

Field of Play:
The “Rise of Xinjiang Youth Football” in Late-socialist China

by

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Abstract

Why do ethnic minority groups play or not play football? The answers might be different depending on specific socio-cultural contexts. This thesis concentrates on the Uyghurs and the Kazakhs from Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China. By situating the diverse participants (young footballers, coaches, parents, government cadres in charge of sports, and fans, etc.) in the late-socialist China where marketization led by state domination and appeal to nationalism, this thesis seeks to answer the major research question: How do ethnic relation, state governance, and social mobility shape the discourse or phenomenon, which I call, the “rise of Xinjiang youth football”?

As empirical data in this thesis illustrate, the “field of play” is not just the pitch where the youth play football; rather, it might be seen as the field where grassroots of ethnic minority groups and the state compete, compromise or cooperate for defining identities and values; furthermore, it might be the Bourdieusian social field, in which ethnic minority youths, as agents, involve in football and aim of converting their capitals for achieving upwards social mobility.

By jointly analysing discourses and practice related to ethnic relation, nationalism and marketizing in Xinjiang youth football, this thesis argues that while China’s authoritarian sport officials selectively embrace logics of marketization and competition to ease ethnic tensions and to seek regional stability in Xinjiang, the popularization of football reflects and contributes to public debates on inequalities existing betwixt classes and ethnic groups.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Perhaps, all stories in this research were initiated in 1997. In that year, Hong Kong was returned to China, and many Chinese believed that the national humiliation in the past a hundred years was finally wiped out. In that year, the “chief designer of the Reform” Deng Xiaoping passed away. Many Chinese sighed that Deng could not catch up to witness the Handover of Hong Kong, and they also recalled to mind that it was Deng who had made the crucial decision that had changed many of their lives. It was also in that year, the CCP (China Communist Party) held its 15th National Congress, and the new leadership delivered a report titled “Hold High the Great Banner of Deng Xiaoping Theory for an All-Round Advancement of the Cause of Building Socialism with Chinese Characteristics into the twenty-first Century”. For many Chinese, at least in state narrative, 1997 was a year of pride, honour and hope. Although not everyone knew what Chinese Nationalism was or what “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” was, most of the ordinary Chinese were inspired by the Party’s optimistic narrative. Dreaming to have more wealth, more happiness, and more respect, they were ready to enter the new century.

However, for some other Chinese citizens who were living in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), 1997 was a year of bitterness. In the beginning of that year, in the city of Ghulja, a youth football tournament was suppressed by the local authority, giving rise to subsequent series of demonstrations that eventually led to the Ghulja incident.¹ After that incident, XUAR strengthened its governance and ethnic relations were once highly strained (Dautcher 1999; Chen 2009; Finley 2013). In the end of that year, China men’s national football team failed in the Asian section of the 1998 FIFA World Cup qualification, losing to four Mid-East teams in the same group.² Although there is seemingly no correlation between the two things, for some of

¹ Ghulja is Yining (伊寧) in Chinese. The Ghulja incident was the culmination of the Ghulja protests of 1997, a series of demonstrations in the city of Ghulja, the capital city of Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture of XUAR, beginning and soon being suppressed in early February 1997. The Ghulja incident is still in mist, for few documents have been released and there exist diverse interpretations on its cause and casualties. Yet, as some informants in this research recalled, it was a youth football tournament that sparked this incident. The significance of the Ghulja incident for this research will be examined in chapter 5.

² Four teams in the same group with China were Iran, the Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Qatar. The four teams then were named “West Asian wolves” by Chinese media.

our informants in this thesis, the significance of the two things means far more than the Handover of Hong Kong, Deng Xiaoping's death, or the Party's 15th national congress.

On an ordinary winter day of 1997, the 27-year-old Kazakh physical education teacher, Keran, went into the office of the local Sports Bureau Director.³ Four years ago, Keran, the former Xinjiang youth football team member, had completed his refresher course at the regional normal college, and returned from the capital Urumqi to his hometown Altay in North Xinjiang. As a retired footballer, Keran organized a student football team in his own workplace, Altay N Middle School. Since then, this team, representing Altay Prefecture, had been participating in the annual regional youth football championship. Yet in the end of 1997, all governmental agencies in XUAR, including schools, were still carrying out "political studies" after the Ghulja incident, and football had somehow become a taboo topic. Keran worried that his team would be disbanded. Thanks to many people's efforts, leaders of the local Sports Bureau and the middle school that he worked for finally agreed to Keran's proposal, allowing him to continue recruiting students and training in the next summer. Then anxious Keran never expected that, twenty years later, he would become the first Chinese Kazakh grassroots football coach, who passed through the national selection and was sent to Manchester, England, to receive high-level – "maybe the best" as he said – youth football coaches training.

On another ordinary winter day of 1997, Beglan, one of Keran's student who was in senior middle school grade two, came into Keran's office with a piece of paper in his hands. That was the well-known sport paper *Football*, printed several weeks ago in Guangzhou. What caught this Kazakh young boy's eyes was a short article in the commentary column. The author blamed the state football governors why not to cultivate more Xinjiang ethnic minority footballers. The article argued that the men's national football team lost to West Asian opponents, like Iran and the Saudi Arabia, but there was still a hope. As this article suggested, since Xinjiang was closed to the Mid-East area and Xinjiang ethnic minorities were physically like Western Asian, if the national team would recruit some of Xinjiang ethnic minorities footballers, China would be able to defeat those Mid-East competitors in the future. Beglan could not agree with this article more so

³ For the sake of protecting informants' identity, all names of informants are pseudonyms and detailed information about the informants' school affiliation is not given, except for well-known public figures.

that he recommended this paper to Keren, hoping to hear his coach's opinion. The then aggressive Beglan never had thought that, twenty years later, he could become a football coach in one of the biggest professional clubs of China at a developed coastal province. And he would not expect that, twenty year later, more people believe in the "Xinjiang ethnic minority's physical superiority", while he himself was not a supporter of that view any more.

In the same winter, Parhat, who was one of Keran's former teammates in Xinjiang youth football team, was preparing the last matches in season 1997. The failure of the national team was indeed frustrating, but Parhat was more concerned about his own career. In the last year, he was transferred from a club in the superior league to the present club in the second league, because he rarely had opportunities to play in a match in the former club. As the only one Uyghur professional footballer in the 1990s, Parhat could not understand that there were so many Uyghur kids fond of playing football on the street, why there was only one staff member working in the Xinjiang Football Association (XFA), and that only staff member was in fact his father. And he could not understand why only he himself could go out of Xinjiang and enter a professional club. The then perplexed Parhat had never expected that, twenty years later, he could be one of the coach staff in China national U19 football team, and there would be four Xinjiang ethnic minority footballers in this team.

One of the four Xinjiang footballers in U19 national team was born in 1999. His name is Erpan Ezimjan. Surely, in 1997, this then unborn Uyghur boy would not have known that he would score a goal twenty years later while representing China, and his wonderful barb and his celebration movement after that goal would provoke another round of public debate on "Xinjiang ethnic minority's physical superiority" (Figure 1-1). Besides, he had never expected that he would have yet to get a contract with any professional club in his nineteen even though his goal has surprised many Chinese fans.

Figure 1-1 Erpan Ezimjan (No. 13 in Red) Wonderful Barb on Panda Cup Tournament 2017. Photo: Osport.



Source: CCTV (央視網). 2017. “葉爾凡驚天倒鉤 U19 國青 1-4 匈牙利國青” (Erpan Wonderful Barb China U19 Loses to Hungary 1-4). At

<http://sports.cctv.com/2017/05/17/PHOAnml7oDRUcNk9jFkjIgoY170517.shtml#4hUwWVe7ufgWg4170517> accessed 6 June 2017.

Two of the above four footballers are my informants. I extract fragments from their life in the past two decades between 1997 and 2017, trying to outline a transformation. Football used to be a forgotten or even forbidden sport from the perspective of Xinjiang government. Now it turns out to be a part of the “China Dream”, the symbol of ethnic unity and social harmony, and the prospect and the approach for many ethnic minority youth and their families to increase domestic income and win respect. If anyone visits Xinjiang, it would not take long time for them to notice and witness the enthusiasm of local people on football (Figure 1-2; Figure 1-3). Via the perspective of football, this thesis tries to examine the situation of Xinjiang under the late-socialist China.

Figure 1-2: A Group of Boys Were Playing Football in the Old Town, Kashgar City



Source: Shot by author. July 2015. The Old Town, Kashgar City, Kashgar Prefecture, Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR).

Figure 1-3: Riding His Horse into Sayram Lake, A Boy was Trying to Pick up His Football Kicked into the Lake



Source: Shot by author. July 2015. Sayram Lake, Bole City, Bortala Mongol Autonomous Prefecture, XUAR. Two photos were shot in the same journey before I conduct my fieldwork.

Following sections of this chapter will give readers a broad review. The first section introduces the target phenomenon of this thesis, the “rise of Xinjiang youth football”, with basic introduction on its social background. The second section gives research questions and defines the scope and significance of this study. As the part of literature review, the third section gives a theoretical and methodological fundament of this thesis. The forth section introduces field sites and major target groups of my informants: Kazakh and Uyghur football boys and their coaches, who live and receive trainings in regular schools of North Xinjiang and South Xinjiang, and in a professional football school of Guangdong Province. The last section presents the organization of the whole thesis.

1.1 The Phenomenon: “Rise of the Xinjiang Youth Football”

Chinese athletes have remarkably won numerous world titles and Olympic medals in many sports since the reform era that began in 1978, and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has been one of the most dominant countries in recent editions of summer Olympic Games since 2000. Thus, many Chinese are proud of their national achievements on the world sport stage. However, football, especially men’s football, has awkwardly no connection with those honours.⁴

After establishment of the professional football league in 1994, men’s football became one of the earliest marketized sports in the PRC. For last two decades, men’s professional footballers earn much more than other Chinese athletes. Yet, improved income does not bring improved national teams’ competition performance. After the first and only once qualification for the final tournament of the FIFA World Cup in 2002, Chinese football declined due to many reasons, in-

⁴ In this thesis, I choose “football” to refer to the sport, also known as association football or soccer, that is different from American football, to ensure the consistence with current appellation *zúqiú* (足球) in China.

Football in this research refers to the sport that is widely recognized as formed in England in the mid-nineteenth century. This sport is now under control by its international governing body the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). In the history of mankind, although there exist many forms of sports that employs the legs and feet in tough tussles for the ball in many other places of the world (for instance, *cuju* 蹴鞠 in ancient China), only the association football has become the world’s favourite game (FIFA n.d. a). It is still unclear and controversial whether *cuju* in ancient China had influenced the origin of the modern football (Liu 2003; Zhang, Zhang and Wang 2007). In this thesis, I draw on some Chinese scholars’ opinions that *cuju* had already been extinct during Yuan Dynasty (1279–1368) and had nothing to do with the modern football (Lan and Xing 2008).

cluding top-level officials' corruption in the football governing body, widespread match-fixing and players' gambling in the league, and the drain of young talents in the grassroots. On the one hand, many Chinese view other players' triumphs as national glories. On the other hand, some fans feel the depression of football as a national humiliation and critiques have always been flooding the public debate (Xu 2008a:217; Xu 2008b).

Just as the anxiety about China football spread in the first decade of the twenty-first century, there was a remarkable new trend arising in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR), China. Since around 2011, the mainstream mass media and social media started to extensively cover Xinjiang football, with the focus on three aspects: (1) Ethnic minority players, represented by Mirahmetjan Muzepper, Bari Mohamedali, Erjet Erzat and Erpan Ezimjan, from Xinjiang have been selected to China national teams, winning the opportunity to play and even scoring goals; (2) Xinjiang eventually has its own professional football club, and has begun to compete in the China League One (CL1); (3) Primary school and middle school students from Xinjiang, representing China, have made impressive achievements in international competitions, and sometimes even defeated opponents by gap sided scores (Urban Morning 2013; Beijing Youth Daily 2013; Xinhua 2015a; Xinhua 2015b; Wenweipo 2015).⁵ These media reports easily give the public an impression that Xinjiang youngsters, especially Uyghur and Kazakh, love playing football and seem to be very good at playing football. The media were screaming that, “‘Xinjiang Force’ Amazingly Rises” (*Xinjiang Liliang jingyan jueqi*, “新疆力量”驚艷崛起), and “Xinjiang football talents suddenly rush out overnight” (*Xinjiang zuqiu ziyuan fangruo zai yiyezhijian turan jingpen*, 新疆足球資源仿若在一夜之間突然井噴) (Southern Metropolis Daily 2011; Wenweipo 2015).

