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**Social Reproduction and Migrant Education: A Critical  
Sociolinguistic Ethnography of Burmese Students' Learning  
Experiences at a Border High School in China**

By

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## Abstract

In recent years, China has become increasingly popular as a destination for international students. Given the increasing prominence of China's economy and China's soft power projection in the world, it is of significance to understand the educational experiences of international students in China. Situated in the context of China's rise and its expansion into ASEAN, this study explores the learning experiences of a group of Burmese students at a border high school in Yunnan province in Southwest China.

Adopting a critical sociolinguistic ethnography, the study focuses on the intersection of language practices and ideologies by examining Burmese students' pre-migration educational trajectories, the institutional practices affecting their school integration and their interactions with their teachers and peers. Data were collected through participant observation, video/audio-recordings of interactions inside and outside the classroom, individual and focus group interviews, the collection of documents and online interactions.

Findings indicate that Burmese students who used to be marginalized as ethnic minority members in government schools in Myanmar saw Chinese as a way to empower themselves and they oriented their aspirations for the future towards China. However, migrating to China for formal education did not translate into successful integration into mainstream education. Examination of school policies and teaching practices shows a series of discontinuities between welcoming diversity at discursive levels and unwelcoming practices in reality. Institutional practices such as the national policy of linking the university entrance exam *gaokao* to citizenship status, the school's streaming policies, militarized regulations and teachers' classroom organization combine to negatively impact Burmese students' educational achievement and restrict their future trajectories. Confronted with various levels of exclusion, Burmese students mobilize their linguistic and cultural resources to reposition themselves and enhance their status. Despite attempting to empower

themselves in various ways, however, Burmese students' agentive strategies rarely produce desired learning outcomes that are acknowledged by the educational system. On the contrary, their agentive practices reinforce existing linguistic and ethnic hierarchies. Paradoxically, it is their post-migration experiences in China that motivate Burmese students to learn and improve their Burmese language skills. As a result, Chinese policies in the border area not only reinforce Putonghua as the only norm of Chinese but also valorise Burmese as the only legitimate language of Myanmar for mutual cooperation and China's soft power projection.

Overall, the study not only provides a new context to confirm the established fact that migrant education reproduces the social order but also offers a new perspective on the tensions and contradictions involved in the emerging promotion of Chinese as a global language.

## **Statement of Candidate**

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Social Reproduction and Migrant Education: A Critical Sociolinguistic Ethnography of Burmese Students’ Learning Experiences at a Border High School in China” has not previously been submitted for a degree, nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree, to any university or institution other than Macquarie University. I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and that it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literatures used are indicated in the thesis. The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: 5201300550 on 15 August 2013.

Jia LI (Student ID: 42802164)

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*“Who fed thee in the wilderness with manna, which thy fathers knew not, that he might humble thee, and that he might prove thee, to do thee good at thy latter end.” “But thou shalt remember the LORD thy God: for it is he that giveth thee power to get wealth, that he may establish his covenant which he sware unto thy fathers, as it is this day” (Deuteronomy 8: 16, 18)*

*“Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Ephesians 5: 20)*

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## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

- ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
- BHS: Border High School (pseudonym for the site where the fieldwork for this research was conducted)
- BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills
- CALP: Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
- CC: Confucius Classrooms
- CCTV: Central China Television
- CI: Confucius Institutes
- CPR: Comprehensive Personal Record
- CRT: Critical Race Theory
- CSE: Critical Sociolinguistic Ethnography
- ESL: English as Second Language
- GCSE: The General Certificate of Secondary Education
- HSK: Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (the standardized Chinese proficiency test)
- IRE: Intiation-Response-Evaluation
- KMT: Kuomintang, Nationalist Party of China
- L2: Second Language
- MOE: Ministry of Education
- NAPLAN: The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
- NCLB: No Child Left Behind Act
- NDA-K: The New Democratic Army-Kachin
- PRC: People’s Republic of China
- TAAS: Texas Assessment of Academic Skills
- SES: Socioeconomic Status
- SOSE: Studies of Society and the Environment
- U.K.: The United Kingdom
- U.S.A: The United States



## Glossary of Burmese and Chinese terms

*Chinlone*: a Burmese ball game that is a combination of sport and dance

*Dota*: an international online game developed in the USA, also called Defense of the Ancients

*Gaokao*: Chinese university entrance examination

*Hanren* or *Han* people: Chinese or ethnic Chinese of *Han* ethnicity

*Hanyu*: Chinese language spoken by *Han* people

*Hanyu Pinyin*: Phonetic system for transcribing Putonghua

*Huaqiao* or *Huanren*: ethnic Chinese living abroad

*Putonghua*: Standard Mandarin Chinese

*Qiaoban*: Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs

*QQ*: instant messaging software service developed by Tencent in China

*Renminbi*: official currency of People's Republic of China

*Sogou Pinyin*: digital input form similar to autocorrect function

*Thanaka*: a yellowish-white cosmetic paste made from ground bark

*WeChat*: instant messaging service developed by Tencent in China

*Yin* and *Yang*: Chinese indigenous concept for the complementary mode of cooperation between two separate but not necessarily hostile forces

*Yuan*: basic unit of Chinese currency in PRC

*Zhuyin*: Phonetic system for transcribing spoken Taiwan Mandarin

# Chapter One: Introduction

## 1.1 Research problem

Borderlands are often flashpoints for political or ethnic tensions. At the same time, they may also be sites of heightened intercultural engagement and contact. The China-Myanmar border area is an example of the latter, where in recent decades people's desire to interact with each other and to understand each other's languages and cultures has increased substantially. As a native of the China-Myanmar border area, I was born and brought up in a Chinese border town close to Myanmar, and many of my relatives and friends to this day work and live on the Burmese side of the border. Like many Han people, my family has kept our ancestral book, which traces my family's presence in the region back to the military migrations during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). The book records the male names of each generation and highlights the images of those who bore official ranks. Despite the fact that my family can clearly trace our Han ancestry over six centuries, our lifestyle is quite different from that of Han people in more central areas of China. As border people, we find it much easier to go "abroad" to Myanmar than to travel "nationally" outside of Yunnan province. Border people are conveniently allowed to travel to designated Burmese border towns without applying for a visa. Crossing this international border for us often means little more than crossing a bridge, a road or a river. Living in the border area, we are more familiar with the tropical foods imported from Myanmar and Thailand than many of the foods advertised on Chinese national television.

Despite this familiarity, interactions between Chinese and Burmese are not necessarily deep. Over the past three decades, Burmese people can also be seen across all walks of life on the Chinese side of the border particularly in domestic work, on construction sites, in restaurants, shops, hospitals and schools. However, despite their increased visibility, I grew up knowing very little about this group of "familiar strangers" who cover their faces in *thanaka*, a yellowish-white cosmetic paste made from ground bark, and who wear *longyi*, a sarong-like skirt, and flip-flops in the streets. At a very basic

level, my research was motivated by the desire to learn more about interactions between the “familiar strangers” calling the Chinese-Burmese borderlands home.

The interactions I am interested in are embedded in significant socio-economic and developmental differences between China and Myanmar. With China and Chinese people, the “senior partners” in most border relationships, Chinese language learning is of immense economic value to Burmese people. For instance, Burmese workers are often paid differentially according to their Chinese language proficiency. The owner of a seafood restaurant in Tengchong explained to me that she paid the lowest wages to Burmese workers who could not speak any Chinese and who were washing dishes in the kitchen. Servers with some Chinese proficiency were paid more and could hope for further pay increase if they improved their Chinese. The top job in the restaurant was being a cashier and was reserved for the most fluent Chinese speaker. When I asked the cashier how he had learned Chinese he explained that he had learned all his Chinese on the job. Having migrated to Tengchong from Myanmar two years earlier, he spoke the local dialect fluently. His dream for the future was to improve his standard Chinese, to move to Shanghai, to marry a Shanghainese girl and to start his own seafood restaurant. His story is not unusual. As I discovered over the course of my fieldwork, Chinese language learning plays an important role in the trajectories, experiences and aspirations of border people from the Burmese side of the border.

Burmese border people are not alone in learning a new language to be able to communicate more efficiently in the border regions. While Burmese may not be as essential to the socio-economic prospects of Chinese citizens as Chinese is to those of Burmese citizens, there is no doubt that Burmese language learning is beneficial and widely desired. For instance, a Tengchong policewoman, Ms Lei, told me that she had been recruited into the police force because of her Burmese proficiency. After failing the national university entrance exam, Ms Lei had to look for a job in her home town. Unsure of her prospects, she considered the importance of Burmese and decided to attend an evening school. Compared to English, Ms Lei felt it was so much easier to learn Burmese. It took her only two months to pass an interview for a border trade company selling agricultural machinery and equipment to Myanmar. This job

experience helped her improve her Burmese greatly because she had to communicate with her Burmese customers every day. With her enhanced Burmese skills, she got a chance to work for the police emergency hotline. From there, she got promoted to a police officer role that focussed on the registration of Burmese migrants. Normally, such a position can only be attained by someone with a university degree but for Ms Lei Burmese proficiency proved more valuable than a university degree. Again, Ms Lei is not unusual, and many border people orient to local transnational opportunities rather than more centralized opportunity structures. Apart from being successful in finding work with a government institution, Burmese language skills are particularly useful in the burgeoning border trade with Myanmar.

Stories such as these are part of the everyday experiences in the border region, where people have come to realize the increasing importance of interacting with each other and knowing each other's languages in doing business, making money, looking for a good job, gaining promotion or even creating a desirable marriage. For Burmese migrants, the hope that learning Chinese will improve their future is not only observable in worksites such as the restaurant described above, but also from the fact that an increasing number of Burmese students are sent to high schools on the Chinese side of the border for their formal education. As an educator, I decided to focus my research on this group of young people caught up in the socio-political transformation of the borderlands and the corresponding intense transnational interactions they experience. What are their educational trajectories and experiences?

Migration for educational purposes has become common practice as students and their families seek a better future. In the twenty-first century, educational migration is no longer confined to English-speaking countries and "the West". Many Asian countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore and mainland China are emerging as popular destinations for international students (Chiang, 2015; Gu & Patkin, 2013; Kang, 2012). Therefore, there is a necessity to extend existing research in migrant education to include a greater diversity of sociolinguistic contexts (Piller, 2016a, pp. 1-15). Considering the increasing prominence of Chinese language promotion worldwide and very little research on international students' learning experiences in mainland

China (see Section 1.3 for details), this thesis aims to contribute to the knowledge of migration, Chinese language education and social justice, in general, and of Chinese border high school education and Burmese students' language learning experiences, in particular.

In the following sections, I will introduce the specific context of the study by presenting the historical and socioeconomic border relations between China and Myanmar (Section 1.2). Then I will situate the study in the wider promotion of Chinese as a global language and argue for the importance of research attention on the emerging language practices at the China- Myanmar border (Section 1.3). After this, I will conceptualize the study under the framework of social reproduction and argue for the relevance of this theory in understanding migrant education in an era of globalization (Section 1.4). I close this introductory chapter with an overview of the thesis structure (Section 1.5).

## **1.2 Introducing the research context at the China-and-Myanmar border**

China and Myanmar share a borderline of over 2,200 kilometres (for the map please refers to page 74). Like many other borders in the world, the demarcation of the geographical border does not always overlap with the cultural and linguistic borders (Bugarski, 2012; Custred, 2011; Martínez, 1994; Omoniyi, 2004; Parham, 2014). Over centuries of historical, economic and cultural development, the China-and-Myanmar border has acquired different strategic meanings for both countries and is now becoming the land-bridge of China's expansion overseas, and the main artery of Myanmar's economy. The following section will review the evolution of China-and-Myanmar border relations, and the challenges of border development for both countries.

The historical impacts of Sino-Myanmar wars have resulted in an unequal power relation between China and Myanmar. The first reports of border conflicts come from the Yuan (1217-1368) dynasty, and border conflicts were also prominent during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1912) dynasties (He, 2010; Huang, 1988). In these conflicts, China generally had the upper hand (He, 2010; Yang & Yang, 2004). This resulted in a tributary system with Myanmar paying tribute to China (F. Liu, 2013; Y.

Yang, 2004). Through many centuries of tributary practices, China has configured itself as a central power and Myanmar as its affiliated neighbour.

While setting up its powerful military position, China also consolidated its national defence by bringing Han people to the borderlands and establishing the dominance of Han over other border ethnic groups. During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), over 300,000 Han people were organised to migrate to Chinese border frontiers such as Tengchong, Longlin and Yingjiang for military safeguard (Lin, 2001; Lu, 2001). The military migration changed the local demographic features and made the Hans outnumber the local ethnics as the major habitants (Yang & Yin, 2000). One of the challenges related to military migration was the insufficient farmland available for plantation, so many Han people consequently migrated to Myanmar and other southeast Asian countries (Wu, 2010). While migrating to Myanmar, the Han Chinese established themselves as successful businessmen, and their migration was perceived as a prestigious familial practice from generation to generation (W.-C. Chang, 2014). The common practice of migrating to the neighbouring countries was recorded in a historical ballad “阳温墩小引” (“Yangwendun Stories;” note that “Yangwendun” is a historical name for “Tengchong”) written in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) (Deng, 2005). This ballad also captured how the Hans perceived Burmese people as barbarians in those earlier days. A similar reference of how Han people categorized Burmese border people as uncivilized can be found in earlier works (Dikötter, 1990; Leach, 1960). In sum, over the centuries of Sino-Myanmar war periods, the Hans established their political position as a ruling power at the border frontiers and continued to expand their China-oriented civilization into Myanmar.

Although the tribute system was challenged and subsequently eradicated during the colonisation by Britain and Japan (Zhu, 2009), the impact of China over Myanmar continues to prevail especially after the Myanmar-and-China border was officially reopened in the late 1980s when the West stopped their diplomatic relations with Myanmar. Over the past three decades, China has become a dominant factor in the Burmese economy. China is currently the largest foreign investor (Turnell, 2011) and also a major supplier of goods and commodities (Reilly, 2012). The border trade

between Myanmar and China is the main artery of Burmese economy given that over 70% of its total trade is conducted along the borderland (Kudo, 2008). In contrast, the Sino-Myanmar border trade only constitutes less than one percent of China's external trade (Kudo, 2008). However, this asymmetrical trading volume has not stopped China from investing in Myanmar. On the contrary, China has offered many favourable terms for the construction of Myanmar's infrastructure such as railways, roads, dams, bridges as well as industrial projects (Reilly, 2012; Xu, 2005). Many observers see China's economic engagement with Myanmar as a strategic alliance to ensure its energy security without passing through the US-controlled Malacca Strait (Koh, 2011; Wang, 2013); to expand China's control over the regional economic structure in the Indian Ocean for its maritime trade (Cook, 2012); and to revive China's ambition of a "Southwest Silk Road" from Yunnan to Myanmar, to Bangladesh, India and the Middle East (Xu, 2005).

In order to guarantee China's strategic interests and Myanmar's economic development, the border stability is of vital concern to both countries. However, border ethnic conflicts have posed a great threat to the regional border integration for both countries. Despite Myanmar's independence in 1948, ethnic conflicts have been a persistent problem in many border areas occupied by ethnic groups with armed forces (Sercombe & Tupas, 2014). Just within a year of independence, there were outbreaks of rebellion against the Burmese government among various ethnic groups, and civil war spread across the country (Walton, 2013). Even in the twenty-first century, the peace agreement has not yet been completely settled and clashes between ethnic armed forces (such as Kachin Independence Army and Kokang Army) and Burmese military are frequent occurrences (Chao, 2015; Dinmore, 2015; Li & Lu 2010; Y. Sun, 2014). The ethnic tensions at the Myanmar-border also threaten China's border security given the large number of refugees fleeing to China's border towns (Dinmore, 2015).

Despite Myanmar's decades of efforts to achieve nation-wide peace through its language and cultural unification (Walton, 2013), ethnic groups especially in the states of Kachin and Shan have developed a high degree of identification with their own

ethno-linguistic group rather than with the Burman-dominant group. Following independence, little has changed for ethnic minorities to gain their legitimacy from the Burmese government, and many ethnic minorities in Shan and Kachin have begun to form broader ethnic identities against a perceived common threat from the Burman-dominated government (Lahtaw, 2007; Mong, 2007). The emergence of a regional lingua franca is a manifestation of broader ethnic resistance. In Kachin state, for example, there are six different linguistic groups: Jinghpaw, Zaiwa, Lhaovo, Lachik, Lisu and Rawang (Lahtaw, 2007). Since the Jinghpaw language has the highest number of speakers within the six linguistic tribes, Jinghpaw serves as a lingua franca linking speakers of related but mutually unintelligible languages (Lahtaw, 2007).

The emergence of a regional identity is also associated with geographic proximity to neighbouring countries. The ethnic minorities living in Shan and Kachin borderlands share many linguistic and cultural similarities and a common sense of identity with related groups living in southwest China. The patterns of linguistic and cultural interaction at the borderlands are quite unique and different from the central regions of Myanmar. There are many enclaves and places like Kokang in Shan and Laiza in Kachin where Chinese influence has been strongly felt for a considerable period (Shannon & Farrelly, 2014). For example, Kokang, a small region in northern Shan, is a self-administrative zone of Myanmar. More than 80% of the inhabitants there are ethnic Chinese (Wang, 2005, p.72). Kokang used to be part of China for several centuries and it was ceded to British Myanmar in 1897 (Wang, 2005). The political demarcation changed the Kokang people from Chinese in China to “ethnic” Chinese in Myanmar. Despite the political division, the influence of China and Chinese presence are far more penetrating than that of the Burman-dominated group. In today’s Kokang, Chinese is the lingua franca: local people speak Chinese, use Chinese microblogging and watch Chinese TV programs. Many have friends and relatives in China, and the Chinese currency is the primary unit of exchange (Wang, 2005). The schooling system also follows China’s nine-year-compulsory education (Xian & Li, 2014).

Besides the historical settlement of ethnic Chinese in Kokang, the recent migration of Chinese also changes the demographic aspects of Myanmar's border region. Many big cities such as Mandalay, Bhamo and Lashio are now densely populated with Chinese migrants, particularly from Yunnan province (Xian & Li, 2014). These Yunnanese are mostly second and third generations in Myanmar, most of them still keep their traditional culture of speaking Chinese as their mother tongue, following Chinese rituals of ancestral worship (Tong, 2010). Due to their recent arrival status in Myanmar, most of them still have frequent border contact with their families and friends in China, and in fact, these migrants have set up their outward business networks with mainland China and have established themselves as border traders in Myanmar (Maung, 1994; Tong, 2010). Accordingly, the geographical proximity with China and their business ties with China have further built up their resolve in maintaining their Chinese language and identity.

While Myanmar is confronted with the challenges of integrating its border ethnic groups into its central political structure, China is also impacted by the complex ethnic identifications and the increasing immigration of Burmese nationals. According to Lu's observation (2006), there are over 15,000,000 inhabitants of over 30 ethnic backgrounds living at the China-and-Myanmar border. The shared kinship and blood ties among cross-border groups seem to dilute the national demarcation. In her field work in China, Myanmar and Thailand on the ethnic identification of Hani people, who are also called Akha overseas, Long (2015) observes the emergence of a Pan-Hani sense of belonging among these three neighboring countries. Long (2015) also suggests that Hani people's bilingual proficiency in Chinese and Hani can be used as a driving force to lead the Pan-Hani groups and to develop a new form of ethnic identity aspiration and the regional imaginary of China's soft power (see the definition of soft power in section 1.2). Similarly, Cun and Li (2010) also show that the spread of the Chinese language as lingua franca has become a newly emerging form of cultural practice between different ethnic groups on both sides of border regions especially as more and more Burmese young people migrate to China for better employment opportunities. At the border city of Ruili, for example, the official number of Burmese migrants is estimated to be over 50,000 accounting for 50% of the local inhabitants

(Meng, 2016). Beside the border migrant workers, an increasing number of Burmese primary school students cross the border on a daily basis and receive their formal education on the Chinese side of the border (Qian Liu et al., 2011; Yunnan Daily, 2012). Integrating newly-arrived Burmese migrants and the border inhabitants of diverse ethnic backgrounds into a joint regional identity and maintaining border stability have become a significant challenge for the Chinese government.

In sum, border integration has brought both opportunities and challenges for Myanmar and China. While sharing the importance of bilateral relations in terms of economic development and border security, Myanmar and China also attach the common importance on the border stability for China's strategic development overseas and Myanmar's nation-building plan. In order to safeguard the bilateral interests at the China-and-Myanmar border and to maintain peace in the border region, the Chinese language has been promoted as a means of unification, of border integration and for border development under the framework of China's rise and soft power projection.

### **1.3 China's rise and Chinese language promotion**

China's rapid economic development has drawn worldwide attention in recent years. An increasing body of literature has demonstrated the implications of China's rise and its global promotion of the Chinese language (Gil, 2015; Hartig, 2012; Lai, 2012; Lu, 2013). The following section will review the recent development of Chinese language promotion and capture its corresponding effects in the international community especially in ASEAN countries.

Since its opening up and reform policy in the late 1970s, China has emerged as a major global economic power. It became the world's largest exporter in 2009, and its gross domestic product (GDP) became the second largest in the world in 2010 (Lai, 2012). Concomitant with its rapid economic expansion is China's apparent increasing global influence via its soft power projection. China's soft power is promoted under the official slogan of “和平崛起” (Peaceful Rise) (Lai, 2012; Scott, 2012). By taking the concept of soft power developed by Nye (2004), China aims to establish a favourable external environment to gain support in world politics (Gil, 2015). The

idea is to use its cultural resources to attract, persuade and convince the world (Li, 2009), and to assure the world about China's peaceful rise against the China threat argument (Lai, 2012). As one of the important mechanisms in projecting China's soft power, the Chinese language is being promoted worldwide.

The promotion of Chinese language has seen a dramatic increase in the number of Chinese language learners and the size of Chinese language learning institutes and schools worldwide. In 2004, there were about 30 million people learning Chinese as a second language, and ten years later, the number has reached over 100 million (Cai, 2014). Perhaps the best known strategy for promoting Chinese language abroad is the establishment of Confucius Institutes (CI) and Confucius Classrooms (CC) organized by Hanban, the Office of Chinese Language Council International under the Ministry of Education. Within a short period of time from 2004 to 2014, the number of CI and CC has expanded dramatically to over 1,000 cultural outposts in 122 countries and regions (Cai, 2014). The dramatic expansion and global impact of CI and CC have attracted a body of research on how China makes use of CI and CC to promote its cultural diplomacy (Kwan 2014), on how it capitalises on Chinese language and culture abroad (Park 2013), on the spread of China's foreign propaganda (Brady, 2008), and on its drive for global dominance (Hartig, 2015).

While promoting Chinese language abroad and increasing its global influence, China is also engaged in attracting international students to China. The number of international students studying at Chinese universities has almost tripled since 2004 (X. Li, 2015). According to a recent report (Ministry of Education, 2015a), China had 400,000 international students studying at Chinese universities in 2015. The recently launched project “留学中国计划” (Study in China) aims to recruit a further 500,000 international students by 2020 (CSC, 2015a). In recent years, China has emerged from the largest sending country of international students to one of the most popular destinations for international students (An & Chiang, 2015; Chiang, 2015; X. Li, 2015).

However, the influx of international students into China has received insufficient attention. Furthermore, the small number of studies on international students' learning experiences in China are exclusively based at elite universities in developed provinces such as Shanghai and Guangzhou. In fact, tremendous educational cooperation and vigorous cultural exchange with ASEAN member countries have been fulfilled by China's less developed provinces, namely Yunnan and Guangxi where an increasing number of ASEAN students come to undertake various levels of education (R. Yang, 2012). According to Wei's (2005) study of ASEAN students' selection of study destinations in China, the relatively low living costs and close geographical proximity are the main reasons that attract international students to these two border provinces.

China's strategies of projecting soft power in ASEAN through educational institutions are two-way and reciprocal. This can be manifested in a variety of mutual exchange program. In terms of international students' demography, the number of foreign students in Yunnan has dramatically increased from 760 in 2001, with students mostly from European and English-speaking countries, to over 30,000 in 2014, with more than 80% of international students from ASEAN countries (See detailed discussion in 5.2). Meanwhile, an increasing number of Chinese students are choosing to learn ASEAN languages, and study in ASEAN countries. For example, at Guangxi University of Nationalities, in early 2007, there were over 600 Chinese students majoring in Thai, Burmese, Vietnamese, Indonesian, Lao, Khmer, and additionally, there were around 5,000 students from Guangxi studying in Thailand and Vietnam (Gong, 2010).

Apart from the increasing contact through sending and receiving students, China and the ASEAN countries have expanded and stabilised their educational collaboration. For example, in 2001, Yunnan University of Nationalities initiated 3+1 programs (three years' study in China and one year in an ASEAN country). With proficiency in ASEAN languages and overseas learning background in ASEAN countries, those Chinese students have better prospects in the labour market (Gong, 2010). For ASEAN students who are coming to China, an increasing number of degree programs has been established in specialised fields including Chinese language studies,

international trade, computer science, tourism, traditional Chinese medicine, agriculture and others (Tang & Yang, 2004). As China and ASEAN deepen their educational cooperation, more specialised areas are taken up by ASEAN students undertaking studies in the natural and technological sciences, bioengineering or industrial chemistry (Zhang, 2007).

It is worth noting that China is still perceived as an attractive destination for ASEAN students despite intermittent troubled foreign relations. For instance, the territorial disputes on the South China Sea between Vietnam and China have not reduced the number of Vietnamese students studying in China. In fact, what has happened is the opposite where in 2004 Vietnam strengthened its cooperation with China by offering large numbers of scholarships to Vietnamese students going to China for study (Yang, 2012). Over the past few years, the number of Vietnamese students has kept increasing and reached over 12,000 in 2009 (Xie, 2012).

Another interesting development is the acceptance of ASEAN students at an ever younger age in recent years. This is particularly true with Burmese, Lao and Vietnamese students who are living at the borderland, and whose families choose to send their children to study in Chinese primary and secondary schools near their national border. Since 2005, the policy of “两免一补” (“two exemptions and one subsidy”) has been adopted to educate all of the international students who are doing nine-year-compulsory education at Chinese government-funded schools (Qian Liu et al., 2011, p. 106). According to this policy, international students are treated as Chinese students in that they do not need to pay tuition and other miscellaneous fees, and they are also provided with certain amount of subsidy based on the schooling conditions.

Apart from offering favourable learning policies, the Chinese government has invested a large amount of money to support border construction including the improvement of school facilities at Chinese border regions. From 2000 to 2010, China’s State Council has spent 2,210,000,000 *Yuan* (about US\$330 million) on the border development of “兴边富民” (the Action of Prospering Frontier and Enriching

People, abbreviated as Frontier action plan) (State Council Information Office, 2011). From 2011 to 2015, more investment continued on more border areas to fulfil the Frontier action plan (China State Council, 2011).

Within a few years, school infrastructures in peripheral border regions have dramatically improved. Along the thousands of kilometres of borderland in Yunnan and Guangxi, for example, over 900 border schools have acquired new campuses with enlarged school size, newly-established teaching and learning buildings, new equipment of multimedia facilities in classrooms and modern sports grounds (Wang & Liu, 2013, p.5).

As the border schools improve their facilities, an increasing number of foreign students come to enrol at these schools. Take a border primary school at Ruili, Yunnan, for example. In 2005, there were only five Burmese students, but in 2011, this number increased to 108 (Qian Liu et al., 2011, p. 105). According to the principal of this school, some Burmese students had graduated from high school in Myanmar but still wanted to enrol at a primary school in China (Qian Liu et al., 2011). Similar learning desire was also found at the China-and-Laos border. In 2007, at a border primary school at Mengla, Yunnan, the school had to add two more classes for Lao students who decided to invest their future by crossing a bridge to study in China (Qian Liu et al., 2011). Apart from the primary school students, there have also been foreign students who have chosen to study at Chinese high schools. According to the local educational bureau, in 2013, there were 1,134 foreign students (predominantly Burmese students) enrolled at Ruili, Yunnan, and among these foreign students, 121 studied at junior high schools and 57 at senior high schools (Qiao & Wang, 2015, p. 128).

Foreign students who cross the national border to pursue various levels of education seem to share similar learning motivations in that they perceive the Chinese language as “能赚钱的语言” (the language of making money) (Qian Liu et al., 2011, p. 106).

According to the principal of Jiegao border primary school (Wang & Liu, 2013), Burmese parents are mostly taking up border trade business, and simultaneously hope

that their children can receive formal education in China so that in the future they might run the family business. Besides taking up business for future employment, there are also Burmese students who want to make more money by doing manual labour at the China-border. An interview with these Burmese students demonstrated the profitable nature of learning Chinese language:

“学不好汉语在这边没有办法生活的，因为都是要和这边打交道的，汉语说得好老板也会喜欢，很多缅甸来的小工都不会讲汉语，都是在街边洗石头或者磨玉石，如果能够讲好汉语，将来可以干很多的工作赚钱”

*“There is no way to live here if Chinese language is not good. This is because we need to communicate here. If we can speak good Chinese, our boss will like it. Many Burmese labourers can't speak Chinese and they all take up jobs either washing stones or grinding jade. If we can speak good Chinese, we can do more jobs making money.”*

*(Interview with Burmese students cited in Qiao & Wang, 2015, p.127)*

While Chinese language is being perceived as an instrument for Burmese students to look for a profitable job on the Chinese side of the border, as described above, the meaning of learning the language on the Burmese side of the border has also shifted. Ethnic Chinese not only learn the language to maintain their heritage, but also to gain capital for job investment and transnational educational opportunities (see Sections 4.3 and 4.4). Despite the fact that the increasing popularity of the Chinese language has been widely acknowledged in the borderland, little research has been conducted on this changed paradigm of language practices in the context of China's rise, and its expanding influence in Southeast Asia. What are the Burmese students' Chinese language learning experiences at Chinese border schools? How do they negotiate their identities in a new destination? What might be their future trajectories after study in China? These are the questions that are not yet answered by the present sociolinguistic studies. This gap is also where this PhD research project is set up to bridge the

knowledge about migrant students' educational experiences at the China-and-Myanmar border.

Based on the previous studies of migrant education (see detailed discussion in Chapter Two, Literature Review), migrant students have high aspirations for their future at destination but their migration does not necessarily lead to upward mobility. On the contrary, migrant students experience the loss of capital, namely, the process of “decapitalization” (Martín Rojo, 2010b) and may end up with a “declassing” trajectory (Simpson & Cooke, 2009). Despite school efforts to welcome migrant students, migrant education often relegates migrant students to the margins of school life. This process of marginalisation within school will not only reduce the likelihood of migrant students' educational attainment but also contribute to the reproduction of existing social stratification. Such contradictory schooling logics are embedded in the general framework of social reproduction theory. Before exemplifying the specific mechanisms that limit migrant students' educational opportunities, I will briefly review the relationship between migration and social reproduction with a particular focus on how migrant education entrenches social inequalities.

#### **1.4 Migrant education and social reproduction**

Education is often perceived as a powerful path to fulfil students' upward mobility through individual talent and efforts. However, numerous studies examining migrant education have demonstrated that education does not guarantee equal access of social resources but may serve to perpetuate social inequalities (see detailed discussion in Chapter Two Literature Review). Aligned with Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Collins (2009) and Heller (2006), I see school education as the key site of cultural and social reproduction. In the following, I will argue for the relevance of using this theory to guide my inquiry of migrant education.

According to the theory of social reproduction, schools are the key sites for nation-states to organise and distribute knowledge through formal education. Schools contribute to the reproduction of existing social hierarchies by creating conditions in which students with a background in the dominant culture are more likely to succeed. Schools achieve this by privileging certain forms of cultural and linguistic knowledge

of dominant students while categorising other forms as inferior. In other words, students who do not possess valued forms of resources will have to make greater efforts to bridge the gap between school culture and home culture; this, in turn, makes them less likely to achieve high levels of educational success and, concomitantly, affect their future occupational outcomes.

The contention that school education serves to reproduce the social order and its inequalities is not new. Since the 1960s and 1970s, the theory of social reproduction has been proposed and applied into various contexts including educational institutions, but since the late 1980s, the theory seems to have been abandoned in favour of other approaches such as “agency”, “identity”, “voice” (Collins, 2009, p. 42). However, while celebrating diversity and individual agency especially in the era of globalisation and neoliberalism, it continues to be important to address the fact that globalisation has not lessened educational inequalities but aggravated them within nations and also on a global scale (See detailed discussion in Chapter Two Literature Review).

Over the past 40 years, the problem of inequality has remained the central concern of educational research and schools appear to have changed little in the way they serve to reproduce the social stratification of students (Collins, 2009, 2011, 2012). It is therefore significant to pay attention to the ways in which schools contribute to the reproduction of social stratification through implicit and explicit school practices under the liberal discourses of “integration”, “tolerance” and “diversity”. To understand how schools function as key sites of cultural and social reproduction, I adopt a critical sociolinguistic ethnography (Heller, 2006) as a methodological tool to explore multiple levels of interaction between schools, individual, and society (see detailed discussion in Section 3.2).

### **1.5 Thesis outline**

This thesis offers a critical examination of the language learning experiences of Burmese students in China. The thesis is organised into eight chapters as follows. In this Introduction chapter, I have provided the historical and socioeconomic backgrounds of my research context by examining the border relations between China and Myanmar. After setting out the research context, I have reviewed the recent

development of Chinese language promotion and argued for the need to extend the focus of sociolinguistics beyond English speaking contexts to the newly emerging language practices of promoting Chinese as a global language. The chapter goes on to draw on the theoretical framework of social reproduction to discuss Chinese language learning experiences of Burmese students in China.

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literatures on migrant education. This consists of an overview of educational barriers faced by migrant students with a particular focus on language, previous educational knowledge and family background. After the review of migrant students' learning barriers, I turn to existing literature regarding educational policies including language development programs, streaming practices and standardised assessment to indicate how schools respond to migrant students' learning needs. Following the review of relevant educational policies, I review research findings on how teachers implement their classroom instruction towards migrant students, and what structural constraints teachers of migrant students face. The chapter concludes by reviewing the literature on migrant students' responses to their marginalised positions. This includes how migrant students empower themselves by mobilising their resources to reposition themselves and also how their agentic practices may reproduce linguistic and racial hierarchies.

Chapter Three outlines the research methodology that undergirds the study. First, the chapter explains why a critical sociolinguistic ethnography is adopted as the main approach. After providing the rationale for the research design, the chapter goes on to detail the data collection by introducing the specific research sites and various data collection methods including participant observation, document collection, interviews and online interactions. Following the data collection, I discuss my own researcher positionality with a particular focus on how I am motivated to conduct research with Burmese migrant students, how I adjust my role as researcher and what strategies I employ to ensure research ethics. The chapter concludes with the methods of analysis and limitations of the research approach.

Chapter Four provides an in-depth analysis of Burmese students' pre-migration educational trajectories. The chapter first analyses Burmese students' learning

experiences in state-run schools in Myanmar with a particular focus on the development of their linguistic repertoires and ethno-linguistic identities. The chapter further examines Burmese students' learning experiences at Chinese supplementary schools through which they attempt to increase their educational and employment opportunities by studying the Chinese language in Myanmar. The chapter concludes with the argument that their previous learning trajectories shape their identities and constitute the background to their migration to China for formal education.

Chapter Five presents the opportunities and challenges faced by the border high school which constitutes the main research site in integrating Burmese students into its school culture. The chapter begins with a description of how the school is officially constructed as a model school for recruiting Burmese students in the context of China's rise. Following this, the chapter shows how the recruitment of Burmese students constitutes an opportunity for the school to counterbalance its decreasing scores on various accountability and ranking exercises. After this, the chapter identifies a series of schooling discrepancies which end up marginalising Burmese students from the mainstream school culture. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of the tensions between inclusive institutional ideologies and exclusionary institutional practices.

Chapter Six continues to explore the tensions and dilemmas Chinese teachers experience in teaching Burmese students of diverse educational and linguistic backgrounds. The chapter first examines the patterns of classroom organisation with a particular focus on what types of knowledge and language practices are recognised in class and how teachers distribute relevant teaching and learning resources. Following the discussion of how teachers position Burmese students academically, linguistically and culturally, the chapter turns to explore how teachers are themselves subject to constraints related to their working conditions and teaching accountability. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of the teachers' low expectations and their consequences on Burmese students' learning experiences.

Chapter Seven probes into Burmese students' lived experiences by addressing how they interact with their Chinese peers, how they negotiate their identities and how they

themselves contribute to the reproduction of exclusionary hierarchies. The chapter starts by examining how class, race and language status intersect with their daily interactions with their Chinese peers. Following the discussion of their experiences of exclusion, the chapter examines how Burmese students mobilise their resources to reposition themselves to counterbalance their marginalised status. Then the chapter continues to explore how they internally position each other by employing the dominant discourses and how their in-group interactions reproduce the linguistic and cultural hierarchies observed throughout the thesis. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of contestation and reproduction in peer interactions.

Chapter Eight summarises the key findings by revisiting the research questions and relating the thesis findings to previous studies of social reproduction in migrant education. The chapter then goes on to outline the implications of the study and to suggest further research directions. In particular, five issues are formulated in relation to global language promotion and border migrant education. Finally, by offering preliminary observations of the participants' post-secondary trajectories, the chapter concludes by calling for longitudinal research to understand the role of language as a structural force that shapes and reshapes migrant students' lives.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter reviews existing research into migrant students' educational experiences, with a particular focus on research into their language learning experiences in high school settings. The chapter begins with a review of research into the educational barriers faced by migrant students in destination societies. These include barriers created by lack of language proficiency in the school language, by lack of familiarity with the dominant language, by a mismatch between prior education and expectations in the destination, and by the precarious socio-economic status of many migrant families. Following the overview of these barriers, I will review research into educational policies intended to bridge the educational and linguistic gaps faced by migrant students. Even if well intentioned, such educational policies oftentimes serve to exacerbate migrant students' disadvantage. Specifically, I review language development programmes, streaming policies and standardised assessment policies. Then, the chapter moves to an examination of existing research into the teaching practices experienced by migrant students. I begin with a focus on the learning opportunities and the amount of instruction provided in class. This is followed by a review of teacher preparation programs and their working conditions. Finally, the chapter shifts the focus from factors impacting migrant students' learning to their agentive negotiation of identities. This includes a review of their lived experiences intersecting with race, language, gender and class, their mobilization of multiple resources to reposition themselves, and the conflicts and tensions emerging over the process of their identification.

### **2.2 Educational barriers experienced by migrant students**

Research with migrant students in a variety of contexts has demonstrated that they may face various linguistic and non-linguistic barriers to education. These barriers include lack of proficiency in the language of instruction, lack of access to the standard language of the destination country, a disjunct between formal education in

the original country and destination country, and the low socio-economic status of migrant children and their families. In the following, I will review existing research examining these barriers in a variety of contexts.

### 2.2.1 Language proficiency

Limited proficiency in the language of instruction constitutes a significant barrier for migrant students to participate fully in education. This includes difficulties in understanding and extending content knowledge and interacting with teachers and peers. Evidence for these problems comes particularly from English-speaking contexts where the presence of migrant students in school has a long history, but, increasingly, also from research into language proficiency as a barrier to schooling in new migration destinations.

A key problem faced by students with limited proficiency in the medium of instruction relates to the fact that their language proficiency becomes a barrier to acquiring new content knowledge. Research with Sudanese refugee students in Australia, for instance, finds that students were struggling with new content (Brown, Miller, & Mitchell, 2006). In learning subject areas such as Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE), the students had difficulties understanding the learning materials because of their weak grammar and lack of technical and topic-specific vocabularies.

Some subjects are more language-heavy than others and some studies have found that migrant students struggle particularly in the social sciences. Ryu (2015), for instance, examined the language difficulties of a Korean student in the USA and found that due to her limited English proficiency, this Korean student had to give up her talents in social studies. Instead, she chose to concentrate on the natural sciences in the interest of achieving higher grades. Despite sacrificing her genuine interest, this Korean student struggled to acquire science content knowledge while working to improve her English proficiency.

In addition to struggling with content, this student also found that her limited English language proficiency was a barrier to interacting with her teachers and peers. She tried to hide her linguistic problems and one way of doing so was to avoid asking questions.

That migrant students may avoid interactions with their teachers because of limited English language proficiency was also found in a study of a diverse school in Madrid, Spain. In their Spanish class (Pérez-Milans & Patiño-Santos, 2014) for instance, the teacher required migrant students to actively respond to questions. However, Chinese students avoided being called upon by the teacher by staring at their paper in front of them and avoiding eye contact. Instead of interacting, they chose to invest their time in looking up words in the Spanish-Chinese dictionary. Unless the teacher made an intentional effort to call upon those Chinese students, they chose not to participate in class discussions to avoid having to speak Spanish.

Lack of proficiency in the dominant language may not only keep students from interacting with the teacher but may also present an obstacle to peer interactions. Ryu (2015), for instance, found that the Korean student in the USA introduced above felt embarrassed to ask her native English-speaking peers to work together; instead, she felt she had to wait to be asked to participate in a group. After class, her limited English also prevented her from making friends with other students even though she felt a strong desire to mingle with them. Similar peer communication barriers are also found in the study of the newly arrived Chinese students at a high school in California. Harklau (1994) has documented Chinese students' efforts in having a casual conversation with English-speaking students. When Chinese students had a chance to talk, their response to English speakers was shyly uttered monosyllables and their conversations were unlikely to prolong beyond two or three turns.

In sum, migrant students with limited linguistic proficiency in the target language face barriers to content learning and to participating fully in their new learning community. However, proficiency in the target language does not guarantee successful participation at school, either, if different language varieties are valued differently and migrant students speak a non-standard variety.

### 2.2.2 Language variation

Even if migrant students have proficiency in the target language, they may experience linguistic difficulties if their variety of the target language is less valued than the language variety of the school. This includes difficulties in oral communication and

academic literacy. Evidence for these problems comes from the countries where the student's country of origin is in a (neo)colonial relationship with the destination country.

Sharing the same language of instruction does not necessarily enable migrant students to participate on equal terms in class. Their accent is often identified as a key problem. Research with English-speaking migrants from Africa in the USA, for instance, demonstrates that students might have difficulties making their utterances heard and understood when they interact with their teachers and classmates (Alidou, 2000; Cummins, 1991). In answering the teachers' questions, African students did not have problems figuring out words to express themselves, but whenever they spoke out the words, they felt awkward because their teachers laughed at their pronunciation and intonation (Alidou, 2000). Having been frequently interrupted and corrected by their teachers, African students subsequently chose to isolate themselves in order to avoid rejection and humiliation.

Similar accent issues have been observed with migrant students from Latin America in Spain. These students may be struggling to reach the local linguistic standard in pronunciation. Martín Rojo (2010c) finds that the lack of distinction between /s/ and /θ/ is a major problem of Latin American students. In Latin America, the phonological opposition between a voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ and a voiceless interdental fricative /θ/ does not exist whereas in Spain it does. Lack of knowledge of this phonological difference can constitute a source of mistakes in spelling and pronunciation. Teachers often require Latin American students to repeat their utterances until they could figure out the desired variety of pronunciation (Martín Rojo, 2010b). As a result, students may withdraw from participation and avoid speaking in class. A migrant student from Peru enrolled at a high school in Spain, for instance, was observed to withdraw in this way (Pastor, 2015). Despite ranking as the second best student of her class, this migrant student felt ridiculed and frustrated when her local peers were staring at her or whispered about her in class because of her Peruvian accent. Later, the student decided not to speak much in the classroom and not to participate in class because she did not want to be reminded of her accent.

In addition to pronunciation, difference in expressions and usage may also cause misunderstanding in oral communication. Indian migrants with high English proficiency in Ireland find it difficult to understand the local expressions (Feldman, Gilmartin, Loyal, & Migge, 2008). One of the Indian migrants explained her difficulty in understanding “passing water” for “passing urine” and “being chesty” for “having chest problems” when receiving a health examination upon arrival (Feldman et al., 2008, pp. 140-141). The different meanings of the same word also pose challenges for Latin American students in Madrid (Patiño-Santos, 2010). “Salado” for Ecuadorian students means “bad luck” but for local students in Madrid, it refers to “funny” (p. 124), so the oral remark like “a very salado kid” can be understood very differently and may cause misunderstanding.

Apart from causing problems in oral communication, language variation may also create a barrier in academic literacy. This is particularly the case for English speakers from former British colonies in Africa. Simpson and Cooke (2009) explore how a Nigerian student was struggling with writing academic English to meet the British English standards before he was allowed to apply for university studies in the UK. This migrant student used to be educated through the medium of English in Nigeria, and his English language proficiency was never considered as a problem in sub-Saharan Africa until he moved to London. According to his British teacher, his writing was poor because he did not pay attention to accuracy and form in tenses, grammar, spelling and punctuation. Because of his lack of accuracy in academic writing, the Nigerian student failed to pass literacy tests and to progress to mainstream education.

In sum, migrant students with fluency in a non-standard variety of the target language may struggle to be heard, to be understood and to be valued. They may face difficulties to assert their linguistic competence by meeting the local normative standard in both their speech and writing. While adapting themselves to the local variety of language, migrant students may further encounter educational barriers caused by the asymmetrical systems between home country and destination.

### 2.2.3 Prior education

Secondary education constitutes a particularly challenging entry point for migrant students who may experience a disconnection between their past educational experiences in the home country and those of their destination. These educational disjunctions include the amount of exposure to key subjects, required cultural and social knowledge of subject content, variations in educational system and teaching methods.

A key challenge faced by students with inconsistent prior education is their lack of sufficient time devoted to learning key subjects. This is particularly the case for migrant students with a refugee background. African refugees in Australia, for instance, have been found to have significant needs to bridge their cognitive competence in content literacy (Brown et al., 2006; Hatoss, O'Neill, & Eacersall, 2012; Miller, Mitchell, & Brown, 2005). Sudanese refugees, for instance, had difficulty receiving the same education as their local peers because of their incomplete schooling periods caused by wars and poverty. Displaced in many countries, these students had not completely developed their L1 literacy in refugee camps before they were resettled in Australia. Their interrupted education meant that they had difficulties transferring their content learning into English (Brown et al., 2006).

Similar educational gaps have been identified in students with frequent translocal and transnational movements (Branz-Spall, Rosenthal, & Wright, 2003; Takenoshita, Chitose, Ikegami, & Ishikawa, 2014). Mexican migrant students in the USA had to move with their parents who were taking seasonal agricultural jobs in different states (Branz-Spall et al., 2003). Due to their frequent movement from state to state and switching from school to school, migrant students were confronted with different curriculums and did not have consistent records of learning. Similarly, frequent transnational movement does not empower but rather interrupts migrant students' high school enrolment and successful completion. For instance, Brazilian migrant students in Japan were unable to catch up with their class due to their family's back-and-forth movement between Japan and Brazil (Takenoshita et al., 2014). Their school attendance was interrupted by a long period of transnational movement, which

consequently impeded their sufficient exposure to content knowledge and their likelihood for school success.

In addition to the gap in subject exposure, migrant students may struggle with assumed knowledge that forms an implicit background to content learning. This unmatched knowledge has been found to pose subject learning difficulties for refugee students who may lack assumed cultural experiences (Brown et al., 2006). In learning Social Studies, for example, refugee students in Australia were required to display their knowledge of Gold Coast Tourism, but their lack of familiarity with local society presented a major barrier to their understanding of the topic, which impeded their classroom participation and academic performance in the subject.

Sometimes the assumed knowledge may frustrate migrant students with different historical and religious backgrounds. In History and Geography class for instance, students from Latin America were not familiar with the topic of Al-Andalus but this topic had been strongly emphasised in the local educational system in Spain because of its essential role in constructing national identity (Martín Rojo, 2010a). Different interpretations of the same historical event may also cause comprehension difficulties among migrant students. Failure to modify curriculum and classroom materials may also create problems for migrant students, as in the case of Muslim Arab students in Madrid who were found to be excluded by the stereotypical representations of the Arab presence in the Iberian Peninsula in textbooks (Patiño-Santos, 2010)

Apart from contested content, migrant students may also experience difficulties adjusting to a different educational system. One of the complaints that has emerged from students relates to the degree of ease or difficulty of the educational system. Japanese students in Canada were used to exam-oriented and competitive Japanese education and they found themselves lost and insecure in a more relaxed and process-oriented Canadian schooling system (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995). Similar sentiments were reported by Chinese students in Spain. Compared with the more demanding system in China, Chinese students felt they were not pushed to work hard; they rarely had any homework; and they did not work as hard in Spain as they did in their home country (Pérez-Milans & Patiño-Santos, 2014).

Different teaching methods may also pose a challenge for migrant students' initial adaptation. A Nigerian student who used to have English as medium of instruction in Nigeria experienced learning difficulties in the UK (Simpson & Cooke, 2009). He attributed his difficulties to the fact that in Nigeria, teaching the subject content was more important than imparting language forms, whereas in the UK, the focus was on language accuracy over content knowledge. Group work has also been observed to present a challenge for migrant students who are not familiar with the local language and who lack friendship links with others. For example, Japanese students in Canada have been reported to participate in small group activities reluctantly (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995). Whenever they were asked to engage in group-work activities, they did not know how to invite their peers and who to work with, and when they had a chance to work together, they resorted to doing nothing but watching their peers in the group.

Overall, migrant students have been found to encounter many educational asymmetries between home country and destination. These differences negatively impact on their learning efficiency, classroom participation and academic performance. What is worse, these educational disadvantages may be further compounded if the socioeconomic status of their families in the destination is low.

#### 2.2.4 Family socioeconomic status

While making a home in a new destination, migrant families often encounter changes in socioeconomic status (SES) that impinge on their children's educational attainment. Two main variables associated with SES have been identified: parental education and their employment status. These two variables impact the way migrant families interact with the local school system and the way they help with their children's academic work at home.

Low-level parental education places their children at risk of low academic achievement because of their lack of academic experience and insufficient knowledge of access to school success. This is particularly documented with Latino farmworkers in the USA (Gibson & Hidalgo, 2009; Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998; Suárez-Orozco, Pimentel, & Martin, 2009; Valencia, 2002). Mexican parents with only elementary

education who move back and forth between Mexico and the USA, where they work as farm labourers, have been found unable to provide academic assistance to their children especially in the upper grades (Gibson and Hidalgo 2009). Given their severe economic conditions, Mexican parents did not want their children to repeat their own harsh life. Instead, they held high expectations of their children's education because they viewed schooling as the avenue to a better life for their children and a way to break the cycle of poverty. Despite these high aspirations, these parents had little knowledge of how to help their children achieve success and how schoolwork is connected to future success (Hao & Bonstead-Bruns, 1998).

Similar constraints have been observed even from well-educated migrant parents who may be struggling to balance their time at work and their family responsibilities. Research examining the employment status of migrants (Guan, Nash, & Orellana, 2016; Perreira, Chapman, & Stein, 2006; Piller, 2016b) demonstrates that migrants are not always able to transfer high levels of education into jobs that match their education and experience. In fact, downward employment mobility in the process of migration is a common occurrence. Guan et al. (2016) offer a detailed account of different migrant families who have experienced low SES after arriving in the USA. Examples include a migrant father who used to work as a government employee in Hong Kong but only found work as a cook at a Chinese restaurant in the USA. At the restaurant, he had to work long hours and could not regularly visit his daughter's high school or help with his daughter's homework at home. When the father once got a chance to go to the school family meeting, he fell asleep during the meeting because of his tiredness and also because he was struggling to understand the English educational jargon of school system.

The devaluation of migrant parents' educational credentials not only lowers their social status but also makes it hard for them to seek regular employment and sufficient economic resources to secure their children's enrolment and academic success at school. Drawing on Takenoshita et al. (2013), Piller (2016b) demonstrates that Brazilian parents' previous education has modest impact on their children's educational attainment because of the way Brazilian migrants are incorporated into the

lower and temporary segments of the Japanese labour market. In Japan, Brazilian migrants are disadvantaged by irregular employment patterns and working unskilled or low-skilled jobs. Compared to their native-born counterparts, Brazilian migrants work longer hours and have less time to spend on their children's study and family care. Their unstable employment and their transnational movements directly affect their children's successful completion of high school study in Japan.

In sum, the fact that migrant families experience downward socio-economic mobility greatly reduces the likelihood of their children's school success due to their lack of time, money and knowledge to support their children's academic performance. Given these structural disadvantages in SES, it is vital for local educators to take into consideration these difficulties, bridge the educational and linguistic gaps and help migrant students integrate into the local school system. The following section will review how schools respond to the specific educational needs of migrant children and what the consequences of these schooling policies are.

### **2.3 Educational policies affecting migrant students**

The increasing diversity of migrant students from different parts of the world has transformed the demographics of many high schools and has posed challenges to schools' management of linguistic and cultural diversity in the era of globalization. Research examining how schools address the linguistic and academic needs of migrant students mainly include three types of policies: language development programs, streaming policies and standardized assessment. In the following, I will review existing research examining these policies and the focus will be on how these policies (dis)empower migrant students' access to school resources.

#### **2.3.1 Language development programs**

When entering schools in the destination society, migrant students often lack language proficiency and content knowledge, as discussed above in Sections 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.2.3. Schools address these learning difficulties in various ways within the constraint they are facing. In terms of general approach to support migrant students with limited proficiency in the language of the school, it is usually the case that a policy of submersion education is adopted. Bilingual education programs are rarely adopted for

migrant students and existing research on bilingual education which focuses on elite bilinguals such as French and English education in Canada (Cummins, 2003; Heller, 1994), Spanish and English in Spain (Mijares & Relano Pastor, 2011) or bilingual education for indigenous students in Wales and Scotland (Baker, 1988) will therefore not be reviewed here. Instead, I will review the literature on submersion education. To do so, I will start by presenting the patterns of language programs, next I will review the school rationale for placing migrant students into various language programs and then come to the evaluation of specific programs based on migrant students' learning experiences.

Two types of submersion education have been identified in terms of placement: a language program in a separate class and a mainstream program with pull-out periods for language learning. These two types of programs share the same fundamental philosophy: to prepare migrant students linguistically and academically to enter into mainstream education within a short period of time. The forms of placement and length of the language-learning period are dependent on schools' management in different contexts. In Spain, migrant students are grouped as a separate class called Bridging Class for a period of no less than nine months and sometimes over two academic years before being transferred to mainstream education (Patiño-Santos, Pérez-Milans, & Relano-Pastor, 2015). In the USA, most of the high schools adopt pull-out programs by placing newly-arrived migrant students in a separate class for different numbers of periods according to their English levels, while mixing them together with the mainstream class to have some subjects with local peers (Kanno & Kangas, 2014).

The assumption behind both of these types of language programs seems to be that they are instructionally beneficial and sensible given migrant students' limited language proficiency. Faltis and Coulter (2007) have demonstrated structural and historical explanations regarding schools grouping students in a separate class. For instance, the justifications given for separately placing newly-arrived Latino students in the USA include the following: first, separate placement is supposed to remove the pressure to compete with native peers. This may provide a sense of security to develop their

language proficiency. Second, teachers working with Latino students might be more sensitive to their language and cultural background and implement specific instruction strategies catering to their individual needs. Third, while spending time in sheltered language programs migrant students are assumed to be able to become familiar with local school routines and practices. Platt et al. (2003) also find that the school administrators try to justify their language policies by arguing that pulling out English language learners for language learning serves as a helpful and safe haven, and students are provided with a comfortable classroom environment where they can build on what they know and not worry about making language errors.

Despite these justifications for placing migrant students separately, a surprisingly homogeneous picture emerges when it comes to the learning outcomes of separate language programs. Many migrant students are kept in a separate language program for much longer than expected (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). Furthermore, some migrant students never successfully exit from the program before their graduation (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). Moreover, it has been found that migrant students have little investment in these classes, feel bored and consider them a waste of time (Harklau, 1994; Pérez-Milans, 2011).

How can this gap between school policies and students' learning experiences be explained, and why do sheltered language programs fail to facilitate migrant students' transition into mainstream education despite being well-intentioned? Some research examining the problems of language programs for migrant students has concluded that these programs do not place enough emphasis on preparing the content and language skills required in mainstream education (Martín Rojo, 2010b; Martín Rojo, 2013). A close examination of what migrant students have learned in sheltered language classes can reveal the discontinuities in school language policies and students' actual learning experiences.

In a separated class, migrant students in Madrid, Spain, felt that the types of linguistic skills developed in the class were not academically oriented, and were a waste of their time (Patiño-Santos et al., 2015; Pérez-Milans, 2011). In terms of their oral Spanish course, the language topics chosen included greetings, requests, city maps, medical

services, and public transport. These language skills are essential for students to survive outside school, but they are not sufficient for academic learning (Patiño-Santos et al., 2015). Similarly, insufficient language training has also been documented in literacy practices. Chinese migrant students in a Madrid high school were reported as lacking training in developing their academic writing competence (Pérez-Milans, 2011). In class, writing activities only focused on isolated letters and sentences rather than literacy practices required in the mainstream classroom. Sometimes, Chinese teenage students were categorised as non-literate. They are given homework, which involved a long period of doing writing activities related to colouring and cutting out with scissors. These migrant students were treated as pre-school children learning to write a language even though their L1 literacy was already well-developed. The fact that migrant students' competence in L1 literacy receives no recognition has also been reported in the language programs in Australia for African refugee students with interrupted schooling. Without considering their lack of L1 literacy, these newly arrived Somali students were placed in the same language classes designed for those students such as Hong Kong-born who had developed full competence in their L1 and had an uninterrupted schooling history (Davison, 2001). As a consequence, very few of the refugee students could develop satisfactory proficiency to catch up with mainstream education, given the triple burden in English, content knowledge and their L1 competence development.

Similar problems with lack of language exposure have been identified with migrant students having pull-out periods. In Toronto, Canada, Japanese migrant students encountered low demanding courses as ESL students in a high school (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995). One of the students in grade 12 complained that the level of the ESL class was far lower than that of the mainstream class in that the most difficult books they read were in fact at grade 10 or 11 level. The Chinese students in California were also provided with ineffective writing exercises which were mostly confined to explicit grammar instruction or sentence structure rather than those that develop their writing competence in English (Harklau, 1994). In class, writing activities focused on errors in run-on sentences and fragments, and sometimes, students were trained to label individual sentences as simple, compound or complex

rather than being instructed to produce compound or complex sentences. In the pull-out language programs, migrant students do have opportunities to interact with local peers in the same class. However, simply being put together in one class does not necessarily lead to successful interactions between migrant students and their native peers. Newly-arrived migrant students often feel frustrated and embarrassed when they strike up a conversation with native peers because of their lack of interpersonal spoken language ability and lack of shared cultural knowledge. Harklau (1994) has demonstrated the language communication difficulties Chinese students faced when they struck up a casual conversation with English-speaking students (see Section 2.2.1). On a daily basis, their conversation was limited to the school-related concerns they shared because of their lack of knowledge of local popular culture.

In sum, despite the schools' desire to facilitate migrant students' transition to mainstream education, language development programs have frequently been found to be unsatisfactory because migrant students in various contexts are not exposed to sufficient language skills and knowledge required for mainstream education. By the time they finish their language programs, migrant students have not yet developed sufficient language proficiency, and they have to face two types of streaming policies. They are either placed into mainstream classes, struggling for double catch-up in language and content knowledge, or are tracked into low-level classes, which have less rigorous instruction than those of mainstream classes. In the following section, I will review how schools' streaming policies work as structural mechanisms to control access to school resources.

### 2.3.2 Streaming policies

In the previous section, I reviewed the problems of language programs for migrant students whose language proficiency in the medium of instruction is insufficient for entering mainstream education. However, in addition to sheltered language instruction, migrant students are often streamed into differentiated tracks based on their linguistic repertoires and academic performance. I will start with an overview of streaming systems in a variety of contexts. After mapping out the patterns of streaming systems, I will document how these systems may restrict migrant students to low-track classes.

Research in a variety of national contexts has shown that migrant students are more likely to be streamed into low-track classes than their native peers (Callahn, Wilkinson & Muller, 2010; Martín Rojo, 2010b; Pérez-Milans, 2011; Söhn & Özcan, 2006; Strand, 2008). In the UK, Strand (2008) demonstrates that Black Caribbean students are less likely to be placed in high-level courses in GCSE Science and Mathematics than their white British peers. In Germany, students of non-German background tend to be funnelled into the least favourable type of programs. Compared to their native German peers at a similar grade level, Turkish migrant students are more likely to be recommended for “Hauptschule”, the lowest track for non-college preparatory courses (Söhn & Özcan, 2006). In Spain, the greatest concentration of migrant workers’ children has been found in non-mainstream programs such as Compensatory Education (Martín Rojo, 2010b).

Such streaming patterns have implications for migrant students’ future academic and employment trajectories. In high-track classes, from which migrant students are largely excluded, the aim is to cultivate students’ academic competence and prepare them for university. In contrast, in low-track classes, students are prepared for vocational trajectories to enter into employment as soon as possible and to work as low-skilled labourers. The fact that migrant students are mostly streamed into lower academic tracks dovetails with economic stratification in the job market, where migrant workers often find themselves relegated to poorly paid low-skilled jobs. According to the Spanish Institute of Statistics (cited in Pérez-Milans 2011), newcomers constitute the majority of the poorly paid jobs in services (57%), construction (23.6%), industry (12.2%) and agriculture (7%). Similar observations have also been made in Japan where 90% of Brazilian migrants take up low-skilled jobs compared to only 30% of native Japanese workers (Takenoshita et al., 2014). What entrenches this economic stratification is the fact that newcomers’ children find themselves in low-skilled vocational trajectories by means of academic streaming in schools.

Instructions in low-track classes may be less rigorous, as research in the USA has shown (Callahan, 2005). There, migrant students in ESL classes receive not only

language instruction but also sheltered instruction on courses titled ESL Maths, ESL Science, ESL in Reading, ESL in Writing, and the like. Despite having parallel courses, the amount of learning content, the source of reading materials and the opportunities to do lab experiments are severely curtailed compared to those in mainstream classes. Students in ESL classes are often given simplified learning content with fewer units covered than their mainstream peers (Kanno & Applebaum, 1995). Textbooks are the predominant source of reading matter for low-track classes whereas students in high-track classes are assigned supplementary materials such as Shakespeare and magazine articles in Social Sciences (Harklau, 1994; Malsbary, 2014). Furthermore, access to hands-on laboratory work is replaced primarily with lectures and textbook-based teaching and learning in the Science subjects (Callahan, 2005).

Because of limited academic input in low-track classes, it is unlikely for migrant students to move up to higher-track classes. The length of time spent in such low-track classes depends on students' English proficiency and academic performance. In some cases, migrant students may spend up to ten years before being transferred into mainstream classes (Umansky & Reardon, 2014). This means, in effect, that migrant students may not be able to upgrade from low-track classes before their graduation.

A consequence of streaming may be that migrant students are unable to fulfil their university dream, as a case study by Kanno and Kangas (2014) demonstrates. Ken, a student in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade migrating to Pennsylvania, USA from the Philippines, had high aspirations to study nursing at university, but the streaming system made it impossible for him to reach his dream within the two years before his graduation (Kanno & Kangas, 2014). In order to earn enough credits in the core subject for doing nursing study, he was required to take Science at an Advanced Placement (AP) level in high school. However, as an ESL student, he was placed in remedial Science upon his arrival in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and from remedial Science to AP. He needed to pass from remedial, regular, advance, honour to AP level-courses by advancing one level each year. By the time he graduated from the 12<sup>th</sup> grade, he had no chance to take up the AP course regardless of his performance and motivation.

