Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Ethnic Identity Formation in China: The Sibe People and the Concept and Practice of *Minzu*

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Declaration

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which has been accepted for the work of any other degree or diploma of the University or other institute of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

Lei Hao
November 27th, 2016

Abstract

The Sibe people in Northeast and Northwest China lived largely apart for over 250 years until information and communication technology (ICT) renewed regular contact. This thesis hypothesizes that the changes in Sibe interaction resulting from ICT use are redefining their ethnic identity – or *minzu* in Chinese. To investigate this hypothesis, data was gathered using a combination of interviews and ethnography of Sibe use of social media across platforms from Sina Weibo to QQ and WeChat. The findings contribute to research on both the concept and practice of *minzu* today and the role of ICT in the production of identity. They challenge essentialist explanations of the relation between ethnic minorities and the internet found in both cyber-utopian and cyber-realist literatures. First, they demonstrate that ethnicity – or *minzu* in Chinese – is a social construction and dynamic concept. Second, they show that ICT participates in identity construction in an interaction between users' social and cultural needs and the characteristics of ICT itself. To support this understanding and show how different players shape ethnic identity in their use of ICT, the core chapters: trace the genealogy of *minzu* as a concept in relation to Sibe identity; analyze the representation of the Westward Migration of Sibe to Northwest China in official museums and unofficially online; and examine debates about how to transliterate Sibe language on the internet.

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List of Abbreviations

CMC   *Computer Mediated Communication*

ICT   *Information Communication Technology*

SNS   *Social Networking Sites*

GMD   *Guo Min Dang, Chinese nationalist party*

CCP   *Chinese Communist Party*

SSCA   *Sibe-Solun Cultural Association*

XUARNLC   *Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region Nationality Language committee*

XUAR   *Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region*

RTS   *Romanised Transliterated Sibe*

SSMCA   *Sibe-Solon-Manchu Cultural Association*

UI   *User Interface*

UX   *User Experience*

Glossary of Sibe Terms

Holbobun	To network, build a good relationship
Suhûwa	Sibe woman taken in marriage by Sultan Khan, a Turkic ruler of Ili (1871-82); she protected her people through her influence over the ruler
Mukun	Clan, lineage
Meyen	Group, team
Niru	Military company, garrison, village
Çabçal	The Sibe autonomous county in Ili Kazak prefecture in Xinjiang
Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen	Charming Çabçal Group is a QQ *qun* based in Çabçal
gege	Lady, sister
gašan	Village, home
gašan dunggu	A cave located in the northeast of China. It is considered to be where the xianbei people come from, and the Sibe believed they are descendants of xianbei, hence, the *gašan dunggu* is considered by the Sibe as their place of origin
ice gašan	A Sibe village outside of *Çabçal* Sibe autonomous county. It is located in Huocheng county which is northwest of Ili Kazakh prefecture
Ice Banjin	A newspaper outlet, literally meaning new life. It published newspapers from 1946 to 1972
Sibe yi anḡa i gisun	Spoken Sibe
Duin Biya juwan jakūn	Westward Migration festival
Banjin Inenggi	This is considered the national day for the Manju. It is on the 13th day of the tenth month of the lunar calendar.

julen holem	A form of Sibe traditional storytelling, where the story is conducted in the form of singing
Duici Niru	Fourth Company
Sunjaci Niru	Fifth Company
Ningguci Niru	Sixth Company
Nadaci Niru	Seventh Company
Jakûci Niru	Eighth Company
Sebsihiyan amban	A Famous Sibe leader and educator

Glossary of Chinese Terms

Erren zhuan	二人转	A form of popular opera found in Northeast China
Minzu	民族	Ethnicity/nationality/race
Zhonghua Minzu	中华民族	Chinese nation
Sahoshu Minzu	少数民族	Ethnic minority
Xibozu	锡伯族	The Sibe nationality
Guanxi	关系	Relationship
Weibo	微博	Chinese SNS application
Qun	群	A group
Dalian	大连	Dalian is a city in Northeast China
Shenyang	沈阳	Shenyang is a city in Northeast China
Fushun	抚顺	Fushun is a city in Northeast China
Beijing	北京	Capital city of China
Danwei	单位	Work unit
Sanqu geming	三区革命	Three Districts Revolution
Waidi Ren	外地人	Not local people
Luohou	落后	Backward
Cao Ni Ma	草泥马／肏你妈	Grass Mud Horse/ Fuck Your Mother
Pinyin	拼音	A transliterated method promoted by Chinese State to transliterate Chinese with Roman alphabet since 1950s

Chapter One
Introduction

Introduction

      The Sibe people in Northeast and Northwest China lived largely apart from each other for over 250 years until information and communication technology (ICT) allowed the two communities to renew regular contact between them. This thesis hypothesises that the changes in Sibe interaction resulting from ICT use are redefining their ethnic identity, or *minzu* in Chinese. To investigate this hypothesis, data was gathered using a combination of interviews and the ethnographic study of Sibe use of Social Network Sites (SNS), across platforms from Sina Weibo QQ, WeChat, Sina Weibo, Sina Blog, to Baidu Tieba. The findings contribute to research on both the concept and practice of *minzu* today and the role of ICT in the production of identity. They challenge the essentialist explanations of the relationship ethnic minorities have with the internet which may be found in both cyber-utopian and cyber-realist literatures. Firstly, they demonstrate that ethnicity, *minzu* in Chinese, is a social construction, a dynamic concept. Secondly, they show that ICT itself participates in identity construction, in interactions between users' social and cultural needs and the characteristics of ICT itself. To support this understanding and show how different players shape ethnic identity in their use of ICT, the core chapters of this thesis: trace the genealogy of *minzu* as a concept in relation to Sibe identity; analyse and compare the representation of the Westward Migration of Sibe to Northwest China in official museums and unofficially online; and examine debates about how to transliterate Sibe language on the internet.

      In this opening chapter, I will firstly explain my motivation for conducting this research, then define the research subject, state the gaps in the existing research, and put forth the questions that this study is going to answer. I will then briefly introduce the research methods adopted in collecting data. After that, I will set down the framework and major arguments of this study. Finally, the structure of this thesis will be outlined.

Motivation for Conducting this Research

From the outset, I should make it clear that this study is motivated by my own experience as an ethnic Sibe person living in China. I was born in a Manchu county in Liaoning province in Northeast China in the 1980s. I was categorised as Sibe upon applying for my Resident Identity card when I was 16 years old. No one had even used the term *minzu* descriptively around me until the point at which the card was issued. The only ethnic difference I was aware of was that between the Manchu and the Han people in my village, as I kept being told by my grandma of the differences between so-called *Zaiqi* (banner people) and *Zaimin* (Han Chinese) over food and festivals.

I did not actually realise I was Sibe until I went to university and moved to the city in the 2000s. In the university entrance exam, I had to supply the information of my *minzu*; as an individual of the Sibe ethnic minority, five points were added to my exam score based on the state's *minzu* preference policy. This made me feel so privileged to belong to an ethnic minority at the time! However, when I was asked by classmates whether, as a member of the Sibe *minzu*, I could speak the Sibe language, or about the history of the Sibe *minzu*, I felt very guilty that I was not able to explain why I could not, even though I was categorised as Sibe. Those questions asked by my classmates about my ethnicity as a Sibe made me feel very uncomfortable, and my existence as a Sibe person became problematic, according to the concept of *minzu* currently held by Chinese people in their understanding of ethnicity in China.

I decided to go to the library and find books on Sibe history and Sibe language. However, as I searched for books on the Sibe, more questions emerged: what, for example, was the difference between the Manchu language and Sibe language? How was the Sibe *minzu* identified? What was the connection between Sibe communities in Northeast China and those in Xinjiang? I could not find answers to those questions in any of the books I found. Thanks to the internet, I was also able to find a number of entries on Sibe history online. As I searched online, however, I found there was little or no consensus; everyone held different answers to those questions. There was also a stark contrast between the representation of the Sibe in published books and Sibe self-representation online.

I could not describe who I am using the content from those books, as it was far different from what I had experienced in my life. The narratives of Sibe history, language and culture that were to be found in those books only confused me further over my own ethnic identity, as I could not find a fixed narrative that expressed who I am. I felt forced by the contradiction between such narratives and my own experience to choose not to talk about my ethnicity in public, in an effort to avoid the awkwardness of not being able to answer people's questions on the differences between the Manchu and the Sibe. This has caused me significant anxiety throughout my entire life in Chinese society.

In order to better understand these contradictions and thus also to resolve my anxiety, I decided to conduct my own research to investigate Sibe ethnicity. I thus chose this as my MA thesis topic. My initial hypothesis was that the internet enables alternative voices to be displayed online. My research question was largely structured in terms of applying cyber-utopian literature to discover what agency the internet grants to Sibe people in the construction of their own ethnic identity. I took the term *minzu* for granted, as meaning ethnicity, without questioning the constructed and constructing nature of the term itself.

In the early stage of my doctoral research, I believed the internet to be a platform for the oppressed voices of the Sibe ethnicity, and that this was the reason for the stark contrast between the presentation of Sibe ethnicity in published books and Sibe self-ethnogenesis online. As above, I also took the term *minzu* for granted without question, and I treated the narration of Sibe *minzu* by my interviewees as the last word on Sibe ethnicity, without any analysis. This initial treatment of the interview data brought me enormous trouble in understanding Sibe ethnicity, as these two sources' narratives of Sibe ethnicity contradicted each other. Later, I came to realise that the meaning of the term *minzu* is not fixed, and that it has been used by individuals in ways intended to establish their discursive power in narrating Sibe ethnicity. As my research developed, I identified the way in which the Sibe understanding of the concept of *minzu* had influenced how Sibe individuals were using the technology of SNSs in practice; and, conversely, at the same time, how the way the technology of SNSs was being used by Sibe individuals had also influenced the Sibe embodiment of the concept of *minzu.* Thenceforward, my research questions

were developed into a concern for understanding the interaction between the use of SNSs and the construction of the meaning of *minzu* among Sibe people. This research therefore aims to understand the Sibe ethnicity, and what relationship exists between Sibe ethnic identity and the use of SNSs.

Object of Study

I will use the following section to introduce the Sibe people and recent Sibe activities promoting their ethnic identity; then I will introduce the development of SNSs in the context of this process and its relation with social change in Chinese society. I will then explain how this research is related with the field of debate about the ICT and social change in China.

Once, the Sibe were considered to be part of the Manchus, who conquered the Chinese heartland, established the Qing dynasty (1644-1911, the final feudal dynasty in China's history), and acted as the ruling class for 266 years. After the fall of the Qing Dynasty, in the turbulent period after the 1910s when Uyghur and Han Chinese nationalisms competed to exercise power in the Ili valley region in Chinese Central Asia, the Sibe people there in Xinjiang Province made a strategic decision to seek an alternative identity, and they tried to detach their connection with the Manchus (Harris, 2004). In the 1950s, after Xinjiang was officially incorporated into the People's Republic of China, the Sibe were recognised as one of China's minority *nationalities* – the usage is significant influenced by Stalin's notion of nationality, the Chinese use the English term 'nationality' to translate the Chinese term, *minzu*. This concept is based on the idea of China as a Soviet-type union of national communities, consisting of different nationalities. However, the Chinese word *minzu* does not imply that ethnic minorities in China are not Chinese citizens; in fact, in this Chinese discourse of *minzu*, the idea of ethnic minority was solely narrated within the framework of the Chinese nation (Moseley, 1965, p.15-27). I will discuss the discourse of *minzu* in further detail in Chapter 4. For now, it is sufficient to note that during the 1980s wave of declining socialist ideology, the Chinese government promoted nationalism as the new ideology to legitimise its ruling position. It was in this vein that the category of *minzu* was applied anew to describe ethnic groups (Bulag, 2010, p.284).

According to the Fifth National Population Census of China conducted in 2000, the total Sibe population numbers 188,824 (State Council Information Centre, 2012). There are 132,615 in Liaoning in Northeast China, and 34,566 in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in Northwest China. The Sibe people in Xinjiang are largely concentrated in the Çabçal Sibe Autonomous County in Xinjiang. There are large Sibe communities in the cities of Yining, the capital city of the Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture, and Urumqi, the capital city of the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (Tongjia, 2004, p. 27-30); it is reported that the gradual Sibe migration to Yining and Urumqi has been ongoing since the 1980s (Tongjia, 2004, p. 27-30).
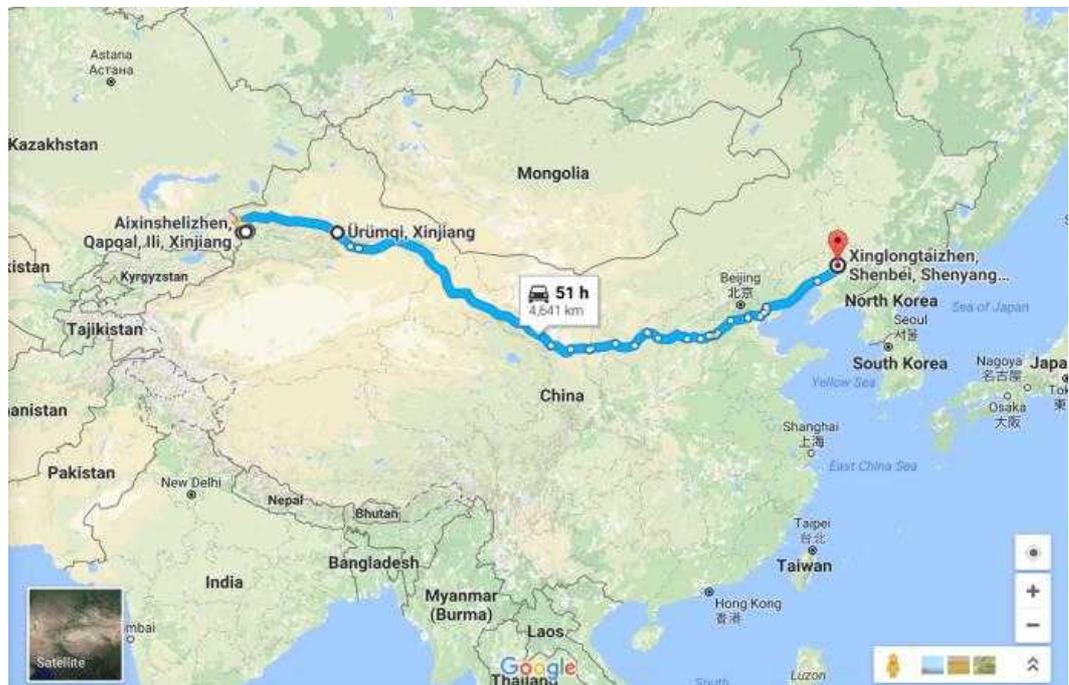
Figure 1. The Main Centres of the Sibe Population in China: Çabçal Sibe Autonomous County in Xinjiang, Xinglongtai Sibe Autonomous Township, and Huangjia *Sibe* Autonomous Township in Liaoning, Northeast China

"Çabçal" is also transliterated as "Qapqal" in accordance with the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet), and as Chabuchaer in the Chinese pinyin system. Çabçal is how it is transliterated in and from the Manchu language. All of these transliterated forms are used among Sibe people; the state uses the Chinese pinyin version Chabuchaer, and, as in the above picture, international organisations like

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Google tend to use pinyin as pinyin method is the dominant transliterated method in mainstream Chinese media. Here, however, I have chosen to adopt the Manchu transliterated form of Çabçal, on the basis that there is increasing use of the Möllendorff[1] system in transcribing the Sibe language online. I will analyse this phenomenon of the Sibe adoption of the Möllendorff system in the CMC (computer mediated communication) environment in detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

Çabçal Sibe Autonomous County, located in Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture in northern Xinjiang is the only autonomous Sibe county in China. The Sibe people in Çabçal Sibe Autonomous County are descended from the Manchurian soldiers who moved to Xinjiang in 1764 on a mission to garrison the new frontier of the Qing empire (Çabçal County Annals Committee, 2007, p. 57). They were divided into eight *niru* [2]; each *niru* established a settlement. The settlements are thus simply referred to as "First *Niru*" through "Eighth *Niru*", with the exception of the settlement established by the Sixth, which has had its name changed several times since it was chosen as the political and cultural centre of the Sibe community in the 1910s. Initially called Ningguci Niru in the Sibe language, which means "Sixth Company" in English, in 1938 its name was changed to "The Sixth Village" in Chinese. In the three-region revolution period (1944–1949), its name was changed back to Ningguci Niru. In 1967, its name was changed to that of "East-Is-Red Commune" in Chinese. In 1981, it changed again to Çabçal, and again became the political, cultural, economic and transportation centre of Çabçal Sibe Autonomous county (Çabçal County Annals Committee, 2007, p. 61).

Çabçal, meaning "the granary" in the Sibe language, has been used as the name of the autonomous Sibe county since 1954 (Çabçal County Annals Committee, 2007, p. 60). It contains Aixinshelizhen ("Third Company"), Duici Niru ("Fourth Company"), Sunjaci Niru ("Fifth Company"), Ningguci Niru ("Sixth Company"), now Çabçal; Nadaci Niru ("Seventh Company"), and Jakûci Niru ("Eighth Company"); as well as Kuohongqixiang, Hainukexiang, Kanxiang, Jiagaisitai,

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[1] Paul Georg von Möllendorff was a German linguist and diplomat who created a system for romanising the Manchu language in the late 19th century (Lensen, 1989).
[2] *niru* is a banner company (Norman & Dede, 2013, p. 287).

Qiongbolaxiang, Zhuohuoer, and Miliangquanxiang (Çabçal County Annals Committee, 2007, p. 61-69).

Figure 2. The Sibe Villages in Çabçal Sibe Autonomous County on Googlemap, 2016

The spelling of "Niru" that has been adopted by Google is Chinese pinyin rather than transliterated Manchu. The word *niru* means "companies from the banner system" in the Sibe language (Harris, 2004, p. 203). In contemporary Sibe usage, it is also used to mean "village". This adoption of Chinese pinyin corresponds with the situation of most transliterated-form names that are adopted for use in physical public space in China. As above, however, and as identified in my ethnography of Sibe use of SNSs, there is growing use of Möllendorff's system of Manchu transliteration in the CMC environment among Sibe people. Hence, in my thesis, I have adopted Möllendorff Manchu-transliterated names of some of the Niru that I found to be typical of Sibe SNSs usage, so as to reflect the Sibe transliteration of the Sibe.

The population of Çabçal county is composed of five major ethnic groups. They are Sibe, Han, Uyghur, Kazakh, and Hui (Çabçal County Annals Committee,

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2007, p. 120). The Sibe and Han live together and are concentrated in the "Sixth Village", Aixinshelixiang, and the "Fourth Village" (Çabçal County Annals Committee, 2007, p. 61-63). As discovered in this research, the Sibe most actively involved with SNSs are mainly from the "Sixth Village" (Çabçal), Sunchaqixiang, Yining and Urumqi. Çabçal, the present name of the "Sixth Village" of the Sibe Autonomous County, was chosen to be the name of the whole county in 1981. Çabçal village (also called Çabçal among Sibe people) is the centre of Çabçal county. (Çabçal County Annals Committee, 2007, p. 61). To avoid confusion, here I will use "Çabçal county" to refer to the whole county. I will adopt the use of "Sixth Village" for Çabçal village, which is also popular among my interviewees from Çabçal county.

Figure 3. China Mobile Office in Sunzhaqixiang, 2011

In the year 2000, the total population of Çabçal county was 161,854; the Sibe population was 13.8 % of the total population of the county. The Sibe population numbered 8,561 in 1949, and 18,938 in in 2000. The Han population of only 388 in 1949 jumped to 58,664 in 2000, while the Uyghur population of 11,199 in 1949 increased to 42,030 in 2000. It may thus be observed that, from 1949 to 2000, the Sibe population in Çabçal county grew more slowly than the Han and Uyghur populations. (To continue for the sake of completeness: the Kazakh population was 11,840 in 1949, and 32,363 in 2000, while the Hui population of 330 in 1949 had grown to 7,543 by 2000 (Çabçal County Annals Committee, 2007, p. 119).

When I visited Çabçal county in 2011, I found there to be a growing fear that the Sibe will lose their culture in the face of increasing Han and Uyghur populations. Thus, among the Sibe population, Sibe cultural festivals and activities were being promoted by not only those local government officials concerned with promoting Sibe culture, but also the local Sibe communities themselves. Among these activities, the history of the Westward Migration was the most important element of the Sibe culture on display. The recurring Westward Migration Festival and the Sibe Folklore cultural museums, are both vigourously promoted by members of the Sibe community, who display a strong desire to reclaim their ethnic identity.

Figure 4. Signpost of the Sibe Folklore Museum in Sunzhaqixiang, 2011

Northeast China is considered to be the homeland of the Sibe people. The population of Sibe there has increased dramatically since the 1980s. In 1982, the Sibe population was registered in the third national census as 49,398; by the fourth national census in 1990, that figure had grown to 120,101 (Tongjia, 2004, p.21).

Since the 1980s, the regional government has granted a variety of preferential policies to promote local ethnic minority culture throughout China, including tax deductions for ethnic minority counties and subsidising the cultural activities of ethnic minorities. Shenyang was long considered as the hometown of the Sibe

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people, as the place from which Sibe soldiers are recorded to have departed for Xinjiang. Two Sibe Townships were approved as such in the 1980s by a state ethnic affairs commission: Xinglongtai Autonomous Township and Huangjia Autonomous Township, both established in 1984. Xinglongtai Autonomous Township and Huangjia Sibe Township are both located in the northern suburbs of Shenyang (Na, 2010, p.1584).

The two communities in Northeast and Northwest China had no contact until the Westward Migration festival was first introduced to Shenyang in 1982 (Na, 2010, p.432). After the Cultural Revolution, the cultural activities of ethnic minorities were promoted throughout China and the government subsidised those activities. The first Westward Migration festival was initiated in this climate. The Westward Migration Festival was organised by the state ethnic affairs commission in each city in Northeast China (Na, 2010, p.433).

During the wave of increasing ethnic nationalisms in China, and particularly in the region of Xinjiang since the 1980s, the history of the Westward Migration was repackaged by the local Çabçal government with a great emphasis on patriotism, which sought to emphasise the Sibe's contributions to the defense of the Chinese national borderlands. This was at the time when socialism was losing its legitimacy to the new wave of liberalism popular in China and around the world.

Among the many newly-invented elements incorporated into the remembrance of this historical event, the "Spirit of Westward Migration" is one of most important elements in re-narrating this event to suit contemporary national policy in Xinjiang. According to the Çabçal county government's executive solution for protecting the Westward Migration Festival, the spirit of Westward Migration is that of patriotism, *minzu* unity, and development (Tongjia, 2004, p. 150).

As the local government implemented a series of policies for promoting patriotism in the history of the Westward Migration, many Sibe people started to collect folklore on the history of the Westward Migration which might reflect Sibe patriotism in the event. Amongst this material, the "Song of Westward Migration" and the "Songs of *Suhûwa*" were the most popular with Sibe communities in Xinjiang. The "Song of Westward Migration" was collected by Guan Xingcai; the song was based on the folklori, story of the Westward Migration to Çabçal (Na,

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2010, p. 433). The "Song of *Suhûwa*" was collected by a journalist, Yanling, who worked at the *Ili Daily;* it was first published by the Ili Online News Portal and then picked up by Tianshan Online News Portal, which is a state-owned news portal in Xinjiang (Tianshannet, 2006). This song was then widely reposted on SNSs.

The Westward Migration was also taken as the most important event for narrating Sibe history in both textbooks and museums. In the Sibe Folklore museum, the display of the history of the Westward Migration takes up the most space in the museum. The Westward Migration festival was used by the local government of Çabçal as a way of boosting local tourism.

Figure 5. Stage Performance of the Westward Migration Festival Hosted by Çabçal County Government; Picture Taken from the Sibe QQ *qun* of *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* (Charming Çabçal group)

Among the Sibe people of Northeast China, however, the road of the Westward Migration is considered and actually taken as a pilgrimage to their ethnic identity. There are increasing numbers of people travelling to Xinjiang to seek their real roots in this way; they consider that travelling the route of their ancestors' Westward Migration is the most important journey they can take, the most important effort they can make in search of their Sibe identity.

Of those north-eastern Sibe pilgrims, G5[3] is one of the most famous among them. On the 8th of April (of the lunar calendar) 2007, G5 started out from Shenyang to drive his car to Xinjiang on the same road as the Sibe Westward Migration of over two centuries ago. He uploaded all the pictures he took during his journey: pictures of the relics of the Sibe companies who migrated westward all that time ago. He named his pictorial theme for the Westward Migration "Prairie Culture", and said that he made this journey to experience the Sibe's past as a nomadic *minzu* (G5, personal communication, June 12, 2015).

Figure 6. G5's Pictures of his Westward Migration Journey Have Been Popular Among Sibe Households in Xinjiang

Inspired by G5, increasing numbers of young Sibe people from Xinjiang and the Northeast of China are also using SNSs to broadcast their journeys on the road of the Westward Migration. This is making a large impact on the significance of the Westward Migration for Sibe people.

In Stalin's definition of the concept of *minzu*, having a distinct language is one of the most important criteria for marking out a *minzu* (Cohen, Rabinowitch, &

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[3] The name of interviewee has been anonymized to comply with ethics codes.

Sharlet, 1980, p. 24). However, in terms of their language and its differences with the Manchu language, the ethnicity of the Sibe does not really fit this criterion. Based on my ethnography of online Sibe discourse, it is apparent that there are heated debates held over language and *minzu* among the Sibe, in the Sibe language. Again, according to my ethnographic data (here on Sibe discussion of Sibe language), the main argument among Sibe people is whether the Sibe language is, or is not, Manchu. There are two forms of language practiced by the Sibe population in Xinjiang. These are: the spoken language that is used in their everyday life, and the written language that is used in publications (Tongjia, 2004, p.104). In the discussions I observed, the Sibe people argued that the spoken language they use is *not* Manchu language, as there are six unique vowel sounds used by Sibe people that are not used in the Manchu language. The written language used by the Sibe was thus argued by the Sibe to have been a different form of language since 1947, when the Sibe and Solon[4] cultural association announced the Sibe language as separate from the Manchu language, because the Sibe have added six letters, based on the phonetic shapes for the sounds of (the) Sibe language (Tongjia, 2004, p.105).

Based on my ethnography of Sibe people's own cultural activities promoting their ethnic culture, it seems that language is considered the most important ethnic trait by Sibe people themselves. There is a growing number of people from the northeast of China starting to use the internet to learn Sibe language. However, as the debate over Manchu and Sibe language influences the choice of method for displaying the sound of Sibe language, this creates enormous confusion for those north-eastern Sibe who want to learn this language and whose first language is Mandarin Chinese.

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[4] Solon was name of the Solon garrison in the Qing empire. The soldiers were mainly from the Dahuer tribe in Heilongjiang province, which was categorised as a *minzu* under the name of "Dawuer" (He & Tong, 1993, p.241). The garrison was in the region of Qorghas. From 1775 on, numbers of Solon soldiers were decimated. In order to make up the numbers of the garrison, Sibe soldiers were gradually moved to the Solon garrison from Çabçal (Harris, 2004, p.24; He & Tong, 1993, p.241-247). Their descendants today in the village of Icegasha still count themselves as Sibe (Harris, 2004, p.24).

Figure 7. Sibe People Use Mobile Phones to Record a Sibe Song for Sharing Later on QQ, Çabçal, 2011

These debates about language and Sibe identity extend to the written form of the language, and the changes which it has been through in relation to political changes. In the 1920s, the Soviet Union officially defined the sedentary Turkic peoples from Chinese Turkestan as Uyghurs, as part of their nation-building policy in Central Asia. This triggered different ethnic groups in Xinjiang to demand their national independence (Bellér-Hann, 2008, p. 5). In this climate, the Sibe were influenced, as a people, by this modern national consciousness. Based on what they learned from the Soviet Union, the Sibe began constructing their own national language. In 1931, the Sibe and Solon Cultural Association was established. The association's aim was to develop ethnic culture; it promoted modern education, printed Sibe language textbooks, and published the Sibe language newspaper. This is the first Sibe organisation that aimed to use the modernisation of culture to construct their own modern ethnic identity among the emerging nationalisms in Xinjiang (Tongjia, 2004, p.168). The association developed the method of transliterating the Sibe language in a Latinised alphabet, and put it to use as a modern method of teaching the Sibe language in a primary school in the Sibe community. Until 1947, the language that the Sibe used was still called Manchu. The transliterated written Sibe that was taught in the school was actually written Manchu at that time. Then, in 1947, during the three-region revolutionary period, the Sibe and Solon Cultural

Association was reconstituted, and this organisation officially announced the concept of the Sibe *minzu* and claimed Sibe language to be different from the Manchu language. Since then, the language that the Sibe speak has been recognised as Sibe language, rather than Manchu language (Tongjia, 2004, p.96). However, as the new transliterated method of distinguishing the Sibe language from the Manchu language was developed slowly, and constantly interrupted by various regime changes in Xinjiang, the Sibe people are still using the transliteration system that was invented to transliterate Manchu language as their main method to transcribe the Sibe language into the format of the Latin alphabet. Thus, because of the influence of the concept of *minzu* and its emphasis on distinct languages, Sibe people are keen to develop a new transliteration method to mark their language's difference from Manchu; the need for a new transliteration system for spoken Sibe is therefore promoted.

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) poses a great challenge for those Sibe people who want to learn the Sibe language. First, the Sibe script is not easily rendered by current SNS platforms. Second, the debate over Manchu and Sibe confuses people's choice of methods to transliterate Sibe in the CMC environment. Third, most Sibe language learners' knowledge of transliteration systems also limits how the sounds of Sibe language can be presented in the CMC environment.
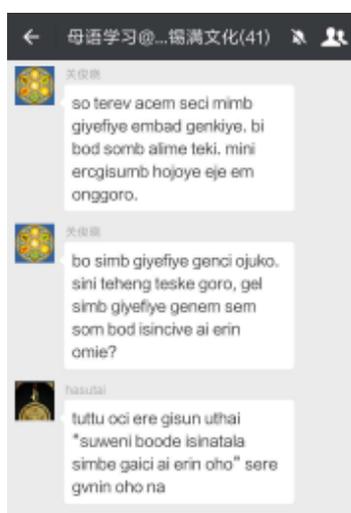
Figure 8. Sibe Use Transliterated Sibe to Learn the Sibe Language Online, 2015

To better understand what the role of SNSs is in the process of Sibe identity construction, it is important to understand the larger field of the internet and social change in China. In China, the most popular SNSs platform has changed from QQ, to Sina Weibo and then to WeChat. I will now explain the role of SNSs in social change in China by reviewing the evolving trajectory of the Sibe preference for SNSs platforms, from QQ to Sina Weibo and then WeChat. To introduce what role SNSs have in Sibe identity construction, I will first review the Sibe history of QQ and WeChat.

Based on the findings of my thesis, Sibe people mainly use QQ and WeChat for making their online community. Initially, they tended to use the microblogging platform Sina Weibo for circulating, sourcing and reading information. Since 2014, however, most of the Sibe prefer to use the mobile phone app WeChat for finding information and promoting their cultural activities.

In many ways, the framing and focus of current research, and the narratives surrounding SNSs in China, reflect a continuing tendency among scholars to oscillate between seeing information and communications technologies (ICTs) as "liberation technologies" and emphasising the Chinese state's authoritarian resilience and adaptive use of ICTs. In China, the development of the civil society sector has been greatly influenced by the advancement in information technology, particularly the internet (Tai, 2006). Researchers have shown that the internet has facilitated individual expression and participation, which has led to the formation of new identities and communities.

Many scholars have argued the internet has become a viable tool for building a new forum for participatory democracy (Yang, 2009). SNSs in particular have been used to exercise the new sociality of democracy in Chinese society in the last thirty years (Qiu, 2009). In this environment, Hughes has argued that popular nationalism has been reinforced by the internet (Hughes, 2006). Hughes argued that in the nationalist activities hosted by the online community, the open nature of the internet facilitates the common people to join with each other in forming ideals of equality and dignity in the national environment; in this sense, this popular nationalism has become, in a sense, the incarnation of democratic processes (Hughes, 2006).

It has also been argued that Chinese internet-based ethnic minority communities have been developing a new form of ethnic minority identity awareness (Gladney, 2004). This is demonstrated, in this thesis, in the study of Sibe SNSs communities facilitated by QQ, Sina Weibo, and WeChat. These communities have evoked the dormant Sibe ethnic identity and bound together the Sibe people from separate locations in the north-east China and Xinjiang for the first time for over two centuries. Throughout my research, I found that many Sibe people are highly connected with each other through their use of the SNSs of QQ, Sina Weibo, and WeChat. Online and offline events from different places are all shared online simultaneously.

These Sibe are as diversely situated spatially, as they are professionally: they range from young students to middle-aged entrepreneurs and former state officials, and from Xinjiang to Northeast China. But while the internet allows them to gather online to discuss, debate and promote Sibe identity, they are all actually embedded in specific places and social contexts, and the diversity of this 'space of places' has led to intensive factionalism and infighting. I will expand this discussion of the ethnic politics of Sibe use of SNSs in core chapters 4, 5 and 6.

QQ was the first SNSs platform in China. Launched in 1999 under the name OICQ by Tencent, this instant messaging service was later renamed QQ (Jucha, 2012). Considering the increasing use of mobile devices in the Chinese market, even in the early stage of QQ, it already had a feature designed to enable its users to connect with wireless pagers and mobile phones (Goggin and McLelland, 2009, p.267). Designed for fostering communication, it immediately gained popularity among many young people in China.

Since its launch in 1999, the number of QQ users has been increasing rapidly. It has been reported that the number of its active users reached 100,000 by 2000 (Tencent, 2003). In 2001, its simultaneous online user accounts exceeded 1 million. In 2004, Tencent QQ's simultaneous online user accounts broke 6 million. By the end of March 2006, the record shows that QQ's online community in China had become one of the largest single online communities around the world (Tencent, 2006), and by 2015, the number of active QQ account users reached 829 million (Tencent, 2014).

QQ functions like Facebook, where small groups of friends can exchange information among themselves, a function commonly used by Sibe people for connecting with and looking for friends across the Sibe communities in Xinjiang and Northeast China. Because these are networks of personal friends, QQ discussions are usually informal, and hard to access by outsiders. Many communities have been organised around this mediated identity in the name of *minzu*. The persistence of QQ-based ethnic communities challenges the proposition that community has been *substituted* by networks in contemporary society (Castells, 2001, p. 127).

The second phase of Sibe use of SNS began with Sina Weibo or microblogging, and was then reincarnated through the mobile phone app WeChat (*Weixin*). By 2009, Sibe people had established numerous bulletin board system (BBS) forums for promoting Sibe culture and connecting Sibe people. Amongst these, Sibeculture (www.sibeculture.com), and Sibeweb (www.sibeweb.com) were the most popular of the Sibe communities. Sibeculture and Sibeweb were, however, shut down in July 2009, following the Urumqi ethnic riot which was triggered in the first place by a violent dispute between migrant Uyghurs and Han workers from a Hong Kong-owned toy factory in Shaoguan, when the Han workers attacked the Uyghur workers (Baker, 2009). The next month, August 2009, the major internet portal Sina launched its microblogging platform Sina Weibo.

Since Weibo was established in 2009, it has undergone several changes and updates with regard to applications and features. Because one can comment on anybody's posts on Sina Weibo and follow the chain of comments under the original posting, as well as make a comment while forwarding a post, one gets an impression of who is discussing a certain topic as well as how people interact with each other. A popular practice is to address or mention other users with the "@username" in the post.

In the features pre-configured by the Sina Weibo platform, it is possible to group the people one follows into specific groups, such as fellow students, colleagues, friends, family, celebrities and others. This shows that on the one hand, Sina focuses on and encourages ties based on family, friendship and work, rather than those based on shared interests or communal/organisational membership; and on the other hand, it singles out a very specific group of strangers, namely celebrities.

Despite this pre-configured category setting, however, one can also group the people one follows into specific groups and thus create one's own communities. A crucial and dividing, indeed hierarchical, aspect of Sina Weibo is the distinction between verified users, marked with a V after the user name, and non-verified users. From the start, Sina has encouraged influential individuals such as celebrities, journalists, scholars, public intellectuals and media organisations to set up a Sina Weibo account, and also offered them the prospect of verification as a status marker and endorsement of their official credit and trustworthiness.

Sibe people often chose Sina Weibo for the promotion of their cultural activities; for instance, the promotion of *Duin Biya Juwan Jakūn* [5]/ Westward Migration Festivals taking place in different cities. The Sibe told me that they work many strategies to make sure their post gets shared by many people for the best media effect. One of the strategies is to get their post picked up by influential opinion leaders and journalists who are normally registered as "Big Vs" on the Sina Weibo platform. Sibe people who found it difficult to get their voices picked up the mainstream media were actively using Sina Weibo to upload images and articles on Sibe history, and language-learning materials. I was told by Sibe Sina Weibo users that they hope their articles will be picked up by others, especially influential opinion leaders and journalists, as they can share that information and make an impact in offline life.

According to my interviewees, although Sibe celebrities used Sina Weibo for goals such as advocacy, ordinary Sibe often found Sina Weibo less friendly and hard to use; as such, only a few Sibe were using Sina Weibo in early 2012. Even if these early users sent out posts, they seldom received responses similar to those they got on QQ, which most Sibe still preferred for communication among themselves.

From the start, Sina has actively recruited celebrities, opinion leaders and bloggers, and also singled them out through the practice of verification, as above.

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[5] This translates into English as "Festival of the 18th Day of the 4th Month in lunar calendar", as this festival was initially called. "Festival of 18th Day of the 4th Month" was a celebration of the harvest. The Sibe troops left Northeast China on this day, so the Sibe also celebrate this festival to remember their hometown. The name of this festival was changed in the 1980s by the Çabçal county government to add a patriotic element (Na, 2010, p.283)

Although opinion leaders are not the same as Big Vs, as the latter also include celebrities who do not necessarily discuss social issues, and not all ordinary verified users can be described as opinion leaders, most opinion leaders are, however, verified users. Sibe celebrities such as the actress Tong Liya (2015), one of the biggest microblog celebrities with 26,688,394 followers, mainly focus on their own work and the promotion of Sibe culture. Tong often promotes Sibe culture and the local tourism of Xinjiang.

Figure 9. Sibe Celebrity, Tong Liya's, Sina Weibo Account, 2015

Another category of Sibe opinion leader is comprised of cultural entrepreneur-turned-social activists, such as the interviewees I have anonymised as R and G2, both of whom have set up microblog-based charities for Sibe people. Their posts on social and cultural issues, including online fundraising for homeless Sibe people, induce many reposts, and many people with grievances also send them private messages on their microblogs, hoping to get their help. R has also used microblogs to engage in social activist work. For example, in 2013 he started a campaign on his microblog account with the aim of creating awareness about, and helping to save the endangered Sibe language.

Based on the analysis of Sina Weibo's hierarchical structure, engineered sociality and limited connectivity, it can be seen that it inscribes and privileges certain users and connectivities. These characteristics illustrate how power structures and hierarchies can be embedded in SNSs technologies, which at the same time are

also shaped by the specific sociocultural contexts in which they operate and by the users themselves.

It has been asserted in the literature that online speech in China is not only influenced by the state's censorship; commercial interests also play a crucial part in shaping online social interaction (Fuchs, 2016, p.14-41). Recent studies suggest that Tencent and Sina, two of the new media giants in China, even work with the state on directing public opinion in their own SNSs platforms in order to gain the favour of the government and to promote their platform in the Chinese market (Fuchs, 2016).

Since the downturn in Sina Weibo's popularity in 2013, the latest incarnation of Chinese SNSs is WeChat, also provided by Tencent. WeChat is a mobile text and call app. The operation of WeChat is similar to Facebook, in that it mostly allows for communication among friends. It is more similar to the mobile app Whatsapp, in that it allows users to send free text messages, and make free voice and video calls to each other. Although domestic users in mainland China can also open 'public accounts' to facilitate information flow beyond friendship circles, Tencent has redesigned WeChat to minimise the visibility of public accounts for fear of political risk. WeChat has been designed to protect people's privacy and hide their information from strangers. Based on this idea, WeChat has produced its own "Moments" function (in the Chinese version, it is called *Pengyou Quan*, or "Friends' Circle"), which is essentially built within the tab where you can see friends' updates, photos, videos, and so on. Initially, WeChat was designed for connecting friends and families. Later, Tencent added the feature of "Official Accounts", which allows users to follow "Official Accounts" set up by celebrities and brands. It works very similarly to RSS feeds. It allows the users to push and share articles and content that suit the users' interests and hobbies. WeChat has a very different mode of sharing information than Sina Weibo. In Sina Weibo, people can easily see others' tweets. In WeChat, however, it is only the friends' information shared in the "Moments" that one can view, or the subscribers to a public account who can see the post. And if a subscriber forwards a post, only that subscriber's circle of friends sees it. A WeChat account thus works much less publicly than microblog accounts do.

R does not always have problems sending out his stories on WeChat and, since switching to the service, he has posted the equivalent of a blog post every week

or two, and built a following of more than 60,000— 'higher than the actual subscription figure of many Chinese magazines', he says. WeChat is now his prime delivery platform for promoting both his jade business and the Sibe culture and language, including the history of *Suhûwa* that would be deemed as not appropriate on microblogs. Meanwhile, he now makes much less use of his Sina Weibo account.

Figure 10. Screenshot of Sibe Cultural Entrepreneur, R's, WeChat Account, 2015

Chinese IT corporations have grown similar to their counterparts in the West, facilitating and profiting from the expansion of their media empires throughout the Global South (Qiu, 2009). However, a key difference persists when it comes to their relationship with the authorities. Since the 2011 Arab uprisings, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) has taken great caution against online grassroots formations (Yang, 2009). In this context, the brief history of Sibe use of SNSs should be understood as much more than just another new practice of alternative online politics. It also stands out against a background of the strength of the conservative backlash, the CCP's authoritarian influence over the IT companies, and the rising importance of nationalisms for social stratification along the lines of ethnic identity in Chinese society.

Research Questions

As discussed in the previous section, the present approaches to studying ethnic politics in China tend to be based on the Gramscian textual analysis of mediated signification and hegemony, (e.g. Litzinger 2000; Schein 2000; Bovingdon 2002), which is rooted in the Marxist notion of the base and superstructure relationship. The Gramscian approach to understanding minority struggles is to study the degree of autonomy that their discursive position can achieve under the powerful authorities which adopt hegemonic strategies to limit the terrain of struggle. It focuses on the analysis of the structural dominance of hegemonic power over shaping subjectivity. However, this approach to studies tends to focus on an assumed model of the power structures based on an economic determinist point of view, rather than investigating possible new power struggles from any alternative perspective. The danger of adopting this approach in studying ethnic minority identity is the risk of neglecting alternative power relations in ethnic identity politics and the real struggles people face in their everyday lives in Chinese society. Inspired by a British cultural studies approach to studying identity (Hall, 1996), this thesis aims to avoid economic reductionism in understanding the current complexities and social relationships in Chinese society. Michel Foucault's poststructuralist approach has also been adopted for this thesis, as it can help us to understand what the potential identity is that Sibe can articulate in the process of interacting with the state-defined *minzu* and the structure of the new media-based political economy.

Given the lack of understanding of how ethnic minorities use the concept of *minzu* in their struggle in ethnic politics, the research questions for this thesis were specifically designed to gain an understanding of the discursive politics that surround the articulation of ethnic identity within *Sibe* use of SNSs in China. This thesis aims to understand the way Sibe identity has been built using SNSs, and how the Sibe people are using SNSs to organise and form a new community composed of Sibe people who are scattered throughout different parts of China. In this thesis, I will investigate how the concept of *minzu* has developed, how that changing concept has shaped Sibe ethnic identity, and what the influence of using SNSs is on Sibe ethnic identity construction. My analysis in this thesis of the construction of Sibe identity in Sibe practices of SNSs use stresses the realisation of a set of principles and ideas of

both *minzu* and the internet that guide Sibe people in how to use SNSs to promote Sibe culture. This study examines the impact of networked SNSs technologies, particularly the Chinese social network sites services, on the ways in which Sibe identities and the meanings of *Sibe* are constructed through Sibe use of the internet, and the influence of the state-defined concept of *minzu* on ethnicity.

My first research question is:

- What is the concept of minzu adopted by Sibe SNSs users and to what extent do the SNSs contribute to their perception of the meaning of minzu?

This question considers how *Sibe* SNSs users perceive the concept of *minzu*. In understanding the meaning of *minzu* among Sibe SNSs users, we can better understand how the Sibe identity, their "Sibeness," is constructed or reconstructed with reference to their understanding of *minzu*. This question then sets out to discover the role of SNSs in constructing these Sibe SNSs users' understanding of *minzu*. This question will also focus on how the logic of power embedded in the technology of SNSs may also be shaping the concept of *minzu*. A mapping of the forces of Sibe identity politics was achieved by analyzing the texts of online discussions taken from the archive of Sibe SNSs groups, and then supplementing this with interview data and historical data.

My second research question is:

- What are the principles and ideas that adopted by Sibe SNS users that guide Sibe people's use of SNS in their minzu practices?

This question sets out to answer how the use of SNSs is influenced by the conceptualisation of *minzu* among Sibe users. By analyzing the principles and ideas of the different SNSs platforms that Sibe SNSs users have adopted in their *minzu* practices, this research question will address how conceptualisations of *minzu* influence how Sibe people internalise and challenge the embedded power structure of SNSs in Chinese society.

The third research question is:

- How do Sibe use this concept of minzu generated in their online practices to direct their minzu practices offline?

This question will analyse how this set of online ideas and principles challenges existing power relations offline, and is at the same time also shaped and influenced by these offline power relationships. This question addresses how, in this dynamic process, the Sibe people internalise the power structures and the concept of *minzu* generated on the internet in their identity formation.

The last question will address the dynamic relationship between culture and technology; this question will examine how the Sibe concept of *minzu* is influenced by ICT, and how the adoption of ICT among the Sibe is shaped by their conceptualisation of *minzu* in their SNSs activities promoting Sibe culture. After evaluating different research approaches to data collection, to address the above research questions, this study has been conducted via the methods of in-depth and semi-structured interview, and an ethnography of the (social) use of SNSs among Sibe people. These approaches were chosen because of the possibilities they provide for understanding the reality of ethnic politics among Sibe people in China.

Research Method

Adopting a post-structuralist perspective, this thesis proposes that an understanding of the Sibe struggle against various forces of domination in Chinese society can be captured by means of a Foucauldian genealogical study of 'the effective formation of discourse' (1972, p. 233). In this method, the possibilities of resistance through practice can thus be clarified and the full complexity of historical events in the presentation of the Westward Migration, the Sibe language can be grasped.

To undertake the research in line with this genealogical approach, which entails identifying how subjects are connected to other forces at a particular historical moment, the researcher must have access to, and become familiar with the historical data of this subject formation. Jones (1999, p. 23), for one, highlights the importance of reconnecting the history of the internet itself with the ethnographic data that researchers collect in studying subject formation on the internet. I have been conducting this research since I wrote my MA dissertation in 2006. The long period of time for which I have been participating in Sibe internet communities' activities has allowed me access to this kind of genealogical data on the activities of Sibe internet users, providing me, and this study, with the historical context of Sibe

identity formation and development. As I am an ethnic Sibe and was invited by Sibe SNSs groups, in 2009 I was able to interview the Sibe SNSs group organisers in order to gain familiarity with their way of working. Subsequent interviews were carried out in the years of 2011 and 2015, for further clarification. A mapping of the forces of identity politics was then achieved by analysing the texts of online discussions taken from the archives of Sibe SNSs groups, and then supplementing this with interview data and historical data. Using these historical data, this study of Sibe internet use will attempt to unveil the conditions of the discourse on identity among the Sibe people in Xinjiang and Northeast China from 2004 to 2015, and what that discourse does to these Sibe internet users.

According to the methodological postulates of post-structuralism, the method has moved from the question of 'what does it mean?' to that of 'what does it do?' – that is, from significance to its effectivity, and from textual analysis to social practice (Foucault, 1979). Therefore, these research questions are not only designed to collect textual data, but also to collect the practice of real Sibe SNSs users, for making a genealogical analysis of why they are committed to acting and reacting in certain ways within the interplay of contextual and historical forces at a certain time.

The research participants are primarily educated Sibe. As educated Sibe receive their knowledge of *minzu* from school education, the interaction of the school-taught collective Sibe identity and their experience of ethnic selfhood will enrich our understanding of the ongoing, developing production of *minzu* identity in China.

Chapter Summaries

The thesis consists of seven chapters. This introductory chapter, Chapter 1, discusses the theoretical framework of this study, highlighting the unique nature of the Sibe as a case study and explains the project's contribution to the field of research.

Chapter 2 reviews the related literature on the subject of Chinese minority ethnicities and the ICT. To understand the complex relationship between the discourse of *minzu* and the use of SNSs on ethnic minority identity construction in China, the relevant literature from studies on ethnic minorities in China, and the role of ICT on identity and community construction is reviewed. I find that the literature

detects several recent transformations in the role of ethnicity and ICT in identity construction in China, suggests that ethnicity is a social construction and dynamic concept, and that ICT participates in identity construction in an interaction between users' social and cultural needs and the characteristics of ICT itself. These three observations form the foundation for my research project.

In this chapter, I also review the literature on ethnic minority identities conducted by Chinese researchers, and identify that there is a lack of concern for cultural factors in identity construction in this body of literature. The research on Chinese ethnic minority peoples conducted by English-speaking anthropologists fills this gap. The British cultural studies' audience studies approach to understanding ethnic identity construction is very useful. The concept of 'new ethnicity' from Stuart Hall has also been helpful for me to understand the ongoing and shifting interplay between technologies and culture in shaping the Sibe identity. Based on a review of the literature on studies of the Chinese internet, the concept of network is identified to be useful in understanding the influence of SNSs on Sibe identity construction. However, most of these studies focus on the infrastructure of technology, and technical and normative protocols provide the structural and cultural means for imagining connection and membership through technology therein. There is a lack of concern in the literature for the role of networks in the local culture of people's online and offline life. In order to develop a more nuanced and less problematic observation of the mediated sociality and practices of the Sibe QQ *qun*[6], I review the theory of network society via a reading of Castells (2000, 2010), Van Djik (1999), Rainie and Wellman's 'networked individualism' (Rainie & Wellman, 2014) Hardt and Negri's thesis of multitudes (2000; 2006), and Deleuze and Guattari's work on rhizomes (2005; 2008).

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in this dissertation. This chapter justifies the use of ethnography in this research. It explains why it is the most suitable research method for gathering the most relevant data to answer the research question about how *minzu* identity is internalised by the Sibe. A detailed account of the methods adopted for this ethnography is outlined in this chapter. The problems related to conducting ethnography on ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, and those of

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[6] The word *qun* means community and network in Chinese.

conducting ethnography in cyberspace are also discussed. It presents the methodology used to conduct this research, including how interviewees were selected and how access to the communities studied was gained and used. It also discusses how data was collected and how ethical issues related to the research were dealt with. It concludes that qualitative research is most suitable for this project. Details are given regarding the choice of research sites. I also focus on the role of the interviewer/researcher. Issues such as the position of the researcher are also examined here, and issues of access. I detail the research methods adopted in this study, including participant observation. Particular attention is paid to the importance of interviews as a research tool in the conduct of this study. The interviews used were in-depth and semi-structured, approaches that were chosen because of the possibilities they provide for understanding the reality of ethnicity politics in China. I also discuss ethical considerations relevant to this research. My approach to analyzing the data is also outlined. In this chapter I detail ethnographical narratives about who is Sibe, derived from the data that I collected during my ethnographic field work in Xinjiang, and also from published books and Sibe self-publication online. These three types of narratives about the Sibe display stark contrasts in their representations of the Sibe. To better understand this paradox, I turn, in the next chapter, to an exploration of the discourses related to *minzu*, the Chinese term used to understand/denote ethnic identity in the Chinese context.

Chapter 4 is the first chapter in which I present my findings. It concerns the conduct of a genealogy of *minzu* ontology in relation to the Sibe in Chinese society. It presents the key findings of this research and it also provides a conceptual framework for the thesis upon which the other chapters have been built. In this chapter, I aim to clarify the meaning of the term of *minzu* in the Chinese context, and therefore borrow Foucault's method of genealogy to trace the history of the construction of *minzu* discourses. I analyze how different discourses of *minzu* were created in different periods in China, and how the meaning of *minzu* has been influenced by various ideologies since the late 19th century. These influences include: the "culturist thesis" of the late Qing dynasty, the racial interpretation of nation of early republican ideology, and Stalin's definition of nationality.

Chapter 5 examines how ICT facilitates the construction of a new Sibe identity and provide agency for Sibe people in their identity construction. This chapter places particular emphasis on the ways in which the Sibe in Northeast China and Xinjiang are each using SNSs to reconstruct an Sibe identity suited to the demands and concerns of their particular local circumstances. I argue the new technologies of SNSs have altered how ethnic identities are constructed. The practice of taking and posting pictures also plays a role in re-constructing the Sibe identity. I argue that the Sibe shooting of pictures for sharing on the SNSs platform of WeChat has changed the representation of the Sibe. These picture-taking and posting practices play a role in re-constructing the Sibe identity. Sibe people also learn about Sibe culture from the sharing of pictures of and by the Sibe. This also means that Sibe culture is *manufactured* for the pictures to be shared on the SNSs WeChat. This logic has become a piece of common sense that has been internalised by Sibe people, and is manifested, as for example when preparing the Westward Migration festival activities. All these activities prepared for the Westward Migration festival, I argue, were set up for the mobile phone camera. The strategies of the Sibe Folklore Museum, which has also been used to reclaim a Sibe cultural identity, are also discussed in this chapter. Here I argue that, with resources from the "space of flow" facilitated by the use of SNSs, Sibe identity has been repackaged for the sharing of pictures in the SNSs. The development of these new uses of SNSs has given Sibe users the opportunity to produce new narratives of ethnic identity, which in turn has led the Sibe as an ethnic minority to discover an agency they can deploy to perform their cultural practices and to "imagine" themselves in new ways.

Chapter 6 discusses how the material conditions of CMC shape Sibe identity by limiting certain expressions. This chapter argues that the materialisation of CMC is influenced by the conceptualisation of *minzu* among the Sibe people. It examines the impact of the use of transliterated Sibe in CMC on Sibe identity construction. This chapter considers how the construction of using transliterated Sibe in CMC is a social formation influenced by both *minzu* discourse and the embedded logic of ICT input methods. In this chapter, two main themes regarding the construction of Sibe transliteration practices are analysed. They include the influence of *minzu* discourse on the choice of Sibe transliteration system and the influence of current input

methods on influencing the Sibe's choice of transliteration method. I concluded that the choices of transliterated Sibe language with the use of Roman alphabets in SNS *qun* are legitimised by an appeal to promotion of Spoken Sibe language. My qualitative analysis confirms that the discourse of *minzu* is engaged in complex processes of cultural governance on the formation of transliterated Sibe language through the choice of Roman alphabets with the CMC. Based on the ethnographic data that I collect from my fieldwork, I conclude that the transliteration of Sibe language with the use of Roman alphabets has been manipulated as a tool to serve the idea that language should represent their community. The choice of using pinyin to spell the spoken Sibe was mobilised by this thought, and it results in the transliterated Sibe used in SNS adopting the spelling of Spoken Sibe.

My argument in this chapter is with the transliterated Sibe language as implicated in the production of community and an idea of imaging the community, with "installation" of the ideas of minzu in Sibe with the ways of SNS *qun*s is connected to practice of holbobun which allow the Sibe to internalise the discourse of Sibe language as management. In this process, the transliterated Sibe language functions as a laboratory where a whole series of strategies on building Sibe ethnic community are brought to bear and test out. Yet this construction is always productive in the sense that ideas, objects, actors and inscriptions emerge from these arenas. This production in return provides a functional justification for the adaptation of the transliterated Sibe among Sibe people. The use of common shared *minzu* knowledge in the use of SNS *qun* reduces the feeling of physical distance for Sibe from Xinjiang and the Northeast of China, while the reference to specific socio-physical boundaries facilitated by the use of transliterated Sibe asserts a distance to the rest of the China. This dichotomy reinforces a sense of belonging for participants by creating a culturally localised niche of Sibe ethnic identity within the expansive space facilitated by the use of SNS.

Chapter 7, the concluding section, summarises the major findings of this study. It highlights the theoretical contributions of this thesis, the limitations of this research project, and suggests directions for future research.

Chapter Two
Literature Review

Introduction

      This literature review covers the existing scholarship on two fields of study, as they pertain to this thesis: the ethnic minorities and identity formation in China, and ethnic minority use of the internet and the formation of identity on the internet.

The Studies on Ethnic Minority

      The issue of ethnic minorities in China is very different from the issue of ethnic minorities in the UK, as ethnic minority groups are formed in the UK by voluntary minority settlement (Small, 1994). In contrast, the ethnic minorities in China were the result of state-led classification (Harrell, 1995; Litzinger, 2000; Mullaney, 2010; Schein, 2000). Most studies argue that the term, *minzu*, was engineered by the state for "interpellation" or "hailing" (Althusser, 1971) for ethnic minority subject formation (Litzinger, 1999, p.154; Schein, 2000, p.73). Those studies suggest that the state-led ethnic classification project played a significant role in forming ethnic identity in China (Harrell, 1995; Litzinger, 2000; Schein, 2000; Mullaney, 2004; Townsend, 1992). In the ethnic classification project which was carried out by the state to identify the existing nationalities in China after 1955 (Mullaney, 2010, p. 123), the concept of *minzu* was argued to be the most important tool for embedding ethnicity in Chinese society (Harrell, 1995; Litzinger, 2000; Schein, 2000; Mullaney, 2004; Townsend, 1992). It has been argued that the ethnicity of ethnic minorities has historically been politicised by the party-state as one of their ideological apparatuses. The notion of ethnicity was tightly controlled by the state, with their management of the concept of *minzu* a tool for assimilating its ethnic minority population into the Chinese nation (Moseley, 1965).