This discourse or phenomenon, what has been called “the rise of Xinjiang youth football” (*Xinjiang qingshaonian zuqiu de jueqi*, 新疆青少年足球的崛起), currently causes heated public debates in China. Fans out of Xinjiang, or “inland” (*Neidi*, 內地), are surprised at the “physical

⁵ China League One, also known as Chinese Football Association China League (中國足球甲級聯賽), is the second division of Chinese professional football system. The Xinjiang team that currently participates in CL1 is Tianshan Leopard (天山雪豹). Urban Morning (都市消費早報) is a Xinjiang local newspaper, as a subsidiary under control by XUAR party newspaper.

quality” (*Shenti suzhi*, 身體素質) of Xinjiang youth; some of them were impressed by those enthusiastic Xinjiang youth born in poor families; and some of them blame national sport governing department why it has ignored those talents of Chinese football for such a long time.⁶ Xinjiang fans, including Hans and ethnic minorities, are proud of their young fellows: some of them insist that Xinjiang young players with their “natural gifts” and zeal for football should have been selected into China national teams (Figure 1-4); some of them call the state provide more preferential policies to support, and appeal to entrepreneurs for investment on Xinjiang football; and some of them ask for a more equal environment for Xinjiang ethnic minority players, for they believe that their fellow players have been squeezed out by Han coaches, teammates and managers. Beyond the passion, some people, no matter whether they are from Xinjiang or *neidi*, choose to be cool bystanders: some question the true competence of Xinjiang football, they wonder why most of those gifted youth in the end give up their footballer career or, for those luckier ones, turn to mediocre adult players; Some blame that the conceptional backwardness of Xinjiang sports authorities for not following the market causes the waste of talents; some of them critique that some entrepreneurs’ motivation to “care” for Xinjiang football is nothing but aiming to commercial interests; and some of them avoid participating in sensational debate, but go deep into the grassroots to film documentaries. By this way, they claim to show the true picture of Xinjiang football (The Paper 2017). In these noises, the teenagers themselves, their parents and coaches are the most silent groups, who rarely come out to speak their words.

⁶ Literally, “*neidi*” might be translated as “inland”. However, in this research for people who live in XUAR, “*neidi*” (内地) refers to the huge area constituted by over twenty developed coastal and developing inland provinces of the PRC, where Han Chinese dominate. For respecting daily facts, I choose Xinjiang local informants’ original word “*neidi*” to refer to other Chinese provinces out of Xinjiang.

Figure 1-4: Passionate Fans of Xinjiang Football



Source: Tianshan (天山網). 2015a. 中國足球的希望 新疆青少年足球近年發展回顧 (The Hope of China Football: A Review of Xinjiang Youth Football in Recent Years) At http://news.ts.cn/content/2015-01/27/content_10958934.htm accessed 8 December 2015. Maybe inspired by those youths' heartening performance, some passionate fans with great prides put a slogan bar at Urumqi Ergong Stadium that is the home venue for Xinjiang Tianshan Leopard, saying in both Chinese and English at "Only Xinjiang could help China football".⁷

Should we keep a distance from ordinary fans enthusiasm and examine current debates on "the rise of Xinjiang Youth Football" in an extended social context, we will find a big complexity. Within the PRC, the multi-ethnic state, most of Han Chinese and Xinjiang ethnic minorities lack the opportunity to interact with each other in daily life. Xinjiang is a distant and mysterious place for the majority, while *neidi* provinces may not be mysterious but still far away for many of the ethnic minorities who had little chances to go out of Xinjiang. Many of Han Chinese easily fall into the pattern of "Internal Orientalism" to view their ethnic minority fellow citizen as exotic people (Schein 2000). At the same time, such "Othering" practice and discourses have also

⁷ It is worth to note that there are two Chinese characters beside Xinjiang, saying "homeland". It is difficult for us to tell which ethnic group two fans holding the slogan bar belong to. Yet, I find that, based on fieldwork experience, many ethnic fans, including Uyghur, Hans, Kazakh and Hui, agree on the opinion that Xinjiang could contribute greatly to China football.

been applied to understanding of the Han Chinese societies by some ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.

In recent years, for many Chinese, Xinjiang is not only a distant and mysterious place, but is more like a synonym of “chaos” or “danger”. Xinjiang society, in the party-state narrative, has been facing huge pressures of “the Three Evil Forces” since the 1990s.⁸ And the primary political task for party cadres of Xinjiang is “*weiwen*” (maintaining stability) after the July 2009 Urumqi riot.⁹ Some journalists have observed a new trend in China society that the Chinese public’s fear and hatred influenced by both domestic and international situation is causing an anti-Muslim sentiment over China’s social media scene (Lüqiu 2016; Mu 2016). As no surprise, this “Islamophobia” leads to the Han Chinese stigmatizing specific ethnic minorities in northwest China, especially Uyghur and Hui (Liu 2016). Meanwhile, many of the Xinjiang ethnic minority groups feel annoyed and depressed for such negative tagging on themselves. And some of them, especially educated youth, use respective ways trying to reverse the mainstream social misunderstanding.¹⁰

⁸ The Three Evils are defined by the Chinese government as "terrorism, separatism and religious extremism". The phrase is frequently used when referring to counter-terrorism operations undertaken by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), a Eurasian political, economic, and military organization which was founded in 2001 in Shanghai by the leaders of China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. This term is controversial. Some scholars think the authority selectively ignores poverty in the public debate; instead they emphasize that terrorism, together with separatism and religious fundamentalism, constitutes one of “three evils,” which, in its view, are all inter-connected threats to China’s national security and regional stability (Chung 2006).

⁹ “*weiwen*”, as “維穩” in Chinese, refers to maintaining stability.

The July 2009 Urumqi riots were a series of violent riots over several days that broke out on 5 July 2009 in Urumqi, the capital city of Xinjiang. The first day's rioting, which involved at least 1,000 Uyghurs, began as a protest but escalated into violent attacks that mainly targeted Han people. People's Armed Police were deployed, and two days later hundreds of Han people clashed with both police and Uyghurs (Xinhua 2009).

¹⁰ There are many such cases, especially in mass media, arts and sports. There are evidences of official supports behind some of these actions. For instance, Kurbanjan Samat (2015), a Uyghur photographer, takes pictures of people from Xinjiang - and hopes his work will break down barriers amid the minds of many Chinese people. There are other examples that good intention has the opposite effect. For example, A Uyghur celebrity’s opposition to the new name (“feizhu” in Chinese, meaning “flying pig”) of a travel platform launched by China’s largest online commerce company Alibaba, which he called “hurts Muslim

Since 2013, the new Chinese leadership has promoted the “Belt and Road” initiative, which will make Xinjiang one of crucial region affected. In the realm of football, the new leader President Xi Jinping (Figure 1-5) has made no secret of his passion for the sport and expressed wishes for Chinese football with very detailed objectives (South China Morning Post 2014; Xinhua 2015c; The New York Times 2017). As interpreted in some media, to achieve “football dream” is a part of to achieve “China Dream” for Chinese government (The Wall Street Journal 2016; Xinhua 2017b). Then in 2015, the General Office of the State Council (2015) printed and issued the Comprehensive Plan for Football Reform and Development in China, which signified that further reform of football as a national level strategy. As a part of this strategy, in the same year, six state ministries and administrations, including the Ministry of Education (MoE 2015a; MoE 2015b) and the State General Sports Administration (GAS), jointly issued guiding opinions on accelerating the development of youth football in schools. It means that the “School Campaign” is officially launched nationwide.

Figure 1-5: Xi Jinping, then China's vice-president, kicks a football during a 2012 visit to Croke Park in Dublin, Ireland. Photo: Reuters.



Source: South China Morning Post. 2014. “Beijing Makes Big Play to Realise Xi Jinping's Dream for Football Greatness.” At <http://www.scmp.com/news/china/article/1657332/beijing-boost-football-xi-jinpings-favourite-sport-100000-students-three> accessed 16 December 2014.

sentiments”. Yet, the public mostly criticize this Uyghur celebrity, for they argued that “religious notions should not interfere with the secular matters” (Global Times 2016a).

Some people in the Xinjiang football circle hence believe that since Xinjiang is important in the “Belt and Road” strategy and so many reports have manifested the national leader’s determination on supporting football, thus, many resources would be introduced to XUAR, so that the “Golden Age” for not only Xinjiang football, but also China football, is eventually coming.

Xinjiang, the China’s Muslim borderland, the crucial region in national strategies and the negatively tagged region in eyes of many Han Chinese, unexpectedly entered the public debate via football. In the past decade, a series of social incidents on Xinjiang and national strategic policies emerged simultaneously with the “rise of Xinjiang youth football” (Table 1-1). Would it be a coincident? Or was there any causal connection? It is true that humanities and social science need to find out the consequences of historic facts. Yet, it is more important to note that, in this research, most discussants’ habitual thinking pattern is still dualistic when they discuss Xinjiang football. This dualistic pattern, as I note at least, includes *neidi* versus Xinjiang, the central government versus the local government, Han Chinese versus ethnic minorities, secularization versus religion, Muslim versus non-Muslim, etc. I doubt whether this dualistic narrative could help us, or in contrast, prevent us from seeing the whole picture and the essence of the problem.

1.2 The Research: Questions, Scope and Significance

This thesis proposes that it is important to explore the “rise of Xinjiang youth football” in China’s “late-socialism”. By “late-socialism” I draw on argument of Zhang Li (2001), refers to that China is undergoing a profound transformation under multiple socioeconomic forces: accelerating marketization and privatization, entrenchment of global capital, and lingering socialist institutions and practices. For the purpose of this thesis, I understand those socioeconomic forces in late-socialist China as a set of narratives, practices, governance, policies, and techniques that seek to extend the principle of state-nationalism, ethno-nationalism, state governance, marketization and meritocracy into the realms of Xinjiang youth football. All these forces result in ideas of aggression and utilitarianism in the realm of football, which overly emphasize competition and efficiency while neglect the social inequality.

Existing literatures of social sciences and humanities on Xinjiang emphasize several groups of conceptions, including ethnic minorities and the state, ethnic identities and Chinese nationalism, and accumulation and resistance, etc. (Yee 2003; Starr 2004; Bovingdon 2010; Finley 2013).

Table 1-1: General Chronology of Related Events

Events Year	State	Xinjiang	China football	Xinjiang football
2002			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> China men's national team qualified in FIFA World Cup 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Song Qingling Football School established in Urumqi
2005			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Found of CSL Company 	
2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beijing Olympic Games 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The film, <i>Maimaiti's 2008</i>, released to the public
2009		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shaoguan incident; July 2009 Urumqi riots 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anti-corruption campaign of CFA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uyghur player Mirahmetjan Muzepper selected in the national youth team
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Province-to-preecture Aid Program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Zhang Chunxian starts his governing in Xinjiang with his "soft tactics" 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bari Mohamedali played in Zhejiang FC in CSL, as the first Uyghur football players to kicked goal on the Asian Champion League; Bari and Mirahmetjan were selected to the national Olympic team
2011		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> XUAR released youth football project 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guangzhou Evergrande first won the champion of CSL 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domestic media started to report Xinjiang youth football
2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New Chinese leadership came to power 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Xinjiang men's football team got the forth on the National Games;
2013		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2013 Tiananmen Square suicide attack April 2013 Bachu unrest 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guangzhou Evergrande first won Asian Champion League 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Urumqi No.5 Primary School team won national shool football cup champion, then defeated South Korean and Janpanese teams in an international youth football tournament and won the champion; the "Silk Road Football Birthplace" monument built in Artush First Xinjiang professional football team kicked off in CLO;
2014		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2014 Kunming attack; April 2014 Urumqi attack; May 2014 Urumqi attack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Men's national team disqualified for FIFA world Cup Final for latest three times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kazakh player Erjet Erzat selected to the National Olympic team, then signed a contract with Portuguese club, became the first one Xinjiang football player who kicked in European professional league
2015		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The State Council printed and issued the Comprehensive Plan for Football Reform and Development in China 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guangzhou Evergrande won its second Asian champion in the Asian Champion League; "School Football Campaign" initiated nationwide 	
2016		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chen Quanguo started to govern Xinjiang, strengthed "social stability" policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guangzhou Evergrande won its sixth CSL champion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Xinjiang Youth team defeated national youth team; 25 Xinjiang players were playing in domestic and international professional leagues, this number was 1 during the whole 1990s.
2017		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Belt and Road Summit 		

These studies have provided crucial anthropological understandings of state power in complex contemporary Xinjiang society, but we still know little about how social domains such as schools, families, discourses and other social institutions function in everyday life of specific realm such as football. The term “governmentality” with its art and strategies of governing practices that aims to shape, guide and affect the mind and conduct of persons is worthy of our note and useful in this research (Foucault 1991; Zhang 2001). Some of governmentalities such as the disciplines of human bodies and regulations of students’ *suzhi* (quality, 素質), as following chapters will illustrate, have already been applied in Xinjiang youth football to produce its participants best suited to fulfil the governments’ policies (Brownell 1996; Zhang 2014b). Therefore, Xinjiang youth football is not just a game but a mirror that reflects how ethnicity, identity, power and market intertwine and reform the state-society relationship. In this sense, this thesis could be read as an ethnography of changing Xinjiang state-society relationship under late-socialism.

