity, and economic opportunity – virtually all parties agree that closing the so-called “minority achievement gap” is imperative (Ma 2011). But what is meant exactly by the “minority achievement gap?”

Catriona Bass’ 1998 study “Education in Tibet” throws this question of minority status into relief: as exhaustive as this monograph is for understanding the Tibetan Autonomous Region, it doesn’t necessarily provide a much deeper understanding of educational issues Tibetans confront in other provinces in China, which is where more than half the Tibetans in China live. Much scholarship is hampered by failing to recognize the diversity that exists on the Tibetan Plateau. For example, the dialects of Tibetan vary greatly from place to place – and therefore a teacher from Amdo but placed in Yushul might not be able to communicate with her Kham-speaking students from Yushul in Tibetan despite both of them being Tibetans from Qinghai Province. But there also exist numerous language-cultures rather linguistically unrelated to Tibetan altogether, such as the Monguor from Guchu Prefecture (the site of this research), who must become quadrilingual (mother-tongue, Tibetan, Chinese, English) if they want to graduate from a Minzu University.

Significant research exists, however, that argues this should be anything but disadvantageous. Bi- and multilingualism often produces significant cognitive benefits (Cenoz 2003), both in language learning and in a variety of other domains relevant to achievement in school. So why do Tibetan students still experience significant achievement gaps when compared to Han Chinese students and national averages? Lambert (1974) noted as early as 1974 that unequal political power plays a crucial role in understanding the additive and subtractive functions of

multilingualism. That is, despite the commonly acknowledged cognitive benefits derived from knowing more than one language, becoming bi- or trilingual can entail different processes for learners depending on the status accorded to their native language, the order in which the languages are learned, the prominence of diglossic speech patterns (Hu 2007) in which different varieties of language vary considerably, and, most importantly, proficiency in the language of instruction (Maluch et al. 2015). That English is a required section of the *gaokao* and standardized EFL learning materials are produced only in Chinese both highlights the problems engendered by lacking a culturally responsive pedagogy and implicates structures of unequal language power (Cenoz 2001; Sleeter 2011, 2012; Ladson-Billings 2014, but also see Paris and Alim 2014).

Though the “achievement gap” diagnosis has gained currency in educational research, Chambers (2009) prefers to name it “receivment gap” in order to demonstrate that the reasons for inequality are structural, rather than due to individual deficiency. The “achievement gap” narrative therefore can contribute to minoritized students’ experience of stereotype threat (Steele and Aaronson 1995) - the perception that one’s failure as a minoritized person represents the entire ethnic group’s deficiency – and other dynamics that assign the responsibility to remedy such imbalances to “underperforming students” rather than to the systems that produce inequitable circumstances. Additionally, the “achievement gap” model implicitly ratifies the legitimacy of the knowledge that the underperforming students have yet to attain. But knowledge, I have argued, is authenticated in political contexts, generally schools, which can be sites and generators of inequality. How can one employ the term “achievement gap” without simultaneously asking, in Apple’s (2012, p. 142) words, “Whose knowledge is this? And who benefits from these definitions of legitimate knowledge and who does not?”



Reframing the language of the “Minority Achievement Gap,” moreover, allows one to reexamine the utility and consequences of the affirmative action policies, which were drafted as part of the 1984 Laws on Regional Ethnic Autonomy, that award additional *gaokao* points as a remedial measure to provide opportunities for minorities to attend Han Chinese Universities. Aimed at rectifying “backwards” (*rjes lus* Ch. *luohou*) educational conditions and attitudes in Tibetan and other, generally rural, minority areas, these policies, in addition to providing some valuable opportunities for students, often have a negative impact. Not only can they evoke resentment and subsequent attitudes of chauvinism among Han Chinese, they can likewise inculcate in minority students a narrative of ethnic deficiency that has been prevalent since its institutionalization during the Cultural Revolution, predisposing some to devalue their own culture, experience, and academic potential.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has presented information on the nature of fields and the specifics of the Chinese and Tibetan educational fields. These details help convey the context in which various forms of capital might be valuable and how educators attempt to inculcate dispositions in students that are prepared to acquire and use these forms of capital. In the first half of this chapter that explicated the notions of fields and how they function, I raised to questions to be answered primarily by secondary research. They concerned, first, the nature of the relationship between Chinese and Tibetan educational fields and between these and the meta-field of power, and, second, the types of educational investments that teachers encourage students to make and the nature of the game in which these investments are made. These questions will be addressed throughout this dissertation, largely indirectly through analyses of the habituses and capitals of

those who participated in this study. However, it is worthwhile to conclude this chapter with some responses.

First, what boundaries and continuities exist between the Tibetan educational field and the Chinese educational field? In other words, is there an *autonomous* Tibetan educational field, with its own logics, dynamics, *illusio* and *doxa*, and, most importantly, field-specific capital that is not reducible to the Chinese educational field? Any answer to this question will indeed have to choose some (relatively arbitrary) point in time at which the question will be considered, for fields are constantly in flux. At the time of this study, then, it seems difficult to deny that there exists all sorts of Tibetan people (i.e. position-holders) and educational institutions that operate with relative or complete autonomy vis-à-vis the Chinese meta-field of power (i.e. the Chinese state field) and the Chinese educational field. Although, it simultaneously seems impossible to deny that the vast majority of these people are only capable of doing so because they exist outside of China. While juridical or geographical borders cannot be considered synonymous with the borders of a field, proximity, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) *does* matter, especially insofar as communication between those outside of China and those within its borders face increasing geopolitical obstacles to communication (even as the relative number of channels for communication increases via the Internet). Tibetan Buddhist monasteries in South India and elsewhere, the Central Tibetan Administration in McLeodganj in northern India, and numerous Tibetan educational, outreach, and scholarly institutions, such as the Trace Foundation or the International Association of Tibetan Studies all exert significant autonomy in recognizing and rewarding certain knowledges and dispositions (i.e., capital) in ways that the players in the Chinese educational field cannot or do not significantly impact. On the other hand, that Tibetan monasteries in South India or schools in McLeodganj teach Chinese or that the Trace Foundation

and other associations adapt their work, schedules, and mission statements to accommodate the participation of those coming from inside China suggests that the demands of institutions within China, explicitly or implicitly made, do exert some influence on the dynamics of what might be called a Tibetan educational field. At the simplest level, then, it can be argued that a Tibetan educational field exists insofar as there is cultural (or 'educational') capital that is specific to the Tibetan field, which is therefore autonomous, albeit not particularly powerful for a variety of reasons, not least of which is that it is nearly entirely divorced from any meta-field of power, as the Tibetan state wields almost no geopolitical power in the form of statist capital. However, there is no doubt that a Tibetan educational field, if it exists, is dominated by religious institutions, like monasteries, who have for centuries housed the primary educational institutions in Tibetan communities (Dreyfus 2003). This appears to be changing, as nunneries and other forms of secular education among distinctively Tibetan populations continue to grow, though primarily only in India (Liang & Taylor 2020). This is to say that if there *is* a Tibetan educational field that exists beyond the Chinese educational field, it might very well be subsumed within the Tibetan *religious* field. However, the extent to which education and religion could even be understood as autonomous components of Tibetan society over the past many centuries is questionable: many Tibetans who occupied dominant positions within the religious field did so precisely because of their cultural (or educational) capital, even if monasteries should not be understood as synonymous with universities (Dreyfus 2003). For the time being, then, this study proceeds by leaving this an open question by recognizing that the Tibetan educational field, if one allows for its provisional existence, exists at the borders of the Chinese educational field. That is, within China, the state is quite able to impose "institutional barriers to entry" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992) that limit the extent to which educational practices and accolades pursued

through institutions other than those that are state-accredited can be recognized at capital. I argue this because Tibetan educators are engaged in precisely the struggle that Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) say characterize the fuzzy boundaries of fields: the struggle to get the capital that they preferentially possess recognized and rewarded by those holding dominant positions (by dint of their volume of dominant capital).

An answer to the second question of the relationship between the Chinese educational field and the meta-field of power is also best understood as a snapshot in a longer process rather than an ontologically stable reality. Baker's (2014) argument, in Bourdieusian terms, is that *all* educational fields are growing in their capacity to impact the meta-field of power. Through using credentials to gatekeep avenues to influential positions within the government and Communist Party, through instituting compulsory education, through policies that ensure a single standardized test remains the sole criterion for college admission, and through a variety of other policies and practices that tie Chinese citizens' capacity to acquire economic and social capital to their educational credentials and background, the Chinese state ensures that the educational fields relationship to the meta-field of power only continues to grow. Moreover, one should not overlook the fact that, again in Baker's (2014) formulation, elevating the educational field (i.e. increasing the relative value of *its* capital vis-à-vis other capitals, namely social capital in the form of titles of nobility, *guanxi*, or inheritance, for example) and its capital is one of *the* primary mechanisms that states use to legitimize themselves and their policies (Bass 1998; Bonal 1995; Meyer et al. 1997) . And the Chinese state regularly engages in such discourse, depicting their 'gift of development' which, it must be remembered, "depends on education"<sup>23</sup> – according to slogans emblazoned on newly constructed school walls around Guchu Prefecture as proof that

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<sup>23</sup> See Figure 2, just below. The slogan emblazoned on the wall of the newly constructed school building reads: "Hope for the development of [minority] nationalities depends on education."

their authority is legitimate vis-à-vis previous governments, such as the Tibetan Ganden Phodrang, which did not provide a universal basic education to all its citizens (Yeh 2013).



Figure 2: Construction of a new school building in a village nearby Serjong.

Finally, I respond briefly to the question of what kinds of investments in the educational field are encouraged and the imagined goals of these investments, though this question is also addressed at length in the chapters that explore habitus. Above all, as a study of *supplemental* education suggests, the primary kind of investment that is encouraged throughout China is one of time and effort put into mastering material that appears on key transitional exams. Indeed, pressure to make this kind of investment grew so rapidly that throughout the past decade, and in the period of time since the conclusion of field work, policies have been put in place that prevent excessive schooling and homework (China Briefing 2021; Liu & Bray 2022). As a testament to educators' beliefs in the importance of time and effort, many circumvent this law in all sorts of ways to ensure that their students are filling as many hours of the day as possible with activities that will produce the best exam results (Reuters 2021). Indeed, this kind of investment is often matched, if not exceeded, by many Tibetan educators who believe, following a well-known

proverb derived from the great saint and scholar Sakya Pandita, that education demands pain (*sdug*) and that one will never become an expert in something if they remain comfortable; even beyond that, the proverb suggests that if suffering is not endured now, real happiness later will be unattainable.<sup>24</sup> The forthcoming chapters provide significant ethnographic detail and analysis on the ways that educators prioritize investments of time and effort, but it is worth stating here that not all Tibetans in my study believe in the virtue of unmitigated participation in all educational activities. Perhaps ironically, it was the *most* formally educated participants, such as Chagtar whose ideas I discuss below, in my study who expressed some misgivings about the massive amount of time and effort that they see as required if one wants to ‘keep up’ with the never-ending quest for education. Those parents who were less familiar with formal education, on the other hand, may have felt skeptical towards the process of schooling, but concomitantly felt less able to resist it or provide critiques of what exactly is problematic about excessive schooling. For many parents who did not go to school themselves and experienced significant economic marginalization because of it see their children’s full commitment to schooling as a reasonable antidote to facing similar circumstances in their own lives.

Perhaps the biggest difference in the kinds of investments encouraged by the state and Tibetan communities regard the scope of one’s ambitions. As Bass (1998) notes, to varying degrees the formal education system in China can be understood as an effort to standardize the ideologies and worldviews of all citizens in China and orient them towards livelihoods that enhance the security and prosperity of China. On the other hand, participants in this study often perceived the logics of Chinese people as well as institutions as deeply individualist and individualizing. Participants in this study sometimes critiqued the ‘every man for themselves’

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<sup>24</sup> མཁམས་པ་སྐོབ་པའི་དུས་ན་ལྷུག། བདེ་བར་སྡོད་ལ་མཁམས་མི་སྲིད།། བདེ་བ་རྒྱུང་ཡམ་ཆགས་པ་དེས།། ཆེན་པོའི་བདེ་བ་ཐོབ་མི་སྲིད།།

philosophy and environment that schooling in China seems to encourage. Not only are high-stakes tests ubiquitous but they are used as virtually every measure of success: teachers' salaries and bonuses are tied to them, students are ranked anew every semester they are in school and top scoring students are promoted to higher classes while low scoring students are relegated to lower classes, and scholarship money and school funding are tied to test scores. Perhaps one of the most public displays of this attitude comes each year after the *gaokao* results are returned. Schools with high scoring students routinely print up large banners, anywhere from 20-50 feet in length, that boast about the scores of the graduating class, sometimes even naming individual students and their scores. To support the analysis of secondary data in this chapter, I provide a quotation that encapsulates the more aggressive critiques I heard an interlocutor offer. Gedun Gyap, a lifetime educator and father of three children who attended the senior middle school at which he taught Tibetan language, related to me that

[The competition among students] has gotten to be too much, really too much (*mang song zig, ngo ma*). I think they should work hard every day, of course. Even in the summer and winter holiday too. It's good if they do some homework, continue to improve. But improve for what? They must dedicate their effort) not just for themselves (*hur res byas nas gshan la sngo 'jog go*). If they do that, maybe they will run out of energy. They must work hard for their family, for their whole village (*sde ba'i mi*). Then they will make some real improvement (*yar rgyas ngo ma*). Maybe others don't think like that. It's crazy. They hang up the signs in town with students' names and scores on it. It can cause nothing good. Either it will embarrass the student or make them too proud. Neither is good for learning.

This example of hanging banners was one that many participants who were critical of the excessively competitive educational environment in China raised to exemplify just how extreme the conditions have become. While there is no doubt that many Tibetans, including many in this study, were deadly serious about the scores and appreciated competition, envisioning success as so thoroughly individualized and instrumentalized – as they saw the notion of success operationalized among Chinese populations – was rare and criticized. In between the success of

the individual and of the country, many Amdo Tibetans saw a prioritization of one's village or one's ethnic group (i.e., Tibetans) as appropriate beneficiaries that justify such an extreme investment in educational success. Therefore, the types of investments encouraged by many educators can be seen as those that could best benefit one's community. This includes substantial overlap with the kinds of investments that can best benefit oneself: majoring in popular subjects that lead to lucrative careers, even if they did not focus on 'Tibetan' knowledge, were perfectly acceptable kinds of investments to make in the minds of most participants. But participants frequently conditioned the righteousness of these investments, explaining that their dividend should be conceptualized in the benefit it brings to the community rather than to the individual. This theme is taken up again in the final chapter, but it suffices for the time being to answer the present Sub-question by saying that Tibetans recognize it materially behooves them to find as much common ground as possible between the investments they encourage students to make and the kinds that official policies and spokespeople of China encourage students to make. That is, there are material advantages to be gained by working to integrate logics dominant in Tibetan and Chinese educational field, but there are symbolic costs if one too eager to ascribe to an individualized and individualizing goals of education. To distinguish themselves, many Tibetans introduced moral and ethical dimensions to learning that emphasized responsibility to *specific* others, rather than just the entire Chinese or Nationality/*minzu* community. As the power of the educational field continues to grow relative to other fields in China and globally, it simultaneously incentivizes intense investments but also more tightly circumscribes what gets recognized as an advantageous investment strategy. Some Amdo Tibetans work to distinguish appropriate investments from those that threaten to exacerbate the marginalization of Tibetan languages and knowledges in the long term. Enrolling at *sabjong* appears to be one of the more



popular strategies for making investments in the educational field that produce both material and symbolic rewards – an opportunity that may be difficult to come by elsewhere in China in 2020.

## CHAPTER 5

### MICRO-REACTIONS: A TYPOLOGY OF SABJONG

#### Introduction

To present roughly 18 months of ethnographic data collection in a coherent manner, I developed a basic typology of *sabjong* based on the 26 at which I was able to conduct at least one day of observation during the course of field work. However, not all participants and interlocutors featured in this research were affiliated with a program at which I was able to conduct observations and, likewise, I was not able to conduct in-depth interviews with a representative from every program I visited. As explained, the Amdo Tibetan term *sabjong* is used to refer to specifically Amdo Tibetan supplemental educational programs, which in this study indicates that Tibetan language is one of the activities that transpires at the program – either as a direct topic of study or as a language medium of instruction in other subjects. There are, of course, numerous supplemental education programs that exist in Guchu Prefecture and Xining city, the locations of this study, which are not included either because they did not meet the above criteria or I was simply unable to locate or access them. Examples of the first type include the many supplemental programs commonly known as ‘cram schools,’ as translated from the Chinese term *buxiban*, which are often attended by Tibetan students but do not feature instruction in Tibetan language. Examples of the second type include the several *sabjong* that exist in Guchu Prefecture (or to a much lesser extent in Xining city) but with whom I was unable to establish a connection that led to an invitation. At least some of these *sabjong* declined to establish a relationship with me because the *sabjong* staff reckoned that inviting me to conduct research at their program would have been too politically risky. Analysis of the twenty-six

*sabjong* included in this study led to the development of the simple typology used in this chapter, which helps organize the presentation of data in a meaningful way.

To create the typology, I conducted qualitative and rudimentary quantitative analyses which involved, for example, counting numbers of teachers, subjects offered, or frequency of classes. To draft descriptions of *sabjong*, I used qualitative memos to record as much information as possible regarding the backgrounds of participants, the materials they used, the goals they articulated, and other pertinent information that they offered to describe their *sabjong*. Program advertisements (*brda sbyor*) and any other literature *sabjong* produced often provided a valuable source of information for comparing *sabjong* in the development of this typology and description. In general, the forthcoming presentation of *sabjong* types aggregates programs together except where a specific program is explicitly described. Aggregation here not only facilitates a more succinct presentation of data but also helps maintain the confidentiality of participants. The grouping of *sabjong* together into the types described below also proceeded through an aggregating process: rather than group *sabjong* exclusively by location, duration, size, or some other single factor, I aggregated data on *sabjong* and looked for larger commonalities across them. While these were indeed correlated with their location or number of years in service, *sabjong* are ultimately grouped to facilitate highlighting characteristics that are germane to the analysis this study provides.

*Sabjong* described below are first separated into two categories: Typical and Atypical. Predictably, “Typical *sabjong*” comprise the majority of programs at which I conducted observations and were found throughout the several counties of Guchu Prefecture. Many other *sabjong* of which I am aware, but were not included in this study, also by and large would fit into this category, although it is impossible to determine this absolutely in the absence of empirical

data. “Typical *sabjong*” were most frequently located in rural grasslands, newly built townships where grasslands communities were consolidated by government policies (see Gyal 2019), county towns, and villages.<sup>25</sup> Also unsurprisingly, “Atypical *sabjong*” evince significantly more variation among themselves than “Typical *sabjong*” and require separate sections to be described coherently. Descriptions of “Atypical *sabjong*” have therefore been separated into two categories based on location, “Atypical Urban *sabjong*”, which comprises two *sabjong* in Xining city, and “Atypical Non-Urban *sabjong*”, which comprises two programs outside of Xining, the Town Heritage Museum in Serjong, the seat of Guchu Prefecture, and one in the rural grasslands of Gangthang County. The latter is Marching Together, the primary field site of this study.

Finally, a note on geographical terms is necessary, as they are used throughout this manuscript. The term “urban” refers to city areas, namely Xining city, in the northeastern part of Qinghai Province. The term “rural” refers to grassland areas generally above 3000 meters above sea level, which are home to those households that traditionally practice animal husbandry and known as *’brog pa*. The term “semi-rural” is used to refer to farming areas (*rong sa*) as well as farming-and-herding areas (*rong ma ’brog*) on the outskirts and valleys surrounding quickly urbanizing towns, such as Serjong. The term “semi-urban” refers to the actual built-up areas of county and prefecture seats, such as Serjong. In many cases, semi-urban and semi-rural areas may be only a few kilometers apart, but I use these terms to highlight whether the setting is

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<sup>25</sup> The Amdo Tibetan term that usually translates “village” is *sde ba*, although there are others such as *grong gseb* and *grong sde*. However, it is important to note that, at least traditionally, herding Tibetans (*’brog pa*) didn’t really live in a nearby ‘village’ setting and herding people belonging to the same *sde ba*, a social and administrative unit, can have dwellings significantly far apart in herding areas. Thus, herding *sde ba* do not significantly resemble ‘villages’ with central streets or closely grouped houses and might better be conceptualized as a communal unit irrespective of the actual architecture or proximity of their dwellings. Nowadays, however, the prevalence of nomad resettlement programs means that many of these previously dispersed herders have a second house – usually subsidized in part or whole by the government – in a “New Village” (*sde gsar*) in a centralized location where hundreds of houses for herders were constructed as part of the same government project. Many *sabjong* exist in these ‘New Villages’. Importantly, when I use the term “village” in this dissertation, I am simply using a translation of the term *sde ba* and do not imply that “villages” necessarily comprise neighbors living in close proximity.

within the village (i.e. semi-rural) or within an apartment or house in the built-up area of the town (i.e. semi-urban). It goes without saying that this typology, and even these geographic descriptions, are only valid in the context of eastern Amdo Tibet (in and around Guchu Prefecture). Even other areas of Qinghai, China – never mind those places in Central Tibet (Ch. *Xizang*), thousands of kilometers away – have very different geographies and social structures. Thus, my use of terms like ‘semi-urban’ and ‘semi-rural’ are not necessarily aligned with meanings current in the geographical sciences. Rather, they are convenient conventions I use to highlight salient differences in this small corner of the Tibetan Plateau. What may be most common, and therefore *typical*, elsewhere on the Tibetan Plateau may differ greatly from the how these terms are used in the typology here.

### *Typical Sabjong*

If an educational researcher of outside school time programs were to enter the Amdo Tibetan educational field seeking to identify programs that met Bray’s (2017) “supplemental, academic, and private” criteria, they would likely conclude that the vast majority of *sabjong* in Tibetan areas are taught by (lay) BA and MA students and other teachers to supplement the results that primary or lower-middle students obtain in mainstream schooling through reinforcing and enhancing the knowledges learned therein. This form of *sabjong*, which was most typical in Amdo prior to and during this research, may most justifiably be called *supplemental* in that leaders and teachers at these programs identify facilitating success in mainstream schooling as their primary and sometimes exclusive goal. Generally, these ‘supplemental’ *sabjong* are organized during the summer and winter holiday breaks by an ambitious and seemingly tireless university student from the area where the *sabjong* is held, rather than afterschool or during

weekends throughout the semester because most students in this prefecture attend boarding school beginning in lower middle school (see Ying 2022) and have classes on evenings and most weekends. Often, though not always, the *sabjong* leader is pursuing a degree in Education and, starting a few years ago, may even receive material, curricular support, or university credits from their university to run the *sabjong*, as the teachers of Black Rock *sabjong* explained to me (detailed below). Some *sabjong* projects even become the topics of BA or MA theses, in the case of a research assistant. Among this type of *sabjong*, it is common for the leader to accept responsibility for staffing and organizing all aspects of the *sabjong*. Leaders typically accomplish this by sending out online flyers and postings to their networks via the WeChat app. Moreover, the leaders are tasked with securing a site (and, if applicable, food, fuel, and dorms), recruiting students, and designing a curriculum and schedule. While it is not uncommon for leaders to recruit classmates from their university programs who may live in other areas, especially as the prevalence of *sabjong* increases, university students from the area in which the *sabjong* is held are often well-represented among the teacher corps. About two-thirds of these have some significant connection to the village or town where the *sabjong* is held, while a few others were friends or classmates of those that do. Only two conditions led to a situation in which teachers had no identifiable connection to the community in which a *sabjong* was held: either the *sabjong* offered a substantial salary and circulated the job posting widely to attract high quality candidates from any area (which I only heard of on one occasion), or some of the teaching staff dropped out at the last minute and organizers were forced to find someone on very short notice, often through their extended networks. Indeed, many university students report significant pressure to teach at them, especially when the *sabjong* is hosted in their hometown. At these *sabjong*, teachers are usually provided with transportation costs (if they are not from the area) as

well as food and housing, which is usually provided by villagers who want to support the *sabjong* and/or have children attending it. If the teachers at these *sabjong* are paid, the most typical stipend was 300 *yuan* (about \$50) per week, which is roughly what I also received for my work at Marching Together.<sup>26</sup> Once *sabjong* organizers have assembled the teaching staff, they will communicate on WeChat or in person (still at their universities in urban centers) to determine the structure of the *sabjong*, most of which share much in common.

*Sabjong* that are most narrowly *supplemental* (i.e., best understood using the Reinforcement Framework), insofar as they adhere closely to providing instruction in what is taught and tested in mainstream schools, have 6-12 teachers, most of whom are BA or MA students at one of several universities in Xining, Lanzhou, or Chengdu. The size of the *sabjong* teaching staff impacts what subjects it offers in scheduled classes. The core subjects that virtually every *sabjong* offers are the three languages (Tibetan, Chinese, and English) that students learn in school. All typical *sabjong* I visited also offer Math. These subjects together comprise the ‘core’ subjects on which all high school students are tested during the all-important National College Entrance Exam (*gaokao*), although changes to this format and the scoring are a perpetual possibility and a common topic of speculation. In addition to these, *sabjong* might offer (from the most to least common among my field sites) history, geography, physics, chemistry, and biology. One of the twenty-six *sabjong* I visited offered political science. Teachers and organizers explained that these subjects are not offered as commonly for two principal reasons: First, these are not core subjects that all students sitting for the *gaokao* will take; the *gaokao* is still many years off for primary students. They reasoned that it is more valuable to focus on the core subjects and the languages in particular because (for at least

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<sup>26</sup> I did not want to keep the money, but after some back-and-forths I had no choice but to accept it, especially because it was handed to me during the graduation ceremony. I was able to return the money just a few minutes later though in the form of a donation, as long it wasn’t obvious that the bills were the exact same ones just handed to me.

Chinese and Tibetan) they are the medium through which all other knowledge is gained.

“Without proficiency in Chinese and Tibetan, our students will have very little chance of learning anything else” one teacher at a typical village-based *sabjong* explained. He continued, “they can focus on their science track (Tib. *rtsis tshan* Ch. *li ke*) or humanities track (Tib. *rig tshan*, Ch. *wen ke*) courses when they get closer to senior high school and know what they’ll be tested on during the *gaokao*.” Second, it was sometimes difficult to find teachers comfortable teaching these more specialized topics, especially in Tibetan – the only language that *sabjong* students in rural areas had learned these subjects in thus far. Issues regarding the language of instruction will be explored in a subsequent chapter, but here it is worth noting that many students as they ascend to higher levels of schooling (and especially into university) are increasingly likely to take their classes in *putonghua* Chinese. Thus, “even if we find a teacher that can teach physics or chemistry, it’s likely that *they* are studying this subject in Chinese at the university, even if they are going to a *Minzu* university” in the words of the same educator quoted above. This was an issue that teachers from a variety of *sabjong* recognized: even if a Tibetan university student *was* fluent in Tibetan, it is likely that their university courses – especially if they majored in the physical sciences – were taught in Chinese so they might not know or feel comfortable explaining specialized terms (e.g., the parts of a cell) in Tibetan. To be sure, not all teachers at *sabjong* lamented this fact, and some teachers like Drolma Jyab whose perspectives I introduce in greater length below and indeed care deeply about Tibetan ethnic and linguistic issues, suggested that learning these topics in *putonghua* Chinese was advantageous anyway. The fact remains, however, that primary and lower-middle school students at Typical *sabjong*, which were all outside of Xining, may not have developed sufficient fluency in *putonghua* Chinese to follow a class taught primarily in that language. Conversely, history and



geography – the subjects most commonly offered at *sabjong* other than the core four – are more easily taught because it is easier to find a university student capable of teaching these in Tibetan to younger students, in part because the vocabulary used in these fields includes fewer neologisms or calques. Perhaps compared to all other subjects other than Tibetan language arts itself that are taught in mainstream schools, history has been the most developed and celebrated field of study in Tibetan institutions for centuries and great historians, from Buton Rinchen Drup (1290-1364) to Gendun Choepel (1903-1951), are still commonly read today.

The majority of teachers at Typical *Sabjong* use the same textbooks used in mainstream schooling and indeed some *sabjong* advertisement flyers mention this and encourage participating students to bring their schoolbooks to the *sabjong*. Though all *sabjong* varied to some degree, a typical program, as is being discussed here, usually begins around 8:30am with three classes before lunch interspersed with fifteen-minute breaks between classes. To signal the changes, one of the teachers might blow a whistle or ring a bell. More often than not, the teachers responsible for signaling the change between classes were not particularly concerned about keeping to a strict schedule and classes and free time could have vaguely defined boundaries. Similarly, while *sabjong* organizers exhibited a variety of leadership styles, in all cases I saw significant autonomy afforded to each individual teacher. Lessons would rarely take up the entirety of the allotted time. Rather, direct instruction often petered-out after thirty or forty minutes of class and the students would have an opportunity to work on exercises given by the *sabjong* teacher or, frequently, summer work assigned by the mainstream teachers. During the time allotted by *sabjong* teachers to work on the summer homework, some students would work diligently, while others would talk, play in their desks, or even get up and walk around.

A few *sabjong* teachers, especially those who were majoring in education and planned to start a career in teaching such as Drolma Tso at Black Rock, would attempt to hold students to a stricter schedule and lamented the apparent disorganization of the schedule. Similarly, their training in and attention to classroom management frequently rendered their classes more reminiscent of those in mainstream schooling taught by credentialed teachers. They often brought organized lesson plans to class and attempted, usually successfully, to implement them. Many of these teachers in training would stroll around the classroom with a strong sense of professionalism, demanding that hands be raised or ‘cold calling’ students whom they thought weren’t paying attention. Some might even inflict minor forms of corporal punishment on the students, *pinching* ears or slapping forearms with a ruler if the teacher reckoned that the student’s effort was subpar. I asked Drolma Tso, a math teacher at Black Rock, a typical *sabjong* that borrowed its classrooms from a Nyingma<sup>27</sup> monastery on the outskirts of a herding township, about her rigorous and highly professional teaching methods. She provided an explanation that typified the perspectives highlighted by those that use a Reinforcement Framework, described in the next chapter, to study supplemental education, explaining that

these students are already struggling in school and the only way they will improve to the point that they can pass the exams and get into a good high school and college is to work extra hard during the summers [and winters]. That’s why we use the same books and even the same exams that they use in the public (*rgya gnyer*) schools. I get them online; you can just download previous years’ tests if you know where to look.

Drolma Tso used a large protractor to draw lines and angles on the board with a precision that characterized successful *thangka* painters.<sup>28</sup> She wrote geometric proofs down the left side of the

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<sup>27</sup> Nyingma is one of the four principal sects of Tibetan Buddhism and the second largest in Amdo (after the dominant Gelug sect, to which the monks that organized Marching Together belong). Of note here is that some Nyingma monastics, known as *sngags pa*, are ‘mantra sayers’ and can be householders with families. Many students from Nyingma villages reported first learning how to read and write from older (male) generations who taught them prayers and mantras at an early age.

<sup>28</sup> Serjong is known for its incredibly successful *thangka* painting industry and people come from far and wide to buy the exceedingly detailed and expensive paintings. While these words are my own, and I am not quoting anyone

blackboard as students were asked to come work out problems on the right side. I imagined that her professors would have been proud to see how seriously she had been implementing the teaching and classroom management strategies that she had been learning in Xining at Qinghai Normal University. The students, by and large, responded positively to this level of professionalism. They appeared to be attentive and energized by the intensive and fast-paced nature of the class. Though I only had the chance to observe three of Drolma Tso's classes over two days, her lessons, and the students' responses, were consistently impressive.

Not all teachers at Black Rock were so committed to providing this type of experience. Another teacher, Ochen, took a starkly contrasting approach. I had known Ochen for at least five years by this point, as he was one of my students when I taught at the intensive English program at a nearby mainstream school. He had since graduated from high school and was attending a *minkaohan* college in eastern China where he was majoring in English and training to become a teacher as well. His fluency in English was virtually unparalleled among everyone I met during my seven years in Tibet – he could rap along with popular songs and deliberately cultivated his proficiency in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), skills that required significant time and effort to develop. His classrooms appeared to be characterized by a different work ethic, however. His teaching was more characterized by a teacher-centered approach that appeared to follow no strict schedule or lesson plan. Of the eight classes of his I was able to observe across three different *sabjong* sessions (one of which was not at Black Rock but at a *sabjong* in a nearby township where he was helping a friend), most entailed a single, long-form improvisational story. Ochen conveyed the story through a thoroughly code-switched Tibetan and English, switching back and forth several times per sentence to highlight some vocabulary words he thought the

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with this comparison, a great respect for precise drawing and handwriting is common in Tibetan areas and particularly in Serjong (on the role of handwriting in Tibet see Goldstein & Rimpoche, 1989; Gyatso et al., 1984; and van Schaik 2014, among others).

students should learn. Sometimes, sections of the story told in Tibetan might last for several minutes without a single new vocabulary word mentioned. The stories, like Ochen, were rather entertaining and always pushed the boundaries of decorum expected in schools. Though class participation and learning activities did not appear to be balanced and organized as meticulously as Drolma Tso's, and indeed some students would go the entire period simply listening to Ochen (or not), most of the students seemed to be at least entertained by his oddly colorful stories of boyfriends and girlfriends, parties and concerts, that were distinctly taboo among older generations or in mainstream schooling. When, after class during the summer session of 2018, I asked Ochen about his approach, he replied in English "it's just *sabjong*, no big deal, man. I try to do something fun with them. I don't really think about planning lessons that much. It's summer vacation. Right?" I followed up by asking him what he hopes students learn and why he is teaching here if he doesn't really care about putting in too much effort in preparing a good class. He replied

These are the kids from my village, my cousin comes here. I care about them, just not about preparing or teaching methods or all those things. If you're gonna ask me what I hope they learn, I can't say. But I hope they just get more interested in learning. I hope they have some fun here, that they get some motivation to study harder when they go back to real school.

Ochen, who was a moderately successful but not particularly serious student, taught at one other *sabjong* that I observed, which was outside his home area and hosted by his friend. His teaching style differed little across the three contexts, although he was slightly more reserved when not in his hometown, refraining from stories that included romantic relationships when he was a guest.

That Ochen taught at least two sessions at Black Rock (and another elsewhere) also shows that his teaching style was not totally disdained by fellow *sabjong* teachers and organizers. One might argue that the organizers of the *sabjong* at which Ochen worked were simply

desperate for a competent English teacher, and so they were willing to put up with his irreverence simply because they could not find a replacement. But this is unlikely to be the case for two reasons. First, over the seven years I spent in Amdo, I saw virtually countless teachers – both in *sabjong* and in mainstream schools – who taught English but had attained nothing like Ochen’s proficiency in the language. Though I am not arguing here that teachers of English in China are rarely qualified for the position, it is common knowledge that not all those who teach it have or could attain a TOEFL or IELTS score that would grant them admission to a competitive university abroad.<sup>29</sup> That is to say, if Ochen were deemed a problematic *sabjong* teacher, finding a replacement would not have been impossible. Second, Ochen’s fellow teachers did not exhibit discomfort or annoyance with his presence at Black Rock *sabjong*. He was a welcome (and entertaining) participant in teacher meetings and school activities. Moreover, the organizer of the *sabjong* changed between the two years that I observed Ochen teach at Black Rock. If personal affinities had compelled an organizer to include Ochen in the teaching staff despite their misgivings, it would be highly unlikely that same pressure would pertain with a new organizer (who was also a bold and confident leader, discussed below).

While Drolma Tso and Ochen were unusual in the respective amounts of effort and professionalism they brought to their *sabjong* teaching practice, I highlight their cases to show not only the range of approaches that exist across all the *sabjong* I studied (i.e., Drolma Tso was among the most prepared and professional of all *sabjong* teachers participating in my study; Ochen was among the least) but also to show that these can exist even within the same Typical

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<sup>29</sup> Some point to the fact that many teachers of English in mainstream schools have very limited conversational proficiency in English to make critiques about the education system in China. But not all. Others confidently declare that it is not an English teacher’s job to be proficient conversationally but to prepare students for getting points on the *gaokao*, which often contains very tricky grammar questions that appear very puzzling even to native speakers of English. Skill in teaching students to ace the *gaokao* is seen by many as a more important attribute of an English teacher than actual communicative ability.

*sabjong* program. In educational cultures increasingly characterized by teachers' personal accountability (which is definitively the case in mainstream schooling, where teachers are financially rewarded as a function of their homeroom class' performance on standardized exams) such apparent inconsistency between teaching styles would often be described as an inefficiency or failure to ensure a unified teaching staff that strives to achieve a designated goal – such as the reinforcement and enhancement of what is learned in mainstream schooling. And while on some level a concerned observer may justifiably conclude that Ochen did not support his students' development as well as he might have if he approached his role differently, it is necessary to consider the critique that Weick (1976) offers of the proclivity of researchers and educators to conceptualize tight coupling normatively, addressed in the next chapter which provides a more thorough analysis of the data presented in this chapter. Ochen seems to appreciate, as does Weick (1976), that different teachers can be doing very different things right next to one another. And not only is this a possibility, it may even be an asset when trying to reach different students and facilitating different kinds of student-teacher relationships. Ochen concludes, "If they don't like my style, that's OK. It's just a summer *sabjong*. But some kids like it, they laugh, ask for my WeChat. Maybe they can get something good from that connection. Or maybe I can." Thus, there is much variation even in 'typical' programs, ranging from teaching and curricular choices to the types of relationships teachers welcome. There are a number of other important aspects of typical *sabjong*, which I turn to now.

University students or others organizing these *sabjong* commonly face several obstacles, the first of which is securing permission from local governmental and law enforcement leaders to host the *sabjong*. To many teachers, permissions are often withheld arbitrarily and there is no guarantee that even once a *sabjong* session begins it will finish as planned. Proximity in both

time and space to politically sensitive phenomena – ranging from self-immolations on the extreme end to a cautious local official on the other – often leads to all locally-organized programs and events being suspended for an indefinite period. Similarly, winter *sabjong* sessions are more precarious than summer ones, as the winter session falls closer to several Tibetan holidays and memorials of political uprisings toward the beginning of March. Indeed, my participation at winter *sabjong*, compared to summer sessions, was curtailed, either because the *sabjong* themselves were not running or because teachers and I felt the climate was too sensitive to engage in research fully, even despite my ‘official permission’ to do so. Even beyond quickly changing government regulations that sometimes actively prevent *sabjong* from running,<sup>30</sup> leaders sometimes have a difficult time organizing the *sabjong* because space, teachers, and materials may not be readily available. Moreover, while many farming villages or herding areas usually have a *sabjong* during summer and winter holidays, it is unusual for a leader to remain in that position for more than a couple of years (at most the duration of their university degree program). Therefore, while some continuities exist, most components of Typical *sabjong* must effectively be organized anew each year, placing them in perpetually precarious positions. This situation raises an important question which was a motivating factor in researching the cultural significance of *sabjong*, namely: Why do some Tibetan college students, tired and busy with their own work throughout the year, spend their summer and winter vacations working with

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<sup>30</sup> Interlocutors offered a wide variety of responses to the questions about their obtaining government permission to run the programs. Fundamentally, any organized activity like this requires government approval. And while leaders of larger and more urban *sabjong* told me stories about the successes and frustrations they experienced in trying to secure an official certificate to conduct this business, many leaders from more rural areas said they barely thought about needing permission and didn’t even attempt to seek it because it wasn’t necessary. Without exception in my research, the more urban the location and the larger the *sabjong* was (hence the greater amount of money they collected) the more likely they were to pursue the required government approval. Leaders of small rural *sabjong* felt less pressure to do so. In this case as well, Marching Together is atypical. It is one of the most rural *sabjong* I visited, but it maintains a close relationship with the local government and proceeds with their permission each year that it operates (and did not operate in the year it did not get permission).

(often obstinate) village and government leaders on organizing and teaching at a *sabjong* for virtually no compensation?

One other aspect ubiquitous among this common form of supplemental *sabjong* are the procedures that characterize the end of the session. Typical *sabjong* (and even most atypical ones) conclude with an exam in each subject, usually taking up the final two days of the session. Exams are often created by the teachers themselves, except in instances when teachers can find, download, and print copies of exams officially administered in mainstream schooling in previous years. However, these can be harder to find for primary and middle school students expecting to take exams in Tibetan language. Most frequently, teachers hand-write the exams during the last week of classes and give a master copy to one staff member, often the organizer, who will head into town to make copies for distribution. They are often brought back to school in sealed envelopes, much the same way they are in mainstream schooling. While waiting for the copies to be made, the organizer might head over to the grocery store to buy supplies for a closing ceremony and picnic. Among the items purchased are: sugary drinks and snacks (usually junk food), tea, milk, bread (and sometimes groceries for a large soup, including noodles, spring onions, radishes, and mutton), as well as prizes for the top scoring students, tokens of appreciation for the teaching staff (e.g., *katak*, Tibetan ceremonial silk scarves), books, or certificates, and gifts for any distinguished visitors, such as *lamas*, monks, or government leaders coming to the graduation ceremony. Most organizers and teachers appear take the exam period seriously in that they will separate desks and sit students alongside students from other classes taking a different test. They are graded quickly but carefully, and much care, conversation, and time is put into the tallying of scores to determine the top scoring students in each class. While teachers are sequestered in the teaching room finalizing scores, students are often asked to clear



the classrooms and, if applicable, carry the borrowed desks and chairs to the entranceway for pick up. Depending on the school and the schedules of the staffs, some *sabjong* will have only a final picnic, some will have only a final graduation ceremony, and some may do both.

Picnics (*gso bzang*), which have been a mainstay of recreational summer activities in Tibet for centuries (Tournadre & Dorje, 2003), are hosted by and for the students and teachers usually on the evening before the final ceremony. Though a light-hearted affair, some aspects of the picnic appear to be standardized and match those organized at much higher echelons of social status. Participants make their way out from the classrooms out onto the grassland. Teachers assign different students to carry milk crates full of refreshments – seeds, sweet breads, fruit, sodas, and all kinds of candy. If the *sabjong* teachers were particularly organized or ambitious, they may have already arranged for a large stove and cauldron in which to make everyone mutton soup and/or milk tea. Sitting informally on the grassland, some students and teachers – almost invariably the women and girls – start distributing the refreshments. Umbrellas and sunhats are essential as the sun in mid-summer on the Tibetan Plateau is very strong. If there is a nearby stream, students may play beside it and water fights, especially those that include soaking teachers, are the hallmark of a fun time and successful picnic day. As several rounds of watermelons are chopped and oranges passed around, teachers may begin to organize some activities. Small groups might be found playing jump-rope or badminton, but the whole group might join in when the singing or strength games start, as a Tibetan proverb reads: “If you can breathe, you can sing. If you can walk, you can dance.” Much to my personal chagrin, many Tibetans take this at face value and singing can ensue for hours in a more or less organized fashion, which I usually didn’t mind until the imagined (or actual) microphone was passed to me. Most memorable were the instances in which boys and girls, accompanied by co-gendered

teachers, sat in two separate groups and ‘taunted’ each other with love songs and melodic poems. If a student knows several *la gzhas*, so called because they are only appropriate to be sung (*gzhas*) on the mountain passes (*la*) out of older generations’ earshot, it is their turn to become the star of the show. A knotted-up *katak* often serves as the proverbial conch: if it is thrown your way from a member of the opposing team, the burden falls on you to muster a melodic response. In the direst situations, a benevolent (and often quite talented) teammate might rescue a timid student and sing on their behalf, throwing the *katak* back to the other team eagerly to the enjoyment of everyone. Though attempts are made to involve everyone – teachers included – a few students and teachers, such as the author, are simply too self-conscious of their inability to sing publicly. They are eventually let off the hook, but not without having to endure minutes that seem like hours of chanting, imploring the tone-deaf individual to sing. Conversely, some students – and boys in particular – only feign diffidence for a moment and proceed to steal the show with song after song that simultaneously impresses and frightens the opposing team (knowing they will have to respond). Before long, gestures become more theatrical, often comedically drawing on elements of traditional Tibetan or Chinese opera in the process. It almost goes without saying that some students who remained silent for the entirety of the previous 20 days’ session (after feigning timidity for the requisite amount of time) burst alive when it is their turn to sing, and the collective character of the class seems remade. If singing dies down before it is too late, a few other competitions might ensue to the delight of those who prefer sports to the arts. A few wrestling and strength games may follow, sometimes with increasingly high stakes both in terms of embarrassment and personal injury. Tug of war might be played from either side of a creek – ensuring that the losing team returns home cold and wet. Most *sabjong* students and teachers then put in some effort to clean up the innumerable wrappers, rinds, and bottles strewn across the

grassland and head back into the village, inevitably recounting both the awesome and awful performances of the picnic.

Finally, a graduation ceremony is held on the final morning of most Typical *sabjong*, in which top scoring students are awarded prizes, certificates are handed out to participants, pictures are taken, WeChat info exchanged, and organizers thank parents and fellow teachers for the support. This often entails a few speeches in which the leaders discuss matters particular to the *sabjong* itself but also the importance of education more generally, especially the role it plays in finding secure employment. Many *sabjong* teachers – and especially organizers – believe that rural parents, many of whom may not have completed substantial schooling themselves, do not fully understand the relationship between educational credentials and secure employment. These speeches, conducted either class by class or with the entire *sabjong* community, took place at every typical *sabjong* I visited on their final day, which I prioritized when possible. Though the atmosphere is not necessarily solemn, and an occasional joke will be made, the speeches often last an hour or more collectively. After the *sabjong* organizer delivers the principal address, other teachers are usually invited to say something if they wish. Though I did not conduct a rigorous quantitative analysis, observation data suggests those that decline the invitation to speak are disproportionately women. Many of the young men, especially if they have ambitions of a higher social status, feel compelled to speak and do so at length. Speeches such as these seem to be one of the few times that parents and students are gathered together in academic spaces. Only during my second year as a high school teacher (in 2014) did the local Tibetan high school start incorporating a parents-and-teachers day.<sup>31</sup> While I have seen *sabjong* organizers offer the

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<sup>31</sup> Actually, these might more accurately be called ‘Householders-and-teachers days’, as the word most commonly used in this instance was *khyim bdag* or *khang bdag*, or Head of Household. Though it may not be worth reading too deeply into these usages, this lexical choice might reflect the fact that the parents of many students are often not able

microphone to householders or visiting colleagues (some of whom may, for example, be teachers in mainstream schooling who sent their children to the *sabjong*) the speeches remained unidirectional and never transitioned into a dialogue or conversation. Moreover, there seemed in most cases to be a very clear line of who would consider participating and who would not. Though no quantitative analysis was conducted, householders likely to participate seemed to be those with ‘official’ jobs (*las byed pa*) working in the government. Parents who were farmers or herders or made a living engaged in ‘small’ businesses rarely spoke up. If these householders did speak up, it was often to ask a specific question, such as “When/How do we register for an upcoming exam?” or “Which school should I try to send my children to?” or “What should I do about my struggling student who is not doing well in school?”

Only twice did I observe householders, even those who felt confident speaking to a group, raise points that characterized a middle-class habitus focused on ‘concerned cultivation’ discussed by Lareau (2011; Calarco, 2014) and willing to ‘take on’ academic institutions rather than take orders. The fact that these programs were less-institutionally powerful and influential *sabjong* – compared to mainstream schools that have much more power to determine a students’ future – suggests householders’ general unwillingness to speak up even more starkly. On the two occasions that parents did speak up to ‘challenge’ or negotiate with teachers in a position of relative authority in this instance (although the householders were often older and more influential than the university students or recent graduates who were teaching), both questions challenged teaching methods that didn’t emphasize preparation for exams students would take in mainstream schooling. One of these householders, who were from the semi-urban town of Serjong and spoke up at a graduation ceremony at New Flower *Sabjong* there, asked “Why do

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to attend these meetings – often because they are working elsewhere – and students’ grandparents or uncles (or sometimes aunts) frequently participate instead.

you spend time learning new things at the *sabjong*, or using new books or playing new games, when the students still haven't fully understood everything they were supposed to learn last year? Shouldn't you spend more time helping them with their homework? They have a lot of it each summer!" The organizer, Drolma Jyab, who was an experienced educator and had recently finished his doctoral degree abroad, replied confidently, in front of the entire school community: "We have more than one goal here. First is definitely to get the students better scores in school. That's true. But we also want the students to feel interested, feel motivated to learn. If they just spend all summer doing their homework, maybe that won't happen." The householder seemed to accept the answer – or at least was not willing to escalate the debate (something that plenty of Tibetan men, if they were willing to speak up in the first place, would be comfortable doing). End of session gatherings in more rural areas indeed resembled ceremonies more than discussions. Three different *sabjong* that I visited arranged to have a senior monk or *lamas* come to address the students and householders on the final day. In these cases, nobody raised questions or challenged the speaker's ideas. However, neither were all students and householders giving their undivided attention, as phone calls were taken, WeChat videos were sent, and friends chatted quietly in the back of the courtyard.

While I cannot discuss here the many points made during these frequently lengthy speeches, a theoretically salient point made by many speakers – in addition to the perhaps predictable injunctions to study hard, help one's family, be ethical people, and strive to get good jobs – was the necessity of doing so in order to benefit one's community through the development of *lhag bsam*, 'pure' or 'altruistic/supreme intentions,' which in this case can be understood to represent an attitude of altruism. Though I did not have the opportunity to ask many graduation speakers during in-depth interviews about their use and understanding of *lhag*

*bsam*, I was able to several other elders about their interpretation of the term and their perspective on how this applies to educational values and goals. Two participants that I interviewed together, a father and son aged about 65 and 40 who both had careers as public-school teachers in addition to a variety of other cultural initiatives they supported over the years, offered an excellent gloss of the term that summarized perspectives I heard from others. *Lhag bsam*, they said, involved the generation of a comprehensive (*pun tshum tshogs pa*) approach to developing dispositions of benevolence, as contrasted with a compartmentalized or instrumentalized approach to education. Takdrug Jya and his father, Mingyur, took turns giving examples showing the breadth of implications of this comprehensive attitude: generating it led not only to proximate educational goals, but also the physical health of people and ecosystems, an ability to act beneficially and strategically in the political arena, a capacity to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ economic development. They added, in a lowered voice while we sat in their living room on the sixth floor of a new apartment building in the county seat, that *lhag bsam* didn’t simply entail a love or appreciation of all things and the actualization of it required an educated person to discern between what is appropriate to support and not, that which should be taken up or abandoned (*blang dor*). Even though this critique remained fairly vague, that they double-checked to make sure we weren’t recording the interview suggested that they assumed we all knew that this was their way of signaling that not all political changes in China were worthy of support and respect. Returning to safer ground, the pair of educators summarized their approach to *lhag bsam*, saying that the skills and knowledges one develops should not be cultivated to benefit the individual alone, but that these should be dedicated to achieving goals beyond the personal.

These exchanges highlight two issues raised in the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, respectively. First, does supplementation have only one, self-evident meaning? Or, in other words, are supplemental education programs well positioned, especially for those whose knowledges and worldviews are marginalized in mainstream schooling, to provide support to students developing a variety of knowledges? Second, how can supplemental programs facilitate the transmission and development of more plastic forms of cultural capital that are valued in several fields, even those that may have competing logics or incongruent motivations, which Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) call the *illusio*, or one's 'stake in the game'? Are there particularly qualities that characterize *embodied* cultural capital that make it especially malleable, and therefore valuable, in the hands of a skilled individual comfortable operating in different fields? I will return to these questions in the analytical sections of this dissertation.

### *Atypical Sabjong*

Atypical Sabjong are in many ways even more important to attend to than typical ones because this ethnographic study uses the extended case method, which stakes its analytical leverage not on the representativity of case studies, as does grounded theory, but on their atypicality (Evens & Handelman, 2006; Burawoy, 1998). This atypicality can be conceptualized in at least two related ways that correspond to the empirical and theoretical significance of the case, respectively: First, what (unique) social forces produce such atypicality? Second, does the case defy what currently dominant theories suggest will be found if research is conducted on a given phenomenon and, therefore, represent an apparent violation of such theories? This current section focuses only on the first of these questions, showing how some *sabjong* – and Marching Together in particular – differ *empirically* from comparable programs in eastern Amdo Tibetan

regions. The *theoretical* atypicality of Marching Together, i.e., the extent to which it violates expectations of what leading scholars would expect to find if conducting research on outside school time programs in Amdo Tibetan areas, is addressed throughout the entire dissertation. However, to appreciate the empirical ways in which *sabjong* in Amdo Tibet differ, it is necessary to balance the previous section describing typical *sabjong* with accounts of less typical programs found throughout my research, of which Marching Together is one.

It is first necessary to clarify that my sample frame does not include all forms of outside school time education in the People's Republic of China. A study of such size would necessarily sacrifice depth for breadth and provide more insight on regional patterns than the complexity of particularly perspectives (Bray 2010). Rather, my sample frame was limited to programs that publicly attempt to inculcate Tibetan knowledges, including but not limited to instruction in Tibetan language, within urban, semi-urban/farming, and rural/herding areas of eastern Amdo, namely Xining city and the counties of Guchu Prefecture (see methodology section for further discussion of how these frames were chosen). Excluded from this sample frame would therefore be outside school time programs attended by Tibetan students but taught exclusively in *Putonghua* Chinese or by teachers who did not attempt to provide instruction on Tibetan topics. Also excluded are private or clandestine programs that provide tutoring but do not publicize their work or accept 'unconnected' (*'brel ba med no*) students. However, included in this frame are programs that provided instruction on Tibetan topics in *putonghua* Chinese if they offer at least some form of learning in or about Tibetan language. Determining if instruction at these programs was led by a teacher who was proficiency in oral and literary Tibetan served as a reasonable proxy for identifying such programs in cases where I could not observe an entire session of



classes to verify what was being taught. As a reminder, it is only the programs that attempted to provide at least some instruction in Tibetan topics that are *sabjong*.

*Sabjong* that do not resemble the more numerous programs collectively described in the previous section differ in one of two principal ways that appear to correspond with their urban or non-urban location (however, the small numbers of these programs make it impossible to establish any strong correlations). I will first describe the urban *sabjong* and then non-urban, the latter of which is the category Marching Together fits into best. The next section will discuss the most pertinent differences, namely teaching staff, scheduling, curriculum, participants, and *sabjong* goals.

#### *Atypical Urban Sabjong*

I identified six urban *sabjong* in Xining but was only able to conduct participant observation at two of them. I did, however, have the chance to conduct in-depth interviews with five teachers and organizers at 4 of these *sabjong*. It is almost a given that the number of *sabjong* in Xining has fluctuated over the course of this research, though I personally did not see any get disbanded or spring up within the 18 months of field work. While global trends suggest that the number would have increased since research began in 2018, government regulations and political issues may have attenuated growth rates, both of supplemental programs altogether and especially of those organized to teach in/about Tibetan topics. Moreover, ascertaining an exact number of such programs is difficult because of the way in which I am operationalizing *sabjong*, the topic of this study, as distinct from all outside school time programs, or *buxiban* (cram schools) or *peixun* (trainings) as they are known in Chinese. As these programs can crop up and be shut down quickly, none of the interlocutors with whom I discussed these programs had a

perfectly clear idea of all the *sabjong* that existed across Xining. Moreover, some of these tutoring programs are publicized little or not at all. Many begin, and may remain, in the realm of unadvertised ‘private tutoring’ in order to avoid the hassle of obtaining requisite permissions and the concomitant government oversight.

Among several key differences that distinguish the few urban *sabjong* in Xining from those that operate in most Tibetan villages throughout Guchu Prefecture, the teaching staff may be the most theoretically salient to an analysis of how *sabjong* experiences impact students’ habituses and how cultural capital is acquired by students, often through “cultural guides” (Lareau, 2015). The two *sabjong* in Xining I knew best, Flower of Good Fortune Education and New Sprouts Education, were both run by impressively credentialed professional educators that I had the opportunity to get to know well over the course of this research. Both educators, one man, Gonpo Thar, and one woman, Tsering Tso, were in their early thirties and were from lower Tibetan areas in the very furthest eastern reaches of the Tibetan Plateau where interaction with people with other linguistic, cultural, and economic heritages would be more common than in the higher herding areas of Guchu where MT is located. Unlike Gonpo Thar, who was single and kept an apartment in the back room of his seven-room *sabjong* in the Tibetan quarter of Xining, Tsering Tso was married with one child and pregnant with another when we first met. She and her husband shared a brand-new luxury apartment building on the newer, western edge of Xining that both sets of parents had helped them purchase. It was clear from her interviews that she, like many women educators in Tibetan areas, felt pressure to start a family that was less common among men, who were more easily able to delay their parents’ nagging. After completing their bachelor’s degrees in Xining and master’s degrees abroad (both in Education), both had opted to begin careers in the management of supplemental programs rather than as teachers in the

mainstream school system. These two educators, and several other *sabjong* managers across Xining, were aware each other's work and maintained friendly relations even if they might be construed as competitors by those approaching the supply and demand of supplemental instruction as fundamentally market driven. Their proficiency in English allowed us to communicate more fluidly, with interviews and conversations marked by frequent code-switching. As a result of their accomplishments and affability, these educators had developed wide networks and considerable social capital as well. Both had successfully sought support for various programs from donors from eastern China and abroad, and both were connected to the NGO and academic communities in Xining. Because both had gone through the arduous and never-quite-complete process of obtaining governmental permission to run their programs in Xining, they both publicly recruited new students and teachers, organized and participated in public events on behalf of their program, and appreciated the intermittent media coverage they received either from official or social media sources.

These many similarities notwithstanding, Gonpo Thar and Tsering Tso approaches to education differed in two principal ways. First, Gonpo Thar spent great effort discursively and symbolically managing the perceptions that others would form about central role that Tibetan ethnicity played in his program Flower of Good Fortune, whereas Tsering Tso spent much less time cultivating an overtly Tibetan 'brand' to characterize New Sprouts Education and the goals it attempted to achieve, though formal Tibetan or Chinese robes were worn by her *sabjong*'s participants on graduation day. Second, the two leaders had contrasting styles in their approach to networking, socializing, and participation at local events. The consequences of these differences can be seen through the brief descriptions of scheduling, curriculum, participants, and *sabjong* goals that follow.

One of the first times I socialized with Gonpo Thar was during the summer of 2018 at his friend's bar watching World Cup soccer games and drinking the newest Tibetan craft beer, Shangri-La. Gonpo Thar had invited me to join him at his friend's place for the evening. He had just come back from another photography shoot in the picturesque region of Yushul in northern Kham (but still in the province of Qinghai). After the games were over, we moved a table out on the much cooler sidewalk and talked for a few more hours about the soccer, Yushul, the schools there, and, inevitably, American education and Tibetan education. A few days later we repeated the ritual, this time at the Tibetan summer party on South Mountain in Xining, a large – and for several years prior to this, cancelled – gathering of Tibetans from all over Amdo who set up picnic tents and exhibits on the mountain ridge for three days. In addition to the Shangri-La beer tent, where Gonpo Thar suggested we sit, there were numerous *thangka* and similar artistic exhibits, games, dumpling stands, and other restaurants. Gonpo Thar seemed to know almost everyone that walked by, and his WeChat messages made his phone buzz incessantly. Numerous pictures were taken and I was asked to be in a few more than I was ready for; not only had my obvious appearance as a foreigner attracted some attention, my decision to wear a Tibetan jacket did as well. Like most people there, Gonpo Thar wore a full matching set – jacket with overcoat – and new boots, with distinguished *mala* beads (*phreng ba*) conspicuously wrapped around his wrist. We talked, again, about soccer and beer and the differences between the education systems in the US and in China. Even though I did not understand everything that was said in the boisterous, crowded conversations, I had little doubt that, at points, Gonpo Thar would use or reframe my points (or even my presence) to support the points he was making about the ways Chinese schooling can dampen students' creativity or that American education creates free-thinking, entrepreneurial people. I tried to nuance or even refute his points where possible, but it

was difficult to stop him from forging ahead with his argument to others eagerly listening. Over the next year and a half, I had several more similar experiences with Gonpo Thar, even running into him a few times at gatherings outside of Xining. If there was something happening, he always seemed to be there. Sometimes, when I was unaware of or didn't attend an event myself, I saw pictures of him at it later. His WeChat feed looked like a scrapbook of the most dedicated networker in Xining. I saw him – or photos of him – at university events and lectures, parties and concerts, often wearing Tibetan clothing and a *katak* himself, or with an elder to whom he had likely just presented one.

The office and classrooms of Flower of Good Fortune Education, located on the ground floor of a large apartment building in the old Tibetan quarter of the city near the Tibetan hospital, were similarly decorated. A three-foot-by-three-foot sign sits out front advertising the program. The title of the program is scrawled in 5-inch letters across the top in an ornamental Tibetan font, and the half dozen bullet points that describe the program and curriculum are written beneath in one-inch-tall Chinese characters. The Tibetan-style banner above the entranceway and title sign is quite noticeable in its surroundings – an otherwise nondescript apartment complex courtyard – although it pales in comparison to the size and brightness of most advertisements in contemporary urban China. Inside, calligraphy banners and *thangkas* are hung on the walls and the large table in the middle of the room is piled high with Tibetan books and houseplants to make a truly inviting scene. Once I was invited to the school to help them paint a few murals, which were designed and traced by Gonpo Thar's friend who had attended a Tibetan arts college program. Not all decorations are Tibetan, as some famous quotes from Kongzi/Confucius and Abraham Lincoln are readily visible too, as are several plaques and other awards emblazoned with government imagery and Chinese characters. The classrooms too, while they may not

feature original *thangkas*, which can be very expensive, feature Tibetan lettering (such as the alphabet) and sayings painted directly on the walls in the primary colors that are iconic in Tibetan art. Many elementary level textbooks from previous school years are stacked high on several shelves, in addition to all kinds of other readers and schoolbooks in Tibetan, English, and Chinese.

Tsering Tso's New Sprouts Education, on the other hand, is located on the third floor of a nondescript apartment building in a large 20-building complex on the western-central district of the city, about a twenty-five-minute walk from her apartment. While there is no sign out front of the building, the internal landing on the third floor has an equally large 3x3 foot sign displaying the name of the *sabjong*. Though it does not actually indicate in which apartment *sabjong* is located, the door is usually left slightly ajar if anyone is inside. New Sprouts, like a few other *sabjong* in Xining and elsewhere that I've visited, is held in a relatively large, multi-bedroom apartment. Tsering Tso rarely sleeps there now that she has better accommodations nearby, but frequently allows an older student or two to stay there if they have no better option in the city, a common occurrence when students travel to Xining to prepare for an exam, interview, or similar opportunity. The apartment walls are covered in students' work and inspirational or helpful phrases almost entirely in English, much like an elementary and middle school classroom in the US might have. "I before E except after C" reads one posterboard. "When at first you don't succeed, try, try again!" reads another. Some of the posters are covered in pictures of the students' summer camp, held out on the grasslands of Tsholo for the past few summers with the help of an American teacher working in Shanghai. The apartment has quickly become too small to accommodate all the New Sprouts students simultaneously, but finding a new space that meets

perpetually nebulous government regulations has proved difficult for Tsering Tso. She complained,

It's one thing and then the next thing. First, it was because that I didn't have correct fire safety equipment, then it was that I had registered as a teaching business – and I asked [the officials in the Public Security Bureau] how else should I register as?! – and they still didn't give me clear answer.

I told Tsering Tso that another interlocutor seemed to have some success registering as an educational consulting business and that it might also work for her. She nodded at the idea, but responded saying, 'It's just like crazy, you know. Like they don't even want kids to get better at school!' Realizing there was not much else that could be done now about this perennial issue, we switched to other topics.

While the schedules of Flower of Fortune Education and New Sprouts may be atypical when compared alongside the several dozen *sabjong* in Guchu Prefecture that meet only during winter and summer breaks, they in fact resemble the format of supplemental educational programs around the world more and throughout China closely (Zhang & Bray, 2015): evening classes are offered on weekdays (usually Monday-Thursday) for students in upper-middle school or adults, and weekend classes are held all day for students at all levels of schooling. Sessions are usually scheduled for roughly 2-3 months at a time. Subject classes are often purchased individually, and although students can choose to attend more than one offered class, there is no expectation that students will enroll in more than the particular class(es) for which they want supplemental instruction (whereas students in rural Typical *Sabjong* cannot select classes individually).

One principal factor that causes the differences between Atypical Urban *Sabjong* and rural Typical *Sabjong* is the format of mainstream schooling itself: Tibetan students in rural areas of China have little choice but to attend boarding schools almost exclusively (Wright 2020). In

rural areas, students may remain at the mainstream boarding school for twenty consecutive days of classes, broken up by four-or-five-day breaks in an effort to ostensibly cut down on the time spent commuting such long distances. Because students from rural areas are in boarding school for such extended periods of time, evening or weekend classes are hardly possible in such areas. However, in urban locations and semi-urban locations, such as Xining and, recently, Serjong town, where students have options other than boarding schools, evening and weekend classes are possible and increasingly popular. While such scheduling disparities cause significant differences between urban and non-urban *sabjong* in their formats and operations, the extent to which curricular differences in the mainstream schools in urban and non-urban locations generate commensurate differences in *sabjong* in these locations is less clear. On one hand, while no students attending mainstream school in Xining learn Tibetan there, a few Tibetan *sabjong* in Xining still exist. Tibetan is not offered in K-12 Xining public schools because none of them are designated as ‘minority nationality’ (i.e., *minzu*) institutions because Xining is not a designated Tibetan zone. On the other hand, students who attend mainstream school in more rural, Tibetan-designated autonomous zones may also attend *sabjong* that teach Tibetan, which suggests that even differences in mainstream curriculum do *not* produce absolute differences between the subjects that *sabjong* in Xining and more rural areas offer. On the other hand, the substantive curricular content at *sabjong* *does* appear to vary greatly. While students from rural areas, who receive at least some mainstream instruction in Tibetan language and study Tibetan much as it is taught in the mainstream school, those students in Xining often get instruction in Tibetan as a heritage language or second language; for example, instruction on Tibetan language arts may be offered through Chinese language or they may use materials that are designed for much younger students at lower grade levels.



The daily scheduling and proximity of supplemental instruction in urban areas like Xining precipitates other differences from the more typical, rural, summer- and winter-session *sabjong* in Amdo Tibetan areas as well. First, the classes offered by *sabjong* in Xining like Flower of Fortune and New Sprouts – and the students attending them – were far more diverse than researchers of supplemental education tend to recognize. As mentioned just above, the clients attending weekend classes (almost exclusively primary and middle school students) and weekday evening classes (upper middle school or adults) were distinct. In fact, the majority of the students I taught in the English weekday evening classes at New Sprouts (once per week for 24 weeks) had already graduated from undergraduate university programs. The make up of this class, “Advanced English,” was particularly eclectic. The regular attendees included: one upper-middle school student, two university students, one doctoral student, four young professionals who had obtained official work (in nursing, advertising, and computer science), two professors, and one young adult, Metok Lhamo, who had opted, for a variety of reasons, including suboptimal *gaokao* scores, to temporarily forego college in China and attempt to enroll abroad with the help of her uncle. While all the students had some preexisting interest in Tibet, two of the attendees were not Tibetans (a nurse and a professor) and roughly half of the attendees did not consider Tibetan their native language and may have, in fact, not been able to understand oral or literary Tibetan with more than basic proficiency. Though the English texts Tsering Tso had chosen for this class featured Tibetan themes and translations of vocabulary words in Tibetan and Chinese, the class prioritized the learning of English. The other evening classes also focused on English or Chinese – topics, Tsering Tso told me, that would hopefully open a lot of doors for Tibetans who mastered them. The four days of weekend classes for primary and middle school

students that I was able to observe were more evenly focused on English, Chinese, and math – using the official, mainstream textbooks for each subject.

The year-end talent show held at a nearby Tibetan restaurant in the new section of Xining (at which I was asked to be a judge) reflected the trilingual interest among the teachers and students. The three-hour affair featured about 30 different performances by students of all ages, most of whom dressed up in Tibetan clothing and jewelry for the occasion. Among the songs, poems, short essays, and dances performed, one of the sexagenarian professors, a Han Chinese man from Xining, opted to read a poem in English. The courage and humility it must have taken to do so – in front of children whose English was far superior no less – impressed me greatly: not only did professor engage in supplemental education virtually alongside students who were still in the process of compulsory schooling, but he was also actively modeling for young students the open-mindedness and multilingualism that many emphasize are personally meaningful in addition to being economically useful. Both of these facts challenge prominent theory of the purposes of supplemental education and the range of benefits that it might have for students. Eventually, Tsering Tso offered the final address at the gathering, again stressing the importance of working hard, not forgetting to help those in your community, and developing a wide base of knowledge. She delivered her closing comments first in Tibetan, then switching into *putgonhua* Chinese to iterate what she had just said (although I was not conversationally proficient in Chinese, I had heard this general set of injunctions often enough that I was able to recognize the points she was making, especially because I had just heard the same message in Tibetan – though I could not pick up on any subtle, linguistic nuances she may have added or omitted). These three themes – work hard, care for your community, and develop a versatile (i.e., trilingual)

knowledge base – characterize her work and New Sprouts more generally, even though she does not offer extensive or advanced Tibetan language courses at New Sprouts.

In structure, Gonpo Thar’s Flower Education across town resembles New Sprouts in many ways. Classes held on the weekend are for primary and middle school students and offer Chinese, Tibetan, and English language instruction, while adults, some of whom are enrolled in higher education, attend classes held on weekday evenings. Gonpo Thar usually teaches the weekday classes himself and the topics are limited to instruction in Tibetan language and, in particular, elementary literary Tibetan. Unlike New Sprouts, Flower Education does not offer organized classes in English for adults and, therefore, does not attempt to prepare students for English exams in higher education or for employment. Rather, all adult students at Flower Education are there to learn literary Tibetan. Many adult students at Flower Education have some Tibetan heritage, but it is not uncommon for some Tibetans to have very limited proficiency in oral (Amdo) or literary Tibetan. A number of reasons contribute to this phenomenon, one of which most strongly factors in Gonpo Thar’s reasoning for organizing such classes: Many Tibetans who grew up in a Chinese city such as Xining never had the opportunity to attend mainstream schooling in Tibetan and their opportunities to develop their language ability in other social settings were limited in the predominantly Han Chinese city. Gonpo Thar, as virtually every Tibetan I spoke to about language development, recalled another important point as if it were second nature: Some in Xining may grow up speaking some Tibetan at home, but, because spoken forms of the language (*bod skad*) differs so thoroughly from the written form (*bod yig*), their Tibetan language skills may be useless professionally unless they spent significant time studying the written language – and not *simply* the written Tibetan language, but “the kind of Tibetan that is on the school and job exams” which is “actually very different that Tibetan

language that you learn in the old books” by which Gonpo Thar meant traditional grammar books, such as *Sum-Tak*, that are used to teach Tibetan in the monastery and considered the canonical texts of Tibetan language learning. Gonpo Thar thus recognizes one of his principal goals as teaching Tibetan to adults who haven’t studied it extensively but would like to. Some of these adults include Han Chinese people, either from Xining or, in rarer cases, from eastern China, who have an academic, professional, or personal interest in learning spoken or written Tibetan. Gonpo Thar readily admits to me that he recognizes the multiple benefits that having Chinese students entails. “It’s great they want to learn Tibetan. If I have more students, I’m happy. Maybe there’s also some connection for me there. If I need money, if I need help, maybe they can do something.” I have little doubt he often thought of our relationship in similar terms!

Though I was not able to observe as many classes at Flower of Fortune as I did at New Sprouts, I nevertheless saw somewhat less commitment and intentional trajectory from the students at Flower of Fortune. While the adult students at New Sprouts missed classes as well, the lessons at Flower Education sometimes seemed one-off. On at least three occasions, I saw Gonpo Thar offer the same introductory lesson to different students. The introductory lesson featured an extended explanatory lecture that addressed the wide range of dialects and pronunciations across spoken forms of Tibetan across the plateau. Gonpo Thar did his best to mimic accents and pronunciations from different areas around Qinghai Province, including the Khampa dialect used Yushu in southern Qinghai. Gonpo Thar repeated for his students – some of whom were conversational in their own dialect of Tibetan – the different ways that vowel sounds are made and the different sounds produced by certain combinations of consonants. The history of the written language, dating back to the fabled Thonmi Sambhota in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century, was covered and students, who were free to ask questions, mostly listened to the interesting history

and background of Tibetan languages. Following this lesson, students used elementary level textbooks to practice alphabets and writing ability, tracing the Tibetan letters over translucent sheets of paper, much as young children do when first learning Tibetan and Chinese.

When I asked him about the apparent rates of attrition in the adult classes, Gonpo Thar did not seem overly concerned. Whereas Tsering Tso felt no qualms about chiding students – children or adults – who missed class and therefore ‘cut their own education,’ Gonpo Thar saw the adult portion of his *sabjong* as at least as symbolically motivated as practically. “I know they often cannot come. They have jobs and family. Many people want to learn Tibetan, but they can’t. If they have a place to try it, that’s good. If there is no school in Xining to learn Tibetan, that’s terrible.” So, while both organizers emphasized to students the importance of succeeding in schooling, Gonpo Thar recognized even the symbolic function of maintaining a *sabjong* at which anyone could learn Tibetan. Even his most recent trilingual *sabjong* advertisements encourage those who see the WeChat posting (in Chinese) to “Please forward [this post] to the children who need to learn Tibetan.”<sup>32</sup> The Tibetan portion of the posting is more poetic, if not heavy handed, reading: “Knowing all the languages is good, but forgetting your native language is an embarrassment.”<sup>33</sup> Tsering Tso, who spoke Tibetan with her children and expressed concern about the future of Tibetan students to me on multiple occasions, was less concerned about the symbolic depictions of Tibetan identity and more concerned with the material rewards Tibetans (and others) could accrue through their educational success, despite (or because of) the inequalities such systems create for Tibetan children.

These projects – both built on a deep concern for the future of Tibetan populations and their knowledges – used different logics, but nearly identical resources and methods, to pursue to

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<sup>32</sup> *máfan zhuǎnfā gěi nǐ shēnbiān xūyào xuéxí zàng yǔ de háizimen*

<sup>33</sup> *skad rigs thams cad shes na bzang mod kyang, rang gi pha skad brjed nan go tsha yin*

their goals. Gonpo Thar and Tsering Tso have much in common, including but not limited to their background in English and recognition of the value of a classically liberal education. These two approaches are discussed at length because they encapsulate the two principal perspectives I encountered among most educators: while there are few differences between what Tibetan educators in either trajectory hope their students achieve practically, and opinions about the resources, dispositions, and vision that facilitates achieving these goals also share much in common, these two approaches to education differ most notably in how they are framed discursively. Discursive framing work plays a pivotal role in distinguishing these educators' approaches in part because there is so little room for *practical* differences when it comes to what will be permitted at Tibetan *sabjong*. Both these programs already operate uncomfortably close to the limit of what is politically possible in Xining. Gonpo Thar and Tsering Tso, as professional educators, also pursue their own career goals through these programs, but both emphasized in our conversations their programs' precarious and modest economic outlook. On multiple occasions as well, I saw both (and many other *sabjong*) educators immediately offer impoverished students discounted or free classes. Again, this is not to argue that Gonpo Thar and Tsering Tso, or other educators I have mentioned above, have no personal interest in their programs and are interested in nothing more than charity. Rather, I want to emphasize that their decisions are made *with economic goals* in front of their mind if one expands, as Bourdieu (1986) suggests, capital beyond its merely economic form to recognize the social, cultural, and, in particular here, symbolic forms of capital that educators can accrue through such practices. That is, through showing the dedication to their community and 'paying forward' the advantages they have had, these educators how legitimate and deserved their cultural capital is in the eyes of others – an important theme that I explore more fully in Part 4. Though their educational

approaches are not reducible to a marketing strategy, the fact that both of these continue to exist despite difficult economic and social conditions in fact reveals that there are Tibetans who respond favorably to these discursive framings of Tibetan *sabjong*. Even within the same *sabjong*, one can see adults and students attending for very different practical reasons, all of which, however, could be included under the heading of improving Tibetans' educational outcomes within and beyond mainstream schooling.

This description is not meant to suggest, as others have (Yang 2015, 2019), that Gonpo Thar and his Flower of Fortune Education program, simply by dint of their more numerous and overt references to Tibetan heritage, exhibited a greater sense of "Tibetan ethnic identity" than those, like Tsering Tso and her students, that did not regularly wear Tibetan clothes, display *thangka*, and stock bookshelves full of classic and contemporary works of Tibetan literature. Operationalizing such data as valid indicators of Tibetan identity assumes an approach to ethnic identity that is too positivist, especially in contexts where identities are themselves politically fraught and frequently deployed strategically and, therefore, inconsistently (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; see also Zenz, 2013; Yeh, 2007). Rather, Gonpo Thar and Tsering Tso both expressed to me their great hope for the success of Tibetan individuals and communities in the future and their concern regarding the displacement of Tibetan knowledges and languages and the barriers this created for Tibetan people striving for economic and political security. Therefore, these two approaches are better understood as different strategies for working out or constructing Tibetan identities that would be ethnically desirable and socio-politically viable, rather than seeing Tibetans who decline to mark their ethnic identity at a given instance as having a weaker sense of it or more amenable to assimilation into Chinese societies.

*Atypical Non-Urban Sabjong*

This section discusses the two *sabjong* at which I conducted research in non-urban spaces (i.e., outside of Xining) that also differ substantially from the typical *sabjong* discussed above also located outside of the Xining metro area. There are two principal *sabjong* in this category, a comparison of which will give a clear picture of how these atypical *sabjong* function and the values and people that guide them. The two are Town Heritage Museum and Marching Together *sabjong*, the principal field site of this research. There are a few other educational programs in Amdo that accept monastic and lay students in the same classes, such as the Treasury of Knowledge School (*shes rig nor bu gling*) in Rabgya and the many, even less-formally organized multi-week study sessions that usually take place at the residence of a learned monk or scholar nearby a monastery.<sup>34</sup> However, the Treasury of Knowledge School and the informally organized tutoring sessions were excluded from the sample frame, as discussed in the methodology chapter.<sup>35</sup> Town Heritage Museum and Marching Together, however, were to my knowledge the only educational spaces in which monks and laypeople interact continually as students and teachers in organized environments in Guchu Prefecture.

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<sup>34</sup> These educational opportunities are closest to the typical usage of ‘tutoring’ in American English, though they are usually called *sabjong* by attending students. Typically, these rather informal sessions are organized by an individual or small group of students that requests a teaching from a learned monk. Nowadays, many of these teachings, especially those that take places for several weeks, focus on Tibetan grammar, poetry, composition, or, one of the other traditional five major or five minor Tibetan sciences. Seeking out religious teachings, which include tantric empowerments, are historically a major component of Tibetan religious practice and frequently follow much of the same sequence: students gather and determine what they want to learn, request a qualified teacher to offer the teaching, prepare gifts and offerings to demonstrate their appreciation for receiving the teaching and commitment to learning it, and organizing an appropriate place and schedule for the sessions. When asked what their first experience at a *sabjong* was, many interlocutors discussed their early memories of learning written Tibetan, perhaps with a sibling or a few close friends, from a monk at their local monastery.

<sup>35</sup> This is the case principally because the Treasury of Knowledge School is located in Golok Prefecture and thus lies outside of Guchu Prefecture, potentially expanding the sociopolitical and policy contexts beyond what is ethnographically coherent. The many monastic *sabjong* were excluded primarily because the principal educators there generally do not feel that they intend to address the goals of mainstream schooling in a substantive way (though, again, I argue they might be). Nevertheless, the exclusion of these types of sites was virtually overdetermined because the increased political sensitivity of monastic sites (never mind foreigners’ interest in them) meant that conducting research at many of these sites might have compromised the safety of the school communities.



Town Heritage Museum is in the seat of Guchu Prefecture, Serjong, which has developed the (mostly self-styled) moniker ‘Culture City’<sup>36</sup> and it is likely the oldest Tibetan-run NGO in the area. Located in the lower part of town close to the river, the Heritage Museum is housed in a beautiful, three-story building with over fifteen rooms. Loosely affiliated with the towering Tashi Kyil Monastery, the third largest in the region after Labrang and Kumbum, the Heritage Museum offers a variety of programs. In addition to the summer and winter session *sabjong* organized most years since 2003, the Heritage Museum also has a trilingual library (with complete Buddhist and Bon canons), a small museum, publishing assistance program for local authors, and a foundation, Mother’s Wish, that raises funds to support projects aimed at poverty alleviation and increasing educational access particularly for orphans and girls.<sup>37</sup> Most projects at the Heritage Museum are organized by two cousins, one of whom is a monk, and the other who used to be a monk. Respected throughout Serjong, the now-lay leader, Aku Samten, and his monastic cousin, Aku Kelsang, are busy but accessible individuals who cautiously welcomed me into the Heritage Museum. On my first visits, Aku Samten showed me around the rooms that held classes, library materials, and the small museum. Other areas, under construction, included newer classrooms and facilities associated with the printing service run from there. Outside of the

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<sup>36</sup> *gser ljons rig gnas ‘byung ba’i grong khyer*

<sup>37</sup> In more recent years, as the infrastructure for raising and distributing such funds has increased, classes of local primary and secondary schools may be sponsored by foundations, such as this one, that cover expenses such as tuition, uniforms, books, and bedding. Mother’s Wish is one of the older foundations running such projects in the area, though organizations from further afield have taken an interest in supporting Tibetan students, including Gesanhua (Tib. *skal bzang me tok*), Pearl Foundation (both from within the PRC), and Eclat Foundation (a Taiwanese-American enterprise). Perhaps unsurprisingly, educators in Guchu consider associations with the organizations as prestigious; not only does having good connections with these organizations raise the symbolic status of an educator, but these programs often host enrichment programs for sponsored Tibetan students to travel to eastern China during school breaks. Decisions over which students get chosen to receive support from these organizations is a controversial topic for many, as I experienced during both my field work and as a teacher. As transparency can be lacking in this process, many students were skeptical of school administrators’ virtually unilateral selection of students for scholarships. Many Tibetan students I interviewed readily noted that certain Han Chinese administrators played strong favorites in determining which students received scholarships from these programs. On the most individual scale, many complained that the administrator simply chose students he liked best, often as a result of their obsequious behavior and lack of objection to his requests (some of which were reported as inappropriate).

monasteries, which themselves are home to countless works of sacred art and other invaluable objects, this was one of the very few museums I had heard of that was run relatively privately. While the Heritage Museum does organize many programs, such as the fundraisers and support for authors, by far the greatest number of students who interact with the Museum do so through its *sabjong* programs.

I was able to observe eight of the 18 days of *sabjong* classes at the Heritage Museum during January of 2019, just prior to the Tibetan New Year. I was not able to attend the first week of the two-week session due to Aku Samten's caution about inviting a foreigner to the *sabjong* to conduct research during a politically sensitive time. I was also unable to attend the final two days of classes because I chose to conduct further research at a different *sabjong* and had to leave in order to attend the first day of classes in the rural Ganga grasslands (which was a rural Typical *sabjong*, as discussed above). Therefore, the forthcoming description of the Heritage Museum *sabjong* should be taken as an example the diversity of programs that can exist across *sabjong* within a given region or across the programs that a single organization might run during different years. The forthcoming description of the salient dimensions of the Heritage Museum's *sabjong* uses, in addition to participant observation and interviews with students and organizers, archival sources – one of the few *sabjong* that for which these exist.

*Sabjong* classes at the Heritage Museum that I observed in 2019 were unique among the field sites studied during this project in several respects, related to class content and teacher and student characteristics. First, this *sabjong* differed from others in the area and from many previous years at the Heritage Museum in that it offered only two classes, taught back-to-back from 9 to 11:30 AM and 1:30-3:30 PM by the same instructor, Aku Kelsang. The composition and poetry classes both focused heavily on grammar, using one historical and one contemporary

commentarial text to clarify the foundations of written Tibetan. When we had originally arranged to come to the Heritage Museum, we were told that the daily schedule would include an history class that was going to use the well-known *White Annals* written by celebrated polymath Gendun Choepel, whose portrait hangs in the front of this and many other classrooms both in *sabjong* and mainstream schools. However, by the time Dorje, my research assistant, and I arrived at the Museum's *sabjong* classes, Aku Kelsang had decided not to teach the history class and instead focus on composition and poetry, explaining that it was important to finish the composition book by the end of the session because the author of the text, Tsetan Shabdrung, emphasized a certain schedule for teaching it with a set number of days and Aku Kelsang wanted to teach it in that way. Tsetan Shabdrung, a former professor at Northwest Nationalities University in Lanzhou, had originally written the book to be used in college courses because many of his colleagues and students complained that too many of the examples and stylistic choices in Tibetan poetry texts are too heavily influenced by Indian cultures. With this brief framing in place, Aku Gendun lead the 18-day session.

Unlike previous years, in which a number of topics taught and tested in mainstream schooling were featured (namely the three languages and math) this winter's session addressed only topics in literary Tibetan. While literary Tibetan is indeed taught and tested in mainstream schools, Aku Kelsang teaching methods and content were only tangentially related to what is prioritized in mainstream schools. For example, Aku spent two lessons (4 hours) explaining the grammatical particle *de* and drilling students on its various uses. For most learners of Tibetan, *de* is one of the very first terms learned and can usually be used equivalently to the English words 'that' or 'then.' *Gaokao* study books designed for high school seniors, on the other hand, rarely spend more than a page or two on such seemingly simple points. But Aku spent over an hour

monologuing about its different uses and highlighting somewhat arcane examples from older texts to show its versatility. Then the students were asked if they had any questions, which several did, and after responding to those for roughly twenty minutes, Aku instructed the class to come up with four sentences that each used *de* in different ways. When I later had the chance to interview two of the lay male students, both in their mid-twenties, about the lessons, one responded by voicing his appreciation for the lesson, saying,

Yes, of course we have learned much of that before. But it's important to maintain your knowledge of literary Tibetan. If we don't use it often, we'll forget the rules. And if you listen carefully, you can always learn something new or hear about a distinction that you didn't know before. And I'm sure some of the students, even if they are monks, don't know the grammar rules very well!

What makes this lesson somewhat surprising is that not only Aku spent so long on a single particle (which most would have considered relatively simple to understand, at least prior to this lesson) but also that the students were far older than the grade levels in which this point is usually introduced and explained in mainstream schooling, marking the second principal area in which the Heritage Museum is unique from other *sabjong*: the students.

Students enrolled in the Heritage Museum's winter *sabjong* evinced more diversity than any I had encountered elsewhere. During the sessions I observed, there were about 50 students in the classes, almost all of whom attended both the composition and poetry class though the attendance was not identical from session to session. Roughly 35 students were monks (31) or nuns (4) or were in training to be. Of the 15 lay students, there were about 6 young women, between the ages of 12-20. The average age of all the students was likely in the early twenties, but at least a few of the monks were in their early forties. What's more, the students had come from a much wider variety of places than I had expected. At Typical *Sabjong*, virtually all students are from in the village where the *sabjong* is held. In the few instances when this wasn't

the case, the students usually had a connection – through a family member or teacher – to the *sabjong* they were attending. But at the Heritage Museum, some of the students had come from hundreds if not thousands of kilometers away, including hometowns outside of Amdo. There were students from Amdo regions of Golog and Tsholho (in Qinghai), and Kham regions of Yushu (in Qinghai), Ngaba, and Gartze (in Sichuan Province), and even a few from Central Tibetan areas such as Nagchu and Lhasa (in the Tibetan Autonomous Region). But all the students I had talked to before and after classes that had traveled far for the *sabjong* were men and usually monks.

While the variety of accents and dialects present at the Heritage Museum may have impeded communication slightly from time to time, Aku Kelsang's lessons adhered closely enough to the more formal written Tibetan style that there were rarely difficulties. Moreover, monks in particular are accustomed to attending classes with students (i.e., other monks) who may come from different areas of the Tibetan Plateau and are considered to be adept at understanding a wide variety of dialects because they generally have stronger foundation in the written language, which is considered by many to be the common roots from which the different forms of spoken Tibetan spring (Dreyfus 2003). Beyond the students' demographic backgrounds, their participation in the *sabjong* classes differed greatly, as well. While some students, usually older males, were ready to answer questions when called on and even had the bravery to ask some challenging ones to Aku Kelsang, many of the other students made little attempt to participate or, in some cases, even pay attention. It seemed painfully obvious that some were forced to attend by their parents, a suspicion that was confirmed in at least two cases during small conversations in between classes. Two of the lay male students who routinely sat near the

front were responsible for adding coal to the iron stove<sup>38</sup> that sat towards the front of the room and two other students eagerly cleaned off the blackboards whenever there was a break in classes. Other similar responsibilities were assigned to the older students (clergy and lay alike); Aku Kelsang and Aku Samten, other than teaching the class and taking a few pictures, respectively, did little to manage or oversee the day-to-day events at the school and were mostly busy with other projects and commitments. Though I was able to talk to Aku Samten during the previous summer and interview two of the winter session students, I was not able to sit down to a conversation with Aku Kelsang despite a few attempts to contact him. He was, no doubt, both extremely busy and wary of becoming too involved with someone like me during the politically sensitive New Years season.