Having little access to learning resources for success and unlikely to compete with their native peers on an equal footing, migrant students in low-track classes have suffered from various psychological drawbacks and social consequences. Kanno and Kangas (2014) have shown that it was challenging for migrant students in the USA to sustain their academic motivation after they were assigned to low-track classes. These classrooms are often characterized by a host of behavioural issues and a significant level of off-task activities such as students sleeping through the entire class, storming out of classroom or talking back to teachers (see detailed discussion in 2.4.1 and 2.4.2). In such a disruptive learning environment, even highly motivated migrant students are prone to give up. Further, staying in low-track classes for a long time may have deleterious effects on students' sense of self-confidence and can lead to a reluctance to pursue academic challenges. This is particularly the case with Chinese migrant students in Spain, who were placed in Compensatory Education, which has less prestige than mainstream education (Patiño-Santos et al., 2015; Pérez-Milans & Patiño-Santos, 2014). Feeling isolated from the rest of the school, Chinese migrant students did not see the institutional bridge between their low-tracked program and university-oriented program. They sensed that they were not “university material” and the school system was not made for them, regardless of their actual abilities and personal efforts. Less than two years after enrolling at school, most of them dropped out, even before completing their compulsory education. Without a high school graduation diploma, the types of jobs available for them are often low-paid. They are also less competitive in the workforce than those with a college degree, and their chances of upward mobility are also reduced.

In sum, schools seem to have a great power in determining track placement concerning who might be streamed in low or high classes, what to teach in different levels of classes and when to move students from one level to another. Migrant students who are linguistically disadvantaged are initially streamed into language development programs, and are later placed in low-track classes, which are not university-oriented. Being placed in low-track classes means having unequal access to school resources in that migrant students are given inadequate exposure to content knowledge, and their likelihood to move up to mainstream classes is also reduced as a

consequence of streaming effects. It is worth noting that the streaming system seems to find its rhetoric in categorizing students in various programs based on their academic performance. In fact, standardized testing has been widely adopted into the schooling agenda and the results of students' testing scores have been used to justify the distribution of educational resources. In the following section, I will review how standardised testing governs the process of the schools' selection of students and creates failures of educational equity.

### 2.3.3 Standardised assessment

In recent years, schools have increasingly become subject to standardised assessment as a major steering mechanism of the schooling system, which is linked to grade level progression, high school graduation, rankings of schools, and in some cases, salaries and tenures of principals and teachers. In the following section, I will review research that examines the intersection between national standardised assessment and the academic failure of migrant students.

Standardised assessment regimes have been burgeoning in many countries around the globe and have been associated with the pursuit of school accountability (Angelo, 2013; Connell, 2013; Lan, 2014). An increasing number of countries is now developing high-stakes tests to evaluate students' academic performance and the schools' effectiveness. In the USA, for example, state-mandated annual achievement tests in grades 3-8 and grades 10-12 have been developed to measure students' English proficiency and academic performance as required by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. With the enforcement of NCLB, the American government explicitly links students' graduation to the performances in each state and district assessment, and teachers and administrators are rewarded or sanctioned on the basis of students' test scores (Connell, 2013). In another example, national standardised testing in the Australian educational system in the form of the National Assessment Program-Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is used to evaluate students' reading, writing, language conventions and numeracy at years 3, 5, 7 and 9. The test scores of NAPLAN are the single favoured source for evaluating student performance and ranking schools at the league table across states and within the nation (Angelo,

2013). A similar examination-oriented educational system can also be observed in China where the *gaokao*, the centralized national university entrance examination, plays an essential role in ranking the schools and fulfilling students' upward social mobility (see detailed discussion in 5.3.1).

The increasing focus on high-stakes testing has produced formidable pressure on schools and teachers, which consequently narrows the academic scope of curriculum and instruction. This is particularly the case with poorly-resourced schools with a large concentration of migrant students (Connell, 2013; Jacob, 2005; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008). In a Latino-centred high school in Texas, USA, for example, there was marginal funding from the federal government and no allocations for science laboratories and a library due to the school's low rank amongst the high schools in the district (McNeil et al., 2008). The school principal was struggling to improve the school's ranking, which was exclusively based on students' grade-level test scores in the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) and was under the tight control of the Texas Education Agency as superintendent. The principal was informed that her job would be terminated if the school's progress on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade exit tests was not up to the standard of the district level. Teachers were also pressured to teach what was tested because their salaries and teaching position were linked to students' scores in high-stakes subjects. This test-driven schooling led to a large amount of time spent on test preparation. According to students' accounts, their classroom experiences were distorted in that there was too much attention on test scores. What they were taught was not real life lessons but endless drills with memorization and the mastery of formulaic processes such as how to craft a five-paragraph essay. Test practice somehow became the de facto curriculum. As Lingard (2010) argues, test-focused schooling will force teachers to abandon their regular curriculum to teach for the test, and while test scores might increase, the quality of teaching and learning will be compromised and degraded. Rather than bridging the educational gaps, testing regimes may serve to deprive migrant students of educational opportunities. Research examining migrant students' learning trajectories has identified two important features: grade retention and high school dropout along with the implementation of state-mandated testing programs (Fine, 2005; Jacob & Lefgren,

2009; McNeil et al., 2008). Fine (2005) found that in 2005, more than half of Black and Latino students could not graduate from New York City's high schools which had intentionally prevented weaker students from taking state-mandated graduation exams in order to inflate test scores. One of the tactics to remove low-achieving students is through grade-to-grade promotion mechanisms based on their testing scores. In their study of Chicago public school students who were retained, Jacob and Lefgren (2009) demonstrated that students who were held back in later grades suffered a significant impact and were likely to drop out.

The effects of holding students back from grade promotion have been documented in extensive ethnographic studies dismantling the "Texas Miracle", which refers to rising test scores in the state but ignores the loss of large numbers of students (Haney, 2000; McNeil et al., 2008). In order to show annual increases in school-level test scores, Texas high schools had adopted grade promotion rules based on whether students could pass the core subjects in English, Math, Science and Social Studies (McNeil et al., 2008). If a student only passed one or two of the core subjects, the student would still be retained no matter whether the student had gained enough credits from other subjects such as Arts, Physical Education or other elective courses. With this rigid grade-to-grade system, up to 50% of students per class had been retained at year 9, and they had to repeat exactly the same courses they had taken until they could pass all of the core subjects. The rhetoric surrounding the grade promotion policy was to make sure students were ready for the state-mandated 10<sup>th</sup> grade TAAS test, but in reality the high-stake testing regime only encouraged low-scoring students to leave the schools so that they would not jeopardize the principal's performance contract.

Apart from the test-driven grade retention, the content of standardised tests has been criticised as inadequate for the evaluation of migrant students. One of the problems related to standardised tests is the invisibility of the language factor. This is particularly the case with migrant students whose language proficiency has not been fully developed, but who have been asked to take a test in their second language. In Victorian high schools in Australia, some migrant students have difficulties showing their knowledge of subject content such as Biology and Science because everything is

tested in English (Brown et al., 2006). Because of their lack of English proficiency, their past success in these subjects was blocked and they were labelled as low achieving students. Similar misrecognized language proficiency also happens to long-term English language learners in schools in New York City (Menken & Kleyn, 2010). These are students who have lived in the USA for more than seven years, who have acquired native-like oracy but only low-level English literacy. Due to their poor academic performance, which demanded a high level of academic literacy, these long-term language learners rarely exited out of the low-track educational programs. Their poor performance was misinterpreted as low intelligence and their literacy problem was overlooked and they did not receive appropriate support.

Besides the language barrier in tests, the standardised assessment carries socio-cultural barriers that impede migrant students' educational attainment. This seems true with migrant students who have different cultural backgrounds, and who are also socially disadvantaged. For example, Piller (2016b, pp. 113-120) relates the case of a newly-arrived refugee student from Africa in the USA, who had to sit the standardised test along with the other children of his age. Due to his lack of American cultural knowledge related to space exploration, the student considered the sample text regarding human beings landing on the moon as fiction rather than fact. Despite his correct understanding of the English language, by reasoning that humans could not fly to the moon, the student still got the "wrong" answer. As noted by Piller (2016b, p. 117), the student failed not because he did not understand the concept of the tested questions but because his knowledge of the world was different from that of his middle-class native-born peers.

Standardized assessment may also serve to exclude those migrant students whose lifestyles are dramatically different from those of dominant upper-middle-class practices. As shown by Wright (2002), many high school migrant students in Los Alamitos in California lived in a low socioeconomic region and their life experiences included family violence, low hygiene at home with rats and cockroaches running around the kitchen and parents' low-paid jobs. At school, however, they were tested on things that they rarely experienced, such as airport travel. In doing a reading

comprehension question, students were asked about why a woman worked in the health profession. The expected answer was that she enjoyed helping people, but migrant students answered that it was because she needed the money. The school teacher later explained why her students failed this question. The explanation was that students were at the survival level, and they would be unlikely to accept that the reason for having a job might be for caring and giving and being able to take care of other people.

In sum, research in the USA and Australia has found that testing regimes govern the process of schools' selection of students and reinforce national control of schooling practices. Driven by the testing regime, schools are striving to boost students' test scores and improve their rankings for fear of being sanctioned and deprived of national funding. Migrant students who fail to pass grade-level tests will be retained and consequently drop out from the educational system in case their participation in state-mandated tests would affect their school's reputation and jeopardise the principal's job security. Rather than considering their diverse backgrounds, the content of standardised assessment has failed migrant students by testing the knowledge of the dominant group and overlooking cultural and language barriers. In the following section, I will turn to another dimension of the educational system and review how teaching practices contribute to migrant students' learning experiences.

#### **2.4 Teaching practices aimed at migrant students**

Research examining teaching practices has demonstrated a close correlation between classroom organisation and teachers' expectations (Martín Rojo, 2010b; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1992; Walker, Shafer, & Iiams, 2004). Students of whom teachers have high expectations are given more learning opportunities whereas those of whom teachers have low expectations often end up having less rigorous instructions. Such self-fulfilling prophecies are particularly tangible in migrant-centred classrooms. This section will review patterns of classroom interactions as indicative of teachers' expectations and then link these classroom practices to a wider context of teaching accountability and teachers' working conditions.

#### 2.4.1 Classroom climate

The classroom climate in migrant-centred classes is often characterised by behaviour management issues and off-task activities (see also section 2.3.2). In migrant-centred classes, the pedagogical priority may not be academic learning but getting students to comply with rules of conduct in the classroom. Teachers may also assume that the emphasis on behaviour issues is necessary to ensure that migrant students from different cultural and educational backgrounds will be able to integrate successfully into the target culture and society.

Drawing from their in-depth classroom observations, Alcalá and Martín-Rojo (2010) demonstrate that teachers of migrant students places their priority on regulating classroom behaviour. This pedagogical focus is related to the teachers' low expectations of migrant students. For instance, a teacher who discovered that a migrant student had forgotten to bring his notebook stopped her planned lesson and began to question and reprimand the student's forgetfulness. Once the student had justified his forgetfulness, he was categorised by the teacher as a liar. Rather than resuming her subject teaching, the teacher insisted on spending additional time preaching to her students on the importance of following the school rules.

Another way of controlling student behaviour in the classroom is through monolingual rules (Martín Rojo, 2010c). Monolingual class norms are usually rationalised as a way to increase migrant students' exposure to the target language. However, for migrant students who have not developed sufficient language proficiency, it is very difficult to keep speaking the language of instruction through the whole classroom interactions. Subject teachers who observe code-switching may get annoyed and categorise such linguistic practices as disrupting classroom order and showing disrespect to others. Such negative teacher reactions to student code-switching have been observed in research in a variety of contexts.

Ryu (2015) has shown how a Korean student and her Korean peers were strictly monitored and penalized by their Biology teacher who did not allow them to use their home language for communication in group work activities in the USA. Rather than seeing it as a learning strategy to facilitate their subject understanding, their teacher

interpreted the use of home language as breaking class rule, which only positioned these Korean students as non-fluent English speakers in the presence of the whole class. Similar examples in which students were reprimanded for using home languages have been recorded in Spanish high schools. When migrant students used Arabic in the classroom, they were scolded as disrespectful to their teacher and other peers of other backgrounds (Mijares & Relaño Pastor, 2011). In the context of the classroom, the “Spanish only” policy made Spanish not only the language of instruction but also associated with knowing how to behave politely.

The demand to speak and to write the standard variety of the school language may affect native speakers of another variety of the school language in similar ways (see also 2.2.2). This seems quite true for internal migrants in China (Dong, 2009, 2010). In a Beijing primary school, the linguistic performance of students from Sichuan province in southwest China was under strict surveillance and teachers frequently corrected them. For the students from other parts of China outside the capital, speaking “incorrect” *Putonghua* meant that they were treated as different and that their speech was seen to index their rural, working class and migrant identities. Against this background, the regulation of linguistic differences became part of the pedagogical focus in the classroom.

Besides behaviour regulation and language-control in class, the physical separation of seating arrangement and classroom location also constitutes part of the classroom climate. McKay and Wong (1996) conducted an ethnographic study at a junior high school in California and identified the seating arrangements as one of the implicit channellings of migrant students into marginalized positions in a low-track class. In a sheltered math class, for example, there were Asians sitting in the left front, White girls in the centre front, White boys in the middle rows, and Latino boys and Black girls in the back.

While segregated seating arrangements have not been observed in all migrant-centred classes, spatial separation of classrooms has been widely reported in a variety of contexts. In a Madrid high school, for example, migrant students in the Bridging Classes are exclusively located on a different floor from those in the mainstream class

and there was lack of peer interaction during breaktimes in the playground. Such spatial division not only set apart migrant students from their local peers but also reinforced the migrant students' marginalised status (Mijares & Relaño Pastor, 2011).

Similar classroom separation is more explicit in test-driven high schools. This is well documented by Lan (2014) who conducted her ethnographic study in a Chinese high school in Shanghai where internal migrant students of rural background were placed in separate classes in different buildings from local urban students. Such physical arrangement was justified by the institutional rhetoric that rural migrant students were not allowed to take the senior high school entrance examination because of their lack of local residential house registration. Despite being included into the same school, the physical boundaries marked the inferior status of newcomers of rural backgrounds who were confined to second-class school facilities, equipment and resources.

In sum, the learning environment in migrant-centred classrooms tends to be characterised by behaviour regulations, strictly monitored by monolingual ideologies of speaking language and sometimes speaking a certain variety like the locals. The fact that migrant students have been physically separated within class and between classes has further disadvantaged their equal access to teaching resources. Apart from the exclusive classroom climate, the amount of teaching input and opportunities to interact with their subject teachers are also reduced.

#### 2.4.2 Student-teacher interactions

Studies of classroom interactions have revealed significant differences between migrant students and their mainstream peers in terms of teaching input, response to opportunity, and feedback.

One of the key concerns related to migrant students' exposure to teaching resources is that migrant students are given less rigorous instruction compared to their local peers. This includes covering a smaller number of teaching units, less academically demanding activities, slower pace of work, insufficient extension of learning materials, limited students' participation and more structured exercises such as rehearsal and repetition (see also 2.3.1 and 2.3.2).

Such dumbeddown instructions are often observed in migrant-centred classes with little schooling support and low teaching expectation (Codó & Patiño-Santos, 2014; Martín Rojo, 2010b; Poveda, Jociles, & Franze, 2014). In order to make it explicit how different teaching inputs might lead to different learning outcomes, I will draw from the works of Martín-Rojo (2010b) and her colleagues who have compared the different teaching procedures of the same subject in a high-track class and in a migrant-centred class with the orientation of most students streamed into low-track programs.

In a writing lesson for example, the pedagogical focus was the topic of argumentation and teachers were supposed to help students learn to show their opinion and to provide reasons for holding the opinion (Martín Rojo, 2010a). However, having a class with the same title did not lead to the same learning effects because of the different teaching inputs contained in the two different types of class.

In the high-track class, the teacher focused on the structure of writing an argumentation by employing a variety of learning resources. The teaching inputs included a variety of reading materials of the same text genre. The subject knowledge was co-constructed between the teacher and the students. The learning process started with the teacher's reference to the reading material as an example to show students the structure of writing an argumentation, then the teacher moved on to ask students to read out their written homework. By commenting on her students' work, the teacher took students' knowledge as a departure point and developed an additional learning resource for her students by responding to the students' problems in writing so that the rest of the students also benefited from this collaborative learning opportunity. Besides the students' written homework, the teaching input was also extended to oral texts in which students were considered as independent learners and were asked to conduct interviews outside class. Their personal experiences were valued and included as part of the learning resources.

In contrast to the high-track class, the same writing lesson in a migrant-centred class was conducted with little pedagogical focus, few teaching resources and lack of student participation. This low-track class was from another school with a "bad"

reputation because of its large numbers of migrant students who would mostly end up in Compensatory Programs after a few years of enrollment. Lack of expectation and self-fulfilling prophecies were the common themes that underpinned the pedagogical practices of migrant-centred classes. The writing class, for example, was supposed to focus on argumentation skills, and students were asked to write about the use of mobile phones beforehand. However, only two students finished their homework. The teacher wanted to invite these students to read out their work in class, but his invitation was occasionally disrupted by other students' sideplay activities and the start of the class was delayed. When the teacher began to read the students' work, he neither made any reference to the structure of argumentation, nor did he encourage students to explain how they developed their arguments. The only reflection on students' work was the teacher's comments on writing without mistakes, but the way of writing correctly was limited to issues of spelling, punctuation, accents, and the like. Rather than focusing on argumentative techniques, the teacher spent a lot of time doing less challenging tasks such as the distinction between subject and predicate and identification of parts of speech. Despite having sequential Initiation-Response-Evaluation (IRE) chains in structured exercises, the participation of students was only symbolic in that students were not able to express their voices and the mechanic drilling exercise only involved a low level of academic learning.

Compared to their mainstream peers, migrant students' learning opportunities in the same course are largely reduced to low-level structured activities with limited teaching resources and little reflexive response from subject teachers. Rather than building up subject knowledge on students' previous experiences, the content teaching seems far from making use of students' contributions and is very unlikely to generate analytical thoughts and academic competence. Apart from the limited teaching input and marginalized participation in class, having unproductive feedback also creates another level of exclusion.

Research examining feedback as a form of schooling inclusion demonstrates that migrant students receive few effective comments from their teachers and little help to enhance their academic literacy (G. C.-L. Chang, 2014; Hallam & Ireson, 2005;

Harklau, 1994). In section 2.3.1, I have reviewed how Chinese migrant students in a Bridging Class in Spain could not receive useful feedback to improve their writing performance because of their teachers' low expectations in assigned homework. What seems to be highlighted in the classroom is the local teachers' insistence on helping their students pronounce and spell words correctly or on structured exercises (see also 2.4.1 above). However, such kind of feedback preferring accuracy over developing content ability in low-track classes only decreases migrant students' learning motivation and enlarges rather than bridges the learning gap between migrant students and their mainstream peers who have received more constructive comments.

Sometimes being transitioned into the mainstream class does not lead to inclusive learning outcomes. Migrant students are still faced with insufficient effective feedback from their mainstream teachers. This was particularly the case with the Chinese students attending a high school in northern California (Harklau, 1994). Migrant students frequently complained about having no feedback or only receiving global comments. Given the fact that mainstream teachers were only good at their content subjects but lacked a linguistic background, it was unlikely for them to explain how nonnative language students made all sorts of grammatical errors such as verb tense, preposition, and the like. As a consequence, teachers often chose to leave all errors unmarked or simply stated general comments such as "Syntax needs work", "You lose clarity because of your expression", "Just don't write too long in one sentence". Sometimes, they just circled words or texts without comments leaving students struggling with their problems by themselves.

Offering appropriate feedback and developing a constructive learning environment for migrant students have posed great challenges to subject teachers who seem professionally and linguistically not ready to cater to migrant students of diverse backgrounds. Rather than criticising teachers for their ignorance of migrant students' needs, I would like to turn to a wider context of teachers' working conditions and reveal how their professional identity has been contested by teaching accountability, and how their desire to implement effective pedagogy has been constrained by their working conditions.

### 2.4.3 Teacher training and preparation

The increasing diversity of student population requires classroom teachers to be linguistically and culturally responsive to their students' needs. However, internationally, the teaching workforce is, by and large, dominated by monolingual teachers who are often ill-equipped to effectively address their migrant students' learning challenges. The following section will review the problems of teacher preparation programs and the factors that impede the implementation of good professional teaching practices.

One of the key issues associated with teacher education is that teachers rarely have sufficient professional training in teaching migrant students. In California, for example, it has been found that teachers of migrant students are largely novice teachers in their first three years of teaching, who had obtained college credits to teach in their content area but who have hardly received any specialized training in working with English language learners (Faltis & Arias, 2007). It is not the case that teachers are unwilling to receive relevant training but that they have inadequate professional development opportunities. According to a recent report by the National Centre for Education Statistics, from 2011 to 2012 only 27% of teachers in the USA received any training on how to teach English language learners (Torre, 2015, p. 43). In contrast, 85% of teachers received professional development in their specialized content area, 67% of them participated in training related to technology use and 43% attended professional development in classroom management.

Even those who have received relevant training find themselves ill-prepared. This problem is closely associated with the quality of teacher preparation programs. A common critique of these programs is that they are too brief and are not aligned with teachers' needs (Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010; Gandara, Rumberger, Maxwell-Jolly, & Callahan, 2003; López, Scanlan, & Gundrum, 2013). In their overview of teacher preparation programs in the USA, Gandara et al. (2003) note that there is a lack of state guidance on the nature of instruction for migrant students; teachers are not provided with appropriate strategies to use materials to support English language learners; and the time spent on the instruction of English language learning only

ranges from three to ten percent of the total training period. In many states, such as Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, South Carolina and Tennessee the dramatic increase of English language learners ranges from 300 to 700% over the past decade (López et al., 2013). None of these states require teachers to have ESL-related certification and they are not required to show any competence in ESL instruction.

Having insufficient training makes teachers unable to diagnose the needs of their migrant students. This is documented by Durgunoglu and Hughes (2010) who tested 62 preservice teachers' knowledge of ESL pedagogy and also observed four preservice teachers' classroom practices in several high schools in California. These young teachers self-reported that they were prepared to teach migrant students, but the testing results indicated their previous training did not add to their knowledge of ESL pedagogy, and there was only 25% accuracy on the knowledge test. The classroom observations of the four teachers indicated that there was little interaction between teachers and their ESL students. In the follow-up interviews, these teachers were not aware of the evident disengagement and lack of comprehension from their ESL students. They interpreted their students' lack of participation as cultural rather than having anything to do with language or comprehension difficulties. What these preservice teachers shared was that they were insensitive to migrant students' language learning problems (see more examples of ineffective classroom interactions in 2.3.1, 2.4.1 and 2.4.2).

In fact, a large body of literature has demonstrated that good professional preparation can increase teachers' sense of competence and provides them with concrete strategies to better meet the needs of migrant students (Gandara et al., 2003; López et al., 2013; Wong-Fillmore & Snow, 2005). For instance, Wong-Fillmore and Snow (2005) outline the critical language skills and knowledge that teachers must have in order to effectively teach English to children of other language backgrounds in the USA. They note that teachers who have knowledge of how tense and plurality are formed in students' native language can discover their students' learning difficulties in English. They also argue that teachers can facilitate migrant students' acquisition of English vocabulary and word construction if they have knowledge of the fundamental

characteristics of students' native language. For example, if a teacher can explain that the suffix *-idad* in Spanish was equivalent to *-ity* in English, the students could achieve rapid learning outcomes in vocabulary and word usage. Although it may not be feasible to expect all of the teachers working with migrant students to be bilingual given the present demography of the teaching workforce, it should be necessary to expect them to be equipped with basic understanding of teaching techniques for second language learning.

Research related to second language acquisition and sociocultural theory can provide many insights for training teachers of migrant students (Cummins, 2000, 2008; Swain, 1995). For example, one of the essential language skills migrant students must acquire is academic language proficiency. However, this critical competency is often misdiagnosed by the schools and teachers of migrant students (see also 2.3.1 and 2.3.3). If classroom teachers are informed about the fundamental differences between conversational language proficiency and academic proficiency, they are more apt to provide migrant students with sufficient academic tasks even when their students appear to be conversationally fluent speakers of the target language. According to Cummins (2008), it takes about two years for second language learners to develop basic interpersonal communicative skills (BICS) whereas it takes five to seven years to develop their cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP). Cummins (2000) notes that in everyday conversation, language learners can derive meaning from words according to various contextual clues, such as facial expressions or gestures. The content of daily conversation is also relevant to speakers' personal experiences, so it is accessible to develop students' BICS. However, building up students' CALP requires more technical and more abstract skills because the manner of communication moves from personal and shared experiences to written texts only. It is the language itself that conveys the meaning, so it takes a longer time to develop CALP than BICS.

Having professional training preparation can not only provide teachers with useful second language teaching skills, but also encourage them to reflect upon the stereotypes and dominant ideologies surrounding migrant students. The reflections may range from blaming bilingualism as a scapegoat for migrant students' poor

academic performance (Cummins, 1991), through schools' monolingual value of standardised language (Au, 1993), to misinterpreting language proficiency issues as low levels of cognitive competence (Goodwin, 2002). Despite having well-established theories as guidance for teacher preparation programs, these theories rarely make their way into actual classroom teaching practices because of the working conditions confronting teachers.

A common conflict faced by classroom teachers is the tension between their own professional identity as teachers and the accountability imperative imposed on them, which is mostly measured by their students' test scores (see also 2.4.3). This is particularly the case with newly-recruited teachers who may desire to apply what they believe to be good pedagogy into their actual teaching contexts (Agee, 2004; Loh & Hu, 2014). However, the reality of classroom teaching and school life often curtails teachers' enactment of their previous teaching beliefs. Agee (2004) demonstrates the tension that a young African American teacher experienced in her first two years of teaching practices in a high school in the USA when she tried to use a constructivist approach to teach multicultural literature and to help students understand and appreciate the lives of others. Because of the pressure to prepare her students for high-stake tests, this young teacher gradually gave up many of her previous teaching goals in the face of the test-driven curriculum demands.

Experienced teachers may encounter similar tensions between their beliefs about good teaching and the pressure to enhance student performance on tests. This is documented by Assaf (2008) who has described the struggles of a reading specialist, Marsha, at her urban elementary school in the USA. She was torn between what her students needed to do in order to be real readers, and what they needed to do to pass the tests. While aligning with her professional belief of effective literacy instruction, her classroom instruction had to be adjusted and replaced by skills-based drilling exercises for test preparation. For instance, one day her grade five students read a book called *Amber Brown Sees Red* and actively participated in classroom discussion by relating to what they had read. Marsha's students could make many personal connections with the story and even extended their own knowledge. On the following

day, Marsha and her colleagues were required to attend a district meeting about testing strategies and test scores and they were told to focus on testing exercises because their school was at risk of being ranked lower. After she came back from the meeting, Marsha had to ask her students to put away the book *Amber Brown Sees Red* and to read a test passage with testing objectives. The process of instruction shifted from promoting rich discussion based on the authentic reading material to requiring students to be silent and search for the correct answer from the passage. The changed instruction with test-based strategies was further complicated when her students demanded more test preparation reading and when reading became about nothing but passing the test.

While compromising their professional identity in the testing culture, teachers of migrant students are placed in more challenging situations with diverse student populations, overwhelming workloads and little support. Different from the mainstream class, one of the salient features of migrant-centred classes is its constantly changing status. Regarding their enrolment period, migrant students may enter into the class at random intervals throughout the school year (Goodwin, 2002). Concerning their previous educational background, they are different from each other, ranging from having little or no prior schooling (see also 2.2.3). Their linguistic levels and cognitive development are also varied given their various SES status and cultural backgrounds (see also 2.2). These multileveled structures of the student population make it a daunting task for classroom teachers to implement appropriate instruction that suits students' individual needs. Rather than following a similar routine and format, teaching students unit by unit like mainstream teachers, teachers of migrant students have to spend considerable time modifying their curriculums with the pedagogical process of many trials and errors, and improvising the use of teaching materials to accommodate their students' needs (Weinstein & Trickett, 2016).

Despite their awareness of students' different needs, their willingness to persistently assist their migrant students seems to be compounded by their overloaded job responsibilities outside the classroom. Fully occupied by formal tasks such as ongoing paperwork and meetings, all school teachers often feel exhausted (Loh & Hu, 2014).

Besides these duties, teachers of migrant students must also offer emotional support for their students and maintain relationships with migrant parents. Different from mainstream students, migrant students and their parents are new to the environment and not familiar with the local schooling system, so they need extra support when they enter school. Therefore, teachers of migrant students play an essential role to bridge their knowledge of the schooling culture (Weinstein & Trickett, 2016). Sometimes, teachers with bilingual competence are used as part of the school's resources and because of their language background, they may be required to take up additional jobs translating documents or interpreting for migrant parents and acting as cultural brokers between migrant students' home and the school (Marschall, Shah, & Donato, 2012).

However, taking up the extra workload does not make teachers of migrant students feel acknowledged and valued. Rather, they experience feeling less important than their mainstream colleagues and have little school support. This is related to how teaching migrant students is perceived. It seems that those who are allocated into migrant-centred classes are often viewed as less competent and less trustworthy than those teaching in the mainstream class with students of a high academic profile. Feng (2010) demonstrates that there is significant difference in terms of teachers' course assignment between new and experienced teachers. Drawing from the state-wide administrative data in public schools in Florida, Feng finds that newly recruited teachers are more likely to be assigned to migrant-centred programs, namely low-track classes, than teachers with more years of experience. In fact, the unequal distribution of teaching resources in Florida is not an exception but has gradually become the norm in the USA (Dabach, 2015; Gandara et al., 2003; Weinstein & Trickett, 2016). Dabach (2015, p. 248) has categorized the teachers' course assignment as "teacher tracking" in that senior teachers are given first choice to teach their preferred mainstream class whereas novice teachers lack freedom in the process of selecting their course schedule and are often given low-track classes. In this way, the process of teaching assignment contributes to a larger mechanism of the streaming system in which migrant students' learning opportunities are differentiated.

In sum, the problem of poor teaching resources not only results from insufficient teacher training programs but also manifests in stressful working conditions. The low status attached to the teachers of migrant students and their overwhelming workload have consequently led to the high turnover of teaching workforce. According to the National Centre of Educational Statistics in the USA (cited in Weinstein & Trickett, 2016. p.24), nearly 50% of all new teachers recruited into urban public schools leave the teaching profession within five years. The high turnover of new teachers is mirrored in migrant students' high dropout rates (see also 2.3). In the following chapter, I will turn to migrant students' practices and review how they respond to various forms of exclusion and isolation.

## **2.5 Migrant students as agents**

In the previous two sections, I have reviewed how school policies and teaching practices limit migrant students' equitable access to school resources. Educational policies and school practices generally serve to position migrant students as subordinate compared to their native-born "mainstream" peers. However, migrant students are not passive receivers of identities imposed by their new society and educational institutions. In this section, I will review how migrant students' lived experiences intersect with various social factors that contribute to their marginalization, how they mobilise their resources responding to various types of exclusion, and how their interactions produce and reproduce global linguistic and racial hierarchies.

### **2.5.1 Experiences of exclusion from peer groups**

Research examining migrant students' experiences in a variety of contexts demonstrates that migrant students are excluded in various ways in a new destination. In her monograph, Miller (2001) has provided powerful descriptions on how Asian and European migrant students encounter exclusion in a number of ways when they learn and speak English in the school contexts of Australian mainstream education. Following Miller (2001) and other scholars who have conducted school ethnographies (Chang, 2015; Clonan-Roy, Wortham & Nichols, 2016; Gu & Patkin, 2013; Lan, 2014; Lin, 2011; Rolón-Dow, 2004; Yosso et al., 2009), I will review how aspects of their

social identities such as race, gender, linguistic identity and class play out in migrant students' interactions with their school, teachers and local peers.

One of the key factors that impedes migrant students' school integration is racism. This type of exclusionary experience has been well documented by scholars employing critical race theory (CRT). CRT was originally used for legal studies in the 1980s as a movement against racial discrimination in American society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In recent years, CRT has been widely adopted in educational studies to examine the multiple ways racialised minority students may experience various forms of discrimination (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009; Sue, 2010; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). For example, Yosso et al. (2009) examine forms of racial discrimination in a white-dominant elite university in California. Practices of racial discrimination may vary in intensity, but overall serve to create a hostile racial campus climate through verbal and non-verbal racial microaggressions. One Latina student interviewed by Yosso et al. (2009), for instance, reported that she was rejected several times when attempting to participate in study groups with White students. The latter devalued her intelligence and refused her requests to join them even though the study group was not full. Similar to verbal rejections, non-verbal microaggressions may serve to reinforce racial segregation. A Latino student, for instance, described his uncomfortable experiences with his White peers in the same classroom. Whenever he entered the classroom, he was reminded of being different because his White classmates, the majority of the students, always sat away from him and from other Black students.

Everyday discrimination such as described above may not only be experienced by students of colour but also by other minoritised groups such as female students. Latina students are found to be positioned by their peers and teachers as hypersexual and lacking academic ambition (Clonan-Roy, Wortham, & Nichols, 2016; Rolón-Dow, 2004). Drawing from the schooling experiences of female Puerto Rican students at an urban high school in the USA, Rolón-Dow (2004) demonstrates how their cultural behaviours and appearance are misinterpreted as being overly suggestive and too sexy and how such misinterpretation resulted in their poor academic performance and high

dropout rate. At school, Puerto Rican girls' appearance, such as wearing make-up, tight pants or low-cut dresses, is often judged as inappropriate and as too showy and provocative. Such gendered judgements placed female Puerto Rican students on the margins and in contrast to the accepted imageries of educated female students. Subjected to these negative cultural stereotypes, Puerto Rican girls often feel frustrated and rejected while socialising with their local peers at school.

Apart from gender discrimination, migrant students who do not speak the dominant language well may also find themselves excluded in their school integration (Chang, 2015; Piller, 2016b). In the previous sections (see 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.2.3), I have reviewed how migrant students encountered various learning difficulties in understanding their class resulting from their lack of language proficiency. Here I will review how their interaction with their local peers is affected by their linguistic difference and how they are positioned as inferior speakers. Drawing on two in-depth ethnographic studies with international students from Japan (Takahashi, 2012) and Taiwan (Chang, 2015), Piller (2016b, p. 152) demonstrates the tension "between dreams of inclusion pre-departure and the experience of exclusion once in the country". Before coming to Australia, Taiwanese and Japanese students tended to imagine themselves as being part of Australian groups, hanging out together and making friends with each other. However, in real life, group inclusion between migrant students and local Australian students rarely happened. On the contrary, locals kept to themselves and international students kept to their co-ethnic groups.

Despite having language proficiency, migrant students may not necessarily find themselves accepted by the dominant school culture because of their lower socioeconomic status. In the Chinese context, it is particularly internal migrants from rural and lower class backgrounds who may find themselves to be the targets of microaggression from their peers (Lan, 2014; Y. Lin, 2011). In Shanghai, urban youngsters often see migrant peers as an underclass without money and fashionable commodities (Lan, 2014). For instance, one of the migrant students noted that her classmates liked to compete with each other over the purchase of computer models, expensive footwear brands and the size of their birthday cakes, but she and other

migrant students were often labelled “乡巴佬” (“country bumpkins”) because they did not even have a computer at home to finish their schoolwork. In addition to poverty and backwardness, insults may also relate to their supposed lack of cleanliness and discipline. Y. Lin (2011) demonstrates that in Xiamen, one of the developed coastal cities in east China, rural migrant students at elementary schools experienced a sense of low self-worth because their teachers looked down on them and often commented on their hygiene habits, linking them to their dirty countryside, and their lack of self-management, viewing them as being too wild.

It is important to note that many social actors may interplay with each other to generate the complex effects of migrant students’ exclusionary experiences. Gu and Patkin (2013), for instance, show how the multiple forces of race, language, class and religion serve to complicate the identity constructions of migrant students from South Asia in Hong Kong. These migrant students are caught in confusion and ambivalence between their Hong Kong identity and heritage identity. Even though most of them were born and had spent most of their lives in Hong Kong, they had not developed sufficient language proficiency in Cantonese and their different racial appearance with dark skin also marked them as inferior. As a consequence, their lack of language proficiency and racial difference hindered their socialisation with local peers and their familiarity with local culture and tradition. While distancing themselves from their Hong Kong identity, they are still confused about their heritage identity given the fact that they lack real living experiences in their “designated” homelands of India, Pakistan or Bangladesh. Further complicating their identity are their families’ imposed traditional and cultural practices that insulated migrant students from exposure to the host society. For the majority of their families, their parents still expect to go back to their homelands one day when they have earned enough money. Their parents are not very connected to Hong Kong; they do not speak or read any Cantonese; and they keep on practising their religion, such as Hinduism, in their ethnic community. Their social networks are also confined to their ethnic community and the jobs they take are mostly low-paid, which makes it hard for them to help their children fulfil their upward mobility in Hong Kong. In sum, the experiences of exclusion for migrant

students described above are multi-faceted and not reducible to one single factor or social agent.

While the experience of exclusion often cannot be reduced to one single factor or actor, there can be no doubt that – in a wide variety of contexts around the world – migrant students, along with or as part of other minoritised groups, often find themselves marginalised in one way or another. In these contexts, ambivalent positionings may be generated and consequently migrant students may act to contest their marginalised positions. In the following, I will review how migrant students mobilise their resources in response to exclusory experiences.

### 2.5.2 Acts of resistance

Research examining how migrant students respond to their marginalisation indicates that there is a continuum of acquiescence to resistance (Martín Rojo, 2010; Yosso et al., 2009). In terms of intensity, resistance can be manifested from non-conformity through to minor disobedience such as sleeping in class or forgetting to finish homework to overt contestation of teachers' authority and school norms such as truancy or dropping out of school. Rather than providing a list of potential acts of resistance, in the following, I will review what linguistic and cultural resources migrant students employ to contest their marginalisation. These include home language use, community resources, accent modification, online digital resources, global cultural consumption and identification with global English.

The home language constitutes a crucial resource that migrant students have available to them, and they may use it to create a safe space where they may help each other in study and in adjusting to the new environment. In the section on classroom climate (2.4.1), I reviewed findings that show that teachers oftentimes view the use of home language as a violation of classroom norms. However, from the perspective of migrant students, speaking the home language is not necessarily an act of disobedience but a learning strategy. Use of the home language may foster understanding of subject content and also provide them with a supportive space where they can make use of their previous knowledge to enhance their learning outcomes.

This is documented by Bruna's (2008) ethnographic study in a Science class in a high school in Iowa, USA. The newly-arrived Mexican students were limited in English proficiency, but they were allowed to use Spanish for communication in class. The observed classroom activity was pig dissection, which was relevant to the students' background given the fact that most of their parents were meat workers. Linda, the subject teacher, was a white English speaker with limited proficiency in Spanish, but she was one of the few teachers who were well-liked by migrant students because she was interested in their lives and also encouraged her students to make use of their previous knowledge to acquire subject learning. In class, Mexican students were given a task to measure the pig's intestines, and they actively participated in the classroom activities by drawing on their parents' knowledge and everyday life experience. While engaging in their group work, they could freely use Spanish to construct their knowledge and finish the assigned task effectively.

Besides clarifying learning concepts and facilitating learning outcomes, the use of the home language is also the manifestation of their transnational identity that is developed and sustained outside of school. This is particularly true with migrant students who cross the border frequently and who have close contact with families and friends on both sides of the border (Brochin Ceballos, 2012; de la Piedra & Guerra, 2012). Brochin Ceballos (2012) demonstrates that the frequent transnational movements between the USA and Mexico have provided rich linguistic and cultural resources for border migrants to maintain their biliteracy and bilingualism in Spanish and English via unofficial experiences. Exposure to Spanish was almost everywhere, ranging from the linguistic signs on the billboards, through to daily groceries to childhood reading materials.

In addition to crossing physical borders, border students can also draw on their experiences out of school spaces to improve their heritage language by speaking it with their families and relatives and participating in religious communities (Brochin Ceballos, 2012; de la Piedra & Guerra, 2012). Different from her schooling experience, where English was the norm of school life, Mary, a student featured in a case study, shared her similar experience with her peers at the USA-and-Mexican

border (Brochin Ceballos, 2012). Mary did not visit Mexico very often, but she had plenty of opportunities to speak and to read Spanish. At home, she spoke Spanish with her grandmother, who was born and raised in Mexico and who lived with her most of the time while her parents went out to work. Her Spanish literacy and oracy was also improved by participating in weekly church activities because the dominant language in church was Spanish. The entire mass was in Spanish, and the books read were also in Spanish.

It is true that by speaking the home language and using community resources, migrant students can contest their marginalised identity, but not all migrant students have the courage to publicly declare their ethnic identity and sometimes, hiding the undesired identity becomes a strategy to resist being marginalised by the dominant group. This is particularly true with Cantonese speakers from the PRC who are studying in Hong Kong (Gu, 2011a, 2011b; Gu & Tong, 2012). Speaking standardised *Putonghua* is an index of educational attainment and employment mobility in the PRC. However, in Hong Kong universities, *Putonghua* is not as highly valued as Cantonese for local peer socialisation because Hong Kong students tend to view mainland China as underdeveloped and *Putonghua* speakers as uncivilised and backward. Thus, *Putonghua* may become an index of inferiority in this changed context (Gu & Tong, 2012). In order to avoid such negative stereotypes, mainland students from Guangzhou, one of the provinces in southeast China where local people speak Cantonese with a slightly different accent from those in Hong Kong, try to hide their identity by picking up a Hong Kong accent thereby covering their relation with mainland China (Gu, 2011a).

Related to home language use, online digital resources also provide migrant students with a third space to construct their multiple identities that transcend geographic locations and boundaries. McGinnis, Goodstein-Stolzenberg, and Saliani (2008) document migrant students' in-and-out-of-school identities via different online communications in the USA. For example, Julia, a migrant student from Colombia, was doing her high school study in the USA and her online interactions reflected her multiple identities. Her blog page was marked with her feminine identity using the sign

of a red background of little multicoloured hearts, her ethnic identity with the Colombian flag posted, and her sense of pride in Latin music as part of her Colombian heritage was signified by this music circulating as background music on her blog page. The way she used languages expressed her dual identities by inserting Spanish words into her chat and by using slang while communicating with her net-friends in English. Most of her net-friends could understand her language use because they were her schoolmates from Colombia and other Latin American countries. Her social network also extended to the global community of Spanish speakers. While expressing her loyalties to her Colombian identity, she also identified herself as part of a Pan-Latino membership. This was recorded when she responded to American national anti-immigrant sentiments which positioned migrant youngsters like her as outsiders to the mainstream in the USA. She promoted a pro-migrant campaign and circulated messages about it in her online network to protest the anti-immigration bill. By inserting her voice into a national debate, she also situated herself within a social network of other immigrant youngsters.

Online and offline, global cultural consumption can also be used as a counterbalance against migrant students' marginalised positions. As mentioned above, the Colombian student used Latin music to construct her sense of pride in her heritage identity in the USA. Using contemporary popular cultures as resistance is no exception for Latino students. African American youngsters in the USA and Canada (Creese, 2014; Heller, 2006; Jeffries, 2011) use hip-hop culture and music to construct their distinct identity and to empower themselves by offering counter-narratives in lyrics against their marginalised status. Japanese students in the USA posted Japanese anime culture online to position their popular youth identity (McGinnis et al., 2008). Besides music, playing sports also helps migrant students to regain their agency in their negotiations of identities. Indian students in Hong Kong may not be interested in local culture nor identify themselves as part of Hong Kong people (see also 2.5.1) (Gu & Patkin, 2013). Rather, participants in Gu & Patkin's (2013) study insisted on their Indian hobbies such as playing cricket. The latter gave them a sense of superiority over their local Hong Kong peers, who are largely ignorant about cricket.

Perhaps the most interesting cultural resource that migrant students have at their disposal, particularly in non-Anglophone contexts, is their identification with global English. Lan (2003), for instance, notes that Filipina migrant domestic workers in Taiwan use English as capital to contest their low-class identity and to ask for the recognition of their Taiwanese employers who had money but did not speak good English. In a similar way, Indian students in Hong Kong empower themselves through their perceived higher proficiency in English as resistance against their unrecognised cultural and linguistic resources (Gu & Patkin, 2013). To counterbalance their poor academic performance in Chinese, an Indian student claimed that “our English is much, much better than the local students’ English. We can use it freely in communication, but they can only get high marks on examinations” (Gu & Patkin, 2013, p. 138). It is worth noting that global English is not the only language that can empower migrants such as Filipinos and Indians. Transnational Arabic is also becoming a form of resistance capital embedded in Islamic groups. A female Muslim student of Pakistani origin in the UK, for instance, desired to make sense of her belonging by investing in learning Arabic at a local night school (Martin, 2009).

In sum, migrant students adopt various resistance strategies to position their multiple identities and to enhance their status. By using their home language, migrant students may help each other with their studies and may improve their academic performance. Family, religious and border resources may help migrant students develop their bilingualism and biliteracy as self-empowerment against their monolingual schooling experiences. Through the accent modification of speaking the dominant variety of a language, migrant students avoid being singled out as outsiders. The use of digital resources can serve to create a third space to get their voices heard and extend their social networks, transcending physical distance and ethnic differences. Finally, by associating themselves with global consumption and cultural practices, such as speaking English and doing hip-hop, migrant students position themselves as a superior group over their local peers. However, while contesting hegemonic power, migrant students themselves may also (re)produce dominant ideologies and social stereotypes. In the following, I will review how the process of resistance (re)produces linguistic and racial hierarchies.

### 2.5.3 Reproduction of linguistic and racial hierarchies

Exclusion does not necessarily occur exclusively between marginalised groups and dominant groups. On the contrary, agents of exclusion may often be marginalised themselves. In the process of negotiating their identities, migrant students may themselves reproduce hierarchies of exclusion. For instance, tensions and conflicts may occur between different racial minority groups, between the same ethnic groups from different regions, between the first and the second generation of the same ethnic background or between ethnic migrants who return to their ancestral homelands.

One of the key conflicts to emerge is between different marginalised groups. Being exposed to each other in close proximity does not necessarily lead to social integration, but can sometimes trigger racial frictions. This is particularly true with migrant students who have been brought up in the same location, but whose perceptions of each other are shaped by their family narratives and the social discourse of wider society (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016; Wortham & Rhodes, 2012). At a migrant-centred high school in Marshall, USA, for example, many racial perceptions separated Latino Americans and African Americans (Clonan-Roy et al., 2016). Influenced by their family's negative experiences with Black people, and the social stereotypes against them, Latino students were warned not to make friends with Black students, who were positioned as violent, criminal and dirty. At school, any conflicts in class or lunchroom clashes between these two groups could trigger racialised assumptions. One of the Latino students rejected going swimming at school because she thought that the Black students went there and that they made the pool nasty and smelly. While racialising Black students, Latino students were themselves positioned as hardworking but lacking academic ambition and success and having illegal migration status. Due to limited employment availability, Latino migrants are perceived as competitors of African Americans who have established themselves longer in the USA. The conflict between the inter-ethnic migrant parents in employment also impacted their children's integration at school.

Besides the inter-ethnic conflicts, there are also conflicts within the same ethnic minorities who are widely perceived as homogenous groups but who internally

position themselves differently. This has been observed with Chinese migrant students from mainland China and from Taiwan who were doing high school studies in California, USA (McKay & Wong, 1996). For mainland Chinese, the meaning of being Chinese is shaped by Chinese nationalist discourses, which are mainly based on their place of origin. However, for Taiwanese, they see Taiwan as a sovereign nation independent from mainland China. The fact that their ancestors migrated from mainland China to Taiwan before the 1950s made their Chinese positioning complicated. Because of the ideological differences and different economic development, there emerged internal friction between Taiwanese and mainland Chinese students. When there is conflict between these groups, the Taiwanese position mainland Chinese as low-class, whereas the mainland Chinese with fair skin tend to use derogatory remarks against the darker-skinned Taiwanese.

Tensions may also arise between first- and second-generation migrant students from the same ethnic background (Malsbary, 2014; Ryu, 2015; Shin, 2012). One of the emerging frictions results from the dominant ideology of speaking standardised English. This dominant ideology is reproduced by the second generation of Latinos and ascribed upon newly-arrived Latinos at a high school in the USA (Malsbary, 2014). The recently-arrived Latino students are not able to pronounce certain English words correctly, and their mispronunciation is mocked by the second generation, US-born Latinos. Sometimes, US-born Latinos would intentionally use difficult words when they speak to recently-arrived Latinos in order to expose their peers' limited English proficiency. By speaking better English and being born in the USA, the second generation claims their superiority over the newly-arrived migrants. Rather than being allies against the wider discrimination against Latino groups, English hegemony is reproduced by second generation Latinos, who serve as agents of exclusion of first generation Latino migrant students.

Facing the linguistic teasing from their peers, newly-arrived Latinos choose to be silent rather than respond to the hostile atmosphere of the school. However, other migrant students adopt more active strategies to reposition themselves when they are confronted with negative stereotypes from their peers of the same ethnic group. This is

particularly true with Korean migrant students who resist the derogatory label “FOB” (“Fresh off the boat”). By contrast, they actively construct themselves as cosmopolitan Korean Cools in Toronto, Canada (Shin, 2012). The newly-arrived Korean students who lack knowledge of local culture and who speak poor English are perceived by long-term established Korean Canadians as FOB. However, newly-arrived Korean students who possess a privileged mode of social status in Korea contest such inferior positionings by drawing on global consumption styles to distinguish themselves from long-term Korean Canadians. Their resistance strategies range from living in middle-class residential areas rather than the districts associated with older and poorer migrants, following updated fashion trends, investing in costly activities such as shopping, golfing, horse-back riding and paying for private tutoring. In the era of globalization, their familiarity with communication technology due to Korea’s economic development, and the increasing value of Korean cultural products, such as soap operas and music, also provided the newly-arrived Korean students with global resources.

Migrants who return to their ancestral homelands constitute a particularly interesting group that is positioned in often conflicting ways on the continuum of local to migrant identities. Well-researched groups of so-called “return migrants” include ethnic Chinese who move to China from Venezuela (Sterling & Pang, 2013) and from the USA (X. Li, 2015), ethnic Germans moving to Germany from eastern Europe (Meng & Protassova, 2013) and ethnic Japanese moving to Japan from Latin America (Tsuda, 2001). The way I use “returnee” or “return migrant” here may not necessarily involve an actual return for the individual but a move to the imagined ancestral land from which their forebears emigrated. Such groups are often positioned as ethnic minorities who do not fully belong to their country of migration. While they expect to experience a fuller sense of belonging upon their “return” to their ancestral homeland, they may find that their ancestral identities are not necessarily validated, either, and instead, they may still be perceived as interlopers.

Examining the experiences of returnee Chinese Venezuelans at a high school in Jiangmen, southeast China, Sterling and Pang (2013) found that these second

generation ethnic Chinese were challenged as authentic Chinese in their ancestral homeland. In China, they could easily pass as locals because of their ethnic appearance, and they did not encounter the same racial discrimination as they had in Venezuela. However, they were expected by their teachers and local peers to fully conform to the Chinese side of their identity by following school codes of conduct and speaking *Putonghua*. Having been born and brought up in Venezuela, however, this was not easy to do for these ethnic Chinese, whose most natural language was Spanish. Consequently, tensions emerged between the imposed Chinese identity and their self-identification. For instance, they had a strong tendency to speak in Spanish, but this was a practice that their Chinese teachers often frowned upon, and from which their Chinese local peers distanced themselves.

In sum, various social factors contribute to the exclusionary experiences of migrant students. Race, language, class and gender may produce compounding effects that marginalize migrant students' successful integration at school. Rather than accepting the imposed identities without resistance, migrant students who possess certain resources reposition themselves in response to their marginalized experiences. The way they empower themselves may range from using their home language to identifying with global English. While contesting hegemonic power and negotiating their identities, migrant students themselves may also reproduce dominant ideologies such as English as the most powerful language in the world. Rather than establishing themselves as a legitimate group by uniting to resist the dominant power, migrant students may further disadvantage their minority peers by employing the dominant discourses against each other. As a consequence, conflicts between marginalised groups and tensions emerging from invalid positioning only complicate the marginalised situations in a dominant society.

## **2.6 Summary**

In this chapter, I have reviewed relevant research into the education of migrant students. I started with an overview of the educational barriers faced by migrant students. First, language constitutes a significant barrier: those with limited linguistic proficiency in the target language face barriers to content learning and to participating

fully in their new learning community; and they have the dual challenge of learning academic content at the same time that they learn a new language. Even migrant students with proficiency in a non-standard variety of the target language may struggle to be heard, to be understood and to be valued. Second, educational asymmetries between the home country and destination constitute a barrier to classroom participation and to achieving satisfactory results. Finally, the low SES of many migrant families may constrain access to time, money and knowledge, and thus act as a barrier to educational achievement.

Following the review of educational barriers, I reviewed how educational policies respond to the educational and linguistic needs of migrant students. Despite the schools' desire to bridge gaps and eliminate barriers, school policies sometimes end up aggravating migrant students' disadvantages. Three types of school policies have been identified as being particularly relevant in this context: language development programs, streaming practices, and standardised assessment. Language development programs remove migrant students from mainstream education and may inadvertently stream them into low-track programs in which they are deprived of equal access to school resources. Standardised assessment may serve to exclude migrant students if it fails to consider the diverse backgrounds of migrant students by testing the knowledge of the dominant group and overlooking the cultural and language barriers of migrant students. This disadvantage may be compounded if the test score is used as justification for streaming migrant students into low-track classes or out of school, altogether.

Next, I reviewed how teachers implement their classroom instruction with migrant students and what structural constraints teachers of migrant students face. It is often the case that in classes with a high proportion of migrant students, behaviour control is prioritised over building a constructive learning environment. As a result, migrant students may miss out on rigorous academic instruction. This disadvantage is compounded by the conditions of the teaching workforce. Teachers are often poorly-equipped to teach migrant student populations and the low status of migrant students is often mirrored in the low status of their teachers, who may be relatively

inexperienced, poorly qualified or overwhelmed by high workloads. The high turnover rate resulting from these conditions constitutes another disadvantage in migrant education as it jeopardises continuity.

Finally, I reviewed the literature on migrant students' responses to their marginalised positions. I focused on factors intersecting with their learning experiences, their agentive negotiation of identities and the conflicts emerging over the process of their identification. By doing so, I examined how race, language, class and gender play out in migrant students' school integration. Acknowledging the power of agency, I reviewed how migrant students empower themselves by mobilising their resources to reposition themselves. Several resistance strategies have been identified, ranging from home language use, community resources, accent modification, online digital resources, global cultural consumption, to identification with global English. Despite their efforts to contest hegemonic power and reposition themselves, migrant students themselves may also reinforce the dominant ideologies and further marginalise their minority peers. This was demonstrated from research into the conflicts and tensions emerging from marginalised migrant students who may themselves reproduce the linguistic and racial hierarchies in which they find themselves.

Most of the research into migrant education I have reviewed here has been conducted in North America and Western Europe. Additionally, the vast majority of this research is located in Anglophone countries. By contrast, research into migrant education in Asian countries has been sparse. I have reviewed here some relevant literatures examining the experience of migrant students in Japan and China. This skewed representation of diverse migrant-receiving societies in migrant education research significantly limits our knowledge. While Chinese students are well-represented in research examining migrant education in the West, there is as yet a significant gap in our understanding of the experiences of migrant students in China. Given that China has, in recent years, emerged as a popular destination for international students (X. Li, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2015a), this gap is in urgent need of attention.

In many of the contexts reviewed in this chapter, the state and the general public view migrants negatively or, at best, ambivalently. However, this situation is different in

China, which strives to promote internationalization and attract international students, particularly from its neighbouring countries. Border education has been designed to attract international students from a young age to study at China's border primary schools and high schools (see Sections 1.3 and 5.2). Despite efforts to attract international students, little is known about the actual experiences of these migrant students "on the ground."

Building on previous research into migrant students' educational experiences at high school (as reviewed in this chapter), this study is intended to contribute to filling these gaps. This study is situated against the rise of China and its expansion into ASEAN. This includes China's and Myanmar's socioeconomic transformation. Against this background, I intend to explore how language practices and ideologies at a border high school serve to produce and reproduce the social order in a rapidly changing and globalizing context. In particular, I will examine the educational barriers experienced by migrant students there, the educational policies affecting migrant students, the teaching practices aimed at migrant students, the agentic practices of migrant students and their interactions with the educational context in which they find themselves. Specifically, the study examines the following three research questions:

1. How do Burmese students' previous learning experiences shape their linguistic repertoires and trajectories?
2. How do institutional practices shape the education of Burmese students?
3. How do school interactions shape the learning experiences of Burmese students?

## Chapter Three: Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the overall research design of my study. I start with the research paradigm that undergirds the design of my research. I then describe the rationale for adopting a critical sociolinguistic ethnography to explore in depth the learning experiences of my participants (section 3.2). Next, I describe details of the data collection including the selection of my field work site, participants and offer reflections on how my own position as a researcher shaped my data collection (section 3.3). This is followed by an exposition of the management of data (section 3.4) and methods of analysis (section 3.5). The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter and the limitations of the study (section 3.6).

My study investigates the learning experiences of Burmese students at a border high school in China in a rapidly changing global context. As stated in Chapter Two, the central research questions are:

- (1) How do Burmese students' previous learning experiences shape their linguistic repertoires and trajectories?
- (2) How do institutional practices shape the education of Burmese students?
- (3) How do school interactions shape the learning experiences of Burmese students?

In order to examine these research questions, I adopt a qualitative paradigm to guide my inquiry. Qualitative research is a situated activity that involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world and allows researchers to study social problems in their natural settings to make sense of and to shed light on the meanings of real life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, pp. 4-5). Ethnography is one of the most significant forms of qualitative inquiry as it allows the researcher to actively construct and interpret realities with participants from an emic perspective rather than imposing an etic perspective (Madison, 2005, p. 22). Following other sociolinguistic scholars who have conducted major school ethnographies with migrant students (Blackledge & Creese,

2010; Dong, 2009; Heller, 2006; Martín Rojo, 2010b; Pérez-Milans, 2013; Rampton, 2006), I use a critical sociolinguistic ethnography (CSE).

### **3.2 Approach: a critical sociolinguistic ethnography**

The use of CSE is based on the assumption that there is a dialectical relationship between the micro-level of day-to-day language practices and the macro-level of socio-political discourses (Blackledge & Creese, 2010, p. 58). In other words, ethnographic research aims to discover links between local practices and larger social processes. In my study, I explore “big” phenomena at macro-contexts such as historical, political, social and cultural aspects of border change “on the ground” at the micro-level of a highly diverse high school which is socialising school students into their linguistic habitus.

CSE is grounded in theories from anthropology, sociology and linguistics. This approach views language as symbolic practice and power by which participants are enabled or constrained in their access to social resources in a given context (Martín Rojo, 2010b). My study is conducted in a multilingual border region where my participants of diverse backgrounds come to receive formal education in China. In the study, I accord a key role to language in the production of certain legitimate forms of knowledge while excluding others, and I see how language plays a key role in constructing social inequality.

The use of CSE also offers a lens of seeing school as ‘a key site for social and cultural reproduction’ (Heller, 2006, p. 17) and a “discursive space” (Heller, 2007, p. 636) within which specific language varieties and linguistic forms come to be invested with legitimacy and authority. Following this logic, school is seen as a key site of selection, hierarchisation and exclusion. Specifically, I focus on how school accepts certain cultural and linguistic resources as legitimate while others are viewed as “problematic” and on how school categorises students.

The CSE approach moves beyond traditional ethnography and explicitly makes a political commitment (Heller, 2006) and takes into account the situatedness and the changing human experiences at ideological levels (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). Accordingly, situated language practices can only be understood and interpreted in

reference to the specific trajectories of individuals and institutions in specific national-regional-local contexts (Codó & Pérez-Milans, 2014). In light of the web-like trajectories of doing ethnography, I will attempt to interpret Burmese students' language learning experiences from the ideological framework of wider discourses of local, national and international processes of socioeconomic and cultural change.

The CSE approach adopts a transnational and trans-local perspective to describe in-depth issues related to language and migration. In the era of globalisation, rapid and wide-spread population movements between countries and within national borders have become highly salient. Transnational citizens may move back and forth physically, ideologically and linguistically (Vertovec, 2009). Therefore, in my study, I see my participants as transnational citizens whose language practices are also shaped and reshaped by their dynamic migration trajectories, and I see it as necessary to explore their pre-migration experiences in order to understand their learning experiences at their new destination.

Finally, CSE also focusses on the tensions and contradictions that participants experience in locally situated practices in relation to historical dimensions and policy agendas (Heller, 2011). This is highly relevant to the fieldwork site, where Burmese students as a new student body constitute a diversity management challenge to school management. CSE allows me to examine the tensions between the ways Burmese students identify themselves and the ways they are positioned by their Chinese teachers and peers.

After presenting the general approach, I will now explain the details of my fieldwork and data collection.

### **3.3 Data collection**

Following CSE, I see school as a key site of social and cultural reproduction. In this section, I will describe how I selected a border high school as my research site; what the distinct geopolitical and cultural features of the fieldwork site and the school are; what types of data I collected; and how I understand my own positionality as a researcher in that context.