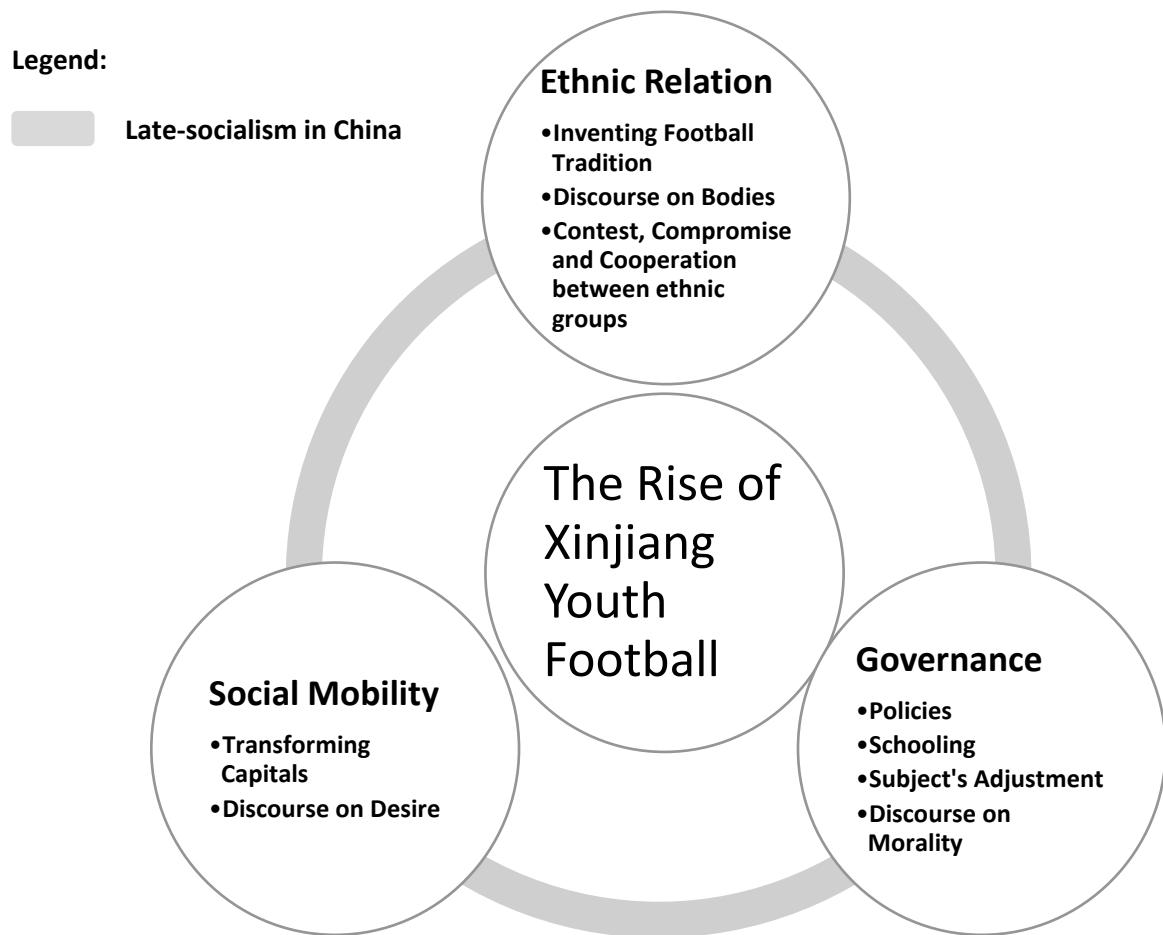
More specifically, this thesis plans to provide an ethnographic perspective to examine what conditions shape “the rise of Xinjiang youth football”. Why do various ethnic minority subjects (young players, parents, coaches, teachers, and officials) participate in football? What did they do in their acting process? What conceptional images and social consequences have their practice led to?

Then, one of objectives of this thesis is to explore whether it is state power that is driving the development of football in Xinjiang. If it is so, what is the mechanism? If it is not, what are the driving forces? In the case of local youth football, how do various subjects handle their relationships with state power? Furthermore, in the process of involving football, what is the relation between the central and the local, between the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities, and between ethnic minorities?

In the end, this thesis seeks to discuss how the pursuit of social mobility through marketization of football is related to the changing state-society relationship in Xinjiang under late-socialism. As the key subject, why some youngsters have chosen to pursue a professional career while some have not? How have their agencies been shaped and affected by state power via football? And in return, in what way have these subjects normalized the practice of state power? Or is there any other reaction they have applied to? And how does this process of interaction between subjects and state power embody China’s late-socialist governmentality?

This thesis plans to initiate the discussion above from three interrelated layers (Figure 1-6): (1) Ethnic relation; (2) State governance; (3) Social mobility. And the discourses and practice of multiple late-socialist socioeconomic forces, as this thesis will illustrate, is like a hidden chain that runs through the three layers.¹¹ They constitute the major research question of this thesis: How do ethnic relation, state governance, and social mobility produce the “rise of Xinjiang youth football” in the late-socialist China?

Figure 1-6: Visualized Framework on this Research



¹¹ In this research, the author uses “discourse” as an analytical category which differs from “ideology” (*yishi xingtai*, 意識形態), which as Susan Brownell (1995: 23-24) took to refer to what the Chinese in the PRC recognize as politicized discourses distinguished from everyday speech. In the context of current China, politicized discourses are mostly presented via the state-run media, and usually concentrate on debate between Communism/Socialism and Capitalism.

Thus, it might explain why the author gives “Field of Play” as the title of this thesis. As empirical data in this thesis illustrate, the “Field of Play” is not just the pitch where the youth play football; Rather, it might be seen as the field where grassroots of ethnic minority groups and the state compete, compromise and cooperate for defining identities and values; Furthermore, it might be the Bourdieusian social field, in which ethnic minority youths, as agents, involve in football and aim of converting their capitals for achieving upwards social mobility (Agergaard and Sørensen 2010:73).

It is necessary to note that this research is not a panoramic anthropological review to Xinjiang youth football. The reason is that, first, the phenomenon of this research is still in its process of transformation. For instance, one of research targets are growing teenagers, thus, further research might need a long-term tracking ethnographic method to collect data, at least, on the youth.

Second, this research leaves out detailed discussions of peripheral participants, including football fans and journalists, though their daily practice and speech are influential for this phenomenon. Nor is this a research about football organization managers, especially managers in professional clubs. Rather it is a study of pre-professional football undertaken within an ethnic region on a national level.

The last but possibly most important reason is about gender. The main sources of force difference analysed in this thesis are ethnicity, state power and class, not including gender. Although I rarely discuss the role of women in Xinjiang youth football, it does not mean that I exclude the significance of gender from this study. In fact, in the studied phenomenon, female are never outsiders, and there are many young girls receiving training in regular schools or local sports schools. Girls football teams also contest in regional football events, and many of these girls have competitive skills and similar enthusiasm like their boy counterparts (Figure 1-7). The local government, as chapter 5 will present, shows equal attitude towards developing girls and boys football, yet, girls’ football has not flourished as boys’ football in Xinjiang. From the public and fans to coaches and male footballers, most of them show different attitudes towards male football players and female footballers in terms of seriousness of their performance and career prospect. These facts make me focus on boys’ football phenomenon, yet the research orientation of this thesis does not mean that I choose to ignore the gender differences existing in Xinjiang.

Figure 1-7: Kashgar Delegation Constituted of Boys and Girls teams on the Victory Ceremony of Regional Youth Football Championship



Source: Shot by author. August 2016. Maralbexi County, Kashgar Prefecture, XUAR. Seven teams participated in girls' event of the regional youth football championship. Kashgar girls' team won the third place in the end.

Existing literature might provide some clues to understand the public's contempt for women's football in Xinjiang. The first factor is academic performance. Chen (2008) found that Xinjiang ethnic minority girls' academic performance at school is much better than their male peers. Thus, parents and teachers pay high expectations on girls' academic prospect, so that studying and entering a college turn to be the core aim for school girls. As a result, the number of girls' football participants is sharply smaller than boys'. The second factor is career expectation. Focusing on gender inequality in Xinjiang employment market, Zang (2002; 2012) points out that though there are no obvious disadvantages on personal ability for female, Uyghur female are significantly less competitive in the job market than Uyghur men, for Uyghur female have less income and job options compared to Uyghur and Han male. Besides, the whole Xinjiang society is comparatively conservative in terms of gender issue, the career expectations of whole society tends to let women stay closed to their families. Therefore, few girls in school plan to take all the risks of training and to be a professional footballer in the future and they, as one Uyghur girl told

me, play football “for pure fun and physique health but not for career.” The third factor is China’s limited female football market. China’s professionalized female football league system was first launched in 1997, but it has never been seriously seen as a counterpart to its male version (Fan and Mangan 2003). In 2017, there are only eight clubs in the female league, while in male’s top two leagues there are thirty-two clubs. More specifically, the amount of market sponsorship, clubs’ investment and footballers’ income in China’s female professional football are greatly less than the male counterpart. In conclusion, when analysing people’s different attitude towards female footballers in the phenomenon of “rise of Xinjiang youth football”, these factors above need to be regarded but they are not the focus of this thesis.

In what follows, I situate research questions as outline above in the larger fields of sport anthropology/sociology and history to briefly discuss how my thinking about these issues has been shaped by existing theoretical literatures.

1.3 Literature Review

For a long time, Chinese anthropological researches on “ethnic minority and sports” have confined to the discussion of “ethnic minority traditional sports”.¹² These discussions have summarized ethnic minority traditional sports in the discipline of “the study of ethnic sports”, or “the ethnology of sports”. One of their research approaches is to study the society and “culture” of specific ethnic groups via investigating their traditional sports (Li 2008). Another approach is to explore an ethnic minority traditional sport as a “cultural heritage”, and to study its “cultural influence” to the reality, for instance, to examine the possibility that a traditional ethnic sport combines with the local education or tourism (Yunnan Social Development Research Centre 1995; Wei et. al. 2012). However, this approach to “culture” is controversial. One notable critique, as Abu-Lughod (1991) argues, is that it reifies differences between ethnic groups, especially be-

¹² In Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy, the article 24 regulates that “the state attaches importance to the inheriting and development of excellent traditional culture of ethnic minorities, regularly host sports games of ethnic minorities and joint performance of ethnic minorities to prosper the cultural and artistic creation of ethnic minorities and enrich the cultural life of people of ethnic minorities” (State Council 2005). Typical Chinese ethnic traditional sports, including wushu, dragon boat, equestrian, fireworks, shuttlecock, swing, cross-bow, peg-top ball and ethnic wrestling, are all official programs in the National Ethnic Minorities Games. Some sports are very popular in specific ethnic minorities.

tween “us” - the anthropological experts - and “them” - the exotic subject, at the same time obscure other differences such as gender and class. I do not intend to apply to this approach to “culture” into this research. This study wants to avoid the dualist trap, one reason is that football is a “modern sport”.¹³ In addition, it should not be ignored that the enormous social transformation under late-socialism is also impacting ethnic minority areas.¹⁴ The bodies of literatures on sports in ethnic regions of the PRC is limited, and among these literatures, empirically grounded research put under late-socialist China are sparse.

To sum up the phenomenon of this study, it would be “a group of ethnic minority youth in Xinjiang who are keen on playing football in the early twenty-first century”. In other words, it is a group of ethnic minority youths who engage in a “modern sport” during China’s post-Mao or late-socialist transformation period. In terms of research questions, I think that it is necessary to review existing bodies of literatures from, at least, two aspects: On theory, to review the relation between “ethnic minorities and sport participation”; On ethnography, to review existing anthropological empirical research on state-sport-individual relationship in late-socialist China. For initiating our discussion, a simple and feasible entry point might be to ask why ethnic minorities play football.

1.3.1 Why Do Ethnic Minorities Play or not Play?

Sports sociology tends to regard “sports participation”, or “sports involvement”, as one of the most common social phenomena in the modern society, and one of the means for its social members to learn or teach the social norm, tradition and ideology (Xu 2008c). Besides sociologists, many anthropologists and historians also contribute rich bodies of literature on interpreting the relation between ethnic minority and sport participation. Some of this literature examine the

¹³ Draw on Susan Brownell’s definition (1995:31), “modern sports” are sports whose “rules moved toward standardization across national boundaries in the second half of the nineteenth century”, and most of these sports trace their present form to roots in Northern and Western Europe, especially England. “These sports include, for example football, track and field, tennis, boxing, wrestling, and so on. Basketball, baseball, and volleyball were North American inventions intentionally derived from the English model”. In addition, for most part, those “modern sports” are or have been on the Olympic program.