Based on data I collected from archival sources at the Museum, the winter session of 2019 was atypical for the Town Heritage Museum and its ongoing programs. There was only a single monastic teacher, rather than a staff of monastic and lay educators and college students; the students were of widely varying ages and backgrounds, the majority of whom were clergy; and, they hosted only two classes, neither of which prioritized content taught and tested in schools that the students attended – though the principal text was developed for college courses. Moreover, while the Town Heritage Museum has intermittently invited foreigners to participate in its programs, the organizers at first balked at my desire to attend the class meetings (though an interview with Aku Samten, in which he discussed political topics so frankly that at one point he asked me to turn off the recorder, was granted easily).

*Sabjong* at Marching Together and the Town Heritage Museum share much in common that generally distinguishes them from Typical *Sabjong*: they are organized by current and

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<sup>38</sup> These are common features throughout dwellings and older classrooms in Amdo. Finding coal or sufficient yak dung to burn in them throughout winter *sabjong* sessions is one of the main tasks and expenses that *sabjong* organizers mentioned.

former monks; they use texts beyond those taught in mainstream schooling; they enroll students from more than a single village; they have a long history and associated archives; they organize or are affiliated with other kinds of projects, such as fundraising and library curation; and, finally, they both attempt to inculcate in students not only knowledge of (literary) Tibetan language but also a belief that development (and not mere ‘preservation’) of such linguistic knowledge is vital to the future existence of Tibetan ethnicity. That is, teachers and students at the Town Heritage Museum and Marching Together (and many other) *sabjong* believe that while learning may well bring academic and economic opportunities, the principal rationale for learning Tibetan (and even Chinese and English or any other subjects) transcends instrumentalist logics and is, rather, a moral responsibility to the community. While this theme will be explored in subsequent chapters, the important point here is that in the minds of many in the educational field, learning and, especially, teaching are morally desirable or even required. The degree to which learning is coterminous with learning *Tibetan language* varies greatly across *sabjong*, and while none thought it was unimportant, neither did all *sabjong* prioritize literary Tibetan in the way that Marching Together or the Heritage Museum does.

Finally, I provide a description of Marching Together, the other Atypical Non-urban *sabjong* and my principal field site. Because Marching Together is described at length throughout this dissertation, as it constitutes the primary data source from which I draw, I only provide details here which are not mentioned elsewhere in the dissertation that help distinguish it typologically from the other *sabjong*. Marching Together was unusual but not utterly singular among the *sabjong* I visited during my fieldwork. Marching Together’s teaching staff is unique for two principal reasons: the core teachers, what I henceforth call the “Senior Staff,” have changed very little over the eleven years that the program has been functioning and, second, this

core is composed of monks. Aku Cheeden (who has, since founding the school, left the monastery and become a householder) and Aku Lobzang started the program eleven years ago with the continued contributions of teaching and organizational support of three other monks, Aku Huazang, Aku Orgyan, and Aku Gyamsten. Together, they have organized, taught, funded, and constructed, both literally and figuratively, Marching Together *sabjong* with intermittent (though not insubstantial) support from a variety of donors ranging from local parents, monasteries and their abbots, and, more recently, a broader network of contacts that include international friends and Internet ‘celebrities’ who maintain live streams, podcasts, and use apps like WeChat and TikTok to host fundraising campaigns that target their followers across China and beyond.

The group of monks, all but one of whom belong to a nearby monastery, take on teaching responsibilities that correspond with their area of learning, and perform virtually every other administrative function at the *sabjong*. In interviews, Aku Lobsang emphasized the amount of effort it takes to furnish all the necessary supplies for the *sabjong* – recounting his frequent tiring trips into town (about 30km) to buy everything from groceries to construction materials to medical supplies. His position as the principal manager of the logistical issues within Marching Together also requires him to be one of the two primary disciplinarians and, despite his often playful nature that I discuss below, he is known for meting out the harshest punishments – as when students act unruly during the Cultural Knowledge Competitions or when two older students got caught smoking and lied about it. Other monks, namely Aku Huazang, Aku Gyamstan, and Aku Orgyan, have worked consistently at the *sabjong* since its inception as well. However, their membership and concomitant responsibilities in a monastery, different from Aku Lobsang’s, means that they are sometimes required to leave Marching Together to fulfil duties at



their home institution. The amount of work required of them depends on their own monastery's ritual calendar and work schedule; my first summer at Marching Together they missed only four days of the session, but during the second year, they missed many more and Aku Gyamtsan, who is the chanting leader (*dbu dzes*) in his monastery, was only at Marching Together for a week total, unable to regularly teach the classes that he had been assigned, a phenomenon that happened with some frequency. These absences notwithstanding, students enrolled as Returners at Marching Together know that a substantial portion of their six sessions spread over three years (roughly 180 days total) will be taught by someone schooled in a monastery and that their instruction in Tibetan grammar in particular will be delivered using a pedagogy as similar to the monasteries' as possible for lay students. In an arrangement unique among all programs I observed, Marching Together enrolls students in one of two categories: Returners and One-Timers. Returners are those who have committed to attend Marching Together for six consecutive sessions studying a curriculum designed with this time frame in mind; One-Timers are students who have enrolled just for the current session. More of this arrangement is offered in the next chapter. For now, I conclude with an edited excerpt from fieldnotes written during my second summer at Marching Together that describe Aku Lobsang's character well and give a frank snapshot of the type of influence the co-founder had on the environment of Marching Together.

*We had just finished breakfast and Aku Lobsang had agreed to drive me the several kilometers to the intersection where I could catch the bus to Xining. I had been able to schedule an interview with Aku Jigme Gyamtsen, one of the leading figures in Amdo Tibetan education who was renowned in the region for the perseverance, tact, and creativity he brought to community organizing, so I was determined to meet him, even if it meant spending several hours on a bus and missing 2 days at Marching Together. Aku Lobsang got in the car parked in the courtyard of Marching Together, and I went to open the big metal gate. In the process of swinging open the huge iron bars, the right side of the gate came hurtling back towards the closed position and caught my finger between the two rusty metal pipes. The pain was immediate and severe.*

*Aku Lobsang burst out in maniacal laughter at my misfortune. I looked down to find out that my left ring finger was badly mangled – the kind of wound that is big and open enough where it doesn't even begin to bleed right away. I was no stranger to gruesome injuries but I knew immediately this might be an unfortunately complicated situation knowing where I was and the schedule I was hoping to keep. Aku Lobsang came over to have a look and uttered "a ma ma" between his laughs as he saw the damage and shouted for the others to come over and have a look. As the pain and bleeding increased, we all realized that the only bus coming through the area was due in just a few minutes and we really needed to move.*

*Aku Lobsang sprang into action. First, he ran into the teachers office and got a bottle of clear alcohol that is usually used for religious offerings. He tore the plastic open with his teeth and doused my finger all while shouting at a student to grab some paper and matches from inside. They quickly returned and after briefly drying off my finger, he lit the paper on fire for a few seconds before blowing it out and jamming the smoldering wad into the open laceration. I saw stars. Students stood around in amazement. Aku Lobsang jammed another burning hot wad of paper into the cut before drowning it in alcohol again. We made a bandage out of tissues and secured it to my hand with ducttape. The bus was due to arrive in just a few minutes.*

*We jumped back in the car, pushed the gate back open with the front bumper, and sped down the road toward the bus stop intersection at roughly 140 kilometers per hour. The bus, approaching the intersection from a different road that traversed the grasslands was visible for the final kilometer or two of the trip. Even though it now looked like we were going to make it in time, Aku didn't take his foot off the gas and I wondered if it would be a collision rather than tetanus that would define my summer in Amdo. He screeched to a stop in the middle of the intersection just before the bus.*

*Then, as several men barreled through others (including, of course, women and children – for monks and nuns are the only ones immune from getting jostled in crowded situations in Amdo, and even they are not always safe) to secure a seat on the 6-hour bus ride, Aku hurled his rock-solid frame into the crowd attempting to mount the bus. He reminded me of Charles Barkley or another professional athlete famous for moving others at will. He boxed out everyone else and cleared a path for me to get on the bus first, ensuring that I'd be able to get to one of the few remaining seats. His act of what can only be called aggressive compassion was a quintessential example of how the leaders of Marching Together – and surely innumerable monks elsewhere – care for their students.*

*He even paid the 30 Yuan (\$5US) for my ticket, which I assured him was unnecessary but appreciated, considering it would have been a chore to get out my money with a mangled hand and suitcase in tow. He paid the driver and escorted me onto the bus and into an empty seat, grunting at the others to make room and help me with my bag if I needed it. He headed back up the aisle toward the doorway and told me to call if I need help. "And go to doctor if it hurts!" I heard him shout as he stepped off the bus. After settling into my seat and reckoning with the pain that pulsed down my arm as I raised it overhead to slow the bleeding, I apologized to my new bus-mates for Aku's domineering display. I*

*said I had hoped to be earlier and get a seat the normal way, but – obviously – I had run into some obstacles this morning. “Oh no problem, no problem,” one said. “And we know Aku. He’s always like that. No problem. He’s just looking out for you.”*

Atypical indeed was Marching Together and Aku Lobsang in particular. Even though he was not from this area, the time he had spent working at MT meant that the program, and he, were sometimes quite capable of bending the rules. Few other *sabjong* enjoyed such autonomy.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has provided ethnographic detail on the types of *sabjong* found in Guchu Prefecture and Xining city during 2018-2019. It has been arranged into a basic typology using aggregated data collected at various *sabjong* to develop ideal types of each of the three principal forms: Typical, Atypical Urban, and Atypical Non-urban. This is not the only typology that could have been used to organize and present this data. Some insight into the nature of *sabjong* practices could be gleaned by categorizing them by, for example, funding structure, years in service, or location. However, rather than grouping *sabjong* by a single category, which would predispose the analysis to spurious assumptions or deterministic interpretations of *sabjong* practice (e.g., they do this *because* they are from an urban area), I instead looked for ‘family resemblances’ and aggregated data such that the general themes and similarities across *sabjong* could be pointed out most effectively, which is to say, in a way that resonates with the general ethos of what educators “thought they were up to” (Geertz, 1973). Ultimately, the strongest criterion on which *sabjong* are grouped is the composition of the teaching staff. In brief, Typical *Sabjong* are generally taught by college students with some significant tie to the location of the *sabjong*; Atypical Urban *Sabjong* are most frequently taught by university graduates who are social entrepreneurs in the field of education and expect to make a career in this field; and Atypical Non-Urban *sabjong* are most frequently organized by those with deep connections to

monastic learning and attempt to maintain the teaching of traditional Tibetan knowledges alongside instruction in subjects taught and tested in school (which also makes the *sabjong* appear less politically problematic). The reason it is most useful to organize *sabjong* around the character of the teaching staff is because it is their practices and perspectives of what students need and how to provide it that motivates the principal inquiry of this study.

## CHAPTER 6

### THE MEANING OF SUPPLEMENTATION

#### Introduction

The influence of formal education on the organization of society – and the widespread perception of the legitimacy of schooling to play this role – continues to grow globally (Baker 2014). One major consequence of this “Education Revolution” is the expansion of outside school time (OST) programs, the broadest term encompassing all ‘outside school time’ activities (Feng & Bray 2019; Noam & Shah 2013). Many OST activities attempt improve students’ academic achievement by providing additional instruction and go by a variety of names, of which ‘supplemental education’ or ‘shadow education’ are probably the most common (Manzon & Areepattamannil 2014). In recent decades, locations across the world, and particularly in East Asia, the region in which Tibet is increasingly thought to be located given its inclusion within China, have seen a rapid growth of such programs (Bray 2013), “the expansion and institutionalization [of which] promises to usurp mass education as the most important (and still among the least understood) education phenomena of the 21st century” (Wiseman 2013, p. xi). In addition to the growing numbers of participants and educators, these supplemental programs have also attracted the attention of those interested in these programs’ potential to ameliorate – but also exacerbate – the unequal access to social and economic opportunities that success in formal schooling facilitates. However, despite these concerns, and the beneficial interventions and policies such research has catalyzed (see Bray & Kobakhidze 2014), few scholars have sought to understand how supplemental education programs (and the categories of the scholars that study them) might reproduce the symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1991) entailed when only some knowledges are recognized as “legitimate.” This chapter, therefore, not only analyzes the

practices of supplemental educators in Amdo Tibet to understand how communities ethnolinguistically minoritized in mainstream schooling can navigate this process, but also highlights and problematizes scholarly categories commonly employed to understand such practices. It thereby simultaneously provides a review of literature on supplemental education in the field of comparative and international education as well as empirical data that sheds light on how the categories and concepts common in this literature might be clarified.

Under the large umbrella of ‘outside school time’, there are almost innumerable forms that programs can take, ranging from ‘cram schools’ that prepare students for upcoming tests and tutoring meant to remediate students’ problems in mainstream school to Boys and Girls Clubs that provide community and peer support to *madrasas* that offer Arabic language instruction on weekends for immigrant communities (Feng & Bray 2019). That any such programs – or engagement in youth sports or scouts other activities – could benefit young people is widely recognized (Eccles et al. 2003). Therefore, scholars attempting to understand how participation in OST activities impacts young people are already faced with a challenge: how might these activities be usefully categorized to facilitate the recognition of activities’ (potentially diverse) benefits and drawbacks? How might the categorizations develop the analytical specificity necessary for conducting scientific research? As I will show below, the array of terminology used by current practitioners and scholars globally does not provide sufficient clarity or coherence that enables one to accept existing labels as sufficiently rigorous to convey what a given OST program does and how it might compare to others.

I, therefore, focus this study, for reasons developed throughout these chapters, on supplemental *educational* programs – one of the most widely used (though by no means universal) labels – though I operationalize the concept somewhat differently than is sometimes

the case. Throughout this study, supplemental education programs refer to activities that explicitly acknowledge that facilitating students' educational achievement in mainstream (i.e. compulsory, credential-granting) schooling is at least one of the program's principal goals. While this use of the term does not contradict leading scholars' perspectives (e.g. Stevenson & Baker 1992; Bray 2017; Silova 2006), a deep exploration of its meaning highlights that there is neither consensus nor precision regarding what constitutes "supplementation." And while consensus need not be considered necessary (or even desirable) and "definitional challenges" are readily acknowledged (Bray 2017, p. 472; Malik 2017), a study that explicates and refines theories of what it means to "supplement" schooling can help scholars and practitioners recognize the diverse ways that such practices can benefit students and communities, contributing both to one's understanding of the role of supplemental education in the context of the Education Revolution as well as how such programs might be able to help students acquire the elusive cultural capital that appears to be so useful in succeeding in schools (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu 1986; Lareau 2011).

It is not as if attempts to articulate the object of study, i.e., supplemental education, have not facilitated understanding of the causes, processes, and effects of this phenomenon. For example, in his agenda-setting presidential address to the Comparative and International Education Society, Mark Bray (2017, p. 472; 1999) reaffirmed a scholarly focus on programs that were "academic, supplemental, and private," restricting a study of 'supplementation' to programs that offered instruction in subjects that were "taught and tested" in mainstream schooling without utilizing public or charitable financial assistance. Importantly, this excludes instruction in heritage languages or other pursuits, such as sports, arts, or music, learned for "pleasure and/or more rounded personal development" (Bray 2017, p. 473). This latter category

was described by Bray (1999, p. 85) as “supplementary tutoring for differentiated demand” and bracketed out of that study – a move that seems to have influenced subsequent researchers (Malik 2017). While there are advantages to these circumscriptions, for example in honing analyses of how economic inequalities are exacerbated by costly tutoring programs (e.g., Entrich 2018) or instructors’ economic decision making (e.g., Kobakhidze 2014), they threaten to disrupt scholars’ (and possibly practitioners’) ability to recognize the myriad ways in which ‘non-academic’ factors originating outside the classroom walls impact results obtained therein, and vice versa (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977). That is, a tendency to opt for a stricter operationalization of supplementation – indeed, to the extent that supplementation becomes synonymous with “shadowing” (Mori & Baker 2010; Bray 2007) – risks bracketing out of scholars’ consideration forms of learning that do not appear to mimic mainstream curricula *even if* the attainment of such ‘non-academic’ knowledge is known to be beneficial for students *in mainstream* schooling (see Lareau 2015).

Furthermore, this exposes students ethnolinguistically minoritized in mainstream schools to a second layer of marginalization: not only are their knowledges devalued and/or excluded in mainstream institutions themselves, but the inculcation and activation of such ‘community cultural wealth’ (Yosso 2005), which often develops in students confidence, cognitive abilities, and senses of efficacy (to name just a few), is also excluded from consideration as educationally valuable – even in the broadest sense – despite the fact that we have long known that they are (e.g. Bandura 1986; Schunk 1991). To be sure, leading researchers of supplemental education have not ignored the influence socioeconomic class position exerts on students’ chances to benefit from supplemental education (e.g., Bray & Kwo 2013), and studies of the inequalities reproduced through supplemental tutoring are increasingly prominent (e.g., Entrich 2018;



Dawson 2010). But, thus far, the capacity of supplemental education to aggravate existing inequalities is conceptualized primarily as a matter of access (e.g., Zhang & Bray 2017) and quality (e.g., Baker et al. 2001; Bray 2010; Chang, Dong, & MacPhail 2011) within the literature discussed thus far, and dominant in the field of comparative and international education.

However, the capacity of supplemental education to reinforce or upset dominant knowledges (and the symbolic and epistemological violences they may precipitate, see Bourdieu 1991; Spivak 1988) has been virtually unaddressed in this field. Scholarship in comparative and international education has attended to social, economic, and political implications of supplemental education, but not to the politics of knowledge itself. And narrowly defining *a priori* what constitutes educationally worthwhile supplementation that which addresses only ‘what is taught and tested’ in mainstream schooling virtually precludes that possibility.

This chapter, therefore, reconsiders the forms of supplemental education that get recognized as such. While acknowledging that leading scholars (e.g. Bray 2017; Bray & Silova 2006) understand that not all supplemental programs mimic mainstream education to the same degree, I will show that educational practices commonly understood as fundamentally disparate – and some, therefore, bracketed out of consideration by most scholars of supplemental education *a priori* – can all justifiably be understood as supplemental insofar as they benefit students’ outcomes in mainstream schooling. In doing so, I hope to dispatch (or at least decenter) the ‘shadow’ metaphor of supplemental education: Not only do shadows rarely replicate the original object’s shape – for the angle of external factors, like the position of the sun or the ground on which it is cast, can distort the shadow despite no change in the object creating it – shadows are characterized by a flatness, a two-dimensional image that purports to represent three. Shadows may appear to mimic the object that causes them, but they homogenize all depths,

contours, and textures of the original object in a new two-dimensional image providing only an outline, an indication of original object; shadows have no depth.

However, unlike shadows, supplemental education programs can sometimes evince *more* complexity than mainstream schools and exhibit a greater diversity of goals and methods, as well as frameworks for making sense of them. While supplemental programs are, as defined herein, necessarily reactive to mainstream schooling in some ways, they are not *merely* reactive to the mainstream: not only do some programs *create* educational goals that transcend those prioritized in the mainstream, some programs are reactive to other forces as well, such as community values, some of which *predate* the existence of mainstream schooling and are simply now best instilled through supplemental education programs. And, as authors are keen to point out (e.g., Wiseman 2013; Davies & Aurini 2010; Bray 2013; Brehm 2018), supplemental programs have begun to affect the very institutions they supplement and the policies that guide them, something entirely unlike the relationship between any shadow and the object that casts it. Finally, given David Baker's (2014) argument that formal educational activities are perceived as legitimate and worthwhile to an unprecedented degree in the world today, it should not be surprising to find a variety of (potentially incongruent) practices 'smuggled in' to educational endeavors, mainstream or not, especially in places, such as contemporary China, where other forms of cultural work are politically fraught or prohibited. Supplemental education can serve a variety of functions. It is *alive* in a way that shadows could never be.

This chapter proceeds by first providing a review of how scholars of supplemental education have conceptualized their objects of study. I then discuss the usefulness of recognizing the loosely nature coupled (Weick's 1976; Orton & Weick 1990) of education systems, and, in this case, supplemental programs, suggesting that neoinstitutional scholars' focus on

isomorphism has precipitated a tendency to prioritize the mimetic nature of expansion (cf. Anderson-Levitt 2003). I then analyze empirical data to show that one particular program in Amdo Tibet engages in different supplemental activities best understood in three distinct ways, revealing supplemental programs' potential multivalence and the inadequacy of categorizing and excluding from consideration programs as if their goals were self-evident and unidimensional (thus suggesting the inadequacy of the shadow metaphor). The analysis continues by showing how these seemingly incongruent goals are actually synthesized by educators and students into a framework that reorients the purposes of education toward cultivating an altruistic mindset (*lhag bsam*) that is capacious enough to incorporate a variety of different pursuits in ways that are academically effective, ethnically desirable, and, importantly, politically possible. I conclude by suggesting that not only can some supplemental educators and students pursue apparently divergent objectives virtually simultaneously, but also that it is precisely through pursuing these diverse goals that some programs, such as my principal field site, are able to model for its students how to navigate specific ethnic, political, and educational tensions that characterize the educational experiences of young Amdo Tibetan students in the People's Republic of China.

### **Literature Review**

One principal consequence of the Education Revolution is the development of educational activities that take place outside of mainstream schooling (Bray 2017). Many labels have been used to describe these, the broadest of which is 'outside school time' (OST), which Noam and Shah (2013, p. 200) describe as "activities that may or may not align with school curricula, that focus on youth development and enriching learning activities..." Despite scholars' shared interest in further categorizing the functions of OST activities, however, limited

consensus over what exactly OST programs (intend to) provide and authors' locations in different historical moments and research institutes – not to mention the translation of idiomatic expressions across several languages – means that there is little standardization between the function(s) of an OST program and how it is labeled in academic or popular discourse (Malik, 2017). OST programs with very different functions can often go by the same name, e.g., supplementary education (cf. Andrews, 2016 and Bray, 2015); programs with similar functions can go by different names, e.g., complementary or supplementary education (cf. Martin et al., 2006 and Hall et al., 2002); and some authors (e.g., Archer et al., 2009) use these terms interchangeably. Numerous other labels have emerged, used with more or less specificity, such as: shadow education (Mori and Baker, 1993), community schools (El-Sherif and Niyozov, 2015), extended education (Stecher et al., 2013), extra lessons (Zhou and Wang, 2015), private supplementary tutoring (Bray, 2018), private tutoring (Kobakhidze, 2014), community language schools (Wang, 1996), heritage language schools (Kim, 2011), Saturday and/or Sunday schools (Gerrard, 2011), and so on. As Malik (2017) shows, even one of the most popular terms for OST instruction – shadow education – is often used quite differently from Stevenson and Baker's (1992, p. 1640) initial formulation, in which 'shadowing' is used "to denote strong connection between allocation rules [such as the presence of high-stakes exams in admissions and employment] and nonformal schooling" rather than the actual instructional "processes, curriculum, and structure," (Malik 2017, p. 11) which is how the term is generally used in the literature today.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, rather than attempt to lay bare the 'inconsistencies' in all these

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<sup>39</sup> That is to say that Stevenson and Baker's (1992) original use of the term 'shadow education' refers primarily to the fact that supplemental programs are more likely to be present in contexts where successful in formal schooling facilitates success beyond formal schooling in employment and other social arenas. They do not initially state that this means 'shadow' education necessarily mimics the curricula, instructional practices, or other components of mainstream education. However, as the publications of numerous authors, such as Kim and Jung (2019), and even Baker et al., (2001) himself suggest, many have readily understood the notion of shadowing to indeed refer to the mimetic nature of the curricula and methods of shadow education.

terms and clarify just what is meant by a given label, this chapter instead shifts focus to the *frameworks* researchers use when conceptualizing object of study and its relationship to mainstream schooling. There is little logic behind the labels these programs have adopted and therefore there is little benefit in providing an analysis of the labeling practices themselves.

While the use of more exact labels can be helpful to highlight what certain OST programs (strive to) accomplish, *a priori* categorization and research employing those categories can predispose researchers (and possibly participants) to conceptualize these programs' functions unnecessarily narrowly. For example, excluding 'heritage language schools' from a study of 'supplementary education' because they "are taught by volunteers and focus on subjects not tested in formal schools" (Bray 2017, p. 473; 2015), predisposes researchers to missing both the mainstream-oriented academic functions that heritage language schools might fulfil (see Zhou and Kim, 2006) and/or nonacademic or extracurricular activities that may still benefit children's lives at mainstream-oriented supplemental programs (see Montebon, 2015). Nevertheless, a brief review of the literature on educational OST programs does reveal important patterns between the ways OST programs are labelled and researchers' capacity to recognize various forms of learning. I use ideal types of each form of supplemental program, based on leading authors' descriptions of these phenomena, to comment on current conceptualizations of these practices.

Researchers of educational OST activities, i.e., supplemental education, generally employ one of three frameworks for understanding programs based on their relationship to the goals prioritized in mainstream schooling: 1) Reinforcement 2) Divergence, and 3) Critique (see Figure 3 below). The Reinforcement Framework is used by researchers who conceptualize supplemental programs as that those which reinforce or enhance what is learned in mainstream school (e.g., Stevenson and Baker, 1992; Bray, 2015). Second, scholars using a Divergence

Framework (e.g. ,Wang 1996; Fishman 2014; Martin et al., 2006) have focused on supplemental programs’ capacity to provide instruction in topics that are categorically omitted in mainstream schooling, often heritage languages and cultures. Third, a Critical Framework is used by researchers who conceptualize the work of supplemental programs as that which primarily “challenges” (Gerrard 2011), “counter[s] the hegemony of” (Hall et al. 2002), or critiques what is learned and experienced in the mainstream. This is not to say that participants always conceptualize their own work as fitting in one (and only one) of these categories. Rather, these frameworks are used by scholars to understand supplementation, who often approach these programs *as if* only one significant educational process is at work. A review of the literature will reveal scholars’ use of these three frameworks for understanding programs’ practices and, subsequently, how (sometimes implicit) adherence to these frameworks limits scholars’ recognition of the diverse forms of learning that such programs can facilitate for students.

Framework	Assumptions of Motivation of Supplementation
<p><b>Reinforcement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Bray (2015)</li> <li>- Kobakhidze (2016)</li> <li>- Stevenson &amp; Baker 1992</li> <li>- Mori &amp; Baker (2010)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Programs reinforce or enhance the goals of mainstream school</li> <li>→ Supplementation necessary because there are not sufficient hours, materials, or quality teachers in mainstream schooling</li> </ul>
<p><b>Divergence</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Fishman (2014)</li> <li>- Creese et al. (2008)</li> <li>- Francis et al. (2009)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Programs diverge from the goals of mainstream schooling to teach key knowledges beyond mainstream curriculum</li> <li>→ Supplementation necessary because mainstream schools only cover general topics, not those specific to a subset</li> </ul>
<p><b>Critique</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Gerrard (2011)</li> <li>- Hall et al. (2002)</li> <li>- Chevannes &amp; Reeves (1989)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ Programs critique and challenge the goals of mainstream education and its curriculum, which reproduce inequality</li> <li>→ Supplementation necessary because without such programs, students will be less able to cope with/overcome discriminatory practices and experiences</li> </ul>

Figure 3: Table of scholarly approaches to educational outside school time activities

Scholars employing a Reinforcement Framework use a strict interpretation of supplementation to focus on these programs' attempts to reinforce and enhance the skills and knowledges that are taught and tested in mainstream schools (Bray 2015, 1999). The proclivity of many researchers of this process to use the term "shadow education" (Stevenson and Baker, 1993; Mori & Baker, 2010) highlights their interest in how such programs "mimic the regular school system" and adjust their programs to match to curricula, pedagogy, and policies dominant in mainstream schooling (Bray et al., 2014, p. 25). Malik (2017) questions whether this current and dominant usage actually reflects the term's initial usage in Stevenson and Baker (1992), in which the process of shadowing referred less to similarities between mainstream and supplemental instruction and more to the similarity of rules and goals that influenced both. Nevertheless, in this framework, supplemental programs are seen as necessarily and highly reactive, following the "institutional logic of mass education" to the "point of being a partner institution to formal education itself" (Mori and Baker 2010, p. 41). Worth noting is that 'reaction' here can also include instruction of content 'in advance' of the regular curriculum so students can prepare for upcoming lessons and exams (Feng & Bray, 2019; Bray & Lykins, 2012). Aurini and Davies (2004), for example, have shown that some tutors are even able to offer for-credit courses, demonstrating how intertwined with mainstream schools and some 'shadow' programs have become. Researchers (e.g. Kobakhidze, 2014; Brehm, 2018) using this framework highlight the continuities between and mainstream schooling and supplementation, showing, for example, how some teachers in mainstream schooling, for more or less justifiable reasons, compel students to attend costly supplemental classes to complete lessons that were begun during classes in the mainstream.<sup>40</sup> Ultimately, it is this tight alignment of *goals* – in

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<sup>40</sup> A distinction here will make my point clearer. Malik (2017) points out a rift between two camps of scholars who use the term shadow education. On one hand, some scholars Stevenson & Baker, 1992; Baker et al., 2001, Baker &

addition to simply the similarity between mainstream and supplemental content or methods – that characterizes the Reinforcement Framework. That this approach to understanding supplemental education has ignited the most interest among scholars in comparative and international education is not surprising given both the ever-growing influence that mainstream education exerts on allocation processes (Baker, 2014; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976) and the prominence in this field of neoinstitutionalist perspectives on educational expansion (Meyer et al., 1997; Baker, 2014). Indeed, it appears a framework focusing on programs’ capacity to reinforce and enhance what is learned in mainstream schooling is well-suited to understanding a majority supplemental practices that exist today.

A Divergence Framework is employed by researchers interested in understanding how supplemental programs can assist students in pursuing goals that (appear to) differ from those prioritized in mainstream schooling. Researchers (e.g., Wang 1996; Martin et al., 2006) using this framework focus on the capacity of supplemental programs to provide that which is categorically omitted in mainstream schooling (but still considered to be educationally valuable by participants), rather than Reinforcing or Critiquing it. Scholarship of this type does not assume that supplemental programs are merely reactive to mainstream schooling, and, if they are, they are reactive primarily in the negative sense that they teach what mainstream educators have

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LeTendre, 2005; Mori & Baker, 2010) do not consider the payment of fees as a necessary condition of ‘shadow education.’ On the other hand, some scholars (Bray, 1999; Bray & Kwok, 2003; Borodchuk, 2011; Bray, Kobakhidze, Liu & Zhang, 2016) generally consider payment a necessary component of shadow education. While this can be an important distinction to make (if trying to understand how such programs address economic inequality, for example) this is *not* a distinction germane to the frameworks I develop because the existence or absence of fees reveals nothing regarding a given programs’ relationship to the learning goals prioritized in mainstream schooling. And, indeed, categorizing programs by the existence of fees – and then focusing on one or the other of these types of programs – will likely prevent researchers from seeing other phenomenon present across a variety of supplemental programs, such as their capacity to pursue multiple goals. Finally, even the existence of fees is not entirely straightforward and, thus, not necessarily a useful distinction for understanding programs unless payments are the object of study. My principal field site, for example, charges a 600RMB (US\$100) fee upfront to students enrolling in the 3-year, 6-session program. However, it remits 100Y to students each session, which means that the program, if one completes it, is ultimately free. But the fees still provide capital for running the school and making improvements.



no intention of including in the curriculum, such as (often minoritized) heritage languages (Fishman, 2014), ethnic customs (Martin et al., 2006) or religious knowledge (Gholami, 2017). These researchers conceptualize the function of supplemental programs as providing culturally responsive or sustaining instruction that supports the affirmation of participants' identities and the community itself. (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Therefore, they diverge from the explicit goals of mainstream schooling. Researchers using a Divergence Framework do not assume that such programs are exclusively subsequent to formal schooling and recognize that linguistic and cultural heritage programs sometimes *predate* compulsory schooling (Fishman, 2001). Zhou and Kim (2006) point out that the existence of programs in the US with these goals dates to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, and that many such programs did not attempt to 'shadow' or even critique mainstream schooling. For example, the successful participation of Chinese students in the mainstream was already occluded by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 but Chinese-American communities nevertheless established community schools to provide instruction in a variety of topics, some of which were included in mainstream curricula and many of which taught skills that better situated students in allocation processes (Zhou & Kim, 2006). Thus, scholars using a Divergence Framework do not assume the same linearity from mainstream to shadow that Reinforcement scholars do, who claim that supplemental education "exists only because of the existence of mainstream schooling" (Bray, 2017; Zhang & Bray, 2016). Because they see supplemental programs as pursuing divergent goals from those prioritized in the mainstream, scholars using this framework do not conceptualize their objects of study as "shadow education" even though they increasingly attend to the ways that participation in these programs may produce (additional) outcomes that facilitate success in mainstream schooling, such as the development of additive bilingualism (Lee & Wright, 2014; Lee & Suarez, 2009; Maloof et al., 2006). Approaches to

studying supplemental education that do not limit their sample frames to programs that teach what is “taught and tested in mainstream schools” are rarer in the field of comparative and international education, where it has been, on occasion, explicitly excluded from conceptualizations of ‘supplemental’ education (e.g., Bray 2017). However, the label ‘supplemental education’ itself is sometimes used by researchers using a Divergence Framework to understand programs’ capacity to teach knowledges absent in mainstream schooling (e.g., Francis et al. 2009), thereby ‘supplementing’ it.

Thus far, a lack of consensus – if not actual confusion – is apparent regarding the usage (and meaning) of supplementation: Does the act of supplementation entail adding more of what already exists (just in insufficient quantity thus far)? Or does ‘supplementation’ mean adding to something that which was not already there? I maintain that these labels are convenient short hand at best and, more likely, misleading and confusing because they do not clearly indicate the actual goals of OST educational activities in the way that the Frameworks proffered here do.

Authors using a Critical Framework (Freire, 1970; hooks, 1993; Giroux 2010) focus on programs’ efforts to address the minoritizing experiences that students face in mainstream schools, the prevalence of which is often treated as a *fait accompli* by researchers emphasizing supplemental programs as sites of resistance rather than mimesis or divergence (e.g. Chevannes & Reeves, 1989). Eschewing a focus on how supplemental schooling Reinforces or Diverges from mainstream schooling, researchers using a Critical Framework conceptualize the work of supplemental programs as that which primarily “challenges” (Gerrard 2011) or “counter[s] the hegemony of” (Hall et al. 2002) what is learned and experienced in mainstream schooling. Researchers using a Critical Framework are primarily concerned with the capacity of supplemental programs to respond to the ways that mainstream schooling can devalue and

marginalize nondominant cultures and knowledges. Researchers using a Critical Framework also emphasize participants' "sense of belonging to a community that supports them practically, culturally, socially, emotionally and spiritually" even as these researchers recognize that supplemental teachers "regardless of their particular curricular focus in the supplementary school, shared a desire to promote their pupils' progress in the mainstream school" (Hall et al., 2002, p. 410). Differing from researchers using a Reinforcement Framework, researchers using Divergence or Critical Frameworks tend to share a skepticism towards mainstream schooling and its capacity to recognize and reward diverse knowledges and worldviews. Researchers using Divergence or Critical Frameworks differ from one another in their perspectives on whether the mainstream does this, respectively, through a more passive omission or through a more active marginalization or devaluation of subaltern knowledges and ways of being.

Some other 'family resemblances' are worth noting as well. Researchers using a Reinforcement Framework tend to use quantitative methods, including international surveys, PISA and TIMSS results, and multi-sited mixed methods research to understand patterns of diffusion, participation, and broader impact (Wiseman et al., 2014; Schreier, 2012; Feng & Bray, 2019) rather than ethnographic research that explores the complexity of what happens at a given program. This scholarship has revealed important regional and global patterns but has brought its own methodological complications and blind spots, too (Bray, 2015). Conversely, researchers using a Critical Framework often use ethnographic case studies to understand how ethnic, linguistic, and other identities minoritized or stigmatized in mainstream schooling are supported by supplemental programs (e.g., Archer & Francis 2009), ultimately focusing on how participation in them is "not merely physical, intellectual or instrumental" but "also emotional, spiritual and deeply meaningful" (Hall et al., 2002). Chevannes and Reeves (1989) articulate an

ideal typical approach using a Critical Framework: “What makes these projects distinctive from other ethnic minority extra schooling is that they do not focus on language or religion,” – which characterizes researchers using the Divergence Framework just discussed – “but rather on teaching the basics of schooling to overcome inequalities in education...”. While scholars using the Reinforcement Framework discussed above have made important contributions to studying the dialectical relationship between mainstream schooling and supplemental programs, such as how supplementation can create inequality (Jokic, 2013; Bray et al., 2016), researchers using the Critical Framework are primarily concerned with the capacity of these programs to *respond* to the ways that mainstream schooling can devalue and marginalize nondominant worldviews and knowledges. As noted, authors using a Critical Framework also refer to such programs as supplementary education (e.g., Andrews, 2016), though “complementary” (e.g., Wei, 2014), “community” (Archer et al., 2010) and other qualifiers are used as well.

In sum, researchers using all three frameworks intend to study how supplemental programs address that which is lacking in mainstream schooling, but the key difference lies in how scholars conceptualize the nature of what is omitted: Is the omitted content not taught in mainstream schools because there are simply insufficient hours in the school-day or the capacity to deliver it, as researchers using the Reinforcement Framework assume? Is content omitted because the mainstream schools never sought to provide instruction in certain topics, like languages or customs, in the first place, as researchers using the Divergence Framework assume? Or is content omitted because to teach it would undermine the legitimacy of mainstream schooling itself, revealing its epistemologically discriminatory foundations, as researchers using the Critical Framework assume? Because it is clear that even a single student could be negatively affected by omissions of all three kinds, it is surprising that so few researchers have sought to

understand how supplemental programs might attempt to rectify shortcomings in all three of these areas.

There are two concluding points to make. First, it's necessary to recall that this summary reviews the scholarly literature, not the actual programs themselves and their functions (although the researchers frequently use interlocutors' descriptions). While supplemental programs often have specific goals (e.g., test-score improvement; heritage language instruction), it is equally possible for programs – or various teachers within a program – to address diverse goals. The scholarly focus on a single function may be the product of a circumscribed theoretical focus or a choice of research methods that limit researchers' capacity (or desire) to recognize multiple forms of learning taking place within a single program in order to illuminate other important findings. Nevertheless, *a priori* use of programs' stated (or even assumed) goals to determine how programs are categorized (and therefore studied) has hindered scholars' ability to understand a given program *qua* organization with complex cultures and norms of its own.

Second, to differing degrees, and excepting a few authors using the Divergence Framework (e.g., Zhou and Kim 2006), many scholars assume or state explicitly that these programs “only exist because the mainstream education exists” (Zhang 2014, p. 246; Bray, 1999, p. 17). While this is no doubt true for many OST programs, it is not the case for all. Some communities maintain programs that predate the emergence of compulsory schooling and instill knowledges not taught therein *in addition to* activities (including but not limited to curricular instruction) that are designed to improve students' outcomes in mainstream education. These multivalent programs, therefore, provide a theoretically significant source of data on how individuals and communities that have experienced educational minoritization and displacement as a result of the Education Revolution (cf. Baker, 2014 and Anderson-Levitt, 2003) negotiate

the assimilation of its norms. Therefore, a study of supplemental programs' attempts to meet one or more of these goals have potential to contribute to debates between those who find a "surprisingly consensual" acceptance of the norms of mainstream schooling (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 145) and those who see widespread and subtle resistance to increasingly influential educational norms propagated through mainstream schooling (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Wu, 2012).

### **From Isomorphism to Coupling**

Perhaps one reason that scholars have not attended to supplemental programs' potential to meet these diverse goals is because they have unnecessarily assumed that these organizations are tightly coupled systems in that the many elements that comprise a school (e.g., teachers' practices, rules, procedures, assessments, students' aims, etc.) all function in a tightly unified manner (Weick, 1976). Indeed, Loyalka and Zakharov (2016) implicitly argue that supplemental programs are even more tightly coupled organizations than mainstream schools – an unnecessary, but reasonable, expectation given their usually smaller-size and apparently more specific focus (e.g., on exam preparation). However, Weick (1976; Orton & Weick, 1990) suggests that organizations need not be considered singular units in which all actors are striving toward the same goal with the same motivating rationale. Educational institutions are often the example *par excellence* that instance 'loose coupling' insofar as classrooms, administration, discourse, and actions often evince more independence and isolation from one another than might be expected among elements in a single organization. If we recall that schools are often loosely coupled, and indeed may strategically be so (Bastedo, 2004), it is possible to transcend frameworks that consider supplemental education as exclusively Reinforcing, Diverging from, or Critiquing mainstream education. Though many educators may recognize a variety of student needs and

goals, researchers often proceed as if a given supplemental program strives to meet only a single goal. What are the origins of such emphasis on the mimetic nature of supplemental education?

Leading sociologists of education have used, though not always explicitly, the phenomenon of institutional isomorphism – that is, the tendency for emerging organizational structures to mimic previously legitimized ones (Meyer et al., 1997) – to understand the growth of educational institutions and their surprising similarity despite vastly different circumstances (e.g., Baker, 2014). Others have offered critiques of neoinstitutionalists' emphasis on isomorphism, arguing that while institutional forms may appear similar globally, in-depth (often ethnographic) research shows that such isomorphism is often coerced, superficial, or limited (e.g., Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Wu, 2016). These now well-worn debates have provided much insight into the processes of adoption, adaptation, and resistance (e.g., Wahl 2016). My purpose here is not to retrace them but to build on them by arguing that the concept of coupling (Weick, 1976; Orton & Weick, 1990) provides better analytical purchase than isomorphism in understanding the nature of supplemental programs' so-called 'shadowing' of mainstream schools and what these dis/continuities with mainstream schooling mean to the participants of these programs. I briefly discuss two principal ways the concept of coupling has been used and the two analytical advantages, vis-à-vis isomorphism, that these uses highlight.

Common within contemporary sociology of education is the use of coupling to describe the extent to which microlevel practices 'on the ground' match not only other organizations but also 'policy texts' (Carney et al., 2009) that circulate through macro-level, often transnational networks of IGOs, NGOs, policymakers, and governments. This first conceptualization might best be referred to as *extraorganizational* (rather than *interorganizational*) coupling to highlight that not everything with which organizations might be coupled are themselves organizations.

Policies (Bastedo, 2004), parental desires (Weick, 1982), and widely circulated scripts about the value of schooling (Baker, 2014) are all referents to which practices at supplemental programs may be coupled but are not organizations. Second, and closer to the initial formulations in the managerialism literature (e.g., Weick 1976), is *intraorganizational* coupling, which describes micro-level coupling within an organization, e.g., between teachers' methods, instructional goals, missions, and stakeholders' expectations within a school setting. Some authors (e.g., Spitzmuller & Park 2018), writing in psychology, refer to extraorganizational coupling as "vertical" and intraorganizational coupling as "horizontal," which is valuable in instances where the hierarchy of a certain set of relationships is evident or at least not the phenomenon under study. I refrain from using these, however, because it is the putative hierarchy (i.e., verticality) of these relationships that this study queries. In other words, assuming that the mainstream schools and supplemental programs already exist in a relationship of vertical hierarchy (with mainstream schools in the position of relative power) forecloses some of the very questions that this study poses. Because the data collected at Marching Together indicate that not all practices 'on the ground' mimic those at higher echelons of the power/influence chain, one is unjustified in assuming that this is a simple hierarchical relationship, or, at least, that it is the *only* hierarchical relationship in which a supplemental program is engaged. That is, the program might be in multiple vertically coupled relationships – with mainstream schools, but also with monasteries, for example. Therefore, eschewing an idea of verticality, which presupposes the directionality of influence or self-evident hierarchical arrangement, I use the notion of extraorganizational coupling to understand the relationships between Marching Together and policies, discourses, and values to which it might be coupled. Horizontal coupling (Spitzmuller & Park, 2018) is less problematically synonymous with intraorganizational coupling, but for the sake of consistency I



employ the latter term throughout.

Scholarship on educational expansion often focuses on extraorganizational dynamics, i.e., how actual practices on the ground become ‘decoupled’ or detached from global educational norms and national policies (e.g., Ramirez, 2003). However, a reconsideration of intraorganizational dynamics, i.e., the disjointing and relative isolation of departments or elements within an organization, helps clarify the potentially monolithic and opaque notion of isomorphism in general, and this paper’s exploration of supplemental education in particular: Exactly which of Marching Together’s norms or practices are isomorphic with mainstream schooling and which are not? And are any elements isomorphic with *other* institutions’ educational practices? Developing notions of intra- and extraorganizational coupling provides two concomitant advantages for understanding the different natures of supplemental programs and the meaning that program participants make of their experience.

First, coupling entails a reciprocity that isomorphism does not. Coupling is not just a link, connection, or a product of a unidirectional causality – like an object and its shadow might be. Rather, as Bray & Jokic (2015) show, many scholars are interested in how the increasing presence of supplemental programs also affects mainstream schooling itself through “backwash effects.” It is not merely the unidirectional diffusion (and subsequent reinforcement, divergence, or critique) that concerns scholars of supplemental education. Earlier generations of research on how what is assimilated and learned outside of schools affects what happens in school (e.g. Bourdieu & Passerson, 1977) evinced an interest in this dialectic as well, rather than simply analyzing how mainstream schools affect or guide practices outside them. Rather than viewing supplemental programs as isomorphic shadows, considering such programs as loosely coupled with mainstream schooling also allows for analysis of ‘shadow’ education often affects the

policies and procedures of mainstream schools themselves, albeit to differing degrees and sometimes indirectly or only eventually (Bray & Lykins, 2012). While my study does not actually attempt to understand the impact that supplemental education programs have on the policies that shape mainstream schooling, researchers (e.g., Bray & Jokic, 2015) have already begun to discuss this relationship in ways that highlight such reciprocity (which is more intelligible using a concept of coupling than isomorphism).

The second advantage produced by a framework employing coupling stems from earlier literature on coupling: in addition to the ‘extraorganizational’ coupling often used by neoinstitutionalists and scholars of the Education Revolution more generally, foundational theorists of coupling (e.g., Weick 1976) focused on ‘intraorganizational’ coupling of micro-level elements within an organization. The use of coupling helps one recognize that different educators might be doing very different things across classes (or even at different moments in the same class) and that, through an intentional omission of certain accountability measures (e.g., standardized exams; oversight from the Bureau of Education), actions of supplemental educators may diverge significantly from each other and from the ‘official’ rationales and injunctions of the organization. Moreover, coupling, as theorized by Weick, facilitates analysis of the different elements that constitute organizations. It is not as if supplemental programs, as a unified whole, simply do or do not ‘shadow’ mainstream education. Neither mainstream schools nor supplemental programs are monolithic organizations that are simply isomorphic or not. Rather, different elements of a program can be more or less coupled with each other *and* with different elements of mainstream schools, monasteries, or the labor market. The examination of intraorganizational coupling, then, can help to identify different elements of schools and supplemental programs that may or may not be coupled by highlighting that there need not be

consistency *across* these relationships. That is, some elements of supplemental programs might be tightly coupled with mainstream schooling, and others may be loosely or, possibly, not at all coupled to practices and norms in the mainstream. It is this set of dynamic arrangements, rather than a static whole (Hallett, 2007), that constitutes the institutional environment that students and teachers negotiate and interpret.

From this perspective, it becomes clear that the authors from each of the three camps have different assumptions about the nature of the coupling between supplemental programs and mainstream schooling. Those using a Reinforcement Framework assume that supplemental education practices are tightly coupled to the methods and goals that characteristic of mainstream schooling. Those using a Divergence Framework assume that supplemental programs' goals are only loosely coupled to those of the mainstream. And those using a Critical Framework assume that programs' goals are decoupled (or, perhaps, inversely or negatively coupled) with those of mainstream schooling. Many scholars approach supplemental programs as if are singular units and therefore can pursue only one of these three avenues. The assumption of a singular goal implies, as Weick (1976) indicates, that supplemental programs themselves are tightly coupled intraorganizationally (i.e., that the different elements of a single program function in concert) with highly aligned methods, goals, teacher identities, and so forth that are intended to meet one of the three functions adumbrated above. However, this uniformity need not be the case; *Marching Together* provides an example.

To summarize, attending to both macro/extraorganizational *and* micro/intraorganizational processes of coupling reveals that even small organizations, like supplemental programs, need not be considered monolithic in “the degree to which [they]... accord with cultural norms and values of modern (world) society” (Hasse & Krucken, 2015, p. 199). Different elements of the

program can be more or less tightly coupled to exogenous forces (namely policy texts as well as mainstream curricula and goals, but also parental demands, mainstream educators' aspirations, etc.) and these can also change over time (Hallett 2010) either through imposition and coercion or as a product of the agency and strategy of individual actors or organizations. Therefore, it is possible, or even probable, that different elements will be more or less coupled as a product of strategies and external forces. For example, in surveillance states like China, discourse often *must be* tightly coupled to official narratives whereas actions may be less tightly yoked to policy texts as long as such loosely coupled action stays *unarticulated* (Kinzelback, 2013). Therefore, what supplemental programs do, and what they are understood to do by their participants, is the product of an arrangement of numerous (intra- and extra-) couplings. I argue that an analysis of this array provides an important corrective to previous scholarship on such programs because, through providing a rigorously ethnographic perspective of what it means to couple tightly in a given instance but loosely in a different one, it increases scholars' capacity to recognize the multivalence of supplemental programs' practices. This work also highlights how these programs can benefit their students, especially in circumstances where sociopolitical circumstances might render blatant or explicit efforts to challenge or decouple from state-sanctioned and mainstream institutions dangerous or illegal.

Therefore, rather than categorizing supplemental programs using a composite measure of whether they reinforce, diverge from, or critique mainstream schooling, Amdo Tibetan *sabjong* compel one to ask: which elements of a supplemental program appear to mimic mainstream school and which do not? And how do participants make sense of this arrangement? Studies of how Amdo Tibetan communities interpret and act upon the rapid expansion of schooling must disaggregate what formal education entails in the minds of Tibetan interlocutors to understand

what aspects of it are reinforced, ignored, or critiqued. That is, different practices and perspectives found at MT cannot all be meaningfully understood if only one single framework is applied across the board. Rather, the flexible way in which MT's educators and students navigate the (often competing) demands of mainstream schooling, greater Tibetan society, and local and familial relationships suggests that the practices and perspectives at MT that differentially reinforce, critique, and diverge from the schools they are thought to 'shadow' are best understood as an endeavor to reorient the meanings and purposes of mainstream education, as I show below.

### **Ethnographic Backdrop**

Dorje and I arrived at MT *sabjong* on a sunny July evening after the 200km drive from my apartment took us past Serjong's farming villages of central Guchu Prefecture (in Qinghai Province, China) and up into the sheep and yak pastures of the nearby county higher in the mountains at roughly 3600m elevation. We approached a typical "new village" a uniformly designed poured-concrete housing development constructed by the government roughly three years prior and plopped into the middle of a seemingly interminable grassland prairie. We followed the steady trickle of motorbikes teetering under the weight of a father, child, and suitcase brimming with warm clothes. The images depicted in MT's yearbook-magazine given to me when I first met the leader Aku Cheeden a month prior of a bucolic landscape dotted with large tents serving as classrooms and dormitories gave way to a starker site: the *sabjong* had relocated and now occupied four adjacent plots in the standard-issue housing block that the *sabjong* leaders had raised money to purchase from their original recipients, an approach I had never seen before. Most other *sabjong* in Guchu Prefecture usually rent rooms in town to host their holiday sessions or set up tents on the grassland for classrooms, a common practice over the

past several decades known as tent-schooling (*ras gur slob grwa*). In addition to those four cinderblock houses initially constructed by the government, the students and staff of MT had the previous winter erected three similar structures, all side by side on the west edge of the now atypically large yard surrounded by a six-foot brick wall. In all, the buildings of the *sabjong* comprised five classrooms, a library, an assembly hall, a small convenience store, a teachers' office/dormitory, a kitchen, and girls' and boys' dormitories. Outside, in the large grassy and sandy lot, was an outhouse, two storage sheds, a basketball court built as gift from a recently graduated class, and the oversized yurt all the students and teachers were currently working to assemble as Dorje, my principal research assistant, and I pulled up to the gate.

After the two hours it took to assemble the yurt, Dorje and I joined the other teachers on stage in the assembly hall. We were led by Aku Cheeden,<sup>41</sup> the lay principal who had started MT over a decade ago, while a monk, with his monastic friends: Aku Huazang, Aku Lobsang, Aku Orgyan, and Aku Gyamtsen. The younger, lay teachers included Chopa, Wende Tso, and Sermo Tso, Dorje, who were all university students or recent graduates, and me, who was most similar to the monks in age, the university students in teaching style, and the young students in my proficiency in spoken Amdo Tibetan language. The assembly lasted over two hours, with the monks passing the microphone and discussing the history of the school, laying out rules and schedule, introducing teaching staff, admonishing the students to behave well, work hard, and support one another throughout the taxing month ahead. The leaders explained to newcomers that there were two tracks of students – “Returners” (*rgyun gzhus*) and “One-timers” (*skabs*

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<sup>41</sup> “Aku” is a common title in Amdo Tibetan areas used to show respect to older men or monks of any age. While Aku Cheeden was no longer an ordained monk and now had a family – the topic of many playful jokes – everyone still referred to him as “Aku.” Otherwise, the title Aku herein refers to an ordained monk unless noted.

*gzhug*), an arrangement utterly unique among the 26 *sabjong* I visited.<sup>42</sup> Returners, who comprised about 75% of the roughly 110 students, had committed to attend MT for six consecutive sessions (i.e., three summer and three winter sessions) and, conferred with a specific class name,<sup>43</sup> often developed a strong class identity in the process. One-timers, if they benefitted from attending, were encouraged to enroll in the three-year Returners program, where they would be enrolled in a new Returners class with other incoming students, irrespective of their actual grade level in mainstream school. Aku finished the meeting by reminding students that this would not be an experience identical to that in mainstream (i.e., Chinese) schools, where things are less flexible, saying: “Compared to the public (literally: Chinese, Tib. *rgya gi*) school, our teachers will decide the content on their own (*slob khrid gi nang don gtan khel*), arrange [the class curriculum] as they see fit.” But Aku Cheeden stated this didn’t imply a lack of rigor at MT. “We have a lot of rules here and we are strict about them because they are to make sure you are studying hard.” This sentiment was expanded upon by other monks who spoke after Aku Cheeden.

After each leader had spoken, Aku Cheeden dismissed the students, many of whom were exhausted after a long day on the back of a motorcycle. The teachers returned to our dorm for tea and bread and to discuss the schedule and associated responsibilities, the most important of which was to ‘create a connection with the students’ (*brel ba zig gtsugs*) and encourage them to speak up in class to develop bravery (*spobs pa*). “But don’t be too relaxed with them either. They need to learn how to work really hard. Don’t let them sleep in class!” Aku Cheeden advised. The teaching staff settled on a schedule (discussed at length in the next section) for the classes MT

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<sup>42</sup> Making this program even more unique is the payment method, which requires parents to put up the not-insignificant sum of 600 Yuan (about \$100) upon enrolling in the Returners class. However, for each of the 6 sessions that the students attend, their family received 100 Yuan in return. This encouraged commitment, generated capital for Marching Together, and meant that MT was ultimately able to provide a free education to most students.

<sup>43</sup> The leaders assign the often-poetic class names, such as “Lords of the Language” and “Wings of Wisdom.”

offers, namely Tibetan grammar, history, and epistemology, as well as Chinese and English classes. Twice weekly ‘work periods,’ during which students would help with some physical task, such as moving into the dormitory the bunkbeds that had been gifted by Tashi Kyil, the monastery in the prefecture seat where Aku Lobsang is affiliated, or dealing with garbage, were also included in the schedule. Memorizations and associated quizzes were included in the daily schedule, as well. No period of time between 6:00am and 10:30pm was unscheduled other than the 2.5-hour break students had during and after lunch, though in practice the schedule was not always enforced punctually. Probably when he saw our reaction to the extensive scheduling and rules at MT, Aku Cheeden explained that a strict routine help create in students an “awareness of themselves and their study habits, their motivation.” An excerpt from my field notes taken on the first morning at Marching Together provides more detail on the atmosphere of the *sabjong*:

*I can already see that it will be a tiring and busy month. The constant activities and long hours remind me of my years in Serjong Nationalities Middle School. Obviously there are many differences that are visible off the bat. But no need to try and analyze those just yet. We were up until fairly late last night planning out the day. I've been here 5 years and I still can't believe how much milk they drink at night. Mug upon mug of milk tea all night. The large water boiler is very convenient though, and the teachers room is a little old and dirty but, overall, has a pretty good set up with most necessities, which means boiled water, electricity, desks, Wifi, and a kitchen with some snacks. I brought some food with me, but the last two meals were very substantial and it seems we even have a full-time cook. It's not as clear to me when or how the students can get hot water, and they get their food from the other kitchen on the far side of the courtyard. They have another full-time cook on over there, I think, but from the quick glimpse I got, their food is definitely not of the same quality as ours. Dinner and breakfast this morning were enjoyable. We all ate together, which I'm sure they've done for years, but they still pretend to make a fuss over one another (and sometimes me) about serving etc. The two young women teachers, however, still end up doing a fair amount of serving and they don't always sit at the table with the rest of us either. The gender divide is unmistakable – even more pronounced than other situations I've been in, likely because the staff is mostly monks. Wende, who I think has been here before as a student and teacher, is funny and outspoken, but Sermo Tso hasn't said a word since we've arrived. I took the bed out on the porch with Dorje. They said it might be cold out there – of course I knew they'd say that. But it is a little crowded in the main room, especially when students are in there, and it's nice to have a little personal space. Dorje is in the top bunk. I'm on the bottom. The conditions are what a lot of other people would call rugged. The dust and smoke are*



*messing with my nose a bit, but other than that I think I can handle it. Not sure if others would feel the same though! We'll see what song I'm singing in after four weeks. The students don't seem to have it as cushy, though. All 100 of them are crammed into 2 or 3 pretty small rooms. I think some even share bunkbeds (meaning there are two on the top and two on the bottom)! At least the boys do. Maybe the girls get a little more room for themselves. The central courtyard isn't bad either. It's mostly dirt or whatever, not exactly a pro soccer pitch, but there's space to walk around, which the students are doing now as they study and memorize passages. I think Aku is whistling for everyone to come to the basketball court for evening recitation. Busy first day! (Field note from July 23, 2018)*

The vast majority of the student body, split almost evenly between boys and girls, came from the local herding area, which means that all were raised speaking Amdo Tibetan at home (indeed, many of their parents could not speak any other language proficiently) and they had no regular contact with other, minority languages spoken by Tibetans (and minoritized by Tibetan) in more diverse and populated areas in the same prefecture (see Roche, 2019). A few of the students had traveled further from lower farming areas, often on the recommendation of someone in their network or extended family. The daily schedule, described further below, includes primarily language courses, epistemology (*tshad ma*), and history. But other subjects commonly taught in supplemental schools, principally Math, were absent here (as one student lamented during his graduation speech). Returners' classes were generally comprised of older students (12-18 years old) who studied a largely predetermined series of Tibetan language, history, and epistemology texts in addition to Chinese and English classes. The One-timers (usually 7-11 years old) were taught the fundamentals of written Tibetan and Chinese, but not English because they didn't yet have English class in the mainstream schools, as Aku Cheeden explained, which in China usually begins in third grade. Despite these differences in schedules and teachers, the overwhelming focus was on written Tibetan, and the importance of speaking "Pure Tibetan" (*pha skad gtshang ma*) – a form of Tibetan language that emphasizes eliminating loan words and code-switching with other languages – was lauded at every opportunity.

## Analysis

### *Introduction*

The following subsections make two arguments. First, MT features diverse practices that cannot all be understood using only a single framework discussed above; rather, MT's educators engage in practices, certain aspects of which can only be understood as reinforcing, diverging from, or critiquing the goals of mainstream schooling. Second, those who shape MT's organizational culture do not simply accept the incommensurability of these goals, but, instead, reorient the goals of education toward the (re)construction an educational-moral universe in which ethnically desirable and politically possible learning goals can be legitimately prioritized. To make these points, I rely primarily on data on the trilingual instruction practices at MT, which provide a heuristic for observing the simultaneous, loosely coupled pursuit of these seemingly incongruent goals even within a single domain. While data on practices other than language instruction could (and sometimes will) still be used to demonstrate that MT, as an organization, pursues a variety of goals, prioritizing data from *one* domain, i.e., language instruction, can better illustrate the true multivalence that characterizes even a single aspect of MT. In other words, if one can observe diverse goals pursued through language learning alone, we could expect to see an even greater variety of goals pursued if we consider a larger number of dimensions (e.g., other subjects, policies, activities) that constitute a supplemental program.

The analysis will show that a single supplemental program can – and is best – understood through using all three frameworks rather than a single framework to the exclusion of others. Participants themselves recognize that at least some educational training useful to succeeding in mainstream school can be delivered through pedagogies (and even materials) ignored there, as MT's leader Aku Cheeden pointed out in our initial meeting, saying that

We teach Tibetan better than they learn in [mainstream] school. We use the monastic manuals (*yig cha*) and do memorization and recitation everyday [unlike the mainstream schools], so the students learn in the traditional way. [Our students] actually get better scores than if they just learned using [the standard school textbook called] Language Arts (*skad yig*).

This indicates that even supplemental programs that deliberately try to improve the student outcomes in mainstream schooling (perhaps among other goals) feature a number of elements, such as schedules, curricula, pedagogies, assessment, disciplinary practices, that need not mimic practices dominant in mainstream schooling. Moreover, this chapter argues that decoupling between mainstream and supplemental schools can happen for a variety of reasons, at least some of which may be strategically devised (see Bastedo 2004) rather than merely the product of limited resources or resistance to domination, the themes most usually highlights (see Anderson-Levitt 2003). Importantly, this decoupling can be advantageous for meeting *both* the goals of mainstream schooling and other objectives pursued by educators and students. It is only by analyzing participants' experience of this array of more tightly or loosely coupled elements that researchers can fully understand the educational cultures of supplemental programs and what participants derive from them.

The following three subsections, which correspond to the three frameworks identified in the literature above, illustrate that a single supplemental program, such as Marching Together, can include important elements that remain poorly understood if researchers employ only a single framework. To summarize: the literature review showed that one of three frameworks for understanding the relationship between supplemental programs and mainstream schooling are used by researchers. Researchers using the Reinforcement Framework focus on programs' capacity to reinforce and enhance what is learned in mainstream schooling through 'shadowing' the content and practices prominent therein. Researchers using the Divergence Framework have

explored the ways that these programs can provide instruction on topics that are categorically omitted from mainstream schooling, such as heritage languages and customs. Finally, researchers using a Critical Framework have focused on these programs' capacity to critique and challenge the stated and hidden curricula imparted in mainstream schooling that may be detrimental to students whose cultures and experiences are devalued therein. The following subsections show that researchers using any of the three frameworks could find at MT what they expect to find – reinforcement, divergence, and critique. However, reducing the complexity of MT to any single one of these pursuits would obscure learning practices at MT that are practically valuable and theoretically significant precisely because they cut across siloed educational pursuits to instead provide a model for how young Tibetan students can accommodate and navigate the tensions created by diverse and potentially competing notions of success. Through arguing that MT pursues goals that would be recognizable to researchers using any of the three frameworks, I conclude by arguing that while some goals of Marching Together appear to be in contradiction, educators there model for students how they can navigate these tensions through synthesizing and ultimately reorienting the goals of education. Through MT's effort to facilitate students' success according to all three of these frameworks by embodying these contradictions, they are offering to students a coherent way to meet these incongruent and potentially competing goals as authentic Tibetans succeeding in Tibetan and Chinese societies. Therefore, it is important to intervene in the existing categories of scholarship because ethnographic research at programs like Marching Together illustrates that these incongruent forms of learning are not only combined in educational practices, but also in the lives of students themselves to gain advantages in a variety of domains, including mainstream schooling itself.

*Reinforcement*

With this brief introduction finished, I now move on to explain how certain practices at MT can only be understood if this supplement program is considered to Reinforce what is learned in mainstream schooling. Because the presence of Chinese classes at MT would be the first counterargument to the claim that MT is best understood using a Divergence Framework, it is worth describing the approach to teaching and learning Chinese at MT. During the two summer sessions during which I conducted fieldwork at MT (in 2018, 2019), Dorje taught Chinese to three classes. Other Chinese classes were taught by Sermo Tso, a recent graduate who was now working on a year-to-year teaching contract<sup>44</sup> in a nearby district, and Wende Tso, an MA student, taught the other two classes in addition to her responsibilities teaching Tibetan history to the One-Timer students. In Chinese classes, which students had each day, the teachers were mostly free to determine their own curriculum. They elected not to use the textbooks used in mainstream school, a move that provoked no criticism from the senior staff. It also worth recalling that the four lay, younger teachers (who were all MA students) had excellent Chinese proficiency, even when compared to college-educated Tibetans, which is certainly not always the case for the teaching of foreign languages at *sabjong*. Other interlocutors of mine, one a college educated teacher in his early 30s who was interviewed in English and Tibetan, remembered their experiences at *sabjong*, recalling that the teachers (who were then often only high school students) “didn’t really know much more [English or Chinese] than the students. They just kind of studied the books together.” Even today, it is not uncommon for *sabjong* teachers of English and Chinese (and even English teachers in mainstream schools) to lack advanced proficiency in

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<sup>44</sup> Career teachers employed by public schools are officially prohibited from teaching for pay in supplemental classes in China. However, because Sermo Tso was still on a temporary contract, it seems like she could teach without issue (either because this actually was not prohibited or because MT did not offer significant enough compensation to draw any attention).

the language they are teaching. But by all accounts, Dorje, Chopa, Wende Tso, and Sermo Tso all had excellent Chinese language skills and, though Chinese teachers at MT were not required to use the mainstream textbooks, they did teach and test students on a variety of Chinese vocabulary and structures that are taught in tested in mainstream schools. These are taught using poetry, ‘four-character phrases,’ and other commonly (and traditionally) accepted methods of teaching Chinese, such as drilling stroke order and repeating phrases after the teacher. And outside of classes, when students had free time to use to the library for example, it was not uncommon for older students to read the Chinese magazines or stories that were kept there. That students, especially the older ones who were preparing for the high-stakes college entrance exam (Ch. *gaokao*) and perhaps more diverse in their interests, spent a significant amount of their study periods reading non-curricular Chinese-language novels and magazines, demonstrates that there is at least some demand from the students’ side for Chinese-language education that goes beyond simply placating leaders at MT or elsewhere and passing exams, though both of these reasons are often taken-for-granted aspects of learning Chinese. Numerous field notes recorded details of the role Chinese learning played at MT:

*Even though I’ve been here for a while, every now and then I am still surprised at the number of Chinese books and magazines in the library. And they’re not just collecting dust. Even the older ones. They seem dated and pretty boring, but students still read them during their free time – which is limited to say the least! It’s a good reminder of the complexity that exists here. Even though the teachers and students continue to emphasize the importance of learning Tibetan everyday, it is never at the expense of Chinese. Of course I notice it doubly because my Chinese is so bad. I can’t participate in any conversations or really read anything when they switch to Chinese, so it’s easy for me to notice it. Like when I asked Gunkar the other day about the Chinese magazine that she was reading in Tibetan she responded in Chinese. She quickly adjusted of course, remember that I couldn’t understand her. But the students don’t seem bored with Chinese class either. Maybe it is because the teachers are younger and more lively than the monks who teach Tibetan, but the students do not just blow off Chinese. (Field note from August 12, 2019)*

Still, a superficial glance at the curriculum and practices of MT might suggest that it is best understood using a Divergence Framework: its goals are to teach knowledges, principally of Tibetan language arts, history, and epistemology, that are generally omitted from mainstream instruction. However, if one approached MT using (only) this framework, the existence of Chinese classes would be quite surprising: Why spend time transmitting the very content that is perceived as the principal force displacing Tibetan language use in schools (Nima, 2014)? And if including Chinese class was just lip service to appease skeptical government security officials, why spend at least an hour a day learning the language or test it on final exams that sometimes result in student beatings if their scores unacceptably low? When I asked Aku Lobsang why they didn't omit Chinese from the curriculum towards the end of our first summer together in August of 2018, his raised eyebrow indicated he knew my question was mostly disingenuous: it would simply be too politically risky not to include it. But, he continued,

It's not like that, though. Of course, we want them to learn Chinese. They *need* to learn Chinese. Not just so they can go to college, but so they can go somewhere in China. There's a lot of books, movies, phone apps, etc. that you need to know Chinese for. A lot of those things you can't do if you only know Tibetan.

A skeptic could still argue that, despite the inclusion of Chinese in the curriculum, MT is still adequately understood using the Divergence Framework because the students only undertake the study of Chinese language because it remains an important section of all education and employment exams in China, even those that lead to Tibetan-language careers. That is, a skeptic of MT's polyvalence could argue that the learning of Chinese is, in the minds of MT's students and teachers, entirely subordinated to learning Tibetan and achieving admission to (ethnically desirable) schools and career paths that use Tibetan language but require Chinese proficiency as a criterion of admission, as outlined in previous chapters. Aku Cheeden's complex perspectives, however, render this explanation unlikely. While there is much evidence – such as

scheduling, rhetoric used during assemblies, disciplinary practices – to believe that MT does indeed prioritize the learning of Tibetan over all else, Aku Cheeden nevertheless indicated at other moments that teaching Chinese at MT was not merely to support the pursuit of Tibetan language-medium career paths, as evidenced by his statement that he hopes that Amdo Tibetan college graduates will temporarily move to Chinese cities. There he hopes they will develop new perspectives and skills in order to lead lives imbued with more economic and social opportunities than working as a young adult in a rural Tibetan township might allow. While it is possible that Aku Cheeden was speaking insincerely, I believe this is unlikely because, by that time, we had known each other for over 14 months and he spoke with candor on other topics that were more politically sensitive than this one.

This instance also demonstrates how social desirability can work in favor of the research: knowing that I was conducting research on Tibetan education and culture, he could have easily responded to my question about his aspirations for graduating students with a response similar to others that I heard, a quintessential example of which was said by a retired teacher, Lubum who I interviewed in his apartment during the fall of 2018:

Moving away to a Chinese city brings material benefits, but it diminishes someone's 'ethnic consciousness' (*mi rigs 'du shes*) and even their ability to live naturally when coming back home to the Tibetan village. Some who move away to a city for a long time can barely speak Tibetan when they return! Such a shame.

Most of my interlocutors perhaps expected that I wanted to hear about their heroic efforts to prioritize the teaching and learning of Tibetan language. Knowledge of Chinese language, as mentioned, still facilitates (and is a prerequisite of) success in 'Tibetan' pursuits, such as applying to a Minzu University or getting government employment in a Tibetan area.

The place of English in MT's curriculum, however, even more clearly shows that some practices present at MT are best, or perhaps even only, understood using a Reinforcement



Framework. While there is little doubt that the curricular priority at MT is learning Tibetan, an hour per day per class (other than for the youngest students) is also spent on English – a language that very few of these students have encountered other than in classrooms or on the Internet. One might be able to argue that the presence of English represents a Critical element of the *sabjong*, for as a global language, English, despite the obviously colonial nature of its global expansion, does for many in China represent both a figurative and literal pathway to the world beyond national borders of China and the social, political, and epistemological limitations this entails. Indeed, some of my interlocutors readily explained that no small number of Tibetans express interest in English and particularly American culture simply because it represents opposition to China. Indeed, a Tibetan language translation of Trump’s *The Art of the Deal* was a common site in bookstores around Guchu Prefecture. But MT’s students are just beginning to learn English – and the promise of using it to study abroad and explore critiques of China’s limitations seems rather distant. None of the teachers at MT had pursued this path and presented themselves as a model for students looking to do the same. Indeed, the next best speakers of English, after Dorje and me were students – not other teachers. Moreover, if the presence of English were intended to facilitate Critical education, why then would only the older students have English class while the younger ones would not?

If one was to take at face value MT community members’ discursive prioritization of learning Tibetan linguistic and cultural that are not tested in mainstream schools, the inclusion of English in MT’s curriculum is surprising. Recalling Tibetan students’ path to admission for Han-Chinese (*minkaohan*) and Minority *Minzu*/Nationalities (*minkaomin*) universities renders this inclusion truly puzzling if one assumes that supplemental programs attempt to fulfill only one goal. When applying to universities in China, all students must take the college entrance exam,

which features, in addition to other subject areas, language tests in Chinese, English, and, for Tibetan students, Tibetan. However, if Tibetan (or other ‘minority *minzu*’) students want to attend one of the dozen *Minzu* University programs, which are the only universities that offer degrees through a Tibetan language-medium, only the applicants’ Chinese and Tibetan *gaokao* scores are counted. That is to say, for the Tibetan students in the *minkaomin* (“minority students to minority universities”) admissions track hoping to enroll at a university where they can study Tibetan, English *gaokao* scores are ignored! Conversely, when ‘minority *minzu*’ students, like Tibetans, apply to a Chinese language-medium university (i.e. *minkaohan*), only scores on Chinese and English language exams are counted, and the applicant’s Tibetan score is dropped. In other words, for Tibetan students, English *gaokao* scores matter only for seeking undergraduate admission to Chinese language-medium universities. As demand for a place in one of the few Tibetan-language medium universities far exceeds the actual number of vacancies, the vast majority of Tibetan high school graduates will attend tertiary education in one of the more than 1500 Chinese language-medium schools, either because they had prioritized this path all along or because their scores are not high enough to compete for the few *minkaomin* vacancies that have become increasingly scarce as Tibetan K-12 enrollments rise faster than the expansion of *Minzu* Universities. If proficiency in English does virtually nothing to support Tibetan students’ admission to Tibetan-language university programs, why would Marching Together include English in the curriculum if it were exclusively concerned with supporting students’ efforts to learn Tibetan heritage?

Other data corroborate this point – interview statements and the collaboration between MT and local mainstream teachers, for example – but I have focused on language learning here to show the ways in which language instruction becomes, for both participants and researchers,

symbolic of larger values and trajectories. Nevertheless, little choice exists but to acknowledge that the inclusion of English is only intelligible using a Reinforcement Framework (if one remains limited to the three that are currently dominant in the scholarly literature).

This subsection has explored the inclusion of English in the curriculum of Marching Together, the *sabjong* that least resembled mainstream schooling, in order to build the first part of this chapter's argument that demonstrates at least some aspects of MT are only intelligible using a Reinforcement Framework. By using the notion of loose coupling to identify different elements of Marching Together *sabjong* – rather than considering it as a single whole – one is able to see how different practices within a single organization can exhibit different relationships to the norms and purposes of mainstream schooling. In this particular instance, one can see that MT clearly engages in practices that reinforce what is taught and tested in mainstream schooling. There is little question that the inclusion of Chinese and especially English cannot be understood without employing a Reinforcement Framework. But other practices and perspectives found at MT, only loosely coupled to those just discussed, cannot be understood using this Reinforcement Framework.

### *Divergence*

In this section, I show how MT attempts to teach students skills and knowledges that are not deliberately inculcated in mainstream schools in the first place and, therefore, that some aspects of MT's program are best understood using a Divergence Framework. For this specific part of the argument, it is only necessary to demonstrate that at least some of MT's activities do not use the norms of mainstream schooling to inform their activities – either to Reinforce them or to Critique them. I again focus on language instruction (often drawn from monastic learning

materials) because it is both discursively positioned by participants as a primary *raison d'être* of the *sabjong* and a criterion *par excellence* that Bray (2017) and other scholars use to distinguish “private, academic, and supplementary” education from the myriad supplemental activities that are not. In other words, showing how MT spends a substantial amount of time inculcating those ‘non-academic’ knowledges and dispositions, which are often seen as precisely those which disqualify a program from consideration as ‘shadow’ or ‘supplementary’ education, provides the most analytical leverage, when taken alongside the arguments outlined above, for arguing that *a priori* categorizations of these programs that use only visible (and superficial) measures for determining what constitutes supplemental education ultimately obscure important forms of learning that take place in such programs and are extremely beneficial to students hoping to succeed in mainstream schooling. An extended (and edited) excerpt of a summary field note I wrote towards the end of the first summer at Marching Together describes pertinent aspects of the daily schedule in detail:

*The first, like every subsequent morning at MT, began in the cold darkness of 5:50am with the two teachers on duty waking up the students, who, still wrapped in their Tibetan overcoats, stumble into their respective classrooms and recite the twenty-one-verse prayer to the Buddhist Goddess Drolma. Two older students, appointed leaders for the day, accompany the teachers on duty to ensure that all others are awake and praying audibly. Then chanting subsides and the sun starts to show. Students wash up and have a forty-minute study session of rote memorization while awaiting breakfast. Three hour-long periods run from 8:00 to 11:30, and another individual study session is squeezed in before lunch break, which, like most mainstream schools in Qinghai, lasts from noon to 2:30 and affords students free time to sleep, play sports, catch up on assignments, or prepare for any upcoming activities, such as the Cultural Knowledge Competition.*

*Two more classes after the lunch break are followed by another study session in which students are responsible for memorizing texts assigned by their teachers. These are usually Tibetan grammar texts for the younger and intermediate students and Buddhist epistemology texts for older students, much as is the case in Gelug monasteries in Tibet. At the conclusion of this session at 17:00, all students are then required to wear their Tibetan overcoats and participate in roughly 45 minutes of circle dancing on the basketball court to contemporary Tibetan music broadcast over a loudspeaker. After dinner, students reassemble by class on the basketball court, arrange their stools into*

*circles, and for another 45 minutes or so recite the texts they have been assigned under the watchful eyes of the teaching staff. Around 8:30pm, students are released back to their classrooms where they can undertake their final independent study session of the day, which lasts until 9:30. During most evening sessions, groups of 10-20 students are called into the teachers' office-dorm, where they recite from memory the assigned section of text while one or more of the monks rigorously correct their mistakes as several of their classmates look on apprehensively. Evening memorization quizzes like this are common in Tibetan monasteries, but usually they are undertaken individually and obviously only include boys.*

*Simultaneously, the two older students appointed as daily leaders and one teacher go to each classroom and write ten vocabulary words on the blackboard, which are not technical or classical terms but words many Tibetans frequently borrow from Chinese to say, such as "Coca-Cola," "watermelon," or "computer." The Chinese characters and the rarely used 'new' Tibetan terms (and, after my arrival, the English translation) were written for students memorize, as they will likely be quizzed on it later during the Cultural Knowledge Competition.*

*At the end of this session, the two teachers on duty and Aku Cheeden go to each class for the 'daily summary,' a meeting in which the class monitor submits a written report to the teachers summarizing the class's work and behavior during the day. These are not just a formality but are taken quite seriously; conversations or punishments from the summaries can take up to a half-hour if Aku Cheeden feels compelled to address an issue fully. Usually, they result in small admonishments from the teachers to focus better or keep the classroom cleaner, but in extreme cases – such as when two students got caught smoking cigarettes in the outhouse after denying they'd brought tobacco to the sabjong – students were castigated and physically beaten in the classroom. Some of the monks here even have implements for such situations (but I have not seen at other sabjong, but they are not uncommon in the mainstream schools). It seems disciplinary practices and expectations of conduct are often stricter at this 'informal' school than they are at mainstream schools! But I have seen cases on the other end of the spectrum, too, where extraordinary contributions to the sabjong or fellow students – such as when one student organized a team to clean and re-organize the library – were recognized proudly as well. It is sometimes tough to believe that such compassion and kindness comes from the same people who inflict such draconian punishments. Aku Lobsang is the main disciplinarian, and Aku Cheeden can inspire some fear as well. But I have never seen Aku Huazang hit any students. Aku Orgyan and Aku Gyamtsen seem a bit more brusque than Aku Huazang, but I have never seen them physically discipline a student either. So far, the strict discipline has been for behavior issues, but even when students do bad on tests or memorization, they know it's possible that they might face real punishment.*

*In all, the incredible emphasis on Tibetan Language Arts is most striking. From 6am to 10:30pm students are never more than an hour away from reading, chanting, reciting, or writing something in Tibetan. Talk about the importance of Tibetan language, which I have seen in lots of places, is really followed up here with lots of hours of dedicated study,*

*which is a bit less common.* (Summary field note compiled on 8/10/2018 from notes taken in the previous three weeks)

More than any other subject, literary Tibetan remains the focus of MT, as it has for its decade of existence. Because Tibetan (precariously – see RFA 2021) remains a core subject in Tibetan schools in Qinghai, many might be compelled to see the inclusion of Tibetan at MT as most intelligible using a Reinforcement Framework. But here I recap the evidence suggests this framework is inadequate for understanding the Tibetan language instruction at MT, showing instead how at least one key element of MT is best understood using a Divergence Framework. First, while educators at MT, like Aku Huazang, certainly “hope that what [the students] learn here is helpful in school” and think that “some of it probably will be” (*phan thogs yod rgyu red*), he is also well aware that “much of what [they] do is different from what Tibetan language classes in mainstream (*rgyal gnyer*) schools teach.” Aku Huazang also added, proudly showing me a picture of a student I knew from the previous year who had not returned because he had, instead, joined the monastery and begun monastic training,

“We don’t just try to prepare (*gra sgrig*) students for the next semester. Of course, we want that. But we focus more on the fundamental knowledge of learning Tibetan and epistemology (*tshad ma*) because that can help them no matter what they do. Some of the parents even asked me about it and suggested we spend more time preparing the students for the school year. That’s like when a patient is sick, goes to the hospital, gets an IV treatment and gets better right away. That’s not good. The cure is too quick and easy. Maybe it won’t last.<sup>45</sup> The methods of other *sabjong* are like this temporary fix, just for tomorrow. We give students a foundation of knowledge, especially in literary Tibetan, that will help them beyond graduation and even after university... But first you need to learn Tibetan so you can understand your culture and your way of thinking. Then you should go learn Chinese and other things, live in other places.”

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<sup>45</sup> The process of a long struggle is emphasized in a number of places, in Tibetan traditions both within and beyond MT. Dreyfus (2003) describes his activities in a Gelug monastery much as Aku Huazang (also in a Gelug monastery) does, explaining that memorization prior to comprehension is more difficult – but that is precisely why they do it in that order. Dreyfus (2003, p. 94) explains that the pedagogy here emphasizes that the harder it is to memorize something, the harder it is to forget it, adding that “material memorized with understanding goes easily because it comes easily.”

To achieve these goals, MT uses monastic textbooks and secondary commentarial texts (*yig cha*, 'grel bshad) often identical to those used in Gelug monasteries, content from which is only rarely featured in a few excerpts in mainstream textbooks. A pair of students, Gunkar Drolma and Yeshe Kandro, who I interviewed together when they returned the year following their graduation from MT, explained that they

[C]an learn Tibetan well at mainstream schools, especially if we have a good teacher. But these are hard to find, [because] they are not monks... And the Tibetan that we learn in school is useful for passing the *gaokao* and other exams, but it's not a deep (*zab mo* – see footnote 2) knowledge. Not like the full program (*cha tshang ma*) that we have to do here.

Like the curriculum, pedagogies that often explicitly draw on Gelug monasticism appear to be best understood as Divergences from the mainstream as well, such as the several daily recitation sessions, individual nightly quizzes, and debates. And, finally, even beyond the curriculum and pedagogies of language instruction addressed here, there are activities, mandatory exercises in Tibetan dance and prayer recitation for example, that have no counterpart whatsoever in mainstream school and do not appear to reinforce the goals of mainstream schooling in any meaningful way. In fact, examples such as these might be explicitly forbidden or discouraged in mainstream institutions.

In terms of the daily routine that students and teachers at MT follow (outlined above), there are aspects of it that are both more strict and less strict than those in mainstream schools. While space is created for students and teachers to interact informally and amicably, numerous aspects of life at MT are highly regimented. These disciplinary practices are important to understand because they provide vital insight into what constitutes 'heritage' schooling in this specific case. While practitioners of other forms of heritage education, such as those discussed by Zhou and Kim (2006), do not necessarily lack a framework for understanding what constitutes heritage, very few programs (or scholars writing about them) draw specific links to

the frameworks supplemental educators use – other than mainstream schooling – to understand the practices of these programs.

In MT's case, however, the origins of curricular and disciplinary practices that diverge from those found in mainstream education are anything but vague. While MT remains flexible enough to meet various goals outlined in this paper, *within* the heritage education goal, MT's educators are very specific about what heritage education should look like and why, as Aku Gyamsten explains during my first interview with him in the summer of 2018: "All of us are monks here. This is the only kind of education method we know, so we use this one for the students. But it's a good one. Learning Tibetan the same as we do in the monastery is the best way to learn it, clearly." Therefore, at MT, this produces at least some practices that are in many ways *more* strict, formal, and traditional than the one found in mainstream schooling. This further reinforces the point that 'formality', among other superficial categories, is not a meaningful category with which to think about whether supplemental programs 'shadow' mainstream schools or not, thus suggesting the inadequacy of terms like 'nonformal' education that are sometimes used (e.g., Entrich, 2020). Indeed, MT deviates from mainstream schooling in its approaches to formality and discipline in *both* directions. In other areas, it is clearly less formal, as this field note excerpt suggests.

*Chopa whistled for the class change again but no one moved much. The students and most of the teachers are still hanging out on the basketball court or talking in the corner. Some are walking towards the bathroom and others are here in the teachers' room asking about going into town for snacks. It's tough to know when the schedule will be followed strictly and when not. Maybe Aku said something and I missed it because of the language barrier. Sometimes when they hear the whistle it's like boot camp. And other times they don't even react. It's not like it's the start of lunch and free time. Classes should have started 5 minutes ago. Chopa doesn't seem too worried about it, though, as he jokes with one of the students while he unsuccessfully tries to spin a basketball on his finger. But just this morning, kids were running to the classroom to avoid the wrath of Aku Lobsang! (Field note from the afternoon of 7/30/18)*



Thus, education diverging from that of mainstream schooling should not be understood necessarily as an education that is free from the formality of mainstream schooling, where students can study at their own pace or choose their own topics (cf. Mirza et al. 2006). Here, “culturally responsive pedagogy” is one that is modeled on extant Tibetan education institutions, namely monasteries, which entails in-class instruction that is often more formal, less-student centered, and more based in rote memorization than connotations of “culturally responsive pedagogy” usually acknowledge. Here, ironically, a culturally relevant pedagogy, if it conceptualized in the sense of responding to students’ traditional ethnic cultures (rather than contemporary cultures they practice daily), almost necessarily entails a *diminished* focus on students as individuals whose ideas should be engaged and explored in student-centered educational spaces (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Rather, pedagogy that is relevant to Tibetan educational cultures would be highly regimented (at least in its earlier stages), entailing significant memorization, recitation, and lecture in which students’ creativity or innovations are subordinated to the maintenance of the scholastic tradition (Dreyfus 2003).<sup>46</sup> Whether or not this pedagogy is culturally *responsive* (Sleeter, 2011) or *sustaining* (Alim & Paris, 2017) is clearly a different question, as many interlocutors and Tibetan authors (from Amdo and beyond) suggest that in order to properly sustain and develop Tibetan culture in future generations, “modern education” (*deng rabs slob gso*) is an essential goal (Gyamtsen 2011; Nima 1997). As Samdrup,<sup>47</sup> quoted in depth below, argued during an interview during my second summer of research,

Knowing the old books is good. Sure. Some people need to do it. But most children need education that will help them be successful in the future. Get a job. Meet some new

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<sup>46</sup> For example, in Tibetan monastic debates and learning spaces, it is common to challenge an opponent’s argument simply by declaring that it is “innovated” (*rang bzo*) or, literally ‘made [up] by yourself.’

<sup>47</sup> As explained below, Samdrup’s interviews were conducted in English and so I quote verbatim his words here.

people. Be able to travel. Actually, without that, there will be no future of Tibetan [culture]. Most kids need modern education, not the monastery debating and memorizing.