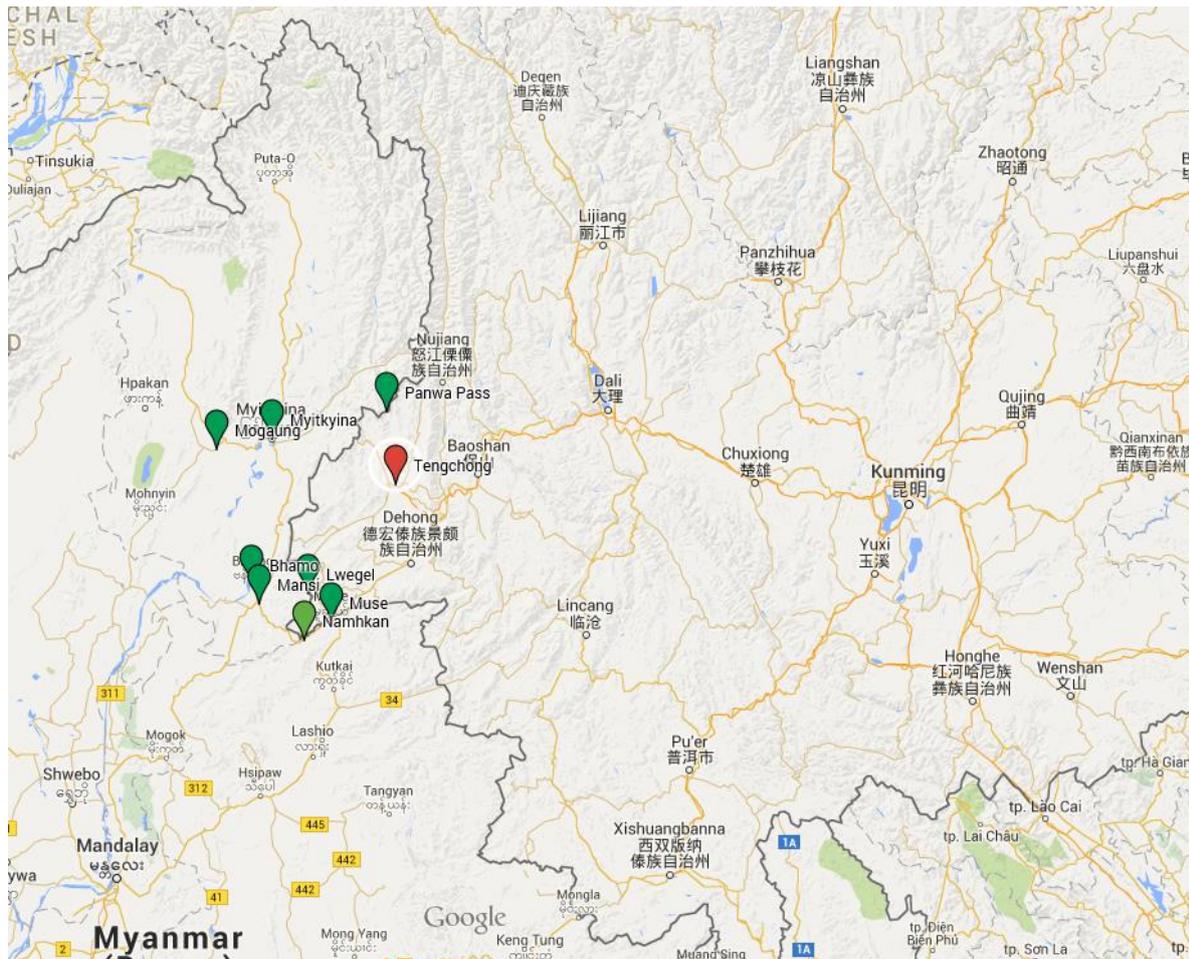
### 3.3.1 Selection of fieldwork site and border high school

Over 90% of the borderline between China and Myanmar is located in Yunnan province on the Chinese side and the states of Shan and Kachin on the Burmese side. Along the more than 2,000 kilometres of the border in Yunnan, I selected a border high school located in Tengchong, a border town of historical and strategical importance, which is being constructed as a key node in the integration of China and ASEAN (see detailed description in 5.2).

Through my personal network and background (see Section 1.1), I was introduced by my relatives to the school principal and able to obtain approval to conduct field work at the school, for which I will use the pseudonym BHS. I selected BHS for three main reasons. First, it is one of the officially acknowledged border high schools where Burmese students receive scholarship support and their high school graduation certificate is acknowledged by the provincial government. Second, it is located in Tengchong, which is known as the ancestral hometown of over 200,000 Burmese Chinese (see Section 5.2). It is interesting to explore how BHS integrates Burmese students of different linguistic and cultural background, and how ethnic Chinese who migrate “back” to their ancestral hometown might experience social inclusion and exclusion. Thirdly, the geographical proximity between Tengchong and Myanmar provides a space for Burmese students’ frequent transnational movement and subsequently shapes their educational experiences. The distance from Tengchong to Myitkyina, the capital city of Kachin state is about 100 kilometres. Because of the travel convenience, Burmese students at BHS are allowed to go back to Myanmar every semester and sometimes during Chinese festivals. It is therefore interesting to study how the border community resources shape their language learning trajectories and even their identities over the process of their frequent migration.

BHS is one of four multicultural-centred high schools located in Tengchong. According to the local educational bureau (Yang & Guo, 2013, P.146), in 2005, there were 1,673 Chinese students who enrolled from Year 7 to Year 12 at BHS. Among these students, there were over 800 (40%) who had ethnic minority status and were identified as Lisu, Dai, Wa, Jingpo or Achang. In addition to its ethnic minority

features, BHS is also known as a model high school recruiting Burmese students from Northern Myanmar such as Myitkyina, Muse, Namkham, Panwa, Lwegel, Bhamo, Mansi and Mogaung (Yang & Guo, 2013, P.73). The following map indicates the origins of the Burmese students who attend BHS for formal education. The green dots on the map represent the birthplaces of Burmese students and the red dot stands for Tengchong where BHS is located.



*Figure 1. Map of Tengchong and border area*

Since 2005 BHS has recruited Burmese students and the following table summarises the number of students enrolled between 2005 and 2013 (Tengchong Education Bureau, 2013).

*Table 1. Number of Burmese students enrolled at BHS between 2005 and 2013*

Year of enrolment	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011- 2012	2013
Total no. of Burmese students at BHS	45	30	18	12	33	11	45	10

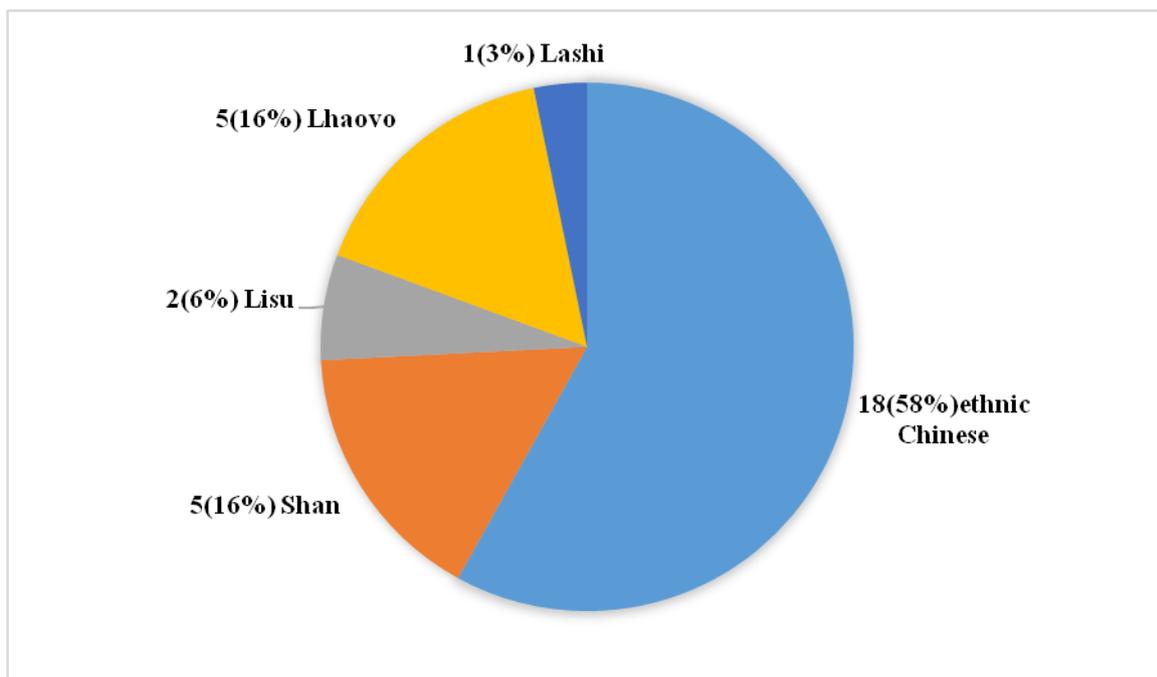
According to the school’s annual report, the recruitment of Burmese students is unstable because of the civil war in Northern Myanmar. This has impacted the enrolment periods of Burmese students. For example, in the Years 2011 and 2012 (see Table 1), Burmese students came to BHS at two different periods: September 2011 and April 2012 and later they were combined into one class. Despite having a small number of Burmese students compared to its majority of Chinese students (the ratio between Burmese students and Chinese students was about 1:100 by the time the study was conducted), BHS has been rewarded with many provincial and national recognitions for educating Burmese students (see detailed discussion in Chapter Five).

### 3.3.2 Burmese Participants

In this study, I use the term “Burmese students” throughout my thesis as it is the emic term used at BHS. The reason the students are referred to as “Burmese” is that Myanmar is the country where they grew up. Most of them are citizens of Myanmar but not all of them are. The latter is due to the fact that all the “Burmese” students in my study come from ethnic minority backgrounds whose relationship to the Burmese state is often tenuous (see Section 4.2.2 for details). In fact, none of my focal participants who I (along with everyone else at BHS) refer to as “Burmese students” is ethnically Burman. Myanmar is a multi-ethnic state dominated by the Burman ethnic group but in the border area other ethnic groups constitute the numeric majority. With regard to assigned ethnicity, my participants are predominantly Chinese but also include Shan, Lisu, Lashi and Lhaovo. However, assigned ethnicity, too, is a homogenizing practice that conceals more than it reveals and participants are very

diverse with regard to their language repertoires, their ethnic self-affiliations, and their educational and family backgrounds. I will explore these diversities, their homogenization and their consequences in detail in Chapter Four and Chapter Seven.

There were 31 Burmese students when I went to conduct the field work at BHS in October 2013 (this number is different from the numbers in Table 1 because of the high drop-out rate; not all Burmese students who enrol will stay, as I will explain in detail in Chapters Five, Six and Seven). Regarding their registered ethnicity, all of them were ethnic minorities in Myanmar, and there was no Burman student, the dominant ethnic group in Myanmar. The majority of my Burmese participants were ethnic Chinese (18 out of 31) and the others included five Shan, five Lhaovo, two Lisu, and one Lashi students. It is noted that their ethnic grounds do not match their language repertoires as shown in the Table 8 in Chapter Four.



*Figure 2. Burmese participants' ethnicity*

Regarding their birth and migration backgrounds, all of my participants were born between 1994 and 1998; most of them (13 out of 31; 42%) were second generation migrants from China, whose father or mother or both had migrated to Myanmar prior to their birth; 35% and 19% of them were third and fourth generation migrants from China, respectively. Only one student indicated that he and his parents and ancestors

had always lived in Myanmar. No matter how long my participants and their families have lived in Myanmar, all of them except the one “native” inhabitant could trace their family’s origin to a specific place in China. According to their self-reports, their families had emigrated from Tengchong, Yingjiang or Longchuan, three border towns in Yunnan. In other words, the participants were Burmese of Yunnanese origins. Apart from their shared kinship ties with China, my participants, especially the ethnic Chinese, reported that their parents still had frequent contact with their Chinese relatives and friends and their family’s businesses were also associated with China:

我家只有我爸一个人在缅甸，他的兄弟那些都在腾冲 (...) 我记得读  
缅文初中时，我爸把爷爷奶奶接过来住过，但爷爷奶奶觉得[密支那]  
天气太热了，受不了又回去了(...) 我爸是做摩托零件和商品买卖  
的，都是到瑞丽[中国]这边和泰国进货再到缅甸卖。

In my family, only my father lives in Myanmar and all of his brothers are in Tengchong (...) I remember when I went to Burmese junior high school, my father took my grandma and grandpa to live with us. Unfortunately, my grandparents could not bear the hot weather [in Myitkyina], and went back to China. (...) My father is doing business with motorcycle accessories and commodities transaction. He purchases his commodities from Ruili and Thailand and sells them in Myanmar.  
(Interview with Lingling)

Lingling’s father was a first-generation migrant in Myanmar. When her father went to Myanmar to seek economic opportunities, he met Lingling’s mother who was also ethnic Chinese. When they married, they decided to settle down in Myanmar. Besides the kinship connection, Lingling’s father seemed to have frequent business activities in China, which further expanded his transnational networks.

### 3.3.3 Data collection procedures

Having introduced the field work site and participants, this section shows how I collected the data during field work. I start with an overview of the data collected, then I describe the procedure of collecting different types of data by categorising and summarising them in a table after my description.

#### *3.3.3.1 Overview of collected data*

At BHS, I conducted intensive field work for three months from October 2013 to January 2014 and two follow-up visits in October 2014 (one week) and December 2015 (two weeks). During the three months' field work, I was at BHS at least five days a week from Monday to Friday from 8:00 am to 5:30pm, sometimes to 9:00pm depending on the availability of participants and the school events. The data collected include copious field notes (2,000 to 4,000 words a day); more than 50 hours video/audio recordings of classroom and non-classroom observation; 55 individual interviews ranging in length from 20 minutes to one hour with Burmese students, school teachers, administrators and other stake holders; six focus group interviews lasting from half an hour to one hour with Burmese students and Chinese students; 103 written linguistic autobiographies and records of daily language practices and future aspirations; institutional documents such as the local educational chronicle, school annual reports, timetables, syllabi, teaching materials, textbooks, examination sheets; pictures and samples of institutional spaces, posters, murals, panels; students' exercise books, assignments, compositions, diaries, and scribbled notes; and, finally, hundreds of screenshots from the online instant messaging tools *WeChat* and *QQ*.

#### *3.3.3.2 Participant observation*

During the first three weeks, I spent time with the 31 Burmese students observing their interactions with each other in class and out of class. In the first week, my observation in class was on students' seating arrangement, and their interactions with Chinese teachers of various subjects. During the break my observation was on how they grouped themselves, where they stayed together, what languages they chose to speak, what they did and what they talked about. In the two weeks that followed, I continued to observe the classes on how subject teachers delivered their teachings to

Burmese students. I paid special attention to the questions raised by the teachers and the answers given by the students, and I also showed interest in teachers' feedback to students' answers in relation to the language performance. During these weeks, I built up friendships with Burmese students and their teachers by having lunch and dinner with them and having informal conversations with their teachers during the break. In my observations of their daily routines, I focused on the students' interests, their topics of conversation, and the way the school and teachers organised the teaching and learning for Burmese students. I kept most of my observations in field notes whenever I could write both in class and after returning to my accommodation. In order to track immediately what had happened, I also used a pen-recorder to recall what I observed outside class when I could not find a place to type or to write. On weekends, I then transcribed some of the audio-recordings into written field notes. On average, my field notes amounted to between 2,000 and 4,000 words a day.

In addition to observations in class and out of class, I also collected audio- and visual-recordings of students' language practices and school social events outside classroom. According to the way they grouped with each other, I selected at least one student to carry the audio-recorder and record their in-group language practices during class, at school canteen and at their dormitory. In addition, I also selected two male students who seemed to have broader contacts with Chinese students than the rest of the Burmese students to understand how they interacted with Chinese peers outside class. Besides the students' language practices, I also observed the school daily and during weekly school activities such as sit-up exercises on the playground and Monday morning national flag raising. In addition, I also recorded some school social events including the outdoor excursion in a tourist site organised by the school, from which I observed how Burmese students grouped themselves, and how they felt about such an experience in relation to their understanding of local society. The annual Winter Sports Meeting was also recorded and I was able to observe how the school discursively constructed valued knowledge during such a public event. Another public event which was associated with Chinese language promotion and morality development was the annual school speech contest in which one of the Burmese students was chosen as a candidate to compete with the rest of the Chinese students on

a given topic. I observed the whole process of the Burmese student's preparation including writing up the speech, revising and rehearsing as well as performing in front of the public. Through this event, I also saw how the school evaluated the criteria of being a good Chinese speaker.

*Table 2: An overview of the participant observation at BHS*

Participants observation	Observed topics	Observed activities
Classroom observation	Subjects in Chinese language, Maths, English, Geography, History, Politics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Computer, PE, Music, Arts	Organisation of teaching content, teaching strategies and teaching points, questioning-and-answering interactions, teachers' comments in relation to language performance
	Burmese students in class	Seating arrangement, interactions with Chinese teachers of various subjects
	Burmese students' interaction during recess	Students' grouping, language choice, interests and conversation topics
Non-classroom observation	Daily and weekly school routines	Aerobic exercises, Monday national flag raising
	Outdoor excursions	Grouping of Burmese students, interesting topics in their informal conversation, their opinions on the visited places
	Annual Winter Sports Meeting	Discursive construction of nationalism, and other highly valued moralities through the opening speeches, rules of the games, marching orders of the athletes, slogans from different classes

	Annual Chinese Speech Contest	Evaluation of speech criteria, speech performance of students, experience of the Burmese candidate and Chinese teachers' comments on the Burmese student's language performance in contest
	Burmese students' interaction with themselves and with Chinese students outside class	Daily interests of male and female Burmese students, daily language choices at dormitories, at playgrounds, at school canteen, and during recess

### 3.3.3.3 Document collection

The collected data in this section can be divided into three types: institutional materials collected from BHS, language-related narrations generated by my onsite observations at BHS and written materials from a Chinese supplementary school in Myitkyina, Myanmar.

From BHS, I collected the school timetables, syllabi, school reports on Chinese language education for Burmese students, textual displays in classrooms and school murals, teaching materials, textbooks, students' certificates based on their various performance, students' compositions, diaries, examination sheets, exercise books, sticky notes, drafts of their casual conversation in class, school activities displayed on the school billboards. Moreover, at the final stage of my field work after they had come to trust me, I also collected students' sticky notes where they had their informal 'silent' conversation in class while their teachers were delivering lessons at the front. I also collected students' drafts where they casually wrote down some scripts in various languages. Though messy, these notes and scripts turned out to be quite useful for my understanding of what Burmese students were actually thinking during class time, and how they acted behind the scene.

Besides the documents obtained from BHS, I also collected relevant materials from the local educational bureau. These written materials included the annual educational report from all of the high schools in Tengchong, the local educational chronicle, the report on Chinese as the international language of education in Tengchong, and the criteria for promoting the standards and status of local high schools.

After establishing mutual trust with Burmese students, I asked my participants to write up their accounts of learning various languages and varieties and to keep a record of their daily language practices. In total, I collected 31 narratives on Burmese students' linguistic autobiographies, 31 narratives about their daily language practices while I was conducting the intensive field work. In October 2014 when I went back to visit the newly-recruited Burmese students at BHS, I also collected 41 narratives on an essay topic, "My Dream", which was submitted to their homeroom teacher to show their willingness and desire to work hard for their dreams.

Besides the documents from BHS, I also collected photos of linguistic landscapes from two bordering cities in Myanmar: Muse and Myitkyina. At the end of my field work, I went to a Chinese supplementary school in Myitkyina where some of my participants graduated from. From there, I collected school landscapes and written materials that were publicly displayed.

*Table 3. Overview of the documents collected during field work*

Documents obtained from	Types of documents	Content of documents
BHS	School materials	school timetables, syllabi, textual displays in classrooms and school murals, teaching materials, textbooks, students' award certificates, students' compositions, diaries, examination sheets, exercise books, sticky notes, drafts of their casual conversation in class, other school activities displayed on the school billboards

	Narratives	31 linguistic autobiographies, 31 daily accounts of language practices, 41 narrations of an essay on “My Dream”
Local educational bureau	Reports and chronicles	The annual educational reports from all of the high schools in Tengchong, the local educational chronicle, the reports on the Chinese as international language education in Tengchong and the criteria for promoting the standards and status of local high schools.
Chinese supplementary school at Myitkyina	School landscapes and written materials	School murals, recruitment advertisements, school activities on the billboards

#### 3.3.3.4 Interviews

After conducting the field work at BHS for four weeks, I started to interview my participants. From Monday to Friday, Burmese students were only available at lunch time from 12:00 to 2:00 pm and at dinner time from 5:40 to 7:00pm. I started to have individual interviews with whoever was available during these two periods. In total I interviewed 31 Burmese students and each interview lasted for at least 20 minutes. The interviews focused on Burmese students’ linguistic trajectories and their language learning experiences in China. In addition to students, I also interviewed 17 Chinese teachers including the principal, two school administrators, and 14 teachers teaching Burmese students in Year 10 and Year 11. The interviews with teachers were mostly about their teaching arrangements in class and language-related teaching experiences with Burmese students as well as their expectations on Burmese students. In addition, I was able to speak to two Burmese students’ parents and formally interviewed one of them. I participated in school events such as the Winter Sports Meeting and the School Cultural and Artistic Show. On these occasions, I informally interviewed Chinese students about their knowledge of Burmese students and other aspects of

intercultural relations in at BHS. I also had the opportunity to interview two employers who came to BHS as part of a recruitment exercise.

In addition to individual interviews, I also conducted six focus group interviews. After getting to know how students grouped themselves and what they were interested in, I started to select them based on their language backgrounds, their groupings and their common interests. Among these six group interviews, five groups were conducted with Burmese students. Each focus group had three to four participants, and we discussed language learning experiences, particularly at BHS and in Myanmar. One focus group was conducted with 10 Chinese students and focused on their interactions and experiences with intercultural communication in the school.

*Table 4. Overview of the interviews conducted*

Types of interviews	Number/gender /identity	Theme
Individual	16 female Burmese students	Their linguistic and cultural backgrounds, motivations of coming to BHS, parents' expectations, educational experiences at BHS
	15 male Burmese students	
	14 subject teachers	Teaching arrangements and language-related teaching experiences with Burmese students as well as their expectations on Burmese students
	2 school administrators	Previous Burmese students' graduation trajectories as well as their teaching and managing experiences with Burmese students
	1 principal	Management of linguistic diversity of Burmese students
	2 Burmese students' parents	Values between different languages and language varieties, expectations sending their

		children to BHS.
	2 Chinese employers	Language and intercultural competence required on Burmese students as well as other professional expectations on potential employees
Focus group	3 males from Lwegel	Previous language learning experiences in Myanmar, selection of friends, Chinese language learning experiences at BHS and interactions with Chinese students
	3 females from Panwa	
	1 male and 3 female from Myitkyina	
	3 males from Myitkyina and Lwegel	Subject learning experiences at their different Chinese schools in Myanmar
	2 males from Lwegel	Language values in relation to their migration experiences
	10 Chinese students	Interactions and intercultural communication with Burmese students

### 3.3.3.5 Online chat data

Another space to observe Burmese students' language related experiences is through online interaction. The dramatic spread of Internet use together with the popularity of smartphones in China has brought about millions of netizens who are interested in doing various online activities including language interactions. *QQ* and *WeChat* are considered to be the most two popular chat tools with more than 800 million users and 400 million subscribers, respectively (Hui, 2013; Liao, 2014; H. Liu, 2013), and these two mobile instant messaging services are also used by teenage Burmese students who tend to frequently update their life stories. These two popular tools have provided me with many insights into Burmese students' language practices and cultural attachment. My participants and I mutually added each other in our friend lists, and whatever we posted online via *WeChat* or *QQ* would be observable within the friend lists. My

intention of observing their language interactions online and offline were also informed at the initial stage of my fieldwork and this was also covered by my Ethics approval.

Most of the online data were collected in *WeChat* and a few from *QQ* due to Burmese students' preference for the former. The data collected were from three main features of *WeChat*: "moments", "group talk" and "individual talk". From these features, relevant data were either downloaded or screenshot. The selection of data was motivated by two factors: language and identity. The first category on language pertained to the language or language variety they chose to interact with whom under a given topic. The second category about identity included their cultural attachment and adaption to BHS and local society. It is noted that such data collection is an on-going process along with my thesis writing and such online interactions with my participants also provide me with an invaluable opportunity to extend my knowledge of their language-related migration experiences.

*Table 5. Overview of the online data collected*

Sources of data	Language			Identity	
	Language/ variety choice	Participants	Ideological discourse	Cultural attachment	School life
Group talk	<i>Putonghua</i> (simplified or traditional Chinese), dialect, Burmese, English, other languages	linguistic background, comments	pronunciation, written forms, values of certain language or language variety, language users, places and countries	Birthplace, Myanmar, China, dress codes, movies, songs, local life style	Codes of conduct, subject learning, school facilities
Moments					
Individual talk					

### 3.3.4 Researcher positionality

This research project continues an earlier study, a national project I participated in between 2009 and 2012 in China. That national project was about foreign language policies in ASEAN, and part of the concerns was the review of studies on Chinese and English language teaching and learning in ASEAN. My contribution to the national project (Li & Wang, 2011, 2013) equipped me with the textual understanding of the language issues in ASEAN and my further interest in language education with students from Myanmar. However, my understanding of language issues only remained at a textual level. In order to gain an in-depth understanding of language learning experiences of Burmese students, I decided to approach the issues raised in the earlier study more holistically by conducting an ethnographic study.

My ethnographic interest in doing multilingualism at the China-and-Myanmar borders derives from my own cultural background as well as my academic readings on critical sociolinguistic ethnography. As a border person from Yunnan province, I was born and have been brought up in a border town close to Myanmar (see Section 1.1.). My familiarity with the local context and my professional background working as a Chinese university teacher in Yunnan province helped to secure my position as a researcher at BHS.

In addition to my professional background, I found it useful to establish rapport and intimacy with the students by making use of my cultural and linguistic resources. Speaking Yunnan Mandarin, the local dialect, and showing my interests in Burmese language and the students' cultural practices helped me build friendship with my Burmese participants. My background as a Han Chinese was especially acknowledged by ethnic Chinese participants who often came to me to talk about how difficult it was for them to study at government schools in Myanmar, and how much effort they had spent in keeping their ethnic heritage in Myanmar. With the Kachin sub-group students, who were all Christians in Myanmar, I found it more effective to relate to them by showing my Christian identity and through our shared faith. For those who registered themselves as Shan, although I did not speak Shan, I found it useful to

engage with them through their hobbies and interests such as the book they were reading or the popular computer games they were playing. By spending time with them and participating in their activities, I obtained many interesting data and also learned to see these students as quite different from the ways they were described by their subject teachers and school administrators.

Regarding my relationship with the school teachers, most of them saw me as one of the professional teachers who understood their teaching difficulties and teaching concerns. They were quite open in explaining to me their struggles with teaching Burmese students (see Sections 6.2.4, 6.3.3 and 6.5). By including me as part of their team, I often heard the comments such as “do you feel that our students (Chinese students) are different from their students (Burmese students)” or “their students (Burmese students) are hard to discipline”. Different from subject teachers, school administrators preferred to tell their side of the story by only reporting their responsibility and efforts in managing Burmese students. They rarely mentioned about the challenges of educating Burmese students except when reporting how much the school had done for them in study and in accommodating them to their new environment. For them, I was more like an authority figure from the provincial level. The school principal kept calling me Professor Li or Dr Li rather than Ms Li, the common way people addressed me. Of course, it is also true that I spent far less time with these school leaders than with any other group of participants, and it may be that this fact in combination with the audio-recorded nature of the interview, made them feel constrained to speak freely and frankly.

In regard to conducting classroom observations and interviews, I was also conscious of “positional reflexivity” and concerns related to “exploitative relationships between analyst and the world” (Macbeth, 2001, p. 38). After being introduced by the school principal to the Burmese students and the class teachers, I did not video- or audio-record any classrooms or have any interviews in the first three weeks in order to reduce lesson disruption and alleviate participant anxiety. Over the first three weeks, I only kept on writing field notes during or after the observations. The classroom observations were videotaped and audiotaped in accordance with the subject teacher’s

readiness from the fourth week. Although I might have obtained richer data through daily videoing on the patterns of students' interaction in class with their teachers, I abstained from doing so out of my respect for the teachers' willingness to cooperate with me. This won me the teachers' trust, which facilitated my interviews with them later. Concerning the interviews, I was also conscious of the issues of power and representations (Talmy, 2010). I see the interviews with my participants as collaboratively constructed between interviewer and interviewee and as "particular representation or account of an individual's views or opinions" (Byrne, 2004, p. 182). During the process of the interviews, I did not merely follow the previously designed research questions but was actively involved in my participants' account of various stories by responding to their feelings, by raising my curiosity of certain issues and by empathising with their experiences.

At the same time, after hearing the life trajectories of Burmese students and observing their learning experiences in China, I found myself struggling with crossing the boundary of being an "objective" researcher. There was always a tension between "involvement and detachment" (Wolcott, 1988, p. 189). I often questioned myself whether I was intervening in the "natural" development of the research site. Should I just stand back concerning the cries of my participants? Or should I do something to "change" or to make their voices heard? Regarding the possibility of "changing" their unfavourable conditions, I positioned myself as a "researcher as resource" (Candlin & Sarangi, 2003, p. 279) and took a stand to assist these students acting like "participatory action researcher" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 26). Over the process of the field work, I sought whatever help I could find to facilitate the Burmese students' opportunities to participate in the school events. In the annual Chinese speech contest, for example, I helped one of the students with his writing and speech rehearsal, and his final achievement as the second prize winner improved the visibility of Burmese students' presence as well as their credibility as proficient Chinese language speakers in front of the whole school. Another research "intervention" was made in relation to the Burmese students' desire to go to university in China and their pre-destined trajectories. By mobilising my professional resources at university, I was able to access social contacts with stakeholders on the scholarship allocation and

university recruitment of ASEAN students. Having been informed of how to go to university in China and the documents they needed to prepare, I then guided my Burmese participants to prepare for their university study and such assistance continued after I came back from field work.

The boundary between the “field work” and “after field work” was not as clear as it may sound because my contact with the participants still continued especially during data translation as clarification of some responses in the interview as well some documents was necessary. While doing data transcription and analysis, I continued to help to guide and encourage them to take steps in pursuing their university dream. Among the 23 students in Year 11, 22 took *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi* (HSK), the standardised language test of Chinese, and this certificate was one of the important requirements for scholarship competition. For this, I worked out multiple choice answers of HSK online with them, and we figured out the testing skills necessary to tackle the test together. I “observed” from a distance in Australia as they went back to Barmo, a city in Myanmar, to take HSK and shared their excitement when they received their results of their HSK. In September 2014, 15 of them were selected and sponsored fully and partially to go to university in China. In other words, 65% of the Burmese students finally ended up going to university in China. Such achievement was also considered as a promotion of the image of BHS later at their annual school report in 2014. It is noted that such high percentage of university enrolment had never happened in the history of BHS according to the school annual reports of Burmese students’ educational trajectories after graduation from BHS.

In sum, as a participant observer I intervened in the educational trajectories of these Burmese students and assisted them in making their university dream in China a reality. These interventions arose out of my field work and basically happened after the data collection, which I considered a way to “repay” the students for having let me into their lives. Even now, I still keep in contact with most of my Burmese participants. I see their online interactions as prolonged friendship and mutual learning and sharing of my life and their life in another space while we are apart, and such sharing can last even after my PhD graduation.

### 3.4 Data treatment

In the study, the stages of data transcription, coding, interpreting and analysing are not separated from each other, each process comes before or after another and some steps overlap time and some are recursively evaluated and processed. In this section, I will describe how I managed the large amount of data I had collected.

#### *3.4.1 Ongoing analysis*

The data treatment involves the processes of inductive analysis “discovering patterns, themes and categories in one’s data” rather than predetermining the data (Patton, 2002, p. 454). Following this inductive approach, I see data collection and data analysis going hand in hand to achieve the aim of coherent interpretation “closer to subjectivist end of the continuum rather than to the objectivist end” (Patton, 2002, p. 454). Before the field work, the initial concepts and categories were derived from the reading of literature to guide the data collection. Over the process of the field work, I was immersed with various levels of data ranging from the Burmese students’ daily language practices to school and local policies and management practices. The analytic procedures of data analysis were ongoing during my participant observation at BHS. My understanding of the previous concepts and categories were confirmed, challenged and even modified during the process of field work. After the field work, my immersion in the data involved reading and rereading to uncover new themes from the processed data. At the same time, related research literatures were constantly consulted, theoretical concepts were also expanded and re-evaluated in reference to the multiple levels of data collected. My understanding of research inquiry was also strengthened by the constant online interactions with the selected participants. The online chat data were also considered as a confirmation of my analyses and provided further insights for the cross-examination of the analysed data and for the confirmation of transcribed data.

#### *3.4.2 Transcription*

The transcription involves the audio-recorded data such as individual and focus group interviews, classroom subject teaching, spontaneous interactions of Burmese students after class and during recess. Due to the limited time and large amount of data

recorded, I only transcribed the focus group interviews, the Burmese students' spontaneous interactions, subject teaching in class and one fifth of individual interviews. The rest of the individual interviews were transcribed by seven undergraduate students who could understand *Putonghua* and Yunnan Mandarin as all of the individual interviews were conducted in either *Putonghua* or the local dialect depending on the preference of my participants. All of the transcribers were employed from a local university in Yunnan during the process of field work through my personal social network. They all signed confidentiality agreements to protect the anonymity of the participants. Before the transcription, I trained them in the relevant transcription conventions through online contact via *QQ* and double-checked each of their transcription and stored it in my file for future analysis. During the process of transcription, I also consulted my Burmese participants for the translation of the Burmese language and other ethnic Burmese languages in their recorded interactions as well as some of the unclear message due to the recording environment. In sum, all of the transcription was written in Chinese language. If other languages such as Burmese, Shan, Lashi, Lisu or Lhaovo were recorded, I marked them and recorded the Chinese translation in the transcript after the translation had been confirmed by my participants. The process of transcription lasted for about one year from October 2013 to September 2014. After I returned to Macquarie University from my field work, consultation with participants for translations, confirmation of unclear recordings and back-and-forth proofreading of transcribed data were conducted online through *WeChat* or telephone calls. The transcription process also occurred concomitantly with other processes of data analysis such as the coding process.

### *3.4.3 Coding*

The data were coded for the purpose of generating categories and themes. There were two main stages of coding scheme: organising codes and grouping codes. The first stage of data coding was completed over the process of field work. All of the participants and the research site were anonymized by assigning pseudonyms. In addition, the other relevant contextual settings were also coded in the form of key words so that the researcher would be able to refer back to the relevant data efficiently. Such process of coding was accomplished during the field work and all of the

recorded data, written documents, and interviews were all coded in a chronological way so that I could trace the historical context of certain types of data. For example, the individual interviews were kept in a separate file from other types of data and an interview was recorded as “20131113Aqing” which means, this individual interview took place on the 13th of November, 2013 with the student anonymised as “Aqing”. Or, if I need the video-recorded data from the Physics class, I would go to the file named “classroom observation” and look for a document “20131113videoPhysics”. Accordingly, “20131213audiosportsmeeting” from the file of “non-classroom observation” refers to the audio-recorded Winter Sports Meeting held on the 13th of December 2013; “20130113audioconversation3MB2FB” from the file of “non-classroom observation” stands for the audio-recorded spontaneous conversation among three male and two female Burmese students.

The second stage of the coding process was grouping the codes “according to conceptual categories that reflect commonalities among codes” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 215). In grouping the codes, I jotted down notes in the margins of text from various types of data, and then wrote a memo on the emerging definition of a key concept such as “proficient Chinese speaker”, and I used different types of data to illustrate it. From the intensive reading and rereading of the data as well as the insights from the literature review, I created diagrams of relationships such as tables, diagrams, or graphs for visualising the data information and searched for the sub-clusters of this category as well as the interconnections between these sub-clusters. Gradually through immersion with the data, I saw the expanded dimensions of the category “proficient Chinese speaker” which was shaped by the sub-clusters such as “previous language background”, “nationality”, “township”, “ethnicity”, “race”. As the coding progressed, I also saw the complexity of the meaning of being a proficient Chinese speaker, which was intersected with various social actors. Over the process of grouping the codes, searching for the clusters and sub-clusters was constantly evaluated, re-evaluated and reformulated (Strauss and Corbin 1998). The emergent patterns were constantly noted and coded in the analytic memos, a number of initial codes were modified and merged together and gaps were also identified for further exploration. To strengthen the validity of coded patterns, cross-case analysis was conducted to test the data from

each participant until they were modified and confirmed (Josselson, 2007; Patton, 2002). This type of coding is actually a form of content analysis, one of the data analysis methods as described below.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

Doing CSE involves the combination of various disciplines in language, sociology and anthropology and this interdisciplinary study also generates data from various sources ranging from text to multimodal signs. Next, I will exemplify how I attempted to cope with various types of data by adopting various analytic methods.

#### **3.5.1 Content analysis**

Content analysis has been used extensively to examine our social life (Bos & Tarnai, 1999; Krippendorff & Bock, 2009). It is one of the popularly used analysis methods in language studies. Previous scholars doing multilingual studies (Gu, 2011b; Gu & Patkin, 2013; Hidalgo, 1995) tend to use such method explicitly and implicitly to analyse the emerging themes from the data, and the selection of themes is usually developed inductively from the bottom up. Content analysis has been broadly defined as “any technique for making inference by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969, p. 14). The strength of using such method is its flexibility of converging initially open coding with later focused coding (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). In other words, by using such method, researchers can identify general themes and later more specific themes are allowed to emerge through the continuous coding and recoding process, which could lead to in-depth interpretation of the underlying context. In my research, I have adopted content analysis for my individual interview data. I have 33 individual interviews with Burmese students about their Chinese language learning experiences in China. I have identified recurring patterns that are salient according to their frequency of occurrence and their relevance to language use, language attitude and identity construction and these patterns include the concepts of “proficient Chinese speaker”, “strong identification with and pride in ethnic Chinese identity”, “profitable value of speaking Chinese in Myanmar”, “insufficient knowledge about China” and “lack of motivation to learn Burmese.” Relationships between these themes were established and

categories emerged, informed by both the data and the relevant literature, and the emerging categories include “Chinese as mother tongue and Chinese as economically valuable”, “discrepancies in learning *Putonghua*”, “classroom organisations and teaching expectations”, “restricted identities and migrations aspirations” and “social reproduction of linguistic hierarchies”.

### 3.5.2 Narrative analysis

Of the data types collected, there are 107 narratives about Burmese students’ linguistic autobiographies, daily accounts of language practices and narrations of their future dreams. These data sources consist of accounts of their historical, social and emotional lives, which provide situated contexts for in-depth understanding of their language value, language choice and identity-related ideas. Narrative analysis is thus adopted as a lens to explore Burmese students’ pre-migration experiences and motivations. The narrative analysis is an interdisciplinary method that draws from traditions in literary theory, oral history, drama, psychology, folklore and film philosophy (Clandinin, 2006; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Stories and life experiences are considered as rich sites to understand participants’ awareness of language as it provides an overt social space about everyday problems (Malsbary, 2014). Such narrative inquiry believes that people’s stories and experiences can reflect “how a person enters the world” and how “their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful” (Clandinin et al., 2006, p. 479). In other words, the interpretation of an individual’s story cannot be separated from the specific contexts and their experiences are shaped by the larger social, cultural and institutional discourses. In the analysis, I look at how Burmese students constructed their previous language learning experiences in Myanmar, how they positioned themselves as a legitimate speaker of Chinese and Burmese, and how such positioning relates to their cultural and national identities, and how their previous trajectories shaped their understanding of China and Chinese language.

### 3.5.3 Multimodal discourse analysis

I documented the linguistic landscapes of BHS and its environs, including those landscapes displayed during important cultural events. I also obtained various policy

documents from the border high school and the local educational bureau. Such data was analysed drawing additionally on multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) because of its advantages in combining the multiple linguistic features and semiotic resources to construct the meanings in human social interaction (LeVine & Scollon, 2004; O'Halloran, 2004). MDA is defined as the extension of language study to “the study of language in combination with other resources such as images, scientific symbolism, gesture, action, music and sound” (Hyland, 2011, p. 120). The reason to choose MDA is because it shares its concern in “demystifying ideological relations of power and inequality” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10) and MDA provides the ways to “uncover the ideological processes that constitute common sense and everyday practice” (Rampton, 2007, p. 591). Thus, MDA allows me to address the issues of language, ideology and inequality in the context under examination by drawing on the relevant work of many scholars in the field (Cameron, 2001; Fairclough, 1992; Van Dijk, 1987; Van Leeuwen, 2008; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In analysing the multimodal features of linguistic landscapes, I focused on the size of signs, content of words, sounds and the geographical and spatial locations of the landscapes. The key concern in doing this analysis was to map out the language hierarchies and ideologies evident in the communicative modes of signs.

#### 3.5.4 Positioning analysis

Davies and Harré (1990, p. 48) define positioning as a discursive practice “whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and intersubjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines”. Positioning analysis links the identity construction with its linguistic forms in a broader ideological context. Positioning analysis involves three levels: self-positioning, ascribed identity and ideological positions (Barkhuizen, 2010). In analysing the positioning, linguistic forms such as lexical choices, use of tense and verbs can be considered as analytic units to refer to an individual’s cultural beliefs and the appropriation to certain identities in a particular time and place (Pavlenko, 2003). In my data, which I consider as a social practice (Talmy & Richards, 2011), positioning analysis was used to examine various perspectives on who could be considered as a proficient speaker of Chinese. Positioning theory was adopted to describe multiple ways through which Burmese

students positioned themselves or were being positioned by others as proficient or deficient speakers of Chinese in relation to certain national, ethnic and cultural identity labels. A particular focus was given on how such different positionings influenced the way Burmese students presented themselves as deficient speaker of Chinese in the transnational spaces and internalised their ideologies of speaking and writing Chinese language and how Burmese students negotiated their heritage identity and racialized identity.

### 3.5.5 Interaction analysis

Interaction analysis has been widely used in educational settings, especially in the study of classroom and non-classroom interactions (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Pérez-Milans, 2013; Rampton, 2006; Rex & Green, 2008; Tsui, 1995). Interaction analysis focuses on the interactions among people and between people in naturally occurring settings and the contents of analysis include “talk, to nonverbal interaction and the use of artefacts and technologies, identifying routine practices” (Jordan & Henderson, 1995, p. 31). Given that interaction analysis seeks to observe the naturally occurring interactions and has the advantages of presenting the original data in relation to its social contexts, I have selected two types of data for examination with this analytic lens: video-recorded classroom interactions from various subjects in class and non-classroom interactions between teachers and Burmese students and among Burmese students themselves during recess. From these two types of data, I identified the patterns of their everyday activities. In the analysis, I paid attention to questioning, teachers’ feedback and comments, language choice, the use of certain varieties, phonological and lexical choice in interaction between teachers and students and among Burmese students with various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In addition to the linguistic features of interaction, I also focus on the non-verbal gestures to understand how body movements and people’s use of space can construct different identities and social marginalisation.

### 3.6 Summary and limitations

In this chapter, I have described the rationale for following the qualitative paradigm in conducting a critical sociolinguistic ethnography to understand my research inquiry.

In presenting the fieldwork site and its strategic importance of location for China's opening to ASEAN, I have shown how and why I located my field work in a border high school from the selected border town. After describing the Burmese participants' ethnic and migration backgrounds, I explained how I collected different types of data at different stages of my field work. Moreover, I also reflected on how my different identities including as a Chinese university teacher, a researcher doing a PhD study abroad and as a local Han Chinese might influence my data collection. In addition, I presented how I processed my data including the analytic procedures, transcription details and coding schemes. In order to have an in-depth understanding of the data from various perspectives, I described how I adopted different analytical methods on various types of data and explained how I selected different types of data for examination through different analytic lenses.

Although I attempted multiple triangulations in the collection of different types of data from various sources and methods of analysis to address multiple perspectives of the research inquiry, there are several limitations to be addressed. First, there are no specific language policies available concerning the education of Burmese students in China due to the "sensitive" issues of the borderland, as I was told after consulting many officers from the local and provincial bureaus. In order to understand the ideological discourse of language policy, I then turned to the publicly circulating discourses such as newspapers and school landscapes for further insights. Second, the number of my participants might raise concerns. However, my study is not a participant ethnography but an institutional ethnography with a specific focus on a sub-set of actors in the institution. The purpose of the study is not to generate any patterns of educating Burmese migrant students in China but to address the complex issues of Burmese students' language learning experiences in relation to the intersections of various social actors such as their nationality, class, language and ethnicity. Third, my Burmese participants are all teenagers and their language learning experiences can be assumed to be different from those of younger or older Burmese students at primary and tertiary levels. Furthermore, all of my participants are members of ethnic minorities, and there can be no doubt that their language attitudes and linguistic backgrounds must be different from those Burmans, the dominant ethnic

group of Myanmar. So, it would be valuable to expand the range of Burmese participants in age, gender, ethnicity, region, and family background in future research.

## **Chapter Four Previous educational experiences**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the participants' educational experiences prior to attending BHS, the senior high school that constitutes the key site where this research took place. The reasons for examining their previous learning trajectories are twofold: to understand the meaning of learning Chinese in Myanmar and to reveal the tensions that may emerge between the previous practices and ideologies and those that participants encountered at BHS. In this chapter, I have divided my participants into two groups based on their migration trajectories. Twenty-one participants came to China for the first time to attend BHS, and their previous educational experiences are discussed in Sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4. The remaining eight participants had received most of their prior education in China as they had already studied in a border primary school and a junior high school since Year Three. The experiences of the latter group, who had a total of seven years' study in China prior to attending BHS, will be treated separately in Section 4.5. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how participants' previous learning trajectories have shaped their identities and constitute the background to their migration to China for formal education.

### **4.2 State-run schools in Myanmar**

#### 4.2.1 The education system

##### *4.2.1.1 Schooling structures*

The structure of government education system in Myanmar can be divided into two main categories: basic education and higher education. There is also pre-school education for children under five years of age, but attendance there is not compulsory. This section only focuses on the primary and secondary education levels because of their relevance to my Burmese participants' previous educational backgrounds. Education policy is centralised by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in Yangon, and implementation of the policy is shared by two departmental offices under MOE, one in Mandalay (for Upper Myanmar) and one in Yangon (for Lower Myanmar)

(Irrawaddy, 2011). The following table provides the information on the structure of Myanmar's education system ("*Education System in Myanmar : Self-Evaluation and Future Plans* "; Ministry of Education, 2004; *World Data on Education Myanmar VII Edi., 2011*).

*Table 6. Structure of Myanmar's education system*

Basic education		
Level		Years
Primary	Lower	3
	Upper	2
Secondary	Lower	4
	Upper	2

According to the Ministry of Education in Myanmar, the term “basic education” extends for 11 academic years including a five-year primary education, a four-year junior high school education and a two-year senior high school education. The first stage of basic education is primary schooling, which is compulsory. Primary education lasts five years and the admission age is 5+, and at the end of primary school, pupils are eligible to enter secondary education if their academic performance in exams and marks obtained in the Comprehensive Personal Record (CPR) are equal to or above the set pass mark. CPR includes students’ participation activities such as having at least 75% school attendance and abiding in school rules and regulations.

The second stage of basic education is secondary schooling which is not compulsory and lasts six years. During these periods, students need to pass two national exams: the Basic Education Middle School Examination, which is necessary to advance to the senior high education and the Basic Education High School Examination (matriculation) for the university entrance exam. At the upper secondary level, students are given compulsory and elective subjects. Burmese language, English and

Mathematics are required subjects and students need to choose three subjects from electives on offer: Physics, Chemistry, Geography, Biology, Economics and History. At the end of their secondary education, students participate in the Basic Education High School Examination (matriculation) for the university entrance exam. Higher education is accessible upon the completion of basic education and passing the university entrance examination. Undergraduates are admitted into different programs according to their academic performance in matriculation.

Concerning the curriculum, there are three core subjects from Year 1 to Year 11 at the basic education level. Burmese, English and Mathematics are given the most importance compared to other subjects (See Table 2 below). Regarding language policies, Burmese and English are the most important languages in government education system. From Year 1 to Year 9, Burmese is the sole medium of instruction; from Year 10 to Year 11 and at tertiary level, English is adopted as the medium of instruction (Fen, 2005, pp. 96-97).

*Table 7. Weekly lesson plans for primary education*

*(World Data on Education Myanmar VII Edi., 2011)*

Subject	Number of weekly teaching period in each grade				
	Lower primary		Grade 3	Upper primary	
	Grade 1	Grade 2		Grade 4	Grade 5
Burmese language	11	11	11	8	8
English language	4	4	4	6	6
Mathematics	7	7	7	7	7
General studies	9	9	9	—	—
Basic science	—	—	—	4	4
Social studies	—	—	—	8	8
Aesthetic	3	3	3	3	3

education					
Physical education	4	4	4	3	3
Activities in school	2	2	2	1	1
Total weekly periods	40	40	40	40	40

The quality of education in Myanmar used to be one of the highest in Southeast Asia in the 1950s, but decades of under-investment and civil strife have led to the current weak state of education system across the whole country (Lall, 2008). Even though Myanmar has a strong desire to improve its educational system in order to build up its economic strength and achieve results comparable to those of other members from ASEAN (*Development of Education in Myanmar* 2004), there are currently many issues and challenges to overcome.

#### 4.2.1.2 Challenges of state education

Many previous studies have highlighted the poor performance of Myanmar's education system, and these studies have also identified various problems and challenges (Aye & Sercombe, 2014; Djité, 2011; Lwin, 2007; Tin, 2000; Wilson, 2008). These challenges include inadequate finance, centralised curriculum, aggressive language policies and aggravated ethnic relations.

The current education system in Myanmar is underfunded. According to the recent report (Haydena & Martin, 2013, p. 51), only 1.7% of the country's GDP was invested in education in 2012-2013, and this level is well below the average of 3.5% of GDP for ASEAN countries. The lack of government funds has led to the deteriorating education system in Myanmar over the past five decades. In many areas, schools are poorly equipped and usually lack basic teaching materials while teachers and professors lack basic qualifications (Lorch, 2008). At the time of independence in 1948, Myanmar played a leading role in education and economy in Southeast Asia,

but now its level of illiteracy in rural areas is twice as high as it was in the time of colonisation (Djité, 2011, p. 48). Despite the government's recent report on the increasing number of schools: "over 41,000 basic education schools in Myanmar, with 0.246 million teachers and 8.2 million students" (Aye & Sercombe, 2014, pp. 156-157) and 164 higher-education institutions in 2012 (Haydena & Martin, 2013, p. 50), there still exists a large gap in the formal education system in terms of accessibility and quality. For example, the distribution of school resources between central Myanmar and border regions are not balanced: one school for five villages at central areas but one school for 25 villages in the border areas (Lall, 2008, p.133).

The lack of sufficient educational funds also leads to the low teaching quality and poor educational outcome. Government school teachers are poorly paid (Vicary, 2014, p. 11). Most of them cannot live on their meagre salary and many have resorted to providing extra fee-based private tutoring classes. It is said that the mid-point salary level of a university lecturer is estimated at about US \$150 per month, but private tutoring classes in cities such as Yangon and Mandalay are estimated to attract in excess of US \$250 per month for each individual student (Haydena & Martin, 2013, p. 51). Due to the lack of government funds for teachers' salary, an increasing number of teachers have sought additional income through private tutoring. In some cases, teachers have even stopped teaching the required subject matters in regular classes and students have to pay for private tutoring in order to pass exams (Lorch, 2008, p.160). Such decrease in school hours has obvious negative implications for equity and overall student performance. That students are charged extra tuition fees becomes a huge burden to individual families who cannot afford the high cost of private tutoring classes.

Apart from the imbalanced distribution of school resources and declining teaching quality, the centralised curriculum has posed great challenges across the country especially in remote and border areas. The current curriculum is criticised as "Burmanisation" designed by the dominant group to produce "excessive nationalism" because it has not taken into consideration the ethnolinguistic diversity at border remote areas (Lwin, 2007, p. 20). In Myanmar, about one-third of the population

consists of ethnolinguistic minorities who are mostly living at border regions, whereas the dominant Burman group takes up about 60% to 70% of the population mainly inhabiting in the central regions. Since its independence in 1947, the Burmese government has been keen on national consolidation by imposing a homogenous national identity across the country. However, such national identity construction is in effect the promotion of Burman identity as the norm. Watkins (2007, p. 281) notes that the nationalist sentiment essentialises Burman culture, Burmese language and Buddhism as national symbols. Steinberge (2001, p. 55) also points out that educational institutions are in fact “designed to educate minority youth in Burman ways”.

One of the consequences of standardised tests for advancement to higher levels of education is low completion and high drop-out rates in remote and border areas where the majority of students are predominantly non-Burman. At the primary level, all of the pupils need to take final examinations and demonstrate proficiency in academic subjects, especially in the three core subjects, Burmese, English and Mathematics, in order to move to a higher grade (*Development of Education in Myanmar* 2004). According to a recent report, only 59.9% could pass the exam and complete five years of schooling (Djité, 2011, p. 48). In 2012, there were 467,846 students who participated in matriculation examination, but only 34.4% passed the national test (Haydena & Martin, 2013, p. 53). Such low passing rates are caused not only by the insufficient government fund, but also by the long-term neglect of ethnolinguistic diversity and “aggressive” ways against non-Burman (Aye & Sercombe, 2014, p. 150). Over the past decades, ethnic minorities feel that they have been ignored and deliberately marginalised (Aye & Sercombe, 2014, p. 156). Even though in some border areas, teaching and learning ethnic minority languages has not been prohibited in theory, there is a lack of political and financial support to maintain or develop ethnic culture and languages (Aye & Sercombe, 2014).

The implementation of Burmese language as sole medium of instruction also poses many educational disadvantages to ethnic minority students at their young age. In several border areas, the illiteracy rate is estimated to be as high as 90% (Smith, 2005,

p.59), and hardly anyone can read and write in the Frontier Areas such as in the eastern Shan state (Pedersen, 2005, p. 165). In Myanmar, about 30% of children do not speak Burmese before they go to school (Djité, 2011, p. 48). Language undoubtedly poses as a main obstacle for ethnic minority students' access to formal education. In addition, linguistic obstacles also pose a challenge for both Burman teachers and ethnic minority students. In government schools, teachers employed are mostly Burman and do not speak the local ethnic language (Lorch, 2008, p.163). The communication between teachers and students undoubtedly influences teaching quality and the educational outcomes. While imposing the standard status of Burmese language at various government schools, the Burman privilege is reinforced and ethnic minority culture and identities are devalued and even attacked. Historically, ethnic minority groups have been stigmatised as primitive, backward and in need of guidance (Lambrecht, 2004). Those living in Frontier Areas such as Kachin and Shan find themselves "most disenfranchised" (Callahan, 2007, p. xiii). Their membership in the national group is still suspect and conditional (Walton, 2013).

Overall, this section has described the current state of Myanmar education system and has also identified the main challenges that negatively impact the educational outcomes. These challenges include the insufficient fund on educational resources, low completion and high drop-out rates in primary schools and lack of linguistic and ethnic considerations in implementing language policies in peripheral regions. Its centralised curriculum has ignored ethnolinguistic diversity and has further disadvantaged the ethnic minority students' learning outcomes. The implementation of Burmese as a national language only privileges Burman identity as the norm while it disfranchises non-Burman cultures and identities. In my study, all of my Burmese participants are ethnic minorities and they are all from Frontier Areas. Their language learning experiences at government schools will be explored against the background of the educational policies and social constraints ethnic minority students experience as described in this section.

## 4.2.2 Participants' experiences

### 4.2.2.1 Overview

As explained in the previous section, the educational system in Myanmar has been blamed for ignoring ethnolinguistic diversity and for leaving ethnic minority students at a disadvantage. This section will explore the participants' experiences at school. It starts with an overview of their educational backgrounds. After mapping out the educational trajectories of participants, detailed descriptions are given of their Burmese, English and content subject learning experiences.

*Table 8. Overview of participants*

Pseudonym	Year of birth	Gender	Language(s) spoken prior to entering school	Years of schooling completed in Myanmar
Adai	1996	Male	Shan	4
Benke	1996	Male	Lashi, Lhaovo	4
Chang	1996	Male	Yunnan Mandarin	3
Chaofu	1995	Male	Yunnan Mandarin	13
Chongjie	1995	Female	Lhaovo, Lashi	4
Gong	1996	Male	Yunnan Mandarin, Shan	4
Huangjing	1998	Female	Yunnan Mandarin	4
Kaicheng	1995	Male	Yunnan Mandarin	12
Kongdan	1995	Female	Lhaovo, Lashi	4
Jinfeng	1996	Female	Yunnan Mandarin	3
Jinhua	1995	Female	Yunnan Mandarin	3
Laxi	1996	Male	Lisu	4
Liang	1994	Female	Yunnan Mandarin	11

Lifu	1995	Male	Yunnan Mandarin	0
Lingling	1994	Female	Yunnan Mandarin	12
Liumei	1998	Female	Yunnan Mandarin	0
Longnu	1997	Female	Lhaovo, Lashi	3
Qidong	1996	Male	Yunnan Mandarin	11
Qimei	1998	Female	Yunnan Mandarin	0
Shenggui	1995	Male	Yunnan Mandarin	3
Wamulai	1996	Female	Lisu	4
Wu	1994	Female	Yunnan Mandarin, Burmese	10
Xia	1995	Male	Yunnan Mandarin	2
Xiaomei	1997	Female	Yunnan Mandarin	7
Yangchao	1997	Male	Yunnan Mandarin	3
Yanglingxian	1996	Female	Yunnan Mandarin, Shan	4
Yingying	1998	Female	Yunnan Mandarin, Burmese	9
Yinzhaoyang	1996	Male	Yunnan Mandarin, Shan	4
Zhaojiawang	1995	Male	Yunnan Mandarin, Shan	4
Zhaoyingdi	1995	Female	Yunnan Mandarin	10
Zhengyuan	1998	Male	Yunnan Mandarin	9

These participants were born in the period between 1994 and 1998, when border communication between Myanmar and China became increasingly frequent and significant (see 1.2). Therefore, it is not surprising that, with the exception of Benke,

30 out of 31 participants were the children (or in some cases the grandchildren) of Chinese migrants to Myanmar.

Regarding their linguistic repertoires, most of them speak Yunnan Mandarin as their mother tongue because of their Han background and because Yunnan is their families' place of origin. Yunnan Mandarin belongs to Southwestern Mandarin (Kurpaska, 2010). The remaining participants speak Shan, Lhaovo, Lashi or Lisu as their mother tongues. These languages are indigenous to cross-border groups living on both sides of the China- Myanmar border (see 1.2). The Shan in Myanmar are considered the same ethnic group as the Dai in China. Lhaovo and Lashi belong to the Kachin branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family, and these two languages share many similar features in phonology, grammar and lexicon (Sun et al., 2007, pp.772-835). They are closely related to Jingpho in China. Finally, Lisu belongs to the Yi branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family and is spoken on both sides of the border (Sun et al., 2007). Considering their length of years of public schooling, most participants (21 out of 31; 68%) did not complete their primary school education before they migrated to China. Such low completion rate confirms the previous studies on the educational trajectories of ethnic minorities in the border regions of Myanmar (see Section 4.2.1.2). In the following, I will describe the impact the government language policies outlined above have had on the participants in this study.

#### *4.2.2.2 Burmese language learning experiences*

Most of my participants reported that their negative experiences were mainly due to their lack of Burmese language proficiency and their minority status. Lack of interest in early schooling was frequently found among ethnic Chinese participants:

缅文我只读了两年，不知道怎的就是不想读。

I studied Burmese in primary school for only two years. I don't know why I just did not want to study. (Xia; Autobiography)

Xia was sent to school by his parents who were the first generation of migrants working as farmers in Myanmar and who had no knowledge of Burmese language.

Due to his family condition, Xia could neither afford to have private tutorial classes to improve his Burmese proficiency, nor could his parents help him with his study. Later in the interview, Xia explained that he had to rely on his classmates' translation to understand his teachers who were Burman and did not speak Chinese language. Consequently, Xia only stayed in the government school for two years.

Similar to Xia, Huangjing did not speak Burmese prior to schooling. Different from Xia, Huangjing could afford for the private tuition classes to pass the final examinations and progress further. However, Huangjing did not complete her primary school education and stopped at Year 4 because she felt lonely and did not have ethnic Chinese friends in class.

到了四年级学得懵懵懂懂的，觉得学的没有意思。而且那个时候汉人学生没有几个了，其他同学说的都是缅语和景颇语，听不懂。

In Year 4, I did not completely understand Burmese language and I felt I had no interest in learning it. What's more, there were few Han classmates in class. My classmates spoke Burmese and Jingphaw. I could not understand them.

(Huangjing; Autobiography)

Huangjing spent four years learning Burmese language at school but despite this she was still unable to communicate with her classmates. Because of her limited proficiency in Burmese, she could not make friends with her classmates, which in turn made her feel marginalised from her peers at the primary school.

It is noted that ethnic Chinese students tend to address themselves interchangeably either as “汉人” (Han or Han people) or “华人” (ethnic Chinese) or “华侨” (overseas Chinese). These terms are highly acknowledged both in the historical and current Chinese official discourses (see sections in 1.2 and 5.2). When they refer to the Chinese language, they alternately use different terms such as “汉语” (*Hanyu*), “中文” (Chinese language), even “(云南)方言” ((Yunnan) Mandarin). In this thesis, I will

not make such a distinction but will simply translate them into respective terms based on my participants' usage unless my participants have intentions to distinguish themselves from others regarding their identity and language.

For the participants who succeeded in completing primary school education, their linguistic autobiographies documented many learning difficulties including exerting extra efforts to learn the Burmese language in order to secure their study. Chaofu reported his extremely difficult working experiences from Year 1 to university:

因为自己不是缅人，为了学会缅语会写缅字，到星期六日的时候，一个人在家写了又写，读了又读，几乎放假时间都没有好好休息。到四年级的时候自己会缅语了。虽然没有缅人说得好写得好，但是在我们华侨里面我已经算是很好了(...) 为了考上缅文高中，我把我的梦想都放弃了。我喜欢足球，已经是省里的球员，代表我们省比赛得过三个冠军(...) 到了十一年级，也就是高中最后一个年级，我努力了又努力，从原本一双好眼睛变成现在的近视眼。

I myself was not Burman. In order to speak Burmese and write Burmese, on Saturdays and Sundays, I stayed at home alone and kept writing and reading [Burmese language]. I rarely had a good rest during holidays. Although I could not speak and write as well as Burman people, I was pretty good among us ethnic Chinese (...) In order to go to Burmese senior high school, I even gave up my dream. I liked football. I used to be on our delegation won three champions for our province in the national match (...) when I reached Year 11, the final year in senior high school. I tried and tried, as a result, my good eyes became short-sighted. (Chaofu; Autobiography)

Despite all these efforts, Chaofu had to leave university after one and half years because civil war broke out in Northern Myanmar between the ethnic Kachin Army and the Burmese military army in 2012.

While working hard at learning Burmese language, many participants reported that they had been singled out in class in one way or another. Shenggui was once ridiculed by his teacher in front of the class.

缅文考试的时候我考了零蛋。老师还让我拿着那个大零蛋去给我老妈，叫我老妈炒着给我吃。

When I took the Burmese language exam, I got zero. My teacher asked me to take this big egg [zero] and give it to my mother and ask her to fry it for me. (Shenggui; Autobiography)

According to Shenggui, “zero” could be understood as “egg” in terms of their similarity in shape. Because of his poor performance in the Burmese language exam, his intelligence was also reduced to “zero”.

Apart from mocking remarks, many participants suffered from various types of corporal punishments such as spanking on the palms or buttocks if they did not answer their teacher’s questions correctly, if they did not submit their homework on time or if they performed badly in exams. Adai, a Shan speaker, shared his experience:

在缅语学校老师问了我一个问题，我就回答，然后他（她）就打我。后来我才知道我做错了要道歉，但用的却是顶嘴的话。

At the government school, my teacher asked me a question and I gave an answer. After that the teacher beat me. Later, I realized that I got the wrong answer. I should have apologised when I gave a wrong answer, but I used wrong words and ended up sounding like I was talking back intentionally. (Adai; Autobiography)

Besides the linguistic disadvantage, their minority status also posed a problem, and many participants were intentionally excluded by their teachers in class seating arrangements and strictly monitoring the use of language. Kaichen reported this story:

李佳: 读缅文时, 谁是你们的缅文老师, 缅族还是傣族?

开臣：缅族老师多，傣族老师有那么几个。从小学读到大学，只要有缅族老师不准我们坐在第一排。还有写日记的时候都是悄悄写。

李佳:为什么？

开臣：缅族老师不准写。我们写汉语。

Li Jia: When you studied at Burmese schools, who were your Burmese teachers? Burman or Shan?