¹⁴ As Guan (2002) argued that the contemporary transformation of Chinese society does not synchronize in the social and cultural aspects for the ethnic minorities: the impact upon the social transformation of the ethnic minorities probably brings the possibility of cultural adaptation, nevertheless it also causes clash and resistance.

motivation of ethnic minorities to involve in sports (Lin 2010; Agergaard and Sørensen 2010); some explore the historical context of the development of a sport within an ethnic minority community (Lin 2010; Bandyopadhyay 2010; Njororai 2010); some focus on the formulation and implementation of ethnic and sports policies from the state level (Riordan 1977; Riordan 1991; Brownell 1995). Why do various ethnic minority subjects (young players, parents, coaches, teachers, and officials) like to participate in football? If this question is the starting point of this study, the existing body of literature could provide many inspirations. Their explanations, as I outline in this section, could be divided into five dimensions, which also, to some extent, reflect how different people, including the grassroots, the academia, and governors of the state, understand related issues.

Race

The typical logic of this theory is that ethnic minority people are born with gifted physical and/or genic conditions, therefore they are born to dominate in certain sports. However, as Coakley (1998:250) critiques, the fundamental problem of this theory is the confusion created by people when using *race* and *ethnicity* interchangeably as they deal with issue related to human behaviour. According to him, “*race* focuses on biologically based traits and characteristics, while the definition of *ethnicity* focuses on culturally based orientations and behaviours” (Coakley 1998:250).

In both history and reality, the ideology of race has always been linked with sports. The tendency to explain the achievement of athletes by skin colour is firmly grounded in Western racial ideology. In Western world, this ideology emphasizes racial difference, like skin colour, and leads to the tendency that people forget history and culture and continue to explain the achievement of athletes by biology (Coakley 1998: 254).¹⁵ In many contemporary Western countries, society has been much friendlier to *coloured people*, but the ideology of race with altered narrative still exists in sport. Take the United States as the example, the current tendency is that

¹⁵ The most notorious case applied to the ideology of race occurred in Nazi Germany. At that time, the Hitler regime was ready to use the 1936 Berlin Olympics to trumpet its “Aryan superiority theory”. American track and field athlete Jesse Owens won four gold medals and effectively struck back the “Aryan superiority theory”, but ironically, his superior athletic performance deepened the anxiety and fear among some westerners against *coloured people* (Kass 1976).

fewer people believe that the white people are physically superior, but more people insist on the myth that as a minority group, the African American have inborn physical and genic advantage on sports (Hoberman 1997; Ferber 2007).¹⁶ Some scholars who study sports have appealed to the public to notice the biological meaninglessness of race (Hallinan 1994). Even though race is socially, not biologically, determined, many researchers still try to explain the physical abilities and achievements of athletes in racial terms (Coakley 1998:252; Lin 2010).

Globally, the “theory of race” is more popular and accepted among non-academic people. Moreover, it is common that majority and minority groups each takes what they need from this theory for the sake of their own interests. In Chinese societies, for example, on the one hand, some Han Chinese believe that ethnic minorities are gifted in art, music and sports, so that ethnic minorities should focus on singing, dancing and sports as their career; on the other hand, if ethnic minorities also acknowledge this stereotype on themselves and rationalize their poor academic performance in schools, they would be more active to engage in cultural and sporty activities. Some Taiwanese scholars have found that the stereotype on indigenous people given by Han Chinese make a vicious circle: indigenous people focus on a particular career, for instance playing baseball, but neglect other career possibilities, this in turn will limit the development of indigenous people (Fu 1987; Lin 2010).

In this research, I note that many of the Han Chinese and ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, including some government officials, agree that ethnic minorities in Xinjiang have “physical and genic advantages” on football. Yet, this myth of specific ethnic groups’ physical conditions has been tested to lack of sufficient proofs (Wang and Wu 2008). Still, I argue that it is important to examine how the discourse of physique and genes is constructed in China, and how it has influenced the Xinjiang case. By this means, it is helpful for us to understand the transforming research phenomenon and discourse.

¹⁶ It is easy to note that African American has dominated at least two of the four most famous professional leagues in North America, basketball and American football. In addition, there are also huge amount of excellent African American athletes in other sports, including baseball, athletics and boxing.

Tradition

This theory attributes a group's involvement in sport to history and culture. Its typical narrative is usually subjective, which claims that because our ancestors has been involved in playing some sport long time ago, so now, our group members should also continue to participate in this sport.

However, must a tradition be an unchangeable relic that has been inherited since ancient times? The conception of “the invention of tradition” has provided insightful response to this question, as it argues that many of the traditions that people love today are far less ancient than they thought, and some are in fact introduced from outsides (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). When discussing or practising some “traditions”, people are dependent more on their image of the past than on their vision of the future. Thus, some ethnic revival has led to the revitalization of local games for recreating new values within ethnic communities (Wei et. al. 2012). Yet, some ethnic groups have in fact stressed simultaneously both the distinctively traditional and the distinctively modern aspects of their culture, and they have purposely adjusted the “tradition” to “modernity” by a series of ritualized and institutionalized practice.¹⁷

When examining the relation between the “theory of tradition” and sports, we may go to prove or disprove a “tradition of sport”. Yet, the key of academic work is to examine the process how a sport become a “tradition”, and the significance of this cultural construction to reality. In this research, one work is to contextualize Xinjiang youth football and to explore why a modern sport, football, which was introduced to Xinjiang a century ago, could be seen as a tradition by some Uyghur. The meaning of this approach is not to explode the “common sense” that “Uyghur are born to play football”, but to examine the significance of governing techniques via exploring the process of constructing such discourse.

¹⁷ For instance, Athletic Bilbao, the leading Basque team in Spanish football league, in the construction of a nationalist community, insist in its particular style of play (fieriness and long passes) and see this style as something peculiarly Basque. By lauding both the Basque language (the only remaining non-Indo-European one in the continent) and Basque football, Basque ethno-nationalists could bridge the past and now, and proclaim themselves and their fellows to be a very ancient people and a very up-to-date one (MacClancy 1996a:9-10; MacClancy 1996b).

Identity

As for identity, there are two widely shared beliefs among humanists and social scientists. First, a person can have multiple identities, and various identities are not mutually exclusive; Second, identity is not stable, instead it can be fluid (Cornell and Hartmann 2007; Eriksen 2010; Chee 2010). When identities meet sports, “sports are ways of fabricating in a potentially complex manner a space for oneself in their social world” (MacClancy 1996a:4).

Most people usually pay attention to the competitiveness of sports. Indeed, almost all sports have rules to judge win and defeat. Such competitiveness makes sports as vehicles to categorize humans into diverse groups, like fans who support different clubs. Meanwhile, there are different programs or disciplines among sports, and it is not hard to note that different sports have different thresholds for participation. For instance, youth from working class would like to participate in collective ball sports, like football, basketball and volleyball, or fierce sport, like boxing and wrestling, but it would be difficult for their family to afford other sports, like golf, equestrian or sailing (Bourdieu 1978; Schilling 1991; Xu 2008b). In these two senses, sports are vehicles of identity, providing people with a sense of difference and a way of classifying themselves and others, whether latitudinally or hierarchically (MacClancy 1996a:2). However, it is easy to overlook that sport does not always equal competition, and in many cases, sports require cooperation or sharing.¹⁸ In other words, individual or group can also have multiple identities based on sports, these identities are not necessarily exclusive and unchangeable (MacClancy 1996a:3).

When examining the relation between nation (or ethnicity) and sports, one commonly shared conclusion is that sports are uniquely effective in defining national (or ethnic) identity and the sense of belonging (Hobsbawm 1990: 143). But it is important to be exact here, and to ask, whose nation (or ethnicity)? Whose belonging? And during what time period? (Jarvie and Walker 1994). If we are here discussing ethnic minority groups in a multi-ethnic state, like the PRC, we need to realize that when they participate in sports practice involves the identity issue, identi-

¹⁸ There have been many cases of sports promoting diplomacy in history, for example, the famous PRC-US table tennis diplomacy in the 1970s, and the recent Iran-US wrestling diplomacy. In that case, playing the same sport is not only the vehicle that reinforce existing identity (Chinese/American, or Iranians/Americans), but also a means to shape the new identity (we are table tennis players/wrestlers).

ty may be a dynamic and variable complexity. Does participation in sports lead to strengthened boundary of their ethnic identity? Or, on the contrary, does it lead to a vanishment of the boundary? Or both occur? The investigation must be put in certain social context, and the factor of the state should not be neglected.

As to this research, the statement that “football makes us *Xinjiangers* more united” is appealing but unclear. Draw on Jarvie and Walker’s (1994) questions, should the “rise of Xinjiang youth football” could reinforce an identity, what kind of identity? Is it an ethnic identity (Uyghur, Kazakh and others)? Or cultural identity (Chinese, Turkic, Islamic and others)? Or national identity (China and others)? Or regional identity (Xinjiang and neidi, South Xinjiang and North Xinjiang)? Or football fans community identity? Should we acknowledge there are such diversities of identities, how do they relate to each other? What influence do they produce? All these questions need to be examined in concrete context.

State Governance

The theory of state governance interprets sports as a process of governing. In this process, the state usually encourages and supports ethnic minorities to participate in certain sports, through schooling and ritualized sport events, to shape certain ideologies, including moral values and social norms. At the same time, the state guides them to acknowledge the national/state identity (Brownell 1995:21-30; MacClancy 1996a:7; Lin 2010).

As Althusser (2009) argues, sport functions as one of the “Ideological State Apparatuses”. In history of the Soviet Union, sport was utilized for socializing the population into the newly established system of values.¹⁹ However, there are also flaws in the use of state governance to

¹⁹ In the context of the Soviet Union, sport could encourage compliance and co-operation in both work and politics, and be used as a means to combat “unhealthy, deviant, anti-social behaviour” such as drunkenness, delinquency, prostitution, religiosity, and intellectual dissidence, etc. Also, if deployed skilfully, it could unite wider sections of the population than any other social activity, transcending differences of ethnicities, genders, ages, classes, geographical locations, and political attitudes. Because, “It has proved to be of utility by reason of its inherent qualities of being easily understood and enjoyed, being capable of generating mass enthusiasm... It has had an advantage over literature, theatre and other forms of cultural expression in being more readily comprehensible to the mass public... It has had the advantage over political meetings and parades by being less demanding in intellect and patience” (Riordan 1977:8; 397-398; Riordan 1991).

explain why ethnic minorities participating in sports. For example, it is often only seen that the state encourages and supports ethnic minorities to participate in sports, while prohibitions from the state are often ignored. Also, state power is not almighty on constructing its ideology via sports among all ethnic groups, when the sport has been an essential part of the local culture (Stuart 1996; Lin 2010). In addition, when examining ethnic minorities involvement in sports, the role of state power could be overvalued, while the role of subjects is often ignored. From the Foucauldian perspective, the key to study the role of state governance is to examine “mechanisms of government that are found within state institutions and outside them, that in fact cut across domains that we would regard as separate: the state, civil society, the family, down to the intimate details of what we regard as personal life” (Gupta 2001:68). Following this idea, take the sport event as an example, on the one hand, it is important to comprehend the relation between sport and power: who attempts to control how a sport is to be organized and played, and by whom; how it is to be represented (MacClancy 1996:5). On the other hand, it is crucial to present the action of participants and interpret the agency of subjects (Lin 2010).

As to this research, a general opinion is to emphasize the enormous role of state power for developing (positively and negatively) China football, including Xinjiang football. As evidences illustrated in following chapters, I argue that this view leads to an overgeneralizing China sport and China society, for it exaggerate state power as a monolith, and ignore other factors, such as market mechanisms, ethnic issues, gender and variable agencies.

Social Mobility

The theory of social mobility tries to interpret the motivation for ethnic minorities to participate in sports, as an obsession that playing a certain sport could assist them to achieve upwards social mobility. And some scholars try to explore the criteria of achieving this upward social mobility among ethnic participants, and find that one is to improve their economic situation (more income), another is to succeed at the high level of competition in order to destigmatize their groups (Wacquant 2006; Agergaard and Sørensen 2010; Lin 2010) Existing literatures also point the gap between reality and ideal in subjects' practice: sport job opportunities, as other career, are limited; and sport means higher riskiness, for instance, it is very common for athletes to get injured, the sport career period is usually short in no more than twenty years, athletes' income are not stable, it is hard to find continuous job after retire, and so on; even so, these unfa-

vourable factors never stop many of ethnic minority people to choose sports as a career (Spaaij 2011).

Generally, the theory of social mobility is very influential in both public debate and the academia. But it is necessary to be noted that should sport be a path to success, it only applies to a limited number of people. A deficiency of the theory of social mobility is that, as a separate interpretive norm, it cannot explain in some cases, like in this research, why among low eco-social classes only ethnic minority groups are keen to participate in football for achieving upward mobility. In addition, it is important to reflect whether we have rationalized the practice of low eco-social classes to pursue upward social mobility via sport. Because, the ideology of compete-win-deserve “constitutes a type of class logic that drives a combination of individual achievement and consumption in society”, it “leads to favourable conclusions about the character and qualifications of those who are wealthy and powerful in society, while it disadvantages those who are poor and powerless. Furthermore, it leads to the conclusion that economic inequality in society is not only good but also natural” (Coakley 1998: 322-324).

In this research, I notice that many of Xinjiang youth want to achieve upward social mobility via football. But, the hidden meaning behind their actions needs to be analysed.