Though space precludes an in-depth exploration of this question, sites like Marching Together provide an excellent empirical case to tease apart key differences between culturally relevant, responsive, and sustaining pedagogies. That is to say, many Amdo Tibetans, both in this study and not, suggest that what might meet the goals of pedagogy that *responds* to traditional Tibetan cultural norms might not provide sufficient heft to *sustain* it. Nevertheless, that this tension exists at all illustrates that the norms at *sabjong* like MT entail practices that are both less strict and more strict than those found in mainstream schooling. This bivalence shows that the lack of isomorphism between mainstream schooling in China and some aspects of *sabjong* like MT are not simply the product of some structural conditions (e.g., lack of resources, lack of trained teachers, lack of perceived legitimacy in the community): it is not as if *sabjong* at MT *want* to be like the mainstream schools but they just can't seem make it happen. Rather, their pedagogies are the result of deliberate choices that can only be understood as intentional divergences from the goals of mainstream education. Thus, one can see that activities and goals at MT diverge *in multiple directions* from those at mainstream schooling – e.g. sometimes more strict, sometimes less strict. This suggests that it is not the case that some activities at MT are intended to Reinforce the goals of the mainstream schooling and simply 'fall short' or become extraorganizationally decoupled for some set of reasons. Rather, actions of educators at MT, in many instances, are best understood as using a Framework that Diverges from mainstream education, for only a truly different framework could produce practices that are both more and less strict than norms found in mainstream schooling.

Consequently, the emphasis on quasi-monastic curriculum and pedagogies and the rationale that is used to justify it, shows that not only do some activities at MT differ from those

in the mainstream but the *goals* toward which they aim are divergent as well, not merely in my comparison of the practices found at each but in MT's educators' description of their own program – as Aku Huazang notes in the analogy to medical cures. MT's educational project is contrasted with mainstream schooling insofar as it is intended for the *lifelong* good of the individual (rather than their success just on the next exam or employment application) and the sustained potential for the individual to contribute to the good of the Tibetan ethnic group – eliding, as many do, internecine political conflicts over what constitutes this ethnic group, its values, and its essence (Roche 2019). In sum, not only do some of MT's practices diverge from mainstream schooling, but they are also discursively positioned by MT's educators as divergent from mainstream goals. Thus, MT's approach to teaching Tibetan and other knowledges associated with it, seem intelligible only through using a Divergence Framework for analyzing supplemental education.

This section has shown that some practices integral to the lives of participants at Marching Together is best understood using a Divergence Framework. Rather than understanding their work as distinctly geared towards reinforcing *or even* critiquing what is learned in mainstream schooling, I have argued that many of MT's practices are best understood not in reference to contemporary mainstream schooling at all, but instead in reference to ethnic, historical, and ethical values that have developed independently from the recent global Education Revolution and the emergence of mainstream and supplemental education it has precipitated, described by Baker (2014). That so much of MT's practices are drawn from the repertoires of *other* educational institutions, viz. Tibetan Buddhist Gelug monasteries, however, compels one to consider that, Baker's argument notwithstanding, the study of these programs provides insight both into the ways that communities with longstanding educational ideas react to the power of

contemporary formal education to shape society, as well as into the politically-laden question of *whose* education becomes hegemonic and ultimately synonymous with the Education Revolution.

The Education Revolution is not simply the expansion of formal education, but a specific kind of education that actively displaces and devalues others' (or other systems?) systems of formal education. The growing hegemony of a particular kind of schooling has therefore driven some populations minoritized by its logics to critique it. Ironically, a byproduct of the widespread acceptance of the value of supplemental education is that they are that much more legitimized as spaces in which this critique can happen, particularly in authoritarian countries where other forms of community organizing are quickly quashed (Hsu et al., 2017; Kang & Krone, 2021).

### *Critique*

It almost goes without saying that if educators at MT explicitly encouraged students to engage directly in subversive political activism, such as the protests in Serjong during 2011-2012 (de Varennes 2012), the *sabjong* would not be operating today. However, despite the prominence of more radical forms of critical pedagogy and activism in scholarly and popular literature, bell hooks, in recounting her experiences with coethnic teachers outside mainstream institutions, reminds readers that even “devotion to learning, to the life of the mind, was a counter-hegemonic act” (1994, p. 2). In authoritarian political contexts like China or Jim Crow America, not all forms of critical education are possible; privileging only more overt forms of resistance as ‘real critique’ employs a masculinist version of social change that delegitimizes more covert and subtle forms of struggles for justice (Mirza, 1997). Moreover, one need not consider the *overt* curriculum as the only possible object of critique. Some educators, especially those capable of

seeing their knowledges devalued in mainstream schooling, are well positioned to critique the hidden curriculum, or those messages that students are taught implicitly through the norms and values prioritized in mainstream schooling (Giroux & Penna, 1979). Therefore, while a Critical Framework can be used to understand a wide variety of practices that entail more or less accommodation, it logically cannot include practices that strive simply to “shadow,” replicate, or merely reinforce what is learned in mainstream school. Similarly, reorientation must logically differ from divergence as well, which by definition is not concerned with addressing what is learned in mainstream schools. But simply because critique more recognizable to audiences more familiar with (and perhaps impressed by) direct political confrontation seem absent, it is not as if one can easily conclude no critique is present: there are numerous levels on which critical education can be pursued, beginning with reframing the student-teacher relationship (Freire 1970). Below, I show that this form of pedagogical relationship can be critical *per se*. The contours of the student-teacher relationship can be understood neither as reinforcing the norms or mainstream schooling, nor diverging from them altogether; rather, the teacher-student relationships cultivated at MT are best understood as an embodied (and often implicit) critique of the relationships students experience in mainstream schooling and a reconstruction of them in ways reminiscent of critical theorists’ vision for pedagogical relationships that decenter teachers as the only authority and compel students to take ownership over their own learning and development (Freire 1970).

Despite the teacher-centered and even authoritarian pedagogies sometimes used at MT, at other moments educators inverted this model and interacted in solidarity with students, engaging them in adapted forms of ‘problem posing’ education that encouraged students to generate and explore ‘thematics’ of their own design (Freire 1970, see ch. 3). Similarly, the educators at MT also

engaged in projects right alongside students, creating conditions for horizontal dialogue that subverts the verticality of domination. An excerpt from fieldnotes from the one day I spent at MT during the winter session in February 2019 is worth including to demonstrate these points.

*Dorje, Luri, and I arrived from the county town at around noon today after driving for about two hours. It's kind of cool to have both of them here, as Dorje is the one who was with me all last summer and Luri is the one who introduced me to MT. We came because this evening is the graduation ceremony... The students were finishing morning classes as we arrived; afternoon classes have been cancelled to prepare. I found Aku Huazang [the epistemology teacher and universally recognized as the most 'intellectual' of the educators] upon arriving, perhaps my closest friend among the educators. Or at least the one with the most patience!. He was sawing some planks of wood and when I asked how they were going to use these in the graduation ceremony, he told me that they weren't and he was just making some more bookshelves for the library. Two students held the planks of wood as he used an old saw. I told him to stop and let me do it for him – eager to jump in and help for a variety of reasons. He waved me off, saying that he was getting too fat and needed the exercise. Aku Orgyan came barelling through on the three-wheeler with more planks and old bunk-bed frames, shouting at the students to come over and take the materials to where they needed to go: 'Wood to the library, beds to the dorm!' We shot around the basketball when we had a minute of free time before some of the students asked us to proofread some of the scripts they planned to read during the ceremony. Very busy and lively afternoon. It was a beautiful sunny day, too, which I'm sure didn't hurt considering it could have easily been 0 degrees Fahrenheit today! I wasn't surprised to see Aku Lobsang or Orgyan getting their hands dirty, but even Aku Huazang was going at it today. (Field notes from 2/18/2019, the only winter day I spent at MT)*

Working alongside students, for at least a few of the monks anyway, was nothing new at all and, indeed, was one of the principal duties that Aku Lobsang took on at MT. Students and educators at MT *both* participated in numerous physically demanding construction projects, including building several of the rooms that now held the *sabjong*. Moving beds, collecting trash, and cementing doorframes were just some of the projects in which everyone participated, and such 'work periods' were even incorporated into the daily schedule during my first year of fieldwork. While similar (though more quotidian) work is regularly expected of students in mainstream schooling or of young monks, empirical and textual evidence suggests that staff members or older monks, especially if they were teachers, rarely engaged themselves alongside their students

(Tinley & Naga, 1993). At MT, however, seeing Aku Orgyan driving a three-wheeler full of materials and students ready to work was nothing unusual. Moreover, work projects were not the only instances in which educators strategically broke taboos or expectations of the authoritative/tarian(?) relationship teachers have with students in either mainstream or monastic educational settings. During a few select moments, the monks would display a playfulness and magnanimity that thrilled and engaged the students, throwing water on each other during the day-off trip to the riverside or satirizing their poor attempts to play basketball. As Aku Cheeden explained during my first night at MT, these interactions were not unintentional:

We try to connect with the students, develop a relationship, let them know we care. That's why you should spend the last ten minutes of your classes just talking or playing games with them...also in between classes... if it's fun for them, it's easier for them to become braver. If they can talk to you, they won't be afraid to talk to others.

The younger, non-monastic teachers like Chopa and Wende Tso (now MA students at prestigious Minzu Universities), as former MT students themselves, are held up as examples for the students of what is possible when you work hard; Aku Cheeden also used them as examples to explain to me and Dorje the types of relationships he hoped we would develop with the students. Among an entire staff that works extremely hard to organize this *sabjong*, Chopa and Wende Tso were particularly indefatigable in constant engagement with students, always talking about a variety of topics from cellphone carriers and life in a big Chinese city to picking college majors and reciting the lineage of ancient Tibetan dynasties.

To develop propensities for leadership and bravery, educators give students a significant amount of responsibility. In addition to the rotating groups of two students who are charged with being daily leaders (e.g. they are responsible for keeping schedules and organizing the students for meals, etc.), older Returner students are also responsible for hosting and running the Cultural Knowledge Competitions. While the staff writes the questions and happily helps with

proofreading the scripts, the Competition is essentially run by and for the students; staff members never even step on the stage. It is only at the end of Competition, to award the Red Flag of Victory and the Black Flag of Shame and to collect fines for speaking mixed language that Aku Cheeden takes full control of the assembly.

It is in cases like these that the emphasis on speaking “Pure Tibetan” seems to play an important, but somewhat unexpected role. Here, in many cases, it functions as a medium through which students (and teachers) can show that they care about one another in an ethic of egalitarian solidarity (in the sense that maintaining standards of Pure Tibetan are beneficial to these students’ futures). Not only are teachers not primarily responsible to keeping track of who used mixed language (i.e., included Chinese words in their Tibetan conversations), but the teachers are also generally caught and fined more often than the students, who take mischievous delight in requiring the monks to pay up. When students repeatedly speak mixed language, they are requested to repeat the oath vowing to speak Pure Tibetan, but not before Aku Cheeden, often with surprising tenderness, explains the importance of not mixing Tibetan and Chinese. The policing of speech allows students to hold one another accountable for their own learning and development goals (again, socio-politically and morally nonneutral though they may be, see Roche 2018). This form of showing care for one another is usually absent (and sometimes prohibited) in mainstream schooling; it is critical because it decenters exam scores – so important at all levels of mainstream schooling – as the sole measure of success. MT, then, provides critical education insofar as it critiques mainstream schooling, in which “knowledge [is] about information only. [Where] it has no relation to how one lived, behaved...” (hooks, 1994, p. 3). By making education an ethnic, moral, and communal endeavor, the atomization of students and



knowledges dominant in mainstream schooling is resisted and replaced with a different vision of developmentally beneficial relationships.

To be clear, this section is the shortest and not without reason: empirical evidence supporting an analysis that MT is best understood as a supplemental program that critiques mainstream schooling is indeed the sparsest. Many of the more overt – but no more legitimate – forms of critical education are impossible to practice at MT: political organizing, protests, or demonstrations are simply not within the realm of possibility. But, even if they were, I am not convinced that MT would have engaged in these activities anyway. As stated from the outset of this study, I focus data collection and analysis on those practices and perspectives regarding what is educationally valuable in this region of Amdo Tibet. Even in polities in which protest remains legal and accepted, it is usually not included in the repertoire of supplemental programs – *even many of those* that are thought to engage in critique. In sum, this section shows that what can be legitimately conceptualized and inculcated as educationally valuable often, in era of the Education Revolution, requires playing *within* systems that are closely aligned with – if not entirely managed by – the state. This conclusion should not be understood as indicating that supplemental programs are necessarily predisposed to reinforcing or critiquing (or diverging from) the goals of mainstream schooling; but supplementation does provide new avenues of practice in all these directions. As the structures of formal schooling expand, individuals' and communities' agency is *both* expanded and limited in new ways. As stated above, agency is not that which is exerted in the negative space left by structure. Structures are often what facilitate agency and supplemental education appears in this case to be no exception. This is an important finding for those who are concerned with the capacity of supplemental programs to ameliorate or exacerbate educational injustice around the world.

*Reorienting the Meaning of Educational Success*

I have shown that MT, like many education institutions, is a loosely coupled organization in that different elements of the organization operate relatively independently from one another and that apparently incongruent or even contradictory goals are pursued within the same organization (i.e., horizontally). I have also shown that MT is loosely coupled to entities at other 'levels' (i.e., vertically), such as mainstream schools, monasteries, provincial education bureaus (*jiaoyu ju*), national policies, and even global norms. I then showed that MT engages in a variety of activities that cannot be understood if only a single approach to supplemental education practices – Reinforcement, Divergence, Critique – is employed, which is usually the case in existing scholarship. Throughout these arguments, I suggested the usefulness of using language instruction as a heuristic for understanding how MT pursues these different goals and highlighted the ways that language instruction produces practical and symbolic outcomes.

Finally, I will now show that key people at MT do not simply accept the incommensurability of these goals but, instead, resolve these tensions by reorienting the goals of education toward the (re)construction of an educational-moral universe in which ethnically desirable and politically possible learning goals can be legitimately prioritized. Evidence from the Cultural Knowledge Competitions (*shes rig 'gran gling*), which can be understood as a ritual that iteratively affirms this reorientation, contextualized by Aku Cheeden's explanations and reflections on educational success, will show how this reorientation happens and its importance.

Even in my first days at MT, I was told to get excited for the Competition: "Wait until the Competition on Friday - that is the *real sabjong!*" Aku Cheeden encouraged when he saw that Dorje and I were a bit overwhelmed after our first couple long days of work. The students prepare for the event as if it were the lifeblood of the *sabjong*, a ritual in which educators and

students are able to make more explicit their attempt to reorient the goal of education away from the instrumentalist, patriotic, and individualist (and individualizing) approach predominant in mainstream schools (see Kolas & Thowsen 2005; Bass 1998; Postiglione 2008) toward one that results in the development of “*lhag bsam dang spobs pa*”, in Aku Cheeden’s words: ‘an altruistic mindset and bravery’. The Cultural Knowledge Competition is a twice-weekly, three-hour event in which the classes compete against each other in a variety of domains and are scored by the teachers who act as judges. The eight rounds of competition include: Debate<sup>48</sup>, History, Logic and Epistemology, Tibetan Language Arts, Foreign Language Translation (Chinese or English), Performance (dancing, singing, or poetry), Charades, and Sketch Comedy/Drama. Much like variety shows on Tibetan and Chinese television, the entire event is facilitated by three student- emcees who are carefully selected by the teachers as model students and speakers. Being selected to host is seen as an honor and students anxiously rehearse and prepare late into the night before the show. Fairly strict rules govern the Competition: time limits are enforced with an abrupt whistle, partial credit is rarely given, and students unsure of what to say are forced to endure the protracted silence on stage, with no help other than the monks’ exhortations to “Speak! Say something!” For the monks, their admonitions are reminiscent of similar comedic taunts they likely gave and received during the debate sessions of their monastic education. Within this almost confrontational space, however, there are many occasions for laughter, impassioned oratory, clever quips, and even satire, as two of the more audacious students showed when they performed a mock newscast about the state of putrid outhouse (which was received so well they

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<sup>48</sup> Debate is a form of Tibetan monastic pedagogy popular both within Tibet and beyond. The generally basic debates between students in the Competition, though inspired by the monastic practice, only vaguely resemble the much more formal and prescribed format of monastic debates. Nevertheless, it would be fair to say that many of the ideals of monastic debate – precision, presentation, confidence, and creativity – are what get rewarded at *sabjong* debates.

decided to perform the same skit the following week). A quick excerpt from my field notes during the final week of my first summer at MT depicts the setting of the Competitions.

*It's about 2:00pm and the competition is scheduled to start in about 50 minutes, when the afternoon classes usually begin. Students bustling around the courtyard. Some quick description: those who will 'host' are outside the assembly room pacing back and forth, memorizing their lines. They are already wearing their traditional Tibetan robes. Aku Cheeden and Chopa are in the teachers room, writing up the scoring chart and finalizing some questions. Chopa just asked me to supply the three English translation questions the students will have to answer in that round. Another group of students is in their classroom, practicing a skit that they will put on. Six of them are in it and most of their class is standing around watching them act it out and giving opinions about how they should perform it. Two girls from a different class are rehearsing dance steps in the far corner of the courtyard. Another group of four students is sweeping out the assembly room, all girls. A group of four boys are moving desks and podiums for the competition to the teachers/judges have our usual seats. Before long, once the assembly room is swept out, the desks moved, and the banners hung up, students start bringing their stools into the big room. But not everyone is preparing diligently. Some students (mostly boys) are shooting basketballs, playing ping-pong or doing what they would normally do during lunch break (like nap). Not all students participate in the Competition every week, so I am guessing that these students won't be performing today. ... Later this evening, I'm just adding that this guess was correct. None of the students playing around were in the Competition today.*

In demarcating this space as separate, the educators of MT are able to create a community in which the students are integral members, rather than onlookers and bystanders, which is often the case both in religious rituals and even ceremonies in mainstream schools, where students may be celebrated or honored but are rarely the driving force of the event. In some talent show-like performances in mainstream schools, which I saw during my time as a teacher and during pilot studies, where students' individual or collective performances *do* constitute the principal portion of the event, the liminality (Turner 2017) produced by the Competition is absent and does not appear to even be a goal in the first place. That is, there is little attempt in mainstream schools to make the space *separate* as there is here at MT. There is no doubt, as well, that everyone's wearing of traditional Tibetan robes contributes significantly to this change.

Moreover, during the many assemblies I've seen – including singing, dancing, and poetry contests in both Tibetan and Chinese – in mainstream schools, there was little or no attempt made to create an atmosphere that inverted or deviated from normal school relationships characterized by educators' authority and students' controlled participation. The Competition, however, is run by students, which creates both a sense of belonging but also mutual responsibility: educators never step on stage, performances are designed and executed by students with no input from staff, and unpredictable debate topics and skits are rewarded and enjoyed by staff and students alike. Indeed, the most predictable aspect of the Competitions is the focus on recognizable (and not apolitical) markers of Tibetanness, such black tents, Pure Language, and the reaffirmation of a commitment to maintaining (*rgyun srung ba*) these traditions despite the pressure to assimilate more thoroughly into Han Chinese society.

The theme most explicitly addressed in virtually every Competition is the importance of maintaining Pure Tibetan and not speaking mixed language: Students recite well-known poems about it, raise its importance as the topic in debate, and comedically reenact classrooms events in which the issue came up. As other Tibetologists (e.g., Roche 2021) have discussed, language purity can work as an analogy for ethnic purity, and language policing is likely a primary avenue through which discrimination targets speakers of minority Tibetan languages. But despite this potential (and often actual) outcome that must be challenged, some evidence suggests that, at least in some cases, Pure Language discourse is not used primarily to justify discrimination or language erasure of minoritized Tibetan languages, but this discourse can signal a reorientation toward a philosophy of education that is not limited to the results obtained in formal schools. Instead, evidence from MT suggests that the policing of Pure Language can include a dimension of interpersonal and social caring and even 'consciousness-creation' (i.e., conscientização, see

Freire 1970) through naming explicitly the important of speaking one's mother tongue that would be impossible if not approached obliquely in this way, using Pure Tibetan analogically.

During interview portions that addressed Pure Tibetan, not one interlocutor at MT ever mentioned a minoritized Tibetan language; only mixing Tibetan with *Putonghua* was the object of disdain. When I asked specifically about minoritized languages, like those spoken around Serjong such as Manegacha or Ngandehua, interlocutors seemed surprised, as Aku Gyamtsen stated: "No, no. Our students don't mix with those languages. I don't think any know them! They are all from here, from this herding area. It's mixing with Chinese (*rgya skad*) that is the problem." While some at MT regularly made statements that attempted to position herders (and their customs) as 'really' (*ngo ma, hre gi*) Tibetan, and that their responses to interview questions about Pure Tibetan included its central place in Tibetan ethnicity, their responses revealed other justifications that have been underemphasized thus far in research on Pure Tibetan. Specifically, while interlocutors emphasized the centrality of knowing and using Pure Tibetan to developing an ethnic consciousness (*mi rigs 'du shes*) (rather than "identity," whose relationship to *mi rigs 'du shes* remains undertheorized in research on "Tibetan identity", e.g., Yang 2018) and the ethnic knowledge it entailed, such as how to construct black tents (*sgra nag*) or use proverbs during oratory, interviewees also supplied soteriological-educational frameworks that transcended the policing of ethnic boundaries. First, teachers and students at MT highlighted the necessity of knowing classical and literary Tibetan well for understanding Buddhist scriptures, (admittedly not devoid an ethnic aspects). Aku Huazang, the epistemology teacher, states,

If they are always depending on *Putonghua* to communicate, how can they read the texts that are in nothing but Tibetan? They need to know the foundations of the language very well if they want to read religious texts (*dpe cha*). If they can't rely on their Tibetan ability alone, how can they deeply understand a [religious] teaching or learn Buddhism?

The rationale for Pure Language was expanded even further in a subsequent interview with Aku Huazang:

Mixing languages is lazy (*le lo*) and if you do it, like I said last time, you won't learn either language well. You won't be able to understand *dpe cha*. Your mind will not become sharp, to know what to keep and abandon (*blang dor*). It will be difficult to learn anything deeply.

While there is little doubt that Pure Tibetan is used to reinforce hegemonic conceptions of Tibetan identity, as well as the importance of distinguishing it from Chinese, evidence presented here suggests that, for some, these functions do not exhaust the reasons for caring so deeply about how other community members learn and use Tibetan.

At the end of each Competition, each class's points are added up and the captain of the winning class is presented with a red victory banner to hang in their classroom until the next Competition. Prior to the final housekeeping updates and dismissal by Aku Cheeden, the 'Mixed-Language' punishments are meted out. In a light-hearted but not trifling display of naming and shaming, one of the leaders reads out the list – compiled by all the students since the last Competition – of everyone who got caught mixing Tibetan and Chinese during the course of *sabjong* daily activities. The culprits are then fined one yuan (about .2 USD) per offense; as noted earlier, even the teachers are not safe and students derive much amusement when the monks must pay up. If one or two students have numerous offenses, they are asked to stand up and recite an oath (*dam bca'*) to speak 'Pure Tibetan' in a way that is neither vindictive nor trivial. Ultimately, each class's infractions are aggregated and the class who mixed language most are presented with a black flag, emblazoned with the Pure Language Oath, that they must hang in their classroom until the next Competition.

Thus, beyond an affirmation of ethnic identity, insisting on Pure Language is a practice that allows educators and students at MT to show that they care about the soteriological and

educational wellbeing of both individuals and the group. Holding one another accountable – and, importantly, not just in a unidirectional fashion from teachers to students – to this discipline not only makes ‘better’ ethnic Tibetans, it makes better learners and better Buddhists. The policing of language, in this case, allows the community at MT to show they care for one another in ways that are usually impossible to do in mainstream schools where exam scores and (a different kind of) discipline are prioritized. The use of Pure Tibetan to care, politically laden and non-neutral as it may be, allows people to show one another they care about their educational development beyond the reductive framework that mainstream schooling prioritizes; it allows them to say, in the words of Aku Huazang, “we care about [their] education not only as an individual, but as part of our community (*sde ba*).” The Competition is, therefore, best understood as a ritual that twice weekly reaffirms this commitment to multilateral caring.

That supplemental programs and associated activities such as the Competition are used to reorient the goals of education raises the question: Reorient to what? To be sure, not all supplemental programs best understood as reorienting educational goals pursue objectives conceptualized in the same way. Most, even in Amdo Tibet, are not. But concluding this chapter by discussing explicitly that to which the community at MT attempts to reorient their educational activities will clarify how best to understand the many different practices found at MT. Practices individually understood to reinforce, diverge from, or critique mainstream schooling can, if performed with care, all pursue the goal of developing *lhag bsam*, the ‘altruistic mindset’ that subtly shapes all aspects of MT and holds this loosely coupled organization together (See Weick 1976, p. 4; 1982), as evidenced by excerpts from several interviews with Aku Cheeden, a founder and the current leader of MT.



*Lhag bsam*, or ‘an altruistic mindset’, has come to represent for some interlocutors the ‘open-mind’ (*rgya che gi*) that includes not only a willingness to learn from all traditions (e.g., Tibetan, Chinese, and English sources) but also a recognition that the goals of this learning must transcend individualist ambitions. This function of *lhag bsam* in the process of reorientation is well encapsulated in Aku Cheeden’s perspective on Chopa’s educational journey, where pursuing prestigious graduate programs is considered laudable primarily to the extent that it allows Chopa to contribute his knowledge to his community (discussed in detail below). Like many educators at MT and elsewhere, Aku Cheeden works to instill in the students a Tibetan worldview in which goals emphasized in mainstream schooling, such as learning *putonghua* Chinese and succeeding on exams, are recognized as important and worthwhile, yet ultimately insufficient for leading a meaningful and ethical life. The imperative to speak Pure Tibetan, for example, is never suggested as an adequate substitute for knowing *putonghua* Chinese; in fact, *putonghua* is taught to all students at MT and quizzed during the Competition. Moreover, Aku Cheeden’s vision of an ideal future of an MT graduate is not one limited to ‘traditional’ Tibetan lifestyles (e.g., herding) to the exclusion of anything Chinese and resisting assimilation into Chinese society. Rather, Aku Cheeden explained,

Just because we are Tibetan does not mean we shouldn’t go to China (*rgya nang*) to study and work. Actually, I hope the students feel brave enough to do that. But some who go just stay there, forget Tibetan language and how to do anything here [like herding or perform other cultural customs]. Look at Chopa. He got a big opportunity to go to school in Beijing. And he should go. Even if he doesn’t study Tibetan, it’s OK. But he always comes back to help the village kids learn Pure Tibetan and improve their grades in school. He’s really doing it right. That’s why it’s good he’s on the teaching staff. He’s doing something of benefit (*phan thogs*) for his ethnic group (*mi rigs*).

In his view, *Chinese* norms can and sometimes should be readily assimilated into a *Tibetan* world, which, though numerically and politically subordinated to Chinese society, nevertheless

promises a more meaningful and worthwhile future because it is not limited by the instrumentality and desire for personal gain that characterizes Chinese approaches to education:

If you just want higher scores on *gaokao*, there are many *sabjong* you can go to. Not just [here] but plenty in the prefecture seat or in Xining. Actually, they can probably help students' scores more. But they don't teach Tibetan there. And they are really expensive. The teachers there aim to make a lot of money.

Thus, the beneficial knowledges, skills, and dispositions (i.e., cultural capital, see Bourdieu 1986; Lareau 2015) that Chopa has accumulated throughout his varied experiences become so widely recognized and valued by his community members precisely because he has decided to return to his home grassland each summer and winter to 'pay it forward' to students who are in the same position he was in a decade ago. While there are many Tibetan students who achieve impressive results in mainstream schooling, "many of them just have their own purpose (*rang don*) as their goal (*dmigs yul*)" Aku Cheeden added. He continued, "If they don't [come back to] teach in the village, how can we say that they are doing anything for their ethnic group? Maybe some are, but we don't see it." While, again, this employs a particular and non-neutral notion of who comprises the Tibetan ethnic group (e.g., native speakers of Tibetan) and what they need (e.g., Pure Language instruction) it nevertheless depends ultimately on a moral framework that *includes rather than resists* the goals of mainstream schooling in China. In other words, what imbues Chopa with symbolic capital in the eyes of some Tibetans is his effort to transmit his cultural capital and to do it visibly. Such visibility, in the words of Aku Cheeden, "is important. It shows<sup>49</sup> young students what they should do. And it shows them that the older ones still have a ethnic consciousness, that they didn't just abandon their hometowns." Thus, by tethering the legitimacy of one's cultural capital directly to their effort to use it to benefit others, many educators, and those at MT in particular, engage in multivalent supplemental educational

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<sup>49</sup> The verb Aku used here (*ston pa / bstan pa*) which I translate as 'to show' is the same verb used to translate "teach," especially in religious settings.

practices that are best understood as simultaneously reinforcing, diverging from, and critiquing the goals of the mainstream. In this way, Tibetan language learning can be understood as a morally desirable pursuit of knowledge that will benefit one's ethnic group – and the presence of Chinese and English in the curriculum (and the way the staff at MT talks about trilingual education) shows that while learning and teaching Pure Tibetan is the best way to develop this knowledge, it is not the only way.

Ultimately, the arguments presented in this chapter should encourage scholars (and practitioners) to reconsider what is exactly meant by the term “supplementation.” Even the Oxford English Dictionary (2021) retains a fundamental ambiguity vis-à-vis supplemental schooling when it states that a “supplement” is “something that completes or enhances something else when added to it” and “supplementation” is “the addition of an extra element or amount to something.” However, “completing” and “enhancing” describe two entirely different actions depending on whether or not one believes that the original entity is lacking only in degree or in kind. Similarly, an “extra element” is hardly synonymous with an “extra amount,” for, as chemists might argue, the addition of an extra element might completely change the nature of the (now compound) molecules. While this may sound pedantic in commonsense terms, it is not when it comes to determining what experiences are necessary for creating an educated person. The struggle over what constitutes an educated person is exacerbated in socio-politically fraught circumstances, where ethnolinguistic and other identities are at stake. This highlights the importance of clearly articulating one's assumptions about what components are necessary and sufficient causes of a valuable education. This is, of course, not to say that those who are interested in researching exclusively those knowledges that are taught and tested in mainstream schooling are wasting their time, that they have an impoverished notion of education, or even

that they necessarily believe mainstream schooling constitutes a complete education. But if one is to use the term “supplementation” scientifically – that is, as a process by which one could identify programs as fit or unfit for inclusion in given sample frame – then further theorization of this concept is necessary. In other words: What does it mean to supplement education? And might some operationalizations of supplementation predispose researchers to overlook key processes that they express an interest in understanding? I take up these questions in the next chapters, which focus, first, on the types of students educators work to produce and, second, on the nature of the capital that is created and transmitted at *sabjong*.

### **Conclusion**

Most scholars who study supplemental educational practices rarely consider the possibility that single programs may strive to meet a variety of goals, some of which may appear to be incongruent or even contradictory. However, supplemental programs’ loosely coupled structure can enhance educators’ capacity to pursue divergent goals, especially for students ethnolinguistically minoritized in mainstream schooling. This may not only provide students with valuable cultural capital that they need to succeed both within and beyond formal education, but it can also, through the creation of new frameworks for understanding the goals of education, allow teachers to model for students methods by which they may effectively navigate competing pressures in their own lives and communities. I used the trilingual instruction practices found at MT and their emphasis on Pure Language as a heuristic to understand how these forms of supplementary instruction encourage students to develop the skills and knowledges that are valued in mainstream schooling and assimilate new frameworks for understanding the purposes of education that transcend narrow (e.g., individualist) rationales. Using the methods discussed

above, educators and students at Marching Together cultivate what is ethnically and academically desirable without precipitating negative repercussions by the state or from stakeholders who still desire success in mainstream schooling. This is accomplished principally by subsuming the goals of mainstream schooling into an educational philosophy that prioritizes the development of an altruistic mindset (*lhag bsam*), best exemplified by teachers' willingness to devote their energy to local students, that itself legitimizes the variety of knowledges and dispositions successful adults have developed. More broadly, this chapter has suggested the importance of studying independent, community-organized educational programs in Amdo in order to gain a fuller picture of how communities there navigate the growing influence that formal schooling has on their lives, both in terms of the opportunities and limitations it presents.

## Part 3: The Formation of Habitus

### Introduction to Part 3

This dissertation is principally concerned with what Amdo Tibetan *sabjong* teachers think is educationally valuable. However, just as Part 2 argued that it is impossible to conceptualize what is valuable outside of a field in which various knowledges and dispositions are recognized as valuable, Part 3 is likewise guided by Bourdieu's tripartite framework and begins from the conviction that it is also impossible to understand what is educationally valuable without understanding a person's underlying dispositions and 'ways of being in the world' (i.e., habitus) in whom value is inculcated. Importantly, this approach is not simply the result of mechanical adherence to a Bourdieusian framework but is principally a product of attending to the ethnographic data themselves. By and large, Amdo Tibetan educators suggested in a variety of ways that educational value can only be conceptualized in relation to the person acquiring and using it: In addition to discussing the value of certain knowledges themselves, educators often perspicaciously weighed the circumstances of knowledge acquisition, its role in students' trajectories, and the impact such acquisition would have on others, both human and not, in their articulations of educational value.

Methodologically, one must concede that there is a difference between what constitutes students' habituses "objectively" speaking and what a given educator perceives as constituting their students' habituses. That is, educators quite obviously do not always perceive their students' capacities and dispositions accurately. However, this incongruence does not pose a major threat to validity for two reasons. First, in addition to interviews and participant observation with educators, I also conducted significant participant observation with students, often in the absence of teachers, as well as interviews with students themselves to triangulate data. But, more

importantly, the primary goal of this study is not to develop a theory of what Amdo Tibetan students' habituses 'actually' are but to analyze how educators' perceptions of this inform what they think is valuable. Therefore, *their opinions* on students' needs, qualities, and dispositions are ultimately just as valuable as other 'objective' measures of students' habituses, if not more. For example, while the number of hours a parent spends reading along and chanting scriptures in the presence of their child would be a reasonable measure in a project attempting to describe a student's habitus, the current project is rather more concerned with whether or not educators would see this as valuable and how their perspective on this would impact their pedagogical relationship with a student.

There are many categories one could use for analytical footing to examine how educators perceive students' habituses, but the most straightforward are the common 'categories of experience' of class, gender, and race (Andersen, 1997). In using this framework, I do not intend to reify these categories, as race, class, and gender may 'work' in Amdo Tibet quite differently than they do even in other Tibetan areas (which have different gender norms, see Gyatso & Havenick 2005, or employment-class structures, see Goldstein & Beall, 1991) and other circumstances in which these concepts are employed. Similarly, I do not suggest that these are the only categories worth using in exploring the sources that inform students' dispositions, as others, such as religiosity, native language, and even elevation appear to exert significant influence on students' formative experiences. However, my relatively unorthodox approach to understanding cultural capital will benefit from using (and then complicating) these widely employed categories rather than developing another novel typology. As such, I use these categories to explore educators' perspectives on students' dispositions, not in an attempt to explain the nature of race, class, and gender in eastern areas of Amdo Tibet.

Some scholars criticize the notion of habitus as being too static and fixed, arguing that people are actually more flexible and malleable than the notion of habitus suggests is possible (e.g., Goldthorpe, 2007). Bourdieu's notion of habitus seems to insist on the primacy and durability of early life experiences in shaping one's dispositions, tastes, and, simply, "way of being in the world" (Dumais, 2002, p. 145). Using this concept to research how Amdo Tibetan communities deal with social and educational change consequently produced a striking irony: Many interlocutors wished that an "Amdo Tibetan habitus" was as durable, pervasive, and determinative as critics claim Pierre Bourdieu argued habitus was. That is, the loss of "a way of life" or a "way of being in the world" is a primary concern of very many Amdo Tibetans and the reduced frequency with which interlocutors recognize "Amdo Tibetan dispositions" among their youth is a common complaint offered by older generations. This was voiced frequently during conversations when both *sabjong* and mainstream teachers complained that current students simply "don't speak Tibetan as well as previous generations" in the words of Migmar, a middle school teacher in Serjong. But even beyond language, some elders lamented, sometimes rhetorically, that younger generations had lost interest and ability in developing what they saw as quintessentially Tibetan dispositions, such as those towards animal husbandry or certain marriage arrangements. This provided an valuable opportunity to approach a study of habitus from the 'opposite direction' as it were, probing, rather than taking for granted, the extent to which habitus became concretized during childhood. In other words, while many scholars criticized Bourdieu for not recognizing the flexibility and change that humans undergo over a lifetime, many interlocutors were wary of just how easily people's ways of speaking, moving, and thinking about the future may shift.



“I am afraid they will, you know, change their mind,” Luri, a second research assistant, told me when I asked about what she fears about Tibetan students’ futures. Because we were not talking about a particular dilemma – one in which there is a clear choice between two alternative options –but simply about broad social issues, I asked at length about what she meant. “They might change their minds about what exactly?” I asked, switching back and forth between English and Tibetan (although her English was much better than my Tibetan, sometimes it was helpful to repeat a question in both languages so we could be sure we were focusing on the same point). “Change their minds about what job they want? What language to speak? Where they want to live? Something else?” I asked in quick succession.

“About many things, but deep kind of change. They could forget who they are, forget how to speak Tibetan. Change their mind about Tibet and China. About their... identity – ?” she said, offering the last word without total certainty she was using it correctly. I assured her that she was, that this would be exactly the way many people would use the term “identity” both in scholarly or popular discourse. I let her off the hook after she replied to my many questions quickly, saying that she “hope[s] people don’t forget how to speak Tibetan or worship Buddhism [sic] or live on the grasslands. We have to make sure we learn how to do these things before it is too late.” Walking home from the restaurant that evening, she was not particularly specific, either because she was unclear herself or uninterested in getting into a tiring and complicated discussion about the future of Tibetan people. On other occasions, we had talked about much more politically sensitive topics, so I doubt that Luri was reluctant to tell me what she meant by the term “Change their minds.” However, the quick examples she gave suggests she is talking about linguistic, religious, and socioeconomic dispositions. Short of a full interview, it is difficult to know exactly what she meant by these comments, but a few things were clear: First, she was

talking about changes in those areas scholars refer to as habitus – changes in dispositions, namely toward language use, religious practices, bodies, and livelihoods. And second, it is not only that deep changes in these areas are possible, but also that such pervasive changes are even probable unless specific kinds of enculturation are practiced.

Part 3 of this dissertation is organized to present and analyze findings in a way that is rigorous, faithful to the data, and relatively concise. Therefore, it is necessary to organize these three chapters to address the multiple questions simultaneously rather than serially. Therefore, I first explicate my operationalization of habitus and show how I connect empirical data, namely observations and interviews, to the scientific concept of habitus. Then, there is one chapter dedicated to each of the three principal categories of experience that help organize educators' perspectives on the various cultures that shape students' habitus formation. Answering this Sub-question directly supports answering the main Research Question on educational value addressed fully in Part 4. Throughout this discussion, which is broken up into chapters on class, gender, and race, each of which presents and analyzes data on specific constituent of habitus (horizons, bodies, and language use, respectively), the two supporting questions will be addressed insofar as they clarify the main sub question. These two supporting questions, as outlined in the analytical framework, are: 1) To what extent do educators believe students' habituses are alterable and what do they do to alter it? And 2) How do *sabjong* educators make sense of mismatches between the habitus and field? Answering these supporting questions in the process of addressing this Part's principal question on educators' perspectives on the constituents of Tibetan students' habituses will provide the empirical specificity necessary to construct a portrait of the students that Amdo Tibetan *sabjong* educators see themselves as trying to support.

### **Operationalization of Habitus in Analysis**

When I entered the field in 2018, I was familiar with the notion of habitus, but I did not fully appreciate how central it would be to a study of cultural capital. While my research methods and questions probed the formation of teachers' and students' ways of being, I did not construct at that time an analytical framework, interview protocols, or a participant observation guidebook that explicitly employed the concept. Because I conducted ethnography that examined, in part, how forces beyond teachers' delivery of the explicit curriculum impact students, my field methods were therefore already geared towards collecting data on situations and phenomena that contribute to the formation of habitus. And, unlike the concept of field, habitus is perhaps best studied by using ethnography (see Part 2 for remarks on the limitations of ethnography for studying fields) because participant observation and interviews facilitate investigation of people's dispositions, how they make sense of them, and how they become *embodied* better than any other research method (Sallaz, 2018). However, I initially had not set out to research students' or teachers' habituses, a task that I worried might be impossible because the concept may be too extensive and vague to operationalize effectively. As critiques of the analytical use of the term identity reveal (e.g., Brubaker and Cooper, 2000), I realized that, in the early stages of data analysis, habitus *qua* analytical concept, might be hindered by many of the same issues that vitiate the scientific use of term identity: Couldn't *any* aspects of students' existence be considered constitutive of identity? How could a researcher separate *talking about it* from the actual *living out* of it? Couldn't any phenomenon, any interaction I saw, be dumped into the category of "habitus formation," which would eventually render the concept useless?

In its broadest formulation, habitus is, simply, one's "way of being in the world" (Dumais, 2002, p. 145), one's dispositions, appreciations, aspirations, tastes, mannerisms, postures, speech

patterns, and other pre-conscious embodiments, such as ways of talking and moving (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Therefore, to avoid analytical imprecision caused by using a notion of habitus that is *too* comprehensive and which functions as a catch-all, much in the same way Brubaker and Cooper (2000) critique scientific use of the concept of identity, I greatly narrowed my operationalization of habitus in the analysis of data presented here. First, I looked to leading authors to reveal key aspects of this concepts vis-à-vis education research. So, for example, I provisionally disposed of analytical data on an individual's habitus that pertained to questions of artistic or gustatory taste, which are addressed in a great deal of cultural sociological literature using the concept of habitus (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984), but are not centrally featured in studies of the sociology of education, where other aspects of habitus are highlighted. Therefore, I narrowed my analysis of students' habitus to three principal dimensions, or types of dispositions.

The first is aspirations and expectations (Roksa & Robinson, 2017; Lareau, 2015), what Curl, Lareau, and Wu (2018, p. 879) call "horizons, which entails the scope of one's social world and orientation to new experiences." In this chapter I adopt the use of the term horizons and use it to represent how participants think about and act regarding aspirations, expectations, prospects, and the generation of behaviors that are formulated in reference to the future. These are addressed in Chapter 7, which uses data on horizons to understand the impact educators see class having on habitus formation. The second dimension of habitus I analyze, covered in Chapter 8, is bodily hexis, or specifically "the forms of bodies, bodily movements, and deportment... that reflect the values of a cultural field" (Schirato et al., 2012, p. xviii; Lareau, 2003). Analyzing data on bodily hexis allows me to speak to the second principal category of experience, gender, and the way it informs students' dispositions. The third dimension of habitus I analyze is language use and attitudes toward it (Dumais, 2002; Curl, Lareau, & Wu 2018), addressed in

Chapter 9. My analysis of language use is not restricted to the everyday speech habits and patterns that characterize interactions between participants, as Annette Lareau (2011) illustrates in *Unequal Childhoods*. Rather, my analysis addresses everyday speech habits including a substantial attention to how participants talk and think *about* language use itself. In other words, I analyze not only how parents and educators talk to students (à la Lareau), but also their perspectives on how educators and parents (should) talk to students and what this language use facilitates, hinders, and symbolizes. Data on language use is analyzed in Chapter 9 to understand the impact that race, or in this particular case, *minzu*, has on habitus formation. Narrowing the operationalization of habitus to these three constituents is certainly advantageous, but it is not merely a coincidence or convenience that this newly circumscribed notion of habitus fits the data that I have; I was all along collecting data on those parts of a person's dispositions that are more immediately related to one's educational trajectory, which horizons, bodies, and language use are (Lareau, 2011; Dumais, 2002; Roksa & Robinson, 2017). I had simply not conceptualized these in Bourdieu's terms just yet.

In the forthcoming analysis, when I discuss how educators perceive students' habituses, I do so in reference to the three principal categories of experience mentioned above: How they think about students' dispositions as they relate to class, as they relate to gender, and as they relate to race. I am aware that this presentation format 'thins' the data somewhat, likely sacrifices fluidity and organicity, and opts for a more mechanical organization rather than a cohesive narrative. Despite these drawbacks, I use this approach here precisely to forestall the tendency to 'lump' all data into one undifferentiated description of participants' "habitus," thus obfuscating analytical clarity in the same way research on "identity" often does.

Specifically, the chapter dealing with class will hinge on examples that show how educators think about *horizons*. The chapter dealing with gender will hinge on examples that highlights how educators think about *bodies*. And, the final chapter of Part 3 dealing with race will use examples that show how educators think about *language use*. To be sure, it need not be organized like this and there are other possibilities. For example, to show how educators think about gendered aspects of habitus, I could have drawn on data that addresses the development of horizons and how educators see these as differing between boy and girls; certainly, this is a common choice taken by researchers who want to use Bourdieu's concepts to understand gender differences in the formation of aspirations (e.g., Dumais 2002). However, I have chosen my 'pairings' principally because they are suggested by the strengths and weaknesses (i.e., comprehensiveness or thinness) of the data I have. If the pairings also allow me to add a new angle to previous research on habitus (e.g., if this study provides insight on the gendered aspects of habitus by studying not the *formation of aspirations* but by examining educators' perspectives about and actions toward *bodies*) then so much the better.

With this said, it cannot be stressed enough that throughout this study, I went to great pains – not hindered but rather enabled by the process of translation between languages – to eschew obscure, academic terms while conducting fieldwork, even though I retain their usages here, which is done for style, clarity, and brevity. In particular, the term 'habitus' was never used during fieldwork except in conversations with my research assistants during which I explained background on the type of research we were conducting. As discussed in the Methodology chapter and just above, I ultimately operationalized the term habitus as horizons, bodily hexis, and language use, collecting data on these directly and on participants' perspectives on these, avoiding any use of scientific terminology during field work. Conducting this research primarily

in Tibetan in fact *prevented* the creation of any misguided interview protocols that employed such language because I was required to break down this scientific term into its readily intelligible component parts and to ask educators about those. Asking educators about students' habituses, therefore, entailed questions that were (usually) entirely appropriate for a conversation with an educator. We talked about students': aspirations (*re wa*), expectations and predictions (*mngon shes*), goals (*dmigs yul*), personalities (*gshis ka*), bodies (*gzugs po, lus*), habits (*goms gshis, goms srol*), language use (*skad cha, skad lugs*), plans (*'char gzhi*), dreams (*rmi lam, 'char snang*), and a variety of other terms that are far more understandable, and more translatable, in colloquial Amdo Tibetan than Bourdieusian concepts. Notes on Tibetan translations of these terms and their incorporation into field work are found in Appendix A: "Interview Protocols."

It is also necessary to clarify my varying use of the term habitus in the singular and plural. Because the habitus is "the internalization of the external", which means the incorporation and embodiment of external, objective field conditions, it is necessary to acknowledge that different individuals with relatively similar positions in a field share substantial aspects of their respective habituses. While no two are perfectly identical, a habitus is indeed largely shared among people with similar positions (i.e., people with similar classed, gendered, and raced experiences), so the use of a 'collective' notion of habitus (i.e., Amdo Tibetan students' habitus) not only makes sense, but is, after all, central to a correct understanding of the concept. To talk about the 'habitus' (in the singular) of, for example, Amdo Tibetan students raised in herding communities, such as their horizons, bodily hexis, and language use, reveals significant commonality, thought by leading researchers to be a product of primarily (but not exclusively) the socioeconomic class conditions in which one was raised. On the other hand, it is vital to recognize the diversity that exists even within ostensibly homogenous groups, especially if one is to avoid the critiques of

determinism often hurled at Bourdieusians using the concept of habitus (e.g., Goldthorpe 2007). Clearly, not all students have identical dispositions and there are important differences that exist even among students of similar classes, genders, and races. Therefore, it also makes sense to talk about habitus in the plural form, for example when discussing how an educator sees one student's dispositions differing from another. In this way, habitus in the singular can be understood as either an individual's habitus or the collective habitus shared by a group of individuals who share important similarities (namely but not exclusively in categories of class, gender, and race). Habituses, on the other hand, can be understood as the different matrices of dispositions that different individuals have.

Finally, I want to emphasize that I am not attempting to give here an exhaustive description of Amdo Tibetan students' habitus, which would be impossible. Much less am I claiming that these findings pertain to Tibetans in other parts of the Plateau and beyond the borders of China. I am also not even claiming to be giving a full description of the ways that class, gender, or race inform Amdo Tibetan students' habitus. Rather, I am pursuing the more modest goal of showing how educators think about what kinds of students they have and what they need, by focusing on one key constituent of habitus in each of the different chapters. For the reader's convenience, I provide a table here that summarizes the data and key findings.

Analyzed Data on	Category of Experience	Domain	Key Findings
Horizons	Class	Intrapersonal	- Spatialization of classed cultures brings perceived but differential dis/advantages for all.
Bodily Hexis	Gender	Embodied	- Genders are different susceptible to Sinicization: different access to Tibetan knowledges/ <i>sabjong</i> - Hesitance to challenge every gender role; some bound up in ethnicity
Language Use	Race/ <i>Minzu</i> / <i>mi rigs</i>	Interpersonal	- Competing ideas about the appropriate language(s) in education - Linguistic policing as ethnic care - Heart of assimilation vs. exclusion

Figure 4: Table of data, domains, and analyses relevant to habitus



## CHAPTER 7

### The Impact of Class on Students' Development of "Horizons"

#### Introduction

*Class: A generator of educational horizons*

This chapter explicates Amdo Tibetan *sabjong* educators' perspectives on how students' habituses are shaped by their families' position in social space or their social class. While Bourdieu questions whether social classes exist in reality or only as an analytical construct (Bourdieu, 1987), space prevents a protracted exposition of Bourdieu's understanding of class, which is scattered throughout his writings (Weininger, 2005). For the time being, however, one's class position can be understood as a product of, primarily, the total volume and, secondarily, the composition of the capital they possess, with economic capital of primary importance, followed by cultural and then social and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1987; Hong & Zhao, 2015; Weininger, 2002). Importantly, for Bourdieu, class exists not just in material differences but the symbolic meanings such differences produce. Hong and Zhao (2015, p. 5) add that "distinctions between individuals or groups mainly occur in material relations and symbolic relationships, namely objective status position and internal ideas and tastes (its different combinations form "habitus")." Bourdieu (1990, p. 135) emphasizes that classes are therefore characterized by their "being" and "being-perceived" simultaneously.

While students' primary habitus – what Benzecry (2018) calls the "classed habitus" – is generally thought to be determined almost entirely by students' family's social class and the home environment thereby produced, empirical data presented in this section suggest that Amdo Tibetan educators think of sources of classed cultures in more expansive, geographical terms rather than on the narrower, familial scale. While families exert an impact on their children's

habitus that is difficult to overstate, education in Amdo Tibet presents two (of many possible) situations that complicate the argument that a students' habitus is inherited directly and exclusively from the immediate family. Data collected from educators suggest, first, a family's particular social class position may have diminished influence on students' primary/classed habitus when students spend a substantial amount of their youths in boarding schools away from their families, a possibility that few authors writing in 'the West' consider when discussing habitus. These boarding schools feature highly standardized schedules, materials, and in school programming that may minimize familial differences among students. Differential participation in extracurricular activities, for example, may be 'flattened' when *all* children in an entire county attend boarding schools with very limited free time off campus. Second, many Tibetan family structures, both in Amdo and beyond but in different ways (see Goldstein, 1971) are not limited to so-called immediate families, especially when parents work far away and young children stay with grandparents, which is a common practice in Amdo. Consequently, children can develop relationships with a variety of extended family and community members, such as an uncle who became a monk, who play important roles in shaping students' habituses, and especially those parts of it (such as language use, etc.) that may be scrutinized in school. The potentially diminished impact that a family's class has on students' educational experience notwithstanding, when interlocutors did talk about how class (and classed cultures) impact students' habitus, these were usually imagined as having specific geographical distributions. Urban areas were the province of the middle class, semi-rural areas characterized the working class, and rural grasslands were home to the poorest families.<sup>50</sup> Rarely did parents or educators talk about

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<sup>50</sup> It goes without saying that I am *not* making the argument that urbanity and capital are directly proportionate, although, in general, those in more urban areas have more capital at their disposal (and more opportunities to acquire it). However, it is important to remember that my argument is not actually built on the objective distribution of

economic inequalities that existed between students in the same school or even in the same county. When economic differences were discussed during interviews, those belonging to other classes were frequently imagined as living elsewhere and attending different schools. This is to say that it requires significant capital (usually of multiple forms) to move from rural to urban areas, and one has more opportunity to acquire different forms of capital in urban areas. Class differences as a product of different amounts of primarily economic capital existed, in interlocutors' minds, across counties and even prefectures, not primarily across families within the same school district. Importantly, however, for many Amdo Tibetans, *nondominant* cultural capital (Carter, 2005) and symbolic capital is perhaps still best acquired in rural areas, where Tibetan norms are more prevalent. Ultimately, this chapter shows that while Tibetan educators generally recognize the ways that classed cultures impact students' experiences and successes in school, these inequalities are usually articulated in terms of geography. This chapter makes this case, for the sake of clarity and organization, by using data principally on one key aspect of habitus: students' horizons and educators' perspectives and actions regarding what they should do to help students attain these.

Despite the absence of explicit talk about class or social class (*spyi tshogs gral rim*), participants' readily acknowledged class position (i.e., the product of the total volume and structure of one's capital vis-à-vis others with whom they compete for material and symbolic goods) as central to the formation of students' habituses. On one hand, the term class or social class only rarely came up during interviews and virtually never during any natural interaction although everyone is aware of the term, no doubt at least in part due to the innumerable times they've heard it during various government-mandated political education activities and

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capital across urban and rural regions; rather, my argument is built on *educators' perceptions* of which class-space positions are advantageous or not to students.

campaigns over the past seven decades. The term, while intelligible in Tibetan, is a relative neologism imported during the 20<sup>th</sup> century rather than an emic one used to describe the structure of Tibetan society over the past centuries. While many Tibetans clearly grew up in a world where *gral rim* was a well-known term, it was not one that was regularly used in interviews to discuss differences between groups of Tibetans, or between any groups in society. On the other hand, the level of a group's "[economic] development" (*yar rgyas*, *gong 'phel*, *'phel rgyas*) or a lack of it was readily identified by interlocutors as an important factor informing students' horizons through child rearing strategies, opportunity structures, and so on. As the following paragraph shows, Tibetans, like people around the world, talk about economic constraints and their impact on decisions and long-term strategies, but they do not necessarily do so in terms that suggest "a class consciousness" – a class *for* itself. The technical term for class consciousness, *gral rim 'du shes*, or anything that could be understood as a colloquial translation of this term, never appeared once in my entire data set, despite conversations that regularly address economics, inequality, and schooling.<sup>51</sup> This is not necessarily surprising, as sociologists (e.g., Lareau 2011) have found that interlocutors are not wont to talk about economic inequality in term of "class"; this may be particularly true in settings such as Lareau's in the US or mine in Tibet, where aversions to language coined by socialist thinkers and leaders are common. Nonetheless, interlocutors were clearly aware of economic limitations and they often 'played out' in ways predicted by those who study class positions' impact on habitus formation (e.g., Lareau 2011).

As detailed above in the comments on operationalization, this chapter explores class through analyzing data on students' horizons and educators' perspectives on them. Horizons, as

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<sup>51</sup> There was another kind of "consciousness" that *was* discussed frequently: *ethnic* consciousness (*mi rigs 'du shes*), which I introduced above and discuss below in the chapter dealing with race/ethnicity.

explained by Curl, Wu, and Lareau (2018, p. 884), is not their term but an emic one, repeatedly mentioned by their upwardly mobile research participants during interviews to “describe a broadening of their life experiences, interest in new opportunities, and a taste for travel.” Here, I expand the notion of horizons to include, and more explicitly signal, the important role that one’s aspirations and expectations play in the generation of habitus, a component of habitus emphasized by numerous scholars, such as Roksa and Robinson (2017). The data presented in this chapter is divided into several principal themes that emerged from the data which speak to the role that social class plays in the formation of Amdo Tibetan students’ habitus, namely: Generating familiarity with schooling, charting a path, and employment without education. These three discussions are all overlaid with a meta-theme – the spatialization of class – that reveals more generally how participants understand the role of class and its impact on students, which is noted throughout and discussed at the end of the section. It is thus possible to see in virtually all the interlocutors’ ideas that the notion of class in Amdo Tibet has an irreducibly spatial component. While numerous authors have written about the spatial distinctions between class (and racial) group within locales and cities (e.g. Zukin et al., 2009), participants in this study conceptualized entire environmental contexts (urban, semi-urban, semi-rural, and rural) on the whole as coordinated with class, or what I call class-spaces in order to highlight the similar impact that interlocutors see class and locale as having on the students’ development of horizons.

### *Generating Familiarity with Schooling*

“One of the main goals of this *sabjong* is to help these kids get more familiar with schooling” 21-year-old Tsomo told me in lightning-quick herder-dialect Tibetan as we began talking in an empty back room of the space she had rented for three weeks to run a *sabjong*.

Located on the other side of the 500-house township from Marching Together, Tsomo's *sabjong* was in its first year and remained officially unnamed, as far as *sabjong* advertisement indicated anyway. She continued,

Many of the students here, of course they have been to school. But their home is very different than school... It's possible that some of their parents went to school, maybe some fathers, but I don't think many parents here went to college. So, the students don't know what it's like. [The parents] can't help with homework. Maybe it's different in the farming areas (*rong sa*). But when [these herding students] are not at school, they are just doing herding work or housework or just watching TV or something.

Numerous other educators both new and more experienced shared these sentiments. The disconnect between Tibetan students' home lives and their schools was mentioned by many interlocutors, and bridging this disconnect remained at the forefront of many educators' ideas, like Ochen discussed above, about the principal purpose *sabjong* education served, even prior to the drilling of specific knowledges and skills that would be tested in mainstream schools. Rigzang, another young educator in her 20s was working on an MA degree in Tibetan Literature in Chengdu and teaching in Serjong where her students came from a mix of farmers and farmer-herder families, shared a similar idea, despite the fact that her students were likely the ones Tsomo perceived as being advantageously positioned vis-à-vis the proximity of home and school cultures. Rigzang admitted,

I know the students might not remember what they learn here. It's OK. My main hope is that this *sabjong* can make them more interested in school. Make them try harder, see how important education is, develop some interest. If it's Tibetan language, math, Chinese, English, anything. Doesn't matter. Just develop some deep interest, that's my main idea.

Across Guchu Prefecture, and even in the few *sabjong* in Xining I visited, the development of students' *interest* in schooling was paramount for almost every educator I talked to. Tsomo, even though she had only just completed her first year of university, echoed the perspectives of numerous older educators I talked to, saying "If they are not interested in education (*slob gso*)

then it doesn't matter how well I teach. They won't learn anything. So, if they are not interested, that's the first thing to do." For many like Tsomo, generating an interest in schooling was an even more foundational to *sabjong* than helping students succeed in schooling.

While many educators highlighted a few principal ways that this interest could be developed, it is important to note that these – or at least their emphasis – differed from *sabjong* to *sabjong*. To be sure, not all educators emphasized that generating interest was their principal goal and, rather, a few saw themselves as providing targeted support in key areas for students who had already developed requisite levels of investment and diligence (perhaps making their programs closer to *zab sbyong*, “in-depth study” rather than *gsab sbyong*, “supplemental study”). These several teachers, who were all located in semi-urban Serjong (rather than Xining city or more rural grasslands) focused on goals more commonly attested to in the scholarly literature (e.g., Bray 2015) and the goal of many participants in supplemental education worldwide: raising scores. The few *sabjong* educators, such as Gonpo Thar and Tsering Tso, in urban areas that participated in this study held either generating interest in specifically Tibetan knowledges or targeted instruction as their goals, depending on the nature of the class. Educators in rural areas, like Tsomo, knew that she had some motivated students but recognized that this would be her primary task with many others. She continued,

To make their interest in schooling increase, we can try a lot of different things. We want to have young teachers who can be friendly with the students, who can help them. We also don't give the students too much work. No homework here... And we try to show them that education is really important to doing new things, going new places, meeting new people. It will create fun and interesting opportunities for them.

Tsomo likely felt particularly strongly about this last point, as that summer she had invited a group of Chinese college students from eastern China to come and teach math, Chinese, and English at the *sabjong*. They were education majors (and visited Marching Together one

afternoon where I had the opportunity to talk to them for an hour or so in a group setting) and volunteering at this *sabjong* would help fulfil their graduation requirements, which was increasingly the case among students attending universities in Qinghai, as well. When the timing was appropriate, I asked Tsomo about the potential drawbacks of inviting monolingual Chinese students to teach at her *sabjong*, especially considering that she, as a resident of the same area in which Marching Together is located, knew about the importance many placed on native language education and resisting increasing pressure to assimilate into Chinese society. “It’s no problem, I think. It’s very interesting for our students to meet people from other places. They love it. They ask about their hometowns, what their university [in eastern China] is like. They even learn some interesting Chinese phrases they don’t see in the textbook.”

For Tsomo, the Chinese volunteers and other aspects of her *sabjong*, such as the lack of homework, represent efforts not only to make schooling fun and interesting for her students, but also to demonstrate to her students the wide variety of opportunities and connections that formal schooling can facilitate. She adds,

If they see that if they get good scores [on exams] they can travel to Beijing or Shanghai, or Japan or America – I think this will make them try harder in school. *They need to see what good grades can lead to. Many don’t usually get to see that at home. They hear it’s important, but they don’t see it.*

Here, Tsomo emphasizes that, for many students, the links between success in schooling and the achievement of various goals are often only vaguely signaled rather than clearly demonstrated for students. She explicitly states that she feels this is the case in many students’ homes, that parents who have been marginalized from mainstream institutions in China and the success that participation in them can facilitate have a more limited capacity to demonstrate for students the benefits that success in mainstream schooling might entail. Moreover, Tsomo also implies that mainstream schools themselves might not serve this function adequately either. She notes



implicitly, and explicitly elsewhere in our conversation, that she recognizes while the students are highly pressured into succeeding in school, many don't appear to have a clear grasp of why. She suggests that a principal reason for this ignorance is that these students' parents, by and large, did not derive benefits from formal education that would be immediately intelligible and attractive to students, such as the opportunity to travel abroad or meet new kinds of people.

For Tsomo, the first step in supporting her students' efforts to succeed in schooling lies not in drilling exam questions, as is the case for many practitioners and scholars of supplemental education, but in clearly connecting the opportunities to be derived from success in formal schooling to the development of knowledges they are already in the process of building, a connection that many parents are unable to articulate clearly to children, in her mind, largely because they don't have experience with this process. In Tsomo's words,

While everyone knows that education is important, many students from here don't see why. They don't know why it's interesting. They only think it's for a job, something their parents said they must do. And they are young so they don't care about jobs yet...[but] I hope I can make going to school interesting. If they have fun in *sabjong*, I think they will be more comfortable (*lobs gi*) and happy in public schools (*rgyal gnyer*) as well.

Tsomo reiterates her belief that *sabjong* education should raise students' interest levels and adds that a useful way of doing that is helping students develop positive feelings toward schooling, not only by seeing more directly the benefits of success in mainstream schooling but also creating a *sabjong* situation in which students become more familiar and therefore "comfortable" in these environments. To preserve the fluency of the quotation here, I limit the translation to a single word – "comfortable." But it is useful to note that in Amdo Tibetan, Tsomo describes this goal of hers as making students *lobs gi*, a colloquial Amdo Tibetan term that means "to get used to" something, where the *gi* syllable simply verbalizes the adjective that precedes it. For example, many times during my fieldwork I was asked if I was "getting used to the food" (*bod kyi za ma e*

*lobs gi*) or to living at high elevations in the grasslands. This is the same term Tsomo used to discuss what her students from herding areas need in order to develop a sustained interest in school (and its benefits).

As can be seen from Tsomo's point about her students from herding areas compared to Tibetans from farming areas, the differences between those who are 'used to' school and those who are not is not merely or primarily conceptualized as class difference. Rather, the framework that Tsomo articulates to describe this difference is geographical. For Tsomo and many others, geographical differences necessarily involve economic inequalities, but the most salient *cultural* grouping in her mind is geographical location rather than an economic one, i.e., class. According to not only my observation data but interviewees' perspectives like Tsomo's, a principal difference that exists among students raised in urban, semirural, or rural settings is the extent to which parents attempt to practice what Lareau (2011) calls "concerted cultivation." This child-rearing strategy is commonly found in upper and middle classes in which parents expend significant time and energy in proactively interacting with the child and scheduling developmental activities beyond schooling. This is contrasted with what Lareau calls 'the accomplishment of natural growth,' an approach to childrearing more commonly found in working class and poor families in which parents take a more 'hands-off' approach and, for a variety of reasons, keep the worlds of children and adults relatively separate. Importantly, Lareau argues that a family's class position is what most directly impacts their adoption of childrearing strategies: the wealthier they are, *ceteris paribus*, the more they employ an approach of 'concerted cultivation' and believe in its value (Lareau, 2011). Lareau (2011) found that working class and poor parents, who may or may not *desire* to practice concerted cultivation to the same degree, less frequently do. Reasons for this range from different pedagogical approaches to

childrearing to differing amounts of free time and energy to spend with children. It goes without saying that the vast majority of parents in this study, intentionally or not, combine childrearing approaches drawn from different points of the spectrum between extreme oversight and total negligence. In any case, Tsomo sees her principal goal as assisting rural students develop a familiarity with and interest in schooling – both of which poorer, rural students lack in comparison to wealthier, more urban students.

The degree to which urban parents, who are almost by definition wealthier than those who did not have a dwelling in Xining city, practice concerted cultivation in contemporary China is well articulated by one interlocutor of mine, Chagtar, a lecturer at a university in Xining who had obtained his doctorate abroad and spoke to me in English, saying

There is a *lot* of pressure to send my kids to *buxiban*<sup>52</sup> all the time. And in Xining, many are very good. We know they will raise the scores. But it's too much sometimes. I want my children to have a childhood, you know? To play outside and do something interesting too. Have fun. There are in school all the time, so during holidays or weekends maybe it's better if they go to village to stay at my parents, even if I can't go. They can speak Tibetan there [which they don't at school in the city].

This contrasts starkly from the response of a parent in a herding family, Jigme, to the same question about whether or not it is useful to send his children to Black Rock *sabjong*. This father, a schoolteacher at the local primary school in the grasslands, said in an interview during the summer of 2018,

The kids go home during holidays and just waste time watching TV. They have to help with housework or doing some herding, but it's nothing too useful (*nang don che wo med gi*), really. When there is *sabjong* here in the village, that's good. Because, if not, the kids will just waste time on TV, asking to play with phones, or getting into trouble outside.

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<sup>52</sup> It is enticing to make meaning out of Chagtar's use of the Chinese term during an English conversation and interpret his statement as referring to Chinese-medium 'cram schools' i.e., programs that only focus on raising test scores rather than the *sabjong* that are the topic of this study. However, one cannot simply deduce this from the given information, as he may simply have been using a common term for supplemental programs without making any specific reference to their content. Therefore, Chagtar's comment, while it does not highlight what *he* actually thinks happens at supplemental programs in Xining, does, on the other hand, highlight the general confusion addressed in Chapter 6, *The Meaning of Supplementation*, regarding the degree to which analytic or scholarly labels for supplemental programs actually reflect the practices and goals they feature.

When school starts in a few months, I will know for sure which students did nothing this summer, which students only did their homework, and which students went to *sabjong* and studied hard.

Here, on one hand, Chagtar, a highly educated parent in an urban area recognizes just how structured his daughter's life has become, which has virtually precluded opportunities for natural play, time outdoors, and conversing in Tibetan with family members. The situation has gone so far that Chagtar even acknowledges that training to get higher scores on official exams – *the* criterion for academic and, therefore, employment success – would probably not be worth the strain it placed on his children. Of all the parents I talked to, very many complained about the stress that constant schooling and *sabjong* placed on students. He, however, seemed to be one of the few actually willing to forego sending his daughter to a supplemental program. Most parents in all locations felt they 'had to' (*dgos gi*) if their child was to have a chance. Perhaps as someone who had experienced educational success inside and outside of China, Chagtar felt he was uniquely positioned to supply his children with necessary academic know-how that parents less familiar with education systems could not. Some, but not necessarily a majority, of those parents stated that *sabjong* could help but did not clearly articulate why, beyond their capacity to boost exam scores.

On the other hand, perspectives of a rural parent, Jigme, and *sabjong* educators like Tsomo, suggest that increased participation in organized activities that resemble schooling is precisely what they think most students in rural areas need. Jigme lamented the lack of organized activities for his children (and other village children) to participate in beyond mainstream schooling. He continued,

Nowadays, [the government] have been talking about three kinds of education: household education, societal education, and school education (*khyim tshang slob gso, spyi tshogs slob gso, slob grwa'i slob gso*). There's really a big emphasis on it... Children everywhere get school education. Of course, we know it's not the same (*mi gcig gi*) [from

area to area], but everyone can go to school if they want. For us, household education means learning Tibetan, learning good morality, how to be a good person, practicing Buddhism. That is simple. And social education is learning about others, doing social things for your village, maybe students can do that during *sabjong*. But I'm not really sure about this one. I know as a teacher I should maybe be clearer about this [laughter]. But I don't know what really to tell children about this.

This schoolteacher is puzzled about how to actually engage in “social education”, questioning what opportunities exist and what it would look like to avail his family of such activities. For him, *sabjong* are one of the few organized activities in which his children can participate that are instructional, and, to some degree, recreational. Whereas Jigme was at a loss for what ‘concerted cultivation’ might look like in practice, the urban professor, Chagtar, acknowledged that he even needed to go against the grain to refrain from constantly enrolling his daughter in such activities. In this case, both parents acknowledge the widespread emphasis that the state, individual leaders such as principals and education officials, and teachers have placed on the importance of those kinds of activities central to ‘concerted cultivation.’ However, interlocutors’ perspectives reveal that, at least in their minds (and in my observation data), opportunities to enroll in these activities differ more significantly by geographic location than by class. For example, wealthy people in herding areas could access disproportionate opportunities for concerted cultivation principally because their capital would allow them greater access to more urbanized areas, not because they are numerous activities in rural areas that are prohibitively expensive for most families. No amount of money could purchase enrollment in structured activities if none exist. Importantly, perspectives of Jigme, Tsomo, and others like them suggest that they believe not only are children’s habituses quite alterable, but that educational programs that bridge the gap between home and school cultures is an ideal activity to create the desired change.

Thus far, it is clear that not only do the actual opportunities to be found in urban and rural areas differ, parents’ perspectives about the value and necessity of these opportunities differ.

Where opportunities for extracurricular activities ‘flood the market’ in urban areas, as Chagtar suggest, their value is diminished and urban parents can pick and choose which they want, even suggesting that there too much ‘concerted cultivation’ would be undesirable. Of the few urban parents I talked to, most expressed skepticism about ‘over-cultivation’ and contrasted it, more or less explicitly, with other opportunities available to youths living in rural environments, which one relatively new mother and social entrepreneur, Yangchen, described as “growing up in a more traditional way.” Originally from the semi-rural area around Serjong but now living in Xining, Yangchen told me “We spend all year in the city, so during summer and winter [holiday] it’s better to go back to my hometown [in a farming area on the outskirts of Serjong] and spend time with my family. Especially during New Years.” I followed up, asking, “What are the main things you do when you are home over summer and winter holidays?” She responded,

Actually, there is really not much farm work that we should help my family with. But when we are home we can speak Tibetan with everyone, and go to the festivals and rituals. New Years in winter is most important, but also during summer there is *lurol* festival<sup>53</sup> and other things like weddings or small pilgrimage[s] that we should do with our families.”

As I address further below, parents, as seen just here, did not contrast the busy ‘converted cultivation’ lifestyle in Xining directly with life in a semi-rural or rural location; they did not explicitly construct a binary in which ‘concerted cultivation’ became synonymous with Sinicization and ‘the accomplishment of natural growth’ became synonymous with Tibetanization. However, they did acknowledge that extensive activities were undesirable when they threatened to cut into time spent on participating in important Tibetan cultural rites and

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<sup>53</sup> Lurol (*klu rol*) is a harvest festival held in August/September each year in many of the villages around Serjong Valley. During most rituals, the mountain god descends to earth through the *lha ba*, a villager who is possessed and mediates between the mountain god and the village, oftentimes practicing extreme asceticism such as cutting oneself. There is significant pressure placed on villagers to participate in the dancing portions of Lurol, as one sign posted in a village where I was conducting research indicated. See Makley (2018) for more.

events. For example, Thubten, another parent in his forties and working most of the year in Xining when not in Serjong, said “If [students] are just going home during the summer to herd yak and sheep, I don’t think it’s that useful for their future. If they are a student, they should go to *sabjong* and improve their studying,” indicating his opinion that supplemental classes *should* take precedence over some activities widely understood as typically “Tibetan.” This parent seemed to understand, however, that not all young people are in school and that herding, rather than *sabjong*, is an appropriate summer activity for people in that line of work. When I followed up to ask Thubten if all children *should* be in school, he responded by saying that

If you are asking if it is good if children go to school, of course my answer is ‘yes’. But I know that not everyone goes. Especially if another person in the family goes, then it’s probably OK (*chog na thang*). [The one who went to school] can make sure to take care of the parents, look after household finances. If some children only want to herd yak and sheep and their parents agree, I think it’s OK. The problem is if a child goes to school but does not work very hard (*hur brtson*) to succeed. Then that is a waste of time. But if a child is a student or herding sheep in the mountains, they still can learn Tibetan culture, speak Tibetan, and participate in the customs [such as Lurol].

Thubten’s comments further elucidate his perspective that, for him, pursuing schooling is not synonymous with Sinicization and herding is not synonymous with Tibetanization. For him and others, herding (and to a lesser degree, farming), while a traditionally Tibetan *livelihood*, was not a *sine qua non* of Tibetanness in the contemporary society. Yangchen, Thubten, and others do not see formal education as *inherently* Sinicizing. Economic and geographical mobility, which this chapter argues are deeply related, are desirable and therefore cannot be conceptualized, in the minds of many interlocutors, as necessarily antithetical to their Tibetan identities and interests. Thubten’s comments suggest he believes that a childrearing strategy of concerted cultivation can still achieve ethnic Tibetan goals, but only if done conscientiously. If more traditional Tibetan livelihoods, such as herding, are eschewed by children attending school, then this sacrifice must be made to be ‘worth it’ through a students’ diligent and focused efforts in

school. Enrolling in school, but doing nothing to make good on this investment, is the regrettable situation for Thubten and others, for then the child has *neither* learned traditional rural Tibetan livelihoods and associated skills nor developed the skills to succeed in a schooled society.

In this subsection, I have focused on evidence collected from observations and interviews of only a few interlocutors, but they are not unique and represent key formulations of the perspectives discussed. Several principal conclusions can be made on the basis of the evidence presented here. First, though clearly related to the economic (and other) capital one has at one's disposal, social class positions that afford different types of access to opportunities and activities that are advantageous for succeeding in schooling are conceptualized by participants as being unequally distributed primarily as a function of geographical location, not sheer economic wealth (this question is taken up again in the subsection just below on 'Caterpillar Fungus'). Second, one of the biggest obstacles facing students in rural areas (irrespective of their family's actual income) is the lack of access to the types of activities that support 'concerted cultivation' and engagement in programs and institutions that resemble mainstream public schools. To be sure, Tibetan society has, in many respects, flourished in highly rural locations for more than a millennium and there have been numerous networks, institutions, and practices that have allowed some Tibetans throughout history to thrive intellectually despite the putative disadvantages of rural life. However, the power and, thereby, benefit of such institutions (e.g., monasteries) and networks (e.g., clan relationships) have not only been proactively limited by Chinese state policies (Goldstein, 1989), but, in many cases, these examples of Tibetan sociality do not resemble the classrooms, schools, and other arenas in which Tibetans must compete for material and symbolic rewards in contemporary China. And finally, third, *sabjong* and other opportunities for 'concerted cultivation' are seen by educators to be beneficial for a variety of reasons, but a



principal one for Tibetan students is that they generate an interest in schooling and make manifest for students the connection between success in schooling and future opportunities to ‘broaden one’s horizons’, which could include traveling to new areas, learning new skills, and meeting new people. Moreover, doing so – if done conscientiously – does not entail threats to one’s Tibetan identity. Thus, *sabjong* can help demystify mainstream schooling and the goals to which it supposedly leads without necessarily displacing “Tibetan culture” and replacing it with classrooms that necessarily entail Sinicization. Virtually all interlocutors recognize formal education in China often generates pressure to assimilate into Chinese society; but they also recognize, at least rhetorically if not actually, that this need not necessarily be the case.

Still, there is no doubt that some Tibetans remain skeptical of formal schooling and *sabjong* that attempt to facilitate success therein. However, the principal argument here is not meant to determine whether or not schooling (or *sabjong*) are ultimately good or valuable. The argument thus far has shown that, in certain circumstances, *sabjong* are seen by Tibetan educators as useful tools in producing the kinds of opportunities and practices that are likely to facilitate educational success in the short and long term, even beyond their capacity to teach content that is imparted and tested in mainstream schools. A principal way in which they do this is by helping students become more familiar with schooling, a service which may be particularly valuable for students who live far from urban areas and institutional environments with which they or their parents are unfamiliar.

### *Charting a Path*

Closely related to educators’ prioritization of the development of familiarity with formal educational contexts are educators’ and parents’ outlooks on how best to navigate the

(sometimes dizzying) array of institutions, policies, and procedures that govern one's educational experience over time. Generating familiarity with schooling can be understood as different than charting a path through educational institutions insofar as the former section analyzed perspectives on how students could prepare themselves to create and recognize educational opportunities, whereas the present section analyzes strategies to navigate those opportunities, especially through the generation of appropriate aspirations and expectations. Practically speaking, this means that while the previous section addressed primarily how *sabjong* could alter parts of the habitus that would better prepare students for engaging with mainstream schooling, this section focuses on perspectives on the ways that students should navigate their futures.

Though these sections are conceptually close enough that they could have been combined, I keep them separate because it is on the topic of charting a path that I had many in-depth conversations which yielded some of the richest data in the study. Throughout the course of field work, I quickly came to realize that asking interlocutors to provide their rationale for how students should develop and pursue aspirations for secondary and tertiary education yielded responses that were not only theoretically significant but fluently and honestly delivered. For example, asking interlocutors about existing obstacles or their own personal histories certainly yielded theoretically interesting data, but, in the former case, interlocutors may have felt social and political pressure to depict obstacles in a certain way to this foreign researcher, perhaps because they were unwilling to discuss politically sensitive issues or, conversely, because they wanted me to understand a situation as discriminatory or racist (even if it may not have been). In the latter case, interviewees may have experienced some social desirability bias and therefore felt pressured, consciously or not, to depict or explain their lives in a manner that made them appear a certain way to me. In general, while this is always a limitation of ethnographic research

(Burawoy, 2004), my seven years in the region of this study allowed me to develop some capacity to know when participants weren't being entirely forthright with me (and, if they were not, I did not attempt to coerce them to be; rather, I treated their reticence about a certain topic as a datum itself). However, my asking about strategies, hypothetical situations, and 'the future' allowed interlocutors to speak openly and creatively; they did not need to do the mental work of 'measuring' their verbal descriptions of the situation in an interview with me against the 'actual' truth of the situation. In general, this became a principal methodological strategy of mine: I often reformulated questions to put them in the future tense or liberally used hypothetical situations to ask about an educators' values, strategies, or expectations. More on this can be found in the Methodology chapter.

In this vein, one of my most successful interview and conversational techniques was to ask interlocutors specific questions regarding their thoughts about how their children should and would navigate their futures. One conversation in which I asked questions of this type was during a lunch break during the first summer at Marching Together when a couple of parents arrived to watch that afternoon's Cultural Knowledge Competition, which started as usual around 3:00pm. Sitting in the circular tent that we had constructed on the first night of the *sabjong*, the two fathers, Aku Cheeden, Aku Gyamtsen, my research assistant Dorje, and I were talking about educational goals and strategies and I asked about the plans they thought would be good for students at Marching Together. Recall that these students are virtually all children of Tibetan-speaking herding families in one of the most rural areas of Guchu Prefecture. Menla Jyab, a father of a second-year Returner student said,

It's difficult for the students to go to those [Eastern, prestigious] universities. Not only is the tuition expensive, it costs a lot to travel there and it's very difficult to get high enough score on the *gaokao* to get in! But we're poor in this area (lit. we don't have any means, *dpal 'byor med gi*), so it's unusual for a kid to go to school in inner China.

The principal of MT, Aku Cheeden, weighed in later in the same small-group conversation,

We want the students to go where they want, to challenge themselves. Actually, it's better if they don't go to college in Qinghai because they will probably get a better job after graduation if they go elsewhere...but, really, it's hard for them. For many, we will have to say we will be satisfied if they finish high school and go to a vocational program (*da zhuan*).

The father chimed back in, saying

Yeah, even vocational programs might be difficult for some of these kids [at the *sabjong*]. They aren't used to (*mi lobs gi*) going to school, sitting quiet all day. Many of the boys here are pretty rowdy, badly behaved... It's difficult to prepare [for going to those schools]. How can we think about the future if we don't know if they will succeed in school now?

Note several important points in this interaction. First is perhaps the commonality between this kind of exchange and others documented in other research (e.g., Carter, 2005; Lareau, 2011). Teachers and parents, while unwilling to argue that economic conditions determined their futures, readily recognized that circumstances made certain possibilities less likely. That they were made less likely both because of 'direct' economic obstacles (e.g., a tuition bill) and 'indirect' economic obstacles (e.g., class cultures better suited to indoor, school-like work) is also an important, widespread pattern. Second, these data corroborate another finding: that families who know that their limited means will create barriers to educational opportunities often adjust their aspirations and expectations to align with what is possible, what Bourdieu (1992) calls an 'internalization' of the 'external' field conditions, often to the extent that this now-circumscribed set of options is depicted as morally or socially superior anyway, in what he terms "making a virtue of necessity." Of course, the curtailing of expectations is not a complete renunciation of ambitions and opportunities; room is left in the interlocutors' approach to justify still the pursuit of students' aspirations even if they aren't as ambitious. They do not simply accept their fate. Ideally, in Aku Cheeden's opinion, they would leave the province for

college because that would give them the best opportunity for lucrative employment. Overall, reviewing this exchange helps establish that participants in this study maintain an awareness of the difference between aspirations and expectations, and that there are many factors that constrain or inform the latter, not simply ‘direct’ economic obstacles or a lack of scholastic ability, but an awareness of the large *cultural* gap that would need to be spanned as well. Also importantly, as Aku Cheeden’s point shows, educators by and large believe not only that students *could* bridge this gap but that it was worthwhile to do so, and, as we will see later as well, not just for reasons of socioeconomic mobility. The cultural gap, as the other sections also illustrate, is complex: it is not just an economic reach, which is obvious to participants, nor merely a linguistic gap of attending university in one’s second language, which, in theory, should pose no problem at all if both native and second languages are thoroughly learned (Winsler et al., 1999). The gap also concerns the ‘mismatch’ between students’ dispositions and those expected of students in universities in eastern China and attempts to rectify it.

While material conditions *on campus* may not be extraordinarily different between universities in eastern and western China (though institutions in the east are generally better funded and maintained), the amount of support students can receive socially off-campus, and the degree to which they are comfortable in their university environment, which is almost always urban, may vary greatly (Yang, 2018). This constitutes an example of why ethnographic research is useful for studying habitus formation: by conducting observations and interviews, it is possible to ‘disaggregate’ aspects of the habitus, such as language use, aspirations, and bodily habits, to focus on which components of habitus in particular are more or less susceptible to hysteresis. Understandings of the mismatch or lag between one’s habitus and the field, i.e., hysteresis, have usually discussed the habitus in a singular, aggregated, composite way. The evidence presented

here, however, suggests that if research can disaggregate the components of students' habituses, it is not impossible to determine that some aspects of habitus are more or less 'suited' to a field compared to others. Whether or not this impacts Bourdieusian theory, however, is not the principal issue here: The point is that parents and educators in this study see aspects of habitus as potentially out of sync with one another – that some components of habitus can be better attuned to field conditions than others.

I now introduce a series of interactions gleaned from three different interviews with educators that add important layers of complexity to, and thereby clarify, the situation just described. The first excerpts are from an interview with Aku Gyamtsan, a senior staff member at Marching Together and a chanting leader (*dbu mdzes*) at the monastery he, Aku Orgyan, and Aku Huazang belong to, a couple hours' drive from MT. Aku Cheeden also used to belong to this monastery. Aku Lobsang is the only senior staff member at MT who belonged to another monastery, the largest Gelugpa monastery in the prefecture, Tashi Kyil, in the lower farming-and-herding area of Serjong. Second, I recount some important moments in an interview with Gedun, a confident and capable upcoming senior in college who is in his second year as the lead organizer of the *sabjong* in the herding township of Black Rock, which is located about a four-hour drive away from Marching Together on the eastern end the same herding county of Gangthang. Even though I was not able to spend more than five days at Black Rock *sabjong* during the period of field work (because I had instead opted to make Marching Together my primary field site), I was able to spend the majority of two summers of pilot research at Black Rock and one of my principal research assistants, Naba, was the previous organizer of Black Rock *sabjong*. Therefore, I do, at times, use previously gathered observation data (under the same IRB protocol) to inform my understanding of what Gedun and other teachers at Black Rock

report. Third, I analyze points from my discussion with Namgyal, who I first met during my time as a teacher in Serjong when we started a Tibetan-English language exchange while he was working as a substitute teacher and preparing for his teaching licensure exams. When we reconnected during field work, he had been promoted a few times and was now, in addition to being a teacher at one primary school in Serjong, an elected village leader of semi-rural Yeli farming village, which lies in the Serjong valley about a 30-minute drive from the main downtown area into the hills. The three interviews are presented in this way because they add three important layers to the process of Tibetan students', parents', and teachers' attempt to 'chart a path' that facilitates students in navigating formal educational institutions successfully.

This "charting" specifically includes three elements: First, any path through education means increasing time spent in urban areas. Second, even *preparing* to succeed in formal education often means going to a more urban locale, which presents further hardships, but herding students *qua* herders see themselves as having the toughness and perseverance to overcome these obstacles. And third, students from farming areas, despite the putative advantages that those from rural herding areas, such as Tsomo, believe semi-rural farming students enjoy, may experience *other* obstacles, such as feeling like they are 'not Tibetan enough' or a 'fake' Tibetan (*bod pa rdzun ma*). Thus, they may experience a double hardship, trying to learn *both* Chinese and Tibetan ethnolinguistic cultures, whereas herding students can more securely focus on mastering only Chinese because their Tibetan ethnolinguistic identities are less susceptible to identity threat, the idea that (positive) image of one's ingroup is "threatened by the activation of negative stereotypes" (Martini & Nitikin, 2019, p. 117; Steele et al., 2002).

Aku Gyamtsen is one of the senior staff members at Marching Together and, like Aku Lobsang, oscillates between stern discipline and jovial silliness. Because he is the chanting

leader at his monastery, Aku Gyamtsen was not always present at Marching Together, as he often needed to attend to his primary responsibilities. Nevertheless, I was able to interview him once during my first summer at Marching Together, an opportunity I relished because as a less talkative and less centrally involved leader at this *sabjong*, I felt that he might be able to share perspectives that were less scholastic or discursively polished; he was not so practiced in describing, advertising, and justifying the *sabjong* to innumerable parents, government leaders, and students as Aku Cheeden is. In our conversation about the purposes of the *sabjong*, I asked Aku Gyamtsen about the so-called “achievement gap” that exists between the scores of Tibetan students and national averages and causes of it. Aku Gyamtsan, said, “It’s not that the kids from herding areas are not smart. It’s not like that. They just don’t have lots of opportunities to do something interesting here (*nang don yod pa*<sup>54</sup>).” I then asked, thinking of some obvious examples of Tibetan behaviors that are often extolled in Tibetan communities and popular media (and in the Cultural Knowledge Competitions) as interesting, “Isn’t herding work, racing horses, or making black tents interesting?” He replied,

They are for some students, but not everyone. Not everyone wants to live on the grassland and do that work. They should learn the traditional lifestyle, but they don’t have to stay here like that. And we can’t say that’s bad... when I said ‘interesting’ before I mean something to develop their mind, develop their education, to do something that will give them opportunities to go somewhere new and learn something new... It’s same for students from Serjong. They have some more opportunities there than we have here in the grassland, but it’s still limited. Just *sabjong*, internet café, Karaoke. And a lot of that is no good. I think there are some good teachers there, but it would be a pity for them to just stay there [in Serjong].

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<sup>54</sup> *Nang don yod pa* can also mean “meaningful” or “worthwhile” as *nang don* is literally “inner meaning.” However, it often does not carry quite the weight in everyday conversation as the English term “meaningful” and, given the context of the interlocutor’s sentence, we chose not to translate his statement as saying there is “nothing meaningful to do here in the grasslands,” which would be inaccurate and harsh: there are meaningful things to do in the grassland, but not many that would be considered ‘worthwhile’ when it comes to preparing for success in mainstream schooling.