Kaichen: The majority of them were Burman and only a few were Shan. From primary school to university, Burman teachers did not allow us to sit at the first row. What's more, when we wrote our diary, we did it secretly.

Li Jia: Why?

Kaichen: Burman teacher disallowed us to write. We wrote our diary in Chinese. (Interview with Kaichen)

Contrary to the above negative experiences, Yingying was the only participant who reported that she liked schooling because of her bilingual proficiency.

从小就是家里的两个帮佣带我，他们都是缅人(...)我三岁半时候就会说一口流利的缅话(...)到了上缅语学校的年纪，妈妈送我去上学，上课时老师说的话我都听得懂，而旁边的小孩则是一头雾水。老师和小孩说的话都是我在中间帮忙翻译，老师经常夸我，还让我当班长。

I was brought up by two housemaids at home. They were both Burman people (...) when I was three and half, I could speak fluent Burmese language (...) when I reached the Burmese schooling age, my mother sent me to school. In class, I could understand my teacher completely whereas those sitting next to me were all lost. I did the interpretation for my teacher and the classmates. My teacher often praised me and even selected me as monitor. (Yingying; Autobiography)

Because of her proficiency in Burmese language, Yingying could easily follow the class whereas many of her classmates seemed to be lost due to their lack of Burmese language proficiency. In her narration, Yingying did not explain whether her teacher could speak or understand ethnic minority languages, but it was clear that Yingying's linguistic proficiency in Chinese and Burmese helped her classmates and teacher communicate with each other successfully. Yingying's bilingual capacity also won her credit as a monitor, an admirable position among her classmates. However, Yingying's story showed the same key point that being of an ethnic minority status and lacking proficiency in Burmese language resulted in negative experiences. Yingying found herself fortunate because of her proficiency whereas her classmates did not understand Burmese and she had to help them. It was having the knowledge of the medium of language instruction that made Yingying access learning resources whereas those who lack such knowledge were seen as problematic.

#### *4.2.2.3 English language learning experiences*

Besides the learning difficulties resulting from the lack of Burmese language proficiency, most participants reported that they found it a great challenge to learn English. In fact, many participants claimed that English was the most difficult subject in government schools. The following description of their English language experiences reveals the extra linguistic burdens on ethnic minority students at the borderland.

In Myanmar, English is a compulsory subject from the first year of schooling, and it is one of the three core subjects in primary school (see Table 7). In order to pass the exams and to progress to the next grade, students have to show evidence of their English proficiency. Right at the beginning of their enrolment, many participants feel the pressure of learning the English subject. Xia, an ethnic Chinese from an economically disadvantaged family, described his English learning difficulties:

我觉得英语一直是最怕的一门课，上英语课就像听天书一样(...)听不懂时问老师，老师让我买字典自己查，字典也是缅英字典，看也看不懂么。如果先学好缅语再学英文可能会好一点。

I felt that English was the most terrifying subject for me. When I had English lesson, it was like listening to the book of heaven (...) when I did not understand English, I asked the teacher, but she suggested that I buy a dictionary and check the words by myself. However, the dictionary was written in Burmese and English, and I couldn't read it. If I had acquired Burmese language first, it might have been easier to learn English. (Xia; Autobiography)

Xia did not speak and write Burmese before he went to the government school. While he was struggling to learn the Burmese language, he had to learn another foreign language—English. For Xia this meant learning one foreign language through the medium of yet another foreign language, which caused a great deal of burden.

Some participants succeeded in passing the English examinations. Such success was usually due to extra financial investment into additional tuition. However, not all of the participants could afford to attend private tuition classes.

小时候我们都是请家教，一对一的教。主要是我的英语不好，我们缅甸除了缅文，别的科目[10 年级后]都用英语教。

When I was young we employed tutors who tutored us one-on-one. It's mainly because my English was not good. In Myanmar, all of the subjects would be taught in English except in the subject of Burmese language [since Yr 10]. (Lingling; Autobiography)

Lingling's parents had made a substantial educational investment into her English study since her young age. Despite having received English private tuition throughout her schooling, Lingling still failed in her university entrance exam because of English.

#### *4.2.2.4 Content learning experiences*

In Myanmar, English and Burmese are not only two core subjects but also the media of instruction at government schools. The following section is about the participants' experiences in learning content subjects delivered through the medium of Burmese from Year 1 to Year 9, and English from Year 10 to Year 11 and at university (see

Section 4.2.1). Both Burmese and English, as media of instruction, imposed various types of challenges on ethnic minority students' content learning at government schools.

Due to their limited proficiency in Burmese, many participants reported that they had difficulty in understanding content subjects. Language-heavy subjects such as History were mentioned as a source of particular difficulties:

李佳: 还记得上缅文学校时, 哪一门课难学一点?

学生: 历史。全部都是缅语写的, 虽然给你图画看, 但什么都看不懂, 也听不懂老师在讲什么。

Li Jia: Which subject did you find it difficult to learn at government schools?

Zhaojiawang: History class. It's all written in Burmese language. Although there were pictures to refer to, I couldn't understand the texts. Neither could I understand what the teacher was talking about in class. (Interview with Zhaojiawang)

According to Zhaojiawang, he was taught History lessons in Social class in Year Four, and it was also in Year Four that he failed most of his exams. Consequently, he could not progress to Year Five and failed to complete his primary schooling.

Apart from finding the History class, linguistically challenging, students were also generally disinterested in the subject matter:

听不懂历史课说的是什么意思, 不感兴趣。都是在讲以前他们那个皇帝多么多么富有, 每次上课都是打瞌睡(...)现在历史在我脑子里什么都没有, 就是当时为了考试背下来。

I didn't understand the History class. I was not interested in it either. In the History class, it's all about how wealthy their kings used to be in ancient time. I often fell asleep in class- (...) now I couldn't remember any history in my mind and I only recited it for passing exams. (Interviews with Liang)

Liang used the third person possessive pronoun “their” instead of the second person possessive pronoun “our” to create an US vs Them dichotomy and to exclude herself from the Burmese group, while she was recalling her learning experiences.

In fact, not all of the participants shared the historical interpretations in the textbook which was centrally compiled by the Myanmar government. Xiaomei, a student from Kachin, offered her doubts in History subject.

不喜欢历史课, 感觉乱乱的, 什么说法都有, 有些说的不对。

I don't like History class. I felt it was a mess, full of different interpretations and some interpretations were not correct. (Interview with Xiaomei)

Xiaomei is from Kachin where some regions have their own administrative autonomy, and some regions have their military armed forces which are not under government control. In other words, the Myanmar central government cannot influence those regions where they have their own power to decide what to teach and how to teach the local students (see Section 1.2).

Contrary to the participants' sentiments on the History class, many participants found it easier to learn Maths in government schools. Their interest in learning Maths started with their enrolment at the school.

喜欢学习数学, 因为当时华文学校教的和缅文教的差不多, 很多学的东西华文学校已经教过了, 虽然写的字不一样, 但算法一样, 所以容易学。

I liked learning Maths. The teaching of Maths at government school was similar to that of Chinese supplementary school. Much of our knowledge on Math was already acquired at Chinese supplementary school before. Although there was a difference in written languages, Maths had the same formula, so it was easy to learn Maths. (Interview with Xia)

It is worth noting that Xia and other ethnic Chinese participants went to Chinese supplementary schools while they were studying at government schools (see detailed discussion in Section 4.3). It was the knowledge obtained from Chinese school that

made him capable of handling Maths subject at government school. Even though he did not understand Burmese language at the government school, he could figure out how to calculate the numbers by employing the same rules. It was those shared non-linguistic formula that made Xia feel easier to follow the class and perform well in Maths. However, doing well in Maths alone could not help Xia succeed in other subjects because he had to pass the exams for other subjects, which were all taught in the Burmese language. This was confirmed by the fact that Xia only stayed at the government school for two years, and the transferred knowledge from Chinese supplementary school could not help him secure his student's position at Burmese school since the Burmese language was the only medium of instruction at the primary school.

The Burmese language is the only medium of instruction from primary school to junior high school (Year 1 to Year 9). From Year 10 to Year 11 and to university, the medium of instruction changes from Burmese to English. All of the subjects except Burmese are taught in English. Many participants reported that they had great difficulty in adapting to the changed medium of instruction. Chaofu and Qidong both felt incapable of handling the subjects they used to be good at.

到了十年級，考試全部都用英語答題。有些題目會繞着你，讀得很吃力，到底在講什麼意思都不清楚。要是能用緬文就好了。

In Year 10, all of the examinations must be answered in English. Some questions were confusing and I found it hard to understand them clearly. If only Burmese language could be used. (Interview with Chaofu)

Chaofu felt that his competence in subject learning was challenged as he could not understand the examination questions which were all given in English. However, it should be emphasised that his difficulty during the exam was not caused by his lack of academic knowledge but the changed language of examination. Because of English, his academic performance was negatively impacted. Similarly, Qidong who used to be good at Maths, also reported his learning difficulty because of English:

数学课觉得读得难了，缅文数学用英语教，很多公式难记，就感觉很多东西[十年级]一下子突然冒出来。

I found it hard to learn Maths because Maths was taught in English at the government school and it was difficult to remember many formulas in English. I just felt that many things suddenly appeared [since Year 10].

It is true that the learning difficulties of core subjects such as Maths at secondary high education were expected to be more challenging than those of lower level such as junior high school, but Qidong's learning difficulties seemed to be associated with English as he found it an extra burden to recite new and tricky formulas in English. In Myanmar, from Year 10, many new subjects such as Biology and Chemistry were offered and delivered in English. It was just the changed medium of instruction that diminished many participants' learning interest in the new subjects. Liang reported her frustration in learning the new subjects delivered through English.

李佳：缅文学校哪一门课难学一点？

梁：不喜欢上化学课。

李佳：为什么？

梁：到底在讲什么都不知道，什么水分子结构， $H_2O$ ？根本就搞不懂化学在学什么。

李佳：有没有补习过？

梁：补习也没用，整个学校就是那个老师，上课是那个教师，晚上补习也是那个教师，反正教化学的就是他，很讨厌学。还有生物课也是一样，好多概念都不懂。本来就难学，还用英语来教。

李佳：那班里那些英语不好的学生学得怎么样？

梁：有些学生几乎完全听不懂啊。学校有些家庭困难的学生就没办法上补习班，他们的成绩在下降，一直在垫底。

Li Jia: At the government school, which subject did you find challenging?

Liang: I didn't like learning Chemistry.

Li Jia: Why?

Liang: I just didn't know what Chemistry was about. What was the Chemistry formula of water, H<sub>2</sub>O? What on earth was I learning Chemistry for?

Li Jia: Did you attend any tuition class then?

Liang: It was useless to attend it because there was only one Chemistry teacher at the school. He was the only one who taught us in class and he was also the one who gave the private teachings after class. I hated learning Chemistry. The same was true of Biology class and I just didn't understand many concepts. It was really hard to learn them in English.

Li Jia: What about those students whose English proficiency was not good in your class?

Liang: Some students didn't understand the class [taught in English] almost completely. At our school, some students came from poor families, they could not afford tuition classes, and their scores kept dropping always at the bottom of the class. (Interview with Liang)

The learning challenges for Liang and her classmates seemed to be associated with many aspects: the content of new subjects, lack of financial support to pay for tutorial classes, lack of sufficient teaching resources and the linguistic challenge brought up by English in all subject areas. However, among these challenges, English, the newly-introduced medium of instruction, seemed to pose the greatest challenge for both high- and low-achieving students. It widened the learning distance between the good and poor students, and made it most unlikely for those financially disadvantaged to understand the content knowledge, to improve their academic performance and to graduate from high school.

#### 4.2.3 Summary

Most of my participants had not been exposed to the Burmese language before starting school. Because of their lack of Burmese proficiency, they experienced many learning difficulties, particularly with regard to language-heavy subjects such as History or English. Unable to display their knowledge through the medium of Burmese, many participants were subject to ridicule and bullying. Their linguistic disadvantage was

further aggravated by their minority status and their families' socioeconomic status (SES). Participants from low SES could not afford tutorial classes, which might have helped them improve their Burmese and achieve greater educational success. Those who succeeded to senior high school education were then confronted with an additional linguistic challenge related to the change of medium of instruction from Burmese to English. As border students from peripheral regions with limited teaching and learning resources for English language education, they particularly struggled with new core subjects such as Chemistry and Biology which were now taught through the medium of English. Unfortunately, the likelihood for ethnic minority students from the peripheral borderlands to ever manage to attend Burmese universities has been found to be exceedingly low.

Overall, participants' learning trajectories at government schools in Myanmar were impacted by the compounding effects of their lack of knowledge in Burmese and English, their minority status and their financial situations. Although many participants did not complete their primary education at government schools, they did not end up looking for a job or becoming a farmer or helping in their families' business. They still continued to pursue education in another schooling system, namely that of Chinese supplementary schools in Myanmar. Contrary to their learning trajectories in the government schools, their experiences in Chinese supplementary schools seemed to empower them and provide them with a different orientation to future employment and educational opportunities. Their experiences in these Chinese supplementary schools will be discussed in the following section.

### **4.3 Chinese supplementary schools in Myanmar**

#### **4.3.1 Overview of Chinese supplementary schooling**

Against the background of Myanmar's weak public educational system, many non-state schools have been established by non-government organisations. Non-state schools have thrived particularly since 1988 and often serve ethnic and religious minority students (Lall, 2008; Lall & South, 2014; Lorch, 2008). Of these, Chinese schools are of particular relevance to this study. According to Xian and Li (2014, p. 141), by the time they published their book, there were over 300 Chinese

supplementary schools in Myanmar, and the number of students at these schools was estimated to be about 80,000. Chinese education in Myanmar can be divided into three streams: traditional Chinese schooling initiated by Hokkien migrants, schools sponsored by Taiwan, and the recent revival of Chinese schools oriented to the PRC.

#### *4.3.1.1 Traditional Chinese schooling and anti-Chinese movements*

Chinese education in Myanmar was first established by Chinese migrants in the early twentieth century. The first Chinese school in Myanmar was named “中华义学” (Zhonghua Yixue), and was established in 1904 in Yangon by Hokkien migrants from Fujian (Xiong & Zhang, 2006). Until the 1960s, Chinese language education in Myanmar experienced a prosperous period. During this period, the number of Chinese educational institutions reached almost 300 (Wu & Yang, 2008, p. 96). By 1962, the number of students who learned the Chinese language was estimated to be 39,000 (Murray, 1964, p. 79). However, this prosperity came to an end after the 1962 coup d'état headed by Ne Win.

The era of military government (1962-1988) was marked by the nationalisation of private firms and discrimination against certain ethnic minorities, including the Chinese. Under Ne Win's regime, Chinese schools were banned and Chinese language classes were eliminated (Fan, 2006; Le Bail & Tournier, 2010; Wu & Yang, 2008). The anti-Chinese riots in 1967 led to the mass emigration of Chinese out of Myanmar with about one hundred thousand Chinese leaving the country (Smith, 1994, p. 63; Than, 1997, p. 119). Many of those who remained in the country stopped identifying themselves as ethnic Chinese and adopted Burmese names, dress and languages (Maung, 1994; Than, 1997). While no longer publicly promoted, anti-Chinese sentiments continue to linger in Myanmar to this day. There is still strict requirement from an ethnic Chinese applying for an ID card as they are required to provide evidence that they have been living in Myanmar for at least three generations (Callahan, 2003). In the public discourse, the increasing economic power of ethnic Chinese is often portrayed as a threat to the local people and the maintenance of cultural heritage. Maung (1994) demonstrates the terror of Sinification by arguing that the “economic dragons” devoured the traditional life of the “Golden city” of

Mandalay. By examining the legally published cultural and media works in Myanmar, Zin (2012) shows the similar anti-Chinese attitudes regarding the massive Chinese migration and purchases of real estate.

#### *4.3.1.2 KMT-sponsored mother-tongue education*

Chinese education in Myanmar, particularly Upper Myanmar, is also heavily supported by Taiwan's assistance. After 1949, thousands of troops of Kuomintang (KMT), the Nationalist Party, fled to Upper Myanmar and took refuge in Myanmar territory for years after the Communist Party won the civil war in mainland China (Xian & Li, 2014, p. 118). To serve this population, many Chinese schools were established in Upper Myanmar by KMT with support from Taiwanese government. The establishment of Chinese schools in the 1960s served not only to keep Chinese culture for those descendants of KMT in Myanmar, but also to act as an anti-communist base where KMT could work in China's Southwest border collecting information for Taiwan for the purpose of "counterattacking mainland China" (Xian & Li, 2014, p. 93). Given the anti-Chinese environment at the time and possibly also to conceal their purpose, most of these schools were established in the form of classes on religious scriptures. In addition, secular education was also taught (Wu & Yang, 2008, p. 96; Zou, 2011, p. 78). The secular education at these schools followed the Taiwanese educational system. There was a full and comprehensive curriculum from Year 1 to Year 12, and Taiwan Mandarin was taught as target language and medium of instruction (Xian & Li, 2014, p. 150; Zou, 2012, p. 158).

It is worth noting that Taiwan Mandarin taught in Myanmar is different from *Putonghua* in many ways, particularly in regards to the transcription system and the written script. For Taiwan Mandarin, "*Zhuyin*" (the Mandarin Phonetic Alphabet) is used to transcribe spoken Chinese and traditional characters are adopted as script. In contrast, *Hanyu Pinyin* is used for the transcription for *Putonghua* and simplified Chinese as script. In other words, there are differences in the ways in which each sound is transcribed and in the ways each character is composed. This might cause learning discrepancies for learners who transition from one set of conventions to the other (Dai, 2010; He, 1997; Peng, 2009; Yin & Luo, 1991). Despite the increasing

importance of *Putonghua*, many Chinese schools continue to use Taiwan Mandarin and follow the Taiwanese educational system if they are sponsored by the Taiwanese government. Many ethnic Chinese students also found the idea of going to Taiwan attractive. Students who graduated from these Chinese schools could sit the Taiwan university entrance examination in designated cities in Myanmar. Their university applications would be considered according to their examination scores. Over the past few decades, there has emerged a popular belief among young ethnic Chinese students that doing Chinese language study in Myanmar is tantamount to “到台湾读书，到台湾打工，到台湾定居” (“studying in Taiwan, working in Taiwan and settling in Taiwan”) (Xian & Li, 2014, p. 111). In fact, the Taiwan government keeps catering to such needs and assists the development of Chinese schools in Myanmar. Every year, about 80% of the students who took the Taiwan university entrance exam could be granted with full scholarship to study in Taiwan universities. Some students were even able to take part time job in Taiwan and remit money to Myanmar (Xian & Li, 2014, p. 151). While going to Taiwan has been an aspiration for ethnic Chinese students for many years, in recent years, mainland China has become another desired destination.

#### 4.3.1.3 PRC-sponsored L2 education

Chinese education has also been greatly promoted by Myanmar’s socio-political transformation and the increasing influence of China as a global power in Southeast Asia. This type of Chinese schooling is often achieved through the establishment of Confucius Classrooms in cooperating schools. By the end of my field work, three Confucius Classrooms had been established in Myanmar with the cooperation of local Chinese schools: Fuqing Language and Computer School in Mandalay, Fuxing Language and Chinese School in Yangon and Eastern Language and Business Centre in Yangon.

Since their establishment, these Confucius Classrooms have strengthened the impact of PRC via the spread of *Putonghua* and *Hanyu Pinyin* into many regions and states in Myanmar. Take the first Confucius Classroom Fuqing in Mandalay, for example. Fuqing was established in collaboration with Yunnan University in 2008. With the

help of Yunnan University, almost all of Fuqing's teaching staff have received training and obtained academic degrees (Z. Li, 2013b). By 2013, the impact of Fuqing has expanded to over 200 Chinese schools in four Regions and two States in Myanmar (S. Sun, 2014). The way Fuqing impacted these schools was through the provision of teachers to support the teaching and learning of *Putonghua* and *Hanyu Pinyin*. While expanding its influence, Fuqing further established 11 Chinese language learning centres within five years (M. Li, 2013). In order to guarantee the learning quality of the Chinese language in these schools, the requirement of *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi* (HSK), namely the standardised Chinese proficiency test has been used to assess students' educational attainment (Xian & Li, 2014, pp. 131-133). In Year 1, students are taught *Hanyu Pinyin* and at the end of Year 6 students need to take the HSK Basic Level exam to get the certificate and move to another higher level. Similarly, at intermediate level, there are two years of study, and students are required to pass HSK Intermediate Level in order to graduate. At the advanced level, there is only one year of study and students are expected to pass HSK Advanced Level. Graduates are often prepared to enter university study in China.

In these PRC-sponsored schools, the Chinese language is no longer taught as the mother tongue language but as L2 for both ethnic Chinese and any other groups of Burmese students (Zhao et al., 2015). Given that China is currently Myanmar's largest trading partner and the biggest source of foreign investment, learning Chinese for career advancement and practical communication skills is often stressed and clearly highlighted in terms of subjects offered in these PRC-sponsored schools. Many traditional subjects such as Maths, Chemistry, Physics are omitted, while many new subjects such as Computer and Business are offered and additional language-related subjects such as Spoken Chinese, Business Chinese, Interactive Chinese, Daily Chinese and Modern Chinese are provided (Zou, 2012, p. 64). Learning Chinese has been constructed as a commodity that will bring cultural and economic profits to Burmese people regardless of their ethnic background. While Chinese is being promoted as a global language, the influence of PRC and speaking *Putonghua* have gained increasing prominence and have shaped the practices of contemporary Chinese language education in Myanmar.

#### 4.3.1.4 Confluences and contestations

As the three “streams” of Chinese education converge in contemporary Myanmar, the value and meaning of learning the Chinese language has shifted and many contestations have emerged. For the traditional schooling, Chinese was taught to ethnic Chinese to maintain their identity with an orientation to Hokkien and other dialects, and this form of learning Chinese came under attack and hence heavily devalued during the military era. Regarding Taiwanese-sponsored schooling, Chinese language teaching is perceived as an ideological tool to align with the KMT and fight the PRC. However, for ethnic Chinese who take up such education, they see learning Chinese as an opportunity to escape Myanmar and to migrate to Taiwan. Hence, learning Taiwanese Mandarin becomes a potential investment to empower their future. When it comes to PRC-sponsored schooling, Chinese education is often taught as L2 and it is considered as an ideological tool by the PRC to exert soft power and to consolidate its influence in the region. However, students of various linguistic backgrounds seem to be interested in the potential study and career opportunities considering the increasing influence of China in Myanmar. In this “stream”, potential conflicts also arise between L2 learners and heritage learners over authenticity as a result of promoting Chinese as a global language in Myanmar (see Sections 4.3.2.2 and 4.3.2.3).

While *Putonghua* is being widely promoted in Myanmar, many tensions also emerge regarding the norm of speaking and writing standardised Chinese. In traditional KMT-sponsored schools, Taiwan Mandarin might be challenged as a legitimate variety of Chinese language. Many KMT-sponsored schools stopped teaching traditional Chinese characters and replaced all of the Taiwan teaching materials with those produced by mainland China (He, 2014). Some schools have still kept on teaching Taiwan Mandarin but have also offered some new courses such as *Putonghua* and *Hanyu Pinyin* (Zou, 2012, pp. 160-176). During my field work in late January 2014 in Upper Myanmar, I went to visit a KTM-sponsored school in Myitkyina, where some of my participants had been educated. Despite their connections with Taiwan, this school highlighted its ethnic pride deriving from being part of mainland China. The following Figure 3 shows the shifting meaning of learning the Chinese language:



In this school recruitment ad, Chinese is constructed as a powerful language in relation to China's economic strength and the strategic position of Myitkyina. Learning Chinese is presented not only as a wise investment but also as an ethnic identification with being Chinese, and ethnic pride of being Chinese and calling China “祖国” (motherland) instead of “祖籍国” (country of origin) is manifested in most mainland Chinese discourse.

In contrast to KMT-sponsored schools, at PRC-sponsored schools the promotion of *Putonghua* is supposed to be fully embraced. However, the implementation of speaking standardised *Putonghua* in the border region is not easy given its demographic structures of ethnic Chinese in Upper Myanmar where Yunnan dialect speakers constitute the largest group, followed by Kokang, Cantonese and Hokkien (Z. Li, 2011; Xian & Li, 2014). To the best of my knowledge, no research concerning the learning difficulties of Yunnan dialect speakers acquiring *Putonghua* exists. This may be due to the fact that the Yunnan dialect belongs to Southwest Mandarin, which is similar to *Putonghua*. It may also be due to the fact that the ethnic Chinese of Upper Myanmar are keen to emphasise their Chineseness, including a desire to keep a “pure blood” and a focus on the maintenance of Chinese traditions and the Chinese language (Tong, 2010, pp. 147-174). The focus on “the Chinese language” does not usually include any further specification as to which variety of Chinese should be spoken. However, when it comes to learning *Putonghua* at school, Yunnan dialect speakers certainly encounter learning challenges (see detailed discussion in 4.3.2.4). In the following section, I will turn to analyse the students' lived experiences of learning Chinese in Myanmar and the focus will be given on how their learning trajectories might be shaped by the wider processes of Sino-Myanmar's socioeconomic transformations.

#### 4.3.2 Participants' experiences at Chinese schools

While attending Burmese state schools, my participants also went to Chinese schools simultaneously. They often worked hard to catch up with both school systems: learning Chinese from 6:00 am to 8:00 am and from 4:00 pm to 6:00 pm on weekdays, and on weekends and during state school holiday, they attend whole day classes.

Despite the fact that they had to pay for their Chinese education and worked extra hard since their young age, all of my participants except eight of them who had different trajectories (see Section 4.5) had finished their 10 years of education in Myanmar before coming to China for senior high school education.

#### 4.3.2.1 Overview

Chinese was taught as a mother tongue in all schools attended by 23 participants. The following table lists their backgrounds including ethnicity, residence and choice of Chinese variety for teaching and learning materials. Here the category of “ethnicity” is based on their passport classification, “residential area” refers to the place where they spent most of their time and “textbooks adopted” is to explain the prioritised variety of Chinese language at school.

*Table 9. Students’ Chinese language background*

Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Residential area	Textbooks adopted
Adai	Shan	Lweje	Mainland
Chang	Chinese	Lweje	Mainland
Chaofu	Chinese	Muse	Mixed
Gong	Shan	Lweje	Mainland
Huangjing	Chinese	Lweje	Mainland
Kaicheng	Chinese	Muse	Mixed
Jingfeng	Chinese	Lweje	Mainland
Jinghua	Chinese	Lweje	Mainland
Liang	Chinese	Myitkyina	Taiwan
Lifu	Chinese	Lweje	Mainland
Lingling	Chinese	Myitkyina	Taiwan
Qidong	Chinese	Myitkyina	Taiwan

Shenggui	Chinese	Lweje	Mixed
Wu	Chinese	Myitkyina	Taiwan
Xia	Chinese	Lweje	Mainland
Xiaomei	Chinese	Myitkyina	Taiwan
Yangchao	Chinese	Lweje	Mainland
Yanglingxian	Shan	Lweje	Mainland
Yingying	Chinese	Muse	Mixed
Yinzhaoyang	Shan	Myitkyina	Taiwan
Zhaojiawang	Shan	Lweje	Mainland
Zhaoyingdi	Chinese	Myitkyina	Taiwan
Zhengyuan	Chinese	Myitkyina	Taiwan

One of the commonalities these 23 students shared was that they had unanimously received Chinese education from kindergarten (one year), primary school (six years) to junior high school (three years) for 10 years. Another similarity was that Chinese was taught as a mother tongue. In other words, these Chinese schools had offered a complete curriculum and students had been exposed to relevant academic subject knowledge.

Besides the similarities, there were some differences regarding the teaching materials adopted. Chinese schools in Myitkyina followed Taiwan system of teaching Taiwan Mandarin, and students were provided a chance to study in a university in Taiwan after graduation. In contrast, the Chinese schools in Lweje adopted mainland China's textbooks and taught *Putonghua* as the standard variety of Chinese. Compared to Myitkyina and Lweje, the Chinese schools in Muse adopted the textbooks from both Taiwan and mainland China, which means, students had been exposed to two types of varieties of Chinese in the school. Given the different choices of Chinese varieties in

teaching and learning materials, these students had developed different learning experiences prior to their migration to China.

Overall, participants had received a complete education system from primary school to junior high school. Ten years of education in Chinese schools also shaped their understanding of Chinese and China as a whole. The following section will address their learning experiences at the Chinese schools and a particular focus will be given on the tensions emerging from the meaning they derived of learning Chinese in contemporary Myanmar.

#### *4.3.2.2 Chinese as a mother tongue*

In their linguistic autobiographies, one of the frequently stated justifications for accessing Chinese education was related with their Chinese identity.

我喜欢中文，因为我是缅甸华人。

I like Chinese because I am ethnic Chinese in Myanmar. (Autobiography; Xia)

Such statement of relating their interest in learning the Chinese language to their identity was often found at the beginning of their linguistic autobiographies. Their justification was also influenced by their parents who believed that it was necessary to keep their Chinese roots:

因为我是华人，所以爸爸妈妈让我学习中文，他们说虽然生在缅甸但是我始终是华人，不应该忘了根。

Because I am ethnic Chinese, my parents asked me to learn Chinese. They said that although I was born in Myanmar, I would be ethnic Chinese forever and I should not forget my roots. (Autobiography; Xiaomei)

Besides ethnic Chinese, students of Shan background also expressed their interest in learning Chinese. Zhaojiawang, a Shan student from Lweje, shared his strong identification with the Chinese language.

汉语可以说是我的母语，是我最精通的语言，从学会说话就说汉语 (...) 我最喜欢的课就是历史，特别是秦汉史，最喜欢东汉时期的曹操和刘备 (...) 历史课本里的故事和电视剧放的很像。

*Hanyu* is sort of my mother tongue. It is the best language I can speak. From the moment I learned to speak, I started to speak Chinese (...) The subject I liked best was History, especially the history of Qin Dynasty [221-207 BC] and Han Dynasty [202 BC to 220 AD] (...) The stories in the historical textbook are quite similar to those played on TV series. (Interview with Zhaojiawang)

Despite being Shan in his passport, Zhaojiawang tends to identify himself as Chinese by indicating his proficiency in Chinese and his knowledge of knowing Chinese history. Compared to his ethnic Chinese classmates, Zhaojiawang seems to be less certain of his identification by using the hedge word “可以说” (sort of).

#### 4.3.2.3 *Chinese as an economically valuable language*

Apart from the cultural identification with speaking Chinese, participants also reported many practical advantages of doing Chinese education in Myanmar.

因为会中国话已经有很多好处了 (...) 毕业后可以在华校工作，工资比缅甸的高得多。

There were many advantages in speaking Chinese (...) After graduation, we can teach at the Chinese school and the salary is much higher than that of the government schools (Interview with Xia).

Besides earning a good salary by working as a Chinese teacher, my participants were also aware of other profitable job opportunities in Myanmar. Qidong explained the value of investing in Chinese education relative to the contemporary employment market in Myanmar:

现在的中国人在缅甸的公司很多，他们都喜欢用华人。

Now there are many Chinese enterprises in Myanmar and they like to employ ethnic Chinese. (Interview with Qidong)

Overall, participants including ethnic Chinese and Shan all showed their great interests in learning Chinese both as heritage identity and as a profitable language. Despite their strong desires to learn Chinese, they also encountered learning discrepancies imposed by the promotion of *Putonghua* as the normative variety as described below.

#### 4.3.2.4 Chinese learning discrepancies

My participants came from three different regions where they had been exposed to different varieties of Chinese in schools (see Table 9 above). Their previous Chinese learning experiences had formed different linguistic habitus, which consequently led to various levels of learning challenges in acquiring *Putonghua*. These challenges include writing the simplified Chinese characters, acquiring the knowledge of *Hanyu Pinyin*, and speaking standardised *Putonghua*.

Liang who attended a KMT-sponsored school in Myitkyina explained to me her lack of knowledge in writing simplified Chinese characters due to her previous exposure to Taiwan Mandarin.

来腾冲前我很担心我的汉语不行，我不懂简体字，我们那里都是念台湾书，学习的中文也是繁体(...)后来我表姐介绍我去一家电脑学校学习普通话。

Before coming to Tengchong, I was very worried about my Chinese. I didn't know simplified characters. In our place, we learned Taiwan Mandarin, traditional Chinese characters (...) later my cousin introduced me to a computer school to learn *Putonghua* (Interview; Liang).

Different from Liang, Kaicheng from Muse encountered learning difficulties in displaying his knowledge of *Hanyu Pinyin* when the Chinese school he attended experienced a shift in linguistic orientation from Taiwan Mandarin to *Putonghua*:

我刚开始读中文书时学的是台湾拼音，直到三年级的时候来了一位中国老师，她教了我们查字典，教拼音，但我还是不太会读。到中一开始学电脑时，老师又教我们用拼音打字，那时我才会读，又才知道一些基本知识。

When I started to learn Chinese at school, I had learned Taiwan's Mandarin Phonetic Alphabet. It was not until when I was in Year 3 that a teacher from mainland China came to my school, and she taught us how to use the dictionary and [*Hanyu*] *Pinyin*. However, I was still not good at it. When I was at the first grade of junior high school, I started to learn Computer and my teacher taught us how to type in Pinyin. Then I began to understand some basic knowledge of Pinyin. (Autobiography; Kaicheng)

It would appear strange that Kaicheng was still struggling with the basic knowledge of alphabets given the years of education at school. However, his struggle was symptomatic of the learning conditions of Chinese education in Myanmar. These conditions included lack of qualified teachers teaching Pinyin and insufficient time for students like Kaicheng to be exposed to learning resources as they had to attend both state school and Chinese school, simultaneously.

Despite having been exposed to the same PRC- teaching materials and having Yunnanese as teachers to assist their language learning, students from Lweje also reported that they lack proficiency in speaking standardised *Putonghua*. Lifu had his story:

我们学校用的教材和这边一样(...) 有 1000 多个学生，从幼稚园到初三，十五六个老师，全部都是华侨，还有一两个章凤的老师 (...) 我以前当过

小学三年级的老师，不过我的普通话学的并不是太好，不知道整体认读音节如“zi, ci, si, zhi, chi, shi”。

We used the same textbooks as those here [in Tengchong] (...) There were over 1000 students from kindergarten to junior high three. There were about 15 and 16 teachers who were all ethnic Chinese. There were a couple of teachers from Zhangfeng [a border town of China, just opposite Lweje] (...) I used to teach students of Year 3 there, but my *Putonghua* was not good because I could not figure out some integral recognition of syllables such as “zi, ci, si, zhi, chi, shi”. (Interview with Lifu)

Lifu used to be employed as a teacher teaching Chinese for two months after graduating from his junior high school because of his good academic performance. However, Lifu was aware of his linguistic deficiency in distinguishing and speaking the correct pronunciation for “zi” and “zhi”, “ci” and “chi”, “si” and “shi”.

Later in Chapter Seven, I will analyse Lifu’s difficulties in speaking standardised *Putonghua* while interacting with his classmates.

#### 4.3.3 Summary

The Chinese language has been widely promoted both as a language to maintain the heritage identity of ethnic Chinese and as a commodity for profitable job opportunities and transnational education and career opportunities oriented to either Taiwan or mainland China. The increasing impact of PRC’s socio-economic expansion in Myanmar has shifted the meaning of speaking and writing Chinese towards *Putonghua*. While *Putonghua* is gradually penetrating into Chinese supplementary schools, various tensions have emerged between learning Chinese as a heritage language and learning Chinese as an economically valuable language, between Taiwan Mandarin and *Putonghua*, and between Yunnan dialect and *Putonghua*. This has brought many learning challenges to Chinese language learners, especially ethnic Chinese whose previous linguistic repertoires usually did not match the norms of *Putonghua*. Their learning challenges relate particularly to learning to write *Hanyu*

*Pinyin* as well as simplified Chinese characters. With regard to spoken language, speaking standardised *Putonghua* constitutes a significant challenge. Participants reported that they were keen to make the best possible use of their resources and to overcome these challenges through informal language practices at home, in the community and via social media exposure.

#### **4.4 Informal language learning and educational experiences**

This section explores the informal language learning experiences of my participants outside school. A particular focus will be given on how these informal practices reinforced their identification with the values of learning Chinese and being a part of China. According to their self-reports, their learning experiences were facilitated by three factors: family members, community engagement and social media.

##### **4.4.1 Family interaction**

The influence of family language practices emerged as the most popular theme from the data. This is particularly the case with ethnic Chinese from Myitkyina where the lingua franca was not Chinese and their parents insisted on speaking Chinese at home as counterbalance of being assimilated into the local society.

Speaking Chinese seemed to be strictly monitored by ethnic Chinese parents. If the children broke the rule, they would be disciplined:

在家如果讲缅语，爸妈就不回答我的问题，有时候说了缅语，还不给我零花钱。

If I spoke Burmese language at home, my parents would not answer my question. Sometimes, they did not give me any pocket money if I used Burmese. (Autobiography; Wu)

Sometimes, speaking Burmese was even considered as a serious problem related with their identification of being Chinese.

如果我在家讲缅甸话，我妈就会说：“你要当老缅还是汉人？你自己想想！”后来我说妈妈我知道错了。

If I spoke Burmese at home, my mother would say to me, “who do you want to be, Burman or Han people? You’d better think about it”. Later I apologised to my mother. (Interview with Liang)

The meaning of speaking Chinese was associated not only with being Chinese but also with choosing the “right” person to marry:

我妈经常跟我说，不要一天到晚讲缅甸语，还是要讲汉语呢，将来还是要嫁汉人呢。

My mother often told me that I should not speak Burmese all day long, and I should speak Chinese because I would marry a Han person in the future. (Interview with Lingling)

Such family language practices reflect the mentality of the Han people’s superiority over other races and ethnicities on both sides of the border regions (see Section 1.2). They also confirm the ideologies of being ethnic Chinese in Upper Myanmar where pure blood, language and ethnicity are used to justify their superiority (Tong, 2010) and being Chinese, one must speak the Chinese language (Z. Li, 2013a).

Different to the parents in Myitkyina, parents in Lweje and Muse seem to attach economic value to the learning of Chinese. This is perhaps due to their closer proximity and more frequent interactions with China’s border regions. One of their common practices was to send their children to China for formal education at their young age and speak Chinese at home.

家里有妈妈、爸爸、还有两个弟弟。两个弟弟都在中国这边上小学，我们在家都只讲汉语。

In my family, there are mother, father and two younger brothers. My brothers are studying at a border primary school in China. At home, we only speak Chinese. (Interview with Chang)

The members of Chang's family were monolingual speakers of Chinese from Lweje, and his parents often sold their farm products in the Chinese border. While seeing the profitability of making money in China, Chang's parents made use of their geographical advantage by sending his younger brothers to receive the standardised education in China. In fact, Chang is not the only family who have decided to completely give up Burmese government schooling but have chosen to cross the border and follow the PRC-educational system at a young age (see detailed discussion in 1.3).

Such language belief of speaking Chinese for economic value is also shared by multilingual parents:

爸爸和妈妈在家讲方言，妈妈和我一样，还会讲点傣语，爸爸会讲五种话，傣语，山头克钦话和德昂话。我问过我妈为什么爸爸会五种语言，我们只会两小种。我妈是这种回答我的“现在的世界汉语比较重要，傣语山头话就不消学了，你爸和我决定在家只说方言，将来你们对你们会有一定好处的。缅语是你们在外面你们和朋友在一起自然会说的，别的话不消学了。”

At home my parents spoke a dialect [Yunnan Mandarin]. My mother and I had the same linguistic repertoires, and we both could speak a bit of Shan. My father could speak five languages: [Burmese, Chinese] Shan and mountain languages such as Jingphaw and Palaung. I asked my mother why my father could speak five whereas we only spoke two languages. My mother answered, “nowadays in the world, Chinese is very important. There is no need to learn Shan and mountain languages. Your father and I have decided to speak only

one dialect at home, which will be of help to you in future. For Burmese, you can pick it up from your friends outside. There is no need to learn other languages.” (Interview with Yingying)

Yingying’s father was doing timber trade, and he needed to do business with people who speak various minority languages such as Jinghaw and Palaung. However, when it came to child-raising practices, Yingying’s family saw the practical value of investing on Chinese language whereas other minorities languages were devalued as “mountain languages”. For Yingying’s family, speaking Chinese at home meant speaking the Yunnan dialect, and thus, speaking Chinese was more than maintaining their ethnic Chinese heritage.

Overall, speaking Chinese had various meanings for different ethnic Chinese families. For those living in an environment dominated by Burmese language, speaking Chinese meant keeping a superior heritage identity as Han people. For those living close to China’s border and frequently crossing the border, their language beliefs seemed to be greatly shaped by the profitable value of speaking Chinese. Apart from the family influence, my participants also reported their exposure to the Chinese language and China-related world via community engagement.

#### 4.4.2 Community engagement

The data obtained from my participants revealed that their language learning experiences were mostly associated with the influence of their peers and Chinese-related environment.

从小周围的朋友都是华人，所以我们只说汉语。

My friends were all ethnic Chinese, so we only spoke Chinese. (Autobiography; Chang)

Chang was born and brought up in Lweje, and speaking Chinese seemed to be the lingua franca among his peers. This was confirmed by my Shan participants who were

also from Lweje and whose language practices were impacted by their Chinese-dominant environment:

和爸妈用傣语，但因为地区不是纯的，专业的傣语有些不懂，因为汉语，说的话夹杂着几个汉语，正统的傣语只会些。

I spoke Shan with my parents, but because my birthplace was not Shan-centered, I could not understand some idiomatic Shan. Because of the influence of Chinese, my Shan was mixed with Chinese. I could not perfectly speak the Shan language. (Autobiography; Adai)

Adai was the only Shan participant whose parents were both Shan, and who kept on speaking Shan at home. However, born as a Shan and registered as a Shan did not make Adai feel like a proficient Shan speaker because of the Chinese influence. In fact, such influence of Chinese-related environment even prevailed into their daily life as indicated by Lifu who was from the same region, Lweje:

我们那里的电话都是中国的区号，也用人民币，都讲汉语，和中国没有区别。

In our place, we use the same telecommunication network as China. We also use *Renminbi* [Chinese money]. We speak Chinese and there is no difference from China. (Interview with Lifu)

For Lifu, living in Lweje had no difference from living in China because of the everyday influence from Chinese products and the Chinese language. Geographically, Lweje belongs to Myanmar, but Chinese presence is everywhere on a daily basis. Lifu's narration seems to suggest that culturally there is no difference between China and Myanmar in the border region. His attachment to a China-oriented world seems to be greatly shaped and reinforced by his locality prior to his migration to China. Besides the community impact, students' exposure to Chinese resources was also reinforced by social media.

#### 4.4.3 Social media

According to my participants, they had been exposed to language learning resources via social media such as TV, movies, popular songs and online instant messaging before their migration to China. Yanglingxian, a Shan student from Lweje, was motivated to learn Chinese through watching TV at her young age, and her knowledge of Pinyin was also complemented by online resources.

从小父母就比较忙，就让我天天看电视，从电视剧的字幕慢慢学会了汉字。上了学前班开始学拼音，但由于那些汉字都认识，就不好好学习拼音，每次考试时拼音部分都是空着，填写词语、成语总是满分。六年级和朋友去舅舅家开的网吧玩，[用拼音]打字都不会，我开始迷恋 QQ[即时通讯]，迷上聊天，天天去，慢慢就会[用拼音]打字了。

When I was young, my parents were so busy that they let me watch TV every day. Gradually I learned to recognise Chinese characters from the subtitle of TV series. When I went to kindergarten [at Chinese school], I started to learn Pinyin. Because I could recognise many Chinese characters, I did not want to study Pinyin. Every time I had an exam, I always left the questions of Pinyin untouched, but I could always figure out the correct answers for writing in words and idioms. In Year 6, with my friend I went to the Internet café run by one of my uncles. I did not know how to type words [by using Pinyin], but because I started to be obsessed with QQ [instant messaging] and online chatting, I went there every day. Then gradually I learned to type words [by using Pinyin]. (Autobiography; Yanglingxian)

Similar to Yanglingxian, many ethnic Chinese have improved their knowledge of *Putonghua* and increased their cultural bonds with China by watching TV programs. This is also true with those who only received Taiwan Mandarin education, and who were living in a Burmese-dominant environment.

来中国前是通过看电视学习简体字的，我的小伙伴和我都特别爱看湖南台的快乐大本营。老妈爱看韩剧，都是中文翻译过来的，老爸爱看动作片，打架的成龙和李连杰的。我爸爸也喜欢看新闻联播。

Before I came to China, I had learned to recognise simplified Chinese characters through watching TV. My friends and I liked watching “Happy Camp” program produced by Hunan TV [a provincial TV channel of China]. My mother liked watching Korean dramas which were translated into Chinese. My father loved watching martial arts movies with Jackie Chan and Jet Li as the lead actors. My father also liked watching Chinese news broadcast.

(Interview with Wu)

Wu went to a Chinese school in Myitkyina where she was only taught in Taiwan Mandarin, but her knowledge of *Putonghua* was developed through watching TV programs. Despite the fact that Wu and her parents could speak fluent Burmese, they still preferred to spend their leisure time watching programs on Chinese television channels.

Chinese media seemed so prevailing at the Myanmar-border that it had provided a space for ethnic Chinese to reinforce their attachment to China as their homeland and birthplace.

家在缅北山区，从小只能通过电视了解中国，对祖国无比的向往。小时候就希望能走遍祖国的每个角落，到各地的山川名流，名胜古迹看看，也越来越想了解中国这个大国。

I came from a mountainous region of Upper Myanmar. I could only understand China from TV and I longed to visit China. When I was young, I had a desire to go to all of the places in my country of birth including those famous rivers and mountains; places of interest. I had an increasing motivation to know China, such a great kingdom. (Diary; Xiaomei)

For Xiaomei, the geographical distance did not seem to separate her from China, the country of her ancestral origin, which she called as “祖国” (country of birth place).

Her desire to be part of China seemed to be growing along with the increasing power of her imagined motherland. For Xiaomei, TV as social media not only provided her with cultural exposure to China, but also reinforced her cultural tie with China.

Apart from having a desire to be part of China, ethnic Chinese participants were also attracted to the image of a modern lifestyle suggested through the Chinese fashionable terms and products they were frequently exposed to.

我有时在电视广告里学一些时尚的词语，如一种酒的广告，用了两句“神采飞扬，中国郎”，当时根本不知道什么是“神采飞扬”，但很感兴趣，就去问老师，老师说这是一个形容词，指人的精神面貌气色丰满奋发。

Sometimes I picked up some fashionable terms from TV advertisements. For example, there was an advertisement for a liquor: “glowing with health and vigour, drinking Chinese Lang [liquor]”. I did not know at all what was “glowing with health and vigour”, but I was very much interested in it. I then went to ask my teacher who explained to me that it was an adjectival phrase describing someone who was in high spirits”. (Autobiography; Xia)

According to Xia, this advertisement was broadcasted at intervals during a famous TV series entitled “Emperor Qin” (the first emperor of China), which was played by Central China Television (CCTV) during the Spring Festival in February, 2007. For Xia, what he was informed of was not only the reputation of this new liquor but also the new usage of the Chinese expression. Such language learning experiences via modern technologies and powerful TV channel like CCTV seemed to provide another resource that ethnic Chinese participants could access.

#### 4.4.4 Summary

Overall, participants had access to a wide range of Chinese language learning resources through their families, community engagement and social media exposure. Even while they lived on the Myanmar-side of the border, their cultural world was largely shaped by an orientation towards China, as evident in the use of Chinese currency, Chinese telecommunication networks, Chinese movies, TV programs and news broadcast. Their attachment to a China-oriented world also manifested itself in the way they had insisted on speaking Chinese at home in order to maintain an identity they perceived as superior and in order to further their educational and career prospects. Their identification with China was reinforced by their increasing exposure to the modern image of China and Chinese lifestyles via China's mass media and online resources. For some families this orientation was so powerful that they commenced their children's trans-border education in China at an even younger age. Consequently, eight participants had been sent to Chinese border primary schools up to seven years before entering BHS. I will now discuss their educational trajectories and experiences.

#### 4.5 Primary border education in China

There were eight participants who had been educated in China for seven years before I met them at BHS. Having been educated for years in China since their young age, these students had formed a distinct feature of peer communication style, and their perceptions of speaking *Putonghua* had been largely shaped by their learning experiences. This section will focus on how this group of students came to China for education, how they had formed their in-group language practices and how they have come to adopt the values of *Putonghua*.

##### 4.5.1 Border education agreement

Border schools at Tengchong started to accept Burmese students since the late 1980s (Yang & Guo, 2013, pp.72-73). The recruitment of Burmese students was initially under the management of Qiaoban (the Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs), and the targeted students were confined to ethnic Chinese who were willing to come back to China for study as reported by the local educational chronicle (Yang & Guo, 2013). It

was not until 2005 that the recruitment of Burmese students was expanded from ethnic Chinese to all other Burmese students of various ethnic backgrounds. Many favourable policies were also provided by the local government to support Burmese students studying at various levels of border schools in Tengchong.

义务教育[一年级到九年级]阶段学校可以接纳缅籍学生就读。只要是缅籍家长提出到我县学校就读请求，我县就接纳缅籍学生就读 (...) 缅籍学生享受义务教育阶段学生的同等优惠政策 (...) 所有在我县就读的缅籍学生均享受着国家的“两免一补”和营养餐补助。

The schools at the stage of compulsory education [from Year 1 to Year 9] can accept Burmese students. As long as Burmese parents request for their children to study at Tengchong, we should accept them (...) Burmese students at the compulsory education stage enjoy the same favourable policies as Chinese students (...) All of the Burmese students studying at Tengchong can have “two exemptions and one subsidy” and nutritious food subsidy”. (Education Bureau, 2014, p. 3)

The local educational policies clearly indicate that whoever enrolls in compulsory educational institutions shall be granted the “two exemptions and one subsidy”. This means being exempted from tuition and other miscellaneous fees and provided subsidised living expenses. For those who want to further their study to senior high school education, they are encouraged to go to BHS as it was officially appointed and funded by the Tengchong government to cater to the Burmese students’ high school education (Yang & Guo, 2013). In other words, there have been relevant policies for Burmese students’ education at all levels from Year 1 to Year 12 in Tengchong, China.

In 2005, 100 Burmese students from Panwa, Kachin State’s Special Region-1, were sent to a border primary school in Diandan, a border town of Tengchong. At the border primary school, these students received four years of education from Year 3 to Year 6. After graduating from the primary school, 30 students were selected to

continue with their three years of junior high school education at BHS based on their examination performance. Three years later, eight of them went to senior high school and later became my participants when I conducted my field work at BHS. During my field work, I was able to contact Ms Li (pseudonym), one of the official leaders participating in drafting the border education agreement and this is what she had to say about the participants' pathway to BHS.

当时是丁英司令跟县政府提出来，他们的一些子女想来县政府读书，当时板瓦离腾冲颠摊比较近，县政府比较支持。他们找了一百个学生，这一百个学生推荐的名单都是由丁英缅甸他们提出来的 (...) 后来又有一部分学生还想继续留下来读初中 (...) 就从 100 个推选 30 是优秀的比较想留下来的继续在 BHS 中学读初中。

It was the Commander Ting Ying who proposed to Tengchong government to send some of their children to study at Tengchong. Concerning the geographical proximity between Panwa and Diantan, the Tengchong government decided to support the plan. Then Ting Ying's organisation proposed the names of 100 students (...) Later, many students wanted to continue to study in the junior high school (...) 30 good students out of 100 were selected and recommended to study at BHS for junior high school education. (Interview with Ms Li)

Zahkung Ting Ying used to be the commander of the New Democratic Army-Kachin (NDA-K) at Panwa. This group was composed of non-Jingphaw Kachin such as Lhaovo, Lashi, Lisu and Rawang, and in 1989, the NDA-K agreed a ceasefire with the Burmese government and was granted control over Kachin State Special Region-1 (Lintner, 2015; South, 2008). Because of their autonomous administration, Ting Ying's government was given the power to implement its educational affairs and initiated his plan of sending a group of young people to China for formal education. The interview with Ms Li indicated that the education of these 100 students was

organised by both governments, and their future trajectories seemed to have been pre-arranged by the Panwan government. During the field work, I had an opportunity to interview the father of two students (sisters), Mr Dong, who was also one of the important coordinators for the border education of these 100 students in Tengchong. The interview with Mr Dong was concerned with how the Panwa government valued their students' education in China, their perception of learning Chinese as well as their future expectation on these students.

是为了对地方文化建设，人才的培养(...) 地方不发达，就是没有文化没有技术 (...) 当时丁司令就讲，中国是我们的周边国家，又是我们的邻居，再着汉语也在世界上普及(...) 如果这些人[100 个学生]会讲汉语，在这个地方工作生活也好，这些娃娃对这些语言和文化精通的话是不得了的 (...) 他们的工作主要是丁司令有安排，有计划(...) 来中国读书，他都是为了双边的大小贸易、双边口岸做贡献，双边没有障碍，语言一通不应该出问题。

It was for the purpose of building the local culture and cultivating the local talents (...) Our region is under-developed just because we don't have culture and technology (...) The Commander Ting Ying once said that China was our neighbouring country, our neighbour and the Chinese language was also widely popular in the world (...) If these people [100 students] could speak Chinese, it would be very much beneficial for these children in their work and lives (...) Their jobs had been arranged and planned by the commander Ting Ying (...) It was his plan to send these children to China for education for the sake of bilateral border trade and border contribution. Border communication should not be a problem if language is not a problem. (Interview with Mr Dong)

Mr Dong confirmed the local needs of cultivating talents for Panwa's development. These students were expected to go back to assist in their regional development by working for the Panwa government in various positions. In the following, I will turn

to describe these students' educational experiences since they were sent to China at a very young age.

#### 4.5.2 Participants' experiences

Despite the Panwa government's desire to cultivate their future talents, learning Chinese and doing education in China was difficult for these students who did not have any knowledge of Chinese and who migrated to China at a very young age. The following section describes how they formed their in-group communication styles and how their language beliefs in learning *Putonghua* had been shaped over the process of their formal education in China.

##### 4.5.2.1 In-group language practices

Concerning students' previous linguistic backgrounds, most of them had little knowledge in Chinese and Burmese prior to their arrival in China, and their mother tongues also varied. Longnu described her learning difficulties right at the beginning of her education in China.

我 8 岁来中国学习汉语，一开始什么都不明白，真的很想回家，特别是老师骂，大姐姐欺负我的时候，感觉真的很无助。每天我们讲的都是想家的话 (...) 我们讲的最多的是茶山话，因为学生大多数是茶山人，第二多的是浪语，才到傣傣语和其他语言，正宗的缅人只有两个，但我们缅语几乎不讲。

I came to China to learn Chinese at the age of 8. At the beginning, I didn't understand anything, and I was missing home very much especially when I was blamed by my teachers and bullied by older students I really felt helpless. Every day, our conversation was all about home-sick topics (...) The most frequently used language was Lashi because the majority of students were Lashi. The second frequently used language was Lhaovo, followed by Lisu and other languages. There were only two Burman. We rarely spoke any Burmese. (Autobiography; Longnu)

Longnu's narration has revealed two aspects of language learning difficulties related with the students' demography: lack of Chinese proficiency and migration at a young age. When confronted with these difficulties, Longnu explained the importance of peer communication for her and her peers who seemed to share similar feelings after their migration to China. Their in-group communication practice was prominently influenced by the dominant group of students, and sometimes some students had to subject themselves to them in order to be part of the group. Laxi, a Lisu student, reported his negotiation of in-group communication.

刚入学的我，除了自己的母语[傈僳语]和缅语之外，别的一窍不通。当时我们从板瓦来的被分成三个班，按照年龄和身高分成一班、二班和三班。我在二班，我们班有 34 个同学，茶山族、傈僳族、浪族、独龙族、缅族组成的一个班集体。那时的我们几乎听不懂老师的讲话，最糟糕的是我的同学连缅语都不会讲。经过漫长的相处，我发现我的茶山语、浪语和汉语有所提高了，只是讲得不流利而已(...) 小学时我们就只上汉语和数学。每次考试的成绩都要寄回板瓦教育局，然后再到我们家，拿到成绩单就像奖状一样。后来六年级参加一次考试，语文和数学的，最后按成绩选了前 30 名接着读初中。

When I went to the border primary school, I couldn't understand any other languages except my mother tongue [Lisu] and Burmese. All of the students from Panwa were divided into three classes according to our age and height: Class A, Class B and Class C. I was in Class B where there were 34 students of various ethnic groups including Lashi, Lisu, Lhaovo, Palaung and Burman. At that time, we could hardly understand our teachers. What's worse, my classmates could not speak Burmese. After a long period of interaction, I found my Lashi, Lhaovo and Chinese improved, even though I couldn't speak them

fluently (...) At the primary school, we only had Chinese and Mathematics. Whenever we took the final exam, our academic reports would be sent back to Panwa Educational Bureau and then sent to our home. It was like getting an award when I received the report. Later in Year 6, we took examinations in Chinese and Maths and 30 students were chosen to continue to study at a junior high school based on our performance. (Autobiography; Laxi)

Laxi had described his negotiation process with his peers. For him, the language hierarchy seemed to have dramatically changed after coming to China: Burmese was no longer effective for communication, and his mother tongue was also not intelligible for peer interaction. In order to catch up with the class and to be accepted by his peers, he had to overcome many languages. Perhaps, the most challenging task for him and these students was *Putonghua*. Over the past seven years of formal education in China, these students' attachment to *Putonghua* had been shaped and reshaped by their exposure to schooling experiences. Next, I will discuss their perceptions on using *Putonghua*.

#### 4.5.2.2 Language beliefs about *Putonghua*

Having been exposed to Chinese language for four years at the border primary school, these students could follow their class lessons and communicate with their Chinese teachers. However, when they went to junior high school, they encountered a more demanding requirement.

到了初中，学习压力增大了，尤其是语文课，上课时普通话要说的好，汉语拼音要会拼会念，朗读课文要读得流畅。到了初三那年，学校教我们去实习当老师，所以就多了一门普通话课。那段时间整个教学楼都是我们读“a,o,e...”的声音。就连我睡觉还说梦话，嘴里念叨“a,o,e...”。

At the junior high school, I felt more stressed from study, especially in the Chinese language arts. In class, we were required to speak good *Putonghua*, spell out alphabets, pronounce *Hanyu Pinyin* correctly and read Chinese

textbooks fluently. At the third year of junior high school, we were required by the school to take up teaching practicum, so we were given *Putonghua* as a new subject. During that period, the whole teaching building echoed with us reading “a,o,e...”. Even in my dream, I was practicing “a,o,e...”.

(Autobiography; Benke)

Benke was a top student but despite his good academic performance, Benke was still struggling with learning *Putonghua* in junior high school. His knowledge of *Hanyu Pinyin* was insufficient for learning tasks in class and for being a student-teacher in internship. His performance in reading *Hanyu Pinyin* alphabets diminished his confidence in being a good speaker of *Putonghua*, as is evident from the example which relates to the simple vowels “a,o,e”.

After receiving formal education in China for seven years, students from Panwa had embraced the importance of speaking *Putonghua* and as the most powerful variety of Chinese language. Laxi reported his strong belief in *Putonghua*:

普通话是中国的国语，是通用的标准语言，是我们留学生与老师之间最好的沟通工具，因此学习普通话是我的至关重要的一个任务.我希望自己能讲得像中国人一样好。

*Putonghua* is the national language of China, the standardised lingua franca, and the best communicative tool between overseas students like us and the teachers. So it is a vital task for me to study *Putonghua*. I hope I can speak as well as Chinese people do. (Autobiography; Laxi)

For Laxi, learning *Putonghua* had many advantages: learning academic knowledge, communicating with his Chinese teachers in class and broadening his contact with Chinese society. In fact, the value of learning *Putonghua* was also reinforced by the employment trajectories of students who had graduated earlier:

我们现在不读书的大部分都在当官的旁边做翻译，那些当官的他们自己在外边做生意的 (...) 他们的翻译主要是缅语、普通话、还有我们那边的茶山话浪族话。毕业回去的同学大部分现在混得很好的。有一个在我们司令的儿子旁边，一下下到处飞，一下在仰光，一下曼德勒，一下板瓦，一下去这去那 (...) 有一个当民兵，在小花街片麻那边，中国人去那边砍料子，他们在哪里弄花岗，在哪里收钱。一张车是 500、600 百那样，收入还是很好的，还经常打电话给我们，我们没电话费了他就经常给我们缴。

Most of the students who have graduated are doing translation jobs for senior military officers who have their own business outside (...) Their job is to translate the languages including Burmese, *Putonghua* and our local languages of Lashi and Lhaovo. Most of the students who have gone back have good jobs. One of them was staying with our Commander's son, taking airplane all the time between Yangan, Mandalay and Panwa (...) One of them has become a soldier working at the checkpoint of Pianma's Xiaohuajie where Chinese traders go to buy timbers, and they are charged about 500 or 600 Yuan per truck. My friend seems to have a profitable job and often calls us and also paid for our phone bills if we are running out of phone credits. (Interview with Kongdan)

From such employment trajectories, Kongdan deduced the value of *Putonghua* in terms of working for senior officers, enjoying the free travel in the big cities, and making a fortune at checkpoints. These employment prospects had strengthened Kongdan's belief that it was worthwhile to invest in *Putonghua*.

Overall, students from Panwa had formed their peer communication style: Lashi and Lhaovo were used as in-group language for the purpose of mutual comfort and support at their young migration age. While staying in China for seven years, these

students had attached great importance to the values of *Putonghua* concerning its academic and official status as well as the possibilities it creates for future employment prospects. However, the longer they stayed in China, the more challenging they found speaking *Putonghua* and being a proficient speaker of Chinese. This occurred when they entered into junior high school where they were required to display higher level of Chinese language by reading each Chinese word correctly in class and by taking up internships working as student-teacher teaching Chinese language.

#### 4.5.3 Summary

This section has identified two main features of the educational experiences of the participants who had received most of their education in China: the peer communication style and the values of speaking *Putonghua*. Coming from various linguistic backgrounds and seeking mutual comfort, speaking Lashi and Lhaovo had been used as in-group markers based on the percentage of the speakers in class. In addition, seven years of border education in China had shaped these students' understanding of the expectation of speaking *Putonghua*: to learn how to speak fluently like a native Chinese. While they were struggling to improve their *Putonghua*, they constantly found themselves positioned as a deficient speaker because of increasing requirements as a qualified *Putonghua* speaker. Despite their insufficient performance, they still held strong beliefs in *Putonghua* as a powerful language code for academic success and future employment prospects.

#### **4.6 Conclusion: Chinese for empowerment in a China-oriented world**

This chapter has presented the language learning trajectories of participants prior to entering BHS. It has focused on the exclusion they had experienced because of their lack of Burmese language proficiency and their minority status; and it has also demonstrated how they attempted to empower themselves by learning Chinese and by orienting towards a China-centric world.