In sum, any single one of these five dimensions of the relation between ethnic minority and sport participation cannot explain why various ethnic minority subjects in Xinjiang participate in football. Sports are social constructions. Thus, the form and meaning of sports given by people differ from place to place and time to time (Coakley 1998:3). In this sense, I argue that it is important to take into consideration all these dimensions together in the context of contemporary Xinjiang and the social transformation in China.

1.3.2 “Body Culture”: China Sport in an Anthropological View

In the literature on sports in China, Susan Brownell’s (1995; 2008) works provide rare anthropological perspectives. Her monographs, especially the ethnographic work *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* (1995), which is based on her fieldwork in China during the 1980s, offers comparative insights into the relation between state power, gender, class and culture via examining sports in China. The core conception that built the framework of *Training the Body for China* is the “body culture”. As she defines,

Body culture is a broad term that includes daily practices of health, hygiene, fitness, beauty, dress and decoration, as well as gestures, postures, manners, ways of speaking and eating, and so on. It also includes the way these practices are trained into the body, the way the body is publicly displayed, and the lifestyle that is expressed in that display. Body culture reflects the internalization and incorporation of culture. Body culture is embodied culture. (Brownell 1995: 10-11)

Using “body culture” as her analytical framework, Susan Brownell has made pioneering contributions to the anthropological studies on China sport. First, she provides a kind of “paradigm” for studying China sport. Specifically, drawing on Bourdieu’s (1978) concept of “rituals”, she “maintains a clearer focus on bodily practice” by using “body culture” to delimit the object of her analysis (1995:11-12). As she (1995: 21) argues, the original point is that “sports should be studied as part of the entire culture of the body”. By following through this approach, she successfully connects the partial issue (sport) with the grand issue (post-Mao China), and provides important insights into the workings of state power in China and into Chinese society as a whole (1995:30). Second, she applies medical anthropologists Kleinman’s (1986) idea “somatization” to her analysis on China sport. This conception refers to “the way in which social tensions are often expressed in a bodily idiom, so that calls for their resolution often center on healing and strengthening the body” (Brownell 1995:22). Drawing on “somatization” she offers a convincing explanation on a phenomenon existing for a long time, that “Chinese attitudes toward modern sports seem to perfectly mirror the anxieties of the Chinese regarding national pride” (Xu 2008a:6). Third, drawing on Foucault’s conception of “discourse” and “discipline”, she concentrates on analyzing three power differences in sports, including state, class and gender (1995:23). When applying “discipline” to analyze China sports, she notes that there in fact exists, with example illustrated, three forms of discourse, including the verbally expressed, the unexpressed, and the inexpressible (1995:24). By this Foucauldian analytic method, Brownell (1995:30) offers one of her most important contribution on China sport, that the party-state is not always a monolithic unity, and “there is room for maneuver in the cracks between the various bureaucratic systems … Different groups attempted to shape the body toward their own goals, but in the 1980s the Party maintained a good degree of control over the body techniques that were disseminated”.

However, I think that in Brownell’s 1980s ethnographic work, there are still gaps and blind spots, which are exactly what this thesis tries to make up. (1) One of her primary limitations is the time when she conducted fieldwork. It is necessary to note that Brownell did her fieldwork in urban areas including Beijing during the 1980s. At that time, the primary anxiety of the post-

Mao China was to integrate fragmented society after the Cultural Revolution, and to modernize agriculture, industry, education and national defence (the “Four Modernizations”) by introducing the market economy and Western technologies. Then Brownell’s major research interest was not nationalism nor marketization, but how “discipline” shaped “civilization”. Her interests in fact reflect the official discourse then in China. However, in the last three decades, as China accelerates integrating the global capitalist market, nationalism replacing socialism has become virtually the sole ideology of the Chinese communist state (Meisner 1999:525). Meanwhile, marketization is changing the political and economic practice of the state and impacting private life of ordinary Chinese (Wang 2004; Rofel 2007; Zhang and Ong 2008). This social transformation also applies to China sports, and as I will illustrate with examples, Xinjiang youth football is no exception. (2) The second limitation is the coverage of Brownell’s fieldwork. As she (1995:15) confesses, she uses the vague phrase “Chinese body culture” to draw a boundary around something that she “somewhat arbitrarily” defines as “Chinese”. In fact, her study does not cover non-Han Chinese area nor Taiwan. And for this thesis, XUAR as an ethnic minority area in the PRC exactly belongs to the region, which Brownell has carefully avoided to reach. (3) Last, although class is also a state power difference that Brownell concentrates, yet, her interest is to examine the relation between sports and social division, not social mobility, which is one of research interests in this thesis.

In conclusion, I think that Brownell’s anthropological research on China sports still has excellent values for follower researchers. The framework of this thesis is partly based on her concept of “body culture”. In this sense, this research with new empirical materials in current context tries to have a dialogue with her existing research.

1.4 Discovering the Field

“*Field of Play*” is based on ethnographic research in multi-site fields and textual research. The field sites include Altay City and Maralbexi County that both are in XUAR, and a football school in a city of Guangdong Province. Figure 1-8 shows the geographic location of three field sites within the PRC. Texts analysed are official documents published pertaining to the school football campaign and schooling, as well as newspapers, social media, technical manuals of regional football tournament, football school’s regulations on administration and enrolment guide, and documentary films and fictional films related to Xinjiang football.

Figure 1-8: Field Site Locations



Source: Draw on China Map. Source: Bureau of Surveying and Cartography of Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission. 2007. The People's Republic of China Map. Beijing: Starmap Publishing House.

1.2.1 Fieldwork

Fieldwork was conducted in 2015 winter, 2016 summer, and 2017 spring. In the first phase, I observed young players' trainings and daily lives in a local middle school at Altay City, the capital of Altay Prefecture under Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture in North Xinjiang. In the second phase, I observed the XUAR regional youth football championship during August 2016 in Maralbexi County of Kashgar Prefecture in South Xinjiang, focusing on observing the interaction of relevant ethnic groups in this event. In the third phase, I went to a private football school at Guangdong Province to study the daily lives and trainings of Xinjiang ethnic minority youth players. One of the rationales for me to choose the three field sites is the outcome of my snow-

ball method on contacting informants.²⁰ Another rationale is that the three field sites would be seen as progressive for me to observe so that I could make a comparison with diverse football participants.²¹

Major methods in the fields are participant observation and semi-structured interview. In each phase, I interview major participants of youth football, including players, parents, coaches, school teachers, and cadres and staff in sport governing bodies. I observe daily training and daily events, and after that, I go into players' resident hall to study their spare time life and record their speeches. Table 1-2 presents informants' basic backgrounds.

1.2.2 Background of Field Sites and Informants

Two Youth Football Teams in Altay

Altay Prefecture is in North Xinjiang. It is home to many ethnic groups, including the Kazakh, Han, Hui, Uyghur, Mongolian and other ethnic groups. Ethnic minorities accounted for about 56% of the population, and Kazakh accounted for about half of the total population. The administrative districts of Altay Prefecture have six counties and one city. Altay City is its capital city where I conduct fieldwork. Research targets here include five groups, including players, coaches, parents, school teachers and grassroots cadres in the sport governing body.

²⁰ In my original fieldwork proposal, I planned to visit a primary school and a state-run football school in Urumqi. The two schools are famous and frequently reported in journalists' reports on Xinjiang youth football. Yet, while I eventually failed to enter the two target schools, I had a chance to go to Altay to know my key informants in this thesis and, thanks to their helps, I then got chance to know informants in Guangdong province.

²¹ In Altay City, almost all football participants are Kazakhs, and their basic situation was training within their own ethnic group. In Maralbexi County, football participants are not only Kazakhs, but also Uyghurs, Han and Hui; and the situation was not training, but competition among regions and ethnic groups. In the private football school in Guangdong, the situation is different: Xinjiang youth living and training there are not amateur but pre-professional elite footballers. In addition, although there exist visible inter-ethnic boundary (Han/ethnic minority) and invisible inter-ethnic tension (Uyghur/Kazakh) within XUAR on football (as chapter 4 and chapter 5 illustrate), in that club-run football school of Guangdong, the inter-ethnic tension between Uyghur and Kazakh has been eased, and players of the two ethnic groups have transformed into "allies", in which ethnic minorities youth from Xinjiang (as chapter 6 illustrates) are seen by their Han peers as monolithic "Xinjiangers".

Table 1-2 Informant Background in this Research²²

Samples: 64

Category	Person	Percentage	Category	Person	Percentage
Gender			Geographical Background		
Male	61	95%	Altay Prefecture	53	82%
Female	3	5%	Kashgar Prefecture	4	6%
Career			Urumqi City	3	5%
Players in senior middle school	3	5%	Artush Prefecture	2	3%
Players in junior middle school	22	34%	Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture	1	2%
Players in primary school	21	33%	Bayingolin Mongol Autonomous Prefecture	1	2%
Coaches	6	9%	Ethnicity		
School teachers	5	8%	Kazakh	51	79%
Parent	6	9%	Uyghur	8	12%
Organizer of fans association	1	2%	Han	3	5%
Key Informants	10	16%	Mongol	1	2%
Professional Players	4	6%	Tatar	1	2%

Source: Field data.

I conducted most of the fieldworks in a middle school of Altay City, “Altay N Middle School”.²³ There are two teams training in this middle schools during the summer breaks and winter break each year since the 2000s. Two teams will represent Altay Prefecture to participate in the annual XUAR regional youth football championship in summer. The younger one, U13 (Under-thirteen) team, is constituted of eighteen players who are born during 2004 and 2005 in their eleven or twelve years of age interviewed in 2016, studying in grade four or grade five at different primary schools in Altay Prefecture. While the elder one, U16 (under-sixteen) team, is constituted of twenty players, who are born during 2001 and 2002 in their fifteen or sixteen years

²² “Professional players” in this table refer to those who has entered or is currently training or kicking in a reserve team or a first team of a professional football club.

²³ All names of informants are pseudonyms and detailed information about the informants’ school affiliation is not given in order to protect the identity of informants.

of age interviewed in 2016, studying in grade two or grade three at different junior middle schools in Altay Prefecture. In other words, both teams were systematically formed according to age. I conducted a one-year follow-up survey of players in both teams (Table 1-3).

Table 1-3: Players' Background Information of Altay Team²⁴

Category	Person	Percentage	Category	Person	Percentage
Team U16 (20 players)			Team U13 (18 players)		
Average career year 4 or 5 years			Average career year 2 or 3 years		
Ethnicity			Ethnicity		
Kazakh	17	85%			
Uyghur	1	5%	Kazakh	18	100%
Mogol	1	5%			
Tatar	1	5%			
Family			Family		
Agro-pastoralist	12	60%	Agro-pastoralist	13	72%
Civil servant	7	35%	Civil servant	5	28%
Small trader	1	5%	Small trader	0	0
Career Choice			Career Choice		
Keep training	14	70%	Keep training	13	72%
Enter professional reserve	1	5%	Enter professional reserve	2	11%
Departure	5	25%	Departure	3	17%

Source: Field data.

²⁴ Ethnicity categories are divided according to players' citizen information cards (CID). Three non-Kazakh informants in U16 team are from interethnic-marriage families, yet one of their parents is Kazakh.

Family categories are divided according to the career of players' parents. In the survey, I found that the career categories of both parents were highly overlapping, which means that most of parents were doing the same job. For those players whose parents are divorced or either has died, they are divided according to the career of their actual dependents.

“Civil servant” refers to the families either parents is employed in the public sector, or employed for a government department or agency, including schools and government departments.

“Keep training” refers to those players who have been selected by the Altay team head coach and are also willing to continue training in Altay team for the annual XUAR regional youth football championship. “Enter professional reserve” refers to players who have been selected by football scouts of professional football club or football school, and their family has paid the training fee to the club or school at the same time. Thus, this group of players began their pre-professional career. “Departure” refers to players who suspend training in the next year for distinct reasons. These players typically return to their respective schools to continue their conventional study.

Before entering the prefectural team, all players must be recommended by their grassroots physical education teachers, and pass a physical test organized by the head coach of the Altay delegation who is one of my key informant, whose name will frequently appear in chapter 3, 4 and 5. These youth who will represent Altay Prefecture are amateur footballers. During academic semesters (fall term and spring term), they study in respective primary schools or junior middle schools with their peers. As they shared with me, they also attend physical education classes in school with their classmates, and since about 2012, football has gradually become a major content of physical education classes in their schools. What distinguishing them from their classmates is that they show more talents (physical conditions and skills) and enthusiasm (spend more time playing football in extracurricular activities), compared to their peers. And this will be an important criterion of assessment for their physical education teachers to recommend these youth to Altay Prefecture.

According to the staff plan, as chapter 5 will present, each team of the Altay delegation should have a head coach, an assistant coach, a goalkeeper coach and a manager. During my fieldwork, all staff were Kazakhs. One head coach and both managers were the faculty in Altay N Middle School, and one of them was in fact the schoolmaster. Other coaches were drawn temporarily from other counties in Altay Prefecture by administrative order of prefectural Sports Bureau.