At a different time, Aku Gyamtsen and I discussed many academically enriching opportunities in Serjong that ranged far beyond what he had stated here. This leads me to believe that in the interaction above, he wanted to emphasize the limitations of a town even as “culturally rich” as Serjong, which is, after all, commonly referred to as the “Cultural City of Serjong” (*gser ljongs rig gnas 'byung ba'i grong khyer*). Had he emphasized the many opportunities in Serjong, he would have been undermining his own point: that students should be amenable to traveling and living elsewhere for a time, even beyond the Tibetan Plateau. Aku Gyamtsen, like many interlocutors, articulates a central tension in the lives of many herding Tibetans: It is not simply that Tibetans would prefer to stay in rural areas but policies and limited opportunities pressure them to urbanize. Rather, opportunities that many Tibetans themselves consider worthwhile seem to be increasingly concentrated in urban areas. That is, the pursuit of interesting opportunities – even interesting *Tibetan* opportunities – often requires relocating to environments increasingly dominated by Han Chinese ethnolinguistic cultures.

Perhaps the quintessential example of this is to be found in the university aspirations of many students and their parents and teachers: many stated that their ‘dream’ university was the Minzu University of China (MUC), which both ‘officially’ and in popular opinion, has the best Tibetan programs and scholars and is in Beijing. While there are some Tibetan communities in Beijing that Tibetans students at MUC do search out and join, it goes without saying that Tibetans are an even smaller numerical minority in Beijing than they are in Xining. Tibetan students attending MUC, as some contacts of mine did, are routinely held up as role models of successful Tibetan students in their hometowns. While many Tibetans from rural areas may have significant non-dominant cultural capital, it is generally only degrees from universities, which are exclusively located in urban areas, that “consecrate” the various forms of capital possessed

by Tibetans from rural areas as legitimate institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Here, consecrate should be understood to mean that university credentials are what allow Tibetan knowledges to be recognized and rewarded as such in labor markets, which are thoroughly organized and overseen by the state (Fischer & Zenz, 2018). Therefore, pursuing dominant and even non-dominant capital oftentimes requires moving to increasingly urban environments, a challenge to which some students may respond better than others (and their relative levels of education, expertise, or ability may have little to do with their ability to thrive in an urban environment). As discussed below in the section on gender, it is perhaps the ability to thrive in a Sinicized environment that, in the minds of many Tibetans, explains why Tibetan girls enjoy better educational outcomes than boys at the moment.

At Black Rock *sabjong*, a college student, Gedun, was in the process of running a holiday *sabjong* for the second time in the summer of 2019 (he had taken over for Naba the previous winter). On a warm summer afternoon after Dorje and I had arrived by car from Marching Together, the three of us sat in his parents' living room. Gedun spoke forcefully about the importance of developing strong aspirations in the students.

Of course I hope they all go to university (*slob grwa chen mo*). That's the main reason I am doing *sabjong*. I think if they do this, there will be a much better chance they will go to university, there's a better chance they will even think about university because they see all us teachers back here doing this.

When I responded by asking if he thinks all the students *will* go to university, he replied,

That's hard to say. Probably not all but each year its more and more students. Some will definitely go to vocational school (*zhuan ke*) and other kinds of programs. It will depend on a lot of things – if they can pass the *gaokao* of course is the main one. But we don't have a *gaokao sabjong* in this village.

By the half-Chinese, half-Tibetan term “*gaokao sabjong*” here, Gedun is referring to a more specialized supplemental educational program that prepares students specifically for the exam,

rather than a more general *sabjong* like the one in Black Rock geared towards younger students. “Here it’s only for primary and lower middle school students. If they want *gaokao* training, they should go to Xining. That’s what I always tell them. Keep going to *sabjong*. Keep looking for good teachers wherever they are. Follow them!” This young educator was a skilled orator and the children enjoyed hearing him speak, and he enjoyed speaking as well. He spoke passionately and gesticulated grandly as he spoke of what he wanted for students. When we talked about expectations appropriate to the students (as opposed to aspirations), he acknowledged that it was unlikely all of them would attend a four-year university, but he spoke quickly and spiritedly about the many options open to even those students who didn’t qualify for university enrollment. “They can go to vocational school. Get a skill. And maybe they can go different places with that, work with the government on projects or become a famous painter...” Gedun’s responses to questions about *expectations*, and in particular the stark reality that it was likely less than 50% of the students in his *sabjong* would attend a four-year university, almost always switched back to talk about *aspirations*, and the many possibilities (perhaps overoptimistic) that could be pursued from any position in the educational journey. A bit later he continued, “They just need to be strong, be tough. There is going to be loss, disappointment (*blo pham, pham ka*). For example, if they fail the *gaokao*. Maybe they’ll retake it. Maybe they’ll give up. I always tell them just do something. You can study one more year and try again, right?” This rugged, even dogged determination encouraged by Gedun is a characteristic that many educators (and herding Amdo Tibetans in general) strive to read onto herding peoples and take pride in doing so. Indeed, when the interview began and I had mentioned that my research assistant and Gedun might be exhausted from a long day work, Gedun replied that he was “a nomad kind of guy” and wasn’t tired at all. My assistant, Dorje, on the other hand happily voiced that he was ready to knock off

for the day! But as we had become extremely close by this point, it was not difficult to convince him to put in another hour or two. In any case, this example can be summed up as showing that even though Gendun's ideas of students' expectations differs from his assessment of their aspirations (largely along the lines of how much support students will get as they navigate senior high school) he prefers to talk about aspirations, which are more open and allow him to emphasize, both me and to students, his *approach* to education rather than his *assessment* of what is happening, which is the domain of expectations. His approach did not recognize the need for pedagogical differences according to students' hometowns (which are virtually synonymous with social classes) or capacity; his approach was that all students should cultivate as lofty aspirations as they can and then adjust according to the results they get. Even if initial plans are thwarted, in Gedun's estimation, the goal of learning new things by having experiences in new settings can still be achieved if one supplies the requisite effort. What Gedun's perspective reveals is that the requisite effort is not simply limited to hours spent studying; it also includes a willingness to move new places and pursue whatever training one must to actualize their aspirations. Whereas Aku Gyamtsan and numerous educators recognize that the pursuit of opportunities will require moving to urban areas, Gedun articulates that even the pursuit of *preparatory opportunities* will often require relocation to an urban area. Thus, for Gedun, dogged determination allows one to learn not merely how win opportunities but, even more broadly, how to pursue them.

A third participant, Namgyal, was not currently teaching at a *sabjong* but had in the past and still worked as the overseer and organizer of one in his hometown. He was currently engaged in a variety of other work to support the local children and the Yeli village learning center he had helped establish. His ideas about charting a path inverted common assumptions of privilege and

deficiencies in an unexpected way. Because he had lived abroad for some time and felt comfortable using English, he spoke to me in a thoroughly mixed form of English and Tibetan<sup>55</sup>, saying

The Xining students and [those] in Serjong have advantages compared to students in the grasslands [which are more rural and at higher elevation]. Better schools and teachers here, bigger community, more money. Of course. But actually, if Xining students think about future, it is a little bit more complicated. They will always have to think about [balancing] Chinese and Tibetan. Will they remember Tibetan if they speak Chinese always? If they always stay in Xining, will they know their [ancestral] homeland in their parents' village? Will they know how to wear Tibetan robe, do Tibetan dance? Nomad kids, OK, it's hard for them. They're poor and don't have much to do in [their] hometown. *But their future is more clear.* They have the strong Tibetan foundation, so they know they will try to go to Xining or maybe Chengdu, get a job there. They can focus their time learning Chinese because they already can speak Tibetan good. They already know Tibetan culture. Maybe students from Serjong are like this [because Serjong has such strong Tibetan institutions and the monastery]. But Tibetan students from [semi-urbanized Tibetan areas without these institutions and with larger Han Chinese populations, such as] Ganga town, Trika (Ch. *Guide*) – maybe they don't know Tibetan language, culture so good. So actually I think it's a little opposite of what you said [when you asked about advantages and disadvantages associated with hometowns]. Their life is harder, but their future path maybe is clearer.

I include this extended quotation in order to convey the complexity and context of Namgyal's statement. He says that despite the economic and other material obstacles Tibetan herding students from rural, homogenous areas face in obtaining educational success, their *existential* concerns, the choices they must make about practicing and maintaining their ethnic identity, are in fact simpler than they are for students from lower, more diverse places who may be, in Namgyal's mind, less likely to know well their own culture(s) and language(s), presumably because it has been mixed with Chinese and other cultures and thereby has become less authentic. Namgyal goes as far to say that even within one county of Guchu Prefecture, Ganga, there is a

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<sup>55</sup> As noted previously, when interlocutors spoke to me in English, I recount their statements as exactly as possible, even if there are some grammatical irregularities. Not only does this give a more accurate picture of the speaker's words without my editing, it also helps prevent homogenizing the English speaking styles and abilities of each interlocutor in this study. Here, Namgyal's statements are part transcribed from spoken English and part translated then transcribed from spoken Tibetan.

significant difference of strategies that exist for students from “Ganga town,” which is a lower and far more ethnically diverse semi-urban county seat, than Ganga-*thang*, the much higher Ganga grassland that is a three-hour drive west of town. In Namgyal’s opinions, students growing up Ganga *town* (Ganga-*dzong*) do not have an environment conducive to learning Tibetan language and culture thoroughly, and, therefore, they may experience some existential doubt as to what path they want to pursue – particularly in terms of which language(s) they aspire to learn well and study in at the university. Conversely, students from Ganga *grassland* (Ganga-*thang*), because they have an environment that is better for learning Tibetan language and culture, would most likely not face the same vexing questions regarding their future *even though* students from the grassland have, on average, significantly fewer material resources at their disposal.

Finally, Namgyal is sure to differentiate these other semi-urban Tibetan places, like Ganga-town and Trika from Serjong, all of which are county seats. Though paying homage to Serjong is almost a matter of course for any Amdo Tibetans from the area, Namgyal is not simply repeating a refrain about Serjong’s superiority. Rather, he recognizes that Serjong is not like comparable areas. Serjong boasts a large monastery and associated or similar institutions (such as those that specialize in the visual or literary arts) that make it an ideal place for learning Tibetan, even though it is located in a farming area and is becoming increasingly diverse. As some residents and scholars see it, this small city has seen a rise of a Han Chinese population as a result of incentivized population transfer (Fischer, 2009). Indeed, walking around towns other than Serjong, it is now sometimes difficult to communicate in Tibetan because the vast majority of residents are Chinese monolinguals, though Tibetan still remains a lingua franca in Serjong.

My principal research assistant, Dorje, though of course a case of just one person, provides an example of what Namgyal discussed here. Dorje is from Ganga-Grassland and was sure to mention his hometown when people we met asked where he was from, especially when people commented that he “looked like a Chinese person,” something he has heard for many years despite the fact that both his parents are Amdo Tibetans; moreover, his grandfather was a very prominent *lama* before passed away in 2019 and people were often embarrassed at this comment when they learned about his family. As Namgyal’s theory predicts, despite the annoyance of having his ethnic identity mistaken for Chinese, Dorje felt virtually no ethnic insecurity and spoke a herding dialect of Tibetan that immediately positioned him as an ethnic peer when we visited other sites. What’s more, Dorje’s Chinese proficiency is excellent too, which is part of the reason Aku Cheeden asked him to teach it at Marching Together during our summers there. Because he had such a strong background in Tibetan language and culture, he reported to me during our innumerable conversations that he never felt insecure in his Tibetan ethnic identity or self-conscious about consuming Chinese media or conversing in the language. Although Dorje is only a single person, his situation is compelling. A fuller portrait of this incredible research assistant and interpreter is offered in the Methodology chapter. In any case, Namgyal, like most others, recognizes that students from different areas face different obstacles both inside schools but, as shown here, outside the classroom walls as well. However, Namgyal is both more willing (perhaps optimistically) to see the advantages of growing up in a rural area and more willing explicitly state that Tibetan students from different areas may be better served by adopting different aspirations and plans.

Several points in each of these interlocutors’ conversations have been analyzed thus far, but it is worth recounting how each conceptualizes the central issues in charting a path to

educational and employment success. First, Aku Gyamtsan insightfully describes how Tibetan students' pursuit of education will necessarily bring them to increasingly urbanized areas, even when the object of their study is Tibetan knowledges. Second, Gedun, the Black Rock organizer, emphasizes that not only do better opportunities exist in urban areas, but one might also need to be willing and able to relocate to urban areas simply to prepare to take advantage of these opportunities. Moreover, Gedun prefers to think in terms of aspirations rather than starker expectations as a way of cultivating an ethos of collective effort rather than highly individualized strategies. In recognizing that all Tibetan students can aim for certain goals, but not all students can reasonably expect to attain them, Gedun instead draws on the stereotypical imagery of rugged herders to develop a framework for conceptualizing and navigating potential exclusion from higher levels of schooling. Finally, Namgyal suggests that different kinds of advantages exist for students raised in different places; while students in urban areas have clear material advantages, they may face great obstacles when confronting how to be a valuable member of their ethnic group, if that matters to them. While all three interlocutors here work to highlight the advantages and capacities that a 'typically Amdo Tibetan' background might produce, they differ in how they see this background supporting students' efforts to chart a path through schooling.

Of the three examples given, Namgyal is the only one who suggests students of different class-spaces should cultivate different aspirations (though all implicitly agree that students from different places should reasonably have different expectations). Though he recognized students from more urban areas enjoy some advantages, he asserts that these advantages come at a price, namely confusion or complexity regarding how to construct and practice one's ethnic identity. He depicts this simplicity as potentially beneficial rather than merely the product of diminished opportunities. In his opinion, economically poorer students from rural areas, by dint of their



relative wealth of (nondominant) cultural capital and symbolic capital, are in a position that can be understood as advantageous insofar as they have fewer ethnic or existential pressures bearing on their aspirations. Rural students' road to success is a simple one-way street. It is the Amdo Tibetan students who grow up, albeit with more economic capital, in Han Chinese spaces who have harder decisions to make and must perform a more strenuous balancing act. At another point in the conversation, Namgyal expanded on his perspective of students' aspirations and expectations, admitting

I know many of these students will not make it to university. That's not good, but it's more than this. Many of these students only want to go to Tibetan *Minzu* universities. They think they will study Tibetan in university and they aren't prepared, [or] aren't interested in something else. Unless they are a top student, they probably have no chance at a *Minzu* university.

This phenomenon – that Tibetan students' aspirations for university do not accurately match the opportunities they are likely to encounter – will be taken up in fuller detail below. It suffices to point out here, however, that Namgyal's critique of Tibetan students' aspirations and expectations is not that they were too modest, but that they were too *lofty*. Of course, this is a subtle distinction to make because one might describe these students' aspirations and expectations as somewhat narrow – they only or primarily want to attend universities in which they can enroll in Tibetan language and topics classes. Unfortunately, with only a dozen or so *Minzu* Universities with Tibetan programs operating in China, there are far more Tibetan students graduating from senior high school than could ever be admitted to these few universities. Namgyal, therefore, describes these aspirations as both too limited and too *lofty*. Neither, it can easily be recalled, does Namgyal simply advocate assimilation and “Sinicization.” While one need not assume that there is necessarily an impeccable logic to all Namgyal's perspectives, one can nevertheless see that he differs from the other two educators in that he thinks students should

be significantly more calculating in forming their aspirations and expectations regarding university.

In addition, unlike Gedun, he is wary of unbridled aspiration. He knows that despite good intentions, single-mindedly following one's dream of studying in a Tibetan program at a *Minzu* University – which, the reader will recall, does not require English for the entrance exam unlike Han Chinese Universities that do (*minkaomin* vs. *minkaohan*) – could create a situation in which a high school student neglects the study of English (thinking they will not need it because it is not counted in *Minzu* University admissions) but then comes to find it necessary to use that score for admission to one of the more numerous *minkaohan* university programs because their other scores were not high enough to secure one of the few coveted spots at a *Minzu* University with a Tibetan program. So, while Namgyal encourages students to be shrewder, he suggests that, on some, perhaps symbolic, levels, rural students have an easier time doing this (or at least must navigate one fewer concern) because their Tibetan identities are less likely to be threatened by living in Han Chinese environments. They already have a strong “foundation in Tibetan culture.” Thus, one can see that, similar to common formulations of the role of class (or what I call class-space in Amdo Tibet) in schooling does entail advantages for some students. However, while these disproportionately fall to students in higher classes/urban areas when it comes to *dominant* capital, students from rural areas do retain some important symbolic advantages in cultural and educational domains over their counterparts from more urban areas.

Ultimately, the task of charting a path as exemplified by the nature of the admissions process to universities in China creates a complicated situation for students hoping to attend their dream schools (i.e., *Minzu* universities) that may challenge or nuance scholarship that operationalizes ‘high aspirations’ as indicative of an advantageous middle-class habitus. In the

current situation, such lofty aspirations, as Namgyal points out, can sometimes be in practice counter-productive because there are simply not enough admissions slots for all students to attend their university of choice (which is always the case) but, for Amdo Tibetan students in China, attending one's second or third choice university (e.g., a Han Chinese university) might require a significantly different preparatory regimen (e.g., better preparing for the English portion of the *gaokao*) than aiming for one's top choice (e.g., which might be a *Minzu* university that does not count English *gaokao* scores). Thus, while Tibetan educators, like those everywhere, strive to communicate to students that they should pursue their dreams and that they can achieve them if they work hard enough, many educators simultaneously know that they may be setting their students up for failure if they encourage them to pursue their dreams single-mindedly. And, with a limited number of hours in the day, students and teachers indeed need to make hard choices about which subjects to study in preparing for the *gaokao*. In this way, charting one's best possible path is *not* necessarily served by developing lofty aspirations. Moreover, these findings also suggest the analytical value of separating out aspirations and expectations in future research on habitus formation and its impact on educational success. A continual struggle for educators, as this section shows, is balancing aspirations and expectations such that teachers remain able to present a motivating and optimistic message students while simultaneously preparing them to cope with institutional limitations at an early age. Most broadly, findings from this study suggest that *sabjong* educators may have the time, energy, inclination, and opportunity to perform this balancing act in ways that mainstream teachers do not.

*Employment Without Education*

Contrary to the exclusive focus thus far on education and its role as *the* pathway to lucrative employment, Amdo Tibetans are also keenly aware of a few other methods by which one might obtain the material and symbolic capital they want in order to lead happy lives in which they have sufficient agency and connections to accomplish their goals. While becoming a fashion model, performer, online celebrity, athlete, or entrepreneur likely remain dreams of many Amdo Tibetans, just as they do for children around the world, there is one lucrative activity that requires neither formal education nor credentials that is particularly salient to Amdo Tibetan society and, therefore, on which I collected data primarily through interviews: digging Yartsa Gunbu (*dbyar rtsa dgun 'bu*, literally “summer grass, winter bug”), or Caterpillar Fungus (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis* in Latin). I include this section here on Yartsa, as it is commonly called, for two principal reasons: first, Yartsa was repeatedly and passionately discussed as a key topic by numerous participants even before I asked about it specifically; second, it constitutes one of the very few cases in which interlocutors were willing to speak negatively, in both moral and instrumental terms, about livelihoods that specifically characterize rural Tibetans and their practices. That my most intensive field work sessions at summer *sabjong* began just as Yartsa digging season wound down at least partially explains why this topic may have been at the forefront of many participants’ minds. It is a controversial issue with ecological, economic, and political dimensions that affect relationships not only between Amdo Tibetans and other ethnic groups, namely Hui Muslims and Han Chinese, but also – and perhaps primarily – between Amdo Tibetan villages themselves. During my several summers in Amdo, it was not uncommon at all to see local police officers standing on mountain ridges and patrolling areas in the pastures above Serjong and elsewhere to ensure that villagers collected Yartsa only from their designated

areas. It was also unfortunately common for disagreements and even physical fights to break out, one of which even resulted in a villager being killed and several others being imprisoned for substantial lengths of time. Despite these issues, Yartsa is still harvested aggressively and for one obvious reason: it is extremely valuable.

Caterpillar Fungus is an entomopathogenic (i.e., insect-killing) fungus that parasitizes moth larvae that, during the previous winter had burrowed in hillside grasslands 3000-3500 meters above sea level. By early summertime, small fungal protuberances resembling a thicker, browner blade of grass spring up from the deceased moth larvae, which are then collected and sold across China and beyond for their medicinal properties. Though the supply and therefore price of Yartsa can fluctuate greatly, it is always expensive, and, for some lucky families with extensive, well-positioned grasslands, it can produce an astronomical source of income many times larger than what they make from other sources throughout the year (Smith-Hall, 2021). A single piece, the size of a pencil, can sell for 50Y (roughly \$10US) in local markets and a full kilogram sold (through an intermediary) in eastern China can sell for \$20,000US, roughly one-third the price of solid gold (Wang et al., 2018).

Though the future viability of the practice remains precarious, families still search for the fungus with alacrity each June. Throughout my seven years in the region of this research, many mainstream schools scheduled a week-long vacation to coincide with the harvesting of Yartsa, in part, as one administrator explained, because so many students were pulled out of school anyway to help their family with the work. It is also quite common for families (which might better be conceptualized as extended families, clans, neighborhood associations, or collectives) to erect semi-permanent camping structures near the Yartsa fields and hire workers from elsewhere to help dig during the short and frantic harvesting season. In interviews, some participants

suggested that many people from herding areas in Amdo enjoy recounting what they see as a distribution of wealth that more closely resembles ‘traditional’ Tibetan economies. Folks at higher elevations had large herds and lived a relatively easier and more comfortable life (despite the bitter cold) relative to farmers at lower elevations who needed to toil in the fields for their income, a trope that stems at least as derived from herder imaginaries of ideal Amdo Tibetan society as it does from actual economic distributions (Tan 2018).

Moreover, Amdo Tibetans were eager to remind me that many of the most quintessential elements of pan-Tibetan culture are drawn from herding communities, such as songs, clothing, foods, etc., which are unique to the Tibetan Plateau and share little with Han Chinese, Muslim or other non-Tibetan, lowland peoples. Nowadays, however, opportunities for economic profit are increasingly concentrated at lower elevations closer to urban centers; many herding families have downsized or sold-off their livestock in an effort to navigate increasingly restrictive and complex state policies regarding rangelands and the resettlement of herding communities in government-planned townships with more access to semi-urban areas (Yeh, 2008; Gyal, 2018).

Yartsa, however, remains one of the few extremely profitable enterprises that is restricted to those who own or have connections to highland herding communities. That children are sometimes pulled out of school for an extended period by their parents to harvest a Yartsa is rarely regretted given the sheer magnitude of the profits to be earned. Even for some of the most educationally dedicated families and teachers I met, skipping school to harvest Yartsa was a relatively unproblematic choice. Stronger feelings arose, however, when it came to what to do with the profits gained from selling Yartsa. One interlocutor and older friend, Jamyang Tenzin, a grandfather in his fifties who lived in a farmer-herder community in the hills above Serjong and

had worked on numerous education projects, regularly brought up Yartsa in our conversations.

Once, he explained

Our village is a good one. We have a very strong tradition of valuing education here and we are always trying to do something in town, especially with the help of Wangdu [a Party member and highly respected intellectual and community organizer]. People can use their Yartsa profits how they want, but most give at least some of it back to the village children. Even this restaurant [that we are sitting in] runs programs in the village because the manager is from there.

When I asked about examples of “bad villages” in this context, he replied, “Oh, there are lots.

Many families will make lots of money with Yartsa – more money than other families make in a whole year – and they don’t do anything with it except buy a nice car, make their house bigger, [buy] clothes, things like that.” He continued his critique, saying

They will probably give a little donation to the [Tashi Kyil] monastery, sure. Or make a pilgrimage with the money. They probably feel like they should do that. But actually the [large, powerful Tashi Kyil] monastery [in this town] is actually very wealthy and they don’t use the money well either. I am a Buddhist [who has taken lay vows], of course. I am Nyingma and the monastery is Gelugpa. But I am not just criticizing because they are from a different tradition (*grub mtha*) than I am. They spend a lot on new temples, new paintings, new dorms – some of those monks get very rich. But there are still kids in Serjong who don’t have uniforms or books for school. Still men and women who can’t read Tibetan! What are they doing about that!?

It is necessary to clarify that, to the best of my knowledge, monks and nuns never dig Yartsa and that Tashi Kyil Monastery does indeed engage in some charity work. For example, Tashi Kyil in fact donated the dormitory beds and some desks to Marching Together through the mediation of Aku Lobsang, who belongs to that monastery. While Jamyang Tenzin here does appear to conflate different sources of frustration, i.e., wealthy Yartsa diggers, avaricious monks, and insufficient education, the fact remains that he and many others felt annoyed that those with the means to support children’s education projects did not always do so.

Another interlocutor with whom I spoke about Yartsa was one of my closest relationships throughout my seven years in Amdo. He lived one floor above me for three years and over that

time I was lucky enough to spend many days in his apartment that he shared with Aku Ngawang. *Alag Jamyang*, just known as *Alag (a lags)*, was a lama, or spiritual teacher, recognized as a reincarnation much later than young children usually are. He went on to become a well-respected local scholar, teaching language and history in his apartment to the monks of the nearby Tashi Kyil monastery. A politically sensitive character, I omit much of what *Alag* said for the sake of safety and confidentiality. But I include two brief (of many possible) excerpts from field notes here to give a brief character sketch as it relates to the topic at hand.

*I visited a lag again today. I hadn't seen him in a while it feels like... During the conversation, I was telling him about the hike I took yesterday up by Yeli. I told him about the funny conversation I had with the group from that village digging yartsa. Clearly, a lag had had this issue on his mind because he almost immediately started criticizing the practice. He's level-headed, of course, so he also expressed that he understands it's an irreplaceable economic boon for many poor Amdowas. But he had more to say than usual (which is a lot!) and Aku Ngawang, his attendant, even came out of the kitchen to see what he was shouting about! Among all the times I've been to his apartment, I think I've heard him criticize just about every ethnic group there is – except white people. That's the one we usually argue about!... I tried telling him about contemporary colonialism and American imperialism but he just isn't having any of it. He even launched into a diatribe about how the world, and Chinese, should be thanking white-skinned people for the scientific knowledge they contributed to the world... He speaks critically of the state (in a muffled voice) and about Muslims<sup>56</sup> (in a less muffled voice), but he doesn't leave Amdo Tibetans out of his critiques either. Not at all. (Field note from 6/22/2018).*

*I went back to the lama's again today. He actually just got another mechanical helicopter?! He has it hanging up in the back room. It seems to work – it definitely looks like a nice piece of equipment. But I haven't seen him fly it. That would be a sight. Now in his bedroom, where spent so much time studying Tibetan while I was teaching here, I think he has 4 flying machines hanging from the ceiling! A Styrofoam glider, the helicopter, a wooden model airplane and a large plastic one like you'd see in a case at a fancy toy shop... He asked me if I went hiking again around the mountains and I told him I hadn't had a chance to. Nevertheless, he made a point of mentioning it again, this time*

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<sup>56</sup> *A lags'* feelings about Muslims are not particularly germane here so it suffices to say that, as an older person well-schooled in history, *a lags* has a painfully clear memory of stories he heard from elder generations about the brutality that Muslim "war lords" like Ma Bufang wreaked on the area. Though I often challenged him on some related points – a privilege of my foreignness, for few Tibetans would talk back to a *lama* so conversationally – he had an impossible time seeing Islam as a religion not characterized by violence. He sometimes contemporary examples, of market practices, butchering, etc., to make his point. "Compared to the brutality of the Muslims, to be honest, even the Chinese were not so bad" I distinctly remember him telling me one afternoon.



*in a bit more subdued manner – but the critique didn't change. I think he wanted me to see just that: that his critique was a reasonable one rather than one driven by agitation or excitement.* (Field note from 6/26/2018)

A reincarnate *lama* (*a lags*), who was a member of and taught at Tashi Kyil had a nearly identical criticism as Jamyang Tenzin, except with the sects reversed. While he acknowledged the shortcoming of his monastery frequently, he often railed against Nyingma practitioners, who believe in certain types of revelations, namely ‘treasure revealing’ (*gter ston*, see Martin, 1994) that Gelugpas do not. He claimed they were obsessed with magic and ritual to the extent that they ignored “real world” (*jigs rten*) concerns like education, employment, and learning how to use contemporary technology. On the latter visit that week, *Alags* returned to talking about Yartsa. “Just wasting [profits] on food and hotels is meaningless. If they buy a computer, teach their children how to use it, that would be great,” the *lama* suggested.

I think many will just buy junk. Or maybe they will buy some *thangkas* or statues. But should spend their money on something more useful that will really help their children. A long time ago, the Nyingma villages had good education. Still some do today, such as Nagdor [which is actually the village Jamyang Tenzin and Wangdu are from]. Because many Nyingma *ngag-pa*<sup>57</sup> live at home, they could teach the kids to read and write when they were very young. But nowadays they don't care about education like that. Just rituals and superstition.

What is interesting about these two critiques is not that they are symmetrically inverse vis-à-vis the religious sects, or even that both interlocutors were willing to criticize Buddhist institutions despite having taken religious vows. It is, rather, that both directly and unproblematically assumed that religious institutions, such as Tashi Kyil or Nyingmapas, had a ready-made role to play in the education of local children. They both articulated that the monastery is responsible, at least in part, for children's education, and it was almost taken for

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<sup>57</sup> The word *Alag* used here is the common title, *snags pa*, (Mantra-reciters) given to Nyingma practitioners who have taken religious vows but continue to live at home and, usually, have a family.

granted that an institution that did not attempt to support Tibetan children's education could not, in their estimation, really claim to be supporting the sustainability of Tibetan culture.

Other conversations with educators and parents from the grassland regions of my field work confirmed, and even extended, this critique. When I asked Aku Cheeden about Yartsa profits, he said,

You really won't believe how much money they make. But many just waste it (*phro brlag gtong*) on cars, new house or apartment, something like that. Some don't even do that! They just rent a big hotel room in Xining for the whole winter where it's warmer and they don't have to do any work. Just relax all day. They spend New Year's holiday there – they don't even go to visit their relatives! It's really not good. Not good.

When I asked Aku Cheeden – principal of a strict Tibetan *sabjong*, as mentioned – what they should do with their money he was surprisingly flexible, saying,

There are lots of things. I'd love it if they donated some to us so we can have a better *sabjong* here, *haha!* Get better desks and floors! Build a new bathroom. I wouldn't use it to cover students' tuition money, though. They should pay that to make the commitment, so they don't quit. But they could use the Yartsa money to go travel or become a businessperson, invest in some business... Just do something that is for tomorrow, not just for today. They spend 100,000RMB (\$50,000US) in one winter! Just staying at nice hotel. Eating good food every day. Some people call Tibetans lazy and backward (*rje lus*). We [here at the *sabjong*] are not, we are always working hard here or on some other business. But maybe they are lazy.

It is not uncommon of course for hardworking people who experience financial hardship to get frustrated at others' profligacy. And neither is it uncommon that these feelings might be exacerbated when one feels like they are working toward a righteous cause while others squander their fortune on material comfort. However, even beyond Aku Cheeden's fear of confirming others' stereotypes of herders or Tibetans more generally, these three critiques (of Jamyang Tenzin, *Alag*, and Aku Cheeden) are theoretically significant for several reasons. First, they offer a vision for education in which a community – especially those holding more capital, either belonging to religious institutions or individuals – are directly responsible for contributing to the

welfare of less fortunate others. Second, all the critics quoted herein were relatively open-minded about *how* one could ‘give back’ to the community, to varying degrees. It was not as if *sabjong* classes or schoolbooks were the only suggestions they gave for how Yartsa money could be better spent. Traveling, learning new technology, investing, and running adult literacy programs are all examples they gave for how Yartsa profits could be better spent that do not require direct aid to financially struggling students. Aku Cheeden’s suggestion of traveling, in particular, stands out because, on some levels, it appears similar to practices he is critiquing (i.e., staying in a hotel). But, in his vision (expanded upon during another interview) there is much to *be learned* through traveling and even if citizens’ contribution to their community is not material in nature, they can contribute new knowledges, new ideas, and new connections to their community. Third, building on but contrasting with the second point, all three interlocutors stated that helping students succeed in mainstream education, even if that education is not particularly ‘Tibetanized’, is still central to Tibetan cultural “preservation” and the well-being not only of Tibetans but of “Tibetanness” in the future. That is to say, while many recognize that Tibetanization of mainstream education would, at least in some respects, be desirable, Tibetan educators do not espouse only one goal, i.e., the introduction of more “Tibetan” content and methods in mainstream classrooms. The preservation of Amdo Tibetan culture depends not only on the existence of people who hold traditional knowledges, but of people who are socially, politically, and economically stable enough to “defend” Amdo Tibetan culture, as Jamyang Tenzing says of Wangdu who, it will be remembered, does not simply work in local government but works for the Communist Party of China itself. To put it briefly, to some degree all these senior educators *who even have a monastic background* think one of the best things a young Amdo Tibetan could ‘do for their ethnic group’ would be to learn anything as long as the benefits of this learning find

their way back to the community. The great atrocity of wasting Yartsa money is not that it is not spent directly on “Tibetan culture” – even donations directly to monasteries were not particularly impressive to these interlocutors who are or have been monks themselves. The tragedy is that they are spent on something that can in no way be conceptualized as an *investment* in Amdo Tibetan communities. This is why I argue that, across the several conversations I had about this issue (many of which are not recounted here), it was the renting of hotel rooms all winter that stands out among my interlocutors as the most egregious use of Yartsa profits, because, upon checking out, one has literally nothing to show for their time and money spent. As Aku Cheeden implies, spending it on *anything* else would be better. Perspectives on the use of Yartsa money speak not only to Tibetan educators’ ideas about what kinds of orientations and dispositions (regarding, for example, how one thinks it is desirable to spend money) would benefit their communities, it also reveals the kinds of activities that these educators think would produce desirable changes of orientations and dispositions that lie on the fringes of the educational field or beyond it entirely.

To summarize, senior participants had the strongest negative feelings towards Yartsa harvesting when the profits it yields are not cycled back into *some* activity that attempts to broaden the horizons of the children growing up in rural herding areas. Educational activities, such as enrolling in programs, paying tuition, or funding projects (whether through the monastery are not) are seen by many as the most laudable use of Yartsa money because they directly produce the ‘broadening of horizons’ that many feel is central to the altering of students’ habituses. In this way, students become better prepared for higher education and employment and predisposed to appreciating and thriving in those environments. But other kinds of investments beyond the strictly educational, such as in computers (a quintessential instantiation

of objectified cultural capital in Amdo Tibet), are also valuable even in the minds of those, like *lamas* or *ngagpa*, who one might expect to hold strict traditional views.

Following the logic that undergirded participants' perspectives, the squandering of money earned through harvesting Yartsa in herding areas is so deplorable precisely because it is the herding children who need the most support in bridging the gaps between home and school cultures, which investments in computers, traveling, or extracurricular activities could provide. Furthermore, one of the most fundamental forms this support could take, according to participants, is exposing students to opportunities and programs that are generally too distant or expensive to access. Naturally, there were other critiques of Yartsa harvesting, namely, its detrimental impact on the environment and the uncertainty of future harvests that renders it an unreliable source of income even if there are major windfalls from time to time. But, ultimately, it is not the fact that Yartsa is destructive, unreliable, or even "blue-collar" work that does not require 'advanced cognitive reasoning' so esteemed in the era of the Education Revolution (Baker 2014) that makes it the target of criticism; Amdo Tibetans in this study were willing to overlook all of these things quite easily. It is, however, when profits from Yartsa are not re-invested in "broadening horizons", primarily, but not exclusively, through the curricular and extracurricular education of Tibetan youths that the practice becomes the object of vitriolic critique.

### *Critiques of Sabjong*

A key part of developing a compelling argument is identifying and addressing data that may challenge the analyses presented by the researcher. Within this argument, this involves highlighting perspectives that argue *sabjong* are *not* effective in achieving the goals that this

dissertation argues they generally do. In this present argument, this includes highlighting and analyzing evidence that suggests *sabjong* are not effective in broadening students' horizons or that they aren't useful in bridging the gap between school and the home cultures of Tibetan students. There were a handful of educators who articulated these ideas and it is worth noting that they disproportionately originated with more experienced and credentialed educators. One of these is Kuntar Gya, who had founded a few kindergartens and educational centers in addition to other social entrepreneurial projects. Another is Huang Luten, the Vice Principal at a local Tibetan nationalities high school and one of the very few Han Chinese participants in this study.

Finally, it is fair to say that "critiques of *sabjong*" is a much broader category than its inclusion here, as a subsection of *Class*, suggests. However, I include it here because it is among apparently *class* lines that different critiques, or lack of them, seem to form. That is, criticism of or support for participation in *sabjong* didn't differ among gendered boundaries, and it did not appear to differ along other significant identity groupings, such as sect of Buddhism, subject area of expertise, age, or race (although, obviously, I did not do significant research with any group besides Amdo Tibetans in Guchu Prefecture). It was only among the people most endowed with dominant cultural capital (and, by and large, economic capital) that I heard systematic critiques of supplemental education. Not surprisingly, those offering in-depth critiques also had many things in common. All had (a) worked or currently work full time in a mainstream education institution; (b) studied or worked abroad; (c) obtained graduate degrees; and (d) enrolled their children in some form of schooling that would likely not have been possible without their 'insider knowledge' and economic capital. Because the propensity to critique *sabjong* seems, above all, to be related to class, I have included in this section.

I begin by recalling one of the critiques brought up by Chagtar, the university lecturer discussed previously who was living in Xining and declined to enroll his daughter in a *sabjong* because it was simply “too much.” In general, when I asked adult participants about the drawbacks of *sabjong*, few independently brought up that they thought the number of hours in during which children engaged in formal education was problematic, although some answered affirmatively after I asked specifically about this issue. I interpret this ‘hesitant acknowledgment’ as interlocutors’ recognition that this *might* be a problem for some students, but it was not an obstacle that they immediately experienced in their child-rearing practices. Students, on the other hand, were quicker to state that the hours and demands of nonstop mainstream and *sabjong* education were exhausting, even though virtually all still acknowledged that it was worthwhile (*nang don yod pa*) for them to attend.

Huang, Chagtar, and Kuntar Gya are all professional educators who spend a substantial amount of their time in urban or semi-urban areas. And each, with a graduate degree, has attained a level of education well beyond the average student born in Qinghai, where the average number of years in school is 8.85 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2021). This is especially true for parents whose children attend school in Xining, like Chagtar, who reported that supplemental opportunities are endless and there is significant pressure on them to enroll their children simply to keep up with other families in the increasingly intense competition for university places.

Choosing supplemental activities, then, becomes for them part of a calculated series of decisions during which students’ exam scores, physical and mental health, and enrichment activities are balanced alongside parents’ schedules, disposable income, and multilingual

learning opportunities. Urban parents who have significant experience and strategies for navigating the education system, like Huang, who spoke in Chinese, reasons,

It's difficult to know if a supplemental program is good or not when it is new. Many of them are just quickly put together without any good planning, curriculum, or qualified teachers. It's better to enroll kids in an established program, where you know they will get results, where the supplemental program has the data and can show you 'we raised our students' *gaokao* scores by this many points' [holding his hand in the air like a benchmark].

I followed up by asking if this would be the main way he would determine the quality of the program and whether it was worth enrolling. “*Dangran*, of course, this is what is important. This is the purpose of *buxiban*.”<sup>58</sup> For this reason, Huang considered not all supplemental programs worthwhile and instead stated he will enroll his son at a *buxiban* in the crucial time periods prior to big exams when he can do specific exercises in the subjects in which he needs higher scores, rather than just as a general practice during all winters and summers (as Huang's son goes to boarding school, weekend or afterschool *buxiban* are not an option). Huang continued on to make sure that I understood the depth of his criticisms with *sabjong*, which many of his current and former Amdo Tibetan students from throughout Guchu Prefecture have attended and taught at, saying “Many are even a waste of time. The teachers are only high school or college students, so how can they don't know how to teach? And the students that go there, do their scores improve? Who knows! It's a waste of time.”

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<sup>58</sup> I include each of the two Mandarin Chinese words here for their own reasons. First, *dang ran* indicates that Huang said “Of course” in English. Even though his proficiency in English was probably not sufficient to hold a meaningful interview, we could still converse about basic topics without the help of an interpreter as Huang knew a fair bit of English and would mix these two languages quite often when talking to foreigners. This anecdote helps demonstrate just how thoroughly multilingual life can be in lower areas of Qinghai. The reason I chose not to translate the second term, *buxiban* (lit. “remedial study class”), which is usually the translation given for “supplemental school” or “cram school” in *putonghua* Chinese is because it highlights the imperfect synonymy of the term used for this activity across the many languages spoken where these practices exist. *Buxiban*, as subsequent research in this and other settings, such as Taiwan, revealed, would likely exclude, in the minds of those enrolled, the free, general classes offered at *sabjong* in Amdo that do not attempt to cram for an exam. Indeed, when *buxiban* is translated into English on Google Translator, for example, “cram school” is the term given. Therefore, the reason I use Huang's term, *buxiban*, is to clarify that I do not know for sure that he is claiming to articulate the goal of *all* supplemental programs, rather than just *buxiban* specifically. I hope this second example as well shows not only the *complications and confusions* but also the *clarifications* that working between language produces.



Chagtar also expressed his unwillingness to enroll his daughter in a supplemental program. The ethnographic details of his thoughts and actions on this issue are given in previously. For the time being, it is sufficient to recall that his principal argument was that he does not want to enroll his child, because he believes she is already tired and pressured by school and does not want to force to her attend more schooling in her free time. He would rather enable her to spend time with her grandparents in their village speaking and learning Tibetan. He recognizes supplemental programs' potential value and realizes that there is significant pressure that may compel her to attend a supplemental program one day. But for the time being, Chagtar reckons they are not worth the sacrifice; he does not want to engage in what Dhingra (2020) calls an 'arms race' of supplemental education. Chagtar's perspective had assuaged some of the doubt I had been feeling about Huang's response and the extent to which it may have been a product of discriminatory or similar beliefs regarding the capacity of Amdo Tibetan educators. Given the variety of data not mentioned here, discrimination was within the realm of possibility. However, not only did Chagtar seem to express a skepticism similar to Huang's, but he also supplied another reason. So did Kuntar Gya, who provided yet another, discussed below.

That both Chagtar and Kuntar Gya, two professional educators who also work tirelessly to benefit Tibetan communities, were willing to quickly offer critiques of *sabjong* made me think that Huang's perspective could not simply be attributed to Sinocentrism, racism, or urban elitism, though these are distinct possibilities. Kuntar Gya, who had founded a number of educational programs and schools in the prefecture, also expressed (in English) his misgivings about *sabjong*:

To be honest, I am not sure how effective they are, if they really help. Yes, some do, but it's difficult to know which are good. Maybe it is still useful if we are working and looking for the right way [to organize *sabjong*]. Maybe in the future they will get better, but I cannot say that all *sabjong* are definitely helpful.

This educator is a local non-governmental leader, and he is well known to virtually everyone in the Amdo Tibetan community involved in education around Guchu. As a central figure in the effort to improve educational conditions in this area of Amdo, he is understandably hesitant to criticize fellow Amdo Tibetans' efforts to improve educational outcomes for their students. He even suggests that the *sabjong* might produce some important results in the future, even if they are unable to now, and conceptualizes these results broadly. He later added, "It can be good practice for the young teachers as well. Or they learn how to organize programs, work with government to get permission, like that."

Despite his open-mindedness, however, Kuntar Gya, too, criticized some parents for their apparently naïve belief that all education was good education, and that all time spent in a classroom was worthwhile. He opined,

Most of the students, I can't say that they should go [to *sabjong*]. They are already bored. Tired of school. Every day, homework. If a student already has a deep interest, they already finish all their homework and during summer they want to learn something more – OK, maybe this student should go to *sabjong*. But if a student doesn't have that energy? There's no point if a student doesn't already have a big desire to learn more.

Here, Kuntar Gya presents a critique that incorporates many of the same points Huang discussed, but also differs from Huang and Chagtar's critique in an important way. Three kinds of critiques are apparent in the data presented here, all of which address to some degree the fact that *sabjong* cannot or do not broaden students' horizons in the correct ways. First is Huang's critique that *sabjong* are not as efficient, professional, or instructive as supplemental classes 'should be' (and, presumably, that supplemental classes organized by professional teachers in cities are). Moreover, for such classes to be 'worth it' he believes they should be targeted toward the very topic in which a student needs help and classes should be delivered during strategic periods, presumably just before crucial exams. The second critique, apparent in data generated in

conversation with Chagtar, is primarily that regular attendance at *sabjong* would be exhausting and tiresome for young students who would benefit from increased time to socialize with family members and engage in other recreational activities. He recounts that *sabjong* can place excessive demands on students that are already exhausted and largely confined to classroom spaces for much of their childhood. Kuntar Gya's critique also includes the skepticism exhibited by Huang regarding the quality of materials and instruction. Kuntar Gya also feels a distrust of incessant schooling that was articulated by Chagtar too, but Kuntar Gya exhibits a different perspective on which kind of students should consider it appropriate to enroll in *sabjong*.

Unlike other educators mentioned here, who say that the decision to enroll in *sabjong* should largely be made based upon numerous factors primarily regarding scheduling capacity, teacher quality, and the timing of upcoming exams, Kuntar Gya insists that it is students' ambition, interest, and mastery that should determine whether or not they enroll in extra classes. Despite the similarities of these critiques, they appear to be constructed on different foundations: not only do these educators appear to disagree on *which students* they see as *sabjong*-appropriate (e.g., students with upcoming exams compared to students with a particularly developed interest), but the educators quoted here also appear to differ in whether or not they see *sabjong* as most effective if they function as *reactive* to students' existing disposition, as Kuntar Gya says, or if they are conceptualized as primarily *creative* of students' dispositions. While educators like Tsomo (whose goal of enhancing students' *interest* in education was discussed above) and others suggest that *sabjong* are generally beneficial in creating desirable dispositions in students, Chagtar recognizes the possibility that they create dispositions, but in less desirable ways.

Within even just these three educators' critiques, another important difference exists regarding their beliefs about the degree to which *sabjong* can (or should) broaden students'

horizons. Huang asserts that not only do *sabjong* fail to broaden students' horizons, but neither are they meant to. Chagtar, if anything, suggests that *sabjong* might have the opposite effect and for students who are overworked and over-schooled: *sabjong* participation might *shrink* students' horizons in at least some important ways, cutting them off from families, friends, and their heritage. But Kuntar Gya avers that *sabjong* can surely broaden students' horizons, but, importantly, only for those students who already want to be there and have the academic ambition to benefit from pursuing topics beyond the depth they are covered in mainstream schooling; *sabjong* will not automatically do so. Contrary to what most parents in rural areas said – which, again, almost by definition meant that they have less lucrative employment and fewer formal educational credentials – these three educators seem to suggest that 'getting students used to schooling' is not an appropriate goal for *sabjong*. They should 'prepare students for exams.'

Though my discussions with rural parents about *sabjong* classes were more limited than with urban educators and parents, they appeared to indicate an open-mindedness that was rarer among urban parents. Urban parents at times considered this open-mindedness simply naïveté – that parents without an extensive formal education would not be able to help guide their children wisely. But rural parents, while clearly concerned with the immediate impact *sabjong* attendance would have on students' test scores and grades, did not share with me that they engaged in such precise and compartmentalized calculations. Whereas urban parents considered the decision to attend supplemental classes as almost entirely a function of exam points earned per *yuan* spent (and hence the increasing popularity in urban areas of the pick-and-choose class format as described above in the chapter on Typology and illustrated in Appendix D), rural parents took a wider approach to the benefits of *sabjong*. Different parents from rural areas offered a wide range of justifications of *sabjong* enrollment, some of which are not even related to the critiques

offered by professional educators: “The students can meet their friends there,” or, “It’s better than sitting at home watching TV or getting into trouble. They can’t help with farming or herding work these days.”<sup>59</sup> Moreover, some rural parents added “It’s very good practice for the college students who teach there. They will become teachers in the future and here they are learning how to do it.” This last benefit was not only ignored by urban parents I talked to but was generally considered a drawback, though Kuntar Gya expresses some recognition of this possibility.

Rural parents are relatively more desperate for opportunities to engage in the practices that they know will be valuable to their children’s educational and employment futures. Tibetan parents in these areas, who by and large have significantly less formal education than those in urban areas, are aware of the benefits that supplemental instruction can provide. Contrary to previous claims made by the Chinese state and others (Li et al. 1997; Ma 2007; also see Postiglione 2009) that rural, unschooled parents do not care about or understand formal education, it was urban interlocutors who actually derided rural parents’ willingness to enroll their kids in *sabjong*, especially if those *sabjong* were organized by non-professional teachers and offered as general supplemental education rather than a targeted attempt to prepare for a specific exam.

It goes without saying that the perspectives present in these ethnographic data cannot simply be generalized to populations of urban and rural parents. However, these examples are intended to show not only that parents at different positions in a class hierarchy, which in Amdo

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<sup>59</sup> “Farming and herding” together is a little unusual, but some families around the main, semi-rural town where this research was based practice this lifestyle, called “*sa-ma-drog*” (lit. [neither] farmer nor herder). The reason for discerning why they had no work is not quite as straightforward. On one hand, many families have sold or no longer use their farmland for income. However, it is possible that this family still did have farm/herding work to do and simply didn’t include the child in it because they were in school so frequently that the child had not learned the requisite skills for farming or herding.

Tibet is highly spatialized, think about the meaning and benefits of participation in *sabjong* differently. More specifically, even within the perspectives of wealthier, more schooled, urban parents, there are differences among their perspectives on whether or not *sabjong* can and should attempt to ‘broaden students’ horizons’ and provide knowledges other than the curricular content that is taught and tested in mainstream schooling.

### *The Spatialization of Class*

Many participants, and perhaps Tibetans in general, perceive urban and rural cultures as classed cultures that inform child rearing practices (either intentionally or not) that constitute the primary habitus. That is, despite the fact that the terms ‘working class’ or ‘middle class’ rarely appeared as such during research, the majority of participants I talked to – regardless of where they were from – regularly assumed, and with good reason (see Grant, 2021), that Tibetans living in urban spaces were generally wealthier than those living in rural (i.e., herding) and semi-rural (i.e., farming or farming-and-herding) areas. In educators’ and parents’ opinions, those living in urban spaces not only were likely to have a greater abundance of (dominant) capital, but they also had better access to acquiring more. One former educator, Jigme, now in his 60s currently living in a rural town said (in a conversation separate from the one just described),

It’s not that we don’t have any jobs here. I taught here for many years and it was OK. But I was a teacher and there’s not too many other kinds of [career] work here, maybe just teacher and government worker. If one goes to Xining though, there’s more chances to make money. They probably need more money to keep an apartment there, but more chances to make money. A good example is the *buxiban* you are interested in. You can make a lot more doing that in Xining than here.

If one revisits the above interactions while keeping in mind the urban-semiurban-rural divisions that this paper has argued plays a significant role in Tibetans’ mental schemata for imaging mobility in contemporary society, the way class informs habitus becomes clearer. That is, while

residing in a rural area does give many Amdo Tibetans greater access to some forms of nondominant cultural and symbolic capital, virtually everyone readily recognizes that dominant capitals are best accessed, acquired, and used in more urban spaces, as the quotation above indicates.

Through various stages of Chinese history, status has been directly linked to the location of one's residence, with household registrations (*hukou*) in more urban areas conferring more prestige and advantages, by dint of proximity to centers of power, than rural residences (Tuttle, 2005). With certain limitations, location for Amdo Tibetans becomes a proxy for class, as a second look at the above interactions shows. If one lets location 'stand in' for class, which I have shown above is reasonable based on both objective data on the capital possessed by those in urban versus rural spaces, as well as 'subjective' data on participants' perspectives on urban and rural lifestyles and child-rearing, then the ways that classed cultures impact Tibetan children's (primary) habitus becomes clearer. Important to remember is that much of the data presented here was not collected directly through my observations (e.g., I conducted only two observations in urban households and two at urban *sabjong*), but through interviews in which interlocutors, urban or rural, reported on their own behaviors and their perceptions of others' actions. While this mitigates the validity of the findings to some degree, in treating these as reported speech rather than the direct conveyance of facts, I do not stake my argument on their existence but, rather, on the fact that many participants see this situation as pertaining.

In this case, class position – operating in large part *through location* – informs habitus insofar as it shapes one's perception of the value of extracurricular learning opportunities and the pressure one feels to participate in them. That is, the scarcity of extracurricular opportunities in rural areas helps create a disposition in which these types of activities are seen as unequivocally

desirable and worth pursuing because they help fulfil goals (e.g., social education, “concerted cultivation”) that Amdo Tibetan educators and State institutions alike have suggested are vital for children’s development.

The case of Yartsa harvesting and the impassioned critiques of it is interesting because it constitutes one of the very few examples in which rurality, and, more specifically, specifically Tibetan customs, is not understood as inherently valuable simply because it is quintessentially Tibetan; rather, the materialistic and myopic attitude that many educators see as characterizing those who profit greatly from Yartsa harvesting is far more reminiscent of their attitudes toward people who live in lowland and urbanized areas (a much greater percentage of whom are not ethnic Tibetans) who, in their eyes, exhibit selfish, materialistic, and instrumentalized approaches to education and employment. For most of my participants, no matter where they lived, a background in Amdo Tibetan customs associated with rural livelihoods – horse-racing, singing, black tents, etc. – and life in rural areas is far more conducive to the acquisition of *nondominant* cultural capital and symbolic capital. These concepts have been addressed in the Analytical Framework, and will be analyzed more deeply in the Part 4 below on Capital.

For the time being, however, I want to highlight this aspect of how educators see more or less urban areas as more or less appropriate for the acquisition of different forms of capital. Bourdieu emphasizes that fields, though they have a physical and geographical character, do not have *borders* that correspond to juridical, political, or other (perhaps geographical) boundaries (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992); and I am not arguing simply that a (dominant) Chinese educational field exists in lowland areas and a (nondominant) Tibetan educational field exists in rural, higher areas. Clearly, the geographical dimension of the Tibetan field exists entirely within the ‘borders’ of the Chinese educational field. If one is to think about it strictly geographically



for a moment, the Chinese educational field stretches even well beyond the borders of the China and impacts the goals, values, and strategies of people across the Sinosphere and beyond, such as through Confucius Institutes (Pan, 2013; Paradise, 2009). The point, more accurately, is that educators see the various forms of capital they believe students need as differentially accessible depending on where they are (and, to be sure, where they grew up). While instantiations of dominant cultural capital (e.g., having accent of a native *putonghua* speaker, degrees from prestigious universities, possessing a classical Chinese instrument like a *gucheng*) are far more easily (or, in cases like degrees, exclusively) acquired and used in urban areas more thoroughly characterized by Han Chinese norms and tastes, many forms of nondominant cultural capital, such as speaking herders' dialect of Tibetan (*'brog skad*), knowing 'mountain songs' (*la gzhes*), and using a black tent, are often *precisely* those things that are *only* mastered after spending long periods of time in rural, ideally herding areas.

Similarly, for Amdo Tibetans, symbolic capital –the notion that one's possession of the other forms of capital is legitimate and deserved (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) – is often best acquired and recognized in rural areas. This notion is perhaps not even limited to contemporary Amdo Tibetan society and finds commonality and reinforcement with Mao Zedong's notion of 'sent down youth' and the contemporary emphasis on Xi Jinping's rural upbringing and the role this has played in his emphasis of 'peasant education' in national development (Zheng et al., 2018). In both Mao and Xi's narrative, it is the rural places where one 'earns their stripes' (Li, 2020). And while many Tibetan intellectuals and cultural leaders are obviously employed by large institutions and live in urban spaces, Amdo Tibetans' nondominant cultural capital and symbolic capital is largely a product of their participation in activities in rural areas, as the above ethnographic data show. This constitutes a marked difference from other Tibetan contexts as well,

where in previous generations and in other places, the relatively urban center of Lhasa, capital of Tibet and Tibetan Buddhism for centuries, was the apogee of locations in which one could acquire cultural capital (Dreyfus 2003). To a large extent, Lhasa still central in the minds of those looking to acquire cultural capital recognized and rewarded by Tibetan communities, even in Amdo. But pursuing these interesting questions remains outside the scope of this study.

The final chapter on Capital addresses this theme more fully in making an argument that *sabjong* also serve as valuable opportunities for young teachers to legitimize their cultural capital, i.e., acquire symbolic capital, by showing that investments made in their education were legitimate and deserved because the individual strived to use their privilege to benefit the village schoolchildren. In sum, these sections have shown that in Amdo Tibet class is understood by educators as highly spatialized; educators see different sites as more or less conducive to acquiring dominant or nondominant capital. They therefore approach their interventions into students' formation of aspirations and expectations with spatialized notions of class in mind.

While sociologists of education are obviously aware of the spatialization of class, the way Amdo Tibetans talk about this is unique insofar as their discourse does not simply suggest that people living in different neighborhoods are systematically richer or poorer, for example. Similarly, while scholars have shown that extracurricular activities generally sought out by parents practicing concerted cultivation are more accessible in wealthier areas (Lareau, 2011), in Amdo Tibet (and many areas in China more generally) 'wealthier areas' are almost entirely synonymous with more urbanized areas, both in terms of household income (Grant, 2021) but also in the perceptions of participants in this study. As noted above, for example, those from more rural areas consider the location of their home environments as an obstacle (though not insurmountable) that hinders their attempts to attend a university in 'Inner China'. The

recognition of these obstacles produced by a low-class status but filtered through a spatialized notion of advantage, appears to generate, according to their statements, changes in the aspirations and expectations of rural Tibetan parents and, therefore, their children.

Additionally, the spatialization of class here is more deeply rooted in the symbolic meaning of labor that goes on in each of these places: Urban places are associated with refined, indoors work, herding places are associated with rugged, outdoors work, and places characterized by farming work, while still taking place outdoors, is nevertheless not understood as rugged or physically liberated as herding work, and is still closer to indoor spaces and lifestyles and amenities associated with them (Yeh, 2008). Ultimately, in the area of this study, a family's class position appears to shape habitus much in the ways suggested by numerous researchers (Benzecry, 2018; Wacquant, 2018; Grenfell, 2008), with a few key nuances.

First, the notion of the family that directly informs students' primary habitus cannot be limited to immediately family members but should be extended to all those who have sustained and direct contact with children. In Amdo Tibet, where parents often work in areas far away from where children and where children regularly attend boarding schools beginning at age 12, it makes little sense to limit one's search for the sources of habitus formation to immediate family members alone. Second, while class cultures exist, they are often not apprehended directly by participants thinking about economic inequality (which is often the case) but instead are understood primarily through the locations in which one spends most of their time and registers their address. Third, familiarity with urban cultures and spaces is directly conducive to acquiring dominant cultural capital, whereas familiarity with rural cultures is directly conducive to acquiring non-dominant cultural capital and symbolic capital.

*Conclusion to Class*

This section has set out to answer the question of how educators see *class* (or, better, *classed* cultures) as informing students' horizons, a key component of habitus. 'Horizons' here includes both aspirations and expectations, which should be understood as related but different. This section has shown that, for many in Amdo Tibet and China more generally, class position – which is the foundation of habitus (Grenfell, 2008, Benzecry, 2018) – is understood as fundamentally spatialized. Data show that participants see dwelling in urban spaces and lucrative opportunities as mutually constitutive. That is, neither is the direct cause of the other, but they are correlated.

While spending extensive time in urban spaces, namely Xining (but also Chengdu, Lanzhou, and even cities within 'Inner China'<sup>60</sup>) is acknowledged as generally restricted to those with sufficient means to support living there (which in most cases means steady work in urban spaces), rural areas are not similarly restricted to poor Tibetans and, indeed, comprise important locations for wealthier, urban-dwelling Amdo Tibetans to practice their culture and acquire the forms of nondominant and symbolic capital that are more easily acquired in Tibetan-dominated spaces, such as temples, grasslands, horse-races, and so forth. For participants at my principal field site and many other Tibetans, the key instantiation of this form of nondominant capital is knowledge of Tibetan language in both in spoken and literary forms, and spending sufficient time in rural, Tibetan-dominant spaces so that Tibetans can acquire and maintain adequate levels of symbolic capital, which, in this case, entails possession of Tibetan knowledges and dispositions that others' see as legitimately earned. Losing knowing of (above all) how to speak

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<sup>60</sup> Xining, Chengdu, and Lanzhou are all cities in which Han Chinese populations are in the numerical majority. However, they have not only higher portions of non-Han Chinese ethnic groups, but they are also largely on the borders of the Tibetan Plateau. For these reasons, and because they each have well respected Minzu Universities with robust Tibetan Studies departments, Universities in Xining, Chengdu, and Lanzhou are seen as 'closer to home' in many ways than those further east.

Tibetan (*bod skad*), as well as failing to naturally participate in rituals, to work with animals and land, or to contribute to the welfare of the village is seen as very damaging to one's reputation in the local community, even as they acknowledge these losses may have little impact on one's life and status while in Xining or other urban spaces.

The difference between farming and herding cultures are, in Aku Lobsang's words, "like the difference between sky and earth." This applies not only to 'classed' cultures but also to different sets of parents' and educators' development of expectations and norms around gender as well, as the subsequent chapter shows. In the eyes of *sabjong* educators, students from different social classes bring different sets of skills, experiences, and support networks to their educational experiences, as sociologists like Bourdieu and Lareau have suggested. That is, educators recognize that students' habituses are informed by differing class cultures. However, while differences among students within the same classroom or *sabjong* were acknowledged, differences in social class that were significant enough to impact students' habituses were seen as mapping onto urban, semi-urban/semi-rural, and rural areas. While this hierarchical class structure, and perhaps levels of income and absolute poverty, might resemble middle class, working class, and poor households elsewhere, these more commonly used class terms are not the principal terms in which Amdo Tibetans conceptualize privilege and privation, even though one's opportunity to live in a given location is directly related to their employment opportunities (especially in western China where household registration certificates, *hukou*, are not always easy to obtain and moving homes may simply be barred by government policies). Rather, students from urban areas were recognized as those who were more likely to undergo childrearing strategies that resemble what Lareau (2011) refers to as 'concerted cultivation.' Participants of all types recognized that urban students have more opportunities for structured interactions with

others, such as specialized supplemental classes, arts and sports activities, and network-building opportunities. Students in semi-rural areas, like those around Serjong, were imagined as being in the early stages of this process. There were more such opportunities than there were previously, and *sabjong* compete with each other and with other activities for students' time and attention. But students there were still seen as hampered by suboptimal material conditions and teacher quality, disconnected from advancement and learning opportunities (e.g., internships), and ineffective school leadership. Students in rural areas were considered lucky if even a single *sabjong* was hosted in their village over the holiday breaks. They spend the majority of their holidays at or around home in unstructured free time and have minimal opportunities to meet new kinds of people, practice Chinese, or develop skills that require an urban environment to practice. In sum, one's social class is determined by more than simply their economic capital. Here, an important dimension of class that is related to, but not reducible to, economic capital, is the volume and structure of the *opportunities available* for lucrative engagement.

That educators (and others) envision status as spatialized creates an important consequence: upper and middle class students, which here it has been argued is probably better understood as those students that go to school in Xining or another urban area, have more abundant opportunities to gain advantages in schooling and employment, but have fewer opportunities to acquire nondominant cultural capital and symbolic capital; opportunities to acquire these capitals are more abundant in more rural areas, but opportunities to acquire (dominant) capital are rarer. Participants see these class-space differences as generating differences in children's habitus regarding their aspirations and expectations, dispositions regarding participation in extracurricular activities, and facility in interacting with different people (who may be in positions of authority). Finally, the critiques of *sabjong* reveal differences

in the ways that parents from rural and urban areas think differently about the purpose(s) of supplemental education. As the urban parents' critiques suggest, when there is a glut of opportunities one must be judicious concerning which they pursue – a critique that was rarely at the forefront of rural parents' minds. But, more importantly, urban parents primarily or only considered the number of points that attending a supplemental school would add to students' exam scores. While rural parents were deeply concerned about this as well, urban parents did not seem to prioritize the many other forms of learning that *sabjong* may be able to supply for students who lack familiarity with schooling and the 'know how' necessary to successfully chart a path through educational and employment institutions.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE ROLE OF GENDER: EMBODIED ASPECTS OF HABITUS

#### Introduction

For nearly a millennium, the embodied aspects of learning have played a central role in Tibetan perspectives on education and longer in Buddhist traditions more generally (Lempert, 2012; Quintman, 2013). Both ascetic and monastic educational practices in Tibet are characterized by significant attention paid to the body: not only does yogic training in meditative exercises involve physical actions essential to effecting the goal of the training, but so do daily and informal study practices among monks and other learners in monastic environments (Lempert, 2012). Practices such as memorization and debate include a variety of habitual movements and positions intended to assist learners whose function range from mnemonic devices to symbolic displays of compassion and victory in debate (Dreyfus, 2003). Of course, few *sabjong* students ever experience the physical training and discipline that characterizes the education of monks or tantric yogis, but even since my first days in mainstream schools with Amdo Tibetan students in 2012, I was struck by the physical expectations placed on students and how significantly these differed from what I had experienced as a student and teacher myself. The extent to which the embodied aspects of learning matter at all – and the teacher’s right and obligation to correct these – differed greatly from my own experience outside of Amdo Tibet and even between field sites. This, therefore, may be one of those areas where *distance* between the researcher and the researched creates clarity, for it serves to ‘denaturalize’ some aspects of learning, such as embodied ones, that are likely to be ignored by those who are familiar with such norms (de Jong et al., 2013). This distance also allowed me to ask educators plainly about their philosophies and actions, a process that would have been more tense if educators’ thought



my questions were disingenuous critiques of their practices that some observers may find morally questionable.

Just as the previous section used data on ‘horizons’ to explore the impact that class has on the formation of habitus, this section on gender primarily analyzes data on participants’ perspectives on bodily hexis, and bodily hexis itself, to discuss the impact that gender has on these students’ habitus formation. This section is broken into five principal discussions, each of which analyses a different theme related to gender that emerged from collected data. These themes are, in order: Susceptibility to Sinicization; Choosing Role Models; Strength, Stamina, and Suffering; Rowdiness and Restraint; and Unequal Representation. Again, it is important to recall throughout these sections that I am not attempting to provide an ‘analysis of gender’ in Amdo Tibet, which would require theoretical frameworks and empirical data different from those I am using in this study. Rather, I am analyzing *sabjong* educators’ actions and perspectives, scaffolded and triangulated by data gathered from students, on the role that gender plays in constituting students’ habituses. This is why, for example, this study omits inquiry into important LGBTQ+ issues on the Plateau: it is not that there are no LGBTQ+ people in Amdo Tibet; there are. Rather, educators and students never talked about LGBTQ+ issues or people insofar as knowledge of such issues would impact their teaching. They never acknowledged the existence of such people in their educational spaces, and so they did not alter their actions or words as if there had been (but neither did environments seem antagonistic or violent toward LGBTQ+ populations). In this way, I hope that this dissertation’s omission of these issues is not interpreted as silence about the discrimination that LGBTQ+ people often experience in Tibetan and Chinese societies. For the same reason, I do not attempt to document and analyze the extent of the obstacles that Tibetan women face that men do not, which are numerous, particularly

because gender barriers, and gendered experiences more broadly, differ greatly across the Tibetan Plateau (Aziz, 1987; Makley, 1999; Hillman & Henfry, 2006), which lie outside the scope of this study. For reasons of space, I cannot focus further on the different conceptions of how masculinity and femininity that pertain in the diverse communities of the Plateau outside of this one herding and farming prefecture in eastern Amdo Tibet or even how these different conceptions may impact students or educators experience in the numerous other institutions they experience. Rather, the scope of this chapter is limited to analyzing the principal ways that gender impacts what kinds of students educators think they are working with such that they adjust their teaching methods, materials, and philosophies to provide what they perceive to meet these students' needs.

In this way, this section analyzes much data that are not precisely on bodies themselves, but on educators' and students' perspectives on bodies, although analyses of this topic are scaffolded by observation on participants' bodily hexis where possible. Bodily hexis is, in Bourdieu's (1990, p. 146) words, "political mythology realized, em-bodied, turned into a permanent disposition, a durable way of standing, speaking, walking, talking, and therefore feeling and thinking." Moreover, "the whole social order imposes itself at the deepest level of the bodily dispositions," (1990, p. 146), which is to say that how educators think about what different students need in order to navigate the social order necessarily includes an embodied element. In developing notions of habitus and field, Bourdieu argues that the social order is imposed on bodies such that those in different classes and with different stocks of capital exhibit their backgrounds through their bodily hexis differently. This occurs primarily as a product of the routinized rewards or reprimands individuals have received over the course of their lives that are specific to the circumstances in which they were raised (Bourdieu, 2004). Bourdieu (2008, p.

85) emphasizes that “bodily hexis is above all a social *signum*,” which he explicates further in a note germane to the present study. Rather than focusing exclusively on an analysis of bodily techniques (of bachelors in Béarn, France), Bourdieu (2008, p. 85) is primarily concerned with how *others* interpret these techniques much in the same way that I do here: I am not merely focused on bodily hexis; this chapter analyzes how educators understand students’ bodies insofar as it informs their teaching practice. While the majority of this dissertation prioritizes analysis of participants’ *perspectives* to answer ethnographically questions that are fundamentally concerned with the philosophy of education, this section provides a treatment of how educators’ see bodies themselves as integral components of the educational process. This analysis of perspectives on gendered bodies is then used to construct a picture of the key ways in which educators’ see gender as a formative constituent of one’s habitus, which is essential for understanding the nature of cultural capital in this field.

### **Analysis**

#### *Susceptibility to Sinicization*

The first emergent theme was prevalent with mostly equal frequency in the words of teachers and students, males and females, urban and rural participants. Stated simply, many participants believe that girls are more susceptible to Sinicization – becoming more like a Chinese rather than a Tibetan person – than boys are and no participants mentioned that they think boys are more susceptible to this than girls. Sinicization here is defined according to an aggregate list of examples that participants gave throughout field work. As such, Sinicization in this context refers primarily to behaviors and perspectives mentioned by interlocutors themselves rather than a dependence on scholarly literature on ethnic (or other) identities. Therefore, it is necessary from the outset to briefly describe the process of Sinicization using the vocabulary

supplied by participants, which including “becoming like a Chinese person” or, in the words of my research assistant, Luri, speaking in English, “changing [one’s] mind,” presumably about a wide variety of issues.

When I asked for examples, responses included (starting with the most common) were “Speaking Chinese a lot, especially when talking to another Tibetan,” “Not going to rituals and holiday celebrations, like New Years,” “Watching only Chinese movies, listening only to Chinese music, or reading only Chinese books,” “Never wearing or being afraid to wear traditional Tibetan robes,” “Not knowing the history of Tibet,” which could have been taken to indicate both/either ancient or contemporary history, and “Not believing in Tibetan Buddhism.” Important to note here is that while these were mentioned frequently, none of them were universally acknowledged as signs of definite Sinicization in a binary fashion and most were understood as existing on a spectrum, as the college student Ochen, discussed above, remarked (in Tibetan),

I don’t really believe in Tibetan Buddhism so much. I think so many people follow it too much. They’re only looking for Buddhism to help them. They only pray, visit the *lama*, do circumambulations of temples and other important religious shrines and reliquary mounds (*mchod rten*). I still go to the temple on holidays, but I don’t have total faith [in Buddhism] like some do.

Similarly, cultivating certain appearances sometimes caused one to be seen as participating in Sinicizing behavior. Key examples in this respect include using skin lightening cream, cutting one’s hair short or dyeing it, and wearing clothing that shows one’s legs or other large portions of skin. These behaviors <sup>61</sup> and appearances are ones that interlocutors see as

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<sup>61</sup> I used ‘Sinicizing’ here rather than ‘Sinicized’ for two reasons. First, ‘Sinicized’, as a past participle, seems to imply that the process is completed, that the person has been ‘Sinicized’ in some final ethnic transmutation. But beyond even this first reason that highlights the *processual* nature of this phenomenon, I use ‘Sinicizing’ to emphasize the *interactive* aspect of this: such behavior is not only ‘contained’ in the ‘Sinicized’ person but also potentially Sinicizes the spaces and interactions in which they participate. I emphasize this because it repeatedly showed up in the data, which is to say that, for example, complaints were often articulated not primarily along the

Sinicizing, even if an individual did not agree with the judgment of their styles or had no intention of indicating they were amenable to Sinicization. Importantly, participants did *not* mention “working for the government or party” or “supporting China” or a variety of similar perhaps more explicit practices as Sinicizing. Indeed, a number of houses, even those belonging to Tibetans passionate about the Pure Language movement and/or Tibetan culture, displayed at least some patriotic images, most commonly the Chinese flag or the portraits of top Chinese leaders (i.e., some combination of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Zhang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and Xi Jinping) photoshopped into a single frame. There is no doubt that at least one significant reason why these images would be displayed is the sociopolitical pressure families face to articulate their patriotic love for China (*ai guo*), and, at times, displaying flags, portraits, or other forms of patriotism have been mandated by the state (Powers, 2017) and enforced during household inspections.<sup>62</sup> However, it remains difficult to say beyond a superficial assessment whether displaying Chinese paraphernalia is indeed Sinicizing, as families recognize they often have no real choice between displaying such images or not. As the above list of ‘Sinicizing behaviors’ gleaned from the data suggest, participants focused much more the *voluntary* adoption of Chinese norms as indicative of Sinicization rather than on a lack of resistance to Chinese authority.

Therefore, I prefer to discuss behaviors that (potentially) indicate Sinicization rather than the assertion of Tibetan identity for two reasons: First, it was in these terms – “becoming like a

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lines of voicing disdain for those that spoke *putonghua* at all but for those that spoke it in a certain space where others that impinged on others’ capacity to center Tibetanness. Thus, the term ‘Sinicizing’ highlights the impact this behavior has on others as well as one’s own relationship to their behavior (unlike ‘Sinicized’).

<sup>62</sup> The most common reason for these inspections I heard was that local government officials often come to newly constructed townships to ensure that herding families are spending a significant portion of the year in the subsidized housing projects rather than in their ancestral homelands out on the pastures. Many resented being forced to stay in the township house and would avoid it when possible, coming back only intermittently to the township house when they had heard an inspection was imminent. See Gyal (2018) for more on this situation in eastern Amdo Tibet, though reports from the Tibet Autonomous Region suggest that inspections and mandated patriotism are much more prevalent there (Mukherjee, 2021).

Chinese person” – that interlocutors expressed frustration around ethnic issues, not in terms of constructing a certain kind of Tibetan identity. Second, it is difficult to systematically study what the diverse Tibetan people of the world think constitutes a ‘real’ Tibetan or Tibetan identity. I therefore approach this issue from the other direction by probing the much smaller, more tractable, and more specifically identifiable behaviors and perspectives that would identify someone as not a ‘real’ Tibetan but a fake one (*bod pa rdzun ma*). This is to say, I do not attempt to talk about “identity” outside of those few times that Anglophone interlocutors may have used the term themselves and instead focus on what constitutes Sinicization in the minds of participants.

Possibly the closest Tibetan translation of the term “identity” in the way it is often used by those doing research on “Tibetan ethnicity” (e.g. Wang et al., 2020; Yang, 2018) is *rus rgyud*, literally “bone-lineage.” However, this term was not mentioned at all outside of the very few times I brought it up with interlocutors who were also scholars. A few other terms related to identity were, however, used by participants. The first was *ngos ‘dzin*, literally “to apprehend the surface, face” and this is most commonly used in the context of the (state’s) *processes of ethnic identification*, stated clearly on everyone’s state Identification Card (*ngos ‘dzin lag khyer* but more commonly in Amdo Tibetan, *thob thang lag khyer*) that puts citizens of China into one of the 56 ethnic groups. This ethnic identification may come with more or less explicit privileges and limitations, as it does for Tibetans. *Thob thang*, here means “rights, status, position” and so conveys the same notion of “identity” conveyed by *ngos ‘dzin* in its use in state identification processes: *thob thang* are the rights and privileges commensurate with one’s particular status, in this case as a citizen of China (who also is designated as a member of a particular ethnic group). This process of identification is almost entirely genetic and determined by the state; outside of a

few extraordinary efforts, very few are successful in changing their designated ethnic identity (Wang, 2015). Changing or ‘constructing’ one’s identity in this sense of the term is analogous to changing citizenship.

The other term that came up frequently during conversations of ethnicity and Sinicization was *mi rigs ‘du shes*, or ‘national/ethnic consciousness’. *Mi rigs* is the Tibetan translation of the term *minzu*, which, as explored below, may be best left untranslated, for contemporary scholarly usage of neither “nationality” nor “ethnicity” translates unproblematically the notion of *minzu/mi rigs* (Elliot, 2015, pp. 203-204; Harrell, 2012). Unlike *ngos ‘dzin* or *thob thang*, the term *mi rigs ‘du shes* refers to a process of developing an awareness, consciousness, conception, or perception of one’s ethnic group, which individuals themselves can undertake. Different people can have, for example, a more or less developed sense of ‘ethnic consciousness’ but they cannot have more or less ‘ethnic identity’. The state assigns identities and those may be discussed and even used in the process of identity construction, but one’s membership in a *minzu* proper cannot be ‘constructed.’ To be clear, I explain these terms here not simply to provide some background on key concepts but also to differentiate scholarly approaches from the forthcoming description of Sinicization in participants’ minds. Analysis of data on ‘ethnic consciousness’ and its role in constituting what participants believe is educationally valuable will be taken up in Chapter 11. With this background covered, the rest of this subsection covers what gets identified as Sinicizing behavior and its potential impacts on educational approaches.

“They’re always talking in Chinese” one research assistant, Naba, told me, referring to his female peers who were teaching at a rural Black Rock *sabjong* where we were conducting a few observations and interviews. Responsible for teaching math, chemistry, and Chinese, these young women were, generally speaking, successful college students. All of them were now

enrolled at four-year universities, two at *Minzu* universities, although one, who I had known since she was a student in high school, had taken a preparatory *yu-ke* year (explained above in the summary on Chinese schooling and language tracks in Chapter 4), which would allow her to attend the *Minzu* university in Xining, Qinghai Nationalities University.

Their differing college trajectories notwithstanding, they had all returned home over the summer to the township area where many herders in this highland section of Guchu Prefecture live in order to teach at their local *sabjong*, which they had attended as primary students. The *sabjong* organizer, Gedun, who was introduced elsewhere, said he was happy to have them join the teaching staff this year because

[I]t's difficult to find teachers who can teach Chemistry and other sciences like that. Most *sabjong* don't have this. Usually we don't even have all of them. But in my sessions as organizer, I always try to have as many subjects as possible. We will always have Tibetan and English covered, Naba [referring to my research assistant who had worked at and organized the *sabjong* many times previously] usually does that. But it is the sciences that are difficult, especially to find someone who can teach in Tibetan.

Other observations during this fieldwork and previously during pilot studies suggested his assessment of the rarity of science classes in *sabjong* was accurate. While the vast majority of *sabjong* have instruction in the three languages and math, those that provide instruction in the sciences are rarer, especially for younger students who still have many years before their encounter with the *gaokao*. But Gedun raises another issue too: it's not just that Black Rock works to include chemistry and physics classes, but that they strive offer them in Tibetan language for these herder students who all speak Tibetan as their first language. The organizer, Gedun, is referring here to a controversial issue that comes up continuously in both *sabjong* and mainstream settings: In what language is it most valuable for students to learn? The complexities of issue will be addressed in the subsequent section on race by analyzing the perspectives of Drolma Jyab, but I introduce the issue now to highlight its gendered dimension specifically: the



vast majority of my participants – both educators and students – perceived that males and females have different capacities, different roles to play, and are susceptible to different types of threats and obstacles in the maintenance and development of Tibetan language education. For many, especially young men, young Tibetan women’s propensity to elect to speak and read in Chinese, is problematic, puzzling, and worth commenting on in any case.

“Why do you think girls speak in Chinese more than boys?” I asked my research assistant and another male college student, Ochen, who was from the same area and working at the *sabjong* teaching English, which he spoke incredibly well. “Not sure” responded Ochen in English. “There’s a lot of reasons. They watch more TV, play WeChat and DouYin (TikTok) more, and listen to Chinese music. It’s easier for them.” Naba, my research assistant added, also in virtually fluent English, “They also go to Chinese universities (*minkaohan*) more than boys, so [in] general they are better at Chinese. Many girls can speak like it’s their mother tongue (*pha skad*), even if they are Tibetan. For the boys, especially nomad (*’brog pa*) guys like us, it really is not like a first language.”

Whether or not graduating girls attend Han Chinese (i.e. *minkaohan*) universities more frequently than boys is possible, but anecdotal evidence and experience suggest that if it is the case, the percentage of boys attending *Minzu* (i.e. *minkaomin*) universities is not significantly higher than girls. But that this *perception* is widespread among participants in this study was unquestionable. Although I did not have the chance to ask everyone I talked to about this issue, I was able to follow up on this theme with numerous educators because this particular conversation happened quite early in the course of fieldwork (summer of 2018). Though not all people concurred with Ochen and Naba, many did: even if girls are not “just better” at Chinese than boys, they are thought to participate in more activities, often online, where Chinese

language skills can be developed. The secondary benefits of these practices are acknowledged even as they are disparaged by both peers and teachers. “Those apps, just watching Chinese and Korean soap operas [which have dubbing or subtitles in Chinese], it’s a waste of time. Totally stupid,” said Ochen in a criticism of contemporary social media and television that is hardly unique to his gender or ethnic group. He continued,

Yeah, OK. I play WeChat in Tibetan, Chinese, or English. And I learn Chinese and English songs, watch TV. Go to a Chinese University. There is no other Tibetan there, I don’t think... But I can still speak *pha skad gtsang ma* [which is Pure Tibetan] if I need to. Actually, I don’t think it’s so important. Not like that *sabjong* you are usually at [which is Marching Together]. I mix Tibetan and Chinese and English, too. But I’m still a Tibetan guy. These girls, they talk like Chinese, even some look like Chinese. It’s annoying to talk like that in the village.

In this harsh critique, Ochen raises three points that numerous participants also raised and cared about, even if they disagreed with him. First, not every Tibetan, and not even all those whose first language is Tibetan, cares deeply about speaking Pure Language or admonishing others that do not. Ochen is proud of his trilingual ability and often goes out of his way to insert loan words in his speech, especially now that his ability in English and Chinese are approaching professional competency. He does not think that borrowing Chinese and English words is particularly problematic to his own education, future, or sense of ‘ethnic consciousness.’ Still, though, for Ochen, Tibetan language remains a central marker of identity; but he (and others) is primarily concerned about whether or not one *can* speak Pure Tibetan, whether someone *could* carry on a complete conversation without needing to lean on Chinese for key terms, rather than whether or not they scrupulously speak Pure Language. For Ochen, mixing three languages together is itself a symbol of an educated, and cool, person – someone who is experienced, has made connections with people from different cultural backgrounds, and, importantly, someone who is not too attached to antiquated or traditional ethnic practices or identities: Someone with cultural capital.

Ochen's dispositions also seem to corroborate the theory that Namgyal offered regarding the ease with which some herding students with strong Tibetan backgrounds may feel less compunction or threat when it comes to studying Chinese and charting an educational path. Among all interlocutors, Ochen is one of the most vocal and explicit critics of the Chinese state and the assimilative pressure put on Tibetans.

Nevertheless, Ochen was one of the only students in his high school class to travel to 'Inner China' for university, a decision he based solely on the opportunity to major in English in university. Unsurprisingly, majoring in English at a Han Chinese university and borrowing frequently between languages does not cause Ochen any doubt or self-consciousness about whether or not he is 'Tibetan enough.' Of course, this is not to say that everyone else would see Ochen as a role model for young Tibetans; many educators have criticized Ochen's choices and style, as he recounted to me in his conversations about university life or during my first-hand experience while he was a high school student at my school. But the point remains: Speaking mixed languages or other decisions are not enough to make Ochen feel inadequate regarding his 'ethnic identity'. Rather, he leans on his herding background – the type of Tibetan he speaks, his familiarity with rural life, his skills in riding horses and motorcycles, his ruggedness, even his darker-than-average skin – to leave no doubt that he is a 'real' Tibetan. Many of these markers, however, are not likewise available or seen as desirable for young women, who rarely ride motorcycles or horses and often feel compelled to prefer softer, fairer skin than those practicing animal husbandry in extreme conditions are known for. Indeed, I even heard one interlocutor in his fifties state, "Tibetans, we are often called the Red-faced (*gdong dmar*). But these days, not many people have red cheeks anymore. They spend all day inside at school! And the girls like to have lighter faces nowadays," a practice not unique to this corner of the Tibetan Plateau

(Kukuczka, 2016). While Ochen does care about maintaining ethnic boundaries, he does so using some membership criteria that are not equally accessible or desirable to people from genders other than his.

Second, Ochen highlights the importance of context: where and about what topics someone communicates in Chinese are also key concerns. This situation is reminiscent of Carter's (2005) study in which participants were interviewed about, among other things, speech patterns of their co-ethnic peers who spoke African American Vernacular English as well as 'standard' English. For these participants, knowing and using 'standard English' *per se* was not a problem. It was when such speech patterns were 'brought back' into nondominant spaces where AAVE served as the primary medium of communication that the use of 'standard English' annoyed participants, reproducing marginalization and projecting an air of arrogance.

Similarly, for Ochen, it is the setting in which Chinese is spoken that renders it more or less suitable. Therefore, in this case, Ochen's perspective is similar to that found elsewhere, even among those who prioritized the speaking of Pure Language. Very few advocate resistance to speaking and reading Chinese; even the traditional monastics at MT still encouraged their students to learn other languages and study outside of Tibetan areas. Rather, their critiques concern the amount of Chinese spoken in spaces which are Tibetan. Perhaps not coincidentally, Ochen's critiques identify a source of the problem that many others do, even those who are more strict in their approach to language mixing: the use of the Internet, television, and social media bring Chinese language and terminology into arenas that participants desire to see as principally Tibetan. Ochen is obviously aware – and not embarrassed to point out – that he himself goes to a *minkaohan* university where he literally “never speaks Tibetan to classmates, educators,” or anyone else in the eastern Chinese city. He surely consumes more Chinese (and English) media

and instruction than most Tibetans, even the young women he was criticizing who, it should be remembered, go to a *Minzu* university close to numerous Amdo Tibetan communities, where they take many of their courses in Tibetan. Thus, for Ochen, as many others featured throughout this study, a proper ethnic consciousness (*mi rigs 'du shes*) does not require 'choosing the Tibetan option' at every step and refusing to participate in Chinese institutions or programs. As explained previously, doing so would be tantamount to near-complete exclusion from any stable and lucrative livelihood. For Ochen and many others, it is not the mere *use* of *putonghua* Chinese – or even enjoyment in it – that is problematic, or a threat or obstacle to one's ethnic consciousness and the well-being of the ethnic group more generally. Rather, it is the *circumstances* in which one centers Chinese language, media, or styles that may be objectionable.

The focus on circumstances was not unique to Ochen. The perspectives of educators at Marching Together are also best understood in a similar way: it is not the existence of Chinese that is problematic but its encroachment into circumstances (which is not entirely synonymous with 'places') that are distinctively Tibetan that the use or centering of Chinese is criticized. For educators at Marching Together, these 'circumstances' into which Chinese must not be allowed to encroach are, first and foremost, linguistic ones; language borrowing that adulterates Pure Tibetan language is a transgression that is seen as problematic on a number practical and symbolic levels. While MT's skepticism of Chinese encroachment (into language) might be the most scrupulous and explicit, similar logics are evident elsewhere, as Ochen's criticisms of the young woman teachers at Black Rock *sabjong* reveal. That young girls are more commonly perceived to be avid users of digital technology brought into Tibetan homes via wireless Internet exposes them to critiques of Sinicization.

Third, participant observation and interview data suggests that one principal reason why young women may use – or at least be perceived to use – digital technology (which, again, necessarily means a disproportionately larger amount of Chinese media, even though websites and apps with Tibetan language functionality exist) more than young men is that they are more routinely excluded or marginalized in communal ‘Tibetan spaces’ – both actual and imagined ones. On numerous occasions, ranging from end-of-*sabjong* picnics and teaching staff meetings to weddings and nights spent drinking and singing at Karaoke, men dominated the central conversation to the near complete exclusion of women. As men and young men – especially those who have developed skills in oratory or singing – gravitated towards the center of the action, women and young women, who very rarely took ‘center stage’ to address the entire group, drifted to the margins and, perhaps not surprisingly, to their phones. Speaking authoritatively and mellifluously is an important aspect of Tibetan sociality (Thurston, 2012) and virtually all social gatherings will feature some form of conversation that addresses all those present, even if only a few there are welcome and willing to participate actively. In my experience in spaces like those just mentioned, such as weddings, it was almost exclusively men who stepped into these central speaking roles. The only time women did so was when the college student organizing the *sabjong* was a woman and she was organizing a meeting with parents and/or other teachers. When female *sabjong* leaders, such as Rigzang or Jigmo, addressed their school communities everyone paid attention and gave them no different levels of attention than other (male) leaders appeared to be given during similar circumstances. And, moreover, these young women were confident and capable public speakers. These final details are provided to reinforce that, whether it is actually true or not, many, like Ochen, *perceived* young women as using Chinese language more frequently, no doubt related to their perceived increase in use of digital media.