      Therefore, the discussion of the effect of ethnic identity formation on ethnic minorities in China cannot ignore the term, *minzu*, the use of which the state initiated to engineer ethnic classification. Ethnic groups in China were engineered via the concept of *minzu* along the line of the Stalinist model of nationality, that is, "common language, common territory, common economy, and common

psychological nature manifested in a common culture" (Harrell, 1995, p. 47; Gladney, 1991, p.66; Litzinger, 2000, p. 8).

Based on a survey of the literature, there are two tendencies in research on ethnic minority identity in China. In the first camp, the literature has been mainly conducted by researchers inside China since the 1990s, and it is focused on the construction of Chinese national identity among ethnic minority people. In the second body of literature, which is mainly conducted by scholars writing in English since the 1990s, the focus is on the power relations between state, market, and ethnic minorities in the process of identity formation. I review each of them in turn in this section. First, I examine the literature from inside China and I find that there is a gap where the nature of the ethnic identity needs to be discussed more. Next, I turn to the second body of literature, and argue that those works are also of limited relevance to understanding the changing boundaries of cultural identity that ethnic minority people encounter in Chinese society today. Hence, I borrow the theory and methods of British cultural studies for studying identity formation among ethnic minorities to provide a new direction to answer the pressing question of ethnic identity formation within the changing culture boundaries of Chinese society.

Scholars inside China became more interested in studying the identity of ethnic minorities during the 1990s, when the central government started to carry out the "Western Development Programme" in the western regions where most ethnic minorities reside, and initiated many large projects to attract Han labour from Eastern and Central to Western China. The State also promotes the development discourse on the relationship between ethnic minority periphery areas and the centre of the Chinese nation to justify the development programme in the ethnic minority regions. (Bhalla & Luo, 2017, p. 21) These initiatives have greatly changed the economic and social structure of the Western regions. There is also increasing tension between the local indigenous population in those regions and the migrant Han population (Lai, 2002; Xie, 1998; Zang, 2007), for instance, the conflict between Tibetans and Han in Lhasa in 2008 (Moyo, 2010), and the conflict between Uyghurs and Han in Urumqi in 2009 (Bruun, 2013, p. 251). Those incidents posed a great shock for Chinese scholars and policy-makers, as they had been confident in the *minzu* preferential policy's effectiveness for soothing ethnic minorities' resentment and strife. This

triggered a great interest from Chinese scholars and policy-makers in understanding the pressing ethnic identity issue in China.

In China, ideas of 'nation' have been developed from the encounter with Europe in the middle of the 19th century (Zhao, 2004, p. 46), and they were then used as a mobilising force for the Xinghai Revolution to overthrow the Qing Dynasty in 1911. The idea of a Chinese nation was built to overthrow the racially other 'Manchu' who ruled the Qing Empire (Leibold, 2007, p. 132). It is argued that the idea of a Chinese nation was based on the homogenising idea of 'Han' Chinese (Dikötter, 1997, p. 4; Leibold, 2007, p.132). Within the context of nation-state building during the last century in China, such efforts served to naturalise the transformation of a fragmented society into a single, homogenising Chinese nation state. In so doing, the state sought to legitimise systems of power and domination.

Therefore, research in ethnic minority studies inside China is mainly focused on political integration into Chinese national identity among ethnic minority groups. The main discussion on the ethnic minorities inside China in this body of literature is about identifying various factors influencing how ethnic minority people identify with the Chinese national identity (Zang, 2007), including the social stratification dynamic in the course of a transition from a state-planned to a market economy. The literature suggests that the changing dynamics of social stratification based on ethnicity and migration status can shed light on how the institutional transition from a state-planned economy to a market economy have re-shaped ethnic identity among ethnic minority people (Zang, 2007). This body of literature mainly concentrates on Uyghur, Hui, and Tibetan people in the region which the Western Development Programme covered. The main finding is that inequality between Uyghur and Han people in their access to economic resources has become larger under market competition, due to the lack of Chinese language skills and weak social networks among Uyghurs (Zang, 2007). On the other hand, Han employers' prejudices concerning Uyghurs' work ethic, culture, and religion also trigger ethnic identity among Uyghur people. (Zang, 2007)

As identity construction is a process influenced by many factors and cannot be reduced to the economic factors of "market discrimination" (Wu & Song, 2014, p. 169) alone to explain ethnic identity formation, the cultural factors also need to be

analysed. The studies of ethnic minorities in east coast cities in China help to fill this gap. Since the 1990s, there has been a growing tendency towards internal migration within China, mostly of rural labourers migrating to metropolitan cities and ethnic minorities from the western regions migrating to the developed eastern region of China (Fan, 2008). In this climate, there are burgeoning studies on the interaction between the local Han and the migrating ethnic populations. The main findings are that the local place-based identity of those ethnic minorities conflicts with the state's *minzu* identity. Yang and Fan (2009) study the influence of integration between local Han in the east coast city of Lianyungang and migrant Hui on the ethnic identity construction of those two groups of people. They find that the Hui have strong local identity based on where they come from, and local, place-based identity challenges their state-designated *minzu* identity. Zang (2007) examines the link between minority ethnicity and traditional behaviour in urban China and offers an alternative explanation of Hui behaviour, by focusing on the effect of status attainment on both inter- and intra-group variation in urban life in China. He found out that a person's ethnic identity affects his or her behaviour, but only within the confines of his or her social status. To be more precise, Zang suggests that the social status generated by the procession of education, material wealth, and occupation play a significant role in shaping Hui individuals' behaviour in relation to their ethnic identity (Zang, 2007, p. 5)

There is also an increasing amount of research conducted by Han researchers on Tibetan identity, as funded by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. However, the literature is comparatively small in terms of numbers so far. Wang (2009) examines language and *minzu* identity among "Tu" communities in Qinghai. The "Tu" people are also called Monguor, White Mongols, or Tsagaan Mongols; they are one of the 56 officially recognised ethnic groups in China. The "Tu" ethnic category was created in the 1950s (Hu, 2010, p. 95). Hu found that local culture plays a significant part in ethnic identity formation among "Tu". In his research, he points out that, as the different communities of "Tu" speak different languages, the state-designated *minzu* identity of "Tu" is not adopted by the people who are categorised as "Tu" according to the *minzu* categorisation. The different communities use their local Tibetan culture to express their ethnic identity. He demonstrates that the "Tu"

people are not unified by their language, but that their "Tu" identity is expressed via those peoples' placed-based culture, which is local Tibetan culture.

These studies provide us with evidence of the general patterns of ethnic minority identity in China. The number of empirical studies conducted on understanding ethnic minority identity is very small. This may be due to the academic interest in this subject being still very new. Another problem with this approach is the lack of attention to the analysis of the constructive nature of the concept and practice of *minzu*; in other words, there is lack of analysis on the power relations between the ethnic minority, the market, and the state in the process of ethnic identity formation, along with the implementation of the notion of *minzu*. In this body of literature, *minzu* as a discursive formation has not been thoroughly analysed. There is not sufficient discussion on what the mechanisms are by which ethnic minorities as subjects identify (or do not identify) with the position to which they are summoned in the discourse of *minzu*, as well as on how those ethnic minority people produce and perform positions in the given notion of *minzu*.

To fill this gap, the second group in the literature on Chinese ethnic minorities, which is focused on the constructive nature of *minzu*, provides more fruitful findings. Research conducted by scholars writing in English on Chinese ethnic minorities fills this gap. Most of the research is conducted in the discipline of anthropology, which is based on ethnographic work in the ethnic minority local communities over an extensive period. This research provides enormous ethnographic detail on ethnic identity construction among those ethnic communities in China that are selected for analysis.

Since the introduction of a market economy in the 1980s, the Chinese government has put a series of policies in place to promote ethnic minority cultures. The ethnic minority cultures are fostered and promoted within the market economy rather than being suppressed or forced into the mainstream, as before the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) (McCarthy, 2009, p. 45; Schein, 2000, p.78). At the same time, marketisation has also deeply transformed the social and political environment in China since the 1980s (McCarthy, 2009, p. 45). Based on the observation of the Chinese government's policies on promoting ethnic minority culture after the 1980s and in the climate of the decline of belief in socialism and the introduction of a

market economy, many anthropologists from English-speaking countries have focused on understanding this phenomenon. They find that there is an increasing tendency for ethnic minorities to be assimilated into mainstream Han culture in this process. These studies have moved away from either culturally- or primordial-based formulations to the analysis of power relations, particularly within contemporary nation-states (e.g., Bovingdon, 2002; Harris, 2004; Harrell, 2001; Gillette, 2000; Gladney, 2004; Litzinger, 2000; Schein, 2000).

These studies have focused on how cultural practices aid the construction of ethnic minorities' identities. They examine how the construction and maintenance of ethnic categories within their cultural practice shape ethnic minorities' identities (Gillette, 2000; Gladney, 2004; Harrell, 1995; Litzinger, 2000; Schein, 2000). A lot of scholars dealing with Chinese ethnic minorities have used Gramsci's concept of hegemony to understand how the Chinese state and market simultaneously homogenise the ethnic minorities' culture while simultaneously promoting it (Barabantseva, 2011; McCarthy, 2009; Schein, 2000). To be more precise, for instance, Schein argues that, in the case of the construction of Miao identity in cultural production related to tourism, the state and tourism industry manufactured a standardised and feminised ethnic minority identity for the Miao in the name of promoting ethnic minority culture. Similarly, Schein argues that Chinese internal orientalism commonly classes minority women as natural, childlike, cultural conservators (Schein, 2000, p.123). In the discussion of texts that represent ethnic minorities, this scholarship critiques Han-centered perspectives, pointing out that such texts tend to eroticize and exoticize ethnic minorities and thereby construct a "normal", majority identity by contrast.

There are two themes in this work. The first is how cultural practice can offer a site for ethnic minorities to construct their own cultural space (Harris, 2004; Gillette, 2000; McCarthy, 2009). They argue that the sharing of cultural practices and the meaning behind cultural production can offer ethnic minorities a sense of connectedness and a cultural space for an ethnic minority to articulate and negotiate their identity. In her study of Sibe music, Rachel Harris (2004) points out that, by singing Sibe songs together, the cultural memory of the northeast of China can trigger a sense of connection between Sibe in Xinjiang and Sibe in the northeast of

China, bringing those Sibe together. On the other hand, she also points out that, because of the regulation of music, the state also plays an important role in repackaging Sibe identity. This cultural space, created by the sharing of cultural memory, is constructed within the lines of the state's regulation. Similar arguments are made by Susan K. McCarthy (2009). In her study on ethnic revival among Dai, Bai, and Hui in the southwest of China, she argues that, by celebrating and reviving their cultural practices, Dai, Bai, and Hui in southwest China gain the space to assert their own collective identity. The sharing of those cultural practices also creates a sense of connectedness among those ethnic minorities. As a consequence, McCarthy argues that it could help those ethnic minority groups reinforce each of their communities as a distinct ethnic group (McCarthy, 2009, p.5).

On the other hand, Erik Mueggler (2001) argues that the cultural revival has supplied ethnic minorities with a space to go against hegemonic categorisation. The proponents of minorities' ethnic identities are seeking to establish local collective identities free of the influence of Chinese socialist discourse and power. He explains this in his study on the ethnic Yi in the southwest of China. The Yi people actively revived their cultural practices after the 1980s, in such things as songs, oral history, and poetry, to restore the culture they were unable to express during the Cultural Revolution; they have taken these cultural practices as a location for processing and resolving their trauma about the past. Mueggler (2001) argues that, by sharing these cultural practices, Yi reject the mainstream Han culture and form their own cultural space (p.22).

The second theme concerns how meaning is constructed in the making of cultural productions (e.g. Bulag, 2010; Schein, 2000; Gladney, 2004). They argue that the minorities' cultural production exposes and enhances state dominance and Han-centric nationalist impulses. In Schein's studies of cultural politics among the Miao, she analyses official practices and interactions among Han and Miao, as well as popular depictions and artistic representations. She discovers that the Miao are described as feminised and subservient in popular cultural production in China. The Miao are produced into products for official Han consumption (Schein, 2000, p. 103). She uses Edward Said's (1979) theory of Orientalism to understand how the ethnic minority Miao was made into an "internal other" to mark the Han's cultural

boundaries. The ideology employed by those Han cultural producers' images of the Miao as an exotic ethnic other is called "Internal Orientalism" by Schein (2000, p. 103). Said (1979) argued that the European orientalists' representation of the object generates a hegemonic description of it; with this cultural discourse, Europe can 'gain in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self' (p. 3). Similarly, Schein (2000) points out that the Orientalist discourse in China not only shows the inferior ethnic minority representation, but also enacts and reproduces identities that maintain asymmetrical power relations in China (p. 104).

Schein argues that the ethnic minorities were used to construct a homogeneous Chinese identity by presenting ethnic minorities as the other in cultural production. She argues that, 'For China, Miao and other minorities constituted an underground self that was internal, yielding an indigenous identity that allowed distinction from the West, while it simultaneously marked the modernity of Han urbanities by offering a traditional alter ego, as signified by the subordinate sex' (Schein, 2000, p. 129). In the representation of ethnic minorities, the ethnic minorities themselves were deprived of voices. A similar argument is made by Dru Gladney in his analysis of the representation of minorities in popular art and culture. Gladney asserts that these representations help construct a sexualised, submissive, primitive, and feminised minority object, and he further argues that the ethnic minorities were used by the Han to portray ethnic minorities as inferior, and, at the same time, to put the Han in a superior position (Gladney, 1994, p. 93).

Gillette's (2000) work on ethnic Hui in China reveals how cultural consumption helped the Hui to assert their alternative Muslim religious identity over their assigned *minzu* identity. Gillette points out, in his research on the urban Hui's cultural consumption practices, that the ethnic Hui consume the same cultural products as the ethnic Han people but hold very different interpretations of them. They use their own ideal of modernity, based on their understanding of transnational Islam, as a critique of the Han people and the Han-dominant state. The Hui use this modernity, based on Islam, to justify their beliefs and customs.

In Schein's studies on the Miao, she points out that there is a mechanism of "displacing subalternity" in the representation of the Miao in contemporary China,

whereby the Chinese nation's subordinate status against the West was displaced onto peasants, minorities, and women. In the representation of the peasants, minorities, and women, a masculinised urban elite can be constructed, and the subalternity of the Chinese nation can be disavowed (Schein, 2000, p. 33). This finding makes a significant contribution to understanding ethnic identity construction from the perspective of the ethnic minority. It challenges the treatment of ethnic identity as static primordial identity, and suggests that *minzu* representation can be understood as part of a process through which the state or the Han majority manages the ethnic minorities.

Gladney also points out the important influence of the nation-state on shaping ethnic minority identity in China. He asserts that the Hui identity is the result of local communities' interaction with the state. He explains that Hui identity is constructed in the response to different social needs in different local contexts. It is not a consistent ethnic identity. Different local communities form different forms of Hui identity to meet their needs and their context when interacting with the state. However, the state still has the dominant influence on shaping local Hui identity (Gladney, 1998, p. 166).

The strength of the above idea is that it addresses the nature of the social world to which we are inextricably tied through the operations of a discourse (Foucault, 1981). While this approach illuminates an elusive but formidable power which permeates our daily lives, it tends to ignore the value of human agency and treat a subject as a passive container waiting to be filled with social imperatives. Litzinger (2000), on the other hand, in his study of the Yao, discusses the possibility of the agency of an ethnic minority when facing the state's intervention in their rewriting of local history. He points out, during the rewriting and writing of Yao history after the Cultural Revolution, Yao intellectuals and elites actively cooperated with the state. They used tradition to position Yao subjects favourably within a discourse of progress and civilisation. They took the writings of history as a platform to voice their own concerns and identity. In the process of negotiating with the ethnic classification project and state ethnic policies in writing about their local history, the Yao successfully negotiated with the state on their cultural rights. Therefore, he argues that there is not only the discourse of power in favour of the dominant Han

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over local ethnic cultural production; there is also the possibility of voicing local concerns within this cultural production. (Litzinger, 2000, p.258),

However, there is a lack of analysis on ethnic identity formation in relation to media and communication. To fill this gap, ethnographic approaches to the study of audiences in the research on ethnic minorities from the UK are very useful to understanding the impact of the unique local context of an ethnic minority on their identity formation in relation to media and communication. The theoretical discussion and methodological frameworks in British cultural studies have produced advances in the appreciation of audience's media involvement in processes of identity formation and identity maintenance, which can be used in studying the changing cultural boundaries of ethnic minority identity in China. They can contribute an understanding of the interrelated complexities informing the interactions between media and ethnic minorities and changing cultural boundaries. Studies of ethnic minorities in the UK increasingly deploy an array of theories and methods from British cultural studies on analysing the media representations of "race" in the UK (Hall, 1992).

British cultural studies in the 1970s and 1980s, through its reworking of European structuralism and Marxism, has proved to be extraordinarily influential (Hall, 1980a, 1980b). Informed by British cultural studies, research on media representations of race in the UK emphasise the analysis of popular culture, and they pay attention to how consent is channelled in the hegemonic struggle in popular culture. As Hall points out, the research on media representation of race in the UK focuses on the analysis of how cultural factors and social factors are articulated in the process of the production of meaning (Hall 1980b).

In understanding the "interpellation" or "hailing" of ethnic minority subjects and how Sibe make sense of the meaning of *minzu* as the ethnic minority subject interpellated by the state, the concept of "new ethnicities" provides great insights into the processe among Sibe SNSs users. The concept of new ethnicities discusses how the subject articulate meanings from media representations. Hall points out that there are multiple readings of the same text, providing a space for oppositional and counter-hegemonic readings (Hall, 1992, p. 34). He argues that this form of reading and re-reading has created a "circuit of culture" (Hall, 1992, p. 34) in which

individuals and groups are in constant relationship with the production and consumption of culture. They are interpellated into positions which they also seek to disrupt and in doing so reposition themselves (Hall, 1997, p. 1). According to Suki Ali, the new ethnicities are not simply additions to existing forms and representations of the subject; they are evolved and metamorphosed "cultural hybrids" (Ali, 2003, p. 10). To be more precise, to know she/he is a Sibe *minzu*, the Sibe must "choose" and recognise this position over other identity positions (Ali, 2003, p. 10). According to Ali, it is culture that constructs both identity and ethnicity. Hence, when ethnicities are formed through people's cultural practices, those people must have some claim on the ethnicity as "cultural identities" (Ali, 2003, p. 10). Homi Bhabha's discussion on cultural hybridity has brought more insight into this conceptualization of new ethnicities: he suggests that cultural hybridity develops not from 'two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity is ... the "third space" which enables the other positions to emerge' (Bhabha, 1990a, p. 211). In the case of Sibe identity, the new Sibe identity generated from Sibe SNSs users' online practices should not be seen as only the result of the interaction of the state's hailing of *minzu* in the online articles and the Sibe people's offline identity. According to Bhabha's concept of cultural hybridity, it should be considered as a discourse that invites a new identity to emerge by denying any essentialist fixed subject position in the previous discourses in *minzu* and Sibe offline identity. Hence, the "culture" of Sibe self-led ethnogenesis in SNSs should be the focus of analysis, because it embodies the new Sibe identity emergent from the use of SNSs as a resource for identity construction.

British ethnic minority studies' approach to audiences is also useful when studying the production of meaning in ethnic minority representation. In the literature on studying the "new ethnicities" problematic, there is increasing interest in processes of audience reception involving "interpretative communities", "polysemic texts", differentiated "decoding", situated contexts of domestic appropriation, and media use within local settings (Gillespie, 1995). In those studies, the mediated "race" and racism appear to have become decentred. They argue that, to understand the relationship between identity and media interpretation, the position of an audience in understanding the media texts cannot be assumed to be static. In other words, the "racialised" decoding cannot be rendered down into an essentialised fixed

audience position. These studies have moved beyond a concern with differentiated "attitudes" towards media output and pursue a deeper understanding of interpretative processes with the help of a model of audience "decoding" (Hall, 1980c). This model anticipates different audience responses, given the "polysemous" nature of media texts, which are thought capable of sustaining "dominant-hegemonic", "negotiated", and "oppositional" codes of audience reading (Hall, 1980c). They argue that the complexities and contestation of multiple "subject positions" or "positionalities" discursively mobilised within and through "new ethnicities" in this decoding process should be analysed (Barker, 1997). This analysis of the fluid positionalities of the new ethnicities is very useful for the study of *minzu* in China, for understanding the discursive subject position of ethnic minorities when encountering the hailing of *minzu* identities in their specific local contexts.

There is also increasing use of the terms, "transcultural" (Gillespie, 1995), "diaspora", and "diasporic consciousness" (Brah, 1996; Gillespie, 1995) to substitute for those of "ethnic minority" and "ethnic minority culture" in those studies. The theoretical theme in the ethnic minority identity studies in the UK is shifting towards culturally fluid, spatially transnational, and multi-layered discursive "reading" positions, and scholars are studying how this "reading" is sustained within the cultural boundaries of diasporic experience (Hall, 1999).

Among this group of studies, Marie Gillespie's (1995) study of transnational communications and diaspora communities is helpful for my research, as it provides thorough discussion on how ethnic identity is constructed through diaspora media technology. In her research, Gillespie studies how transnational media play a role in sustaining South Asian diaspora formations and consciousness by focusing on everyday cultural and discursive practices among British Asian young people living in Southall, London. Gillespie studies the reception of two TV versions of the Mahabharata, which were viewed in India and in the diaspora. She discusses how Hindu women in London and Delhi selectively appropriate and contest key narratives for their own purposes from those TV texts. She analyses how those viewers have subverted patriarchal and nationalist discourses in the construction of their identities. Gillespie points out that the young British Asians use transnational TV programmes, video films, and TV talk to construct an "alternative public sphere" (Gillespie, 1995,

p.7). In this "alternative public sphere", she argues that different forms of self-narration and identities are performed and experienced. Gillespie's study on ethnic identity formation is very useful for my studies on understanding the construction of the meaning of *minzu* through the use of SNSs by Sibe people, as Gillespie's study provides an approach to analysing how meaning is constructed through the use of media texts by different people for their own needs.

From the literature, it can be concluded that the strength of this group of studies for studying ethnic identity formation in relation to media is that they combine the approaches of studying audiences and new ethnicities in understanding ethnic identity construction. Studies on British cultures, as reviewed above, give fruitful suggestions for the study of ethnic identity in China and how media representations can both register and contribute to the shifting political-cultural climate of *minzu* — a conflictual conflicted and contested terrain that, by definition, is constantly on the move. In the analysis of ethnic identity formation with the use of media from this body of literature, there are two suggestions on understanding the relation between identity construction and media that have been very useful in guiding my research on Sibe identity and ICT; the first is to analyse the interactions between different uses of different media technologies and their insertion into everyday cultural practices; the second is to analyse how the interaction between the social use of media and the media representations of ethnicity shape the interpretations of the text. In the following section, I will review the role of ICT in constructing identity and community in detail.

Review of Chinese Internet Studies

The word *qun* means "community" and "network" in Chinese, and "group" in Sibe, in which language the term is written *meyen*. In understanding Sibe *qun*, the literature about the internet and online communities is crucial, because the SNSs *qun* are groups of Sibe who are linked by their use of SNSs (QQ, Sina Weibo, and WeChat), and their sense of community was constructed through their interaction,

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facilitated by SNSs and the information on the definition of *minzu* that they shared there. I will elaborate the nuanced difference between *qun* and *meyen* in studies on social networking in China below.

I will review the literature on the Chinese internet and SNSs first and, based on that literature, I will identify a gap in understanding how meaning is constructed in terms of technology and society. The current literature is dominated by the simple cause and effect relations of technology and society. There is not enough literature on understanding how the cultural form of SNSs is constructed; in other words, there is a lack of analysis of the dynamic relationship between the social use of technology and the ongoing construction of the culture associated with the use of this technology. In order to fill this gap, I will review the literature on *guanxi* in Chinese society, and its influence on the Sibe notion of *holbobun* ("networking" in Sibe language) and *meyens* (groups in Sibe language. Then, I will review the literature on how the internet offers material conditions to develop this sense of *guanxi* (or social connections in English) under a new spatial logic of networks. Through the literature review, I find I need to clarify the relation of agency and the structure of the network. Therefore, I review the studies on networks, that is, the theories of network societies from Castells (2000; 2010) and Dijk (2006), networked individualism from Rainie and Wellman (2012), multitude from Hardt and Negri (2000; 2006), and rhizomes from Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; 2008). Overall, I argue that the meaning of *minzu* is constructed by the interaction between networks facilitated by *holbobun*, SNS *qun,* and the *minzu* identity. Furthermore, the agency of Sibe in articulating their ethnic identity is generated in a process of interaction between those networks, rather than being prefigured in the logic of any pre-existing network.

Based on reviewing the literature, the current studies on the Chinese internet mainly focus on the political economy of the internet and social change, and the political effects of the internet in China. It can be concluded that there are two camps. The first is cyber-realist; understanding the role of internet use in social change in China, this group of studies suggests that the Chinese government uses the technology of the internet for social control and maintaining its political power (Hughes, 2000). The second camp can be summarised as the cyber-utopian camp, which believes that the internet will liberate the people from the control of the

Chinese government and bring pluralization and liberalisation into Chinese society (Herold & Marolt, 2011; Yang, 2009).

There are increasing numbers of studies that focus on the interactions between state, society, and technology in Chinese internet studies (e.g., Herold & Marolt, 2011; Hughes & Wacker, 2003; Qiu, 2009; Tai, 2006; Yang, 2009). Similar to the previous cyber-utopian literature, many studies still analyse the role of the internet in social change from the perspective of a simple cause and effect paradigm, and they argue that internet will improve the relationship between state and society. However, that literature has developed into focusing on more nuanced factors of the role of the internet in causing social change, and enhancing political participation (Yang, 2009; Zhang and Zheng, 2009).

Many of the studies analysing the relationship between technology and society in China have been conducted on Chinese online activism in recent years (Liebold, 2011; Herold, 2011; Yang, 2009). One of the most useful analyses on Chinese internet activism is the work conducted by Yang (2009) in his book, *The Power of the Internet in China*. Yang argues that 'online activism derives its forms and dynamics from a broad spectrum of converging and contending forces' (p. 1). He argues that internet activism is influenced by the state, cultures of contention, the market, civil society, and transnationalization. Those factors are influenced by each other and shape online activism. Hence, Yang criticises the online/offline dichotomy; he argues that it is simplistic to understand online activism by separating the online and offline, and he argues that the online practices are influenced by the offline factors, and the interaction between online and offline creates a synergy that shapes the social practice through the use of the internet (Yang, 2009, p. 122).

This is very useful criticism of most of the current studies, as they indeed still follow the online/offline dichotomy when analysing the internet and social change in China. As the internet increasingly assimilates the fabric of our daily life, the online and the offline converge into a single social realm (Fernback, 2007). Interactions within communities need to be understood as a melding of the physical and the virtual (Fox, 2004). The use of SNSs in building networks, therefore, must be understood as essentially interconnected with social processes; it simultaneously

shapes and is shaped by society. On the one hand, online relationships are influenced by offline social structures, power relations, global information flow, and capital (Fernback, 2007). On the other hand, social relations both online and offline also generate new cultural patterns to facilitate social change (Gotved, 2006). As the internet has integrated into social, political, economic, and cultural processes (Jones, 1999, p. 234), a contextual analysis on the use of the internet is needed in order to understand how institutions and culture interact to produce variations in internet use (Chua et al., 2009).

For example, Yang points out that Chinese internet users use Chinese homophones to replace those words officially censored to avoid censorship (Yang, 2009, p. 61). He also points out that Chinese internet users also use images, substituting signs or symbols for Chinese characters, or separating characters with spaces in order to avoid censorship (Yang, 2009, p. 61). Yang's observation is reflected in Sina Weibo netizens' creative strategies for avoiding censorship. For instance, according to Meng (2011), Sina Weibo netizens use "grass-mud-horse" lexicon and imagery to express an obscene curse in order to avoid being censored. As one sound in Chinese can represent a variety of characters depending on context, many homophones exist in Chinese. The term "grass-mud-horse" is pronounced "cao-ni-ma" in Chinese. These sounds could be interpreted into the Chinese characters of "grass-mud-horse", but they could also be interpreted as the Chinese characters of the obscene curse, "fuck-your-mother" as the pronunciation of "cao" could represent the character of "grass" and it also could represent the character of "fuck", and so on (Meng, 2011). The use of abusive and obscene words, as a strategy of resistance, then can be understood as a method of freeing netizens from the seriousness and traditional decency endorsed by the authorities. In this vein, the strategy of utilising homophones for abusive and obscene words from Yang's observation on Chinese internet users (Yang, 2009, p. 62) can be understood as a protest toward the power of the authorities. It demonstrates a method through which the powerless could also get their message out about unresolved issues.

Yang's findings on linguistic resistance are particularly useful for my project, as they point out how speech or texts can be used online discursively to challenge opposing discourse. The limitation of Yang's analysis is that he did not thoroughly

analyse the material operations which make homophone resistance possible discursively and materially. The construction of technologies remains undertheorized in Chinese internet studies, which often considers the term "technology" narrowly as passive artefacts with no historical substance. This narrow understanding the internet has been challenged by Foucauldian internet studies. In the Foucauldian approach, they understand the 'technologies' of the internet from a perspective of how the production of the knowledge of the internet and ideological structures that are embedded in material and cognitive settings construct and shape individual use of internet (Fung, 2002). For instance, in my project on analysing the efforts to develop romanisation of transliterated Sibe in the internet, the Foucauldian approach will be used to study how the material conditions of the internet shape romanisation of transliterated Sibe, and what principles have led people to develop the internet into that material condition.

The Studies on Social Networks in China

The field of analysis in my thesis is defined as encompassing a wide range of commonly-used SNSs among Sibe people; they are QQ, Sina Weibo, and WeChat. In this thesis, I will describe how the formation of the meaning of *minzu* is conditioned by the technologies underlying them and what set of ideas and principles guides the construction of those material conditions. In this respect, the notion of community and networks enables us to grasp how the factors influencing identity formation are embedded in a material and technological base.

In studies of the relationship between media and community building, Anderson's concept of the imagined community is most influential. In his analysis of the construction of modern nation, he focuses on the internalised structures of the community and argues that the media technologies provide the structural and cultural means for imagining connection and membership. He points out that a nation is a socially constructed community, imagined by the people who perceive themselves as part of that group (Anderson, 1993, pp. 6–7). Following Anderson's concept of imagined community, scholars understand the formation of online communities as a mainly subjective process. They believe that a community and identity can be built based on the basis of the subjects' online interaction (Clothey, Koku, Rekin, & Emat, 2015).

Contrary to Anderson, Anthony Smith (1991) argues that the formation of modern nations cannot be reduced into a simple process of subjective "invention" and "imagination". Influenced by Eric Hobsbawm's (1983) concept of invented tradition, Smith explains that the construction of the concept of nation is based on using pre-modern customs and traditions to form a community. In this way, the invented tradition helps human beings to shape and direct their destinies in a rapidly changing social environment. Smith argues that the construction of the notion of the modern nation is a process of rediscovering and reinterpreting the pre-modern bases of nationhood in earlier manifestations of ethnic community. In the European context, nationalist movements parallel the rise of the capitalist revolution. Smith argued that the notion of the nation as being centred on the idea of an autonomous individual, "ultimately denies the power of the past of received structures to determine the products of human agency" (Smith, 1991, p. 364). Hence, for Smith, national identity is not purely determined by the structure of imagined community, but it is also influenced by the complex factors in the process by which people articulate the resource of tradition in the construction of national identity.

Therefore, in understanding the construction of the concept of *minzu*, studies on Sibe online *minzu* practice should focus on how the Sibe use SNSs to articulate the state-defined *minzu,* the Sibe's traditional notion of community (which is *meyen* in the Sibe language), and emerging relationships in their interactions. In other words, this study will situate the construction of the meaning of *minzu* in the context of network dynamics: I will look at the meaning of *minzu* when it is constructed in the dynamic, interpersonal, relationship-building process, and analyse what social psychological needs the meaning of *minzu* fulfils in Sibe SNSs users' interactions.

Guanxi in Chinese means long-term, mutually reinforcing and reciprocal interactions between individuals constitutive of networks of relationships. Many studies claim that it is characteristically Chinese in nature (Hwang, 1987; Kipnis, 1997; Lin, 2001; Yan, 1996; Yang, 1994). One of the most influential analyses of *guanxi*, the work conducted by Bian (2006), points out that '*Guanxi* refers to a dyadic, particular and sentimental tie that has the potential of facilitating favour exchanges between the parties connected by the tie' (p. 312). The literature suggests *guanxi* as an essential element of Chinese culture, which is traced back to traditional

Chinese philosophy of the formation and identity of an individual's "self" (Fei, Hamilton & Wang, 1992; Hwang, 1987; Kipnis, 1997; Lin, 2001; Yan, 1996; Yang, 1994). Unlike Western individualism, in Chinese culture, it is claimed that the individual is subordinate to the collective; thus, self-identification and self-evaluation occur in terms of one's relations to the groups and communities to which one belongs (Fei, 1992, p. 65). This culture lays both the abstract and the concrete foundations for *guanxi* to operate as a guiding behavioural principle (Bian and Ang, 1997).

According to my ethnography, the Sibe community shares similar features with the notion of *guanxi*. In the Sibe language, *meyen* is the term that refers a group. And a *meyen* is constructed by the webs of personal relations, or *holbobun* networks in the Sibe language. These "personal networks" are very similar to the networks based on *guanxi*, in which the individual Sibe is located at the centre of this network and reaching out to different people via social relations. The *holbobun* network is, hence, a network of collective social relations to which the person differentially relates. *Holbobun* networks are open and fluid in nature, as they are not bounded by geographical factors. However, they are constructed by social proximity.

If reciprocity in China is based on the dyadic quality and the capacity of a network to provide social resources (Gold, Guthrie, & Wank, 2002), then Sibe cultural norms also have some similar social rules. For instance, the term, *dere* means moral obligation to help, to maintain mutual dependence and group solidarity among people enmeshed in their networks. Under this social norm, the individual Sibe can develop multiple networks, with their social relationships built by *dere*. Within this particular cultural context, SNSs, for instance, QQ, Sina Weibo, and WeChat, are likely to play a role in reconstructing the *holbobun* network.

In this thesis, I will use network theory to understand the *qun*. As a community is normally made manifest through a network of people, so examining the network can help to understand the characteristics of sociality within a community. Sibe people are coming to understand the meaning of *minzu* together by communicating with each other in a *meyen* (group), and in a SNSs *qun*. The power relationship generated by the interaction of people in this network is my focus, as this dynamic relationship is the key factor influencing how people make sense of the

meaning of *minzu*. I will analyse the interplay between Sibe SNSs *qun* and its constituents and the ways in which these work together to construct the meaning of *minzu*. Here, it is necessary to pay attention to the agency of the self in the network.

Agency of Self in the Network

Based on the preceding review of social networks in Chinese society, Sibe SNSs users can connect to numerous social network groups at will, as long as they can fit the rules of *dere* and *holbobun* based on the social relations that they have built with the use of social media. If they do not fit the network, they are dropped by the network. Likewise, if the network does not meet an individual Sibe's needs, the individual drops it. This insight helps us to understand the agency of Sibe people in constructing the meaning of *minzu* when they use social media; their agency is constrained by both the structure and the properties that operate dependent upon the type of network within which they are situated. The network is the Sibe network, facilitated by the use of SNSs, such as QQ, Sina Weibo, and WeChat.

The question is, where can agency be generated? Is it an input of the network, which has been predetermined by the network's properties? Or is the agency generated through the interaction of Sibe people and free from the predetermined logic embedded in the network? To begin to answer these questions, I will review Castell's thesis on network society, Hardt, and Negri's thesis of the multitude (Hardt & Negri, 2000; 2006), and Deleuze and Guattari's work on rhizomes (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; 2008). The studies on networks have attracted enormous attention from various scholars. They include theories of network societies from Castells (2000; 2010) and Dijk (2006), networked individualism from Rainie and Wellman (2012), the multitude from Hardt and Negri (2000; 2006), and rhizomes from Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; 2008). Network analyses attempt to map, and thereby, to understand the behaviour, predictability and potential of networks, and of the nodes or actors within. In these instances, networks are seen as describing a relational-organisational form (Dijk, 2006, p. 24).

The concept of the network society is discussed in relation to the social, political, economic, and cultural changes caused by the spread of networked, digital information and communications technologies (Castells, 2010; Dijk, 2006). In analysing the network society, both Castells and Dijk recognise the importance of

social and media networks in changing the structure of modern society. They both assert that social and media networks are shaping the prime mode of organisation and most important structures of modern society (Castells, 2010, p. 502; Djik, 2006, p. 20).

The difference between them is that Castells argues that the culture of the network society is largely shaped by the information communication technology (Castells, 2010, p. 507). Castells argues that the network society is a social structure based on networks operated by ICT based on microelectronics and digital computer networks that generate, process, and distribute information via the nodes of networks (Castells, 2010, p. 3) Castells further notes that "societies are asymmetrically organised around the dominant interests specific to each social structure" (Castells, 2010, p. 446). He explains that social domination is facilitated by the cultural codes which are embedded in the social structure. He further explains that the possession of these codes opens the access to the power structure (Castells, 2010, p. 446). The diffusion of a networking logic substantially modifies the operation and outcomes in the processes of production, experience, power, and culture. The new IT (information technology) paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure (Castells, 2010, p. 500).

Castells' network society thesis is very helpful in understanding the relationship between new technology and the new sociality. He argues that the new political economy is generated by the logic of "informational capitalism" (Castells, 2000; Fuchs, 2016). To be more precise, Castells argues that the new information systems based on the use of ICT has created innovative forms of powerful networks, and these new forms of networks, he argues, have generated new forms of political economy. In explaining the construction of this new political economy, Castells analyses the global forms of organisation, and he argues that the role of "informational capitalism" is increasingly critical in organizing the globalized span of capitalist organisation (Castells, 2000, p. 21).

Castells argues that, in the network society, the network is goal-oriented, as it exists to perpetuate and further the interests of the dominant group of people. Castells argues that the law of the network is designed by the power elite, who want to invest their interests in the network. Castells points out that the constituency of the

network is selectively connected to the network (Castells, 2010, p. 442). Castells further points out that the arrangements of dominant organisations' and institutions' internal logic plays a strategic role in shaping social practices and social consciousness for society at large (Castells, 2010, p. 442).

In explaining how the technology determines social change, Castells explains that the inclusion of most cultural expressions within Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) has major consequences for social forms and processes, as it weakens the symbolic power of traditional senders external to this new system which is based on electronic materialisation under the logic of the "space of flows" (Castells, 2010, p. 406). The space of flows refers to a new spatial arrangement facilitated by the use of ICT, and the emergence of new globalised cities and global managerial elites according to Castells (2010, pp. 442-445). In explaining the construction of the material conditions of the network society, Castells points out that a circuit of electronic exchanges based on ICT has constructed the material support of the space of flows in the network society (2010, p. 442). He argues that the development of electronic communication and information systems allows for an increasing disassociation between spatial proximity and the performance of everyday life functions (Castells, 2010, p. 424). This further facilitates the construction of the material conditions of the space of flows. Castells argues that the technological infrastructure of the network society is itself the expression of the network of flows whose architecture and content is determined by the powers of the dominant network (2010, p. 443). He further points out that the convergence of information technologies and social evolution has constructed a new material basis for the performance of activities throughout the social structure (Castells, 2010, p. 502).

Similar to Foucault's argument on technology in his concept of governmentality that associates the technology with a codified body of knowledge, ideological structures embedded in material, and cognitive settings that shape how the technology is constructed (Foucault, 1972), in arguing that the network logic is the most important force shaping the contemporary society, Castells points out that the emergence of individualism as the dominant culture of contemporary, advanced industrial societies promotes a need for a communicative mode for people to build a

sociability along self-selected communication networks. Castells argues that the new communication technologies meet such a demand.

On understanding the effects of internet use on social relations and sociability, Castells asserts that sociability is transformed into a "networked individualism" with the use of the internet (Castells, 2010, p.128; Rainie & Wellman, 2014). In explaining the process of information capitalism and the new power logic, Castells explains the relation between the "network" and the "self". He argues individualism is influenced by the network society. Castells points out that individualisation in work in the network enterprise, in the decline of patriarchalism, in the withdrawal from politics and civil society, and in new patterns of urbanisation and the dislocation of the spaces of everyday life in cities are all influenced by the result of new network conditions of the space flows. Castells argues that the network of communication is the fundamental spatial configuration: places do not disappear, but their logic and their meaning become absorbed in the network. The technological infrastructure that builds up the network defines the new space (Castells, 2010, p. 443). Castells further points out that the localities become disembodied from their cultural, historical, and geographical meaning, and reintegrated into functional networks, or into image collages, inducing a space of flows that substitutes for the space of places (Castells, 2010, p. 406).

Castells asserts that networking logic promoted by the global capitalist networks surpasses any specific social interests of the local expressed in the networks (Castells, 2010, p. 500). This is a reductionist point of view on the relationship between social change and technology. My finding in the research on the Sibe's *minzu* practices conflict with this assertion; the interests of some Sibe people in the Sibe WeChat *qun* are manifested against the neo-liberal logic embedded in the structure of social media. Sibe people can find ways to bypass the constraints of the SNSs structure. In my own research, I find that networks are constituted in the local context, and the meaning of *minzu* is formed in the interaction of Sibe SNSs users. The agency of individual Sibe SNSs users is not necessarily limited by the structure of predesigned social media. If Castells is right, the construction of the meaning of *minzu* should be understood as it is created by the logic of the network, as facilitated by the use of social media. This is not true in Sibe communities, as there are social

networks organised around the idea of *holbobun* and the concept of *minzu,* and the development of SNSs is different from the US and UK. However, the CMC do generate another hegemony for limiting the agency of Sibe, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 6 when I discuss the construction of the transliteration of the Sibe language online. There is other criticism of Castells' reduction of the complexity of the formation of this new network culture. Based on ethnographic findings in nine countries, Miller has pointed out that the material logics of economics and technology do not necessarily account for the complexity and variability of life worlds constituting the network formed by local people; the formation of a network in a local area has the local distinguishing cultural features that shaped its construction (Miller, 2016, p. 20).

From the above review of Castells' concept of the network society, it can be concluded that network, for Castells, is goal-oriented and its existence is to further the interests of the global elites, as they have designed the network according to their interests. However, Dijk rejects Castells' complete determinism by making reference to the necessity of an operating system's engagement with its environment to reproduce itself. Dijk argues that, once a network, which is a collection of relatively closed systems, engages with other systems, the possibility of the construction of new agencies are opened up. Dijk has defined the idea of the "network society" as a form of society increasingly organising its relationships in media networks, gradually replacing or complementing the social networks of face-to-face communication. He argues that modern society is in a process of becoming a network society, as people are increasingly linked with each other through their use of the internet. The network society can be defined as a social formation with an infrastructure of social and media networks enabling its prime mode of organisation at all levels (individual, group, organisational, and societal). Increasingly, these networks link all units or parts of this formation (Dijk, 2006, p. 20).

Dijk argues that individuals, groups, organisations, and communities still hold the most important role in current society, albeit increasingly linked by networks (Dijk, 2006, p. 241). He believes that networks are maintained by the actions of people, channelled by ICT. His approach is to take networks as an organising principle, hence he studies the relationships of people rather than the

connecting nodes, and he prioritises network systems over ecological environment. Dijk believes that it is the humans who participate in the network that decide who is included in and excluded from the network. The crucial factors for Dijk include how individuals, groups, organisations, and communities manipulate resources when shaping the network (2006, p. 241). Dijk criticises Castells' treatment of the network society that prioritises form over substance. He believes that information forms the substance of contemporary society, and networks shape the organisational forms and (infra)structures of this society (Dijk, 2006, p. 241). Hence, he believes that the networks produced by different individuals, groups, organisations, and communities in different ways for different purposes can either support or hinder a new social structure.

Deleuze and Guattari's writing on the development of capitalism in Asia has echoed Dijk's argument. They point out that the reconfiguration of the system does not involve replacing former alliances and relationships, but that it is a process of overcoding the previous relationship. In Deleuze and Guattari's own terms, 'The objects, the organs, the persons, and the groups retain at least a part of their intrinsic coding, but these coded flows of the former regime find themselves overcoded by the transcendent unity that appropriates surplus value. The old inscription remains, but it is bricked over by and in the inscription of the State' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p. 196).

Rainie and Wellman (2012) agree with Castells (2001) that social structure and historical evolution prompt the emergence of individualism as the dominant culture of our societies, and the new communication technologies perfectly fit into the mode of building sociability along self-selected communication networks. What distinguishes Rainie and Wellman's works is their rejection of the "group" versus "individual" dichotomy in their concept of networked individualism. They argue that the networked world has developed into a stage at which groups and communities are no longer a prime affiliation for each individual, as each person is increasingly registered with multiple networks and each person will therefore draw upon and contribute to numerous networks that their individual need or context demands. In this vein, Rainie and Wellman argue that the individual person should be the focus of the study rather than the group. They argue that 'the hallmark of networked

individualism is that people function more as connected individuals and less as embedded group members' (Rainie and Wellman, 2012, p. 12). Along similar lines, in rural China, McDonald (2016) finds that SNSs has facilitated a shift to individual-based networks.

Rainie and Wellman point out that the emergence of networked individualism is the result of the triple revolution, which is the *social network revolution*, the *internet revolution*, and the *mobile revolution* (Rainie & Wellman, 2014, p. 21). They argue that the social network revolution is a relational shift, rather than a technological shift, as there are three cultural and material changes that led to this shift in relational structure, which are widespread connectivity, weaker group boundaries, and increased personal autonomy. They argue that the social network revolution is largely facilitated by technology, and the social network revolution, in turn, further develops those internet and mobile technologies (Rainie & Wellman, 2014, p. 107).

Rainie and Wellman (2012) discuss the relationship between technology shifts and relational shifts. They argue that the technological shift of the internet revolution, and the mobile phone revolution are the results of the relational shift of the social network revolution. At the same time, they argue that the technological shift constitutes and promotes a further relational shift of the social network revolution (Rainie & Wellman, 2014, p. 121). They further argue that the increased mobility of ICTs, especially the increasing penetration of smartphones, has significantly challenged the boundary of public space and private space (Rainie & Wellman, 2014, p. 170).

Rainie and Wellman's work is very useful for understanding the effect of social and technological change. They argue that the influence of SNSs on social change is down to how people use SNSs as particular material artefacts and cultural norms:

> Networked individuals live in an environment that tests their capacities to deal with each other and with information. In their world, the volume of information is growing; the velocity of news (personal and formal) is increasing; the places where people can encounter others and information are proliferating; the ability of users to search for and find information is greater

than ever; the tools allowing people to customize, filter, and assess information are more powerful; the capacity to create and share information is in more hands; and the potential for people to reach out to each other is unprecedented. Rather than snuggling in — or being trapped in — their groups, people must actively maneuver their networks. Some people are more likely to be network mavens than others, better able to navigate and operate the system. (Rainie & Wellman, 2014, pp. 18–19)

The concept of networked individualism is very useful for understanding Sibe SNS *qun*, as it offers a language with which to discuss a shift away from the group, without devolving into a narrative of rugged individualism. It breaks the dichotomy between individual and group, and eloquently describes the complex reality in which the research subjects, the Sibe people, live.

However, the problems with the above studies are that they are closed networks; they only analyse agency within one closed network. This is not sufficient for me to understand the interaction between multiple networks, in which Sibe produce a sense of agency in the construction of the meaning of *minzu*. Therefore, I turn to Hardt and Negri (2006), and to Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 2008). According to Castells, agency is an input which configures the network to further its interests. However, Hardt and Negri, and Deleuze and Guattari, suggest that agency is not an input, but an emergent property of the system during the process of each interaction between elements in the system.

In Hardt and Negri's account of the network, it functions like a "swarm intelligence" (2006, p. 91). They point out that, 'since the network has no center that dictates order ... the network attack appears as something like a swarm of birds or insects in a horror film, a multitude of mindless assailants ... If one looks inside a network, however, one can see that it is indeed organized, rational and creative' (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 91). They argue that the network is generated by the interaction between different nodes in the swarm, and not by the communication between "head" and "body" (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 91).

According to Hardt and Negri, the multitude is a multiplicity of singular difference. It is singular and multiple at the same time (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. xiv). Similarly to Castells' argument on the space of flows, Hardt and Negri argue that

Empire, which is constructed by globalised, organised resistance and globalised organisation, provides a material condition for this multitude (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. xiii).

According to Hardt and Negri, the skills of cooperation and communication generated by the globalised capitalist system have come under the control of what they call Empire. They further point out that the pattern of coordination and communication shared by individuals has been produced by Empire as a means of control. They explain that Empire can be characterised as "reducing the common to a means of global control, and expropriating the common as private wealth" (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 212). At the same time, the multitude, which is the people who follow the rule of the dominant capitalist networks that they reside in, are using such capitalist networks that oppress them to communicate and collaborate, and it is through this communication and collaboration that the multitude produce the common body of knowledge and ideas (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 218). Hence, according to Hardt and Negri, as the political economy conditioned by Empire shifts, the political struggle should focus on the "common" (2006, p. 212). This account of multitude is very useful for understanding the construction of the meaning of *minzu* in China, because *minzu* was produced by a network of power elites composed of the state and, more recently, capitalists, as I have identified in the preceding literature review. The Sibe have to follow the rules produced by those power elites when using the term of *minzu* to communicate and collaborate. However, according to Hardt and Negri's assertions on multitude, this common body of knowledge and ideas from communicating via the term of *minzu* could also serve as a platform for democratic resistance to the very network that produces the *minzu,* or, in Hardt and Negri's term, Empire.

Moreover, Hardt and Negri argue that Empire has no constitutive "outside", as everything works within the logic of Empire. According to them, the multitude has been formed by the commons of cooperation and linkage (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 92). They point out that the individuals of this network 'do not have to become the same or renounce their creativity in order to communicate and cooperate with each other. They remain different in terms of race, sex, sexuality and so forth' (2006, p. 92). Hence, in Hardt and Negri's account of multitude, meaning is generated by

interaction between its members and it is not predesigned by the network. This argument challenges Castells' assertion that the meaning is produced by the central node in the network. This is very useful for understanding the production of the meaning of *minzu* by Sibe people with their affiliation to different social networks.

To further clarify how the meaning is produced by the interaction of different networks, I will turn to Deleuze and Guattari. Deleuze and Guattari have created a new way of thinking on the network. In their two most famous collaborations, *Anti-Oedipus* (2008) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), they discuss the concept of rhizomes, which can be applied to the debate on the agency of individual and network. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizomatic model of knowledge is closer to the network model, but it is a network of a particularly chaotic nature. Deleuze and Guattari argue that 'any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root model, which plots a point, fixes an order' (1987, p. 5). The authors point out that tree-order is constructed by connecting 'traits of the same nature' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). Rhizomes, in contrast, connect according to a logic of movement. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari elaborate the concept of rhizomes, explaining that it is a concept to describe becoming rather than being, and providing examples, such as becoming-woman, becoming-animal, and becoming-imperceptible. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 238) They point out that new alliances come into being in the process of becoming. They further point out that these alliances are not the merging of two nodes, but a process of multiplicity. They explain this nature of multiplicity in the discussion of becoming-animal, arguing that, 'A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity. ... The wolf is not fundamentally a characteristic or a certain number of characteristics; it is a wolfing. ... Every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack. ... It is at this point that the human being encounters the animal. We do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 240).

Different to Castells' understanding of the node and network, in which, once the individual has been incorporated within the network as node, the node has to be absorbed by the network, and disappears from view as a discrete object or agent. For Deleuze and Guattari, there are no "nodes" to disappear from view. According to

them, the network is not a unity, hence, there is no such disappearance of the node. Deleuze and Guattari point out that 'Unity always operates in an empty dimension supplementary to that of the system considered' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8). However, they argued that there is no supplementary relation in the rhizomes: 'All multiplicities are flat, in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9). Hence, in Deleuze and Guattari's account of network, there is no node against which other nodes can be contrasted.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, a rhizome is dynamic and constantly changing in nature. They explain the rhizome in contrast with tree or root structure (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 5). In the tree metaphor, allotted places and channels of transmission are already fixed. The nodes assume their given location in this hierarchy. Deleuze and Guattari point out that, in the structure organised by tree-logic, the identity of the node may change over time; however, the structure of the network remains the same. In contrast with this tree-logic structure, rhizomes are 'acentred systems, infinite networks of automata in which communication runs from any neighbour to any other, the stems and channels do not preexist, and all individuals are interchangeable, defined only by their state at a given moment' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 17).

Deleuze and Guattari argue that the rhizomes are an inclusive structure, in which, the node can connect with *any neighbour* node (1987, p. 17). They further point out that 'the rhizome is made only of lines ... These lines, or lineaments, should not be confused with lineages of the aborescent type, which are merely localizable linkages between points and positions' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). According to Deleuze and Guattari, the networks do not produce the rhizome's lines in order to connect with other networks; the line was rather created by movement. As Deleuze and Guattari argue, 'The rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automation, defined solely by a circulation of states' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21).

In Deleuze and Guattari's account of the network, the flows constitute a very important concept, as it lays the foundation of Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the network, or rhizome, in their own terms. In Castells' understanding of network, the flows are understood as a link for connecting the nodes in the network

for exchanging goods, information, and people. Hence, the link is generated to serve the node. However, for Deleuze and Guattari, flows are a primal component in the network, in Deleuze and Guattari's understanding of the network, the flows are neither produced by nor produce the nodes. They argue that the flow is the initial property of the network; in their terms, the nodes are "desiring machines" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p. 5), interruptions in the flow, which channel and direct it. These machines work like switches and channels; they point out that what the machines interrupt and how the machines convert the flow is the work involved in coding (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p. 48). In this vein, Deleuze and Guattari's argument on agency not being an input of the network is very similar to that of Hardt and Negri. They all argue that the agency is generated from the outside. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the coding is not constructed by the one node, but is constructed by the interaction with other nodes. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the node, or machine, does not have its own meaning until it is associated with other nodes within which use is found for it (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p. 40). Thus, 'an organ may have connections that associate it with several different flows; it may waver between several functions, and even take on the *regime* of another organ' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 41).

Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizome is very useful for understanding how Sibe people articulate the meaning of *minzu* in the interplay of different networks. It helps to understand how the meaning of *minzu* can be constructed in the interaction between SNSs networks, and *holbobun* networks. Hence, in my thesis, I ask what the influence is of particular features of SNSs on shaping how people interact with each other and how individuals and groups relate to each other through this medium. In other words, I ask what features of QQ, Sina Weibo, and WeChat influence how Sibe socialise with each other in the course of constructing the meaning of *minzu*, and how Sibe relate to each other through these SNSs in relation to the construction of *minzu*. In the following chapter, I will introduce the research methods employed in answering the above questions.

Conclusion

In summary, based on the survey of the literature, it can be concluded that, to understand how the Sibe make sense of their ethnic identity, the meaning of *minzu*

should be analysed. In studying the production of the meaning of *minzu*, it is suggested by the literature that the research should analyse what the mechanisms are by which ethnic minorities as subjects identify with the position to which they are summoned in the discourse of *minzu*, as well as how those ethnic minority people produce and perform positions within the given notion of *minzu*. To answer this inquiry on studying *minzu* identity, I have surveyed British cultural studies on identity construction. From reviewing relevant works, it can be concluded that, to study the construction of the meaning of *minzu* among Sibe SNSs users, the research should analyse the interactions between different uses of different SNSs and their insertion into everyday cultural practices.

Therefore, on understanding the construction of the concept of *minzu* among Sibe SNSs users, this study focuses on how the Sibe articulate the state-defined *minzu,* the Sibe's traditional notion of community (*meyen* in Sibe the language), and emerging relationships in their interaction with their use of social media. In other words, this study will situate the construction of the meaning of *minzu* in the context of network dynamics, in which this research will analyse what meaning of *minzu* has been constructed in the dynamic interpersonal relationship-building process, and analyse what social psychological needs the meaning of *minzu* fulfill in the Sibe SNSs users' interactions.