Despite being born and brought up in Myanmar, most of my participants did not complete public primary school education in that country. One of the key learning barriers they experienced was their lack of dominant language proficiency. Without

the knowledge of Burmese language, my participants found it hard to follow classes and to achieve good grades. Their learning difficulties were aggravated by the role of English, which is a core subject from Year 1 and becomes the medium of instruction from Year 10. For these students located on the periphery of Myanmar, the English language constituted an additional barrier in accessing learning resources and achieving educational success. For students who did not speak Burmese and who could not afford private English tutoring, these barriers were virtually impossible to overcome. As a result, most participants could not achieve the benchmarks and dropped out of the government educational system at a young age. Apart from the barriers of Burmese and English, the participants' minority status also kept them from equal participation in classroom activities. The ethnic Chinese, in particular, reported that they were often ridiculed or bullied and were strictly forbidden to use Chinese in class. Their experiences of marginalisation echo those of Latino students in the USA-and-Mexican border regions. The consequences of the mismatch between home language and language of instruction and the stereotyping of ethnic minority students are the same as with Latino minority students in the USA (see detailed discussion in Chapter Two). The result of the policies and practices reported here lead to the academic failure and low graduation rates of ethnic Chinese and other minority groups in Myanmar.

However, in contrast to minority students whose experiences of exclusion and marginalisation have been most widely studied in existing research (see 2.5.1), the participants in this study were not particularly concerned about their success in government schools and did not necessarily see their dropping-out as an educational failure. In contrast, the participants in this study had, in fact, high educational ambitions. The difference with the experience of minority students elsewhere (see 4.3.1 and 4.3.2) lies in the fact that their marginalisation in government schools was “offset” by their empowerment in Chinese supplementary schools. Attending government schools and supplementary schools in parallel – usually one in the daytime from 9 am to 3:30 pm and the other in the rest of time- participants experienced an enormous contrast between the two systems, which shaped their language learning beliefs and educational motivations. Their persistent efforts in

improving their Chinese may originally have been motivated by their or their parents' desire to maintain their Chinese ethnic heritage. However, their experience in the government schools meant that Chinese came increasingly to be seen as a more profitable investment for their future educational and career prospects. Their strong beliefs in the value of learning Chinese for transnational mobility and for improving their life prospects, threw the usefulness of the central educational system offered by the Burmese government into question.

Their dismissal of the usefulness of public education in Myanmar must also be understood against the fact that the Burmese government is widely seen as politically weak and incapable of pacifying the border regions where ethnic conflicts and clashes are a frequent occurrence (see Section 1.2 for details). Given the fact that all of the participants are members of ethnic minority groups from the border region, their low completion rate in government schools is not only an indicator of their educational marginalisation but must also be understood as an expression of their distrust in the Burmese state and all its expression, including their dismissal of the value of the Burmese language. This is evident from the ways participants contested the usefulness of learning Burmese, the content of Burmese History classes and their self-exclusionary positioning as not being part of the Burmese nation.

In contrast, Chinese supplementary schools offered them an opportunity to reimagine their identity and their homeland. For instance, while many strongly disliked studying Burmese history, studying Chinese history was extremely popular and the favourite subject of a number of participants. Furthermore, their exposure to Chinese historical figures and events was enlarged and strengthened by TV series and movies, which resulted in further positive identification with China and Chinese language and culture. The ready availability of all kinds of Chinese-related materials via media and community engagement in the border area further shaped the participants' identification with China and their orientation to a China-centric world. Learning Chinese thus became a powerful agentic strategy to reposition themselves from being a part of a disadvantaged ethnic minority group from a peripheral region to being members of the larger Chinese nation who saw themselves on a trajectory to full

inclusion and empowerment as part of a “rising China”. This constitutes a significant contrast to similar previous studies (see 2.2) of migrant students who may not have the same kind of readily accessible means to empower their education and career prospects as potential members of a dominant society. In sum, my participants aspired to transform their marginalised identities in Myanmar by accessing a Chinese position they perceived as privileged and as a powerful form of linguistic and cultural capital in the borderlands.

At the same time, in the context of China’s rise, the paradigm of what it means to speak and write Chinese has also been changing and has gradually shifted to *Putonghua* as the norm. This means that significant tensions over what it means to speak Chinese have emerged, and these relate specifically to contestations of the authenticity of the “mother-tongue” versus “non-heritage learners”; contestations of the standard seen as Taiwan Mandarin or *Putonghua*; and contestations of the valorisation of the Yunnan dialect versus *Putonghua*. The first type of tension also manifests as a contestation over Chinese as a language with economic value and Chinese as a marker of a heritage identity. Such tension is similar to what has been observed in Canada where the globalised economy challenges the meaning of speaking French both as a marker of an economic identity and an ethnic identity (Heller, Bell, Daveluy, Noël, & McLaughlin, 2015). Given the promotion of *Putonghua* via Confucius Classrooms and the increasing importance of China’s economy in Myanmar, it can be expected that this tension is going to become more pronounced in the future.

The second and third types of tensions are played out more directly in the participants’ learning experiences: those who had been exposed to the Taiwanese system had to learn to how to write simplified Chinese characters, those who had just followed the PRC-system often found themselves lacking knowledge of the *Hanyu Pinyin* system and both groups were also confronted with their lack of exposure to the pronunciation of standardised *Putonghua*. These tensions are not unique to my participants and have also been observed in Chinese diasporic communities, where *Putonghua* is

challenging the legitimacy of home varieties such as Cantonese or Hokkien (W. Li & Zhu, 2010).

Learning *Putonghua* i.e. acquiring the right kind of linguistic capital for educational and career mobility was not only a challenge for students who had come to China in the mid to late teens. Students who arrived in China as young as seven years old and had received most of their formal education in China faced similar problems. The findings from the eight participants in this category indicate that their learning difficulties in *Putonghua* may not be reduced by their early exposure to the language but may actually increase as the requirements in core subjects become more demanding. From the moment of their enrollment at the border primary school, they struggled to understand Chinese as a medium of instruction. By the time they graduated, they could listen well but could not speak fluently. When they reached junior high school, they were required to display a higher level of Chinese proficiency in reading aloud the Chinese texts in class, knowing the rules of *Hanyu Pinyin* and pronouncing each alphabet correctly and passing the standardised test for student-teacher teaching Chinese language.

In sum, participants had come to BHS from a background where they had been marginalised as non-speakers of Burmese and English but where they had nonetheless found it possible to empower their educational careers by orienting their educational aspirations towards China. In the following chapters, I will explore how these previous educational trajectories continued to shape their education once they arrived in China, and specifically BHS. Did an orientation towards China empower their education and were they able to fulfill their aspirations through their migration to China?

## **Chapter Five: School practices**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines both the external and internal factors affecting the Burmese students' education at BHS. First, it shows how BHS is positioned by the national, provincial and local governments as a model school because of its recruitment of Burmese students as human capital for China's soft power project. The chapter goes on to show that recruitment of Burmese students constitutes an opportunity for BHS to construct itself as a "model school" in an effort to counterbalance its decreasing popularity with local Chinese students. Even though educating Burmese students is highly valued at government and school levels discursively, as I will show in Sections 5.2 and 5.3, respectively, an examination of actual school practices in Sections 5.4 and 5.5 reveals a series of discrepancies. These discrepancies are discussed with a focus on the educational and social consequences of Burmese students' learning experiences at BHS. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of the tensions between inclusive institutional ideologies and exclusive institutional practices at BHS.

### **5.2 Becoming a model school**

This section will describe the official discourse on recruiting Burmese students for education as part of China's recent project of soft power promotion in ASEAN. The discussion will focus on how Burmese students have been discursively constructed as human capital at national, provincial and municipal levels of government.

As China is driving to integrate its economy into the world system, it is also actively engaged in promoting its positive image through the increasing appreciation of soft use of power (Gil, 2015; Kurlantzick, 2006; Nye, 2005). One of the most noticeable achievements in this respect is associated with the global promotion of the Chinese language. Promoting Chinese has been positioned as a national mission which is expected to benefit the country's national security and influence others' positive perceptions and beliefs about the peaceful rise of China (Zhang, 2005). According to

China's 12<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), border provinces are encouraged to take advantage of their geographical location in expanding mutual cooperation with their neighbouring countries in various forms and promoting Chinese globally is part of the national scheme.

In response to the national plan, Yunnan has been participating in the promotion of the Chinese language in neighbouring countries while seeking to improve its local economy. Geographically, Yunnan has over 4,000 kilometres of borderlines with Myanmar, Vietnam and Laos (see 1.2). Economically, Yunnan has been backward with a low degree of socio-economic development ranking near the bottom in per capita GDP in China (Poncet, 2006). With China's rapid development in the world economy, Yunnan has seized this opportunity to develop its economy and to integrate itself into China's global expansion. In 2009, China signed a free-trade agreement with ASEAN. Since then, Yunnan has been turned into a “桥头堡” (Bridgehead) linking China to ASEAN and South Asia (M. Li, 2014; Su, 2013; Summers, 2013). One of the achievements of the “bridgehead” project has been the increasing number of international students in Yunnan. In 2001 there were only 760 international students (X. Wu, 2010), but ten years later their number had increased to 15,000. Only three years later again, by 2014, this number had doubled to over 30,000, with more than 80% of overseas students from ASEAN. It is expected that the number of international students in Yunnan will reach 100,000 by 2020 (People's Daily, 2014). The high number of ASEAN students is not only a result of Yunnan's geographical proximity but also related to Yunnan's ethnic connections with ASEAN countries, where over ten million ethnic Chinese with Yunnan origins reside. The Chinese government has considered this large Chinese diaspora a good opportunity to further China's global influence, as stated by Qiu Yuanping, the director of Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council (Ma, He, & Li, 2015):

在东盟国家聚集着数千万华侨华人，他们是促进中国与东盟友好合作的天然力量，也是云南对外开放和发展建设的借助力量。

There are ten million overseas Chinese in ASEAN. They are a natural strength for the friendly and mutual cooperation between China and ASEAN, they are also the power that Yunnan can draw on to open up and develop the local economy.

The ethnic Chinese have been perceived as a powerful nexus between mainland China and ASEAN. This positioning is mostly due to their remarkable economic performance in ASEAN, and their historical contributions to China's nationalist movement in the early twentieth century (Bhattacharya, 2009; Tu, 1994; G. Wang, 1991). With China's desire to reinforce its influence in ASEAN, ethnic Chinese have come to be considered as ideal mediators between China and their home countries. The similar discourse of embracing ethnic Chinese to come back to China for investment and study is also frequently circulated in many bordering towns and cities of Yunnan.

As one of the bordering towns in Yunnan, Tengchong is actively responding to the "bridgehead" project. In order to seek its legitimacy into the part of the national mission and provincial scheme, Tengchong has made use of its geographical and cultural resources. Historically, Tengchong was a fortress town of military significance during many ancient dynasties and even during WWII (Lin, 2001; Lu, 2001; Yang & Yin, 2000). Geographically, Tengchong shares more than 148 kilometres of borderlines with Myanmar. Because of its historical significance and geographical location, Tengchong has been perceived as a strategic key node in the integration of China and ASEAN. Since the establishment of border trade with Myanmar in 1988, several government-approved border trading posts in Tengchong have been set up at national and provincial levels. Apart from that, the Tengchong government is also exploring its human resources and actively constructing itself as the ancestral hometown of ethnic Chinese. According to the local report (Education Bureau, 2014), Tengchong has about 350,000 overseas Chinese distributed into 23 countries and regions in the world, and the majority of these, over 200,000, live in Myanmar. Because of these connections, the kinship discourse has been frequently

adopted in the local strategy attracting ethnic Chinese and their children coming “back” to invest and to study. For the Tengchong government, the ethnic Chinese are often perceived as human capital to improve the local economy:

与腾冲紧紧相邻的缅甸北部，有着丰富的森林资源、矿产资源、宝（石）玉石资源以及水资源，我们不能以文化谈文化，而是如何利用好在文化建设中，发展已有的条件，腾冲在缅甸有几十万华人华侨旅居于此，有着众多爱国爱乡的典范，我们应该利用好这人脉资源，振兴腾冲的经济。

Tengchong is closely bordering Upper Myanmar where there are rich forest, mineral, gem and jade, and water resources. We can't only talk about culture with culture but we should make use of cultural resources to develop the local economy. There are hundreds of thousands of ethnic Chinese living in Myanmar, and many of them are the good models of loving China and loving Tengchong. We should make good use of these human resources and then revitalize Tengchong's economy. (Education Bureau, 2014)

Seeing the importance of ethnic Chinese as commercial links, the local educational authorities are engaged in recruiting ethnic Chinese students to study in Tengchong in the hope that they will become cross-cultural communicators in the future as described below:

华文教育将满足华人华侨子女回国就读与深造的愿望，加深对祖国的了解，增进华侨华人对祖国的认同、对家乡的热爱之情，有利于促进中缅两国的经贸和文化交流。

Ethnic Chinese language education can fulfil the dream of ethnic Chinese children coming to study in China. It can reinforce their understanding of China and their identification with their homeland [ China ] and their love

for their hometown [ Tengchong ] . It can promote the economic, business and cultural communications between China and Myanmar. (Education Bureau, 2014)

Besides ethnic Chinese students, Burmese students of other ethnic groups are also included in the local discourse and they are also positioned as the future potential talents for China's expansion in ASEAN:

通过招收外国学生到县内重点学校学习汉语，为汉语走向东南亚奠定坚实的人才基础，增进了彼此之间的了解，加深了友谊，培养一大批既了解中外国情又通晓两国语言的专门人才，为桥头堡建设培养和储备好人才资源。

To recruit foreign students to study Chinese at the key schools of Tengchong, we can prepare a group of talents for spreading Chinese in ASEAN. We can understand each other and strengthen our friendship. We aim to cultivate a large group of professional intellectuals who can understand China and foreign countries and who can speak the languages of two countries. These students are the potential talents to be used for the Bridgehead project.

(Tengchong Education Bureau, 2013)

In order to attract Burmese students to study in Tengchong, many favourable policies have been provided. For example, since 2005, Burmese students have been given the same policies as Chinese peers to enjoy the nine-year-compulsory education, enjoying free tuition fees and other miscellaneous fees (see sections 1.3 and 4.5). As for those who have finished their nine-year-compulsory education and want to advance to the senior high school education, there are also relevant policies for them. BHS has been officially accredited and financially supported to cater to Burmese students doing senior high school education in Tengchong. Every year, each Burmese student will be sponsored by the local government with 3000 RMB to

cover their living expense while their tuition fees will be sponsored by the provincial government of Overseas Chinese Office (Education Bureau, 2014). Besides the financial support for their education, the promising pathways for Burmese students after graduation from China have also been highly emphasised in the government discourse.

已经毕业的学生有的回到住在国、在华校从事教育工作，有的回到住在国经商，有的升入更高一级的学校学习，以后他们将成为促进中缅友谊的桥梁。

After graduating [ from China ], some students went back and took up teaching jobs at Chinese schools [ in Myanmar ], some went back to do business and others advanced their study in China. In the future, they are expected to become the bridge for Sino-Myanmar friendship. (Overseas Chinese Office 2015).

It is worth noting that these favourable policies and educational trajectories are targeting all Burmese students. Ethnic Chinese students are subsumed under the category of Burmese students even though other official texts construct them as a distinct group noted for their special ties with China (see above). In educational practice, too, ethnic Chinese and Burmese of other ethnic groups are often treated as one group.

汉语国际推广是党和国家的一项重要战略部署，对华人华侨子女的教育也是这项工作的重要组成部分。

Promoting Chinese as an international language is an important strategic scheme of the Communist Party and China. Educating ethnic Chinese children is included as an important component in this project. (Tengchong Education Bureau, 2013)

Strategically, promoting Chinese as an international language seems to include Burmese people of different backgrounds and ethnic Chinese seems to be specially considered and welcome. Such official discourse has formed a tension between treating all students from Myanmar as “Burmese” on the one hand and singling out ethnic Chinese as special on the other. This may cause identity conflicts among ethnic Chinese who self-exclude themselves from other Burmese peoples and who also see themselves as part of China (see Sections 4.3 and 4.4).

At BHS, the first group of Burmese students were recruited in 2005 and these students happened to be all ethnic Chinese from Myanmar (Annual Report, 2013). Only one year later, BHS was rewarded as one of the model schools for promoting Chinese as an international language. Such national reward did not highlight the achievement on educating ethnic Chinese but categorised it into a larger project, namely the global promotion of Chinese language. The ethnic Chinese were accordingly perceived as Burmese students and their international identity was stressed while their ethnic identity was either ignored or often interchangeably used in official discourses. Such national acknowledgment within the short period of time indicated the Chinese government’s desire to construct BHS as a window expanding its influence in Myanmar.

Being nationally approved as one of the model schools in China, BHS and the local government in Tengchong have seen the potential value of constructing the modelling effect through recruiting Burmese students in order to win more national investment and to keep the sustainable development of the local economy:

积极争取国家汉办的支持，不断改善学校的办学条件。通过汉语推广基地建设，着力打造县内重点品牌学校，使之产生更大的办学辐射效应，成为对外交流平台和窗口，促进县域经济的持续、快速发展。

Actively apply for the national support from Hanban and improve the teaching facilities of the schools. The special focus will be given to building the key modelling school of Tengchong through the development of promoting the

Chinese language. The construction of modelling school is expected to produce the expansion effects, become the communicative forum and window with the outside world so that the regional economy can be sustainably and rapidly developed. (Tengchong Education Bureau, 2013)

Over the past few years, the local positioning of constructing BHS as a national project has produced many positive effects. Apart from the national grant as one of the few modelling school for promoting Chinese as an international language, BHS has drawn nation-wide and even global attention. Many high officials such as Tang Ying, Chinese ambassador in Myanmar (Annual Report, 2013), and Qiu Yuanping, the director of Overseas Chinese Affairs of the State Council (Ma et al., 2015) have visited BHS. In the annual report of Tengchong's educational achievements, BHS has been frequently mentioned and displayed as a model school. Over the three months of field work at BHS, I met many Chinese officials from local and provincial levels and some delegates of Sino-Myanmar companies coming to employ Burmese students even before their graduation. Overall, Burmese students are perceived by the Chinese government as a group of cross-cultural communicators who are expected to understand China and to contribute to the mutual cooperation between China and Myanmar. Seeing them as potential human capital for China's global influence and regional economic development, many favourable educational policies have been instituted to attract Burmese students, that is why BHS is strategically positioned as a borderland model school.

While taking up the national mission of promoting Chinese globally, BHS is also faced with many challenges on how to balance the different learning needs of Burmese students of various ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and how to keep its competitive positions with other Chinese schools. The following section will describe BHS's school policies and practices in integrating Burmese students into the mainstream school culture.

### 5.3 BHS's educational vision

As a border high school, BHS has to compete with other high schools in the same locality while educating Burmese students of diverse backgrounds. This section explores how BHS addresses this tension between competing for the school ranks and maintaining its diversity.

#### 5.3.1 Chinese high school education

Since China embraced a market-oriented system in 1979, Chinese high schools, too, have competed against each other for resources. While the central government still retains control over the purpose of education, curriculum design, textbook allocations and teaching guidelines, a series of policies have been implemented to shift the central government's funding responsibility to lower levels of government and to push schools to compete against each other (Chan & Ngok, 2001; N. Sun, 2002).

Competition plays out predominantly on the terrain of the centralised national college entrance exam, 高考(*gaokao*). *Gaokao* scores are used to evaluate student performance, teacher efficacy, and even the administrative performance of school principals and local government officials (Kirkpatrick & Zang, 2011; Wang & Ross, 2010; Zhang & Yang, 2003). Behind this *Gaokao*-centred mode of competition is the potential value of the individual's upward social mobility (Shangguan & Zimu, 2009; H. Zhang, 2013; Zhao, 2013). *Gaokao* is such a highly centralised and high-stakes examination that it can define who has access to higher education and what kind of higher education one can have. Despite recent national educational reforms allowing alternative university admission routes, *gaokao* results continue to be immensely important. Under such educational competitions, better-resourced schools with good reputations in major cities enjoy advantages over schools in rural and peripheral areas (Wang & Ross, 2010). In the context of this unequal competition, a high performance on the *gaokao* is the only opportunity for students from poor rural and peripheral areas to gain access to a university education, to find a middle-class job in the city, and to gain urban residency to fulfil their city dreams (Wang & Ross, 2010).

### 5.3.2 BHS under the competition mechanism

BHS, located in a peripheral and frontier region of China, is driven by the *gaokao*-centred discourse under the competition mechanism. In order to compete for the good sources of students, BHS had to outperform its competitors in students' average test in *gaokao* on the one hand. On the other hand, BHS was engaged in making use of its local resources to distinguish itself from its competitors as a counterbalance to win public attention and the government's investment. By the time the field work was conducted, in Tengchong, there were only four high schools with a complete schooling system from Year 7 to Year 12. In other words, the main competitors for BHS were the three high schools in the same locality. In order to attract good sources and escalate its reputation, BHS had to compete with the high schools in the students' performance of *gaokao*. However, based on its annual performance in *gaokao*, BHS was only ranked as the third and sometimes even fourth place, which means, BHS was ranked toward the bottom in terms of school reputation (Annual Report, 2013; *Gaokao* report, 2012). Because of their unsatisfactory performance in *gaokao*, BHS had lost its advantage attracting good students with high scores, which led to a vicious cycle of school recruitment and the evaluation of teaching and management efficiency. Mr Fan, an administrator of BHS, explained the importance of having good students as school resources:

生源一旦有差距的话，最终努力后，无论学校老师再怎么努力，他们[学生]智力和脑子是最终无法和成绩好的学生无法比的。就像连锁反应，比如，这一年的教学质量好、考分高，下一届招生的生源就会好，考试成绩也会跟着好。像家长他也不瞧你的起点或别的原因，他们就马上知道，这个学校考的第一，就会蜂拥的报这个学校。

If there is a gap in the sources of students, no matter what efforts schools and teachers have made, their [students'] intelligence and brains can never compete with the students of good achievement. It's like chain reaction. For example, if it happens that our academic performance is good this year and our teaching

quality is effective, we will likely have good sources of students who will produce good learning outcomes next year. However, parents do not consider the initial level of students or any other reasons, they are only interested in whether this school ranks first and then they will swarm into the school for enrolment. (Interview with Mr Fan).

In order to enter the vicious circle, schools had to do all they could to ensure its competitive forces in *gaokao* by keeping the students in classes for long hours, assigning huge amount of homework and organising countless mock exams (see 5.4 and more detailed discussion in Chapter Six). However, not all of the high schools could be ranked on the top. For the rest of the schools who failed to perform, they were striving hard to legitimise themselves as a potential school with certain features for attracting public attention and potential investment while still keeping their focus on *gaokao*-centered practices (P. Wu, 2013).

### 5.3.3 Negotiating BHS's visibility as a model school

BHS seems to experience a great challenge to stand out from its three competitors due to its low rank in *gaokao* performance. In order to make itself visible, BHS is actively engaged in constructing its new positioning as a model school by making good use of its local resources. By combining its historical significance and the present components of students' demography, BHS has formed its development direction featured with four types of education, namely "four in one" mode of education:

为了提高教学质量，促进学校的可持续发展，结合学校实际，确定了民族教育立校、普通教育稳校、音体美教育活校、对外汉语推广教育促校的“四位一体”的特色发展思路，力争把我校建成一所高标准、高质量的边疆民族教育示范学校。

In order to improve the teaching and learning quality and promote the school's sustainable development, we have considered the school's reality and have formed the development of "four in one": ethnic minority education as the

foundation, general education as a stabiliser, Music, Sports and Arts education as enabler and teaching Chinese as an international language as a school promoter. We aim to make our school as a model school of the border ethnic education with high standards. (Annual Report, 2013)

As a model school taking responsibility for the four streams of education, BHS successfully positions itself to the outside world as an important unit of local education for embracing students of various backgrounds. For BHS, highlighting the four streams of students' diversity can reveal its distinct features from its competitors and its specific achievements as an educational institution. For the local government, BHS's positioning is an indispensable display of the local practice of equal education among various ethnic groups of students. For the national government, BHS's adoption of multicultural and international features is also the long-term national pursuit of ethnic solidarity and national security given the various rewards BHS received (Annual Report, 2013).

Despite having multicultural components of education, the four streams of education are not given equal attention, and they are also positioned in different orders with different functions. Regarding the ethnic minority education, its distinct category is only symbolic because of its historical relevance as a school targeting ethnic minority students in Tengchong (Yang & Guo, 2013). Over the two decades of development, the percentage of ethnic minority students has been greatly decreasing from over 80% in 1990 to only 40% in 2013 (Yang & Guo, 2013, pp.139-146). At BHS, there is no longer any separate class for ethnic minority students, and education for these students per se is merged into either general education or Music, Sports and Arts education.

For the general education, there are 46 classes out of 50, consisting 92% of school classes at BHS. The general education represents the mainstream school culture because students in such educational stream constitute the most visible space (see Section 5.4), and their academic performance in high-stake tests such as the senior high school entrance examination and *gaokao* can influence BHS's school reputation and teachers' promotion. In its annual reports, BHS always highlights its educational

quality which is almost exclusively based on these students' performance in high-stake tests.

Similar to the general education, students doing Music, Arts and Sports education need to take *gaokao*, but different from the general education, the university admission requirement for those doing Music, Arts and Sports is much lower than their mainstream peers. Despite the small percentage of classes, these Music, Arts and Sports students also contribute to the visibility of the school at local and national levels. Their contribution is often associated with their outstanding performance in the cultural activities at local, provincial and national levels and these activities include the display of Chinese handwriting and painting show, dancing and singing performance and sports games. Their achievements are considered as the typical components of school's distinct feature, which in turn reinforces the visibility of BHS's public reputation.

The fourth education is teaching Chinese to foreign students, especially, Burmese students. Given that educating Burmese students has been positioned as a local government's task for the long-term strategy of China's expanding influence in its neighbouring country, BHS's educational achievement on Burmese students is often addressed in various official reports. For the school itself, BHS also sees it as a great opportunity for adding school's competitive forces and sustaining its long-term development as reported by Mr Ma, the director of the office for teaching and learning at BHS:

华文教育一直是腾冲的特色。还是当时我们的学校领导有远见，争取到了这个华文教育项目。从学校来讲，如果这个班不存在，我们和 xxx 中、xxx 中、xxx 中比起就只是高考成绩，但因为我们生源受限制，和成绩好的学校肯定会有差距，我们的成绩无法和其他学校比。但我们还有特色班，因为我们学校有这些特色，音体美班、华文班，投资的人也觉得有这个价值，有投资意义，县上也很重视。

Overseas Chinese education has been Tengchong's characteristic. Thanks to the previous leaders who had a long-term perspective and obtained this project of teaching overseas Chinese. For BHS, if this class [Burmese class] did not exist, we could only compete with xxx high school, xxx high school and xxx high school in *gaokao* performance. Given our disadvantage in recruiting good students, we would definitely lag behind and our testing scores could never compete with these schools. Thanks to these Music, Sports and Arts class and Overseas Chinese class as our feature, the potential investors will find it valuable and meaningful to invest and Tengchong government also places great emphasis on the development of these featured classes. (Interview with Mr Ma)

According to Mr Ma, BHS seemed to experience a great challenge in standing out from the other three competitors due to its low rank in *gaokao* performance. Under stress over improving the school ranking, BHS made itself visible and countable by highlighting its distinct features and empowering itself as a model school to negotiate its disadvantages in the standardised testing performance.

#### 5.3.4 Summary

In sum, a key impact on BHS is the *gaokao*-centred competition mechanism. Because of its low performance on the *gaokao*, BHS has been positioned at the bottom level of the local ranking system and has thus largely lost its capacity to attract academically strong students. In order to improve its reputation, BHS has reinvented itself as a model school with a diverse “four in one” educational mission. Recruiting and educating Burmese students is an important pillar of the model school strategy which aims to enhance school visibility and increase funding opportunities. BHS's diversification strategy also fits into the local development plan of positioning Burmese students as potential human capital for China's soft power projection and border development. Even though the official discourses at government and school levels are highly positive and inclusive towards Burmese students, the ways in which BHS manages student diversity and the challenges BHS has to confront remain largely unknown to the wider community (see Sections 1.2 and 1.3). In the following, I will

turn to actual school practices with a particular focus on the management of diversity and the regulation of Burmese students.

#### **5.4 Management of school diversity**

Many previous studies on migrant students' education reveal a continuum of schooling discrepancies between the institutional recognition of diversity at the discursive level and exclusionary practices at the implementation level (see detailed discussion in 2.3). Aligned with the research inquiry of schooling discrepancies, this section examines the school practices including the boarding policy, daily routines, school landscapes and the physical organisations of the classroom. These practices are then examined in relation to their educational and social consequences on the Burmese students' learning experiences at BHS.

##### **5.4.1 Boarding policy and students' family background**

In Tengchong, BHS is the only high school which requires all of its students to live on campus from Monday to Saturday whereas other schools allow students to have an option to live on campus or to travel to school on a daily basis. BHS's unique boarding school policy is associated with its historical foundation and is also impacted by its disadvantaged geographical location.

In 1990, BHS was established to cater to ethnic minority education as its founding purpose. Given that ethnic minority students were from rural areas and could not travel on a daily basis, BHS has implemented the boarding school policy since the beginning of its establishment. Another reason for having a boarding school policy is the constraint of its physical environment. BHS is located in the west suburb of Tengchong, about three kilometres away from the downtown area. Concerning the distance, three kilometres is not far for daily travelling, but the school is not located in an easily accessible area. Against several mountains, BHS's access to the outside world is a winding and narrow asphalt road. This is simultaneously shared by many private houses standing where there used to be a large tract of farmlands. The city expansion and urbanisation in China have changed the landscape of these farmlands into residential places. In general, it takes at least 15 minutes on foot to pass through this road and to reach access to public transport. There is another wider road facing

the backdoor of the school, but the ownership of the road needs to be negotiated with the local government and the border military army. Because of these complicated relations, the backdoor road is often “abandoned” for decades and the road is dusty and bumpy and on rainy days, it is hardly passable, which forms a big contrast to the outside modern city infrastructure. Because of the inconvenience in travel, BHS has lost its advantage attracting urban students who have the option to choose the other three high schools that have easy access to city facilities. Different from urban students’ concern, rural students seem to find it convenient to live on campus as it is difficult for them to travel on a daily basis. Because of these physical constraints brought about by the school location and its practice on boarding policy, BHS has failed to attract urban students but has attracted many rural students. For example, in 2013, the annual report of BHS on students’ *gaokao* performance proved that over 90% of students who graduated from Year 12 came from rural areas (*Gaokao* report, 2012).

The high percentage of students from the rural background has two main implications for the construction of the school culture: a strong emphasis on *gaokao* as the only means of upward mobility and the associated learning spirits to achieve such a dream. For rural students, the only way they can have social mobility is through *gaokao* (see 5.3.1). Consequently, *gaokao* in the rural student-centred schools is escalated as the symbolic power and learning ethos (see detail analysis in 5.4.3). In order to achieve success in *gaokao*, rural students are often expected to develop certain desired qualities such as “diligence”, “perseverance”, “cleanliness”, and “thrift”. These qualities are highly valued and acknowledged by the school culture. Opposite to these qualities are being “lazy”, “indolent”, “sloven” and “extravagant”, which are devalued by the school culture. In order to cultivate students with these desired qualities, BHS has implemented a military-style education as an important part of the school life to regulate students’ social behaviours.

#### 5.4.2 Military-style daily regulations and routines

The previous subsection has described the boarding school policy and students’ demography. Given the fact that students of diverse backgrounds are required to live

on campus 24 hours from Monday to Saturday, BHS has implemented military-style daily regulations and routines to maintain school order and to cultivate in students the desired qualities. The following analysis is based on the daily school observation at school canteen, the playground and dormitories.

Living on campus, all of the students at BHS are required to strictly follow the school timetable from 6:30 am to 22:20 pm from Monday to Friday. On weekdays, from morning to afternoon, excluding morning reading class, students have nine classes to focus on various subject-learning and two extra classes for tutorial purposes in the evening. Each class lasts for 40 minutes. Despite the absence of an explicit timetable for Saturdays, BHS still holds the regular classes for Chinese students. Such practice is no longer a secret but shared by all of the high schools in Tengchong even though the Chinese government forbids any form of tutorial lessons on weekends and holidays (informal conversation with Mr Xie). The following table is the daily time table for all of the students in BHS.

*Table 10. School timetable for students' daily activities*

Time		Length (mins)	Tasks
Morning	6:30-6:50	20	Getting up, washing up, cleaning dormitory; getting up at 7:00 on Sunday
	6:50-7:05	15	Morning exercise
	7:05-7:30	25	Breakfast, clean public spaces
	7:30-7:50	20	Morning reading
	7:50-8:30	40	First class
	8:30-8:40	10	Breaktime
	8:40-9:20	40	Second class

	9:20-9:40	20	Excercise
	9:40-10:20	40	Third class
	10:20-10:30	10	Breaktime
	10:30-11:10	40	Fourth class
	11:10-11:20	10	Breaktime
	11:20-12:00	40	Fifth class
	12:00-12:55	55	Lunch, washing clothes, cleaning public spaces
	12:55-13:55	60	Rest
Afternoon	13:55-14:15	20	Washing up, cleaning dormitory
	14:15-14:20	5	Ready for class
	14:20-15:00	40	Sixth class
	15:00-15:10	10	Breaktime
	15:10-15:50	40	Seventh class
	15:50-16:05	15	Eye-protection exercise
	16:05-16:45	40	Eighth class
	16:45-16:55	10	Breaktime
	16:55-17:35	40	Nineth class
	17:35-19:25	110	Dinner, entertainment, cleaning
Evening	19:25-19:30	5	Ready for class
	19:30-20:30	60	First tutorial class
	20:30-20:55	25	Breaktime, snack

	20:55-21:55	60	Second tutorial class
	21:55-22:20	25	Washing up, ready to sleep

Students' daily activities are accounted for by minutes from morning to evening with 950 minutes in total. Besides spending 360 minutes (37% of the total amount of time) in their classes, students are given clear set schedule when to have breakfast, lunch and dinner, as well as late supper and when to do washing up and cleaning. Regarding their recreational time, they are only given 110 minutes from 5:35 pm to 19:25 pm, and within this period, they also need to finish their dinner and cleaning tasks. The following snapshots record part of their daily activities in which almost 3000 students live in the same school swarming into the same places for eating, washing and playing, at the same time.



*Figure 4. Breakfast hall on a winter morning*



*Figure 5. Daily morning exercise*



*Figure 6. Rushing back to dormitories to get their food container*



*Figure 7. Lunch queue*



*Figure 8. Washing routine*

The above snapshots recorded part of the students' intensive pace of daily life. Under the regulated life style, every student has to learn to plan each minute well, otherwise they will have trouble in adapting to such a “military-style management” (a term frequently used by the school teachers and leaders). Being late for class or being absent from class is often regarded by subject teachers as “indolence” and “lack of will-power” and stands in contrast to the values of the school (see above Section 5.4.1). It seems that Burmese students have troubles adjusting to this life style and their disobedience is often positioned as a problem, as the homeroom teacher Mr Xie complained:

我们这边从早到晚，就像军事化，但他们 [ 缅甸学生 ] 不同，普遍纪律涣散，只要有一点问题就不来上课。还有迟到方面。

Here what we practice is like military training from morning to evening, but they [ Burmese students ] are different; they generally lack discipline. If there is a minor problem, they will not come to class. They also have a problem of being late for class. (Interview with Mr Xie)

Besides the daily routines, the regulation on students' codes of conduct is also part of the school culture. Anyone who goes against the rules will be blamed by the school leaders and such blame will in turn affect the average performance of their classes and their homeroom teachers' salary and promotion. The purpose of implementing the codes of conduct is to homogenise students into a unified culture so that everything can be quantified for measurement as "good" or "bad". At BHS, all students are required to dress in the same school uniforms from Monday to Saturday, and these uniforms are homogenously designed in a sportish style for high school students. Apart from the school uniforms, there are also strict requirements on their hair length and style with colours strictly forbidden. For boys, long, bald or curled, or dyed hair is not allowed; for girls, having hair curled, or dyed, loosened instead of bound together, or cut very short is not permitted. The following figure provides the "standard" look of high school students' hairstyle in China:



Figure 9. Standard hairstyles of high school students

Such homogeneous practices in dress and hairstyle have formed an explicit normalized school culture in which any deviation from these regulations is considered a deficit or a problem. Such cultural homogeneity in fact has posed a potential challenge to the school's management and students' multicultural backgrounds. Since the responsibility of regulating students' codes of conduct is shifted to the homeroom teachers, tensions between students and teachers regarding expected cultural behaviours are likely to arise. According to the homeroom teacher Mr Xie, one of the

most challenging tasks with regard to Burmese students is changing their previous codes of conduct into the desired cultural practices at BHS:

我们这边一律校服，发饰要求严格。他们那边，男生拖鞋，女生擦那个老缅粉，穿得花的花红的红，我都被政教处说好几次，花了好长时间才改过来。

Here our students are required to dress in school uniforms and there is also a strict requirement on hairstyles. Where they come from, boys wear slippers and girls put on *thanaka* powder and dress in colourful clothes. I have been blamed many times by the Office of Education, Discipline and Administration. It has taken a long time for them to change. (Interview with Mr Xie)

In Myanmar, wearing slippers and putting on *thanaka* is a common practice at government schools, but such dressing codes are considered as deficit and are to be erased at BHS. By implementing military-style daily regulations, BHS constructs a social space in shaping students' moralities and codes of conducts into the desired performance, thus reproduces the norm of cultural homogeneity, and consequently overlooks and devalues Burmese students' previous cultural practices. What seems to justify these homogenous practices is *gaokao*-centred discourses in which the desired qualities to fulfil the success in *gaokao* are often glorified and highly acknowledged in the public space.

#### 5.4.3 *Gaokao*-centred education

Despite BHS's presentation to the outside world as a featured school, its featured educational mission including Music, Sports and Arts education and overseas Chinese education is only displayed sparsely in the school landscapes whereas the majority of school space is occupied by the homogenous aspiration of *gaokao* as the glorious dream.

Passing through the entrance one can see several windows displaying BHS's historical development, recent academic achievements, features of school and other school

regulations such as codes of conduct as well as cultural activities. Some of these window displays such as cultural activities are replaced from season to season but others such as the school regulations, academic achievements seemed to remain for years as marked by the publishing dates. Almost all of the school notices are written in simplified Chinese except a tiny space marking two sentences in Burmese for the celebration of an opening ceremony of a Burmese class. In contrast, window displays are overwhelmed by the *gaokao*-related information publicised at very conspicuous spaces with much visibility and lengthy display.

This following school poster in the window was posted in 2011 based on the data information given in the bar chart, and it has remained there for a couple of years when the field work was conducted between 2013 and 2014.



Figure 10. Billboard showing *gaokao* performance from 2008 to 2011

This photo contains the increasing number of graduates for university admission from 2008 to 2011 and underneath the bar chart are the specific names of students who are ranked from top to bottom based on their performance in *gaokao* in 2010. Despite its “outdated” information, these figures with the background colour red, one that bears

an auspicious meaning in Chinese, present to the outside world the school's academic achievement as well as its stable advancement from year to year.

The right side of the window display is covered with names of those students who have been admitted to distinguished universities.



Figure 11. Billboard showing successful BHS graduates at elite universities

These students are gloriously advertised photographed standing confidently in front of their universities' gates, and these idolised students are all included into the map of China, which correspondingly matches the desired dream of students: going to a distinguished university is powerfully constructed as a glorious dream and *gaokao* is the bridge linking themselves to their dream.

Apart from these students and their universities covered in the Chinese map, there are several lines of words for motivating students to believe that they can be one of these lucky students in the future: “今天我们相聚民中，明天我们遍及祖国大江南北”

(Today we gather at BHS; tomorrow we will be all over the motherland covering South and North of the Yangtze River) and “明天校以我为荣，今天我以校为荣” (Tomorrow the school will be proud of me; today I am proud of the school”). These successful students are publicly announced as the school’s pride and property by the commonly-used idiom in Chinese “桃李遍天下” (Having disciples everywhere). In contrast to the glory of these successful students is the school badge located at the bottom right of the photo and the badge is marked with ethnic minority students dressing in their traditional costumes holding flowers in hand with smiling faces. The image of ethnic minority students is represented in their traditional costumes, but it is unclear whether some of the successful students depicted above belong to one of these ethnic groups. It is the *gaokao* that unifies the students’ diverse backgrounds and reconstructs their identities as “successful” or “unsuccessful”.

Besides the school landscapes, *gaokao* discourse is constantly stressed in every day classrooms (see detailed discussion in Chapter Six) and also widely circulated in the school cultural events. The annual winter sports’ meeting is held to strengthen students’ physical body and to cultivate their team spirit. On such cultural event, the *gaokao* discourse has also penetrated and been reproduced. In one of the organised competitive games, each class is required to march into the centre stage like soldiers with the same pace and the same posture. While marching into the stage to be evaluated by the school leaders, students need to shout their own slogans to show their willingness to compete and to fight for the sports games. What makes their slogans interesting is their meaning. The slogans are often composed of four phrases with four words in each phrase and the phrases need to be rhythmical and structured with logical sense. Students are supposed to shout these four phrases loudly and clearly with determined attitudes as one of the important criteria for their marching performance. Apart from highlighting the spirit of cooperation and perseverance, the slogans also reproduce *gaokao* as the highest pursuit of students’ dream. The *gaokao* -centred slogans include “展望高考，追逐梦想” (imagining *gaokao*, chasing our dream),

“激情澎湃，高考不败” (our passions flow, we will never fail at *gaokao*), “拼在高三，赢在高考” (we will fight at Senior Year Three, we will win at *gaokao*).

Overall, *gaokao* is constructed both as the only symbolic spirit and the same glorious dream that everyone is unified under and as the new social space to divide students and reposition them either as “successful” or “unsuccessful”. Such new space via *gaokao* -discourse seems to manifest in the school physical organisations of classrooms.

#### 5.4.4 Physical segregation

The physical distribution of classrooms and dormitories can reflect the *gaokao*-centred stream of education. Entering the school and passing by the school window displays, two connected buildings are used as Chinese students’ dormitories where females and males are separated by their different gates and each gate is strictly guarded by staff members 24 hours. Walking further inside the campus are several teaching and learning buildings. The first one on the left side is the new building completed in 2010. Due to its multi-functions for teaching and learning, administration and laboratory, it is named the comprehensive building and Burmese students at Year 11 are the only group of students allowed to study in this building where they also live.

Connected with the comprehensive building are two teaching and learning buildings with different heights and colours. The shorter building in yellow is used for three grades of junior high students from Year 7 to Year 9. At the end of the playground is the taller white building with senior high school students doing general education from Year 10 to Year 12.

Behind the white building of senior high school students stand three bungalows at a hill side thinly covered with grass. These three buildings are the teaching and learning space for Music, Sports and Arts students from Year 10 to Year 12.



*Figure 12. Burmese student building*

When asked why there is physical segregation between Burmese students and Chinese students, the school principal and the subject teachers gave me different answers with different emphases.

On the first week of my field work, Mr Fan, the school principal, gave the following answer which seems to show the privileging of Burmese students' learning and living needs:

学习上，我们给这些学生配备的是优秀的师资队伍，最新的教学楼，你看他们用的都是全校最好的多媒体教室。生活上呢，把他们统一安排在这边好管理，在这边他们住的条件比中国学生的好多了，平时洗漱都不用和中国学生抢着用。

In study, we have offered these students excellent teaching staff, the brand new teaching and learning building. You see, what they are using is the best multi-media classroom. In terms of living, we have allocated them here for better management. Here, their living conditions are much better than those of Chinese students. They do not need to compete with Chinese students with shared water closets and daily hygiene routines. (Informal conversation with Mr Fan)

Different from the principal, the subject teachers I interviewed seem to justify such separation based on the priority given to “正常的教学次序” (the normal teaching and learning order), which is *gaokao*-oriented education where the general education is the norm whereas other education is marginalised:

他们在这里进行一些教学活动会比较方便，如果把他们放在那边 [普通教育教学楼] 的话，他们放电影或玩一些活动游戏就会影响其他班的正常教学次序。

It would be much convenient for them to conduct some teaching and learning activities here. If they were there [in the teaching building for general education], they would affect the normal teaching and learning order of other classes when they played movies or had some games and activities. (Interview with Mr. Xie)

Due to the physical segregation of classrooms and dormitories, there is little space for Chinese students and Burmese students to interact with each other even though they are all living on the same campus. The limited communication is confirmed by one of the Chinese students who has played basketball with several Burmese boys but who has no more contact with them beyond that:

我跟他们打过几场篮球，我们只是在路上聊过，也不太了解，打完球后他们回他们呢宿舍我也回我的。

I have played basketball with them several times. We only have a chat on the way, and I don't know them well because they go back to their dormitory and I go to mine after playing basketball. (Interview with Chinese BHS student)

For many Chinese students, their knowledge of Burmese students seems to remain at the curious level. During the class break time, the entrance door to the Burmese

students' class is often crowded with Chinese students who peer in at the class and murmur something with each other:



*Figure 13. Curious boys and girls standing outside the classroom*

When I approached these students asking what they were doing there, I was told that they came to do laboratory and their laboratory room was just opposite that of the Burmese students' class. After several rounds of questioning, these students finally admitted that what they were observing were Burmese students whom they had heard of but had no chance to speak with.

Similarly, Burmese students have the desire to know their Chinese peers but are separated by the school's physical arrangement as reported by Jinhua:

我们来到这儿并不仅仅只想和班里这些 [ 缅甸 ] 学生交流，我们来到这儿也需要认识当地的社会和文化。全校有 3000 多个学生，我们都没机会认识他们。

Coming here, we not only want to communicate with these [ Burmese ] students in our class, but also need to understand the local society and culture. There are over 3000 students, but we have no chance to know them. (Interview with Jinhua)

Overall, from the perspectives of Burmese and Chinese students, they both have the desire to know each other but the physical segregation has posed a hindrance for their successful communication. Even though the school tries to present to the public that

Burmese students are well-accommodated by living in the modern building and having multi-media equipment, the actual physical arrangement seems to imply the intentional segregation between Burmese students and Chinese students who are expected to follow different educational and social trajectories (see detailed discussion in 5.5).

#### 5.4.5 Summary

Despite presenting itself to the public as a model school welcoming Burmese students, BHS's implementation of their education goals is contradictory to its public rhetoric of embracing diversity. The in-depth analysis of actual school practices such as the boarding school policy, daily regulations and school landscapes all convey the aim of shaping Burmese students into an appropriately homogenous group similar to their Chinese peers. By living on campus 24 hours from Monday to Saturday for the whole semester, the military-style daily regulations strictly monitor students' social behaviours and substantially shape their cultural practices and moralities at a young age. Those who cannot or will not conform to the school's expectations are positioned as a "problem" to be disciplined and corrected. What further shapes the homogenous school culture is through unifying the students' dream towards *gaokao*. As the most important standardised assessment, *gaokao* performance is constructed as the only glorious dream at BHS: those who achieve good marks are publicly recognised in multiple forms. *Gaokao* thus creates a new social mechanism to divide students into superior or inferior. However, no matter how hard Burmese students study at BHS, they have no chance to fulfil the same *gaokao* dream as their Chinese peers. In the following section, I will continue to analyse the consequences of not having access to *gaokao* with a particular focus on the multiple levels of structural forces that stream Burmese students into different educational and social trajectories.

### **5.5 School regulations on Burmese students**

Despite seeing the recruitment of Burmese students as capital, BHS is faced with many external constraints and internal conflicts including having to cater to various interests of different actors. The challenges in educating Burmese students range from citizenship status, funding resources, instruction style and participation in the local

community. This section describes how BHS responds to and negotiates with these external constraints, and how it distributes its school resources by implementing relevant policies and the corresponding consequences of these school practices.

### 5.5.1 Citizenship constraints

In China, it is required to have a Chinese resident identity card and household registration to participate in *gaokao* (Ministry of Education, 2015b; Yan Wang, 2008). Without access to participating in *gaokao*, Burmese students are given a shorter length of schooling period than their Chinese peers.

他们没有中国的身份证，所以不能跟中国学生一样参加高考。在课程设置上就没有给他们安排高三的教学任务，因为我们这边高三都是在复习前面高一高二学过的知识，都是在为高考在做准备，所以他们读完高二就可以毕业了。

Given that they do not have a Chinese identity card, they cannot participate in *gaokao* like Chinese students. In the course design, there is no teaching and learning tasks for them at Year 12 because we normally spend Year 12 reviewing what has been learned in Year 10 and Year 11 and in getting ready for *gaokao*. Thus, they can just graduate after finishing their Year 11.

(Interview with Mr Fan)

From the perspective of the school principal, having two years of high school is a favourable policy in that Burmese students can save one year of education to obtain the same graduation qualification as Chinese students. However, such educational qualification issued by the school is not recognised nationally, as explained by a provincial administrator working at the provincial Office of Overseas Chinese Affairs:

学校可以给他们[缅甸学生]毕业证，但他们没有学籍，因为他们没有中国身份证号，所以进不到中国的这个学生呢学籍管理系统中。

The school can issue them [Burmese students] a graduation certificate, but they do not have enrolment records. They cannot be entered into the management system for Chinese students' enrolment because they do not have a Chinese resident identity card number. (Interview with Ms Li)

Having no Chinese identity card, the educational credential they obtain is not legally acknowledged by the Chinese government. According to Ms Li, issuing the graduation certificate is only a temporary solution, but such practice cannot solve the problem of unequal access to Chinese educational resources such as attending *gaokao* and having the equal aspiration for such academic pursuit.

In spite of their ineligibility to attend *gaokao*, Burmese students can take another path to go to Chinese universities without *gaokao*. There are different requirements on the university application, but in general, international students who want to go to Chinese universities need to provide their high school graduation certificate and their transcript of record (CSC). However, there are some constraints in terms of the universities and programs they can choose. Take Yunnan province for example. By 2015, there were 69 universities in Yunnan (Zhang & Lin, 2015), but only 10 universities were officially credited to accept international students (CSC, 2015b). In addition, not all of the scholarship holders can select any programs they want for study, and there is also restriction on what to study at Chinese universities (CSC, 2015b).

According to Ms Li, there is a ratio on the distribution of scholarship resources: out of 10 international students, only one can be given a full scholarship whereas the rest of the nine students have to pay for themselves. For the Burmese class in Year 11, there used to be 45 students registered but only 23 remained by the time the field work was conducted. Assuming all of the students want to go to university, only two or at most three students will likely be granted with a scholarship to further their study in China. Given this limited ratio on scholarship distribution, many talented Burmese students have to give up their university dream and go back to Myanmar as reported by one of the subject teachers, Mr Xiang:

上一届毕业的有两个学生，非常喜欢流行音乐，乐感非常好，我们当时跟云南艺术学院联系过，他们说缅甸学生呢，他们也想招，但是不能免学费，大概是差不多 7000 多一年，然后那两个学生呢觉得学费太高了，不能够接受，然后呢放弃了。

Last year, there were two students who liked popular music very much and whose sense of music was also very good. We contacted Yunnan Arts University and they were happy to recruit Burmese students but they could not reduce the tuition fee which was about 7000 Yuan a year. Then these two students felt the tuition was too expensive to accept and had to give it up. (Interview with Mr Xiang, Music teacher)

Despite the possibility of going to a Chinese university without taking the most competitive standardised assessment, Burmese students at BHS are also confronted with the financial constraints. In fact, Burmese students' learning experiences have been greatly impacted by funding problems and financial issues penetrate deeply into their education and daily life.

#### 5.5.2 Insufficient funding

It is true that BHS is officially and financially sponsored to recruit Burmese students, but concerning its cost calculation, it is unlikely that BHS can make a fortune by recruiting Burmese students as reported by Ms Li:

从成本核算看，BHS 办这个班还是不合算的。学生的学费是省侨办出了，每人每年 3000 元。县政府补助一些，每人每年 2400 元，包括学生的住宿费、书费、还有老师的费用等。剩下也没有多少了，学生基本都是自己负担生活费。

Regarding its cost calculation, BHS does not make much money in organising this Burmese class. The students' tuition is 3000 yuan per student, and it has

been covered by the provincial Overseas Affair Office. The local government provides 2400 yuan for each students on other expenses including their accommodation, textbooks and teachers' expenses and the like. There is not much left, so students have to take care of their living expenses. (Interview with Ms Li)

Apart from the provincial and local governments' funds, BHS has to provide its financial assistance for Burmese students in purchasing the insurance and school uniforms. Moreover, seeing the financial difficulties of some Burmese students, BHS also offers a small amount of subsidy ranging from 100 yuan to 150 yuan each month (Interview with Mr Xie). By assisting Burmese students financially, BHS also constructs itself as a benevolent donator who expects Burmese students to be grateful for what they are given. Upon the beginning of the enrolment at the weekly school assembly, Burmese students are especially reminded of the "benefits" they enjoy:

“你们的费用都是我们出的，在这里不用出钱就能学习，希望你们好好珍惜在这里学习的机会，将来报答祖国对你们的恩情。”

“Your expenses have been covered by us. Here you don't need to pay for study, so you are expected to cherish the learning opportunity and to repay the grace of the motherland towards you in the future.” (Informal conversation with Lingling, a Burmese student who reported what they were told)

Lingling quotes the words she has heard frequently from her teachers and the school leaders. In fact, such money-talk is often circulated in the official reports and even on my first visit of the school. It seems that Burmese students are homogenously constructed as financially stricken and are enjoying the financial support whereas their Chinese peers have to pay for the tuition fee and other living expenses. Such financial positioning not only creates friction between Burmese students and Chinese students (see 7.2) but also reproduces the economically disadvantaged status of Burmese students as someone from an underdeveloped country. Such inferior positionings often

occur when Burmese students “break” the classroom regulation or when they have conflicts with their Chinese peers.

While doing chemistry laboratory work, Burmese students are not reminded of how to effectively conduct the experiment but are subtly informed that they are economically disadvantaged:

小心点! 杂烂了 [ 试管 ] 你们赔不起。

Be careful! If it [ test tube ] is broken, you cannot afford to pay back.

(a comment by their first Chemistry teacher)

Even their Chinese peers also form such positioning stereotyping of their Burmese peers as those who lack hygiene, and are from a country whose social reputation deserves nothing. Jinfeng reported her unpleasant experiences with her classmates who are mocking her and her country:

“你们缅甸人是不是上厕所不用纸只用手?”

“Is it true that you Burmese people go to the toilet without using toilet paper but using hands?” (Comment from Chinese classmate reported by Jinfeng)

“你们缅甸嘛，给我做总统我也不会去!”

“Your Myanmar, I’m not going there even if you let me be the President there”.  
(Comment from Chinese classmate reported by Jinfeng)

Overall, while Burmese students are being positioned as a privileged group with their school tuition and other living expenses waived, they are also constructed as financially disadvantaged on campus. Such financial positionings have created negative social stereotypes against Burmese students as those who are poverty-stricken, uncivilised and low-esteemed. In sum, Burmese students are confronted with compounding disadvantages in their eligibility to gaokao and being financially devalued, these two factors further impact their access to rigorous teaching and

learning resources at school, and consequently, they are streamed into low-level class with low schooling expectations.

### 5.5.3 Low expectation in learning outcome

Given the fact that the amount of the government's financial support is based on the number of Burmese students recruited (see above 5.5.2), BHS has to consider its efficient distribution of school resources. This financial concern has directly impacted Burmese students. According to the previous organising practices from 2005 to 2014, Burmese students are either allocated with a separate class or are mixed with the other Chinese peers who are doing general education. These two types of grouping are dependent on the number of Burmese students recruited. If the number of students is more than 30, Burmese students will be organised as a separate class; if the number is below 30, they are to be distributed into various Chinese classes. In other words, the priority of organising Burmese students is not out of the academic concern, but mainly driven by the financial consideration. It seems that the ideal organisation of educating Burmese is as a separate class to fulfil the mission of being a model school and to prevent Burmese students from interrupting the “normal teaching and learning order” of Chinese students who are doing *gaokao*-oriented education (see 5.4.4).

No matter whether Burmese students are organised separately or mixed with Chinese classmates, they are not given the same expectation as their Chinese peers. It seems that teaching Burmese students is “easy” because teachers are free from the *gaokao* pressure and they are given full power to decide what to teach, how to teach and how much to cover in their subject content as reported by Mr Xie:

至于教到什么程度，没有具体的规定。他们不用参加高考，所以教学时不用讲太深，可适当降低难度，讲得简单些，让他们觉得学到东西，学得开心些。

Concerning to what extent we should teach them, there is no specific requirement. Given that they do not need to attend *gaokao*, the content of teaching might not be necessarily deep, its degree of difficulty can be lowered a

bit. We can teach them in a simple way so that they can feel that they have learned something and also enjoy learning. (Interview with Mr Xie).

There are no specific teaching and learning objectives for educating Burmese students except stressing on the simple and practical teaching and happy learning process. Ironically, such *gaokao*-free instruction does not empower Chinese teachers to organise their class efficiently. On the contrary, teaching Burmese students without *gaokao* has created many pedagogical asymmetries upon Chinese teachers who are used to being guided and evaluated by *gaokao*-centred practice (see detailed analysis in 6.4).

Given the insufficient funding resources on educating Burmese students, BHS has not invested much in designing a course for Burmese students except doing minor changes based on the normalised schedule. Take the timetable for example. The subjects offered are almost the same as those of Chinese students in the same grade except adding the flavour of “practical and recreational” elements as indicated below:

*Table 11. Weekly course timetable for the Burmese class*

Week	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sun.
From 7:30 to 12:00	English	Chinese	English	Chinese	English	
	English	Chinese	English	Chinese	English	
	Physics	Maths	Chinese	History	Physics	
	Biology	History	Chemistry	English	Chemistry	
	Chemistry	Biology	Politics	Maths	Biology	
	PE	Geography	Maths	Physics	Computer	
From 14:20 to 17:35	Maths	English	History	English	Chinese	
	Chinese	Physics	Geography	Politics	Music	

	Chinese	Chemistry	Maths	PE	Computer	
	Politics	Activities	Maths	Geography	Painting	
From 19:30 to 21:55	Geography	Chinese	History	Physics	English	Maths
	Politics	Chinese	Biology	Chemistry	English	Maths

According to the homeroom teacher Mr Xie, what makes the curriculum different from that of Chinese students in the same grade are the additional courses such as Computer, Music and Painting. These “minor” subjects are not provided for the Chinese students in Year 11, but the purpose of offering these courses to Burmese students is to teach them practical skills and make their study delightful.

Regarding the content of the timetable, the majority of subjects are exactly the same as those of Chinese classes in Year 11 with the same stress on the high-stake subjects such as Chinese, Mathematics and English. It seems that Burmese students are provided with equal opportunities to access to the same amount of high-stake subjects while having “fun” by taking additional subjects. However, the course arrangement shows a lack of understanding of Burmese students’ previous learning backgrounds and future aspirations. Most teachers especially those teaching Maths, Chemistry and Physics complain that the majority of Burmese students cannot catch up with their teaching, and they have to adopt various strategies to bridge the gap of content knowledge and to lower their teaching expectations (see detailed discussion in 6.2).

The low expectations on their learning outcome have implications on the Burmese students’ learning experiences. Because of the less demanding learning requirement, they feel that they are not taught properly:

我们老师对我们太放松了，没有严格地对我们，都是老师教老师的，我们学我们的。

Our teachers are very causal to us. They are not strict to us. They just fulfil their teaching task. They do not care about what we have learned. (Interview with Jinhua)

在这边学的感觉还没有我们在洋人街学得多么。

We feel we have not learned as much here as what we used to learn in Lweje before. (Interview with Lifu)

Being distributed into the low-level class with low academic expectation, Burmese students are streamed into an imagined employment trajectory. Based on the previous graduation records, the majority of Burmese students went back to Myanmar working as teachers in Chinese supplementary schools or as translators or doing family business at home, and a few of them continued to go to Chinese universities (Tengchong Education Bureau, 2013). Due to the constraint on the scholarship (see above 5.5.1), it also seems quite unlikely that the majority of Burmese students can be sponsored to go to Chinese universities. Both the previous trajectories and financial constraint seem to shape the educational trajectories of Burmese students at BHS. However, tracking them into the employment-trajectory has not only lowered their learning outcomes in content subject, but also deprived them of equal access to the school resources. Take the amount of learning input for example. Having the same subject such as Physics does not guarantee the same amount of quality teaching. Burmese students complain that their Physics teacher has never allowed them to enter into the laboratory to practice what they have learned, and this has consequently restricted their future employment trajectory. The following natural conversation occurs while two boy students are having lunch at school canteen. Their conversation is about what job position to choose by working at a power station in Myanmar:

何：讲钱么到是钱么诱人呢，鸡巴，一个月拿三四千呢！

夏：学过工程呢就干的那个[工作]了。

何：脑子不够用啊我们！

夏：学着专业那种。

何：又不是，高中我们又不是好好呢学，是这种乱学学来么。机瓜，什么牛顿三定律么倒是背的呢，具体呢，搞实验小谢[物理老师]又不哟我们整过。

Lifu: Talking about the money, money is indeed attractive. Fuck, 3000 to 4000 a month!

Xia: Whoever has learned engineering can take up that [job].

Lifu: We are not intelligent!

Xia: As long as [we have] learned the professional knowledge.

Lifu: It isn't, it isn't us who do not want to study well at the senior high school, but we have learned casually. Fuck! I can recite like the Newton's three laws of motion, but in reality, Xiaoxie [Physics teacher] has never given us a chance to do an experiment. (Natural conversation recorded by Lifu)

The above conversation happened after the Burmese students were informed of the recruitment for working at a power station in Myanmar. Two types of employees were recruited: one group who specialises in engineering and another group who can do bilingual communication jobs in Burmese and Chinese. There is a significant difference in terms of salary for these two types of job: those working as engineers can earn more than 3000 *Yuan* a month and those doing language jobs earn less, about 2000 *Yuan* a month. Unfortunately, there is no choice for Burmese students to move into an engineering job because they are not given appropriate content knowledge in subject learning such as Physics. Despite the fact that they are given four classes of Physics each week and they have been learning this subject for almost two years, they are not taught as seriously as their Chinese peers, and they also have no chance to enter into a laboratory, which is available to the Chinese students only. Despite the fact that Burmese students like Lifu work hard on a daily basis, their learning of “Newton's three laws of motion” is confined to book knowledge, and thus their future prospect is also constrained to language-related work only.

Overall, due to their lack of citizenship status and their financial constraint, Burmese students are streamed into the low-level class with low expectations on their academic outcome. As a consequence, they cannot enjoy the same amount of teaching quality and schooling resources as their Chinese peers and they feel that they rarely learn anything at BHS. Without having rigorous learning and sufficient academic input, Burmese students are further disadvantaged in searching for a good job. Their upward employment mobility is also greatly restricted by the amount of knowledge they learned at school.