*Role Models*

Notions of ideal teachers and students are often gendered (Al-Khairi, 2015). This is not to say that students and educators thought that only males or females possessed the traits necessary to being an exemplary teacher or student, but when discussing various desirable traits, participants regularly saw these as more naturally possessed by males or females. There are a few consequences of this division that are salient to explicating how gender informs the habitus of students who educators see as their responsibility to educate. The first concerns the role models and notions of an ideal teacher that the students develop, which I explain primarily by drawing on in-depth interview data with one educator in his thirties, Puwa. Second, I draw on other interview and observation data to develop a picture of how some educators think about ideal educators and what kinds of traits are necessary to be one. Again, my goal is not to provide a complete gloss of gender in Amdo Tibetan society. Rather, my goal is to show some of the principal dynamics that inform how educators (and students) in this region conceptualize what is educationally valuable. Therefore, insofar as gender issues do *not* appear to shift perceptions of or attempts to transmit educational value, analysis of them is omitted from this study.

After learning about the emphasis that Marching Together placed on learning Tibetan, and the great effort that many students of all genders put into learning Tibetan there, I began asking as part of semi-structured interviews or informal conversations about my interlocutors' opinions about learning language and who might constitute an ideal teacher of it. Whether interlocutors responded with a specific individual or a general type of person, every single response indicated that the interlocutor's idea of an ideal teacher of Tibetan language was male. This response is a pronounced example of the preferences I found among the general pool of

participants in this study for male role models in Tibetan and other humanities subjects (but not Chinese or English language). Though I did not focus on gender during field work, my interview protocol included a small series of questions asking interviewees about their (previous) academic role models in the two general scholastic domains of sciences (*rtsis tshan*, Ch. *li ke*) and humanities (*rig tshan*, Ch. *wen ke*). I asked participants: Do/did you have any significant academic role models? Who? Why? What did they study? And what made you look up to them?

Of the 44 interlocutors (29 of whom were male) who answered these questions, 31 expressed that at least one of their role models was a woman but only 3 of these said their ‘humanities role model’ was a woman. According to this non-representative quantitative data, women were *not* drastically underrepresented in interlocutors’ responses when asked about their role models in general. Even twenty males named older sisters or aunts/cousins as academic role models, but these were entirely confined to English, Chinese, math or *li ke* subjects, namely physics, biology, and chemistry if any subject area was given. Among the educators who answered this question, responses frequently drew from interlocutors’ memories of their childhood teachers, tutors, and extended families. One interviewee’s responses, which I discuss below, illustrates well the ways that gender can subtly inform the development of supplemental learning programs and perspectives about them.

Puwa is a thirty-five-year-old man who has taught in a primary school in one of the nearby villages above Serjong for the past couple years. We had first met several years earlier at a lecture on Tibetan language given at one of the newly built local tea houses that we frequented. Our similar ages and interests gave us a lot to talk about, as well as his patience with my slowly improving Tibetan, and Puwa was happy to share as we sat in my hotel room sharing tea one spring evening in May of 2019. His thoughts represent an exaggerated but quintessential version



of many interlocutors' childhood memories. Responding first to a question about what *sabjong* he attended when he was in grade school twenty-five years ago, he recounted,

We didn't really have *sabjong* in those days. Not like today with small classes in most towns and villages and lots and lots in the city. We would call it *sabjong*, sure, but really this just means 'extra study' (*gsab pa'i slob sbyong*)— it doesn't need to be a separate school. My brother and cousin and I would go every summer and winter break to our maternal uncle's room in the monastery. I remember he would teach us the foundations of spelling – the prefixes (*sngon 'jug*) and suffixes (*rjes 'jug*) that you can't just learn from speaking.

Before continuing with Puwa's narrative, it is worth point out what it already reveals about the development of *sabjong* and supplemental education in Amdo. Many male participants in their thirties and older had memories of receiving supplemental instruction outside of school time during their youths. However, other than two participants in their early forties who remember traveling to Xining in the 1990s for a training class, which they remember was organized specifically to prepare for employment exams in teaching, all those in their thirties and older recollect that their first experience with supplemental schooling entailed going to the monastery during holidays and some long weekends to get instruction in Tibetan language arts from monks. Moreover, Puwa mentions his opinion about the criteria for calling a program a "*sabjong*." It is difficult to know exactly what Puwa means by the phrase "It doesn't need to be a separate school," which he said in English, though the interview was a bit more than half in Tibetan. But it seems that Puwa means that the term *sabjong* need not be consider synonymous with for-profit classes that usually entail specific efforts to 'cram' for an exam (i.e., *buxiban*), which, in Qinghai, are generally located in urban areas and are officially registered as afterschool programs. Puwa suggests that, though their general practices and appearances have changed over the past decades, *sabjong* comprise any form of instruction beyond school time. This highlights, in reference to supplemental education in general and gender in particular, one of the methodological issues of

measuring participation (see Bray, 2010): Tracking historical participation over time can be difficult, not only because different practices during different eras all seem to fall under the category of supplemental instruction, but also because there are a variety of factors, as the next paragraphs show, beyond mainstream schooling that impact different genders' participation in supplemental education. That is, it is not simply the case that for Tibetans born in the 1980s or previously, boys were more likely to attend mainstream school than girls (Seeberg, 2008; Seeberg, 2015); it is also the case that supplemental opportunities, often confined to the monastery during the Summer Retreat (*dbyar gnas*), were in much greater supply for boys, as girls are generally barred from entering monastery grounds during this time.

Puwa's comment also raises another key concern for scholars of supplemental education, discussed at length previously: How closely do all the components of instruction (materials, methods, spaces, etc.) in supplemental education need to mimic those of mainstream schooling for such educational practices to be considered as "shadow" education which, the reader will recall, attempts to "teach only those things that are taught and tested" in mainstream school (Bray, 2017)? Are students who attend(ed) classes in a monastery to learn Tibetan to a degree beyond which is taught or tested in mainstream schooling still engaging in properly supplemental education, which, as Chapter 6 outlines, might be thought of as that which seeks to reinforce or enhance the goals of mainstream education? Or are they engaging in ethnolinguistic heritage education that diverges from mainstream education, or perhaps something else? I, along with Puwa, argue that a categorical answer to this question need not be given because it restricts one's ability to identify the variety of academically and educationally beneficial practices that may take place in *sabjong* that are evidently not calibrated to match norms in mainstream schooling.

Puwa went on to discuss the nature of his early *sabjong* experiences and his assessment of the teachers who made these experiences important.

[My teacher] was a monk since before we were born, and his Tibetan was excellent. He knew all the grammar rules, memorized them, taught Tibetan in the monastery to the young monks. He wrote a few books, too. Nothing famous but some study guide and a local history of our village. But everyone in my village said ‘if you want to learn Tibetan, you should go learn from Aku Sampten. His Tibetan is the best.’ He was also very good at debate, but since he is older now, he doesn’t have to do that anymore... My sister didn’t come [with my cousin and I]. I’m not sure if she wanted to, but usually during summer, girls can’t go into the monastery anyway. It’s Summer Retreat. Nowadays it’s a little more relaxed. But at that time, girls really cannot go into the monastery houses or some temples. She was OK with it... She did better in school than me. She is an accountant for a company in Xining. Her math scores were really good. I am just a teacher here in town at a primary school, but I can teach Tibetan and English so I am happy with that for now.

Here Puwa underscores the fact that, simply put, boys have more opportunities to learn Tibetan well. More specifically, while girls have the opportunity, via mainstream schooling, to learn an amount of Tibetan that would allow an industrious student to earn a good score on the *gaokao* and gain university admission, they still have fewer opportunities during childhood to learn Tibetan in a way that might prepare them for a level of expertise that distinguishes them as an accomplished Tibetan scholar within literary or educational fields. As I show below, Puwa is surely not the only one to associate proper methods of learning Tibetan language with styles and content that prevail in monastic education, a domain that is obviously harder to access for female students both literally and figuratively. Thus, for Puwa, the notion of an ideal *Tibetan* teacher is not only male but an ordained one – *monks* are the ones best prepared and positioned to teach Tibetan language as it has been their primary topic of study for much of their lives (Dreyfus, 2003). As Puwa implies, his sister’s ultimate academic progress was not significantly hindered by lacking this opportunity to learn literary Tibetan at a young age. Although of course I cannot

know her initial dreams, Puwa gives the impression that she enjoyed and was successful at learning quantitative subjects.

I also spend extra time here explaining Puwa's words here because they suggest the veracity, or generalizability, of a finding discussed in the previous section on the spatialization of class and some consequences of this. The anecdotal evidence he offers supports the previously discussed finding that as Tibetans succeed in various levels of schooling, the chances that they find work outside of Tibetan areas becomes increasingly likely. While my finding is not so much on the *actual* numbers of people for whom this pertains, but rather that many interlocutors *feel* that this is the case – a different but no less valuable finding if the goal is to explore educators' philosophies and the actions they inspire. It is also worth noting that Puwa and others see education as one of the few sectors in which gainful employment need not lead directly to life outside of one's home area. Puwa says, as if it were totally natural, that an accountant would likely move to Xining, but a teacher would have the opportunity (rather than 'be consigned to their fate') to live in an area where Tibetan languages and norms are, if not actually dominant, at least widespread.

Though it is impossible to offer single, hand-picked examples to substantiate general theoretical claims, it is possible to use ethnographic data to give examples of theoretical claims that have already been substantiated and then show how the examples might corroborate but also nuance or challenge a theory (Burawoy, 2004). This is a purpose of discussing this example here: Puwa asserts that "he is happy with teaching [in the semi-rural village just outside the county seat of Serjong] for now" because he gets to teach Tibetan and English. At a later point in the conversation, Puwa briefly discussed why he likes his position, saying

English, you know I love English. I studied it for a long time. It's great that I can use it to teach kids, show them something new, something unusual about the world. And Tibetan.

This is like the big goal. We have to teach kids Tibetan. This is a great responsibility. It's important to learn many things, but without Tibetan, we will be totally lost.

Puwa, as many others I met during and prior to fieldwork, suggests the superiority of learning and, especially, *teaching* Tibetan. While he readily admits his sister has more economic capital, and that he too may decide to pursue economic capital more distinctly in the future, he is also quick to acknowledge the symbolic superiority of teaching, especially languages and especially Tibetan language, to youths. Thus, this one example illustrates numerous dynamics that have been described thus far. First, Puwa's sister finds a position as an accountant that likely provides greater economic mobility than Puwa's teaching work. That her job will bring his sister to Xining and that Puwa will stay in Serjong for the time being are taken as a natural consequence of their now diverging educational trajectories. But, second, Puwa and his sister grew up in the same family, with largely the same access to resources (i.e., forms of capital), so it is justified to claim that in many ways their primary (i.e., classed) habituses are very similar (Benzecry, 2018). However, their *secondary* habituses, those that are acquired after the initial years of childrearing and increasingly a product of sustained training or education, begin to diverge. Nevertheless, Puwa, in his interview, "makes a virtue of necessity" (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 77) in suggesting that the position to which his upbringing has led him is a noble and worthwhile one. The notion of "making a virtue out of necessity" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Bourdieu, 2001) refers to the ontological complicity that develops between habitus and field, in which people given a "forced choice" try to "pass [it] off as a positive choice of the ideal" (Bourdieu, 2013, p. 46).

Where this potentially challenges or nuances Bourdieusian theory on the complicity that develops between field conditions and habituses is that Puwa's case suggests that, in some instances, it is not the classed aspects of habitus but the gendered ones that appear to be particularly 'complicit' with the field. That is, it does not appear to be the case that the difference

between Puwa and his sister's *class* background led them to see different lines of employment as desirable but their *gendered* experiences. As other sections of this dissertation explore, one's class background – especially as a single variable that represents the aggregate volume and structure of one's capital – may not be entirely effective in understanding habitus formation when there is significant struggle over the boundaries of a field, or when there are, for whatever reasons, multiple field logics that compete with one another for dominance. In sum, Puwa's ideas about his prior experiences in *sabjong*, and the potential impact they had on him and his sister, illustrate that gender (and race/ethnicity) must be considered as important constituents of students' habituses – or at least those parts of them that are 'highlighted' in educational settings – for, despite the existence of legal equality, which are not enforced in independent religious institutions like a monastery, boys and girls even from the same social class often have different levels of access to learning opportunities (and different levels of comfort while there).

On one hand, this seems obvious and hardly worth pointing out: there are systematic gender differences in students' outcomes (Steeh et al., 2019); on the other hand, studies of gender equality that “[emphasize]... the gender-specific effect of parental income and education, and the child's own preferences for study subjects” (Akabayashi et al., 2020, p. 315) appear to emphasize the role that familial (and therefore students') *capital* plays in providing access to and generating interest in certain subjects, in this case STEM. Current research often neglects to account out for prevailing field conditions in which key personalities, institutions, and position-holders within fields do not have neutral ideas about which genders are best suited for certain employment roles and may deliberately encourage students of a particular gender to pursue certain goals. In other words, Puwa's story reveals that, much as Bourdieu (1992) often admonished, it is not just *interactions* (between parents, teachers, and students) that explain

educational outcomes but it is the configuration of objective relations (i.e., the field) in which certain forms of capital (e.g., linguistic skill) are more recognized and rewarded when possessed by those who have the ‘right’ habitus to gain recognition for their ability (Bourdieu, 2020). As an important factor informing habitus, gender is not simply an attribute that others can see and react to, but an important ‘category of experience’ that shapes what people see as possible and desirable in their lives. Now that I have used Puwa’s example to discuss some of the principal forces shaping students’ trajectories, I move on to analyzing Sherap’s interview to show how gender informs ideas about what constitutes an ideal educator by analyzing a conversation we had about corporal punishment.

### *Strength, Stamina, and Suffering*

Another phenomenon that came up in numerous conversations but is best introduced here in a section on how gendered bodies inform participants’ notions of ideal teachers and learners was the physicality of education. Participants saw physical stamina, discipline, and even sheer strength as important traits to cultivate for those hoping to be successful in mainstream schooling. Participants’ concern with physical strength was highlighted in conversations of student discipline, which often began with educators discussing their ideas of how punishments and physical interactions should be managed. In general, the expectation of an *embodied* relationship between teachers and students, and, in particular, the recognition of the possibility of corporal punishment, was existent at every field site I visited. This is not to say that every educator I worked with advocated physically punishing students, but I saw virtually every educator I worked with make physical contact with students on numerous occasions (often in ways that

symbolized kindness or care, in addition to strict discipline). The following field note taken from one of the last days at my first year at Marching Together demonstrates this well.

*Earlier today, the cook and a couple teachers we're trying to convince Aku Cheeden not to go reprimand the students for their bad scores on the end-of-session exams. Aku didn't seem to be having it, though. They said it's just sabjong, he doesn't need to punish them. Aku said that didn't study hard enough, that they gave up at the end, saying "They're here for one month and still they cannot memorize or explain the lessons! If I go easy on them, they'll never get it." He grabbed a ruler and walked off. It wasn't as menacing as Aku Lobsang's implement, an electrical cord knotted up at points. Everyone's scared of that! But certainly this would get the students' attention.... Just two days ago, though, at the final Cultural Knowledge Competition, Aku Cheeden had his arm around one of the students who was standing up, a bit too embarrassed or nervous to say the Pure Language Oath clearly. Aku came over and comforted them, even touching the young boy's chin and reassuring him that everyone at MT has been through the process at one time or another... The juxtaposition reminds me of last summer when one afternoon Aku Lobsang and Aku Gyamtsen were having a water fight running around the courtyard soaking each other and getting soaked by students. Then, not a few hours later, Aku Lobsang was really letting a couple students have it because they had slept through their chores. (Field note taken on 8/16/2019).*

As my note on positionality above details, students and teachers in this study held different expectations than my learning and teaching in a predominantly American context had developed in me. I, therefore, took a personal as well as intellectual interest in those phenomena that caught me by surprise, and corporal punishment (or physical interactions more generally) was largely absent in my schooling but in the forefront here. I had been made aware of the widespread perception that schooling entails physical interactions during my time as a high school teacher in this area from 2012-2015. During my time on the teaching staff, many parents told me that I should physically discipline their child if they were not working hard or getting good grades. I was always struck by the forcefulness with which they mimed the types of beatings I should consider administering to their children; on more than a few occasions I thought it was possible that the parents were joking – making a show out of this mock disciplinary session in which they took delight in slapping their child silly for not achieving in



school. Whenever I had interactions like this, I always told parents that I would not hit (*rdung ba*) their children, and I stayed true to that for the entirety of my professional teaching in Qinghai.<sup>63</sup> However, the widespread and surprisingly vehement support, principally, though not exclusively, voiced by older generations, required me to question how physical punishment might fit into the educational philosophies of research participants.

Setting out for fieldwork, I had declined to develop a framework for research concerning this form of interaction between teachers and students. Nevertheless, interview discussions of physical punishment persisted despite my lack of specific questions about it. Eventually, I felt my attitudes towards the utility of physical punishment getting shaken loose from their heretofore-unquestioned foundations, and I began to follow up on this topic more deliberately. Though all those who spoke about the embodied aspect of the relationship between teachers and students assumed physical interactions in the classroom were primarily teacher-generated, there was also a widespread belief that it can be both appropriate and beneficial for teachers and students to make physical contact. I address these topics by first analyzing one conversation I had with Samdrup, an extraordinarily ambitious and outspoken educator living and working around the semi-rural town of Serjong, where he was raised. We had known each other for a few years by the time I conducted our first semi-structured interview in the spring of 2019.

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<sup>63</sup> Space prevents a full exploration of this topic, but two points are worth mentioning. Throughout my time teaching in the mainstream school prior to dissertation research, I refrained from ever hitting students and made sure to tell them (in English and Tibetan) that I would never hit them. Nevertheless, being the gesticulative teacher that I am, I often made sudden exaggerated movements while teaching. On a few occasions, the student(s) sitting near where I was standing would flinch significantly, covering their head and ducking out of the way. These interactions first alerted me to the physicality of schooling in Amdo Tibet. Second, as described elsewhere, I was encouraged not only by parents of students in mainstream schooling but by the staff at MT to be more draconian with students on many occasions. It was a difficult line to tread to say the least. I opted, ultimately, to mimic Chopa and other younger teachers in their physical interactions with students. By the end of my time at MT, I realized that I had indeed pinched a few ears (lightly!) and given some soft bops on the shoulder of a sleeping student with a rolled-up notebook. I was internalizing ideas about valuable practices right alongside my researching them.

One of the most challenging conversations I had during my field work came when interviewing a peer who was well-known around town, not only because he was a prominent lower-middle school teacher, but he had also co-founded with his wife a local kindergarten, which hosts *sabjong* during summer and winter breaks. She is officially the director of the kindergarten because, as an employed schoolteacher, Samdrup cannot legally be the principal manager of an education business. Samdrup<sup>64</sup> was unique in many ways, not least of which is the fact that he had earned his BA and MA abroad in the US and spoke very good English, which he now taught at one of the local *minzu* primary schools, despite his not having traveled to an Anglophone country in nearly 10 years. As Samdrup and I sat in a room in the second story of a local Tibetan restaurant waiting for food to arrive, I asked him about what makes a good teacher. He spoke at length on the topic and I recount and analyze many of the details of his characterization, focusing here on the aspects of his description that were gendered. He explained “Women can be good teachers, of course. But in general, men are probably better teachers.” I asked why he thought this was, hoping I didn’t get an answer that made me too uncomfortable. He replied:

Teaching is a hard job. Even in America, I saw about some high schools and primary schools there. It’s hard. Many classes, lots of talking, bad students. Some of those students, especially the boys, they can be really bad. Always talking, fighting, doing something, wasting time.

I quickly interjected, as I sometimes did with interlocutors with whom I had a good rapport, to remind him of the question thinking he was getting off topic, “But why are men teachers better than women?” He responded quickly,

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<sup>64</sup> Samdrup is one of the several participants in this study who had excellent English skills. Therefore, I have elected to recount his words verbatim rather than ‘cleaning up’ the prose so his words are “grammatically correct” in a written document, despite the irregularities that exist in his speech compared to a native speaker of American English.

That's what I'm saying! The bad students will not be scared of woman teacher. Maybe [those bad students] won't ever behave in the class. But they look at me [as he kind of puffs out shoulders and arms] and they know they have to behave. Many women can't beat students. Maybe they think it's bad, or maybe they are too weak. And if the students know this, the bad boys, they will never behave because they don't care about school. But a big guy like me will have no problem with them.

Indeed, Samdrup is on the large side at about 6'2, 220 lbs. While this was far from my first encounter with teachers, parents, or even students who believed that corporal punishment served some useful purposes, this was the first time I had heard someone refer to one's ability to physically discipline students as a reason for why some teachers might be better than others. "Would you hit any student that misbehaved too much?" I asked, wondering about his ethical framework for meting out physical punishment.

It's possible, but I don't think I have ever beaten a girl. Maybe twist the ear or ruler on the hand, like that. But never hard. Actually girls usually need the opposite, especially if they are not from the town. Some of my students are from *kha-stod* [herding-and-farming villages above town] and they are a little different from the students who always grew up in the town. Those girls from the valley can be very shy... not very naughty. I don't beat them. I only criticize them to 'Speak louder!' 'Raise your hand!' 'Don't be shy!' like that. The kinds of things we learned in ETP,<sup>65</sup> right.

I wanted to return to Samdrup's ideas about corporal punishment, so I asked "So you can physically punish the students better than a woman teacher?" "Of course" he said. "But I don't usually. Only or two times in a month I will beat the student. But they know I can."

Samdrup explained that, despite his semi-regular use of it in his fifth-grade primary school classroom, physical punishment is not an ideal punishment for girls or for older students, stating that "They will be too humiliated if they get a beating while in high school. [One should] never beat the college students also. They will not follow the teacher after that. They will definitely just hate that teacher and disagree with them." Before I got a chance to ask him to expand on these differences and explain why it is inappropriate to embarrass older students in the

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<sup>65</sup> Samdrup had attended the university English Training Program that was loosely related to the high school program in which I taught. But we had many contacts and experiences in common because of this shared history.

way one might embarrass primary students, he continued to talk about his own classroom and philosophy, so I followed the conversation in that direction.

They know I am a very strict teacher” he added. “[I] Work very hard, very serious. I am always there at 6:50 every morning to check on their study session before breakfast. If they are not doing the homework, I will be very angry. Sometimes I go back home for breakfast. If students are bad, I have to stay there. I just say and don’t eat breakfast.

Following up on what he meant when he said if the students are bad, Samdrup answered that “being bad” consisted of a few principal behaviors: First, students could be “bad” by not doing their assigned work, which usually meant they were talking to others when not allowed or causing some other kind of mischief; second, they could be “bad” by having received poor marks on previous exams and other graded materials; and third, they could be “bad” by failing to complete their assigned chores around school, which included some strenuous activities like cleaning floors and classrooms or picking up trash on campus. Students’ responsibility to do chores was not unique to Samdrup’s primary school, although mainstream teachers enforced the duties much more sternly whereas *sabjong* educators often waited until the final day to ensure significant cleaning had taken place. Neglecting to hold one’s class to their assigned chores would reflect negatively on that class’ head teacher, Samdrup explained. “And I don’t want any other teachers saying ‘Look, he only cares about exam scores.’ Or ‘he only cares about being [the teacher of] the first [ranked] class (Ch. *yi ban*)’. When the other teachers see me be strict with the students, they think they should also do it too. They know I don’t just care about grades but about the students’ personal [development]. Then our whole school improves.”

I jotted down notes as fast as I could to guide follow up questions, but he continued quickly, launching into his daily routine assuming it was what I wanted to know about.

The first class starts at 8:20, I come home quickly for lunch but I go back to school around 1:00pm and have night class [Mondays through Thursdays]. Then grading papers, checking students’ scores. Every day is like this. Actually this schedule is impossible

without my wife. She usually makes every meal for me even though she must go to the kindergarten every day. This is why my class is always the best class. We always have the best scores on *Zhong-kao* [the Senior High School Placement Exam]. I am a really hard-working teacher.

I responded quickly to keep the momentum of the conversation flowing, asking if other teachers also hit their students and if this practice was more popular with a certain type of teacher. I wanted to hear him speak about how physically disciplining students made other teachers think about him and how this practice fit into his teaching philosophy.

Sometimes they do. Maybe the men teachers [beat students] more than the women, but everyone has their own idea of what they should do. And I usually tell others ‘You should be more strict with your students’ and ‘they are not studying that hard.’ I see it because I am always there, looking in their classroom, looking in the hallway. But I don’t tell them to beat the students. I don’t say how they should teach.

Despite his recognition of various teaching styles, Samdrup nevertheless avers that strictness is central to successful teaching, even if he is not willing to say categorically *what* is the best way of being strict, although he seems to have determined his own approach quite clearly. Likewise important is Samdrup’s interest in *being seen as strict*, a phenomenon I saw regularly in both mainstream and *sabjong* education. For Samdrup, it is not enough that students respect his professionalism (and know they might be beaten for crossing him), it is also vital for Samdrup to think that he is setting a model for other teachers in the school. As his comment on being the ‘first ranked class’ suggests, he knows that other teachers might complain that his methods are simply instrumentalist, as doing whatever it takes to squeeze a few more exam points out of students. He is quick to defend himself against this kind of criticism, distancing himself from a teacher who is strict *only* to produce better exam scores.

For Samdrup, rather, higher exam scores are one consequence of discipline, but perseverance and tenacity are also real goals of his physical discipline, as he alluded to in another comment, the connection between which I did not perceive immediately. Towards the

end of our conversation, on another impassioned rebuke of lackadaisical teaching practices, he added,

And some teachers, many parents just always tell the kids ‘Go for the government job. It is so secure, the best job.’ But [it’s] really disappointing me, those students just looking for an easy solution. Looking for a job where they don’t have to improve or try something new. Just guaranteed job; they don’t learn anything about business or science or anything.

As he became more energized and frustrated with what he saw as some internal obstacles facing Tibetan graduates – i.e., obstacles to broadening horizons created by complacency – his English broke down somewhat and he began to use more Tibetan and Chinese words in his speech, though I could still understand him clearly. “Those kids who just want to be *lee-shay-pa* (i.e., a government employee), maybe it’s the same as some teachers who don’t push the students. They are OK with how it is. They don’t want to change something.” These later critiques of students’ limited horizons made clearer his ideas about the goals of physical discipline. It is true, as my data and first-hand experience corroborates, that the majority of parents and educators encourage Amdo Tibetan students to pursue government work, a practice that has been widespread since the implementation of the guaranteed employment scheme for university graduates was put into place (Fischer & Zenz, 2018). But Samdrup reckons that pursuing government work won’t *change* anything, and it is possible based on his other comments to infer here that he is referring to changing the current marginalization that Tibetans experience in dominant social and political arenas. Even if he is not referring specifically to marginalization, he is undoubtedly referring to the lack to non-governmental economic development and entrepreneurial initiatives organized by Tibetans, which he articulated to me during a story in which he described admirably his aunt’s multiple attempts to start a bakery which, despite the obstacles, aimed to produce an independently owned business that would bring economic capital to Amdo Tibetan families.

Linking his comments on physical discipline to nongovernmental work, it becomes possible to see that Samdrup believes that physical discipline is appropriate to use in cases where it might challenge a student to hold themselves to a higher standard of achievement. Men, because they can instill more fear in students, are likewise capable of ‘inspiring’ more significant changes and improvements in behavior that veer further from the road most commonly taken (i.e., aspiring to work in the government). Physical punishment of older students is not appropriate not necessarily because embarrassment is bad *per se*, but because embarrassment at this stage of a students’ career is, in Samdrup’s mind, far more likely to produce an oppositional disposition that would likely not arise in younger students, perhaps because Samdrup feels that younger students have shorter memories, more capacity for forgiveness, or some other combination of traits.

For Samdrup, it is not just one’s home culture, one’s *classed* experiences, that shapes one’s habitus. The secondary experiences students’ have in school are also capable of altering the habitus in important ways. But, Samdrup’s approach suggest two key caveats, which could be considered in future research. First, Samdrup suggests that male teachers are more capable of making significant changes in students’ habituses because they can instill strong, disposition-altering emotions, like fear, in students in ways that women cannot. Second, while habituses are alterable through formal education, Samdrup does not think they are always malleable to the same degree throughout one’s many years in school. Younger students are, in Samdrup’s mind, more malleable and therefore require a level of (physical) interaction that older students would likely not benefit from.

It is not difficult to establish a few of Samdrup’s key convictions when it comes to teaching and learning, and while his perspective may seem extreme and surprisingly frank, he

was not the only person I heard frame teaching and learning in such terms. First, Samdrup clearly believes there is an irreducibly physical dimension to learning – that it requires corporal sacrifice, work, and punishment. Indeed, the well-known Tibetan proverb from Sakya Pandita cited above (about educational success requiring suffering) relays this widely accepted premise clearly. More importantly for the current argument, however, is that Samdrup believes that men are more capable of fulfilling the physical demands that ideal teaching involves: Not only are the hours long and hard, requiring strength and stamina, but, in his mind, students too are best taught by those who are capable, mentally and physically, of exerting force to guide their education. Briefly alluded to above, but discussed with Samdrup in another part of the conversation, Samdrup also recognizes that boys ‘need’ more taming, that they are the ones who will likely require reprimand and, possibly, physical punishment. Girls, especially those raised in more rural and traditional families, need a different kind of encouragement – to speak up, to participate, to cultivate a sense of bravery that those at Marching Together also identified as vital. Finally, I can confirm, having visited several of Samdrup’s mainstream classes both prior to and during field work, that he is not cruel to students or women colleagues. Indeed, his students in his classes were more outspoken, jovial, and curious than many I had visited (either in mainstream schools or *sabjong*). Nevertheless, Samdrup ‘switched gears’ in class (and in conversations about his classes) quickly and easily, not unlike the monks at MT. Teaching, disciplining, entertaining, and mentoring students in quick succession requires, in Samdrup’s mind, a ‘thick skin’ that is more likely to be found among men than among women. However, he did recognize, as intimated above, that the possession of such energy and tolerance in school is not entirely determined by biology when he recognized how the effort he puts into teaching is only possible because his wife does so much labor at home and at the kindergarten. Similarly, it is possible to see



Samdrup's approach as not merely chauvinistic or supremacist: he argues that in most cases boys are the poorly behaved students and the ones requiring discipline. For him, males are both more problematic in learning contexts and more capable of addressing these problems. What this means for the present argument is that for Samdrup and many like him notions of ideal students and ideal teachers are gendered – not in the sense that maleness is always preferable to femaleness but that male Tibetan students need different kinds of instruction than female Tibetan students, and that male Tibetan teachers are differently capable of providing such instruction than female teachers.

### *Rowdiness and Restraint*

I continue this discussion of how educators' (and students') conceptualization of gender norms and expectations shape the development of Amdo Tibetan students' habitus with another example from Marching Together *sabjong*, drawing specifically on observation data collected during Cultural Knowledge Competitions (*shes rig 'gran gleng*) and interviews in which I asked educators and students to reflect on the Competition. In a very different context, Thurston (2018, p. 28) asked one of his interlocutors, an experienced speaker at weddings and similar events, about the qualities of a good orator. Klu-rgyal responded "His speech must be eloquent; second, [he] must have confidence (*spobs pa*); also, [he] must enjoy or be interested in others' speeches." This tripartite description is remarkably similar to that given by Aku Cheeden and other leaders at MT when describing what they hope to cultivate during the twice-weekly Competitions, contending,

We want to students to become comfortable speaking up in front of others. This means they need to know what to say and they need to have the bravery (*spobs pa*) to say it. Honestly, even if they aren't sure what to say, we encourage them to say something when they are on the stage, to get over their fear.

Although the grammatical subject in Tibetan sentences is often understood and need not be stated anew in each phrase, as Klu-rgyal's indicates, there is little doubt that he is referring exclusively to male speakers, as they are the only ones who give formal wedding speeches like those discussed in Thurston (2018). But despite the fact that at MT men are the only teachers who give speeches or address the *sabjong* as a whole (as nearly the entire teaching staff is men and the 'senior staff' is all men), Aku Cheeden's aspirations for students' confidence apply equally to boys and girls and this is reflected in Cultural Knowledge Competitions, such as in the students he holds up as role models or assigns to host the Competition. Other educators, like Samdrup, clearly have different ideas about what qualities are differentially lacked by boys and girls. Numerous educators and students repeated common stereotypes when I asked for their opinions on the differences between boys and girls: "Boys are rowdy, especially the nomad boys. Girls are calmer, better behaved" were Samdrup's words on the matter, and many, especially older males, tended to echo these sentiments.

Aku Cheeden, Aku Lobsang, and other senior staff of Marching Together expressed similar sentiments. Aku Lobsang, the principal disciplinarian of Marching Together, concurred

[The boys] brought cigarettes to school. Are they crazy?... The girls, maybe they will try to hide their phone and play WeChat at night or something like that. But they don't need substantial discipline (*'dul ba*) like the boys do.<sup>66</sup>

But, unlike Samdrup, educators at MT saw a discrepancy between boys' behavior inside and outside of schools. Aku Cheeden added during an interview one morning in the summer of 2019 at Marching Together,

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<sup>66</sup> *'dul ba*, pronounced *dulwa*, is a term with both contemporary and religious meanings. Within Buddhism, *dulwa* generally translates "(monastic) discipline" but it is also the verb 'to tame' or 'to train.' As a proper noun, it translates the Sanskrit term *Vinaya*, the rules and procedures that govern Buddhist monastic communities, which is one of the three principal collections of Buddhist texts (*tripitika*), the other two being the *sutras*, i.e., the words of the Buddha, and the *abhidharma*, i.e., the commentaries on the sutras.

They can sing and laugh when they are on the grasslands, but in the classroom their mouths are closed. If you ask, ‘What is the meaning of bravery (*spobs pa*)’? There are many meanings and different situations have different meanings. Many of these students, especially the boys, they feel brave during summer or winter holiday... but in school, even some very loud boys are afraid to speak. You can see it during the Competition... Some students, like Luthar Tsering and some others, they never want to go on stage during the Competition. Actually, it is their turn to compete in [this afternoon’s] Competition. The competitors are chosen by where they sit in the classroom. He's next. But he and a few others called their parents yesterday to ask them if they can ask us to not make them compete today! He asked to borrow his phone from the teacher’s office. I didn’t know what he was calling home about. I thought maybe someone is sick. But after he talked to his dad, he gave me the phone and the father asked if Luthar Tsering can sit out this Competition. I told the father ‘This is a bad idea. Luthar Tsering can do it. I have seen him on stage before. He’s OK and, anyway, these are the rules of our *sabjong*.’ So the father agreed and Luthar Tsering will compete this afternoon.

Coming from the same area as most of the students at MT, and now a well-known community organizer and social entrepreneur, Aku Cheeden knows many of the students and their families beyond the setting of MT. Luthar Tsering is actually a distant relative of Aku Cheeden. He continued,

I’ve seen him sing songs during holidays at home and during summer at some local festivals. He’s a good singer! When he plays basketball here at MT, he is not afraid. He is happy to play against a foreigner like you with no problem. But now he is scared to participate in the Competition? What’s that about?

Aku Cheeden, like some other educators, recognizes that bravery in certain domains does not readily translate to those of formal education for many Tibetan students, especially boys. Tashi Tso, an alumnus of MT who taught there for two years after finishing the three-year Returner’s program, addressed these ideas on this issue in a separate interview the previous summer, saying,

Yes, everyone talks about how Amdo Tibetan boys are brave, should be brave, like a ‘real herding guy’ (*‘brog pa ngo ma*) but these days I think the girls are braver than boys in school. If you go into a classroom and look who is raising their hand, who is answering questions – it’s not only boys. Maybe it’s more girls, actually.

Thus, for Aku Cheeden, Tashi Tso, and several others at MT, the stereotypes of Amdo Tibetan male bravery closely associated with herding culture – accurate or not – do not readily translate

to the classroom. Moreover, male students may feel particularly scrutinized and embarrassed when their lack of confidence is exposed in scholastic settings, as I observed on many occasions during the Competitions. For example, during Competitions, boys and girls participated relatively equally, boys' and girls' performances were regularly met with applause, judges' scores did not appear to reflect a gender bias, and all students took the Competition seriously. But only boys seemed to experience what might be considered humiliation or extreme embarrassment when things went wrong for them during the Competition. There were, of course, some female students who froze up, offered incomprehensible answers, sang out of key, or fell short of an exemplary performance in some other way. But in these cases, the unlucky girl(s) on stage usually looked down, spoke the remainder of their words in a soft, low voice, or just waited out the clock for their chance to return to their seat. The boys, however, were far more mortified by a poor performance. Beet-red faces and a full-sprint back to their seat where they could hide their head in their Tibetan overcoat more accurately characterizes the reactions of the boys whose performances did not go as planned.

“It’s not a big problem if we fail in the Competition” Gunkar Drolma replied to my interview question, to which Yeshe echoed “Yeah, yeah.” These two girls from the third-year class at MT had elected to do an interview with me together during my second year at MT and took turns explaining to me what they thought about the Competition. Gunkar Drolma said, “My strongest memory from the Competition is one time I was on stage, my first year here, and I was too nervous. I couldn’t say anything. I was trying to think of an answer but had no idea... That first time was pure embarrassment, but now it’s OK if I don’t know an answer. I will still have a try even if I am not sure.” Then, Yeshe added, “Yeah, girls are more modest (*nyams chung*). It’s embarrassing for a little bit but not so bad.” I was puzzled by her comment at first but the latter

explained to my research assistant that, by this comment, she likely meant that because girls are more modest, there is, in a sense, less to lose by participating and performing in the Competition. A poor performance would not be as embarrassing as it would be for someone more haughty, verbose, or self-assured, as she implied some of the boys were.

Even though boys and girls are seen to come to MT with different levels of abilities in public speaking and performance, in the mind of MT's educators, both boys and girls need some forms of prompting and encouragement to participate in the Competition. For many of the girls at MT, feel like they "don't have many opportunities to do public speaking" in mainstream school or "may be too embarrassed to join a speech competition in front of [their] whole middle school" of roughly 1000 people, as Gunkar Drolma and Yeshe put it, respectively, the Cultural Knowledge Competition at MT provides an opportunity for these students to participate actively in space they feel is safer than the larger stage of mainstream school. In fact, more than a few female students at MT and elsewhere told me that one aspiration they have for the future is to become a host or M.C. (*do 'dzin pa*) on TV or Internet variety shows.

One of the older students, Dungkar Tsho, who had hosted many Competitions, recounted to me that she "love[s] the Competition" and that

when I am in class, I'm usually very shy. I don't raise my hand unless I am sure [of the answer]. But in the Competition, if I am the host, I can talk without a problem. Actually, I like being the host because then I also don't compete. If I had to compete [like all the other students], I think I would get nervous like in class.

Though my observations suggest Dungkar Tsho is accurate in reporting her comportment, it is possible that she (and other students) may be repeating the ideas and words of Aku Cheeden, who has on many occasions communicated the goals of the *sabjong* and the Cultural Knowledge Competition directly to the students, almost supplying them with a vocabulary with which they can describe the *sabjong*. Nevertheless, Dungkar Tsho, and other girls who participate in the

Competition more frequently as competitors than hosts, spend significant hours preparing for the Competition twice per week. That many of the girls at MT talk about the Competition in terms suggested to them by Aku Cheeden, however, is no hindrance to this argument, the goal of which is to describe how *educators* perceive students' habituses and, therefore, what they believe needs to be supplied through education.

Boys benefit from participation in the Competition, often but not always in ways that are comparable to girls. In addition to my multiple conversations and interviews with senior staff and teachers, I talked about participating in the Competition with two older male students and one recent alumnus who was now helping out at MT *sabjong* running the small convenience store on campus and doing odd jobs when called upon. One of the male students interviewed, and several others with whom I engaged in casual conversation, reported many of the same benefits deriving from participation in the Competition. Gangchen, a third-year Returner student in the same class as Yeshe and Gunkar Drolma, said,

Before, I was too shy to speak at all in class. You can see that [when you are teaching in our class]. I still don't like to talk in class, but the Competition has changed that a little. I'm still terrible in English, so I don't speak in your class. But I will raise my hand in Tibetan class, history class – even though we don't have it this summer.

Here, Gangchen is referring to the fact that their head teacher, Debo, who teaches history, was unable to attend that summer's session because he was away completing a requirement for his MA during most of the summer session. On the few days he was able to return to campus, he was greeted with great enthusiasm and admiration by the students, who do not seem to mind that he was unable to teach that summer, which means that his students usually have a study period during their history class, rather than having another teacher lead a lesson. Gangchen explained his thinking about Debo's absence, "How can we think it's annoying if he's not here? It's OK

because he's doing something to pursue his own dream. It's important to be confident enough to go new places, do new trainings (Ch. *peixun*). I want to get an MA degree too."

Gangchen is somewhat unique in that he had not attended the public primary or lower middle school but instead went to a religious boarding school run by Tibetan Buddhist monks a few hours' drive away. He had just finished his second year in the public senior high school. Because he had a comparatively diverse set of learning experiences, I asked him to compare the different environments, directing my questions at the presence of competitive activities at each and what benefits or drawbacks they entailed.

My previous [mainstream] school [named Gyayum] actually had more competitions than here. Three per week. They were similar to the Competitions here but had even more subjects. There was many of the same here, but also Math, Science, and Geography, I think. But only the best students in each class could join [i.e., compete on stage]. Most of us usually just watch. I only competed in Tibetan composition a few times. My other subjects are bad, I actually wish I could study them here too.<sup>67</sup> Nowadays, my [public] school also has competitions, but they are different than the Competition here at MT. Those are usually like Speech Writing, Dancing, Singing or something like that. They don't test Tibetan culture (*rig gnas* and *rig gzhung*) in the same way. So, I like the Competitions here the best.

Here, Gangchen is echoing and, as the related footnote explains, providing some evidence for the veracity of the senior staff's conviction that the Competition is a vital tool in developing the confidence and public speaking abilities of the students at MT.

For many boys, especially those who have had limited opportunities to engage in public speaking, competition, performance, or even critique/debate, the Competition represents one of the first instances in which they are able to participate directly and develop oratory and

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<sup>67</sup> Indeed, Gangchen, to the surprise of some, voiced this at the graduation ceremony the next winter, where all graduates are invited to address the entire school community for as long as they like. Some students only give a very brief 'thank you' and talk briefly about how they have developed, some students go on at length about how important MT has been for their education and the preservation of Tibetan culture and supporting the use of Pure Language. A few even offer some critiques, which are listened to patiently. Gangchen's was far more directly critical and longer than I would have ever expected a student's graduation speech to be, yet almost no one in the audience seemed fazed by it. In fact, Aku Cheeden acknowledged it almost proudly in his final address, saying that he was happy that Gangchen felt capable of speaking his mind in this situation and that his points would something they would consider (though they did not change the curriculum at all during the next session).

performance skills that are so esteemed in traditional and contemporary Tibetan societies (Thurston 2018). As Jigshem, the recently graduated student who was responsible for managing the convenience store and doing other odd jobs, added

I am small and come from a simple [not prominent] family. Of course, I am young. I never had the chance to speak or perform. I don't know if I really like it, but I wanted to try it. In Tibet, we always like when there is a good host – someone who leads the wedding toast or other kind of ceremony. Here, I got that chance.

Especially for students on whom there is greater pressure to win respect and popularity through their reputation for oratory, such as these boys from herding areas in Amdo, the Competition provides an opportunity to participate in (and practice) this esteemed Tibetan custom. Students, whose backgrounds more closely resemble what Annette Lareau (2011) calls “the accomplishment of natural growth” more commonly found among ‘working class and poor families’ generally have parents who do not have extensive formal education and generally spend less time dialoguing with their children. The Competition however, presents an opportunity for boys and girls to practice the very abilities that are highly rewarded both inside and outside of formal schooling but are rarely taught and trained there. Much like the female students mentioned above, these boys, based on Aku Cheeden’s explanations, see the Competition as an opportunity to develop bravery (*spobs pa*), a quality seen as vital to success in a variety of areas of life and an instance of embodied cultural capital that functions advantageously in both dominant and non-dominant fields.

Developing bravery is not the primary benefit of all participants in the Cultural Knowledge Competitions, however. Educators recognize one other benefit it can produce that is particular to a few (kinds of) boys. Not only does the Competition provide an opportunity for timid or anxious students to express themselves in a safer, more modestly sized and recurring forum, but, according to many on MT’s staff, it also serves as an outlet for some boys who are, if



anything, *too* comfortable singing, dancing, performing, and being the center of attention. Aku Pema, an athletic and articulate monk in his early twenties, who was only present during my second year at MT (2019), responded to my question about further benefits of the Competition by explaining,

Almost all the kids here are from herding families and some of the boys can be very loud, rowdy, like a wild man (*mi rgod*) sometimes! During summer, winter in their home areas, they are always singing, shouting when they are herding. Then they go to school and have a big problem. Many teachers are not used to boys like this. Even the teachers who *are* herders themselves think it's bad behavior, right? They are probably right.

Though I did not conduct any interviews with any of the boys in the rowdiest, loudest clique at Marching Together, several other students and teachers that I talked to described that it would probably be hard for boys exhibiting such behavior in mainstream schooling to form good relationships with teachers or administrators. Because many of these students attend the same mainstream schools, and based on my three years of experience as a high school teacher in this area, I believe the reports that these boys have difficult times forming positive relationships with teachers and administrators in mainstream schools. As Samdrup's interview recounted previously reveals, teachers and administrators often expect and enforce strict discipline with draconian measures. The Competition, in the words of Aku Pema, gives them a chance to "get attention, be funny, do something different" from their daily routine in mainstream schooling.

Perhaps this came up in conversation because, just the day prior, two of the sillier students in the first-year class had performed a very humorous skit in which they pretended to be two television newscasters reporting on the putrid state of the outhouse that we all used in the corner of MT's courtyard. Students and even staff were falling out of their chairs laughing at this perfectly executed piece of satire that repeatedly came very close to transgressing norms, as a discussion of a putrid outhouse is likely to do, especially in mixed company. The two boys who

performed the skit could be described as classic troublemakers and, when I was teaching them, I often oscillated between reprimanding them for sleeping during class or simply letting them have an hour of rest. Sometimes napping in the back of class, other times shouting out without raising their hand, hogging the ping-pong table, pulling pranks, skipping prayers, surreptitiously using their phones, asking repeatedly for permission to go to the nearby convenience store, and rarely completing assigned work, these boys were considered quintessential class clowns by many other students who knew them from mainstream schooling. For example, on a different occasion, one of these boys had lied to one of the senior staff in order to go into town and received a painful and embarrassing punishment for it, which included getting hit with a stick across the legs several times. A few days later I asked a few students about this incident and what they thought about corporal punishment. They acknowledged that the punishment was embarrassing and must have been painful, but none of the half dozen students I asked were vehemently against it. “I don’t like when the teacher hits too hard, or too many times. And they shouldn’t do it if the student is too old. But if someone doesn’t listen to the teacher, what else can the teacher do?” was the response one girl gave to which several others nodded agreement. But regular reprimands and the occasional beating notwithstanding, these two students reveled in the attention and admiration they had gotten as a result of their performance that had brought down the house. In fact, they enjoyed the results of their skit so much that they performed nearly an identical one in the next Competition four days later! “It’s an excellent change for students to conquer their timidity (*ngo tsa*),” Aku Lobsang added, “and for the students who are not timid, they can do something good with their energy. Not just play some game or waste it but develop some ability that will help them later in life. Public speaking, confidence, preparing. Those kinds of skills.”

Aku Lobsang here is referring to some of the events of the Competition that require students to design and perform skits (which are sometimes comedic), do charades, sing songs, or dance.

Actually many times we don't even worry about what the performance is *about*, we judge on how confident, how clear [students' presentation is], how prepared they are. If they can show the importance of speaking Pure Language, or give a way that other students can learn or preserve Tibetan culture, that's great. But it doesn't have to be like that...

Aku Lobsang said about his understanding of the Competition. Aku Cheeden, the other co-founder of MT along with Aku Lobsang, affirmed this:

For example, when they debate, it's a little like monastic debate. But of course they don't know the real topics of monastic debate [which focus on philosophical and other points Buddhist scriptures]. We teach some epistemology (*tshad ma*) here [which is the usual content of debates in the monastery] but we don't expect them to do that. Actually we tell them directly, 'anything you want to debate is fine. You can even debate whether school is good or bad, whether cellphones are good or bad, whether driving motorcycle is safe or not.' It doesn't matter. But they should have a clear idea and argue it confidently.

Despite this apparently relaxed attitude toward the content of some sections of the Competition, the staff and students take most other aspects of it very seriously. If the audience becomes chatty, it is not uncommon for Aku Lobsang to walk around the back of the room looking for culprits who need disciplining. Aku Cheeden, too, will shout out to the assembly to "Keep Quiet!" when someone else is on stage. There are similarly important protocols and rules that pertain during the Competition, explained in more detail below.

This brief description of one aspect of the Competition has shown the ways in which, despite the presence of some strict rules, it is a valuable creative outlet for many students – especially boys – who could benefit by connecting with teachers in ways other than the teacher-student relationship that pertains in classrooms in mainstream schooling. Through the Competition, boys like the two above can channel their creativity and energy, but also their unruliness, audacity, and even propensity for bathroom humor into educationally valuable

experiences that they can share with teachers and other students. Such ‘channeling’ is also made possible through other activities present at MT (e.g., playing basketball or day-off trips to the riverside) and other *sabjong* at which end-of-year picnics are popular where students are able to interact with teachers in ways that they generally cannot in the mainstream, both because the setting is different and because the *sabjong* teachers, as college students, are closer in age to the students and with less curricular and professional oversight. Aku Lobsang, as both one of the more severe teachers but also one of the silliest, is quick to note the importance of the many ‘methods’ (*byed thabs*) he uses with students. He concluded,

Most of all, [the students] should see that the teachers care about them. The students can see that I am always going into town for food and supplies, that I am playing when it is time to play, that I am serious when it is time to be serious. When I’m playing with Aku Gyamtsan and the kids see that, they know we want to be here and that we are friends too. That’s good if they see that.

Aku Lobsang is perhaps understating the extent to which his demeanor with students varies. On many occasions he reminded me almost of the terrific Tibetan deities, like Phakmo Dorje, who at one moment can be terrifying and inflict great violence and at others can grant boons or solve problems.<sup>68</sup> Students, and myself, were often both amused by Aku Lobsang but only a moment away from being terrified. Despite the fact he was one of the two principal disciplinarians at MT, it was his behavior that sometimes resembled the unruly boys who had a harder time sitting still, keeping their voices down, and generally displaying those kinds of attitudes that are often rewarded in mainstream schooling. In addition to some other circumstances in which questionable student behavior was tolerated by teachers, the Competition is a place where it is almost celebrated, if it falls within the rules of the Competition (much like Gelug monastic

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<sup>68</sup> As Chogyam Trungpa has said in some teachings, the terrific deities, also known as “protectors” (*dgon po*), often show up as wrathful and inflict pain as a way of awakening us to the potential of our misguided actions to create significant negative karma, perhaps likened to the unpleasantness of a fire alarm (Berner 2022, personal communication).

debates, see Dreyfus, 2003). As a result of cultivating this liminal space on the margins of what normally pertains and bolstering the community-building relationships such interactions entail (Turner, 1969), the Competition becomes an opportunity to channel the performative and attention-seeking proclivities of many adolescent Tibetan boys, which are often celebrated outside of schools as a hallmark of Tibetan manhood, into educationally valuable activities.

### *Unequal Representation*

The composition of *sabjong* teaching staffs, and particularly the staff at MT, is a useful example on which to base the concluding points of this section, because it highlights how some Tibetans navigate the preservation of important cultural forms on one hand, and the desire of many to ameliorate gender inequalities on the other. The senior staff at MT is all men and almost entirely monastic, as well. Aku Cheeden founded the *sabjong* while he was a monk but, after some life-changing experiences that included a long-stay in the hospital, left the monastery and started a family. The ‘senior staff’ (my title, not theirs) is also comprised of monks that were there from the first few years of the *sabjong* in 2004. Aku Lobsang has been there from the beginning as one of the co-founders with Aku Cheeden, and Aku Gyamtsan, and Aku Orgyan joined the following year. Aku Huaden came the next (in 2006). Other than Aku Cheeden, all of the Senior Staff are monks. Several other teachers have taught at the school several times, namely Chopa, Debo, and Vajra— all men who attended the *sabjong* as students are now or have recently participated as teachers during their summer and winter breaks from their respective MA or PhD programs.

During my first summer at MT, there were two women teachers, Sermo Tso and Wende. Wende also attended MT as a student in the same class as Chopa and had taught at the *sabjong*

once before. Sermo Tso did not attend MT and only found her way to the *sabjong* because she was doing a favor for her uncle, a close friend of Aku Lobsang, after the previously scheduled Chinese teacher dropped out at the last minute. There were no women on the teaching staff my second year at MT; Wende Tso's position had been filled by Aku Pema, and Sermo Tso's Chinese teaching responsibilities were primarily covered by my research assistant, Dorje. Further details on the background and structure of the staff can be found in the section on *sabjong* typology. Unlike MT and mainstream schools, however, the other 23 *sabjong* in my study were relatively equally organized by men and women. That is, of the 26 *sabjong* at which I conducted at least one day of observations, 11 of them were organized by women. And, importantly, other than the *sabjong* at the Town Heritage Museum, the only other 'Atypical Non-urban *Sabjong*', run by former monk Aku Samten, there were no systemic patterns among which *sabjong* were run by men or women.

After spending so much time at Marching Together and developing a rapport with some female students (which was still somewhat more distant than I had with the male students), I asked them how they felt about having few or no women on the teaching staff. Did they resent the lack of gender equality in authority positions? Did they see the monks as inappropriate role models (a question which could also pertain to boys not interested in monastic life, as well)? Did they feel marginalized or unheard at MT, especially when it came to health or safety issues? I was, to be honest, somewhat surprised when virtually no girls (or boys) expressed concern over the lack of women teachers at MT. Though I recognize they may have been withholding some opinions during our conversation because they may have felt uncomfortable talking to an older male teacher about this issue, I believe they were speaking mostly truthfully both because of the explanations of their statements and because their critiques *were* more forthcoming when it came

to other topics. For example, regarding the final question about health and safety, some of the female students, Wende Tso, alumnus Tashi Tso, and Tsetan Lhamo, our cook, in separate conversations stated that they did have some complaints regarding the state of the *sabjong* and how it could be improved. “We need better bathrooms, for sure” one student replied to my question about what ways the *sabjong* might be changed to improve life for girls enrolled. She continued,

And, maybe you heard, the other night there was a problem. Someone, not a student, he came through the gate because it wasn't locked and he tried to get into the girls dormitory. It was very scary. It was good that there were many of us there, but now Wende Tso and the cook sleep in our dorm. He really shouldn't do that. It's terrible.

I had indeed heard about this the morning after it happened and was deeply concerned about the students' safety and the ensuing nonchalant attitude many of the staff had taken towards the incident. On a couple of occasions in the following days, I suggested that I could run into town to get a better lock for the gate or that we could keep a cellphone in the girls' dormitory in case there was a similar issue, but I did not really have an adequate solution and it was difficult to press the issue significantly further than the senior staff was willing to. While the cellphone suggestion was taken up, I was deeply bothered by how little action seemed to be taken other than this and the installation of a large floodlight at the gate that illuminated the entire courtyard all night and shined directly into my bed. Perhaps there were other measures taken in private that I did not know about and that they did not want me to know about, but, both before and after this incident, the girls at MT were willing to tell me about some of the hardships they faced that boys did not. The lack of clean bathrooms, washing stations, and hygiene products was bothersome to the girls and they reported the former two explicitly to me. However, from an outsider's perspective, they seemed to deal relatively well with the conditions, as many of the young women had almost certainly navigated similarly difficult situations at home or in mainstream

schools, where hygienic facilities can be inadequate to say the least. The Senior Staff, too, while perhaps not totally sensitive to the students' various needs, readily recognized the need to upgrade the hygiene facilities on campus and worked hard raising money to do so.

During the course of these conversations with female students and teachers, I probed deeper, asking if their concerns regarding issues related to gender spilled over into the classroom.

Some of the boys are very annoying, very loud. They don't pay attention in class, they don't do their work. Even some boys broke the rules, brought cigarettes to school. Snuck out, something like that. I don't mind if they get in trouble," said one student Dungkar Tso, who was one of the oldest students at MT and looked up to as a brave and intelligent young woman who really "knows about Tibetan culture" in the words of Aku Cheeden.

Curious to hear about more about these students' ideas about the curriculum and teaching staff rather than their thoughts on the boys in their classes, I asked more specifically about whether there were any issues that might stem from having only male teachers. Dungkar Tso responded,

It would be bad if we only had men teachers in all of our schooling. Definitely. we need some women teachers, women leaders. It's good if we can see that. But at this *sabjong*, the goal is to learn Tibetan language, Pure Language, and get a traditional education (*srol rgyun slob gso*). And the monks are best for that. Their Tibetan language will be the best.

Another older student, Yeshe, added in her interview with Gunkar Drolma, "Of course, it's no problem [having only male teachers]. I came to this school – we came because the monks teach Tibetan here. That is the reason." Wende Tso, the MA student teaching at Marching Together for the past few sessions agreed (in a separate interview conducted in August of 2018), "Of course the monks should teach Tibetan here. That is the goal of the *sabjong* and they are the best to do it. If we [younger teachers] teach Chinese or English, OK. Maybe they are not the best at that. That's why I am here, you are here. You can teach that best [in English] so that's your job." With



Wende Tso, a particularly intelligent, confident, and talkative young woman with whom I had built a decent rapport over the course of the *sabjong*, I knew I could ask questions more directly and even agonistically<sup>69</sup> than I might have otherwise. To my question about the existence of gender inequality at MT, and the problems it might pose, she responded,

Yes, there's a lot of inequality (*'dra mnyam ma yin pa*) but not all of it is bad. It's according to our nature, our culture. Many women want gender equality (*pho mo 'dra mnyam*) outside the house and I can understand that, but many women also don't want to give up power inside the house. They want to be in charge there. Same with monks. Monks in the monastery get some benefit from being a monk and not interfering with social domestic life. If they want to participate in domestic life, then they have to give up the benefit that they receive as a monk.

Wende Tso here is suggesting not only that some gender roles and subsequent inequalities are acceptable, but also that the structure of Tibetan society – namely, the monastic institutions – in part depends on gendered divisions of labor and areas of expertise. As the students and teachers quoted here recognize, monks are both men and have (apparently) irrefutably better mastery of the Tibetan literary tradition. Whether or not this is desirable or fair is doxa that are “granted a recognition that escapes questioning” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98). As we continued our interview in the assembly room at MT, Wende Tso pointed to the large screen-printed banner behind me, featuring a large quotation and picture of Aku Jigme Gyamtsen, a widely revered monk, educator, entrepreneur, businessman, and humanitarian that is arguably the individual most successful at navigating the desires of Tibetan communities and those of the state. In the quotation, he extolls the importance of the education one receives from their mother (*a ma'i slob gso*) and how this form of education precedes all others. “See – ” Wende said, “Many leaders say

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<sup>69</sup> Agonism (Koutsouris et al. 2020) in the context of education is the idea that learning can happen through the process of “being able to challenge and dissent in a productive way.” This form of learning is, to the chagrin of some, highly prioritized in Tibetan monastic education through the emphasis on debate in Gelug institutions. All of the monks at MT are Gelug monks and, though the current Debate activity in the Competition does not really resemble monastic debate too closely, this idea that hard and direct questions are appropriate for adults to ask and answer was a recurring feature of my time in Tibet, much to my delight – as it made interviews with those who appreciated this conversational style easier to navigate and oftentimes exciting.

that women are also important teachers too. They provide the whole foundation (*rmang gzhi*). This is not a job that monks can do like mothers. Each one has their place.” Whether or not the ‘places’ of mothers and monks are equal in status or recognition is obviously not the question here (and, if it was, the answer would clearly be negative). But for many people across genders, challenging gender-based discrimination and violence does not necessarily mean envisioning all as equally capable of playing each role, a message widely promulgated by the state during the Cultural Revolution and other periods in modern Chinese history in which monks (in particular) were criticized in public struggle sessions (*‘thab ‘dzing*) and gendered divisions of labor and other domains were effectively prohibited by the state (Barnett, 2008). Indeed, one monastic interlocutor of mine was, during the 1960s, forced to leave the monastery, marry a wife, and become a householder, in a similar fashion to the 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama. The comments of Wende Tso and others, though only the elder interlocutors brought up these events explicitly, suggest that while gendered *discrimination* should be challenged where possible this need not include homogenizing all gendered *divisions* that are seen as integral to Tibetan social structure.

### **Conclusion: Tensions over Gender Roles**

The purpose of this section has not been to provide an overview of “gender differences” in Amdo Tibetan communities. Nor has this section even tried to document that various obstacles and forms of discrimination that different genders experience in education institutions. Instead, this section has attempted to contribute to a sketch of Amdo Tibetan students’ habitus by offering five thematic examples of ways educators and students think about the differences between what male and female educators and students are like and, therefore, what they supply and need scholastically. To summarize them briefly: First, educators participating in my study

felt young women were more susceptible to Sinicization, that they adopted Chinese speech patterns, habits, and styles more readily than boys and, therefore, are not seen as natural conveyors of Tibetan tradition, but must be guided to do so. Boys are less susceptible to Sinicization, but, concomitantly, struggle to achieve the same ease and success in Chinese institutions. Second, while most participants who discussed role models and archetypes of educational success cited both men and women among their examples, role models' genders were nonrandomly distributed across different fields. That is, virtually every woman who was discussed as an educational role model was successful in the quantitative sciences (*li ke*) or a professional field, such as teaching or medicine, whereas those who were viewed as role models in the humanities (*wen ke*), in fields such as literature, history, or religion, were exclusively men.<sup>70</sup> Third, teaching and learning are – and should be – physically demanding processes with numerous components requiring significant strength and stamina that men and women are differently capable of providing. Fourth, while educators generally believe that both male and female students have the capacity to be successful in schooling, boys and girls need different forms of instruction (i.e., communication, encouragement, punishment) to best channel their natural capacities into the tamed yet energetic, inquisitive yet obedient, independent yet cooperative student that is able to be successful in a variety of settings that are more or less affiliated with the state. And fifth, participants often felt it was unproblematic that the genders of teachers (and role models more generally) were not equally distributed across various domains. For many, gendered divisions not only made sense vis-à-vis different groups' capacity to teach a

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<sup>70</sup> There were two exceptions to this. Two interlocutors stated having women role models in the religious field – both of whom discussed an aunt who had become a nun and was living an admirable life in a nunnery, which consisted of eating a vegetarian diet, chanting and praying, working on some charity projects, and doing other altruistic deeds. However, because they were not conceptualized as *educational* role models (i.e., it was not their *study* of Buddhism that my participants hoped to emulate but their holiness, altruism, and tireless devotion) I do not include them here.

certain type of knowledge, but the maintenance (with modifications) of such roles appeared integral to preserving and respecting Amdo Tibetan social structure.

Stepping back, one overriding question for educators and students queries the extent to which ‘traditional’ Tibetan gender roles should be maintained and inculcated within younger generations. On one hand, many of these roles are deeply limiting, primarily to women but also to men (Hillman & Henfry, 2006). On the other hand, bearers of Tibetan cultures, like others across the world, maintain notions of what a properly ordered universe looks like and that performing appropriate gender roles can constitute an important part of this proper order. In particular, many Tibetans appear to appreciate distinct gender roles because such separations produce at least an implicit resistance to previous (and, for many, still current) Chinese state notions of gender equality stemming from Mao’s well-known dictum, “The times have changed, men and women are the same”<sup>71</sup> (Yang & Yan, 2017).

I even had a research assistant, Luri, recount to me an exchange she had with her grandmother after getting her hair cut in way her grandmother didn’t like: “My grandmother scolded me. She doesn’t like my haircut [with bangs] in front. She said I look like a Chinese!” Perhaps to avoid such a perception, but also to keep hair clean and out of the way while doing rugged outdoor work, many Tibetan women of all ages virtually never cut their hair and instead wear one (or, if married, two) very long braids down their back. Only very rarely in my seven years in Amdo did I see women or girls with hair that did not reach their collar. Men’s hair is also worth mentioning as well, for it constitutes a similar medium for signaling gender identities. One of my first experiences as a new teacher at the mainstream high school in 2012 to was see the then Headmaster, who was also Tibetan, violent scold and ultimately beat one of the senior

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<sup>71</sup> 时代不同了, 男女都一样

boys who insisted on keeping his hair long, like many from herding areas do.<sup>72</sup> While men from farming areas might certainly care for and appreciate beautiful hair, I never saw them wear the long, free flowing, blown-out hairstyle that is popular among herders and other bearers of forms of culture widely understood as quintessentially Tibetan, such as poets and singers.<sup>73</sup> It is generally not allowed for boys to keep long hair in school or government work, and therefore doing so remains the privilege of those who are not currently responsible to any such institution. To my knowledge, women do not face the exact same restrictions, but keeping uncut hair in a single, long braid was more common among women and girls who spent less time in urban, lowland places and more time in herding environments than those who spent most of their time in urban areas.

Of course, keeping long hair is not the only marker of ‘traditional’ gender roles, but I discuss it briefly here because it highlights the difficulty of identifying what “Sinicization” looks like. It’s difficult to know what choices would be made in the absence of school policies, and it appears to be differentially important to different Tibetans. While for some, hairstyle is a vital component of style that signals – and in some cases is the *sine qua non* of – Tibetan ethnic

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<sup>72</sup> Many were afterwards upset at the Headmaster’s anger at this student who decided to keep his hair long and to display a number of other unruly behaviors. As a student in my program at the time, I can confirm that, while not necessarily a bad kid, he did give me and the other teacher in my program a number of problems, most of which stemmed from a refusal to participate in almost any activity we did in class. Nevertheless, students were quite shocked that he had beaten and humiliated so badly, because the Headmaster was widely respected and was an excellent author and teacher of Tibetan literary traditions. Over the course of this research, several interlocutors told me they felt disappointed in this headmaster (who I, of course, did not ask about this incident when I interviewed him five years after the fact) because, while a great Tibetan academic, he was not “strong enough” in defending the high school against new education policies that many be perceived as Sinicizing the school, namely the elimination of subject classes taught in Tibetan language.

<sup>73</sup> Monks, of course, are an exception to the rule. First, monks who have taken vows of celibacy keep their heads shaved as one of their principal vows, the history of which stretches back thousands of years to the time of the Buddha. Some monks of the Nyingma or Bon traditions who are known as Mantra-Sayers (*sngag pa*), however, grow their hair indefinitely, spinning it into dreadlocks, and wearing it atop their heads keeping it in place with a tie and cloth. On the few occasions I have seen these *mantrins* take down their hair, it can reach to the floor. Others *Nyingmapas*, who are not fully ordained *Ngagpa*, still often grow their hair long and tie it up with a red thread, as some of my interlocutors and their parents did.

identity so much so that they might be willing to accept a beating from a Headmaster in order to express this, for others, hairstyle appears to be merely a matter of convenience. Many of my interlocutors (who, admittedly, have unusually high levels of schooling compared to the general population in China, and Tibetans in particular), who were vitally concerned about the future of the Tibetan nation and all its constituents, wore relatively short hair and didn't bring it up to me at all in discussions of Tibetan ethnicity and its future.

For the interlocutors quoted here, to insist on gender equality among teachers of Tibetan language at MT, for example, would be tantamount of reordering the structure of Tibetan institutions. It would be another attempt to homogenize, neutralize, assimilate the “unique culture and heritage of Tibet” (Dalai Lama, 2008) into a Chinese society that has a distinct (and, in their view, perverted) idea of gender equality. For many men, but even for many women – and even many young girls that are ‘modern’ and ‘non-traditional’ in important ways (e.g., listening to Chinese music, etc.) – maintaining gender roles is a form of maintaining the integrity of the Tibetan nation as a form of ethnic boundary keeping.

Ultimately, this chapter has shown how some *sabjong* educators and some students see gendered (as opposed to classed or raced) cultures constituting the habitus using a variety of examples that focus on the body. The previous section showed how class is perceived to constitute students' habituses, primarily by analyzing data on aspirations and expectations. The next section will explore how educators see race/ethnicity shaping students' habituses by analyzing data on language use.

## CHAPTER 9

### RACE, ETHNICITY, NATIONALITY, *MINZU*, OR *MI RIGS*? AND HABITUS

#### Introduction

This Part of the dissertation began by examining how educators see class as constitutive of Amdo Tibetan students' habitus. Traditionally, class has been understood as *the* determinant of habitus, or at least one's *primary* habitus, insofar as the socioeconomic conditions that characterize family life appear to have a greater impact on childrearing strategies – and the horizons, bodies, and language use habits these generate – than other factors (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu, 1992; Benzecry, 2018; Wacquant, 2018; Lareau, 2011). However, Weininger (2004), looking at Bourdieu's (2001) more recent work in *Masculine Domination*, suggests that Bourdieu's (1984) earlier position outlined in *Distinction* that gendered aspects of social actions are (merely) contingent on a primarily *classed* habitus has evolved to include gender as an “independent force structuring habitus” (Reay, 2004, p. 436) to that extent that Bourdieu now recognizes the “extraordinary autonomy of sexual structures relative to economic structures” (; 1998, p. 81; 2001). This “breaks sharply from his earlier treatment of gender...as a “secondary” factor” (Weininger, 2004, p. 111). However, the ‘expansion’ of habitus's constituents need not be limited to class and gender: Cicourel (1993, p. 109) argues that there is a “need to expand the notion of habitus to include not only gender differences in socialization, but how such differences are linked to circumstances that can occur within and across cultures...or ethnic groups within larger nation-states.” This is not to say that class is not, in many cases, still the most influential ‘category of experience’ that informs the possibilities and limitations that students see before them, as Lareau's (2011) *Unequal Childhoods* demonstrates convincingly. However, the emphasis Lareau places on class as the variable that explains differing parenting

strategies may be, in part, a product of the fact that the study was undertaken in a single school district in the contemporary United States, where, for example, the division of gender roles (or languages, or religions) may not be as pronounced as it might be elsewhere. Though gender roles, sexism, and gender-based violence and discrimination still clearly exist in contemporary United States, parenting strategies that serve to inform the construction of gender, and, therefore, students' habituses, may be diminished compared to this Area Tibet, where parenting strategies vis-à-vis acquiring educational may have differed greatly and where many reported they feel compelled to *maintain* some instantiations of gender roles.

One may still argue, however, that Lareau's study found *some* differences in habitus formation as a product of gender, but that class was still by far the dominant factor, especially vis-à-vis race. Lareau (2011, p. 308) states this clearly, saying "I did not observe race-based patterns in parents' institutional knowledge or in their management of their children's experiences within institutions. In these realms, the patterns that emerged fell along lines of social class, not race." However, it is quite plausible that Lareau did not find significant differences in the processes that constitute habitus formation between races because of the circumstances in which "race" was studied (in nearby areas of a northeastern city): Despite some families in her study identifying as members of different racial groups (and exhibiting phenotypical differences thereof), the families nevertheless all shared much in common: they spoke English as a native language, they all lived in the geographical region as non-Indigenous people, they expressed no 'national' identity and claim to territorial sovereignty other than that of the country in which they lived, and they had no ancestral or sacred relationship to their homeland, just to name a few key similarities among the racially diverse participants in Lareau's study. In other words, although the skin colors of Lareau's participants differed, they may have



shared many other characteristics in common which led to an analytical minimization of the influence of “race” in the specific case being made in Lareau’s (2011), which in no way argues that racialization and racism aren’t significant and enduring features of so many societies.<sup>74</sup>

But here analytical inadequacy of a simple construct of ‘race’ begins to show, for what constitutes ‘racial’ differences in the region where *Unequal Childhoods* was produced may be entirely different than in some other situation where belonging to different “races” *would* likely entail, for example, different native languages and different relationships to sacred geography, not to mention living in a place where policies and laws, quite literally, apply differently to people of different ‘races’, such as is the case in China as outlined in Part 2. Not only, then, do the comments of Cicourel (1993), Weininger (2004), Reay (2004), and Bodovski (2010), as well as simple logical extrapolation, suggest that ‘race’ be included in an examination of the factors that shape the formation of habitus (alongside class and gender), but doing so in a Chinese national context provides an excellent opportunity to delineate what exactly is meant by the term “race” in the question addressed in this chapter: What kinds of educational experiences do Amdo Tibetan students need that differs from an education appropriate to students of other races in the minds of their educators?

As intimated just above, this formulation raises a question that must be dealt with before proceeding: Are Tibetans a *race*? An ethnic group? Or a nation? Or perhaps they are better conceptualized as a *minzu*, a Chinese term that draws from both ethnic and national wells of meaning but is not perfectly translatable as either (Harrell, 1990; Roche, 2019)? Or a *mi rigs*, a Tibetan term that has been used for centuries with a variety of meanings (including ‘caste’ and ‘race’, though *rigs rgyud* is the more common term for race) but, nowadays, is most commonly

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<sup>74</sup> Of course, this is not at all to diminish the dehumanization that many people experience as a product of their skin color alone. Clearly, the experiences of even two otherwise very powerful and privileged people with different skin colors can be drastically different.

used as a translation of the term *minzu*?<sup>75</sup> For a variety of reasons, this dissertation does not fully explore whether Tibetans (in general) or Amdo Tibetans (in particular) are best conceptualized as a race, ethnic group, nation, *minzu*, or *mi rigs*, although some comments on this topic are offered in Chapter 5. The argument at hand, however, does not require a neat resolution to deciding between these terms because, ultimately, this dissertation is not about scholarly understandings of nation(alism), ethnicity, or race – the differences between which are not always clear in *English*. As Stocking (1987, p. 235) shows through the presentation of historical evidence, “nation” and “race” were used “almost interchangeably” into the twentieth century. Moreover, whether (Amdo) Tibetans are best understood as an ethnic group, race, nation, or something else is largely an academic concern, in both senses of the word: first, this question is one for scholarship that focuses on this topic, which this dissertation is not; second, regardless of how Tibetans are “best” conceptualized, the fact remains at present that they are, in every meaningful way, *addressed as a minzu* in China so any attempt to understand policies and social forces in China that affect Tibetans as a group would need to employ *minzu* as a, if not the, salient concept (Yeh, 2007). In fact, questioning the ‘fitness’ of the concept of race in this study is not altogether different than the foregoing discussion of class, in which I showed the classic sociological concept of class, while applicable to some Tibetan areas (Kolas, 2003), is not understood by many Tibetans in the same way that sociologists and other scholars use the term. i.e., it is discussed in largely geographical terms. In the same way, the ‘race’ portion of the classic tripartite ‘categories of experience’ commonly used in social sciences need not be taken at face value and can, rather, be used simply as a platform from which an investigation of this

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<sup>75</sup> To be sure, if one uses the term *minzu*, then they are likely constrained to using the term to refer to one of the designated 56 *minzu* of China, which are the majority Han and the 55 officially recognized minority *minzu* groups. To my knowledge, the term *minzu* is not used by speakers of Putonghua Chinese to refer to differentially to white people, black people, or other ‘races’ globally.

topic can proceed. I do so knowing the commonalities and differences between the referents of terms “Tibetan” (which is the ‘name’ of the *minzu*) and “Amdo Tibetan” (which might reasonable, if simplistically, be considered one of three principal subgroupings of the Tibetan) are not always clear. For ensuring discussion, I specify where necessary which grouping I am referring to.

As mentioned, a rigorous discussion of the politics and history of terminology used in China to discuss the different groups of people living within its current borders lies outside the scope of this dissertation. However, offering some background is instructive because it reveals the different ways that Tibetans and other peoples in China conceptualize the nature of the differences between groups and the types of claims made possible by the mobilization of a given set of terminology (Yeh, 2007). *Minzu*, like the term “race,” is a relative newcomer; most agree that the term was first used around the year 1900 and borrowed from the Japanese term *minzoku*, which comes from the combination of Japanese (*Kanji*) characters for “the common people” (i.e., *min*) and “clan, lineage” (*zu*) used to translate European terms like *nationale*, *volk*, and others (Harrison 2001, p. 104; Doak 2007; Thomas 2022, p. 128). Many leaders in post-Qing era, including the “founder of modern China” Dr. Sun Yat Sen, began using the term *minzu* extensively in their oeuvre and the term became more widely adopted (Duara, 1995). Historian and Sinologist Frank Dikotter (2015, p. xiv) has argued that the term could be translated as “race,” because both *minzu* (as well as *zhongzu*, commonly used to translate ‘race’) both emphasize “the physical rather than the sociocultural aspects of different peoples.” Dikotter shows that many Chinese leaders of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century differentiated between superior and inferior ‘races’ (i.e., *minzu*) often on the basis of skin color with preference being given to lighter-skinned people as superior. This “cement[s] the idea that *minzu* carried [or carries?] with it unambiguously racist

connotations” (Thomas 2022, p. 128). One consequence of the racialization of *minzu*, according to Dikotter (2015, p. 3), is that Han Chinese were distinguished, in the minds of contemporary people, from the ‘barbaric’ peoples living in the hinterlands of western China on the basis that the former, who were seen to be more urbanized, integrated, and less hamstrung by internecine *minzu* conflicts, “always prized learning, cultivation, and educational achievement over social background or ethnic origin” thus implying that the *minzu* from the ‘frontier regions’ of China were provincial, insular, and backward.

Still today there remains some uncertainty of what, or who, exactly *minzu* refers to because it is used in the context of two principal formulations. On one hand, *minzu* are depicted as distinct groups within China that began to be officially recognized by the state during the 1950s as part of the process of state formation in the nascent People’s Republic of China. On the other hand, *minzu* is also intelligible as the entirety of the Chinese nation as opposed to peoples of other nations and places on earth (Ma, 2017). In the first sense, which is closer to “ethnic group” in that people of a *minzu* share languages, cultures, homelands, and rituals, leading Chinese sociologist Ma Rong (2017) supplies the synonym of *zuqun*, recommending against the use of *minzu* to refer to the different peoples of China and instead suggesting the *minzu* be conceptualized in the context of *Zhonghua minzu*, the people of the nation of China. As Leibold (2007, p. 113) argues, even the use of *Zhonghua minzu* to index “the Chinese *minzu*” or “the various *minzus* of China” was chiefly a matter of timing, helping to show that there are not inherent or transhistorical meanings in this term. Finally, Ma (2017) advises a restructuring of “*minzu* discourse and policy” altogether, arguing that the analytical imprecision, empirical confusion, and discursive polysemy of the term(s) has created relationships among members of various *minzu* that neither stabilize the Chinese state and its population, nor generate policies that

actually benefit people they are intended to benefit. This rather creates ethnic tensions and separatism. In calling for the depoliticization of *minzu*, Ma (2017; 2007) suggests abandoning “*minzu* policies” in favor of a more robust cultural pluralism (which he calls “Culturalism”) that resembles the assimilationist approaches more common during Qing dynasty, which ended in 1911, rather than those of the USSR. Therefore, while the notion of *minzu* is unavoidable in contemporary Chinese society – for it governs what claims on the state are possible and not (Yeh, 2008) – whether it’s meaning is closest to the English terms of race, ethnicity, or nationality is difficult to say, as is the stability of a given understanding over time.

This is what Thomas (2022) explains is the case with *minzu*, that it is, as Hunt (2006, p. 496) says of race, “in a perpetual process of formation (that is, recreation, destruction, and realignment).” Irrespective of how *minzu* are currently conceptualized, the PRC can be understood as a “racial state” which is a polity “composed of countless institutions infused with race-based assumptions and policies, [which] regularly intervenes to stabilize contemporary racial dynamics” (Hunt 2006, p. 496). Whether or not these interventions indeed “stabilize” racial dynamics is a separate question which cannot be addressed here, but the point remains that the state intervenes with the intention to promote collective harmony and stability among the different *minzu* in China that they define and, in this way, positions itself as a state that actively intervenes in *minzu* affairs, which he can be understood as *racial* affairs (Fischer, 2013). Therefore, if we apply the five “logically connected societal assumptions and normative expectations” that Darnell Hunt (2006, p. 491-495) suggests characterize racialized societies to the case at hand, there is little question that Tibetans can be conceptualized as a race: Many Tibetans would or do report that they have experienced the negative consequences of the Han Chinese majority holding such assumptions and expectations (Yeh, 2008). That is, if we are to

operationalize “a race” as a group people who have experienced racism by virtue of their membership in a group that is at least to some degree constituted by phenotypical features, then undoubtedly it is reasonable to conceptualize Tibetans as a “race” (Tuttle, 2015). Thus, while alternative interpretations of terms like *mi rigs* as a non-racialized term are possible, Kleisath (2013, p. 24 n16) argues “in the current historical moment, it functions [as a racialized term].”

Nevertheless, in the present case, I don’t try to resolve the question of race vis-à-vis Tibetans: Many aspects of their lives are, alternatively, best understood as they are related to race, e.g., they face discrimination based on skin color (Tuttle, 2015), ethnicity, e.g., a common religion and language perceived to be held in common among members of the group (Barnett, 2008; Grant, 2019), or nationality, e.g., the existence of a political movement centering on the territorial sovereignty of Tibetans (Jabb, 2015; Smith, 2019). Therefore, rather than attempting a thankless task of trying to argue that Tibetans are a nationality, race, ethnic group, or something else, I instead slightly reformulate the above Sub-question simply to highlight the important data: Do educators think Tibetan students have some educational needs that students *who are not Tibetan* don’t? To organize data that helps answer this question into a tractable form as I did in previous chapters (which, respectively, analyzed data on ‘horizons’ and ‘bodies’), I restrict my analysis to data that speaks to another, final principal component of habitus: language use. In other words, there are many avenues through which one could pursue the question of whether or not educators think Tibetan students need a different kind of education than other students. To answer this question, I’ll focus on educators’ perspectives on language use, a component that is utterly central to habitus formation and on which I have significant data as a result of interlocutors’ alacrity to discuss language more than any other aspect of Amdo Tibetan students’ education.

### **Organization of Chapter**

This chapter therefore proceeds to examine race, this third ‘category of experience’, without attempting to employ an analytically precise notion of race – which, again, may be impossible to delineate in a contemporary context of China. Not only are the translations into Chinese and Tibetan of English terms ethnicity, race, and nation inexact, but there is also, even within Chinese and Tibetan languages themselves, a surprising lack of consensus on what these terms actually refer to at this moment, and the extent to which these have shifted over the past century (Kleisath 2013).

With this conundrum in mind, I analyze over the next three sections in this chapter the ways in which Amdo Tibetan *sabjong* educators’ think their students need a kind of education that differs from students who are not Amdo Tibetans. There are a handful of data sources that could be explored to answer this question on the constituents of habitus. For example, I could analyze data on how educators’ think Tibetan students’ *horizons* are and should be conceptualized differently from those of Han Chinese, Hui Muslim, or American students. Similarly, data on *tastes* could also provide a rich portrait of the development of Amdo Tibetan habituses, analyzing, for example, which forms of artistic expression are worth producing and consuming and how best to appreciate traditional Tibetan paintings or folk songs. But, instead, to address how ‘race’ impacts the formation of Tibetan students’ habitus(es), I analyze educators’ (and others’) perspectives and actions regarding *language use*, one of the primary practices that constitutes, and thereby helps reveal, the nature of habitus (Swartz, 2002).

Crucial to note is that, for a few reasons, I take a somewhat more macroscopic view of *language use* than is sometimes the case in studies of the relationship between habitus and

cultural capital. In Lareau's (2011) study, for example, researchers examined the individual *interactions* between parents and children to determine how parents inculcated certain linguistic habits and speech patterns in their children (or not) that might be differentially recognized as valuable and rewarded in institutions like schools. Unlike many such studies (e.g., Calarco 2014) using a similar approach, I do not take a micro-interactional approach to studying language use among Amdo Tibetans. The principal reason for this is that, in an effort to determine what is recognized as educationally valuable (without collecting and analyzing extensive and, in this case, unattainable quantitative data on students' exam scores and college enrollments) it is necessary to expand the scope of my inquiry beyond the domain of ethnomethodological approaches to account for educators' perspectives on the context of such interactions – what position-holders in the educational field are likely to recognize and reward. In the words of Goffman (1983, p. 23-24), “the record itself will not always be enough. The biography and prior experience of the participants may have to figure. In the matter of presuppositions, then, that which language allows us to study takes us beyond language to social arrangements that are essentially non-linguistic.” While attending to language use in micro-interactions between parents, educators, and students would surely be a worthwhile approach to understanding key phenomena, it could by contrast, obscure participants' ideas about the context of such speech, about the inequalities that shape what communicative skills are valuable and why, or about what kinds of skills and dispositions will benefit Amdo Tibetan students. In developing a Bourdieusian ethnography using the Extended Case Method, my goal is to analyze the macro-forces that shape participants' strategies, and I do this primarily by focusing on participants' understanding of the broader educational context of how language should be learned and used, rather than, for example, focusing narrowly on the ways educators and parents use language in



discrete interactions. While this chapter analyzes *language use*, I do not focus on practices as much as I focus on educators' attitudes *about* language use and their perceptions of what kinds of language use are valuable.

The remainder of this chapter is broken up into four sections that, first, introduce the politics of trilingualism in Amdo Tibet and, then, analyze the three principal themes suggested by data on educators' perspectives on what kind of education Amdo Tibetan students' need when it comes to using language. The second section entails an analysis of how educators attempt to provide an *Education for Agency* through the delivery of trilingual education. The third section analyzes the delivery of an *Education for Tibetan Consciousness* (*mi rigs 'du shes*). These two sections represent the principal tension that many interlocutors voiced: How best to navigate the extremes of assimilation and exclusion in a situation in which *education for agency* might result in the complete omission of all non-dominant knowledges, thereby facilitating assimilation whereas an *education for Tibetan consciousness* might focus on non-dominant knowledges to the extent that graduates are not competitive in employment markets, thereby facilitating exclusion. The fourth section focuses on how these dueling concerns may be reconciled through a *Comprehensive Tibetan Education*. One could say that in many ways this chapter represents the heart or the foundation of this dissertation because it outlines the principal tension – navigating educational assimilation and exclusion – that motivated the work of virtually all the participants in this study. As such, the sections feature strategically chosen narratives that not only reveal how educators understand how students come to be how they are (i.e., habitus) but also explore the broader field conditions that students and educators navigate.

*The Politics of Trilingual Education in Tibet*

That Amdo Tibetan educators think their students need education in three languages is virtually beyond dispute, but the exact processes by which three languages should be employed in educational institutions are far from consensually agreed upon. Prior to that, though, it is worthwhile to establish that every participant (i.e., students, educators, and parents) in my study believed that students need formal education in Tibetan, Chinese, and English and to analyze the frameworks they provide for determining this. “Tibetan, Chinese, and English are like the three levels (*rim pa*) of education – you need Tibetan at home in Tibet, you need Chinese to go anywhere in China, and you need English to go anywhere in the world,” declares Kandro Tso, the co-organizer of a new *sabjong* New Flower Education in Serjong. She and her husband, Drolma Jyab, told me this in much the same way I had heard it numerous times over the past several months. Another teacher, Tsering Drolma, who was retrieving something in the teachers’ room where we sat at New Flower, added, “Yeah, it’s like that. You can’t go anywhere in the world if you don’t know English. And you can’t go anywhere in China if you don’t know Chinese.”

“And what about Tibetan?” I asked. “Without knowing it you can’t go anywhere in Tibetan?” I probed, knowing that my question was a more complicated one than the previous two analogs of Chinese and English suggested, given the complicated politics and variety of Tibetan language(s) and dialects that are spoken on the Plateau (Roche 2018). “Ha-ha” she laughed. “You can speak Tibetan with other Tibetans. But we should learn Tibetan because it is our father language?<sup>76</sup> It’s not OK (*mi rung gi*) to not learn our own language.”

Though she did not cite the 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama (1938-1989) specifically, Tsering Drolma echoed a sentiment pervasive in at least this region of Amdo, which finds its principal articulations in a few key statements by the Panchen Lama emphasizing the importance of

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<sup>76</sup> In Tibetan, one’s native language is referred to as their “father language” (*pha skad*).

knowing Tibetan. A prominent Tibetan commentator (writing primarily in Chinese) Woesser (2014) offers a translated version of one of his most famous quotes: “My ability to speak Putonghua [Chinese] is a manifestation of my knowledge and capability, but if I did not have these capabilities, it would not be a humiliation; but if I cannot speak or read Tibetan, it would be a lifetime of humiliation, because I am a Tibetan.”