The XUAR Youth Football Championship

As an important supplement, I followed two Altay teams and observed the annual XUAR Youth Football Championship during August 2016 in Maralbexi County (or Bachu, 巴楚 in Chinese) of Kashgar Prefecture in South Xinjiang. This championship is the highest level of youth football event in Xinjiang. There were three disciplines in this event, U12 Boys, U16 Boys and Girls. All prefectures except the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) have sent representatives to participate in the competition.²⁵ Thirteen teams participated in U12 Boys; Eleven teams participated in U16 Boys; and seven teams participated in Girls.

²⁵ The Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps (XPCC) is a unique economic and paramilitary organization in Xinjiang. The XPCC has administrative authority over several medium-sized cities as well as settlements and farms in Xinjiang. It

In many non-academic reports, the “rise of Xinjiang youth football” seems to have nothing to do with other ethnic groups except Uyghur. During my observation in the regional youth football championship, this impression is partly true. Among thirteen district representatives, only two teams, Altay Prefecture and Changji Hui Autonomous Region, were not mainly constituted by Uyghur players and coaches. Besides, based on examining the event technical manual, I noted that Uyghur and Han each account for half of technical staffs (event organizers, competition officials and judges). This detail also confirms the fact that although the Uyghur account for 48%, Han account for 36%, and Kazakh account for 7% of the population in Xinjiang, at least in the youth football most front-line participants are Uyghur.²⁶

Would-be Elite Xinjiang Players in Football School, Guangdong Province

As another crucial supplement, I visited a football school in a city of Guangdong province. This football school, G Football School is run by one of the best known professional football clubs (with the pseudonym as “G Football Club” in this thesis) in China. The purpose of running this school is to cultivate professional footballers who can fit into professional league all over the world. The school has been recruiting students from Xinjiang every year since its establishment in 2011. Now there are about 120 youths from Xinjiang living, training and studying in this school in the early 2017. Most of these students are Uyghur, and a few are Kazakh. In addition, there are several ethnic minority coaches and staff from Xinjiang in this school. It is important to note that it is different from the module of “Xinjiang Class in *neidi* senior high school”, students and coaches from Xinjiang in G Football School have been split into each teaching unit so that they study and train with their fellows from all over the country.²⁷

has its own administrative structure, fulfilling governmental functions such as healthcare and education for areas under its jurisdiction. The Government of XUAR does not usually interfere in the administration of these areas.

²⁶ Population source: Statistics Bureau of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (2016).

²⁷ “Xinjiang Class in *neidi* senior high school” (内地高中新疆班, “内高班”), refers to the China’s systematic educational scheme that selects and sends Xinjiang students, mostly ethnic minorities, to boarding senior high schools in *neidi* provinces (Chen 2008).

1.5 Organization of Thesis Chapters

This thesis consists of seven chapters, grouped into four clusters: introduction, context, ethnography and conclusion.

Chapter 1, Introduction

This chapter gives a brief description of the social phenomenon “the rise of Xinjiang youth football” and points out its unique features. Then it puts forward research questions and literature review divided into two parts, including (1) the relation between “ethnic minorities and sports participation”, and (2) anthropological method and findings on sports in the institutional and socio-cultural context of the PRC. The research method is presented with fieldwork information in the last section.

Chapter 2, Contextualizing Xinjiang Youth Football

This chapter moves to specific account of ethnic relation, state governance and marketization in the “rise of Xinjiang youth football”. This chapter explores two crucial contexts with crucial relevance to this research. Firstly, it illustrates the complexity of Xinjiang by providing information about contemporary Xinjiang society, especially the background related to this research, including geography, ethnic diversity, and socio-economy. This section also gives the development of ethnic tension in Xinjiang in the past two decades as the background of ethnic relations and the state’s various projects. It also gives a broader analysis on how the state are utilizing youth football to secure stability in Xinjiang. Second, it illustrates the system and mechanism of Chinese youth sports, and then it presents the development of Chinese professional football, focusing on controversies related to youth and conflicts between marketization and lingering socialist institutions and practices.

Chapter 3, Tradition and Myth: Art of Forming Consent

From this chapter, the thesis goes into the ethnographic part, and chapter 3, chapter 4 and chapter 5 together constitute the discussion of ethnic relation and governance. Based on text and discourse analysis, this chapter presents two phenomena: (1) the invention of “Uyghur football Tradition”; (2) the construction of social myth on “Xinjiang ethnic minorities’ physical superiority”. Blending description and analysis on cases, this chapter argues that by systematically promoting the two discourses, the state tries to produce the ethnic minority citizen best suited to

those governments’ “Football for Stability” policies. This organized governing practice in the football realm might be seen as governmentality that results in two effects: it ostensibly reinforces the transethnic notion of “*Xinjianger*” as a regional identity, but in fact it strengthens the ethnic boundaries between some the Uyghur and the Han. In addition, this chapter also examines how state-nationalism and ethno-nationalism influence Chinese concepts of the body, and how these concepts reflect social anxieties of the Han and Xinjiang ethnic minorities respectively.

Chapter 4, One Football, One Dream? The Arena for Identities

This chapter moves to football participants (fans, coaches and young footballers’ parents) and investigate two categories of ethnic relations. One is the inter-ethnic relation among the Uyghur, the Kazakh and the Han in Xinjiang, and the second is the intra-ethnic relation within the Uyghurs. In this chapter, it presents competitions, compromises and co-operations between different ethnic minority groups via several cases, including “ethnicizing” daily football trainings in Altay, fans’ diverse attitudes on the national team of China and Xinjiang’s own professional club, Xinjiang coaches’ conceptual conflicts in a football school of Guangdong, and a youth football championship at South Xinjiang. By analysing informants’ speeches in the ethnographic context, readers might note that football in Xinjiang has not naturally become the almighty ideological state apparatuses, as the state plans, to acculturate ethnic minority (especially Uyghur) and promote the ethnic unity. Nor has it become the vehicle, as some “conservative Uyghur ethno-nationalists” expect, to unify all the Uyghurs. In this chapter, football has accelerated the hybridity of identities and values in Xinjiang.

Chapter 5, “Combining Sport and Education”: The Role of State and Beyond

Chapter 5 turns back the focus on the role of state power. Following the previous chapter, by examining the “School Football Campaign” in Xinjiang, this chapter lays out the practice of state power at the grassroots level through policies, propaganda and schooling, and how these organized practices rationalize grassroots coaches and students’ discourses and actions. Then, this chapter provides the case in a Kazakh middle school in North Xinjiang and shows daily discourses and practice of “political brokers” (local coaches, teachers, and sports cadres at the grassroots level), who act as agencies of state power at the local level to mediate unequal rela-

tionship between grassroots ethnic minority footballers and the state institutions.²⁸ This section suggests that the state is not a monolithic whole when it encounters with an ethnic minority group at the grassroots, and ethnic minority subjects might adjust their relationship with the state by different means, in response to the changing value in the late-socialist era.

Chapter 6, “Kick the Ball with your Brain!” The Dream of Upwards Social Mobility and Its Challenge

Draw on Bourdieu’s (1986) classic conception of “capital”, chapter 6 examines youth footballers’ practice of pursuing upward social mobility via training in regular schools or the market-oriented football school, and it analyses the hidden meaning behind their actions. This chapter begins by describing the school lives in the two educational institutions in Altay N Middle School and G Football School at Guangdong Province. Then it gives the daily life of football teenagers who participate in football training, followed by illustrating the social and economic circumstances of their families. It also gives comparison with those common students who study in school and do not participate in football training at Altay. Then, it analyses footballers’ motivation of football training within the framework of Bourdieu’s three forms of capitals combined with Shilling’s (1991) conception of “physical capital”. Apparently, players and their family members want to transform teenagers’ physical capital into economic capital (improving domestic income). Essentially, they also want to transform the physical capital into cultural capitals (gaining social acknowledgement and destigmatizing ethnic tag). I argue that in this process, social capitals and economic capitals are both vehicle and obstacle for them to achieve social mobility. This argument is then examined with examples in both regular school at Altay and market-oriented football school in Guangdong. Cases from fieldwork will be helpful for us to understand the challenges and strategies of football youth in transforming their capitals. The last part of this chapter will reveal the logic behind the various capitalization, a logic that is deeply influenced by discourse of meritocracy in China. This logic makes many of participants in Xinjiang youth football normalize teenagers’ practice for social mobility via training in football but ignore the grim economic, social and institutional inequality.

²⁸ The term “political broker” has been discussed by many social scientists. In this thesis, I draw on Siu’s (1989) notion, using this term to refer to grassroots cadres who act as the coordinators between the state and common people.

Chapter 7, Conclusion

The conclusion assesses the state's organized practices in the research phenomenon and the future of Xinjiang youth football in late-socialist China. It rethinks how ethnic relation, state governance and social mobility have created an illusionary prospect for these ethnic minorities young footballers. Last but not least, it calls for a better and broader understanding of ethnic cultural diversity and everyday life conditions through football among the ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.

Chapter 2 Contextualizing Xinjiang Youth Football

In August 2016, I followed the Altay delegation from North Xinjiang, spent two days and one night by bus and train, arrived at Maralbexi County of Kashgar Prefecture in South Xinjiang to observe the annual regional youth football championship. In the latest five years, violence repeatedly erupted in South Xinjiang, and one of the most serious unrests outbroke in April 2013 at Maralbexi (*Bachu*, 巴楚 in Chinese).²⁹ Since the April 2013 Bachu unrest, the local government has maintained overall high-level security in the county (Figure 2-1). In terms of everyday space, Uyghurs and Han Chinese residents are separated from each other: Uyghurs mainly live in areas scattered among the old town where infrastructures are relatively backward, whereas Han Chinese concentrate in the relatively modern new town. The stadium of the youth football championship was in the new town. I stayed in a hotel nearby, which was run by a couple from Sichuan Province. I learnt from them that most residents living in the new town were mostly Han migrants from Sichuan, Henan and Anhui province. Some of these migrants came to Xinjiang in recent years as cotton-picking workers or construction workers, others travelled between China *neidi* and Xinjiang doing medicine or agricultural products business. “Apart from the fact that a few guests are Uyghurs,” the hotel hostess said, “we seldom contact with local Uyghurs in our daily lives.”

One day after all the matches ended, I went back to the hotel and wanted to buy some naans for dinner.³⁰ Naan is the most common staple food of Uyghurs and Kazakhs. The Sichuan hostess was surprised and confused for why I would have naans for dinner. She told me that at that time I had to go to the old town two kilometres away and warned me to “come back early and be careful!” Walking down the road that she pointed for me, I reached the old town at 9 p.m. in Beijing time that was 7 p.m. in the local time. Night just fell, and it was the high time of the market.

²⁹ State media reports twenty-one deaths, including fifteen police or social workers, during outbreak of the April 2013 Bachu unrest. Among the fifteen deaths, ten were Uyghur, three were Han Chinese and two were Chinese Mongolian (Al Jazeera 2013; CNTV 2013).

³⁰ Naan, as “饢” in Chinese, is a leavened, oven-baked flatbread that is one of the common daily food for many ethnic groups in Xinjiang.

Obviously, its environment was dirty and chaotic in contrast to the new town. Motorbikes passed through the narrow dirt road, and the dust drifted over street food and fruit stands.

Figure 2-1: Police Vehicle Parked outside a Middle School at Maralbexi County during the Championship



Source: Shot by author. August 2016. Maralbexi County, Kashgar Prefecture, XUAR. All delegations lived in a local middle school, while a police car parked in front of the school gate during the championship.

Besides me, there was no Chinese speaker around. It was not difficult for me to find a naan vendor, who was obviously a local minority man in his thirties. I told him in Chinese Putonghua that I wanted to buy two naans. He stopped chatting with his customers, two local minority young ladies, and turned his cold face to me. Our business process was done with no verbal exchange. I thought that the vendor understood my words but might not know how to speak Chinese. When I had my naan, one of the ladies asked me in Chinese, “do you come here for traveling?” Apparently, in the night market that seemed not to set for tourists, they were surprised to see a Han Chinese man’s sudden arrival. I replied that I came for a football championship. Hearing my reply, the previously indifferent naan vendor spoke up and asked me in strong accent if I was a footballer. I said no. He kept asking me if I was a coach or referee, and I shook my head. “So, what do you do?” He asked in Chinese Putonghua. To avoid over complicated explanations, I did not answer that I was doing anthropological research but told him that I came here to “observe” young footballers. The vendor asked with astonishment, “You are a scout, aren’t you?” I non-committally replied, “sort of”. My answer had an unexpected effect. The man smiled and asked me to give back the bag of cool naan that I had just bought. Then he gave me a warmer one from the stove. It seemed that suspicion and caution vanished in the moment of the handover.