#### 5.5.4 Limited participation in local communities

Besides the schooling policies concerning what to teach and how to prepare students for future trajectories, BHS has also implemented its policy concerning how to integrate Burmese students into local communities:

通过开办华文教育，使他们[缅甸学生]能够感受到中华文化的博大精深。

Through the Overseas Chinese education, we can help them [Burmese students] experience how profound it is to understand the Chinese culture. (BHS, 2011)

The way BHS interprets how to spread the Chinese culture is not only associated with imparting the book knowledge on a daily basis but also manifested in its social practices outside the school as reported by the school principal:

在平时的教学活动中，我们也会组织他们一些社会实践活动，了解本土风情，比如腾冲的侨乡和顺，腾冲机场，国山墓园，火山热海等地方参观，让他们了解当地文化，增进对中国的了解。

In the teaching and learning activities, we have organised them to conduct many practicums and to understand the local culture such as visiting Heshun, the ancestral hometown for overseas Chinese at Tenghong, Tengchong airport, national cemetery of the fallen of World War II, volcano and hot spring and similar places. We want them to understand the local culture and improve their understanding of China. (Interview with Mr Fan)

These places are the local scenic spots with three different features. The first group of places are famous for their historical and political significance such as the ancestral hometown and the national cemetery of the fallen of World War II. The second type of places to visit is those of natural sceneries such as volcano and hot spring while the third group of places is the representation of the modern image of the local development such as the Tengchong airport. These excursions, though being conducted only on occasion, can produce certain effects in shaping Burmese students and what they are supposed to know about the local community. However, these explorations only position Burmese students as tourists and overlook the students' real desire to be part of China. In fact, the majority of Burmese students expect to seek employment in China:

他们[爸妈]就是说让我在这里好好读，他们以为在这里读就有工作了，肯定有工作了。他们的思想是认为肯定的。因为他们说“缅甸不发达不发达”，他们这样说。

They [my parents] just want me to study well here. They assume that as long as I study here, I can find a job, and will surely find a job. They have a strong belief on that because they speak to me “Myanmar is not developed at all”.  
(Interview with Zhengyuan)

Similar to Zhengyuan, Kongdan also wants to find a profitable job in China so that she can settle down and live in China:

毕竟自己还年轻嘛，就想在中国这边找个工作，先吃苦两年 (...) 很想留在中国，但是不知道能不能找到自己喜欢的工作。回到自己的国家工作是好找的，和这边不一样。

I am still young anyway, so I just want to find a job in China and work hard for a couple of years (...) I really want to live in China, but I'm not sure whether I could find a job I like. It would be easy to find a job in my own country, which is quite different from here. (Interview with Kongdan).

Similar to the above students, Chaofu, the only son in his family, sees coming to China to study as a good chance to expand his family business in real estate:

来这边不仅可以学习汉语，还可以看到中国的经济发展，看当地人怎么生活怎么做生意。

Coming here, not only can I learn Chinese but I can also observe how China develops its economy and how the locals spend their time and do their businesses. (Interview with Chaofu)

Apart from seeking for jobs and living in China and expanding business in both China and Myanmar, many participants have the desire to recover their kinship tie with China:

爸爸想让我来这边的，加上自己的爷爷以前是古永的[腾冲的一个边境小镇]，自己偶尔也去看看那里的亲戚。

It is my father who wants me to come here [China]. More importantly, my grandfather migrated from Guyong [a border town of Tengchong], so I can occasionally visit the relatives there. (Interview with Liang)

For those who used to struggle with their previous ethnic identity, they want to come to China to fulfil their authentic claim of being Chinese:

我从小就问我爸，我是中国人还是缅甸人，我爸说了“你是中国人不是缅甸人” (...) 我妈妈让我来中国读书，做个中国人，叫我好好学写中国字。

I used to ask my father whether I was Chinese or Burmese. My father said: “You are Chinese and you are not Burmese” (...) My mother wants me to come to China to study so that I can be a Chinese and learn to write good Chinese scripts. (Interview with Yinzhaoyang)

Yinzhaoyang's father was a Chinese man who migrated to Myanmar in the 1990s as a construction worker, and later married his mother who is a Shan. Because of the mixed blood with Chinese and Shan, Yinzhaoyang seems to be confused with his ethnic identity. Given that his father passed away when he was only ten, his mother thought it was better for her son to be registered as a Shan in his ID document because of the convenience of getting such a document for Shan compared to ethnic Chinese (see 4.3.1.1). By the time China becomes an ideal destination for migration, Yinzhaoyang has been given a space to reconstruct his identity as a Chinese by learning Chinese and doing education in China.

Overall, the way BHS incorporates Burmese students into the local community is showing them around the famous scenic spots. The fact that Burmese students are treated like tourists greatly limits their identity possibilities and their desire to be a real part of the local community. Given that Burmese students migrate to China for various aspirations, integrating them into a local society should go beyond treating them as tourists.

#### 5.5.5 Summary

To sum up, Burmese students' successful school integration has been hindered by a number of external forces, namely, their citizenship status (5.5.1), their lack of funding (5.5.2) which has been further aggravated by the internal forces of streaming (5.5.3) and limited participation (5.5.4). Being constrained by their citizenship status, Burmese students cannot compete in *gaokao*. Because of their ineligibility to take *gaokao*, BHS has lower expectations of their educational outcome and thus has little interest in investing in their course design. Despite the fact that Burmese students can take other paths to go to university without attending *gaokao*, such alternative paths are not recognised as school achievements. Furthermore, their trajectories to university are further restricted by limited scholarship opportunities. These two types of external forces have produced confounding effects in marginalising Burmese students' school participation as legitimate members at BHS. Being deprived of attending *gaokao* means being positioned as academically inferior given that the school culture perceives *gaokao* as ideal and the only dream worth dreaming (see

5.4.3); the financial constraints also position Burmese students as economically disadvantaged and socially inferior. Rather than counterbalancing these external constraints, BHS's internal policies seem to cement Burmese students' marginalised status. Streaming policies track Burmese students into low-level classes with less demanding tasks and lower expectations on their learning outcomes than their Chinese peers. This further limits their access to the schooling resources and consequently restricts their employment opportunities to language-related jobs. The way BHS integrates Burmese students into the local community is also problematic. Rather than acknowledging Burmese students' migration aspirations to be part of the local community, Burmese students are treated as tourists, who occasionally visit some local scenic spots. In sum, the integration of Burmese students into the school and the local community is restricted to their admission. By contrast, actual schooling practices serve to exclude them from successful participation and overlook their migration aspirations.

## **5.6 Conclusion: institutional inclusion or segmented incorporation?**

This chapter has presented the schooling discontinuities between embracing diversity at discursive levels and exclusionary consequences of actual practices. At national, provincial and local levels, Burmese students are discursively constructed as human capital for China's soft power project. They are perceived as an emerging generation of cross-cultural communicators between China and Myanmar and educating Burmese students is seen as an important strategic scheme of the Communist Party and China that can produce expansion effects to revitalise the local economy and maintain regional sustainability. In responding to these governmental discourses, BHS actively constructs itself as a model school teaching Burmese students. At the same time, BHS also sees its Burmese students as an opportunity to improve its public visibility and to attract more government funding. At the school level, a benevolent discourse is often circulated regarding the "privileges" Burmese students enjoy in contrast to their Chinese peers. These "privileges" include the provision of better living conditions, modern learning facilities and "good" teaching staff, having a shorter period of schooling for graduation, tuition fee waivers, and stipends covering learning materials, school uniforms, insurance, and other living expenses.

These privileges with regard to migrant student's material conditions are in stark contrast to most previous studies, which find that migrant-centred classes tend to be more poorly-resourced, their teachers less qualified and migrant students kept for longer period for grade progression and graduation (see Sections 2.3, 2.4 and 2.5). However, a closer look into the actual schooling practices at BHS reveals that, despite their privileges, Burmese students experience similar patterns of marginalisation as migrant students in other contexts (see 2.3). Despite the welcoming discourses of diversity, Burmese students' successful integration has been greatly hindered by various structural mechanisms which restrict their access to school resources and constrain their future academic and employment trajectories.

Similar to high schools in a variety of other contexts (see 2.3.3), BHS is highly constrained by practices of school accountability and ranking that favour standardised assessment, particularly in the form of *gaokao*. At BHS where the vast majority of students are from rural backgrounds, *gaokao* is not only the most important high-stakes test to enable students' upward mobility, but also creates a new social space to position students as superior or inferior. Those who perform well on the *gaokao* are highly visible and glorified as the school's heroes whereas those who do not do well are kept invisible and away from public view. In contrast to their Chinese peers, Burmese students who have no chance to compete in the *gaokao* are found to be the most marginalised and the most disadvantaged group academically simply because of their citizenship status. They have no chance to prove themselves and are unable to contribute to the most valued form of school success. Being deprived access to the *gaokao* is due to their citizenship status and has nothing to do with any of their personal characteristics, including intelligence or language proficiency.

Apart from their citizenship, their economic disadvantage further marginalises Burmese students. Due to a lack of funding, BHS has invested little effort in designing appropriate courses and teacher training that might target Burmese students' learning needs and empower their aspirations. As a consequence, Burmese students are streamed into low-level classes with low expectations of their educational outcomes. Similar to previous studies into streaming practices (see 2.3.2), most Burmese

students are physically segregated from their Chinese peers. Even though some Burmese students are mixed with their Chinese peers in the same class and taught by the same subject teachers, they are still treated differently with lower expectations and often experience micro-aggressions from their teachers and classmates (see detailed discussion in 6.2.2 and 7.2). The fact that Burmese students are tracked into the low-level class not only deprives them of opportunities to be exposed to rigorous study and academic training but also restricts their future employment trajectories to language-related jobs.

In contrast to many previous studies (2.3.1), it is not their language proficiency but their citizenship status that makes it impossible for Burmese students to be transferred into mainstream education, namely *gaokao*-centred education. This does not mean that the language factor does not play a role in shaping Burmese students' identities at BHS. In fact, a close examination of teaching practices and students' interactions will reveal the impact of the norms of speaking and writing standardised Chinese (see detailed discussion in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven). A finding from this study that coincides with the findings of previous studies (see 2.3) is the fact that BHS does not bridge but widen the gaps between Burmese students and Chinese students by physically segregating them and academically underpreparing them. Despite the rhetoric of diversity and a myriad of good intentions, BHS thus entrenches educational inequalities and affects future employment outcomes negatively – in the same way as do other migrant-centered schools around the world (see 1.4).

Perhaps the military-style education at BHS constitutes a unique mechanism to regulate linguistically and culturally diverse students. The military-style education at BHS seems to socialise students into the desired cultural homogeneity. Officially, BHS positions itself as a featured school embracing cultural diversity, but such public positioning is only to counterbalance its decreasing popularity compared to the other three high schools in the same locality. In reality, the way BHS incorporates its students of diverse backgrounds is conditional and militarised in that students' previous cultural practices are to be erased and to be shaped into the homogeneous social behaviour by strictly following the daily activities related to washing up,

cleaning spaces, dress code, exercising or studying. If Burmese students do not comply with the daily regulations, they will be publicly blamed and categorised as problem students, and any display of their cultural difference, for instance through hairstyle or dress choice, is considered intolerable. Such schooling practice via military-style education has rarely been observed in previous studies (see 2.3) in which migrant students often attend day-schools, where the regulations of social and moral behaviours are less disciplined and relegated to the private home space. Given the fact that BHS is a boarding school, the military-style education has created a new space to reposition students based on their daily social behaviours and incorporating attitudes.

In sum, while the institutional discourses are quite inclusive and position Burmese students as valuable for China's soft-power projection, the actual schooling practices turn out to be similarly exclusionary as has been observed in previous studies (2.3). It is true that the school is constrained by many social forces beyond its control such as Burmese students' citizenship status and their funding, but BHS chooses not to resist such external forces and not to help Burmese students to counterbalance their disadvantages. The approach adopted by BHS is to provide conditional schooling integration for Burmese students who are officially recruited to BHS but then systematically excluded from its educational resources. This exclusionary process is similar to the "segmented incorporation" that internal rural migrant students have experienced in the cosmopolitan city of Shanghai (Lan, 2014). In the following chapter, I will continue to explore how teachers address the educational needs of Burmese students and whether self-fulfilling prophecies (see 2.4) might be created through the daily teaching activities, but also how teachers balance their students' needs, their working conditions and their subjection to various forms of accountability.

## **Chapter Six: Teaching practices**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines the tensions and dilemmas Chinese teachers experience in teaching Burmese students at BHS. The chapter starts by exploring how teachers organise their content teaching in section 6.2 and language teaching in section 6.3. While presenting the patterns of classroom organisation, the chapter also acknowledges the challenges Chinese teachers are confronted with in teaching Burmese students of diverse educational backgrounds. Following the discussion on how teachers position Burmese students academically and linguistically in class, the chapter continues to examine in Section 6.4 the cultural perceptions Chinese teachers have of their Burmese students based on an analysis of out-of-class interactions. Similar to previous studies on the teaching of migrant students (see Section 2.4.3), many teaching practices described here can be seen as indicative of Chinese teacher's low expectations of their Burmese students. From there, the chapter moves on to explore teachers' working conditions and the constraints imposed by accountability exercises. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of self-fulfilling prophecies in teaching practices and their consequences for Burmese students' learning experiences

### **6.2 Norms of classroom organisation**

This section explores the patterns of classroom interactions between Chinese teachers and Burmese students, which include teachers' decisions about what is taught to whom, how and when. It also investigates whether teachers provide students with competencies and skills to compete in society, how their pedagogical focus is influenced by their expectations and how their expectations are related to the understanding of the previous educational experiences of Burmese students. It is worth noting that most of my classroom observations have been conducted in the Burmese class where Burmese students in Year 11 are organised as a separate class. School officials gave me permission to follow the whole process of learning and teaching in the Burmese class whereas I was deemed an "interruption" in most of the

regular teaching and learning of Year 10, where eleven Burmese students are mixed with Chinese students. Therefore, the data related to classroom interactions of Year 10 students mainly derived from interviews rather than classroom recordings.

Prior to the arrival of the Burmese students at BHS, none of the Chinese teachers had received any professional training on how to teach Burmese students. They were organised to attend a meeting on how to educate Burmese students. At that meeting they heard nothing about Burmese students' backgrounds or aspirations but were reminded of their social identities and the low expectations related to their learning outcomes:

当时叫我们去开会，讲过，我们家是为了弘扬中华文化，和他们家建立好关系，在教的过程中，还是肩负重大的任务，对待他们不能像中国学生，打不得骂不得，出了问题国际问题呢。还说学生不用参加高考，不能给他们太大压力，讲课呢讲得简单滴滴实用滴滴，让他们学得开心滴滴。

At that time, we were called to attend a meeting, and were told that educating Burmese students was to promote the Chinese culture and to build the good relationship with them. We were also told that we should take the great responsibility in teaching and we should never scold or beat them like what we do with Chinese students. If there was going to be a problem, it would be an international problem. We were also told that these students do not need to attend *gaokao*, so we should not push them too much and our teaching should be simple, practical and enjoyable. (Interview with Mr Ma, the director of Education, Discipline and Administration)

Largely left to their own devices when it comes to teaching Burmese students, teachers implemented the vague guidance they had received largely according to their own personal understanding. In the following, I will explore how Chinese teachers interact with Burmese students on a daily basis.

### 6.2.1 Less rigorous input

One of the most common teaching practices observed is that Burmese students are not given the same quality teaching input as their Chinese peers. This means that a smaller number of teaching units is covered, that teaching operates at a slower pace, that fewer extension materials are offered to them and that they are given less homework, as the following examples show.

上侨四班比较轻松，自由，普通班有规定任务，在本学期之后就要参加学业考试。

It is relaxing and free to teach the Burmese class whereas there are required tasks in general classes because Chinese students need to take the graduation examination after this term. (Interview with Miss Peng, Geography teacher)

这个班没有升学压力，不需要拓展太深，比较灵活，如讲到某个历史事件，可以安排给他们看电视，不像普通班必须上完一本书。

In this class, there is no pressure from going to university, so there is no need to extend their knowledge too much. Teaching is flexible too. For example, when I teach certain historical events, I can arrange them to watch TV whereas I must finish the whole book in teaching general classes. (Interview with Mr Wang, History teacher)

在普通班这本书 [ 上册 ] 是早就上完了，高二那边已经开始上下册了。

In general classes, this book [ volume I ] has been covered a long time ago, and now they start to study volume II. (Interview with Mr Xie, Physics teacher)

因为普通班要体能测试，上报国家体质健康检查表，所以上课有意识去训练他们一些项目，像八百米、立定跳远等，但华侨生不用上报，就可以让他们自己活动自己玩。

Given that Chinese students in general classes need to take physical tests, and I need to submit the form of national physical health examination, I must consciously train Chinese students in many tasks such as the 800-metre running, standing jump and long jump etc., but there is no need to submit Burmese students' performance, so they can play by themselves and do as they like. (Interview with Mr Yang, Sports teacher)

和普通班比，因为没有升学压力，侨生班讲得粗一点，练习不频繁，普通是一个月一次测试，平时还要大量的布置作业。

Compared to the general classes, the Burmese class is taught in a simple way because there is no pressure of going to university. There is not much exercise to do, but in general classes, there is a quiz once a month and there is a large amount of homework on a daily basis. (Interview with Ms Yin, English teacher)

In general classes, assigning daily homework and having weekly quiz are the common practices. However, in a Burmese class, these exercises are often reduced and even eliminated. Regarding the examination, Burmese students are only given mid-term and final exams each semester and very little homework is assigned by their subject teachers on a daily basis. Concerning the homework, only four teachers (English, Chinese, Geography and History) have ever assigned tasks for Burmese students to finish after class. Despite assigning homework, the amount, frequency of the homework is much less, and there is also less structure than other classes. For example, most of the homework in English is word dictation, and there were very few chances to write up any English compositions or any other forms of exercises. Similarly, in their Chinese subject, students are asked to write up to no more than five essays over

their stay of one and half years compared to the general classes with at least one essay writing every two weeks.

In sum, be it in major subjects or minor subjects, Chinese teachers tend to provide Burmese students with less teaching content and fewer learning opportunities than their Chinese peers. Apart from the simplified instruction, the student-teacher interactions in class are quite limited, which further reduce their learning opportunities and frustrate their learning motivations.

### 6.2.2 Limited classroom participation

Based on the classroom observations, Chinese teachers rarely actively engage Burmese students. There are two types of questioning used by subject teachers: questioning students as a group and questioning them individually. Group questioning is typically observed in Maths class where there are numerous calculations involved. The way the subject teacher, Ms Yang, organises her class is like this: she starts by presenting a new formula and then shows the class how to apply the formula step by step. During this process of presentation, Ms Yang checks whether the Burmese students can follow her by asking the class “是不是” (right?) or “等于” (equal to?).

After introducing the new formula, Ms Yang sets exercises for the students, which they are required to solve for the remainder of classtime. Answers are checked directly in class. None of the exercises is checked individually and all of the questions are answered by chorus response. Over the period of classroom observation, only a small group of students are actively engaged in her questions by voicing out their answers and it is often those students who are sitting in the middle and front seats and who are categorised as “good” students in her class. In contrast, the majority of the students just keep silent, sitting as far as possible from the centre of the class. There is also no eye contact between Ms Yang and the majority of those who can not follow the class. It seems that the Maths class is only for a few students who react to her instruction. This practice allows Ms Yang to reduce her workload and thus make the job of teaching this high-stake subject relatively simple.

Different from the Maths class, some subject teachers do employ individual questioning, but the questions do not seem to be challenging or extend the relevant knowledge of subject learning, and only require a little effort to answer. Examples of such simple direct questions relate to calling on an individual student to read out a paragraph in Chinese class or to posing yes-no questions in Physics and Biology classes. Sometimes, questioning is even used to control the order of classroom and discipline students instead of testing their knowledge. This kind of questioning is typical particularly in the class of the homeroom teacher, Mr Xie. As a homeroom teacher, he is not only a subject teacher but also the teacher in charge of Burmese students' life and codes of conduct (see 5.4.2). Like most Science teachers, Mr Xie also found that the majority of Burmese students are unable to follow his class and only a few can respond to his questions. In order to make sure that Burmese students obey and listen "attentively", Mr Xie likes to question those who fall asleep, play on their mobiles or chat with their desk mates. If a student is called up and cannot answer his question, this student will be commented like "上课不要分心讲小话哈" ("Be attentive and don't chat in class."). Mr Xie does not elaborate his question, provide further explanation and ensure student understanding.

As regards teacher attention, the situation in Year 10 is hardly any different from that in Year 11. Despite attending the same class and having the same subject teachers as their Chinese peers, Burmese students in Year 10 are still treated differently, as the following interviews with subject teachers reveal.

The Biology teacher is in charge of teaching all of the students in Year 10 and like the other subject teachers, she is aware of the existence of her Burmese students, but her impression on these students seem to be associated with their low performance in Biology exams.

我讲的生物课和生活联系不紧的，都是为高考为目的，他们学习普通班比较差，他们 11 个学生，最多 2 个能及格。

In my class, Biology is not closely related with life, and the subject-teaching is for *gaokao* purpose. Their academic performance is generally poor. There are 11 students, but at most two of them can pass the exam. (Interview with Mr Ma, Biology teacher)

Given their poor academic performance in many subjects, Burmese students seem to lag far behind the class, and the longer they stay in general classes, the more difficult it is for them to catch up with their Chinese peers. Despite the fact that Chinese teachers are aware of their learning difficulties, they explain that they have to take care of the majority of Chinese students who aim for *gaokao*. Hence, the teachers leave these small group of Burmese students aside by not pushing them too much:

他们和老师没有互动，都是坐在后面。他们也不很交作业，我们考试都不消去管他们 (...) 因为他们不参与班与班的竞争。

They do not have any interaction with the teachers, and they sit at the back. They hardly hand in their homework, and we also do not need to bother them much in terms of exams (...) because they do not participate in the competitions between classes. (Interview with Miss Wang, Geography teacher)

Burmese students are not only perceived as inactive participants in class by putting them physically at the back of the class, but also academically abandoned given that their academic efforts are erased from the class competition. The following figure captures the physical arrangement of their seating space.



Figure 14. Two Burmese students sitting at the back seats in a general class

As the above figure shows that two Burmese boys are arranged at the back seat far from the centre of the class, behind them is the classroom mural which is full of the encouraging words about having “中国梦” (China Dream). Despite sitting in the same classroom as their Chinese peers, Burmese students cannot share the dream of *gaokao*. In fact, mixing Burmese students with their Chinese peers does not help their fulfill their academic achievement but aggravates the division between Burmese students and their Chinese teachers and peers.

One of the Burmese students describes her experiences of being marginalised and abandoned by her subject teachers:

金凤：我读了一个月，有几个老师我几乎是一句话也没机会说上过，在那里上课，你不专心，老师就会说“哎，管她了，她是华侨生，不管她也无所谓”。

李佳：当着面说吗？

金凤：眼神透露出来的！你看我们在普通班里，我们画画、看小说，老师就在我们旁边，他也不说。你不说我们就更无所谓了，是不是？如果你说了，我还知道原来你在乎我一点，是不是。你越来越这样，不说不说，我也就这样，一直一直放荡下去，就成这样。

Jinfeng: I have studied for one month, but I have had no chance to talk to some teachers. When I'm in class and not attentive, my teacher will sigh saying "leave her alone. She is an overseas Chinese. It doesn't matter if she is ignored."

Li Jia: Did he speak to you face to face?

Jinfeng: I saw it in his eyes! You know, in our general class, when we draw pictures, read novels, our teacher will not criticise us even when he is just standing beside us. If he does not reprimand us, why would we even care, right? If he says something, at least I know he cares about me a little, right? When he carries on like this, I also simply carry on behaving like that and my behavior just deteriorates.

In sum, neither in the segregated nor in the integrated classroom are Burmese students given equal opportunities to engage with their learning and interact with their subject teachers. On the contrary, what they experience is a series of marginalisations in class. Sometimes, classroom teaching is even replaced by off-task activities without any academic learning at all.

### 6.2.3 Off-task activities

Apart from watching TV programs in their History class and playing by themselves in their PE class as described in section 6.2.1, the normal teaching seems to be "interrupted" by many other types of off-task activities ranging from enjoying sunshine at the school playground, going on an excursion to somewhere closeby, playing sports games outside the classroom to watching movies.

The interviews with subject teachers all convey the similar sympathetic tone that they want to reduce Burmese students' learning pressure by not imparting them content knowledge but giving them entertainment instead.

有时候上累了，会让他们打打篮球，放松一下。

Sometimes when they feel tired of learning, I will give them a chance to play basketball and relax for a moment. (Ms Yang, Maths teacher)

我领他们去过三馆 [ 学校附近 ] , 带他们转转。

I have taken them to Sanguan a place close to BHS ] , and shown them around.

(Ms Yin, English teacher).

On average, Burmese students in Year 11 are given such “freedom” to walk outside their classroom at least once a day while the rest of the school are having lessons in their classrooms. Figure 15 is a common sight, where Burmese students are free to idle while their Chinese peers are in class.



*Figure 15. Burmese students idling outside during lesson time*

Off-task activities are so common that even Burmese students take for granted that it is part of the “normal” teaching practices for them. One of the students even records such “privileged” freedom in her *WeChat* indicating that they are given a chance to watch movies in class instead of having the usual lessons according to the time table.



Figure 16. WeChat screenshot on the classroom activities

This student posted the message in her moment on *WeChat*: “Wow, this class is watching movie again, cool” with two emoticon faces of applauding gesture. Under this sentence, she posts two more photos: on the left side are two students searching for their favourite movie and on the right side is a subject teacher sitting in her chair while the other students are watching the movie rather than having the normal class. It is also interesting to note how her classmates respond to her post. Five of her classmates “liked” her post to acknowledge this experience and one of them comments “这种正常呀” (Such thing is quite normal) with two emoticons of saying that it’s not unusual.

Overall, Chinese teachers adopt different strategies to teach Burmese students but all these strategies lack seriousness, showing the low expectations of the academic performance of Burmese students. This approach results in a number of tensions for Chinese teachers teaching Burmese students, as I will demonstrate in the next section.

#### 6.2.4 Teaching challenges and asymmetries

Despite the fact that BHS has recruited Burmese students since 2005, the school has not produced an efficient and clear schooling guidance on educating Burmese students, merely telling the subject teachers to make their teaching “simple”, “practical” and “enjoyable”. However, teaching Burmese students is not easy. The in-depth interviews with subject teachers have revealed many teaching asymmetries in educating Burmese students.

A key challenge that exists with teaching Burmese students is understanding how to bridge their previous content knowledge. Chinese teachers, especially those teaching Science subjects, complain of their difficulties in giving the same amount of teaching tasks to Burmese students:

有些学生在那边 [缅甸] 从来就没上过生物课，这些学生就老火了。

Some students have never learned Biology [in Myanmar], and it is really hard for them to follow my class. (Interview with Ms Zhou, Biology teacher)

虽然他们来读高中物理，但很多连初中生的水平都没有。

Although they are coming to learn senior high school Physics, most of them do not even have junior high school level. (Interview with Mr Xie, Physics teacher)

Not having been exposed to the subject or having lower level of required knowledge is often reported by their Chinese teachers who find it hard to implement their teaching effectively. Burmese students’ lack of subject knowledge is mainly due to the differences between the educational systems at BHS and their previous schooling experience in Myanmar. Take Burmese students from Myitkyina and Lweje as examples. The students from Myitkyina have been taught with the Taiwan system in which subjects such as Chemistry, Physics and Biology are combined into one, whereas these subjects are separated and require certain amount of previous basic knowledge at BHS. Because of their lack of required knowledge in these Science subjects, the students from Myitkyina find it hard to follow their Science teachers in

China, and they are often sitting at the most peripheral corners of the class. In contrast, the students from Lweje have been exposed to the PRC system and most of them, especially male students, feel that they can catch up with Maths, Chemistry and Physics. These students are often sitting in the most visible space in class in full view of the teacher. Their high participation with their Science teachers especially their homeroom teacher often makes them highly visible, and consequently, they become the teachers' favoured students. However, for these students who are good at Science subjects, they are often the ones with least competence in learning the English subject. According to their previous educational trajectories in Myanmar, there is only one English class each week in a Chinese supplementary school, by the time they come to BHS, many of them cannot even figure out 26 English letters (based on the interview with an English teacher). This is in contrast to those students from Myitkyina whose English proficiency is much better than their Burmese peers from Lweje. This is because they have received longer periods of education at government schools in Myanmar where English is taught from kindergarten and becomes the medium of instruction from Year 10 onwards.

Another challenge associated with teaching Burmese students is the use of the *gaokao*-oriented teaching and learning materials.

这套教材都是为高考编写的，高中数学内容很抽象，很难跟现实有联系。

This textbook is compiled for the purpose of *gaokao*. The content of Maths in senior high school level is quite abstract, very hard to link with the daily life. (Interview with Ms Yang, Maths teacher).

从内心来讲学生是想学习 [ 英语 ] 的，只是这个教材不适合他们，语法讲解太多，交际方面的内容太少，让他们学起来很枯燥。

From the bottom of their hearts, they really want to study [ English ], but this teaching material is not suitable for them: too much content for grammar but

little in communicative learning, so they feel it is boring to learn it. (Interview with Ms Yin, English teacher)

这套教材不适合他们，像我们上的第一课，要联系国民大革命时期

[ 1926-1928 ] 的背景，他们是很难理解的，我们中国的学生对中国的历史特别是近代史现代史都很清楚，比如朱自清的《荷塘月色》，毛泽东的《沁园春·长沙》，在什么时候写的，为什么写，但他们 [ 缅甸学生 ] 没有这些背景知识，如果给他们讲就像强塞给他们的感觉。

This teaching material is not appropriate for them. Take the first lesson we learned for example. It requires the background knowledge of Northern Expedition [ 1926-1928 ] and it is very hard for them to understand it whereas our Chinese students are very clear about China's history, especially early modern and modern history, like Zhu Ziqing's "Moonlight over the Lotus Pond" and Mao Zedong's "Qin Yuan Chun Changsha". When were these articles written? Why were they written? They [ Burmese students ] do not have such background knowledge. If I teach them these articles, it's like stuffing their minds. (Interview with Mr Ge, Chinese Language Arts teacher)

这门课有四个模块：经济常识，政治常识，文化生化和哲学(...) 经济常识大部分是生活中的实际情况，反应的是现在的经济，所以不但适应中国还适应其他国家，了解还是对他们好的，但到了第二政治模块就删掉，上的时候提供大量素材，影片图片来教学，主要是教到他们做人的道理，讲得慢，还有是文化哲学，涉及一些人生中的启发，还是有必要给他们上。

In this subject, there are four modules of learning: economics, politics, culture and philosophy (...) most of the knowledge in economics derives from actual life, and reflects the present economy, so economics is applicable not only in China but also in other countries, and it is good to acquire it. But the second part is politics and should be deleted. What I teach in class is to offer them many learning materials from movies, pictures which are about the rules and behaviours of life, and which are taught very slowly. Then there is culture and philosophy, they are associated with the enlightenment of life, so it is necessary to teach them. (Interview with Ms Ma, Politics teacher)

To respond to the problems caused by the *gaokao*-oriented textbooks, some teachers choose to simplify teaching points by reducing the teaching speed, or omitting certain chapter, or not expanding any relevant knowledge, or assigning little or no homework and additional exercises (see 6.2.1). Some teachers such as the History and Politics teachers resort to the multimedia and online resources to complement their teaching points. However, not all of the subjects can use online resources for the purpose of practical teaching, as explained by the Maths teacher:

如果数学课能像历史、政治课一样，有点故事性可能会好一点，现在我们只有概念知识，所以学起来很枯燥 (...) 我也想扩展知识，让他们觉得学得有点兴趣，但可惜网上没有这方面的数学相关知识。

If only Math could be taught like History and Politics, it would be better with a bit of a story-line. What we have now is only conceptual knowledge, so it sounds boring to learn (...) I'd like to expand the subject knowledge so that they may feel a bit interested in learning Maths, but there is no such information about Maths online. (Interview with Ms Yang, Maths teacher)

Given the fact that Maths is an important subject because of its high percentage of the timetable (see Table 11) and given most Burmese students lack age-appropriate levels

of maths, Ms Yang has to reduce the educational gap by teaching them the knowledge of junior high school maths and lowering the demanding tasks.

我以前给他们补过课初中的数学，但现在只有几个能跟得上我的课。

I used to compensate for their knowledge of Maths of Junior high school, but now only a few of them can catch up with my class. (Interview with Ms Yang, Maths teacher)

Despite offering additional knowledge to bridge the learning difficulties, such a teaching strategy does not seem to work well when Burmese students come to BHS at different periods of time. The fact that Burmese students come to BHS at different intervals has posed another level of teaching challenge to Chinese teachers who have difficulties teaching Burmese students of various subject levels. Similar to Maths, the English teacher also finds it hard to conduct normal teaching practices in the Burmese class where some Burmese students like those from Myitkyina are good at English whereas many from Lweje are struggling with basic English. As a consequence, only one-third of learning content has been covered in the English class with less amount of exercises and less demanding tasks assigned after class.

Overall, Chinese teachers do not find it easy to teach Burmese students of different educational backgrounds and the actual teaching process is full of negotiation and contestation. The fact that Burmese students have not been exposed to the same educational system means they are behind the required subject knowledge at BHS. In response to their lack of content knowledge, some teachers choose to delete China-oriented knowledge such as China's political system and only keep what they think might be useful to build up with knowledge of the world. Other teachers, especially those teaching Science subjects, choose to compensate for lack of pre-existing knowledge by teaching Burmese students the junior high school subjects first before teaching the senior high school content. However, bridging the previous content knowledge is not enough to empower Burmese students' performance. The use of *gaokao*-oriented textbooks poses another educational barrier for Chinese teachers to incorporate and make their teaching relevant to their everyday lives. In order to

counterbalance the problem of using standardised textbooks, some teachers turn to online resources to elaborate on their teaching points and make their teaching practical and interesting. However, not all of the teachers can find appropriate resources to facilitate their teaching. What further aggravates their teaching difficulty is that Burmese students do not enrol at the same time. It is impractical for the same subject teachers to repeat what they have taught to the new group of students who still lack the content knowledge. As a consequence, teaching Burmese students of different educational backgrounds not only brings extra teaching tasks for Chinese teachers but also precludes teachers from feeling empowered to teach well.

### 6.2.5 Summary

In sum, Burmese students are not given sufficient teaching and effective learning to compete with their Chinese peers. The close examination of classroom interactions demonstrates that Burmese students are taught with less teaching content and at a slower pace. They are provided with fewer materials to extend their learning opportunity. Their classroom participation is largely limited to structured exercises and disciplinary control rather than being encouraged to develop their academic potential, and sometimes academic teaching is replaced by entertaining off-task activities. These less rigorous teaching and learning styles are indicative of the teachers' low expectations on the students' academic outcome. However, an in-depth analysis of teaching asymmetries reveals the tensions in implementing the normal teaching practices upon Burmese students. One of the teaching challenges is caused by the gap between the expected content knowledge and Burmese students' previous educational backgrounds. Another challenge is related with the asymmetry between implementing practical and delightful pedagogy and using *gaokao*-oriented textbook. What further complicates the teaching efficiency is the difficulties in balancing Burmese students' various learning needs and different educational backgrounds in the same class and in considering those who are mixed with Chinese peers but who are not preparing for *gaokao* as legitimate participants. Despite their awareness of Burmese students' different learning needs and educational backgrounds, most subject teachers seem to abandon their agentive power to help to counterbalance the actual learning difficulties of Burmese students. Their reluctance to spend more effort to

empower Burmese students will be discussed in Section 6.4 with the consideration of a wider context of teaching accountability and working conditions. What their subject teachers emphasise after teaching them for a while seems to be quite language-oriented, namely focusing on correcting Burmese students' Chinese language while cultivating their morality and behaviours.

### **6.3 Norms of Chinese language practices**

Given the fact that Burmese students are positioned as academically deficient and their teachers find it hard to empower their students' subject performance, Chinese teachers choose to focus on Burmese students' linguistic output, as reported by the homeroom teacher:

不说一定要教他们学到什么，只要说他们能说好中文就不错了。

We don't expect them to be able to master this and that, but as long as they can speak good Chinese, it is already good enough. (Interview with Mr Xie, homeroom teacher)

The homeroom teacher's comment is actually derived from his previous impression of some Burmese students' poor performance in Chinese. His comment is also acknowledged by other subject teachers:

刚开始有几个学生叫他们起来回答问题，讲点中文讲也讲不清楚，讲得颠三倒四的。

At the beginning, when I asked some students to answer questions in class, they could not speak Chinese clearly and they spoke Chinese in an incoherent way. (Interview with Ms Zhou, Biology teacher)

According to the Chinese teacher, Mr Ge, Burmese students' Chinese proficiency level is very different from each other when they first enroll at BHS:

单说中文了嘛噶，这些学生有的只有幼儿园水平，有些是小学，有些是初中水平，有些么可能接近高中水平 (...) 像开始来有一个女生，她基本

上连汉语也不会讲噶，汉字也不会写噶。她以前在教室里面第一排就天天那种坐着，她也不说话噶 (...) 在了一段时间，这个学生不在了噶。还有一个学生，他来以前也是不会讲中文噶，他是突击了三个月噶，来呢时候就是在 [ 缅甸 ] 华文学校学了三个月才来呢，所以说勉强可以讲点中文噶。

Regarding their Chinese alone, these students range in proficiency from kindergarten, primary school, junior high school to approaching that of senior high school. Take a female student who just arrived at the beginning for example. She could not even speak any Chinese and neither could she write any Chinese characters. She used to sit in the first row of the class every day, and she was all silent (...) after staying here for a while, this student disappeared. Also there was another student who could not speak Chinese and had only learned it for three months. Before coming here, he went to a Chinese school [ in Myanmar ] for three months, so he could speak a little Chinese.

(Interview with Mr Ge, Chinese teacher)

According to the school principal, Burmese students who come to BHS for formal education should have obtained the certificate of junior high school education from a Chinese school in Myanmar, but the final decision is given to the Burmese principals on who to recommend and select. Given that Chinese supplementary schools in Myanmar are not subject to government oversight, it is not to be expected that they would take a standardized approach to teaching and learning. Therefore, the students who they recommend for education in China do not necessarily meet any particular language proficiency and educational standards. However, when they arrive at BHS, they are expected to have Chinese language proficiency that meets at grade-norm levels. Given that Chinese is expected, some Burmese students will find it impossible to follow the class because they lack the required proficiency. It is worth noting that by the time the field work was conducted, the number of Burmese students in Year 11

had been reduced to almost half from 45 to 26. The challenge of teaching Burmese students via Chinese as medium of instruction must be considered one of the contributing factors to the high drop-out rate at BHS. In the following section, I will examine how subject teachers implement implicit language policies in their content teaching by mainly drawing from the classroom recordings and from the interviews with teachers.

### 6.3.1 Speaking standardised Chinese

On a daily basis, subject teachers seem to stress on the correct usage of Chinese terms when they elaborate certain concepts. They constantly rehearse simple terms and make sure Burmese students' Chinese expressions are correct. In a Biology class, for example, Ms Zhou talks about “the impacts of population density”:

1. 老师：在座的各位同学有没有性别？

Teacher: Do all of you here have genders?

2. 学生：有。

Students: Yes, we have.

3. 老师：有。那可不可说“我有性别比率”？

Teacher: Yes. Then, can we say “I have a gender rate” ?

4. 学生：不能。

5. Students: No, we can't.

6. 老师：对于一个个体来讲，有出生或死亡，能不能说“这个人有出生率或死亡率”？

Teacher: For an individual, there is birth or death. Can we say “this person has birth rate or death rate”?

7. 学生：不能。

Teacher: No, we can't.

8. 老师：再举个例子，同学们可以从缅甸迁入中国嘛，那么对你们来讲，从缅甸出来算是迁出，进了中国算什么呢？

Teacher: One more example. You can emigrate from Myanmar to China, right? Then for you, migrating from Myanmar is emigration, and entering China is?

9. 学生：迁入。

Students: Immigration.

10. 老师：迁入。拿一个人来讲，可以是“迁入”或“迁出”，可不可以说你从缅甸出去了，叫“迁出率”？或者你把户口转到中国了，叫迁入了。可以不可以叫做“迁入率”？

Teacher: Immigration. For an individual, we can say “immigration” or “emigration”. Can we say it’s “emigration rate” if you emigrate from Myanmar? Or if you change your household registration to China, it should be immigration. Can we say it as “immigration rate”?

11. 学生：不能。

Students: No, we can't.

Despite the fact that the teaching tasks of the class is to talk about the factors that impact the population density, Ms Zhou still spends quite a lot of time distinguishing the words with or without “率” (rate). Such linguistic practice of correct usage of terms does not finish until the teacher uses Burmese students as an example to distinguish “迁入” (immigration) and “迁入率” (immigration rate), and “迁出” (emigration) and “迁出率” (emigration rate). However, such an example seems to be inappropriate for two reasons: first, it serves to other Burmese students as different from the mainstream student body, and this constant reminder of their Burmese identity further separates them from the school; second, the example also conveys the

ignorance of the teacher of the diverse identifications of Burmese students (see Sections 7.3.2 and 7.3. 4). Many of them, especially those from Lweje, do not see any differences from their hometown to China and see the activities of crossing borders as a daily practice instead of migration between countries (see Sections 4.4 and 4.6 in Chapter Four).

Besides using the correct Chinese terms, standardised pronunciation is also stressed. In the Politics class, for example, Ms Ma is consciously training her Burmese students to improve their *Putonghua* pronunciation while imparting the knowledge of being a model student. The following transcription is about the norms of behaviours and moralities which are valued by the school and the Chinese society:

1. 老师：腊西你说夏是道德模范是吧？为什么，原因？

Ms Ma : Laxi, are you saying Xia is a model of morality, right? Why?

Your reasons?

2. 腊西：因为/ 他会/宽容别人。[腊西站起来回答问题]

Laxi : Because / he can / tolerate others. [stands up answering the question]

3. 老师：他会宽容别人，无论你们怎么说他、怎么欺负他，他最终还是比较隐忍的。

Ms Ma : He can tolerate others. No matter what you say to him and how you bully him, he always ends up very tolerant.

4. 腊西：欺负到没有。<@@@>

Laxi: There wasn't any bullying actually. <@@@>

5. 老师：用这种比较开阔的心胸对待任何一个同学是不是？

Ms Ma : Does Xia treat every classmate with broad heart?

6. 腊西：嗯。

Laxi : Yes. [“嗯” signals agreement]

7. 老师：不管是别人认可也好不认可也好，他都是这样以一种很平和的心态、宽容的心态对待大家。

Ms Ma : No matter whether others acknowledge him or not, he always treats them with the same moderate attitude and generous heart?

8. 腊西：是的

Laxi : Yes.

9. 老师：对，还有吗？

Ms Ma : Right, anything else?

10. 腊西：还有//

Laxi : Also//

11. 老师：这是对人，为人处世方面的。

Ms Ma : You mention the way he treats people. What about the way he does things?

12. 腊西：勤劳。[腊西发这个词的音是 qi lao 不是 qin lao]

Laxi : Diligence. [ pronounces this word as “qi lao” instead of “qin lao”]

13. 老师：哈？勤劳[QIN LAO]，哈，勤劳。哪些例子呢，勤劳？

Ms Ma : What? DILLIGENCE! [QIN LAO] Yes, diligence. Any examples about his diligence?

14. 腊西：比如说我们星期二下午打扫-星期二大扫除的时候，我们有些同学在那里歇着，他是，怎么说呢？<@@@>

Laxi : For example, every Tuesday, we need to do cleaning. When we do the big clean on Tuesday, some of us take rest there, but he is, how to

say? <@@@>

15. 老师：他是任劳任怨，像牛玉儒一样的是不是？<@@@>任劳任怨，是不是，在干自己的工作。不管你们闲的也好、站这聊天的也好，他就自己在那做着自己手中的事情。

Ms Ma : He is willing to work hard, like Niu Yuru, right? <@@@> Hard working, right? Doing his own job. No matter whether you are resting or standing chatting, he is doing his job.

16. 腊西：嗯。[肯定的回答]

Laxi : Yes.

17. 老师：所以这个，从你这里不仅是道德模范，还是什么模范，劳动模范是不是（笑）还有没有了？

Ms Ma : So this/ based on what you've said, he is not only a model of morality but also a model of work, right? Anything else?

18. 孔丹:学习模范。[一个学生补充]

Kongdan: A model of study. [responds despite not being questioned]

19. 老师：还是学习模范，三个模范，头衔太多了是不是？

Ms Ma : Also the model of study, three models, so many reputations, right?

20. 陇奴：有点啰嗦 <@@@>[一个学生补充，但老师没有回应]

Longnu : A bit long-winded. <@@@> [ responds but no confirmation from the teacher]

21. 腊西：帮助人。

Laxi : Helpful.

22. 老师：帮助/人，乐于助人，像雷锋一样的是不是？只要哪一个同学有一点小事情，夏一知道，呼叫夏，夏马上就到了是不是？[学生大笑<@@@>] 不要不好意思啊，好，坐下。

Ms Ma : Help/ful, willing to help, like Leifeng, isn't he? As soon as any student has a small trouble and Xia knows it, you ring Xia, and Xia will immediately arrive, right? [the whole class laughs<@@@>]. Good, sit down.

The above classroom interaction is the discussion of why one of the Burmese students, Xia, is chosen as a model student. The interaction between the teacher and the students makes explicit the linguistic and behavioural norms expected at BHS. First of all, the knowledge of a good student is being constructed by the acceptable qualities of “宽容别人” (tolerate others) (see Turns 2-11), “勤劳” (diligent) (Turns 12-13), “任劳任怨” (hard-working without complaining) (Turns 15-17), and “乐于助人” (willing to help) (Turns 21-22). Over the inferential process, the expected behaviours and knowledge are implanted through the discussion of Xia's qualities and sharing the commonalities with role models such as Niu Yuru (Turn 15) and Leifeng (Turn 22) who are publicly known as communist servants because of their work ethic and devotion (Liao, 2013; Liu, 2009; Wang, 2004). The values of being a good student are interwoven with the confirmation of the association with the publicly honoured figures. Thus, such modelling education becomes an effective way of regulating Burmese students' codes of conduct and shapes them into a group of students as expected by the school and teachers.

What makes the excerpt linguistically relevant is the language features of the interaction between the subject teacher and the Burmese students. In order to make the class delightful, the teacher seems to intentionally use some lexical terms to achieve a humorous effect. For example, in Turn 3, the teacher uses the expression “欺负他”

(bully him) instead of “treat him” to exaggerate the tolerance of Xia; a similar feature can also be found in Turn 22 when the teacher chooses the word “呼叫” (ring him) instead of “叫他” (ask him) to express the willingness and efficiency of the model student in assisting others. Another important linguistic feature is associated with the norm of speaking standardised Chinese language in class. In Turn 12, Laxi gives an answer “勤劳” (diligence), in Chinese this word is pronounced as “qin lao”, but Laxi pronounces it as “qi lao”. Because of this mispronunciation, the teacher pauses for a second in Turn 13 and then quickly corrects Laxi’s pronunciation by stressing the correct sound with a prolonged and higher voice and then repeats it in a natural way to continue with her teaching. The way Ms Ma corrects Laxi is not because of the “wrong” answer he gives, but because of the poor pronunciation which needs to be corrected first before the confirmation of the content. In fact, Ms Ma is not the only teacher who keeps on correcting the standard usage of Chinese language. In the Chinese class, Burmese students are frequently called up to read Chinese textbooks and the standardised pronunciation of speaking *Putonghua* is thus implemented at classroom level.

### 6.3.2 Writing standardised Chinese

Similar to speaking standardised Chinese, Burmese students are required to write the correct simplified Chinese characters. Such practice is often observed in students’ assignments, with zero tolerance for wrong spellings of Chinese strokes:

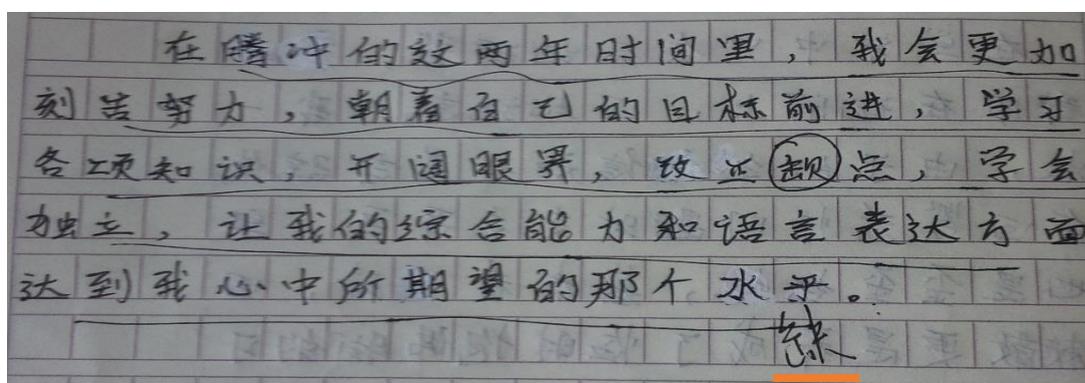


Figure 17. Burmese student composition with teacher feedback

In Figure 17, the underlined word “缺” (shortcoming) is misspelled, and if not carefully checked, I as a native speaker of Chinese do not even notice such minor error because it looks so similar to the correct word except the wrong character component on the right side. Apart from the strict requirement on writing correct Chinese words, using traditional Chinese characters is not allowed, either. The interview with Qidong, who likes to write his name with traditional Chinese characters, reports his experience:

老师不让写 [ 繁体字 ] , 写了会不高兴。说是下次不要写了。

Our teachers do not allow us to write [ traditional Chinese characters ] . If we write it, they are not happy, and they hope we will not write it next time.

(Interview with Qidong)

Apart from writing correct Chinese words with simplified version, Burmese students are also required to be able to display their capacity as professional teachers who are expected to use the Chinese language to teach their own students in the future. This idea of cultivating Burmese students to be Chinese language teachers is derived from the Chinese teachers' perception on their future employment trajectory. The chemistry teacher, Mr Hua, for instance, mostly organised his classes as language training rather than Chemistry lessons. He justified this practice as follows:

侨生班出去都是当老师。

After graduation, Chinese Burmese generally take up teaching as their job.

(Informal conversation with Mr Hua, Chemistry teacher)

In class, Burmese students are required to give about 10-20 minute presentations, which are then evaluated by Mr Hua as micro-teaching exercises. His evaluation is mainly about whether Burmese students can talk about a certain topic clearly and logically. Chinese language performance including correct usage of expressions and

the standard forms of simplified Chinese characters are further assessment criteria. Take the following student's presentation for example.



Figure 18. Xia's presentation in Chemistry class

In the example, the student is presenting a short lecture on the topic of “a cold spell”. After his presentation, Mr Hua points out the first mistake in using the term “因素” (“factors”) which should be written as “后果” (“consequences”). His second comment is also about the fact that the student misspelled the key word “潮” (“spell”) as “朝” by omitting the left component. Mr Hua points out the error in writing the word “潮” “in a way that blames the student:

你看都是高二的学生了，寒潮的潮字都不会写。

Look, you are already a Year 11 student and how come you can't even write the word “spell”? (Field notes)

Overall, the classroom interactions between Burmese students and Chinese teachers indicate that Burmese students' Chinese proficiency is perceived as inferior in

speaking and writing standardised Chinese. The meaning of speaking standardised Chinese implies the competence in using the correct expressions for the key learning concepts and in pronouncing Chinese word with correct usage of consonants and tones. The requirements on writing standardised Chinese include use of simplified characters, writing the correct word with correct components and strokes and writing like a would-be teacher with good handwriting. While imparting the standardised practices of speaking and writing the Chinese language, to students, Burmese students are also shaped and cultivated by the “standardised” morality and social behaviours of how to be a model student and how to be a would-be teacher as expected by their subject teachers.

### 6.3.3 Teaching challenges and asymmetries

Although the ideologies of speaking and writing Chinese are explicitly and implicitly implemented at classroom level, speaking standardised Chinese does not come easily for the Chinese teachers from the peripheral region where Tengchong is located, which is more than 3,000 km away from Beijing. While following the language policy of speaking standard *Putonghua* in class, Chinese teachers struggle with presenting the linguistic performances of a legitimate speaker of standard *Putonghua* themselves. The following classroom recording provides an example of the teaching challenges this creates, as both Chinese teacher and Burmese students fail to figure out the correct pronunciation of the word 束 “shù”, one of the key words in teaching the electric field intensity in Physics.

In class, Mr Xie displays the images of electric field lines on slides and writes down on the blackboard the description of the curved lines. Then, Mr Xie checks the pronunciation of the word “bunch”. In “Standard” Mandarin Chinese, the word for “bunch” is “束” and the standard transcription of pinyin for 束 is “shù”.

1. 老师：这个字怎么读？

Teacher: How to pronounce this word?

2. 学生 1：cù [ 小声回答]

Student A: cù [in a small voice]

3. 学生 2 : cù [比前一位学生声音更大]

Student B: cù. [louder volume than Student A]

4. 多个学生 : cù[学生群体齐声回答]

Students: cù. [more students chorus the response]

5. 老师 : 嗯 ? zú 还是 cù?

Teacher: What? Is it “zú” or “cù”?

6. 多个学生 : cù [学生群体齐声回答]

Students: cù [all students chorus]

7. 老师 : 嗯 , 一 cù/ 一 cù/ 一 cù 鲜花。

Teacher: Yes, a cù (bunch) of/ a cù (bunch)/ a cù (bunch) of flowers.

8. 学生 3 : sù [一位学生给出不同发音]

Student C: sù [gives a different pronunciation]

9. 学生 4 : sù [另一位跟着支持]

Student D: sù [confirms the pronunciation]

10. 学生 5 : sù [第三位声音比前两位更大 , 意在纠正]

Student E: cù [tries to “correct” Students C and D]

11. 老师 : 一 sù 鲜花 , [老师给出答案 ] 一 zú 曲线哈[音量比之前小] 。 //

好,下面[音量清晰宏亮] 。

12. Teacher: A bunch (“sù”) flowers// a bunch (“zú”) of curve lines [ reduced volume]. // Yes, Ok, next

The pronunciation of the Standard Mandarin Chinese word “束” is a consonant “sh” and a vowel “u” with the falling tone, but neither the teacher nor any of the students can produce the correct pronunciation. Given that the word “shù” is an important concept in teaching electric field intensity, Mr Xie’s limitation in his knowledge of *Hanyu Pinyin* and speaking standard *Putonghua* becomes very apparent here.

However, and perhaps to avoid losing face, Mr Xie passes his linguistic insecurity on to his Burmese students, which does not produce the correct result here.

Despite having *Putonghua* as the only legitimate medium of instruction, some Chinese teachers like Mr Xie have difficulties in figuring out the standard pronunciation in class. Unfortunately, keeping the practice of *Putonghua* does not help both teachers and students to improve their *Putonghua* as none of them has access to interact with standard spoken practice. Their co-constructed linguistic knowledge does not seem to clarify but to confuse their knowledge of *Putonghua*, which further makes them deficient speakers of the language. Knowing the limitation of speaking standard *Putonghua*, many Chinese subject teachers would rather cover their deficiency by stressing the standard form of writing Chinese characters or by speaking the local dialect with Burmese students. In fact, the use of the local dialect seems to be well supported by both Burmese students and teachers:

开始的时候是和他们讲普通话，后来发现他们居然会讲方言，就换成方言跟他们讲了。

At the beginning, I spoke *Putonghua* with them, later I find that they can speak dialect, so I shift to the dialect to communicate with them. (Interview with Mr. Yang, PE teacher)

觉得老师用方言和我们讲话很亲切。

It gives me a close and cordial feeling if our teachers speak dialect with us. (Interview with Lifu)

In sum, the imperative to speak standardised Chinese poses significant challenges for both students and teachers in this peripheral part of China. Outside the classroom, both teachers and students seem to find a space to counterbalance their disadvantages and create rapport by using Yunnan Mandarin, the mother tongue of the majority of Burmese students and their Chinese teachers.

#### 6.3.4 Summary

Despite the fact that BHS is geographically over 3,000 kilometres away from Beijing, and BHS has students from a variety of linguistic backgrounds, the hierarchies of speaking and writing standard Chinese are not contested and challenged, but are strictly implemented at the classroom level. One of the consequences of implementing spoken and written standard Chinese language policy is that Burmese students are constructed as linguistically deficient in many ways. Their linguistic disadvantages relate to pronouncing Chinese words correctly, spelling and reading *Hanyu Pinyin* with the correct tones, using simplified Chinese characters and writing Chinese characters with their correct components. In fact, Burmese students are not alone with these problems; even their teachers, who are all native speakers of Yunnan Mandarin, face similar challenges. As a consequence, not all of the Chinese teachers are confident in their own *Putonghua*. This clash of the imposition of *Putonghua* vis-à-vis a lack of proficiency in *Putonghua* by all interactants creates a lot of awkwardness and problems in the classroom. The consequences are felt predominantly by the Burmese students, though, whose lack of linguistic proficiency is compounded by their lack of legitimacy in China where they are seen as Burmese. Outside class, it is sometimes possible for both Chinese teachers and Burmese students to negotiate more positive identity positions as both proficient Chinese speakers and authentic Chinese people by communicating in Yunnan Mandarin, as I will now show.

#### **6.4 Interactions outside classrooms**

This section describes what cultural resources are valued or devalued outside the classrooms; what count as problems; who become the legitimate participants; and how Burmese students are minoritised through various forms of interactions between Chinese teachers and Burmese students.

In Section 5.4.2, I described the conflicts between Burmese students and Chinese teachers concerning the school's intention of homogenising students of diverse backgrounds through militarised education. Apart from unifying their cultural practices, Burmese students are also homogeneously perceived by their Chinese teachers as financially inferior (see 5.5.2) and academically deficient (see 6.2.2).

These overall positions are reinforced in daily interactions. For instance, a casual joke may be embedded in negative stereotypes, as in the following example. One day, I observed a chance encounter between three Burmese male students and their first PE teacher, who had taught them a year earlier. The teacher greeted the students as follows:

个还玩着三飘呢? 个还玩三批了? 个还抽烟了?

Are you still playing Sanpiao? Are you still playing Sanpi? Are you still smoking? [Sanpiao and Sanpi are card games associated with gambling.]

At BHS, gambling and smoking are categorised as problems and acts of disobedience of school rules. This PE teacher seems to greet Burmese students in a joking way, but his words reproduces a negative stereotype of Burmese students as rule breakers. Negative stereotypes about Myanmar, similarly, form the basis of everyday jokes. Qidong related to me this joke made by a former Chemistry teacher:

你们那里是不是毒品大街上摆着一堆一堆呢卖?

In your country, aren't drugs sold publicly in the streets?

Qidong was still offended when he told me about "the joke". Along with these negative stereotypes, it is also the case that some Burmese students are favoured by their Chinese teachers. These students are categorised as "good" students because they have special talents:

李佳：你们班有没有学生有特长？

谢老师：有，例如礼福字写得非常漂亮，常打篮球打得好，还有夏学习也不错球也打得好。

Li Jia: In your class, do you have some students with special talents?

Mr Xie: Yes. Like Lifu, his handwriting is very beautiful; Chang is a good basketball player, and Xia performs well both in study and playing basketball. (Interview with Mr Xie, the homeroom teacher)

Because of their special talents these students received additional opportunities: Lifu's calligraphy, for instance, was entered into a province-level competition and sent to Kunming. This, in turn, enhances the reputation of BHS. Chang and Xia's talent at basketball allowed them to interact with their subject teachers, who also liked to play basketball, outside class. These additional interactional opportunities made them "visible" to their teachers, and they received further opportunities to take on student leadership roles: Lifu as class monitor, Xia as learning representative and Chang in charge of assigning cleaning tasks. Because these three students stood out to their teachers as "special", they also received more attention in class. In class, they were – in contrast to all other Burmese students - often called up individually; outside class, they were given opportunities to participate in public events such as sports competitions and calligraphy contests. Furthermore, they are the ones who were recommended by their homeroom teacher for employment opportunities and university scholarships. In fact, Xia and Lifu later became the only two students who received a full scholarship for university study.

In contrast to these three favoured students, other Burmese students usually played a subordinate role outside class as bystanders or cheering groups. The only exception to this pattern was a parade where Benke, a Lashi student from Panwa, who was not a teacher's favourite, was selected to carry the class sign as parade usher (see Figure 17).



*Figure 19. Burmese Class marching during Winter Sports parade*

Holding the distinct class sign for the Burmese students, Benke was the first to catch the public attention when the Burmese class came onto the stage for evaluation by the school leaders and government officials who were sitting on stage. It is important to examine how Benke was selected as the most visible Burmese student for this important school event which was attended by school leaders and local government officials. During the daily participant observation in the classroom, Benke was such an invisible figure: sitting at the corner of the classroom and keeping quiet most of the time in class. His name was rarely mentioned by the teachers, and he was neither positively nor negatively noticed by any of the teachers. What qualified Benke to be the parade usher was not his Chinese proficiency or academic performance or any special talents, but his dark skin colour. Because of his looks, Benke embodies the stereotypical image of Burman people from Myanmar. On this official and public occasion, Benke – along with all the other Burmese students marching in the parade - was constructed as a token, a representative member of another culture, and a symbol of that essentialised community. This process of tokenisation also serves to reproduce the minoritisation of Burmese students at BHS.

Besides skin colour as a distinct feature, the names of Burmese students can also be used as a symbol of their otherness. The Chinese teacher, Mr Ge, reports his different impressions on Burmese students after teaching them for more than one and half years:

有些学生是华侨子弟噻，还有些学生姓氏像“腊西”、“奔科”啊、“等旺”啊，这些是纯纯的是属于缅籍学生。所以说他们属于不同层次的人，他们的基础不一样，所以你要用同一种方法刻教他们是根本行不通噻。

Some students are ethnic Chinese, and others such as those named Laxi, Benke, Dengwang and so on, these students are pure Burmese. Therefore, they do not belong to the same level, and their previous foundations are also different. It is impossible to teach them with the same method. (Interview with Mr Ge, Chinese teacher)

Mr Ge categorises Burmese students into two groups on the basis of their names and how those names that do not conform to Chinese patterns are positioned as problem students with a different level of intelligence. It is worth noting that names are not, in fact, a clear ethnic marker in the border region. Shan Burmese students, for instance, all have Chinese-like names, and they are seen as ethnic Chinese by Mr Ge's naming practices. In fact, in the Burmese class, all of the students except one claimed that their ancestors were Chinese and accordingly they also share the kinship and blood ties with Chinese people. However, because of their names and their looks students such as Laxi or Benke are not perceived as ethnic Chinese. The fact that these students from Panwa had actually received seven years of Chinese formal education prior to coming to BHS was rendered invisible.

In sum, there is a continuum of homogenisation of Burmese students and a process of minoritisation in positioning them as culturally inferior. On the whole, Burmese students are categorised as a group of students whose previous cultural practices are devalued and erased. Given their relatively poor academic performance, their intelligence is questioned, their community is misrepresented, and they are stereotyped as lacking diligence, being poverty-stricken and being trouble-makers.

Only a few Burmese students managed to escape these processes through their special talents, which helped to position them as good students.

## **6.5 Teaching dilemmas**

In Sections 6.2.4 and 6.3.3, I analysed the teaching dilemmas resulting from a lack of clarity in the purpose of educating Burmese students. In this section, I will link the teaching practices described here to the wider context of teaching accountability and teachers' working conditions to further illuminate the complexity of teacher agency and the consequences of structural constraints on the teaching of Burmese students.