To understand how agency has been generated or constrained in the interaction of different networks when Sibe articulate the meaning of *minzu* in their SNSs practice, I have surveyed the literature on networks drawn up by some of the leading scholars in this field. According to Castells, agency is an input which configures the network to further its interests: he argues that the material condition of the "space of flows" is constructed by power elites in the network for perpetuating and furthering their own interests, as he holds the idea that the law of the network is designed by those power elites. In this vein, he argues that the link is generated to serve the node. If Castells is right, the networks facilitated by the use of a SNSs *qun* can be understood as a determining force on shaping Sibe identity. Rainie and Wellman, and Dijk, reject this deterministic view on the role of ICT in influencing individual identity. They believe it is the human who participates in the network that decides who is included and excluded in the network. Hence, the individuals, groups,

organisations, and communities still can shape the network by manipulating resources. Hardt and Negri's and Deleuze and Guattari's work offer a theoretical language to explain Rainie and Wellman's and Dijk's assertion on human agency in the network. They suggest that the agency is not an input, but an emergent property of the system during the process of each interaction between elements in the system. Both Hardt and Negri, and Deleuze and Guattari, argue that flows are primal components in the network, and they are neither produced by the nodes (as in Castells' assertion on the construction of the "space of flows") nor produce the nodes (as in Rainie and Wellman's assertion on networked individualism, and Dijk's argument for human factors in the network society). Similar to Castells' argument on the "space of flows", on the perspective of the material condition constructed by the network, Hardt and Negri argue that Empire is also constructed by an emerging network logic which is built by a network of transnational corporations, international organisations, and the nation-states that benefit from them. The difference is that Hardt and Negri argue that this Empire is also constructed by globalised, organised resistance and globalised organization. Hardt and Negri see that the network is constructed by both the power elite and the resistance against the elite. Hence, there is not a central node to organise the network according to Hardt and Negri's account of the network in their argument on Empire; they argue that the swarm's intelligence is generated in the links between the nodes. In other words, Hardt and Negri argue that the agency is generated from the outside of the network of Empire; the meaning is generated by the interaction between its members and it is not predesigned by the network of Empire. Similar to their argument on agency being generated outside the network, Deleuze and Guattari further argue that the flow, which means the interaction in my research, is an initial property of the network. The nodes, which mean the individuals in my research, are "desiring machines", interruptions in the flow, which channel and direct it. Deleuze and Guattari argue that coding is not constructed by the one node, but within the interaction with other nodes. The node, or machine, does not have its own meaning until it is associated with other nodes within which use is found for it. This can be interpreted, in my research, as meaning that *minzu* is constructed by the interaction between networks facilitated by *holbobun*, SNSs *qun,* and the *minzu* identity. The *holbobun*, SNSs *qun,* and term of

minzu does not mean anything for individual Sibe SNSs users until the Sibe SNSs users associate these nodes to solve their own individual problems in their local life.

Chapter Three
Methodology

Introduction

  This chapter presents the methodology used to conduct this research, including a discussion of the conduct of ethnography in the digital environment, how data was collected (including online and offline issues influencing the collection of data); how the presence of body in the online/offline environment has influenced the way in which this research was conducted; how the participant observation of SNS groups was conducted; how research interviewees were selected, and how access to certain interviewees and communities for the study of Sibe identity construction was achieved. It is also concerned with how ethical issues related to the research were dealt with.

  In describing the research methods adopted in this study, I first discuss virtual ethnography, and then the importance of interviews as the research tool used to conduct my study. I explain that the in-depth and semi-structured interview method was chosen because of the possibilities it provided for gaining a detailed understanding of how Sibe people articulate the concept of *minzu* in their everyday life. Finally, I discuss some ethical considerations for this research. Through the methods of ethnography, I define and examine the four major aspects of Sibe self-led ethnogenesis through which the Sibe are able to exercise agency, via the affordances and constraints of ICT in China. In this way, they can, to some extent, effect what their *minzu* means to them through their discussion of the concept of *minzu*, the celebration of the Westward Migration festival, and the construction of the romanised rendering of the Sibe language. These are then the subjects of the subsequent three empirical chapters.

Access to Research Subject

  The primary aim of this study is to investigate how Sibe people use SNS to construct the meaning of *minzu,* and in this process, how the networks organised around SNS *quns*, the relationships based on *holbobun*, and the concept of *minzu* influences the constructing of the meaning of *minzu*. In particular, this research seeks

to answer how agency is generated from the interaction between the networks of SNS *qun*, networks of *holbobun*, and networks based on *minzu* identification.

To understand how Sibe SNS users appropriate technologies, fitting them into their everyday lives and making sense of them based on their own needs, this research adopts the domestication of media and technology framework proposed by Silverstone (1992). The main argument of this theoretical framework is that technologies should be understood from the perspective of their integration into everyday life and how they are adapted to daily practices. Scholars promoting this framework argue that the users of technologies, and the environment in which technologies are used, change and adapt accordingly. They further argue that the adaptation of a technology also feeds back into innovations in such technologies in the industry. In other words, how people adapt a technology also influences the next generation of that technology (Silverstone et al., 1992, p.34).

This framework gives me a structure within which to analyse how technology is used in the everyday lives of individuals and groups (Haddon, 2011), and a theoretical language to examine the nuanced, complex, and context-dependent negotiations and meaning-making processes involved in constructing the meaning of *minzu* via the use of SNS. This framework also offers me a theoretical perspective to examine the agency involved in shaping technology through everyday life practices (Bakardjieva, 2006). To examine the context of the social use of SNS, it was necessary that the research site be set in everyday life, so that I might collect relevant data on how SNS have been used and deployed in practice by Sibe people, to meet their own individual needs.

An ethnographic approach is particularly suitable to meet the research agenda outlined above, as it offers a thorough method for understanding the emerging agency generated by the interaction between different networks of Sibe SNS users in articulating the meaning of *minzu* in their practice. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), ethnography involves participation 'in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned' (p. 2).

An increasing number of researchers (e.g. Bakardjieva, 2006; Baym, 1995a, 2000; Haddon, 2011; Hine, 2000; Rutter, Jason, and Gregory, 2005) have come to apply ethnographic approaches to studying how groups and individuals use the internet. In their studies, they have argued that the internet is both cultural context and cultural artefact (e.g. Hine, 2000, p.14). For studying the agency of Sibe people in the use of SNS within their *minzu* practice, this research adopts the method of virtual ethnography to study SNS as both a cultural context and cultural artefact. Virtual ethnography is an ethnographic approach to studying the production and consumption of meanings in the online setting, as promoted by Christine Hine (2000). In studying SNS as a cultural context, I look into the online and offline issues influencing the data collection. In studying SNS as a cultural artefact, I look into SNS as material culture, examining which conditions of SNS generates what sort of understanding of it, and how their understanding of it has directed Sibe SNS users to develop their SNS use into the way they use it between themselves. One research issue encountered in understanding SNS as an artefact is that of the situation of the body in a Sibe SNS user's online practices. Another is that of the relationship between researcher and research subject during the course of research. I will elaborate my strategies for dealing with these issues in the following sections.

Certain of the problems involved in gaining an understanding of Sibe SNS users' identity construction are raised by the conditions of online and offline material reality as the context of the research subjects' practice. According to Hine (2000), identity is constructed by the relations of subjects, and these relations are embedded into the space in which the research subject is embedded (p.7). Hence, the online and offline pose a complicated situation of special dimensions for Sibe SNS users' identity construction. On the one hand, the particular circumstances of the online environment influence how Sibe SNS users interact with each other there; on the other hand, the same Sibe SNS users are also influenced by the offline physical environment in which they reside.

As Bruckman (2002) points out, 'It's important to remember that all "internet research" takes place in an embedded social context' (p. 3). Thus, as Bruckman suggests, "online research" should consider offline factors (Bruckman, 2002, p. 3). Accordingly, to have a better grasp of the Sibe social practices facilitated by the use

of SNS, I have connected the online practices of those Sibe SNS users with their offline social environment. In order to understand Sibe practices of *minzu* in relation to identity construction, this research engaged in both online and offline interactions with the Sibe SNS users. Throughout the research process, I have been aware that my own personal experience of using SNS has played an important role in influencing how I interpret other Sibe user's SNS practices. As the empirical data collection progressed, the relationships that emerged between the research subjects and myself through both online and offline interactions all had a significant role on shaping how the data has been interpreted.

Although "cyberspace" is a virtual space, the bodies of the researcher and research subjects are still embedded in the temporal and spatial environments where each resides. The limitations of the body in time and space still apply. Thus, one of the key factors influencing the construction of the meaning of *minzu* is the bodily boundaries of the research participants and the researcher using SNS in the course of their communication. In the WeChat *qun* and the QQ *qun*, people come and go, and the spaces are permeated by the use of mobile phones, which bring the public world into the private sphere, and allow people to do multiple things at the same time. The use of mobile phones can offer people a deterritorialised space (Deleuze and Guattari, 2008, p.367) whereby they can escape the rules of social interaction embedded in the physical environment. On the other hand, the CMC facilitated by the using of mobile phones produces another process of recontextualisation, or re-localisation (Licoppe and Heurtin, 2002, p.101) in shaping the representation of *minzu*. This posed as a significant challenge the question of what theory should be used to direct the design of research, and applied to understanding people's behaviours in such new environments. For instance, when I conducted the virtual ethnography of interviewing the research subjects, my informants normally spontaneously answered my questions in the deterritorialised internet (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008, p.367). To be more precise, each was usually doing multiple things in their own physical space, and interacting with me in virtual space at the same time. To get hold of the informants, I often had to compromise my own time schedule to suit their availability. In other words, it was only through maintaining an observance

of their embodied needs that I as researcher could guarantee that I could catch the interviewee in a specific time and space.

There is another issue around the body I want to discuss in relation to this research, and that is the temporal and spatial relationship of SNS users to text. On the SNS platforms of WeChat, QQ, Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs and Baidu Tieba, every Sibe SNS user produces and interprets the messages on the SNS platform based on their own individual local context. This consideration of the disjunction of users' temporal and spatial relations to text in cyberspace, caused by the electronic storage of the discussion and the asynchronous nature of communication, has been informed by similar studies in the UK (for example, Rutter and Gregory, 2005). In other words, each different person associated with the SNS in question has a different temporal relationship to the messages. In the case of this research, this relationship will have been influenced by how the online text has been exposed to each of the Sibe SNS users. The text in SNS is not necessarily constrained by a fixed time arrangement in which the texts were produced. However, the temporal arrangement has become a crucial element in the node in which the text is interpreted. That means the text on the SNS platforms of WeChat, QQ, Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs and Baidu Tieba cannot be analysed through the previous theory based on fixed temporal settings. This causes a significant difficulty in gauging the meaning of the text. To understand the text in this virtual space, I have analysed texts at the node where and when Sibe users consumed those texts in their local everyday setting, as related to me in their offline semi-structured interviews. In other words, I have located the *body* of those Sibe SNS users and analysed their relation to the text at the time and place in which they made their own interpretation of it in their individual local setting.

Virtual Ethnography

In this research, I have focused on networks of individual Sibe people using SNS *qun*, rather than on any particular offline social group, subculture or geographically-defined locale. My decision to focus on a SNS *qun* was in keeping with studies of other SNS platforms, and similar to Baym's approach to studying MUD multi-user environments (Baym, 2002). According to Ranie and Wellman's insights into networked individualism (Ranie & Wellman, 2012c), a method which pivots around individuals rather than a network is more appropriate for

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understanding how different networks work together in influencing how Sibe associate with each other in constructing the meaning of *minzu* via the use of SNS *qun*.

Following the networked individualism framework proposed by Ranie and Wellman, I have focused on Sibe individuals' use of SNS. To this end, I have travelled into Dalian, Urumqi, Yining and Çabçal to observe the situated use of QQ *qun* and WeChat *qun* by Sibe individuals. This strategy enabled me to examine multi- or trans-sited networks, and afforded me more nuanced perspectives on understanding how different networks work together in constructing the meaning of *minzu* among these Sibe SNS users.

Two decisions needed to be made regarding my research sites. One concerned which internet service I was going to use, and the other where l was going to conduct my fieldwork. The SNS services of WeChat, QQ, Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs and Baidu Tieba seemed to be the most prominent for the analysis of Sibe identity construction, due to their having many Sibe communities. Sibe people have established numerous bulletin board system (BBS) forums for promoting Sibe culture and connecting Sibe people. Of these, Sibeculture (www.sibeculture.com), and Sibeweb (www.sibeweb.com) were historically the most popular among Sibe people. However, both were shut down in July 2009 following the Urumqi ethnic riot, which was triggered in the first place by a violent dispute between migrant Uyghurs and the Han workers of a Hong Kong-owned toy factory in Shaoguan, in the south-east of China (Bruun, 2013, p. 251). The Sibe Westward Migration Festival organised by the *Sibe* WeChat and QQ chatroom community impressed me with its impact on offline social gatherings, as I will discuss further in Chapter 5. The computer mediated communication in the QQ and WeChat chatrooms, as conducted in the transliterated forms of the Sibe language, was another reason for me to choose the QQ and WeChat *qun* chatrooms, and I will analyse this in detail in Chapter 6.

As for choosing the places to do fieldwork, I first conducted pilot research in Dalian in 2009, on the Sibe QQ community constructed by the QQ groups of Dalian QQ *qun* and Xinjiang Sibe students QQ *qun*. As my research developed, I found that there was a strong link between Sibe activities in Dalian and those in Xinjiang. Ultimately, I decided to take another field trip to Xinjiang. I went to Urumqi, Yining

and Çabçal in 2011, and spent three months conducting ethnographic data collection in those three locations.

Ideally, I had wanted to spend a relatively long period with the groups I was investigating so that I could immerse myself in the groups as an ethnographer and also conduct participant-observation. However, because of limited time and funds for my research, the data was eventually collected from two short ethnographic trips and a virtual ethnography. There was another practical challenge for me in conducting this ethnographic work, which involved the intense scrutiny of social research by the Chinese government during the period of my field research in the region of Xinjiang. Since the 1990s, ethnic tension and violence have increased in Xinjiang. To name just a few that have been reported on by research, these include the Baren riot of April 1990 in south Xinjiang (Smith, 2013), the Yining riots of 5-6 February 1997 (Warikoo, 2011), and the Urumqi ethnic riots in July 2009 (Bruun, 2013). The increasing ethnic tension between Han and Uyghur has led the Chinese government to intensify its "Strike Hard" anti-separatist campaign (Guo, 2015; Shan and Chen, 2009). Under these conditions, the state initiated tight controls on social research in the Xinjiang region. As a result, I was denied entry to conduct fieldwork in Xinjiang in 2009.

Exclusively conducting interviews and collecting documents online could have shortened the time spent doing fieldwork, but I found that research of this kind alone would be inadequate to enable me to understand how different networks influence the ways in which Sibe people make sense of the meaning of *minzu*, and the agency generated in the process of different networks interacting with each other. Therefore, I opted to spend two field trips doing fieldwork in the above sites. Initially I was unsure what to focus on and how to put reasonable limits on the research I wished to conduct. This problem was eventually resolved, however, by deciding to conduct virtual ethnography on Sibe SNS groups and interviews with SNS group members in the geographical areas of Dalian, Urumqi, Yining and Çabçal.

To follow Geertz' interpretative approach on studying social phenomena, the design of this research has not been naturalistic, in acknowledgement of the fact that what I have observed and heard has been interpreted and represented via the lens of knowledge that I have (Geertz, 1973, p.15). To be precise, my personal experiences

as an ethnic Sibe and as a SNS user of QQ *qun*, WeChat *qun*, and Sina Weibo, have become very important factors in influencing how the data has been interpreted and presented, and the research and analysis has been conducted with this awareness. The relationships between me and my informants have been developed during the process of the research, and it must also be pointed out that these relationships have influenced how the data has been interpreted. As my knowledge of the SNS platforms of WeChat, QQ, Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs and Baidu Tieba as a cultural context is tied up with how the ethnography has been conducted, the research method of virtual ethnography and the phenomena of Sibe *minzu* practice have thus worked in tandem to define one another. In other words, the online context of how Sibe SNS users interact with each other has (also) been defined *as* a cultural context by the way in which the virtual ethnography has been conducted.

It is important to state the influence of my personal background on this research. My background is that I was born to a Sibe family in Northeast China, which allowed me to join Sibe communities and also made it easier for me to recruit participants for interviews. I know the participant known here as N through my family, as my family hosted him when he conducted his own ethnography of Sibe history in the 1980s. N introduced me to A, who was my host when I conducted my field work in Çabçal. I got to know T through the QQ *qun*, and he introduced me to T2, H, W, A2, T4, S, T8, K, and F2. I came to know A3 and H2 through A, and I know Y, Z2, T6 and T7 through the use of QQ *qun.* In this process, the relationships facilitated by the use of QQ *qun* have played a significant part in helping me connect with my informants. I got to know T3, D, G, H2, G2, G3, R, Z, G4, G5, T5, and W2 through the use of WeChat *qun*. The indigenous relationships facilitated by *holbobun* also helped me significantly in reaching participants in Çabçal, Yining and Urumqi. I came to know S and K through T. I knew F when I was a child in Dalian, and reconnected with him in WeChat *qun.* A detailed demography of these interviewees has been attached in the appendix B.

Another concern was the impact of the researcher on the setting, as, in my observation, some Sibe SNS users seemed almost to feel obliged to engage in some form of recognition of the concept of *minzu* for the benefit of the researcher, while other Sibe SNS users refused to associate with this term at all. It was sometimes hard

to judge what was normal behaviour in talking about ethnicity. My observation over an extended period of time was thus intended to facilitate a more thorough understanding of how the term of *minzu* is embedded in Sibe SNS users' everyday interaction with their use of SNS. In order to validate my findings on the use of the term *minzu*, I sent out what I had written about them to my informants, in order to discuss them with them. This was one important way of checking the validity of what I had written.

Gaining access to the communities studied in this research took place in several stages and involved the use of different strategies. First, I needed to join as many online *Sibe* communities on QQ and WeChat as possible to get a general idea of the types of communities which existed there, and the range of their activities. Fortunately, I already belonged to several QQ *qun* prior to beginning this research, so I already knew a little about some of the communities.

My family's relationship with one Sibe scholar also significantly helped me to gain access to Sibe communities. N is a Sibe scholar, famous for his books introducing the Sibe culture and communities in China. My family came to know him when he conducted his research on Sibe folklore culture in the village where I was born in the 1980s. Through N's introduction, I was able to access a number of Sibe scholars in Dalian, Urumqi, Yining and Çabçal.

Before and during my fieldwork I worked on building a balanced profile of who I was and what I was doing, so that I could mix my personal life with my fieldwork. I believe that this helped me to make better connections with the informants during the actual research, and that the informants were able to accept me both as an individual and as a researcher. As a member of Sibe language learning communities in WeChat *qun* and QQ *qun*, I was quite easily able to gain access to members of Sibe language learning communities in Northeast China and Xinjiang. This granted me a great degree of access to the research sites. Through the Sibe language learning communities, I successfully engaged with the Sibe language class held in the local middle school in Çabçal.

After spending six months gaining access to the communities I wished to join and building my profile, my second step, begun around January 2009, was to contact the *qunzhus* (the organisers of SNS *quns*) for permission to collect data from their

quns. This was especially important in the case of those SNS *quns* that kept their information private. Another reason for me to contact the organisers was to ask if I could meet them and set up an interview with them in future. This stage in the process of gaining access to the SNS *quns* I wished to study was crucial, since rejection on either of these two points could have put a quick end to my proposed research. It was also important for me to establish good relationships with the gatekeepers of various SNS *quns*, since the gatekeepers could often introduce people to me, and access to the organisers of SNS *quns* is often controlled by them. Fortunately, all the SNS *qun* organisers I contacted agreed to allow their communities to be used for research.

With regard to meeting with the SNS *qun* organisers, some of the organisers were really positive toward my proposed interviews as they wanted to recruit more members, while in other cases they were interested in gaining publicity or felt it was their duty to support research that involved the communities they organised. Some organisers were suspicious about my overseas research background; they kept asking why I wanted to conduct research on the Sibe. After I told them that I was born in Laohutun, a village in the Sibe homeland in Northeast China, and N introduced me to the community of Sibe SNS *qun*, the organisers changed their attitude toward me and started to be more cooperative. This indicates that personal relationship based on the idea of *holbobun* was the key to gaining access to the community.

After I gained access to the organisers of those SNS *qun,* I identified some of key individuals who cross-registered in different SNS *qun.* As Rainie and Wellman (2012) assert in their concept of networked individualism, groups and communities are no longer a sole or prime affiliation for each individual as each person is increasingly registered with multiple networks, and each person will therefore draw upon and contribute to numerous networks according to their individual needs or contextual demands. A study of these individuals played a strategic role in understanding how *holbobun* networks and SNS networks work together.

Initially I had planned to conduct a field trip to Xinjiang in July 2009. However, the ethnic unrest that took place on 5 July of that year led the government to intensify its control on researchers' access to Xinjiang. As a result, my entry to Xinjiang was denied. The entire internet service and telecommunication services

were also shut down there, so that I could not establish contact with QQ *qun* participants in Xinjiang. This meant that I had to compromise my choice of research sites, which was limited to Northeast China. My first pilot participant observation was conducted in Dalian in April 2009 with the group Dalian *Sibe Ren qun* (Dalian Sibe People's group). It was at a dinner party hosted by Dalian *Sibe Ren qun* to facilitate socialising amongst Sibe students from Xinjiang in local universities. Over twenty people attended this event, and the responses I received made me confident that the research I wanted to do on *Sibe* SNS *qun* communities was both worthwhile and possible. The second Sibe SNS *qun* community activity I joined in China was of an event celebrating a Westward Migration Festival at Dalian Nationalities University and organised by Dalian *Sibe Ren qun*, organised with the use of QQ *qun* in May 2009 (Dalian is a city in Liaoning province, Northeast China). I was invited by one of the participants I had met earlier at the dinner party in April 2009. This event was crucial in helping me to establish a Sibe network. Not only did I have the opportunity to meet many members of the Dalian *Sibe Ren qun* itself, but I was also able to establish contacts at this event, which led to my conducting fieldwork with a group called *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* (Charming Çabçal group) in Xinjiang and later with a group called *Urumqi Sibe Meyen* (Urumqi Sibe group). Any worries I may have had about whether people would accept me or whether I could actually conduct my fieldwork in Xinjiang disappeared once I experienced the warm hospitality of the members of the Dalian *Sibe Ren qun*. I also explained my research briefly to the members at that event and many of them expressed an interest in it. I maintained relationships with the Sibe people I met in this event, and later I was introduced to the *Sibe Giyamun* (Sibe Courier Station) WeChat *qun*, the Sibe United Society WeChat *qun*, the *Urumqi Sibe yi anḡa i gisun Gašan* (Home for Urumqi Spoken Sibe language) WeChat *qun*, the Sibe Folk Culture WeChat *qun*, and the Great Westward Migration WeChat *qun*. This experience reminded me of the importance of having what Silverman (1993, p.36) refers to as 'bottom-up' access, which means not only gaining access to the organisers of a community but also building strong relationships with the general members. Most of the people I conducted interviews with were recruited through events such as the one just described.

After becoming a member of this community, I maintained only a minimal presence and tried not to disturb the community, aiming to keep my own influence on the *Sibe* QQ *qun* members' behaviour at a minimal level. I especially refrained from participating in "sensitive" discussions and debates, lest my presence change the dynamic of this community.

Online discussions between Sibe SNS users formed an important part of the data collected for the present research because they provided an understanding of how Sibe SNS users use SNS both as a means for organising social events and as a tool to communicate with each other. For the purposes of this research, it was crucial to examine simultaneously both online and offline activities to understand the contexts in which the SNS was being used (Mackay, 2005, p.129). SNS communities do not exist solely online but also often involve face-to-face interactions which occur offline (Baum, 1998, p.35).

From January 2009 to August 2015, I collected a wide range of data from a variety of SNS platforms on a daily basis. The data includes online articles, user-generated videos, and discussions of online articles and videos. The SNS platforms on which I focused my data collection were WeChat, QQ and Sina Weibo. The Sibe QQ *qun*s on which I focused were *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* (Charming Çabçal group) QQ *qun*, *Dalian Sibe Ren QQ qun,* and *Urumqi Sibe Meyen* (Urumqi Sibe group) QQ *qun*. The Sibe WeChat *qun*s included *Sibe Giyamun* (Sibe Courier Station) WeChat *qun*, Sibe United Society WeChat *qun*, *Urumqi Sibe yi anḡa i gisun Gašan* WeChat *qun* (Home for Urumqi Spoken Sibe language), Sibe Folk Culture WeChat *qun,* Great Westward Migration WeChat *qun.* Research on Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs and Baidu Tieba was focused on topic-centred posts, on the topics of Sibe histories, Westward Migration festivals, and debates on language.

Multiple methods were used for the present research, but mainly those of virtual ethnography and offline semi-structured interview. These approaches were used not only because the data collected through methodological triangulation corroborate each other (Mason, 1996), but also because the different kinds of data collected through these methods is helpful for understanding the interactions of different networks facilitated both online and offline, and their influences on the construction of the meaning of *minzu*. The data collected from the virtual

ethnography and semi-structured interviews has thus been collectively examined in order to understand how online factors and offline factors intersect and connect with each other.

For identifying the actions of Sibe SNS users in constructing the meaning of *minzu*, I used the method of virtual ethnography, as this method allowed me to collect relevant data on the context in which those actions take place. This helped me to make sense of Sibe SNS users' actions, and consequently facilitated a better understanding of the text input by Sibe SNS users in the QQ *qun*, WeChat *qun*, Sina Weibo, Sina Blog and Baidu Tieba.

The research technique that I adopted in this virtual ethnography was that of participant observation. As a technique, participant observation helped me to make connections with members of Sibe communities and also served as a means for collecting fieldnotes. The technique of participant observation provides a tool for the researcher to see the world through the eyes of the research subjects (Corbetta, 2003, p. 236). In my own case, I felt it best to place more emphasis on participation rather than on observation, since observing people from a distance would have seemed inappropriate and made me stand out. Since most of the events I participated in were held for socialising, I tried to take part in the events to the fullest extent possible. Nonetheless, I also made it clear to people who asked me that I was doing research on Sibe internet communities. While this strategy enabled me to be an observer of the people I was studying, it also made the interviewees more willing to respond to the questions I wanted to ask later. In the process of conducting my fieldwork, I believed that it was necessary to maintain a balance between my identity as an ethnically Sibe individual and that of a researcher. On the one hand, being too impersonal would not have provided me with sufficient access to the Sibe SNS users I wanted to study and could possibly have prevented them from expressing themselves more openly to me as a researcher. On the other hand, as is well-known, getting too close to one's subjects can lead to a researcher's loss of objectivity (Silverman, 1993, p. 120). To deal with these problems, I presented myself as a north-eastern Sibe who wanted to learn the Sibe language and meet more Sibe people. This self-positioning worked to bring my participants to feel that I was close enough to being one of them, as I am ethnically Sibe, while at the same time I hoped

that my north-eastern Sibe background allowed me enough distance to be objective when analysing the Xinjiang Sibe.

Notices for most of the events I attended were posted on QQ *qun* chatrooms and WeChat *qun* chatrooms. I also posted notices that I was going to attend events in my personal accounts profile pages, as such pages are easy for other SNS users to access. Moreover, event participants can communicate with each other by accessing a QQ *qun* and WeChat *qun* chatroom beforehand, which enables them to ask questions and greet each other so that it is easier when they meet face-to-face later. The QQ *qun* and WeChat *qun* chatrooms also allow Sibe SNS users to meet each other in small groups before joining the main event. The information I gathered from participant observation was thus supplemented by data made available directly by those in the QQ *qun* and WeChat *qun* communities.

Participant observation was conducted on a daily basis among the Sibe SNS *qun*, in and around the QQ *qun* communities and WeChat *qun* communities, as well as on offline locations, between January 2009 and December 2009, April 2011 and October 2011, and May 2015 and August 2015. I took fieldnotes to record these activities daily. This included the first-hand experience of attending online activities in Sibe QQ *qun* and WeChat *qun* chatrooms including, for instance, news discussions and sharing pictures. I also attended the offline Sibe language class which is promoted and organised by the *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* and visited the Sibe Folklore Culture Museum, as discussed in Chapter 5.

Based on my virtual ethnography of Sibe SNS *qun* undertaken for an extensive period between 2009 and 2015, I found out that the most important thing for Sibe people in using SNS is to build up and maintain their social networks. This has been reflected by the fact that a large proportion of the content of their online discussion is to develop a relation of reciprocity between each other via the technique of *holbobun*. Sibe SNS users have developed specialised norms in maintain their interrelationships with each other, and the mastery of these norms has helped to define the membership of such networks. I will elaborate these findings in detail in Chapters 4, 5 and 6.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Having completed the first stage of virtual ethnography, the next stage involved mapping and understanding the offline lives of Sibe SNS users, and more specifically the relationship between their SNS use and their *minzu* practice in their self-led ethnogenesis, their discussions of language, and Westward Migration. The main method employed in this study was that of the semi-structured interview. I chose to do semi-structured interviews since this type of interview allowed me to ask questions which were directly related to my research questions and also because it provided space for interviewees to address their own concerns in their own language.

Using the method of the semi-structured interview also functioned as a triangulation of methods that helped to increase the validity of my interpretation of the data that I had collected from the virtual ethnography. As Hine (2000) argues, the development of relationships between researcher and informant in first an online, and then an offline, environment could be seen as a way of contextualising the research findings from the virtual ethnography and hence adding authenticity to the findings obtained online (Hine, 2000, p.48). As such, the semi-structured interviews employed in this research have increased the validity of those data that I collect from the virtual ethnography and contributed to my understanding of how SNS were used by Sibe SNS users in their individual contexts.

My decision to choose the offline interview as a research method was significantly influenced by Hine's (2000) argument on research in virtual ethnography. She argues that in studying people's online discussion, the researcher should bring an ethnographic immersion in the context about which their statements are being made (Hine, 2000, p. 76). These Sibe users' use of SNS is deeply embedded in their everyday experience of using Sibe language, of the Westward Migration. Therefore, to make sense of their perception of their SNS use, it was necessary to immerse myself in the context in which they actually used the SNS of QQ, Sina Weibo and WeChat. To get a better understanding of this context, offline interviews were set up, and field trips to Urumqi, Yining, Çabçal and Dalian were conducted.

I conducted thirty-four topic-led qualitative interviews with users of the Sibe QQ *qun* and WeChat *qun* communities, between July 2009 and December 2009;

April 2011 and October 2011; and May 2015 and December 2015. Interviewees were selected on the basis of class, age and location, as well as involvement in the Sibe QQ and WeChat *quns*. The locations were the two regions of Liaoning province in Northeast China, and Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR), as most online discussion was conducted by Sibe people from these two regions. The spectrum of interviewees' ages fell into the designated age groups of 18-25, 25-35, 35-45, and 45-55. I found out that the school education the interviewees received in different time periods must be considered as one of key factors influencing Sibe people's identities. The social class status of the interviewees was largely working class; as according to the existing literature, and as confirmed by the findings of my virtual ethnography, a rise in ethnic identification in China has been triggered by the alienation wrought by capitalist development (Schein, 2000; Zang, 2007). As it turned out, the interviews provided me with an opportunity to investigate the role of Sibe QQ and WeChat *qun* on the emergence of the new Sibe ethnogenesis. For the ethnographic interviews, I obtained written informed consent, with each informant receiving a copy of the consent form. Finally, interview data was subjected to discourse analysis and used to support the arguments I develop in the following empirical chapters. Interviewees were mainly recruited from the people I had met while doing virtual ethnography in the SNS contexts of QQ and WeChat *qun*s.

Research Ethic

I decided to present myself as both a researcher and a Sibe QQ and WeChat user who held similar passions and concerns for Sibe *minzu* culture as the interviewees; I assured them that their identities would be anonymised. All the interviews were recorded for later analysis, and the interviews were transcribed and subjected to discourse analysis. The interviews were typically conducted at a restaurant, although other locations were used when it was more convenient for interviewees, including their homes. The standard length of an interview was approximately one hour, but in some cases this time was extended to two or three hours. I attempted to interview Sibe SNS *qun* organisers first so that I could find out more about their SNS *qun* while simultaneously asking about their personal motives for being involved with these communities. Later I began to conduct interviews with Sibe SNS *qun* members.

Since my aim was to understand how the Sibe make sense of *minzu* and how they associate with each other via the use of networks, most of the research involved public rather than private matters. However, during interviews, interviewees would occasionally reveal some sensitive information about their private life that needed to be handled with special care. Such revelations were often unexpected since they were not specifically prompted by the questions I had asked, but seemed instead to arise out of a need on the part of some participants to address personal issues in their own lives. The anonymity of these interviewees has been maintained and their identities have been protected throughout the course of this research.

When I conducted my virtual ethnography, a specific issue of informed consent was raised by the nature of internet, as in the virtual environment, people cannot see that I am there if I "lurk" in a SNS *qun*. I found it very difficult to maintain a stable presence in a virtual environment when people could not see that I was there. This was made worse by the constantly changing social composition of virtual environments as new people arrive and others leave – mostly unannounced. To deliver informed consent, I included an indication of my research in my SNS profile, and mentioned my research in my signature on my QQ and WeChat SNS accounts.

The negotiation of absence and presence is another ethical issue that was posed during my research by the deterritorialised nature of cyberspace. As in the stage when I conducted my virtual ethnography in the SNS *qun*, I tried to minimise my presence in each SNS *qun* to reduce the possible influence of my presence on Sibe SNS *qun* users' behaviours. I decided not to intervene in the online discussion there. However, this then constituted a challenge to the ethical code that says that ethnographers should declare their research identity in the field and be open about their research agenda. To deal with this problem, I presented myself in the virtual ethnography as both a researcher and participant who was actively search the meaning of *minzu*. Indeed, for myself, my research into Sibe SNS *qun* is not only social research; it is also a process for me to try to find who I am, similar to that of any other Sibe from Northeast China who conducts a pilgrimage to investigate their 'ethnic origin' in Xinjiang and northeast of China, both online and offline. Although the reason for pilgrimage for their 'ethnic origin' are very different between Xinjiang

Sibe and Northeast Sibe, as Xinjiang Sibe seek ethnic identity to protect their cultural place from further intrusion by the Han migration in the framework of Stalin definition derived *minzu*; while for the Northeast Sibe, ethnic identity is a harbour for them in the environment of constant change caused by marketisation and urbanisation. The different motivation toward ethnic identity between Xinjiang Sibe and Northeast Sibe result they chose different sites for their own pilgrimage. So, I included this explanation of my interest in Sibe culture as both a personal pilgrimage, as a Sibe, as well as a project of academic research in my QQ, WeChat and Sina Weibo profiles, so that anyone who looked at my profile would be aware of this. I also tried to engage in impression management by working with 'fronts' (Goffman, 1959, p.12) and trying to convey impressions which were appropriate to specific situations (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p.32). Since I already had QQ, WeChat, and Sina Weibo accounts for a long time before I began to conduct this research, the connections I had with various friends helped me to avoid giving people the impression that I "came from nowhere".

Chapter Four
A Genealogy of the Meanings of *Minzu* in Sibe Self-led Ethnogenesis on Social Networking Sites

Introduction

The concept of *minzu* in China is an ongoing process, which has undergone many changes since the early 20th century. My use of *minzu* is inspired by Hobsbawm's (1983) concept of the 'invention of tradition' (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983, pp. 1-14). He argues that tradition is invented by groups of people seeking to define themselves and be redefined by local powers of domination. I treat *minzu* as a process of what Gladney called "ethnogenesis", that is, the recent ethnical collectivity recreated in dialectical interaction with imagined historical traditions and modern geopolitical necessities (Gladney, 1991, p.1). A number of scholars' perspectives are useful for understanding minzu. Light (2008), for example, argued that ethnic identity among Chinese ethnic minorities has been constructed by a complex process of the ethnogenesis of national identity through dialectical interaction between State definition and accepted notions of cultural tradition.

Light argues that the Chinese State has used the Uyghur *maqam* song tradition as a cultural canon to represent the Uyghur ethnic group within China and on the world stage. The ethnic tradition was used by the State as a way to construct ethnic identity for this ethnic minority. Light points out that the State has manipulated the cultural materials, skills, and contexts of traditional performance with those of the "modern" repertoire. The local cultural producers have to revise this repertoire and create historical discourses around it that reflect new concepts of nationhood and ethnicity. Light also points out that sources of ethnic identity were complex in Uyghur culture, and the logics of culture, concepts about culture and how to change it, vary widely among Uyghur people. This results in a reflexive reworking of culture, and reworking of the logics and interpretations of that culture. Hence, efforts to shape collective culture were always in process. In this vein, the ethnogenesis relating to *minzu* requires cultural producers to implicitly and explicitly reflect what their own ethnicity is by constantly making decision on what elements of ethnicity are acceptable and what should be excluded. Light observes that the construction of *minzu* became 'a moral question, an ethics, and proper performance of one's

ethnicity involved constant work of discipline and censorship, as well as debate and reinterpretation' (Light, 2008, p.14).

In this thesis, I focus on *minzu* construction in order to analyse the process of working out cultural content in relation to discourses about Sibe identity and the collective self. My research findings on Sibe SNS users debate on Sibe's origin, Sibe's Westward Migration and Sibe Language supports the above scholar' views on *minzu.* In this chapter, I will analyse how meaning of minzu is internalized and negotiated by the Sibe people on their debate on their ethnic origin.

Based on the ethnographic findings from participant observation on the *Sibe* QQ *quns,* WeChat *quns*, and Sina Weibo, Sina Blog, and Baidu Tieba that I conducted via virtual ethnography from 2009 to 2015, this research finds several different repeated discourses occurring in the Sibe usage of *minzu* in their discussion on finding their ethnic origin; they are the cultural *minzu,* the racial *minzu,* and the Stalinist-derived definition of *minzu.* In order to understand why those discourses of *minzu* were frequently used by Sibe SNS users, I analyse what those discourses of *minzu* mean to those Sibe SNS users. The meanings of those discourses of *minzu* are also examined via a genealogical investigation (Foucault, Rabinow, and Rogers, 1984) into how those discourses of *minzu* were produced in the specific historical moments when each of them was invented, respectively, and the material condition of operations that facilitated the emergence of those discourses of *minzu.* Those historical moments are the late Qing dynasty (Crossley, 1999; Wang, 2004), the Republican era (Crossley, 1999), and the Socialist era (Mullaney, 2011). After grasping the ideas of each discourse of *minzu,* I discuss how those ideas of *minzu* facilitate Sibe SNS users' discussion in the SNS *quns.*

My argument is that, historically, each of those three discourses of *minzu* was produced by an system of operation that was largely controlled by the state for the construction of a nation-state. This process was conditioned by a closed network which was manipulated by the state's ownership of the material operation of the discourses of *minzu.* To be more precise, I argue that, because the state controlled the media, this allowed the state to circulate the idea of nationhood that helped to implement its chosen concept of *minzu* amongst the population under its control and also to promote nationalism, which which normalised the idea of nationhood that

would justify their action in circulating those discourses of *minzu*. In this vein, people could not talk back to the state and challenge the concept of *minzu* by circulating their own individual perceptions of their history. When people read books, listen to radio, watch films, and watch TV that are channelled by the state, they can only access this state-led ethnogenesis of their history, which was conveyed by the concept of *minzu*. However, in the age of social media, as I find in my research, although Sibe SNS users still reference those terminologies referring back to older concepts of *minzu* in their online discussions on their history, the Sibe people have used the terminology of *minzu* to communicate and collaborate with each other and they have produced a common body of knowledge and ideas which is beyond the previously stated and government-defined meanings of Sibe *minzu*. Based on Hart and Negri's theory of multitude, I argue that this common body of knowledge and ideas can serve as a platform for a resistance to the hegemony of *minzu*. Sibe people do actively search out the meaning of *minzu*, and they link together different pieces of information according to their preferences, and they can also disseminate (Rainie & Wellman, 2014, p. 11) their perceptions of their own history from their own SNS platforms and network with other Sibe who share similar ideas or are willing to believe these ideas. In this vein, the networked individualism (Rainie & Wellman, 2014) that facilitates knowledge production is an open network and it functions as a kind of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008) that interrupts and challenges the previous closed network that dominated the meanings of *minzu*. In this sense, the networked individualism from the use of SNS facilitates a more open discourse of *minzu*.

The Impacts of the Western Development Programme and the New Silk Road Projects in Xinjiang

The Sibe communities in Xinjiang are mostly concentrated in the Çabçal Sibe autonomous county, Yining, Ice Gašan, Tachen, and Urumqi (Tongjia, 2004, pp. 27–31). The Chinese government has initiated large economic investment in the region of Xinjiang since the 1990s, from the Western Development Programme to the current "New Silk Road" project (Lai, 2005). Xinjiang will be completely revamped and urbanized with expanded cities, new cities, and new transport infrastructure by 2023. Based on this plan, the government of Xinjiang has increased its investment in

the key cities and plans to revamp them into the centres of culture, commerce, and transportation of Xinjiang, and Yining is one of these cities (Lai, 2005).
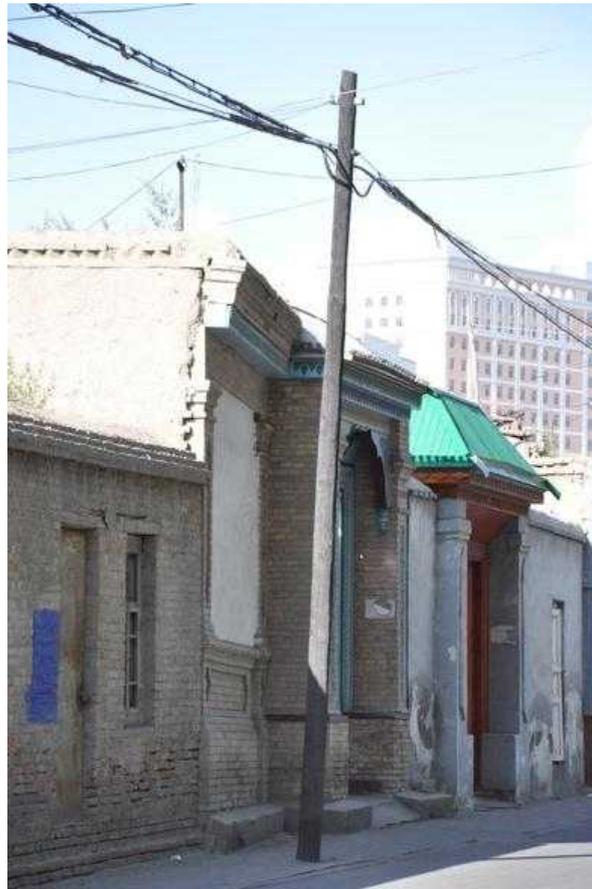
Figure 11. New Buildings under Construction Behind the Old Town in Yining, July 2011

Figure 12. New Buildings under Construction in Çabçal, July 2011

Under this urbanization and economic development initiative in Xinjiang, increasing numbers of Han Chinese who want to benefit from this new opportunity are migrating to Xinjiang. The cities of Yining, Urumqi, and even the Sibe Autonomous County of Çabçal, display this demographic shift clearly, as I found on my field trips in Xinjiang. I saw the streets of Yining, Urumqi, and even Çabçal were full of migrant workers speaking the different dialects of China. It has been reported that the influx of migrants and workers from other parts of China coming to work in Xinjiang has changed the demographic composition of the population in Xinjiang (Lai, 2005). I have been informed by my interviewees that this causes a great deal of anxiety among Sibe people. The arrival of Han migrants in Xinjiang, taking advantage of economic opportunities, is perceived by the Sibe as a threat to their ethnic culture, especially their language, according to my interviewees. They told me that in the streets of Çabçal, Chinese has become the dominant language for communication. This was confirmed by field trips in Çabçal. I noticed the languages heard in public spaces are mainly Chinese and Uyghur.

Figure 13. China Telecom Office in Çabçal, July 2011

The Chinese government and media perceive the ethnic problems in Xinjiang to be largely due to the problems of poverty. Hence, the state initiated a series of economic policies to attract investment to Xinjiang to modernise and improve the economy. (Hettige, 2007) According to Benson, between 1949 and 2008, the proportion of Han in Xinjiang rose dramatically, from 6.7 percent (220,000) to 40 percent (8.4 million) (Benson, 1990).

Figure 14. Kazanqi Folk Tourism District in Yining, 2011

Urbanisation in Xinjiang requires the mandatory eviction and relocation of the people living there and to some extent results in the demolition of the traditional local communities (Zang, 2007). Hanren – meaning "Han Chinese" -- Street in the old city of Yining, an example mentioned repeatedly by my interviewees, reflects this tension. Hanren Street was traditionally inhabited by various ethnic groups, including Uyghurs, Han, Hui, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Sibe. Hanren Street was revamped into the Kazanqi Folk Tourism District by the Yining government in 2007, which, according to the tourism administration of Yining municipality, features Uyghur people's original folk customs. Hanren Street was renamed with a Uyghur name to suit Han tourists' image of Xinjiang. According to the tourism administration, *Kazanqi* means "wok vendor" in Uyghur language. The reason for taking this name for this Folk Tourism District, according to the tourism administration of Yining municipality, is that 'most locals made their living by making and selling woks' (Zhongguo Yining Zhengwu Menhu Wangzhan, 2016).

Figure 15. Kazanqi Folk Tourism District in Yining, 2011

Figure 16. Sibe House, Demolished in Kazanqi Folk Tourism District, 2011

In the process of revamping the Hanren Street district, I was informed by my interviewees that many old Sibe houses in *Kazanqi* were demolished, and the Sibe residents were relocated into the outskirts, to apartment blocks (A personal communication, July 24, 2011; A2 personal communication, July 28, 2011; Y

personal communication, June 23, 2011; S, personal communication, July 28, 2011).
My interviewees told me that, although the condition of their new apartment is much better than their old house in Hanren Street, they do not know their neighbours in their new apartment building, which makes them feel very segregated (A2 personal communication, July 28, 2011; Y personal communication, June 23, 2011). My interviewees told me that they still preferred their own house on Hanren Street where they knew everyone and could have their own local community (A2 personal communication, July 28, 2011; Y personal communication, June 23, 2011). The destruction of old neighbourhoods has caused Sibe people to feel that their own communities have been broken up. This has caused serious anxiety among my Sibe interviewees concerning Sibe culture and language, as their traditional social fabric, where language and culture reside (A personal communication, July 24, 2011; A2 personal communication, July 28, 2011; Y personal communication, June 23, 2011; S, personal communication, July 28, 2011; T5, personal communication, July 7, 2011), has been destroyed. It is in this context that the Xinjiang Sibe try to use ethnicity to get hold of their local community as a whole and stop it from further fragmenting. This attempt was evidenced throughout the Sibe discussion on their self-led ethnogenesis on the SNS platforms of QQ, WeChat, Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs, and Baidu Tieba.

Sibe in the Northeast of China

The northeast of China is a geographical region which consists of the provinces of Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang. The largest Sibe community lives in the northeast of China. The northeast of China has been modernising its industry infrastructure since the beginning of the twentieth century, which is earlier than the rest of China. Hence, in the earlier PRC periods, it was developed as the major industrial base for the country. The economy in the northeast of China is largely dominated by State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs). However, the economy in the northeast worsened during the marketization process in the 1980s (State Council of China, 2007). Since the 1990s, China's central government has started the policy of labour commodification in order to restructure the state-sector economy into the market economy. In this process, the previous permanent workers of SOEs have been replaced with short-term contract and temporary workers hired through a deregulated

labour market. This policy has brought about massive redundancies of state-employed workers and the privatisation of SOEs. These policies had a destructive impact, particularly on the people in the northeast of China, as the majority of the economy in the northeast of China was based on SOEs. It has been reported that six to seven million people from the northeast of China lost their jobs between 1997 and 2002 (Cai, 2014, p. 18).

Facing this economic environment, the people in the northeast of China feel very uncertain about their lives. According to Cai's findings (Cai, 2014, p. 19), the northeast people have lost their sense of security, and socialism has lost its credibility among those people. Many northeast Chinese people believe that 'it is the many years' exploitation in the socialist planned economy from the other provinces in China, like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangdong, that cause this poverty of the northeast of China,' 'it is the Han people that cause all the economic chaos in the northeast of China.'[7] A regionalist sentiment is increasing among the people in the northeast of China.

In this context, it is not difficult to understand why the Sibe in the northeast have started to search for their ethnic identity. It certainly gives Sibe people some "ontological security" (Giddens, 1991, p. 36) to hold onto and provides something constant to define Sibe people in a world of flux. In this vein, their ethnicity, for the northeast Sibe, is an "ontological security", from which they can reclaim those certainties taken away in the painful process of marketisation since 1990 and the alienation brought about by the deterritorialization accompanying the loss of the security of their fixed *danwei* (work unit) lifestyle. Hence, their claim to ethnic identity is strongly attached to the regionalism associated with the land of the northeast of China. This attempt to attach their identity to the region of northeast of China was evidenced throughout the Sibe discussions on their self-led ethnogenesis on the SNS platforms, QQ, WeChat, Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs, and Baidu Tieba.

Three Discourses of *Minzu*: Cultural *Minzu*, Racial *Minzu*, and Stalin's Definition Derived *Minzu*

In the following section, I analyse the three discourses that keep occurring in Sibe people's self-led ethnogenesis on SNS platforms. To understand what those

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[7] This is a translation of Sibe online discussion. The original language is Chinese.

discourses of *minzu* are, I explain what the idea is behind *minzu* discourse. I also discuss the history in which the discourse was constructed, and analyse the material operations used in disseminating such ideas in their respective historical periods. In the discussion of the modern idea of nation, Wang Hui (2004) has detailed how the idea of nation emerged in the late Qing period by tracking the trajectory of intellectual thinking in the late Qing period. However, he has not explained how such an idea has been implemented in Chinese society. To understand how the idea of nation has penetrated into Chinese society, I analyse what material operations facilitate its spread. The most important medium for conveying such the idea of the nation is the term, *minzu.* Since the late 19th century, each political regime has had their own vision of nation, and hence manipulated the term, *minzu,* for their own agenda.

In the following section, I show how different ideologies have influenced the construction of the idea of nation and how *minzu* as a material operation has been manipulated by different political forces in constructing the idea of nation by managing the ambiguities of the meaning of *minzu.* In manipulating the definitions of *minzu*, political forces in China have attempted to define *minzu* via two approaches: through manipulating and forcing a physiological relationship tied to race between the Han and non-Han cultures, which is the method used by the GMD (Guomindang Party); or through the recognition of separate cultures but a long history of intermixing between the Han and non-Han peoples, resulting in mixed blood but not a single race, as proposed in the concept of *Duoyuan Yiti* (Plurality in Unity) (Fei, 1988), which is promoted by the CCP (Chinese Communist Party). As we can see, these two ideologies both acknowledge the importance of common blood in shaping a *minzu,* but they are different in their respective definitions of culture and race. In both the GMD and CCP's ideas of *minzu*, they both attempt to define the national through its relation to the ethnic minority population. The difference is, for the GMD, all ethnic groups in China belong to a single race, while, for the CCP, it is recognised that different ethnic groups in China have evolved from different races. The similar conclusion for both the GMD and the CCP is that, through the intermixing between the Han and non-Han, all ethnic groups should evolve into single nation. In other words, the CCP see the Han and ethnic minorities as growing

closer together through intermixing, while the GMD saw the Han and ethnic minorities as coming from a single common biological origin and then diverging, the common origin justifying the forced control of the minorities to restore them to their former condition. As these two parties have ruled China in respective historical periods and respective territories, they have been able to manipulate the modern nation's communication infrastructure to secure a fixed spatio-temporal meaning of *minzu* to consolidate their respective ideas about the Chinese nation. In the following section, I analyse how these two versions of the idea of nation were developed by different political forces and how they have been implemented by managing the ambiguity of the meaning of *minzu* at different historical moments in China.

Cultural *minzu*

The ideas of "nation" were developed from the encounter with Europe in the middle of the nineteenth century (Zhao, 2004, p. 46). Although China had a clear sense of Chineseness for centuries, the cultural *minzu* notion of Chinese identity attached to a bounded space was far more fluid than Chinese identity today. As Wang (2004, p. 15) points out, the boundaries of Chinese identity in imperial times were culturally dynamic and situationally contingent, determined by culture and ecology. He asserts that the boundaries of Chinese identity were based on an inclusive and largely descriptive identity based on cultural distance, and an exclusive identity based on physical or ecological differences (Wang, 2004, p. 16). Hence, Chinese identity in imperial times was defined by cultural proximity rather than a fixed spatial-temporal boundary.

Although Liang Qichao does use a spatio-temporal idea to define the Chinese nation (Wang, 2004, p. 16), arguing that all within the borders of the Qing dynasty were perceived as naturally part of China, dating back to the time of the Yellow Emperor, he did not fix the people of the nation into a clear association with the territory of the nation. Liang argues that there was no pure race in China, as there had been intermarriage between Han and non-Han for centuries. However, he further argues that the same intermarriage means that every individual who made up the *zhonghua minzu* (Chinese nation) shared the same blood. It is this same blood that leads to China as a single nation, in his terms, *zhonghua minzu* (Wang, 2004, p. 86).

However, this concept of *minzu* has a very serious weakness in terms of defining who has rights to claim the land of China, since the intermixing gives everyone equal rights to claim possession of the land. This did not suit the Han nationalist agenda to expel the Manchu out of China, so the cultural *minzu* was criticised by early nationalist revolutionaries. The nationalist revolutionaries promoted a concept of *minzu* with strong racial connotations to achieve their political agenda in the first decades of the twentieth century.

The ideology of the cultural *minzu* is the result of Qing dynasty's careful restructuring for centuries to create the sense of a central state, with a non-Han people ruling China. The Qing dynasty defined cultural *minzu* in an inclusive manner by pointing out that the essence of *minzu* is culture, as for instance, in Liang Qichao's use of *minzu* as a concept of people who live in the Qing Empire (Wang, 2004, p. 86). Hence, this cultural concept of *minzu* includes the Qing Empire's borderland territories of Tibet, Xinjiang, Mongolia, and Manchuria. The peoples within these territories, although not of Han origin, were referred to in official Qing documents as peoples of the central state (Crossley, 1999, p. 350). For the Manchu people, as non-Han people who ruled China, the use of cultural *minzu* could significantly help them to legitimise their rule in China in two ways. The first was the legitimation of the state's control over the territories on the borders of the empire. The second was to officially include non-Han as members of the state (Crossley, 1999, p. 350). This second point was also a means of legitimising Manchu rule over China, since the Manchu, as a non-Han people, can be included as members of the state. By using this term, the Qing dynasty could pervasively assert that the *minzu* includes Han, Mongols, Tibetans, and Hui as members of the state.

Racial *minzu*

The historian Pamela Crossley argues that the racial concept of *minzu* was developed by Han nationalists, through the alienation from and reaction against the Manchu people in the Qing dynasty (1999, p. 360). In 1895, the term "*minzoku*" was borrowed from Japan, and it was translated into Chinese as *minzu* to express the meanings of people, race, and nation (Crossley, 1999, p.359). Hence, the term *minzu*

is derived from Japanese. In this historical period, *minzu* was invested with strong racial overtones and it appeared to have an ambiguous meaning ranging from people to nation and race. It is highly contested when the term was first introduced in China. However, Crossley argues that when *minzu* was first introduced in 1895, a sense of nation and people was borrowed from the comparable Russian term — *narod* — and it was translated into nation and people for constructing the sense of nationality. In the same period, *minzu* also developed a strong meaning of race from the ethnocentric ideologies of behind *minzuko* (Crossley, 1999, p. 360).

This racial idea of *minzu* was massively used in the nationalists' slogan in the 1911 revolution. The slogan is *Quchu Dalu Huifu Zhonghua* in Chinese, which means "expel barbarians, restore Chinese land to Chinese" (Duara, 1996, p. 10). The binary racial connotation in this slogan is very clear, as it explicitly indicates that it would only be through the unity of the Han people that the barbarians would be expelled and China would become a modern nation. This idea of racial *minzu* was then massively spread by the newspapers and magazines in southern China (Reed, 2004, p. 197).

With scholarship divided among Qing reformists, whose concept of *minzu* was inclusive of all ethnic groups that would formulate a giant *zhonghua minzu*, and Han revolutionaries, who believed strongly in a *hanzu* (Han ethnicity), leading Han reformists developed separate ideologies on who would be included within the new nation. This complicated the definition of *minzu* leading up to the revolution. But, by the time the Qing court was overthrown in 1911, much of the anger felt by Han Chinese resulted in severe Manchu bloodshed and racial bigotry towards non-Han peoples. This resulted in many of the Manchu people hiding their names and adopting Han surnames throughout China (Na, 2004, p. 125). This soon proved to be quite problematic, since the alienation of groups affiliated to the Qing Empire meant that the new government could no longer retain territorial integrity when they claimed the territory of the Qing Dynasty as China. With Outer Mongolia's Declaration of Independence from the Qing Empire in December 1911, the newly founded Republic of China government quickly developed policies that extended the meaning of *minzu* to be more inclusive of the non-Han cultures, in order to re-stake claims to territories that had been part of the Qing Empire (Dikötter, 1997, p. 12).

The political discourse of *minzu* changed into re-imagining the Chinese nation in a way that would eliminate racial boundaries in order to construct a unified *zhonghua minzu* after the GMD was founded in 1912. In this political climate, early Qing literatus Liang Qichao's (1873 – 1929) concept of cultural *minzu* was employed to deal with the complicated situation. However, as Liang's concept of *minzu* denies the fixed connection between people and physical land, this leads to ambiguity in using the concept of *minzu* for legitimising the GMD's control of the borderlands. To be more precise, on the one hand, the racial *minzu* exclusively refers to the Han as the Chinese Nation, as they emerge as one single race in the process of expelling the Manchu barbarians beyond the borders of the nation-state. However, at the same time, it was also argued that this racial *minzu* would be inclusive toward non-Han people and their land to form the Chinese nation-state. In other words, what makes the discourse of racial *minzu* ambiguous is that it contains a meaning of ethnocentrism, of a single race forming the Chinese nation in the process of a new China being shaped by a shared identity among the Han; however, at the same time, the racial *minzu* was also asserted to be an inclusive term for all non-Han people in the borderlands of China.