I am not a scout, but Keran the head coach of the Altay delegation told me that every year scouts of professional clubs would come from *neidi* for selecting young talents during the annual regional youth football championship. In G Football School I interviewed two Uyghur young footballers Zulyar and Rahman, who were in the under-17 reserve team of G Football Club. In 2011 the two boys were selected by the scout of G Football Club at their hometown Artush. Thanks to the scout's help, the two boys successfully applied for the national studentship for poor students and were enrolled in G Football School. When I interviewed them at the beginning of 2017, Zulyar and Rahman were seventeen years old and paid 3000 *yuan* a month from the club. Considering their salary, they were at the forefront of their Xinjiang peers who were pursuing careers in football. However, these two boys were still worried for the possibility of unemployment if they could not get a contract with a club. As Rahman told me, "When I was a kid, I dreamed of playing football in the top-five European leagues, and then I dreamed of playing in the China Super League. Then I thought it would be acceptable for me to play in Xinjiang Tianshan Leopard even if it is just an ordinary club in the China League One. Now, as long as I could get a contract with any professional club, it would be ok."

This chapter will examine two major contextual issues on Xinjiang youth football. The first issue is the development of ethnic tension in Xinjiang within the past two decades under local geographic, ethnic and socio-economic conditions. In this development, youth football turns out to be the approach that state power utilizes for securing Xinjiang stability, and daily practices of football participants in return reflect the complexity of Xinjiang ethnic relation. The second issue is the transformation of China's football institution, which used to be governed by the state but now is under the force of both marketization and the state in the late-socialist era. In this transformation, young footballers from poor families dream of improving domestic economic condition by pursuing career in football; meanwhile, they have to overcome difficulties from the state, the market and public opinions.

Seemingly, the two issues above are intertwined, but they separately provide two contexts for formulating research questions of this thesis. What is the motivation for the central and local government, as the external forces, to develop football? At the macro level, what measures do they take? And what opportunities and risks will these measures bring? As the core participants, why do these youth like to pursue a career in professional football? And what possible prospects and underlying risks do these youths face? Combining with the discussion on these two issues,

readers will have a general understanding of the hardship that Xinjiang young footballers might be suffering. This chapter will aim at a macroscopic discussion about the political and social milieus of the development of Xinjiang football, while the microscopic research on the different local aspects of it will be examined in the later chapters of ethnographic sections.

2.1 Xinjiang as an “Issue”: The Background of Youth Football

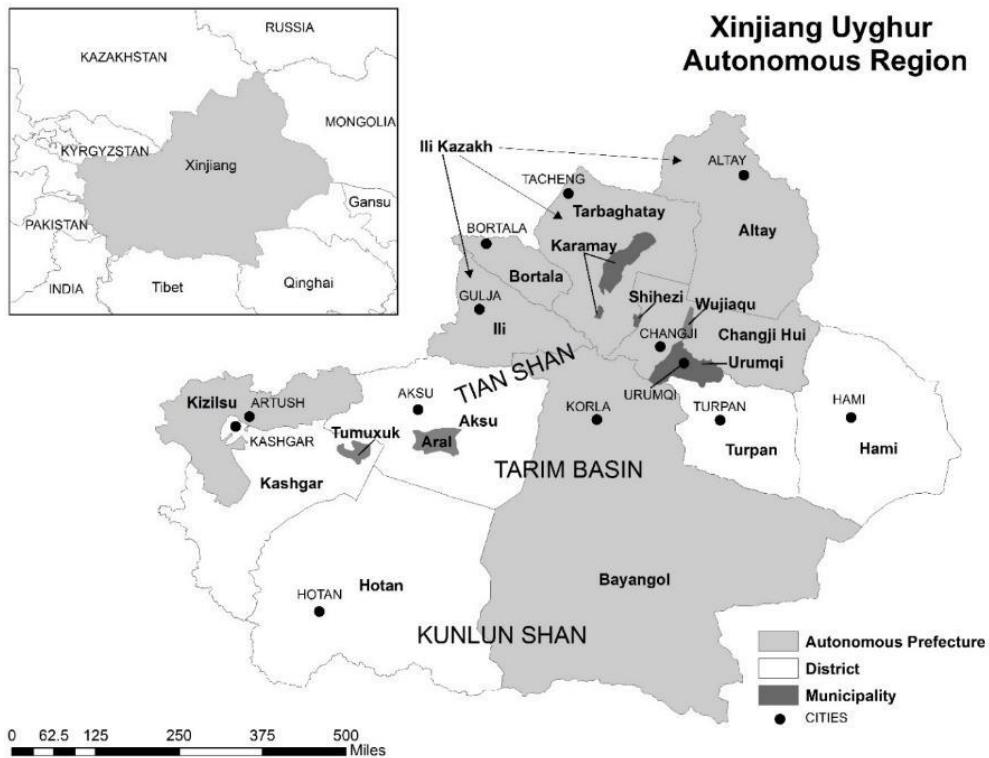
As this thesis emphasizes, the socio-cultural phenomenon of “the rise of Xinjiang youth football” must be examined in the politico-economical and socio-cultural context of XUAR. This section plans to narrow down certain perspectives from existing bodies of literature on Xinjiang studies.

2.1.1 Geographic Difference

Located in the northwest frontier of China, Xinjiang, in full Uygur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang, is China’s largest political unit (Hsieh and Falkenheim 2017). Although road, rail and air transport network has been built within the region, due to the huge regional territory, it still costs time and money for interregional transportation (Figure 2-2). For football teams within XUAR, the transportation is a big challenge when they participate in a football event either inside or outside Xinjiang (Netease 2013).

Remote from the ocean and surrounded by high mountains, Xinjiang is cut off from marine climatic influences. It therefore has a continental, dry climate. Tien Shan Mountain separates the dry south from the slightly less arid north, so the northern slopes of Tien Shan Mountain are more humid than those of the south (Figure 2-2) (Hsieh and Falkenheim 2017). This climate affects daily football training. In general, due to more snowfall in North Xinjiang, half of a year (October to next March) is not suitable for players to train outdoors (Figure 2-3). Because football fields are all outdoor, this means that in winter, North Xinjiang teams can only have outdoor training before it snows heavily. In theory, if condition provided teams could have indoor trainings in snowy winter, including strength training and tactical training. However, teams in North Xinjiang in fact had no such training venues and they lacked funding to travel to warmer south provinces. A rough conclusion is that teams in North Xinjiang have less training time per year compare with their counterparts in South Xinjiang.

Figure 2-2: Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region Administrative Division



Source: Toops, Stanley. 2016. "Spatial Results of the 2010 Census in Xinjiang." At <https://cpianalysis.org/2016/03/07/spatial-results-of-the-2010-census-in-xinjiang> accessed October 29, 2016

Figure 2-3: A Football Field in North Xinjiang after Heavily Snow



Source: Shot by author. January 2016. Altay N Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

2.1.2 Ethnic Diversity

Named a Uyghur autonomous region, Xinjiang is in fact inhabited by more than nineteen different indigenous ethnic groups, but the largest of which are Uyghur and the Han. Other include Hui, Mongol, and Turkic ethnic groups such as Kazakh, Kirgiz, Uzbek, Tatar, etc. (Table 2-1).

Table 2-1: Ethnic Groups of Xinjiang in the Year 2015: Distribution of Population

Total Population (Year-end): 2359.73 (10 000 persons)

Ethnic Group	Uyghur	Han	Kazakh	Hui	Kirgiz	Mongol	Tajik	Xibe	Others
Population	1130.33	861.1	159.12	101.58	20.22	18.06	5.01	4.32	59.99
Percentage	47.90%	36.49%	6.74%	4.30%	0.86%	0.77%	0.21%	0.18%	2.55%

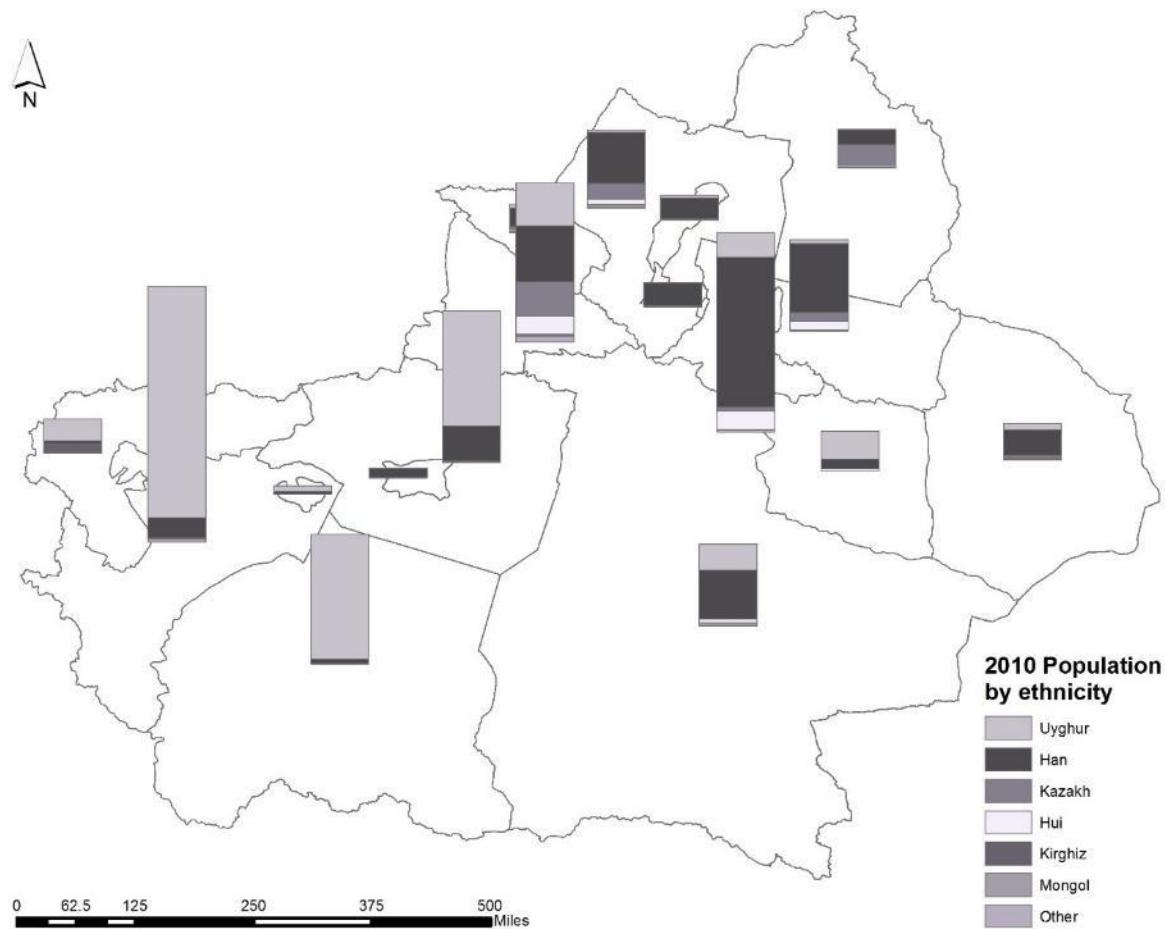
Source: Statistics Bureau of Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. 2016. *Xinjiang Statistical Yearbook*.

In this research, the two major concerned ethnic groups are Kazakh and Uyghur.³¹ The Uyghur are especially concentrated in South Xinjiang, engaging in oasis agriculture; whereas the Kazakh are especially concentrated in North Xinjiang, engaging in husbandry. The Han influx mainly concentrate in cities around the Junggar Basin because of its resource potential. These cities include the capital city Urumqi, Changji, Karamay and cities under the control of XPCC (the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps), like Shihezi (Figure 2-4).

The Uyghur and the Hui are the largest two Muslim groups in Xinjiang. The Kazakhs also follow Islam, but vestiges of Shamanism remain (Benson 1998:31; 44-46).

³¹ In China official narrative, both Uyghur and Kazakh are indigenous ethnic groups in Xinjiang. Some anthropologists suggest that either Uyghur or Kazakh had not formed as ethnic group until the recent 19th century. Dru Gladney (2004) and Rian Thum (2014) provide references on the ethnogenesis of Uyghur. A widely shared idea on Kazakhs in China is that Kazakh is an external ethnic group who moved from nowadays Kazakhstan to Xinjiang during 18th and 19th century (Benson and Svanberg 1998).

Figure 2-4: Xinjiang Population by Ethnicity



Source: Toops, Stanley. 2016. "Spatial Results of the 2010 Census in Xinjiang." At <https://cpianalysis.org/2016/03/07/spatial-results-of-the-2010-census-in-xinjiang> accessed 6 June 2017.

2.1.3 Socio-economic Gap

China's economic growth since 1978 has greatly benefited Xinjiang. By the standard of non-coastal provinces, Xinjiang today is extraordinarily well off. Yet, it remains an outlier in many respects (Wiemer 2004: 164; 188). Comparing with other *neidi* provinces, XUAR is still at the bottom in terms of economic strength. According to the national statistics, XUAR ranks at the bottom six of China's thirty-one provinces/regions for gross regional product growth in recent years (Table 2-2) (National Bureaus of Statistics of China n.d.). For this research, one current socio-economic issue in Xinjiang is that though rural-urban disparity is narrower than elsewhere in China, sharp differences in income exist along ethnic lines (Wiemer 2004: 188).