### **6.5.1 Impacts of appointment system on teachers of various backgrounds**

It is true that Chinese teachers can decide on how and what to teach to Burmese students and teachers are given much more agency in their instruction styles than is usually the case. However, this does not mean that teaching is as easy as might be expected. Chinese teachers, old or young, experienced or inexperienced, told me that they find teaching Burmese students “not rewarding” “complicated” and that they “lack competence” to teach Burmese students:

侨四班没有压力，想怎么发挥就怎么发挥，但我感觉成就感没有那么大。

There is no pressure in Burmese classes and I can teach whatever way I want, but I don't feel sense of achievement. (Interview with Miss Peng, Geography teacher, in her early 20s)

来这个班心情是愉快的，但也是复杂的。

It is delightful to come to this class, but also complicated. (Interview with Mr Hua, Chemistry teacher, in his mid 30s)

我教语文已经教了差不多 30 年，但来教侨四班我感觉我不会教了。

I have been teaching the subject of Chinese language arts for almost 30 years, but when teaching Burmese students, I don't know how to teach any more.  
(Interview with Mr Ge, Chinese language arts teacher, in early 50s)

These teachers do not experience the fact that they do not need to prep Burmese students for the *gaokao* as liberating. In fact, because of this, the Chinese teachers seem to be lost in teaching Burmese students. Their confusion is closely associated with their positioning as a good teacher at BHS from a peripheral region subjected to the present evaluation mechanism for Chinese teachers in China.

Being a teacher at BHS means that they do not have the strong students' resources to compete with their rivals such as another Tengchong high school, where teachers are rewarded with considerable bonuses and good reputations because of the high percentage of students from that school going to top-tier universities:

腾冲 xxx 学校好，生源好，考上重点大学的学生多，但像 BHS，不管老师再怎么苦，学生最终的成绩是有限的，最终的奖金差别不大。

Tengchong xxx high school is good and their students are good, so many students can go to top universities, but at BHS, no matter how hard teachers work, students' final performance is limited, so there is not much difference in bonus for teachers. (Interview with Ms Zhou, Biology teacher)

Knowing the disadvantages of its students, BHS has no choice but to compete with its rivals on students' *gaokao* performance, the only nationally acknowledged criterion for evaluating school quality in China (see Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2). In order to drive teachers to improve their teaching performance and activate their desire to improve students' *gaokao* performance, BHS adopts the competition system between teachers by employing “聘任制” (the appointment system).

学校订目标，班级和班级之间对比也有竞争，如果你教的科目成绩差的话，那么就意味着你在三年以后就会处于不利地位。现在中学都是聘任

制，班主任和老师之间自由搭配、自愿聘任。如果下一届如果班主任不聘任你的话，就感觉你这个教师的地位和价值就无法实现。

The school designs the objectives and there is competition between classes. If students' academic performance in your subject is poor, it means that you will be in an unfavourable condition three years later. Nowadays, the high schools all practice the appointment system: the cooperation between homeroom teachers and subject teachers is dependent on mutual choice and mutual appointment. If you are not appointed by the homeroom teacher in the next round, you will feel like your teaching position and value are unrealised.

(Interview with Ms Ma, Politics teacher)

It is worth noting that the appointment system has different consequences for the teachers in the various stages in their career: to new and young teachers who need to prove themselves in order to be accepted by a homeroom teacher; to experienced and middle-aged teachers who have acquired a reputation on who to work with but are also pushed to compete with new teachers after being appointed; to old teachers who have accumulated decades of human capital but their declining physical health might become an obstacle to their appointment. Ms Ma, an experienced teacher, describes how old, young and middle-aged teachers, respectively, are constraint by the appointment system:

毕竟老教师曾经做出过成绩，有些班主任会明白，大部分老师会看在人与人之间的关系，不会因为他/她年长了不聘任他/她。

Afterall, old teachers have already made much contribution, and some homeroom teachers will understand that. Most teachers will consider the interpersonal relationships and they will not reject them because of their old age.

这种制度对于年轻教师更残忍，年轻教师刚从学校走出，进入学校后，这方面的圈子和人际关系还是比较单薄的，本身自己没有教学经验和成绩，要做出成绩还是困难的，这个也是成长过程吧。年轻教师还是有机会，只要有课上，就有机会来证明，成绩一出来就没有多少问题。

Such a system is more cruel to young teachers who just graduated from their universities. After entering BHS, they lack interpersonal networks, and they themselves lack teaching experience and achievements. It is hard to achieve something, and this is also a process of learning. Young teachers might have a chance: as long as they can teach, they have an opportunity to prove themselves. There won't be much problem as long as they can produce achievements.

有经验的中年的教师，他们在聘课上面不需要太主动，下一届班主任会考虑我们班科目老师应该是哪些，他们就会主动来联系这些教师。因为自己有了资质和资本以后，人家都知道你的水平和平时的做法。聘任上不用担心，算是比年轻教师有优势。但是，如果一次考试下来，成绩如果比年轻教师成绩差的话，虽然班主任不会讲什么，但自己带了这么多年的成绩还是赶不上年轻教师，自己在心里面还是会造成一定影响。

For the experienced and middle-aged teachers, they do not need to take initiative in asking for a teaching position because the homeroom teachers in the following round will be clear of who might be the subject teachers in their classes, and they will come to contact these teachers instead. Given that they have their own qualifications and capital, everyone is aware of their teaching level and their instructional style on a daily basis. There is not much to be worried about the appointment, which is an advantage compared to young teachers. But if their students' performance in exam is worse than that of young teachers, it will put them to shame given that their years of achievement cannot

match with that of young teachers even when the homeroom teacher does not blame them for that.

No matter how hard teachers are working to improve students' *gaokao* performance, it will not produce much difference in terms of teachers' material rewards, as pointed out above. However, it will matter much for a teacher's sense of value within the school community and their sense of fulfilment as a teacher. At BHS, the valuation of being a good teacher is largely dependent on weekly, monthly and yearly performance of *gaokao*-centred exams and the final outcomes of students' performance in *gaokao*. To the teachers who have internalised these evaluation hierarchies, teaching Burmese students who are not able to attend *gaokao* presents a great challenge because it means they are operating outside the evaluation mechanisms of the exam-centred teaching system. That is why young teachers tend to feel less rewarded when it comes to the final evaluation of their teaching performance, while experienced teachers find it complicated to satisfy Burmese students' learning needs and to balance their teaching workload. On the other hand, old teachers who are used to teaching their subjects based on *gaokao*-centred instruction feel perplexed in their teaching objectives and evaluation of Burmese students' learning outcomes.

#### 6.5.2 High workload and high turnover

Just before I commenced my field work in October 2013, four subject teachers out of eleven had quit and had been replaced by new teachers. In October 2014, when I visited BHS for a second time, none of the subject teachers who had taught the Burmese class in 2013 were teaching Burmese students. This high turnover rate is not only caused by the appointment system, which does not specify any teaching rewards for educating Burmese students, but a result of the high work load faced by the teachers of Burmese students and the lack of acknowledgement from the school. The interview with Mr Xie the homeroom teacher, also the subject teacher teaching Physics, reveals his teaching dilemma:

教侨四班也是迫不得已的事，这个华侨班以前有位化学老师，因为觉得自己负担重，申请不上侨四班了，鉴于我和现在化学老师的关系，才得以请到现在的化学老师。其实自己如果不是班主任，也许也不会在这个班教课了，但因为自己就是班主任，必须做好带头作用。

We feel compelled to teach Burmese class. In this class, there used to be a Chemistry teacher who felt he had a great burden and requested not to continue to teach the class. It is because of my relationship with the present Chemistry teacher that I can invite him to teach Chemistry. In fact, if I were not the homeroom teacher, I might not stay here and teach the class. Just because I am the homeroom teacher, I must take the leading role. (Interview with Mr Xie, the homeroom teacher and also Physics teacher)

In fact, Mr Xie rarely complains of his high workload as the homeroom teacher of the Burmese class. The above conversation occurred after Mr Xie was admonished by the school's senior administration for failing in his responsibility to monitor Burmese students who were late for the weekly flag raising ceremony and who had not done their cleaning job properly. On that day when I observed his class teaching as usual, he spent half an hour criticising some Burmese students who did not obey the school rules, and I asked him about this unusual instruction during the class break. According to the school regulations, the homeroom teachers are the first ones to be blamed, and their monthly salary as well as the teaching performance will be impacted if their students do not obey the rules (see also Section 5.4.2). It is clear that the appointment system does not work in the same way as described above when it comes to teaching Burmese students because in this case the homeroom teacher has to beg subject teachers to teach instead of being in the role of someone with the power to decide who to select and who to refuse for teaching.

Perhaps what aggravates their teaching workload is the lack of school's acknowledgement on their extra efforts in teaching Burmese students:

可能有些老师认为侨生班不需要参加高考，应该很轻松、好教，但我其实感觉，要教出让侨生班满意，又能学到东西，又不无聊，还是非常难的，还是要动一番脑子。当然说是随随便便教，那也一点问题没有！

Some teachers might think it is easy and relaxing to teach Burmese students who do not need to attend *gaokao*. However, I feel like it is really hard to teach Burmese students because I need to think hard to achieve the effective teaching outcome so that Burmese students are satisfied with what they have learned and also feel happy with their study. Of course it would not be a problem if I don't care and just teach them whatever! (Interview with Ms Zhou, Biology teacher)

From the perspective of the school, it is easy and relaxing to teach Burmese students because they are free from *gaokao*-related obligations and thus have no use in adding value to the school's reputation. However, from the perspective of the Biology teacher, it is difficult to ignore Burmese students' real learning needs on a daily basis.

Investing extra efforts means fulfilling her obligations, but the lack of effective teaching accountability demotivates her agency to invest more.

Apart from the frustration between professional obligations and teaching accountability, many teachers often feel overburdened to respond to various non-teaching tasks while being stressed to fulfil their teaching tasks in improving their students' *gaokao* performance. Compared to teaching Chinese students, teaching Burmese students seems to involve more efforts in teaching preparation to achieve what they think should be the right teaching practices:

在普通班上课，我感觉让学生学什么做什么心里非常清楚。来侨四班上课，我要好好准备才能来上课 (...) 我们不止要教书，还要应付这里的检查，那里的检查，这样的总结那样的总结。我感觉 80% 的精力都在应付学校和上级部门，但在我看来也不是很有必要的东西。

When I teach general classes, I'm very clear about what my students should learn and what they should do. However, to teach Burmese class, I have to make a good preparation beforehand (...) Our job is more than teaching students subjects. We have to cope with this inspection and that inspection, this summary and that summary. I feel like 80% of my efforts are used to respond to the school and the senior official departments, which I don't think it as worthwhile to do. (Interview with Ms Ma, Politics teacher)

Overall, subject teachers seem reluctant to teach Burmese students given that they have to make extra efforts in rearranging their subject content and pedagogical focus. Moreover, their efforts are not acknowledged by the present evaluation system, and most of them experience frustrations and ambivalence in their teaching. As a consequence, many of the subject teachers withdraw from teaching Burmese students, and the remaining teachers also do not seem to see it worthwhile to invest much effort in it after balancing the efforts and their outcome.

### 6.5.3 Summary

In sum, the appointment system as the evaluation of teachers' performance has complicated the teachers' investment and efforts in teaching Burmese students. Despite the fact that Chinese teachers are given much agency in exercising what they believe to be right in teaching Burmese students, their willingness to incorporate Burmese students' learning needs is greatly hindered by the school's lack of an appropriate reward system and clear teaching objectives for educating Burmese students. The current evaluation system is mostly based on students' *gaokao* performance whereas teaching Burmese students is without *gaokao*-orientation. In other words, their teaching performance is out of the present accountability discourse and how to teach and what to teach Burmese students is consequently up to the teachers' personal decision and willingness. Given the fact that Chinese teachers are all subjected to huge amount of non-teaching tasks, their motivation to explore new approaches to teach Burmese students and their devotion to catering to students' individual needs are significantly constrained.

## **6.6 Conclusion: self-fulfilling prophecies and their consequences**

Different from the previous studies in which migrant students are provided with less qualified and less experienced teachers (see 2.4), Chinese teachers for Burmese students at BHS are the same as their Chinese peers and the textbooks are also the same as those used in the mainstream class. However, having the same teachers, having the same subjects and using the same learning materials do not ensure that Burmese students are expected to perform well or given with the same amount of teaching and learning opportunities. An in-depth look into the classroom organisations reveals the patterns of self-fulfilling prophecies and their subsequent consequences for Burmese students' learning experiences.

A key theme emerging from the classroom interactions is that Chinese teachers do not hold high expectations of Burmese students' academic performance. In class, Burmese students are given less teaching content, fewer opportunities to extend their learning and less demanding tasks in homework and exercises. There is little academic participation in class, and the pedagogical focus is often on disciplinary control over academic input. Sometimes the academic teaching is replaced by off-task activities such as watching movies, playing sports, going on excursions or simply enjoying the sunshine outside. These practices are indicative of low teaching expectations, which is similar to what has been found in previous studies in a variety of other contexts (see 2.4).

Rather than ignoring the process of teachers' negotiation between their agency and the structural constraint, the chapter examines the challenges and asymmetries Chinese teachers are confronted with in teaching students of diverse educational backgrounds. A close examination reveals the process of how teachers negotiate their agency to counterbalance Burmese students' learning disadvantages, and how their teaching strategies are subsequently subjected to various tensions. The educational barriers that have been identified include Burmese students' lack of previous content knowledge in learning core subjects and their lack of background knowledge in China's history and political system. In order to bridge the educational gaps and to respond to the school mandate of making their class interesting and useful, Chinese teachers have exercised

their agentive power by adopting different teaching strategies. Maths and Physics teachers compensate the learning gap by teaching Burmese students the relevant subject knowledge equivalent to the junior high school level before having their normal lessons. Politics teachers omit the China-oriented content that they think is not useful and are boring for Burmese students to learn. History, Chinese and Politics teachers turn to multimedia resources for practical knowledge that they think is relevant to their teaching.

Despite adopting different strategies to respond to Burmese students' needs, the implementation of these teaching practices have encountered many tensions emerging from the use of *gaokao*-oriented textbooks, Burmese students' different enrolment periods and their different academic development. The use of *gaokao*-oriented textbooks poses a great challenge for Chinese teachers, especially those teaching Science subjects, to make their class interesting and useful when their teaching content is full of conceptual and abstract knowledge. Apart from the tension between using the standardised textbooks and keeping their class useful, the effective teaching practices are also hindered by Burmese students' unpredictable enrolments at different intervals. Despite their willingness to compensate their students' previous knowledge, teachers find it hard to simultaneously meet the needs of the Burmese students of diverse educational levels. As a consequence, only a couple of students can follow Maths; very few students participate in Physics class; only one-third of the English textbook is covered over the whole semester; and Chinese teachers all seem to reduce the amount of teaching content, assigning less demanding tasks and lowering their expectations on Burmese students' learning outcomes.

Apart from the practices of positioning Burmese students as academically deficient, the self-fulfilling prophecies are also tangible in the language interactions between Chinese teachers and Burmese students. Similar to the previous studies (2.4.1), the monolingual ideologies are strictly implemented to exclude other languages and varieties at the classroom level. Burmese students who do not have or have little knowledge in Chinese have dropped out of the system as indicated by the interviews with Chinese and Biology teachers. Those who remain at BHS and who constitute half

of the original number are also subjected to the linguistic requirements of speaking and writing standardised Chinese. In class, Burmese students are required to display their knowledge in pronouncing Chinese words, correctly using *Hanyu Pinyin*, using the correct terms to express the key concepts, writing Chinese characters with simplified version and with correct components and strokes. If Burmese students do not write or pronounce a word correctly, they are immediately corrected by their subject teachers in front of the whole class, which further positions them as linguistically deficient. Despite the fact that the majority of Burmese students learn Chinese as their mother tongue, and they have received years of formal education in Chinese supplementary schools in Myanmar (see Chapter Four), their lack of knowledge in pronouncing standardised Chinese and writing the simplified characters have rendered them deficient speaker of Chinese.

The actual implementation of *Putonghua* at BHS does not go without contestation given the tension that exists between using *Putonghua* as the only medium of instruction and the Chinese teachers' lack of proficiency in pronouncing *Putonghua* correctly. Different from the previous studies (see Chapter Two), teachers of mainstream culture do not seem to be "immune" from the problem of speaking standardised variety of a national language. At BHS, which is over 3,000 kilometres away from Beijing and where all of the Chinese teachers speak Yunnan Mandarin on a daily basis, everyone's opportunity to improve their *Putonghua* is quite limited. The analysis of the Physics teacher's difficulties in pronouncing the correct words with correct tones confirms such linguistic deficiency among many border Chinese teachers. As a consequence, speaking *Putonghua* does not lead to the empowerment of Burmese students and Chinese teachers who are both struggling to pronounce the standard Chinese but who are constantly positioned as linguistically disadvantaged. To counterbalance their disadvantages and perhaps to contest the myths of *Putonghua* as lingua franca, both Chinese teachers and Burmese students prefer to use Yunnan Mandarin to interact with each other outside class and during break, which makes them feel more comfortable and intimate.

In addition to the fact that Burmese students are perceived as academically and linguistically deficient, they are also categorised as culturally disadvantaged. This is similar to the way Burmese students are regulated at the school level (see 5.4.2). On a daily basis, Chinese teachers tend to homogenise their cultural differences by emphasising disciplinary regulations and cultivating the desired morality and social behaviours. Burmese students whose previous cultural practices are similar to those of BHS are often favoured by Chinese teachers over other Burmese students. These students are often good at playing basketball, have the same physical appearance and the same naming practice as Chinese people, show their earnest attitudes in learning subjects and their Chinese language proficiency is also outstanding. Because of these shared values, these students are given more visible space in a Burmese class where they take the most important student leadership roles, having closer contact with their homeroom teacher and also possess the privileges that are not given to other students such as being recommended for employment opportunities and for scholarship funding. In contrast, those who have non-Chinese features in their names, their physical appearance and their language practices are often constructed as typical of Burmese culture.

Self-fulfilling prophecies are not only reproduced through the way Chinese teachers see their Burmese students academically, linguistically and culturally, but also circulated among teachers themselves who do not see it worth their while to teach Burmese students. Their unwillingness to teach Burmese students is not because they are not capable to cope with their students' learning difficulties and help them achieve academic success, but because their investment and efforts are not acknowledged and well supported by the school and by the wider system of teaching accountability. On the one hand, Chinese teachers feel frustrated in teaching Burmese students because of the extra efforts required in managing their social behaviours and preparing lessons without clear guidance; on the other hand, their jobs are often misunderstood by the school and their colleagues as easy and simple. What makes it complicated is the fact that teaching Burmese students does not count towards Chinese teachers' material rewards and promotion. The appointment system which is used to punish or reward teachers at BHS is exclusively dependent on students' *gaokao* performance. In other

words, no matter how much time Chinese teachers devote to educating Burmese students, their performance is not measured as accountability, which subsequently demotivates them. While teaching Burmese students, Chinese teachers often feel overloaded because they have to take on many non-teaching duties such as documenting things in response to the bureaucratic requirements of senior departments. Feeling stressed, frustrated and unsupported constitute an important aspect of their teaching experiences with Burmese students, and consequently lead to their lack of sense of achievement and high turnover rates.

In sum, the interactions between Chinese teachers and Burmese students reveal teachers' low expectations of their students' educational outcomes, linguistic performance and cultural practices. The examination of teachers' working conditions such as the teaching challenges and dilemmas demonstrates the complexities of educating Burmese students and being a good teacher at BHS. Being caught up in various teaching dilemmas, Chinese teachers have lost their aspirations to be agents of change to empower Burmese students. Their classroom organisations are not only the negotiation of agency and structural power but also a continuum of resistance. This resistance comes in the form of reducing the teaching content to resigning from teaching Burmese students to counterbalance the streaming system of teaching Burmese student without *gaokao*-orientation and against the teaching evaluation system. In the following chapter, I will turn to Burmese students' agentive strategies in response to the schooling and teaching practices described so far.

## **Chapter Seven: Burmese students' learning experiences**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter examines three aspects of Burmese students' lived experiences: the impacts of social identities on their learning experiences, the negotiation of their marginalised identities and their internal differentiations. The chapter starts by analysing how class, race and language are played out in their daily experiences at BHS. Following the discussion of their exclusionary experiences based on class, race and language, the chapter turns to examine how Burmese students empower themselves by employing various agentive strategies to counterbalance their marginalised status. Rather than seeing Burmese students as a homogeneous group as perceived by their Chinese teachers and Chinese peers, the chapter continues to explore the different linguistic and cultural practices among Burmese students of diverse backgrounds with a focus on how they internally position each other, and how their in-group interactions reproduce hierarchies of exclusion. The chapter concludes with a critical discussion of contestation and reproduction in peer interactions.

### **7.2 Exclusionary experiences**

In Chapters Five and Six, I have described how Burmese students are marginalised by the school's segregation policies and their teachers' low expectations. In the following, I examine how aspects of their social identities intersect with their lived experiences in their peer interactions at BHS.

#### **7.2.1 Class**

At BHS, the vast majority of local Chinese students are from rural backgrounds (see 5.4.1). In the Chinese context, the rural-urban divide can be taken to constitute a class marker and the socioeconomic status of the rural population is generally lower than that of the urban population (for the consequences of the rural-urban divide as a class marker in education, see Section 2.5.1). Given that all students at BHS come from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds, doing well in school and entering university is their main avenue for social mobility: for good students there is the prospect of

upward social mobility through education and successful performance in their *gaokao*. Therefore, being “a good student” who can be expected to do well in the *gaokao* becomes a symbolic class marker at BHS with “good students” – who are expected to be on an upward social trajectory – receiving privileged access to school resources (see 5.4, 5.5 and 6.2). As explained, Burmese students are barred from attending the *gaokao* by state policies and this means that the status of “good student” is largely irrelevant for them. As a consequence, their Chinese peers mostly perceive them as socially inferior.

Despite the fact that Burmese students were provided with many “privileges” (see 5.6), their Chinese peers saw themselves as superior to them because they had the opportunity to fulfil their dream of upward social mobility through education:

比我们自在多了:可以玩手机、看电影,不用高考(...)我们不想换成他们,他们倒是读读高中就得了,我们还是要考大学的,压力比较大,毕竟高考也能提升自己嘛。

Burmese students have an easier life than us: they can play on their mobile devices, watch movies and they don't need to attend *gaokao* (...) we don't want to become like them because they only need to finish senior high school whereas we need to pass the university entrance exam and we have great pressure. Anyway *gaokao* can promote us. (Focus group interview with Chinese students)

At the same time, their “privileges” also caused friction between Burmese and Chinese students, as a Burmese student from the mixed Year-10 class explained to me:

因为我们在那个班里[普通班]是不用做作业(...)他们要做什么我们也不用。学费、书钱、校服钱啊,什么也不用给,他们就说:“你们简直就是VIP”。

Because we do not need to do the homework in the [general] class (...) whatever they need to do, we don't need to do it. Tuition fees, book fees, school uniforms, we don't need to pay for anything. They say: "you folks seem like the VIPs". (Jinfeng, Year 10)

Having stayed in the same class without having the same opportunity to attend the *gaokao*, Burmese students were ignored not only by their subject teachers (see 6.2.2) but also by their Chinese peers who seemed to be indifferent towards them:

来这边在得不舒服，学习也跟不上，我旁边坐的是学习好的人，老师讲的呢，不懂呢问他们，但他们爱理不理，不想理啊！问老师，老师在批作业没有时间，等晚自习时才能去问。

I don't feel comfortable living here. I can't catch up with the others in school work. I'm surrounded by high-achievers. My teachers say I can ask my classmates if I don't understand anything, but they seem indifferent and uninterested in talking because they don't really want to be bothered! I could have asked my teachers for help, but they are busy marking students' homework and don't have time. I have to wait until the self-study periods in the evening. (Yingying, Year 10)

Year 11 students, too, experienced their inability to attend the *gaokao* and the upward mobility it promised as the overarching barrier to their inclusion at BHS. In fact, the whole point of their education became opaque and meaningless to them:

要是我们可以和中国学生同考的话，给我们加压，我们肯定会跟现在不一样。

If we could attend the same exams as Chinese students and were pushed to work hard, we definitely would be different from what we are now. (Interview with Laxi)

我们班同学走了很多，不是因为家庭经济原因而退学，而是觉得在这里浪费时间，读着也没有意义。

Many of our classmates left the school, and it's not because of the family economic condition but they felt that it's a waste of time studying here, and it's also meaningless. (Interview with Lingling)

In sum, not having access to *gaokao* is the underlying problem that disadvantages Burmese students not only with regard to institutional and teaching practices but also circumscribes their interactions with Chinese peers.

### 7.2.2 Race

Although public discourses tend to construct Burmese students as human capital for China's soft power projection (see 5.2), a close look into their interactions with their Chinese peers demonstrates implicit practices of racial discrimination. Following the Critical Race Theory (see 2.5.1), I explore various forms of micro-aggressions Burmese students experience at BHS.

It was not unusual to see Burmese students positioned as the racial other during conflicts or quarrels. Usually, such racially-charged remarks related to their supposed lack of hygiene and values (see 5.5.2) but were relatively indirect. For example, I observed a group of Burmese students watching “中国好声音” (“Voice of China”), a national singing contest. A Chinese student, who was passing by, noticed and commented as follows:

你们还看“中国好声音呢”?

Wow even you guys are watching “The Voice of China”?

This Chinese student's question seemed to suggest that he was surprised that Burmese students were viewers of a “Chinese” TV show when, in fact, Burmese students from the border region have been brought up in a cultural environment that is almost identical to that of their Chinese peers (see 4.4).

Another way to otherise Burmese students was to comment on their physical appearance, as in the following examples, which I overheard during fieldwork:

一点都看不出来你们是缅甸人！

I just can't believe that you are Burmese people! (Overheard at school canteen)

你们长得太像中国人了！

You look so much like Chinese people! (Overheard on the sports field)

Overall, Chinese students tended to avoid the Burmese students because they had been informed by their Chinese teachers that they might pick up bad habits from them:

我们老师让我们别去惹缅甸学生，以前我们班就有一位同学和缅甸学生一起玩，学到一些不好的习惯：抽烟，打架，最后还被开除了。

Our teacher tells us not to provoke Burmese students. In our class, there used to be a student who played with Burmese students and who ended up picking up many bad habits: smoking, fighting and this student was dismissed in the end. (Informal conversation with a Chinese student in Year 11)

The way Chinese students perceived Burmese students as rebellious and disobedient was similar to the negative stereotypes held by their teachers (see 6.4.1). Some Burmese students were acutely aware of this rejection, as in the following “doodle” conversation I collected from Jinhua and Adai, who were bored during Maths class and secretly “chatted” to each other through exchanging these notes:

1. 金花：这个老师怎么不太爱笑？有没有觉得这个老师的眼神可以杀死人？

Jinhua: How come this teacher doesn't smile? Don't you feel that this teacher's eyes can kill people?

2. 阿戴：只是在要给我们玩的时候，偶尔会看见，但像勉强的假笑。晓得她呢真假啰。

Adai: Only when we are allowed to play outside can we see her smile, but it looks like fake smiling. I don't know whether her smile is true or not.

3. 金花：她有多大了？

Jinhua: How old is she?

4. 阿戴：学校进门来的路上有，不知道。

Adai: It's written somewhere close to the school gate, I don't know.

5. 金花：不会是不喜欢我们吧？

Jinhua: Does she dislike us?

6. 阿戴：哎，应该不是，所有老师好像都差不多吧。可能是她心里问题吧，可能是从高的地方来的骄傲吧，还是对缅人不满。

Adai: Sigh. it's probably not true. All of the teachers look similar. Probably she has some psychological problem. Probably, there is some pride in coming from a superior place, or probably she's discontented with Burmese people.

Racial othering was most offensive to ethnic Chinese students who had just arrived at BHS and who still had the strong emotional, social and economic attachment to China as their “祖国” (homeland of birthplace) (see Chapter Four). Jinfeng, who saw herself as no different from her Chinese peers, invoked her authentic Chinese identity against the racial discriminations she encountered:

我们也是中国人，我们不是什么什么，我们搬去缅甸我们就是缅甸人(..)  
同样是一个国的人，同样是流着一样血的人，同样是一个皮肤一个眼睛颜色的人，是不是？”

We are also Chinese. It is not like, like that we move to Myanmar and we become Burmese people (...) we are the same from the same country, we have the same blood, we have the same skin and the same colour of eyes, don't we?

Despite their claims to racial legitimacy, Jinfeng and other ethnic Chinese were not perceived as legitimate Chinese, partly because of their different linguistic habitus, as I will now explain.

### 7.2.3 Language

Prior to migration, Burmese students had expected that their *Putonghua* would improve rapidly once they had a chance to interact with their Chinese peers on a daily basis. However, after their migration at BHS, they found they had little access to interactions with their Chinese peers; and, even if they did, their Chinese peers could not speak *Putonghua*, either.

来之前以为他们 [中国学生] 都讲普通话，我问他们为什么不说普通话，他们说“我们本来就这样”。

Before coming here, I used to think they [Chinese students] all spoke *Putonghua*. I asked them why they didn't speak *Putonghua* and they said “this is the way we speak”. (Interview with Jinfeng)

Jinfeng was surprised to find that Chinese students do not use *Putonghua* for peer communication, and later she reached the conclusion that “只有电视上的人才讲普通话” (“I see, only people on TV speak *Putonghua*”).

Despite the fact that the majority of Burmese students speak Yunnan Mandarin as their mother tongue, the shared dialect does not make it any easier for them to interact with their Chinese peers because Chinese students do not accept Burmese students as speakers of Yunnan Mandarin:

他们班男生认识几个，像那个瘦瘦高高的那个，擦着老缅粉，篮球打得不错 (...) 他们的汉语还是有点区别的，怪一点。

I know some male students in that class, like that student, thin and tall, wearing *thanaka*, he plays basketball well (...) their Chinese is a bit different from us, a bit weird. (Focus group interview with Chinese students)

Many Chinese could not, or did not want to, understand the Yunnan Mandarin of Burmese students:

在普通班里，由于语言的差异，一般都说普通话，但也有个别听不懂 [普通话] 的，得重复两三遍，[如果重复还不管用] 最后只能说“听不懂就算了”，有一段时间都用手写来代替口语。

In the general class, I often use *Putonghua* because of the language variation, but sometimes I need to repeat myself two to three times if they don't understand [my *Putonghua*]. [If the repetition does not work], I just say “forget it”. For a while, I used handwriting to replace the verbal communication. (Interview with Huangjing)

Huangjing, who was a student in the mixed Year 10 class, was rejected by her peers because they could not understand her Chinese. However, as a native speaker of Yunnan Mandarin myself, I never had any communication problems with the Burmese students speaking in Yunnan Mandarin. Therefore, I believe the explanation for the fact that Chinese students had difficulty understanding the Yunnan Mandarin of Burmese students lies not in linguistic factors but in perceptions of linguistic otherness and expectations of language problems (see Piller, 2011, pp. 128-142). Chinese students' refusal to share the communicative burden might be related with the way they perceive Burmese students as “unworthy” in other ways (see above).

#### 7.2.4 Summary

In sum, Burmese students are largely excluded from interactions with their Chinese peers. Without access to the *gaokao* they have no access to the most desirable identity at BHS, namely the identity of being a “good student.” As a result, Chinese students consider them unworthy to make friends with. Furthermore, negative racial stereotypes further complicate their participation and they are positioned as racial other, who might even pose a danger to Chinese students and exert a corrupting influence. Finally, despite sharing Yunnan Mandarin as cross-border mother tongue with their Chinese peers, Chinese students frequently refuse to validate Burmese students as legitimate or even comprehensible speakers. Being subject to such exclusionary treatment, Burmese students in turn exert their agency and mobilise a range of linguistic and cultural resources to empower their marginalised positions. I will now move on to explore those strategies of resistance.

### **7.3 Agentive practices to empower their study and reposition themselves**

While confronted with marginalisation at BHS, Burmese students actively mobilise their linguistic and cultural resources to empower their Chinese language learning and to contest their marginalised identities. Their agentive strategies of resistance include the use of home language(s), hiding undesired identities, learning *Putonghua* via online resources, global cultural consumption and identification with global English.

#### 7.3.1 The use of home language(s)

While BHS is ostensibly a monolingual environment where only *Putonghua* is valued, Burmese students often make use of their multilingual repertoires to achieve learning tasks. An example can be found in Figure 20, which shows an excerpt from a student’s textbook with difficult Chinese words marked with *Hanyu Pinyin* in some cases and Burmese (the latter underlined in orange) in order to remind her of the pronunciation of particular words.

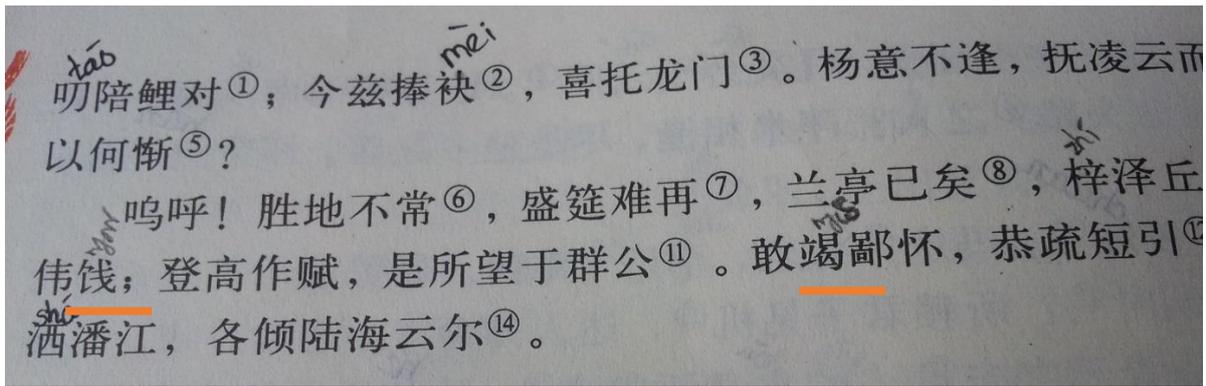


Figure 20. Zhaoyingdi's notation on Chinese characters in her Chinese textbook

Zhaoyingdi had difficulties with six words in the passage. To memorise them she drew on her knowledge of Pinyin and Burmese in order to help her memorise their pronunciation.

Other bilingual or multilingual Burmese students used their linguistic repertoires to improve their English, as in the following example, where a student used both Burmese and Chinese to mark the pronunciation of the English word “teenager”:

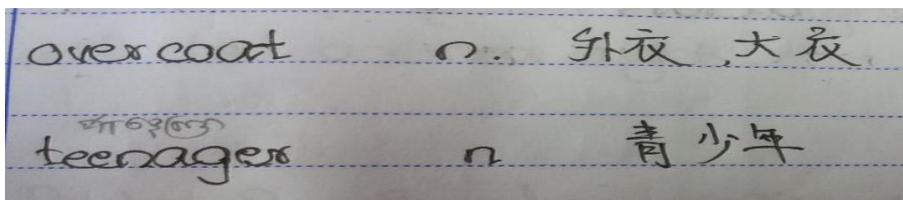


Figure 21. Chinese and Burmese used as phonetic notation for English word “teenager”

Apart from using home language(s) to enhance their learning, Burmese students also used their linguistic resources in peer interactions, including as an opportunity to covertly express their personal dissatisfactions, as in the following example.

我们四个在打饭的时候，会用茶山话讨论饭菜，“饭太少了”或者“菜很难吃”后面会用汉语加一句“烂学校”。在讨论别人的时候，通常用浪语，形容词多数用汉语，后面呢就用茶山话解释。洗衣服的时候，没水，会

先用浪语、茶山语、缅语把学校骂个遍，最后用汉语总结一句“包租婆，怎么没水了，我的衣服才洗了一半耶”。

When the four of us [multilinguals from Panwa] order food, we use Lashi to discuss rice and food like “there is too little rice” or “the food tastes bad” and then we use Chinese “bad school” at the end of the sentence. When we discuss people, we often use Lhaovo, many adjectives in Chinese followed by the explanation of Lashi. When we wash our clothes and there is no water, we would complain about the whole school first in Lhaovo, Lashi, and Burmese and then summarise with a Chinese sentence “landlady, how come there is no water. I’m only half-way through washing my clothes”. (Linguistic autobiography from Longnu)

Similar to Longnu, female students from Myitkyina employed gossip in Burmese as a form of resistance:

我感觉我们班主任有点偏心那几个男生。其实我们刚来的时候在课堂上也很用心，积极的听课，用功，努力的读书，但是后来我们发现不管我们怎么做，班主任还是偏心那几个男生，不看好我们几个，后来我们几个索性就不好好上课，不好好听课，变得越来越不听话，每当这个时候我们姐妹几个就会在下面用缅语窃窃私语讲老师和男生的坏话。

I feel that our homeroom teacher favours a couple of male students. Actually, when we just came here, we also listened to class carefully and participated actively in class. We were also working hard, but later we found that no matter what we have done, the homeroom teacher still showed his favouritism towards those male students and did not value us. So, later we decided not to listen in class and increasingly became more and more disobedient. Whenever we behave like this, we, female students would talk bad of our teacher and male students in Burmese. (Linguistic autobiography from Lingling)

The favoured male students referred to in this example are monolingual Chinese speakers from Lweje. In fact, they are the same three boys acknowledged by Mr Xie and other subject teachers as having “special talents” (see 6.4).

In sum, Burmese students make use of their multilingual repertoires to empower their learning, to express solidarity with other students from the same place and to express their emotions. Expressing negative emotions in a language other than Chinese was a way to simultaneously vent and hide the emotion. Hiding undesired identities was a further common strategy to resist being rejected and further disadvantages and took many forms, as discussed in the following.

### 7.3.2 Hiding undesired identities

Given that the majority of Burmese students look like Chinese people and speak Chinese as their mother tongue, one way for them to fit in was to downplay any Burmese aspects of their identities. Exerting their agency by hiding undesired identities could be observed with regard to sports, dress and script choice.

To begin with, Burmese students hide undesired identities through their choice of basketball over *chinlone*. *Chinlone* is a Burmese ball game that is a combination of sport and dance. *Chinlone* is a team sport without an opposing team, and the goal is to play the ball beautifully. The game is strongly associated with national identity and pride in Myanmar (Aung-Thwin, 2012). On visits to Myanmar, I have often observed local people, old or young, gather together to play *chinlone* in public to relax (see Figure 22).



*Figure 22. High school students playing chinlone in Myitkyina*

At BHS, however, *chinlone* is not visible although Burmese students have brought their *chinlone* balls along. When I visited a male dormitory, for instance, I happened to spot a *chinlone* ball under a bed. When I spotted the ball, the students were keen to show me their skills. However, they chose to do so inside the dormitory (see Figure 23).



*Figure 23. Burmese students playing chinlone in their dormitory*

While refraining from playing *chinlone*, these students shifted to playing basketball in public. In addition to being an acceptable public performance at BHS, basketball also

provided a rare space for Burmese students to interact with their teachers outside class (see section 6.2.3) and sometimes also with their Chinese peers.



Figure 24. Burmese students playing basketball with their homeroom teacher at BHS

Similar to the choice of basketball over *chinline*, wearing *thanaka* (see Chapter One) is perceived differently in Myanmar and in China. In Myanmar, students are expected to wear *thanaka* as part of their school uniform as it protects their face from sunburn and has other health benefits. In contrast, at BHS, wearing *thanaka* constitutes a violation of the school's code of conducts (see 5.4.2). The different positioning of *thanaka* caused tensions among Burmese students, especially among girls, who either chose to conform to the school rules or to resist by using only a little *thanaka* so that it was barely visible.

在缅甸我们去政府家办事,像办身份证呀,都要擦老缅粉,还要穿上老缅甸裙,打扮得像“村姑”一样。

In Myanmar, we need to wear *thanaka* if we go to the government institutions for official documents such as applying for an identity card. We also need to

wear Burman dress, which makes us look like a “village girl”. (Interview with Liang)

Liang and some other ethnic Chinese students told me that they did not like *thanaka*, but they had to follow the dress codes in Myanmar both in government schools and government institutions. However, some other students, particularly those from Panwa, were extremely attached to *thanaka*. They kept using it but lightly that it was impossible to see without examining their face closely. While these students explained to me that they liked the feel of *thanaka* on their skins, I have also noted that it was particularly the darker-skinned students from Panwa who kept wearing *thanaka*. I suspect that, worn so lightly, the white cream also was a strategy to make them look more fair, hence, more Chinese, particularly as the darker-skinned girls felt quite vulnerable. One of them, Kongdan, has told me about her fear of walking alone on campus:

平时我不敢一个人在校园走路，都是和她们[板瓦来的女同学]几个起。

Every day, I dare not walk alone on campus, and I always go together with them [the other female students from Panwa]. (Kongdan, Informal conversation)

Finally, Burmese students also had to make a choice with regard to their writing style. Having been exposed to Taiwanese educational system at Chinese supplementary schools in Myanmar (see 4.3.2), they had learnt how to read and write traditional characters. This was particularly true for the ethnic Chinese students from Myitkyina, where Taiwan still seemed more prestigious than mainland China:

我们那里都是去台湾读书，很少有人来这里。

In our hometown, we tend to go to Taiwan for education and very few people will come to mainland China. (Interview with Liang)

For Liang and her peers, Taiwan Mandarin seemed more attractive than *Putonghua*. However, coming to mainland China means speaking *Putonghua* and writing simplified Chinese characters. Their proficiency in Taiwan Mandarin was no longer

seen as desirable but devalued as problem as evidenced by their teachers' dissatisfaction with their traditional Chinese characters (see 6.3.2). In order to pass the exam and not be criticised by their subject teachers, these students all adopted simplified Chinese characters for their schoolwork. However, when it came to writing their Chinese names, some of them preferred the traditional version:

觉得[写我的名字用]繁体字好看，写习惯了。

It looks beautiful when I use traditional characters [in writing my name]. I'm used to it. (Interview with Qidong)

Although others shared a similar preference, Qidong was the only student who wrote his name in traditional characters on his food card, in his assignment note books and even on his examination sheets.

Overall, Burmese students have changed their previous cultural and linguistic practices in one way or another. The way they adopt certain practices and hide others is not neutral but is subjected to the wider process of normalisation. Choosing to play basketball over *chinline*, giving up *thanaka* or wearing it lightly, lightening their dark skins or expunging traditional characters from their repertoires, all constitute ways to fit in and to make them themselves “more Chinese” and “less Burmese”.

### 7.3.3 Learning *Putonghua* via online resources

No matter what cultural and linguistic strategies they adopt to reposition themselves, Burmese students all acknowledge the importance of speaking standardised *Putonghua*. However, at BHS, Burmese students cannot get access to *Putonghua* for various reasons: because they are physically separated from their Chinese peers (see 5.4.4); because Chinese students do not speak *Putonghua* themselves (see 7.2.3); and because Chinese teachers, too, actually struggle with their own *Putonghua* pronunciation (see 6.3.3). In order to empower their *Putonghua* and to compensate the disadvantages of speaking *Putonghua* at BHS, Burmese students turn to online digital resources to make friends with Chinese people, to acquire the knowledge of *Hanyu Pinyin* and to expand their knowledge of China and Chinese society.

In their linguistic autobiographies, almost all of the Burmese students indicated that their *Putonghua* had been improved and their “social network” had been expanded after migrating to China:

自从学会用微信，我的社交网络扩大了，我可以和全世界的人聊天，我的普通话也进步了。来中国前，我不会用拼音打字，现在我可以很快就拼出每个字的拼音。

Ever since I learned how to use *WeChat*, my social network has been widened so much that I can communicate with the people all over the world and my *Putonghua* has also progressed. Before coming to China, I did not know how to use Pinyin to type the words, but now I can immediately figure out the spelling for each word. (Liang’s linguistic autobiography)

It needs to be noted that learning how to type pinyin on a smartphone or other device is quite different from learning to spell Pinyin correctly. The predominant digital input form is “*Sogou Pinyin*”, which does not require a good knowledge of spelling. *Sogou Pinyin* is similar to ‘autocorrect’ or an auto-complete function. Users of *Sogou Pinyin* do not need to know how to spell a word correctly but can simply input the initial letter and will then be offered a number of completion options to choose from. As a result, the learning gains for pinyin spelling resulting from *Sogou Pinyin* may be questionable.

When asked with whom they often chose to speak, they preferred to add two types of friends in their *WeChat* list: non-Yunnanese in China and ethnic Chinese in Myanmar. One of the students talked about her experiences on making friends with those outside Yunnan province:

我的朋友圈里的中国人都是外省的。BHS的一个都没有，不知道为什么，反正就是不喜欢和他们聊天。

In my *WeChat*, all of my Chinese friends are from other provinces. I don't add any friends from BHS. I don't know why; I just don't like talking to them.

(Interview with Longnu)

Like Longnu, Burmese female students seemed to have many Chinese friends in their *WeChat* list. When asked what they were talking about or how much they were exposed to Chinese society via *WeChat*, their communication with Chinese netfriends, mostly males, seemed to remain at a superficial level. Sometimes they had to block some of their male netfriends who flirt with them too much.

Instead of communicating with their Chinese net-friends, most Burmese students just spent time observing online resources. Over the years of online exposure, they have picked up some popular expressions used online such as “懂你个毛线” (you don't understand at all), “我也是醉了” (I don't want to say anything), “屌丝” (nobody) etc. These expressions were often copied and used in their *WeChat* conversation with their Burmese peers and sometimes such language input was also transferred to their oral communication with their families at home when going back to Myanmar on holiday. In most occasions, their families were shocked at their Internet slangs and question their study in China:

我回去[缅甸]时经常会不知不觉地说一些这样的话，家里的人就说“你到底在中国学了些什么呀?”

When I go back home [Myanmar], I often unconsciously speak Chinese like this. My families would say “what on earth have you learned in China?”

(Informal conversation with Lingling)

Another group of netfriends in their *WeChat* list were of ethnic Chinese background. Some of them are their old friends who they used to study and play with in Myanmar and others are introduced by their friends and friends' friends. By the time Burmese students came to BHS, it was also the time they started to register as a *WeChat*

member and their friends in Myanmar also began to use WeChat. Liang was one of the students who used *WeChat* almost every minute of her spare time. Being isolated from her Chinese peers at BHS, Liang found her friends online:

我也是来到这边才学会用微信呢。刚开始也跟他们讲普通话，后来慢慢自己呢朋友越来越多，就开始用方言了。觉得用方言更亲切些。

It is not until I came here that I began to learn to use *WeChat*. In the beginning, I also use *Putonghua* to communicate with them, but later after I have gradually made my own friends, I started to use my dialect for communication. I feel it is more familiar to use dialect. (Interview with Liang)

Overall, online digital resources have provided Burmese students with a third space to learn *Putonghua* and to expand their social network with Chinese people. By learning how to type in *Hanyu Pinyin* via smart phones, they have been empowered to meet Chinese people from all walks of life online. With the convenience of using instant messaging tool *WeChat*, they have also resumed their friendship with those who are physically residing in Myanmar. It seems that the technology has made available to them multiple identities that transcend geographic locations and national boundaries. However, it remains questionable whether these interactions will really improve their *Putonghua* given that their netfriends have different motivations for making friends with them, and the online linguistic resources such as the Internet slang expressions are not necessarily valued as the norms of *Putonghua*.

#### 7.3.4 Global cultural consumption

Despite the fact that Burmese students are from a peripheral region in Myanmar, a country that is itself peripheral to the world system, they are exposed to global cultural practices such as going to church, watching Hollywood movies, and playing online computer games. Engaging in these forms of global cultural consumption, which are not necessarily valued at BHS, is another way for Burmese students to exert their agency in an effort to overcome their marginalised positions. This identification with

global cultural consumption is particularly relevant for Burmese students of non-Chinese ethnic backgrounds.

The students from Panwa are all members of the Kachin people, and they have all been raised in Christian families and have had experience of going to church with their parents from a young age. In church they were taught to read the Kachin language through Bible study. Despite speaking different languages such as Lashi, Lhaovo and Lisu, these students are thus united by their common religion (Christianity) and language (Kachin). Their attachment to their religion has provided them with a space to contest their marginalised identities. For instance, when one of the students, Chongjie, showed me her family photos, she was particularly proud of her hometown with its “European style” buildings:

我们那里的教堂最漂亮，都是那种高高的像欧洲的房子那样。

The church buildings are the most beautiful in our hometown. They are all tall and look like European buildings. (Informal conversation with Chongjie)

In contrast to Shan students, who practiced their Buddhist religion in Burmese temples but who rarely spoke to me about their religious experiences, the Christian students from Panwa were keen to talk to me about their religious practices. In fact, their religious practices were acknowledged and recognised by BHS, which granted Burmese students a one-day holiday at Christmas while the remainder of the school had normal lessons.



*Figure 25. Christmas party with Burmese students and Chinese teachers in 2014*

From the perspective of the school, it is considerate to allow Burmese students to celebrate “their festival” even though, in fact, only a small number of them – ethnic Kachin from Panwa – practice Christianity as their religion. While empowering for these students, for others, the association of “Burmese” with “Christianity” serves to erase their claim to Chineseness (see a similar example on the choice of parade usher in Section 6.4).

Apart from identifying themselves with global religion, students from Panwa also developed their global connections through watching Hollywood movies and listening to English language pop songs, which constituted a significant contrast to their ethnic Chinese peers who follow Chinese soap operas and celebrities.

我只喜欢看好莱坞电影(..) 不喜欢缅甸的电影，觉得老缅蹲着吃饭的样子不好看。

I only like watching Hollywood movies (...) I don't like watching Burmese movies because it doesn't look good when Burman people squat to eat.

(Interview with Kongdan)

In her narration, Kongdan not only identified herself with western culture but also distanced herself from being part of Myanmar. Her description of typical Burman

dining culture seemed to show her distinct identity with Kachin-related group which had been in long conflict with the Burman army (see 1.2).

Besides highlighting their “western” aspects of cultural practices in religion and entertainment, other Burmese students displayed pride in their skills in using computer and playing online games. Adai, one of the Shan students from Lweje, was usually quiet, but in his daily language report, he added the following comment on his identity:

平时我不太爱讲话 (...) 不是我自吹，我是全班玩电脑最厉害的。

I do not like talking much (...) I’m not bragging, but I’m the best computer player in our class.

In fact, his computer skills were often recognised by his subject teachers who had problems with accessing online files and multimedia facilities. Besides his self-taught knowledge of computer, Adai seemed to be popular among his peers because of his performance in playing online games:

我只打 *Dota*, 觉得中国的游戏没有意思。

I only play *Dota*. I don’t find playing Chinese computer games interesting.

*Dota* is an international online game developed in the USA. Because of his high ranks in playing *Dota*, many of his Burmese classmates liked to play with him in the same team so that they could be promoted to be “heroes” in the game. Once Adai also mentioned that he had met English speakers online by playing *Dota* with them. While playing the internationally recognised computer games, Adai’s interest in learning English language had been strengthened.

### 7.3.5 Identification with global English

Similar to Adai, Burmese students all attach great importance to learning English, but most of them do not seem to be attentive during their English class, partly because the textbook used is *gaokao*-oriented (see 6.2.4) and partly because Burmese students lack faith in Chinese teachers whose English proficiency is sometimes questionable:

这里学习英语都是选择题 ABCD, 都是为了应付考试, 感觉没学到什么。

Here, learning English means doing multiple choices of A, B, C and D. It's all for passing exams. I feel like I haven't learned much. (Informal conversation with Liang)

老师的英语不纯正, 发音发面有中文色彩, 比如[t]发成[tə:], [meik]发成 [meikə:], 有中文音。老师有时候还发错了(...) 我们在缅甸从小就开始读英语, 高中就全部用英语来学。除了缅文, 其他课都是用英语来学。

Our teacher's English is not good and her pronunciation has a Chinese flavour. For example, she pronounces [t] as [tə:], [meik] as [meikə:] with Chinese accent. Sometimes her pronunciation is wrong (...) In Myanmar, we start to learn English since we are young and at senior high school, all of the subjects except Burmese are taught in English. (Interview with Wu)

Lack of confidence in their English teacher and their exam-oriented textbook, some Burmese students sought help from other resources by purchasing materials from Myanmar which they considered more useful for learning English by themselves.

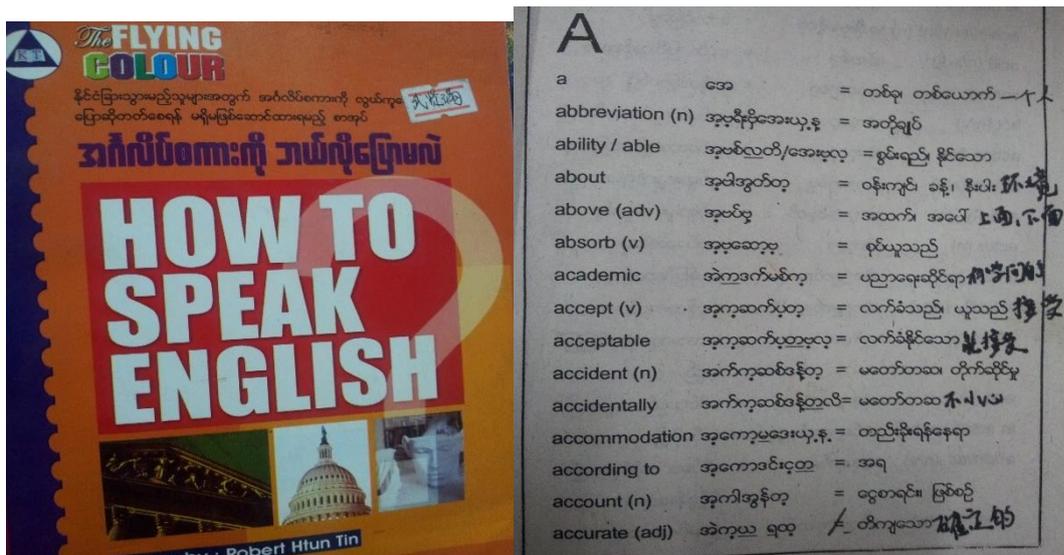


Figure 26. English materials from Myanmar used by Burmese students

The above material belonged to Wu and Xiaomei, two female bilingual students from Myitkyina. Every day, they sat together at the corner of the class and their names were rarely called up by their subject teachers, but these two students were aware of the importance of learning English and they keep on learning English. While learning English with the above material, they also kept on learning Burmese and Chinese. For Xiaomei, her Chinese was better than Wu's, but her Burmese was not as good as Wu's, so Xiaomei taught Wu Chinese by writing up the translation of the meaning next to the Burmese connotations. For Wu, she could help Xiaomei to improve her Burmese because of Wu's background growing up with Burman nannies and thus they both made use of their linguistic resources to support each other's learning of English, Burmese and Chinese.

Overall, despite their awareness of learning English as an important language, Burmese students seem to question the usefulness of their school learning because of the examine-oriented English textbook and their English teacher's poor pronunciation. By learning English independently, Burmese students not only empower their marginalised position but also fulfil their desire of identifying with English as a global language.

### 7.3.6 Summary

In sum, Burmese students are not passive language learners. In fact, they make use of their previous linguistic and cultural resources to contest and to empower their limited identities while being marginalised at BHS. Their agentive strategies range from the use of home language(s), transforming their cultural and linguistic practices, constructing a third space online to empower their *Putonghua* and knowledge of Chinese society, highlighting their command of global cultural resources to identifying themselves with global English. In terms of using home language(s), some students use the Burmese language to help them read certain tricky words while others use Burmese and Chinese to memorise English vocabulary. Sometimes, the use of home language(s) also provides them a safe space to express their emotion and to engage in backstage criticism of BHS and their teachers. Many practices that might be considered "Burmese" (such as playing *chinline*, wearing *thanaka*) are hidden from

their Chinese teachers and peers. Given their physical segregation from their Chinese peers and the learning disadvantages they face, Burmese students turn to online resources to expand their social network and to improve their *Putonghua*. The popularity of using smart phone and online messaging tools seems to provide a third space for Burmese students to learn to use *Hanyu Pinyin* quickly by chatting with their Chinese netfriends who seem to speak better *Putonghua* than the “real Chinese” at BHS. Sometimes, Burmese students seem to feel superior by highlighting their transnational identities of practising their Western religion, watching Western movies and playing Western online games. When it comes to learning English, Burmese students also contest the usefulness of doing formal education in China by questioning the exam-oriented English textbook and their English teacher’s proficiency. For them, it seems more effective to learn English independently by accessing resources online or buying the materials from Myanmar to empower their communicative skills in speaking English. While Burmese students are mobilising different resources to reposition themselves and to empower their marginalised status, they are also engaged in positioning each other in different ways and producing the exclusion of hierarchies.

#### **7.4 Internal differentiations**

Burmese students are often perceived by the school and their Chinese teachers and peers as homogenous (see Chapter Five and Chapter Six and the above section 7.2). However, as will have become clear by now, they are different from each other in language, ethnicity, educational background, culture, religion and family conditions. In this section, I will examine how Burmese students negotiate this diversity, how they internally position each other and how their post migration experiences may shape the meanings of speaking Burmese and their identifications with Myanmar.

##### **7.4.1 Language negotiations between Burmese students**

At BHS, speaking *Putonghua* seems to be adopted without any challenge when it is used as the medium of instruction in class. During class break and outside the classroom, however, the norm of speaking *Putonghua* seems to be implicitly contested by Yunnan Mandarin with which Chinese teachers and Chinese students feel more comfortable and natural to speak (see 6.3.3 and 7.2.3). Regarding the norm of in-

group interactions, there has emerged a continuum of negotiations and contestations between Burmese students of diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Laxi, one of the two Lisu students at Burmese class, reported his struggle to learn “other languages” over the past few years of his formal education in China:

外界复杂，我每天都很努力的学着别的语言(...)初中我会听懂茶山话和浪族话 (...) 到了高中我还学会说茶山话。

It's complicated outside and I have to strive hard to learn other languages every day (...) at junior high school. I have learned to understand Lashi and Lhaovo (...) when I come to senior high school. I have learned how to speak Lashi. (Linguistic autobiography by Laxi)

While learning *Putonghua* in China, Laxi also took extra burden by learning other languages to interact with his peers from the same region Panwa, where Lashi and Lhaovo are widely used. In Burmese classes, there are eight students from Panwa and over the past few years, they have formed their peer communication styles by speaking Lashi and Lhaovo as in-group markers (see 4.5.2). However, such in-group language practices had been contested and challenged by ethnic Chinese who constituted over half of the student population and who also spoke Yunnan Mandarin as their mother tongue like the rest of the Chinese students at BHS.

就是不习惯嘛，和他们要说汉话。

We are just not used to it because we have to speak *Hanhua* with them. (Interview with Longnu)

What Longnu called “*Hanhua*” was Yunnan Mandarin spoken by ethnic Chinese. It is noted that she did not perceive Yunnan Mandarin as *Putonghua* given her previous knowledge of speaking *Putonghua* as the only norm of lingua franca in China (see 4.5.2.2). According to her experience, Longnu, whose mother tongues are Lashi and Lhaovo, used to feel comfortable when she communicated with her friends from Panwa in Lashi and Lhaovo. However, when she started with her senior high school

study, and when the majority of her Burmese classmates were ethnic Chinese, Longnu felt stressed because of the change in her language practices. Her uncomfortable experience was confirmed by the monolingual speakers from Lweje:

我们本来一开始讲汉语嘛，他们[板瓦同学]几个突然讲时很不自在啊，在一起时他们一这样我们马上就让开了。

We are speaking *Hanhua* all the time, but they [students from Panwa] suddenly speak their languages, and we feel very uncomfortable. As soon as they behave like this, we immediately go away. (Focus group interview with Lifu, Jiachuan and Xia)

For monolingual speakers Lifu, Jiachuan and Xia, they saw it as norm to speak Yunnan Mandarin in their peer communication and speaking other languages was seen as problem. The way they saw other languages was associated with their perception of seeing other languages as “minority languages” even though they themselves were also ethnic minorities in Myanmar.

有时候看着他们讲少数民族语言，自己只能望着他们(...)只见他们在那叨叨地像念经似的，自己什么也听不懂。

Sometimes when they speak their ethnic minority languages, I just look at them (...) they speak like Buddha murmuring, and I myself can't understand anything. (Record of daily language use by Xia)

However, when those students from Panwa spoke Yunnan Mandarin, ethnic Chinese students laughed at their funny pronunciation as reported by Shenggui:

奔柯一讲汉语我就想笑，肚子都笑疼了。

When Benke speaks *Hanyu*, I couldn't help laughing. My tummy is painful because I laugh too much.

Ethnic Chinese students seemed to enjoy the privilege as legitimate speaker who could evaluate other minority students' language performance in Yunnan Mandarin. This is so even if their proficiency in Yunnan Mandarin could not successfully transfer to *Putonghua*, and they were not regarded as legitimate speakers of Chinese by other Chinese because of their lack of proficiency in *Putonghua*.

The following excerpts were recorded at a Burmese boys' dormitory while four students (Lifu, Benke, Yinzhaoyang and Gong) of different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds were chatting and playing cards. The conversation captured these students' difficulties in speaking standard *Putonghua* and how they helped each other figure out the standard pronunciation and the spelling of *Hanyu Pinyin* for the three expressions: 衣服 “yī fú” (clothes), 架 “jià” (pair of) and 炸 “zhà” (bomb).

The first part of the conversation showed how Bengke's pronunciation was corrected by Lifu:

1. 礼富 : 晚上我洗澡来拥抱你!

Lifu: After I take a shower this evening, I'll come to hug you!

2. 奔科 : 你全身都湿着咋个拥抱?

Benke: How can you hug me when you are all wet?

3. 礼富 : 咋个拥抱? 你不会换衣服给?

Lifu: How? Can't you change your clothes?

4. 奔科 : 换衣胡么麻烦啊! [发错成“衣胡”]

Benke: It's troublesome to change clothes. [mispronounces “clothes”]

5. 礼富 : 是衣服, 不是衣胡! [纠正奔柯的发音]

Lifu: It's yī fú not yī hú. [corrects Benke's pronunciation]

6. 奔科 : 换衣服么// [慢慢小心地发音 “衣服”]

Benke: If I have to change yī fú [ clothes] // [slow and deliberate pronunciation of “clothes”]

7. 礼富：嗯!

Lifu: Right!

8. 奔科：麻烦还要洗它，么么么!

Benke: It's troublesome because I have to wash it, right!

In Turn 5, Lifu pointed out Benke's mistake in pronouncing the word "clothes" and Benke accepted Lifu's correction by carefully imitating the sound "fú" and prolonging it (Turn 6). For Benke, Lifu possessed the authority to speak "standard" Chinese because Lifu was a monolingual speaker of Chinese and also the homeroom teacher's favoured student, whose Chinese handwriting and writing skills were often acknowledged (see Section 6.4).

However, even so, Lifu had problems with the standard pronunciation and the spelling of *Hanyu Pinyin*. The second part of conversation showed how the boys, including Lifu, struggled to pronounce and spell out one of the key words used in their card game. The key word is "炸" (bomb) which should be spelled "zhà", but none of them could come up with the right spelling rules for the word:

1. 礼富：A点。

Lifu: A.

2. 尹兆洋：2点。

Yinzhangyang: 2 points.

3. 礼富：架。[“架”是游戏规则之一表示至少三个连对牌]

Lifu: Jià. ["Jià" is one of the playing rules with at least three pairs of equal cards]

4. 尹兆洋：么么干得好!

Yinzhangyang: Wow, good job!

5. 礼富：一对K，给要?

Lifu: A pair of K, can you follow?

6. 奔科：不要。

Benke: No, I can't.