However, given the anxiety caused by Japan's support for the independence of Mongolia, using the theory of national self-determination, in December 1911, and Japan also using anthropological findings to argue that the Yi ethnic minority is close to the Japanese, the GMD started to use anthropological findings to support the territorial integrity of the regime of the Republic of China. The GMD started to search for anthropological evidence to prove that all people living in the territory of the Republic of China at that time were a single race, and to legitimise the GMD's rule over those populations who reside inside the territory of China. The discovery of Peking man in the 1920s aided in shaping this new discourse, as the GMD began claiming that all of the different cultures in the Republic of China belonged to a single race (Schmalzer, 2008, p.25). The GMD's new interpretations of Sun Yat-sen's use of *zhonghua minzu* pushed for a re-thinking of *minzu* in anthropological terms, in which the history of the different cultures was re-imagined as descending from a single ancestor, which is the Yellow Emperor. Later, to justify the connection with northern *minzu*, the GMD added the Yan Emperor as an ancestor of *Zhonghua*

Minzu, as the Yan Emperor, in Chinese mythology, was considered to be the ancestor of the northern tribes of China (Dikötter, 1997, p.56).

Stalin-derived definition of *Minzu*

Marxism and the Soviet model of nationality have had a significant impact on the CCP's minority policies. I will discuss their influence on Chinese *minzu* policies first and then analyse how they shape the meanings of *minzu* in Chinese society. In the early PRC years, the CCP injected the Marxist discourse into the understanding of nation (Mullaney, 2011). Through this Marxist lens, ethnic conflicts came to be perceived as class conflicts, and the CCP's mission was to help the oppressed classes to overthrow the dominant class, who represent the interests of the bourgeoisie (Yang & Wang, 1994, p. 8). With this concept of *minzu*, the CCP gained the support of ethnic minority groups that were in conflict with the GMD throughout the 1930s and 1940s. For instance, the ethnic conflicts between Sibe people and the GMD's Nationalist army in Xinjiang has been recognized by the CCP as the Three Districts Revolutions, which are part of the Chinese proletariat's revolution against the reactionary GMD's rule in China (Oidtmann, 2014). The Three Districts Revolution is also recorded as the Ili Rebellion by Linda Benson (Benson, 1990). This Revolution lead to a short-lived Soviet-backed Turkic socialist people's republic (1944–1949), which is named the East Turkestan Republic (ETR) by Benson.

In the 1920s, the CCP was far too weak to forcefully push a political agenda structured around the status of non-Han groups in the formation of a unified China. In order to gain support for the CCP from minority ethnic groups in the early days of the party after its foundation in 1921, the CCP started to develop their own interpretation of *minzu* (Yang & Wang, 1994, p. 3). The CCP adopted the Bolshevik policy to recognise the non-Han groups as *shaoshu minzu* (minority nationalities), which maintained that minorities who made up the majority of the regions they occupied would have the right to self-determination. The position of the CCP is that the CCP is the leader of the class struggle of the proletariat and the class struggle for all nationalities to gain their right to self-determination (Yang & Wang, 1994, p. 7). By using the class struggle of the proletariat, the CCP used the concept of *minzu* as a means of defining the proletariat, transcending superficial categories of race or ethnicity to fit the revolutionary agenda. In this vein, the CCP's concept of *minzu*

was more inclusive of the other ethnic groups within the territory of China without enforcing a linear ancestral heritage.

During the Long March (1934–1935), Mao Zedong reintroduced the question of *minzu* into the CCP's political ideology. The CCP wanted to expand the definition of *minzu* beyond the five cultural groups still used by the GMD at that time (the Han, Manchu, Mongols, Hui, and Tibetans), to recognise groups such as the Yao and Miao as separate ethnicities to gain the support from the Yao, Miao, and others (Hao, 2016). Adopting a similar view to the GMD, the CCP felt that the assimilation of the borderland territories into China proper was necessary for China's survival, as, according to Marxist analysis, the ethnic minority nationalities were in the "backward" stage of development, making it the duty of the more "advanced" *minzu* to help those minority nationalities to develop into Communist societies (Shi, 2005, p. 11).

The CCP's theory of *minzu* reflected the GMD's understanding of *minzu*, in that there existed shared blood among all the Han and non-Han peoples. However, instead of a single race that comprises the *zhonghua minzu*, the CCP promoted the idea of the *zhonghua minzu* as a multi-*minzu* state (Hao, 2016). This helped the CCP to gain the Sibe's support in Xinjiang. In the Three Districts Revolution, when the Uyghur united Sibe and other ethnic groups to rebel against the rule of the GMD in Xinjiang, the Three Districts Revolution led to a regime called the East Turkestan Republic in the Ili, Tarbaghatai, and Altay regions in Xinjiang, from 1944 to 1949 with backing from the CCP as well as from the Soviet government (Benson, 1990, p. 3). It has come to light that the CCP contacted the Sibe people in the late 1930s to seek support for their cause by rebelling against the GMD (Na, 2010, p. 861).

After the CCP founded the PRC in 1949, the task of determining who was a citizen of the new state, and how these citizens would be identified, become a priority for the CCP government. Having unified most of the territory conceived by the CCP as the state of China, the government began a nation-wide census in 1953 to identify the population's ethnic affiliation and to investigate the social and cultural conditions of the ethnic minorities and perform taxonomic operations (Mullaney, 2011). In the operation of the census, Joseph Stalin's definition of nation was widely adopted by the ethnologists, anthropologists, sociologists, and social scientists who

participated in this ethnic classification project. Stalin's definition is: "A nation is a historically evolved, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community of culture" (Litzinger, 2000, p. 8). This definition was used in the PRC's project of *minzu shibie* (ethnic classification) as the guideline for determining the validity of a group's claim to the title of *minzu* (Mullaney, 2011).

As I have argued at the beginning of this chapter, the ambiguities of the term, *minzu*, and the complexities of its usage interacted with each other, and they are largely rooted in their historical contexts. Hence, by analysing how political rhetoric was used to shape and reshape the meaning of *minzu*, we can understand how the ideology of the CCP and its material operations were orchestrated in producing the meaning of *minzu*. Even before the nation-wide census in 1953, to provide a method for classification and recognition of the separate *minzu*, the PRC attempted to declare a working definition of *minzu*, through which we can see how *minzu* was in the process of being reshaped by the ideologies of the ethnologists who participated in this project. In the guidelines on designating a *minzu*, Stalin's definition of a nationality, with its four factors, were largely employed in the census.

After the first stage of classification ended, it turned out that 400 *minzu* were reported in the census (Shi, 2005, p. 15). Hence, at the second stage, narrowing down the number of *minzu* recognised by the state became the main task of the ethnographers. This required ethnographers to take liberties in determining which *minzu* within a region could be combined to form a larger *shaoshu minzu.* In his detailed analysis of the project, Thomas Mullaney (2011) addresses the importance of social science and its influence on the state, in that it allowed the government a way to categorise ethnicity. At this stage of development, language played a key role and heavily impacted on the method of categorisation, as comparisons between differing vernaculars within an area were used to, in some cases, re-imagine a shared historical context in which these languages may have initially been similar and have since become separate dialects (Mullaney, 2011, p.67).

As mentioned earlier, because Stalin's definition of *minzu* was the only explicit definition of this concept in classical Marxist writings, it became the sole guideline in the Ethnic Classification Project. However, in actual practice, Stalin's

vague definition was found to be highly insufficient as a criterion for taxonomic assessment. As Mullaney (2011, pp.12-14) suggests, almost every existing report on the Ethnic Classification Project in China cites Stalin's definition as the guiding principle, but they also always point out right away the distinct differences between the reality in China and in modern Europe, and argue for the impracticality of following the definition faithfully without modification. This problem was also reflected in the process of identifying the Sibe in northeast of China.

My interviewee, N, also used this Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* to guide his work on identifying the Sibe in the northeast of China in the 1980s. However, he told me that he met some problems in distinguishing between the Manchu and Sibe during his fieldwork. He told me that his participants told him that they are Sibe. However, according to criteria derived from Stalin's definition of *minzu,* they are the same as Manchu. This caused enormous trouble for N. I asked him how he dealt with this situation. He told me that he respected the wishes of his interviewees and recorded their *minzu* status according to their desire, and that he had compared it with their family trees (N, personal communiction, August 2, 2009). This indicates that N's solution was to combine Stalin's definition of *minzu* and his beliefs that bloodline determines one's *minzu.* This belief in bloodline determining *minzu* is commonly shared amongst the notions of cultural *minzu* and racial *minzu.*

In the Ethnicity Classification Project, different ethnic minorities were assessed and placed in different social development stages, according to a schema that envisions human history as a linear progression that goes through five stages: primitive, slave, feudal, capitalist, and socialist, the final stage that eventually leads to communist society (Yang & Wang, 1994, p. 8). This social stage theory, first formulated by Lewis Henry Morgan and then absorbed into Marxist historiography by Engels, became the dominant historical consciousness in the writing of history in the early PRC. At the time, the Han group was placed at the late-feudal stage and ethnic minority groups were assessed, through the *minzu shibie* (ethnic classification project), to be at various less-developed stages (Harrell, 1995, p. 24). Based on this social stage assessment, the CCP argued quite ambivalently that Stalin's definition of a nationality only applied to fully developed *minzu* and, since the minorities' societies were underdeveloped compared to the Han, they were considered, *luohou*

(backward) *minzu*. Hence, aid from the Han to help minorities to develop their cultures and economies had to be provided first for them to reach the status of a developed *minzu* (Shi, 2005, p. 11). This thinking allowed the CCP to keep China as a nation centred around the Han and at the same time also to consider itself a state with multiple nationalities. Based on this social stage assessment, different kinds of democratic reform were carried out in the minority regions from 1955 with the aim of bringing all the minority groups into the socialist stage (Lin, 2016, p. 146).

To sum up, we can infer from the history of the Ethnic Classification Project, as well as the CCP's overall ethnic policies that, although many practices and policies were reframed in a Marxist discourse of equality, freedom, and class struggle, many of the fundamental principles of the CCP's ethnic policies can be understood as the heritage of a Han-centric universalist prototype from China's pre-modern dynastic times. The re-imagining of *minzu* in the Stalin-derived definition is revealed as part of the continuing project of reinventing *minzu* based on the ideologies of those Han in power. It shares this quality with cultural *minzu* and racial *minzu,* and is related to them in the root-and-tree logic of knowledge production (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008).

Online Debate on the Origin of Sibe

Regarding on the origins of the Sibe, which have been discussed in the Sibe SNS communities, there is a debate around the origins of the Sibe, according to the findings based on participant observation on the Sibe QQ *quns,* WeChat *quns*, and SinaWeibo, Sina Blogs, and Baidu Tieba, which I conducted through virtual ethnography from 2009 to 2015: it concerns whether the Sibe are the descendants of the Xianbei or whether they derived from Jurchen. I will first analyse the discourses of *minzu* used by Sibe SNS users in their debates on Xianbei as the ethnic origin of the Sibe, and how those discourses were used discursively by Sibe people in their discussion, and then analyse how those discourses of *minzu* were manipulated by Sibe SNS users to support their arguments.

Most Sibe scholars claim that Sibe are in direct descent from Xianbei*,* a nomadic people who were formed in the third century A.D. (He & Tong, 1993; Wu & Zhao, 2008). Xianbei created a powerful state covering the land of today's eastern

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Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, and northeast China. The country that was built by Xianbei people was recorded as Northern Wei (386–535) in Chinese records (He & Tong, 1993, p. 71). This ancestry is generally accepted by the Sibe community in Xinjiang that Harris was informed by the community in her ethnography in Xinjiang in the 1990s (Harris, 2004, p. 18). Jurchen are the predecessors of the Manchu who ruled North China as the Jin dynasty (1115-1234) (Li, 2010, p.13). In the Sibe SNS qun, there is heated debate concerning the origins of the Sibe, on the theories of Xianbei as the Sibe's ancestors and of the Jurchen as the Sibe's ancestors, according to my ethnography on the Sibe SNS communities since 2009.

Based on the virtual ethnography that I conducted on Sibe QQ, WeChat, Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs, and Baidu Tieba from 2009 to 2015, I have identified that the topic: "what is the Sibe's origin?" was one of most discussed topics in these Sibe SNS *quns*. The other heated topics are westward migration and Sibe language. I will discuss those topics in Chapter 5, and Chapter 6, respectively. Regarding the topic of "what is the Sibe's origin?", the main issue is the debate over whether the Sibe are from the Xianbei or the Jurchen.

I identified that Xinjiang Sibe on the SNS *quns* argue that the Xianbei people are their ancestors, and they find many historical records that can be traced back to support their argument. Xinjiang Sibe SNS users argue that the name, "Sibe", originated from "Xianbei". The Xianbei were one of the five major peoples in ancient China. The main argument is that the Sibe people are descendants of the Tuoba Xianbei who stayed in the Greater Khingan Mountains to guard the Tuoba ancestral shrine in the *gašan dunggu* while the rest of the Tuoba moved south into Inner Mongolia and then northern Shanxi and finally conquered north China. The Sibe come from southern Siberia, which is located in today's northeast China. In 1692, the Sibe were incorporated into the Eight Banners and were stationed in Qiqihar and parts of northeast China. After a revolt by the Qiqihar Sibe in 1764, the Qianlong Emperor had sent 3,275 Sibe soldiers to the Ili valley in the far north-western part of China, which is known as Xinjiang currently, to resist both Russia and the Uyghur.

The northeast Sibe argue that Sibe are derived from the Jurchen, and the following narrative is representative of the most common theme in their online posts:

We Sibe are Tungusic-speaking people, we are the descendant of Suzhen who lived in northeast of China 3,000 years ago. In the Liao Dynasty (916 to 1125) and Jin Dynasty period (1115 to 1234), the Chinese called us Nvzhi. We called ourselves Jurchen until Nurhaci founded the Qing dynasty and created the concept of Manju. We join Nurhaci's Manju in the late 14th century. By the end of the 15th century, with the collapse of the Liao Dynasty, we were moved by Nurhaci to the Songhua River and Nen River area as vassals of the Khorchin Mongols. (Baidu Tieba, 2015)

From the online discussion, that the Sibe's roots lie in southern Siberia, which is located in today's northeast of China, is generally agreed by the Sibe communities based on my virtual ethnography on Sibe SNS *quns*. However, each of the Sibe communities hold very strong views in terms of their belief in Sibe origins in relation to whether the Xianbei or Jurchen are the Sibe's ancestors by making specific links with the past to support their arguments. As Harris (2004, p. 18) points out, peoples living at a greater distance from the Chinese Centre are normally recorded with contradictory and obscure narratives in the early Chinese records, and this is particularly true in relation to Sibe ethnic origins. However, different groups of Sibe just take advantage of the ambivalent nature of the historical records on the Sibe to make their own ethnogenesis. This ambiguity offers a place where the politics can take place. In the follow section, I will look at what politics are taking place in the Sibe self-led ontogenesis by looking at the position with which Sibe chose to identify and at the influence of SNS on the discursive formation of Sibe ethnic identity.

In the following section, I will analyse the debates on whether the Sibe have derived from the Xianbei or the Jurchen. I will first analyse what discourses of *minzu* have been used in these debates, and analyse how those discourses of *minzu* were used by Sibe SNS users to achieve their own purpose. Then, I will analyse what new space emerged in those discussions in which new statements can be made. In order to achieve this, I will analyse what material operation was used by the Sibe SNS users in the discussion and how this new discourse of *minzu* discursively helped the Sibe SNS users in their discussion.

Based on my observation of the Sibe QQ quns, WeChat quns, and Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs, and Baidu Tieba, which I conducted during my virtual ethnography from 2009 to 2015, there were extensive debates on Sibe origins. The debate mainly focused on whether the Sibe are from the Xianbei or the Sibe derived from the Jurchen. Throughout the discussion, a repeated conflict of discourses around *minzu* emerged in the online discussion. I have concluded that the emergence of this conflict is due to the co-presence of *minzu* discourses on the same SNS platform. The conflict is between the racial *minzu* and Stalin's definition of *minzu* in the Sibe discussion on their ethnic origins.

Based on my virtual ethnography, I have identified the racial *minzu* and Stalin's definition of *minzu* as the most frequently referenced discourses in the online discussion. The typical narrative is as below:

> The Xianbei are a nomadic people that lives in eastern Mongolia and in the northeast of China. Throughout Chinese history, the Xianbei people created a powerful country in what became today's eastern Mongolia, Inner Mongolia, and northeast China. It was recorded as Northern Wei (386–535) in Chinese history, this country. (Baidu Tieba, 2015)

The origin of the Sibe supplies the Sibe people with a feeling of historical belonging, which can justify the two Sibe communities' respective positions in Chinese society. To be more precise, it is the Xinjiang Sibe who want to consolidate their ethnic identity to protect their community interest in Xinjiang against the alienation brought about by the urbanisation and the Han-Uyghur ethnic nationalisms in Xinjiang, and the northeast Sibe who need ethnicity as a defining identity to fight against the alienation brought about by the capitalist exploitation of their local economy.

The ethnic origin of the Sibe has very important meanings for those two Sibe communities. In the following discussion on whether the Sibe's ancestors are Jurchen, we can see the emphasis on ethnic origin is actually to supply rhetoric to further the above purpose of each Sibe community's claims on ethnic identity.

The comment below on Sibe's ethnic origin is taken from the *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun*. The Sibe SNS users in this WeChat *qun* are mostly from the region of Xinjiang, but there is also a large percentage of users from the Northeast of China.

The *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun* has 305 members: 239 members are from the region of Xinjiang, and 66 members are from the Northeast of China. The most common topics in this WeChat *qun* are: Sibe ethnic origin, Sibe language and Sibe tradition. The following comment provides a vivid example of how Sibe SNS users represent and debate their history:

> Sibe originates from a minority nationality in the Northeast China. It is also a member of the multiethnic family in the motherland. For historical reasons, the vast majority of Sibe people have left their hometowns and have moved to new places. Now the Sibe are mainly distributed in Liaoning and Xinjiang; a small number are distributed in Inner Mongolia, Jilin, Heilongjiang and other places. There are three different versions of the origin of the Sibe language so far that I can find. The first view is that both the Sibe and Manchu are descendants of Jurchen. The second view is that Sibe is descended from Xianbei. The third view is that the Sibe and Oroqen shared the same origin. They both originated in Shiwei from the Liao Dynasty. Shiwei and Jurchen belong to the descendants of East Hu, so the second two views are basically the same. So in fact the origin of Sibe can be summed up as Xianbei and Jurchen. I support the theory of Sibe originating from Jurchen. So I want to share why I think Sibe originated from Jurchen here. I will set out views based on the evidence of Guaerjia family tree. The name, Sibe, appeared in the historical records is very late: of the two earliest recorded famous people in Guaerjia clan, the first is Niyahatch, the second is Chaomoergen. Three brothers belonged to the Guaerjia clan of the Eight Banners Manchu: the first son is Fuerjia, the second son is Niyahatch, the third son is Zhucha. They later separated. Fuerjia lived in Suwan. Niyahatch moved to the north. Zhucha moved to Siangaji ferry. From the records here, we can see that Niyahatch was obtained from the data of family tree. (H2, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun,* 2015).

In the above comment on Sibe ethnic origin, the H2 uses the notion of racial *minzu* to argue that Sibe and Manchu all derived from the Jurchen people. H2 uses the family tree of clan "Guaerjia" among the Sibe in the northeast of China and proves that the bloodline of the Sibe is inherited from the Jurchen. This triggers a heated debate

among the Xinjiang Sibe. The claim that the Sibe are descendants of the Jurchen will conflict with the *minzu* status recognised by the state, which is based on the principle that Sibe and Manchu are separate *minzu*. This is crucial for Sibe people in Xinjiang, as Xinjiang Sibe want to keep their status of being separate *minzu* from the Manchu. For Xinjiang Sibe people, they suffered from the nightmare of ethnic elimination in the past centuries and, therefore, the idea that they might already have lost their ethnic identity is the most worrisome thing for them. The following statement from a Xinjiang Sibe reflects this sentiment:

> Like other ethnic groups, Mongolian, Uyghur, Kazakh, Tajik, Uzbeks, which all have their own ancestors, and, eventually, we evolved into the Zhonghua Minzu, Sibe; like other ethnic groups, we all come from different tribes, evolved into modern minzu. The state recognised us as new minzu, this is a fact. No one can deny the fact that our Sibe is a minzu. (G3, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun*, 2015)

This narrative is very common on Sibe SNS platforms. From this narrative, we can see that there is a strong attempt among Sibe people to argue they are a separate ethnic group. I have analysed the profile of such posts' authors and also interviewed them. I found out that most of the posts were written by Xinjiang Sibe users. In order to find out why there is a strong assertion that the Sibe are direct descendants from the Xianbei, I conducted interviews with those Sibe SNS users. According to my interviews, the reason that Xinjiang Sibe make 'such' claims is that they want to protect their *minzu* status, as some of their *minzu* characteristics are being lost — for instance, the language — according to Stalin's definition of *minzu*, which is crucial for the community's position in Xinjiang; and they also want construct a strong sense of Sibe community in Xinjiang to protect the Sibe culture from the Han's increasing cultural influence.

The following comment from U in the *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun* in 2015 argues against the above comment of H2's statement that the Sibe are 'Descendants of Jurchen':

> The Sibe migrated from the northeast of China, but are not necessarily the 'descendants of Jurchen': the Manchu people hold the legendary Jurchen as their ancestors and memorialise them. They describe themselves as

'Descendants of Jurchen'. This is very natural. To memorialise and worship the Jurchen can strengthen the integrity among Manchus, enhance Manchu culture. They use the Banjin Inenggi[8] festival which was the founding date of the Qing dynasty, to celebrate their minzu culture; we Sibe respect this tradition of the Manchu of memorialising the Qing dynasty. There is no disagreement. The problem is, in these years, some Manchu extend the concept of '*Manju*'[9] and impose 'Descendants of Jurchen' on other minzu in China, including the Sibe, which denies the fact that every minzu has their distinct ancestors. This is typical 'great nationality chauvinism,' disrespecting the feeling of other minzu.   (U, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun*, 2015)

He calls on all *Sibe* people not to identify with Jurchen: 'We should know our true origin; do not put others' ancestors in our heads' (U, *Sibe Giyamun WeChat qun,* 2015).

On SNS, where the text of Sibe history from the printed books has been digitalised, the ways in which the text has been read and consumed have been significantly different to the previous, linear experiences. On SNS, it is because of the fact that articles on Sibe history can be added to and amended by anyone with access to SNS, and the information on Sibe history can be directly and effortlessly connected to related materials by Sibe SNS users, based on their needs at that moment. Hence, the rule of reading and re-reading of the text has created a 'circuit of culture' (Hall, 1993, p. 34), in which the individual and groups are in constant relationships with the production or consumption of culture.

The discussion above was excerpted from a WeChat *qun*, which is a function of the smartphone app, WeChat. It serves new social networking functions for WeChat users. The Chinese character for "*qun*" can mean "network", which means users can share and access information in a networked community. The *qun* provides

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[8] Banjin Inenggi is considered the national day for Manju. It is on the 13th day of the 10th month of the lunar calendar. For details of the Banjin Inenggi festival, please see Manchublog (2006).

[9] Manju is a concept of the people whose ancestor is Jurchen and live in the northeast of China; hence, Manju supposedly includes Sibe, Manchu, and Oroqen. It is a concept of people associated with an idea of the territory of the northeast of China that is promoted mainly by Manchu on their SNS platforms. See: Manju xu wen kvwaran (2013).

a perfect social operating system for networked individuals who want to find people with similar ideas.

WeChat *qun* has strict verification for participants, which makes one's virtual social circle more intimate and tightly formed, and more integrated into one's real-life social circle. Only mutual friends can set up communication in the *qun,* which indicates a high reciprocity among acquaintances. *Qun* aligns with an interpersonal structure that is very similar to how the *holbobun* network functions among the Sibe people.

The Sibe feel very insecure about their future position in the Han *minzu*/nation. Hence, it is not very difficult to understand why there is a large volume of discussion on the Sibe's position in the Han *minzu*/nation when we see their discussion on the Sibe's ethnic origin. In this climate, the Sibe are actively putting new meaning on their histories with any sources that they can find online. The Sibe people were trying to rebuild their position in Han *minzu*/nation through their own resourcefulness. They used varied branches over the network operating system to find support, improve, and create knowledge of Sibe history.

As we can see from the following discussion, which I quote from the *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun*, Sibe people are conducting a self-led ethnogenesis by searching the anthropological, ethnological, and historical knowledge on the WeChat *quns*, and Sina Weibo, and Baidu Tieba, and throughout the searching of the information online, they communicated with friends from the SNS networks for validation and to get further suggestions on new directions in the information searching. This affirms Rainie and Wellman's concept of networked individualism (Rainie & Wellman, 2014, p. 232), in which they argue that similar people who hold a similar idea tend to cluster together and form the same opinion online.

From the above cluster of online information on Sibe social media, we can see the role of experts and information gatekeepers has been radically altered as empowered amateurs find the hyperlinked nature of the internet and raise their voices and challenge authorities (Rainie & Wellman, 2014, p. 14). In the analogue media environment, information gatekeepers can control the exposure of the article to the audience by keeping editorial control. However, in social media, as I have demonstrated via the above SNS discussion on Sibe self-led ethnogenesis, the

editorial control has been seriously challenged by the nature of digital reading on SNS as a horizontal hyperlinked phenomenon based on the user's individual preference at the moment when a Sibe user reads this article. Sibe people use SNS and the web as an information store that can help them to gather information and find and connect with others who have discussed the same issues. The following statement made by T reflects this tendency:

> As for Sibe, we are not inferior in comparing our history to Manchu history. Before the Qing dynasty, the Sibe's ancestors, the Xianbei, had already played a role on the stage of human history. Sibe ancestors can be traced back to several thousand years ago; at that time, our ancestors, the Xianbei, lived near the east Heilongjiang River. Part of them kept moving west and south. Although Sibe people and Manchu live together and intermix with each other during the Qing dynasty, that doesn't mean that the Sibe are the same *minzu* as the Manchu. Sibe just joined the banner system as soldiers. However, the Sibe and Manchu have different ancestors. Our ancestors are the Xianbei people, not the so-called 'Descendants of Jurchen'. (T, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun,* 2015)

Another Sibe who holds a similar idea goes further, saying:

> Thanks for your input. I agree with your point! All different *minzu* have their own ancestors and histories. Using Descendant of Jurchen to deny other *minzus'* ancestors is not only a theoretical error, but also a political fault. To deny that other *minzu* have their ancestors and origins is to deny the existence of other ethnic groups, and to deny the equal place and rights of those ethnic groups in China. (T6, *Sibe Giyamun WeChat qun*, 2015)

From the above *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun* discussion, we can see a very clear difference in the use of the term *minzu.* The Sibe SNS user, U, uses the term in the sense of Stalin's definition deprived *minzu,* as his claim of *minzu* is through the recognition of separate cultures but a long history of intermixing between *minzus,* resulting in mixed blood but not a single race of people. He says that, although the Sibe and Manchu people lived together and intermixed with each other during the Qing dynasty, that does not mean that the Sibe do not have their own ancestors. The ethnic origin justifies the Sibe as separate *minzu* according to the Stalin's definition

of *minzu.* On the other hand, U fights against clearly holding an idea of *minzu* influenced by racial *minzu*, as he accepts that the Sibe and Manchu are racially tied to each other and inhabit the territory of northeast China.

The expression of belonging to and identifying with the Xianbei is itself ideological, in that the theory of the Xianbei as the Sibe's ancestors supports a statement that the Sibe is a separate *minzu* from the Manchu according to Stalin's definition of *minzu.* This is very important for the Xinjiang Sibe, as they need the *minzu* status to protect their community in Xinjiang in the midst of the urbanisation taking place in Xinjiang. The statement of this article emphasises that the Sibe having the same ancestors as the Manchu explicitly challenges the claim that Sibe is a separate *minzu.* It is against this statement that the expressions of belonging to and identifying with the Xianbei were promoted online.

The expressions of belonging to and identifying with the Xianbei in the discussions on WeChat *quns*, and SinaWeibo, and Baidu Tieba, discussions suggest a complex sense of identity, which is not uncommon among minority peoples. However, these expressions may also be calculated.

The ethnogenesis of the Xianbei supplies the Sibe people with a feeling of historical belonging. This can provide the Sibe people with some "ontological security" (Giddens, 1991, p. 36) where they are otherwise in a condition of flux both in Xinjiang and in the northeast of China, where urbanisation and marketisation have dramatically changed the local communities in these two regions. However, as the political economic environment is different in those two regions, the focus of the debate on Sibe ethnogenesis also differs between those Sibe from the two communities I have identified in my ethnography. For Sibe people from Xinjiang, the impact of urbanisation from the West Development Project on local Sibe culture is significant. It has increased immigration both from Han in the regions and from property resettlements of Sibe into new development zones, and the growing Chinese-language media productions in their community result in a huge pressure on Sibe people to maintain their sense of community in Xinjiang. Therefore, for Xinjiang Sibe, their concern with their ethnogenesis is to get hold of the continuity of the Sibe community's culture.

For Sibe from the northeast of China, as most of them live in an environment in which millions of people lost their state-secured jobs and could not find any jobs during the economic downturn in their local community, many people are very uncertain of their future. As many years of a state-planned economy and state jobs gave them a sense of security, this sudden lay-off caused dramatic uncertainty for them, and long-term state-fixed jobs in *danwei* gave the northeast people a strong sense of locality based on their state-facilitated work unions. Hence, the sudden loss of the work union necessitated another local identity to soothe the uncertainty. In this vein, we understand why most of the northeast Sibe focus on a strong regionalism, based on the northeast culture, in their Sibe ethnogenesis.

There is an apparent contradiction in the above Sibe SNS users' use of discourses of *minzu* during SNS discussions on Sibe ethnogensis. First, U uses Stalin's *minzu* to argue that the Sibe should be recognised as a separate *minzu*. At the same time, U uses the racial *minzu* to argue that the Sibe's ancestors are the Xianbei, not the Jurchen. Hence, Sibe is a separate *minzu.* This contradiction can be resolved if we see Sibe *minzu* discourses and practices as polyphonic. Stalin's definition of *minzu* and racial *minzu* are forms of two discourses that have been used by the CCP since the Mao period. By continuing this tradition, the Sibe inscribe their actions within a repertoire of legitimate political practices. At the same time, they fill these two discourses of *minzu* with new meaning. The purpose of raising ethnic awareness is not primarily to construct a narrative of what is Sibe, but to use the ethnicity to reposition themselves in the changing political and cultural environment in China.

By raising ethnic awareness through the promotion of common knowledge of Sibe ethnogenesis, Sibe SNS users use discourses and symbolic practices from previous *minzu* discourses to construct their own version of respectful ethnogenesis, in which Sibe SNS users engage with the general public in promoting their ethnic identity.

Ethnic Boundaries in Xinjiang

Since the 1990s, Uyghurs employed social practices, such as religious practices, food taboos, Xinjiang time, and dress codes, to reinforce and reproduce ethnic, social, and spatial boundaries with Han (Bellér-Hann, 2008). The

discrimination against the ethnic minorities in everyday practices and Han linguistic preferences also produce and reproduce an ethnic and social boundary with the Uyghurs (Cliff, 2016). Many scholars further argue that those social practices performed by both Han and Uyghurs are regarded as resources with which to engage on for drawing ethnic boundaries, actually resulting in a social boundary drawn between the identities of Chinese and non-Chinese in the social space of Xinjiang. (Bovingdon, 2002; Cliff, 2016; Dautcher, 2009). When I visited Urumqi in 2011, I was informed by my interviewees that all the Han people had moved out from the Tianshan district, where the ethnic conflict took place in 2009, and moved to the Xinshi district. When I walked in the streets of the Tianshan district, I seldom saw any Han Chinese there. However, when I went to a new city district, I could hardly see any Uyghur people there.

Figure 17. Xinshi District of Urumqi Became an Area where Han Chose to Live after 2009 (Photo Taken in 2011)

Figure 18. Tianshan District of Urumqi Became an Area where the Uygur Chose to Live after 2009 (Photo Taken in 2011)

The Sibe, as a small ethnic group in this political and social environment in Xinjiang, face a dilemma on whether to affiliate themselves with either of these two communities or keep a precarious distance between them. Whichever side it chooses to ally with, it would risk being eradicated either inwardly or outwardly, and the ethnic Han and Uyghur nationalisms would leave the Sibe no space in which to preserve their ethnic identity within the Chinese or non-Chinese dichotomy brought about by the Uyghur and Han ethnic boundary-making.

This social condition in Xinjiang produces profound crises of identity and ethnic anxiety for Sibe people. Living with such crises is painful, and they must be resolved. One way to accomplish this is through searching for an ethnic identity using ethnogenesis. However, ethnogenesis is not unregulated, but shaped by forces including the idea of *minzu tuanjie* (unity among the *minzu*), the discourse of racial *minzu*, and the discourse of the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu*.

It has been argued that the discourse of ethnicity has undergone a thorough and systematic reform in post-Mao Chinese society, in order to help protect China's political-territorial unity in an era of rising ethnic nationalisms in China (Baranovitch, 2003). Baranovich points out that the Han-centric narrative of "inter-

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ethnic struggle" and "invasion of foreign people" was replaced with a more inclusive historiography, one that centres on the natural and harmonious "ethnic fusion" of the various nationalities of China, with the conquering dynasties now rendered as examples of "national unification" or the "peaceful unification into a single family". This change is also reflected in the Sibe's self-led ethnogenesis in the social media. The following excerpt from the *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun* is one example.

> The Xianbei people live on the Nuo river, the left bank of the Chaoer River, and along the Taoer River. This part of the Xianbei evolved into the Sibe. The Sibe were first nomadic in the East Khingan Mountains, living around the "*gašan dunggu*" by hunting and fishing. After the sixteenth century, they were put into the Mongolian Eight Banners. Their social organisation underwent dramatic changes, into a stable agricultural economy. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Qing government, to consolidate the northwest border, moved some of the Sibe to Xinjiang, and then the Sibe in the Ili valley settlements established their second home. The Sibe have fought with Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities shoulder to shoulder against nationalist reactionaries and the shared history with other *minzu* in Xinjiang also make the Sibe *Xinjiang ren* [Xianjiang people] (U, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun,* 2015).

In the discussion of Sibe self-led ethnogenesis, I have concluded that Sibe employ two strategies to legitimise their self-led ethnogenesis. The first one is to use the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* to reinforce their *minzu* status. This strategy based on Stalin's definition makes connection with the culture of the northeast of China to promote a great potential for articulating Sibe identity on a larger scale. By promoting seemingly apolitical concepts of Sibe culture, and, at the same time, emphasising the concept of *Xinjiang Ren* to make a connection with the territory of Xinjiang and legitimise their status as an indigenous ethnic group, Sibe SNS users use elements from state-defined discourses of *minzu* on the importance of connection with the land. This depoliticises the Sibe's self-led ethnogenesis. The second strategy used by Sibe is to share micro-narratives of Sibe self-led ethnogenesis to depoliticise the term, *minzu*. The micro-narratives of Sibe self-led ethnogenesis on SNS are shaped by the Sibe *holbobun* network of reciprocal relationships among Sibe, which

draws people close to the notion of *minzu* that the Sibe SNS users promote. In this vein, micro-narratives of Sibe self-led ethnogenesis humanise the political term, *minzu*. Using the *holbobun* network is a discursive strategy that presents the Sibe in an interaction based on mutual recognition of the same identity.

In those two strategies, we can see Sibe SNS users tactically utilising the ambiguity of the term *minzu* to position themselves ambiguously between China and Xinjiang, with their use of racial *minzu* and the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu*. On the one hand, U states that the Sibe's origin is in the northeast of China. By referring to their ethnic origin in the northeast of China, the statement indicates the Sibe's connection with Chinese historiography. On the other hand, the statement also points out that the Sibe people migrated to Xinjiang and were influenced by local cultures; they have shared the common history with the Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities that fought against nationalist reactionaries. This shared history with other *minzu* in Xinjiang also makes the Sibe *Xinjiang Ren* (Xinjiang people). Here, the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* is used to prove the Sibe's connection with Xinjiang. Because the Stalin-derived definition is state-endorsed, using it to legitimise the Sibe's connection with the Uyghurs and Xinjiang is safe. The Sibe further creatively link the discourses of the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* and discourse of unity among the *minzu* for their own benefit. Although the Sibe were using the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* and discourse of racial *minzu,* they successfully transfer their original meanings into new meanings to support their claim about Sibe's ethnogenesis.

On the other hand, using both the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* and the racial *minzu* loosely creates a situation of slippage in the meaning of *minzu.* This causes the ambiguity in the Sibe position in the discourse of *minzu.* It is this ambiguity that leaves spaces for the Xinjiang Sibe to challenge the subordinate position of Sibe assigned in the previous discourses of *minzu.*

The writings of *Sibe* history in *Sibe* SNS *quns* are significantly influenced by the discourses of racial *minzu* and the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu.* The individual Sibe use any materials they can find to support their arguments. The situation of co-presence of authors and readers on SNS poses a great challenge to the hegemony of the previous single discourse. As we can see, the arguments in the

debates around Xianbei and Jurchen reflect this tendency. While both discourses appear on the same SNS platform, the interactive features of SNS open the previous configurations of knowledge and classifications of ethnic minorities in both of these two discourses to contestation and reformulation. The body of common knowledge based on the discussion of the Xianbei as the ancestors of the Sibe provides a platform for resistance toward the state's hegemony. As Litzinger (2000) suggests, the struggles in building the hegemony to reposition ethnic minorities in the Chinese nation will eventually 'open up spaces for imagining of alternative futures' (Litzinger, 2000, p. 259).

Because liminal states are so potentially powerful, everyone tries to use them by using the authority of the state, communal elders, and traditions. In my research, I have identified the liminality of Sibe ethnic identity being regulated by offline social contexts and also by the material conditions generated by the networked individualism of social media. R's case reflects how the social context regulates the ambiguity of *minzu* in Sibe identity.

R was born in Çabçal. He is a 38-year-old male IT professional. He received his education in the 1980s, when the policy on ethnic minorities was released and Sibe-language education was reintroduced in Sibe primary schools after the Cultural Revolution. After university, he began to work as an IT professional in Karamay. Karamay is city which produces jade, and many Han businesspeople come to this city in Xinjiang for the jade business, due to the Han enthusiasm for consuming jade in the form of ornaments. Given the demand generated by Sibe people's quest for developing the Sibe language in communities in Xinjiang, the Sibe cultural and language association was established in Karamay in 2003 (R, personal communication, Aug. 2, 2015). R was elected as one of fifteen committee members in the association. He lost his IT job in Karamay in 2013, as it became more competitive, with a lot of Han migrants coming to Karamay (R, personal communication, Aug. 2, 2015). He decided to go back to his hometown, Çabçal. Initially, he wanted to continue to work in the IT industry in Çabçal. However, after several months' job-hunting, he decided to change his career into other fields, as he could not find any job vacancies in the IT industry in Çabçal. He told me that as the demand for jade from inner China was increasing, he decided to work as an

entreprenur in the jade business. He told me that he wants to use jade as a carrier to promote Sibe culture. As he put it, 'The development of Sibe culture needs a carrier. I take the jade as a form of carrier for developing Sibe culture' (R, personal communication, Aug. 2, 2015). R set up the *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre* in 2013 in Çabçal. Given that his business initiative is to combine Sibe culture and jade together, he told me that he engraved Sibe scripts on jade. This is very similar to Han seals. This seal is very popular among Manchu and Han Chinese tourists, R told me (R, personal communication, Aug. 2, 2015).

Figure 19. *Sebsihiyan amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre*'s Jade Business

R explained to me that the decline of Sibe language is due to there not being sustainable development for it, which he further explained:

I think if we want to develop our Sibe culture, we have to use the market to bring about Sibe cultural development. You cannot be dependent on our government's help. If we bring our Sibe culture into the market, it will be much better for our Sibe culture's development. Therefore, in my business, what I do is promote Sibe culture, to be loved by as many people as possible, and, by bringing the Sibe culture into the market, we can use the profit we earn in the business to further invest in Sibe language and culture development. For example, using the money we earn from the jade business, we hosted a spoken Sibe language competition last year; it attracted many

Sibe people to participate, and this is the sustainable way to develop our Sibe language and culture (personal communication, Aug. 15, 2015).

Figure 20. The Hotel in which I Lived in Urumqi was Next to a Jade Trading Centre for Han Chinese Buyers, 2011

The Xinjiang Sibe have been situated between the Han and Uyghurs. I argue that the Xinjiang Sibe deliberately position themselves ambiguously between the northeast of China and Xinjiang with their use of both racial *minzu* and the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* to support their claim. However, the northeast Sibe actively participated in developing their ambiguous identities into a fixed, single ethnic identity. In contrast to the northeast Sibe, the Xinjiang Sibe tactically use the ambiguity of *minzu* for repackaging their ethnicity to suit the changing political and cultural environment in China.

It is also the material conditions of networked individualism, facilitated by the use of social media, that supports this new identity: the inter-mixing of information and communication challenges the process of hailing and *minzu* subject-formation. Reading in the SNS environment, which is based on a feedback process between institutional information and interpersonal information, is different from the original two-step flow of information in the offline environment, in which people receive information from the mass media and then discuss it with friends and

families. My research has shown that Sibe often obtain information first from friends and family via SNS, and then go back to the SNS to check and amplify it. They prefer SNS, because it has the best searching functions over other platforms. Instead of a two-step flow, there is a multi-step process, with people checking back and forth with their social networks and institutional sources and the social media. The Sibe SNS users also often discuss those articles in person with their fellow network members, whom they discover online. Hence, the offline discussion and online discussion form a continuous cycle between institutional information and their *holbobun* networks for finding and assessing information.

This sort of cyclical behaviour of interweaving institutional information with interpersonal information means that Sibe SNS users exploit the network information available to them according to their assessment of what is most beneficial and efficient for their needs. They use some different media and human sources to collect and verify information. The connection between a cluster of friends, websites, social media, books, and other print media produces the information that the Sibe are collecting. Therefore, I argue that the Sibe self-led ethnogenesis is the result of interaction between the *holbobun* networks*, minzu,* the networks of Sibe in Xinjiang, and the networks of Sibe in the northeast of China.

Figure 21. *Sebsihiyan amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre* Translates Japanese animation

Figure 22. *Sebsihiyan amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre* Helps Businesses to Design Logos in the Sibe Language

In R's *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre*, R works in the jade business and translates Japanese anime into the Sibe language. In this way, *minzu* is represented not by the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* but, more importantly, as a resource that can produce an economic return for Sibe individuals and whole communities. Indeed, to commercialise Sibe culture presents it as popular culture and not as an ancient and dying culture needing government help to survive. By referring to the concept of the Sibe hyphenated with Manchu, the *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre* addresses the Sibe and Manchu audience as a whole and promotes an idea that they believe, which is that the Sibe and Manchu are the same *minzu*. This reduces the geographical and moral distance between the Xinjiang Sibe, northeast Sibe, and Manchu, making it easier for all Sibe and Manchu to relate to *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre* and increasing the likelihood that they will identify with Sibe culture and language and start to visit their WeChat public account more often. Hence, we can understand why R promotes the idea that the Jurchens are the ancestors of Sibe. Promoting the Jurchens as the Sibe's ancestors can bring out the connection with the Manchus. However, it also nurtures more

politicised reactions, for, by mobilising a link with the Manchu it can also open a space to challenge the validity of the officially used Stalin-derived definition of *minzu.*

Conclusion

My analysis of Sibe self-led ethnogenesis in this chapter has identified two strategies of contestation used by Sibe to challenge the state's hegemony over *minzu.* The first one is to use the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* to reinforce their *minzu* status, making the connection with the culture of the northeast of China to promote a great potential for articulating Sibe identity on a larger scale. The second strategy used by Sibe is to share micro-narratives of Sibe self-led ethnogenesis to depoliticise the term, *minzu.* Sibe SNS users articulate alternative discourses of *minzu* that constitute subtle forms of social criticism. These alternative discourses contest the hegemony of official discourses of *minzu* by rearticulating elements from the official discourse in new ways, thus destabilising current systems of the meaning of *minzu.* Moreover, Sibe employ specific strategies to (de)politicise and legitimise the discourses they articulate. In particular, they blend racial *minzu* and the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* by articulating polyphonic discourses. These polyphonic discourses legitimise Sibe self-led ethnogenesis.

Through the analysis of Sibe self-led ethnogenesis in this chapter, I argue that searching and discovery of information are more connected with the idea and practice of the network, as I have demonstrated in Sibe self-led ethnogenesis on the SNS platforms. The hyperlinked information makes the knowledge of Sibe history challenge the authority of a previous single narrative of Sibe history. It challenges the control of meaning in the text; resistant reading is networked with similarly minded people. The new social operating systems of WeChat, QQ, Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs, and Baidu Tieba have provided people with network structures. The process of creating, collecting, assessing, and distributing information is increasingly becoming networked through social processes.

Chapter Five
Online Picture-sharing Practice Challenges the State's Disciplinary Control of the Meanings of Westward Migration

Introduction

This chapter examines how ICT facilitates the construction of a new Sibe identity and provides agency for Sibe people in their identity construction. It places particular emphasis on how the Sibe in the northeast of China and Xinjiang are each using Social Networking Sites (SNS) to reconstruct a Sibe identity suited to the demands and concerns of their particular local circumstances. I argue that the new technologies of SNS have altered how ethnic identities are constructed. The practice of taking and posting pictures also plays a role in re-constructing the Sibe identity. I argue that the co-presence of communication and information in knowledge production in the digital environment challenges the disciplinary power of historical knowledge that is controlled by the state. The meaning of *minzu* is articulated by different people for their own individual purposes. Based on my observation of Sibe picture-sharing practices on Sibe SNS, QQ *qun*, WeChat *qun*, Sina Weibo, and Baidu Tieba, I found that the meanings of *minzu* are influenced by the information that is communicated through the social networks organised around the idea of *holbobun*. The idea of *holbobun* interacts with the idea of SNS *quns*: the social network constructed by using the idea of *holbobun* is largely facilitated by SNS *quns*, and the *holbobun* social network, in turn, further develops SNS *quns*, as the formation of SNS *quns* is the result of the relational shift of the *holbobun* social network. At the same time, the technological shift of SNS *quns* further constitutes and promotes a relational shift in the social network of *holbobun*. Informed by Foucault's argument on technology within his concept of governmentality, which associates technology with a codified body of knowledge, or ideological structures embedded in material, and cognitive settings that shape how the technology is constructed (Foucault, 1972), in this chapter I analyse how the idea of *holbobun* has interacted with the use of SNSs in Sibe picture sharing practices in relation to the Westward Migration.

In this chapter, I first introduce how Westward Migration Culture was invented out of patriotism after the 1980s, and then I analyse how the state managed to use its centralised communication system to shape the Sibe Folklore Museum,

with its patriotic discourse on the Sibe's Westward Migration history. After analysing the communication system that the Chinese state adopts in the Sibe Folklore Museum, I analyse how individual Sibe engage in constructing the meanings of the Westward Migration through their uses of SNS. These individuals are respondent G2 and their experience managing a Sibe SNS as an organiser of social events in Beijing; respondent G5's re-taking of the Westward Migration road to Çabçal; A3's re-tracing of the Westward Migration road as a pilgrim to the Sibe Home Temple; H1's sharing of pictures in a quest for a sense of community; and F2's picture-sharing project for Sibe academic websites. I analyse how the idea of *holbobun* has interacted with the use of SNS in Sibe picture-sharing practices in relation to the Westward Migration.

Based on the results of my analysis, I argue that Sibe people shooting pictures for sharing on the SNS platform WeChat has changed the representation of the Sibe. These picture-searching, picture-taking, and picture-posting practices play a role in re-constructing the Sibe identity. Sibe people also learn about Sibe culture from the sharing of pictures of and by Sibe people. Here I argue that, with resources from the "space of flow" facilitated by the use of SNS, Sibe identity is repackaged for the sharing of pictures on the SNS. The development of these new uses of SNS have given Sibe users the opportunity to produce new narratives of ethnic identity, which, in turn, has led the Sibe as an ethnic minority to discover an agency they can deploy to perform their cultural practices and to "imagine" themselves in new ways.

In the analysis of Sibe people's online picture-sharing practices in relation to the Westward Migration in this chapter, I conclude that there are three different types of Sibe who are actively articulating Sibe ethnic identity through the practice of picture-sharing about the Westward Migration. The first type is Sibe who are working in metropolitan cities and are originally from Xinjiang; they use the Sibe SNS *quns* and the Westward Migration festival as sites for social gathering. The second type is Sibe who are working in metropolitan cities and are originally from the northeast of China; they mainly use the Westward Migration festival and SNS *quns* as sites for searching for alternative self-identities. The third type is Sibe who live in Çabçal, Dalian, and Shenyang; they use the Westward Migration festival and SNS *quns* to compensate for the fear of the changes in their local community brought

about by the urbanisation and economic change taking place in their areas. Therefore, I analyse the respective reasons for those Sibe people to articulate their ethnic identity in the following section. However, before analysing each individual type of Sibe's reasons, it is necessary to critically review the historical context of the invention of Westward Migration Culture.

Duin Biya Juwan Jakūn literally means "the 18th Day of the 4th Month in the lunar calendar" in the Sibe language. The 18th day of the 4th Month in the lunar calendar was a temple fair day in the northeast of China during the Qing dynasty. Since Buddhism was promoted by Qing rulers, there were many festivals related to Buddhism. The 8th, 18th, and 28th of the 4th lunar month were set for temple fairs to take place, to promote Buddhism in China. The temple fair normally combines religious ritual celebration and markets (Na, 2010, p. 283).

Duin Biya Juwan Jakūn is often written as "*Duin Biya Juwan Jakvn*" by Sibe SNS users in their online communication, as the letter, "ū", cannot easily be typed with the current input method on their computers and phones. They use letter "v" to replace "ū" in their adaptation of Romanised, transliterated Sibe. For detailed discussion on Sibe SNS users' adaptation of Romanised transliterated Sibe in the CMC environment, see Chapter 6.

When the Sibe received the order from Emperor Qianlong to make the expedition to Xinjiang, they chose *Duin Biya Juwan Jakūn* to mark their departure (Tongjia, 2004, p. 148). After the Sibe were garrisoned in Xinjiang, every year, at the temple fair on the 18th of April, each *niru* in Xinjiang held a religious ritual organised by their *uheri da* to memorialise this departure day and their hometown in the temple of each *niru* (Tongjia, 2004, p. 148). A *niru* is a military banner company (Norman and Dede, 2013, p. 287). *Uheri da* is the commander of a Sibe military banner company. On that day, along with the religious ritual, the temple fair was also promoted; a series of activities ranging from archery and wrestling to opera performance also normally took place. On this day, Sibe people today also like to go to the riverside for a picnic, as a way of memorialising their life back in their hometown in the northeast of China. These activities were held up until the late 1950s, in the years before the Cultural Revolution (He & Tong, 1993, p. 96).

After the communisation movement of the late 1950s, the festival was not celebrated for some years. The official celebration of the *Duin Biya Juwan Jakūn* has been revived since the 1980s, organised by the Çabçal Cultural Bureau (Harris, 2004, p. 118). During this period, the name of the *Duin Biya Juwan Jakūn* was changed to the Westward Migration Festival by the Çabçal Cultural Bureau to memorialise the historical event of the Westward Migration to defend the borderland in 1764 and to use this day to educate the Sibe people in patriotism (Tongjia, 2004, p. 148). Since then, the *Duin Biya Juwan Jakūn* has been organised by the Çabçal local government under the name of the Westward Migration Festival every year. It is normally held by the local government in the form of stage performances. Influenced by the Westward Migration Festival held in Çabçal, Sibe communities in the northeast of China also started to celebrate the Westward Migration Festival to "enhance their *minzu* cohesion" after the 1980s. (Na, 2010, p. 433)

The Westward Migration Festival was recognised as National Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006 (Tongjia, 2004, p. 151). In 2007, the Chinese State Central Propaganda Department, the Chinese State Central Civilisation Office, the Ministry of Culture of China, the Ministry of Education of China, and the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China together announced the *Opinions on the Use of Traditional Festivals to Promote the Fine Traditions of National Culture* (Tongjia, 2004, p. 151). Under the influence of the "Opinions", the Çabçal Cultural Bureau organised specialists to (re)discover a series of cultural elements of the Westward Migration. They include: the literature on garrison life and the history of the Westward Migration; the stories of the Westward Migration; the narrative poems, "Song of the Westward Migration", "Song of Leaving Home", and "Song of *Suhûwa*"; Shaman religious practices; Sibe traditional storytelling, or *julen holem*; the *Beilen* dance; and traditional clothes (Tongjia, 2004, p. 150). *Julen holem*[10] is a form of Sibe traditional storytelling, where the storytelling is conducted through

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[10] For details of *juelen holem*, see Harris's *Singing the Village: Music, Memory and Ritual among the Sibe of Xinjiang* (Harris, 2004, pp. 57–60). For video example, please see, Manchublog (2006), Manju xu wen kvwaran (2013), and Chabucha'era 察布查尔 a (n.d.b).

singing. (Harris, 2004, p.57-60). *Beilen* dance[11] is a set of Sibe traditional dances, closely related to Mongol dance cycle. (Harris, 2004, pp. 57–60). In this vein, Westward Migration Culture was produced to show Sibe people's patriotic sense of belonging. The Çabçal Tourism Bureau and the Çabçal Cultural Bureau also worked together to build the Sibe Folklore Museum in 2009, further develop the Westward Migration Festival, and ensure cultural elements of the Westward Migration were reflected in the Sibe Folklore Museum and the Westward Migration Festival (Tongjia, 2004, p. 152).

To understand the influence of the "Opinions" on the (re)construction of the meaning of the Westward Migration, it is necessary to analyse the "Opinions" from Chinese Central State Government. They state:

> *Minzu* traditional festivals are important part of the fine traditional culture of the Chinese *minzu*, which embodies the spirit of the Chinese nation. To understand the importance of cultivating socialist core values and strengthening the attraction and cohesion of Socialist Culture, we should fully understand the *minzu* traditional festivals to carry forward patriotism as the core of the *minzu* spirit. We should deeply explore the *minzu* traditional festivals, fully demonstrate and inherit the fine tradition of the Chinese *minzu* [*Zhonghua Minzu*]. We should put *minzu* traditional festivals, as an important part of traditional culture, into the development of *minzu* education and spiritual civilization, making it an excellent platform for the display of *minzu* traditional culture. (Tongjia, 2004, p. 151)

It has been argued that the ethnicity of the ethnic minorities has been politicised by the party-state as one of their ideological apparatuses. The notion of ethnicity is tightly controlled by the state, with their management of the concept of *minzu* as a tool (Mullaney, 2011, p. 123) for "interpellation" or "hailing" (Althusser, 1971) for ethnic minority subject formation (Litzinger, 1999, p.154; Schein, 2000, p. 73). In the central government's aforementioned "Opinions", we can see the slipperiness of meanings in the use of the term, *minzu*. The state uses the same

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[11] For details on the *Beilen* dance, see Harris (2004). For video examples, please see: Chabuchaera 察布查尔 a (n.d.a).

strategy that I have shown in the previous chapter on *minzu*, which is to use the context of the sentence to implicitly point out the meaning of *minzu*, and, as the power of explanation is held by the state, the ethnic minority subject has to obey what is the state-assigned meaning of *minzu*. The state uses this power to guarantee their panoptic control of the meaning of *minzu*. To be more precise, in the above statement, *minzu* could mean "ethnic minority" or "Chinese nation". Ethnic minorities cannot locate the exact meaning of *minzu* until they receive instruction from the state. For instance, the first *minzu* in "*minzu* traditional festival" could be read as "ethnic minority" or as "Chinese national traditional festivals", and the second *minzu*, in "an important part of the fine traditional culture of the Chinese *minzu*", could also be read as ethnic minorities or as the Chinese nation. Therefore, the sentence can result in multiple meanings, based on the interpretation of *minzu*. However, the state controls who has the authority to interpret *minzu*, while an ethnic minority does not have agency within the centralised communication system channelled by the current bureaucracy. Therefore, the meaning of the sentence is controlled by the state to read: "Ethnic minority traditional festivals are an important part of the fine traditional culture of the Chinese nation". Any voice of the ethnic minorities challenging this assigned meaning of *minzu* cannot be included in this centrally controlled communication system. In other words, the discourse of *minzu* has been grounded by the state's control of historical information via state's control of technological mechanisms, such as media, and through social institutions, such as the schools, universities and museums. As a result, the individual has ceased to have access to and control over historical information. It is in this context that the state maintains its hegemony on the discourse of *minzu* in physical public spaces. However, in the communication environment of SNS, where the information on *minzu* has been digitised, and the material environment, in which the discourse of *minzu* has been circulated by the ICT "space of flow", the meaning of *minzu* is no longer regulated according to the logic detailed above. The "space of flow" is a new spatial arrangement, facilitated by the use of ICT, in which spatial proximity and the performance of everyday life-functions can be disassociated (Castells, 2010, p. 424). In the material condition constructed by the "space of flow", the meaning of *minzu* is not confined by the mode of centralised communication used in the Sibe Folklore

Museum, but is shaped by the "space of flow" logic in communication using SNS. In this "space of flow" material condition, the meaning of *minzu* is constructed through a manner of co-presence of information and communication, as in the SNS environment, where the text is digitised and the search for information spontaneously interacts with communication in relation to this information (Rainie & Wellman, 2014, p. 224). Based on my observation of Sibe picture-sharing practices on SNS, Sibe QQ *qun*, WeChat *qun*, Sina Weibo, and Baidu Tieba, I found that the meanings of *minzu* are influenced by the information that is communicated through the social networks organised around the idea of *holbobun*. The idea of *holbobun* interacts with the network of SNS *qun*: the social network of *holbobun* is largely facilitated by the using of SNS *qun*, at the same time, the social network facilitated around the idea of *holbobun* influences the formation of SNS *qun*. On the other hand, the technological shift to organising social networks with the use of SNS *quns* further constitutes and promotes a relational shift in *holbobun*. To undertand the interaction between *holbobun* and SNS *qun*, I will use Foucault's concept of governmentality (Foucault, 1977), to examine what the influence of discourse of *minzu* on the formation of Sibe SNS qun is, how the SNS qun accommodate the idea of *holbobun*, and how the idea of *minzu* is used to construct a *holbobun* network in Sibe picture-sharing practices in relation to the Westward Migration.