Tsering Drolma, and many other interlocutors at different moments, ascribed to the logic that being a Tibetan means knowing Tibetan language. What’s more, a second, even pithier line of the Panchen Lama is regularly emblazoned on restaurant walls (where I happened to see it first), placards, and any place that would not cause too much controversy. It reads: “If you are ashamed to wear Tibetan dress, you don’t have to wear it. If you are ashamed to speak Tibetan, you don’t have to speak it. But what will you do about your flesh and bone?”<sup>77</sup> The 10<sup>th</sup> Panchen Lama, who is an enormously popular figure in contemporary Tibet and particularly in Amdo, where he was born and spent much of his life, is emphasizing in these quotes the centrality of Tibetan language to Tibetan identity (again, whether that is best conceived of national, ethnic, or racial identity is not a key concern at the moment; it can reasonably be conceptualized as all three). As Woesser (2014) articulates, these are challenging words for the many people categorized (or who identify) as Tibetan but were born into families in which they did not learn Tibetan as a native language. This is possible for a variety of reasons ranging from an outright ban on learning Tibetan (in addition to wearing Tibetan clothes or wearing one’s hair long) prior to and during the Cultural Revolution (Agnihotri, 2020) to growing up in urban areas or culturally mixed families where parents’ common language was *putonghua* Chinese. Woesser (2014) explains on a prominent Tibetan blog, *High Peaks, Pure Earth* how this sentiment made

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<sup>77</sup> ལྷོད་ཚོས་བོད་སྐད་བཤད་པར་ངོ་ཚན་མ་བཤད་ན་ཚོགས། བོད་ལ་ལྷོན་པར་ངོ་ཚན་དེ་ཡང་མ་གོན་ན་ཚོགས་མོད། འོན་ཀྱང་ལྷོད་ཚོའི་ཤ་དང་ལུས་པ་ཇི་ལྟར་བྱེད་ལྷུ་ཡིན།

her feel, reminding her of the time several decades ago when the Panchen Lama came to their university but ended up leaving dismayed by the students' lack of Tibetan language ability and apparent disinterest in dressing and acting Tibetan. She recounts, looking back "I could not help but sigh... reliving the scene of the Panchen Lama looking down at us young Tibetans with an expression of resentment for having failed to meet his expectations."

Many of my interlocutors felt this pressure keenly as well. When I asked interviewees about why it is important to learn Tibetan, the most common response – at least before further probing – was almost bewilderment at the obviousness of the question: "It's important to learn Tibetan because we are Tibetan" was the resounding answer offered by another young educator, Dorje Tenzin. Almost all participants in my study agreed that the importance of learning Tibetan is "grant[ed] a recognition that escapes questioning" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98) and thus constitutes an important instantiation of the *doxa* that characterizes this educational field.

However, the pressure to learn to speak *and* read Tibetan – skills that require significantly different types of experience and training – can be complicated by at least two principal factors. The first is that, as Roche (2019, 2020) and Roche and Suzuki (2018) show, Tibetan is *not* the native language of all people who are identified by the state or identify themselves as Tibetan. Serjong, the seat of the prefecture in which this study took place, is a well-known example of the linguistic variety that exists on the Plateau and village communities that are mere kilometers apart can use languages that are distinct from Tibetan, Chinese, and one another. For many years, but especially in recent times, when language shift *to* Tibetan is increasingly prominent in these areas, children reared in these villages grow up speaking multiple native languages – often Tibetan, Chinese, and their language (Roche, 2019), such as Manegacha or Ngandehua. Speakers of minoritized Tibetan languages are often subject to

discrimination and shaming by those who advocate the synonymy of Tibetan people and Tibetan speakers (Roche, 2020). Focused exploration of this situation, however, lies beyond the scope of this dissertation.

The second factor that (potentially) poses an obstacle to learning spoken and written Tibetan well is the prominence of and pressure to learn *putonghua* Chinese and English. For many, successfully navigating trilingual education is the key to enhancing one's agency in a variety of domains. The following paragraphs explicate the common conception I heard throughout this research: Tibetan, Chinese, and English map neatly onto the three domains of Tibet, China, and the world, where proficiency in each language was necessary in different domains and for different reasons. For many, Tibetan represents the foundation of this structure and so I begin with learning Tibetan, a principal goal of every *sabjong*.<sup>78</sup>

There is a proverb (*dam dpe*) in Tibetan that states, “[Like] every valley has their [own] language, every *lama* has their [own] religion.” Without philological research outside the scope of this dissertation, it is difficult to know whether this proverb is using the well-known fact of linguistic diversity around the Plateau to explain to the listener that *lamas*' understanding and practice of Buddhism is similarly diverse; or, inversely, that the proverb is using the well-known diversity of *lamas*' religious practices to remind the listener that people around the Plateau use all different kinds of Tibetan language. Perhaps the proverb's speaker assumes both are facts already well known by all, and the proverb is used to show that some *other* thing, like language and a *lama*'s religion, can vary greatly across time and space. “To each his own” is perhaps an appropriate meaning of the proverb, “Different strokes for different folks.”

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<sup>78</sup> This is so by definition, as I have operationalized *sabjong* as supplemental schools taught by and for Tibetans specifically.

In any case, it is clear that the diversity of Tibet's languages is so established that it has become axiomatic and worthy of heuristic inclusion in proverbs. The principal tension, therefore, exists in the relationship between the many varieties of spoken Tibetan (*bod skad, yul skad*) and the relatively standardized form of written Tibetan (*bod yig*), which many see as having a spoken form known as Standard (or Common) Tibetan (*spyi skad*) (Tournadre & Dorje, 2003). One *sabjong* educator and college student, Rinchen Drolma, from a village in Serjong county explains the situation,

When we have classes in Tibetan in school, that is in literary Tibetan (*bod yig*). I think you can see the same language in any Tibetan Language Arts textbook (*skad yig slob theb*) in Qinghai at least. For example, the [Language Arts] textbooks are usually same here and in Yushu [a Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture in southern Qinghai but part of the Kham ethnolinguistic region rather than Amdo]. Maybe in Sichuan, Gansu, Lhasa [i.e. The Tibetan Autonomous Region] students learning Tibetan have these same books.

I replied, "Do you think that is a good thing that Tibetans across the province and beyond are using the same materials?" thinking also of new dictionaries and other materials intended to cultivate 'common' Tibetan. She continued

It's great if more Tibetans can speak to one another. If we have more unity, it will be easier to bring all the Tibetans (*bod rigs*) up to the same standard (*chu tshad*) of education. [Different dialects] can also cause problems. I don't know about other places, but even in my class in Xining [at University] if the professor is explaining something [in Tibetan] they will probably use some of their local language (*yul skad*). Some try not to, they try to speak only in Standard Tibetan, but if students are in the class from Lhasa, it is very difficult for them to understand if the teacher has a strong accent from Amdo.

Many students from around the Plateau come to northeastern Amdo, including Xining and Guchu Prefecture specifically, to learn Tibetan, because, in the words of one young monk attending a *sabjong* at the Town Heritage Museum, "there is a better Tibetan environment here, better teachers and more students." It is also not uncommon for Tibetan college students from other areas of the Plateau to sometimes opt for Chinese-medium courses if they have an easier

time understanding them. Rinchen Drolma explained, speaking on behalf of students from elsewhere in Tibet such as a few friends from Lhasa she had made in University in Xining,

Of course they *want* to learn Tibetan. They are Tibetans. They know it's important. But they are also worried about their grades. If they cannot understand what the teacher is saying, or if they can't understand the textbook, then how can they get a good grade in the class? Some of them like to take classes in Chinese instead because they know that language better. Or can at least understand the teacher better.

Indeed, for many from other parts of the Plateau, when it comes to the kind of language used in academic settings like universities, their Chinese proficiency may be quite a bit better than their Tibetan. Much of it depends on which language they learned a particular subject in throughout their primary and secondary schooling; and, while policies exist to streamline these processes, as explained previously, there are innumerable exceptions, tweaks, and deviations to education policy on language use.

Here, it was difficult to know exactly what Rinchen Drolma is comparing and I didn't have an opportunity to stop her to follow up. She may be saying that students from Lhasa know Chinese better than they know Amdo Tibetan; but she may also be saying that students from Lhasa know Chinese better than they know *any* Tibetan, including Central Tibetan (*dbus skad*) which is the form of Tibetan spoken in their home areas. A survey of the language policies of the Tibetan Autonomous Region lies well outside the scope of this study, but it is nevertheless the case that numerous interlocutors and official documents suggest that opportunities to learn in Tibetan (i.e., Model 1, as discussed previously) in the Tibetan Autonomous Region are fewer and further between than they are in Amdo, particularly in Guchu Prefecture. This appears to be the case in primary, secondary, and tertiary education (Phuntsog, 2019). Again, Rinchen Drolma hints at a key issue: Even if Tibetan students grow up speaking Tibetan, the *form* of Tibetan they speak at home *and* the topics about which they converse in this language may be significantly

different from what they are taught and tested on in mainstream schools. Several language organizations large and small, ranging from the Qinghai Translation Bureau to Marching Together *sabjong*, have sought to address this issue in a few crucial ways, such as the publishing of trilingual picture dictionaries and creation software for smartphones that facilitates translating and vocabulary building in ‘Standard’ Tibetan.

Though virtually all the interlocutors I asked about the issue are appreciative of the significant effort that Tibetan scholars and translators have put into making the dictionaries, some are a bit more skeptical of their utility. Drolma Jyab, co-leader of New Flower with his wife Kandro Tso, laments (in English),

They are a little helpful, sure. We have one at home and study it with our children when we have time. But many of those Tibetan words in there, I have never heard them. Of course, words for ‘gigabyte’ or science, engineering kind of words, I have never heard those in Tibetan, but I know them in Chinese. Even some in English. But I read those and I think that no Tibetans will know these words. They are totally new. I think: Why should we study this word? Who will use it?

Drolma Jyab’s perspective on trilingual education will be explored more fully below, but for now his comments frame this introduction to how multilingual issues are experienced by some participants in this study.

Returning now to the conversation with Tsering Drolma and Kandro Tso, it is not obvious that knowing Tibetan would necessarily facilitate someone’s travel or work elsewhere on the Tibetan Plateau Tibet (though it likely wouldn’t hurt<sup>79</sup>). Many Tibetans, especially those who do not read or write it regularly, have for centuries been aware of the difficulties of

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<sup>79</sup> This was, in some respects, not my experience – although I am clearly not a native speaker of Tibetan. On and off from 2007-2012, I had studied the variety of Tibetan language most commonly used in central Tibet (*dbus-tshang*) and in Tibetan communities in Kathmandu, Nepal, as well as literary and classical Tibetan. Though this benefitted me in many ways, detailed in the section on positionality within the methodology chapter, my training in Central Tibetan was a stumbling block when it came to the Amdo Tibetan spoken in Serjong and Gangchen. Even through the end of fieldwork, there were still some words I would pronounce in ways that were very unusual to the ears of my Amdo Tibetan interlocutors. Throughout the course of fieldwork, however, I was able to adapt somewhat to the Herding dialect (*’brog skad*) spoken in Gangthang and other parts of Guchu prefecture, much to the surprise and delight of many interlocutors, though I never achieved the level of proficiency I desired.



communicating when traveling to other regions of the Tibetan Plateau (Kapstein, 2006). Even beyond the three principal cultural-linguistic regions of Tibet (*cholkha gsum*), U-tsang, Amdo, and Kham, there are numerous ‘minority languages of Tibet’ such as those spoken in Gyalrong or, indeed, in Serjong, such as Manegacha and Ngandehua, mentioned just above (Roche, 2018). Also importantly, language use – particularly vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation rules, and styles – can differ greatly between communities living at different elevations even within the same Tibetan region, such that lexicons even take on different names such as Herder-speak (*‘brog skad*) and Farmer-speak (*rong skad*). Part 2 explores this issue in much greater depth, but for now it suffices to remember that the even within three principal ‘dialects’ of Tibetan spoken in Amdo, Kham, and U-Tsang, there is great linguistic diversity and that substantial parts of a person’s spoken lexicon may not be shared with other Tibetans living relatively close by.

All of this background is known by virtually every speaker of Tibetan, which – now returning to the interaction I began recounting above – explains the difficult nature of my question about the reason for knowing Tibetan and how it might differ from the reasons for knowing Chinese or English. “Well, we need to know Tibetan because we are Tibetan” Tsering Drolma answered quickly before leaving the room, letting Kandro Tso and I continue our conversation which began to flow in another direction concerning teaching practices. But Tsering Drolma’s response was same one that I heard on numerous occasions, often accompanied by looks of bewilderment at the blatant stupidity and obviousness of my question: “We should learn Tibetan because we are Tibetan.”

Another interlocutor and very close friend of mine, Choepel, said the same, in one of our ‘interviews’ that continually switched back and forth between English and Tibetan (often with the help of Dorje, my research assistant). Though I was able to probe some interlocutors’

responses for their rationales for *why* it is important to study Tibetan, many were unwilling or unable to provide an answer that transcended the appeal to self-evidentiality that all Tibetans should learn Tibetan simply because it is their native language (*pha skad*). In discussions with friends and colleagues who were more amenable (or, at least, used) to my annoying questions and volubility, I was able to keep probing until I got explanations for why Tibetans needed to learn Tibetan, but the responses oftentimes did not go beyond still relatively self-evident or tautological explanations. Choepel, an exceptionally talkative and inquisitive young man, organized many *sabjong* and similar activities in his hometown. He spent a considerable amount of time teaching me Tibetan as I taught him English, but almost struggled to find words to answer a question that he likely thought I had known the answer to for years. Perhaps the presence of a recorder and a semi-formal interview setting threw him off, but this was unlikely as this was not close to the first time he had talked seriously and on record about these issues to me or others in a variety of social, professional, and political positions. According to Choepel,

Language is the most important issue (*rtsod gzhi gtso bo*) for Tibetan people right now. Other *mi rigs* don't have the same problem. Most don't have their own language, their own writing. It's no problem for them to go to school only in Chinese. If they do have their own language, usually it is only a spoken language, so they can't use it in school anyway. But we have a written language with a long history. [Switching to English] We cannot forget it. Dalai Lama, [the 10<sup>th</sup>] Panchen Lama said language is the heart of Tibetan people. Our culture is in Tibetan language. We cannot forget it.

Choepel may have been one of the most forthcoming and eloquent speakers on this topic, but his sentiments were echoed by almost everyone I talked to.

As Roche (2017, 2018, 2019) points out, the assumption that all Tibetans speak and have a moral duty to know Tibetan in both written and spoken forms is not unproblematic, however. There there are numerous groups of Tibetans – some in Guchu Prefecture itself – who have native languages other than Tibetan. To many, the insistence on the synonymity between Tibetan

speakers and Tibetan people is deeply marginalizing and discriminatory to many now doubly-minoritized people on the Plateau (Roche, 2020). While I can report that none of my participants expressed views that denigrated speakers of minoritized languages spoken on the Plateau (as is too frequently the case, see Roche 2018 for examples), I chose not to pursue issues of intra-Tibetan language politics as the focus of my study for a variety of reasons, so it is possible that some of my participants may have held views similar to those Roche (2018) critiques. However, the majority of my participants came from Gangthang County, which, at a minimum elevation of 3500m, is traditionally home exclusively to Tibetan herders leading pastoral lifestyles who have no native languages other than Amdo Tibetan. Aku Gyamtsan, one of the monks on the senior staff at Marching Together, explained his perspective on the politics of Pure Language and the synonymy of Tibetan people and Tibetan language, saying “At Marching Together, we don’t have any students whose native language is not Tibetan,<sup>80</sup> so we are working to make sure they learn their native language well, to speak Pure Language.” When I asked about the discrimination that often accompanies Pure Language discourse, Aku Gyamtsan responded,

It’s bad if people do that. Everyone has a right to speak their native language. That’s what we are doing here. When we focus on teaching, strictly teaching Pure Language (*pha skad gtsang ma*), we are only concerned with the students mixing Chinese and Tibetan. Speaking mixed language (*sbrags skad*) is bad... but we don’t have any student who know those languages in Serjong or Gyalrong or some other places that you said. Our students only mix Chinese and Tibetan.

When I asked about mixing other languages with Tibetan, Aku continued,

They still shouldn’t do that. It’s bad for their language learning. They won’t learn the grammar, the right vocabulary of Tibetan. Actually, they won’t learn their own native language correctly either! If they want to support their own language, they should stop mixing it with Tibetan. Other languages are not the problem. Mixing is the problem.

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<sup>80</sup> My observations and other interviews suggest that this is a true comment and not an attempt to participate in the erasure of speakers of languages other than Tibetan, which has sometimes been found other researchers.

Here Aku Gyamtsan exhibits, as I and many others might without having read about the languages of Serjong, a slight lack of familiarity with these other languages, which do indeed share some vocabulary in common with Tibetan and Chinese, and so the speaking of a language such as Manegacha might appear as mixed when it is actually not – or not mixed by an individual speaker beyond the borrowed terms current in the language itself (Roche, 2017).

Despite this small inaccuracy, however, Aku Gyamtsen not only specifies that he has no problem with Tibetans speaking languages other than Tibetan, but he also argues (in a somewhat misguided sense) for their importance and suggests a learning method by which they made be best preserved and maintained, i.e., not mixing it with Tibetan or Chinese. Within the limited, non-random sample of my study, which drew disproportionately on the perspectives of formally educated people who were native speakers of Tibetan, no one explicitly denigrated other languages (whether ‘minority Tibetan languages’ found on the Plateau or *putonghua* Chinese), but many had very strong opinions about the ways they should be employed and learned. As Aku Gyamtsen’s point indicates, a number of reasons were given by interlocutors for why mixing languages is undesirable: it is an ethnic embarrassment not to know one’s own language, it is pedagogically disadvantageous and mixing will only inhibit the learning of either language, and/or it symbolizes an intellectual laziness that others will surely pick up on. In an important sense, these are all questions of habitus: How can educators create students who will develop the ‘right’ dispositions, and the knowledge of how these dispositions are likely to be understood by others, such that multilingualism will not become an obstacle in their educational trajectories?

*Education for Agency in Dominant Contexts*

The previous argument established that *sabjong* educators believe two things: first, they believe that trilingual education is necessary; and second, they believe that the Tibetan language component of this trilingual education is unique and requires for a variety of reasons – namely the difficulty and importance of learning literary Tibetan in addition to the spoken varieties – a special kind of rigorous instruction that is virtually impossible to achieve in K-12 mainstream schooling. The next two sections, however, argue that despite the existence of these two widely shared beliefs, there are competing notions of how best to accomplish this and how educators can best articulate and demonstrate publicly their commitment to achieving these goals.

First, a methodological point regarding the representation of perspectives that were not widely shared by ‘many interlocutors’: It is not as if the other perspectives presented in this paper should be understood as universally held among all those questioned. Participants’ responses to virtually all questions evinced variation to some degree, but throughout this dissertation, I often focus my analysis on the most unusual or compelling piece of evidence that can be used to build the general argument of this study. I do this for relative brevity and because the strength of the theme being presented greatly outweighed the one being omitted; it is impossible to present all participants’ views on every question. In a few cases such as this one, however, there is such a lack of consensus that finding (never mind focusing on) the ‘strongest’ emerging theme is not only difficult but to do so would belie the great diversity among participants’ perspectives and practices. So, in cases such as this one, I elect to focus on the collective uncertainty itself, on the lack of consensus. But it my hope that focusing on a lack of consensus here does not give the impression that a consensus among participants should simply be assumed in other cases.

To state the nature of the debate in oversimplified terms: There are varying opinions among *sabjong* educators about the best approach to provide students with trilingual education that meets the variety of goals Amdo Tibetan individuals and communities hold. This diversity of opinions among educators is perhaps a microcosm of the varying positions taken on this question held by leading thinkers in Tibetan (and to a lesser degree Chinese) society, ranging from Trowo Gyamtsen (2014) and Baden Nima (2002) to Ma Rong (2018), who, in brief, vary in their opinions over the place that *minzu*-specific instruction should hold in the curriculum. Space, the argument at hand, and a variety of other obstacles prevent me from taking up a thorough review of Tibetan and Chinese authors' perspectives on the means whereby trilingual education is best undertaken. Instead, the following section will hew closer to the Subquestion guiding it by limiting discussion to the perspectives of participants, rather than juxtaposing these rich findings with the even more extensive and nuanced ideas professional scholars. I similarly omit discussion of the policies that these perspectives and practices are meant to navigate. Analysis of the rapidly changing policies and their varied enforcement is beyond the current scope

As a rhetorical strategy to demonstrate the array of positions as efficiently as possible, I will contrast two positions held by different educators that characterize varying perspectives regarding the best ways to navigate trilingual education. After examining Drolma Jyab's ideas that rhetorically prioritize agency, I shift to analyze the perspectives of Gonpo Thar (leader of Flower of Fortune *sabjong* in Xining, discussed above), which rhetorically prioritize the construction of a "Tibetan consciousness." In comparing these two perspectives, I show that both Drolma Jyab and Gonpo Thar care deeply about enhancing *both* students' agency and their sense of Tibetan consciousness, but that these goals are seen to be best pursued through different

approaches. I also show that such approaches are informed by the contexts in which the educators find themselves and ideas they form about their students as a result of these contexts.

Drolma Jyab recently returned from earning his Ph.D. in Tibetan Studies abroad and currently runs (but legally cannot teach at) a *sabjong* with his wife, Kandro Tso, on the outskirts of Serjong while holding a lectureship at a university in Xining. Drolma Jyab had as a college student attended the well-known English Training Program (ETP) at Qinghai Normal University that many Tibetan students had over the past 15 years. Many graduates of ETP organize a variety of NGO-type activities and businesses after graduation as, traditionally though no longer, community organizing was one of the skills that students enrolled in ETP would develop rigorously. *Sabjong* are one principal example of these activities, and Drolma Jyab is a good example of someone who is regarded as a very successful graduate of ETP, and as a current professor in the English Training Program mentioned during our conversations. As a result of his hard work and various experiences, Drolma Jyab can communicate in English extremely well.<sup>81</sup> During a series of interviews taken after hours in his *sabjong* teachers' office during the spring and summer of 2019, Drolma Jyab states that he is "really concerned about the future of Tibetan language. It's one of the main reasons we established this school." But, as he expands subsequently, "We don't only teach Tibetan here. Actually, most of our students study English, Chinese, and Math here," and roughly six days of observations at his *sabjong*, New Flower Education, bears out the truth of his claim.

Our main goal is not exactly to teach Tibetan, but to help any students with their education and their scores in any subjects. So far, because we are here in the county seat, all of our students have been Tibetan, I think. We thought about starting a *sabjong* in Xining, but it's too complicated for now. We think there's many competition in Xining, but only a few in Serjong, so we started it here, where many friends and parents said there is a need."

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<sup>81</sup> As usual, the words of interlocutors who spoke in English are recorded verbatim. Rather than editing words spoken in English, I add clarifying terms when necessary.

Unlike *sabjong* in more rural areas, and similar to other supplemental programs in urban areas, New Flower Education is one of the few in *sabjong* in Serjong that allows students to pick and pay for individual courses rather than sign up for the program as a whole. Also, unlike *sabjong* in more rural areas that are limited to summer and winter sessions that run for multiple weeks straight, New Flower Education runs weekend classes throughout the school year in addition to the more intensive summer and winter sessions. New Flower was, to my knowledge, unique in that it was a year-round program outside of Xining that offered instruction in Tibetan. It was also unique in that it offered Tibetan language classes but also allowed students to enroll in and pay for individual classes rather than signing up for a full-day program. I estimate that since the period of this research there are likely more programs like this that have been established in semi-urban areas like Serjong, but I do not have data on those. Given the nature of the program, teachers at New Flower consisted of recent college graduates and part-time teachers who are more experienced than the average *sabjong* teacher (who is generally a matriculated university student).

When I returned to the topic of trilingualism in our conversation, I asked Drolma Jyab what he is concerned about regarding the future of Tibetan language instruction and to what extent they try to provide it for students at New Flower. Drola Jyab responded,

Last winter was our first session and we really had a lot of students to come here to study Tibetan. We don't use the same books that they use in school. The ones in school are not really complete, not thorough. You can read some Tibetan literature in there, but it's really not a deep explanation... For our Tibetan class we are teaching to the younger students spelling (*dag yig*) and sentence making (*tshig grub*) but then, for the older students, we have the first texts on Grammar (*sum chu wa*), and then synonyms (*ngon-brjod*)... Then the highest is Composition (*rtsom rig* and *rtags jug*). So basically we are teaching this and we are not teaching their school textbooks. But we have one or two students, their parents asked us to teach the school textbooks. To prepare for the exam.



I responded by asking Drolma Jyab if my impression that he didn't want to use those books was correct, asking "What is different or better about your materials or methods for teaching Tibetan?"

He answered, saying "

Those official textbooks, they are well organized, [but] there's a lot of different things in there. [Instead], we are trying to focus on [using] a traditional Tibetan textbook, so this will help. No matter what kind of things they learn in the [school] textbook, there are the basic knowledges of Tibetan language...

Important to note from Drolma Jyab's words thus far is that even though the official school textbook (part of a K-12 series titled 'Language' – *skad yig*) is well organized and professionally made, it is insufficient for developing the Tibetan proficiency he hopes students obtain. Part of the reason it is insufficient is that the books contain readings from a variety of literary traditions from around the world (translated into Tibetan) and, perhaps because of that, remains at too basic a level for someone to learn Tibetan very well. Drolma Jyab maintains that using textbooks other than those employed in mainstream schooling, usually produced by independent authors, monasteries, or Tibetan language working groups, makes it "convenient for us to organize classes as well. If we teach the school textbook, then we need to find one classroom – you know, one teacher for each class [of students according to their grade level in mainstream schooling]. But [here] we are judging from the level of their Tibetan, not from the level of their school grade." Drolma Jyab adds more about the Tibetan language pedagogy in his *sabjong*, saying that because Tibetan students in mainstream schooling can have highly varying levels of Tibetan, it does not make sense to simply teach them at *sabjong* according to their levels in the mainstream.

Rather, at New Flower they regroup students learning Tibetan by their level of progression, as measured by a test they administer, according to more 'traditional' Tibetan language pedagogical frameworks derived from the traditional organization of Tibetan linguistic knowledge. To be clear, Marching Together, the *sabjong* at the Serjong Town Heritage Museum,

and several others that state they focus on Tibetan language learning frequently do the same thing: in conjunction with using Tibetan texts other than those used in mainstream schooling, they regroup classes so students do not necessarily share *sabjong* classes with the students who are in their same grade level classes in the mainstream schooling.

New Flower is somewhat unique in that they rarely use the official textbooks for any of their language classes. Chinese and English classes also employ different textbooks and assessments than ones used in mainstream schooling, though Math classes use the standardized textbooks. However, students in classes other than Tibetan *are* grouped among students in their grade level (though this can cause a few scheduling conflicts but thus far they have not been overwhelming); they simply use textbooks different from the ones in mainstream schooling. Dolma Jyab continued, “Many of the materials we use have their own tests, textbooks, workbooks that come with them, so we use those tests as well. It’s like a set, like in ‘New Cambridge English’ which we use. It’s better than the one they use in school. Of course, they don’t have to take this or that class if they don’t like it.” At New Flower, this schedule format is made possible by the fact that New Flower is close enough to a populous town to have sufficient students for each subject and that students live close enough to *sabjong* for parents to come and pick them up at various times throughout the day. New Flower also has a couple of extra rooms in their space that can be used for study rooms for students who have an hour or two between classes in which they are enrolled, a luxury which very few rural *sabjong* enjoyed.

New Flower staff is also relatively independent so teachers are welcome to employ some of their own materials and methods in their respective classes. Drolma Jyab stated,

No, we didn’t have a single staff meeting at the beginning of the year to train the teachers. We hire people who are professional, or almost professional teachers. We meet with them to discuss the teaching program of course, but we don’t need a big teacher meeting, like a training. We’re not just getting college students. So, we trust them in the classroom to

teach well. And if they teach the subjects differently than the other teachers, that's OK. Maybe the students will benefit from that variety.

Additionally, unlike many other *sabjong* especially in rural areas, the teachers at New Flower are generally older and more experienced. Most have taught in a mainstream school for at least one semester, either during their college internships, as a substitute, or on a temporary contract. One teacher, Tsering Drolma, who was introduced previously, had taken a leave of absence from the mainstream school during her pregnancy, but wants to keep teaching reduced hours, which New Flower can provide, for some extra income and to keep her teaching practice active when possible. Another teacher at New Flower recently finished a year on a temporary contract and will keep teaching at New Flower until a more permanent job opportunity comes along.

While different *sabjong* use standard textbooks to varying degrees, it is not possible to determine the level of 'Tibetanization' of each educational program as determined by their textbook choice, with those that diverge from the mainstream curricula as necessarily more 'Tibetanized' (Zenz, 2013). Interview and observation data reveals that there are many causes that lead to coupled or decoupled curricular choices and, in fact, at a given *sabjong* the experience of the teachers, the financial support, the length of their history, and their connections to 'model' *sabjong* who they follow all appear to be more influential in curricular design than the degree to which *sabjong* organizers' attempts to express a Tibetan identity (*mi rigs 'du shes*).

For example, proximity to urban centers where Chinese languages and cultures are more dominant did not lead *sabjong* organizers to use state-supplied materials more frequently; and only one *sabjong* organizer in an urban area, Gonpo Thar, who is discussed next, expressed any 'oppositional' logic for choosing more 'Tibetan' sources which are necessary *because* he is in a more thoroughly Chinese location in Xining city. For the majority of educators, the list of reasons given just above – which can be boiled down to two principal factors: experience and

network support – seem to be the most determinative of textbook choice as it was explained in the interviews with educators (although a correlation analysis was not conducted). Experience here can be understood as the number of years that the *sabjong* has been running with roughly the same group of educators. The longer teachers have been teaching at a *sabjong*, the more likely it seems they are willing to use textbooks other than those used in mainstream schooling. Reasons for this can differ. In some cases, it is the *sabjong* that have been around the longest, such as Marching Together and Serjong Town Heritage Museum, that were started with and maintained more specific goals over the past decade; in other cases, newer teachers, with limited experience and connections to other teachers and *sabjong* who were trying innovative things and supplying curricular support (or at least suggesting materials), stayed closer to the textbooks issued in mainstream schooling. But could I find no relationship between the vehemence of an educator's expression of Tibetan identity and their textbook choice within *sabjong*.

Thus far I have presented the case of New Flower *sabjong*, organized by Kandro Tso and her husband Drolma Jyab, which, as most other *sabjong*, aspires neither to merely shadow the curriculum of mainstream schooling nor depart from it significantly. As many other programs' educators argue – Marching Together being perhaps the quintessential example – and educators at New Flower likewise state that Tibetan students cannot learn Tibetan proficiently if they confine themselves to the textbooks used in mainstream schooling. To learn Tibetan well, in their opinions, it is necessary to go above and beyond what mainstream schools offer and study Tibetan using appropriately rigorous standards, which almost necessarily means materials produced and/or delivered by someone with monastic training. Thus, these educators see Tibetan students' needs as different from students who are not Tibetan insofar as the Tibetan students need supplemental instruction simply in order to learn (the written form of) their own native

language. Where Drolma Jyab differs from other educators who exhibit the same perspectives, however, is in his overall strategies for navigating the language tracks of education in China.

Despite his interest in and concern for Tibetan knowledges, evidenced to an appreciable degree by the fact that Drolma Jyab got his Ph.D. in Tibetan Studies and founded a *sabjong* in Serjong, he is skeptical of efforts to simply ‘Tibetanize’ education at every opportunity. “I’m not so sure if going to *minzu* universities is a good idea for everyone, especially in the sciences (*like*). Of course, I went to a kind of *minzu* program<sup>82</sup> but I was studying English and Tibetan teaching, so I think it makes sense.” I had heard Amdoi Tibetans critique *minzu* universities for a variety of reasons – offering too few courses taught in Tibetan language medium being the most common and admitting too many Han Chinese students/not having sufficient admissions places for Tibetans being the second – but, as these suggest, most critiques were, in categorical terms, that *minzu* universities were not going far enough to deliver the education promised to “minority nationalities” in education policies, particularly those outlined in the 1984 Law on Regional Autonomy.<sup>83</sup> Drolma Jyab, however, had a different and rarer critique, but not one that was unheard of. “

Many people think it’s good if you can go to college in Tibetan, learn science in Tibetan. Of course, there is one big benefit. You can teach science or something in Tibetan primary school. This is very important. But it is better if students can just learn science in Chinese. Students should [switch to] learning science and similar subjects, like math, in Chinese as soon as they can. Many people want to take the opposite [approach].”

Here, Drolma Jyab expresses an opinion that is the minority among research participants and likely among all Tibetans in Serjong, but is by no means unique. He states that “because

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<sup>82</sup> In addition to the officially designated *minzu* universities, there are a handful of *minzu* programs that exist in other institutions, either as vocational or associates degrees, or, in the case of ETP, as a *minzu* program housed *within* a normal *minkaohan* university. These *minzu* programs, despite their location within Han Chinese universities, are still places where, if admitted, one can take at least some classes with other Tibetan students in Tibetan language.

<sup>83</sup> Language requirements are technically permitted under Article 49 of China’s Regional Nationality Autonomy Law (*minzu quyu zizhifa* 民族区域自治法), which also stipulates that cadres in minority regions should have knowledge of the respective minority language.

many science majors, unless they become a teacher in Tibetan areas, will need to look for work in Chinese, they should just study the topics directly in Chinese if they can.” Drolma Jyab here is speaking to the great imbalance that exists between postings for jobs that require applicants to know Tibetan and those that don’t, as if he is well aware that, in Fischer and Zenz’s (2017, pp. 1-2) words, “jobs that are appropriate for university graduates are biased, through their recruitment processes, towards those who possess stronger Chinese language skills and related cultural aptitudes.” Simply stated, with the decline of the *fenpei* ‘employment allotment’ system that guaranteed college graduates a position commensurate with their education since the late 1990s, many graduates of Tibetan university programs who intend to use Tibetan in their careers are often dependent on government work as a cadre, since there is an “exceptionally limited supply of formal private employment in Tibetan areas that would correspond to the employment expectations of tertiary graduates” (Fischer & Zenz, 2017, p. 2). As Drolma Jyab and others, including the ordained *lama* I often spoke with, reasoned, it does not make good sense to take one’s entire education in Tibetan if this training will not provide advantageous positioning in the labor market upon graduation. However, as the statements of Drolma Jyab (and the *lama*) reveal, a skepticism toward the usefulness of a Tibetan-language education across all sectors does not equate to a disinterest in learning or teaching Tibetan language altogether.

Drolma Jyab and the *lama* (in different contexts) both even provide instruction in Tibetan language that goes well above and beyond what is taught and tested in mainstream schooling – New Flower does so for lay students, while the *lama* provides Tibetan classes for monks in his home. As such, their notion of Tibetan instruction is anything but tokenistic. Much like that at Marching Together, they provide rigorous instruction in topics central to Tibetan language arts but beyond what is taught and tested in mainstream schools. However, they are careful to

articulate that their belief in the importance of Tibetan language and its preservation and development is not necessarily synonymous with believing that all subjects are best taught in Tibetan.

As mentioned in *Chapter 4*, the policy that all courses should be taught in Tibetan except for Chinese and English language classes is referred to as “Model 1 Bilingual Education” whereas the policy that all courses except for Tibetan be taught in Chinese is referred to as “Model 2.” One early summer day in 2018 during field work, the exams scores had come in and results from Gangthang county showed that primary and lower middle school students taking a Model 1 education scored better than Tibetan students elsewhere in Guchu Prefecture enrolled in a Model 2 school.<sup>84</sup> Many research participants and colleagues celebrated this as excellent news, as it effectively demonstrated that Model 1 education, which prioritized learning in Tibetan, was ‘working.’ Drolma Jyab, the *lama*, and others were happy to hear the news but were less convinced about its significance. When I asked the *lama* about this, letting him read the Tibetan WeChat post on my phone, he remarked,

It’s good. It’s good. But it probably doesn’t change much. The problem is that there are not enough jobs that require Tibetan. That’s it. Really. If they require government workers in Tibetan areas know Tibetan well, that is the real issue. Right now, it’s all in Chinese and Chinese people are in charge. But it’s difficult to make this critique publicly. I’m already in big trouble. The Public Security Bureau is always watching me because I said some things like this at the government meetings and they were really angry about it. So now they are watching me closely.

Drolma Jyab’s comments echo a similar sentiment: that while education in a Tibetan language medium is on some level desirable, without commensurate recognition and rewarding of Tibetan language mastery in the labor market, Model 1 education might, in some cases, result in an education that precipitates exclusion, or at least under-employment.

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<sup>84</sup> I cannot provide analysis of the scores themselves because I never saw them. I only saw the WeChat and other media that publicized the results and reactions to them.

Drolma Jyab's perspective provides a revealing example. Though deeply concerned about the future of Tibetan language and culture, Drolma Jyab argues that, in the absence of structural changes to employment policies and opportunities, pursuing all subjects in Tibetan (i.e., Model 1 Education) may result in exclusion from socioeconomic mobility. In the absence of a demand for Tibetan language skills in prominent fields, such as the science and technology sectors, scientific knowledge in Tibetan will remain subordinated to knowledge in Chinese both in its earning potential and also in the variety of opportunities and locations that are possible to pursue. Drolma Jyab, among others, indeed recognizes that knowledge of scientific topics obtained through the Tibetan language is vitally important for teaching students who may not have sufficient proficiency in *putonghua* Chinese to learn science. And, without a doubt, Drolma Jyab and all others I spoke with assert that it would be better for students to learn subjects in Tibetan than to not learn them at all or learn them in a language in which they are not yet proficient. But, Drolma Jyab continues, "If students are able to study other subjects in Chinese, then they should." Drolma Jyab supported this claim on a multiple of fronts, averring that not only will proficiency in Chinese ultimately be required by anyone employed in a science field, but also there is not a standardized and accepted lexicon for new or technical scientific terms in Tibetan anyway. In other words, even if advanced scientific knowledge is learned in Tibetan, the holder of such knowledge might need to translate it into *putonghua* to communicate it even to other Tibetans. While educators applaud the development of new dictionaries and other materials that facilitate the promulgation of new terms, they cannot help but admit that these terms have yet to gain widespread use and, at times, seem unnatural and difficult to remember even for native speakers of Tibetan.



What will benefit Tibetan communities the most, in Drolma Jyab's estimation, is if Tibetans can gain lucrative and stable employment that allows them access to capital within but also beyond Tibetan societies. Drolma Jyab and his wife Kandro Tso essentially commute weekly between Xining and Serjong despite the extra energy it takes to travel an two hours each way, which is, ultimately, "not a big problem. If I can have a good job in Xining and we can spend a lot of time in Serjong, that is like the best of both [worlds]." Ultimately, for many, even some of the staunchest proponents of Tibetan language – and for some of the harshest critics of Chinese encroachment, such as the *lama* – studying all subjects in Tibetan is sometimes little more than window dressing that precipitates the exclusion of Tibetan communities from participation in work that facilitates socioeconomic mobility. In recognizing that the assimilationist goals and policies of the Chinese state far outpace the minority *minzu*-oriented protections described in prior sets of laws and policies (such as the 1984 Laws on Regional Ethnic Autonomy) these educators attempt to reconcile the mismatch between habituses and the current field by criticizing what they see as symbolic – but largely empty – efforts at Tibetanization and instead recommend the obtainment of secure employment as a strategy of protecting Tibetan communities and the languages and cultures they practice.

### *Education for Ethnic Consciousness*

Concerns and strategies of research participants living in urban areas, such as Gonpo Thar, the organizer of New Hope Education in Xining and one of my closest peers while in Amdo Tibet, differed from the perspectives of educators just discussed such as Drolma Jyab and the *lama*. While there are numerous supplemental education programs in Xining city, which is home to over 1.5 million people, there are very few *sabjong*, if the reader recalls that *sabjong* is

used specifically to refer to supplemental programs that feature instruction on or through Tibetan language. Gonpo Thar runs one of the few *sabjong* in Xining city, though getting a ‘final’ count is difficult because many of the *sabjong* remain unpublicized because they are sometimes operated without all the requisite paperwork and therefore may be reluctant to publicize their program. However, aggregating site visits, *sabjong* advertisements online (*brda sbyor*), and hearsay, I was able to estimate that during the period of field work there were around 10 *sabjong* operating in Xining in which a student could sign up for classes taught in or about Tibetan language (of course, this cannot include the many ‘independent’ or ‘private’ tutoring classes and sessions that students pursue with privately identified tutors). However, many *sabjong* in Xining, unlike Tsering Tso’s New Sprouts Education discussed previously, recognize that ‘scaling up’ to become an officially registered business would likely be impossible, so they prefer to remain ‘underground’ and recruit students by word of mouth. Moreover, after the political unrest of 2008 and the subsequent closures of many NGOs and educational programs, the future for almost any Tibetan-run NGO program is understood by many to be precarious at best. During my field work in 2018-2019, some participants felt a restrained sense of hope regarding the possibilities for the future: participants saw that registration requirements had become more significant and rigorously verified, but they hoped this would also lead to a decline of the arbitrariness with which many of the previous generation of NGOs had been shuttered. Tsering Tso, featured in the previous chapter and a former classmate of Gonpo Thar who ran a separate *sabjong* across town, described the tension, saying,

These days, it’s really hard to register. I try several times, but they really look [at] everything. Fire [escape]. Desk and chairs. How clean the windows are. But I think it’s still possible. Not like in the past. Maybe they just come shut me down without saying why. You saw this happen recently. But if you are registered, then there should be no problem. I hope.

Nevertheless, Gonpo Thar has managed to organize a multifaceted *sabjong* that is quite unique among those I studied: It is a fully registered, year-round *sabjong*, so it provides both summer and winter programs intensive programs as well afterschool and weekend classes throughout the school year. Unlike virtually all *sabjong* in rural areas, Gonpo Thar's *sabjong* also provides evening classes to adults who wish to learn Tibetan, which includes not only Tibetan but other residents of Xining who want to learn about Tibetan language and culture, perhaps because of their marriage and family situation, their own hobbies and interests, or their work.<sup>85</sup>

Gonpo Thar works with students in Xining who are quite different than the average student at rural and semi-rural *sabjong*. In addition to the fact that adult students, Tibetan and not, attend his *sabjong*, the greatest difference between Gonpo Thar's students and those at other *sabjong* outside of Xining is that many of his students come to *sabjong* with very limited Tibetan proficiency, especially when it comes to the written language. Many of Gonpo Thar's students could be considered, if one is generous, 'heritage speakers', i.e., someone "who is a bilingual who has acquired a family... and a majority societal language naturalistically in early childhood" (Cabo & Rothman, 2012, p. 450). In many cases, however, the heritage speakers may have knowledge of Tibetan that is limited to a conversational lexicon that might be used with parents around the household and market. Many of these speakers, who were raised in Xining come from families with one Tibetan parent and a parent of another ethnicity, express a desire to learn the written language and therefore enroll at Gonpo Thar's *sabjong* to get lessons beginning with the alphabet and spelling. Gonpo Thar reflects on his students' needs, relaying to me in a

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<sup>85</sup> Evening classes at Rinchen Tso's *sabjong*, also in Xining, featured a similar dynamic: several non-Tibetan adults had enrolled in her program to study English, even though the majority of the materials used there were bilingual in Tibetan-English and the content of the lessons was primarily about Tibetan culture.

conversation one evening in the winter of 2018 that is a thorough mixture of Tibetan and English, (which he studied while completing an MA degree abroad) that

many of [my] students never learned Tibetan at all. They grew up in Xining and go to Chinese school. They speak Chinese with their friends. Maybe they spoke some Tibetan at home, in the kitchen or doing some housework. But they don't even know simple *Ka-Kha-Ga-Nga* [i.e., the alphabet]. So, we must start there.

Here, Gonpo Thar is speaking, it seems, both about school-aged and adult Tibetans living in Xining, as several other clues from our many conversations suggest.

As far as I could tell from my seven visits to his *sabjong* stretched over roughly 12 months, which was a bit far away from my main base in Gangthang and Serjong and not my principal research site, the way Gonpo Thar goes about providing instruction in Tibetan differs significantly from the practices found at Marching Together, Serjong Town Heritage Museum, and several other *sabjong*. While there is no question Gonpo Thar cares deeply about his *sabjong* and works earnestly to improve it, instruction in Tibetan is perennially limited and introductory compared to that found at other centers where one could study the written language at more advanced levels. A critic of Gonpo Thar's called his *sabjong* "kind of a show," adding that Flower of Fortune is "very interesting but I don't think they help the students that much, in the long run." While I will provide some examples of evidence that might substantiate this claim, I also provide a reinterpretation of Gonpo Thar's work that I hope will reveal the varying approaches to Tibetan language instruction that, when juxtaposed to the other strategies discussed above, evince the relative uncertainty educators have about how best to provide a trilingual education to Tibetan students rather than the potential superficiality of their endeavors.

Located on the ground floor of a large apartment complex in traditionally Tibetan quarter of Xining near the Tibetan Hospital, Flower of Fortune Education consists of five classrooms, two large foyers, one bedroom where Gonpo Thar usually sleeps, two bathrooms, and a central

room sectioned off from the main foyer with semi-permanent glass walls. The central room serves as the main office and classroom on occasions when students number less than a half dozen or so, which is usually the case during evening classes for adults. The central room is beautifully decorated, with *thangkas* and other paintings and scrolls hanging on the walls. Numerous plants and other statues or images (*sku 'dra*) of deities sit atop the central table and with many bookcases, which are full of beautifully-bound multi-volume Tibetan publications ranging from the preeminent Tibetan scholar-saint Tsong Khapa's (1357-1419) famous *Stages of the Path* to contemporary works from leading visionaries like Khenpo Tsultrim Lodro and Jigme Phuntsok. Stacks of Tibetan books in English, Chinese, Tibetan sit on the tables as well; awards, banners, and gifts are tucked in empty spaces on the shelves and tables. With good sunlight coming in through the large window facing south, it is an extremely pleasant and comfortable office especially in the winter. The many adornments and decorations are a testament both to Gonpo Thar's incredibly hard work, which has been recognized frequently, and also of his desire to be recognized and respected as a leading educator and social entrepreneur within the Tibetan community in Xining and beyond.

With his penchant for meeting foreigners, especially ones who don't mind a drink or a joke or helping his cause, Gonpo Thar and I became good friends shortly after meeting and found time to socialize on several occasions during the 2018 World Cup and other summer activities such as the Tibetan Gathering (*bod tshogs*) on South Mountain on the outskirts of Xining, which was allowed to go ahead for the first time in several years. Gonpo Thar and I were able to speak very openly and honestly, which I greatly appreciated, although his busy schedule and prioritization of his career meant that we were often unable to meet up. Even beyond his career, he is very social and had friends and colleagues all around Xining, which kept him

extremely busy. Nevertheless, he was one of the first and last people to whom I spoke during the course of this research. His biography is a good example that reminded me on many occasions that my research participants have complicated lives that often go beyond simply education or Tibetan cultural preservation. Despite the complexity of balancing career trajectories, earning an income, making friends, tending to family needs, and simply engaging in other recreational activities, it was sometimes easy to see my interlocutors as single-mindedly invested in Tibetan educational goals, especially because so many of them are indeed extraordinarily committed to their work. While the same can be said for Gonpo Thar, the relationship was a good reminder that not all my participants simply existed to teach Tibetan students even though the extent of my relationship with many participants never went beyond our shared interest in education.

On several occasions that I visited Flower of Fortune, sometimes after school and sometimes on weekends, there was something new or unusual happening. One weekend, classes had been cancelled because they needed to repaint the some of the five classrooms and foyers, which included some well-designed images of Buddhist deities on the walls and the eight auspicious symbols of Tibetan Buddhism. During an evening class a few weeks later, Gonpo Thar was running very late because he was held up at a conference at a nearby university and so cancelled classes. He finally returned, dressed as he usually did on social occasions in fashionable Amdo Tibetan style robes and hat, and we ended up chatting for a long time that evening after ordering some food and drink to be delivered. On more than one other occasion, the evening classes was attended by adults who had not been to any classes at Gonpo Thar's *sabjong* before, so he led a conversation (in Chinese) in which he introduced the Tibetan alphabet and a variety of characteristics about Tibetan language, such as orthography, the different dialects, and related sociopolitical issues discussed above. Perhaps the 'most typical'

day I visited was a Saturday on which the *sabjong*'s five classrooms were full of students, most but not all of whom were children, learning basic Tibetan and English with Chinese classes scheduled for later in the evening. Gonpo Thar asked me if I would mind teaching one of the English courses that afternoon, as their regularly scheduled teacher was not able to attend. While Gonpo Thar's English proficiency was certainly adequate to handle the task, he was hoping I could take the class because he was engaged with some other students who were organizing a delivery of new and used Chinese books that he gotten as a donation from an NGO in eastern China. Of course, I obliged and twice ran through 45-minute lesson on body parts that I had learned to have in my back pocket for just such occasions, which were more common than random chance might produce.

Through interviews and participant observation at situations like those described above, it is possible to understand Gonpo Thar's work as an effort to 'Tibetanize' (Zenz, 2013) some aspects of life in Xining in ways that often prioritize the visibility of the project over the calculated instrumentalism that characterize the strategies of other educators, like Drolma Jyab and Kandro Tso. While Drolma Jyab and Kandro Tso are passionate about the future development and use of Tibetan language and express great concern over threats to it, they advise students to pursue schooling that will best prepare them to succeed on a labor market that systematically prioritizes the capacity to use *putonghua* Chinese. It is worth remembering that Drolma Jyab and Kandro Tso's *sabjong* operated in Serjong and enrolled predominantly students who grew up speaking (Amdo) Tibetan as a primary language in the household and at least through primary school. Gonpo Thar, on the other hand, works with students raised in Xining who, in his estimation, "maybe speak Chinese and Tibetan at home" and attend school in Chinese only. That is, in some respects, namely their exposure to and relative proficiency in

Chinese, Gonpo Thar's students are in the position that Drolma Jyab and Kandro Tso value: they can pursue schooling, and scientific subjects in particular, in *putonghua* Chinese. Conversely, students raised in Serjong or the herding areas around it are much more likely to speak Tibetan at home and have perhaps attended significant schooling in a Tibetan language medium; they likely have the language skills that Gonpo Thar is trying to inculcate in his students.

In a sense, both parties seem to think that 'the grass is always greener', though it goes without saying that being totally proficient in all three languages is everyone's hope for their students. These two orientations differ not only in how they characterize what students need linguistically, but also in how they represent their goals discursively and the obstacles they need to overcome to articulate their goals publicly in ways that will lead to success. For example, Gonpo Thar is happy to publicize his *sabjong*'s ostensible goals (to (re)teach Tibetan so the language is not lost) in ways that draw attention to his mission, and of course he is sure to play by the rules to avoid any legal problems. As a very social person who has a habit of turning up at nearly every major event on Tibetan education and language, Gonpo Thar makes a point of publicizing and embodying his message that learning Tibetan language and culture are vital. Even if actual instruction sometimes remains insufficient or even if many adults enrolled in Tibetan classes do not actually return week after week to learn Tibetan to a level of conversational and literary proficiency, Gonpo Thar sees much of his work as popularizing Tibetan culture and language, of making it visible around Xining to the extent possible, of demonstrating the grandeur and value of all things Tibetan. This has left a few of his colleagues and acquaintances, who are "not sure about the quality of his classes" thinking he is a bit pompous, and "who is always doing something for others to see." But Gonpo Thar seems happy to sacrifice some instructional quality for the publicity and popularity of his work, and not



simply because it benefits his own reputation. Because he has tethered his own reputation to his *sabjong*, and committed both of those to the glorification of Tibetan culture, it is relatively easy for him to chart his approach to educating in Xining: Tibetanization wherever possible. His perception of students' linguistic needs in this way allows him to mobilize the ethnic and moral sensibilities of many who think the marginalization of Tibetan is catastrophic.

The staff at New Flower led by Drolma Jyab and Kandro Tso, on the other hand, see themselves as in the minority, as holding an unpopular but strategically worthwhile opinion about what Amdo Tibetan students need regarding their language training. Because the moral righteousness of their opinions is not immediately evident to other Tibetans – who might say their approach seems to accept and even advocate ethnolinguistic assimilation – interlocutors holding this kind of position often felt compelled to explain the ethical acceptability of their approach by differentiating it from a mere assimilationist stance. This often entailed the very convincing arguments that pursuing schooling in Chinese would allow Amdo Tibetan students to get better jobs and therefore exercise more agency in their hometowns (either directly through government work or indirectly through injection of economic opportunities and capital).

The point here is that their different orientations towards language learning reveals a relative amount of uncertainty among educators about what are the best language practices to inculcate in students even for educators whose goals share much in common. However, the interlocutors mentioned in this example attempt to resolve the uncertainty with a perspective that ultimately transcends instrumentalist reason and instead conceptualizes these and other strategies all as attempts to benefit Tibetan communities by creating or participating in institutions that will ensure its prolongation into future generations.

*A Comprehensive Education*

Many educators spoke and acted in ways that attempted to bridge the two, potentially incommensurable, perspectives detailed above. That is, educators were concerned about navigating both threats of exclusion and assimilation that Drolma Jyab and Gonpo Thar sought to address at their *sabjong*. The reason Tibetans confront this set of obstacles in ways that those of other *minzu* do not is that, in the words of Aku Cheeden,

Tibetan culture and language, especially the language, is complex. But it is not only complex and difficult – many languages, like English, Chinese, or Mongolian, are complex and difficult to learn... It is also that written Tibetan is very different than spoken Tibetan. The Tibetan the kids speak at home is very different than what they need to learn in school, what they learn here [at MT]. And to understand our culture, our religion, our history deeply, *even what they learn in public school is not enough*.

Again, Aku Cheeden revisits his frustration regarding the insufficiency of Tibetan language instruction in mainstream schooling. “Yes, they learn Tibetan in school. But it's not enough” Aku said to me on many occasions, often when I asked him about the curricular design and their intentions at Marching Together. Here, Aku goes beyond the framework laid out in the chapter on *The Meaning of Supplementation*. In that chapter, I developed a typology of three approaches that scholars usually use to understand what happens in supplemental programs and I suggested that scholars using the first framework, Reinforcement and Enhancement, conceptualize the work of supplemental schools as adding to, completing, rounding out that which is learned in mainstream schooling. It would seem, at first glance, that this is what Aku Cheeden believes Marching Together should and does do – reinforce and expand upon the Tibetan language instruction that students get in mainstream schooling. One might also then think that if mainstream schools were to offer more hours of Tibetan language instruction (either in its own course or as the language medium used in the instruction of other subjects) this would resolve Aku Cheeden's frustration and complaints. But, as one can recall, Aku Cheeden is actually not

an extreme proponent of Model 1 education to the exclusion of a Model 2 which emphasizes Chinese (though he does think Model 1 has significant benefits for some students); moreover, he suggested that an ideal path for Tibetan students would be to travel outside of the Tibetan Plateau, learn other languages and skills, and become familiar with cultures other than their own. Clearly, Aku is not advocating isolationism, which was in fact a strategy among parents not too long ago (Postiglione, 2006) but one that did not show up in my data whatsoever.

So what sense can one make of Aku Cheeden's perspective? Does he see Marching Together as *Reinforcing and Enhancing* the goals of mainstream schooling, or doing something else, like *Diverging* from them in order to teach a heritage language and culture?

It seems difficult to deny that Aku would refuse to put himself into either of these categories; he insists he is doing both despite the fact that few scholars of supplemental education seem to recognize this possibility. The key to seeing the multivalence of his work lies in properly interpreting Aku's statement above (in italics) that the Tibetan that these students learn in public school is not enough (*mi 'dang gi*). As the curricular choices at Marching Together reveal, it is not just that these students do not have sufficient hours in the schooldays to study Tibetan language to a degree that would render them genuine holders of Tibetan cultural knowledge. It is that the teachers of Tibetan in mainstream schooling, knowledgeable and dedicated as so many of them may be, do not have the expertise or curricular support necessary to teach comprehensively the foundations and nuances of Tibetan language arts. And, if there is one point that virtually every one of my interlocutors agreed upon it was this: To teach the foundations and nuances of Tibetan language arts adequately one *needs* to have studied extensively in the monastery. Irrespective of participants' age, gender, class, or social status, one thing they all agreed on was that besides the one-in-a-million autodidact types, those educated in

monasteries were, by far, the ones most capable of teaching Tibetan to students at a level high enough to be considered genuine holders of Tibetan linguistic knowledge. According to Aku Huazang, the epistemology teacher at Marching Together and perhaps the most intellectually oriented of the senior staff members, the Tibetan lessons students receive in school are

Not bad. They definitely learn something there. But if you look at the books – you’ve seen them, I know – they have just a little bit. It’s not very deep. Students using that book will know what *Sumtak* [which is a portmanteau of the two principal extant Tibetan grammatical treatises dating back nearly a millennium] is, but they probably won’t know how to compose anything. Same with poetry or epistemology. Here, we try to give them classes more like the monastery, where they memorize the foundations (*rmang gzhi*) of the grammar and they can really have this knowledge.

Though it is perhaps a (deliberately) grandiose title, one of the Returner classes at Marching Together was named “Kha-Khae-Dakpo” (*ka kha’i bdag po*). *Ka kha’i* is the name of the first two letters of the Tibetan alphabet post-fixed with a genitive particle (*’i*) and *bdag po* is a term that here means something similar to *gsto bo* or *dbang po*, which translates terms such as leader, lord, sovereign, master, owner, holder, or steward. In this sense (though none at MT actually discussed their mission in these exact terms outside of the title of the Returner class just mentioned), Aku Huazang and the rest of the participants at MT can be seen as attempting to cultivate a learning environment in which students can take ownership over their Tibetan language education and thereby become stewards of this knowledge of Tibetan language arts. *This* is the kind of Tibetan language education that many participants in this study saw as lacking in mainstream schooling; I heard repeatedly that not only is there insufficient time allotted to learning Tibetan in mainstream school, but the *kind* of learning that happens there will, even if they had more time, probably not lead to sufficient mastery of literary Tibetan (*bod yig*), which, again, differs greatly from the varieties spoken Tibetan (*bod skad*).

Whether or not non-Tibetan people living in China or elsewhere believe they need more education in order to be ‘good’ stewards of their heritage is not a question this study is positioned to answer. But the data analyzed in this study indicate that the preservation of Tibetan heritage and the fulfillment of Amdo Tibetans’ aspirations both require above all a certain kind of *education* that mainstream schools are only partially equipped to provide. Not surprisingly, this conviction extended beyond a specific focus on literary Tibetan and pertained to two other principal domains, combatting backwardness and generating collectivity, which will be explored through analyzing data on language use primarily collected during an interview with another monk from a different part of Guchu Prefecture, Aku Rinchen.

I met Aku Rinchen during my first year as a teacher in the county seat in 2012. My American colleague introduced me to the monk, as they had collaborated previously on funding and running a *sabjong*, the first I had heard about them. Aku Rinchen was a few years older than me and was well known around town. Not only did a small physical disability make him slightly more memorable, but he was active in raising money to organize *sabjong* in his home area, roughly two hours to the east of the county seat, (and quite far away from Marching Together). Aku spent much of his time at his home monastery, Tashi Kyil in Serjong, which meant we ran into one another in the market and at restaurants with surprising frequency. But he, too, was from a herding region and often emphasized the difficulties, such as isolation, that herding students’ uniquely face. Given our short history and his interest and experience in *sabjong* education, he was one of the first people I sought out to interview on the topic, even before my study was fully conceptualized. This means that while I had the opportunity to ask him a variety of questions about his work, experience, and philosophy, I had not yet developed a final interview protocol that I employed beginning with my first summer at Marching Together. Nevertheless, I did ask

Aku about development – a theme that I pursued on a few occasions during my pilot research largely because it had occupied such a central place in the literature and discourse I had been consuming while working as a teacher in the Tibetan Nationalities High School, where other teachers and administrators were anxious to fulfill state imperatives to avoid backwardness (*rjes lus*) and promote development through education. As one newly constructed school building had stenciled on the side of it: “Nationalities’ hope of development depends on education.”<sup>86</sup>

A small explanation of the notion of backwardness and development as they are used and understood in Amdo is instructive here. While backwardness and development often appear as antonyms in English, the opposition is even more clearly articulated in the Tibetans translations of these terms. First, *rje lus*, backwardness, itself has two shades of meaning, as the organizer of Black Rock, Gedun, explained to me. If the term is broken into the constituent two syllables, the first, *rje*, means ‘behind, after, later’ and is often used in phrases with a similar meaning, such as “see you later.” The second syllable, *lus*, related to the verb *lus pa*, means “to be left” and is used in phrases such as “to be left behind,” “to remain” or “to be left over.” Together then, *rje lus* means backwardness with connotations that can be more or less specific, Gedun explained. In the more general formulation, *rje lus* can mean simply ‘left behind’ or ‘finished later, finished after,’ as my research assistant explained in English during the interview. “Like if a lot of school children are running in a race,” Gedun continued, “and some of them are slow, and they finish after the winners, we can say that they are *rje lus*.” Similarly, if students in class continually get the lowest grades, they are at risk of becoming *rje lus*, either left behind when the other students are promoted to the next year in school or they might be relegated to the class ‘beneath’ them in the rankings, as explained in the Chapter 4 section.

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<sup>86</sup> *mi rigs gong 'phel gyi re we ni slob gso la rag 'dug*

In addition to this general use, the term can also be employed to mean backward in the sense of ‘underdeveloped, retrogressive, primitive, or antiquated,’ much as was described in the section detailing how various *minzu*, especially those from the higher elevations toward the west, were seen as barbarous or savage by low-land Chinese people who considered themselves and eastern Chinese peoples as more refined (Johnson, 2000; Kolas & Thowsend, 2005). While many participants were familiar with the term and are aware of state-issued warnings against engaging in such practices which are often seen as related to ‘splittist’ mindsets that deny the unity of China (Karmel, 1995), such as refraining from enrolling girls in school, which lead to being ‘*rje lus*’, none actually reported that they themselves had been addressed by someone else using this term pejoratively. Nevertheless, in Tibetan, backwardness has an irreducible *directional* character, which Gedun’s first explanation of the term shows, as does the Chinese word for the same concept, *luohou*. The Tibetan words most commonly used for “Development,” on the other hand, *gong ‘phel* (or *phel rgyas* or *yar rgyas*) both imply a growth, expansion in an upward (*yar*) or earlier, before, higher, or top (*gong*) direction. Therefore, it is reasonable to understand Aku Rinchen’s thoughts on development and backwardness as an explanation of what he sees as two sides of the same coin: those kinds of orientations and attitudes that should be abandoned and those that should be cultivated, *blang dor*, a Tibetan heuristic introduced previously. While he accommodates the state’s official description of these where possible, he clearly refuses to accept them in their entirety, and instead affirms a variety of behaviors as desirable even though they don’t neatly align with dominant explanations of what constitutes backwardness and development.

I sat in the Tibetan restaurant above the square in Serjong with Aku Rinchen and my research assistant Naba in the spring of 2018. Aku Rinchen spent significant energy and time in

our interview explaining what he thought constituted good development, especially in the realm of education, distinguishing it from undesirable development. For Aku Rinchen, and other leaders like Aku Cheeden whose perspectives can be seen throughout this manuscript, backwardness in many cases was understood precisely as *bad* development and *good* development was understood as the antidote or opposite of *real* backwardness, as they understood it rather than as the state defined it, as the following paragraphs show specifically. Interlocutors were poised to point out the many instances in which their understanding of the terms dovetailed neatly with official statements on the issue. These areas of overlap most frequently included: an emphasis on enrolling students in school for as long as possible, providing equal opportunities to boys and girls, appreciating and contributing to the effort to improve material conditions in poorer areas in China, and, notably, studying a wide variety of subjects rather than only those concerning one's *minzu*. However, Aku Rinchen's perspective began to take on a trajectory less neatly aligned with the state's when he began discussing elders, and the relationship a community or society has with its older generations. In many socialist states, where the ruling party is seen as the "vanguard of the people" the epithet "backward" can simply be understood as "a refusal to satisfy state-defined requirements (Oi, 1989, p. 92). Even for Bourdieu (1984), working classes are literally "behind the times," which can be understood, as the analytical framework suggests, by saying that there is a 'mismatch' that exists between their habitus(es) and the currently pertaining field conditions (i.e. hysteresis).

Aku Cheeden remarks that the elevation and rurality of the Plateau has been an obstacle in the effort to achieve collectivity with others, "It's hard for us because we are from such a high place - normally, people in society don't have this obstacle. Some of us don't realize the importance, the opportunity that education is." This obstacle is one of the most common state-



supplied reasons for the backwardness of Tibetans and the rationale for establishing centralized schools and townships to which Tibetan communities are relocated (Gyal, 2019; Yumji, 2020). Aku Cheeden, the principal organizer of Marching Together was also quick to note, “It is difficult for our students to prepare well for school and exams. Some families are poor, disconnected (*’brel wa med gi*) from other people.” For Aku Cheeden, overcoming exclusion from opportunity was not a goal always subordinated to more ‘traditional’ concerns of learning literary Tibetan or Buddhism. Though Aku Rinchen saw this balance a little differently, he too maintained a capacious understanding of what ‘good’ development looked like for Amdo Tibetan students.

When I asked Aku Rinchen about what would indicate the presence of ‘backwardness’ and how it could be stopped, he began, “The most important thing is how we talk to the elders, how we treat the elders. There needs to be respect (*rtsis bkur*) and affection (*mdza rtse*). But not just these. Young people must know that the elders (*rgan pa*) have wisdom, have knowledge.” Already, Aku Rinchen, who was not particularly outspoken about politics and happily suggested that we do the interview in a booth at a nice Tibetan restaurant, is showing his divergence from state narratives of regarding backwardness, which in China particularly emphasize an orientation towards modernization and a turn away from traditions characterized by the “feudal” tendencies especially pronounced in rural areas (Kipnis, 1995). Aku Rinchen goes on,

The elders are actually developed, in one meaning of that term. They know how to live healthily. They could get their own food, wear clothes that are not made of plastics, and most importantly they know how to live with compassion (*snying rje*, one of the two ‘ultimate’ Buddhist virtues along with wisdom, see Gyatso 2011) towards all living things.

Aku here echoes a sentiment I heard numerous times throughout my research, though it never became my focus: threats to the physical health of people living in contemporary China where

the safety and purity of food is constantly questioned by Amdo Tibetans. “Fake” (*rdzun ma*) or “chemical” (*rdzas ‘gyur*) foods were an ongoing concern for interlocutors. Many, but not all of them were older than I am, were wary of consuming the products of industrialized agriculture in China. Aku’s comment here on unhealthy food and clothing can be understood as an important critique of the backwardness-development binary that matters in much contemporary state-authored media. Questioning the quality of food and clothing, for example, is not as explicitly political as critiquing the policies of the state, though it provides some ground for making the same kinds of comments and positioning speakers of these comments in a similar, critical relationship to state policies and practices.

Even beyond critiquing the negative consequences that state-led development may have on health, however, Aku Rinchen is sure to state that the principal way in which “development” could be misconstrued would be by failing to recognize the importance of elders in society. Aku continued,

What should we avoid? We should avoid talking to elders, or talking about elders, like we don’t have something to learn from them. Many times young children do not even want to talk to the elders; they think ‘they are old and don’t know how to use phones or computers, so what can we learn from them?’ But this is totally wrong. Actually, *this* is totally backward. We need to remind the youths to talk to elders as much as they can. This is also why it is important that the kids still know their local dialects (*yul skad*, literally: hometown speech).

In Aku’s estimation, neglecting traditional knowledge held by elders would signify an approach to development (*gong ‘phel*) that is incorrect or, as I show below, more characteristic of how he defines ‘backwardness’.

In addition to explaining what Aku Rinchen believes can be gained by communicating with elders, it is important to also briefly address *how* he envisions this communication happening. Aku states,

We should show compassion through the way we act and the way we speak. Acting means doing some work for them. If they need something, you do it. Take them to the doctor. Rub their feet. Bring them food. But conversation is also very important. If the youths don't take the time to sit and talk nicely, slowly, with the elders, they cannot learn anything from them. They have to try to make the connection because if they don't, they won't learn how to live a good life" (*mi tshe bzang bo*).

When I asked Aku to elaborate on what he meant by a "good life," he replied,

Mainly it means two things. It means having compassion (*snying rje*) and wisdom (*shes rab*). Knowledge is a part of wisdom, so they must go to school and study very hard. If they don't develop good skills, it will be difficult to find work and then it is difficult to be comfortable. They cannot provide for their elders after they retire. But, they also need knowledge from the elders about Tibetan culture (*rig gnas*<sup>87</sup>) and customs (*lugs srol*). So when they are not in school, they need to talk with the elders as much as possible and develop a relationship with them. Then they can learn how to behave right, how to be good people. How can we say 'development' if it does not result in become a good person? How can we say something is 'backward' if it makes a child a good person?

For example, when I was a child if there was some marriage and maybe something bad happened to the parents and the children are now orphans, everyone in the family will worry about those children. The aunts, uncles will come and take the children into their family. They are connected like that. There is a deep affection there. They will talk to them, show compassion, help them. But nowadays, maybe not. You can see there are orphans today, maybe their family lives far away or thinks they need to take care of only themselves. Whether this is due to the advancement of society, I don't know. But there is no affection. If there is no affection, even if society evolves to have better housing or more lucrative jobs, I don't think that's improvement. This is just an example from my experience.

Aku is offering a comparison between a polluted present and a purer past that is perhaps not at all unique to Tibet; people all around the world nostalgically recall when 'things were better' and people were more moral beings. I recount these examples, however, to point out that the central place that *communication* and *verbalized care* hold in his descriptions of what is desirable and what constitutes 'development'. It is not enough, for Aku Rinchen, that orphans are taken care of

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<sup>87</sup> While an extended explanation of Tibetan words for culture are outside the scope of the present conversation, it is worth pointing out here that there are two principal terms that Tibetans use to translate the term "culture" – namely *rig gnas* and *rig gzhung*. *Rig* here, meaning 'knowledge' is the same *rig* used in the title of the Cultural Knowledge Competitions (*shes rig 'gran gling*) at Marching Together. An overly literal translation of the two terms for culture equate to "Knowledge of place" and "Knowledge of theory" in which the former is understood, to paraphrase the *lama* with whom I spoke about many of these questions, to mean the physical, material side and the latter indicates the realm of texts, philosophies, and thought-systems.

or that young adults with good jobs financially support their grandparents. Aku Rinchen also wants to emphasize that while there is benefit in this, the ‘giver’ in this case, i.e., the younger generations, only fulfill part of their responsibility to older generations and their communities more generally. It is the talking together, the compassionate words, the actual interest in interactions which require using elders’ lexicon, that Aku emphasizes as the kind of development that leads to becoming a better person. What is backward, in Aku’s understanding, is a world in which these kinds of relationships are devalued or precluded by all sorts of obstacles, political, developmental, personal, and, perhaps above all, linguistic, the last of which includes not just the actual language medium of interaction (e.g., a language that elders know well compared to one they do not) but also the way such language is used and whether or not it is characterized by affection (*mdza’ brtse*) and respect. Indeed, the first syllable of affection, *mdza’*, on its own, emphasizes closeness and connection.

For Aku Rinchen then, development and backwardness are to be understood largely in terms of connection to others, across space and also through time, to past and future generations. To develop not only these connections but the sense of connectivity – or, perhaps, collectivity, as the example regarding the orphaned child suggests – Tibetan youths need kinds of learning that does not and, generally, cannot take place in schooling *or* in *sabjong* because it is predicated on relationships with elders who are, almost by definition, no longer immersed in the world of work. Aku’s opinions on teaching staffs at *sabjong* provide a useful example for understanding his perspective:

If possible, it is important to have teachers at *sabjong* be from that village [where the *sabjong* is]. The teachers who gain experience - they will help improve the village... also, if the teachers are from the village, they will probably be able to teach the students year after year. Maybe not ten years, but for a few. They can develop a longer relationship with the students, a deeper connection. Then the students’ foundation will become more stable.

Here, it is possible to interpret Aku Rinchen's notion of foundation (*rmang gzhi*) on a spectrum from more to less specific, each end of which nevertheless distinguishes *sabjong* education from mainstream education in important ways. On the more specific side, one can understand *rmang gzhi* here to mean a foundation in Tibetan language and culture. In this case, *rmang gzhi* is one component of a phrase such as "the foundations of written Tibetan" (*bod yig gi rmang gzhi*), a phrase I commonly heard throughout my many years in Amdo, usually in the form of a complaint coming from teachers about younger Tibetan students' "lack of foundation in Tibetan language arts." In the middle of the spectrum, *rmang gzhi* could more simply mean a 'foundation' in elementary education, a kind of general education that primary students should receive in school that will prepare them for success later in life. This broader interpretation would still include developing skills in written Tibetan, but certainly also math and Chinese, and possibly other subjects and topics, such as English and the sciences. At its broadest, which is how I believe Aku used the term, *rmang gzhi* includes but transcends the kinds of knowledges that are taught in schools. Foundations certainly include the linguistic and other knowledges that youths need to lead financially stable lives, but they also include the knowledges, learned from elders, that conduce to leading *good* lives full of compassion and wisdom. He points out that the close relationships that are able to develop between village youths of different ages over several years at *sabjong* participation allow for level of connection (*'brel ba*) that students rarely get in mainstream schooling. *Sabjong* go some way to providing these types of connectivity that Aku desires, but they can't necessarily solve all the problems. One reason is that *sabjong*, because so many of them are led by college students, rarely have experienced elders as teachers, although many *sabjong* I observed at least attempted to invite elder monks or educators to speak to the students for an afternoon or during the final ceremony.

In providing more ideas about what makes an ideal *sabjong* teacher, Aku explained that a big part of what makes teachers capable of providing lessons for students that results in forming the vital sense of connectivity, which Aku sometimes called moral (*kun spyod*) or inspirational (*kun slong*) instruction, cannot be achieved by educators and students who do not deeply recognize the value of what they are learning, a comment that resonates with Tsomo's points in a previous chapter about making the connections between learning and the results more palpable for students. But unlike Tsomo who suggests university students and recent graduates are well-positioned to make these connections clear for students and parents with limited familiarity with formal schooling, Aku in this case argues that older teachers might be better than younger ones. Because younger teachers can be energetic and inspiration for young students, they still have much to offer in Aku's estimation, but when it comes to imparting to students the "recognition that what they are learning is meaningful, so that their enthusiasm increases", then it may be better to have an older teacher who can better convey this kind of context.

He says that one of the weaknesses of the *sabjong* he financially supports in his hometown (but doesn't teach at) is that they don't have older teachers there, and the younger high school and college students teaching there are not really capable of 'giving advice.' My research assistant Naba and I, both of whom have known Aku Rinchen for several years, initially had a difficult time understanding Aku's exact meaning because on many occasions he used the word *slob gso* in a way that it is not most commonly used. In today's Amdo Tibet (and most other Tibetan areas that are currently in the China), '*slob gso*' is the word most used for "education." For example, the Education Bureau, the process of education, and the institutions of formal education are articulated using the term '*slob gso*.' However, here Aku uses the term in way that my research assistant (and I) translate as 'advice' - mostly to distinguish it from the

more common usage. However, it could still retain the meaning of “education” (rather than advice) if one were to understand that the way Aku is using the term here is in the deeper sense of education, as someone might use it in a phrase like “I went to school, but I didn’t get an *education*.” We chose to translate it as ‘advice’ because, in many cases, translating *slob gso* as “education” would obscure the meaning of what we think Aku is trying to convey. I base this conclusion on the distinctions made in Aku’s speech that are not immediately perceptible, but only become clear after re-reading his entire interview as a whole during the final stages of analysis and coding.

For example, Aku Rinchen says on more than one occasion that college students can teach (*slob khrid*<sup>88</sup>) such that students’ scores will improve but they are less capable of providing *slob gso*. By and large, most participants were not so opposed to schooling that they thought raising exam scores had *nothing* to do with education. For virtually everyone, succeeding in school is still an integral of getting an education. However, Aku is using the term here in a way that is more expansive and *deeper* than what is implied by the more common use of ‘*slob gso*.’ Though virtually no interlocutors used the term *shes yon*, which is far more popular a term in Tibetan communities outside of China, the meaning of *shes yon* - learning, knowledge, *an education* - is perhaps closer to what Aku meant when using the term *slob gso* in this way. In saying that “nowadays, teachers only can teach but they cannot give advice to students” Aku Rinchen is expressing his frustration over what he perceived to be not only the deprofessionalization of teaching but its *compartmentalization* – that teaching in schools has been reduced to providing instruction or information on a set of topics, but not ‘an education’

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<sup>88</sup> Though there is a danger of interpreting Tibetan syllables literally and then aggregating the meanings to arrive at the final term, it may be instructive here. The term ‘*slob*’, which most closely means learning, training, or studying in English is followed by one of two terms. *gso* entails the notion of ‘cultivation, sustaining, or nourishing’. *khrid*, on the other hand, means to ‘lead or guide’.

that imparts to students deeper lessons in life, such as building connections with elders or considering one's physical and mental health.

In a concluding portion of the interview, Aku explains what language learning should entail:

If you are learning a language, first you must understand the value of that language, what is beneficial about learning it, what is the goal of learning it, and then this can be explained to students so that the students could feel inspired to learn, feel a passion for it... The students should also feel inspired because it is not easy to become a student, not everyone has this opportunity. If they can connect on this level, even what the teacher teaches won't just be lessons. Also, it will lead them to broader topics, which may be meaningful to the students.

Aku Rinchen's perspective highlights what many Tibetan educators prioritize: an education that is not as compartmentalized and instrumentalized as the school system and its policy makers pressure them to be. For Aku Rinchen, what Tibetan students in particular need are educational experiences that connect them across time and space to other knowledges *and* other people.

### **Conclusion: Diverse environments, complex habituses**

Habitus is "never the replica of a single social structure" but rather is "a multilayered and dynamic set of schemata that records, stores, and prolongs the influence of the diverse environments successively traversed during one's existence" (Wacquant, 2022, p. 5). The analysis of ethnographic data in this chapter attends to how the influences of diverse environments are mediated and assigned degrees of moral and ethnic worth. The data readily reveal that the habituses of all participants (students, teachers, parents) are indeed multilayered and dynamic; the presence of multilingualism and the active pursuit of it seem to confirm this easily when one considers that, at some moments, *putonghua* is seen as the primary threat to Tibetan ethnolinguistic vitality, which Roche explains is the 'relationship between a language, its



speakers, and its wider linguistic, social, and political context' (2017, p. 193), whereas at other moments *putonghua* is recognized as an economic *and* educational priority. But, more than this, the *pursuit* of an increasingly multilayered habitus is itself one of the most recognized and rewarded forms of embodied cultural capital. The predisposition to *be open to assimilating new dispositions*, perhaps similar to cultural omnivorism (Petersen, 1992; Petersen & Kern, 1996) in which it is the breadth of cultural consumption and appreciations that distinguishes the individual, rather than tight circumscription, that is lauded by interviewees as a recognized instantiation of valuable cultural capital.

But the data reveal more than this as well. As Friedman (2014) points out in his work on stand-up comedy and cultural capital, it is not *mere* omnivorism that is desirable but a *properly ordered* omnivorism and, in both Friedman's work and the data I present here, morality provides a fundamental logic for properly ordering this omnivorism. As Aku Cheeden's and others' comments suggest, the pursuit of a habitus more 'complicit' (which here can even be taken in the double sense, the first of Bourdieu's ontological complicity but also in the more immediately sociopolitical complicity one might adopt in reaction to the Chinese state's minoritization of Tibetan institutions) with Chinese fields is undesirable *only when* it entails the displacement of or disinterest in the "record[ing], stor[ing], and prolong[ing]" (Bourdieu, 2001) those things that make the habitus of Amdo Tibetans *Amdo Tibetan*. For many interlocutors, the desire to deny what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) refer to as the "multilayered and dynamic schemata" of the habitus was met with disdain, especially when 'other' Tibetans simply developed an entirely Chinese habitus *but also* when others appeared contented to perpetuate a unidimensional 'Amdo Tibetan habitus.' The first, as interview data reveals through perhaps the primary example of failing to teach one's children to communicate in Tibetan, was objectionable to my key

interlocutors because it directly violates the moral order by failing to give children the basic skills needed to practice Buddhism (and appears to be almost proudly complicit in doing so, to the material benefit of oneself, no less). But the latter option, too, is undesirable, for denying the necessity of developing a habitus more amenable to Chinese fields also portends an unsustainable strategy for protecting the future of Tibetan culture (especially language). This latter path was not perceived as a direct (and self-interested) perversion of the moral order, so it is clearly not met with the same abhorrence as the first. But it is nevertheless discussed by some with disdain, frustration, and incredulity. The refusal to allow one's habitus to be complexified and diversified in this case is tagged as *backward* and *this too* is seen as inimical to the sustainability of Amdo Tibetan cultures and the people that practice them.

## Part 4: The Acquisition of Capital

### Introduction to Part 4: Justification, Goals, and Terminology

In Part 4, I focus on capital, one of a suite of concepts – habitus, field, and capital – derived from Bourdieu’s theory of social reproduction to analyze Amdo Tibetan educators’ perspectives on how *sabjong* can help students develop what is educationally valuable. From the start, it is necessary to acknowledge that cultural capital and what is educationally valuable are not necessarily synonymous; for many, there are educationally valuable attributes that may not be best understood as capital, especially to the extent that students’ abilities are seen as “inherent” (existing prior to the acquisition of any form of economic, cultural, or social capital) (Dumais, 2002, p. 59). Some prominent scholars (e.g., Dweck, 2014) argue “inherent abilities” and their impact on educational success are seriously overstated (a perspective more commonly found outside of the United States and among my participants) and this study proceeds with its focus on cultural capital as a robust measure of what is educationally valuable without needing to disprove the existence of “inherent ability” for two principal reasons. First, the research questions interrogate Amdo Tibetan educators’ perspectives on how *sabjong* can help students acquire what is educationally valuable; by definition, any ability that is inherent is clearly beyond the limits of what an educator might be able to influence. As such, probing teachers’ perspectives about attributes and abilities that they can do nothing to affect is hardly a worthwhile study; and a study of innate cognitive abilities or the like is probably best left to those with other research questions and in fields other than the social foundations of education. Second, and more importantly, for an ability – or anything – to be *valuable*, it requires the existence of some form of ‘market’ in which its worth might be recognized by others. In other words, even there are inherent cognitive skills, the *value* of such a skill is not; it requires recognition and some form of

compensation to be so. Therefore, I justify the extensive use of Bourdieu's concepts in this study *not* because cultural capital is synonymous with exactly what is educationally valuable, but because it is the most robust approach for understanding what educators can do to help students minoritized in mainstream schooling *acquire* what is educationally valuable. Moreover, as mentioned in the Analytical Framework, cultural capital is also a useful way to approach what is of educational value because as part of a comprehensive theory. How capital is related to the bearer (i.e., habitus) and those recognizing it (i.e., field) has already been meticulously elaborated by Bourdieu and other researchers in this tradition.

The goals of this Part are framed by an attempt to make sense of apparently contradictory findings that have come out of the wide variety of research on cultural capital. This surfeit of approaches to studying fields, habitus, and in particular cultural capital, has led to some contradictory findings, covered extensively in the Analytical Framework and exemplified here by the juxtaposition of DiMaggio and Mohr's (1985, p. 1231) finding that cultural capital has "significant effects" with Kingston's statement that it "does not substantially account for the relationship between social privilege and academic success" (Kingston 2001, p. 88). Is it possible for both these claims to be true? This Part proceeds from the assumption that both findings may be valid and that the principal reasons for the discrepancy lie with the degree to which researchers' operationalization and measurement of cultural capital are sensitive to participants' habituses and field dynamics, both of which determine capital's constitution and value. For example, as Wu (2008) shows, cultural capital, operationalized in 'orthodox' ways, such as whether there are substantial books in the home or a student's father regularly reads the newspaper, has different effects on educational attainment in different periods of Chinese history. Wu (2008, p. 2010) explains, though unfortunately without actually using the notion of "field"

itself, that the (sometimes drastically) changing dynamics of the Chinese educational field prior to, during, and after the Cultural Revolution meant that even the same exact instantiation of cultural capital (e.g., “father reads technical or scientific books or works of literature”) impacted students’ educational attainment quite differently. Within just this example, we can see that, as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 95) emphasize, these three concepts cannot be understood as existing outside of *time*: not only are field dynamics in constant (though sometimes very subtle) flux, but habitus too is an agglomeration of dispositions and appreciations, each to some degree informed by the previous states of the habitus that assimilated them.

Therefore, even beyond the variability of the value of capital as one moves from field to field, even a single field, through its dynamism, its contractions and expansions, will render a given instantiation of capital more or less ‘valuable’ – that is, more or less useful in the acquisition of goods, opportunities, and statuses. Moreover, Byun, et al. (2012) found that students’ embodied cultural capital actually had a *negative* effect on their education attainment, and Dumais (2002, p. 59) echoes Willis (1977) to make a similar point that, for some boys, cultural capital might be conceptualized as a “liability” if they perceive others to recognize it as “effeminate.” These vexing findings highlight the crux of the problem: How could the same thing be very valuable in one context, barely valuable (or neutral) in another, and even disadvantageous in a third? Clearly, it seems that a reasonable response is to recognize that the contexts (i.e., fields) are different, the individuals (i.e., habituses) attempting to use the capital is different, or both. If these are variable, so, too, must be both the actual value of the capital acquired (for capital becomes valuable primarily through *recognition*), and others’ interpretations of what such capital symbolizes or indicates about its possessor. In the same way that a single action could be understood by others quite differently depending on the context in

which it transpired or the person who undertook the action, it is impossible to understand what constitutes cultural capital outside its relationship to field and habitus.

I therefore specify what these chapters intend to do in responding to the principal research question: How do Amdo Tibetan educators conceptualize the capacity of *sabjong* to help students acquire what is educationally valuable and how do they engage in this? First, this analysis clearly does not attempt to analyze the effects of commonly used measures of cultural capital (e.g., possessions in the home, trips to the museum, parents' newspaper reading habits) on students' educational attainment and achievement, as does a significant portion of research on cultural capital (e.g., DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Aschaffenburg & Maas, 1997; Dumais, 2002, etc.). As should be clear by now, I do not assume that any given measure of cultural capital, no matter how orthodox, is a *necessarily* valid measure of cultural capital in a particular field; measures used in other cases are, more accurately, attributes found to be correlated with educational success elsewhere (so they do, therefore, constitute a reasonable place from which to *start* an inquiry of what specific, substantive cultural attributes are valuable for success in schooling in some other context). But until a given attribute has been shown to be valuable, recognizing that there are a variety of ways to conceptualize this, it cannot meaningfully be called capital. In other words, it is no surprise that Kingston (2001) and the authors he cites found limited effects of cultural capital in American schooling because they do not show that they were using robust measures of it, i.e., measures highly appropriate to the current state of that field. For example, knowing the work of Jean Racine (read: a *substantive* understanding of cultural capital) may very well *not* have been advantageous for succeeding (either by merit or by symbolic recognition) in American classrooms during the periods that Kingston and the authors he cites survey even if knowledge of Racine may have done the trick in France in 1960. But that

doesn't mean that there were no culturally dominant knowledges, accents, or possessions (read: a *categorical* understanding of cultural capital) that were recognized and rewarded. In many studies, there appears to be limited attempts to empirically establish what are *actually* valued instantiations of cultural capital in a given field; thus, one secondary goal of my study is to redirect scholars' attention to the importance of empirically establishing, rather than just importing from previous studies conducted on cultural capital *in other fields*, what actually counts as cultural capital. To be clear, I do this indirectly, by focusing on subaltern critiques of what is actually recognized as valuable by educational institutions in China.