7. 礼富：架！

Lifu: jià!

8. 尹兆洋：牌好了。//你瞄，3456789 干出一对一对，诺！

Yinzhaoyang: You've got good cards. // Look, 345678, all are pairs like these!

9. 龚：两对炸！[龚发对这个字的发音“炸”]

Gong: Two zhà! (bomb) [speaks the correct pronunciation “zhà”]  
(...)

10. 奔科：炸拽噶？

Benke: Is it zhà? [asks Lifu for confirmation]

11. 礼富：嗯，炸拽。

Lifu: Yes, it's zà. [confirms but mispronounces as “zà” instead of “zhà”]  
(...)

12. 礼富：架，美美！

Lifu: jià, good!

13. 尹兆洋：jia, jia 是咋个拼呢

Yinzhangyang: jià, how to spell out “jià”?

14. 龚：jia//jia。[正确拼法，但没人回应]

Gong: jia// jià. [correct spelling for “jià”, but no one responds]

15. 礼富：哦 ca// za。[拼错读错]

Lifu: Ok, ca//zà. [incorrect spelling and pronunciation]

16. 尹兆洋：ca//

Yinzhaoyang: ca//

17. 礼富 : ca 架 za!  
Lifu: ca//zà!
18. 尹兆洋 : ca//ca 噶? [觉得礼富的不对]  
Yinzhaoyang: ca//cà? [doubts Lifu's answer]
19. 龚 : 额, 尹兆洋拼那个字? 架还是 za? [提高音量, 但把“zha”都成“za”]  
Gong: What? Which word is Yinzhaoyang asking for, jià or zà? [raises his volume for more attention, but mispronounces “zha” as “za”]
20. 奔 : jia !  
Benke: Jià!
21. 龚 : za// za! [读错拼错]  
Gong: za//zà! [incorrect spelling and pronunciation]
22. 礼富 : cha//zha [把声母“c”换成“ch”, 但没有拼对规则]  
Lifu: cha// zhà! [replaces “c” with “ch” but does not get the spelling right]
23. 奔科 : 嗯。  
Benke: Yes.
24. 尹兆洋 : jia 我讲呢是 jia,jia 啊!  
Yinzhaoyang: jià, I said jià, jià!
25. 龚 : jia//jia! ca//  
Gong: jia// jià! ca//
26. 礼富 : jia// zha? 哦, jia//zha。  
Lifu: jia//zhà? Ok, jia//zhà.
27. 尹兆洋 : 不对吧? [缅甸语回应]  
Yinzhaoyang: I'm afraid not. [responds in Burmese]
28. 礼富 : qia //zha [把“j”换成“q”还是没有拼对]

Lifu: qia// zhà. [gives another answer for the spelling by replacing the consonant “j” with “q”, but does not get it right]

29. 尹兆洋 : 不对吧, 不知道吧。[觉得不对并用缅甸语回应]

Yinzhaoyang: Maybe not, I don't know. [is not convinced and responds in Burmese again]

30. 礼富 : qia //zha [小声回应, 声音越来越不自信了]

Lifu: qia//zhà. [responds in a lowered and less confident voice]

The above discussion pertaining to linguistic practices was related to the correct spelling of the two words “Jià” (pair of) and “zhà” (bomb). After Yinzhaoyang raised the question (Turn 13), four students responded, each with a different answer. Gong seemed eager to answer (Turns 14, 19, 21 and 25) but was largely ignored. In Turn 14 Gong gave the correct spelling “Jià”, but immediately after Lifu gave another answer, and Gong's answer was ignored by his peers. It seems that in order to be considered a legitimate speaker of Chinese among Burmese peers certain characteristics needed to be present. Lifu was considered a legitimate speaker because he was a monolingual mother-tongue speaker of Chinese and because he claimed “pure” Han ethnicity. By contrast, Gong, who was registered as ethnic Shan, was not heard as a legitimate speaker in the same way. Despite the fact that his answer actually provided the correct Chinese form, he was ignored and his answer went unnoticed.

Concerning the key word “zhà” (bomb), none of the students could figure out both the correct spelling and pronunciation. In Turn 9, Gong actually gave the correct answer, but somehow in Turn 19, Gong was confused by “z” and “zh” when it came to spelling it out in *Hanyu Pinyin*. His confidence in spelling out the correct Pinyin was reduced as shown by his hesitation. Similarly, after several rounds of questioning from Yinzhaoyang, Lifu was more than confused by giving many wrong answers (see Turns 15,17,22,26 and 30). Not receiving a correct answer, Yinzhaoyang tried to solve the problem through addressing it in Burmese.

In sum, the peer interactions between Burmese students of different linguistic backgrounds often reproduce hierarchies of exclusion. Those who speak Yunnan

Mandarin as their mother tongue can find themselves positioned by their peers as Chinese language authorities. Within Yunnan Mandarin speakers, however, ethnic Chinese students are considered superior to Shan students because of their Han identity. Despite these claims to authentic Chineseness, ethnic Chinese students have themselves problems with speaking *Putonghua* correctly, as in the example where none of them manages to distinguish between the dental sibilant “z” and the retroflex “zh”.

#### 7.4.2 Contested Chinese identities

Despite being subjected to the norm of speaking *Putonghua*, ethnic Chinese students still possess many advantages compared to other minority peers. Because of their ethnic appearance and proficiency in Yunnan Mandarin, they can easily pass as locals. However, despite their shared ethnicity, there are significant frictions between these ethnic Chinese students who have been brought up in different linguistic and family backgrounds in Myanmar. A close look into their internal positionings can reveal why monolingual speakers of Chinese become the teachers’ favoured students whereas ethnic Chinese students who are bilingual are marginalised, and their ancestry is frequently contested.

In Section 6.4, I described that monolingual speakers from Lweje are highly acknowledged and favoured by their Chinese teachers because of their Chinese language proficiency, their academic performance and their skills in playing basketball. The homeroom teacher highly praised Lifu’s Chinese handwriting, which won Lifu an opportunity to display his writing skill and compete with his Chinese peers at school (see 6.4.1). Xia’s academic performance and qualities such as diligence, endurance, and the like were often mentioned by his subject teachers (see 6.3.1) Similar to Lifu and Xia, Chang’s professional skills in playing basketball were much valued at BHS and he was given the opportunity to increase his visibility as a good player on campus. These three students are taking up important students’ leadership in their Burmese classes. However, bilingual speakers of ethnic Chinese do not seem to acknowledge their superior positions, and on the contrary, keep on

contesting the monolingual students' identities of being good students and being legitimate Burmese students.

The monolingual speakers' inability to speak the Burmese language was challenged by their bilingual peers from Myitkyina:

我们从来没把洋人街当缅甸看，他们那里的人都不会讲缅语。

We never see Lweje as part of Myanmar because people there do not speak Burmese. (Interview with Liang)

Apart from their lack of proficiency in the national language, those from Lweje were also devalued because of their lower economic and social status compared to Myitkyina, namely between the capital city and a border town in the same state of Kachin:

小小洋人街的人，凭什么当班长。

How the hell does someone from the small town of Lweje deserve to be the class monitor! (Quarrel between Lingling and Lifu)

The above insult was uttered when Lingling had a fight with Jiachuan who was in charge of assigning cleaning tasks to the students, and who found out that Lingling's group (four female students from Myitkyina) did not do their job properly. Later, Lifu, the class monitor, came to the rescue and tried to appease their fight, but was also involved in the quarrel until the homeroom teacher arrived.

Linguistically and economically, students from Myitkyina think themselves superior to those from Lweje because they speak Burmese and they come from wealthier families. Even the students from Lweje also imply such a gap in their economic status:

以前我们班有四个从密支那来的男生，他们经常在一起用缅语说我们的坏话。他们家都很有钱，有一个的爸爸开学时就直接在饭卡上打了 4000 块钱。

We used to have four male students from Myitkyina, and they often stayed together and talked rudely of us in Burmese. Their families are rich, and one of the students' father directly deposited 4000 yuan to his meal card at the beginning of the semester. (Focus group interview with Lifu, Jiachuan and Xia)

However, being rich is not considered to be an accepted superiority at BHS where the majority of students are from rural areas (see 5.4.1). In fact, in their Burmese class, showing off is even despised and is seen as a problem instead of an advantage:

男生早就看不惯梁她们几个了。

Male students have had a bone to pick with Liang and other students. (Informal conversation with Kongdan)

我们性格合不来，她们经常会说“我这个买了多少钱，我那个买了多少钱”。

Our personalities are not matched because they often like to say “I pay this much for this. I pay that much for that”. (Informal conversation with Longnu)

Despite their advantage in speaking Burmese, bilingual ethnic Chinese are not acknowledged by their Chinese teachers who do not see their bilingual proficiency as a value that contributes to students' academic performance at BHS. As ethnic Chinese, bilingual students are expected to display their ancestral identities by only speaking Chinese and by fully conforming to the school's codes of conduct in language and social behaviour. Because of the discrepancies in their previous practices and the school's monolingual rules, speaking Burmese creates tensions between the imposed Chinese identity and their self-positioning. What further complicates their Chinese identities is their previous exposure to the Taiwanese educational system. Their use of traditional Chinese characters is often diagnosed as a problem (see 6.3.2). In sum, bilingual ethnic Chinese who can speak both Burmese and Chinese, and who are also economically advantaged do not find themselves empowered at BHS. Just the

opposite, their language and cultural advantages turn out to be in conflict with the limited identities imposed by the school and their Chinese teachers.

#### 7.4.3 Meanings of speaking Burmese language

In the previous section (7.4.2), I have pointed out that bilingual ethnic Chinese use their advantage in speaking Burmese to challenge monolingual ethnic Chinese who lack such linguistic proficiency. It is noted that such contestation is derived from the wider dominant discourse in Myanmar where ethnic Chinese are not usually seen as legitimate members of the Burmese society because of their lack of Burmese proficiency (Maung, 1994; Than, 1997). In Myanmar, speaking Burmese is perceived as a must in order to participate in the dominant society. In China, speaking Burmese is also constructed as a must to meet the strategic expectations of China's soft power projection in which Burmese students are being prepared to be cross-cultural communicators. Therefore, speaking both Chinese and Burmese is seen as the desired outcome. Ethnic Chinese who are monolingual speakers of Chinese only come to realise the desirability of Burmese proficiency in China, where they are exposed to discourses that bring home to them the disadvantage of being unable to speak Burmese.

我觉得自己不会讲缅语怪怪的。

I feel it weird that I can't speak Burmese. (Jiachuan's linguistic autobiography)

以后我们还是要回缅甸发展，不会缅语肯定不行。

In the future, we will go back to Myanmar and it won't work if we can't speak Burmese. (Interview with Lifu)

In Myanmar, ethnic Chinese were often warned against speaking Burmese at home in case they might be assimilated into Burman culture (see 4.4.1). Such a family language policy has been challenged by the fact that their future employment opportunities require them to be linguistically proficient in both Chinese and Burmese. This message is reinforced when Burmese students were informed of many job

opportunities in Myanmar during their time at BHS. Once, two delegates from China Southern Power Grid Company came to recruit Burmese students to work in Chipwi, Myanmar. The homeroom teacher highly recommended Lifu, one of his favoured students, to apply for the position. However, Lifu's exposure to Burmese is only limited to simple and everyday greetings, which is far below the linguistic requirement of the China Southern Power Grid Company, which presumably see Burmese students as native speakers of Burmese. In the job requirements, Burmese students only need to show that they are proficient in Chinese, and it seems that all of the Burmese students are qualified for the job, but Burmese students are also aware of the implicit requirement of speaking Burmese. As a consequence, monolingual speakers of ethnic Chinese who perform academically well in China and are highly acknowledged by their Chinese teachers are ironically excluded from such profitable job trajectories.

After going back to the dormitory, Lifu expressed regrets not having acquired Burmese:

尹兆洋，要是你好好教我缅甸语么，老子现在肯定去电站工作了。我的前途就是被你毁了。

Yinzhaoyang, if you had taught me Burmese, I would surely have gotten opportunity to work at the power station. All my bright future has been ruined because of you. (Conversation recorded by Lifu at the dormitory)

Yinzhaoyang is good at speaking Burmese but is weak in Chinese. While playing basketball and living with Lifu in the same dormitory, Yinzhaoyang sees Lifu as his Chinese teacher (see the above natural conversation at boys' dormitory in Section 4.7.1). Because of their close contact, Lifu sometimes picks up Burmese expressions from Yinzhaoyang, but Lifu's Burmese has not seriously improved over the past one and half years since they stayed together in the same dormitory. Despite being acknowledged by his Chinese teachers, Lifu is not linguistically qualified for the jobs offered.

Similar to Lifu, many other Burmese students have begun to realise the importance of having good knowledge of Burmese. Wu and Xiaomei (see Section 7.3.5) helped each other to learn Chinese, Burmese and English to strengthen their linguistic capitals. The following figure captured Chang’s desire to learn Burmese:

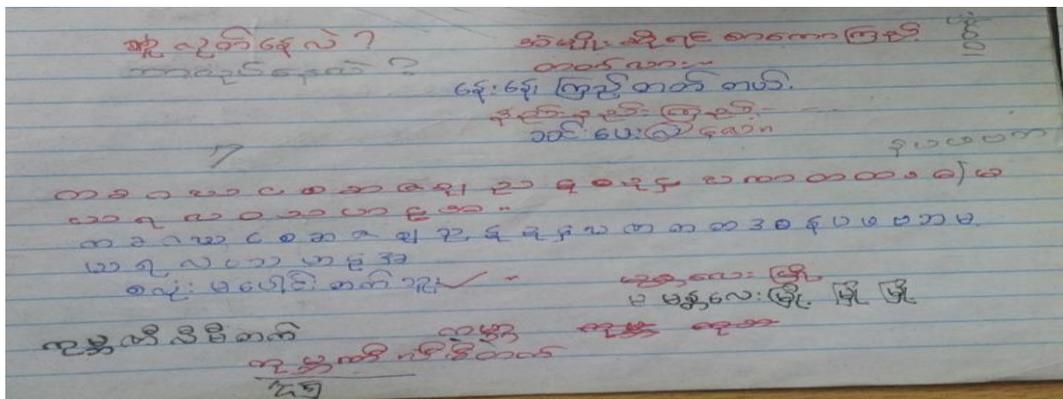


Figure 27. Dialogue between two Burmese students on learning Burmese language

The above figure recorded the moment two male students, Qidong and Chang, practice Burmese language. Qidong wrote his words in red and Chang responded in blue on a draft. In the first red line, Qidong asked Chang whether he could read Burmese words, Chang admitted that he only had little knowledge of it, and then Qidong corrected Chang’s mistake in stating “only knowing a little”. Chang then asked Qidong to teach him Burmese. In the middle space of the page all of the Burmese alphabets were listed followed by an exact copy of them in Chang’s handwriting. In the other space of the page were two written parallel expressions such as “Mandalay” and “company”.

Apart from speaking Burmese for the profitable future employment, Burmese students’ identification with Myanmar seems to be changed from seeing China as their ancestral land but Myanmar as the land of future opportunities:

我很喜欢中文，因为我是华人，但是我现在更喜欢缅甸语，因为我现在的祖籍是缅甸，所以缅甸话对我以后非常重要，是走遍缅甸的唯一方法。

I like Chinese because I’m ethnic Chinese, but now I like Burmese more because my present homeland is Myanmar. Therefore, it’s very important to

speak Burmese for my future, and it is the only way to travel all over Myanmar.  
    (Linguistic autobiography from Chang)

Chang has realised the necessity of speaking the Burmese language, the national language of Myanmar, in order to find a good job. Despite claiming his national attachment to Myanmar rather than China, Chang does not actually hold Burmese citizenship because his parents cannot prove that their family has lived in Myanmar for at least three generations.

In sum, it is paradoxical that it is through receiving their education in China and exclusively through the medium of Chinese that Burmese students come to see themselves as Burmese and come to realise the importance of Burmese language proficiency. Before migrating to China, monolingual ethnic Chinese had not necessarily seen it as valuable to speak Burmese given their feelings of superior status over other minority groups, and their ethnic identifications with a China-centric world (see Chapter Four). However, their post-migration experiences in China have made them realise the different meanings of speaking Burmese and being Burmese students. Their changed language attitudes towards learning Burmese is not because of their ethnic identification with Burman culture, but largely embedded in the profitable employment opportunities in Myanmar and the wider discourse of China's soft power projection that construct them as proficient bilingual speakers.

#### 7.4.4 Summary

In sum, Burmese students who have been brought up in different linguistic and cultural environments are not a homogenous group but are shaped and reshaped by their pre- and post-migration experiences. A close examination of in-group interactions reveals a continuum of language negotiations and contestations among Burmese students of diverse backgrounds. In the Burmese-only Year 11 class, speaking Yunnan Mandarin and having "Han blood ties" are constructed as two important symbols of privileged Chinese ethnicity and privileged Chinese speaker status. Those who lack Yunnan Mandarin are subjected to being positioned as deficient speakers and those who are not ethnic Chinese but who speak Yunnan

Mandarin as their mother tongue are also excluded as legitimate speaker of Chinese. Despite having the advantages of having Yunnan Mandarin as their mother tongue and being Han, which is considered as a superior identity, ethnic Chinese are also contested as authentic speakers because of their lack of proficiency in pronouncing *Putonghua* correctly.

Apart from the challenge imposed by speaking *Putonghua*, ethnic Chinese are caught up in the tensions between their ancestral identities and the imposed Chinese identity. This is particularly the case with bilingual ethnic Chinese who can easily pass as locals because of their ethnic appearance but who are expected to fully conform to the school's regulation on monolingual rules. Because of the asymmetries between their previous language practices and the school's monolingual policy, the authenticity of bilingual ethnic Chinese who are used to speaking Burmese as part of their linguistic habitus is contested. Their previous exposure to Taiwan Mandarin also challenges their Chinese authenticity because of the way they write using traditional Chinese characters rather than simplified Chinese characters.

Perhaps what makes their post-migration experiences most interesting and dramatic is that Burmese students have come to realise the importance of speaking Burmese, which is reproduced by the dominant national discourse and the global discourse of promoting China's soft power in Myanmar. Before migrating to China, they are all ethnic minorities who do not speak Burmese as mother tongue, and many of them were monolingual Chinese speakers in Myanmar. Their proficiency in Chinese has provided them with access to formal education in China, but their lack of proficiency in the Burmese language becomes a problem in Myanmar where speaking Burmese as the national language is not only necessary but also a desired capital for working in Chinese-invested companies. Being considered to be proficient bilinguals and cross-cultural communicators, Burmese students have been engaged in creating their desired identity by improving their Burmese language informally in China.

## **7.5 Conclusion: reproduction of hierarchies and valorisation of the Burmese language**

This chapter has presented Burmese students' lived experiences by examining the intersection of social factors that contribute to their marginalised status, exploring their agentive strategies responding to their marginalisation and drawing attention to in-group differences between Burmese students of diverse backgrounds.

Similar to the migrant students that were the focus of previous studies (see 2.6.1), Burmese students have been subject to high levels of exclusion while undertaking senior high school studies in China. The factors that mediate their exclusion are class, race and language. These factors have created compounding effects in marginalising Burmese students' learning experiences. Without access to *gaokao*, they are deprived of opportunities to construct the desired social identity to fulfil their educational attainment and social mobility. Because of their lack of this social capital, Burmese students are perceived by their teachers as lacking intelligence, and they are also ignored by their Chinese peers who see themselves as superior. Despite the Burmese students' identification with a China-oriented world (see Chapter Four), they are negatively stereotyped as racially inferior. The process of stereotyping Burmese students' cultural practices is similar to findings from previous studies in which migrant students travel from undeveloped country to developed country, from peripheral to semi-peripheral region and from rural to urban area (see Chapter Two). Despite the fact that Burmese students speak Yunnan Mandarin as their mother tongue, and their Chinese teachers can successfully communicate with them in Yunnan Mandarin (see 6.3.3), Chinese students choose to reject communicating with them both in *Putonghua* and in Yunnan Mandarin. This exclusionary process is different from those experienced by migrant students who lack language proficiency in the dominant language and cannot have a natural conversation with native peers (see 2.3.1). The refusal to communicate is partly because Chinese students themselves struggle to speak *Putonghua* and partly because they do not think Burmese students are worthy of cultivating friendships with.

Similar to the process of exclusion between Chinese students and Burmese students, the in-group interactions between Burmese students themselves also reproduce the process of exclusion through linguistic and ethnic hierarchies. Regarding their internal language practices, Lisu students are the most marginalised group because they have to learn others' languages for daily communication with their friends from the same region Panwa and with other Burmese students from Lweje and Myitkyina. For those sub-Kachin groups, they used to form a fixed in-group communication style by speaking Lashi and Lhaovo, but such language practices are challenged by Burmese students who speak Yunnan Mandarin. Students who speak Yunnan Mandarin as their mother tongue constitute the majority group. However, between these Yunnan Mandarin speakers, there are also different positionings. Burmese students who speak Yunnan Mandarin as mother tongue but who register themselves as Shan are perceived as inferior to the ethnic Chinese who both speak Yunnan Mandarin and who have "Han blood ties". The superiority of being Han makes ethnic Chinese the most visible of the Burmese students and their linguistic and ethnic background also grant them the ability to position themselves as superior to other Burmese students. However, when it comes to speaking standard *Putonghua*, ethnic Chinese as authentic speakers of Chinese are contested because of their previous exposure to the Taiwanese educational system and because of their problems with reading *Putonghua* correctly.

Confronted with various levels of marginalisation, Burmese students employ different agentive strategies to reposition themselves and to enhance their status. Burmese students from Panwa are the most invisible group and are often misrepresented by their teachers and school as typical image of Burman people at important cultural events (see 6.4.2). These students are most inclined to highlight their transnational identities by watching Western movies rather than Chinese or Burmese movies, attaching themselves to Christianity over other religions and celebrating Christmas rather than the Chinese Spring Festival. Similar to the sub-Kachin group, Burmese students of Shan background also like to identify themselves with global cultural consumption: playing online computer games and becoming well versed in using high technology. Despite their advantages in speaking Yunnan Mandarin, the authenticity of the way Burmese students of Shan background speak Chinese remains contested.

To counter this, they empower themselves and improve their visibility with their teachers and other Burmese peers by playing globally-acknowledged online games such as Dota and by helping their Chinese teachers solve computer problems. Different from the students of sub-Kachin group and Shan background, ethnic Chinese who look like their Chinese peers and who also speak Yunnan Mandarin tend to hide any undesired identities. However, despite their many strategies to avoid being identified as “typical Burmese”, ethnic Chinese students are not treated equally by their subject teachers who seem to favour those of monolingual background over bilingual background. As acts of resistance, bilingual ethnic Chinese students turn to identify themselves with global English and resist learning English through the formal education in China. Given their previous educational backgrounds in government schools in Myanmar where English is the medium of instruction from senior high school and above, bilingual ethnic Chinese students who have finished their high school study feel much privileged over other Burmese students and even over their Chinese teachers whose English pronunciation is perceived as deficient. The way bilingual ethnic Chinese students challenge their Chinese teachers’ English proficiency is similar to the way Indian students in Hong Kong challenge their native peers and Filipino domestic workers challenge their rich Taiwanese employers (see 2.5.2).

Even though Burmese students are different from each other in terms of their choice of agentive strategies, they all have the same desire to improve their *Putonghua* and make friends with Chinese people. For bilingual and multilingual speakers, they like to use home language(s) to help them read Chinese because of their lack of knowledge in *Hanyu Pinyin* and lack of proficiency in pronouncing Chinese words correctly. Besides using home language(s) to assist their *Putonghua* learning, a more observable strategy adopted by almost every student is the use of online resources that transcend geographical and national boundaries. At BHS, Burmese students are physically segregated from their Chinese peers and they are kept at school by the military-styled education from Monday to Saturday. In order to empower their access to *Putonghua* and to resist the schooling disadvantages, Burmese students make use of cyberspace to make netfriends with Chinese people from all parts of China and even with overseas

Chinese. While chatting with their Chinese netfriends, they have learned to type Chinese characters via *Hanyu Pinyin*. Having been exposed to these Internet resources, they have picked up fashionable cyber expressions. It seems that online resources have provided Burmese students with a powerful space to enhance their visibility and access to *Putonghua* and Chinese society. However, it remains unclear whether Burmese students have effectively improved their *Putonghua* via these online resources. Having learned to type Chinese words via typing tools such as Sogo Pinyin does not lead to the standard knowledge of *Hanyu Pinyin*. In fact, they are still confused about the orthography of Chinese words. Besides, making friends online does not provide them with trustworthy relationships and many of them end up blocking their netfriends who are only interested in flirting with them. Their exposure to online reading resources contributes little to improving their use of *Putonghua*.

Apart from empowering their *Putonghua* learning online, Burmese students' dependence on using cyber resources also implies the discontinuities of speaking *Putonghua* at the China- Myanmar border. Different from previous studies conducted at the US- Mexican border where Mexican students in the USA do not seem to question the English proficiency of their American teachers and peers (see Chapter Two), at BHS, Burmese participants, Chinese teachers and Chinese students all face the same challenge with regard to their proficiency in standardised *Putonghua*. Chinese teachers, especially those teaching Science subjects, seem to struggle with reading the correct Chinese words and prefer to use Yunnan Mandarin to communicate with their Burmese students. Similarly, Chinese students also use Yunnan Mandarin for daily communication except having lessons in class; Burmese students who used to have difficulties with the knowledge of *Hanyu Pinyin* and reading *Putonghua* in Myanmar (see 4.3.2) are still confronted with the same problem after migrating to China. Their *Putonghua* proficiency has not improved much because of their migration to China's border. In other words, the imposition of *Putonghua* presents a challenge to both Chinese and Burmese border people.

Besides the contestation of border people's legitimacy in speaking *Putonghua*, what makes the promotion of *Putonghua* most interesting is perhaps the implicit

valorisation of the Burmese language. Different from the previous studies at the US-Mexican border (see Chapter Two) where Mexican migrant students are discouraged to speak Spanish, and their linguistic nationalism in the form of speaking English is strictly monitored at the border regions. By contrast, Burmese students speaking Burmese is highly encouraged based on their migration experiences in China. Rather than excluding the Burmese language, Burmese students are expected to be proficient bilinguals in Chinese and Burmese so that they can meet up with the employment requirements and find a profitable job under the dominant discourse of China's soft power projection. However, such intention of incorporating two national languages at the border regions runs into many tensions and conflicts. Apart from the discrepancies and difficulties in speaking *Putonghua*, speaking Burmese also constitutes a significant challenge in Myanmar's northern border region where ethnic conflicts between minority groups and government army and the emergence of regional languages such as Kachin, Shan and Chinese have complicated the processes of Myanmar's national linguistic integration (see 1.2). My participants are all members of ethnic minorities who do not speak Burmese as their mother tongue, and their pre-migration experiences in Myanmar were such that the majority of them had only very limited exposure to Burmese and little desire to identify with Myanmar. However, their post-migration experiences in China almost turn this on the head and shape their beliefs so that they now see that speaking Burmese can enhance their future careers and that it is insufficient to speak Chinese only. As a result, the promotion of China's soft power projection not only constructs *Putonghua* as the norm of Chinese language but also restructures the linguistic order in the border region. Both *Putonghua* and Burmese are economically constructed as potential capital to empower individual student's upward mobility and to fulfil the mutual benefits of China's and Myanmar's national interests: for China's expansion into Myanmar and for Myanmar's integration of its border ethnic groups.



## **Chapter Eight Conclusion**

This thesis has explored the educational experiences of a group of Burmese high school students in a border high school in China's Southwestern Yunnan province. By tracing their previous learning trajectories, I described and analysed in Chapter Four how Burmese students formed their language repertoires and how they were motivated to learn Chinese and to migrate to China for their senior high school education. In Chapters Five and Six, I examined how the school and Chinese teachers integrated Burmese students into the mainstream culture and how the institutional practices via the schooling policies and classroom interactions created specific discontinuities in their educational experiences. Shifting from institutional perspectives to Burmese students' lived experiences, I examined in Chapter 7 how Burmese students' learning experiences were impeded by the compounding effects of various disadvantages and how their agentive practices reproduced existing hierarchies. This concluding chapter draws together the key findings of this research by revisiting the research questions and by presenting the implications and suggesting possible directions for future research.

### **8.1 Revisiting the research questions**

8.1.1 How do Burmese students' previous learning experiences shape their linguistic repertoires and trajectories?

This research question was addressed in Chapter Four, which explored Burmese students' pre-migration educational trajectories. The examination of their experiences in government schools and Chinese supplementary schools in Myanmar showed an enormous contrast between the two systems: fewer than half of the research participants completed public primary school whereas all of them finished their junior high school Chinese supplementary education. The failure to complete government education in Myanmar was mainly due to their lack of Burmese language proficiency and their minority status. However, none of my participants saw their dropping-out as an educational failure. My participants' low completion rate was not only an

indication of their marginalisation but also an expression of their distrust of the Burmese government and their dismissal of the value of the Burmese language. In contrast, their persistent efforts to improve their Chinese language proficiency provided them with a space to empower their marginalised identities. Living in the border region where they were exposed to Chinese-related materials via mass media and community engagement, these readily accessible resources not only shaped their language beliefs and confirmed the value of learning Chinese to them but also shaped their imagined identities as members of a China-centric world. The Chinese language became a powerful form of linguistic and cultural capital with which they hoped to transform their marginalised identities in Myanmar and to achieve better prospects in life.

Despite the promises of Chinese, there were also significant tensions embedded in the educational practices surrounding Chinese language education in Myanmar, where “Chinese” has increasingly come to mean *Putonghua*. Despite years of formal and informal Chinese language learning, this presented a formidable barrier as neither spoken nor written *Putonghua* was readily available in the participants’ pre-migration experiences. In sum, despite being marginalised as ethnic minority members in government schools, my participants from the border regions of northern Myanmar had found it possible to empower their educational and employment opportunities by learning Chinese and orienting their aspirations for the future towards China.

#### 8.1.2 How do institutional practices shape the education of Burmese students?

The second research question was addressed in Chapters Five and Six, where the institutional practices related to the integration of Burmese students into the school culture at BHS were explored. The examination of school policies and teaching practices showed a series of discontinuities between welcoming diversity at discursive levels and unwelcoming practices in reality. On the one hand, Burmese students were constructed by Chinese official discourses as human capital for China’s soft power projection and they were granted many advantages over their Chinese peers. In response to the national strategic scheme, BHS provided Burmese students with material and academic privileges related to the quality of their accommodation, their

learning facilities, their scholarships and tuition waivers, or their shortened period of schooling to graduation. However, Burmese students did not experience these privileges as such. On the contrary, they felt disappointed because they did not learn much and were segregated from the mainstream school culture. In fact, a close examination of actual educational practices showed aspects of structural mechanisms that entrenched educational disadvantages of Burmese students and restricted their future career options.

One of the key structural constraints was their citizenship status. Without a Chinese identity card and residential household registration, Burmese students were not able to participate in the *gaokao*, the most important national standardised assessment in China. As a result of their inability to compete on the *gaokao*, Burmese students did not have value on the most important school metric: student performance in the *gaokao* was the single most important measurement of school “quality” in accountability exercises and ranking lists. BHS, as a peripheral high school ranking at the bottom of such lists, was extremely invested in this competitive mechanism. In fact, *gaokao* at BHS was even constructed as a social category to position students as superior or inferior. Burmese students without access to *gaokao* were consequently rendered as the least “valuable” group of students, and hence, most invisible.

As a result of their exclusion from the *gaokao*, Burmese students were streamed into low-level trajectories without high levels of academic input and learning expectations. What further complicated the streaming practices was the school’s lack of funding. On the basis of cost calculations, Burmese students were organised into a separate class if their total number in a year group was 30 or over. If their number was less, they were distributed into mainstream classes along with Chinese peers. However, no matter which forms their incorporation took, Burmese students were not given the same schooling and teaching resources because they were excluded from the *gaokao* and thus added little value to the school’s performance in accountability and ranking exercises. Lack of funding hampered efforts to design targeted courses catering to Burmese students learning needs and empowering their aspirations. The result was a

high level of tension in the way classrooms were organised and teachers' sense of purpose.

Without clear teaching objectives, teachers felt lost as to how and what to teach Burmese students who enrolled at different times and whose prior knowledge was extremely diverse. Furthermore, the use of *gaokao*-centred textbooks did not enable teachers to implement effective and meaningful instruction. On the one hand, teachers found it hard to teach subject content and covering sufficient units. On the other hand, Burmese students felt it was meaningless to learn something that they would never be able to use. As a consequence, they displayed various forms of resistance such as sleeping, playing on their smartphone, doodling, reading novels or missing class. In fact, Chinese teachers were struggling to educate Burmese students. They often felt ambivalent and experienced a lack of sense of achievement. On the one hand, educating Burmese students was perceived as easy and simple since they did not need to be stressed about improving Burmese students' *gaokao* performance; on the other hand, they had to spend extra efforts in managing Burmese students of diverse backgrounds, but their efforts were not acknowledged by the teaching evaluation system which only counted student performance on the *gaokao*.

Teaching was further complicated by the school's military-style education in which the school and teachers took it upon themselves to shape Burmese students' social behaviours towards the desired goal of cultural homogeneity. Conflicts over behaviour regulation often occurred between Chinese teachers and Burmese students. The resistance strategies of Burmese students signalled a lack of interest to their Chinese teachers and were perceived as lack of perseverance and lack of self-discipline.

In addition to the explicit form of militarised school regulations, another implicit form of homogenising Burmese students' difference was through the implementation of speaking and writing standardised Chinese in class. Being streamed into an employment rather than academic trajectory, Burmese students were expected to do language-related work in the future. Therefore, Chinese teachers spent a lot of effort on instilling *Putonghua* in their Burmese students. However, this rigorous focus on standardised Chinese did not empower Burmese students because *Putonghua* is, in

fact, largely absent from “real life” in the border region. This was most clearly demonstrated by the fact that, at BHS, Chinese teachers who spoke a form of Yunnan Mandarin were themselves not necessarily able to speak *Putonghua*. In sum, the institutional practices including the national policy of linking *gaokao* to citizenship status, school’s streaming policies, militarised regulations and teachers’ classroom organisations produced compounding effects that impacted Burmese students’ educational achievement and restricted their future trajectories.

8.1.3 How do school interactions shape the learning experiences of Burmese students? The third research question was addressed in Chapters Five and Seven, which focused on the ways in which class, race and language status intersect with Burmese students’ learning experiences. Being deprived of access to *gaokao* meant being positioned socially inferior to their Chinese peers. This impacted Burmese students’ interaction with their Chinese peers, who often saw them as lacking intelligence and unworthy of being friends with. The fact that Myanmar is an underdeveloped country also produced negative stereotypes that position Burmese students as racially inferior, as expressed through their imputed lack of hygiene and civilisation. Being socially, academically and culturally devalued, Burmese students had a hard time interacting with their Chinese peers, who refused to validate them as “Chinese” through speaking Chinese with them.

Burmese students were subjected to such exclusionary practices irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds. However, rather than uniting with each other to counterbalance their marginalisation, interactions among Burmese students themselves reproduced exclusionary hierarchies. Among them, speaking Mandarin and having a “pure” Han ancestry was most highly valued. Those who did not speak Mandarin and were not ethnic Chinese were further marginalised.

Confronted with various levels of exclusion as a result of segregated schooling policies, dumbed-down instruction, intentional rejections from Chinese peers and sometimes even their co-national peers, Burmese students employed different agentic strategies to reposition themselves and enhance their status. Those who were most marginalised because of their darker skin tones and ethno-linguistic backgrounds were

inclined to identify with global cultural consumption by watching western movies instead of Chinese or Burmese movies, by practising Christianity rather than engaging in Chinese rituals, or playing global online games. In contrast, ethnic Chinese were more inclined to conform to the cultural and linguistic norms of the school. Among ethnic Chinese students, further internal differentiation could be observed. Alignment with global English served as a resource for some of them to reposition themselves vis-à-vis their Chinese English teacher, whose English they challenged as deficient.

Despite attempting to empower themselves in various ways, Burmese students' agentic strategies rarely produced desired learning outcomes that were acknowledged by the standard educational system. On the contrary, their agentic practices reinforced the existing hierarchy of speaking *Putonghua* as the only norm of Chinese. While making use of online resources to empower their *Putonghua*, Burmese students chose to make netfriends with non-Yunnanese who they believed could speak better *Putonghua* than Yunnanese. Their offline interactions also reproduced the linguistic norm of speaking *Putonghua* when they helped each other to improve their knowledge of *Hanyu Pinyin* and standard pronunciation of *Putonghua*.

Apart from being internalised by the standard ideology of speaking *Putonghua*, their post-migration experiences in China also shaped the meaning of speaking Burmese and being Burmese students. In Myanmar, my participants had not seen it as valuable to learn the Burmese language because of the social and ethnic exclusion they experienced due to their minority status. However, in China, they were homogeneously perceived as Burman people whose Burmese proficiency was desired by the Chinese government as a means to cultivate cross-cultural intellectuals. Being strategically tracked as bilinguals for their profitable future trajectories, it was in China that Burmese students became motivated to learn and to improve their Burmese language proficiency. This means that China's soft power projection reconfigures the value of Burmese as national language of Myanmar and devalues the languages of the country. In sum, Chinese policies in the border area not only reinforce *Putonghua* as the only norm of Chinese but also valorise Burmese as the only legitimate language of Myanmar for mutual cooperation and China's soft power projection.

#### 8.1.4 Reproduction of the social order and existing linguistic hierarchies

My findings in response to the three research questions all confirm to the established fact that migrant education reproduces the social order and existing linguistic hierarchies, with which I began this thesis. Over the process of their formal schooling both in Myanmar and in China, my participants are not empowered to fulfil their educational aspirations but restricted to limited future trajectories.

In Myanmar, the majority of my participants had failed to complete their primary school education not because of their lack of intelligence but because of the structural constraints that create unequal access to educational resources. One of the key barriers is their lack of Burmese language proficiency. As ethnic minorities from peripheral regions, my participants hardly spoke any Burmese language prior to their schooling. Their lack of Burmese language proficiency greatly impeded their understanding of content learning and educational performance. Another constraint is associated with their minority status. Because of their ethnic backgrounds, my participants experienced discriminatory treatment in class. The ethnic conflicts in the border regions also complicated the learning experiences of ethnic minorities who questioned the value of studying subjects such as History, which was only taught from the perspective of the central government and the dominant Burman group. In sum, the monolingual schooling policy and the complicated ethnic tensions in the border regions impeded their successful integration into government schools and consequently led to high dropout rates before they had even completed their primary school education.

Despite having invested years of education at Chinese supplementary schools in Myanmar, their post-migration experiences in China demonstrate the same structural constraints with different forms of mechanisms that impact their educational outcomes and upward mobility. Again language constitutes an important structural barrier. It is true that my participants had learned Chinese for about ten years before coming to BHS, but the meaning of speaking Chinese in China turned out to be different from what they had previously learned and experienced. Because of their lack of proficiency in speaking and writing *Putonghua*, my participants were categorised as deficient

learners, and their previous knowledge of non-standard varieties of Chinese was devalued and diagnosed as a problem. Apart from language barriers, my participants were particularly constrained by their citizenship status. Without a Chinese identity card, my participants were not allowed to compete with their Chinese peers on an equal basis. As a result of the citizenship constraint, my participants were streamed into a low-level class where they were not given sufficient teaching and learning resources. This not only impacted their learning motivation but also restricted their opportunities to expand their subject knowledge. Being tracked to employment- rather than university-oriented trajectories, my participants lost opportunities to pursue careers that require intensive academic exposure and their migration aspirations were by and large reduced to language-related positions.

In sum, as ethnic minority members in Myanmar and as foreign students in China, my participants suffered from “double” forces of exclusion. In these two countries, they are similarly marginalised as deficient speakers of dominant languages, namely Burmese in Myanmar and *Putonghua* in China. Without acceptable proficiency in these two powerful languages, my participants were forced to make great efforts to bridge the linguistic gap. However, their self-empowerment becomes least possible where resources are limited and where their marginalised social status complicates their legitimacy.

## **8.2 Implications and future research directions**

As this study shows, there are discontinuities in educating Burmese students at the Chinese peripheral border region. Drawing on the key findings and building on the knowledge of the previous studies, I present the implications of the study on global language promotion, migrant education and border development. I also propose to conduct the longitudinal study on migrant students’ language learning trajectories.

### **8.2.1 *Yin* and *Yang* approach for language promotion**

Under the framework of China’s border language promotion, Burmese students are constructed as human capital playing a bridging role between China and Myanmar, and both Burmese and Chinese are desired linguistic capitals to achieve mutual understanding and mutual benefits. This paradigm of language promotion is in stark

contrast to previous studies in North America and Western Europe (see Chapter Two). In many of the western contexts, migrant students are exclusively negatively positioned, and their previous language repertoires are devalued and erased in the process of their migration and in the new destination. However, this is not the case with the way the Chinese language is promoted in the border region of China and Myanmar. Rather than excluding the Burmese language, the promotion of Chinese as a global language includes the valorisation of Burmese as a valued form of mutual cooperation. This paradoxical approach cannot be addressed within the knowledge base of the western paradigm which is conflictual and exclusionary in nature. Given the increasing power of China's economic force and the global promotion of Chinese language, China is no longer a data point serving to verify western theories but is actively engaging in producing its distinct approach to cooperate with the rest of the world.

Many Chinese scholars of International Relations (Chen, Tsai, Chang, & Lin, 2010; Ling, 2013; Qin, 2010; Qin, 2012; T. Zhao, 2009) have employed the Chinese indigenous concept of *Yin* and *Yang* to reconfigure the meaning of China's Rise. The concept of *Yin* and *Yang* describes two separate but not necessarily hostile forces. The opposite nature of *Yin* and *Yang* is dialectical in the sense that the two forces can transform into one another and the development can only be achieved through mutual cooperation. In promoting China's global policies such as the most recent initiative "One Belt One Road" which involves over 60 countries with complex linguistic and cultural diversities, the key words like "mutual reciprocity", "mutual benefits", "common interests", "win-win nature" are frequently emphasised in official government discourses. As an essential part of China's soft power projection, the promotion of Chinese as global language per se follows the *Yin* and *Yang* approach by including the opposite forces, namely the national languages of others with the idea of producing a new harmonious synthesis; that is, constructing mutual cooperation by valorising bilingual competence in *Putonghua* and the national language of the targeted country. This complementary mode of cooperation embedded in the *Yin* and *Yang* approach is open and inclusive to different linguistic norms, co-evolving without mutual eliminations and searching for the balance point while maintaining the

properties of each. As described in Chapter One, the way China cooperates with ASEAN is two-way and reciprocal: the promotion of Chinese language in ASEAN also valorises the values of ASEAN languages by cultivating cross-cultural communicators promoting the regional economy and integration. This study conducted in the border region of China and Myanmar thus provides not only a new context to contribute to the present knowledge of sociolinguistics and migrant education, but also has implications for sociolinguistic theory and offers a new perspective to overcome the overdependence on the western paradigm.

### 8.2.2 Power of agency and institutional constraints

Confronted with marginalisation at school, migrant students are not passive receivers but are actively engaged in mobilising their resources to reposition themselves and to enhance their visibility. Aligned with the scholarship on migrant students' agency, this study has demonstrated how Burmese students contest their marginalised positions. In addition to presenting their agentive strategies, the study takes a further step discussing the limited power of agency by drawing attention to what is uncontested and what is reproduced over the process of their self-empowerment.

While contesting their marginalisation and negotiating their identities, my participants themselves also reproduce linguistic and cultural hierarchies. This is particularly demonstrated by the peer interactions between Burmese students of diverse backgrounds. Ethnic Chinese students view themselves as proficient speakers of Chinese and thus superior to their non-Chinese Burmese peers. Those who do not speak Yunnan Mandarin as mother tongue or who do not have "Han blood ties" are devalued and turn to identify themselves with global cultural consumptions as a way to counterbalance and challenge the superiority of Chinese.

However, it is not enough to focus on the self-empowerment strategies of my participants while ignoring the larger structural constraints. In Chapter Five, I showed that Burmese students are subjected to the overwhelming effects of structural mechanisms that consequently restrict their educational achievements and future career trajectories. Their citizenship status is the key barrier that impacts on their access to the equal distribution of teaching and learning resources. Without Chinese

citizenship, Burmese students are streamed into a low-level trajectory. No matter how well they perform in their academic subjects and how well they can speak the Chinese language, they can never be transferred into mainstream education. The exclusionary national policy that links *gaokao* with Chinese citizenship status becomes the root problem for their successful integration. If the problem of citizenship is not solved, Burmese students will never enjoy the same education as their Chinese peers and they will never be able to fulfil their migration aspirations in China.

### 8.2.3 Spread of Chinese and development

As discussed in Chapter One, China's rapid economic development has great implications for the global promotion of the Chinese language. As an important driving force behind the spread of the Chinese language, the Chinese diaspora is positively included in China's soft power projection, especially in ASEAN where over two third of overseas Chinese reside (Wang & Miao, 2015). My study has shown the tensions of learning Chinese and being authentic Chinese for ethnic Chinese living in Myanmar, where the spread of *Putonghua* has shifted the paradigm of learning Chinese from maintaining ethnic heritage to economic valorisation. The commodification of *Putonghua* has reconfigured the hierarchies among the various varieties of Chinese. Paradoxically, migrating to China for formal education does not empower ethnic Chinese students' access to *Putonghua*. On the contrary, their authenticity of being Chinese is greatly challenged because of their previous exposure to non-standard varieties of Chinese and their citizenship status. In the border area, where Yunnan Mandarin is the lingua franca for daily communication, speaking *Putonghua*, though basically inaccessible for both Burmese and Chinese border people, has been strictly implemented as the medium of instruction in the school setting. The power of *Putonghua* not only devalues other varieties of Chinese such as Yunnan Mandarin but also invalidates the ancestral identities of ethnic Chinese outside China, who speak any variety of Chinese other than *Putonghua* as their mother tongue. My findings not only confirm previous studies of the hegemonic power of *Putonghua* upon Chinese diasporas (Li & Zhu, 2010; Zhu & Li, 2014), but also demonstrate the discontinuities of practising *Putonghua* in China's peripheral regions within Chinese territory. In sum, *Putonghua* has been constructed as a global language

embracing international diversity and with the capacity to improve the socioeconomic situation of language learners. However, the spread of *Putonghua* also excludes other varieties of Chinese and entrenches educational inequalities in the borderlands where access to speaking and practising *Putonghua* is out of the reach of the community.

#### 8.2.4 Border education and border integration

Official reports about Chinese border education have highlighted the increasing number of Burmese students receiving formal education at various levels of schools in China (see 1.3). While celebrating the increasing diversity of border development through educational integration, what has been absent from our knowledge is the discussion of social justice and equity in the schooling in the borderland.

One of the key problems related with border education is the failure to acknowledge the dynamic and transnational border contexts. Educational policy-makers and school administrators emphasize national standardised tests rather than accommodating the linguistic and cultural diversity of border people. The one-size-fits-all approach only widens the educational gap between peripheral regions and the national centre given the unequal distribution of teaching and learning resources. Moreover, standardised education perpetuates educational inequalities among border ethnic groups who have to make great efforts to bridge the gap between home culture and school culture.

Given the increasing visibility of Burmese migrant students at Chinese border schools, centralised formal schooling should be replaced with more localised evaluation systems that consider border realities and migrant students' diverse needs.

Apart from enforcing context-specific schooling policies, more inclusive pedagogy should be developed. Teachers should be trained to develop the transnational identities of their Burmese students. Rather than disciplining them into a homogenous group and obsessing with the standardised assessment, teachers should be aware of their students' previous learning trajectories, adopt more sensitive approaches to bridge their learning needs and achieve meaningful learning. More specifically, teachers should have an educational vision cultivating Burmese students' multilingual competence so that they can be better prepared to fulfil the potential for international success.

### 8.2.5 Longitudinal research of future trajectories

I have continued to follow my research participants, especially those in Year 11, beyond my fieldwork and have thus been able to observe their trajectories since their graduation from BHS. I will close this thesis by sharing some preliminary observations about their educational and employment trajectories over the past two and half years to highlight the need for longitudinal research beyond the scope of a PhD thesis.

Participants have followed two types of trajectories after graduation: some have taken up language-related jobs in Myanmar, as their teachers expected them to do, and others have entered university either in China or Myanmar. Those who took up language-related jobs back in Myanmar either teach in Chinese supplementary schools or work in China-invested companies as translators or work in service roles in casinos, where many customers are from China. No matter what jobs they have taken, their proficiency in Chinese has been a precondition for their present work.

A larger group has been accepted by a Chinese border university and they have enrolled in one of three majors: International Trade, International Tourism, and Chinese as International Education. Upon their enrolment, they had to sit a Chinese language test along with all the other foreign students. Because of their previous education in China and their good performance in HSK-6, some of them were promoted into their second year because the first-year courses for foreign students are mostly Chinese-related subjects. By progressing straight to the second year, these students have been able to save one year of study and also one year of living expenses in China.

At the border university, these students are perceived as bilinguals who are proficient in both Chinese and Burmese. Because of this positioning, Burmese students of bilingual and monolingual backgrounds have been impacted differently. Qidong and Lifu, for instance, have experienced a contrastive trajectory while studying in the same class at the same university. Because of his proficiency in Burmese and Chinese, Qidong was chosen to teach Burmese language for Chinese students who learned Burmese language as a selective course. By making use of his bilingual proficiency,

he was not only paid a good salary, but as one who had been one of the ‘invisible’ Burmese students at BHS, also attracted much attention in the department. As a result, he is often recommended for part-time jobs as a translator for Chinese companies who want to develop their business in Myanmar. Through his association with these Chinese business leaders, many doors have opened for Qidong as he has been informed of business opportunities and international trade developments, which in turn is a further advantage for his studies in International Trade.

In contrast, Lifu, who used to be one of the most favoured student at BHS (see 6.4), has become one of the crowd at university. When I went to visit him in 2015, I noticed that Lifu was not as talkative as before and he seemed to have lost interest in his studies and in the social events organised by his university. He told me that the programs for foreign students are too simple. In addition, he has been constantly challenged as an authentic Burmese student because of his lack of Burmese language proficiency. At university, every Burmese student is arranged with a Chinese peer in a language buddy program. Chinese students who are interested in learning Burmese can come to Burmese students for help and in return they teach Burmese students Chinese language. However, this mutual learning model is not suitable for Lifu, who does not have proficiency in Burmese. As a result, he has little opportunity to develop friendships with Chinese students. A similar linguistic challenge is raised when Lifu stays with his Burmese classmates. Speaking Burmese amongst themselves is an implicit rule among Burmese but his lack of Burmese also excludes Lifu from his Burmese peer group, some of whom make fun of his lack of Burmese proficiency.

Only two participants went back to Myanmar to enrol in a university there. Both of these chose Yangon, Myanmar’s largest city, which is located far away from the border region in the south of the country. They told me that they chose Yangon because they wanted to improve their English language proficiency. One of them, Liang, who is bilingual in Chinese and Burmese, wanted to fulfil her dream of eventually going to Singapore by studying English at a university in Yangon. While living in Yangon was costly for her, she had many opportunities to work as a private Chinese language tutor. However, two years on, Liang has moved to Mandalay, which

is only about 300 kilometres from the Chinese border and is now also working as a Chinese teacher at a supplementary school. Her Singapore dream fell through because she failed to secure a scholarship to study there. Laxi also chose to study in Yangon to improve his English. Drawing on his religious Christian and ethnic Lisu background he enrolled in an English-medium Bible college for Lisu people. Because of Laxi's proficiency in Chinese and his previous educational qualifications in China, the principal of the Bible college often asks Laxi to serve as his translator and interpreter when there are important social, religious and educational exchange programs between Lisu people in China and Lisu people in Myanmar. Similar to Qidong, Laxi was one of the most marginalised Burmese students at BHS but through the principal of the Bible college, his multilingual proficiencies in Chinese, Lisu and Burmese have opened many doors for him. For instance, through his interactions with high-ranking officials and his awareness of the bilateral cooperation between Myanmar and China, Laxi has formed an entrepreneurial vision for his future as the founder of a Chinese language school for Lisu people.

In sum, my participants have gone through different learning trajectories after graduation from BHS, some of which could not have been anticipated. In particular, it is noteworthy that those who were categorised as "good" students at BHS did not necessarily do well after graduation, particularly as lack of Burmese proficiency turned into a serious disadvantage post-secondary education. By contrast, some of the multilingual students, who were the most marginalised in the monolingual environment of BHS, gained access to unexpected opportunities by virtue of their multilingual competence in Chinese, Burmese and their ethnic language. It is thus obvious that school achievement is not necessarily a predictor of future achievement, particularly in a highly fluid context as the China-Myanmar border lands, which are undergoing rapid socioeconomic transformation. Longitudinal research is essential to understand the relationship between school careers and post-secondary development. I am hoping to continue to follow my participants and to make such a contribution myself in my post-doctoral career to show the role of language as an important social force that shapes and reshapes migration trajectories and social mobility.

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## Appendix 1: Transcription and Translation Conventions

All spoken data for this thesis were transcribed in simplified Chinese characters. The vast majority of oral data were spoken in various forms of Mandarin, particularly Yunnan Mandarin. Additionally, data in other languages such as Burmese, Shan, Kachin, Lisu, Lhaovo or Lashi were recorded. While I am a native speaker of Yunnan Mandarin, I am not proficient in those other languages. To transcribe those, I consulted my bilingual participants for the meaning and then translated and transcribed them in Chinese. For data in Yunnan Mandarin, I followed the equivalent sound of the words and transcribed them in simplified Chinese characters.

All analyses in this thesis are based on the original language data and the Chinese transcriptions. English translations are provided only for the convenience of the reader and only excerpts that are presented in this thesis as evidence were translated into English. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations are by me. In order to ensure the quality of the translation from Chinese to English, all translations were double-checked by two Chinese-English bilinguals, namely my PhD colleague Alexandra Grey and my associate supervisor Dr Huamei Han.

In most cases, the Chinese original is presented first followed by the English translation. In the case of extended excerpts, the English translation follows after each turn to ensure readability.

The following transcription conventions were adopted:

◦	Sentence final intonation
,	Clause final intonation
“ ”	Direct quotes
!	Sentence-level emphasis
?	Question intonation
(...)	Researcher's omission
[something]	Researcher's supplement to incomplete utterance or explanatory notes

/ Short noticeable pause  
// Long noticeable pause (more than half a second)  
<@> laughter (one @ per syllable, i.e. @@@ = hahaha)

## Appendix 2: Final Ethics Approval Letter



**MACQUARIE**  
University

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15 August 2013  
Professor Ingrid Piller  
Department of Linguistics  
Faculty of Human Sciences  
Macquarie University

### Final Ethics Approval Letter

Dear Prof Piller,

Re: "Multilingualism at the Chinese Burmese Border"(5201300550)

Thank you for your recent correspondence. Your response has addressed the issues raised by the Faculty of Human Sciences Human Research Ethics Sub-Committee and approval has been granted, effective 15th August 2013. This email constitutes ethical approval only.

This research meets the requirements of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). The National Statement is available at the following web site:

[http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/\\_files\\_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf](http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72.pdf).

The following personnel are authorised to conduct this research:

Ms Jia Li  
Prof Ingrid Piller

Please note the following standard requirements of approval:

1. The approval of this project is conditional upon your continuing compliance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).
2. Approval will be for a period of five (5) years subject to the provision of annual reports.

Progress Report 1 Due: 15th August 2014  
Progress Report 2 Due: 15th August 2015  
Progress Report 3 Due: 15th August 2016  
Progress Report 4 Due: 15th August 2017  
Final Report Due: 15th August 2018

NB. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned you must submit a Final Report as soon as the work is completed. If the project has been discontinued or not commenced for any reason, you are also required to submit a Final Report for the project.

Progress reports and Final Reports are available at the following website:

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how\\_to\\_obtain\\_ethics\\_approval/human\\_research\\_ethics/forms](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms)

3. If the project has run for more than five (5) years you cannot renew approval for the project. You will need to complete and submit a Final Report and submit a new application for the project. (The five year limit on renewal of approvals allows the Sub-Committee to fully re-review research in an environment where legislation, guidelines and requirements are continually changing, for example, new child protection and privacy laws).

4. All amendments to the project must be reviewed and approved by the Sub-Committee before implementation. Please complete and submit a Request for Amendment Form available at the following website:

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how\\_to\\_obtain\\_ethics\\_approval/human\\_research\\_ethics/forms](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/forms)

5. Please notify the Sub-Committee immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.

6. At all times you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research in accordance with the guidelines established by the University. This information is available at the following websites:

<http://www.mq.edu.au/policy>

[http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how\\_to\\_obtain\\_ethics\\_approval/human\\_research\\_ethics/policy](http://www.research.mq.edu.au/for/researchers/how_to_obtain_ethics_approval/human_research_ethics/policy)

If you will be applying for or have applied for internal or external funding for the above project it is your responsibility to provide the Macquarie University's Research Grants Management Assistant with a copy of this email as soon as possible. Internal and External funding agencies will not be informed that you have approval for your project and funds will not be released until the Research Grants Management Assistant has received a copy of this email.

If you need to provide a hard copy letter of approval to an external organisation as evidence that you have approval, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Secretariat at the address below.

Please retain a copy of this email as this is your official notification of ethics approval.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Peter Roger

Chair

Faculty of Human Sciences Ethics Review Sub-Committee

Human Research Ethics Committee

### Appendix 3: Subject Information Statement



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**Title of the project: Multilingualism at the Chinese-Burmese Border**

You are invited to participate in a study of multilingualism at the Chinese-Burmese border. The purpose of the study is to explore how people living in the border region learn and use Chinese and other languages.

The study is being conducted by Jia Li in fulfilment of a PhD in Applied Linguistics within the Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Human Sciences in Macquarie University. Professor Ingrid Piller from the Department of Linguistics is the principal supervisor. Contact details for further information are as follows:

Jia Li (researcher)

Ph. +61(2)98507425

Email: [jia.li14@students.mq.edu.au](mailto:jia.li14@students.mq.edu.au)

Ingrid Piller (principal supervisor)

Ph. +61 (2) 98507674

Email: [ingrid.piller@mq.edu.au](mailto:ingrid.piller@mq.edu.au)

As the research findings will contribute to the completion of a PhD thesis, participants in this research will not be involved in any other studies.

Jia Li is interested in which languages you speak and how you learnt them. If you decide to participate, Jia Li would like to interview you. If you agree, Jia Li would set up an interview with you at a place of your choice at your convenient time and the questions will broadly include: which languages you speak, how you learnt them and other observations about multilingualism you would like to share. The duration of the interview is expected to be from 20 minutes to one hour. For research purposes, Jia Li would like to audio record the interview with your permission.

Jia Li is also interested in observing the ways you speak with your people while you are playing together or doing group work. Therefore, she would also like to ask for your consent

to record some of your conversations in the school. If you agree, Jia Li might ask to record your



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conversations during convenient times such as group work. You can always say no later if the timing is not convenient.

Any information or personal details gathered in the course of the study are confidential. Code names will be made on all data records, analysis and publications. Nobody can be identified in any presentation or publication of findings.

Digital audio recorded data will be downloaded as electronic files and stored on a password protected computer in the researcher's office and home. Only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data.

You can request a review of any quotes that will be attributed to you by contacting the researcher and supervisor on the phones and emails listed above.

If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from further participation in the research at any time without having to give a reason and without consequences.

The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee (Human Research). If you have any complaints or reservations about any ethical aspect of your participation in this research, you may contact the Ethics Review Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (phone: 61 2 9850 7854, fax: 61 9850 8799, email: [ethics@mq.edu.au](mailto:ethics@mq.edu.au) ). Or should you wish to confirm the researcher's identity in China or express any concern, you may contact xxx, Principal of BHS, Ruili, China (phone: +86-xxx). Any complaint you make will be treated in confidentiality and investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.



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### 参与者信息陈述

#### 项目名称: 中缅边境多语研究

尊敬的参与者：

您好！

诚邀您参与“中缅边境多语研究”课题的调查活动。本课题旨在研究中缅边境地区人们如何学习和使用汉语以及其它语言。

本课题为澳大利亚麦考瑞大学人文学院语言学系博士研究生李佳的语言学博士学位研究项目，并由麦考瑞大学语言学系 Ingrid Piller 教授指导。

联系方式如下：

李佳            电话：+61 (2) 98507425      电邮：[jia.li14@students.mq.edu.au](mailto:jia.li14@students.mq.edu.au)

Ingrid Piller    电话：+61 (2) 98507674      电邮：[Ingrid.piller@mq.edu.au](mailto:Ingrid.piller@mq.edu.au)

如您愿意参与此项研究，我将就您的语言使用和学习情况做相关的调查。首先李佳对您进行访谈，就您方便的时间和地点向您询问一些问题，诸如：您讲哪些语言，您是如何掌握这些语言的以及使用不同语言的经历。根据具体情况，每次访谈时间可能为 20 分钟到 1 个小时之间。如果您同意，我将对我们的访谈进行录音，以便方便记录研究。



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同时，李佳对您的语言互动活动感兴趣，希望能对您和朋友交流以及小组活动时使用的语言进行现场录音。参与的目的在于了解您和他人的语言互动的方式。参与的过程中，任何时候您都可以自由决定退出。

如果您同意，访谈将被录音以便妥善保存。访谈过程收集的所有信息及个人资料将严格保密并不向任何个人或机构泄露。只有研究者本人及其导师能使用资料。所有资料将安全存于研究者电脑里。录音资料将在论文结题五年后销毁。研究者在发表科研成果时将使用假名代替真名，并且采用其他相关措施以确保您的真实身份不被暴露。

该项目已获得麦考瑞大学科研道德审核委员会（人文类研究）的审批。如您对参与此研究的调查活动有任何科研道德方面的不满或保留意见，可通过道德审核委员会秘书反映（电话 +61 2 9850 7854；电邮：[ethics@mq.edu.au](mailto:ethics@mq.edu.au)）。如您需确认研究者的身

份或了解有关情况，可与 BHS 校长 xxx 联系（电话 +86 xxx）。您的意见将予以保密并调查，调查结果会向您告知。

## Appendix 4: Guiding questions for individual and focus group interviews



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### Multilingualism at the Chinese-Burmese Border

#### Interview Guide

Interviews will be conducted in an informal and semi-formal manner and are intended to be semi-structured. The following is a list of the central questions that interviews are intended to explore. The overall focus is on participants' linguistic repertoires, their experiences of language learning and use, and their language attitudes

#### General questions

1. Which languages do you speak?
2. How did you learn these languages?
3. Which languages do you use where and with whom on a normal weekday?
4. Can you tell me about good experiences you've had associated with speaking your languages?
5. Can you tell me about bad experiences you've had associated with speaking your languages?

#### Group-specific questions

##### Teachers

Can you tell me about language-related challenges you face in your teaching?

##### Parents

1. Can you tell me about language-related challenges you face in your parenting?
2. How does your language situation affect your child's schooling?
3. What are your hopes for your child's language learning and future education?

##### Students

1. What's your favourite subject?
2. Have you ever found you can't understand what your teacher is saying? What do you do when that happens? How does it make you feel?

Have you ever found you can't understand what your classmates are saying? What do you do when that happens? How does it make you feel?