Sibe Folklore Museum

Figure 23. Front Door of the Sibe Folklore Museum, 2011

Harris's ethnography on the Sibe music practice in Çabçal shows that the Sibe in Çabçal, as a migrant people, locate their cultural, traditional ties in their home in the northeast of China in order to construct their cultural uniqueness in the multicultural environment of Xinjiang, and hence they actively use the state's idea of *minzu* to modify their cultural tradition (Harris, 2004, pp. 55–56). This insight is also reflected in the display on the Westward Migration in the Sibe Folklore Museum. On my field trip to the Sibe Folklore Museum in 2011, I found that the Sibe Folklore Museum has engaged in two projects in the display on the Westward Migration: one is to present who they are through colluding with the state's Stalin-inspired definition of *minzu*; the other is to construct an imagined blood kinship between the Sibe in the northeast of China and in Xinjiang, as I will show in the analysis of the display on the Westward Migration in the Sibe Folklore Museum. As I was informed by the tour guide at the Sibe Folklore Museum, the museum aims to represent the Sibe's *minzu* spirit, which is a spirit of patriotism.

Figure 24. The Stone-Inscribed Introduction to the Museum in the Sibe
Folklore Museum, 2011

Figure 25. The Video Display and Physical Display of a Traditional Sibe
Household in the Sibe Folklore Museum

Figure 26. An Instructor Introduces the Xianbei as Ancestors

Figure 27. The Gašan Dunggu was Introduced as Sibe's Origin

The display of indoor furniture is guided by Marxist historiography, in which the history of the Sibe is narrated as linear progress. While Figure 25 illustrates a historical moment in Sibe history, the video above the house display explains how the Sibe evolved from a feudal society to a new, socialist stage. The introduction on Sibe history in the video is divided into three consecutive sections. The first introduced Sibe society's primitive stage. In this section, the video in the museum discusses at length how Gašan Dunggu was identified as the place from which the Sibe originated. In the second section, the video introduces what Sibe society looked like under feudalism. In this section, there are many images of Qing soldiers, and the

narrative is focused on how Sibe people joined the Manchu with their military banner system, and the Sibe people's contribution in defending the borderland of the country is the focus. The whole video is sixty minutes long, and the narrative on the Sibe's military contribution during the Qing dynasty and the Westward Migration takes up almost 30 minutes. The last section is focused on the achievements that the Sibe people made after the 1950s, during the socialist period.

Customs and artefacts are all referenced in the state-endorsed history. The museum is one of those institutions holding "symbolic power", acting as an important place for the accumulation of information, and financial resources, and for shaping the ways in which information and symbolic content are produced and circulated in society (Thompson, 1995). Harold Innis (1951) would describe such an institution as a "monopoly of knowledge", a centralised structure of power, situated in an imposing museum, controlling the preservation of the historical knowledge and identity of the dominant culture and also of world knowledge, seen through the lens of the dominant culture. It has been pointed out that museums have been manipulated by the state as a means by which nationalism is reinforced, and the nation is selectively remembered and narrated (Anderson, 1993, p. 168).

This reading of the museum was also reflected in the display on the Sibe's Westward Migration in the Sibe Folklore Museum. My pictures below on the Sibe ethnic culture and customs in the museum show how the display of colourful ethnic Sibe costumes is accompanied by little attempt to set these costumes in any meaningful historical context. The depiction of ethnic customs and cultures as essentially static and unchanging denies the Sibe the status of historical agents and portrays them instead as historical raw material to be shaped and moulded for their own benefit by the "advanced" Han.

Figure 28. Sibe *Minzu* Clothes in Sibe Folklore Museum

In the video introduction to Sibe history during the Qing dynasty, the actors in the video dress up in costumes exactly like those that I could find in Qing court historical dramas as I have demonstrated in Figure 29, in the following section. This use of the popular image of the Qing dynasty creates a sense of connection between Sibe and Manchu, as the Manchu are recognised as representative of the Qing dynasty. The effect of this display is to offer a space for imagining common blood kinship between Sibe and Manchu. This is contradicted by Sibe elites' efforts at constructing a separate Sibe identity distinct from Manchu, as I have discussed in the preceding chapter on Sibe self-ethnogenesis. However, the strategy of situating Sibe culture in the home of the northeast is the same as the Sibe attempt at constructing the uniqueness of Sibe *minzu* identity, adopted by the Sibe elite, and discussed by Harris in her analysis of Sibe music practice (Harris, 2004, pp. 55–56). The reason for largely referencing the image of the Qing dynasty from popular TV drama may be due to the ownership of the Sibe Folklore Museum. As I introduced at the beginning of this section, it was built by both the Çabçal Tourism Bureau and the Çabçal Cultural Bureau. It seems that fragments of historical memory have been meticulously selected and pieced together to cater to exotic tourist tastes. However, that image is also composed with themes that connect with northeast China.

Figure 29. Picture of the Video on Westward Migration used by Sibe Folklore Museum, 2011

Figure 30. Picture-taking Practices in the Sibe Folklore Museum in Çabçal, 2011

The Sibe Folklore Museum trumpets the benefits bestowed on the region by China — both in the present and in the distant past. For example, the Sibe Folklore Museum finds that the history of the Westward Migration manifests mutual benefit and harmony between the national centre and the Far West in the present day. To strengthen the management of the western regions, the Qing dynasty garrisoned Sibe troops there, opened up wasteland, and grew food in Çabçal on a large scale, bringing about advanced production techniques, and promoting the economic development of the Çabçal area. As I was informed by the instructor from the Sibe Folklore Museum, it was Tubet who led the Sibe people to garrison the land of Çabçal. I also found the story of Tubet at the Tubet statue in front of the Museum.

The instructor told me that, initially, the order from the Qianlong Emperor was that the Sibe people should stay in Xinjiang for sixty years and then they could go home to the northeast of China. Tubet was the military commander of Sibe troops in Xinjiang. He decided to open a canal, as he believed he needed to make this land like home while the Sibe people stayed there. The opening of a canal transformed the desert land into a harvest land. And to name this land as "Çabçal" is to memorialise Tubet's contribution to the Sibe people as I was informed by the instructor.

The display of this history largely uses the elements of patriotism extracted from the cultural (re)production of the history of the Westward Migration. These elements focus on the hardship of the Westward Migration, the bravery of the Sibe people in defending the borderland, and the hardships encountered in creating their second home in Xinjiang.

Figure 31. The Display of the Location of Sibe Military Garrisons in Xinjiang and the Çabçal Canal which was built by Sibe

When I stepped into the Sibe Folklore Museum, in the entrance, there is a big display on the Sibe's Westward Migration journey. This display depicts how Sibe soldiers marched toward Çabçal in Xinjiang and developed the land from desert into farmland. There are no pictures of the northeast of China in the display.

Figure 32. The Oil Painting Memorialising the Event of the Westward Migration, Captioned in Chinese Characters and Sibe Language as "Great Westward Migration, the 29th Year of Qianlong's Reign (1764 A.D.)"

Many tall Sibe soldiers in the painting are dressed like Manchu soldiers from Qing historical dramas. However, the figure of each Sibe individual is so small that I cannot see their faces. I can see that there are two stories in this oil painting. The first is the Sibe march on the road of the Westward Migration towards Çabçal. The second story, from what I can see of the soldiers displayed in the paining as working on the canal and the agricultural land, is of the Sibe people's contribution to turn this borderland into a habitable granary.

Based on analysis that I conducted of the displays in the Sibe Folklore Museum on Tubet and the opening of the canal, and the contribution of the Sibe in garrisoning the border, I conclude that presenting the history of the Westward Migration was chosen to confirm the patriotism of the Sibe contribution towards the protection of the Chinese nation's borderland. Indeed, this Museum was labelled as a base for patriotism education, as is shown in Figure 33.

Figure 33. Sibe Folklore Museum is Labelled as "A Base for Patriotic Education", 2011

Figure 34. Tubet Is the Leader Who Led the Sibe to Build Çabçal Canal, 2011, at the Sibe Folklore Museum

Çabçal has recently been named "The Land of Archery" to attract tourists. Advertisements concerning it can easily be found on numerous outdoor media in Urumqi, such as billboards and taxis.

Archery is accepted as one of the symbols of the Sibe people. Sibe archers occupy a certain proportion of China's squad at every Olympics, such as Haifeng Xue at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

In this section, I have shown that the Sibe Folklore Museum uses the display on the Westward Migration to deliver two projects. The first is to present Sibe identity as a *minzu* identity by colluding with the state's Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* and using varied resources borrowed from the state-endorsed narrative of Sibe history. The second is to construct an imagined blood kinship between Sibe in the northeast of China and in Xinjiang largely by employing the images of shared cultural practices. A Sibe identity that is situated within the traditions of north-eastern China has thus been constructed with the selection and omission of elements of Sibe culture in the museum. This construction of Sibe identity is constructed with the help of the centralised communication system of the museum, including the videos and books on display in the museum. Those media help Sibe elites from Çabçal who associate with the Chinese state to construct a Sibe identity that suits their agenda in Xinjiang. However, what happens to Sibe identity in the digital environment, where communication and information interact with each other? In the following section, I discuss how Sibe identity is articulated by different Sibe in their use of SNS.

Picture-Sharing Practices on SNSs

In this section, I analyse the discourse of the Westward Migration in relation to how individual Sibe use SNS and how their understanding of the Westward Migration in relation to Sibe identity influences how they present the Westward Migration Festival. I examine how the internet shapes the discourse of the new Sibe ethnic identity. The old discourse of the Westward Migration Festival uses the stage and history books to make this festival more like a show for the state's *minzu* policy. But the internet allows Sibe people to upload pictures and interact with each other. This makes the Westward Migration Festival more reflective of their individual voices on what this festival is about, which is community-building. There are large amounts of pictures being shared on the journey Sibe people made as their pilgrimage to their "roots" and "home". Through identification with online images,

the Sibe individual can find his or her position in the discourse of *Zhonghua Minzu*. Through controlling the image of elsewhere in cyberspace, the Sibe can control their cultural space "here" and "now", in their individual life context.

With photo-sharing systems on WeChat, a new regime for shaping views has emerged: "sharing pictures" means that the site mediates the construction and interpretation of connective knowledge. Collecting and connecting data are equally important functions. Based on my virtual ethnography on Sibe SNSs from 2009 to 2015, I observe that thousands of Sibe deliberately upload pictures to SNS and link up with others, feeding the network culture that influences the interpretation of the Westward Migration and articulating the meaning of Sibe identity through the Westward Migration.

It has been reported that SNS are not just neutral information systems, as the materiality of SNS also influences how pictures can be shared and even interpreted in certain patterns (Papacharissi, 2011, p. 26). In the case of G2, I will discuss how networking culture brought about by the SNS promotes the picture-sharing practice and how G2 adopted this networking culture to suit the purpose of his SNS *qun*. G2 established a Sibe SNS *qun* called Beijing Sibe WeChat *qun*. It has been a very successful SNS *qun* for organising social events in Beijing. It also functions as one of the most important social networks for Sibe working professionals in Beijing. I have been informed by my interviewee H1 that, 'if you go to Beijing, you have to contact G2 from Beijing Sibe WeChat, it is our Sibe home in Beijing'.

WeChat *quns* are normally semi-public, as one needs to receive an invitation to join the *qun* and every *qun* is a chatroom for talking with members. *Quns* offer space for many-to-many contacts, and almost half of all Sibe WeChat users participate in multiple *quns*, based on the finding from my virtual ethnography on Sibe SNS *quns* from 2009 to 2015. A *qun*'s initiator automatically becomes the host and administrator for this *qun*. G2 works for Sina, which is the provider of one of the largest SNS — Sina Weibo — in China. He was born in Çabçal and went to Beijing to study at one of the most prestigious universities in China in his early 20s. After graduating in Computer Science, he chose to work in Beijing, as he told me that 'here we have more opportunities than in Xinjiang'. I have been informed by observers that the east and west social schisms in China have increased along with

economic development; their perception is supported by research that per capita GDP in Western China is less than half of what it is in Eastern China (Yang, 2012, p. 20; Zhao, 2004, p. 35). This result no doubt can explain why people from the western region in China seek work in the eastern cities.

G2 told me that there are many Sibe people going to Beijing for work. The Westward Migration Festival is the most important occasion for gathering Sibe people together, and Sibe people can use this festival as an opportunity to get to know each other. As G2 works professionally at an SNS provider, G2 wanted to create an SNS to allow all the Sibe in Beijing get to know each other. He told me that: 'An SNS can give all Sibe people a platform for connection and even for work purposes, and it could also connect them with friends and families back home in Çabçal'. (G2, personal communication, June 2, 2015)

The Westward Migration Festival is used by a lot of Sibe who live and work outside their hometown of Çabçal or the northeast of China as an opportunity to connect with fellow Sibe people in new cities and maintain links with their hometowns. Therefore, the main purpose of setting up the SNS *qun* is to organise social events to expand their social network. Before WeChat became popular in China in 2014, G2 had already established a QQ *qun* for social gatherings for Sibe working professionals in Beijing. He also established a website, with BBS function, in 2004. A BBS is a bulletin board system that works as a forum where Sibe can share or exchange messages with each other. He told me that the website was good for uploading articles, however, it lacked interactive features. While there was a BBS forum within his website, there was not so much interaction on the forum. He also has a Sina Weibo account, but he told me that Sina Weibo has a similar problem with lack of interaction. This contradicted my assumption concerning Sina Weibo, as I thought Sina Weibo, as a platform for Web 2.0 SNS, should encourage interaction between users. I asked him to clarify this. He told me that, although Sina Weibo has the function of following other people's posts, as with the "@" button in Twitter, the open nature of Sina Weibo means that people's posts are exposed to the public. Therefore, many people do not like to talk in Sina Weibo. He told me that 'people just go to Sina Weibo to search for information rather that for socialising'. Hence, neither BBS nor Sina Weibo suit G2's need in building a social network and

generating "meaningful" social interaction offline. I asked him what his experience was with QQ, and he responded:

> QQ is much better than BBS and Sina Weibo in terms of gathering people for a group. However, QQ didn't have an optimised UI for smartphones back in 2013. As most Sibe like taking pictures at their social gatherings, the QQ gave people really poor UX when we used QQ for sharing pictures via smartphone. (G2, personal communication, June 2, 2015)

UI (User Interface) is the design of the interaction platform between human and machines or software. UX (User Experience) here means the experience of the users of QQ via smartphones, in terms of how easily it can be used. What G2 means, in choosing WeChat over QQ for building his social network in Beijing, is that WeChat is easy to use for taking pictures with smartphones, which is crucial when organising Sibe social gatherings, in G2's experience.

G2 likes to use many technical acronyms in his conversation. Perhaps this is because he was a Computer Science major. His experience on working at an SNS provider gives him sensitivity to the nuanced differences in using different SNS platforms for organising a *qun*. As an ethnic Sibe, G2 understands how his fellow Sibe's behaviour when developing their *holbobun* relationships. He told me that taking pictures with each other is a gesture of bonding between Sibe. Hence, they like to upload those pictures onto SNS and share them with their friends to demonstrate that social bonding: 'It is this picture-taking-friendly function of WeChat that made me decide continue to use WeChat when organising my social network group in Beijing'.

From the conversation with G2, we can see how the technology of SNS meets the needs of Sibe people's *holbobun* development. As I have discussed in the preceding section, the social network of Sibe people, which is formed in relation with the construction of the *holbobun* network, is largely shaped by use of SNS *quns*. At the same time, the network organised around the idea of *holbobun* further develops the social network of SNS *quns*. As the technological shift resulting from the adoption of SNS *quns* further constitutes and promotes a relational shift in the *holbobun* social network.

G2 told me that, 'The Sibe language and Westward Migration Festival are the most important elements of Sibe culture and it is through these two elements that all Sibe people in Beijing come together'. (G2, personal communication, June 2, 2015) The Sibe language functions as a symbolic power bringing Sibe in Beijing together. Although, as far as I know from my contact with some Sibe from Beijing WeChat *qun*, most of them cannot speak the Sibe language, but they use some Sibe in their online communication as a gesture to express their Sibe identity. Based on my virtual ethnography, the Westward Migration Festival supplies an online and also a physical platform for Sibe people to meet each other, and from there they develop their own *holbobun* network.

In the following section, I analyse how the deterritorialized Sibe identity among those Sibe working professionals in Beijing and the picture-sharing practice compensate for their sense of rootlessness and how they negotiate within the Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) environment and reterritorialize their identity to fit the SNS network.

The following quote is from a conversation with G2. I asked him why ethnic identity is an issue in his life in Beijing. He responded:

> Every time I tell my colleagues that I come from Xinjiang, they are so surprised. They tell me that I don't looks like someone from Xinjiang [*Xinjiang Ren*]. I ask them, what do you think someone from Xinjiang should look like? They point out the news of a terrorist attack in Xinjiang in the newspaper and to a Uyghur wearing a decorative brocade hat and smile at me. (G2, personal communication, June 2, 2015)

G2 told me that one of the problems he encounters in Beijing is his *Xinjiang Ren* identity and his Sibe identity. He told me that,

> No one has heard of Sibe in Beijing, and everyone thinks Xinjiang only consists of the Han and Uyghur, and terrorist attacks. I don't want to make friends with those narrow-minded people. That is another important reason why I set up Beijing Sibe *qun*. (G2, personal communication, June 2, 2015)

From the above conversation with G2, we can see that G2, as a Sibe in Beijing, wants to find his location in the discourse of *Xinjiang Ren*, but outside the

dichotomous framework based on Uyghur and Han. There is no space for Sibe in the new either/or discourse of *Xinjiang Ren* after 5th July ethnic conflicts in Xinjiang in 2009, as *Xinjiang Ren* is the discourse promoted by state media, as part of ethnic tension between Uyghur and Han, via an "other" versus "us" dichotomy (Cliff, 2016). In this either/or discourse of *Xinjiang Ren*, Sibe could not find their own position as non-Muslim and non-Han ethnic.

In the state-promoted *Xinjiang Ren* discourse, via the concept of *minzu* in contemporary Xinjiang, on the one hand, to promote ethnic unity in Xinjiang, the state uses Stalin's definition of *minzu*, with the concept of Plurality in Unity, which recognises the ethnic groups' individual cultural identities. On the other hand, to promote a Chinese national identity, the state also uses the racial idea of *minzu* to legitimise Chinese national identity over the ethnic minority population in relation to the idea of the nation state. This is demonstrated in the strategy used by the newspaper article to which G2 refers, criminalising the Islamic cultural elements of the Uyghurs as racial others to protect the nation-state's integrity in Xinjiang. The inconsistency in using *minzu* discourse to promote *Xinjiang Ren* discourse causes significant confusion among ethnic groups like the Sibe in their efforts to locate their position in the discourse. At the same time, the slipperiness when using the concepts of *minzu* also provides Sibe people with an opportunity to position their subjective liminality in different contexts. This ambiguous meaning of *minzu* in the discourse of *Xinjiang Ren* pinpoints out the anxiety at the heart of Chinese identity in Xinjiang. This anxiety, in return, enables the Sibe to resist the state-promoted discourse of *Xinjiang Ren* and to (re)construct a Sibe ethnic identity from their own perspective.

From the above analysis on the liminal position of Sibe in the discourse of *Xinjiang Ren*, we can understand why Sibe people are very discursively engaged in regard to their ethnic identity, as discourse is a response to their fear and worry, and, also, being discursive can help to compensate for the fear, and mask it too. To promote the Sibe's own cultural space, in response to the Sibe ethnic identity's oppression by the binary discourse of self and other between Uygur and Han, the Sibe have promoted a strong emphasis on their ethnic belonging. The over-determination of the notion of ethnic belonging in cyberspace fetishizes their cultural attributes of language and the Westward Migration Festival as important ethnic

markers. Intense focus on and over-investment in the fetish of ethnic belonging leads to a construction of ethnic difference based on ethnic boundary-making, evident and implied in the discourse of *minzu* in Sibe people's picture-sharing practice in relation to the Westward Migration, which insists on strong ties of ethnic belonging. In this way, the SNS produce a cultural artefact, an imaginary ethnic identity, termed by Benedict Anderson as an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1993).

Having reviewed the social reasons for Xinjiang Sibe articulating ethnic identity through the Westward Migration Festival, I now move to analysing why Sibe from the northeast of China articulate their ethnic identity.H1 worked in SOEs in Dalian, in the northeast of China; she was laid off in 1998. She has entered self-employment and sold clothes in a department store since then. Her poem, "Reunion", was widely shared by Sibe SNS users in 2009 and then frequently used as one of the poems recited at the Westward Migration Festivals in Dalian, Shenyang, and Çabçal.

H1's motive in joining the Sibe SNS *quns* was strongly linked to the dramatic changes in social conditions in the northeast of China. She told me that she was very proud to work in one of most prestigious state-owned factories in Dalian. The factory for which she worked looked after her, from accommodation to social activities after work. She lived in an apartment that the factory sold to her with a low-interest mortgage, as the part of the welfare package that the state-owned enterprise normally granted to their employees. Her neighbours were all her colleagues. The factories always organised some activities for their leisure time. She told me she really missed those good old days. After she got laid off in 1998, she had to find some other job. A job was not easy to find for her, as a middle-aged female without any other qualifications and skills. Therefore, she decided to enter self-employment and rent a counter in the department store to sell clothes. She told me that the rent for that counter increased year by year, as did the cost of living in the city of Dalian. She decided to rent out her apartment in the city and went to the suburbs to rent cheaper accommodation, as the living expense was beyond what she could afford, based on her earnings. She and her family moved into a flat in the suburbs, which was one hour away from the city. She told me that she did not know anyone in her new neighbourhood and most of her neighbours were *Waidi Ren* who had come to work

in Dalian. *Waidi Ren* means people who are not from the local area. H1 told me that she did not talk to them too much, as she could seldom meet them: 'Those *Waidi Ren* only spent time with their own circle', she told me, 'I think they were southerners from their accent'. She did not know her neighbours.

The northeast of China was once a proud and buzzing industrial centre in the socialist, planned economy era. However, it became a rust belt when the state launched its market economy campaign. Millions of SOE workers were laid off in the 1990s when the state implemented a labour commodification policy. It has been reported that six to seven million people from the northeast of China lost their jobs between 1997 and 2002 (Cai, 2014, p. 18). In Shenyang, the capital city of Liaoning province, about thirty per cent of the workers from the state and collective sectors were laid off by the late 1990s (Lu, 1998, p. 6). The economic situation in the northeast of China became even worse as the market economy developed in the 2000s. As I walked along the streets of Dalian, I could see the unemployed workers gathering in makeshift "labour market spots". In many streets, they stood behind placards announcing their skills: plumber, electrician, nanny, seamstress.

Figure 35. Unemployed Workers Gathering in a Makeshift "Labour Market Spot" in Dalian in the Northeast of China in 2009

H1 told me that she found the Sibe QQ *qun* for *Dalian Sibe Ren* at the Westward Migration Festival in 2005. Since then, she has loved this new "place", as

she told me. She checks the information shared on Dalian *Sibe Ren* almost every day. She especially likes "sharing her everyday picture" with other Sibe on Dalian *Sibe Ren*. She said that, 'sharing a picture makes you feel you were there'. Phrases such as "sharing pictures" are used interchangeably with "sharing experiences". The two phrases are often mentioned in the online discussion on photography practices concerning the Westward Migration Festival and, based on my virtual ethnography, are demonstrated in many Sibe SNS' picture-sharing practices throughout the discussion in relation to the Westward Migration Festival on SNS.

H1 told me that 'I always check the information on the Westward Migration Festival on my WeChat. Seeing some pictures shared on the WeChat *qun*, I feel that I also was there at the festival'. From this phenomenon of interchangeable phrases on "sharing pictures" and "sharing experiences", we can see that, for H2, the picture-sharing practice is a way of sharing life experiences, and, by the acts of sharing the same pictures and having discussions around these pictures, a sense of an interpretive community can be formed. It is this sense of "community" that H1 wanted to find after she lost her stable job at the SOE:

> I feel it is the same, meeting our Sibe friends online and meeting our Sibe friends in real life. Especially when I met those Sibe friends from Xinjiang, I felt very close. It is in this context that I wrote the poem, *Reunion*, before this year's Westward Migration Festival. It is a reflection of how I feel, as a Sibe person, when we meet each other online. I also want to let people know that there is a minority nationality [*shaoshu minzu*] who made great contributions in protecting our country's borderland.... I uploaded it on my Sina Weibo and blog. I heard that the article was widely shared by Sibe people and they even put the poem into Westward Migration Festivals. That I hadn't predicted. (H1, personal communication, Aug. 5, 2009)

While experiencing sharing, photos were chosen by Sibe WeChat users as the most popular medium for translating their connection with the Westward Migration Festival. Not surprisingly, the idea of sharing photographs as a community-based social activity is firmly rooted in analogue practices of photography. Analysing SNS as a particular manifestation of the culture of connectivity may offer a

comprehensive framework for understanding how the "sharing" of pictures leads to specific narratives of Westward Migration.

In the following quotation from H1, I will show what H2 thinks of the importance of the Westward Migration Festival for her knowledge of Sibe culture and history. By sharing this information about Sibe with people who hold a similar interest, H1 can find a sense of community. This is why H1 particularly likes to join the Westward Migration festival. As I have analysed in the preceding section, H2, like millions of laid-off workers in northeast of China, lost her community in the process of economic reform in northeast of China. The sense of community from the ethnic identity to some extent provides a foothold in the current unstable social situation.

> I should thank the organiser of Dalian Westward Migration Festivals; if I hadn't attended the celebration, and if I didn't know so many good friends who lent me books on Sibe history at the festival, I couldn't know our Sibe history and develop my affection towards our own *minzu*. I wanted to use this poem to express my gratitude towards those warm-hearted people. . . Since my husband and I were laid off at home, we don't have so many activities to attend as we did in the SOE. The Sibe cultural organisation is like a family. Every time I come here, I can meet a lot of warm-hearted friends. . . I still remember, the first time I joined the Westward Migration Festival in 2005 in Dalian. All the people who attended that day had met through QQ. Some of them are students at university. Some of them are university graduates from Xinjiang and chose to stay in Dalian to work. We had a dinner together. I feel that it is through the Westward Migration Festival that all us Sibe people are united together tightly. (H1, personal communication, Aug. 5, 2009)

From H1's introduction, her reason for joining a Sibe SNS was to find a place where she can share her experience, and also to find a sense of community. These two activities are supplied by the SNS, Dalian *Sibe Ren*, that she participates in. The SNS combines community-building and the sharing of life experience together by inviting people to talk and comment on pictures that they took at the Westward Migration Festivals that they have attended. By doing so, they turn their activity into a collective experience.

Since the emergence of SNS, electronic platforms in China, by default, encourage the exchange of pictures for communicating users' daily lives with their friends on the SNS. The sharing of photographs as a collective community experience is smoothly transposed to the digital age, where it translates into interface features. The formation of groups is a prominent feature on Chinese SNSs. Their software's overall design strongly favours group activity, as we can read about in the design of Baidu Tieba:

> The mission of Baidu Tieba is to bring together like-minded people. Whether it is a public topic or a minority topic, it can accurately gather a large number of good friends, display individual style, make friends, and build community. (Baidu Tieba, 2015)

Therefore, we can understand that the SNS were designed to create community feeling, and they promote social networking by design. Indeed, the mission statement of WeChat, on their website, is: 'WeChat is a way of life; form your community by sharing pictures and texts and keep constant contact with your friends' (Baidu Tieba, 2015). The mission statement of QQ is: 'Communication is a way of releasing youthful passion; the world is big, you will not feel alone as you will find similar minded people here in QQ who will explore the exciting world with you'. (QQ, 2015) The motto of Sina Weibo, on their website, is: 'Microblogging, anytime, anywhere to find new things! Microblogging is with you to enjoy every wonderful moment in the world, to understand every story behind the scenes. Share what you want to say, and let the world hear your voice.'[12] All three emphasize sharing and community.

The following poem was written by H1 after she joined the Westward Migration Festival. She was touched by the Sibe history that she learnt from the Sibe she met in the Westward Migration Festival. She put this poem in SNS, and it was widely shared by Sibe:

Reunion

245 years of history,

245 years of Sibe blood,

The same heart,

The same last name,

You and I meet in front of the computer screen,

Didi Dada,

We communicate.

Endless longing,

Endless is affection.

The network has pulled you and me,

Mouse click,

We saw each other.

Snow Mountain is in the Western Regions,

Plain rice is in Liaodong.

The environment has not changed your face,

Missing their loved ones,

Miles away,

Year after year,

245 years,

245 years.

You want to find roots,

245 years,

You look forward to meeting.

High mountains couldn't block your view of home,

The desert couldn't bury your footsteps returning home,

The wind cannot stop your way home.

245 years,

I am missing you,

245 years,

I need to hug you,

The water at home is waiting for you to scoop,

Home millet is waiting for you to taste,

The soil of the Hometown is looking forward to being kissed by you.

My distant relatives, ah,

When will you return home,

Your hometown relatives, ah,

Hope you and I will be reunited.

(H1, personal communication, Aug. 5, 2009)

H1 told me that 'one of my biggest wishes is to go to Çabçal':

I thought I could go to Çabçal this year. However, I just found out that this year's trips, organised by the Dalian Sibe Association, are being conducted by a travel agency, and the cost has doubled since last time. The time it will also mean being away from Dalian for a longer time. My husband has been laid off from his job, and my son is still studying at university. I couldn't leave the shop for too long, either. All those reasons make me unable to join this year's trip to Çabçal. (H1, personal communication, Aug. 5, 2009)

"This year" refers to 2009, when this interview took place.

Although I had A's telephone number, who is a Sibe from Çabçal, and I can go to Çabçal by myself and stay at her place, I am very worried about my family. So, I have to give up this opportunity to go to Çabçal. I think I can go when I receive my pension and when my son can go to work. (H1, personal communication, Aug. 5, 2009)

It can be concluded from H1's narrative on Çabçal that Çabçal for her is something of a symbolic home, from which she can find a sense of community, belonging, and locality. This sense of locality helps to compensate for her lack of community after she lost her work unit life in the 1990s. The Sibe ethnic identity, to this point, provides her with an "ontological security" (Giddens, 1991, p. 36) to hold onto.

After analysing the social reason for the northeastern Sibe's articulation of Sibe ethnic identity online, I will move to analyse what the power of sharing pictures for expressing and articulating ethnic identity among Sibe people through the experience of G5. G5 was born in a city called Kaiyuan, in Liaoning province, in the northeast of China. He got to know the history of the Westward Migration when he

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was studying at university. He told me that he felt he had to trace the route of the Westward Migration and take this journey again at some later date to experience how the Sibe ancestors fared on that heroic journey to Xinjiang.

G5 now works as an operations manager for an auto-racing team in China. In 2007, he managed to get support from the Government of Çabçal Sibe Autonomous County and the Mongolian Automobile and Motorcycle Association. He started his drive from Shenyang on 1 May 2007, and he successfully arrived in Çabçal on 28 July 2007. He had travelled 20,000 kilometres to trace the route of the Westward Migration. He passed through Tongliao, Kailu County, Ar Horqin Banner, across Outer Mongolia, and entered Xinjiang through Altay, then passed through Tacheng, Bole County, and arrived in Çabçal. G5 took more than 4,000 pictures during his journey. He uploaded them all, sharing them with other Sibe on the SNS, and he told me that he wants more people to know the history of the Westward Migration, and to let all Sibe know about this journey that the Sibe have been through.

G5 told me that he just wanted to fulfil the aspirations of elders before he took this journey on the Westward Migration route. It was after he arrived in Çabçal that he realised that 'the tracing of the Westward Migration route is not just about the experience of the walking on the road, but it is also about the spirit of the great heroism that our *minzu* demonstrated on the journey.' G5 told me that 'the Sibe Westward Migration is one of the most precious stories that was kept alive in written language on nomadic cultures. It will educate us with patriotic sentiment.' He said that,

> The theme of Westward Migration is nomadic culture; our Westward Migration Culture is witness to the history of evolution from nomadic culture to farming culture. It is through the journey of walking again on the Westward Migration route that we can trace back and experience how it felt as a nomadic culture *minzu* 200 years ago. (G5, personal communication, Aug. 6, 2009)

G5's pictures are of the places he travelled to on the route of the Westward Migration. He also took this journey as an archaeological and anthropological investigation into the history of the Westward Migration. He searched through the evidence concerning the Westward Migration that he learned from history books. He

used his camera to record the pieces of evidence from the history books and shared them with other Sibe through the SNS. He told me that,

> The biggest challenge on my trip was to identify the correct route of the Westward Migration that our ancestors took in the region of today's Mongolia, as it was not clearly recorded in our historical record and also some of the places have changed their names in the last 200 years.... With the help of the local herders in Baruun-Urt in Mongolia, I confirmed my hypothesis on which route the Sibe took in Mongolia. It was through the area of Choibalsan and walking along the Kruun River, then walking along the Tuul River. In Fuyun County, in Xinjiang, with the help of local Uyghur, I also found the ferry that Sibe people used in the Westward Migration along Irtysh River, and, with the help of my Mongolian friends from Bole County, I finally found the courier station that Sibe people used in the Westward Migration. (G5, personal communication, Aug. 6, 2009)

G5 internalised Stalin's definition of *minzu* concerning the Chinese nation to consider Genghis Khan as a Chinese *minzu* hero; his pictures with a statue of Genghis Khan has triggered a heated debate on Sibe SNSs. This echoes the heated debate on Genghis Khan's nationality in Chinese academic circles. There is a growing debate in Chinese academic circles over whether Genghis Khan should be recognised as a *minzu* hero[13] The main arguments are: Genghis Khan is the ancestor of one of the nationalities in China and hence should be regarded as a *minzu* hero; on the other hand, the opposing claim is that Genghis Khan should not considered Chinese, as he is an ethnic Mongol and Mongolia is a separate nation from China. The arguments over whether Genghis Khan should be considered Chinese is the result of the redefinition of "Chinese" via the use of the concept of racial *minzu* and Stalin's definition of *minzu*.

The logic in justifying Genghis Khan as a *minzu* hero via the use of Stalin's definition of *minzu* is that China is a united community constructed out of different *minzu* living inside China. Since the ethnic Mongols were recognised as one of the

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[13] For the politics involved in the Chinese nation's inclusion and exclusion of Genghis Khan, see Baker (2006).

minzu living in China; hence, their own ancestors should be considered as a *minzu* of China. The logic in justifying Genghis Khan is not Chinese with the use of racial *minzu* is: China is a nation state which is constructed by the Chinese nation, however, Genghis Khan is ancestor of Mongolian nation, hence, Genghis Khan should not to be considered a Chinese *minzu* hero.

G5 took a lot of pictures during his journey, as he wanted to share his experience of the Westward Migration with other Sibe. For instance, in the city of Ulaanbaatar in Mongolia, he decided to take a picture in front of the statue of Genghis Khan in the Ulaanbaatar Government Square, in which he holds the banner of the Westward Migration bearing all his Sibe supporters' signatures. G5's action in taking the banner of the Westward Migration for the camera is shared by A3, which I will analyse in the next section. This behaviour, of using a banner for taking pictures, I interpret as functioning the same as Sibe people's tendency to take pictures of each other and upload them onto Beijing Sibe WeChat *qun* as I have demonstrated in the preceding section of this chapter, which is an action that builds the *holbobun* network with the help of SNSs. On the other hand, I argue that it is also the use of SNSs that results in the action of taking a banner for building the *holbobun* network, as the SNSs need the banner to virtualise the bonding that people want to achieve.

G5's route was highly influenced by the history knowledge he gained through reading books; in the following account, we can see how his route was designed to find the evidence for the historical knowledge that he had learned from books.

> It was not a city when our Sibe walked here 200 years ago. Our Sibe people walk along the Kruun River to enter Mongolia. I can still see the same blue sky and clear river, that 200 years ago, our Sibe people could see. I hope that our northeast of China can go back to those good days when the sky was so blue. (G5, personal communication, Aug. 6, 2009)

He also took a lot of pictures along the along Kruun River; he told me that the Kruun River is the most important site for the Sibe's Westward Migration, based on his reading on the history of the Sibe's Westward Migration. He told me that the Sibe people stayed here for a couple of months and that there are some songs written on the days the Sibe rested here 200 years ago. He told me that the Kruun River is one of most beautiful and poetic sites on the Sibe's Westward Migration journey. He

internalised that historical knowledge into his sense of Sibe identity; the landscapes that he captured as pictures strongly project the influence that he received from the books he read. Those books are part of a *minzu* identity project that was co-worked by the state and the Sibe elite in Çabçal. Sibe people in Çabçal, as an immigrant group in Xinjiang, have to promote the discourse of *minzu* to legitimise their existence in multicultural Xinjiang. It is in this context that large volumes of Sibe history have been published since the 1950s (Na, 2010, p. 25).

> You can imagine the excitement of our ancestors, first seeing the Kruun River after they had walked day and night for 400km, in the dessert, for months. This river gave our Sibe people hope. (G5, personal communication, Aug. 6, 2009)

He pointed to the pictures of the Kruun River that he took, and continued to tell me that,

> I can still see how clear and how peaceful the Kruun River is now; the river was so clear that you can see through the green water plants on the riverbed. I hope our northeast of China can have more rivers like this. (G5, personal communication, Aug. 6, 2009)

Inspired by G5's picture-sharing practice, there are many other Sibe who like to share their own pictures about the Westward Migration, and they like to take pictures of wheel artefacts, which reflect the hardship of the Westward Migration. The following picture has been shared on Sibe SNS.

Figure 36. A Picture of a Wheel, Shared by a Sibe WeChat User, 2014

I have found that picture-sharing practices have become a documentary practice and that WeChat has become a significant platform for Sibe people to share their pictures from the Westward Migration Festival. Yet these groups not only share pictures, but also swap stories about Westward Migration events that they attended. WeChat groups, in that respect, have both an informative and a therapeutic function. Consequently, WeChat is an image aggregator as well as an experience aggregator.

G5's pictures on the Westward Migration were widely shared by Sibe people on SNS. Sibe people also printed out those pictures and put them in each place on the map. The following picture I took in the house of one of my interviewees' in Çabçal. My interviewee, A, told me that, with those pictures on the map, the Westward Migration is more tangible and she even can feel her ancestors walking on the road when she sees the map. She put the map up in her living room. When I arrived at her house, the first thing she did was to introduce the Map of the Westward Migration proudly to me.

清代锡伯族官兵和家属西迁新疆伊犁戍边行进路线

大连市锡伯族学会

Figure 37. A Put the Westward Migration Route on the Wall of Her Living Room; Pictures Attached to the Westward Migration Route Map are from G5's Journey from Shenyang to Xinjiang

People form groups to share ideas and their affiliation with the Westward Migration Festival. The *qun* functions as an important aspect of developing community bonds, particularly in building a shared perspective on history; by exchanging photos and comments in the *qun*, WeChat's functionality as a communication device facilitates the construction of narratives on the Westward Migration.

Figure 38. Sibe People Hang the Route of the Westward Migration on the Wall of a Restaurant, Indicating that the Westward Migration has Become a Totem for Sibe Identity in their Public Space

I will now analyse the case of A3's pilgrimage to the Home Temple in Mukden. Mukden is the Manchu name for Shenyang in the northeast of China. In 1625, the Manchu leader, Nurhaci, conquered Shenyang and decided to relocate his entire administrative infrastructure to this city and renamed it as Mukden, which means "the rising capital" in the Manchu language (Na, 2010, p. 321). My virtual ethnography shows that Sibe SNS users largely adopt the name of Mukden in their online communication. The Sibe Home Temple was built in 1707 in Shenyang. It hosted the first Westward Migration Festival in the northeast of China in 1982. It is considered the ancestral shrine by Sibe people. The Home Temple is used for collective rituals and festivals in honour of the ancestors. The rituals were performed to worship the Sibe ancestors on the same day as the Westward Migration Festival, which is on 18th day in the fourth month of the lunar calendar (Na, 2010, p. 283).

Inspired by the pictures that G4 took on the road of the Westward Migration that he found online, A3, from Çabçal, also traced the route of the Westward Migration road and he also uploaded the pictures to the SNSs and shared them with

other Sibe.[14] A3 teaches his own dance class in Çabçal. He is of the post-1980s generation. He told me that Sibe culture has come to face a serious challenge from assimilation in recent years. Many Sibe people do not speak the Sibe language and they have lost their Sibe culture; he continued:

> I always wanted to do something to raise our Sibe people's ethnic awareness, and I have always wanted to go back to our hometown, Mukden, to have a look. I always hear from the elders that Mukden is our hometown. (A3, personal communication, Aug. 24, 2015)

In 2015, A3 decided to travel back to Shenyang. He posted pictures of every city he visited on the way to Shenyang to his WeChat Moment and shared them with all his WeChat friends. WeChat Moment is similar with Facebook Timeline and Twitter News Feed. In WeChat Moment, Sibe SNS users can post updates, uploading images as well as sharing videos and articles with their friends. His original post on fundraising for his march to the Home Temple was been shared widely by Sibe people and he successfully raised 20,000 RMB within one week.

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[14] For a snapshot of the visual content he uploaded to SNSs, see, A3. (2015, October 10)

Figure 39. Other Sibe Repost A3's Announcement and Call for Assistance for A3 on WeChat, 2015

The above picture is A3's original post, shared by another Sibe, whose name is C, from the northeast of China. He posted A3's post and asked his friends to spread the message. I asked C why he immediately shared this post. C was very excited to tell me that,

> This is such great thing for a Sibe to do. I really admire him for having such courage to travel such a long distance to the northeast of China. I always wanted to do exactly the same thing. I also want to follow our ancestors' route to experience how it would look to travel to Xinjiang. I think this is the one thing every Sibe should do during his lifetime. (C, personal communication, Aug. 20, 2015)

The analysis above demonstrates that Sibe ethnic identity stems from holding two essentially incompatible attitudes, simultaneously involving the disavowal and recognition of difference. First, although Sibe share a great similarity with Manchu in terms of language and history, on the other hand, simultaneously, they deny it. Secondly, although they were influenced by Uyghur culture and history,

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simultaneously, they disavow it. Such ambivalence injects slippage and creates an absence of "locality" in Sibe ethnic identity. The picture-sharing practice, with a great emphasis on locality, to some extent compensates for this lack of locality. Thus, the Sibe cannot be easily hailed because they are not really there. They are always already (dis)located by doubt and ambivalence. The pictures shared by A3 and C in the discussion on the Westward Migration reveal a theme of home in their narrative of the Westward Migration. Their picture display symbolises an ambiguous journey towards home, becoming the subject of longing and uncertainty, even as the sense of home is inevitably renounced. Renunciation, however, did not mean complete eradication, and, in this light, the display of the home banner can be seen as enacting the recuperation of an underground sensibility.

It has been argued by Castells that virtuality is the foundation of reality in the new forms of socialised communication in the network society (Castells, 2010, p. 406). Society shapes technology according to the needs, values, and interests of people who use the technology. Furthermore, ICT is particularly sensitive to the effects of technology itself on social uses. The internet community reinforces the "privatisation of sociability", and the internet community rebuilds social networks around the individual, facilitating a personal community, both physically and online. In this process, hyperlinks provide the opportunity to make social links for people who, otherwise, will live more limited social lives, because their ties are increasingly spatially dispersed (Castells, 2010, p. 389). A3's journey to Shenyang confirms this assertion.

On the road, I was imagining who will I meet and what will happen on the journey to Mukden? What do the Sibe people look like in the northeast of China? And what does the Home Temple look like? Although I have seen them online, I never been there before, so I will certainly take a picture of it first when I arrive there. . .I always took pictures with my Sibe compatriots after they fed me with such nice meals every time I met them in each city. The road to Mukden is long; however, thinking about how many Sibe compatriots I will meet, I feel full of hope. . . I like to talk with those Sibe compatriots I meet on my journey to Mukden. I can even find some familiar names when they talk about Sibe culture in each place in our conversation.

The Sibe world is so small, it made me feel that we knew each other a long time ago. Maybe that is why there is a Sibe saying, which says that all Sibe belong to one family. . . Every time, after taking pictures together with those Sibe compatriots that I met on my journey, I would ask them to write their names and cities of origin on the banner that I had prepared. As I travelled closer to Mukden and passed by more places, the names on my banner were getting more and more. (A3, personal communication, Aug. 24, 2015)

The names and locations signed on the banner and also the pictures shared on WeChat contain strong spatial references to physical, off-line locations and community members through images and symbols. Physicality seems to play an integral role in asserting social boundaries, creating a sense of belonging, and establishing commonalities. The absence of face-to-face interaction in an SNS environment does not prevent members from sustaining interaction and asserting group identity. When members of Sibe SNS post entries on the WeChat *quns*, commonalities are established between group members and group identity is reinforced by references to specific people, physical locations, and community-affirming events. In the case of the Great Westward Migration WeChat *qun*, the sharing of pictures also reduces the feeling of physical distance between the Sibe in Çabçal and the Sibe in the northeast of China. On the other hand, the pictures also foster greater connective bonds between all Sibe and Manchu and create an increased sense of belonging based on the *holbobun* and SNS networks.

The following quote is from A3 on his reflect when TV News interviewed him:

The television interviewed me. So many companies saw the news, and they called me to sponsor my trip to the Home Temple. . . So many Sibes' houses in which I have stayed on my way to the Home Temple display the Westward Migration Map. They also told me to take their wishes with me to the Home Temple in Mukden. (A3, personal communication, Aug. 24, 2015)

In the picture-sharing practices about the Westward Migration among Sibe people, I argue that there is a process of identity switching from the de-territorialisation of Sibe identity within the physical space of Xinjiang to a re-

territorialization in the new Sibe online community based on the use of SNS. This process generates a consciousness of uprootedness. From my interviews with Sibe SNS users on the image of the Home Temple, I find that the Sibe ethnic identity has a double meaning. On the one hand, the narrative of the Home Temple is often affected by the uprooted feelings of social marginality of those Sibe who live in Xinjiang and those northeastern Sibe who live in an urban area; they want to use the Home Temple to redefine their identity. Therefore, those Sibe live at the intersection between their previous offline experience and the ethnogenesis brought about by the online discussion from the Sibe online community. From this perspective, we can consider that those Sibe online users share the theme of de-territorialisation (spatial, psychological, social) of their cultural identity. As the missing link between culture and place, which is provided by the use of SNS, this process is accompanied by the mixing of culturally rooted practices, producing new forms of culture, both hybrid and complex.

The combination of images allows users to create a more profound connection with offline reality. The use of images — particularly representations of physical localities — emerges as a common tool throughout the WeChat *quns* for constructing and asserting distinctions between communities in Çabçal and communities in the northeast of China, as well as for establishing a unified Sibe identity, which is based on the sharing of Manchu culture. The use of images to reference and reproduce physical localities has become a common and defining feature throughout the WeChat *quns* and the Sibe QQ *quns* of *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* (Charming Çabçal Group) QQ *qun*, *Dalian Sibe Ren* QQ *qun,* and *Urumqi Sibe Meyen* (Urumqi Sibe Group) QQ *qun*, and the Sibe WeChat *quns* of *Sibe Giyamun* (Sibe Courier Station) WeChat *qun*, Sibe United Society WeChat *qun*, *Urumqi Sibe yi anğa i gisun Gašan* WeChat *qun* (Home for Urumqi Spoken Sibe Language), Sibe Folk Culture WeChat *qun,* Great Westward Migration WeChat *qun*, and Beijing Sibe WeChat *qun*.

Using the following quote from an account by A3 on his journey to the Home Temple, I will demonstrate how SNS *quns* facilitate a dynamic meaning of ethnic identity that challenges the previous *minzu* discourse:

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On the seventh day of my trip, when I arrived in Zhangye, I met another Sibe person who asked me where I had come from and where I was going. I said I had come from Ili in Xinjiang, and I was going to the northeast of China, to Mukden, to seek ancestral roots. After he heard that, he told me to stop the bike. He wanted to invite me for dinner, and told me that he came from the northeast of China and that he likes making friends. I was a little bit hesitant, as I worried whether I would be deceived by a stranger in an unfamiliar environment … When I stepped into the restaurant, I found out that he is a Sibe from the northeast of China. He told me that he is the restaurant owner, and there was a rich, northeast-style feeling inside the restaurant … and he has been to so many places working on *er ren zhuan* [northeast Chinese folk song and dance] performances. He told me that the economic situation in the northeast of China has been really bad since the 1990s, and there were not so many job opportunities, so he went to different places for work, and then he met his wife here in Zhangye. He married her, opened this restaurant, and settled here … We also met his friends, two Yugur boys, they also all work as performers here … I find out that the Yugur language is so similar to our Sibe language; a lot of their words I can understand, like some animals, for example, horse, sheep … They also like drinking and singing. At the dinner, the Yugur boys sang their Yugur songs. Their song really makes me miss Çabçal. They also asked me to sing a Sibe song. I sang the song, *My beautiful home, Çabçal*. I feel I need to learn more Sibe songs when I go back to Çabçal…. (A3, personal communication, Aug. 24, 2015)

Zhangye is a city in Gansu province. It borders Inner Mongolia to the north and Qinghai to the south. There are many ethnic groups in the city, including Hui, Yugur, and Tibetans. Yugur is an ethnic group, also called Yellow Uyghurs (Rudelson & Rudelson, 1997, p. 206). The majority of Yugur people speak Western Yugur, which is a Turkic language, considered to be the traditional Uyghur language (Göksel, 2000). Sibe language has been influenced by Uyghur for the last two hundred years in Xinjiang. However, as a result of the promotion of *minzu* identity since the 1950s, we can find Sibe people using their cultural resources to strongly promote their link with their former home in the northeast of China as a method of

meeting the criteria of the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu*. This phenomenon has been confirmed by Harris's research on Sibe music practice, in which Harris points out that the Sibe musicians strongly seek their link with the northeast of China in their music practice and situate their musical tradition in the northeast's culture, omiting the influence they have received from local, oasis culture (Harris, 2004, pp. 55–56). This strategy of building the *minzu* identity I have also demonstrated in the preceding discussion on the Sibe Folklore Museum; it can be understand as a result both of the state Ethnic Classification Project and also of the Sibe people themselves wanting to build a unique and new ethnic identity. It operates in the centralised communication system, for instance, as I have demonstrated in the discussion on the Sibe Folklore Museum, where the local Sibe voice cannot be included in the representation of Sibe in public space. However, in the public space of the digital environment, where representation of the Sibe is constructed by both information online and the communication that Sibe people associate with the information, it poses a challenge toward the hegemony of the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* in representing the Sibe culture. As we can see from picture-sharing practices online, A3 posted every picture he took on his journey to the Home Temple. He also points out the connection between Sibe language and Yugur language. This directly challenges the previous promotion of Sibe culture as that of a northeastern ethnic group. The images are shared by many other Sibe people on his SNS, and then they use their *holbobun* network to share these images with their SNS. The meaning of Sibe identity, in this vein, is constructed in a new network which differs from the previous meaning of *minzu* from the state and Sibe elites' cultural project, as the Sibe identity constructed by the state and Sibe's elites is emphatically based on constructing the uniqueness of Sibe culture by situating it in the northeast's culture. However, the Sibe identity from the users of SNS is a more discursive identity generated from a negotiation of Sibe individuals' interests in the *holbobun* network.

From above conversation, we can see there were different tendencies in identification between A3 and the restaurant owner. The restaurant owner has a strong affiliation with northeast Chinese culture, as he hears that A3 wants to go to the northeast of China and he feels so close that he invites A3 to a dinner. In northeast Chinese culture, inviting a stranger for dinner together is a gesture to bring

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about close social proximity. For A3, he is worried that he will be deceived when he hears that the restaurant owner wants to treat him to dinner after A3 tells him his plan to go to the northeast of China; at this point, A3 still recognises the restaurant owner as "other", and as a "stranger"; it is only after he finds out that the restaurant owner is also Sibe that he feels the northeast-style restaurant becomes close to him. There is another point that demonstrates the restaurant owner's identification with locality over Sibe identity, which is that the restaurant owner does not tell A3 he is Sibe when they first meet, but introduces himself with an identity attached to the locality of the northeast of China, saying 'I am also from the northeast of China.' This could indicate the restaurant owner identifying with the identity of locality over the *minzu* identity of the Sibe. I did not get the opportunity to ask A3 about why the restaurant owner identified with northeast Chinese identity over Sibe *minzu* identity. A3 had a strong identification with Sibe *minzu* identity, demonstrated by his change in feelings when he finds out the restaurant owner is also Sibe. On the other hand, the shared identification with northeast culture can also be confirmed from A3's interview, as he and the restaurant owner both recognise each other after they find out that they share a common attachment to the northeast of China.

The dynamic of connection facilitated by use of the SNS constitutes the condition in which the narrative of the Westward Migration was produced, based on my observation of Sibe people's use of WeChat, QQ, Sina Weibo, Sina Blog, and Baidu Tieba.

Ethnic identity can also generate local publicity as it interests the local community. Therefore, the local media gave A3 great coverage on his journey to the Home Temple, and A3 also used this opportunity to promote his own business by showing the banner with his company logo. He told me that, 'Before the trip and during the trip, I gave interviews to the Çabçal TV station. I felt so excited, this was my first time being on TV and I am so proud as a Sibe.'

When I asked him why he did not choose the route through Mongolia, to follow the original Westward Migration route, he told me the following:

> It is difficult for us to get passports in Xinjiang, it would be very complicated
> for me. Plus, riding on the route inside China, I can meet other Sibe people in
> the cities that I will pass by, and, also, I can upload the pictures with them to

WeChat, to show our pride as Sibe. (A3, personal communication, Aug. 24, 2015)

Figure 40. A3 Shared his Route to the Home Temple as a Picture on WeChat, 2011

Sibe SNS users taking pictures with friends and sharing them on SNS can be interpreted as Sibe liking to use picture-sharing practices to show solidarity. This also attracts commercial interest, with many advertisements using ethnicity to promote their product. A3 told me that:

Another reason why I had to take the road inside China is that I could also give the Sibe people that I met in different cities the lavender essential oil that my sponsor gave me. After all, they gave us a lot of sponsorship. I have given away those lavender essential oils to many Sibe who helped me on my way to the Home Temple. (A3, personal communication, Aug. 24, 2015)

Based on the observation of Sibe people's discussions on the Westward Migration Festival on SNS, physical locality is also a very important element for the

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construction of Sibe identity amongst the members of SNS. Offline cultural identity and physical space are very important components in constructing community as well as asserting group identity and social boundaries. Local Sibe in SNS de-territorialise themselves by asserting representations through the internet and simultaneously re-territorialise themselves in this new environment by reproducing socio-physical boundaries with their picture-sharing practices. For the Sibe, the interactive SNS became sites or locations for communal gatherings, where they could "perform" acts symbolic of their love for Sibe culture and proclaim their allegiance to the Sibe community.

Figure 41. A3 Posts All the Pictures He Took with Those Sibe People He Met in Each City He Visited on his Way to the Home Temple with the Banner, 2015

Sibe people share this information and make a community from sharing this information. By looking at the online pictures uploaded on the route back to Shenyang, the Sibe form a new community facilitated by the use of WeChat and identifying the history of the Westward Migration.

Symbolic events that suggest a sense of unity includes sharing pictures taken during their journey to the Home Temple. The sharing of the pictures and also all the Sibe participation in viewing, reading, sharing, and commenting on A3's pictures and posts is a symbolic community-building exercise. As we can see in Figure 39, many Sibe shared A3's post with the call for assistance for his trip to Mukden.

From Figure 53, we can see the local celebration of the Westward Migration Festival is territorialised in their locality, in Xinjiang or in the Northeast of China. They become de-territorialised by uploading the pictures and discussion online. In the WeChat Sibe *qun*, the Westward Migration Festival is then re-territorialised in a new hierarchy based on the "space of flow" facilitated by using ICT. WeChat repackages the images that Sibe uploaded online, and the Westward Migration Festival cultural resource is territorialised in each Sibe recipient's local context. Insofar as they are articulated by those Sibe recipients to achieve their own individual goals, in this process, the Westward Migration Festival is re-territorialised into the meaning based on each Sibe recipient's local context.