Second, this study also does not embark on the useful task of finding out, through means of regression analyses of survey data, *which* factors contribute to or are correlated with success in schooling and then, retroactively, label those attributes as cultural capital. This would indeed be a valuable project as it could reveal, for example, the similarities and differences between the cultural attributes that different school systems (or educational fields) recognize and reward. This would be valuable knowledge if one wanted to facilitate the successful transitions of immigrant students or work with teachers of multicultural classrooms to recognize and reduce teachers' biases, for example. However, such a study would have a difficult time differentiating between what people (particularly minoritized populations who have institutions and communities that wield non-dominant capital of their own) think is valuable and what the dominant institutions, namely schools, reward. That is, it would (continue to) obscure subaltern critiques of educational institutions that marginalize some knowledges in the process of legitimizing others, as Yosso (2003) points out so clearly, essentially using science to commit symbolic violence in the defining of 'educational value' in a way that obscures the struggle over its meaning (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). For example, if one took success in schooling as evidence that a given cultural

attribute could meaningfully be considered cultural capital, one would have no way to recognize and analyze the attributes that were not recognized and rewarded in schools but are nevertheless recognized (and even rewarded) as valuable within a (non-dominant) community whose logics and values are not coterminous with dominant institutions like mainstream schooling. Such an analysis, while valuable, is precisely the kind that the current study critiques insofar as it considers school success synonymous with educational success, thus reducing the meaning of education to that which schools – almost always directly managed or at least overseen by the state – reward as valuable.

Thus, third, to restate the general project of this dissertation in the terms of these chapters, this research analyzes what constitutes cultural capital in a non-dominant field (the Tibetan educational field) that is nested within/at the boundaries of a dominant field (the Chinese educational field). It analyzes notions of educational value without a) relapsing to a subjectivist notion of capital in which the objective chances of success and failure are ignored (often in an effort to emphasize the heroic agency of the minoritized) or b) limiting a study of cultural value to only those things that are rewarded in mainstream institutions, thereby reifying the objective conditions of Chinese education as static and self-evident logics that structure Tibetans' action. The goal of this study and chapter in particular is to analyze ethnographic data on how a group ethnolinguistically minoritized in educational institutions simultaneously navigates and attempts to affect the struggle over what gets recognized as educationally valuable cultural capital.

Therefore, while other theories and concepts could have been used, there are a number of reasons that I approach this question in the terms supplied by Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction. First, cultural capital is a component of a comprehensive theory that allows educational value to be understood not only insofar as it exists in specific instantiations, but how



these forms are inculcated and acquired through durable dispositions and how these forms receive varying types of recognition and compensation depending on the context in which they are employed. That is, these concepts provide a framework for understanding educational value contextualized across times and spaces. Second, that some scholars have found that cultural capital may be *negatively* correlated with success in school violates simplistic (but perhaps common) assumptions about the natural synonymy, or at least harmony, between education, school, and culture. That is, the concept of cultural capital (rather than, say, educational achievement or attainment – which should perhaps be called *scholastic* achievement or attainment) provides a framework for understanding instances in which what is considered culturally valuable does *not* neatly align with what schools reward but *is* valued in some other contexts. Third, cultural capital provides a way of discussing educational value that is neither restricted to merely what gets rewarded in schools nor completely untethered from what is valued in the ‘real world’. In transcending the false dichotomy between material and symbolic efficacy, using cultural capital allows me to attend to strategies that pursue a wider variety of goals than merely those aimed at acquiring human capital; but it also allows me to avoid unhelpful – and unevidenced – subjectivist approaches in which ‘value’ becomes untethered from any ‘real’ profits that it can produce for people in the world. Cultural capital provides a path that transcends objectivism and subjectivism. And, fourth, to be sure, cultural capital is a key part of a body of theory used by innumerable educational researchers (Davies & Rizk, 2018). It is, therefore, *worth* using – not only in the sense that it is wise to follow in footsteps of leading scholars, but also that improving aspects of this theory may have a disproportionately large benefit to others because the theory and this particular concept is so widely used. Sometimes the place to begin is simply “with our favorite theory” (Eliasoph & Lichterman 1999).

Most broadly, cultural capital is often articulated in terms of knowledges, habits, possessions, skills, credentials, and dispositions, which are instantiated, or exist, in one of three states: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized.<sup>89</sup> The branch of Bourdieu's theory that pertains to how instantiations of these are recognized and rewarded (or not) in educational institutions has perhaps engendered more research and debate since its inception fifty years ago than any other in the subfield of sociology of education (Davies & Rizk, 2018). Therefore, research using and critiquing this theory and its components is too vast to address in this single place; Bourdieu's (1986) succinct piece outlining the "Forms of Capital" alone has over sixty thousand citations. This dissertation, therefore, will not attempt to summarize and systematize the foregoing research on Bourdieusian theory of social reproduction (see Davies & Rizk, 2018; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Grenfell et al., 2008; and Medvetz & Sallaz, 2018 for comprehensive reviews). However, it is essential to explicate how I understand these concepts in this study precisely because this body of theory – and its core concepts of habitus, field, and capital – have generated so much scholarship, and, therefore, debate over the past decades. As Davies and Rizk (2018, p. 349) note, Bourdieu's theory has remained particularly popular perhaps because it is so "synthetic": researchers with diverse backgrounds, agendas, and methods, and interested in different phenomena have, to varying degrees, invested these core concepts with divergent and sometimes incongruous meanings (cf. Yosso, 2005, Lareau, 2011, and Kingston, 2001 on

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<sup>89</sup> In order to make as clear as possible my understanding of cultural capital, I use the term *instantiation* to describe manifestations, examples, actualizations, etc. of cultural capital. I recognize that this is an uncommon term to use, but I believe it is justified not only because of its etymological link to the three "states" of cultural capital, but also because part of my goal is to disentangle *categorical* descriptions of cultural capital (such as a speaking accent used by those dominant in society, i.e., a *category* in which capital might be instantiated) and *substantive* descriptions of cultural capital (such as a Transatlantic accent, i.e., an *instance* of an actually well-esteemed accent in a given field). Another example: "a credential" is a classic example of a *categorical* example of institutionalized cultural capital. A B.A. degree from *Minzu University of China* is a *substantive* example of this, an *instantiation*. That 'degrees' are institutionalized capital, but the 'value' of a particular instantiation, say a B.A. from *Minzu University of China*, would differ greatly between different fields (Tibetan educational fields, Chinese educational field, American educational field) demonstrates clearly the importance of differentiating between these two levels of description.

capital). Moreover, within scholarship on education, there is sometimes a tendency to employ one of these three concepts, namely capital, while ignoring its relationship to the others – an approach that has led to quite contradictory findings but is ultimately unjustifiable, as these concepts are not intelligible except for in relationship to the others (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992; Grenfell, 2008).

Building on the Analytical Framework, I show that much research on cultural capital is vitiated because it does not adequately apprehend these two points adumbrated above, namely that Bourdieu’s concepts must be treated as both 1) open, in the sense that these concepts do not have substantive meanings that can be applied *a priori* to empirical investigation, and 2) systemic, in the sense that meanings of these are mutually constitutive. These are really two sides of the same coin. On one hand, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, pp. 95-96) state that capital is an “open concept, which is a way of rejecting positivism... a permanent reminder that concepts have no definition other than systemic ones,” which I take to mean that cultural capital has no *substantive* (Xie, 2022) meaning – that there is, for example, no actual thing (e.g., accent, possession, diploma) that one could unequivocally identify as cultural capital outside of reference to a field in which it is recognized as valuable. On the other hand, I recognize that this openness is precisely what has led to the proliferation of meanings ascribed to cultural capital (Davies & Rizk, 2018) and frustrated scholars who assert that “too many conceptually distinct variables have been labeled cultural capital” rendering it too vague to reveal much about how social background “accounts for academic success” (Kingston 2001, p. 88). But an open concept is not at all synonymous with an ambiguous one and nowhere did Bourdieu claim that *anything* could be meaningfully considered cultural capital in social research. For example, Yosso (2005), argues that Bourdieu’s notion of cultural capital is too narrow and fails to recognize the many

cultural resources possessed by minoritized populations. These pivotal works by Kingston (2001) and Yosso (2005) will be used as ideal types of two common critiques of Bourdieu. My treatment of these critiques show that, while they raise important points that lead to the improvement of research using Bourdieusian theory, they are ultimately misplaced because they adopt an approach to understanding capital that is either *too* positivist (in the case of Kingston) or *too* relativist (in the case of Yosso). That is, open concepts, such as capital, can neither be understood positively (i.e., substantively) and imported wholesale from studies in other fields in other places, nor can they be defined at the whim of whomever wants to operationalize capital in their own subjective way. Therefore, cultural capital is best understood as a *concept*, not a theory, as claims Kingston (2001). It is “designed to be *put to work empirically in a systematic fashion*. Such notions of habitus, field, and capital can be defined, but only within the theoretical system they constitute, not in isolation” (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 96). What constitutes cultural capital is the question to be answered; it is not an assumption on which a study can proceed. With this framework in place, I turn now to analyzing data on the acquisition of capital.

Crucial, too, is precision regarding the processes that capital undergoes when it is *acquired*. Previous studies have conceptualized these processes with more or less care, but the vast majority spends little if any time explicitly theorizing the choice of vocabulary. However, the verbs chosen to represent this process are significant because they signal and/or occlude certain assumptions about the nature of capital, often implicitly. This dissertation follows Bourdieu (1986) and employs the term “acquire” for a few reasons, but it is important to understand why this term is preferred over other commonly used verbs, such as transmit, accumulate, or obtain. This term, acquire/acquisition, is preferable because its definition is most coterminous with the variety of processes that capital can undergo. More specifically, it can be

used both interpersonally and intrapersonally, as well as volitionally or not – something that no other terms used to describe the processes of capital can do.

First is the question of interpersonal and intrapersonal processes. In this instance, terms like ‘transmit’ fall short of capturing all the processes that capital can undergo. While one can easily imagine a teacher or parent transmitting to a student a speaking accent and style that is more likely to be respected by future employers (and, similarly, introducing a student to a colleague who works at a university career center, thereby transmitting social capital), the notion of “transmission” leaves little room for one’s own effort to cultivate cultural capital, which is, it must be noted, a key aspect of why, *ceteris paribus*, the embodied form is particularly valuable: It is one’s own time and energy spent in cultivation that often wins the admiration of others and transmission does little to capture this (Bourdieu, 1986). Transmission (*brgyud pa*), especially in a Tibetan context where this term is exactly the one used to describe the process of teaching tantric and other texts to students such that they internalize the teaching without aberration or error, implies that what has been transmitted remains unchanged and of equal value irrespective of the possessor. But, this is not the case for capital, as previous chapters have shown; the habitus of the possessors of capital necessarily informs their ability to use it. Mastery of the Tibetan guitar (*‘dra gnyen*), Chinese characters, and Tibetan proverbs are all forms of embodied cultural capital that, while facilitated by a teacher, cannot be conceptualized exclusively as a process of transmission because they require cultivation, even if the recipient is not fully conscious of the ramifications of such effort. Rather, it is the student’s own effort to *acquire* ability that results in the possession of capital. Thus, the term “acquire” is preferable to “transmit” in this sense because it connotes a sense of development that ‘transmit’ does not. If capital were only transmitted, then Goldthorpe’s (2007) critique would be spot on and there would indeed be

nothing an underprivileged student could do to affect their fate: they would have no chance at acquiring capital other than what was transmitted to them. The term “acquire” on the other hand, allows for, and sometimes even demands, effort on the part of the person doing the acquisition. In this sense, capital is not merely something that can be deposited, or ‘banked’ in students, as Freire (1970) was fundamentally concerned with, but requires some inputs by students as well.

Second is the question of volition. Acquisition is a preferable term because it includes both intentional attempts to cultivate capital as well as purely environmental and involuntary processes that may be completely hidden to those who possess capital (or not). That is, cultural and social capital sometimes exist entirely independently of (and prior to) one’s efforts to accumulate them. Thus far, it seems that while some terms, such as transmit, are not preferable, others, such as inculcate or accumulate might still be applicable. While accumulation and inculcation indicate growth, they connote a growth whose source is elsewhere – an addition or an accretion that is introduced to the existing quantity (even if it is of the same type, such as snow). There is little room in this conceptualization for an organic, internally powered *development of what already exists*. The assumption that capital can *only* be accumulated from elsewhere is, in part, what Yosso (2005) railed against in her decolonial critique: she declares that all people, including those marginalized in mainstream institutions, *already possess* capital that is appropriate for recognition and development; to consider the process of cultural capital development as limited merely to accumulation is to state that what people currently are is of no value and the only things that can facilitate success in powerful institutions must be gathered from elsewhere. And, as Yosso (2005) and Carter (2003) argue, not only is this approach to capital dehumanizing, but it is also empirically inaccurate, because minoritized people *do already* possess skills and dispositions that are valuable in school and other institutions. It is not

a question of simply accumulating new (dominant) capital, but of developing and refining the capital that is already possessed by those minoritized in schools, of finding ways to repackage the capital that already exists so its value is more easily recognized in/by powerful institutions. Thus, while it seems that Yosso may overstate the case, and resources are only meaningfully conceptualized as capital once they are recognized as valuable in a given field (as I explain above), the key point here is that ‘acquisition’ seems to be the most appropriate description of this process because it includes value-generating processes that are both endogenous and exogenous, as well as processes that are both intentional and not. No other descriptions of this process facilitate recognizing this wider variety of practices of capital generation. Flowers do not accumulate beautiful petals; they grow them. With that said, while the fundamental process at work is ‘acquisition’ I do from time to time use other terms, such as transmit, develop, or even produce, throughout the analysis to emphasize different, more specific dimensions of the process of capital acquisition.

## Chapter 10

### THE ACQUISITION OF EMBODIED CULTURAL CAPITAL

#### Introduction

These chapters explore the implications of one of Pierre Bourdieu's best-known ideas: educational institutions frequently evaluate students on the possession of knowledges and behaviors that they did not explicitly teach them (Bourdieu, 1973). Especially in educational contexts characterized by high-stakes examinations such as those in East Asia, scholars of supplemental education have focused on ways that supplemental programs' curricula mimic, or 'shadow,' that of the mainstream (Zhang & Bray, 2016).<sup>90</sup> Substantially less attention has been paid to understanding supplemental programs' capacity to develop in students skills, habits, and dispositions beyond mastery of curricular content itself that facilitate navigating the series of educational (and post-educational) institutions and challenges that students encounter. Though studies of cultural (e.g., Zhang, 2020; Yamamoto & Brinton, 2010) and social (e.g., Zhou & Kim, 2006) capital in supplemental educational settings exist, research on these programs' capacity to help students acquire various forms of capital has remained sparse. This is despite the facts that numerous studies have shown the benefits that these forms of capital facilitate for students (see Lareau & Weininger 2003 for a review) and that students whose home cultures might not inculcate the skills and dispositions valued in schools are disadvantaged in mainstream institutions as a result of a lack of opportunities to develop these forms of dominant capital (Lareau, 2016). Perhaps supplemental programs' capacity to fill this role has been overlooked because, as explicated in the chapter *The Meaning of Supplementation*, supplemental programs have largely been understood only insofar as they address the particular content that is explicitly

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<sup>90</sup> Although this is not the only, or original, rationale for using the term 'shadow education.' However, it is perhaps the most common reason employed currently. See Stevenson and Baker (1993).



taught and tested in mainstream schools (Bray, 2017) through a so-called ‘shadow curriculum’ (Kim & Jung, 2019). Also pertinent here is that a majority of researchers assume that stocks of capital are almost exclusively inherited from the family unit (cf. Bourdieu, 1986 and Goldthorpe, 2007), which not only implies a singular source of one’s capital, but also a static amount that is ‘transmitted’ *en masse*. However, as Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) show, one’s stock of cultural capital has a sustained impact on one’s educational success over several educational transitions and periods, but the capital inherited specifically from one’s family becomes decreasingly influential as years go by. This indicates the importance of other sources of capital that become available to students during the educational experiences; Lareau’s (2015) discussion of “cultural guides” and Jack’s (2016) analysis of the “privileged poor’s” proclivity to forge relationships with career advisors are two quintessential examples. In sum, the forthcoming discussions show that not only are institutions beyond the family, like *sabjong*, well-positioned to facilitate students’ acquisition of important capital, but that such institutions might be particularly vital for students who do not generally acquire dominant capital in their home environments. With this in mind, the forthcoming discussion focuses on how other practices facilitate the development of capital, which are not only valuable in society but *in educational institutions themselves*.

### **Background**

In their review of research that uses the concept of cultural capital, Davies and Rizk (2018) identify three distinct branches of the topic, an analysis of which indicates that the concept of cultural capital often ‘gets incorporated into prevailing theoretical and methodological traditions’ rather than causing a distinct paradigm shift or a refinement of the topic that ends with consensus (also see Lamont, 2012). That is, Davies and Rizk (2018, p. 333) state,

The concept has proven to be quite generative; its meanings and uses have continually shifted in response to well-known criticism, though not by prompting clear ‘corrections’ of problems but by launching a plurality of approaches. The term has endured not by closely dictating empirical investigation, but by being amenable to use in a wide variety of research traditions, even though they stand in opposition to one another.

Given this proliferation of approaches to studying cultural capital, it is important to clarify how I use the concept herein. The three principal ways scholars have thought about cultural capital can be understood as status attainment, reform, and interactionist approaches (Davis & Rizk, 2018). In the first, articulated by Bourdieu (1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and popularized by seminal work by DiMaggio (e.g., 1978) and DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) cultural capital is operationalized as familiarity and facility with ‘high-brow’ and dominant cultural forms, such as classical music and art, ‘standardized’ speech and cosmopolitan accents, and subdued or refined bodily hexis. This notion was employed in research that developed a “status attainment framework” which helped researchers to understand which factors in a student’s home life – such as the number of books in their house or the frequency with which their parents read scientific literature – facilitated educational and employment success (e.g., DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985; Sullivan, 2001). This largely quantitative research program generally operationalizes cultural capital as rates of participation in high status activities and then tests its power to mediate statistical links between class background and school outcomes (Davies & Rizk, 2018).

In this first research tradition, cultural capital and its acquisition is thought to be relatively open to all who are willing to put in the time and energy; and the benefits of acquiring cultural capital can be enjoyed by those from all social classes and economic backgrounds. That is, a series of major findings reshaped the conclusions of Bourdieu. DiMaggio and Mohr (1985) showed that participation in ‘high culture’ activities often had an independent effect on school outcomes, over and above measures of class background and ‘ability’ (usually measured through

standardized aptitude tests, a somewhat problematic assumption itself). Thus, researchers in this branch conclude, cultural capital is not necessarily the exclusive property of the upper- and middle- classes, but is, instead, a robust resource that could facilitate anyone's success in education, leading to mobility. This emphasis on upward mobility distinguished this tradition from Bourdieu who generally did not see such possibilities (Davies & Rizk, 2018).

A second generation, articulated most prominently by Lamont and Lareau (1988) and in their subsequent works (e.g., Lareau 2011, 2015) understands cultural capital as that which determines in-group and out-group members through knowledge of linguistic and social 'codes' that help identify its possessor as someone who has a 'cultured' background. For example, Lareau's (2011) *Unequal Childhoods* focused on class-influenced capacities of families to align their practices with school requirements. In contrast to DiMaggio, Lareau elucidated links between class, families, and schools. Rather than operationalizing cultural capital as familiarity with high-brow culture and tastes, Lareau and scholars in this tradition (e.g., Calarco 2014) conceptualize cultural capital as the advantages that students derive from home environments that align with the expectations and requirements of dominant institutions, such as schools, corporations, and state agencies. Davies and Rizk (2018) clearly describe the distinction between this tradition and the 'status attainment' framework of DiMaggio, noting,

In contrast to DiMaggio, Lareau described a secondary mechanism of education inequality... she examined processes by which already-advantaged families secured further advantages by intervening effectively in school matters, participating in school events and mirroring education activities at home.

In Lareau's now-famous formulation, she contrasted the "concerted cultivation" practices that characterized child-rearing approaches in middle class families with an appreciation for the "accomplishment of natural growth" that characterized the 'hands-off' style more commonly found in working class and poor families. Such distinctions in child-rearing practices lead to

significant differences in the ways children and adults interact and the frequency with which they do so. Lareau (2011) argues that children in middle class families develop a familiarity and appreciation for, above all, the abstract and creative use of language which is a skill crucial in securing benefits in schools and other institutions where children and young adults must interact with authority figures. Moreover, Lareau (2011, 2015) contends that such a facility with language often empowers children to make claims on institutional representatives, like teachers and administrators that, over time, produce advantages. Lareau's findings suggest that cultural capital is more than just the product of transmission and can be actively sought by those who feel empowered, or entitled, to do so (Lareau & Calarco, 2012; Davies & Rizk, 2018). Lareau (2015, p. 2) further points out that much research on this topic has focused, in Bray's (2017) words, only on the knowledge that is "taught and tested" in schools, or what Lareau calls "individuals' academic knowledge, achievements scores, and work skills, rather than on the more elusive and contingent forms of informal knowledge that nevertheless can be crucial in facilitating advancement" (see, e.g., Downey, von Hippel, and Broh, 2004). Following Lareau, then, this chapter explores the proactive efforts of students, educators, and families to acquire cultural capital at *sabjong* that is valuable for succeeding in educational institutions over a student's career.

Third is Randall Collins' (2014) notion of cultural capital as the skills one possesses that makes it possible to navigate interactions – a relatively distinct and microsociological operationalization that is not thoroughly employed in this study, although my conceptualization of the term does, as will be shown, include those linguistic and behavioral skills that assist in navigating interactions with various people. For Collins, cultural capital is a resource that facilitates successful interactions in *any* group, not just high-status ones (Davies & Rizk, 2018).

In his framework, cultural capital refers to “knowledge of vocabularies, concepts, styles, and objects” used in any set of ‘rituals’(i.e., patterned interactions) and capital is what bring status in those rituals. Collins departs from Bourdieu’s understanding in multiple ways. A major distinction between Collins and Bourdieu is that Collins (2014) deemphasizes a macrosociological approach that understands cultural capital is a key factor in in social reproduction, arguing that the culture forms produced by dominant institutions are not as determinative or influential in society as Bourdieu argued (Davies & Rizk, 2018). For these reasons, adopting Collins’ framework in this study of cultural capital in Tibetan areas in China is both empirically questionable – as dominant institutions in China *do* exert tremendous influence (especially those in subjugated positions who feel pressured to mimic dominant cultural forms to remain politically and socially secure) – and relatively inappropriate to this study which analyzes how Tibetans navigate dominant institutions themselves, rather than only in their own communities and interactions. However, my operationalization of cultural capital does draw from Collins an openness to understanding cultural capital as not the possession of exclusively those from upper and middle classes. That is, much in line with Yosso’s (2005) argument, Collins also departs from Bourdieu by seeing cultural capital “as something that can be possessed by nondominant groups” which is to say that “low-status groups do not simply suffer from “cultural deficits” if they are able to generate bonds and confer status among themselves in particular situations, even those not deemed to be prestigious by dominant groups” (Davies & Rizk, 2018). The extent to which these ‘more localized’ or nondominant forms of cultural capital are valuable in dominant institutions and the fields they occupy is what this chapter explores.

### Analysis

This section makes two parallel arguments: First, I show that supplemental education programs in general are important sites for the acquisition of dominant cultural capital and, second, that *sabjong* are particularly useful for assisting ethnolinguistically minoritized students acquire both dominant and nondominant cultural capital. Countless studies have sought to analyze the impact that the possession and activation of cultural capital has on student success throughout schooling and beyond (Davies and Rizk, 2018). Many have also focused on the production and transmission (i.e., the two aspects of acquisition) of cultural capital through both more commonly recognized mechanisms and channels, such as parents and teachers in mainstream schools (Lareau, 2011), and more subtle or informal means, such as peers, mentors, and recreational activities (Lareau, 2014; Rios-Ellis et al., 2015; Calarco, 2016). Despite these advancements in understanding how cultural capital facilitates beneficial outcomes for students as well as the development of research focusing on the now global prominence of supplemental education programs (Mori & Baker, 2010), few scholars have sought to understand how such programs might enable the production and transmission of cultural capital. Therefore, the first subsection of this analysis shows how supplemental educational programs may be well-positioned to help students acquire cultural capital.

In making the first of the two arguments simultaneously (i.e., that supplemental programs are important sites for the acquisition of cultural capital) I deliberately understate the roles that race and, more specifically, ethnolinguistic minoritization play in this process in order to highlight the supplemental programs' potential to benefit all students in the broadest possible terms. While data are drawn from supplemental programs navigating educational success in a

climate characterized by inequalities along ethnolinguistic lines, the first subsection argues that supplemental programs in any environment can benefit students in important ways often overlooked by researchers of cultural capital and supplemental education. I therefore generally use the term “supplemental programs” here instead of *sabjong* to indicate that, while data is drawn from *sabjong*, principally Marching Together, arguments of the first type apply to any supplemental program attended by students of any class, gender, and race rather than only those ethnolinguistically minoritized in mainstream schooling. Unlike the majority of this dissertation, the arguments contained in this section need not be taken as specific to circumstances in Tibetan areas in China. The second line of argument, which for brevity I provide alongside the first (rather than in a separate section or chapter, which would require restating a significant amount of evidence), is specific to the Amdo Tibetan case in Guchu. To summarize: arguments regarding supplemental programs more generally and *sabjong* in particular, appear alongside one another in the same sections; when framing is not explicit, my use of terms “supplemental programs” and “*sabjong*” indicate to which scale I refer.

Following the general organization of the chapters on habitus, I make this argument in three sections that revolve, respectively, around the development of cultural capital vis-à-vis horizons, bodily hexis, and language use. It is important to note that these components of habitus are not conceptualized by scholars of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Lamont & Lareau, 1988; Weininger, 2004) as corresponding neatly to the three states of cultural capital (embodied, objectified, and institutionalized), so an introductory note on how these components of habitus and states of capital articulate is necessary. Rather, all three of these components of habitus *qua* habitus should properly be considered instantiations of *embodied* cultural capital. That is, bodily hexis, language use, and horizons (that are recognized and rewarded by others) are all forms of

cultural capital that are *embodied* insofar as they become inscribed in the body via physical and mental schemata (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) that constitute resources that agents can use to navigate various situations. In other words, embodied cultural capital is incorporated into the habitus as durable dispositions that provide frameworks for (advantageous) actions, reactions, orientations, etc. Conversely, the sections dealing with habitus did not spend significant time addressing the appropriation of other states of cultural capital, namely objectified and institutionalized cultural capital. Objectified and institutionalized cultural capital find their locations outside of the individual bearing them: musical instruments, paintings, diplomas, and certifications, for example, are not in any meaningful way conceptualized as components formative of one's (primary) habitus. However, one's ability to 'properly appreciate' and, more importantly, appropriate their value *are* (Bourdieu, 1984). The ability to play instruments, analyze Renoir paintings, or secure advantageous commensurate with a diploma *are* a product of one's embodied cultural capital. Therefore, this section follows both the Analytical Framework provided and the themes in collected data insofar as I focus on the embodied cultural capital that supplemental programs can help students acquire. The two sections in this chapter address the dominant and nondominant instantiations of embodied cultural capital that might be acquired at supplemental programs. On the other hand, the extent to which supplemental programs (and *sabjong* in particular) can assist students in acquiring objectified and institutionalized cultural capital appeared very limited, and, therefore, is not addressed in this chapter but will appear, where appropriate, in the next and final chapter on the forms of capital, other than embodied cultural capital, that students can acquire by their participation at *sabjong*.

### *Dominant Cultural Capital*



Supplemental programs can provide substantial assistance to students in their acquisition of cultural capital in multiple ways. One of the most important among these is the broadening of students' horizons, such as their expectations and aspirations, which has been shown to be a valuable form of embodied cultural capital (Lareau, 2011; Lareau, 2015; Curl, Wu, & Lareau, 2018). One principal way in which the broadening of horizons is achieved at supplemental programs is through the relationships formed with instructors who are often well positioned to serve as "cultural guides" (Lareau, 2015), older peers, mentors, and, simply, knowledgeable friends who have familiarity with institutional cultures. They can provide advice, assistance, and other tools to students in the effort to learn how to successfully navigate educational and employment institutions. For a variety of reasons, explored below, educators at supplemental programs are often *better* positioned than those in mainstream schooling to provide the very knowledges to students that they need to be successful *in and beyond* mainstream schooling.

When I asked Aku Cheeden what kinds of teachers he prefers to invite to teach at Marching Together, he responded, "We want teachers who talk to the students not just in the usual way, but also a bit like friends (*rogs pa*). The most important thing is that they develop a close relationship with students, are affectionate towards them, and show them we care about them." Aku Cheeden envisions close relationships between students and teachers as characterizing the ethos of Marching Together, and, in some cases, he prioritized the formation of these relationships above curricular goals. Before I had spent any time at Marching together Abu Cheeden clarified the nature of the teaching position to me during our first dinner in a Tibetan restaurant in Gangchen county town, facilitated by my research assistant Luri.

If the students don't think you care, they won't pay attention. This is extra school, and it is very hard work. Thirty days with only a small break and they study from dawn until dusk. Of course, they need to learn Tibetan when they are here. But there are even bigger

goals than this – we want the students to develop bravery (*spobs pa*) to do what they want to do.

A month or two later, during my first days at Marching Together while it was in session, Aku Cheeden and the other senior staff members reiterated this privately in our lesson planning sessions but also gave a similar message to all the students during the opening assembly. “Try to leave minutes minutes at the end of each class just for conversation” he explained to Dorje and me. “If you are not sure what to do or say, you can ask Chopa. He is a good teacher and he also went here as a student, so he really knows how to do it. He is a strict teacher during the lesson but very fun (*skyid po*) with the students between classes.”

Though Marching Together was indeed more organized and punctual than many other Typical and Atypical *sabjong* I visited, it still provided significant “down-time” between classes or at other points in the day when students were relatively free, almost giving the campus a momentary feeling of summer camp, as this aggregate portrait of typical moments between classes suggests:

*On many days, after one of the teachers on duty blew the whistle to signal the end of the class period, many students and teachers would pour out of the classrooms, some racing to the ping-pong table or basketball court. On many occasions, Aku Lobsang, the fear-inspiring disciplinarian, and Aku Huazang, the studious Logic instructor, would be bouncing the basketball and hurling at the hoop with the skill of two middle-aged men who had never seen a basketball before. The students loved the comedic display and would run to join in. Some of the students, on the other hand, were talented athletes and could quite literally run circles around the monks as they scored basket after basket in a quickly improvised game of 3 vs. 3. Aku Lobsang would laugh and laugh as he chucked the basketball towards the hoop, considering it a point if his shot made contact with the backboard. Aku Huazang, whose dress shoes and glasses made him slightly less capable of mounting strong competition, tried his best to keep up. Aku Lobsang would offer innocuous taunts and perpetually try to bend the rules or the game in his favor. The students would shout back that he had no idea what he’s talking about and some of the more experienced athletes would explain some rules or techniques to him.*

*Simultaneously, many students would prefer to stay out of the hot sun, and instead, huddled in the little pockets of shade provided by overhanging roofs or umbrellas, as trees are rare on grasslands above 3500m in elevation. In one corner of the courtyard,*

*some girls were huddled around Wende Tso, who had attended MT as a student and was now in teaching her third session. The topics they discussed would vary greatly, and there is no doubt that the few times I joined their group affected what they discussed. I heard, and sometimes participated in, conversations that included trivia contests, quizzing one another about the various kings of the Tibetan dynasties of and leading up to the Imperial Era (618-842 CE), or critiques of the teachers they liked and didn't like in their mainstream schools. The students often asked each other about what summer homework they had been assigned and how to do it, but they also played games, drew pictures, and chatted about all the things that students on summer break are likely to talk about like new songs and movies and other small talk. (Compiled field notes from 8/1/2018, 8/8/2018, and 7/22/2019)*

During these and other moments of free time, the students would ask Wende about how best to study Chinese – the language that Wende taught at Marching Together – and what life was like in Chengdu, where she attended the prestigious Southwest Minzu University. Perhaps unsurprisingly, girl students often gravitated towards Wende and boys to Chopa, although the gendered divisions were never hard-and-fast; many of the older girls greatly enjoyed spending time with their homeroom teacher, Debo, when he was there which, as described previously, was intermittent.

Staff members had different opinions about whether or not the students saw them as role models and cultural guides. Among senior staff members, Aku Lobsang, Aku Gyamtsan, and Aku Orgyan did not give especially long or detailed responses to my questions about the possibility that students would look up to their teachers beyond their role as knowledgeable about Tibetan grammar, history, or philosophy. Aku Lobsang maintained that Marching Together's value lay in two principal sources: the learning of Tibetan language arts and developing a strong 'work hard, play hard' work ethic. Indeed, Aku Lobsang's capacity to switch gears between a playful and terrifying personality was well-known by all. Aku Orgyan, who had the most limited teaching responsibilities at MT but handled many of the material issues that arose there, also expressed minimal interest in the possibility that teachers at MT were role

models. “We are monks. Of course, many of the students don’t want to follow our path. So I don’t know if we are really an example (*mig dpe lta sa*<sup>91</sup>) [to be watched and followed].”

However, when I asked about what students could learn from him, other than what he imparted during classroom sessions, Aku Orgyan responded,

For example, I am always working hard, especially when we need to build something. They can see me drive the three-wheeler [small construction vehicle], stacking bricks, building the classrooms, making bookshelves. Maybe the students are a little surprised to see a monk do that. But here, we have no choice. I cannot just sit in a fancy room and drink tea all day. There’s a lot of work to do and I just do it! So, I think they can see me as an example, as you say, of someone who works very hard, who is not afraid to just do something that needs to get done. But I’m not really sure.

Thus far, it is clear that not all educators at supplemental programs see themselves as role models, because, as they recognize, their life choices that have brought them to the position of teaching in a supplemental program (whether lay or as clergy) may differ from what students envision as a desirable life path. However, even among those that did not imagine themselves serving as role models were able to articulate ways that they might benefit students’ learning beyond merely what they teach in the classroom. The first, and by far most resounding, theme discussed by educators at MT who do not imagine themselves as appropriate role models for students is that they can nevertheless model for students what a desirable work ethic looks like, expressed as *hu-re shey* in colloquial Amdo Tibetan. The ‘work ethic’ Aku Lobsang and Aku Orgyan discussed, moreover, was not limited to the scholastic domain – perhaps surprising when one remembers that these are all monks initiated into the Gelug sect, which prioritizes

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<sup>91</sup> This term is one that I developed with Dorje and other research assistants during pilot studies and early days of field work. While it is an intelligible phrase in its own right, and not unheard of in Amdo, it is not exactly a term that has appeared in Tibetan texts and conversations over the past many years and so it may not be understood as effortlessly as other emic terms. *Mig dpe lta sa* is a combination of four syllables, each with their own meaning. *Mig* is the term for eye, *dpe* is the term for example, model, or specimen (and is the principal word used to refer to religious texts, *dpe cha*), *lta* is the verb to look, and *sa*, which usually means place, earth, or land, is used here in another common form to mean the ‘object’ of the verb, such that “*lta sa*” is the “thing that one sees” or, in another common phrase, “*’gro sa*” – a “place to go.” The construction of this term, which highlights the notion of role model as ‘person to be watched and emulated’ might to some degree explain why monks suggested they are not role models for lay students.

scholasticism even more than other monastic traditions within Tibet (Dreyfus, 2003), which itself generally takes a more scholastic approach to Buddhism than the traditions found in other societies and countries. Both Aku Lobsang and Aku Orgyan emphasized that ‘hard work’ often requires ‘getting your hands dirty’ and being able to take on problems directly and confidently. Thus, even though these monks do not think that they themselves are appropriate career models for the students, they nevertheless are role models, guiding students wordlessly by their alacrity in solving problems and their courage to take ownership over the events that affect their lives.

Aku Cheeden and Aku Huazang, however, as well as numerous students, more explicitly indicate their belief in the benefits of fostering these relationships. Older students were quick to note how much they appreciate the kinds of spaces that supplemental schooling can provide for teacher-student interactions. “I really like the teachers here” declared Dungkar Tsho, one of the third-year students who is regularly one of the hosts of the Cultural Knowledge Competition.

When I asked about her teachers in mainstream school, she explained,

Actually, I like the teachers in mainstream school a lot. Maybe some of the other students don’t like the teachers there, but that’s probably because they don’t do their homework or they don’t behave well in school. But I try to be a good student and I am the class monitor [in charge of liaising between homeroom teachers and students] so I think I am doing OK there.

When I asked Dungkar Tsho to compare her teachers in mainstream schooling to those she has at

Marching Together, she added,

I love the teachers here. They always talk with us and play with us. We laugh everyday here. The teachers in my [mainstream] school are good. I can learn the material clearly, but they have a lot of students. I don’t really know their personalities (*gshis ka*) and they don’t know mine, even though I am the monitor! I think they don’t have any free time. Or they have too many students. They are always just grading papers and preparing lessons.

She went on to add that,

In school, we always follow their schedule exactly. The teacher will decide exactly what we are doing during the class. They have to be very precise [with their time] because, if they are not, maybe we won't learn what we need to for the exam.

When I asked her to expand on what makes the relationships with teachers at Marching Together so special and what in particular she likes about learning from them, she responded,

There are two kinds of teachers here. Monks and young teachers [who are university students or recent graduates]. Wende Tso and Debo are good teachers. Maybe they not as good as mainstream teachers because they are young and don't have much experience and teaching skill. But I love being in Debo's class... I like when he tells us about studying for his MA in Beijing, the different adventures he has in inner China (*rgya nang*) sound very interesting. I would like to go to Minzu University [in Beijing] like him, but if I can't go there, I still want to travel around China.

When I asked if she learns similar types of things from the monks she responded,

Maybe not. I think most of them have not left Amdo. But that is not their job. They are experts in teaching Tibetan language arts. I cannot learn in [mainstream] school like I learn from them. There's no comparison. But even if the monks don't know about that, they are always encouraging us – asking us what we want to study, what job we want.

Dungkar Tsho's comparison of the teachers at MT and in mainstream school, which we usually referred to simply as "school" (*slob grwa*) or "public school" (*rgyal gnyer slob grwa*) is instructive on several levels. I analyze her perspectives, in the context of practices at Marching Together, to discuss four ways that supplemental education can assist students in acquiring cultural capital that exists in the form of "horizons," a component of habitus concerning one's expectations and aspirations that provide an important foundation from which students can make ambitious goals for the future and develop plans to achieve them (Roksa & Robinson, 2018).

First, she recognizes that even if teachers in supplemental programs may not always have the same experience, skill, or credentials as mainstream teachers, they may, nevertheless be better able to provide important forms of support to students that have been shown to positively impact their experiences and outcomes in mainstream schooling (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam 2013). Such forms of support include but are not limited to taking an interest in the person

beyond their identity as a student, which Dungkar Tsho appreciates when she emphasizes that the monks are asking about her aspirations, even beyond what the monks might personally understand or appreciate. This support also includes encouragement and opportunities to speak up, which is one of the principal purposes of the Competition. Students say this activity boosts their confidence and makes them feel more in control of their educational experiences, an emotion that Dungkar Tsho suggests was missing in mainstream schooling, where schedules and curricula were tightly circumscribed by teachers' and administrators' demands. Opportunities to talk with teachers between classes about their experiences were reported by many students as being one of their favorite aspects of supplemental education. For students who have not traveled outside their home region or encountered different kinds of people, obstacles, or opportunities, conversations with educators who are *in the process* of developing their own careers was exciting and energizing. These informal conversations with teachers provided students with ideas and ambitions that they could ponder and, possibly, act on. Importantly, for many students, and especially those at Marching Together whose parents have generally had very limited opportunities and success in formal schooling, conversations with young educators like these in the process of developing their careers was understood quite differently from those conversations with older adults who were already 'set in their ways'. Teachers in mainstream schooling, by and large, are career teachers and, if they are over roughly 35 years old, grew up prior to the dissolution of the state's 'work allocation' (*fenpei*) program, which means that they experienced a very different labor market in which their future paths, and the educational credentials necessary to pursue it, were much more clearly arrayed (Fischer & Zenz, 2019). However, for students in the contemporary era, there is more uncertainty and anxiety about what educational paths lead to stable and lucrative employment. Being able to discuss potential paths with recent

graduates who are navigating the same labor market (not to mention social and political worlds) as the students – rather than older teachers who finished schooling before the advent of the Internet and a variety of other policy changes – is greatly appreciated by students like Dungkar Tsho.

Second, it may be precisely the loosely structured nature of supplemental programs themselves that allow this. Recall that Weick (1974) not only theorized the phenomenon of loose coupling, in which different elements of an organization evince a substantial independence from one another, but also suggests that such an ‘absence of tight coordination’ need not be understood normatively or as necessarily undesirable, as scholars and practitioners often do when critiquing a lack of coordination or accountability. Rather, Weick suggests, ‘loose coupling’ can be advantageous and indeed remains one of the main tools that educational institutions, such as universities, have at their disposal to meet such a wide variety of goals (Weick, 1974; Orton & Weick, 1990). Dungkar Tsho also appears to understand the value of loose coupling, though probably not in those precise terms. One of her favorite aspects of her supplemental education is that the teachers *don't* have the same credentials or backgrounds (as one another or from those in mainstream schools) but are differentially capable of providing various educational experiences which are all valuable but not necessarily in the same immediate ways. For learning Tibetan, she asserts, and numerous other interlocutors agree, one cannot find a better teacher than one who was schooled in a monastic setting. But, despite monks’ expertise in *this* area, she readily admits, they may have limited knowledge of Chinese language, life in other provinces, or many other areas that students at Marching Together would indeed like to know about. In a school (mainstream or otherwise) that prioritized teachers’ credentials when hiring, it is less likely that there might be such a diverse array of experiences and knowledges among the teaching staff. But



here, as she explains, there are two types of teachers and they have distinctly different roles. To be sure, as Gangchen critiqued in a previous chapter of the dissertation, Marching Together does not have what many would consider a sufficiently broad curriculum – they don't offer math, any sciences, or even humanities subjects taught in school like geography or politics. But this only makes the argument built on Dungkar Tso's appreciation of 'loose coupling' that much stronger: even at a tightly focused program like Marching Together, the diversity of teachers personalities and capabilities is understood as beneficial by students.

In sum, the diversity of teacher identities and the sometimes-informal structure of supplemental education that is not overseen by the state facilitates two specific benefits identified by Dungkar Tsho. These need not be conceptualized as unique to Marching Together or other supplemental programs that specifically serve minoritized students. First, the diversity of teacher identities on important factors related to educational trajectories themselves provides a wider array of role models and experiences for students to learn from while at supplemental school. This generates, in the case of Dungkar Tsho diverse and invigorating interests in the *many* possibilities for development that schooling has to offer, much along the lines of what Tsomo hoped her program could accomplish (detailed in Part 3). Second, the looser scheduling (which is not to say looser disciplinary practices) of supplemental programs often provided substantial and repeated opportunities for students to get to know the relatively diverse identities of their teachers in ways that were not possible in mainstream schooling. Despite spending nearly ten times as many days in mainstream schools than they do in supplemental programs, students like Dungkar Tsho nevertheless report that they actually know their supplemental teachers better (and are known better by them). These diverse student-teacher relationships that are given time to develop are virtually precluded by the norms of mainstream education, yet they

are precisely the type of relationship that Lareau (2015) shows is so valuable for all students, but minoritized students in particular. It is therefore to this central theme that I now turn.

### *Nondominant Cultural Capital*

The first two points mentioned above should be understood as possible for all supplemental programs irrespective of participants' experiences with ethnolinguistic minoritization. That is, even though these data were collected at a *sabjong*, there is no *a priori* reason why these processes and the responses they produce in students might not transpire at any supplemental program. The next two practices that facilitate students' acquisition of cultural capital, on the other hand, are specifically advantageous for students ethnolinguistically minoritized and, perhaps, only to Amdo Tibetan students at Marching Together.

Third, teachers at Marching Together and other *sabjong* can model for ethnolinguistically minoritized students how to acquire dominant cultural capital in 'desirable' ways, which I explain after first providing some examples drawn from observation data, first recounted in a field note excerpts:

*Over just the past two days, I have recounted the following scenes: Dorje was practicing the different tones used in Chinese language with a student who said they didn't know them clearly. Dorje told the student he studied these with a Han Chinese professor he had in university. Shortly thereafter, Dorje was answering these students' questions about choosing a major when applying to universities. "It's really a balance between liking your major and picking the school with the best reputation. Don't just go with reputation because if you hate the major, you'll be bored everyday" he told them... In the teachers' office/dormitory, Chopa was sitting with one student who was watching him create the tables and Powerpoint file that we use in the Competition. Chopa was explaining how to make columns and rows and use functions of Microsoft products, which are not available in Tibetan. Chopa was explaining in Tibetan to the second-year student translations of the terms in the Chinese language drop-down menu. He even let the student make one table (but then later re-sized it to fit the page)... Dungkar Tsho and other students were perusing the Chinese-language young adult magazines in the library. Most are a couple years old. They have human interest stories on astronomy and astronauts, bungee-*

*jumping and other extreme sports at travel destinations across China, and unique foods and dishes around the world.* (Field note excerpts from 8/6/2019).

Examples of dominant cultural capital acquired at Marching Together and similar *sabjong* evidenced here include but are not limited to: knowledge of Chinese characters and standard *putonghua* accents (e.g. using ‘proper’ tones<sup>92</sup> when speaking in Chinese); familiarity with dominant institutions, like universities, and their norms, such as application and admissions procedures; increased knowledge and skill in using contemporary technology, smartphones, and various apps, such as those that provide information on current events and new policies, as well as websites from which one could download useful materials ranging from practice *gaokao* exams to interview questions that employers are likely to ask; and interest and curiosity about cultural and other events in China that students read about in magazines and newspapers during free time. It is true that many of these instantiations of cultural capital could be acquired in mainstream schooling. Certainly, educators in mainstream schooling attempt to instill capital that appears toward the beginning of this list – with knowledge of Chinese language, institutions, and cultures a central priority. Even in the busier and more tightly-scheduled mainstream environment, students can find pockets of free time to read newspaper articles about upcoming events or learn about new apps and how to use them. Therefore, what potentially differentiates the acquisition of dominant cultural capital in mainstream schooling from that in *sabjong* is the concept of ‘desirable’ methods of acquisition. Here, I use the words of Aku Pema to explicate ‘desirability’ in this context.

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<sup>92</sup> In *putonghua* (and many other forms of) Chinese, there are four principal tones used to differentiate characters by modifying the pitch with which the character is said – an even tone, a rising tone, a falling-then-rising tone, and a falling tone. Interlocutors and others readily acknowledge that many Chinese speakers in this region, speaking either in Qinghai-dialect or *putonghua* do not use tones in the way specified in *putonghua* Chinese which is largely based on the Beijing dialect of Chinese.

Aku Pema was 21 years old and a newly ordained monk (though this means he has still been in the monastery since early adolescence). Though he came only during the second summer I spent at Marching Together, he taught history and some grammar classes and was a near-permanent fixture on the basketball court where he competed against the students with significantly more success than his older counterparts, Aku Lobsang and Aku Huazang. Aku Pema and I developed a good rapport over three weeks together, as we both enjoyed energetic conversations and fast paced sports. We even found ourselves facing off in the semi-finals of a ping-pong tournament that Aku Cheeden had thrown together one evening when it was pouring rain and the regularly scheduled class memorization sessions that took place outside were impossible. Because he was extremely interested in this research project, and because my Tibetan proficiency was at its high-water mark during my final summer in Tibet, not to mention that my research assistant Dorje and I had been working together for nearly two years by this point, I was able to conduct a very frank interview during which we had the opportunity discuss what he imagines the acquisition of dominant capital should look like.

As we conversed, I raised the point that there are many kinds of knowledges, skills, and credentials that would be beneficial for succeeding in China today, such as a degree from a top Chinese university, business acumen, or expertise in Communist Party ideology and policy. Essentially, I gave examples of what most scholars would agree are instantiations of (dominant) cultural capital. I asked Aku if he thought it would be good if Tibetans acquired these and if there might be any drawbacks to doing so, probing specifically about the possibility, which Carter (2005) discusses, that dimensions of racial/ethnic identity and nondominant cultural capital might be sacrificed in the pursuit of more widely 'valuable' dominant cultural capital. Aku Pema responded,

Actually, I think it will be great if students here have the opportunity to get some of those things. I'm not sure about becoming a leader in the Party, *haha*, but I hope these students can go to a great university or have great jobs. But the downside, if they can't keep in close relationship with the older generations and younger generations of Tibetans. Elders are the one who know our history and our culture. If contact with them is lost, then the culture is lost. Then because of the lack of connection and communication [with elders], it will be like you learned everything through the Chinese way and it will be difficult to know your own culture. Even your way of talking will be different. And it will be like everything you learn now will be through a red lens."<sup>93</sup>

For Aku Pema then, the accumulation of dominant cultural capital entailed undesirable consequences when it resulted in damaging the connections to other generations of Tibetans with whom Tibetan language and culture would be learned and taught. But, he maintained on several occasions throughout the interview, in the absence of other immoral or selfish motivations, the acquisition of dominant cultural capital was otherwise desirable:

They should teach more other subjects here and less of the monastic curriculum. Logic (*tshad ma*) class is useful, but not as useful for these lay students as the subjects they have in school. Actually, whatever they teach doesn't really have a big impact on ethnic consciousness (*mi rigs 'du shes*) anyway. The subject doesn't matter. Whether it is taught with altruism (*lhag bsam*) and a pure mind (*sems rnam dag*) then this will increase ethnic consciousness.

Aku Pema is here suggesting that it is one's intention that renders the acquisition of dominant cultural capital desirable or not. He even characterizes Tibetan identity *as that which necessarily is* altruistic and this altruism is recognizable because it is investment in the intergenerational maintenance of culture. In this way, students at Marching Together are able to learn from Aku Pema and others a framework for pursuing dominant cultural capital not only in ways that does not threaten their ideas of ethnic identity, but also, through an emphasis on altruistic intentions, in ways that actually benefit their communities.

Though many students may eventually decide that they do not agree with Aku Pema's approach – and indeed some such perspectives, like Samdrup's, are analyzed in this study – the

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<sup>93</sup> It is difficult to say whether Aku Pema was specifically using the term red to refer to the Communist Party or simply to indicate that everything would be filtered through some other framing.

point remains that, at least, students ethnolinguistically minoritized in mainstream schooling are at Marching Together able to develop relationships with adults of various ages who are able to model and explain how students can pursue the acquisition of crucial forms of cultural capital without risking violence to their own sense of identity or their community's material well-being.

And fourth, *sabjong* like Marching Together can help minoritized students acquire nondominant culture capital and provide frameworks and scaffolding that assist these students finding ways to use it effectively. As Yosso (2005) and Carter (2005) recognize, students marginalized in mainstream institutions, often for their lack of dominant cultural capital in the form of 'appropriate' horizons, body hexis, and language use that exhibits familiarity and comfort with dominant cultures, often possess substantial knowledges, skills, and dispositions that are valuable in achieving goals outside of dominant institutions. Contexts in which such nondominant capital is useful may range from family and neighborhood situations, finding employment to managing hardship, or avoiding legal trouble. Through using language – AAVE in Carter's (2003) case, rather than a putatively standardized form of language that is more commonly favored in dominant institutions – in ways that are more 'natural' and appropriate to one's environment, those minoritized in mainstream institutions can signal their legitimate membership in a (marginalized) cultural group and more effectively navigate spaces where these 'nondominant' logics and sensibilities are actually 'the norm'. Such nondominant knowledges, or what Yosso (2005) calls "community cultural wealth" are often acquired by members of marginalized communities through organizations and relationships of their own design, rather than in dominant institutions (Zhou & Kim, 2006).

At the very least, then, Marching Together and other *sabjong*, such as the Town Heritage Museum, that prioritize Tibetan topics can be understood as a concerted effort to assist students

in acquiring nondominant capital that is, nevertheless, valuable, at least in certain contexts. In training students in Tibetan language and performing arts, the end products include knowledge of literature, memorization, dance, song, and oratory that is widely valued in Tibetan communities and at Tibetan cultural events like weddings and festivals (Thurston, 2020). These outcomes can also include acquisition of the dispositions, accents, mannerisms, and worldviews that get recognized by others as being ‘authentically’ Tibetan. Without a doubt, *sabjong* are important organizations for the production and acquisition of nondominant cultural capital in addition to dominant cultural capital and, even more basically, the knowledge students need to score well on mainstream exams. Indeed, this is what many educators and students, such as Aku Pema and Aku Samten of the Town Heritage Museum see as their primary function, so much so that Aku Pema and others, like Gangchen, as shown above, wish that Marching Together focused *less* on the inculcation of nondominant capital and more on the subjects taught and tested in mainstream schools. However, at the very least, Marching Together spends time and energy cultivating students’ dispositions for successful public speaking and the use of Pure Tibetan, both of which are recognized by other Tibetans as culturally valuable.

Because these valuable knowledges and orientations are recognized and rewarded by other Tibetans with respect, status, esteem, and, when possible, economic benefits, ranging from employment opportunities to monetary support for various causes, there is no question that these knowledges are indeed capital, albeit of the nondominant form, insofar as they are convertible (with effort) to economic and social capital. The desire of Dungkar Tso and other students to find work as a TV show host, newsperson, translator, or any number of other positions in which skills in Tibetan oratory, for example, would be rewarded is evidence that they recognize there *are*

material (as well as symbolic) benefits to acquiring these nondominant knowledges and dispositions. In this way they are justifiably understood as capital.

Beyond assisting students in the acquisition of nondominant capital, *sabjong* serve another important function for their students, often through the uniquely close and supportive relationships that *sabjong* educators form with students. Individual educators and *sabjong* staffs collectively can help students who have nondominant cultural capital get it recognized and rewarded in increasingly wider contexts. These larger contexts are, namely: wider Tibetan society, Chinese society, and the (Anglophone) global society. This argument first requires me to briefly revisit the notion of fields.

It is puzzling that Carter (2003) and Yosso (2005) go to great lengths to discuss the unjust lack of recognition that nondominant forms of capital receive in mainstream institutions and contexts, but omit a theorization of the nature of these contexts and their relationship to nondominant contexts. This is particularly surprising because, as the Analytical Framework and other chapters have made clear, Bourdieu (1984, 1984, 1992) and other scholars using his work (e.g., Martin, 2003; Nash, 1999; Naidoo, 2004; Grenfell, 2008) not only provide the concept of fields for understanding the nature of these ‘contexts’ but, in fact, they *insist* upon its use in any scholarship employing the notion of capital. As Davies and Rizk (2018) note, more recent scholarship using Bourdieu’s work often extracts the concept of cultural capital and jettisons other components of his theory of social reproduction, especially in American educational contexts. But returning the concept of cultural capital to its proper place alongside habitus and field, as this study has done, is helpful because it helps to reveal not only how it is that certain instantiations of capital are recognized in one context but not another, but it also helps reveal



how an individual might go about using the capital they do possess in multiple contexts that are characterized by different values and logics.

As shown previously, there is debate about – or at least different approaches to – determining when one can state that a field exists. As Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) and Thomson (2008) explain, fields are not ubiquitous and not everything is a field: For a field to exist a number of conditions must be met, including but not limited to a shared belief in the existence of a game (*doxa*), a shared investment in that game and a conviction that it is worth playing (*illusio*), field-specific capital, and shared orientations towards what constitutes a legitimate actor in this field, the (often unspoken) ‘rules of the game’, and the boundaries of the field itself – though these are necessarily always up for debate on some level (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Therefore, while not every context constitutes a field, there are indeed numerous ones and they have different relationships to what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) call the ‘meta-field of power’, or the political-economic field in which the principal form of capital is ‘statist’ capital, that is – the capacity to make and enforce laws and norms that impact all other fields. Thus, Bourdieu investigates fields of, for example, television (1998b), housing (2000c), and literature (1996a) in addition to ‘larger’ fields such as that of culture (1984) and, of course, education (1977). So while it is relatively clear in formal language what criteria must be met for a field to exist, *proving* the existence of one is more difficult, which Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) acknowledge themselves, because the boundaries of a field, i.e., that by which one would identify its autonomous existence, *are* the location of the struggle between those who benefit from such a distinction and those that benefit from its assimilation into another field.

Therefore, while it is easy to acknowledge the existence of the Chinese educational field, it remains an open question whether Tibetan education constitutes an autonomous field itself or

simply an ‘area’ within the Chinese educational field (if one recognizes that this ‘area’ of the Chinese educational field has a geographical component but is not reducible to geography nor neatly bound by political borders). In any case, an ethnographic study such as this one is not positioned to make a case, one way or the other, for the existence of a Tibetan educational field, but the notion of field provides an apparatus for understanding the relationship between settings and the logic by which certain accents or mannerisms are recognized as valuable or not that the not-scientifically-specified term ‘context’ does not. The contours of this Tibetan corner of the Chinese educational field and the broader Chinese educational field have been discussed in the Part 2 and so need not be revisited here. But with the preceding points in place, it is now possible to understand fully what functions *sabjong* can provide for students who care about success in two domains – Tibetan society and Chinese education – that frequently reveal divergent, competing, and even sometimes antagonistic logics and values.

Returning to the question of how *sabjong* can assist students in their acquisition and, in particular, the use of nondominant cultural capital, I begin with the perspectives of Aku Cheeden and triangulate them with practices common at Marching Together. “Take Vajra [who was a student and, subsequently, a teacher at Marching Together] as an example” said Aku Cheeden in response to my question about what kinds of support *sabjong* teachers can provide for students even though they have limited time and may not be experts at *gaokao* preparation or transmitting other ‘insider’ knowledges valuable in dominant institutions.

[Vajra] is working for the local county government now. That’s excellent. When he first came here, he was only maybe fourteen years old and just starting middle school. But our school was even more traditional in those days, like the monastery, in the way we did

debate and other kinds of activities. We didn't even have these buildings, but we had the school in tents on the grassland in summer..."

Chopa began listening, realizing the Vajra we were discussing was his friend, just one year ahead of Chopa at Marching Together. Aku continued,

His parents really wanted him to learn literary Tibetan and he had some background. Maybe he studied a little in the monastery with an uncle or something... He studied very hard here and really participated in everything. I think that was he developed a very strong Tibetan consciousness. At first, he was shy but then he participated in the activities more and more. When he graduated, he had excellent Tibetan abilities so he wanted to go to a Minzu school so he could keep studying in Tibetan. So, he went to your school.

Aku Cheeden correctly remembered that Dorje in fact had attended as a student the same school at which I had taught during 2012-2015, and even was enrolled in the intensive English program in which I worked, though we did not overlap much as he was finishing when I arrived, and I only taught his class a few times. "Because his Tibetan was so good, he was able to get into the top class at that school [which is based on aggregate test scores] and then, in the top class, there were all kinds of opportunities." Aku is again remembering this clearly, as the top classes in many schools often receive scholarship money to cover tuition and other enrichment activities, including sometimes trips to Shanghai or other destinations. Vajra's class was indeed one several around town that got scholarship money from organizations like Gabzang Metok, Mother's Wish, Pearl Foundation, Éclat Foundation, and others.

From there, Vajra met many new people and I think this helped inspire him to study hard because he saw there were many opportunities. And during this time, he also helped raise some money for building our own sabjong and he also taught here for one or two years, like Chopa is now. After that, he went to *minkaohan* university and did very well there. I think he studied transportation (*'grim 'grul*) and it was useful (*phan thogs yod pa*). Now he is working in the government. Maybe in five or ten years he can really make some good changes in this area.

I responded to Aku by asking if working in the government or for the Party were by far the best jobs that someone could have.

They are good because you can if they do that, they can maybe have an influence (*shugs rkyen*) on local policies or projects. But we teachers or other businesspeople also need to think like that. That's why I started my company [which processes yak dung into even more flammable kindling] and always try to build relationships with the government officials.

Thus, it is apparent that Aku Cheeden thinks that those who have graduated from *sabjong* (or school more generally) can provide support for students in at least two ways. I call these two ways 'front-end' and 'back-end' support. The former refers to educators efforts to directly help students improve their own strategies for winning recognition and rewards in dominant fields and institutions for the (often nondominant) knowledges they possess; the latter refers to indirect ways that educators, community leaders, and others with more substantial amounts of capital (in all its forms) work to make institutions, labor markets, and other dominant fields more receptive to the nondominant capital that Amdo Tibetans generations possess. There is little doubt among this study's participants that the latter of these two strategies is the more useful and, by far, the more difficult to accomplish for a variety of reasons, the overarching one being that they are attempting to shift the dynamics of dominant fields in an effort to, as Burawoy (2012, p. 16) says, "dislodge symbolic power."

'Front-end' support lies in directly working with students to find ways to make the knowledges that they do have and bring to school more easily recognizable as valuable there, which entails building both specialized and versatile knowledges at *sabjong*. For example, Marching Together does more than just force students to *internalize* knowledge of Tibetan history or grammar; in forcing them to *explain* or *exhibit* this knowledge with poise and confidence during Cultural Knowledge Competitions, the staff at Marching Together already begins fostering in students dispositions to apply or demonstrate their specialized knowledge in front of others and the pressure this creates. As Aku Cheeden discussed, the generation of a

particular body of knowledge was not only useful in expanding Vajra's horizons, it also resulted in higher test scores that gave him an advantage when it came to seeking admission into the top class (Ch. *yi ban*), which, in turn, gave way to greater exposure to funding, networking, and travel opportunities. Other activities at Marching Together (rarer though increasingly visible at other *sabjong*, too), such as producing periodicals, inviting online celebrities to campus, or simply spending down-time with graduate-student-educators who have navigated successfully the different levels of schooling in China, provide opportunities for students to learn how to frame and activate their nondominant capital such that it gets as much recognition and reward as possible in dominant fields, namely education and employment institutions. That is, educators can directly facilitate students' attempts to convert nondominant cultural capital into other forms through both explicit, active intervention and implicitly through modeling and living out this process. Many educators, not just those at Marching Together, saw role modeling as one of the main ways in which teachers could benefit students

'Back-end' support, on the other hand, was both less commonly mentioned by educators and, when I asked about it directly, seen as a extremely desirable but far less likely possibility. Nevertheless, Aku Cheeden's comments suggest that he and other perspicacious and conscientious leaders still aspire to make these kinds of changes as well. Examples of my notion of 'back-end' support are subtle but present in Aku Cheeden's words. In addition to directly intervening in students' lives, he also strives to create societies and communities that are more attuned and receptive to the nondominant knowledges that his students possess. His comment about Vajra's position in the government and the influence he might have – albeit rather limited – suggests that he believes those who work in the government or for the Party are not merely stooges or cogs in a wheel. While there is no doubt that no one assumes it would be possible to

simply put up direct resistance to government policies or plans and thereby compel the state to change course, it is possible for individuals to exercise limited agency even (or, better, *especially*) within the confines of government employment. Indeed, many educators, as Aku Cheeden, are entirely open to the possibility that working from *within* the government as a cadre enhances one's agency more than working independently or for some other (presumably) Tibetan business might. To be sure, as Fischer (2013) points out, private sector employment opportunities for Tibetan Autonomous zones are few and far between. However, Aku Cheeden's fuel business constitutes one example of meaningful and relatively lucrative employment available to Tibetans outside of working for the state. Nevertheless, supporting those who carry Tibetan consciousness in their quest to obtain positions within the government is one of the principal strategies Aku Cheeden and others pursue to make nondominant capital more readily recognized and rewarded. Importantly, some, like Samdrup discussed above, see the desire to work for the Party or government as limited and unimaginative. Samdrup argues that striking out on one's own, ideally as a social entrepreneur (like him, who started some kindergartens and *sabjong*, or even like his aunt who started a Amdo Tibetan bakery), would provide more latitude in recognizing and rewarding the cultural capital preferentially possessed by Amdo Tibetans. On the other hand, working in some capacity for the state would not, in Samdrup's opinion, allow for much of this 'back-end' work that Aku Cheeden sees people like Vajra doing successfully. One can see that while the perspectives and strategies differ, both are framing their ideas of educational and employment success in terms of participating in endeavors that assist the efforts of Amdo Tibetans to get their capital rewarded in ways they believe are more commensurate with its worth.

Through these four processes, many *sabjong* educators are ideally positioned to buttress the efforts of the holders of nondominant capital to get the best ‘conversion rates’ possible when they enter fields characterized by dominant logics and values. It is, of course, not the case that all *sabjong* educators see themselves as brokers who straddle these two domains. At typical *Sabjong*, college students and educators who organized and taught there most frequently saw themselves as primarily or exclusively reinforcing or enhancing the knowledges taught and tested in mainstream schooling. While some recognized that they themselves might serve as appropriate role models to students (though modesty prevented most educators from saying this outright before I prompted them to speak about it with a direct question), most conceptualized the scope of this as limited merely to academic success, which they articulated in terms of studying hard, getting good grades, and going to university. Few articulated to me that they considered themselves as models for how to bridge these two domains and engage strategically in ‘front-end’ and ‘back-end’ support. The students I interviewed did not articulate their interest or appreciation of such support as explicitly as I have described it here, of course. However, indirect references (in answers to *other* interview questions, such as those answered by Dungkar Tso) and students’ behaviors suggest that they nevertheless *do* understand and appreciate the bridging and buttressing work that educators do on their behalf. Evidence for this is drawn from responses to the relatively simple question I asked students “Who are your favorite teachers at this *sabjong* or in mainstream school and what do you like about them?”

In their answers to this, students recounted numerous ways that they appreciated their teachers: Dungkar Tsho and other students in Debo’s class loved hearing about the progress he was making towards his master’s degree at the prestigious *Minzu* University of China in Beijing. He would bring back magazines and other periodicals published by different Tibetan writing

groups based at his university in Beijing and discuss with them the different activities in which he participated. Students in Debo's class such as Yeshe Kandro and Gunkar Drolma, whose interview was discussed earlier, especially enjoyed hearing stories about the new friends and professors, especially those from different regions of Tibet, that Debo met in Beijing and to hear about their impressions of Tibetan language and culture, both those specific to Amdo but also about Tibetans from elsewhere. They also got amusement from hearing Debo's woes of dealing with difficult professors, obstinate registrars, and crazy landlords. It therefore appears that, even if Debo himself or his students never articulated it explicitly, they both appreciated the ways that Debo's presence at the *sabjong* made them feel that their educational pursuits were more closely connected to prestigious and interesting opportunities than they otherwise feel in the high-elevation grasslands and schools of northeastern Amdo Tibet. For the community at Marching Together, Debo, Vajra, Chopa, Wende Tso and others represent the possibility that the acquisition of dominant capital, success in dominant fields, need not come at the price of sacrificing one's non-dominant capital and identity as an Amdo Tibetan.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has analyzed the ways in which students can, through their participation at *sabjong*, acquire embodied cultural capital. In doing so, I described four processes that facilitate students' acquisition of capital. The first two of these ways can be understood as applicable potentially to all participants in supplemental education programs and, as such, represent a set of findings that encourages further examination of these processes at any supplemental education program. The latter two findings and their associated analysis are specific to supplemental programs organized for and by people who experience ethnolinguistic minoritization in dominant,



mainstream institutions. The findings reveal that such supplemental programs are well positioned to provide to students many of the skills, knowledges, and dispositions that schools routinely reward but are criticized for failing to actually provide to students (Dumais, 2002; Bourdieu, 1973). Moreover, because of their loosely coupled nature – both in the sense that educators at supplemental programs can operate largely independently from one another and that supplemental programs often need not abide by the same policies and accountability measures as mainstream schools – educators at supplemental programs can provide a wide-range of supportive services, including those that help students make sense of and navigate mainstream schooling itself. This function is particularly valuable precisely for those students whose home cultures and languages may not closely match those found in mainstream schooling. Now that the principal forms of capital acquisition have been described and analyzed, I move onto the final analytical chapter of the dissertation, which describes forms other than embodied cultural capital that participants at *sabjong* can acquire.

## CHAPTER 11

### THE STRUGGLE FOR, AND OVER, CAPITAL

#### Introduction

Thus far, analysis has centered on educators' perspectives on the formation of students' dispositions and what educators believe students need to develop the most academically valuable, politically viable, and ethnically desirable dispositions possible. I have paid particular attention to three types of dispositions, namely horizons, bodily hexis, and language use, or what can be conceptualized as intrapersonal, bodily, and interpersonal dimensions of habitus, respectively. The focus on acquiring and refining advantageous dispositions has led to an exclusive focus in the previous sections on *embodied* cultural capital. I have honed this study to focus on this state of cultural capital for three principal reasons. First, it is, *ceteris paribus*, the most 'valuable' state compared to others because it requires inputs of energy, attention, and time, the last of which is, as Bourdieu (1986) says, the "least inexact" measure of determining the merit or legitimacy of acquired capital; that is, it cannot simply be bought nor can anyone delegate another to acquire embodied cultural capital on their behalf.

Second, in a study of minoritization, it is one's embodied cultural capital that remains most susceptible to devaluation and marginalization because one 'wears' these in a way that is inseparable from the person themselves, unlike the other states of cultural capital which, in an important way, exist 'outside' the person (Bourdieu, 1986). It is analogous to what Delpit and Dowdy (2008) insightfully refer to as "the skin that we speak" in their conversations of race and education in the US. Whereas the impact on one's life chances of possessing university diplomas or works of art remains an important topic both in general and in the particular fields that citizens of multiethnic states like China must navigate, a study of embodied cultural capital cuts closest

to the heart of the very vectors of minoritization that Tibetans in China experience (Fischer, 2008): Horizons, body hexis, and language use *are* most often the very frames that scholars use to study and explain “achievement gaps” among the different *minzu* in China (e.g., Postiglione et al., 2006; Kipnis, 2011; Zhang & Zhao, 2014; Yang et al., 2015).

Lastly, methodologically, an ethnographic study of locally organized education programs is best positioned to investigate and analyze what perceptions, perspectives, and practices educators think are valuable. If this study were to switch foci and instead investigate which *objects* or which *degrees sabjong* educators thought were truly valuable, it would be likely that there would be far less discrepancy between their perspectives and dominant ones because, for example, in such highly standardized education and employment systems there is little dispute over which diplomas are more or less valuable because the employment tracks for which they qualify the credential-holder are objectively determined by the state. In any case, it is obvious that *sabjong* educators are less capable of influencing the volume of objectified and institutionalized cultural capital their students possess, as the ethnographic data, and indeed common sense, reveals. Upon developing the Analytical Framework early in the study, implementing it through developing interview protocols and participant observation guides, and conducting initial analyses based on the data they yielded, it became clear that *sabjong* had little capacity or specific ambition to supply students with objectified and institutionalized cultural capital. Nevertheless, it is necessary to address the acquisition of these two states of cultural capital briefly before moving onto to other forms of capital, namely social and symbolic, that *sabjong* can help participants acquire.

*Institutionalized and Objectified Cultural Capital*

It might be difficult to claim that *sabjong* in this study had no awareness whatsoever of transmitting institutionalized cultural capital to students when so many of them distribute ‘graduation’ certificates to students on the final day of the session (or, in the case of Marching Together, to students who had completed the three-year program, which did not happen at the end of each session but only once per year), and many educators would like their *sabjong*’s reputation to be recognized by others. Though I prioritized conducting observations on the final day of the session when possible, there were some (e.g., Town Heritage Museum) that I was unable to see. However, in those cases, I asked interviewees what the final day of the *sabjong* looked like and if they had any particular events planned. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Heritage Museum, attended largely by monks, was one of the only *sabjong* that confirmed they do not have any ‘graduation ceremony’ or special events (hence why I did not prioritize staying around). Other *sabjong* such as New Hope, New Flower, Marching Together, and Black Rock went to some lengths to organize a final gathering. These ceremonies most often included two main components: first was the distribution of completion certificates and prizes for top-scoring students or those otherwise deserving recognition (for example, one student was always extremely helpful in cleaning up the classrooms at the end of each day and their hard-work was recognized). Prizes almost always comprise school supplies and books, often but not always in Tibetan language, often but not always written by a contemporary Tibetan visionary, such as Khenpo Tsultrim Lodros, the famous abbot of Larung Gar in Kham (Sichuan) or the hagiography of a great Tibetan from history, such as Gendun Choepel or Milarepa (1052-1135), the great Tibetan yogi-saint. Sometimes, sports equipment or snacks were distributed, but in every case, whatever certificates and goods were distributed were accompanied by a *katak*, a scarf, traditionally made of silk though not always in the current era, that has numerous symbolic

meanings. In general, is used to indicate auspiciousness, pure intentions, and respect on the part of the giver. Second were the speeches. In most cases, they were offered first by the principal organizer of the *sabjong*, and then other teachers would have an opportunity to speak, if they desired. In some cases, like at Marching Together, all teachers, including the present author, were compelled to say something, a request that most teachers ultimately answered without much issue. On several occasions, especially if the *sabjong* has a close connection to a monastery, *lama*, or other elder, a religious leader is invited to speak to the crowd of students and parents, which can sometimes go on for an extended period. These usually bilingual graduation certificates and prizes are, perhaps, the first and most obvious example to begin with when considering the transmission of institutionalized or objectified cultural capital.

To be sure, the graduation certificates are not readily recognized by any schools, employers, or state institutions as guaranteeing a certain level of competence, which is perhaps the hallmark of institutionalized cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). They do not qualify holders for any jobs, positions, or titles. At least some of them wind up smushed in the bottom of backpacks, never to be seen again. But others were kept, some even framed and hung up in students' houses. In my innumerable visits to Tibetan families' houses over the seven years I spent in Amdo, I frequently saw awards of all kinds framed and hung up prominently in the main living area or bedroom. Some families with especially capable children might cover an entire wall with their certificates, which ranged from graduation diplomas from all levels of mainstream school to other prizes for high marks, good behavior, essay writing, public speaking, and, indeed, *sabjong* certificates. The most impressive displays I saw contained over twenty certificates which were framed and displayed proudly. However, simply because these are hung up alongside one another does not of course mean that they are recognized by families as equally valuable. More

important awards were usually given pride of place at the top or center of the display and, in any case, when I had the opportunity to ask which diploma or award the bearer was most proud of, they usually indicated the most institutionally-recognized award – often a senior middle school (i.e., high school) or university diploma.

Even a very generous analysis of the capital transmitted by *sabjong* would have a difficult time making a compelling argument that such certificates are best understood as institutionalized cultural capital. Even if one were to get beyond the fact that these diplomas are completely unrecognized as valuable *qua* legitimate credentials by dominant institutions who are in a position to reward their possession materially or symbolically, one would have a tough time finding even nondominant institutions and individuals that understand these certificates as legitimate indicators of some competence – after all, they are handed out by uncredentialed teachers to virtually any student willing to attend a free class for a couple weeks. Marching Together, as usual, provides the limiting case, as I was able to find a few people who did not have a personal connection to Marching Together, but, nevertheless, knew about the quality of its Tibetan instruction and acknowledged that someone who finished their three-year program would have a very strong foundation in Tibetan language arts. For example, Migmar, a teacher in Serjong town had heard of Marching Together and responded when asked about it,

Yes, I've heard of that school. I had one or two students a few years ago that went there. It's true. Their Tibetan was excellent. Probably the best in that class. I think that's a great accomplishment... But it's difficult to say if going to that *sabjong* will be useful for their educational path ahead. Maybe if they study Tibetan or want to write a book or something. That will be great. But it probably won't help them in other subjects.

Beyond this small acknowledgement, however, whether possession of this certificate *per se* will lead to any material benefits for its possessors remains highly unlikely. Even the staff of Marching Together themselves during interviews could not think of an instance in which it might

produce a material benefit. In the absence of any material benefits, direct or even indirect, it is ultimately impossible to consider these diplomas institutionalized cultural capital. They may, nevertheless, be valuable in other ways, as I explore below. Almost by definition, supplemental programs that take place prior to graduation from university cannot transmit institutionalized cultural capital in the form of diplomas or certificates because, most importantly, as voluntary programs definitively *not* organized or overseen by a state-accredited institution, ‘graduation’ from these programs symbolizes very little, if anything, to those in an educational field. Perhaps completion credentials from ‘supplemental programs’ geared towards professional development and continuing education through university extension programs and “massive open online courses” (MOOCs) may constitute institutionalized cultural capital, but as they do not pertain to students transitioning to secondary and tertiary education, they fall beyond the scope of this study. In sum, there is no evidence to suggest that *sabjong* in Amdo Tibet and supplemental education programs worldwide transmit institutionalized cultural capital.

The extent to which *sabjong* assist students in acquiring objectified cultural capital is likewise extremely limited, though perhaps there are some small examples that suggest some possibilities, if not now, then perhaps in the future. Somewhat basic, yet, for many, important instantiations of objectified cultural capital are the books, supplies, and other prizes they may win at the last day of the *sabjong*. While the possession of classic books associated with high-brow culture, such as the well-known *Life of Milarepa*, are quintessential examples of objectified cultural capital in virtually any understanding of the concept (Bourdieu, 1986), their effects may be significantly attenuated if families only acquire these books well into the child’s life rather than during early childhood and the cultural competence that comes with possessing and using the materials is not passed down from parents (Kraaykamp & van Eijck, 2010). Especially

considering that many students in rural areas of the Tibetan Plateau may have higher literacy levels and competencies than their parents (Postiglione et al., 2006), the possibility of that this instantiation of objectified cultural capital has the ‘intended’ effect remains small. Moreover, while school supplies and similar objects that can be distributed at *sabjong*, like sports equipment, *katak*, or other possible examples, may to some degree materially facilitate cultural development and symbolically indicate this learning to others, it is difficult to argue that objects easily purchased at the store for only a few Renminbi constitute cultural capital insofar as they cannot be meaningfully used to exclude others from status groups, which is one principal formula for identifying cultural capital given by Lamont and Lareau (1988). Because students leave *sabjong* with no more possessions than they entered with, it is virtually impossible to argue that they are effective in transmitting or helping students acquire objectified cultural capital.

A final possibility for the acquisition of objectified cultural capital at *sabjong* is discussed more in hypothetical than actual terms by educators – computers and other digital technology. While no *sabjong* I visited had computers available for regular student use (and only Atypical *Sabjong* had computers regularly on site at all), many educators expressed their desire to eventually be able to provide this type of opportunity and training for the students. “There are supplemental schools (*peixun*) in Xining that have computers for the students. They can take classes in how to use computers and learn all kinds of things that we can’t do here in this *sabjong*” Rigzang, the extraordinarily ambitious and energetic leader of a *sabjong* in Serjong town, said to me, electing to use the Chinese term *peixun* rather than the Tibetan term *sabjong* to describe the programs in Xining about which she spoke:

It would be great if students can come here to learn computer programming and other skills, but it’s totally impossible for now. We don’t even have this building for more than a few weeks. We don’t even have any place to keep them, let alone the money to buy



them! And some of the us teachers are OK with computers, but I don't know if we could *teach* computer classes.

For most *sabjong*, computer classes are well outside of the realm of possibility for now: those *sabjong* most likely to be interested in this possibility and have the teachers with competence to teach this topic are generally the Typical *Sabjong*, who rarely own the buildings their classrooms are in. *Sabjong* with more permanent storage space, generally Atypical *Sabjong*, prefer to focus on teaching topics directly related to Tibetan culture rather than computing skill, which would be almost entirely in Chinese, though even some of these skills were transmitted *ad hoc* at MT. It seems if any *sabjong* in my study were to incorporate computer classes it would be the Atypical Urban *sabjong* New Sprouts Education run by Tsering Tso or the Typical Semi-Urban *sabjong* New Flower, run by Kandro Tso and her husband Drolma Jyab. Other Typical and Atypical *sabjong* educators offered perspectives like Rinzang's – they would love to include computer classes but it is simply not remotely possible for the time being – though others, such as Thubten Dorje, a college student operating a *sabjong* in Serjong, suggested the possibility of a similar course, but for cellphone usage.

We could teach them about Tibetan apps. There are many nowadays, but a lot of kids don't know about them or how to use them. There are dictionaries, maps, news, and all kinds of useful things. But the students are young and most of them don't have phones yet. Maybe there are some classes for adults on how to use cellphones, but it's important to teach the kids, too, so they don't just play games and waste time.

Thubten Dorje is open to the more modest possibility of teaching students to use cellphones, rather than computers, but even this seems far-fetched at the moment, as he realizes that few young students have phones. Nevertheless, he appears keenly aware of the possibility that *sabjong* might be able to help students in acquiring objectified cultural capital, or, if not the phones themselves, the competency (i.e., the embodied cultural capital) necessary to properly appropriate the objectified cultural capital. Ultimately, then, one must conclude that *sabjong* – as

most supplemental schools everywhere – do not appear to have the capacity to assist students in the acquisition of other states of cultural capital. While it seems that sources beyond the family, like *sabjong*, may be ideally positioned to help students acquire all kinds of embodied cultural capital, the acquisition of objectified cultural capital may remain more immediately the product of intergenerational forces confined to the family (or particularly close connections) alone, just as the acquisition of institutionalized cultural capital remains limited to schools and universities.

### *Social Capital*

Unlike most other concepts used in this study, social capital has a provenance and application outside of Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction and general research program. I necessarily follow Bourdieu's (1986) operationalization of the term in this study because wresting the concept of social capital from its context in Bourdieu's theory of reproduction and fields would render the term unintelligible because it could no longer be understood as convertible into other forms of capital (Grenfell, 2009). It is, therefore, important to briefly distinguish my operationalization of the concept from other uses, but simultaneously show how other uses of the concept, such as Coleman's (1990), inform the findings analyzed here.

Most fundamentally, according to Bourdieu (1980, p. 2) social capital is

... the sum of current and potential resources which are linked to possession of a network of lasting relations, of more or less institutionalised shared acknowledgement and recognition; or, in other words, belonging to a group, as the sum total of agents who not only share the same characteristics (liable to be perceived by an observer, by others and themselves) but also joined by permanent and useful connections.

And, for Bourdieu (1986, p. 249), "the volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural, or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of

those to whom he is connected.” One can therefore deduce that in this conceptualization, social capital is possessed by *individuals* and is a product of the aggregate total of the capital possessed by their ‘network of lasting relations’ especially insofar as those relationships are supported by institutions, which can more or less formally support the maintenance of the relation. Social capital is, like the other forms, is a resource that can be used or ‘activated’ to secure advantages over others without such capital and it can be used to do so in subtle ways that are prone to misrecognition by others. That is, in a way homologous to cultural capital, social capital “is a force that helps to create and sustain preexisting social advantages” and thereby allows for the accumulation of “unequal advantages [which] may be disguised as merit (Manza 2006, p. 559).

Not all scholars using the concept of social capital employ it in the same way, however. The principal other approach to social capital was theorized by James Coleman (1990, p. 4), who states that social capital can be thought of as “as closed systems of social networks inherent in the structure of relations between persons and among persons within a social group to promote cooperative behavior and to serve specific needs of its group members.” Closure, here, refers to the degree to which those in the network are connected to others within the same network, which produces the key factors of trust, durability, and reliability that make social capital valuable according to Coleman. Halpern (2005, p. 154) for example describes closure as the degree to which parents in a school talk to one another, thus reinforcing a shared set of norms and values. Others (e.g., Wallace & Pichler, 2007) however, emphasize the opposite phenomenon: that it is network members’ connections *beyond* the network that create value. In either case, the departure from Bourdieu’s approach to the concept is clear: networks are understood as valuable on their own terms by Coleman, but Bourdieu is primarily interested in a network as it is appropriated by an *individual* and how it precipitates advantages vis-à-vis others. Coleman

suggests here that social capital, rather than being the possession of an individual is the existence of a valuable network on which people can draw. Rather than being the product of an individual's family inheritance, as those working in the Bourdieusian tradition imagine capital to be, Coleman's (1990) "model views social capital in terms of social structure" (Manza 2006, p. 559). Putnam (1993, 2015) extended this emphasis on the collective nature of social capital that adheres in networks (rather than in individuals) to an even wider scale, arguing that social capital can be the property of communities, societies, and even nations. For Putnam, then, social capital is not a zero-sum game, but an essentially public good that could, in theory, benefit everyone simultaneously if sufficient investments of effort, trust, reliability and other socially beneficial contributions are made. To apply these three approaches to the case at hand, one could conclude: For Bourdieu, individual *sabjong* participants have varying amounts of social capital; for Coleman, *sabjong* themselves are nodes in networks that facilitate the accumulation of social capital for those in the network; and for Putnam, communities can increase the amount of social capital they possess by continuing to invest in and support organizations like *sabjong*.

As this summary of perspectives suggests, there is much to be gained by considering operationalizations of social capital other than what Bourdieu suggests, especially when conducting case study research *on* organizations themselves that exemplify networks that create value for proximate communities. Zhou and Kim (2006) use Coleman's (1990) conceptualization of the term in one of the very few students of supplemental education programs that explicitly addresses their capacity to generate social capital (either for the networks they are a central node in, as Coleman prefers to put it, or for the individuals that increase their network size through participation in the supplemental program, as Bourdieu would frame it).

Zhou and Kim (2006) found that in addition to the benefits of direct instruction, one of the principal advantages derived at Chinese-American and Korean-American supplemental programs in southern California was the social capital they facilitated even for participants' families. Not only did Chinese- and Korean-American students (whose home cultures may have differed significantly from those dominant in mainstream schooling) have the opportunity to interact with co-ethnic peers in supportive and friendly ways, their parents also had opportunities to enlarge their networks, which led to making new friends, enlarged clientele bases for business-owners, and opportunities to speak their native language. Moreover, such network closure facilitated the sharing of important information, such as project due dates or SAT deadlines, and other knowledge about desirable teachers or good guidance counselors that would have likely been unavailable to students and parents had they not participate in a supplemental program which, I iterate, did not necessarily have the specific intention to provide such beneficial information to parents in the first place. With these varying approaches in mind, I analyze the social capital made available by *sabjong* in ways not necessarily limited to Bourdieu's (1986) narrow, i.e., individualized, notion of the concept. Ultimately, however, I maintain that for capital to be capital, it must at some point be convertible to other forms of capital (Grenfell, 2009) and produce exclusionary advantages (Lamont & Lareau, 1988) thus emphasizing Bourdieu's approach over Coleman's or Putnam's.

Given the quality of Zhou and Kim's (2006) findings, it made sense to begin my search for social capital generation (which Coleman and Putnam emphasize) and acquisition (which Bourdieu emphasizes) in the same areas that Chinese- and Korean-American supplemental programs in California were so successful. My participant observation guidebook and interview protocols reflected this. First and most obviously, *sabjong* served to varying degrees as

organizations that could benefit participants' volume of social capital through introducing participants (and their families) to others who they would have not met otherwise. However, the extent to which *sabjong* facilitated these connections varied greatly.

Three quick examples are instructive: perhaps on the most limited end of the spectrum are Typical Semi-Rural *sabjong*, such as Yeli Village *sabjong*. In this *sabjong*, which took place in a farming village outside of Serjong, students were able to walk to the *sabjong* and attended largely with students that they knew from their local primary or middle school. Sometimes, however, because of staff sizes and student numbers, students would be grouped with others who were not in the same grade as they were in mainstream school. Some organizers tried to avoid this when possible, principally, they explained, because it made instruction much more difficult considering they planned to use the standard textbooks used in mainstream school (but others such as MT and New Hope readily embraced it). In terms of widening students' social networks, these relatively small *sabjong* in villages and rural areas were not particularly successful. And because students often walked to and from class, parents generally only convened once at the end of the session. However, given the close-knit nature of many Amdo Tibetan villages, many of these parents knew each other (and many were distantly related) anyway. At rural *sabjong*, parents rarely came to the *sabjong* other than the final day to retrieve their students and take a few pictures, at most.

In contrast, semi-urban *sabjong* like Clever Rabbit, which were organized in the relatively populous Gangthang county seat and drew students whose hometowns may have been scattered all over the large herding county, brought a student body together that attended a much wider variety of mainstream schools across the county and therefore Clever Rabbit represents a *sabjong* in the middle of the spectrum in terms of their capacity to generate social capital for

participants. Students could meet others and increase their network sizes. Parents, too, were invited to the school buildings (which were repurposed granary store-rooms adjacent to a large central hall) on a couple of occasions, such as the mid-session talent show and the final graduation and activity day. While I cannot speak to the degree to which these parents kept in touch – some may have known each other for 40 years, others may never meet again – *sabjong* in town centers appeared to draw more parents both because these *sabjong* had more events (e.g., poetry contests, circle dance) and because parents were more present in dropping-off and picking-up their children from the *sabjong* each day. This may have been because they felt the county seat was not as safe as the more isolated village, or because it was a farther walk (or both and more reasons), but, in any case, *sabjong* other than the most rural ones did present some opportunities for parents to both reconnect with those they knew well and, in some rarer cases, interact with new acquaintances.