Figure 42. A3 Shares Pictures when he Arrives at the Home Temple, 2015

Figure 43. A3 Takes a Picture of Himself Holding his Bike Club's Flag
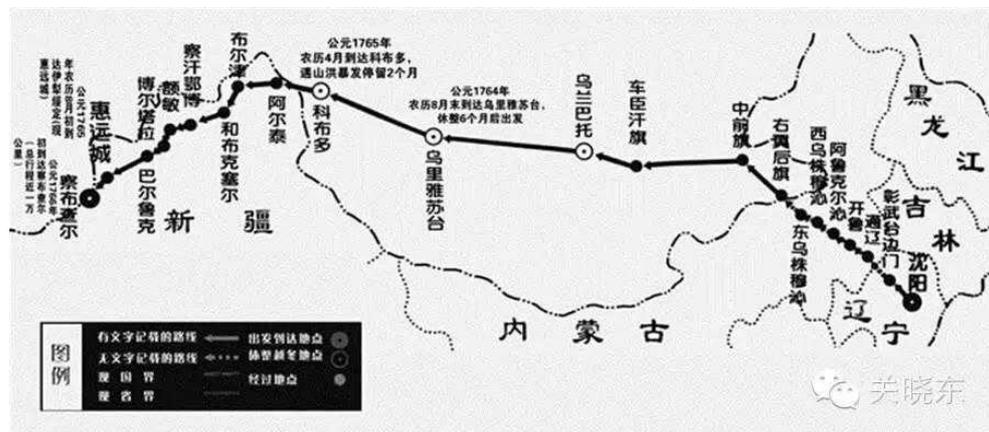
Figure 44. The Westward Migration Route Shared by the Sibe on WeChat

Having reviewed the northeasters and Xinjiang Sibe's reasons for articulating ethnic identity based on their respective social reasons, I will now analyse what the SNS' influence is on the ethnic identity of the Sibe. Networking culture is an important condition for shaping the narrative of the Westward Migration: it refers to the increasingly powerful digital environments that are operated without the knowledge of those who use these environments and upon whom they are having an effect. Sibe SNS users are aware of what a technology does and how it works. They understand the basic operation of a platform from its interface features, which let them consciously deploy advanced technology to suit their (social) purposes. The networking culture, however, is a powerful steering agency that does not simply facilitate human activity but actually constitutes it. As analysed, the northeastern and Xinjiang Sibe each make their input in the same discussion on the Westward Migration. This makes for a situation in which there are local differences in the display of the Westward Migration Festival. The use of common shared space in the

use of WeChat reduces the feeling of physical distance for Sibe from different physical places, while the reference to specific socio-physical boundaries asserts a distance from the rest of the China. This dichotomy reinforces a sense of belonging for participants by creating a culturally localised niche within the expansive space of the internet.

I will conclude with the example of F2. F2 works as a university lecturer in Urumqi. He was born in Yining in the 1970s. He joined the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association in 2002. The Xinjiang Sibe Language Association was very actively promoting the Sibe Westward Migration Festival in Urumqi. It has organised a Westward Migration Festival every year since 1981. F2 is the editor of the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association website. The Xinjiang Sibe Language Association was established in December, 1981, in Urumqi. It is an organisation of Sibe scholars on Sibe language, Sibe history, and Sibe cultural research in Xinjiang. It aims to bring about academic collaboration in research on Sibe language, history, and culture, and also promote Sibe culture. (Baidu Baike, 2015) Its website URL is www.xjsibe.com. F2 is very keen to use ICT to promote Sibe culture. Under his influence, quite large collections of books on Sibe history and culture have been digitised and archived on the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association website. He is also very keen to promote the use of SNS to teach Sibe language. He has produced a great number of Sibe language teaching materials, which are suitable for the CMC environment. For instance, he has participated in the campaign to use the modified Roman alphabet from Möllendorff's transliteration system to communicate on SNS, as they are easy to adapt for computers and smartphones. I will discuss this further in Chapter 6. He also recorded a great number of video materials for teaching Sibe language.[15] F2 was very active in promoting the Sibe language and culture with the help of SNS; he has set up quite a few SNS *quns* to promote Sibe culture and Sibe language.

In 2013, the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association set up a project collecting a pictorial archive on Sibe Westward Migration Culture from Sibe SNS users. The idea is to construct collective knowledge of Sibe Westward Migration Culture from Sibe communities and put up Xinjiang Sibe Language Association websites as

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[15] For example, see videos of Sibe language online classes on the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association website; see Xinjiang Sibe Language Association (n.d.).

repositories for such collective knowledge. Their strategy is to approach users from the SNS platforms, WeChat, QQ, Sina Weibo, and Sina Blog, and invite Sibe SNS users to discuss and select the representative pictures of Sibe Westward Migration Culture. From the discussion taking place on the SNSs, collective knowledge on Sibe Westward Migration Culture can be gathered.

Figure 45. F2 Shares Different Places' Sibe Celebration of the Westward Migration Festival, on the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association Website

Figure 46. F2 Shares Old Pictures from Sibe SNSs on Westward Migration on the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association Website

The strategy aimed to achieve three goals: to increase awareness and thus improve access by sharing photographs from the Xinjiang Sibe Language

Association's visual collections; to gain a better understanding of how SNS and community input could benefit the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association as a cultural repository for Sibe culture; and to increase "common knowledge of the Sibe Westward Migration" by encouraging Sibe SNS users to share their selection of pictures for uploading to the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association's visual collections based on my interview with F2. The idea behind this strategy is to facilitate community by having them engage with, and build on, their common cultural heritage of the Westward Migration. F2 told me that, from his initiation of this project in March 2013 until the interview date (May 2014), he had already collected over 3,800 pictures on the Westward Migration.

F2 and his colleagues from the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association website are eager to use the SNS users' collective input to build collections of knowledge on the Westward Migration. Digital projects like these are considered the perfect intermediaries between an infinite number of knowledgeable Sibe, who actively participate in SNS communities. The factors influencing what information will be shared on SNS, as I have identified in my virtual ethnography, is firstly the impact of the *holbobun* network, and, secondly, the protocols of SNS *quns*, and, thirdly, the selection mechanisms which are, in turn, already prefigured by the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association and F2 and his colleagues' *modus operandi* for defining what the cultural heritage of the Westward Migration actually is. From my virtual ethnography, I conclude that the photos which were selected by the Xinjiang Sibe Language Association website's project largely resulted from "connective" work conditioned by the *holbobun* network and SNS *quns*. It is not just the images that configure a communal view of the history of the Westward Migration, but also the connective work of selecting the photos as the representative pictures of the Westward Migration. In the culture of connectivity, photo-sharing comprises practices of knowledge production mediated by social and technical protocols. Social protocols include the rules by which we produce data and databases and how we access and distribute knowledge.

Online debate on the meaning of Westward Migration

In the previous section, I analysed how the Sibe SNS users' use of online picture sharing challenges the State's disciplinary control of the meaning of Westward Migration. In the following section, I will revisit the online discussion on the meaning of Westward Migration in which I participated during my virtual fieldwork to analyse what Paul Gilroy (1993) and James Clifford (1999) terms the discourse of roots works in regulating Sibe identity and what he terms the discourse of routes works in challenging the state-defined meaning of Westward Migration.

To understand the influence of SNSs on construction of Sibe identity, I will analyse interplay between state-promoted Westward Migration heritage and Sibe people's individual pilgrimages in the debate over Westward Migration through the prism of the relationship between routes and roots.

In the case of Sibe, "roots" refers to a state-promoted heritage, in which the meaning of the Westward Migration is fixed. China is still undergoing the process of re-conceptualising its own pasts and present; its identities and cultures are directly linked to territories and places, especially places of heritage. In the case of Sibe, the roots comprise the knowledge of *minzu*, where political elites and regimes try to fixate on places in solid and fundamental discourses fixed in time. In the case of the Westward Migration, on the National People's Congress website, the State's definition of the Westward Migration is represented as follows: 'Westward Migration is the festival of Sibe people to memorialise their military departure from the northeast of China to Xinjiang in 1764; to memorialise this heroic day, the Sibe people celebrate this day with a variety of activities.'

According to Gilroy (1993a), roots are used when one describes one's identity via ties to origin, whereas "routes" is used to express dynamic identity: it indicates the current 'where you're at' (Gilroy, 1993, p.120) and it focuses on movements, cultural flows and migration (Clifford, 1999, p.10). Roots is something we go back to or seek to rediscover. The route, in the case of Sibe people, is exemplified by individuals' pilgrimages to Çabçal. The route is the fixed knowledge of Westward Migration that is open to further discovery. The route always requires some point at which to start, but that doesn't mean routes are the same as roots; routes are more dynamic and change in different contexts while roots are fixed.

In the case of the knowledge of Westward Migration, Sibe SNS users that I observed during my fieldwork perceive Westward Migration as being open to a multiplicity of readings, not always tied up only to one historical temporality but also connected to discussion in the present. The state-promoted Sibe heritage in Westward Migration is manipulated as a site of fluid, flexible symbols and identifiers that one can enter and explore. To Sibe SNS users, heritage and history are multiplex sites of abundant creativity and self-searching.

Roots, meanwhile, represent the Sibe people's fixed location of origin, which is the Northeast of China. The route is the Sibe soul that is perceived to have developed along the road of westward migration.

This section is about the processes by which the Sibe, in their online practices of ethnogenesis, are actively rejecting State power in favour of their own understandings of ethnic identity, as Chinese state policies to control and direct diversity are ineffective in the environment of SNSs. This is exemplified through analysis of how the discourses of route and roots work within the debate on Westward Migration among Sibe SNS users.

The interaction relating to the Westward Migration between 'nodes' among the Sibe participants in SNS groups challenges state supervision and control. At the same time, it constructs new power relations: elite definitions of ethnic identity based on the network materiality. In the following section, I will also examine how the new power relations were produced in the SNSs' networked environment, when Sibe SNS users are negotiating 'routes' and 'roots' in the interplay between state-promoted heritage and individual pilgrimages.

From my online virtual ethnography on Sibe SNSs on WeChat, QQ, and Weibo from 2009 to 2015, I found out that the writing of Westward Migration is a contested and contingent process of imagining boundaries of the Chinese nation. As suggested by Duara (1996, p.4), it works as a process of imagining boundaries to secure the Chinese national subject through time. This is why the history of

Westward Migration matters in the discussion on Sibe SNS *quns*. In the following section, I set out the key ideas and political context to the discussion.

The Chinese State uses the Westward Migration to incorporate Xinjiang into China, as the Sibe are made out to have migrated domestically to protect the borderland of the Chinese empire. Xinjiang is then intimately tied to a shared, conceptual community with China through the Sibe's Westward Migration. Hence, Sibe identity is constructed by the very concept of developing Xinjiang. It is the discourse of patriotism that brings the definition of the Sibe people legitimacy in Xinjiang. Fei Xiaotong's (1988) theory of a "unified, pluralistic" (Fei, 1988, p. 188) Chinese nation legitimises Xinjiang people in the land of Xinjiang, as Chinese modernity has developed through agricultural development based on land and lineage. The Chinese nation developed from the internal boundary between Hua/yi and between sedentary/nomadic cultures, and the two components can develop into the same Chinese national subject. However, these attachments to land and lineage from state-promoted theory on the Chinese nation, which is from Fei Xiaotong's (1988) theory of a "unified, pluralistic" Chinese nation, run counter to Sibe people's ideas. As Sibe people are not attached to either the land of Xinjiang or the Northeast of China, they are migrating group. Their identity is not fixed by territory.

On Sibe SNSs, Sibe people conceptualise the soul of Westward Migration in different ways from the State. When the State frames the soul of Westward Migration, there is an emphasis on patriotism, pioneering spirit, *minzu* unity. Sibe SNS users understand the meaning of Westward Migration is more diverse, contextual, and individually oriented.

Although on the SNSs, the Sibe SNS users can orchestrate their Sibe identity using the materials they can find on Sibe SNSs, based on my observations, the state-defined Westward Migration turns out to endure and become relevant at times in discussions among Sibe SNS users.

In the context of Sibe people in Xinjiang, the state uses the Westward Migration to define the Sibe identity, and the state uses the discourse of *patriotism, pioneering spirit,* and *minzu unity* to serve the construction of a sense of Chinese nationhood in Xinjiang. Sibe SNS users, consciously or unconsciously, infuse the

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three discourses of *patriotism, pioneering spirit,* and *minzu unity* from the state-defined meaning of the Westward Migration into their discussion on it.

Sibe SNS users in my fieldwork were focused on building up their cultural capital along with exploring the routes of their Sibe identity in the context of emerging ethnic nationalism in China, and they neither considered their Sibe identity equivalent to their roots nor meant to abandon their route, but endeavored to keep these elements resting at peace and exploit them only when they were needed. They maintain connection to their roots while also exploring the routes. In other words, SNS users adhered to aspects of the state-defined narrative as a way of retaining credibility while retaining the capacity to explore their identity further.

The Sibe SNS users keep repeating two words when discussing the Westward Migration. The two words are 'hun' (*soul*) and 'gen' (*roots*). They tend to use *soul* to describe the route of their identity, and routes are something in the making. Roots are in the Northeast of China; the official narrative and Sibe SNS users discussing the Westward Migration both agree on Sibe roots. However, as the soul of the Sibe people is still under construction by the Sibe on the route of Westward Migration, there is a lot of difference regarding what the soul of the Sibe should be.

For the state, the soul of the Sibe is *patriotism, pioneering spirit,* and *minzu unity*. The meaning of Westward Migration, in general, was perceived by Sibe SNS users as a route and mobility about fixed roots of Sibe based on virtual ethnography fieldwork on Sibe SNS. Sibe SNS users recognise the Sibe soul in a much more fluid way. For the Sibe SNS users, *soul* represents contemporaneity itself. It depicts the evolving Sibe ethnicity, hopes, and lives-in-the-making, as well as places imagined along the routes and roads.

One issue for analysis is how Sibe SNS users utilise the discourse of patriotism in their online discussion to serve their own needs. In the Sibe SNS users' own narrative on the Westward Migration, patriotism was endorsed by the state as very important rhetoric in defining ethnic identity among the ethnic groups in Xinjiang. The discourse of patriotism was also supported by the discourse of development in legitimising its application to the subject of the ethnic minority in Xinjiang. To be precise, local development was brought about by Chinese national development; hence, one should give love back to the motherland. This is the very

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discourse the State promotes on the relationship between ethnic minority periphery areas and the centre of the Chinese nation as I have introduced in the literature Review (see The Studies on Ethnic Minority in Chapter and The Impact of Western Development Programme and the New Silk Road Project in Xinjiang)

In this discourse, the Sibe take over the very element of patriotism that the state endorses in the Westward Migration narrative, and develop the Westward Migration into the narrative of the Sibe people contributing to Xinjiang's local development. Sibe people are in a privileged position in developing the region of Xinjiang. It is the contribution and sacrifice that Sibe devote themselves to protecting and developing the borderland that makes Sibe people one of the important *minzu* in the Chinese nation.

The discourse of patriotism was found in SNS users' common narrative on why the Sibe came to Xinjiang. The Sibe SNS users take the mission of Westward Migration to protect China's borderland as an expression of who they are. The discourse of patriotism proliferates in the discussion of the history of Westward Migration in the SNSs. In the online debate on the Sibe SNSs, Sibe people use SNSs to share their knowledge of the Westward Migration with other Sibe online. Based on my observations, the retelling the story of Westward Migration is used by Sibe SNSs as a tool to re-imagine their identity. At the same time, the sharing of knowledge on Westward Migration also was used by them to re-spatialise the location of Sibe in the Chinese national imagination. According to my observations, I found out that while the state-defined Sibe identity derived from the Westward Migration focuses on the patriotism, when Sibe SNS users discuss the Westward Migration, Sibe SNS users tend to focus on their contribution toward the development of Xinjiang via their prompting of the *spirit of endurance,* and *pioneering spirit,* and *the persistence at keeping tradition.* They tend to discuss the hardship that the Sibe ancestors experienced on the journey and use the hardship to express the spirit of endurance that Sibe people developed from the Westward Migration; this spirit has helped Sibe people to overcome the challenges and difficulties of living in Xinjiang over the last two hundred years.

The discourse also focuses on how the Sibe people bring the development into Xinjiang from the East. Sibe people use their hands and pioneering spirit to

cultivate the land so that it is habitable; the opening of the Çabçal Canal is one of most oft-repeated topics among Sibe SNS users. The Sibe SNS users praise their ancestors for opening the Çabçal Canal and making the land into a land of harvest. The name, Çabçal, means "harvest" in the Sibe language.

These themes are brought out if we consider some examples of Sibe SNS users' online discussions. The Sibe SNS users draw upon patriotic discourse, framing the Sibe in Chinese national history but actually promoting the Sibe people's virtue rather than emphasising the Chinese State's contribution to Xinjiang. In the comments made in *Çabçal Sibe* WeChat *qun* on the discussion on the Westward Migration on the day of the Westward Migration festival, Sibe SNS users from Çabçal community used this opportunity to glorify the Sibe community's contribution in the development of Çabçal:

> During more than 200 years of garrison settlement after Sibe migrated westward into Xinjiang, Sibe soldiers garrisoned 18 Karen near the borderland with Russia. The Sibe people's defence of the motherland faithfully fulfilled their deep sense of duty to defend against foreign enemies and safeguard the stability of the motherland. Sibe people made major sacrifices and defended the highest interests of the country… In the meantime, we Sibe people opened the Cabucal *buha* (canal)，cultivated the wild land, to build our homeland here at Çabçal. The spirit of Westward Migration developed into *minzu unity spirit, forge ahead spirit*，this is the main sprit that our Sibe's westward migration represents. (G, Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen QQ *qun*, 2015).

In the above comment, the Sibe SNS user converts the discourse of patriotism into a focus on the Sibe's contribution to the construction of the Chinese borderland via transformation of the state's narrative of Westward Migration on the Sibe's contribution to garrisoning the borderland into one that focuses on the Sibe's sacrifice in cultivating the wild land into a land of harvest and into the habitable homeland of the Sibe people. The patriotic spirit of the Westward Migration, hence, developed into '*minzu unity spirit, forge ahead spirit*'.

The *Çabçal Sibe* WeChat *qun* is a WeChat *qun* mainly used by Sibe people from the region of Çabçal in Xinjiang. Sibe people in Xinjiang very carefully use the

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terminology supplied by the State when discussing their own history. At the same time, the local Sibe people very creatively use State-sanctioned texts to serve their own end, which is to promote the local Sibe community's contribution in Xinjiang. This works as cultural capital for local Sibe people and helps Sibe people advance their position within the State-promoted development discourse in the emerging nationalism in Xinjiang. The following two *qun* users' comments reflect the above point:

- At that time, the southern bank of the Ili River was still a wilderness. Only the ruined temple left from the Junggar period and the remains of a few acres of cultivated land from Taraki were found in places such as Haiouk. The Sibe chose to settle in arable land (G, *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun*, 2015).

- After more than three decades, the population of the Sibe company had multiplied to more than 7,000 people. The land could no longer meet the needs of the growing population. Only further opening up canals, expanding the cultivated area, and developing agricultural production could maintain the livelihood of the entire Sibe community (T8, *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun*, 2015).

In the above Sibe SNS users' comments on the Westward Migration, the users develop the state-sanctioned rhetoric of patriotism into the discourse on development. What the Sibe SNS users emphasise is the Sibe people's sacrifices for the sake of protecting the borderland and cultivating the borderland into a habitable place. It is Sibe people who developed the borderland into a land of harvest. This implies that Sibe people are at the centre of the development of the Chinese nation.

The canal is one of the most important projects that brought security and prosperity to the local Sibe community. Hence, the historical figure of Tubet (see Figure 34), who was in charge of the opening of the canal, is emphasised by the local Sibe community. Tubet was used as a very important historical memory in order to remember the hardship Sibe people went through while developing the region of Çabçal. The following comments from Çabçal Sibe WeChat *qun* was made by local Sibe people from Çabçal on discussing what is the spirit of the Westward Migration on the day of the Westward Migration festival in 2015:

- 47-year-old Tubet... Proposed opening a canal leading to the Ili River ... in 1802 (Jiaqing seven years) September 1, work on the Canal officially started…The project is arduous, and the workforce is not enough. Tubet... after the start of the project, he went to the site in person and started his work day and night, solving various problems in time. His work-spirit greatly stimulated the morale of the vast numbers of soldiers and civilians. After six years of arduous hard work, the canal was finally completed in the spring of 1808. The total length of the canal was 100 kilometers. The canal was 3.3 meters deep and 4 meters wide. It was originally called "Sibe Canal", and it then changes into Çabçal Canal" as Çabçal means "granary" in Sibe language (H, *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun*, 2015).

- On the deserted wilderness on both sides of the Çabçal Canal, the thriving scene of the village crossroads and the paddy fields connecting each other emerged. With the continuous development of production, the annual harvest of crops has greatly improved the lives of the soldiers and civilians in Sibe (T8, *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun*, 2015).

- The Çabçal Canal was successfully opened under very difficult conditions of the day and was inseparable from Tubet's vigorous advocacy and hard work. The Sibe people regard the Çabçal Canal as their mother river and Tubet as *minzu* hero and benefactor. He has been praised by generations. And Sibe people built "Tugong Temple" in the drains of the Canal to memorialise his contribution to the Sibe community. Sibe people help worship here every spring and autumn (H, *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun*, 2015).

From the above comments, we can see how Sibe SNS users developed the State-sanctioned discourse of patriotism relating to Westward Migration into the narrative that emphasises the virtue of Sibe people in cultivating the new frontier. The focus on *minzu* unity was changed into a focus on the Sibe people's characteristic persistence at overcoming the hardships of the process of developing a new area.

Sibe SNS users also compare the Sibe people with state's organisation in term of the contribution on developing Xinjiang. The following comment was made by T8 on his Weibo account on the day of Westward Migration Festival in 2015: 'Sibe people is the first group of Bingtuan (Production and Construction Corps) in Xinjiang, they are the first corder,...they are the first group people who develop Xinjiang' (T8, *Weibo*, 2015).

The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) is an economic and paramilitary organization that entered Xinjiang in 1954 with the mandate from the central government to develop Xinjiang, promote economic development, ensure social stability and ethnic harmony, and consolidate border defense. It is still powerful in the region. The history of the Sibe is made out to resemble the role of the XPCC, as a military group that brought economic development to Xinjiang.

It is significant that this comment was made on Weibo. Weibo is a public platform; all the posts on this platform are open to public. This statement a Sibe person made on Weibo can also be taken as reflecting how Sibe people want to present Sibe identity to the public in China.

The State presents itself as having brought economic development in Xinjiang, (Bhalla & Luo, 2017, p. 21) and the Sibe people's contribution in the Çabçal region reflects the State's agenda in xinjiang. The Sibe people praise themselves as they achieve this even before the modern Chinese State began to develop Xinjiang. In this sense, the Sibe advance their cultural location in the Chinese nation within the development discourse in Xinjiang. In this discourse, the Sibe are able to put Sibe people at the centre of Chinese nation building.
As the development and cultivation are so fundamental to the ideology of the Chinese nation state, (Bhalla & Luo, 2017, p. 21), in the discourse of Chinese nation building, the Sibe people's contribution on developing the region of Çabçal are also recognized as an action forChinese nation building.

Keeping the tradition of the Northeast of China

The State-sanctioned Westward Migration is designed to fix Sibe identity with their roots of Northeast of China, as this narrative can clearly fix the location of

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the Sibe within China's national imagination, and then use the Westward Migration to mark the patriotistic garrisoning of Sibe people in Xinjiang to serve the construction of the Chinese nation in Xinjiang. In this vein, we can see the narrative on the Sibe's tradition has been careful positioned with the connection with the Northeast of China.

T8's comment, in *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun*, on Sibe culture in relation to the Westward Migration vividly illustrate this point. This comment was made in a discussion on what the Sibe culture in Xinjiang is: 'Westward Migration folk art still retains the ancient Sibe hunting culture and customs from the northeast of China, which consist of hunting in the winter and fishing in the spring.' (T8, *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun*, 2015)

On the other hand, in the discussion on Sibe tradition, based on my observations of Sibe SNS users on WeChat and Weibo, most Sibe SNS users tend to advocate the idea that Sibe tradition is not limited to any territory; it is not bounded by the Northeast of China, nor it is bounded by Xinjiang. The Sibe tradition, based on my findings from Sibe SNS users' online discussions, is developed with reference to the experience of the Westward Migration:

> The habit from northeast of China also formed a custom that Sibe people must go to the river fishing and eat fish at the Westward Migration festival each year, and created the special fish-eating method called "river water boiled fish"; this way of cooking fish become a very famous Sibe cuisine in Ili region. (T6, *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun*, 2015)

We can see from the above comment that Sibe SNS users tend to focus on how Sibe people developed their tradition from the Northeast of China into a new culture to suit the new environment in Xinjiang. The cuisine of "river water boiled fish" vividly reflects this tendency. In Sibe SNS users' comments, they take the state-sanctioned idea of the Westward Migration, that it, that, starting from the journey from the Northeast of China, the culture of those Sibe people migrated westward into Xinjiang. Their culture formed during the process of westward migration; their culture is fixed by neither the Northeast of China nor Xinjiang. What is the new Sibe culture from the experience of the Westward Migration? What is the Sibe identity

that Sibe SNS users assert from their online discussion? I will use the following excerpt to analyse this:

> Sibe people keep our ancient fishing, hunting culture and shamistic religious culture from northeast China during the 200 years of garrison life in Xinjiang, and developed into a unique contemporary Sibe culture which combines the influence of oasis neighbours' culture... all the people say that we Sibe people have tongues of larks so that we absorb the language from Uyghur, Kazakh, Mongolian language, and our Sibe people are multilingual experts by birth, in that we can speak so many different languages. We are the most sophisticated *minzu* in Xinjiang… (F2, *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun*, 2015)

In the above comment, Sibe identity is as mobile and fluid as the Sibe people migrating from the Northeast of China to Xinjiang. Sibe SNS users celebrate the mobility of Sibe identity in-between northeast Chinese identity and Xinjiang identity, state-defined ethnic minority identity, and Chinese national identity. Sibe identity is regarded as dynamic rather than a fixed culture.

From observation of Sibe SNS comments, we can conclude that Sibe SNS users' imagination is unbounded and not framed by the rules of the Chinese state, which strives to fix ethnicity within territories and the Chinese national history framework. Sibe SNS users' comments call into question the view that there is a fixed relationship between place, identity, and culture. Routes, rather than roots, emphasise that identity and belonging are formed from the experience of real and imagined journeys and connections. Sibe SNS users express their neglect of the sacredness of fixed relationship between identity and place. They criticise the fixed geography of Sibe identity and emphasise that Sibe culture was developed in the course of the process of the Westward Migration; the Sibe in Xinjiang have adopted the environment of Xinjiang and developed a new culture which is significantly different from the Sibe culture in the Northeast of China.

Based on data from the virtual ethnography that I conducted on Sibe SNSs, on the discussions on the Sibe culture in relation to the Westward Migration, it can be concluded that a hybrid identity emerged from Sibe SNS users' interactions concerning the Sibe culture. The discussion on the Westward Migration and Sibe

culture function as a form of self-pilgrimage on the meaning of Sibe, which can deviate from the state-promoted fixed Sibe identity

Sibe SNS users practice their self-identifications of the Sibe soul in multiple and contextually contingent ways. According to my observation on Sibe SNS *qun*s, the meaning of Sibe-ness is produced through the debate on what the Sibe culture is, mediated by contestations over the meaning of the Westward Migration in ways which blur and merge the boundary of the Northeast of China and Xinjiang in defining Sibe identity.

Sibe SNS users tend to recognise the Westward Migration in terms of the Sibe *soul,* developed along the road of the Westward Migration. Sibe SNS users theorise their identity from the Westward Migration not through conceptual, national belonging but through the social bonds of *holbobun* understood through SNS networks.

The Sibe SNS users took the roots of the Northeast of China together with the route of their identity from developing the concept of Westward Migration into the developing of their new Sibe identity. This takes place in the new context of SNSs allowing this to be articulated when talking of the Westward Migration. I argue that this may lead Sibe to reconstruct their ethnic identities in a new social context.

In this chapter, my analysis on the Sibe SNS users' narrative of the Westward Migration confirms that Sibe SNS users take up a 'third space' in narrating the Westward Migration, a state of in-betweenness where they negotiate between the State-defined ethnic minority identity and what Litzinger (2000, p.248) called the post-socialist identity; this space presents both a privilege and a challenge (Bhabha, 1994). The concept of post-socialist identity focuses on the possibility of cultural identity being brought about by marketisation, while being negotiated with previous socialist roots-type, fixed meaning ethnic identity. The concept of post-socialist identity is very useful for analysing the Sibe SNS commentary on the Westward Migration in terms of routes and roots as the concept provides an analytical

perspective via which to understand why Sibe people have to alter the narrative of their roots in order to construct a new identity for the current social condition.

All my participants seemingly tended to take their 'third space' as a privilege: they voiced their appreciation of the fact that Sibe identity is not limited to any particular regional identity and the Sibe people are a group of migrants whose identity is dynamic and who enjoy more autonomy and freedom in this hybrid identity than in an identity limited to any territory. The privileges these Sibe SNS users felt fortunate to have inclined them to use this third space to negotiate their position between the old and the new: the previous, fixed, socialist *minzu* identity (Harrell, 1995 Litzinger, 2000; Schein, 2000), and the new post-socialist identity (Litzinger, 2000). This is the reason that the Sibe SNS users are enjoined to promote their new Sibe identity online and celebrate their hybrid identities.

The comment from Sibe SNS users on the Westward Migration remains both localised and cursed by this same locality at the same time. Sibe SNS users do not deny their "roots", their northeast Chinese origin, and they strive to create a Sibe identity based around leading the development in the local community. This technology of development is brought by the Sibe people from the Northeast of China through the Westward Migration. In this sense, the Westward Migration is a symbol that sets an example for all ethnic minorities in Xinjiang. At the same time, Sibe make the Westward Migration a tool, so that it is through the Westward Migration that the Chinese nation can bring the borderland into a Chinese style of settlement and agriculture. It is in this way that Sibe people can put across their advanced position in Xinjiang, and it is this advanced position in Xinjiang that grants Sibe people the agency to claim that their culture ought to be preserved. However, the more the Sibe advance themselves in the development of the Chinese nation, the more Sibe culture is assimilated into Chinese Han culture in the emerging discourse of post-socialist national identity in China (Litzinger, 2000, p.248).

Ethnographic data on ethnic identity construction among Xinjiang in is not common due to the Chinese state's tight control of the region, my fieldwork data has enriched the ethnographic data on minzu construction among ethnic minority in Xinjiang. The State has manipulated the cultural materials, skills, and contexts of

ethnic minority cultural tradition with those of the "modern" repertoire. The local cultural producers have to revise this repertoire and create historical discourses around it that reflect new concepts of nationhood and ethnicity. My virtual fieldwork on Sibe SNSs and onsite fieldwork bring me to the first-hand material to evaluate complexity of above argument. There is plenty of evidence of Sibe people adopting the state-approved discourse and being coerced by the state in their sense of identity. However, there are also examples of Sibe people manipulating the state-sanctioned narrative to prioritise or advance their community's interests. The Sibe people can use state material, and show that the Sibe are more advanced than the Han as they have also been a source of economic development in the Xinjiang region. There is subtle way to manipulate the state's sanctioned text. The Sibe cannot fully control the production of their ethnicity, yet the State seems to fail to fully control it either.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I mainly discussed the social protocols that appear in the SNSs governing the meaning of the Westward Migration. The activity that takes place in the current flow of contacts between Sibe people and SNS platforms of WeChat, QQ, Sina Weibo, Sina Blog, and Baidu Tieba cannot be the result of either an individual or collective reminiscence. Rather, I argue that it is a networked culture where social interactions and cultural products are inseparably enmeshed in technological systems. A personal network indicates a social structure between actors of *holbobun* or SNS social networks facilitated by the use of SNS through kinship, social and professional bonds, material exchange, shared behaviour, and suchlike. The idea of "sharing" in the context of SNS platforms has become mostly an unconscious technological pursuit. The institutional protocols shape the picture-sharing practice and, as a result, influence the meaning of the Westward Migration.

The Influence of Social Networking Sites and Discourses of *Minzu* on the adoption of Transliterated Sibe Language in Computer Mediated Communication

Introduction

As, under the influence of Stalin's definition of *minzu*, language was prioritised as one of most important ethnic marker for a *minzu*, the Sibe language is utilised as one of the most important characters for the Sibe identity construction. The adoption of transliterated Sibe plays a crucial role on marking the ethnic boundary of Sibe. In the socialist period, when the *minzu* was identified by the state, the state used its administrative technique to hail a *minzu* identity from the state's perspective of imagined community. In this process, the Sibe *minzu* was constructed out of criteria of claiming the knowledge of Sibe language. However, in the networked society in which the SNS function as a community for Sibe, in this environment, the Sibe language becomes a communication tool for Sibe to be included in the Sibe community; in this environment, the mastery of Sibe language becomes an important marker for Sibe identity.

In this chapter, I will analyse the way in which Sibe identity was built using transliterated Sibe in the SNS *qun*, how the Sibe people are organised by using transliterated Sibe in the SNS *qun* to form a new community that resembles Sibe people who are scattered in different places. In this chapter, my analysis of the development of *minzu* narrative in the SNS *qun* stresses the realisation of a set of principles and ideas of *minzu* that guide the choice of transliterated Sibe in SNS *quns*. The transliterated Sibe on SNSs, according to Foucauldian concept of culture as governance, is an amalgam of limited of practical resources that the Sibe people are able to put to use to claim their identity in relation with the use of Roman alphabets in transliterating Sibe language.

In analysing the relationship between transliterated Sibe language and Sibe *minzu* identity, and inspired by Rainie and Wellman's concept of networked individualism, which recognises the individual's agency in articulating the meanings produced by the networks, my analysis, in this chapter, will focus on the individual Sibe SNS users and how the concepts of *minzu* and the material conditions of SNSs

interacted with each in producing the choices of method and transliteration and sense of identity.

In this chapter, I first review the phenomenon of the adoption of transliterated Sibe by reviewing the problems of Sibe language software and different transliterated systems. I then introduce what the concept of Sibe language is and its connection with the technique of transliteration. I then review the history of the construction of Sibe language. By reviewing the history, I offer a historical context for the arguments concerning the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language, and introduce the context in which Sibe people promote their Spoken Language.

After reviewing this historical context, I present my ethnographic findings on what transliterated Sibe was adopted by Sibe SNS users to provide data for further analysis on the relationship between *minzu* discourses and the choice of transliterated Sibe.

I then examine what the main statements are in the discussion of the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language and identify the discourses of *minzu* that influence the debate. Based on interviews with Sibe SNS users, I conclude that the *minzu* discourses that hailed to Sibe in relation to their statements on the relationship between Manchu and Sibe language are cultural *minzu,* racial *minzu*, and Stalin's definition of *minzu*. In analysing the discussion amongst Sibe SNS users on the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language, I conclude that there are two conflicting but consistent statements on the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language, based on my interviews with Sibe SNS users. The first statement is that Sibe is a separate language from Manchu. The second statement is that Sibe language has developed from Manchu language. The reason why I argue that the statements are conflicting is the first statement's denial that Sibe language is the same as Manchu language, while the second statement claims that the Sibe language has developed from the Manchu language. The reason why I argue that the statements are also consistent with each other is the fact that both statements argue that Sibe language should be considered an independent language. From these conflicting but consistent statements, we can glimpse Sibe people's attempt at discursively constructing an independent status for Sibe language at this stage.

After comparing the different statements on the relationship between Sibe and Manchu language among Sibe SNS users, I conduct further analysis on why Sibe SNS users made such seemingly conflicting but consistent statements on the Sibe language by analysing their statements' connection with Stalin's definition of *minzu* and Chinese nationalism. I argue that the reason Sibe insist they are a separate *minzu* is that they want keep their *minzu* status under Stalin's definition of *minzu*, as it is the only legitimising channel to protect their language. On the other hand, Sibe also claiming that Sibe language is the same as Manchu language is due to the situation in which the only way to develop Sibe language in the current political economic condition of developing ethnic minority languages in China is to connect the Sibe language with the Chinese nation. Manchu language, as the language of the Qing dynasty makes a significant contribution towards producing a very significant part of the history of the Chinese nation. With the importance of contributing to the writing of Chinese history, the state and nation will develop Sibe language. It is through this logic that Sibe people argue that Sibe language has developed from Manchu language, and, as my interviewee H, said, 'Sibe language is the key to revealing the history of the Chinese nation' (H, personal communication., Urumqi, July 27, 2011).

After reviewing the main statements of the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language, I analyse individual Sibe's practices on promoting the Sibe language in relation to the use of transliterated Sibe. I analyse K's experience as a Sibe language teacher in a Sibe language training class in Çabçal; T7's experience as a Sibe language teacher in promoting Spoken Sibe with the use of Romanised Transliterated Sibe on the SNS *qun*; Z2's experience as Sibe language editor at Çabçal TV station using Written Language on TV programmes; A's Sibe language teaching experience on the SNS qun; H2's experience while hosting *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun* at constructing a linguists' environment for Sibe to speak and learn Sibe language; W's practices of promoting transliterated Sibe-Manchu by inventing the transliteration method to transliterate Sibe with the use of Roman alphabets; A2 as a Sibe poet and his experience using transliterated Sibe to promote Sibe ethnic identity.

Based on my analysis of the Sibe's practices at promoting Sibe language, I find that there are numerous contradictions between their statements and their

practices. The statements on promoting an independent Sibe language have been contradicted by their actual practices when using the Manchu language. Based on my ethnography, I conclude that this contradiction is due to the discourse of *minzu*'s influence and the constraints and affordability of CMC in the SNS *qun*. Sibe SNS *qun* users were guided by the material condition of SNSs and the discourses of *minzu* to the conclusion that transliterated Sibe should adopt pinyin to represent the phonetic shape of Sibe language. Pinyin is the tool implemented by the state for nationalising Mandarin as the national language through compulsory education since 1950s in China. By using pinyin to represent transliterated Sibe, a certain constraint both from the materiality of pinyin and from the discourse of pinyin has shaped Sibe identity.

I also identify the choice of transliterated Sibe language in the Sibe SNS *qun* as not simply a result of the shared knowledge, but, through the formation of a special relationship generated from the interaction between *holbobun, minzu*, and SNS *qun* amongst the Sibe SNS users, it also helps to construct a certain character for the culture and community of a new ethnic group for Sibe in Çabçal and in the northeast of China.

I conclude that the choice of transliterated Sibe language, with the use of Roman alphabets in the SNS *qun* is legitimised by an appeal to the promotion of Spoken Sibe language. My qualitative analysis confirms that the discourse of *minzu* is engaged with complex processes of cultural governance on the formation of transliterated Sibe language through the choice of the Latin alphabet within the CMC. Based on the ethnographic data that I collected during my fieldwork, I conclude that the transliteration of Sibe language using the Latin alphabet has been manipulated as tool to serve the idea that language should represent their community. The choice of using pinyin to spell Spoken Sibe was mobilised by this thought; it results in the transliterated Sibe reflecting the Spoken Sibe used by Sibe people in Çabçal.

My argument in this chapter is that the adoption of transliterated Sibe language in CMC, as implicated in the production of community and an idea of imagining the community, with "installation" of the ideas of *minzu* in Sibe with the ways of SNS *quns* is connected to practice of *holbobun*, allows Sibe to internalise the

discourses of *minzu* as management in their identity construction. In this process, the transliterated Sibe language functions as a laboratory where a whole series of strategies for building the Sibe ethnic community are brought to bear and tested out. Yet this construction is always productive, in the sense that ideas, objects, actors and inscriptions emerge from these arenas. This production, in return, provides a functional justification for the adaptation of the transliterated Sibe among Sibe people.

The shared use of transliterated Sibe language reduces the feeling of physical distance for Sibe from Xinjiang and the Northeast of China, while the reference to specific socio-physical boundaries facilitated by the use of transliterated Sibe asserts a distance from the rest of the China. This dichotomy reinforces a sense of belonging for participants by creating a culturally localised niche of Sibe ethnic identity within the expansive space, facilitated by the use of SNSs. I argue that the transliterated Sibe adopted online, which is influenced by the transliterated systems based on Roman alphabets and the discourse of *minzu*, allows for new meaning of Sibe ethic identity online self-evidently.

The Adoption of Transliterated Sibe

There is still no adequate software to produce Sibe script in cyberspace. Mongolian Character Code has been allocated in UCS/Unicode. Experts have put in effort since 1993 to develop Sibe-Manchurian Character Code and Fonts but the limited cooperation between international organisations, experts, and local end users have slowed implementation of Sibe script (Tongjia, 2004, p. 43). In this context, based on my ethnography on the Sibe SNS *quns* since 2009, I have found out that the Sibe people tend to use the Roman alphabets to transliterate Spoken Sibe in a CMC environment, in order to make it easier for people to learn Sibe language and Manchu language. And it also makes it possible for people to type Sibe on a computer more easily. Sibe SNS users started to modify Möllendorff's transliterated Manchu system and make a new version of Romanised transliterated Sibe, which is easier to type with ASCII Roman alphabet. W's method of transliteration was produced in this context, and his method has been mostly adopted by Sibe SNS users.

He uses the ASCII Roman alphabet to represent the phonetic shape of Sibe language, making it easier for those Sibe and Manchu who live in the Northeast of

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China and who do not have a Manchu-language background to learn the Sibe language. For instance, he changed the Romanised syllables, *ša, še, ši, šo, šu* into *xa, xe, xi, xo, xu, xv.* He told me that the reason for making such a change is also his wanting to make each Sibe syllable have a corresponding syllable in the Roman alphabet from the computer keyboard. This will 'make Sibe language easier to type with a computer' (W, personal communication., July 20, 2011).

Figure 47. Transliterated Sibe Roman Alphabets Tables, Compiled by W, Screenshot from QQ *Qun* Chatroom, 2011

In the Sibe SNS *quns* studied in this thesis, Sibe people were asked how they wanted the Sibe language to be spelled. In this situation, they were usually having their accent transcribed into phonetic Sibe. They were using the Roman alphabet or Chinese character to represent the sounds of Sibe language. In the mobile SNS application, WeChat, they quite often recorded their voice by Voice Message to communicate with each other. As Sibe are using the internet as a medium to teach the Sibe language, they are inevitably constrained by the linguistic resources available to them in the CMC environment. As Blakeman (2004) argues, people use a combination of their knowledge of language combined with their innate creative abilities to write an existing language in new ways. They are using the limitations of a keyboard to invent a new online lexicon, taking the best features from certain aspects of written language and combining them to create a new variety of language best suited to the CMC environment (Blakeman, 2004).

The chart in Figure 47 was compiled by W. In the interview that I conducted with him in his office at the *Gašan Cultural Communication Company* in Urumqi in 2011, he told me that this Sibe transliterated table references Möllendorff's transliterated method on Manchu, as Möllendorff's is most used transliteration method for writing Manchu among Sibe speakers and Manchu speakers. From the above transliterated table, we can see that some signs, for instance, *ź, š,* and *ū*, cannot be easily typed with the input method that is adopted on mobile phones and computers in China. In order to use the Roman alphabet to communicate in Sibe in a CMC environment, the Sibe creatively choose alternative letters which are available through the keyboard of mobile phones and computers to represent the phenolic shape of Sibe language.

Figure 48. Modification of Transliterated Sibe Roman Alphabets Tables for
the Use in CMC environment, Compiled by R, Screenshot from WeChat
Group Chatroom, 2014

The above chart, in Figure 48, contains the letters that Sibe altered for use in

a CMC environment. R told me that he made some changes to the letters, mainly to

solve the problem that some letters cannot be found in the input method on mobile

phones and computers. We can see, from the chart above, some special Roman signs:

ż with an index sign is replaced by *r*; *x* is used to replace the sign of *š*; *v* is used to

replace the sign of *ū*. As for the letters *r*, *x*, and *v*, they can be found in the pinyin

method easily on mobile phone and computers used in China. R told me that the

pronunciation of those Sibe scripts is also similar to the letters *r, x,* and *v* in pinyin

pronunciation. This requires the Sibe who use those Roman alphabets to represent the phonetic shape of Sibe language also to be familiar with the Chinese pinyin method.

Figure 49. Screenshot of A2's Phone Keyboard, 2015

The following screenshot in Figure 50 is the example that Sibe use the transliterated Sibe to communicate with each other.
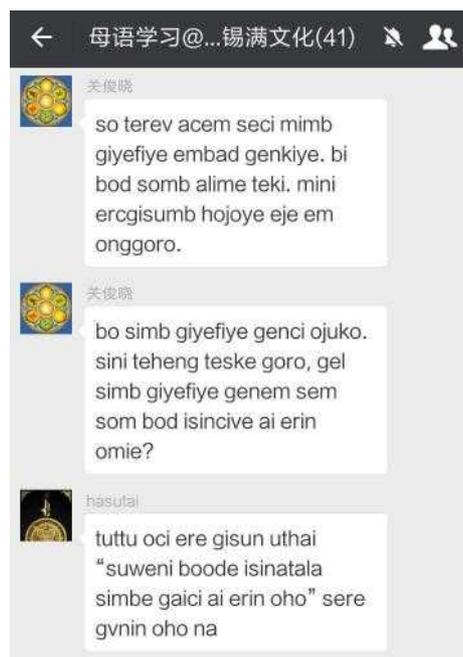
Figure 50. Screenshot of Sibe Using Roman Alphabets to Transliterate Sibe Language in WeChat Sibe Language Learning Group, 2015

Figure 51. Modified Transliterated Sibe

Gašan should be written this way, but, as there is no *š* sign on the keyboard
used on Chinese mobile phones, the Sibe SNS users creatively use the letter *x* for *š*.
Hence, *gašan* was written as *gaxan*, as shown in the above screenshot in Figure 51.

The nature of CMC and the trouble with using Sibe scripts on the current
SNS platforms, coupled with the fact that many Sibe users of CMC are well-
educated, all contribute to the widespread use of transliterated Sibe in internet
communication. Some Roman alphabets from transliterated Sibe systems are not
available on the mobile phone keypad, as I have shown above. Many letters were
replaced with their equivalent alphabetical symbols that can be found in the
keyboard, for instance, using the letter *x* for *š*.

This modified transliterated Sibe is so widely used that they have become an
integral part of transliterated Sibe language, as I have found from virtual ethnography
on Sibe SNSs from 2009 to 2015. The phenomenon of Romanisation of Sibe
language is apparently a response to technical constraints (lack of script support), but
the ways users get around this constraint, and the ways they use transliterated Sibe
with the Roman alphabet in contexts where this constraint does not apply, reveal
much about interaction between the technology and ethnic politics in Chinese
society.

According to my interviews with Sibe SNS users, Sibe SNS users choose
certain phonological descriptions of Sibe language based on their knowledge of Sibe,

and the way Sibe SNS users are familiar with Roman alphabets when using them for Spoken Sibe. Given that the sounds vary considerably, the SNS users have transcribed the words as they were able to hear them, using the Roman alphabet. The choice of certain Roman alphabetical symbols for phonological description of the Sibe language has become much wider, and depends on how familiar Sibe SNS users are with Spoken Sibe and the Roman alphabet.

According to Li, there is a number of different Romanisation systems for transliterating the Written Manchu. They are by P. G. von Möllendorff; H. C. von der Gabelentz; Luis Ligeti; Jerry Norman; Li Shulan; An Chengshan; and Guo Yuaner (Li, 2010, p. 16). Based on my ethnography on Sibe CMC practices on Sibe SNS quns from 2009 to 2015, I found out that there are three systems for transliterating the Sibe with Latin Alphabet that are most popular among Sibe SNS users. They are: the Möllendorff transliteration system; Li Shulan's phonetic transcription of Sibe using IPA for the sounds of the Sibe words; and the third transliteration system is based on the transliterated Sibe chart complied by W from the *Gašan Cultural Communication Company*. I will discuss the third system later in this Chapter.

According to my ethnography on the use of transliterated Sibe among Sibe SNS users, the transcription used by Li Shulan reflects the real shape of the language with great accuracy. W's system is preferred by Sibe SNS users, as it is much easier to use with the current input systems that most computers and mobile phones have adopted. Möllendorff's transliteration system is preferred by educated Sibe.

The main feature which distinguishes W's transliterated system from Li Shulan's phonemic transcriptions is W's system's use of those Latin alphabet letters that are easily found on the computer keyboard to mark the actual shapes of Sibe words.This is popular among Sibe WeChat users who previously have not received formal Sibe language education. Most Sibe WeChat users from the northeast of China, in my interviews, told me that W's system is easier to use in CMC, as it chooses the Roman alphabet that is easy to use with keyboard and smartphone. My interviewees informed me that they have difficulty finding the accented letters on the normal computer keyboard. For instance, the letters *ū* and *š* are difficult.

Based on my ethnography on Sibe SNS users online linguistic practices from 2009 to 2015, I found out that no single transliteration system was fully adopted. Sibe SNS users referenced some words of spelling from Möllendorff's transliteration system; in most practices, Sibe SNS users adopt the pinyin system for transliterating Spoken Sibe. I concluded that there are three reasons why Sibe did not adopt existing Romanisation systems for transliterating the written language. The first reason is that the existing Romanisation systems were mainly based on Written Language and the vocabulary of Spoken Sibe has changed significantly within the last hundred years. Hence, the existing Romanisation systems could not express the current, Spoken Sibe. The second reason is that, out of political motivation, the Sibe people in Xinjiang want to construct a separated Sibe *minzu* identity in contrast to Manchu. They deliberately deny the linguistic connection with Manchu language, hence some Sibe do not use the existing Romanisation systems. The third reason is that, due to the Sibe people's familiarity with the existing Romanisation systems, they are more familiar with the pinyin system which is a tool for learning Chinese within compulsory education in China.

A Genealogy of Sibe Language

In this section, I will introduce the concept of Sibe language and its connection with the technique of transliteration. I will examine the role that *minzu* plays in regulating Sibe language by showing the history of the construction of Sibe language.

The Sibe language is recognised as Modern Manchu by Manchu linguist, Gertrude Roth Li (Li, 2010, p. 21). The Sibe language is considered by the Sibe people to be the most important ethnic marker due to the influence of Stalin's concept of *minzu.* The Sibe language is regarded by Sibe people to take two forms, according to my interviews. One is the form of Spoken Sibe, which is practiced by local people in everyday contexts. The other form is regarded as the Written Language, which is a literary language derived from Manchu. Spoken Sibe is mostly used at home. Books, newspapers, and Çabçal TV news all use the Written Language. The Sibe language textbooks also teache the form of Written Language (Tongjia, 2004, p. 54).

Based on my ethnography on Sibe SNS users' linguistic practices in relation to learning Sibe language, the Written Language refers to written Manchu; in every interview with Sibe from Xinjiang, the word of Manchu is omitted. To be more precise, the Manchu is not mentioned as a source of comparison by Xinjiang Sibe. This reflects a collective action on constructing a Sibe identity with their choices in terms of Written Language. Sibe people tend to say "Written Language" to refer to written Sibe. This reflects a contradiction between their understanding of language and their statements about the language. The "Written Language" is actually written in the Manchu writing system in Sibe's writing practices, as I found out in my ethnography, so I asked my participant S why they didn't call it "Written Manchu". He told me that 'the state has already recognised Sibe language as an independent language, we should call it Written Language instead of Written Manchu.' (S, personal communication, July 29, 2011). From S's reply, we can see that Sibe people are aware that the language is Manchu language in their minds. However, they need to make the statement that Sibe is an independent language. Hence, they say "Written Language" instead of Written Manchu. Hence, the relationship between the Written Language and Spoken Sibe is that the Written Language refers to a Manchu identity, and the choice of Spoken Sibe refers to an emphasis on a Sibe identity.

The greatest obstacle for Sibe people learning Sibe language is the great variance among groups of speakers and fluidity in the pronunciation of Spoken Sibe. The transliterated Sibe adopted in the CMC environment is complicated by the fact that some of the speakers recognise the Written Language as the written standard in the CMC environment, while the others recognise Spoken Sibe as the written standard in the CMC environment. For the people who recognise the Written Language as the written standard in the CMC environment, the transliterated Sibe should follow the syllabics based on Manchu syllables. The people who recognise Spoken Sibe as the written standard in the CMC environment insist that the written standard of transliterated Sibe should follow how the Sibe language is spoken in their everyday lives.

According to my interviews with the Sibe historian, H, during my field trip in Urumqi, the main features which characterise the sounds of Spoken Sibe as opposed to the Written Language were recorded and published into the first book which

systematically introduced Sibe language at the beginning of the 20th century. This was recorded in Salachun's *Sibe Grammar:* Salachun added some syllables to reflect the Spoken Sibe used in Sibe communities in Xinjiang in the 1940s and deleted some Manchu-language syllables which were not used by the Sibe people in Xinjiang. It was based on this modification that the Sibe language was announced as a separate language by *Sibe-Solon-Manchu Cultural Association* (*SSMCA*) in 1947 (H, personal communication, July 27, 2011).

The overall impression given by the present situation is that the school textbooks were based on the syllabary of Manchu language, which is based on the pronunciation that was standard at the beginning of the 20th century. And, as the Sibe language has been significantly influenced by Uyghur, Kazakh, and Chinese in the last hundred years, the pronunciation of Spoken Sibe has changed significantly. Hence, there is gap between the Sibe language taught in schools and the Sibe language spoken in the local community. This constrained the spread of the Sibe language, as S told me in the interview: 'As the standard Sibe taught in the primary schools has a huge gap with the Sibe language used in the different local communities, the school education on Sibe language was challenged by the local Sibe communities' (S, personal communication, July 20, 2011).

The Written Language is written in vertical columns running from top to bottom and from left to right. Most letters have several different forms: initial, medial, and final, which are used at the beginning, middle, and end of a word respectively. The vowels also have isolated forms. Some letters have different shapes depending on which vowel comes before or after them.

Within the last hundred years, the Sibe language appears to have gone through a great change, with several reforms. Sibe language was considered to belong to the Tungusic language family (Li, 2010, p. 13). There is debate on Sibe language's origin in the academy. Sibe scholars argue that Sibe is a separate language in relation to Manchu (He, 1995; Shetuken, 2009; Tongjia, 2004); the other argument, proposed mainly by the scholars in Manchu studies is that the Sibe language is a modern form of Manchu language (Li, 2010). Although Sibe scholars insist on the uniqueness of the Sibe language, they also recognise that the Sibe

language has developed from the Manchu language (Shetuken, 2009, p. 11; Tongjia, 2004, p. 12). I will review how the Sibe language evolved, following this consensus.

The Manchu language developed from the Jurchen language. The Jurchen people ruled North China, as the established Jin dynasty (1115–1234); they developed two scripts, the "big" and "small" scripts. Over time, these scripts fell into disuse, and the last known Jurchen inscription dates from 1526. As their own scripts disappeared, the Jurchen substituted written Mongolian whenever they had a need for documentation. In 1599, Nurhaci, the founder of the Manchu empire, commissioned scholars to modify the Mongolian script so that it would be suitable for writing Jurchen and this new form of Jurchen was called Manchu language. Beginning in the 1620s, the script was further refined by adding dots and circles to eliminate certain ambiguities of the Mongolian script. This modified script remained in use throughout the Qing dynasty (Li, 2010, p. 13). Following the establishment of the Qing dynasty in 1644, most Manchu lived either in Beijing or in walled garrisons throughout the empire. For a while, they were able to maintain their language, especially within the garrisons. By the middle of 18th century, Chinese had become the dominant language among the Manchus (Li, 2010, p. 14). These trends were hastened by the fact that, towards the end of the Qing dynasty, especially after the 1911 revolution, the Manchus become the target of Chinese nationalist persecution, creating a situation which made those who could still speak Manchu ill-inclined to publicise that fact (Li, 2010, p. 15). Reformers, led by Sun Yatsen, manipulated popular anti-Manchu sentiment to promote a new pan-Han Chinese nationalism (Dikötter 1992, pp. 25–30). The Sibe, with their strong association with the Manchu and their orientation towards the Qing, were extremely vulnerable to this movement. In reaction, they began to seek new strategies to legitimise their existence, reaching out to reformist movements in Soviet Russia and in central China, and they began to emphasise a unique Sibe ethnic identity, separate from the Manchus. In the 1920s, Sibe people started to go to the Soviet Union to study modern technology. Influenced by their experience studying in the Soviet Union, they started to reform the Manchu language. In this period, the Sibe people were influenced by Stalin's concept of *minzu* which recognise language as one of the important marker for a *minzu*, and started to promote the concept of Sibe language as a unique ethnic marker for their

ethnicity. I will discuss this later in this chapter. In 1927, Wang Yuhua, who graduated from Soviet Union university, introduced the Russian Cyrillic alphabet to transliterate Sibe language (Tongjia, 2004, p. 16). However, it was not accepted by the general public (Tongjia, 2004, p. 123). During the period of the "three regions revolution" (1944–1949), the "language reform committee" of the *SSMCA* was established by educated Sibe elites (Tongjia, 2004, p. 123). A project on reforming written Sibe into a separate language was launched by the *SSMCA*. In the newly established regime of the "three regions revolution", the Sibe were offered the opportunity to establish a newspaper in their own language (S, personal communication, July 29, 2011). In 1946, the Sibe established their first Sibe language newspaper, the *Ice Banjin*, literally meaning "new life" (Li, 2010, p. 15). Sibe people used this opportunity to claim their language as Sibe language (S, p.c., Yining, 2011). The announcement of Sibe language by *SSMCA* in 1947 was considered to mark the emergence of the concept of Sibe language (Tongjia, 2004, p. 168). Salachun, the Sibe scholar and also the Sibe county magistrate at that time, "standardised" Manchu language's syllables with a modern grammar in his book, *Sibe Grammar* (Shetuken, 2009, p. 11). This book was implemented in all the Sibe schools as the Sibe language textbook in 1948 (Tongjia, 2004, p. 168).

Since 1955, a project on reforming all ethnic groups' language was conducted by the newly founded Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomic Region Nationality Language Committee (XUARNLC). In December 1955, the XUARNLC proposed to reform Sibe language into a language with Cyrillic-based spelling. This was echoed by a new language project in Xinjiang. This proposal was passed at the 13th Peoples' Congress of XUAR in 1957. In May 1957, the *New Method on Reform of Sibe Language* was produced (Tongjia, 1989, p. 35). In 1958, the original plan of using Cyrillic letters for transliterating Sibe was changed in favour of using the Roman alphabet (Tongjia, 1989, p. 35). In 1962, an order came from Central government that 'Sibe should use Han Chinese as the communication tool, use Sibe language as the language in the transition period' (Tongjia, 2004. p. 98). However, use of the Sibe language as the tool in the transition period was never achieved, there were no Sibe language classes or Sibe publication as, in 1966, when the Cultural Revolution started, the Sibe newspaper, *Ice Banjin*, was abolished (Tongjia, 2004. p. 35). This is

because, under the guidance of the Cultural Revolution, the languages in China should be unified with the more advanced Chinese language (Tongjia, 1989, p. 35). From the 1960s to the 1970s, Sibe language education in schools was stopped and the teaching language in the school was implemented as Chinese only (Tongjia, 2004. p. 98). The Sibe newspaper, *Ice Banjin*, has been allowed to publish in Sibe language again since 1972, and its name has been changed into *Çabçal jerkin*, which means "Çabçal News" (Li, 2010, p. 15). The two decades of abandonment of Sibe language education and publication caused two generations of Sibe to be illiterate in written Sibe (Tongjia, 2004, p. 25). Most Sibe people are nowadays illiterate in the Written Language. A recent survey of literacy in Sibe villages found 44.2% of individuals were literate in Sibe, 76.8% literate in Mandarin Chinese, and 11% illiterate (Dwyer, 2005).

There is great concern from my Sibe interviewees in Xinjiang that the increasing Han migration to the Çabçal area has had significant influence on their culture and language. H2 told me that

> There were only less than 1,000 Han in Çabçal before the 1980s; now there are 60,000 Han in Çabçal and 50,000 Uyghur in Çabçal, Kazakh is 38,000. Sibe is 20,000. In every *niru*, the Han is the majority. Now the biggest impact is the Han migrants, each village is mostly Han. As the Han is the majority in each *niru*, if you want to talk with them, you have to use Chinese. In this way, we don't have too many opportunities to speak our mother tongue. The only place we can speak Sibe is at our home.

He paused for a second, when mentioning home, and continued, 'now, even at home, we cannot guarantee that we can speak Sibe, because *aji juse* all tend to speak Chinese now, as they are speaking Chinese in schools; they don't like to switch language all the time.' *Aji juse* is the Sibe word for children.

> Now our children hesitate to speak both Sibe and Chinese; they understand the Sibe, but they don't like to speak Sibe language. And then their tongue becomes hard, because for long time, they will not be able to speak Sibe language.

In this section, I have introduced the concept of Sibe language and its relationship with Manchu language. I have also connected the emergence of Sibe language and the political situation at various historical moments, and I have analysed the emergence of Sibe language in relation to the nationalist movement in Xinjiang. I conclude that the emergence of Sibe language is the result of the concept of the modern nation state in Xinjiang and the standardisation of Manchu syllables into Sibe language, which was focused on Spoken Sibe, is an attempt to create an ethnic identity in the Sibe community. The Chinese influence since the 1950s in relation to language reform has interrupted the process of using Spoken Sibe to create a Sibe political identity. The recent Han migration towards the Sibe community further challenges the Sibe identity. There is another important reason for Sibe to promote the Sibe identity, which is Stalin's definition of *minzu*. In this definition, language is the most important ethnic marker for legitimising *minzu* status. In the following section, I will present my ethnographic findings on what transliterated Sibe was adopted by Sibe SNS users to provide the data for further analysis on the relationship between *minzu* discourses and the choice of transliterated Sibe.

The Choice of Transliterated Sibe Was Influenced by the Concept of Sibe Language and Manchu language

Based on my ethnography on the use of transliterated Sibe language among Sibe people in SNS *quns* from 2009 to 2015, I found out that the use of transliterated Sibe with the Roman alphabet is oriented around the debate on the relationship between Sibe and Manchu. First of all, the discourse of *minzu* influences Sibe's choice of Roman alphabet for transliterated Sibe. The choice of certain Roman alphabets for transcribing Sibe language in a WeChat group environment is not random. Sibe users choose certain phonological descriptions of Sibe language based on their knowledge of the relationship between Sibe and Manchu. One particular example is the exclusion of the long vowel $\bar{u}$ which is transliterated with the alphabet symbol of *v*. Many Sibe languages learners from the Northeast of China told me that their use of transliterated Sibe, including the letter *v* rather than Xinjiang Sibe, excluding the letter *v*, makes it difficult for them to be understood by Sibe from Xinjiang. A comment from F provides one example:

Actually, I have learned Möllendorff's transliterated system. As a Manchu who doesn't speak the Manchu language, it is very useful to learn the transliterated Manchu. My understanding is that Möllendorff's is the most authoritative transliterated system on Manchu language. However, when I am chatting online in written form with those people from Çabçal, they all said they don't understand me, so I have to learn their way of transliterating Manchu. And they insist that the language is not Manchu; it is Sibe language. And they have their own different transliterated form... (F, personal communication, Aug. 3, 2015).

The choice to exclude the letter *u* is not because the Sibe language does not have the pronunciation of long vowel of *u*, but comes to be tied to the debate on the relationship between Sibe and Manchu. In 1947, the *SSMCA* announced the abandonment of the syllable, *ū*, for representing the long vowel, as a character distinguishing Sibe from Manchu language (Tongjia, 2004, p. 97). This indicates that the Manchu language does have the long vowel, *ū,* while the Sibe language does not have this long vowel, *ū*. When I interviewed T7, a retired school teacher who learned the transliterated Sibe at his primary school in the 1950s in Çabçal, he explained to me that the syllables table he learned from at school did not have the long vowel, *ū*. Many of the Sibe from Çabçal insist that there is no syllable, *ū*, in the Sibe language that they speak.

The choice of system for transliterating Sibe has been placed in a curious position, by connection with the debate on Sibe and Manchu and phonetic pronunciations of the language that promote local identity, the transliterated Sibe language becomes part of network of possible interventions into *minzu* identity, yet the transliteration of Sibe takes over the role of the state on administrating the boundary of *minzu.*

The choice of systems of transliterated Sibe language is very clearly a matter of governance. Ideas about choosing the transliterated Sibe systems that are politically correct in reflecting *minzu* discourse and easy to use with pinyin input method are inserted into the logic of constructing the transliterated Sibe method at the level of common sense. From a Foucauldian perspective, these practices and beliefs are far from natural; rather, they are the result of a very specific historical

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conjuncture and a set of important, although ultimately contingent, cultural transformations on the emerging of phonetic language and along with the construction of the modern nation state. In the Sibe effort to promote their ethnic identity, their Sibe language becomes a very important ethnic marker for their ethnic boundary. Therefore, they focus on the discussion on the Sibe language being not Manchu language.

In order to understand what the influence is of the debate on the relationship between the Sibe language and the Manchu language on the adoption of transliterated Sibe among Sibe SNS users, I will review the debates on this topic among Sibe SNS users in the following section. I will analyse the interviews that I conducted with Sibe SNS users. I conclude that there are two conflicting but consistent statements on the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language. The first statement is that Sibe is a separate language from Manchu. The second claim is that Sibe language has developed from the Manchu language. Both statements agree that Sibe language should be considered independent language. From these conflicting but consistent statements, we can have a glimpse of Sibe people's attempt to discursively construct an independent status for Sibe language at this stage.

Based on my virtual ethnography and interviews, I conclude that the relationship between their statements on Sibe language and the choice of transliterated Sibe is as follows: the choice to use transliterated systems based on Manchu syllables is supported by their claim that Sibe language is Manchu language; on the other hand, the choice of adopting Roman alphabets to spell the Spoken Sibe is associated with the statement that Sibe language is a completely separate language.

I argue that the Sibe SNS *quns* were instrumental in enforcing the use of Sibe language and cultural practices. Initially, it appears that compliance was due to pressures of the social homogenisation of Sibe culture into Han culture, along with the market economy, and Sibe language revival was promising new found pride and community strength. Over time, the practices of adopting transliterated Sibe have brought new consciousness and new connections among Sibe people. It has become an ethnic marker and a source of pride for those people who associate with it.

Based on my virtual ethnography on Sibe SNS qun from 2009 to 2015, I have concluded that the transliterated Sibe language used on SNSs is fundamental to how Sibe construct their community based on their sense of *holbobun* and *minzu*. The reason for taking the Sibe's practices of adopting transliterated Sibe language as key factors in their formation of community is because the adoption of transliterated Sibe among Sibe SNS users informs the way in which communicative practices are enacted among them. Based on my virtual ethnography on Sibe SNS *quns*, I conclude that there is a tendency amongst Sibe SNS users to switch to regarding Sibe language as a language contructed out of the Roman alphabet and learn Sibe language with the alphabetic method.

The following statement was commonly referenced among SNS *qun* users when I asked them why they use transliterated Sibe.

> The textbook teaches Sibe language through syllabic method. They teach us hundreds of syllables. I feel it is an alphabet with individual letters, some of which differ according to their position within a word. I choose to learn the script as alphabet. I choose to learn Sibe language as an alphabetic language, because I believe that it is easier to learn the script as individual letters than as a multitude of syllables (F, personal communication, Aug. 3, 2015).

I argue that different linguistic knowledge of Spoken Sibe in Xinjiang and the Northeast of China lead to different treatments of transliterated Sibe. Sibe in Xinjiang tends to use Spoken Sibe to transcribe Sibe language, as the Spoken Sibe is still practiced in their local communities. In the Northeast of China, Sibe people tend to use transliterated Sibe, which follows the Roman alphabet version of Manchu script to communicate in WeChat, as the materials on learning Sibe language in printed books are only available in written Manchu for the Sibe people in the Northeast of China.

In comparison with Northeast Sibe, there is generally a higher percentage of Sibe speakers in Xinjiang. By contrast, in Northeast China, most Sibe take Chinese as their first language and the textbooks for Sibe language that is available for them are mainly in written Manchu. Therefore, there is less transliterated Spoken Sibe used by Northeast Sibe.

Even though the virtual community facilitated by the use of SNSs greatly reduces the limits of the influence of physical community on ethnic identity, the constraints of language proficiency of Sibe from different offline communities still holds some influence on forming an online community, as written Manchu and Spoken Sibe have considerable differences in terms of intelligibility.

Boundary contestation in Xinjiang in the discourse of *minzu* is not about the intrinsic value of the boundary itself but about how to conceptualise community. According to my virtual ethnography, Xinjiang Sibe are resisting the idea that Sibe language was developed from Manchu language. Instead, the Xinjiang Sibe assert that Sibe is a separate language from Manchu. As language and lineage are recognised by Sibe as connected as authentic and objective sources of self-identification, in the following section, I will review those statements on the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language.

The first statement is that Sibe has developed from Manchu language. This is one of the most commonly shared statements shared by Sibe SNS users. I will review T8, H, and S in their claims in relation to this statement from their own perspectives. I will analyse the discourse of *minzu* referenced in their statements in relation to their claim of a relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language.

T8:

The first case is T8. T8 is a language teacher employed by *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre*. He conducts online language training in Sibe language using SNS WeChat *qun*. The WeChat *qun*'s name is *Mother Tongue Learning Sebsihiyan Amban Classroom.* This online training class is free to the public. The *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre* promotes a connection between Sibe language and Manchu language. This statement is also reflected in their company's name. In the language class in SNS *qun*, T8 also promotes the company's claim of Sibe language's close relationship with Manchu language.

Manchus learned their script like a syllabary, with syllables divided into twelve different classes based on their finals' phonemes as we can see in Figure 64. T8 uses this twelve classes of syllable table to teach Sibe language. T8 teaches Sibe script as a syllabary and divides them into twelve classes of syllable, based on the ending phoneme of each syllable. The twelve classes of syllable table were

constructed based on the Manchu vocabulary syllables. T8 also uses voice messages in the *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre* Sibe language to introduce the twelve classes of syllable in Sibe language, from his own understanding.

Figure 52. *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre* Sibe Language Adopt Syllables Method for Teaching Sibe, 2015

I interviewed him on his decision to use the syllable to teach Sibe language in his WeChat *qun*. He explained:

> The reason that I used Manchu scripts to teach in my class is that we learn Sibe language to study the Qing history. All books in old Manchu archives were written in old scripts. Learning in Manchu scripts can help us to read those materials…

> You cannot cut down the internal relationship between Manchu and Sibe; if there is no inherent relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language, Sibe will not translate those Manchu archives, and it is us Sibe who will conduct the actual translation work on translating those old Manchu archives in Beijing. The reason is obvious and simple. If, to say more deeply,

it involves some political questions, I will not go that much further. Nevertheless, we do something that is good to develop our *minzu* culture on condition of not violating our country's law.

Sibe language is a concept from after 1947. I remember that my grandfather who was born before 1950s in the time of the GMD, only used the term Manchu language to denote our language. In 1947, they just did some small modification on the language; the basic elements of language are still the same, the fifth vowel was omitted, the syllables *k, e* were modified, the grammar was kept the same. (T8, personal communication, July 29, 2011)
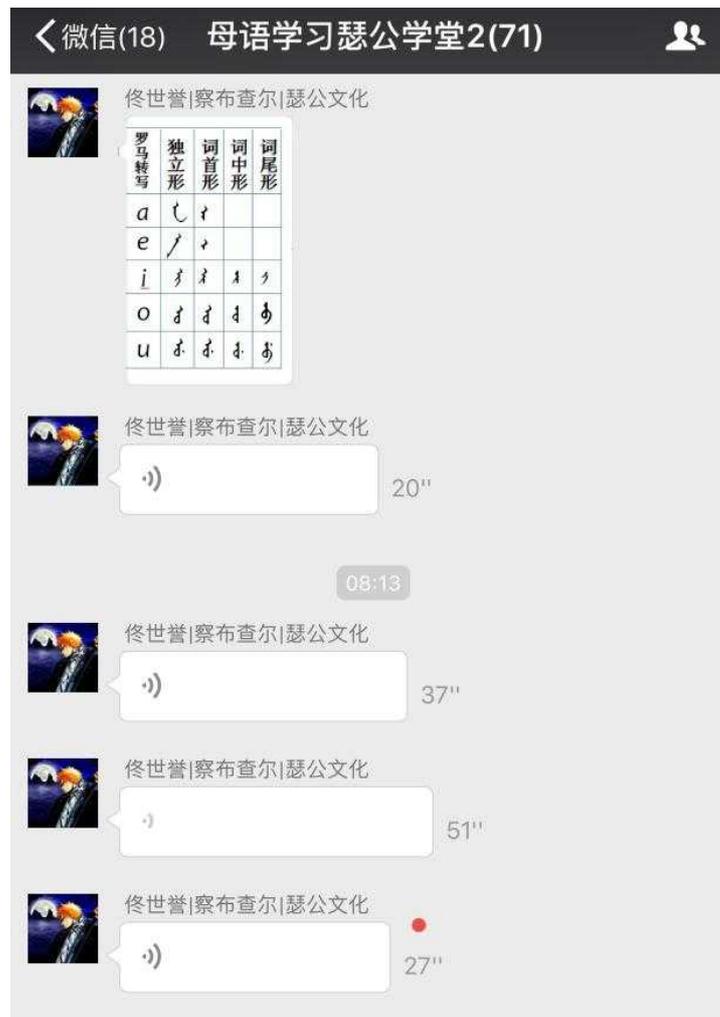
Figure 53. *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe Manchu Culture Centre* Use Roman Alphabets to Teach Sibe Vowel Syllables, 2015

From the above statement, we can see that T8's statement that Sibe language has developed from Manchu serves the purpose of advocating the learning of Sibe language as a tool to read Manchu archives on Qing history.

For the company title, *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe-Manchu Culture Centre*, if you just say Sibe culture communication, it is not comprehensive enough; the resources after 1947 were very limited, almost all the Sibe language materials are materials written before 1947, which were from Manchu language resource…

Because Sibe and Manchu languages have an inherent relationship between each other, we cannot simply ignore this relationship for the *minzu*. As a company which runs the business, we planned it in the long-term. We also

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need this connection to make more people study our Sibe language. (T8, personal communication, July 29, 2011)

From the above statement, we can see T8's statement positioning Sibe language within Manchu language is made because he wants to attract more Manchu people to also learn Sibe language. As *Sebsihiyan Amban Sibe-Manchu Culture Centre* is also a company which is involved in the jade business, as I have introduced in Chapter 4, it needs language classes to expand the company's publicity. Hence, we can understand why they promote the connection between Manchu language and Sibe language.

H:

The second statement is that Sibe language is a separate language compared to Manchu language. H is an historian of Sibe history. H has worked as an editor at Xinjiang People's Press since 1982. He told me that, 'it is the duties of a Sibe scholar to save Sibe language' (H, personal communication, Aug. 1, 2011). He is author of many Sibe histories and archives of classic books written in Sibe. H told me that Sibe has their own individual culture before the Qing dynasty. During the Qing dynasty, Sibe language and culture were gradually assimilated into Tungusic Manchu culture.

However, H also emphasises that Sibe language inherited and developed Qing's "Guoyu" and "Qingwen" (H, personal communication, July. 27, 2011).

Sibe language is a very important tool for recording Qing culture and history. There are tens of thousands of historical archives of the Qing recorded in this language. This language is only spoken by Sibe people now. Sibe people are very proud to be the group of people who speak this language. (H, personal communication, July 27, 2011)

H was born in the 1950s in Çabçal. After graduating from high school, H was sent to the countryside to receive re-education from the farmers in the 1970s. H spent three years in the countryside. In 1978, H participated in the first university entrance exam after the Cultural Revolution, and was enrolled into History at Xinjiang University.

Use of the notion of *minzu* in the Chinese nation does not mean H wants Sibe culture to be assimilated into Han culture. H wants to use the term, *minzu*, to develop

the Sibe's own culture and language. His tactic is to use the socialist notion of the Chinese nation as amalgamated group of different nationalities to legitimise the development of Sibe culture, his argument being that the development of Sibe' culture can contribute to discovering the rich tradition of the Chinese nation.

> There are tens of thousands of historical archives that were written in Manchu, and those records are the most precious materials for revealing the secret of our great nation during the Qing dynasty. And the Sibe language is the key to uncovering those materials…Extreme chauvinistic nationalism has caused serious damage to our Chinese nation. In the Cultural Revolution, much traditional art and culture was destroyed. This means a lot of Chinese people don't know history. In the Cultural Revolution, many Sibe books were burned, and Sibe language was forbidden from being taught in schools. The only language is Chinese. This generated a huge culture gap for all Chinese people since 1970s. I am not saying Han culture is not good; Han culture is advanced culture, we like to learn from it. What I mean is that our Chinese nation consists of 56 ethnic groups and evolved from the history of 56 ethnic groups. If only Han language and culture are used, certain parts of our Chinese nation's history will be lost, we will not understand where we come from… (H, personal communication, July 27, 2011).

From the above narrative, we can see H use the term, *minzu*, to criticise Han nationalism's damage on the construction of Chinese nation. He uses the concept of *minzu* on the Chinese nation, stating that the Chinese nation developed from 56 nationalities and evolved into the Chinese nation, to criticise the social campaigns, like the Cultural Revolution, based on a single, Han culture. He explains that social campaigns based on Han nationalism will be the obstacle for the construction of Chinese nation as certain history of Chinese nation will be lost as a result of the Han nationalist's campaign.

When I asked H how the Sibe are identified out of the Manchu, H told me that the state did not give clear documentation on how to identify the Sibe out from Manchu in the 1950s. This leaves the state more space to keep its control over the definition of Sibe whenever it is necessary. To justify the publication of the Sibe

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books, H continues to use the discourse of *minzu*, on unity in diversity, to explain how the Sibe were influenced by the Han culture.

> The Sibe people also translated Han Chinese classic books into Sibe. Through those books the Sibe culture was influenced by the Han culture… the fact of Sibe and Han are influenced with each other since a long time ago. We can use this to teach young people on how Sibe are influenced by Han culture and accepted Chinese culture. (H, personal communication, July 27, 2011).

When H explains the relationship between Sibe language and written Manchu language, he uses the term, *Zhonghua Minzu,* to explain the connection between Sibe and Manchu.

> Just like all ethnic groups in China live together and develop the same culture of *Zhonghua Minzu* (Chinese nation), Sibe adopting Manchu language and, developing the Manchu language, it became our own Sibe language…any ancient books are the common cultural heritage for all humans. Those books are the most important carrier of the traditional culture. Those classic Manchu books, which were translated from Han in the Kangxi period, in the Qing dynasty, were very popular among the Sibe people. Especially for those Sibe people who migrated to Xinjiang, they copy those books and read them from generation to generation until the 1950s (H, personal communication, July 27, 2011).

From the above narrative on Sibe language, we can see a clear discourse of *minzu* on unity in diversity, in which the ethnic minority culture is narrated as part of Chinese culture, and different ethnic groups influence each other and eventually evolve into a common Chinese culture. This discourse of *minzu* was promoted especially in the 1950s, in the first Five-year Plan (Çabçal Yearbook, 2011, p. 23). In this discourse of *minzu,* ethnic minority culture and language were recognised as bearers of the past for the Chinese nation. As Eric Hobsbawm rightly points out, the invention of tradition is for the construction of the new nation (Hobsbawm, 1990, p. 23); the protection of Sibe language in this discourse can be understood as a method to accumulate resources for the construction of the imagined community of the Chinese nation. The construction of Chinese nation has not necessarily oppressed all

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Sibe people. The Sibe people are not all the same; some Sibe people have been incorporated into the system that the Chinese state has developed. The imagined community of the Chinese nation can also secure those Sibe a position in the system that the state has developed. On the other hand, whether the outcome of the discourse of imagined community of Chinese is of benefit for certain Sibe individuals also depends on how the individual manipulates the resources he has.

S:

S is a Sibe language expert. S is teaching Sibe language at Ili Normal University in Yining. I got to know him through one of my interviewees, N, in 2009. S is well-known among Sibe linguists. He has written numerous Sibe language books. His book of Sibe language grammar (Wu, 2009) is one of most referenced book in the Sibe SNS online discussion on how to transliterate Sibe language online, based on my observations from my virtual ethnography from 2009 to 2015.

Although he is a Sibe language expert and his job is based around teaching Sibe language, S did not make strong statements that Sibe language is a separate language compared with Manchu language. He uses the phrase, "Sibe language has developed from Manchu language" (S, personal communication, July 28, 2011). He promotes the idea that Sibe language teaching should use the syllabic method. However, he told me that some of the syllables that were standard in 1947 were also out of date. His books use the syllabic method for teaching Sibe language. However, when I visited him in 2011, he had adopted transliterated Sibe to communicate with me on the QQ SNS.

S lived in an apartment at Yining Normal University. When I walked in the campus, I found so many new buildings were under construction. I remarked to S that there must be so many new students enrolled this year. S told me that the increasing numbers of students did not apply to the Sibe language subject: "It just happens in the opposite direction, the number of students who choose to study Sibe language is decreasing every year." And he explained the history of Sibe language:

> First, the Sibe language is the development out of Manchu language.
> Therefore, if you know how to speak Sibe language, you can speak Manchu
> language. Secondly, although Sibe language is Manchu language, the state
> has recognised the status of Sibe language in the *minzu shibie* (ethnic

identification project), the Sibe language is protected by the law. Therefore, we should continue to use the name, Sibe language, to name our own language and to develop it (S, personal communication, July 28, 2011).

In discussing the discourse of *minzu* unity, unity with diversity, S told me that ethnic minorities need to learn from the Han and evolve into the same social society in the end. Ethnic minority is a part of the Chinese nation; the Chinese nation is based on the ethnic Han (S, personal communication, July 28, 2011). This *minzu*-definition of Sibe is based on the imagined community of the Chinese nation, rather than on the local Sibe community's perspective.

These developments of the transliterated Sibe language from the Roman alphabet reveal the Sibe's desire to construct their local community. Phonetic, transliterated Sibe language needed to be made to match the discourse of the unity with diversity of the Chinese nation; the danger lay in the potential promotion of local separatism, which may cause the central State to become suspicious of the intention behind promoting local phonetic language. Bearing this concern, the transliterated Sibe carefully manipulated its definition of ethnic identity in the discourses of *minzu.* The Sibe people discursively use the discourses of cultural *minzu*, racial *minzu*, and Stalin's definition of *minzu* to argue for the relationship between Sibe and Manchu, and collectively adopt a transliterated Sibe to suit their need to construct an ethnic community.

S told me that he believed that Sibe language is continuation of Manchu language:

> The difference between Spoken Language and Written Language took place once standardisation of language took place, because standardisation is always ordered by the Emperor. The first standardisation of Manchu language didn't follow how the language was spoken by Manchu people in their everyday, yet it just took Mongolian scripts to modify Manchu language. My opinion is that the language we are using now is just the development from Manchu language; my opinion is that Sibe language is the continuance of Manchu language. (S, personal communication, July 28, 2011)

S described his experience of transliterated Sibe. He explained to me that the knowledge that the user has of the transliterated system determines what system of transliteration the user will tend to use. He told me that most Sibe like to choose pinyin to transliterate Sibe, as most Sibe learn pinyin during their school education.

> I also like to use pinyin to spell Sibe language, because, when I use pinyin to spell Sibe language, everybody can understand. IPA is only used by some linguists, not so many Sibe understand how to use it. However, everybody knows how to use pinyin, as we were all educated with pinyin for learning Chinese since the 1950s. Since everybody is very familiar with the pinyin system, I use the pinyin system everybody can understand (S, personal communication, July 28, 2011)

In this section, I have examined Sibe people's statements on the relationship between Manchu and Sibe. By examining the Sibe's statements, I concluded that Sibe people do not simply take up the state-defined *minzu* discourses. The Sibe people articulate the discourses of *minzu* based their needs in different contexts. I argued that this manipulation of *minzu* discourse was an important factor in influencing the choice of transliterated Sibe. In the SNS *quns*, the electronic communication generated a situation where information also associated with the action of communication. The fabric of the mind-set between different Sibe's desires on ethnic identity thereby becomes a weave of textuality and proximity. It helps to bring those Sibe together for the construction of discourse on Sibe ethnic identity. SNSs allow a cohabitation of the Sibe's voice within the state-defined *minzu* discourse. However, there are minor negotiations when constructing the discourses in different contexts. The SNS provides a kind of middle landscape that allows individuals to exercise their impulses for both separation and connectedness according to different contexts. The liminal space generated by the use of SNSs for narrating Sibe subjectivity also interrupts the official *minzu* discourse's fixed spatial arrangement on Sibe subjects. The use of SNSs creates a space for Sibe to bring their position into being a fluid position in the discourse of *minzu* to meet different Sibe's needs in their local contexts.

The Discourse of *Minzu* Influenced the Adoption Transliterated Sibe

After reviewing the main statements on the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language, I will analyse what is the Sibe people's practices on promoting Sibe language. In this section, I will analyse the interviews that I conducted on the Sibe who actively promote the adaptation of transliterated Sibe in cyberspace. Based on my analysis of Sibe people's practices in promoting Sibe language, I find out that there are numerous contradictions between their statements and their practices. The statements of promoting an independent Sibe language has been contradicted by their actual practices of using the Manchu language. I argue that the choice of transliterated Sibe based on local Spoken Sibe language was legitimised by a strong quest for a sense of local community. It is important to note that this transliterated Sibe language is more than just about knowledge sharing, but is the result of a historically specific experiment in identity construction to meet the Sibe's need for local community.

K:

In order to counsel those Sibe who went out to studies and work, the Çabçal Sibe Language Committee conducted a Sibe language class for free to the public. The class opened in 2010. It opens in the summer vacation and winter vacation for those Sibe people that are out for studies and work and want to enhance their Sibe language, and also for the staff who work in the local government. She told me that she wants to work in Beijing where she can work as a translator for the Manchu Archive. By the time, I visited her in 2011 in Çabçal. She also worked as a Sibe language teacher for the Sibe language training class organised by Çabçal Sibe Language Committee. With her help, I also participated in the class. My visit to the Sibe language class offered a unique opportunity to find out how Sibe language was taught in Çabçal. The language class was organised by the Çabçal Education Bureau and the Çabçal Sibe Language Committee.
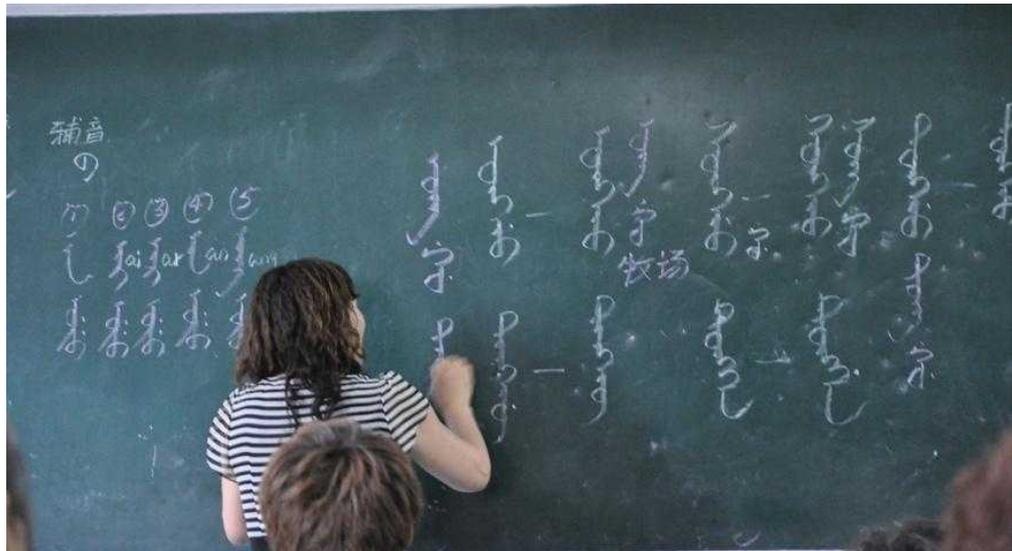
Figure 54. The Sibe Language Training Class Conducted by Çabçal Sibe Language Committee, With Adopted Syllables Based on Manchu Vocabulary Being Used to Teach Sibe Language, 2011

The students varied, through different age groups and professions. They are mostly the Sibe who went to Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Chengdu for work, and many government staff from Çabçal. Some people are like me, who came from the Northeast of China and want to learn the Sibe language. The class was divided into two classes. One was entry-level. Another was for Sibe whose first language is Sibe and want to improve their reading and writing skills. The classrooms were No. 1 Middle School classrooms. I went to both these two classes. The entry-level class was filled with people like me who came from the Northeast and were interested in learning Sibe language. Most of them were young people. They are aged between 20 and 30. The other class was attended mostly by the local Sibe from Çabçal. They were very mixed, from working professionals to students. The government staff take up a large proportion of this class. I was informed that the local government requires all the staff in the Çabçal government to have a certificate in advanced Sibe language.

The class adopted the method of teaching Manchu script by syllabic method. For instance, in Figure 54, the teacher used Roman Alphabet to teach students how the syllables are pronounced. The thinking behind adopting Roman Alphabet to introduce the pronunciation of Sibe syllables was that Sibe language is a phonetic language, hence the sound of Sibe language can be expressed with the Roman Alphabet (K, personal communication, Aug. 3, 2011). The class was using Chinese

as the instruction language. They gradually used more Sibe language to introduce Sibe scripts over the course.

Figure 55. Teacher in the Sibe Language Class Teaches Sibe Language in Çabçal

As urbanisation and Han integration grows, the need for ethnic minorities in Xinjiang to speak Mandarin increases, as those who do not are at a severe economic and social disadvantage. Chinese is now the main language of instruction in Xinjiang schools (Tongjia, 2004, p. 61), and some Sibe fear that their native language is becoming obsolete. The bilingual education, I am informed by my interviewees, is a tool to promote Chinese.

'We don't say that Sibe shouldn't speak Chinese or Sibe shouldn't study Chinese,' K told me,

> They should be able to speak the Chinese language in order to compete with the Han Chinese in society. But, at the same time, they are a different ethnic group, so they should be able to adapt to Chinese society by keeping their own culture, their own traditions, their own ethnic identity (K, personal communication, Aug. 3, 2011)

This is *minzu* discourse derived from Stalin's definition.

If you lose your ethnic language, you lose your community as a whole, and now we have already been influenced by the Han a lot. If we couldn't keep our community as a whole, we will be lost ourselves and assimilated into the Han. Therefore, we promote Sibe language.

T7:

T7 was a Sibe primary school teacher in Çabçal and is now retired at home, and he is very active promoting Spoken Sibe online with the use of Romanised transliterated Sibe. I knew him in *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun* since 2009. He complained of poor representation of Spoken Sibe language in the Sibe language class in primary school. T7 told me that there is no space for keeping Sibe language alive by using the syllable table based on the written language of Manchu and ignoring how Spoken Sibe has been used in the local community in Xinjiang.

As the state-issued Sibe language phonetic table was following the pronunciation of Manchu scripts, and Manchu scripts had not been used by people as the first language for hundreds years, some syllables have disappeared, and as our Sibe language is the first language used in Xinjiang, it changed all the time. You cannot teach a language and ignore how the language was spoken by the real people. (T7, personal communication, Aug. 5, 2011)

He explained that there is no way for Sibe to use this inaccurate Sibe language phonetic table to teach Sibe language. In the following quote, we can see how T7 promotes the Spoken Sibe language in language education.

There are a lot of confusing parts in the Sibe language phonetic table. The phonetic table doesn't reflect the Sibe language's pronunciation that is used by the Sibe in Xinjiang. Therefore, the Spoken Sibe language self-learning book published in recent years is the only good tool to help protect Sibe language. It uses the Roman alphabet to transliterate Sibe language, just like what the pinyin does for Chinese. I feel like, in school, you should have to learn Spoken Sibe first and then teach the Written Language; it will be easier, as the Written Language is too different (T7, personal communication, Aug. 5, 2011)

The problem of school education on Sibe language makes Sibe people choose alternative media for their language education: 'In everyday situation, we all speak Spoken Sibe, if you use Written Language, no one will understand, so Spoken Sibe is the best communication tool' (T7, personal communication, Aug. 5, 2011)

From the above we can see T7 connect the Spoken Sibe with the local community's development. The Spoken Sibe can help to strengthen the local community. This is especially important in the current climate, where the Sibe community is facing significant Han influence, as I have shown in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. In this vein, transliterated Sibe, with the use of Roman alphabet just meets this demand, as it can reflect the sound of Spoken Sibe and it is also easy to use on a computer or smartphone, which are the most common communication tools, based on my ethnography on Sibe's language practices.

Z2:

The question of whether to use Mongolian font scripts or transliterated Sibe with Roman scripts highlights the relationship between the capabilities and application of computer technology; those who wish to communicate in Sibe have two options: Sibe inputing software Unicode ISO/IEC/WG210646 or transliteration with Latin Alphabet that they can find in CMC. Transliteration refers to the transposition of sounds of Sibe, into Roman alphabets, or groups of characters, that approximate the sounds of the Sibe language. Since the inputting software Unicode ISO/IEC/WG210646 is very expensive and since there is no free version of this software available online to download, transliteration was chosen as the only viable way to communicate in Spoken Sibe language.

Z2 is Sibe language editor at Çabçal TV Station. She was born in the 1980s in Çabçal. I met her in *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun* in 2009. She graduated with a major in Sibe language from Çabçal Teachers College. The course in Sibe language in the Çabçal Teachers College is to train specialists in Sibe language for Çabçal TV Station and Çabçal Newspaper and schools in Çabçal. Hence, after she graduated from schools, Z2 directly works for the Çabçal TV Station. Z2 always told how hard it is to work as Sibe language editor at the TV station. She complained that she had to use the Written Language for the broadcasting scripts. However, the Written Language was not used by Sibe people in

Çabçal in their everyday life; therefore, the audience always complained that they could not understand the news. On the other hand, Z2 told me that, if she were to use Spoken Sibe in the news, it will end up with too many Chinese words in the Sibe news, and will also receive complaints from the audience that the news was not reported in pure Sibe:

> The audience is very picky with us; our Sibe language is very different like Chinese; we have significant differences between Written Language and Spoken Language. I cannot write Spoken Sibe; we have to write in written language. Then we asked the news anchors to read the scripts that we prepared in Written Language…There are a lot of words Sibe language cannot translate; for example, party secretary we directly read in Chinese as *shuji*. We couldn't use too much spoken language, as there is too much Chinese in spoken language; if we use spoken language in the news, it will sounds like news read in Chinese. So we normally change the words of Spoken Sibe into written language, because most people don't use written language and they are not familiar with Written Language, so the use of Written Language in our news programme also means some of the audience don't understand what we are saying in the news.…Like Chinese, we translated the words of a great man from Chinese into Sibe; a lot words don't exist in Sibe language.

The written Sibe language is a phonetic language which uses the Manchu script. It is written in a vertical line and the line feed direction is from left to right. This writing style is entirely different from other languages existing in the world that are Unicode recognised. The current Unicode ISO/IEC/WG210646 is using Mongolian font to represent Sibe language (Tongjia, 2004, p. 150). Sibe is written with the Mongolian font, with the addition of 84 diacritics (Tongjia, 2004, p. 151).
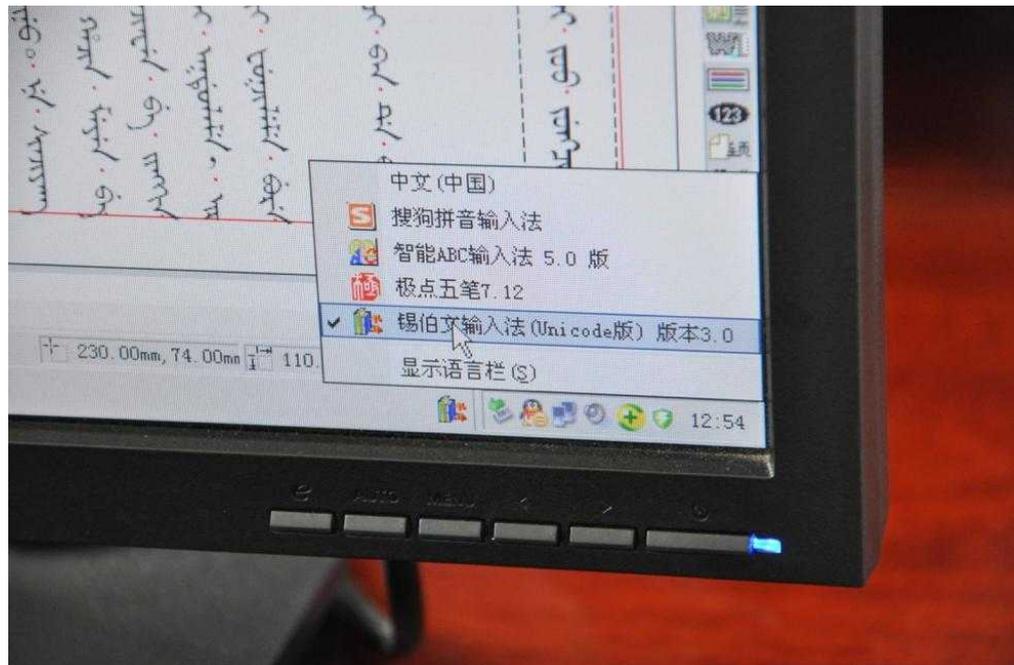
Figure 56. Unicode ISO/IEC/WG210646, Used by Çabçal TV Station for Sibe Language, Çabçal, 2011

As the Sibe alphabet symbols are connected and their shape varies depending on their position within a word, the ASCII used in the current computer operating systems has some difficulty with inputting and displaying Sibe properly, because it cannot handle the different forms that letters should take depending on their position within the word (isolated, initial, medial, or final) (Z2, personal communication, July 24, 2011).

Therefore, some Sibe words cannot be rendered properly with the current Unicode ISO/IEC/WG210646. When I interviewed Z2, she told me that she prefers to use a piece of paper to write the article first and then use her writing to correct the wrong spelling conducted with the Sibe input software on her computer (Z2, personal communication, July 24, 2011)

Figure 57. News articles in Sibe writing, Çabçal broadcast TV station, Çabçal, 2011

A:

A is a retired Sibe language teacher. She spent most of her spare time teaching Sibe from the Northeast of China to learn the Sibe language on SNSs. I knew her in the *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* QQ *qun*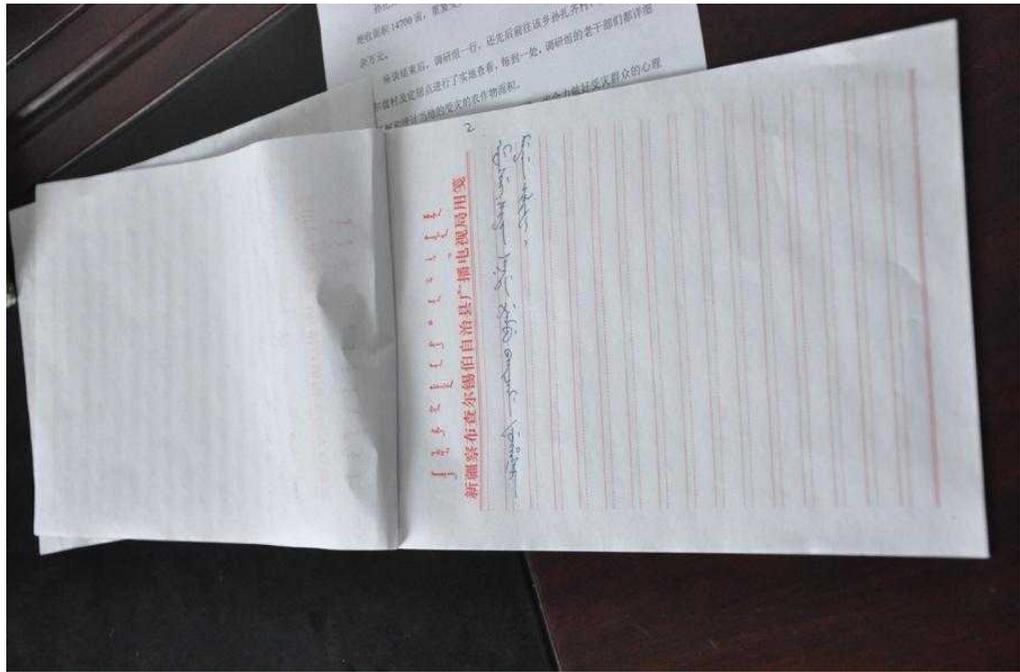. In my ethnographic field trips, I have lived in her house for two weeks in Çabçal. During the stay, I have interviewed her on her experience of using SNSs for teaching Sibe language. A told me that she wanted to represent phonetic shape of the sound of Sibe language, *š*. However, as no such sign exists in the standard pinyin input method, A has to change her choice into *x* to represent this sound of Sibe language. I asked why she used *x* to represent *š*. A told me that she follows the W's Transliterated Sibe Roman Alphabet table that was modified by R. I have discussed the modified Roman Alphabet table in the preceding section, with Figure 48. She told me that it is common practice among Sibe SNS users to use this transliterated method, as it is convenient in a CMC environment.

A told me that she uses Latin Alphabet to transliterate Sibe because of the limited syllables from Written Language for expressing the new vocabulary,

> If you want to write our Spoken Sibe, it is impossible to use the syllables that
> we learned from school to write our Spoken Sibe, because the syllables are

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not enough; there is a lot of pronunciation of Spoken Sibe that you cannot express with those syllables you learn from School. The syllables we learn from school are based on the Written Manhcu language. (A, personal communication, July 24, 2011)

A explained to me that the advantage of using transliterated Sibe with the Roman alphabets is that they are flexible enough to spell the everyday Spoken Sibe:

There are a lot of words that the written Sibe's syllables cannot express, for example, the word for "stone", if I use transliterated Sibe to spell it, is very easy to write, it can be written as "*vehe*". However, if we need to write it in syllables, it is so difficult, because we don't have the syllables of "he"…The reason for this is that the syllables are made for the Manchu language's word, and each syllable is corresponding to each Manchu word; the problem is that those Manchu language's words' pronunciations are from one hundred years ago. The syllables, hence, are corresponding to the pronunciation of words which were used in hundred years ago. And our Sibe language have changed a lot in last hundred years, so a lot of words, those syllables are not capable of representing them. How can you use the syllables which were made one hundred years ago to represent today's Sibe words? (A, personal communication, July 24, 2011)

In the above account of A's complaint against the syllables for teaching Sibe language, we can see that the demand for using transliterated Sibe to represent Spoken Sibe is because the syllables used in teaching Sibe language at school are out of date, and Sibe people quest for a writing system that can represent the contemporary shape of the language. In this vein, the more transliterated Sibe, with the Roman alphabet, meets this demand. This is from a perspective of promoting their Spoken Sibe.

However, on the other hand, there are also various other social factors that influenced the form of transliterated Sibe. For instance, people's knowledge of the transliterated system is also a very important factor. A told me that the Sibe from the Northeast of China normally have no Sibe language background and they do not speak Sibe at all, and most of them are Mandarin speakers and thus do not

understand the Sibe phonetic table. She told me that it is easier to use Chinese characters as the transliterated medium to teach northeast Sibe how to speak Sibe language.

Figure 58. The Names of Sibe SNS Users are Adapted Using Chinese Characters to Transliterate the Sibe Names

In Figure 58, we can see the name of the SNS user was written as 阿几哈吉 in Chinese. It was transliterated as the Sibe word, "*Aji juse*", which means "little boy". I asked 阿几哈吉 why he used Chinese to transliterate Sibe; he told me that it is easier for him to use Chinese to write the pronunciation of Sibe, as he is more familiar with Chinese, as Chinese is his first language.
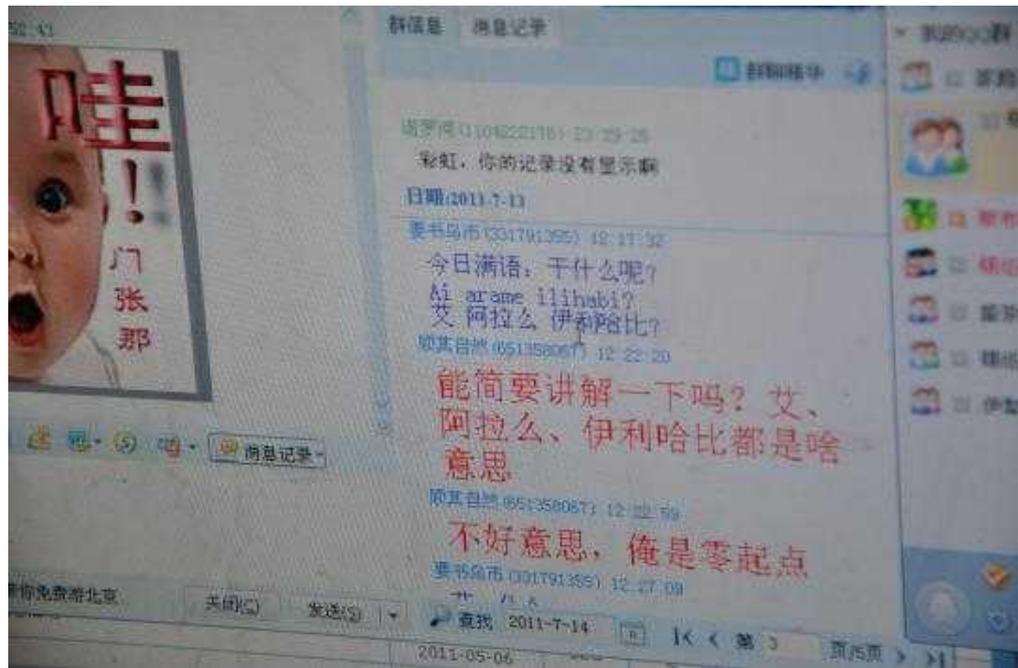
Figure 59. Use Chinese Character to Transliterate Sibe

In Figure 59, we can see A uses transliterated Sibe with Roman alphabets to teach Spoken Sibe, and she also uses Chinese to transliterate the previous sentence for the students in order to inform her students on the pronunciation of the Sibe language. Based on A's experiences, we can see that the choice of certain methods in transcribing Sibe language into a CMC environment is not random. Sibe users choose certain phonological descriptions of Sibe language based on their knowledge of Sibe, and the way the Sibe SNS users are familiar with Roman alphabets on using them for Spoken Sibe. The choice of a certain Roman alphabet or Chinese characters for phonological description of Sibe language has become much more popular, and depends on how well the speakers are familiar with the Roman alphabet and digital keyboard.

Figure 60. A Uses Transliterated Sibe to Teach Northeast Sibe How to Speak Sibe Language in QQ (Photo was Shoot at A's Home in Çabçal, 2011)

When I asked A about her choice of Chinese characters, she told me that, although she is still reluctant to have her choice of transliterated Sibe altered, as her students from the Northeast of China are only familiar with Chinese characters and also because it is difficult to choose the correct alphabet in the pinyin input method on the SNS in China, she feels that Chinese characters are the only easy way for her to teach her students from the Northeast of China. In this vein, we can conclude that the Sibe's "choice" of transliterated Sibe is limited to the affordability of the input method and people's familiarity with the Roman alphabet and Chinese. By the time my ethnography on how to use transliterated Sibe on A was completed, when I interviewed A, she told me that she only used Chinese characters to teach Sibe from Northeast China.

The choice of system for transliterating Sibe, then, is slowly refined from something like a raw material, and it has become aligned with an external measure of the affordability of the algorism of the input method and the culture of its users. As the Sibe's choice influences the phonetic shape of the language that can be read, the lack of standard pronunciation of the transliterated Sibe leaves some Sibe experts who hold the power to interpret the pronunciation of such transliterated Sibe. In light of Foucault's concept of governmentality, in which Foucault argued that certain practices in modern society produce certain sets of principles through which subjects

are governed (Foucault & Hoy, 1986, p. 35), I argue that the choice of system of transliterated Sibe language was used as a technique of governance on *minzu* identity.

This tactic of manufacturing choice is employed and the Sibe slowly learn to accept it. The Sibe can choose their preferred transliterated Sibe system to communicate in the SNS software, but, as the SNS software's input method's affordability limits certain choices of transliteration method, this material condition suggests that the Sibe should do something else if their own choice is inappropriate. In this sense, the SNS software's input method constitutes a node in a network society which determines the choice of a certain system of transliterated Sibe language.

From the above example of modification of Möllendorff's transliterated Sibe choice of Roman alphabet and A's adoption of Chinese characters for representing the sound of Sibe language, we can conclude that the Sibe SNS users are guided to use the resources that can be found online to represent the actual sounds of Sibe language.

In this process, the digital transliterated Sibe language became a space with a logic of its own, much more separate and distinct from the actual Sibe language spoken offline than it had ever been before, but with this relationship to the outside world more clearly defined than hitherto. It is precisely in this respect that the transliterated Sibe became much more like a laboratory: an exclusive, experimental space where the results of specific strategies can actually be assessed and tried out. However, in becoming more and more like a laboratory, the transliterated Sibe language simultaneously became more like a factory, in that the desire to produce a local ethnic community became the guiding impulse. The transliterated Sibe now had a recognisably modern final aim: the manufacturing of community. The imperative for the Sibe to construct an ethnic community, then, is connected to that reformulation of the transliterated Sibe on SNSs as an experimental but simultaneously productive space.

H2:

H2 was born in the 1970s in Çabçal. He has worked in the local Çabçal People's Congress to facilitate local cultural activities since 2006. His working experience in the local Çabçal People's Congress made him have a strong awareness of Sibe culture. H2 built *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* SNS *qun* in 2007. He told me that the reason for building this SNS *qun* is to offer a space for Sibe people to get to know each other. He also told me that he wants to use his SNS *qun* to connect Sibe in Xinjiang and Sibe in the Northeast of China.

> We organise a lot of activities, we have a fixed group of Sibe. The reason I named it as *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin* is that I want to use it as a platform show people how Çabçal changes everyday, for both our own Sibe who have gone to other places for work and for people who have never come to Çabçal, and, secondly, use it as a platform for bringing closeness with Sibe from the Northeast of China. Thirdly, there are so many Sibe from Çabçal that have gone to other cities for work. I want to attract them to attend *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen*…We organise parties on Westward Migration Festivals Days. We introduce Sibe people to each other. In the activities and events, people can meet each other. This can help Sibe people to build their identity to Sibe culture. Every month, we organise Sibe cultural activities. Because people come to eat, drink, and make friends, we can have bonding of Sibe people. We also organise Sibe language classes. Most of the activities were organised around festivals when all Sibe come back to Çabçal. (H2, personal communication, July 25, 2011)

The discourse of racial *minzu* associates the notion of *minzu* with a sense of territory. Influenced by the discourse of racial *minzu*, H2 argues that each *niru* in Çabçal has been developed into the dominant ethnic group's space. SNSs offer Sibe an alternative linguistic space for H2, where H2 can speak Sibe and meet other Sibe who want to use the Sibe language.

In order to promote the Sibe's own cultural space in the situation of the Sibe ethnic identity oppression by the binary discourse of self and other between Uyghur and Han, the Sibe has promoted a strong emphasis on their ethnic belonging. The over-determination of the notion of ethnic belonging in cyberspace fetishises the use of

Spoken Sibe for ethnic boundary making. In this vein, the use of SNSs produces a cultural artefact, an imaginary ethnic identity, and, as formulated by Benedict Anderson, an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1993).

W:

W was born in the 1970s in Çabçal, he went to join the army after he graduated in high school in Çabçal. He used the education opportunity for which military sponsored him; he completed a law degree at the University of Xinjiang. He worked as a solicitor for many years in Urumqi, and built a comprehensive *holbobun* network among Sibe people. He told me that he 'wants to do something for the *minzu.'*

W participates in the committee organising the Celebration of Westward Migration Festival in Çabçal in 2004, and he used this opportunity to collect a large amount of Sibe folklore, dance, and language. He made a pictorial archive of those materials. In the same year, he established the *Gašan Cultural Communication Company.* He made a short documentary on Westward Migration Festivals in Çabçal. He compiled all the Sibe folklore songs and published a music record called *Yilihe de Sinian* (Missing Ili River) in 2005. In the same year, he moved his *Gašan Cultural Communication Company* to Urumqi.

Figure 61. W Promoted Sibe Folk Music by Making Music Record, 2011, Urumqi

Figure 62. W Participated in the Sibe Intangible Cultural Heritage Training Organised by Çabçal Cultural Bureau

In 2007, he compiled a table of transliterated Sibe letters with Roman alphabets, based on Möllendorff's transliteration method for Manchu grammar (see Figure 47). His company has helped Çabçal Cultural Boureu to apply the Sibe language as intangible cultural heritage (W, personal communication, July 20, 2011).

His use of Möllendorff's transliteration method triggered a great debate among Sibe people. Some criticised his ignorance of the state's recognition of Sibe language as a separate language, as his use of Möllendorff's transliteration method equally indicates that Sibe is Manchu language. Some criticised his completed use of Möllendorff's transliteration method as not practical on a CMC environment, as some Roman symbols cannot be expressed by the keyboard. After a period of debate, a revision of W's transliterated Sibe method was shared by many Sibe in cyberspace in 2011 (see Figure 48). In this process, W and his *Gašan Cultural Communication Company* gained a high degree of exposure among the Sibe community. His company also helps Çabçal county government and local small businesses to promote their projects and business.

A2:

A2 was born in *Duici niru* of Çabçal in 1962. His job is news editor in the *Çabçal jerkin*, which is the only Sibe-language newspaper in China. He is also a well-established poet in the Sibe community. In 1979, A2 went to Ili Normal University to study. After he graduated from Ili Normal University, he went back to Çabçal to teach in a middle school in Çabçal.

The introduction of nationalist discourse into the Sibe community has led to an emphasis on the imagined ethnic group whose boundaries are defined increasingly through the written Sibe language. And the written Sibe language is the written Manchu language. This does not reflect some of the Sibe's feelings about the language they speak. A2 is one of the most outspoken Sibe who promote the spoken Sibe language as the standard for transliterating Sibe, as it is the language spoken by Sibe in the local community.

A2 worries about the influence of Mandarin on Sibe language; he told me that the adoption of transliterated Sibe can resist the outside language influence and protect the Sibe language by using the phonetic transliterated Sibe language. The use of transliterated Sibe with Roman letters highlights the use of symbolic resources among Sibe people. In the case of Spoken Sibe, the informal use of transliterated Sibe with the Roman alphabet or Chinese characters appears to be enabling a vernacular with local prestige. Users apparently choose to use transliterated Sibe

with Roman letters as a writing language online to show their pride in their local community.

When I asked A2 about why he chooses to compose in Sibe, he explained to me that it is based on the pride he has in the Sibe language and culture and he told me he wants to use poem to recall Sibe culture:

> The reason I insist on using Sibe language to compose my poems is because, the Sibe language is a phonetic language; the image and feeling come out of it are different compared to using the pictographs of Chinese language. The sound of the mother tongue can inspire me to express a lot of emotion and feeling which I cannot get from Han Chinese characters. One word of our mother tongue can express a lot of our imagination.

In the interview that I had with A2, A2 told me that he likes poems because the format of the poem allows him to record the sound of the indigenous Sibe language and the traditional life of the Sibe community.