Somewhat more successful in the generation of social capital than *sabjong* like Clever Rabbit were a few other typical *sabjong*, such as the Butter Lamp *sabjong* run on the high grasslands of Ganga in the hometown area of my principal research assistant Dorje. This *sabjong* was typical in the sense that it held classes only during holiday breaks, was taught primarily by university students in makeshift classrooms that had to be identified anew each session. However, the one factor set it apart from other Typical Sabjong is that it was routinely sponsored by a local Tibetan-run NGO called the Butter Lamp Association. This group, which for reasons of political sensitivity was not made the focus of this study, raised funds throughout the year to facilitate the execution of a *sabjong* during winter and summer breaks. An outside observer, if they focused only on the visible daily activities of the *sabjong*, would not know that this *sabjong* was embedded within a larger organizational structure (hence its inclusion in the Typical Sabjong

category). However, the Butter Lamp *sabjong* was unique in that once per week they would invite parents to arrive early at the end of the day to watch their school engage in Tibetan circle dancing before heading home for the evening. It was common during these events to see parents and teachers standing off to the side conversing and using their phones. Whether or not they were just catching up or actually discussing educational strategies was sometimes difficult to determine, as I only have teachers reported speech on these interactions and was rarely if ever included in them myself. However, I talked to one university student, Tashi Jyid, who was a regular teacher at this *sabjong* and a well-known young intellectual in the area. She recounted,

You want to know what I talk about with the parents during circle dance and on the final day? It is difficult to say. We can talk about anything. I know some of them well and maybe they just ask ‘How is your father, your mother?’ like that, or ‘how is living in Chengdu?’ or about my poetry writing. Sometimes it’s just catching up. Some others will ask directly about school and university – they’ll ask me how to choose a major or how to study well... There are many I have known for a long time. We see each other a lot. But we never talked about school stuff before this *sabjong*. Maybe I am like their niece and we see each other on holidays or summer. It’s nice. But now they also ask me about university and I try to help them because I have some good experience.

On ‘graduation day’ as well, the teachers at Butter Lamp spoke at length to the parents of their ‘homeroom’ class in a manner more specific than any I had seen elsewhere. Many of the parents indeed knew each other (perhaps as members or supporters of the Association in the first place) and, as they sat in classrooms listening to the university student-teachers, they able to hear a great number of valuable details and strategies for successfully navigating school – perhaps a quintessential form of social capital generation in educational spaces. Parents learned from other parents and teachers about important test dates, learning materials, and strategies for how to effectively intervene in their students’ educational experience in mainstream schooling. Butter Lamp *sabjong* was unique in that it engaged most explicitly in these small group ‘strategy sessions’ on graduation day which consisted primarily of university students telling the parents



what they should expect over the next couple of years. Parents listened intently, university students appeared to enjoy the respect and time they were given, and many seemed to leave the with a greater degree of information and network connection. As Tashi Jyid's comments illustrate, while these connections, the networks themselves, clearly predate the *sabjong*, as many villages are tight-knit or even extended family clans, the advent of *sabjong* has helped the network produce advantageous educational strategies in particular. While these communities (or members of these communities by dint of their membership) have possessed social capital since long before the contemporary era, *sabjong* have allowed these network connections to facilitate educational advantages in ways perhaps not previously enjoyed. In other words, the networks are not new. But these networks' capacity to facilitate specifically *educational* advantages seems directly improved as a product of *sabjong* proliferation. This, of course, is not surprising – clearly educational programs worth the name have the capacity to increase educational advantages. What is significant about this finding is that the *sabjong* appear to 'thicken' or make more robust connections that already existed (but perhaps for different reasons), thus strengthening the community and its resilience in weathering sociopolitical change.

And finally, the *sabjong* most successful at transmitting social capital to students were Atypical *sabjong*, both those in urban and non-urban spaces. Those in urban spaces brought together not only students of various ages (including adults) but they were also able to maintain durable bonds simply because they operated on a weekly basis rather than during summers and winters only. The routines at the Atypical Urban *sabjong* were pleasant among the adult class I taught on Thursday nights; we enjoyed seeing each other weekly and from time to time would make plans to socialize after class. Some of the parents in this course even enrolled their children in the weekend courses. The regular scheduling and varied ages meant that both density and

variety of connections formed at Atypical *sabjong* were unmatched anywhere else. The two Atypical non-urban *sabjong* were also successful in helping their participants (and their families) acquire valuable social capital but differently than Atypical Urban *sabjong* and one another. Town Heritage Museum, as the name indicates, is a vital source of social capital far beyond its *sabjong* programs. It regularly invites speakers, experts, authors, charitable organizations, artists, and government officials to its headquarters in the center of the Prefecture seat of Serjong. The cousins who manage the Museum are connected throughout town – so much so that scheduling interviews was tricky and sometimes impossible – and they share these connections as much as possible with participants at the *sabjong*, either through hosting events, circulating publications, or similar activities. Participants at atypical *sabjong*, unlike virtually all others, with the exception of Marching Together, were also extraordinarily varied in their ages, hometowns, and religious status. The Town Heritage Museum welcomed students from all three regions of Tibet (Amdo, Kham, and even U-Tsang) when politically possible, though all students who traveled from other regions were monks or nuns. The students whom I spoke to, both briefly in between classes and also during a few in-depth interviews, greatly enjoyed spending their winter breaks in a new location as replete with vibrant Amdo Tibetan culture in the prefecture seat of Serjong. One monk in his late twenties who was taking the winter classes at the Heritage Museum told me

It is a great environment for learning Tibetan here. That's why we come from all over Tibet to study here. We can meet people from other places and the teachers here are the best. We want to join the monastery here in town, but they have not let us in yet. So we are just staying here and studying until we can get it. It's worth it if we can stay here.

In finding roommates, new teachers, and other monastic and lay scholars that work in and around this Prefecture seat, participants at the Heritage Museum were aware of the social capital that derived from participation there. In Coleman's formulation, the Heritage Museum itself is likely the most valuable instantiation of social capital in this study. However, it is important to

differentiate the *applications* of this social capital from those at more typical *sabjong*, like Butter Lamp. While the social capital acquired by participants at the Town Heritage Museum are advantageous in general, and even educationally so, as the monk's comments about finding new teachers and improving his chances for admission to the monastery suggest, the social capital gained at Atypical Non-Urban *sabjong* may not be primed to help students in mainstream schooling. At the Town Heritage Museum, there were no speeches about how to succeed on the *gaokao*, no parent-teacher meetings in which strategies and opportunities were shared, and no bolstered connections with mainstream teachers or those who knew them and their preferences well. Thus, even *educationally* valuable social capital should not be considered necessarily limited to mainstream schooling.

Marching Together, located as it was out in the grasslands and running only winter and summer sessions with no other principal functions such as a museum or library (though Aku Cheeden hoped this would soon change), was also able to provide for its participants valuable social capital but of a type generally different than that at the Heritage Museum. Rather, Marching Together's student body was largely from the same three villages and all but three or four of the students lived in Gangchen, the grassland county to the south of the Prefecture seat. Because it was one of the few boarding *sabjong*, parents rarely came to campus other than the handful that would come on to watch Competition days or to pick up their children on the final day. However, many of the parents knew each other through their village relationships and most students had at least one parent come to watch the graduation ceremony and pick them up from the *sabjong*. Some who couldn't make the trip would send taxis for their children and friends who would carpool back home – a ride sometimes as long as four hours. It may be argued that participants at Marching Together met the *fewest* and the *least* varied people of all *sabjong*

participants in this study. So how is it possible that Marching Together was able to help students acquire social capital?

There are two principal components of a response to this question: extreme closure and durability of the bonds. Rather than conceptualizing the ideal configuration of relationships an individual could have as one that is as broad and varied as possible, Marching Together sometimes took the opposite approach. By mimicking a monastic environment in many ways, and preferring temporary seclusion and intensive study to varied opportunities and connections, Marching Together was, arguably, the only *sabjong* in this study that successfully generated and imparted to students its own ethical and dispositional norms – a degree of social control characteristic of communities with greater social capital (Halpern, 2005). Whereas other *sabjong*, even the few that provided students with housing and meals, focused primarily on the instrumental value of learning, leaders at Marching Together continually emphasized the moral nature of the project of learning Pure Tibetan that students had now embarked on. Through ‘daily summaries’ in which students’ faults were confessed and commendations given class by class at the end of each day, through biweekly ritual Competitions, and through extreme discipline juxtaposed with uniquely affectionate interactions, Marching Together cultivated an intense sense of closure, not unlike monasteries, where all participants are compelled (perhaps forced!) to feel an extreme sense of responsibility to one another. This showed up in a number of instances as previous chapters have described, such as turning others in for speaking ‘mixed language’ or students’ unusual gumption in pitching in physical labor to construct the *sabjong* campus. Aku Cheeden moreover was in regular contact with many of the parents, many of whom he knew from his life and work in this area. With nightly recitation sessions in which members of each class had to recite passages individually for the teaching staff in our office and other

quasi-monastic features in place, there was no *hiding* at Marching Together such that it became painfully obvious as soon as anyone began slacking on their manual or intellectual duties. As a result of this intensive and prolonged participation at Marching Together, the social capital that was built, while perhaps more limited in breadth was arguably far more valuable in its depth. These were not the proverbial ‘weak ties’ (Granovetter, 1973) that sometimes prove to be so valuable; these were atypically *strong* ties that do not produce all kinds of exciting opportunities but do facilitate social control, shared norms, and a serious commitment to community – all important aspects of Amdo Tibetan communities that those in this study feel is increasingly *lost* in mainstream schooling and contemporary Chinese society. That many teachers remained with MT for over a decade, that several students became teachers and helpers after graduation, that students enjoy talking about (and watching videos of) past years at the *sabjong* with great admiration, and that students strive endlessly to compete for class glory in the Competition all provide evidence that suggests participants here not only feel a greater sense of responsibility to one another but actually act on it and count others to do so as well.

As Weick (1976, p. 4) mentions of loosely coupled systems, there are two principal mechanisms that maintain cohesion: one is the technical core of an organization, that is, the fundamental goals of what the organization is to produce; the second is the authority of office, or leaders’ capacity to impose norms and sanctions on organization members. While both of these are highly active in the case of Marching Together, it is perhaps the norms that Aku Cheeden, Aku Lobsang, the rest of the staff *and senior students* (such as the daily leaders, described in previous field notes), which is made possible through their unique Returner model of enrollment, that make Marching Together unique in their capacity to generate social capital. In Bourdieu’s terms, however, Marching Together is not particularly effective at helping students acquire social

capital: It does not substantially increase their networks to those who have new or other kinds of valuable capital. But, as alumni frequently return to Marching Together for a variety of reasons, just to chat (as many did), to donate something (as one graduate now living in England did), to raise money for a worthy cause (as Chopa did to enroll in graduate studies), to watch a Competition, or for a variety of other reasons, it is clear that participants at Marching Together derive a significant value that is, in a sometimes indirect way, convertible to other forms of capital. But, clearly, the intention to make such conversions must necessarily be deemphasized and disguised to the point where they could never be considered a worthwhile investment if one were to use exclusively economic measures. That is to say, whether emphasizing the *quality* of interpersonal bonds over their *quantity* is an advantageous strategy for succeeding in mainstream education and employment remains to be shown. It may very well be the case, as Zhou and Kim (2006) and other studies on the relative value of ‘weak ties’ show, that the breadth of one’s network may simply be correlated with better educational outcomes. However, despite Aku Cheeden’s openness to students’ pursuit of diverse experiences and educational-employment trajectories, this is one area that he and other educators at Marching Together appear to actively resist is the instrumentalization and depersonalization of education and educational spaces: students at MT, sometimes even sleeping in the same single bed for a month, are anything but ‘in it for themselves’. This perspective will be taken up again in the final section on symbolic capital.

Similar to Zhou and Kim (2006) then, it is possible to see at *sabjong* the acquisition of many types of social capital that is indeed advantageous to individuals (even if it is *also* advantageous to networks or communities as a whole). To varying degrees, students and parents are able to increase the breadth of their social networks and thereby increase the quality and quantity of connections they have for facilitating a wide variety of educational advantages, such as learning

about test dates and strategies, preparation opportunities, and so forth. That many *sabjong* are actually forced to combine students of different ages in the same classrooms, which may be frustrating for teachers, may still further increase the quality (and value) of students' and parents' social networks. Similarly, *sabjong*, whether they are organized by successful university students, professional teachers, or even monks, provide parents with connections to a variety of people who can serve as all-important 'cultural guides' or 'translators' – both literal and figurative in this case – who have more experience straddling Tibetan communities and Chinese institutions (Lareau, 2015).

As mentioned, on the final day of *sabjong*, parents were usually invited to attend the graduation ceremony and listen to the *sabjong* organizers speak. While such speeches weren't always universally appreciated or seen as particularly beneficial, these events created opportunities for parents or students and teachers to trade contact information, websites, and other valuable resources. *Sabjong* organizers who were particularly successful in the university and graduate studies, such as Tashi Jyid or Rigzang, told me about the never-ending stream of texts and voice messages they got from parents asking for advice on all sorts of school-related matters. For some *sabjong* organizers that had even more experience and success in schooling, such as Kandro Tso and her husband Drolma Jyab, they worked more in an advising capacity than in a teaching one and intentionally stepped into the role of connecting parents to information and resources (recall that their *sabjong* was actually registered as an 'Educational Consulting' business and Drolma Jyab himself was not actually permitted to teach any courses, as he held a position at a university in Xining). Connections facilitated or enhanced by *sabjong* located in village settings also led participants to feel like they were participants in a sort of mutual-aid cooperative. As Thubten at Sunlight Education, a typical semi-rural *sabjong*,

explained “Sure, I am happy to [do this] work. It can be a little boring, but it’s not bad. Besides, I should do it for my village. Many people supported me in college. If I teach here, they will know I’m not selfish. Maybe they will help me again, if I ask.” In some cases, the organization that ran the *sabjong* also took responsibility for fundraising for all sorts of projects, ranging from temple repairs to the purchase of farm equipment, as in the case of Butter Lamp Association. While I cannot argue that the community support for such projects would be decreased in the absence of *sabjong*, the continued support of *sabjong* by such organizations suggest that communities find these to be valuable not only for boosting grades but for boosting the village’s social capital, as Putnam (1995) would put it. Ultimately, in some form or another, all of the opportunities to acquire social capital identified by Zhou and Kim (2006) were in evidence to some degree among the 26 *sabjong* that comprise this study, although *sabjong* were often limited in the extent to which they could provide various opportunities for social capital acquisition.

It is worth concluding this section, however, by discussing some instantiations of social capital acquired at *sabjong* that were not emphasized in Zhou and Kim (2006) or other (Park, 2012; Diskin, 2010) research on supplemental education programs, which often considers the benefits of social capital in terms of educational outcomes only. However, *sabjong* in Amdo Tibetan can serve more purposes than the improvement of grades and development of the variety of skills that lead to this. In the following paragraphs, I discuss three unexpected ways in which at least some *sabjong* can boost the social capital of their participants.

As the reader will notice, when appropriate I elect to use the *sabjong* ‘participants’ rather than simply ‘students’ because one of the largest themes I found through data analysis was the benefits that *educators* themselves derived from their participation in *sabjong*, in addition to the benefits students (and, by extension, their families) enjoyed. First, participation in *sabjong*,



whether typical or not, urban or not, was understood by many teachers not only as useful way to improve their teaching skill, make friends and perhaps a little money. It was also understood as a duty or responsibility if not an outright obligation. These feelings were piqued when *sabjong* teachers worked in their own villages. Many educators, such as those at Black Rock and Yeli, explicitly reported to me that at least a small factor in their decision to teach were the frequent calls made by village leaders and other elders that ‘encouraged’ them to organize and teach a *sabjong* during a summer or winter break. It is sometimes impossible to say, based on interview transcripts alone, just how coerced these student-teachers felt, as they would be unlikely to complain much about accepting a responsibility that they knew was, in general, worth accepting. Moreover, in Amdo Tibetan, the term for “let” and “make” (as in: compel, force) is the same (*jug pa*) and even context clues do not always reveal the distinction. For example, the phrases “they let us organize a *sabjong*” and “they made us organize a *sabjong*” (*gsab sbyong ‘dzin grwa zig sgrigs ‘jug*) are sometimes indistinguishable. In any case, a significant number of *sabjong* teachers across all programs reported that they felt that they *should/must* teach – another set of terms that is in Tibetan generally signified by the same word (*dgos pa*). In cases of typical semi-rural village *sabjong*, such as at Black Rock and Yeli, educators told me that several parents from the village had specifically called them and asked if they would host a *sabjong*, if the political environment permitted it. This direct request for teachings is always difficult to deny, but especially in Tibetan and Buddhist cultures where there are millennia-old expectations that requests for teaching simply cannot be refused without compelling reasons (Dreyfus, 2003). But even at Atypical Urban *sabjong* in urban areas where there were no ‘village elders’ who could call on potential *sabjong* teachers directly, organizers like Gonpo Thar (of Flower of Fortune) and Tsering Tso (of New Sprouts) nevertheless reported that they felt a significant pressure “to

do [something] beneficial for my ethnic group (*mi rigs*)” in Gonpo Thar’s words. In explaining why they felt this pressure, Gonpo Thar added,

Many have supported me when I was young. My village helped raise money to help me enroll in college. And then in college, many professors helped me find scholarships so I could attend graduate school in the Philippines. I should return that kindness to the younger generations.

Where village environments created a greater sense of closure, however, the obligation was felt even stronger by educators in Typical Non-urban *sabjong*. Though no educators discussed their participation in this way, conducting weeks or in some cases months of participant observation at particular sites (namely Marching Together and Black Rock, where I spent the most time overall) revealed that these student-educators also appreciate the amount of goodwill and popularity it helps them earn, what in Chinese is called “connections” (*guan xi*), a word that often remains untranslated due to the contemporary popularity of the term. That is, many educators were happy to meet parents, guardians, and older siblings. Walking the ten minutes through the village to and from the *sabjong* each day in Black Rock, Naba with whom I stayed, his younger brother who attended the *sabjong*, Ochen, and I stopped and talked for at least a moment with virtually every neighbor that saw us. In addition to being interested in the bizarre looking foreigner in the village who spoke a bizarre form of Tibetan, neighbors would share pleasantries beginning with the typical “Where are you going?!” even though all surely knew we were heading to and from the *sabjong*. Naba, who also worked as an interpreter and research assistant for a few stints like this trip to his hometown of Black Rock, generally appreciated working in the *sabjong* and he refused to take any money for it, though in later years, as his schedule got busier and he pursued summer internships outside of his hometown, he declined to participate without any regret or incident. Participating in *sabjong* for many educators was a clear and direct way to signal to others not only that (formal) education is

important (a sentiment that seems beyond question for many now), but that the *sabjong* teacher believed in the academic potential of the village children and was willing to work tirelessly to see them succeed. Organizing *sabjong*, therefore, on one level can be understood as a public display of goodwill, trustworthiness, and dedication to the village. It is an unmistakable form of investment that older, successful students can make in village children on behalf the (generally un-schooled) parents who may not be in a position to make such a contribution themselves. I personally even felt this sense of community trust and welcome myself on many occasions, which was no doubt partially a product of the fact that my Tibetan language skills far outweighed my Chinese proficiency, a fairly rare occurrence among most foreigners coming to this area. When locals found out I was interested in education and willing to volunteer to teach English at *sabjong*, skepticism toward me and my motivations dissipated significantly. Though everyone always remained on alert to some degree, given the political sensitivity of a foreigner conducting research on a topic such as education in Tibetan autonomous zones, my identity as a *teacher* brought me extensive goodwill, conversations, and invitations.

The key point here is that participation in supplemental education programs can facilitate the acquisition of social capital not only for students and their families, but for the teachers as well both in Bourdieu's sense and in Coleman's. Not only do teachers experience all the opportunities to meet peers, make connections, learn new information about co-teachers' university life and employment plans, which constitute classic instances of social capital acquisition in Bourdieu's formulation, teachers also have an ideal opportunity to make publicly visible investments in their village and its schoolchildren that are widely interpreted by others as beneficial, altruistic, and community-building. I heard some local education leaders, such as Kuntar Gya who was one of the handful of people – almost all professional educators – who voiced skepticism towards the

benefits of *sabjong*, say this specifically in interviews: “If the teachers aren’t very good, I don’t know if students get a lot of benefit from the *sabjong*. But I think the teachers do. They get teaching practice, they meet new people, and learn some new things.” It is therefore important to highlight that these young teachers as well derive much from their participation in *sabjong* – both in terms of the material and social benefits they acquire for themselves (ranging from teaching practice to new friends) but also in enhancing the connectivity and goodwill of the village itself (or community, in the case of urban *sabjong*). Further discussion of this process will be concluded in the next section on symbolic capital.

Finally, it is important to recognize that the creation of good will is not even confined to the network that exists among villagers alone. That is, while hosting *sabjong* facilitates a sense of closure in that community values are practiced and reaffirmed through the sociality of the institution (Halpern, 2005), it also helps establish key links between members of the village network to well-positioned others *outside* that network, namely government officials, who in general have better access to the meta-field of power. Running a *sabjong*, in most cases, requires at least tacit permission from a few government officials, though in recent years this process has become more ‘rationalized’ (which at least means that arbitrary closures should become less common, although no one expects a complete change of circumstances) and increasing amounts of paperwork and ‘government approval stamps’ (*chog mchan, tham ka*) are necessary. And during sensitive seasons or even years, permission to host a *sabjong* is anything but a given. Nevertheless, *sabjong* preparation is one of the first and most direct experiences many college students have working with government officials and ingratiating themselves with those who exert significant control over village life and its prohibitions. On one occasion when I asked

Naba about the difficulties he encountered in organizing previous iterations of the Black Rock *sabjong* he replied (in English),

I also learned from *sabjong* how to do all the other things for preparation. It's a lot of work. We have to plan: where can we get desks? where we can have class? do I they need supplies? do I [have to] hire a [moving] truck?. I had to go to government office three times to get permission to have the *sabjong* last year. At first, [I had] no idea how to do it. That was two years ago. But now they know me. So hopefully it will be easier in the future.

The connections established between *sabjong* organizers and government officials also help account for why certain *sabjong* were able to get permission to run during more sensitive times when others were not. During January and February of 2019, political tensions had made it difficult for some *sabjong* to get permission to run and I was discouraged from visiting a few *sabjong* with whom I had already scheduled a visit. However, Marching Together and the Town Heritage Museum were both able to hold programs mostly in the way they had planned despite the fact that, if anything, *they* might be seen as the ones *most* likely to transgress political boundaries as they were teaching “Tibetan culture” rather than merely preparing students for mainstream schooling. However, when I asked Aku Cheeden about this that spring, he responded easily, “We’ve known the government officials here for a long time. Since even before 2008 [when there were massive political issues and subsequent prohibitions on many cultural activities]. Almost everyone else was shut down after 2008 but not us. They trust us here.”

At the risk of sounding tautological then, the longest running *sabjong* are, in many instances, the *most* secure and stable despite the fact that they appear to teach the most politically questionable material (because it ‘diverges’ from mainstream curricula), largely because they have the longest and most durable relationships with government officials. While it goes without saying that this could change at any moment, the cultivation of trust, both within and beyond the village setting, is a key product of *sabjong* organization *and* a key factor in sustaining them.

*Symbolic Capital*

As outlined previously, symbolic capital can be understood in two senses. First, which is not the usage employed here, is a qualifier of cultural and social capital; that is, cultural and social capital are symbolic insofar as they are valuable *because* they are recognized as indicators of some other attributes or competence, as Kingston (2001) critiqued regarding the proclivity of middle-class teachers to take students' (functionally useless) of "knowledge of [the high-brow French author] Racine" as an indicator or symbol of their intellectual aptitude. That is, Kingston argues that cultural capital is *merely* symbolic, and not a reliable index of one's competencies or knowledge. However, others, like Lareau (2011), suggest that while there is a symbolic dimension to cultural capital (in that it always requires recognition by someone to be understood as capital), cultural capital constitutes a 'real' competence by which individuals activating such capital can achieve their goals without simply relying on surreptitiously exchanging cultural codes but, rather, through employing actually valuable institutional knowledge (Lareau, 2015). That Lareau and Muñoz (2012) and Calarco (2014) argue parents sometimes activate cultural capital in ways that *annoy* teachers and administrators, rather than impressing them through shared high-brow, upper-class sensibilities, indicates that they do not conceptualize cultural and social capital as merely symbolic.

A second, perhaps simpler or at least more direct description of symbolic capital is that symbolic capital exists as another *form* of capital (rather than merely a description *of* cultural and social capital), although it does, nevertheless, still relate to the other forms of capital. In brief, this notion of symbolic capital is "the form that the various species of capital assume when they are perceived and recognized as legitimate" (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 17; Bourdieu, 1986). In the words of Manza (2006, p. 600) it is "the ability to make certain kinds of relationships of power

and privilege seem disinterested or natural.” In this way, symbolic capital is the basis of symbolic power: “It is the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 23). Ultimately, symbolic capital is that which causes others to see one’s capital not as merely capital but recognized as “legitimate competence” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 245). Thus, the granting of titles, such as ‘Master’ or ‘Doctor’ by dint of possession of a degree which must be accredited by the state after all, produces symbolic violence at the same time as it confers symbolic capital because it imposes quasi-universal recognition; that is, it attempts to impose a “monopoly over legitimate naming” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 21). In sum, one’s symbolic capital is synonymous with the degree to which others perceive their *other* forms of (economic, social, and particularly cultural) capital as legitimately possessed, i.e., deserved. For example, while two people may each own the similarly high-end Languedoc guitar (i.e., the same instantiation of objectified cultural capital), the ability of one person to tune it, play it, and discuss its specifics confers greater symbolic capital than it does on someone who simply purchased one with inherited money who may remain, in the eyes of many, an undeserving or illegitimate possessor of such a fine instrument. It is therefore also clear how deeply implicated one’s habitus – i.e., their dispositions such as speech patterns, bodily skill, and ambitions – is in the process of compelling others to see one’s cultural capital as legitimately possessed.

I therefore conclude with the most complex function that I observed some *sabjong* perform: Marching Together, and some other *sabjong*, served as generators of symbolic capital in that they provide opportunities for successful graduates and educators to ‘repay’ their debts to their community publicly. By doing so, they thereby compel other villagers or members of Amdo Tibetan society at large to recognize the educators’ cultural and social capital as both legitimate

(because they were able to demonstrate their intellectual acumen through teaching) and deserved (because they were willing to pay forward the investments that the community, however it is imagined, made in them).

Recounting a short episode from my first days at Marching Together illustrates this process. Aku Cheeden and Chopa were gone for the majority of my first full day at Marching Together, which at the time I thought was odd. When I later inquired as to why Aku Cheeden and Chopa were away for the start of the *sabjong*, I found out that they were attending a picnic-party that the village was throwing in honor of Chopa, who had just gained admission to the prestigious Minzu University of China in Beijing. Aku Cheeden had also taken part in organizing it and had made arrangements for Marching Together's first day to go on even in the absence of two of its main teachers. From the outset, then, I was keenly aware of the collective effort it often took to send students far away to prestigious university programs. The whole village participated in raising money for Chopa's travel and tuition, decorating Chopa with congratulatory *katak* and red envelopes full of money. As one of the very few students from the village where Marching Together was located to attend this university, the community felt a strong sense of both pride and responsibility to ensure that Chopa's next educational endeavor was successful. Chopa, unsurprisingly, also felt compelled to acknowledge the collective effort and make good on their investment. In addition to vowing to work hard in Beijing, volunteering his time at Marching Together to teach the local schoolchildren helped repay his debt.

In an interview thirteen months after I first arrived at Marching Together, Aku Cheeden shed more light on how he understood this reciprocity. I pickup at a conversation that featured previously in this dissertation. "It's excellent if students leave Tibet to study or work" Aku Cheeden said as we sat in the restaurant talking over tea and waiting for food. "There is a lot they



can learn outside (*phar phyogs*) that they can't here. Look at Chopa. He's going to Minzu University in Beijing, that's excellent for him and for his family. For everyone." I asked if this might bring complications or drawbacks, perhaps akin to a so-called "brain drain" where the best students from Tibetan areas continually leave. Aku Cheeden replied,

No, it's no problem. They should go if they can. The problem is if they don't come back, if they don't help out after getting an education, if they lose their connection to the village community... If they just use their education for their own sake, then it doesn't bring any greater benefit at all. It's just for themselves, but they've forgotten others.

In particular, Aku envisioned two aspects that could cause a problem: first was if those who travel elsewhere do not maintain native-speaker fluency in Tibetan, which, of course for Aku Cheeden, means the capacity to speak Pure Tibetan, or, in a less politicized-formulation, the capacity to express whatever one wanted to say without having to resort to using Chinese; the second was if the benefits of one's learning were not passed on to others. Aku Cheeden continued, "If they go to inner China (*rgya nang*) and get a good job, make a lot of money, that's great. But if they just stay there, then what can we say they are doing for their family? For the village?" For Aku Cheeden, one's symbolic capital is 'measured' by the extent to which they make contributions to their community.

Aku Rinchen, who I interviewed several months prior and was unrelated to Marching Together, voiced a similar sentiment in the context of our conversation about what constitutes 'good' development, admitting:

Of course everyone needs money nowadays. If you are rich, you will get others' admiration (*rtsis bkur*)... Or if you have a good education, you will get others' admiration. But if you have a bad personality, you will not have their respect/esteem (*mthong chen*)... The main reason we get an education is to become a good person, to try our best to benefit others. And if you think of benefitting others more than yourself, then that is what a good person is.

Aku Rinchen even went further than this, by specifying “the goal of development is to have the *thought* of benefitting others... If you can’t benefit others then no matter how educated you are, no matter how right you are, if you can’t benefit others, then there is no meaning (*nang don*) of development.” I repeat the phrases of Aku Rinchen in order to show the emphasis with which he articulated the importance of orienting one’s education toward the benefit of others. Aku seems to say, quite simply, that an education that does not lead to the benefit of others is not a real, or legitimate education at all. Other elders, such as Teacher Takdrug Gya and his father, also echoed this sentiment with their small discourse on the development of *lhag bsam* or the ‘altruistic intention’ that should be both the motivation for education and the result of a good or *real* education – what Aku Rinchen called *slob gso* as opposed to mere *slob khrid*.

Teaching at *sabjong* of all types, but especially those that deliberately serve students perceived (primarily by the state, but also many others) as underprivileged or living in poor conditions (*cha rkyen zhan pa*) that impede attempts to succeed in schooling, is one of the most direct ways to make good on the investments Amdo Tibetan communities have made in those young adults, like Chopa. Moreover, in the current political climate, where private sector employment is tough to come by, Tibetan-run NGOs are routinely shuttered, and village projects are always politically fraught (Makely, 2018), *sabjong* represent one of the few ways to perform services that are both generally accepted by the state *and* able to be read by other Tibetans as displaying a strong ‘ethnic consciousness’ characterized by altruism.

Tibetans and others in China readily recognize that diplomas, especially from prestigious universities, are extraordinarily valuable in the current era. They also recognize that government jobs, which usually require and, in turn, supply substantial *guan xi* and thus social and economic capital are integral to long-term success and even security in China: policies and circumstances

can change quickly and there is no substitute for being protected from such vicissitudes by one's close relationship with state institutions and their representatives – as all my interlocutors who remembered the Cultural Revolution or previous events were quick to point out. That is, Tibetans in my study did not attempt to ignore political economy in favor of a moral economy (Thomson 1971, p. 78) in which Amdo Tibetans prioritized only “a belief that they were defending traditional rights or customs.” As shown, many participants were eager to embrace new technologies, employment sectors, and even worldviews; I did not find a single interlocutor who simply preferred a ‘return to the past’ in all aspects of society. But, on the other hand, the majority of interlocutors lamented that formal education in China increasingly compelled students to instrumentalize and individualize their learning.

It was the disavowal of a deeply instrumentalized sense of learning that many used to maintain ethnic boundaries in ways that did not require them to explicitly articulate their disdain for the encroachment of Han Chinese people and norms – a statement that could cause one serious problems if it were interpreted unfavorably by an official from the Public Security Bureau. And, for the most part, it is not the existence of Han Chinese people or Chinese cultures that is so problematic for participants; they have been coexisting more or less peacefully alongside far more numerous Chinese populations for many centuries and Chinese personalities and influences have played a role in Tibetan state-making and culture, just as Tibetan personalities and influences have played a role in Chinese state-making and culture (Tuttle, 2005). What my principal interlocutors continually returned to was their conviction that most people, if given the time and resources, could succeed in school; this was not a special skill that led to distinction and thereby value. Distinction, in their minds, belonged to those who used their

education in ways that commensurate with a Tibetan Buddhist worldview that emphasized the benefits to *others* that learning can – and *should* – produce.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored forms of capital other than embodied cultural capital participants at *sabjong* can acquire. Importantly, this is not limited only to ‘clients’ who enroll at supplemental programs but to the teaching staffs and even connected families as well. First, I showed that *sabjong*, and supplemental programs more generally, are rather limited in their ability to transmit objectified and institutionalized cultural capital to their participants. However, they are sometimes able to supply the embodied cultural capital that facilitates appropriation of objectified or institutionalized capital, for example though teaching students about computers or smartphone apps (in the case of objectified cultural capital) or places to look for employment opportunities and graduate programs (in the case of institutionalized cultural capital). In both cases, many *sabjong* organizers had the aspiration of providing training to their students in these areas, but economic and other logistical concerns simply make it impossible for the time being for *sabjong* to host computer training courses that remain the prerogative of supplemental programs with big budgets and permanent locations. This means all programs (to my knowledge) with this capacity are located Xining, though the prefecture seat of Serjong may start to see *sabjong* incorporate such classes in the near future. An answer to the question of what, if any, institutionalized cultural capital *sabjong* can offer at first seems quite simple: None. As unaccredited supplemental programs organized anew each year, they are nowhere close to offering credentials that ‘officially consecrate’ the acquisition of cultural capital and confer on the bearer of the credential a reliable guarantee of their competence that is universally (or even

widely) recognized. Nevertheless, *sabjong* continue to distribute ‘graduation’ certificates and other prizes, perhaps in an attempt to generate an interest and familiarity with the norms of schooling and, indeed, cultivate from an early age an *investment* (i.e., *illusio*) in the game of formal education, a disposition that, as noted, has not always characterized Tibetan communities’ approaches to education elsewhere on the Plateau (Postiglione et al., 2006). However, in the contemporary era both in China and globally, a disavowal or disinterest in education is likely to lead to exclusion from secure and lucrative employment (Baker, 2014) and, in the Tibetan case, be interpreted as a lack of desire to engage in, arguably, the *one* practice that promises to lift Amdo Tibetans out of poverty without transgressing moral norms that discourage selfish, extractive, or exploitative livelihoods.

Finally, *sabjong* play a role that is both unique and vital in Tibetan communities: they provide a relatively politically safe space for successful Tibetan students and educators to publicly repay debts to their communities, who, generally speaking, collectively contributed to supporting these individuals when they were students in need of tuition assistance and other forms of support. Envisioning educators’ commitment to teach in *sabjong* in this way also gives Tibetans a politically viable ground for marking ethnic boundaries because it displaces such boundary keeping by one degree and thus facilitates doing so by proxy: Interlocutors articulate that it is not Han Chinese people that are the problem, but the individualized and instrumentalized approaches to education – which happen to disproportionately characterize Han Chinese populations, though not inherently so – that are the main threats to the thriving of Tibetan communities and cultures. Teaching at *sabjong* provides an important solution available to everyone but pursued only by those who have gotten a ‘real’ education, which entails the development of altruism.

Whether or not Amdo Tibetans actually feel like the mere existence of Han Chinese people on the Tibetan Plateau is problematic is not a question this study engages directly. While there is no question whatsoever that some feel this way, one purpose of this study has been to analyze how these sentiments find expression through educational philosophies and practices. Ultimately, then, *sabjong* can serve many purposes and, in some special instances, such as Marching Together, they constitute institutions that are deeply meaningful to their participants in addition to providing instruction in what is taught and tested in mainstream schooling. That graduates at Marching Together end each graduation ceremony with protracted and predictable bouts of crying, an event that almost takes on a ritualistic character (so much so that Aku Cheeden warned me in advance that the graduates would cry when they got their diplomas), indicates not necessarily their affection for their *sabjong* (though it might) but, rather, it indicates the responsibility they feel towards making public their commitment to what it is that *sabjong* do.

## **Part 5: Conclusion**

## CHAPTER 12

### CONCLUSION

The past chapters have provided ethnographic data and analysis that have shown the ways that *sabjong* educators conceptualize what is educationally valuable and help students acquire it through supplemental educational programs. To do so, I focused in particular on the practices and perspectives present at one *sabjong*, Marching Together, atypical both when compared to other programs in northeastern Amdo Tibet and atypical vis-à-vis what the leading body of theory, namely the world culture strand of neoinstitutionalism, says one should expect to find when analyzing supplemental programs and their constituent parts (Baker 2014; Meyer et al., 1997). Methodologically, this entailed using the Extended Case Method of ethnographic analysis, which differs from other principal ethnographic methods (e.g., grounded theory, ethnomethodology, and the interpretive case method) in that it leverages situational analysis of ‘micro-interactions’ to reveal the macro structural forces that produce such unique phenomena, facilitating reconstruction of powerful theories through forcing them to confront apparent violations. In the present argument, the complexity of some supplemental programs organized and attended by communities ethnolinguistically minoritized in mainstream schooling in authoritarian contexts appears to challenge and nuance theory on what exactly these programs do and the motivations and philosophies that guide their action. Analytically, I employed three principal concepts – field, habitus, and capital – from Bourdieu’s theory of reproduction in culture, society, and education which provides an explanation for how it is that certain knowledges, dispositions, and values come to be unequally recognized and rewarded in schools, both within but even beyond the confines of a given curriculum. In developing these concepts for use in this study, I both leaned heavily on ‘orthodox’ principles giving these concepts their



specific analytic utility and more recent critiques that, directly or indirectly, force scholars to clarify not only the meanings of these terms and the relationships between them, but also the ethical implications of certain scholarly operationalizations of technical terms: For example, what does it mean to say that nondominant knowledges simply ‘are not valuable capital’? I applied this framework to answer the principal research question: How do *sabjong* educators conceptualize what is educationally valuable and help students acquire it through supplemental educational programs?

Before addressing the principal research questions dealing with capital, I summarize the key findings of the chapters addressing fields and habitus. Part 2 on fields argued, most broadly, that it is difficult to determine whether there exists an autonomous Tibetan educational field or whether it should be considered as an ‘area’ that occupies a marginalized or non-dominant position on the fringes of the Chinese educational field. Following Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) I showed that determining the existence of a field hinges on the existence of logics and a field-specific capital not reducible (but convertible) to those of other fields, namely economic field as it is accessed through university success leading to lucrative employment. Rather than arguing for its existence or not, a rather thankless task, I argue that many Amdo Tibetan education efforts, such as *sabjong*, are usefully conceptualized as attempts to exercise educational and intellectual autonomy that help participants clarify and articulate their notions of educational value.

Approaching the phenomenon of supplemental education using Bourdieu’s notion of fields is significant because it provides a theoretical framework for understanding educators’ strategies in context, unlike other studies that use only an untethered notion of capital whose ‘markets’ and ‘bearers’ are not specified. More specifically, in Part 2 on fields, I argued, after

outlining the context of education in China, that *sabjong* generally adhere to one of a few principal formats, although they evinced increasingly complexity and hybridity even over the duration of this study (e.g., New Hope *sabjong*). I argued that many *sabjong* are organized and taught by university students or recent graduates in villages and require repeated efforts to meet students' needs during summer and winter holidays. Comparatively fewer *sabjong* in Amdo are organized and taught by professional educators and attempt to reach students through a wider variety of offerings afterschool and on weekends, although these can be difficult to execute because so many Tibetan students attend boarding schools and are only free during summer and winter holidays. This argument is significant because it requires scholars to rethink the boundaries of what constitutes supplemental programs, which some even call 'after school programs', and the ways in which their contexts impact what curricular possibilities exist for teachers and students in these semi-annual, multi-week intensive programs rather than in weekly or daily classes. Even beyond curricular differences though, the different formats found in Amdo Tibet suggest that relationships, responsibilities, and commitments created by *sabjong* differ as well. I argued that these, too, comprise integral components of an educational process, at least for some communities in Amdo Tibet. Finally, I argued in Part 2 that these different circumstances allow educators to pursue goals that have been recalibrated or reoriented from what is usually prioritized in mainstream education. This is significant because it forces scholars to consider the possibility that not only do other supplemental frameworks exist beyond 'Reinforcing and Enhancing' the goals mainstream education, but that multiple frameworks can be simultaneously employed by educators who do not feel compelled merely to 'shadow' mainstream educational norms.

In particular, Chapter 5 provided a typology of *sabjong*. It is important to note that my organization of data on *sabjong* could have proceeded differently. Rather than using the typology I did, *sabjong* could have usefully been described and categorized by focusing on, for example, the composition of their teaching staffs, the composition of their study bodies, their location, their payment structures, or a handful of other important factors. My typology, rather, attempts to aggregate all of these factors and more into a composite portrait of each *sabjong*, rather than focusing on one ‘variable’ and thereby using that to explain what happens therein. Most obviously, however, *sabjong* in my study could have been categorized according to their curricular offerings: Which materials and methods do they use? What kind of assessments do they administer? And how closely does their curriculum resemble that found in mainstream schooling? However, I chose not to prioritize curricular offerings in my categorization because doing so would obscure a principal point that this dissertation makes. Whereas much other research (e.g., Kim & Jung, 2019) focuses, sometimes exclusively, on curriculum as a means of understanding what it is that supplemental education programs do, I instead argue that the variety of functions that such programs serve cannot be adequately understood by investigating only, or even primarily, the explicit curriculum because so much of what students learn and benefit from at such programs is rarely intentionally included in lesson plans and the formal curriculum. I further argued that this is especially true in politically sensitive contexts, where curricular offerings may often *need* to closely resemble those of mainstream curriculum (at least in newer or more precarious *sabjong* situations) so as to not draw too much unwanted attention from state surveillance institutions such as the Public Security Bureau. In this way, the typology of *sabjong* takes an aggregate account of the different organizations and looks for key similarities and differences across all the components that comprise *sabjong*. To be sure, *location* does become

an important factor differentiating *sabjong*, largely because, given the Chinese education system outlined in Chapter 4, location often determines the schedules and availability of students and teachers, for whether one has the opportunity to attend ‘after school’ classes at all depends on if they attend a boarding school or not, for example. Moreover, as the subsequent Part 4 on habitus shows, students’ location also greatly influences how teachers perceive the needs of students and which vital knowledges are thought by teachers to need supplementation.

Chapter 6 then goes on to explore the implications of the claim that curriculum is not the only or even best variable by which to understand *sabjong*. In this chapter, I show that some *sabjong*, Marching Together providing the limiting case, provide a diverse curriculum that cannot be understood using any single framework that assumes a simple or monovalent relationship between *sabjong* curriculum and that of the mainstream. Rather, through pursuing diverse and sometimes apparently incongruent curricular goals, some *sabjong* are best conceptualized as Reorienting – rather than Reinforcing, Diverging from, or Critiquing – the goals of mainstream education. Such reorientation is only noticeable to researchers if an aggregate, ethnographically rich portrait of a *sabjong* is provided rather than a singular focus on curriculum. Thus, Part 2, and Chapter 6 in particular, invites the reader to consider that curricular instruction is not the only, or even the most important, process that transpires at all *sabjong* (though it may certainly be at some *sabjong* and in the minds of many educators as well). Because *location* (e.g., urban, semi-urban, semi-rural, and rural, defined above) appears to be so influential on *sabjong* activities, it was necessary to investigate how these correlations develop. Data indicated that this happened through teachers’ beliefs about the types of students they think they have and, therefore, what needs the teachers believed they had to address. Therefore, the next part focused on students’ habitus, the ‘durable mental and physical schemata of dispositions,

orientations, and appreciations' that teachers worked to develop in ways that would be more readily recognized and rewarded in mainstream schools and other domains.

Part 3 served as an extended inquiry into Amdo Tibetan educators' perspectives and practices regarding how they perceived the habitus of their students and, therefore, what these students needed to succeed. Chapter 7 on class argued that educators in my study interpreted class differences as primarily a question of the geographic location of one's hometown insofar as it impacts students' horizons and, importantly, what they could or should do as educators to improve students' chances of success. This is significant because it reveals the complexity of factors that constitute 'class position' beyond economic capital. While sheer distance from urban centers and opportunities has been widely acknowledged as characterizing disadvantaged class positions (Hao et al., 2014), this study has shown that rurality often provides *better* access to forms of non-dominant capital that are also desirable. Educators then calibrated their teaching strategies to accommodate for students' distance or proximity to a variety of forms of capital, not merely dominant ones.

A second chapter on habitus, Chapter 8, explores the ways in which students' formation of dispositions is gendered through focusing on data on bodies and educators' perspectives on how gender impacts who students are and what they need. Data on gender gleaned from conversations and observations provide a good example of this tension: Is working to change traditional gender roles, such as the virtual monopoly monasticism has on Tibetan linguistic knowledge, desirable when doing so may entail the disappearance of one of the methods through which Amdo Tibetan peoples distinguish themselves from others? Samdrup, the mainstream teacher who spoke frankly about the physicality of schooling, suggests, in an effort to emphasize the physical pain and exertion that are required for learning, argued that male teachers are

preferable insofar as they can better corporally discipline unruly students—a sentiment found in some of most fundamental sources of Tibetan Buddhist pedagogy, such as the Sakya Legshe of Sakya Pandita and in many other monastic curricular texts (Dreyfus, 2003). However, many in this study suggest corporal punishment and some other ‘traditional’ practices, such as the extensive memorization required in monastic education, are antiquated and not worth practicing in secular education today even as others decry the loss of a truly *Tibetan* education and the assimilation into Chinese and global norms regarding the methods and purposes of learning. Ultimately, Chapter 8 argues that educators and students see those of different genders as differentially capable of providing certain educational services, all of which are important. However, those that have been palpably associated with the ‘maintenance of Tibetan culture’ are disproportionately in the domain of males, as monks are *the* ideal teachers of Tibetan language, which many (perhaps problematically) see as the *sine qua non* of Tibetan identity. I showed in this chapter, as well, that while many seek to challenge gender inequalities existent in Amdo Tibet, virtually all recognize that altering the monasteries’ dominance when it comes to legitimate knowledge in the realm of Tibetan language arts would create undesirable and perhaps catastrophic changes in Tibetan social structure, threatening to further weaken Tibetan institutions vis-à-vis Chinese hegemony. This argument suggests that future studies of gender inequality in education, especially among minoritized groups, must attend to the stakes of challenging and ‘rectifying’ such inequalities; even those who may be disadvantaged by such inequalities might consider this hardship secondary to others and thus may be unwilling to challenge unequal circumstances because a ‘successful’ result may be less desirable than the current situation. This chapter on gender showed that what constitutes educationally valuable skills and dispositions – and therefore the approaches taken to inculcating these – also depends to

a large degree on the gender of the bearer, for certain behaviors, such as modesty or outspokenness, are not inherently valuable but can only be understood in relationship to the social expectations students of different genders encounter.

A third chapter, Chapter 9, on habitus analyzes data on language use, particularly the Pure Language movement, to investigate the ways in which educators believe Tibetan students need an education different from students who are not Tibetan. This chapter continued to explore foundations of habitus beyond merely social class, expanding from gender to race as well. This chapter began by arguing that despite the central place that ‘race’ has in the tripartite categories of experience of ‘race, class, and gender’ used by most sociologists, in contemporary China *minzu* is perhaps a more useful term than race and that the Chinese term *minzu* is reducible neither to race, nationality, or ethnicity. After showing the stakes of choosing certain terminology, I argued that *sabjong* educators believe that Tibetan students need a different kind of education than other students principally because their *minzu* entails unique religious, geographical, and especially linguistic heritages. This chapter highlighted in particular educators’ (and students’) beliefs about the unique nature of Tibetan language, both in the divergence between written and spoken forms as well as the central role the written language plays in accessing all important soteriological and religious knowledge contained in scriptures (and best taught my monks). Whether these circumstances are actually unique or not is not the principal point, but I focus on educators’ *belief* that these unique circumstances create unique needs for Amdo Tibetan students that can only be met through supplemental education. However, such supplementation is seen by many not at all as supplemental but as *fundamental*. To them, it is only through extra study that one can learn the foundations of the language that make Tibetans Tibetan – hardly a ‘supplemental’ task at all. This third category of *minzu* added to my argument

that habitus cannot, at least in Amdo Tibet, be understood as solely or even primarily as a question of social class position operationalized as a measure of one's stocks of (primarily economic) capital. Rather, in places where race (if one is to use that term instead of *minzu*) necessarily entails distinct and mutually unintelligible linguistic, religious, and cosmological heritages, one cannot generalize previous findings, like Lareau's (2011) or Bourdieu's (1984) that *class* differences seem to impact habitus formation more than any other factor – for what Lareau or Bourdieu meant by 'race' is not synonymous with what the term *minzu/mi rigs* means to Tibetans in general and Amdo Tibetans in particular, who differ from Central Tibetans in numerous important ways particularly in respect to gender norms (Makley, 2007, 2018). Moreover, this may be particularly pronounced in places where minoritized communities may have a particular distaste for the sociological and socialist language of class. Even if communities in the US, Amdo Tibet, or elsewhere are unlikely to *talk* about class, it may of course still have an impact. However, where the notion of *minzu* often serves as a discursive rallying point for identity, its role in habitus formation may be heightened, especially in school and home environments on the grasslands where income inequality is relatively small and ethnicity provides the framework that most students and educators use to understand their minoritization and hardships. Therefore, even beyond arguing that in Amdo Tibet (and likely elsewhere) habitus cannot be considered as the product of social class position alone, this chapter argued that attitudes toward language use, namely speaking Pure Language and speaking confidently in institutional settings, produced in educators strategies for transmitting cultural capital that they saw as differently devised than had they been teaching students who were not Tibetan. This finding is significant because it challenges scholars' assumptions regarding the singularity of goals that supplemental education should provide and shows that the construction



of this plurality of goals is a particular product of students' ethnicities/nationalities/races/*minzu*. Most broadly, Part 3 on habitus has shown that what educators attempt to provide through supplementation cannot be fully understood without attending to their beliefs about the kind of students they have, and that supplemental educational practices are calibrated not only to mainstream curricula but the relationship – and the nature of the perceived *mismatch* – between students and mainstream curricula.

I now turn to answering the principal research questions on capital. First, this dissertation has shown that students who experience ethnolinguistic minoritization in school can acquire through participation at supplemental programs dominant and non-dominant capital, principally cultural capital in the embodied state, but also others. Initially, it seems unsurprising that students of any background can acquire cultural capital at supplemental programs. Whether one believes that mainstream schools only reward (dominant) cultural capital or that mainstream schools *both* help students acquire it *and* reward it is immaterial here. Whichever one believes it the case, it should be no surprise that supplemental programs strive, with some success, to inculcate the very knowledges, speech patterns, aspirations, behaviors, and dispositions that are rewarded in mainstream schooling; after all, a principal purpose is to improve students' grades and experiences in school. At the simplest level, my data show this clearly. Some educators were successful in boosting students aspirations and plans for achieving them, others helped students interact with authority figures with polite confidence, and still others helped students learn so-called "four character phrases" (*chengyu*) popular in Chinese societies as and indicators of a well-cultured upbringing (Zhang, 2016), which are all textbook examples of embodied cultural capital irrespective of how one sorts through the nuances of the concept (cf. Yosso, 2005 and Kingston, 2001). Nevertheless, few if any studies have explored the process by which such

cultural capital is made available and acquired at supplemental programs, and the majority of studies on the topic of supplemental education frame them as ‘shadow’ schools that are best understood directly in reference to the goals of the explicit curriculum of mainstream schooling.

However, that supplemental programs are effective in helping students acquire the *implicit* knowledges that are recognized and rewarded in mainstream schools is the first principal and original finding of this study. This suggests that studies that limit themselves to conceptualizing supplemental programs as those which provide instruction on only what is “taught and tested in mainstream schooling” (Bray 2017, p. 438) may miss many important functions that supplemental programs serve, especially for ethnolinguistically minoritized students whose family environments may differ substantially from those found in mainstream schooling. Perhaps this need not be the case if ‘what is taught and tested in mainstream schooling’ is reconceptualized to include all the subtle, implicit, and hidden lessons that students are taught and, indeed, constitute part of the material on which teachers evaluate them, even if outside the confines of an explicit exam. But, in the absence of researchers’ commitment to understanding these processes, one has little choice but to take their statements at face value and assume they are referring only to the explicit curriculum and exams that test students’ knowledge of it.

One reason that supplemental programs may be especially effective in helping students acquire such capital is the constitution of their teaching staffs. Rather than qualified and credentialed teachers sticking tightly to a standardized curriculum that will be tested soon, supplemental educators in this study were often college students, part-time teachers, clergy, and other individuals who had the opportunity to be more flexible with their time and energy than professional teachers in an authoritarian ‘surveillance society’ (Shao, 2020). Precisely because there were ‘disorganized’ breaks between classes, smaller teacher to student ratios, less

individual teacher accountability, a general lack of uniformity between teachers, and less pressure to teach to upcoming exams (i.e., very loose coupling), supplemental educators are well-positioned to discuss with students the many knowledges and skills valuable for succeeding through successive levels of schooling that teachers in mainstream institutions in China often ignore or do not have the opportunity to discuss. These kinds of teacher-student interactions in any supplemental program could benefit students of virtually background other than those who already have all the dominant cultural capital they need (such as Huang Luten's son, which is perhaps why Huang emphasized raising test scores as the useful measure of supplemental program quality). However, the importance of these student-teacher relationships is potentially heightened in situations where teachers and students experience ethnolinguistic minoritization in mainstream schooling and lack dominant cultural capital. That is, as teachers who are closer in age, class-cum-hometown, religion, native language, and a host of other habitus-informing variables, many Amdo Tibetan supplemental educators can effectively serve as 'cultural guides' that help students acquire cultural capital and successfully bridge home and institutional environments (Lareau, 2015). Moreover, supplemental educators who are familiar with minoritization were capable of mediating and interpreting students' potentially minoritizing experiences. Through informal conversations at *sabjong*, Tibetan college students were able to share stories and strategies for how to deal effectively with such experiences in ways that are unavailable to mainstream teachers (for a variety of reasons, such as time, political sensitivity, an excess of students, etc.). Therefore, rather than devaluing or displacing the non-dominant capital that students bring with them to educational spaces, supplemental educators often had the time, opportunity, and awareness not only to recognize and reward such knowledges and dispositions themselves (giving students confidence and comfort), but also to channel students' efforts in a

way where they might be able to be more successful in getting the cultural capital they already possessed recognized in dominant institutions and fields. *Sabjong* educators' support of students' attempts to write and publish their own literary compositions in Tibetan are examples of this. That *sabjong* educators who have experienced ethnolinguistic minoritization in schooling are particularly well-positioned to use supplemental programs to assist students who may experience the same obstacles is the second principal finding of this study.

Finally, *sabjong qua* community organization also serve an important social function insofar as they provide an opportunity for relatively privileged and respected graduates, clergy, and other professional educators to show, materially and symbolically, their investment in the success of their communities. As some key participants suggested, for many Amdo Tibetans, learning that is not informed by altruism (*lhag bsam*) and resulting in enhanced wisdom and compassion to help others is not 'real' learning at all. While everyone recognized that some successful graduates pursue lucrative work avariciously, and no one denied that the economic, social, and cultural capital that accompanies such success is often desirable, many participants were critical of those who failed to 'pay back' the great support and kindness they might have been shown, either specifically by their village members or more generally by both present and previous generations of Tibetan society. *Sabjong*, however, give community educators not only a chance to improve their teaching practice and develop their own networks, they, perhaps most importantly, provide a politically viable, academically valuable, *and* ethnically desirable opportunity to contribute one's learning to the benefit of their communities. Working at *sabjong* allows educators to maintain ethnic boundaries simultaneously to engaging in nationally and globally valued practices that appeal to the deepest foundations of Tibetan Buddhist values – education. Teaching at *sabjong* also allows educators, especially young adults, to show that their

learning and unique status as a (soon-to-be) degree-holder from prestigious university is both legitimate and deserved, thereby enhancing their symbolic capital in ways that no Amdo Tibetan graduate who neglects to work for the benefit of their community can, irrespective of how much economic, social, and cultural capital they have acquired. Moreover, in the process of doing this, educators can increase the size and strength of their network connections and thereby their social capital. Ultimately, it is in this way that many *sabjong* educators work to ‘Tibetanize’ education: they resist the instrumentalism and individualism that they see as characterizing students who do not answer these obligations. Thus, what constitutes cultural capital for *sabjong* educators can be summarized as that which meets the three conditions of being politically viable, academically valuable, and ethnically desirable. Ultimately, however, like the boundaries of the field(s) in which such capital is valued, what exactly each of these means is the object of ongoing struggle, both within and beyond Amdo Tibetan communities. But despite varying perspectives on what might meet these criteria, no *sabjong* educator was willing to jettison any single one. Thus, whatever meets these criteria is cultural capital – and this can change.

There are, of course, limits to what can be acquired at *sabjong* and supplemental programs more generally and this dissertation does not argue that supplemental programs are a panacea for educational obstacles everywhere or even that *sabjong* are a viable solution to all the obstacles that Amdo Tibetan students face. While educators and students were able to enhance their social capital, there were very limited opportunities for the acquisition of economic capital and objectified or institutionalized cultural capital at supplemental programs. While many educators may have aspired to distribute phones or computers to students, or at least teach them how to use these skillfully, this service seems a long way off for all involved in this study. Similarly, while many *sabjong* distribute graduation certificates and awards, it would be perhaps

exceedingly generous to recognize these as institutionalized cultural capital simply because no employers, institutions, or the state recognize them as meaningful indicators of competency that guarantee the bearer certain privileges or status. And, finally, the stipends paid at *sabjong* are, not surprisingly, a negligible source of economic capital. In some ways, the stipends *need* to be merely a token, given the argument made for symbolic capital above. However, it makes most sense to understand *sabjongs'* attempt to distribute stipends, certificates, books, and other goods not as economic, institutionalized, or objectified capital, but primarily as props in an effort to familiarize, often through mimicry, students *and* parents with the norms of mainstream schooling in an effort to help them learn the 'rules of the game'. For these reasons, I argue that, especially for students whose home cultures do not closely match those found in mainstream schools (and similar institutions organized by the state), another principal function of *sabjong* is to familiarize students *and parents* with school environments.

Ultimately, *sabjong* educators are under few pretensions about what their programs can accomplish. Many were surprised at the grandeur of some of my questions, as one stated that they were "just a small school helping students prepare for the exam." Throughout field work and analysis it was difficult to know whether I was taking Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) third bias of positionality seriously – the intellectualist bias. While the first bias they discuss concerns the location of research in socio-economic space (i.e., how does my social class impact what I find), the second potential bias concerns my location in academic space (i.e., how is what I look for and find influenced by my position as a young scholar trying to devise a successful strategy in a competitive academic field?). However, Bourdieu says it is ultimately the third, which he calls the intellectualist bias, that poses the biggest obstacle for researchers because it implicates our entire program: How do I know what I see is not the product of my desire to see their

practices *as something*, a spectacle that *reveals* something profound, to see a theoretical logic behind the apparent chaos of practices?

The principal antidote to this bias is to take practical logics of actors for what they are rather than imputing to them a rhyme and reason for action that presupposes theoretical coherence. Despite my heavy use of existing theory, I have tried to report the very practical yet sometimes very symbolic actions of Amdo Tibetan *sabjong* educators and students in ways that facilitate challenging, expanding, and revising theories, rather than using theories simply to ‘explain’ new data. Still, the modest responses of many educators and the common attitude of ‘Why do you care what we’re doing here?’ force me to continually confront Bourdieu’s warning regarding the third bias.

Upon stepping back, I disagree with those humble educators and the nagging voice that tells me I have made something out of nothing: These educators work tirelessly to make the lives of others better and do so with resilience and strategies devised to navigate seemingly insurmountable obstacles. These educators and students *are* doing something both theoretically interesting and personally inspiring: their resourcefulness, perseverance, and perspectives show that ‘supplemental’ education programs can, and perhaps *should*, do much more than just supplement schooling. These programs engage in subtle and complex efforts to reorient the goals and meanings of education such that they enlarge the space and influence of activities that are ethnically desirable, politically viable, and educationally valuable. This forces scholars to rethink the very notion of supplementation: Is it adding more of what already exists? Adding that which completes an otherwise beneficial but inadequate entity? Or is it something that fixes or rectifies something that may be problematic or dangerous if left unaddressed? As the participants featured in this study reveal, some supplemental programs are capable of doing all three simultaneously –

a process that has not before been observed and analyzed ethnographically – in an effort at reorienting educational goals in ways that transcend what mainstream educators, the state, and scholars generally see as compartmentalized and instrumentalized pursuits. Querying the goals of supplementation in this way, these educators have forced practitioners and scholars to reconsider the even the goals of the education such programs are meant to supplement. I can only hope they learn as much from my analysis as I learned from them during my time in Amdo Tibet.



**Appendix A: Interview Protocol**

For MT and other Sabjong Teachers:	
1. What, if anything, has changed since last year in your organizing this sabjong?	གསལ་སྤྱོད་འཛིན་གྱི་འདི་ཙམ་འཛུགས་ཀྱི་ཐད་ནས་ལོ་སྟོན་མ་དང་བསྟར་ན་འགྲུར་སྟོན་ཆེ་བྱེད་ཡོད་གི
2. What have been some of the major challenges and successes of holding the sabjong year after year	གསལ་སྤྱོད་འདི་སྤུ་འབྲེལ་ལོ་ལོ་མང་ང་བྱེད་ག་བཅུགས་བཏང་ནི་དཀའ་ལག་ར་རྒྱལ་ཁ་གང་གང་ཡོད་གི
3. What is your main goal for the sabjong?	ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་གསལ་སྤྱོད་སྐབས་ལོ་ནི་གི་དམིགས་ལུ་ལ་གཙོ་བོ་ཆེ་བྱེད་ཡིན།
4. What do you think is most important for students to learn here?	ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་བསྟར་ན་འདི་ནས་སློབ་མ་འཇགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་སྟོན་གཙོ་བོ་ཆེ་བྱེད་རེད།
5. What do you think is most important for students to learn in regular schools? In sabjong?	ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་བསྟར་ན་རྒྱལ་གཉེན་སློབ་གྲྭ་ནང་ནས་སློབ་མ་འཇགས་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་སྟོན་གཙོ་བོ་ཆེ་བྱེད་རེད། གསལ་སྤྱོད་ནས་གང་རེད།
6. How would you know if your sabjong is successful?	ཁྱོད་རང་གི་གསལ་སྤྱོད་སྐབས་ནི་རྒྱལ་ཁ་གང་གང་ཡོད་མེད་དེ་ཆེ་བོ་ཤེས་གི
7. How does this sabjong differ from public schools?	གསལ་སྤྱོད་འདི་རྒྱལ་གཉེན་སློབ་གྲྭ་(དང་/ར)་བསྟར་ན་མི་འདྲ་ས་གང་ཡོད་གི
8. Can you tell me a little bit about the history of this school?	སློབ་གྲྭ་འདི་འདྲི་སྟོན་གི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་རགས་ཚམ་བྱེད་བཤད་ན།
9. How did you find out about the teaching position here?	ཁྱོད་སློབ་གྲྭ་འདི་ན་ལས་གནས་བྱེད་ཡོད་ནི་ཆེ་བོ་ཤེས་ནི་ཡིན། ཁྱོད་ཆེ་བོ་བཅའ་ནི་ཡིན།
10. Tell me about your teaching experience before this sabjong?	ཁྱོད་གསལ་སྤྱོད་འདི་མ་ཡོང་གོང་གི་སློབ་ཁྲིད་ཉམས་སྦྱོར་རེ་གཙོ་བོ་བཤད་ན།
11. When did you start working/organizing sabjong?	ཁྱོད་ནས་བྱེད་ག་ལས་ཀ་མགོ་བཙུགས་ཀྱི་ལས་ནི་ཡིན། / ཁྱོད་ནས་བྱེད་ག་ད་གསལ་སྤྱོད་སྐབས་མགོ་བཙུགས་ནི་ཡིན།
11. Have you worked at sabjong other than this one?	ཁྱོད་འདི་མ་གཏོགས་པའི་གསལ་སྤྱོད་གཞན་པ་ནས་ལས་ཀ་ལས་ཨེ་སྤྱོད།
12. Can you compare the different sabjong you've worked at? Can you tell me about their difference and similarities?	ཁྱོད་རང་གི་ལས་ཀ་ལས་སྤོང་སོ་གི་གསལ་སྤྱོད་འཇགས་ཀྱི་བསྟར་བ་ལས་རེས་ཅིག་བཤད་ན། མི་འདྲ་ས་ར་འདྲ་ས་ཅིག་བཤད་ན།
13. How do you find/recruit teachers to work at this sabjong? What kind of teachers do you look for?	ཁྱོད་དགོ་ཆེན་ཆེ་བོ་བཅའ་ནི་ཡིན། ཁྱོད་དགོ་ཆེན་གང་ཅན་པོ་བཅའ་ནི་ཡིན།
14. What kind of teaching styles do you want the teachers to have? For example: strictness? Instruction methods? Habits? Training? etc	ཁྱོད་དགོ་ཆེན་གི་སློབ་ཁྲིད་བྱེད་སྟངས་གང་ཅན་པོ་མཁོ་གི་or ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་བསྟར་ན་དགོ་ཆེན་གི་སློབ་ཁྲིད་བྱེད་སྟངས་གང་ཅན་པོ་རྟེན་གི་དཔེ་བཞག་ན་གཞན་པོ་ཆུ་ལྷོ་སྤེལ་འབྲིད་བྱེད་སྟངས། གོ་མས་གཤེས།
15. What are the challenges/problems at this sabjong?	གསལ་སྤྱོད་འདི་མཚན་ནས་བཤད་ཀྱི་ན་དཀའ་ལག་ར་གཞན་དོན་



<p>4. What do you think Sabjongs should accomplish?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་བཟུངས་ན་གསལ་སྤོང་གིས་ཆེ་བྱེད་ལེགས་འགྲུབ་ཡོང་ན་འགྲིག་གི</p>
<p>5. What kind of teachers constitute an ideal teaching staff at Sabjongs?</p>	<p>དགེ་ལྡན་གང་ལྟ་བུ་བྱེད་གི་གསལ་སྤོང་གི་དཀའ་སྤོང་སྤོར་སྤོར་ལ་དུག་འཕྲོག་གི་སྤྱོད་གི</p>
<p>6. Can you tell me about the history and development of sabjong education in Malho/Amdo?</p>	<p>མ་རྩོད་ལ་མདོ་གི་སློབ་གསོ་གི་འཕེལ་རྒྱས་ར་ལོ་རྒྱུས་གི་སློབ་རེ་བཤད་ན།</p>
<p>7. How do you think the sabjong education may change in the next 5-10 years?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་བཟུངས་ན་ལོ་བཅུ་ནས་བཅོ་ལྔ་ཡིང་ང་རྒྱལ་གཉེར་ར་གསལ་སྤོང་གི་སློབ་གསོ་གི་གནས་ཚུལ་ལ་འགྲུར་བ་ཡོད་ཀྱི་ཨེ་རེད། འགྲུར་བ་ཆེ་གི་འགྲུང་རྒྱ་རེད།</p>
<p>8. How do you think Tibetan students should choose between Min-kao-min and min-kao-han university tracks?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་བཟུངས་ན་བོད་གི་སློབ་མ་རིགས་ག་minkaomin་འདེམ་ན་ཅུ་གི་ཡང་ན་minkaohan་འདེམ་ན་ཅུ་གི་ལོ་ལམ་སུ་དེ་ཆེ་གི་འདེམ་ན་འགྲིག་གི།</p>
<p>9. How do you think student should choose between རྒྱས་ཚན་ and རིག་ཚན་ tracks?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་བཟུངས་ན་སློབ་མ་རིགས་གི་རྒྱས་ཚན་ར་རིག་ཚན་གི་ལམ་སུ་དེ་ཆེ་གི་འདེམ་ན་འགྲིག་གི།</p>
<p>10. In what ways to Tibetan values differ from those of formal/public schools?</p>	<p>ཕྱོགས་ཐང་གང་བྱེད་ནས་བོད་གི་རིན་ཐང་འདི་རྒྱལ་གཉེར་སློབ་གྲྭ་ར་གཉེས་ཀ་མེ་འདྲ་གི།</p>
<p>11. Is it important to speak བ་སྐད་གཙོ་བོ་མ་</p>	<p>ལ་སྐད་གཙོ་བོ་མ་བཤད་རྒྱུ་དེ་གལ་ཨེ་ཆེ་གི།</p>
<p>12. is it important for Tibetans to go to school in their native language? Is there any disadvantage to going to school in a Chinese medium?</p>	<p>སློབ་མ་རིགས་སློབ་གྲྭ་ལ་མོང་ནས་ལ་སྐད་ཀྱིས་སློབ་བྱིད་ལྟེང་ལ་འདི་གཙོ་བོ་བྱེད་པེད། ག་ལ་སྐད་གི་ལམ་ནས་གཙོ་བོ་ནོ་གི་སློབ་གྲྭ་འཕྱོ་རྒྱུ་དེ་གལ་ཨེ་ཆེ་གི། རྒྱ་སྐད་གི་ལམ་ནས་གཙོ་བོ་ནོ་གི་སློབ་གྲྭ་དེ་སློབ་ཚུན་ཆ་ཆེ་བྱེད་ཡོད་གི།</p>

<p>13. What about people from Nyantok, Gomar, and other villages around Rebgong who first language is not Tibetan? Should there be schools available in their native languages? Why/not?</p>	<p>སྤྱོད་མོག་ར་སྐོང་མང་། དེ་མེན་རེབ་གོང་གི་ཕྱེ་བ་གཞན་པ་ན་ཡོད་ཅོག་པ་སྐད་བོད་ཡིག་མེན་ཅོག་ཕྱེ་བ་ཚོ་སྤྱོད་མོག་གི་སྐོང་མང་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་རྒྱུ་རེད། འོ་ཚེ་རང་གི་པ་སྐད་གཙོ་ཡིན་ཅོག་སྐོང་གྲྭ་ཡོད་ན་འེ་འཕྲིག་གི་རྒྱ་མཚན་ཆེ་ཞེག་རེད།</p>
<p>14. Is there anything else you'd want to tell me about your sabjong or experience in education?</p>	<p>ཁྱོད་རང་གི་གསལ་བ་སྐོང་ར་ཉམས་སྐོང་གི་ཐད་ནས་ང་བཤད་ན་འདོད་ཅོ་ཅི་ཟེག་ཡོད་གི།</p>
<p>15. Can you tell me a bit about your own work and research in the education field?</p>	<p>ཁྱོད་རང་གི་སྐོང་གསོ་གི་སྐོར་གི་ལས་ཀ་ར་ཞིབ་འཇུག་ཅིག་བཤད་ན།</p>
<p>16. Can you tell me a bit about the social and political aspects of the པ་སྐད་གཙོ་མ་ movement</p>	<p>པ་སྐད་གཙོ་མ་འེ་ལས་འགྲུལ་སྐྱེལ་མཁན་རིགས་གི་དམིགས་ལུལ་གཙོ་བོ་ཆེ་ཟེག་རེད། ལྷོ་སྐད་གཙོ་མ་ལས་འགྲུལ་དེའི་མོག་འ་ད་ཁྱོད་བཤད་རྒྱུ་ཅི་ཞེག་ཡངོ།</p> <p>ལས་འགྲུལ་འདིས་སྤྱོད་མོག་ར་ཆབ་སྲིད་གི་སྐོར་ར་འཕྲུགས་རྒྱུ་རྒྱུ་འབྲས་ལོ་ཞེག་ཐོབ་ཐ།</p>
<p>17. How important is it for parents to be involved in their kids' education? For example, to know the teachers, visit the classrooms, etc?</p>	<p>པ་མ་རིགས་ག་ཁྱིམ་པ་གི་སྐོང་གསོ་ནང་ང་འཚུངས་ཚུ་དེ་གལ་ཨ་ཆེ་གི་དཔེ་བཞག་ན། དགོ་ཆེན་རིགས་གི་དོ་ཤེས་རྒྱ། སྐོང་མ་སྐོར་རྒྱག་རྒྱ།</p>
<p>18. Are there any leaders/educators, or programs that you think are doing especially work and are a good model for other Tibetans working in education?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་བུས་ན་བོད་གི་སྐོང་གསོ་མཚོན་ན་ཁ་མིག་ཡར་བརྗེད་ས་གི་སྤྱི་འབྲིང་པ། ཡང་ན་དགོ་ཆེན། སྐོང་གསོ་བ་དེ་མོ་ཁྱེད་པར་ཅན་ཨ་ཡོད་གི།</p>
<p>19. Is the best way to learn the Tibetan language through traditional monastic styles of teaching ལུས་བསྟུ་བ། རྟགས་འཇུག་ཅིག་etc.? are there other effective ways to learn Tibetan?</p>	<p>དགོན་པའི་ནང་ནས་སྐོང་གསོ་གི་སྤྱིག་གཞི་འོག་ནས་ལུས་བསྟུ་བ་ར་རྟགས་འཇུག་ལ་སོགས་པ་སྤྱིངས་དེས་བོད་ཡིག་སྐོང་གོ་ནོ་དེ་བོད་ཡིག་སྤྱིངས་སོལ་ཆེས་ཡག་ཤོས་དེ་འི་རེད། བོད་ཡིག་སྐོང་སྤངས་གཞན་པ་འེ་ཡོད་གི།</p>
<p>20. It seems different sabjongs can have different goals. What do you see as the array of purposes sabjongs have? Can you compare them?</p>	<p>གསལ་བ་སྐོང་མི་འདྲ་བ་ལ་ཕོན་ན་དེ་མིགས་འབེན་ར་མི་འདྲ་བ་རེ་ཡོད་གོ་གི། འོ་ན་ཁྱོས་བཟུས་ན་གསལ་བ་སྐོང་དེ་རིགས་གི་དམིགས་ལུལ་མི་འདྲ་བ་གང་གང་ཡིན་རྒྱུ་རེད། ཁྱོས་བཟུས་བ་ལས་རེས་ཅིག་བཤད་ན།</p>
<p>Questions for Sabjong Students</p>	
<p>1. How many sabjongs have you attended?</p>	<p>ཁྱོས་མ་ཟེག་གི་དོས་ནས་གསལ་བ་སྐོང་མི་འདྲ་བ་དུ་ཞུགས་སྐོང་།</p>
<p>2. Can you tell me about your experience as a sabjong student here and can you compare it to other sabjong?</p>	<p>ཁྱོད་སྐོང་མ་ཟེག་གི་དོས་ནས་གསལ་བ་སྐོང་འདིས་ཁྱོད་ཉམས་སྐོང་སྐོར་ཅི་བཤད་རྒྱུ་ཡོད།</p> <p>དེ་ནས་ཁྱོས་གསལ་བ་སྐོང་གཞན་པ་ར་གཉིས་ཀ་བཟུར་བ་བྱས་ནས་ཡུལ་རེས་ཅིག་བཤད་ན།</p>

<p>2. What was the best sabjong you attended and why? And the worst?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་གསལ་སྤྱོད་ལྷགས་ལྷགས་ལོ་ནང་ནས་ཆེས་ཏུ་ནོ་གང་རེད། ལྷ་མཚན་ཆེ་བློ་ག ། འ་ ཏི་གི་མེ་ཏུ་ནོ་གང་རེད།</p>
<p>3. What are you hoping to learn/accomplish by coming to this sabjong? Did you accomplish that goal?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་ཡོང་ལོ་ལྷན་སྤྱོད་བསམ་ནི་ཡིན། དམིགས་ལུལ་དེ་ཡོངས་འབྲུབ་བྱུང་ཡོད་གི</p>
<p>4. What are the main differences between your experience in sabjongs and your experience in the public schools?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་གྱི་གསལ་སྤྱོད་འཛིན་གྲུབ་ལྷན་ལ་ར་རྒྱལ་གཉེར་སློབ་གྲྲི་གི་འཛིན་གྲུབ་པར་ གཙོ་བོ་ཆེ་བློ་གང་རེད།</p>
<p>5. Can you tell me about your sabjong teachers? Are they professional teachers, college students, monks, or someone else?</p>	<p>གསལ་སྤྱོད་གི་དགོ་ཞན་སློབ་མཁན་ཅེག་ཤོད་དུ། ལེ་ཚོ་དགོ་ཞན་དོ་མ་རེད་ལ། སློབ་ཆེན་ སློབ་མ་རེད་ལ། ལྷ་བ་རེད་ལ། ཡང་ན་ལྷ་གཞན་པ་རེད།</p>
<p>6. What are the characteristics and qualities of an ideal sabjong teacher?</p>	<p>གསལ་སྤྱོད་གི་དགོ་ཞན་ཞེག་ག་ལྷོད་ཆོས་རྟེན་ལ་ཆེ་བློ་གྲོ་འཛོམས་ན་འབྲིག་གི་དགོ་ ཞན་དགའ་བློ་གྲོ་ཞན་ན་ཆེ་མོ་བློ་གྲོ་ཞན་རེད།</p>
<p>7. What are your plans for the future? What college would you like to attend? What job would you like to have? Can you tell me about your plan to achieve that?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་འོངས་བ་གི་འཆར་གཞི་ཆེ་བློ་གྲོ་ཞན་ལིན། ཁྱིམ་ཆེན་གང་ང་འཁྱོ་ན་འདོད་གི་ ཁྱིམ་ ལས་ཀ་ཆེ་བློ་གྲོ་ཞན་ན་འདོད་གི་ ཁྱིམ་རང་གི་འཆར་གཞི་དེ་ལེགས་འབྲུབ་ཡོང་བྱོ་གི་ འཆར་གཞི་སློབ་མཁན་ཅེག་བཤད་ན།</p>
<p>8. Who are some role models you've had in your life? What do you try to emulate about them? How have they been helpful to you?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་གྱི་མིག་དཔེ་བཟུ་ས་སུ་ལེན། ཁྱིམ་རང་གི་དཔེ་སློབ་ནས་ཆེ་བློ་གྲོ་སྤྱོད་བསམ་གི་ ལེ་ཆོས་ཁྱིམ་ཆེ་བློ་གྲོ་ཞན་ལེན་ཞེགས་ལོ་གི་</p>
<p>9. Do you think that going to sabjong in addition to regular school means that students (like you) are in school too much? Do you get bored or tired of school?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་བཟུ་ས་ན་ཁྱིམ་གྱི་ཡང་ན་གསལ་སྤྱོད་ལ་འཁྱོ་བྱོ་ལ་ལྷ་བློ་གྲོ་ཞན་མང་པོ་བཟང་ཡོད་ནི་མ་ ར། ཁྱིམ་བཟུ་ས་ན་ལྷ་གཉེར་སློབ་གྲྲི་ལས་གཞན་པ་གི་གསལ་སྤྱོད་ང་སོང་ནི་དེ་སློབ་གྲྲི་འཁྱོ་ བྱོ་མང་བཟང་གི་འདོད་གི་ ཁྱིམ་གྱི་ནང་ནས་སུན་ནི་བློ་གྲོ་ཞན་ལེན།</p>
<p>10. Have you noticed an improvement in your grades since you started attending sabjong?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་གསལ་སྤྱོད་ལ་ལྷགས་ནོ་གཞུག་ནས་སླར་འབྲས་ཇེ་ཏུ་ཡོ་སོང་། རྫོ་མཉམ་པར་འེ་བཞག་ཐལ། །</p>
<p>11. Since you started attending sabjongs, have you noticed an improvement in other aspects of your experience at public schools?</p>	<p>ཁྱིམ་གསལ་སྤྱོད་ལ་ལྷགས་ནོ་ནས་བཟུང་ཁྱིམ་གྱི་ཕྱོགས་གང་ཞེག་ནས་ཇེ་ཏུ་ཡོ་སོང་།</p>

<p>12. Do you have a lot of friends at this sabjong? Do you think sabjong is a good place to make new friends? Do you stay in touch with friends you made at the sabjong after it is over? (either during the school year or after you have graduated)</p>	<p>ཁྱོད་གསལ་སྤྱོད་འདི་ན་རྣམས་གཞོན་ཤེས་སྤང་ངའི་ཡོད། ཁྱོད་བཟུང་ན་གསལ་སྤྱོད་འདི་རྣམས་པ་གསར་བ་སྐྱེག་ས་དགའ་          ཟླ་ལོ་འདྲ། ཁྱོད་གསལ་སྤྱོད་ནས་ངོ་ཤེས་ཚོ་གི་རྣམས་པ་འགས་ཀ་མཐར་ཕྱིན་ཚོ་གི་གཞུག་ནས་འབྲེལ་བ་ཡས་ནི་འདི་ཡིན། (སྤོང་གྲུ་ཚོགས་གོ་དཔལ་ཡིན་ན་ཚོག་གི་ཡང་ན་མཐར་ཕྱིན་ཚོང་ན་ཚོག་གི)</p>
<p>13. Do you think that coming to this sabjong is useful for students even if they are ཚེས་ཚན་ students? Or if they go to min-kaio-han programs?</p>	<p>ཁྱོད་བཟུང་ན་ཚེས་ཚན་གི་སློབ་མ་ཟེག་ལ་མཚོན་ན་གསལ་སྤྱོད་འདི་ཡོང་ན་ཕན་ཐོགས་ཡོད་གི་འདྲོད་གི་གལ་ཏེ་minkao han གི་ལས་བྱའི་སློབ་མ་འདིར་ཡོང་ན་ཕན་ཐོགས་ཡོད་ཀྱི་ཨ་འདྲ།</p>
<p>14. In public school, do you think it's OK if teachers hit a kid if they do something bad? For example: what kind of thing should a student get hit for?</p>	<p>རྒྱལ་གཉེར་གི་སློབ་གྲྭ་ནང་ནས་ཀླུ་ཏེ་སློབ་མ་ཟེག་གི་བྱ་བ་ངན་པ་ཟེག་ལས་དང་ན་དུག་གི་ཚན་གིས་གཙུག་ན་འེ་འགྲིག་གི་ཡང་ན།          སློབ་མ་ཟེག་གི་ཆེ་ཟེག་ལས་བཏང་ན་ད་གཙུག་ན་འགཙུག་གི་འགྲིག་གི</p>
<p>15. In sabjong, do you think it's OK if teachers hit a kid if they do something bad? For example (what kind of thing should a student get hit for)?</p>	<p>གསལ་སྤྱོད་ལྟ་བུ་མཚོན་རྒྱ་ན་སློབ་མ་ཟེག་གི་དོན་དག་ངན་པ་ཟེག་ལས་དང་ན་དུག་གི་ཚན་རྣམས་གིས་གཙུག་ན་འེ་འགྲིག་གི་ (བྱ་བ་གང་ལྟ་བུ་ལས་བཏང་ན་གཙུག་ན་འེ་འགྲིག་གི)</p>
<p>16. Do you think coming to Marching Together sabjong is helpful for your exams?</p>	<p>ཁྱོད་བཟུང་ན་ཆེ་ཟེག་མཉམ་བསྐྱོད་གསལ་སྤྱོད་འདི་ན་བྱ་དེ་ཡོང་ན་དེ་གི་ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་འབྲས་ཐོག་གལ་ཕན་ཐོགས་གི་འདྲོད་གི</p>
<p>17. Why is it important to learn written Tibetan very well?</p>	<p>ཡིག་སྐད་ཡག་གོ་ཟེག་སྤྱོད་རྒྱ་དེ་གལ་ཨེ་ཆེ་གི་ཆེ་ཟེག་ག་</p>
<p>18.</p>	<p>མཉམ་བསྐྱོད་གསལ་སྤྱོད་འདི་ན་བྱ་གི་བོད་ཡིག་འབྲིང་ཚོགས་དེ་ལ་མིག་ཡར་བལྟ་བྱེད་ས་ཟེག་འེ་འདྲ།</p>
<p>19. What, if anything, would you change about MT if you were the leader of the sabjong?</p>	<p>གལ་ཏེ་ཁྱོད་མཉམ་བསྐྱོད་གསལ་སྤྱོད་གི་མགོ་བཙུན་རྒྱ་ན་ཁྱོད་གང་གི་ཚོགས་ནས་བསྐྱར་བཅོས་བྱེད་བསམ་གི</p>
<p>20. In the future, do you think more/less/same amount of students will attend this sabjong?</p>	<p>ཁྱོད་བཟུང་ན་མ་འོངས་པར་གསལ་སྤྱོད་ཡོང་ན་གི་སློབ་མ་ཟེ་མང་ང་འགྲོ་རྒྱ་ར་ཟེ་ཉུང་ང་འགྲོ་རྒྱ་རེད།          ཡང་ན་གཅིག་ལས་འདུག་རྒྱ་རེད། འགྲུར་ཚོག་ཡོད་ཀྱི་མ་འདྲོད།</p>

### **APPENDIX B: A note on translation and transliteration**

Because this research was conducted primarily in a herding dialect of colloquial/spoken Amdo Tibetan, I strive to represent interlocutors' words and ideas as faithfully as possible through presenting the terms used by participants. However, because this is not a project that focuses on linguistic issues themselves, I often refrain from offering full quotations in Tibetan for style and brevity and instead give only key terms and explanations when they serve to clarify the speaker's meaning or bridge concepts across contexts.

When presenting the original words used by interlocutors, I italicize them and transliterate them to match the pronunciation common among (herding) Amdo Tibetan speakers as closely as possible. There is no standardized method for conveying spoken Amdo Tibetan in the Roman alphabet or English language. However, in cases where knowing the term may prove useful for Tibetologists or others interested in etymology or linguistic issues, I present, when possible, the written form of the word in italics and in parentheses following the conventions set forth by Wylie (1959). Because the vast majority of translated and transliterated terms are from Tibetan, I do not mark the language each time and the reader should consider Tibetan the default language of any translated and transliterated term. In instances where a Chinese term is used, I either indicate that explicitly in the body of the text or, in cases where the italicized term appears in parentheses, it is marked with a "Ch." to indicate the language. I have omitted including four the tones used in Chinese, both because they are immaterial to this study and because they are often conspicuously absent or different than *Putonghua* tones that more closely approximate pronunciations of Chinese found closer to Beijing.

APPENDIX C: Sample *Sabjong* Flyers/Advertisements

Featured here are two images advertising *sabjong* in Amdo Tibetan areas in Guchu Prefecture. I include the flyer on the left in its entirety, as this *sabjong* was not ultimately included in the study and were not one of the 26 *sabjong* at which I conducted research. While the flyer on the left is printed page that was distributed around town (this one was photographed by the author on a bulletin board in a local restaurant), the flyer on the right existed only in digital form. This advertisement was circulated as an image file via WeChat. This latter type of advertisement became increasingly popular during my time in Amdo and over the course of the study. However, even if smartphone technology and access have increased greatly, physical flyers remained common throughout the study because primary and secondary school students are generally not allowed to use cellphones while at school, which they are for weeks at a time.

The flyer on the left, of New Cultural Logic Supplemental Class (*rig lam gsar ba'i rig gnas gsab sbyong slob grwa*), as the tables indicate, provides a variety of options and pricing



plans, where students at different levels pay different amounts. They also have the option to enroll in single courses or the entire daily program. The faint blue lettering in the top right corner also advertises that one-on-one tutoring with an expert is possible, and the introductory blurbs indicate that it is specifically geared towards preparing for the National College Entrance Exam (*mtho rgyugs*, Ch. *gaokao*) and the Senior Middle School Entrance Exam (*'bring rgyugs*, Ch. *zhongkao*). The flyer on the right was issued by Marching Together, the principal field site. It does not offer one-off classes and instead invites, with “unstained altruism” (*lhag bsam zol med kyis*), students to join in the 7<sup>th</sup> Returners’ Class (*rgyun zhugs*) which will be enrolling students for the 10<sup>th</sup> year / 20<sup>th</sup> session beginning in 2016. Also worth noting is that the authors of the add further encourage students to come this year because it is an anniversary occasion and numerous previous students and teachers will be invited to the school for a ceremony, suggesting implicitly the social capital that is to be gained by dint of participating in the *sabjong*. It then goes on to indicate the starting data in both Tibetan and International calendars as well as that a location has already been arranged (an area nearby but not identical to where I observed Marching Together’s summer session). On one hand, the flyers are well within usual range of flyers I collected over the course of the project; neither is entirely unique. Yet the difference is striking: not only does the format of New Cultural Logic use numerous tables and photographs, requiring fairly advanced design skills, it presents the information in sentences (*tshig grub*) that are uncommonly short, especially for written Tibetan. It even invites oversight, stating in the bold black line near the bottom that parents are most welcome to come and listen to lessons at the *sabjong*. Marching Together’s post, on the other hand, uses only two full sentences, and is written in narrative form, using more traditional locutions and eschewing tables and significant formatting. Even the photographs included depict distinctly different types of learning environments. While it is

clearly not the case that the character of a *sabjong* can be inferred from its flyer alone, the flyer nevertheless still represents an important aspect of how *sabjong* leaders prefer their programs to be advertised and symbolically understood. As I argue in Chapter 7, I do not believe it is a coincidence that the *sabjong* offering individual classes is located in a semi-urban area while the comprehensive program is located in a rural one.

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