> My poetry is very different from those of other people, there is the image that only existed in the history of Sibe which has been disappear in Sibe community, for instance, the image of *niru*. *Niru* is the basic union of the banner system in the Qing dynasty…I also write some other images which reflect Sibe *minzu* characters, for instance, the Shaman, sunset, lamasery. (A2, personal communication, July 28, 2011)

According the ethnography that I conducted on the use of transliterated Sibe, the majority of Sibe orthography used in Sibe WeChat is based on Spoken Sibe. I found out, on the online CMC on Sibe SNS *quns*, there is a strong desire to create a language that is as "speech-like" as possible. Previous research suggests that accent and other aspects of the language act as markers of group identity (Abram & Hogg, 1987). The choice of spoken Sibe language according to the interviews with A2 also addresses a strong pride in his local communities. On explaining why he likes to communicate in transliterated Sibe, he told me that, by using the transliterated Sibe, the Sibe community can be strengthened.

The reason that I insist on using the transliterated Sibe from Spoken Sibe is because the transliterated Sibe based on written Manchu doesn't reflect how the Sibe language was spoken in our community. This type of transliterated language will have no help for Sibe from the Northeast of China communicating with Sibe in Xinjiang. The old standard of transliterated Sibe based on Written Manchu, therefore, should be updated to reflect the quest of the Sibe people in current days.

The Sibe community is simultaneously the place that the Sibe WeChat users must somehow try to reconstruct in the SNS environment, which comes as a kind of substitute for the community that the state has failed to build in the past decades.

A2 told me that it is very important to carry out Sibe language education, as the language is the main means for passing on Sibe culture. And he expressed his worries on the current Sibe language education. He told me that the Sibe language education was interrupted by several social movements. As a result, there is a gap in the use of Sibe language as the first language between people who were born before the 1950s and after the 1950s.

As A2 told me,

However, my writing skills in our mother tongue, Sibe language, are not as good as my skills in Han Chinese, as I didn't receive as systematic training in Sibe writings as the old generation. Those old generations can use Sibe language to write and express sophisticated thoughts ...In my opinion, language is the carrier of culture; *minzu* culture will not exist if the *minzu* language is lost. As a Sibe poet, I am very worried, and sad, when I saw our Sibe culture is disappearing. Therefore, in my poem, there is a sense of desolation.

When explaining what the importance is of Sibe language to Sibe people, A2 emphasises the connection that Sibe language can bring with the past. A2 told me that:

Sibe language is our mother tongue, accompanying us from history. She is a rope with magic, one end connecting to our ancestors, the other end connecting to us. Depending on this rope, our Sibe people inherit our blood,

and also pass on our glorious *minzu* culture. Our mother tongue is what our identity leans on. It is our mother tongue giving us the opportunity to knock on the door of our ancestors.

Figure 63. A2's Poem in Transliterated Sibe Using the Roman Alphabet

From A's account of Sibe language, we can conclude that A2 revisits the definition of Sibe language as an alteration of the Sibe's subaltern self-consciousness, described as the victim of several social dislocations in the political movements throughout the 20th century. The social alienation of the Sibe is represented as an uncertainty of "history", frequently symbolised by the metaphor of Sibe language in various hypostases: absent, provisional, or as an ideal image of self-fulfilment.

A2 was (re)performing Sibe-ness through neutrality and accommodation through the promotion of Spoken Sibe, which is practiced in the Sibe community.

This is enunciation, transgression, and subversion of dualistic categories. which challenges the binary oppositional positioning of ethnic groups in the discourse of *minzu* narrated in the discourse of Chinese nation. A sense of ethnic identity that is based on local community is engendered.

A2 told me that Sibe language is influenced by Uyghur language, a lot of words adopted the Uyghur word, hence, the syllables of Written Language derived from Manchu are limited to expressing those pronunciations. For example, *tamax*, which means "lively"; *parang*, which means "chat"; *qilak*, which means "bucket". They were all influenced by Uyghur and there are no syllables from the Written Language that can express those words. Hence, the transliterated Sibe offer Sibe people a viable way to express their local language.

With this analysis of the individual accounts of transliterated Sibe language from T8, H, S, K, T7, Z2, A, H2, W, and A2 in this chapter, we see clearly a vision of what the SNSs might produce as part of *minzu* as governance. The modern nation state continues its projects by working in a way that installs a concept of *minzu* for instrumentalizing the material that it can govern. The concept of *minzu* was not produced as an abstract concept, but is constructed with the material condition that codified with a certain set of idea and principle which is the result of the interaction between community and technology. The construction of transliterated Sibe language through the use of the Roman alphabet, as I have analysed in this chapter, reveals this logic.

As we can see from the analysis in this chapter, when the Sibe want to communicate in transliterated Sibe with the Roman alphabet, they need the transliterated Sibe with Roman letters to be recognisable by the other Sibe. As there is no standard system for transliterating Sibe with Roman letters at the current stage, the transliterated Sibe with Roman letters written on the SNSs needs to find Sibe people who also agree with a similar system of transliterating Sibe with Roman letters. The transliterated Sibe, then, is never merely a way of promoting Sibe language education, a way of getting Sibe language spoken in the cyberspace; it is also a practice of forming a community. The Sibe carefully chose the most appropriate Roman letters to transliterate Sibe language, based on Spoken Sibe. The choice of certain Roman letters as phonological description of Sibe language has

become much more popular, and this depends on how well the speakers are familiar with the Roman alphabet and with smartphones and computer keyboards, and on the way in which Sibe SNS users are familiar with the Roman alphabet when using them for Spoken Sibe. Although the interviewees made it explicit that they were interested in finding Sibe people who can speak Sibe language with them, however, as the transliterated systems adopted by different Sibe is also different, therefore, it is only possible for Sibe who chose the same transliterated Sibe system. Hence, we can conclude that it is impossible to keep the dynamic of choice of transliterated system separate from Sibe language community construction.

To analyse the sociolinguistic connotations of the adoption of writing systems of transliterated Sibe on SNSs entails other aspects of how the Sibe ethnic identity is formed with the use of SNS *quns* and the use of Spoken Sibe. The SNS *qun* is composed of highly mobile individual Sibe; as individual Sibe are involved in various sub-communities on SNS *quns*, they are not attached to any particular SNS *qun*. Different from the physical world, where highly mobile individuals innovate their language according to their particular motivations, Sibe SNS users in SNS *quns* modify transliterated Sibe in accordance with the particular nature of the CMC, for instance, using the alphabet that is easiest to find on the keyboard to replace some letters of transliterated Sibe, such as the letter, *ū*, in the transliterated Sibe, was replaced by the letter, *v*. On the other hand, the large number of individuals in SNS *quns* also form a close-knit social network based on the use of transliterated Sibe and use of the same SNS *qun*, as well as enforcing the adoption of transliterated Sibe based on Spoken Sibe. Even though the relationship between Sibe people in SNS *quns* is constructed by the weak ties of *holbobun*, the necessity of expedient communication in an SNS *qun* eventually shapes the formation of the "standard" Sibe language in an SNS *qun*. And the Sibe people who later join this SNS *qun* have to converge with the "standard" language of transliterated Spoken Sibe to become involved in the Sibe SNS *qun*.

Those who initiate the similar system of transliterating Sibe have been identified in my ethnography as tending to group together. And those Sibe who are already connected with each other within the *holbobun* network also tend to use the same transliterated system for the sake of convenience. In this sense, the use of

transliterated Sibe in an SNS *qun* also indexes one's social group and *holbobun* network.

From this analysis of Sibe SNS users' experience adopting the appropriate transliterated Sibe in SNS *quns*, I conclude that the Sibe's choice of systems for transliterating Sibe is a mixture of influence of *minzu* discourse and the influence of CMC. The process of construction of transliterated Sibe language is constructed along with *minzu* discourse with the constrain of CMC.

Online Debate on Spoken versus Literary Language

In the preceding sections in this chapter, I have analysed how Sibe people use Sibe language when communicating online. In the following section, I will analyse how Sibe ethnic identity as performed through the discussion over the opposition between spoken and literary language. The Sibe negotiate their ethnic identity between the official and the everyday, the State's framing of ethnic identity and the performativity of ethnic identity by Sibe people in their SNS interactions and exchanges.

The SNS users accommodate the strategy of forging linkages and synergies between different narratives on spoken Sibe language and emphasise the multiplicity of Sibe identity in the discussion on literary Manchu over spoken Sibe. The representation of the multiplicity of Sibe identity poses a stark contrast with the literary language defined by the State, with its emphasis on homogeneous single identity from a uniform standard language. I argue that the SNS provides Sibe people with a form of rhizomatic resistance (Deleuze & Guattari, 2016, p. 249) towards the State-controlled definition of Sibe identity. At the same time, I argue that the very strategy of rhizomatic resistance against State-defined Sibe identity in defining the spoken Sibe also facilitates a rhizomatic logic which prioritises multi-connectivity and heterogeneity in the communication and knowledge on defining the Sibe identity, which requires thicker communicative process on the knowledge production on Sibe language; this subsequently puts the Sibe elites who have the access to technical means and knowledge in a privileged position in defining the Sibe identity.

There is heated debate on literary language and spoken Sibe among Sibe people. The debate is over whether Sibe language is Manchu language. If the Sibe language is Manchu language, then, according to the criteria of Stalin's definition of nationality, the Sibe should not qualify as a *minzu*. Hence, many Sibe from Xinjiang strongly defend the idea that Sibe is a separate language from Manchu. However, at the same time, in the current social condition in China, the State also promotes multiplex and heterogeneous identity within Chinese identity, and so the local community's perspective is encouraged. In this context, the Sibe utilise their access to Sibe language and try to negotiate their relationship with the previous State-defined literary language.

Some Sibe language enthusiasts and Manchu people argue that Sibe language is the same as Manchu language, as they argue that literary Sibe is the same as Manchu language. On the other hand, Sibe people from Xinjiang are typically greatly angered by this statement. They argue that Spoken Sibe has evolved into another language. In the following section, I will analyse how Sibe SNS users argue the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language.

In the discussion over Spoken Sibe and Literary Manchu, based on my observation on Sibe SNS *qun*s, the Sibe SNS users argued that Spoken Sibe developed from Manchu language and has evolved into a new language. The Spoken Sibe is a result of language development, influenced by the environment in which Sibe are living. The following discussion on the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language from *Sibe Giyamun WeChat qun* vividly reflects the above argument.

'Language, in the development process, will continue to be affected by its neighbour languages. This effect is continuous, and it is reflected in the lexical, grammar, pronunciation and many other aspects' (H, *Sibe Giyamun WeChat qun,* 2016). Following H's comment on how language was influenced by its environment, A2 added this insight on how Sibe developed itself after the Westward Migration:

> We say that, in the Sibe language after the Westward Migration, we can see that some language features that appear today in Sibe language differ from those in Manchu. So are these features inherent to Sibe language or influenced by the geographical proximity of the language after the westward movement? (A2, *Sibe Giyamun WeChat qun,* 2016)

To develop A2's comment, T2 added his input from a more theoretical perspective. He used the social Darwinian's perspective to argue that the language should change, and the change of Sibe language out of Manchu language is due to social development:

> 'In the long process of historical change, Manchu Language has also changed as a communicative tool. As the law of survival of the fittest, those can adapt to the development of the society live and those cannot adapt died. Therefore, both the ancient Manchu and the modern Sibe have carried out reforms in Literary Language and injected new blood to promote its development' (T2, *Sibe Giyamun WeChat qun*, 2016).

In the above comment from T2, there is confusion on his use of terms. At the beginning of the sentence, he refers to 'Manchu language'. However, at the end of his comment, he uses 'Literary Language' instead of 'Manchu language'. The ambiguity he made between Manchu and Sibe language is intentional, as T2 is attempting to articulate his assertion of Sibe identity emerging out of Manchu identity. As, in China, language is one of the most important ethnic markers for an ethnic minority, according to the ethnic minority, T2's misuse of the terms, Manchu language and Literary Language, can be understood as an attempt to construct a heterogeneous understanding of Sibe language, in which he can assert his claim of Sibe as an independent language and also justify Sibe language's close relationship with Manchu language. He tries to reposition Sibe language from the State-defined fixed definition of Sibe through blurring the boundary between Sibe language and Manchu language.

This strategy is widely used by Sibe SNS users based on my virtual ethnography. Many other Sibe SNS users follow this narrative and use their knowledge to enrich it. A2 is another example of someone that carries on this narrative: 'It is true that languages are constantly evolving as time goes by. Written Manchu language has now become the language of literature, Sibe spoken language has been developed by Sibe people and continues to be enriched' (A2, *Sibe Giyamun WeChat qun*, 2016). H follows A2's discussion, saying:

> 'Oralization of the Literary Language and the increasing use of
> "conventional" words in Spoken Sibe has led to a growing number of new

words; this also means some of the terms once shared by Sibe and Manchu have developed new meanings. This makes the difference between literary language and spoken language: it is only the Spoken Sibe can reflect those changes' (H, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun,* 2016).

On the other hand, Sibe SNS users also emphasise the influence of the State's ethnic policy on securing Sibe as a separate language from Manchu:

If we say that Sibe is a Manchu dialect, then the Sibe spoken language is a spoken language of Manchu dialect. If the Sibe language is not a dialect of the Manchu language, then the Sibe spoken language is the spoken language of Tungus language; it has nothing to do with the Manchu language. As for the language of Sibe not being Manchu language, from different linguistic perspectives, or combined with ethnic policy, we can have different understandings of whether Sibe language is an independent language (A2, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun,* 2016).

Another discourse that Sibe SNS users use to argue in support of Sibe language is that of dialect. Sibe tend to argue that Sibe language is an independent language from Manchu, but the discourse also recognises the inherent nature of Sibe language as being derived from Manchu language. This generates a multiplex and heterogeneous narrative on Sibe identity. And Sibe SNS users use their own initiative to forge linkages and synergies between different narratives to serve their own argument.

The following consists of excerpts from a discussion on what is Sibe language, from a Sibe language-learning WeChat *qun*. The learners in this WeChat *qun* are mostly from the region of Xinjiang, but there is also a large percentage of users from the northeast of China. *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun* has 305 members: 239 members are from the region of Xinjiang, and 66 members are from the Northeast of China. Language is a very important ethnic marker in China, according to the *minzu* policy. Hence, ethnic minority people are very keen to promote their language to protect their rights from *minzu* policy. However, as the post-socialist social condition changes people's quest for their identity, this results in people from different

communities having different quests. The following discussion on the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu reflects this difference, and how those different quests synergise with each other.

In *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun,* many users come to this WeChat *qun* is to learn Sibe language. As there is a debate on whether Sibe language is Manchu language, based on my virtual ethnography from 2009 to 2015, most Sibe from Xijiang strongly insist on the idea that Sibe language is independent language. There are also a lot of Sibe from the Northeast of China who insist that Sibe language is actually the Manchu language. The following statement was made by T2 from *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun* on offering his understanding of the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language. He creatively borrows the idea of dialect to argue that Sibe language develop from Manchu language

> In Sibe language-learning, two concepts are often confused, intentionally or unintentionally, that is, dialect and spoken language. Dialect and spoken language are two concepts that have no direct relationship. The so-called dialect, that is, different people within the same language, using a local speech, grammar, and vocabulary, have more significant differences in terms of their local languages. For example, Northeast Mandarin, Cantonese, Southwest Mandarin are dialects of Chinese; and Heihe dialect and Jianzhou dialects are dialect of Manchu. The standard language is based on a dialect; usually the dialect is the dialect of the political, economic, cultural centre or national centre. For example, Mandarin Chinese is the standard Chinese dialect, Manchu Jianzhou dialect is Manchu standard language (T2, *Sibe Giyamun WeChat qun,* 2016).

T2 skilfully uses the concept of dialect to articulate the idea that Sibe language belongs to Manchu language. He subtly challenges the idea that Sibe language has no relationship with Manchu language. He also uses the discourse of national language to illustrate the position of Sibe language by comparing the position of 'Northeast Mandarin, Cantonese, Southwest Mandarin' with 'Chinese'. As the discourse of national language has been endorsed by the State, to use it to explain the position of Sibe language simultaneously helps to prove the point.

Following T2's statement, N used the ethnic minority policy to justify Sibe language being an independent language:

Without regarding the Sibe as a *minzu*, that is, assuming that the Sibe is not a *minzu*, then Sibe can barely count as a dialect of Manchu; this dialect relationship is similar to Cantonese as a dialect of Chinese. The difference between Manchu and Sibe language is the difference between dialects. And the Sibe people are a *minzu*. They are a *minzu* recognized by the national government. They have their own culture, language and ethnic psychology. So Sibe language is an independent language, independent of Manchu language (N, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun,* 2016).

In the above discussion, N uses the state ethnic minorities policy when arguing that Sibe language should be recognized an independent language. According to the State's ethnic minorities policy in China, any ethnic minority recognised as a *minzu* has the right to develop their own language. In this vein, N argues that 'Sibe language is an independent language', as 'they (Sibe) are a *minzu* recognized by the national government'.

A similar strategy, of forging linkage and synergies between different narratives, is also used in explaining the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language.

- Sibe is one clan of Jurgen. They migrated to the west for the consolidation of the Qing Dynasty's border. Sibe belong to the Tungusic language branch of the Altaic language from a linguistic point of view. Not exactly the same, there are some similar parts. (T8, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun,* 2016).

- Because Manchu language is a phonetic language, and this language truly records the Jurchen spoken language, that is to say, that Jurchen spoken language is the foundation of Manchu language, also that Manchu's "spoken language" and "literary language" is highly consistent. However, most of the literary Sibe language was formed by borrowing the Manchu language. That is to say, the literary language of the Sibe language is not

entirely a written system established in the Sibe spoken language. Therefore, there is a huge difference between the literary Sibe language and the spoken language (Z, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun,* 2016).

Sibe SNS users keep repeating the statement that Sibe language has developed from Manchu language:

- 'The modern Sibe literary language is closely related to Manchu Written language. Manchu Written language can be said to be the main source of Sibe Literary language' (F2, *Sibe Giyamun* WeCha*t qun,* 2016).

- The Manchu written language, formed and developed on the basis of the Jianzhou Jurgen was carefully and strictly standardized in the Qing Dynasty. Once widely used as a "national language", a large number of language reference books were widely circulated among Sibe people. All this prompted the Literary Sibe language in its formation and its development process has always been in a Manchu Written language-based environment. Thus we can see from the above description many similarities in history between the languages of the Sibe and the influence of Written Manchu on literary Sibe (Z, *Sibe Giyamun* WeChat *qun,* 2016).

The reason why F2 and Z use Sibe Literary language is that they are trying to make use of the ambiguity: as Sibe Literary language is Manchu Literary language, the Sibe people do not want to say it is just Manchu Literary language. They want to argue that Sibe is an independent language. The choice of words reflects various Sibe people's attempts to articulate the concept of Sibe language as an independent language.

In the earlier discussions, many Sibe people set up a clear distinction between Spoken Sibe language and Literary Manchu when they discuss the issue of Sibe language. However, some Sibe commentators try to blur that binary by talking of Sibe Literary language. This adds complexity when narrating Sibe language, constructing an ambiguity through their use of term.

From the above analysis, we can see Sibe SNS users using various strategy of forging linkages and synergies between different narratives on spoken Sibe language, and the action of forging linkages and synergies between different narrative produces

a type of ambiguity, multiplicity, and liminal Sibe identity. I argue that the liminal Sibe identity provides Sibe people a form of rhizomatic resistance (Deleuze & Guattari, 2016, p. 249) towards the State-controlled definition of Sibe identity. On the other hand, I argue that the very strategy of rhizomatic resistance against State-defined Sibe identity also facilitates a rhizomatic logic which prioritises multi-connectivity and heterogeneity in the communication and knowledge production. This subsequently puts the Sibe elite and internet savvy, who have the access to technical means and knowledge, in a privileged position in controlling the knowledge production on Sibe identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the dilemma in developing Sibe language among Sibe communities from the analysis on collective construction of transliterated Sibe in Sibe SNS *quns*: on the one hand, Sibe want to develop language with a focus on the Spoken Sibe, as Spoken Sibe is a crucial factor for safeguarding their ethnic community in Xinjiang, and this is the important reason for Sibe to develop their language. In order to develop Spoken Sibe, they have to abandon the syllables teaching method derived from Manchu vocabulary, as the syllables are too outdated to reflect contemporary Sibe vocabulary. On the other hand, the Sibe could not abandon the syllables teaching method derived from Manchu vocabulary, as the Sibe language's connection with Manchu language was the most important reason for a lot of Sibe to learn Sibe language, as they can find translation jobs for Manchu archives and the connection between Sibe and Manchu is also the important reason for investment from the state to develop the Sibe language. This dilemma functions as cultural management to shape the discourse of *minzu* in the discussion on the relationship between Manchu and Sibe, and also to shape how the transliterated Sibe takes its specific shape in the SNS *qun*.

Within the discourse of homogeneity and conformity of the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu*, the connection with Manchu have to be minimised so that the Sibe can fit into the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu*, and keep its separated *minzu* status. On the other hand, the Sibe also need to link with Manchu, as the connection with Manchu can offer Sibe people more economic opportunitities and funds from the state for developing their language. These two opposing discourses suggest that

the Sibe are required to select their ethnic positioning according to which discourse is in power in a particular situation. In this chapter, I have shown how the construction of transliterated Sibe within the use of SNSs reflects new complexities in the politics of ethnic identity in contemporary China.

This chapter discovered that SNSs function as a medium supplying a platform that allows different opinions to display together in cyberspace. This give the discourse of *minzu* construction a new environment to articulate meaning. This chapter situates the transformation of the Sibe ethnic identities within the context of a growing interactive media culture that informs and shapes many of their interactions and their knowledge of the world and their sense of community. The SNS, with its relative freedom, limitlessness, and accessibility for Sibe people who are spread across distance is of key importance in this context, and helps in the formation of new identities. From the formations, the new sense of Sibe, which is based on the sharing knowledge of transliterated Sibe, based on the use of SNSs, emerges.

The Sibe members' collective constructing of ethnic identity serves several important functions. It constitutes the processes by which the Sibe as a group assemble shared storylines that subjectively constitute their collective identity. It has been documented that constructing a shared past is an integral part of the general process of negotiating collective identities (Anderson, 1991). Moreover, ethnic identity gives access to a shared space that is peculiar to the Sibe. It thus enhances the cohesiveness and affiliation among the members and gives further legitimacy for the group's claim on Spoken Sibe. It thus serves as a support for enhancing the Sibe's position in Xinjiang.

There is a strong sense of participation and of community in the Sibe's construction of transliterated Sibe, based on my ethnography on Sibe SNS *quns* from 2009 to 2015. The Sibe SNS *qun* functions as an imagined community, but it has very strong local-cultural "origins." It is the result of a unique SNS's influence that brought about a dialectic between the offline Sibe communities and the parallel world of Sibe online communities facilitated by the use of SNS *quns*. The online community is not "imagined" in the sense of an entirely different scheme of reality. The distant Sibe have communicated with each other and the community of Sibe has been visualised via the use of transliterated Sibe.

Chapter Seven
Conclusion

Introduction

In this final chapter, I first review the central thesis and core findings of this research. I then review the results of the research presented in this thesis. After reviewing the findings of the research, I discuss the contributions and limitations of the present study and offer some suggestions for future work on the study of SNS and subjectivity formation in China.

Central thesis

This research examines how ICT facilitates the construction of a new Sibe identity and provides agency for Sibe people in their identity construction. It emphasizes how the Sibe in the northeast of China and Xinjiang are using SNS to reconstruct a Sibe identity suited to the demands and concerns of their particular local circumstances. On understanding the construction of the concept of *minzu* among Sibe SNS users, this study focuses on how the Sibe articulate the state-defined *minzu*, their own traditional notion of community, and emerging relationships in their interaction with their use of SNSs. In other words, this study situates the construction of the meaning of *minzu* in the context of network dynamics, analyses how the meaning of *minzu* has been constructed in the dynamic interpersonal relationship-building process, and examines what social psychological needs the meaning of *minzu* is fulfilling in the Sibe SNS users' interactions.

This study has been conducted via the methods of in-depth and semi-structured interviews, and an ethnography of the (social) use of SNS among Sibe people. These approaches were chosen because of the possibilities they provided for understanding the reality of ethnic politics among Sibe people in China.

Before conducting the field research for this thesis, it became clear that studies of ethnic minorities in China are quite different from studies of ethnic minorities in the UK. Based on the review of the literature on studies of Chinese ethnic minorities examined in Chapter 2, I demonstrated that, in China, the ethnic minority identity was defined by the state with the implementation as a process of ethnogenesis of the concept of *minzu* through education and media. The conscious

sense of ethnic identity in ethnic communities is often less developed in China than in the UK because ethnic identities have been bestowed on groups by the state, rather than originating from within the communities themselves. Nonetheless, ethnicity is still a keyword for understanding the situation of ethnic minorities in China, although there are also different terms in addition to ethnic group, such as nationality, and culture. The term *minzu* is itself a relatively new word, given that it was invented for constructing the modern Chinese nation in the late 19th century. It is a highly politically loaded term, and its meaning has changed since it was adopted. Originally, the term was used primarily to refer to the Chinese nation, but it is now used to refer to ethnic minority people, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 2. What are the factors influencing the meaning of *minzu*? As I have demonstrated in Chapter 2, *minzu* has been engineered by the state through the use of education and media. Therefore, the communication brought by SNS has been the main aspect that my analysis has focused on.

The main purpose of this thesis was to consider the relationship between the changing meaning of *minzu* and communication technology. It has demonstrated that the communicative practices of the Sibe SNS *qun* have facilitated the process of ethnogenesis. Ethnogenesis occurs when the participants of an ethnocultural formation, such as Sibe social media groups, express, articulate, negotiate, and reconstitute their ethnic subjectivities through CMC. This process not only gives rise to a new computer-mediated manifestation of ethnicity, it also engenders a new incarnation of community, an ethnically based virtual community. This investigation of the communicative practices of the Sibe SNS *qun* therefore reveals that the Sibe SNS *qun* serves as a site of both ethnogenesis and virtual community. The process of ethnic identity formation and community building converge to form an ethnic virtual community, the Sibe SNS *qun*, based on the pre-existing concept of *minzu.*

This thesis has argued that the meaning of *minzu* should be scrutinised to understand how the Sibe make sense of their ethnic identity. Therefore, this thesis has analysed what the mechanisms are by which ethnic minorities as subjects identify with the position to which they are assigned in the discourse of *minzu*, as well as how those ethnic minority people produce and perform positions within the given notion of *minzu*. This research has analysed the interactions between different

uses of different SNSs and their insertion into everyday cultural practices. It has confirmed with Harris's finding on Sibe in Xinjiang, that to create their cultural marker in Xinjiang, they situate their tradition in their former home (Harris, 2004, p. 55).

I have argued that the new, emergent *Sibe* ethnic identity is constructed by the interaction between networks facilitated by *holbobun*, SNS *qun*, and the *minzu* identity. The *holbobun*, SNS qun, and term *minzu* do not mean anything for individual Sibe SNS users, until the Sibe SNS users engage these nodes to solve their own individual problems in their local life. Castells (2010) argues that agency is an input which configures the network to further its interests. He argues that the material condition of the "space of flows" is constructed by power elites in the network for perpetuating and furthering their own interests, and holds the idea that the law of the network is designed by those power elites. In this vein, he argues that the link is generated to serve the node. Hence, in the vein of Castells' argument, the networks facilitated by the use of an SNS *qun* can be understood as a determining force in shaping Sibe identity. However, as I have demonstrated in my thesis, the Sibe's self-led ethnogenesis is not only a result of empowerment brought about by the use of SNS. It is also part of a complex process intertwining technology and changing social structures, through which individuals continually reconstruct a localised identity with the space made available by broader systems of political economy. The power in redefining the new space is mediated by a strategic appropriation of a changing political economy, which is brought about by the use of ICT, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 4, Chapter 5 and Chapter 6. In the following sections, I outline the key findings of this research.

Research Findings

In this thesis, I have problematised the nature of *minzu* and the simple cause and effect understanding of the relationship of technology to society, by analysing how the cultural form of SNS is constructed. In other words, I have analysed the dynamic relationship between the social use of technology and the ongoing construction of the culture associated with the use of that technology.

In understanding the Sibe struggle against various forces of domination in Chinese society, this research has adopted a Foucauldian genealogical approach to studying 'the effective formation of discourse' (1972, p. 233). I have examined the historical data on subjectivity formation among Sibe SNS users to identify how subjects are connected to other forces at a particular historical moment. According to the methodological postulates of post-structuralism, the method has moved from the question of "what does it mean?" to of the question of "what does it do?" – that is, from significance to its effectivity, and from textual analysis to social practice (Foucault, 1979). In this vein, the research questions of this thesis have been used not only to collect textual data, but also to collect the practices of real Sibe SNS users, for making a genealogical analysis of why they are committed to acting and reacting in certain ways within the interplay of contextual and historical forces at a certain time.

As I have discussed in the above section, in my thesis I have examined the construction of the meaning of *minzu* among the Sibe SNS users, within concurrent wider debates on technology and ethnicity. After having reviewed the claims about the definition of *minzu* in Chinese society, I turned my attention to the political economy of interactive communication. My reason for reviewing the political economy of the communication brought by the new media was based on my findings on the construction of *minzu* in Chapter 4, in which I demonstrated *minzu* was constructed by the state using the centralised media. Essentially, previous studies attempting to explore why ethnic minorities quest for identity were largely focused on economic factors influencing the marginalised social position of ethnic minority people, and left out that social relationship between ethnic minorities and Han influences ethnic identity construction among ethnic minorities. I have interrogated the meaning of *minzu* in terms of the debates on communication and imagined community, and have scrutinised what I perceive as a troubled relationship between the understanding of technology and social change. My enquiry therefore concerns the relationship between subjectivity formation and the use of SNS, through the prism of Sibe practices and an understanding of the concept of *minzu* in their use of SNS. Sibe people's use of the SNS QQ and WeChat in regards to the Westward Migration festival and the transliteration Sibe language have provided insights on

understanding how subjectivity is formed with the use of SNS. The research questions address the reason for the Sibe quest for ethnic identity, and what the role of SNS is in constructing this identity. In this manner, I approached the complexities of the construction of Sibe identity with the use of SNS from two different angles: from a Foucauldian approach, understanding how the concept of *minzu* and the SNS as a cultural institution disciplines the Sibe identity; and from the prism of ethnicity as an empowerment, pertaining to the Sibe's *minzu* practices. With these two perspectives in mind, I developed my research questions. The research findings have been concluded based on answering the research questions I set in Chapter 1. I will discuss the research findings in the following paragraphs.

Overall, I found that the SNS have facilitated the construction of a new community for Sibe people. I focused on how the logic of power embedded in the technology of SNS shapes the concept of *minzu*. By analysing the texts of online discussions taken from the archive of Sibe SNS groups, and then supplementing this with interview data and historical data, I have identified that Sibe SNS users have adopted the *cultural minzu*, *racial minzu* and Stalinist-derived definition of *minzu* in their online discussion and offline interview. Based on my virtual ethnography, I found that although those Sibe SNS users still reference the terminology of *minzu* in their online discussions on their history, Sibe people have used the terminology to communicate and collaborate with each other, and they have produced a common body of knowledge and ideas which goes beyond the officially enunciated definitions and meanings associated with the Sibe *minzu*. Based on Hart and Negri's theory of multitude (2004), I argue that this common body of knowledge and ideas serves as a platform for resistance to the hegemony of *minzu*. Sibe people actively search out the meaning of *minzu*, and they link together different pieces of information according to their own preferences and needs. They have also broadcast their perceptions of their own history from their own SNS platforms, and network with other Sibe who share similar ideas, or are willing to believe these ideas. In this vein, the networked individualism as proposed by Rainie and Wellman (Rainie and Wellman, 2012), facilitates knowledge production as an open network and functions as a kind of rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 2008) that interrupts and challenges the previously

closed network dominating the meaning of *minzu*. In this sense, the networked individualism from the use of SNS facilitates a more open discourse on *minzu.*

The practice of taking and posting pictures also plays a role in re-constructing the Sibe identity. I argue that the co-presence of communication and information in knowledge production in the digital environment challenges the disciplinary power of historical knowledge that is controlled by the state. The meaning of *minzu* is articulated by different people for their own individual purposes. Based on my observation of Sibe picture-sharing practices on the Sibe SNS QQ *qun*, WeChat *qun*, Sina Weibo, and Baidu Tieba, I found that the meanings of *minzu* are influenced by the information, as communicated through the social networks organised around the idea of *holbobun*. Based on the results of my analysis, I argue that Sibe shooting of pictures for sharing on the SNS platform WeChat has changed the representation of the Sibe. These picture-searching, picture-taking, and picture-posting practices play a role in re-constructing the Sibe identity. Sibe people also learn about Sibe culture from the sharing of pictures of and by Sibe people. Here I argue that, with resources from the "space of flow" facilitated by SNS, Sibe identity is repackaged for picture-sharing on the SNS. The development of these new uses of SNS have given Sibe users the opportunity to produce new narratives of ethnic identity, which, in turn, has led the Sibe as an ethnic minority to discover an agency they can deploy to perform their cultural practices and to "imagine" themselves in new ways.

Based on my ethnography of how Sibe people use transliterated Sibe in their everyday lives, I found out the *culture minzu*, *racial minzu*, and Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* have been manipulated to serve each individual Sibe's own purpose in building ethnic identity. I conclude that there are three different types of Sibe who are actively articulating Sibe ethnic identity through their online practice. The first type is the Sibe who are working in metropolitan cities and are originally from Xinjiang; they use the Sibe SNS *quns* as sites for social gathering. The second type are Sibe who are working in metropolitan cities and are originally from the northeast of China; they mainly use SNS *quns* as sites for searching for alternative self-identities. The third type are Sibe who live in Çabçal, Dalian, and Shenyang; they use SNS *quns* to compensate for the fear of the changes in their local

community, brought about by the urbanisation and economic change taking place in their areas.

The principles and ideas generated from the concepts of *minzu* have directed Sibe to promote their ethnic identity based on their local community. The transliterated Sibe language of spoken Sibe is promoted in this context. However, under the affordances of ICT, this form of transliterated Sibe was constrained to using Roman alphabets and Chinese characters. With the influence of Sibe SNS users' familiarity with transliterated systems, the method of using Pinyin to transliterate Sibe has eventually been adopted, and prevailed with Sibe SNS users.

Under the influence of the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu*, language was prioritised as one of most important ethnic markers for a *minzu*, and the Sibe language was used as one of the most important characters for Sibe identity construction. The adoption of transliterated Sibe takes on a crucial role in marking the ethic boundary of Sibe. In the socialist period when the *minzu* was identified by the state, the state used its administrative technique to hail people to take up a *minzu* identity from the state's perspective of imagined community. In this process the Sibe *minzu* was constructed with a criterion of claiming knowledge of Sibe language. However, in the networked society where SNS function as a community for Sibe, the Sibe language becomes a communication tool for Sibe to be included in the Sibe community. In this vein, mastery of Sibe language becomes an important marker for Sibe identity.

I have analysed the way Sibe identity is built using transliterated Sibe in the SNS *qun*. In this thesis, I have emphasised on how Sibe people organise by using the transliterated Sibe in the SNS *qun* to form a new community and collective identity that is re-assembled by Sibe people who are scattered in different places. This echoes Tsagarousianou's thesis of "from connectivity to consciousness" (Tsagarousianou & Sofos, 2013, p.116), from her study on the role of media technology in bringing together Muslims who are scattered in different places in Europe, and constructing a "translocal space", using media technology to contest injustice.

My analysis of the development of *minzu* narratives in the SNS *qun* stressed the realisation of a set of principles and ideas about *minzu* that guide the choice of transliterated Sibe in SNS *qun*. The transliterated Sibe language in SNS, according to

the Foucauldian concept of culture as governance, is an amalgamation of the limited practical resources that the Sibe people are able to use to claim their identity, in relation to the use of Roman alphabets in transliterating the Sibe language. In analysing the relationship between transliterated Sibe language and the Sibe *minzu* identity, inspired by Rainie and Wellman's concept of networked individualism, which recognised the individual's agency in articulating the meanings produced by networks, my analysis has been focused on individual Sibe SNS users. I have analysed how the concepts of *minzu* and the material conditions of SNS interacted with each other in producing the choices of method, transliteration, and sense of identity. I have examined the main statements in the discussion of the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language, and identified the discourses of *minzu* that influence the debate.

In analysing the discussion amongst Sibe SNS users on the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language, I concluded that there are two conflicting but consistent statements on the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language, based on my interviews with Sibe SNS users. The first statement is that Sibe is a separate language from Manchu. The second claim is that Sibe language has developed from Manchu language. I argue that the reason the statements are conflicting is that the first statement denies Sibe language is the same language as Manchu language, while the second statement claims Sibe language has developed from Manchu language. The reason that I argue the statements are also consistent with each other is that both statements agree Sibe language should be considered an independent language. These conflicted but consistent statements indicate Sibe people's attempts to discursively construct an independent status for Sibe language. I have also analysed why Sibe SNS users make such seemingly conflicting yet consistent statements on the Sibe language, by analysing their statements' connections to the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu* and Chinese nationalism. I argued that Sibe insist they are a separate *minzu* because they want keep their *minzu* status under the Stalin-derived definition of *minzu,* as it is the only legitimising channel to protect their language. On the other hand, Sibe also claim that Sibe language is the same as Manchu language because the only way to develop Sibe language in the current political economic condition of developing ethnic minority

language in China, is to connect the Sibe language with the Chinese nation. Manchu language as the language of the Qing dynasty can offer a significant contribution to the history of the Chinese nation, and therefore the state and nation will develop the Sibe language.

After reviewing the main statements on the relationship between Sibe language and Manchu language, I have analysed individual Sibe's practices of promoting the Sibe language, in relation to the use of transliterated Sibe. I found that there are numerous contradictions between their statements and their practices. Their statements promoting an independent Sibe language have been contradicted with their actual practices of using the Manchu language. Based on my ethnography, I summarised that this contradiction is due to the discourse of *minzu*'s influence, and the constraints and affordances of CMC in SNS *qun*. The Sibe SNS *qun* users were guided by the material conditions of SNS, and the discourses of *minzu* demanding that the transliterated Sibe should adopt pinyin to represent the sounds of the Sibe language. Pinyin is the tool implemented by the state for spreading Mandarin as the national language through compulsory education in China since the 1950s. By using pinyin to represent transliterated Sibe, a certain constraint both from the materiality of pinyin and the discourse around it has shaped Sibe identity.

I have also identified that the choice of transliterated Sibe language in the Sibe SNS *qun* is not simply a result of shared knowledge, but also the formation of a special relationship generated from the interaction between *holbobun, minzu* and SNS *qun* amongst the Sibe SNS users, which has helped to construct a certain type of culture and community, and a new ethnic group for Sibe in Çabçal and in the northeast of China. I concluded that the choice of transliterated Sibe language with the use of Roman alphabets in SNS *qun* is legitimised by an appeal to the promotion of spoken Sibe language.

My qualitative analysis confirmed that the discourse of *minzu* is engaged in complex processes of cultural governance in the formation of transliterated Sibe language, through the choice of the Roman alphabet with the CMC. Based on the ethnographic data that I have collected from my field works, I conclude that the transliteration of Sibe language with the use of the Roman alphabet has been manipulated as tool to serve the idea that language should represent their community.

The choice of using pinyin to spell the spoken Sibe was mobilised by this thought, and as a result the transliterated Sibe reflects the spoken Sibe used by Sibe people in Çabçal.

My argument in this thesis is that the transliterated Sibe language is implicated in the production of community and an idea of imaging the community. An 'installation' of the ideas of *minzu* in Sibe with the practices of SNS *quns* connects to the practice of *holbobun,* which allows the Sibe to internalise the discourse of Sibe language as a process of ethnic identity management. In this process, the transliterated Sibe language functions as a laboratory where a whole series of strategies for building Sibe ethnic community are tested. Yet this construction is always productive in the sense that ideas, objects, actors and inscriptions emerge from these arenas. This production in return provides a functional justification for the adoption of transliterated Sibe among Sibe people.

Based on data collected from in-depth and semi-structured interviews, and an ethnography of the (social) use of SNSs in self-led ethnogenesis, the Westward Migration, and the adoption of transliterated Sibe language among Sibe people, I have concluded that the shared use of transliterated Sibe language reduces the feeling of physical distance for Sibe from Xinjiang and the northeast of China, while the reference to specific socio-physical boundaries facilitated by the use of transliterated Sibe asserts a distance from the rest of China. This dichotomy reinforces a sense of belonging for participants by creating a culturally localised niche of Sibe ethnic identity, within the expansive space facilitated by the use of SNS. In this vein, I argue that the transliterated Sibe adopted online, which is influenced by the transliterated systems based on the Roman alphabet and the discourse of *minzu*, allows for new meanings of Sibe ethnic identity online.

In this process of constructing Sibe community with the use of SNS *qun* the idea of *holbobun* interacts with the idea of SNS *quns*. The social network constructed by using the idea of *holbobun* is largely facilitated by SNS *quns*, and the *holbobun* social network, in turn, further develops SNS *quns*, as the formation of SNS *quns* is the result of the relational shift of the social network of *holbobun.* At the same time, the technological shift of using SNS *quns* further constitutes and promotes a relational shift in the social network of *holbobun.* Informed by Foucault's argument

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on technology within his concept of governmentality, which associates technology with a codified body of knowledge, ideological structures embedded in material conditions, and cognitive settings that shape how technology is constructed (Foucault, 1972), I argue that the idea of *holbobun* has interacted with the use of SNS in picture sharing practices in Sibe subjectivity formation.

Contribution and Limitations of this Research

This thesis is the first empirical study on studying how Sibe people in Northeast China and Sibe in Northwest China interacts with each other with the use of the ICT. The analysis of the co-construction of the notion of Westward Migration between Sibe people in Northeast and Norwest of China with the use of SNS has provided an important angle on studying the issue of *minzu* in current increasingly mediated Chinese society. I have suggested that the Sibe people in Northeast China and Northwest China each has their own different reasons and concerns for articulating the ethnic identity based on their offline context in this thesis, however, the SNS has offered translocal space for both of them to interact and negotiate. This thesis has suggested that *minzu* identity was influenced by the interactions of multiple networks of *holbobun* and SNS qun.

In this thesis I have problematize *minzu* by demonstrating it is a social construction, a dynamic concept, with a genealogical investigation on the meanings of *minzu* in Sibe community in relation with their history and language. I also demonstrated that ICT participate in identity construction in Sibe SNS users' self-led ethnogenesis, Picture-sharing practices on Westward Migration and debate on how to transliterate Sibe language on the internet.

In this thesis, I argued that the Sibe SNS group provides an alternative organising structure that can open up potential for 'rhizomatic multiplicities' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, p.37). People from different physical places articulate the meanings of Sibe in the same online space in Sibe SNS *qun*, like QQ group chatroom and WeChat group chatroom communities. Peoples' different life experiences make for different interpretations of what Sibe is. However, the same online space gives those Sibe people an opportunity to negotiate the meaning of being Sibe together. This was not available before when knowledge production was

'arborial', being rooted in time and space that was tightly controlled by the State. On the other hand, there is a constraint from SNS as a technology on how Sibe ethnogenesis can be conducted. Although the SNS play a major role in self-led ethnogenesis, in terms of spreading narratives and re-grouping the ethnic community, as the technology of the internet is appropriated in particular ways which the political economy determines, how it is used also shapes the process of self-led ethnogenesis. For instance, Sibe enjoy the community characteristics of the SNSs, such as the QQ and WeChat. However, SNSs do not appear to be about to facilitate an ethnogenesis as Sibe expect. The case of Sibe having to use romanised Sibe for communicating online, due to the constrain of CMC, suggests that the material conditions of SNS appear to be important to constructing Sibe language.

Rainie and Wellman (2012), and Dijk (2006) believe it is the human participating in the network who decides who is included and excluded in the network. Hence, the individuals can still shape the network by manipulating resources. Hardt and Negri's (2006) and Deleuze and Guattari's (2008) works offer a theoretical language to explain Rainie and Wellman's and Dijk's assertions on human agency in the network. They suggest that the agency is not an input, but an emergent property of the system during the process of each interaction between elements in the system. Both Hardt and Negri, and Deleuze and Guattari, argue that flows are primal components in the network, and they are neither produced by the nodes (as in Castells' assertion on the construction of the "space of flows") nor producers of the nodes (as in Rainie and Wellman's assertion on networked individualism, and Dijk's argument for human factors in the network society). Similar to Castells' argument on the "space of flows", on the perspective of the material condition constructed by the network, Hardt and Negri argue that Empire is also constructed by an emerging network logic which is built by a network of transnational corporations, international organisations, and the nation-states that benefit from them (Hardt and Negri, 2006, p.218-219). The difference is that Hardt and Negri argue that this Empire is also constructed by globalised, organised resistance and globalised organization. Hardt and Negri see the network as constructed by both the power elite and the resistance against the elite. Hence, there is not a central node to organise the network according to Hardt and Negri's account

of the network in their argument on Empire; they argue that the swarm's intelligence is generated in the links between the nodes (Hardt and Negri, 2006, p.91). In other words, Hardt and Negri argue that agency is generated from the outside of the network of Empire; meaning is generated by the interaction between its members and it is not predesigned by the network of Empire. Similar to their argument on agency being generated outside the network, Deleuze and Guattari further argue that the flow, which means the interaction in my research, is an inherent property of the network. The nodes, which mean the individuals in my research, are "desiring machines" (Deleuze and Guattari, 2008, p.5), interruptions in the flow, which channel and direct it. Deleuze and Guattari argue that coding is not constructed by one node, but within the interaction with other nodes (Deleuze and Guattari, 2008, p.196). The node does not have its own meaning until it is associated with other nodes, within which its use is found. This has been affirmed by my research showing that *minzu* is constructed by the interaction between networks facilitated by *holbobun*, SNS *qun*, and *minzu* identity. The *holbobun*, SNS *qun,* and the term *minzu* do not mean anything for individual Sibe SNS users until the Sibe SNS users associate these nodes together to solve their own individual problems in their local life.

Castells asserts that networking logic promoted by the global capitalist networks surpasses any specific social interests of the local expressed in the networks (Castells, 2010, p. 500). This reductionist point of view on the relationship between social change and technology is challenged by my empirical findings, as I have demonstrated in my thesis that the interests of Sibe people in the Sibe WeChat *qun* are manifested against the neo-liberal logic embedded in the structure of social media. Sibe people can find ways to bypass the constraints of the SNS structure. In the case of Sibe self-led ethnogenesis with the use of SNS, the picture-sharing practices on the Westward Migration, and the adoption of transliterated Sibe language, I find that networks are constituted in the local context, and the meaning of *minzu* is formed by the interaction of Sibe SNS users. The agency of individual Sibe SNS users is not necessarily limited by the predesigned structure of the SNS. The construction of the meaning of *minzu* is not created by the logic of the network as facilitated by the use of SNS. As the SNS social networks are organised around the

idea of *holbobun* and the concept of *minzu,* and the development of SNS, the meaning of *minzu* is the result of the interaction between *holbobun* and *SNS qun*. However, the CMC in the case of Sibe do generate another hegemony for limiting the agency of Sibe, as I have demonstrated in Chapter 6 in the discussion on the construction of the transliteration of the Sibe language online.

Rainie and Wellman agree with Castells that social structure and historical evolution prompt the emergence of individualism as the dominant culture of our societies, and the new communication technologies perfectly fit into the mode of building sociability along self-selected communication networks (Castells, 2001; Rainie & Wellman, 2014). What distinguishes Rainie and Wellman's works is their rejection of the "group" versus "individual" dichotomy in their concept of networked individualism. They argue that the networked world has developed into a stage at which groups and communities are no longer a prime affiliation for each individual, as each person is increasingly registered with multiple networks and each person will therefore draw upon and contribute to numerous networks that their individual needs or context demands.

According to Castells, agency is an input which configures the network to further its interests. However, Hardt and Negri, and Deleuze and Guattari, suggest that agency is not an input, but an emergent property of the system during the process of each interaction between elements in the system. In Hardt and Negri's account of the network, it functions like a "swarm intelligence" (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 91). They point out that, "since the network has no center that dictates order ... the network attack appears as something like a swarm of birds or insects in a horror film, a multitude of mindless assailants ... If one looks inside a network, however, one can see that it is indeed organized, rational and creative' (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 91). They argue that the network is generated by the interaction between different nodes in the swarm, and not by the communication between "head" and "body" (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 91). According to Hardt and Negri, the multitude is a multiplicity of singular difference. It is singular and multiple at the same time (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. xiv). Similar to Castells' argument on the space of flows, Hardt and Negri argue that Empire, which is constructed by globalised,

organised resistance and globalised organisation, provides a material condition for this multitude (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. xiii).

According to Hardt and Negri, the skills of cooperation and communication generated by the globalised capitalist system have come under the control of what they call Empire. They further point out that the pattern of coordination and communication shared by individuals has been produced by Empire as a means of control. They explain that Empire can be characterised as "reducing the common to a means of global control, and expropriating the common as private wealth" (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 212). At the same time, the multitude, which is the people who follow the rule of the dominant capitalist networks that they reside in, are using such capitalist networks that oppress them to communicate and collaborate, and it is through this communication and collaboration that the multitude produce a common body of knowledge and ideas (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 218). Hence, according to Hardt and Negri, as the political economy conditioned by Empire shifts, the political struggle should focus on the "common" (Hardt & Negri, 2006, p. 212). This account of multitude is very useful for understanding the construction of the meaning of *minzu* in China, because *minzu* was produced by a network of power elites composed of the state and, more recently, capitalists, as I have identified in ethnographic data. The Sibe have to follow the rules produced by those power elites when using the term of *minzu* to communicate and collaborate. However, according to Hardt and Negri's assertions on multitude, this common body of knowledge and ideas from communicating via the term of *minzu* could also serve as a platform for democratic resistance to the very network that produces the *minzu,* or, in Hardt and Negri's term, Empire.

Deleuze and Guattari have created a new way of thinking about the network. In their two most famous collaborations, *Anti-Oedipus* (2008) and *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), they discuss the concept of rhizomes, which can be applied to the debate on the agency of individuals and the network. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the rhizomatic model of knowledge is closer to the network model, but it is a network of a particularly chaotic nature. Deleuze and Guattari argue that "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be. This is very different from the tree or root model, which plots a point, fixes an order" (Deleuze & Guattari,

1987, p. 5). Deleuze and Guattari point out that tree-order is constructed by connecting "traits of the same nature" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). Rhizomes, in contrast, connect according to a logic of movement. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari elaborate their concept of rhizomes, explaining that it is a concept to describe becoming rather than being, and providing examples, such as becoming-woman, becoming-animal, and becoming-imperceptible. They point out that new alliances come into being in the process of becoming. They further point out that these alliances are not the merging of two nodes, but a process of multiplicity. They explain this nature of multiplicity in the discussion of becoming-animal, arguing that,

> A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity. ... The wolf is not fundamentally a characteristic or a certain number of characteristics; it is a wolfing. ... Every animal is fundamentally a band, a pack. ... It is at this point that the human being encounters the animal. We do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 240).

My interpretation of Sibe identity construction in relation to their pursuit of *holbobun* networks is inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the "desiring machine"- the individual Sibe, in relation to building a *holbobun* network, creates a situation from the very action of building *holbobun* network, producing a desire to reproduce the meaning of Sibe.

In Castells' understanding of the node and network, once the individual has been incorporated within the network as node, the node has to be absorbed by the network, and disappears from view as a discrete object or agent. In contrast, for Deleuze and Guattari, there are no "nodes" to disappear from view. According to them, the network is not a unity, hence, there is no such disappearance of the node. Deleuze and Guattari point out that "Unity always operates in an empty dimension supplementary to that of the system considered" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 8). However, they argue that there is no supplementary relation in the rhizomes: "All multiplicities are flat, in the sense that they fill or occupy all of their dimensions" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9). Hence, in Deleuze and Guattari's account of network, there is no node against which other nodes can be contrasted. Deleuze and

Guattari's concept of the rhizome is very useful for understanding how Sibe people articulate the meaning of *minzu* in the interplay of different networks. It helps to understand how the meaning of *minzu* can be constructed in the interaction between SNS networks, and *holbobun* networks. Hence, in my thesis, I ask what the influence is of particular features of SNS in shaping how people interact with each other, and how individuals and groups relate to each other through this medium. In other words, I ask which features of QQ, Sina Weibo, and WeChat influence how Sibe socialise with each other in the course of constructing the meaning of *minzu*, and how Sibe relate to each other through these SNSs in relation to the construction of *minzu*.

The thesis has primarily focused on a group of Sibe intellectuals and professional whose work is related with cultural production. Further research can be conducted to expand the research demography into uneducated Sibe, migrant labour, and small business owners, as their experience will enrich our understanding of the construction of meaning of minzu in the prism of class.

Suggestions for Future Research

While I drew heavily on personal experience and personal connections, funding constraints limited this paper to a small number of interviewees. The strong censorship on the Chinese internet, especially after the ethnic unrest on the 5th of July, 2009 in Urumqi, makes most people very cautious about chatting on the internet. Most questions about ethnic problems can increase the caution of the interviewees, and are easily taken as politically taboo. It is likely that a lot of people may not say quite what they want to say, as they are always careful about who the interviewer is and the purpose of the interview. Although I took as much time as possible to build a trust relationship with the interviewees before the research started, the anxieties of the participants still influenced the conversations significantly.

A further problem of the internet is its mechanics, in that people cannot communicate face to face as easily, but have to get to know each other by chatting through text, which decreases the reliability of the responses. That was the main reason why the interviews were conducted by face to face conversation. There is a digital divide between the Sibe of the Northwest and those of the Northeast, in that the smartphone penetration in Xinjiang is not as high as the rest of China. The cross-

section of people interviewed cannot be considered fully representative of the Sibe in both parts of China.

My research has shown the importance of linking online and offline factors in understanding ethnic identity construction among Sibe people, and therefore opens up the possibility of new research based on longer term ethnographic observation of SNS-facilitated ethnic community. This research has offered some reflections on how the "politics of knowledge" is engendered by these technologies, and in what ways it is likely to influence the emergence of alternative conceptions of Sibe identity and discourse. This research has concluded that SNS function as a medium, supplying a platform that allows different opinions to be displayed together in cyberspace. This gives the discourse of *minzu* construction a new environment to articulate meaning. This research has situated the transformation of Sibe ethnic identities within the context of a growing interactive media culture that informs and shapes many of their interactions, knowledge of the world, and sense of community. The SNS, with its relative freedom, limitlessness, and accessibility for people who are spread across distance, is of key importance in this context, and helps the formation of new identities. From these formations, a new sense of Sibe which is based on sharing knowledge based in virtual community emerges, as I have demonstrated in my research.

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Appendix A: List of Interviews

Name Abbreviation	Gender	Occupation	Age	Date of Interview
N	M	Scholar	60s	02/08/2009
A	F	Teacher	60s	24/07/2011
T	M	Scholars	40s	12/07/2011
T2	M	Musician	40s	15/07/2011
H	M	Scholar	60s	27/07/2011
K	F	Teacher	60s	03/08/2011
A2	M	Media workers	50s	28/07/2011
T3	F	Entrepreneur	40s	20/06/2015
D	F	Entrepreneur	30s	19/06/2015
G	M	Entrepreneur	20s	10/06/2015
A4	F	Entrepreneur	40s	07/06/2015
H1	F	Entrepreneur	20s	05/08/2009
G2	M	IT	30s	02/06/2015
G3	F	Musician	30s	11/07/2011
R	M	Entrepreneur	30s	02/08/2015
W	M	Entrepreneur	40s	20/07/2011
T4	M	Scholar	60s	09/07/2011
Z	M	Scholar	40s	08/08/2015
F	M	Entrepreneur	30s	03/08/2015
G4	M	Entrepreneur	40s	07/10/2015
F2	M	Scholar	30s	01/07/2011
G5	M	Manager	50s	06/08/2015
T5	F	Entrepreneur	40s	07/07/2015
W2	M	Entrepreneur	30s	02/07/2011
Y	F	SOE worker	30s	23/06/2011
A3	M	Entrepreneur	30s	24/08/2015
S	M	Scholar	60s	28/07/2011
T6	F	NGO	30s	23/05/2011
H2	M	Municipal official	40s	25/07/2011
C	M	Entrepreneur	20s	20/08/2015
W3	M	Municipal official	50s	23/08/2011
T7	M	Municipal official	60s	05/08/2011
Z2	M	SOE worker	30s	24/07/2011
T8	F	Teacher	30s	29/07/2011

Appendix B: List of Sibe Social Media Communities

The SNS platforms on which I focused my data collection were WeChat, QQ and Sina Weibo.

The Sibe QQ *quns* on which I focused were *Çabçal Tuyenmbuhe Buyenin Meyen* (Charming Çabçal group) QQ *qun*, *Dalian Sibe Ren QQ qun,* and *Urumqi Sibe Meyen* (Urumqi Sibe group) QQ *qun*.

The Sibe WeChat *quns* included *Sibe Giyamun* (Sibe Courier Station) WeChat *qun,* Sibe United Society WeChat *qun*, *Urumqi Sibe yi anğa i gisun Gašan* WeChat *qun* (Home for Urumqi Spoken Sibe language), Sibe Folk Culture WeChat *qun,* Great Westward Migration WeChat *qun.*

Research on Sina Weibo, Sina Blogs and Baidu Tieba was focused on topic-centred posts, on the topics of Sibe histories, Westward Migration festivals, debates on language.