Table 2-2: China's Gross Regional Product (2009 to 2015) (100 billion *yuan*)

Region	2015	2014	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
Guangdong	72812.55	67809.85	62474.79	57067.92	53210.28	46013.06	39482.56
Jiangsu	70116.38	65088.32	59753.37	54058.22	49110.27	41425.48	34457.3
Shandong	63002.33	59426.59	55230.32	50013.24	45361.85	39169.92	33896.65
Zhejiang	42886.49	40173.03	37756.59	34665.33	32318.85	27722.31	22990.35
Henan	37002.16	34938.24	32191.3	29599.31	26931.03	23092.36	19480.46
Sichuan	30053.1	28536.66	26392.07	23872.8	21026.68	17185.48	14151.28
Hebei	29806.11	29421.15	28442.95	26575.01	24515.76	20394.26	17235.48
Hubei	29550.19	27379.22	24791.83	22250.45	19632.26	15967.61	12961.1
Hunan	28902.21	27037.32	24621.67	22154.23	19669.56	16037.96	13059.69
Liaoning	28669.02	28626.58	27213.22	24846.43	22226.7	18457.27	15212.49
Fujian	25979.82	24055.76	21868.49	19701.78	17560.18	14737.12	12236.53
Shanghai	25123.45	23567.7	21818.15	20181.72	19195.69	17165.98	15046.45
Beijing	23014.59	21330.83	19800.81	17879.4	16251.93	14113.58	12153.03
Anhui	22005.63	20848.75	19229.34	17212.05	15300.65	12359.33	10062.82
Shaanxi	18021.86	17689.94	16205.45	14453.68	12512.3	10123.48	8169.8
Inner Mongolia	17831.51	17770.19	16916.5	15880.58	14359.88	11672	9740.25
Guangxi	16803.12	15672.89	14449.9	13035.1	11720.87	9569.85	7759.16
Jiangxi	16723.78	15714.63	14410.19	12948.88	11702.82	9451.26	7655.18
Tianjin	16538.19	15726.93	14442.01	12893.88	11307.28	9224.46	7521.85
Chongqing	15717.27	14262.6	12783.26	11409.6	10011.37	7925.58	6530.01
Heilongjiang	15083.67	15039.38	14454.91	13691.58	12582	10368.6	8587
Jilin	14063.13	13803.14	13046.4	11939.24	10568.83	8667.58	7278.75
Yunnan	13619.17	12814.59	11832.31	10309.47	8893.12	7224.18	6169.75
Shanxi	12766.49	12761.49	12665.25	12112.83	11237.55	9200.86	7358.31
Guizhou	10502.56	9266.39	8086.86	6852.2	5701.84	4602.16	3912.68
Xinjiang	9324.8	9273.46	8443.84	7505.31	6610.05	5437.47	4277.05
Gansu	6790.32	6836.82	6330.69	5650.2	5020.37	4120.75	3387.56
Hainan	3702.76	3500.72	3177.56	2855.54	2522.66	2064.5	1654.21
Ningxia	2911.77	2752.1	2577.57	2341.29	2102.21	1689.65	1353.31
Qinghai	2417.05	2303.32	2122.06	1893.54	1670.44	1350.43	1081.27
Tibet	1026.39	920.83	815.67	701.03	605.83	507.46	441.36

Source: National Bureaus of Statistics of China. No Date. Gross Regional Product At <http://data.stats.gov.cn/english/easyquery.htm?cn=E0103> accessed 10 June 2017.

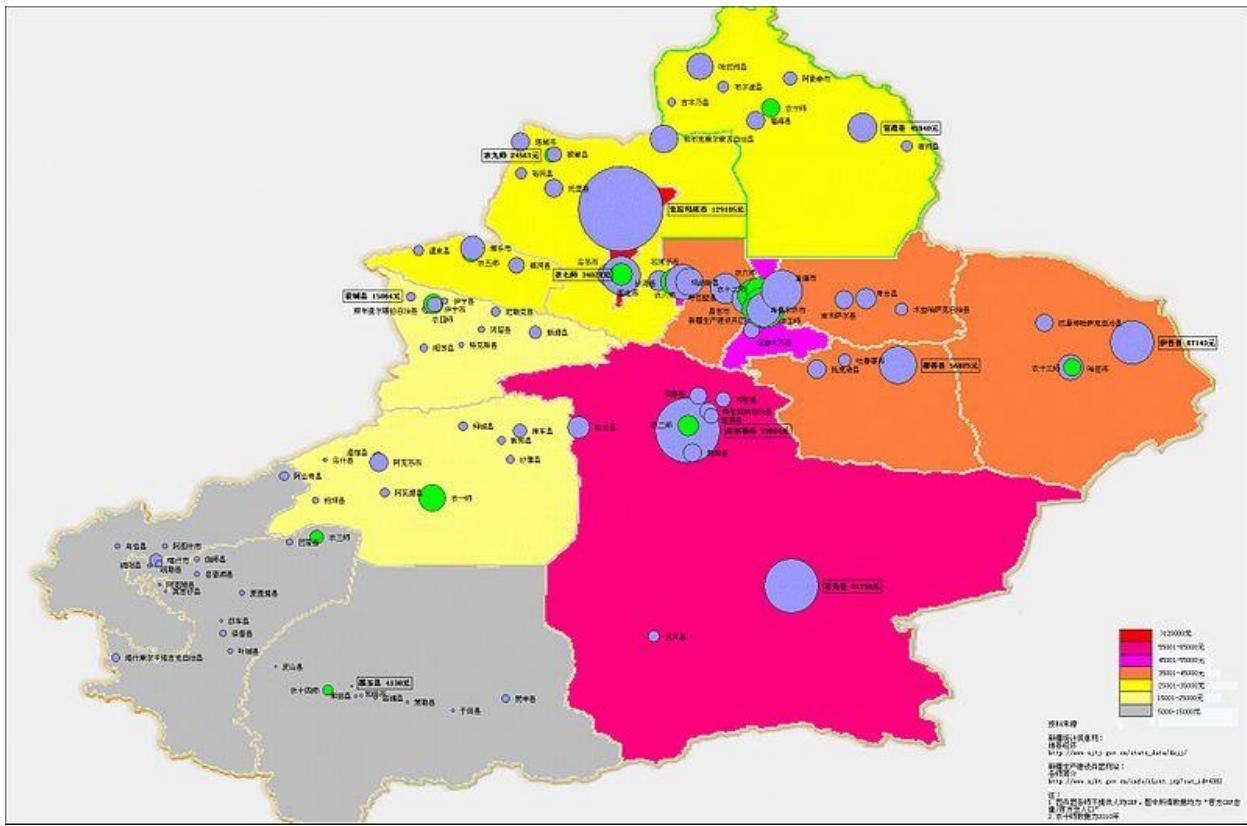
Ma (2013) compares the demographic data of 2000 and 2010 national census and finds that in the last decade when most ethnic groups of China were accelerating the process of industrialization and urbanization, the Uyghur and Kazakhs were the only two ethnic groups whose agricultural population had grown up. In southern Uyghur regions, low household income in rural

areas and high unemployment rate among urban educated youths are viewed by some Uyghur intellectual as top-two crucial social threats in Xinjiang (Ilham 2014). In the North, strengthening Sino-Kazakhstan economic links and fast-growing cross-national imports for beef and mutton has impacted many Chinese Kazakh pastoralist' household income (Loughlin and Pannell 2001; Alff 2014) In addition, the Chinese government in recent years is pushing the sedentarisation project among ethnic minorities in North Xinjiang. This state-level project with the objective of urbanising pastoralists is altering the traditional life and livelihood of Chinese Kazakh pastoralists. A negative consequence is emergent poverty, for sedentarised pastoralists lack professional qualifications and confidence to take up new occupations in the settlements, while the state has provided rare assistance (Shanatibieke 2016).

Among my informants in this research, most of the young Uyghur or Kazakh footballers are from rural or pastoralist families, vulnerable to current socio-economic transformation (Figure 2-5).³² To get rid of poverty is a plain motivation for them to play football; in reverse, poverty is the obstacle for them to continue participating in football. I will explore this argument in Chapter 6.

³² According to GDP Per Person shown in this map, the poorest regions in XUAR are Hotan Prefecture, Kashgar Prefecture (including Maralbexi County), and Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture (including Artush), which are all in South Xinjiang. While GDP per Person of Altay Prefecture (including Altay City) is also below average within XUAR, but slightly better than South Xinjiang.

Figure 2-5: The Distribution Map of Xinjiang's GDP per Person



Source: Wikipedia. 2011. 2011 年新疆維吾爾自治區各地、州、市、縣及兵團各師人均 GDP 分佈圖 (The Distribution Map of Xinjiang's GDP per Person) At

<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f0/%E6%96%B0%E7%96%86%E5%90%84%E5%9C%B0%E4%BA%BA%E5%9D%87GDP.jpg> accessed 19 June 2017.

2.1.4 Development of Ethnic Tension

A notable fact is that, for narrowing the socio-economic gap, the central government has offered preferential policies to XUAR for many years since the 1980s. These preferential policies brought economic growth and more modern infrastructures and improved the population of educated people. Some ethnic minorities did get rich due to these policies. However, these preferential policies did not bring the social stability and Uyghurs' commitment to national identity as the state had expected. This is largely related to the incidents causing deaths and injuries involving ethnic minorities of Xinjiang in the past two decades. Jin (2014) points out that the development of Xinjiang ethnic tensions in the past two decades reflects the rise and the extremalization trend of two forces in the 1990s: the state-nationalism that emphasised the whole state and the ethno-nationalism that emphasised a specific ethnic group.

On politics, state-nationalism and its decision makers believe in state violence and prefer to take instant actions for securing social stability, while ethnic-nationalism and its practitioners resist to be the same as others and ask for sharing political power and seats (Jin 2013). The contradiction between the two nationalisms is highlighted as an impact on the appointment of grassroots cadres. In the first three decades after 1949, Han cadres in Xinjiang were deeply trusted by Uyghurs and other local ethnic groups, for these Han cadres from *neidi* respected local ethnic groups, learned ethnic minorities' languages and cultures, and would like to adapt themselves to local ethnic groups' living styles like having halal food for three meals. But since the 1990s, many army men have been transferred to civilian work as governors at the town or county levels in Xinjiang. They tended to use militarized methods to govern a place and believed that stability could only be strengthened by force and did not pay attention to the structural adjustment of governance policies and strategies. As Chapter 5 will present, because of local rulers' strengthened emphasis on stability governance, Ghulja incident turned from a youth football tournament into one of the most severe unrest in Xinjiang in the whole 1990s. The incompetence of grassroots cadres' administrative ability had resulted in the accumulation of people's dissatisfaction, which transformed into a political anxiety and distrust among ethnic groups and the government (Sautman 1998; Finley 2013).

On economics, state-nationalism supports monopolizing exploitation of natural resources and state officials believe that economic growth in undeveloped areas would naturally ease ethnic tension, while ethno-nationalism asks for more development opportunities, and local minorities urged the promise of preferential policies; as the poor population and ethnic minority highly overlap, such homogenization has provided convenience for extreme ethno-nationalism to mobilize the public (Jin 2013). An ironical phenomenon is that local ethnic minorities are still poor but Han migrants as newcomers become rich. As the beginning of this chapter shows, many Han migrants are construction workers, technicians or migrant workers who come from *neidi* following aids programmes to Xinjiang. Yet, compared with local ethnic minorities who are still at the early stage of industrialization, these Han migrants are more likely to find a job in Xinjiang for they have more advantages in languages, professional skills and accepting new things/ideas (Jin 2013). Another example is about the Kazakh "new settlers" in cities and towns of North Xinjiang. Several Kazakh young footballers in Altay told me that due to the sedentarisation project, their parents, who used to be pastoralists, settled down in suburban areas and had to learn agricultural

skills. However, their products such as melons, as one Kazakh boy at his sixteen at 2016 said, “are not as good as Han Chinese peasants’ melons, only a few of ours have been sold.” At least, these boys’ domestic income has not increased in recent two years, and their families has to give up traditional living way as pastoralists. Like this, ethnic minority farmers, pastoralists and ordinary urban citizens, who cannot share the fruits of development, have been further marginalized. As a result, class differences can easily be used by ethnic nationalists as grounds for ethnic tensions.

On culture, state-nationalism promotes extreme materialism, adopts a hostile attitude towards religion and disregards cultures of ethnic minorities, while ethno-nationalism tries to revive ethnic traditional culture, develop ethnic language and protect ethnic traditional religion (Jin 2013). This thesis has a few of discussions on religion issues, but religious notions and practices, as Chapter 5 will illustrate, are excluded from schooling. In this thesis, there are three highlighted issues that might embody cultural tension between the two nationalisms. The first is that XUAR has been expanding bilingual education for strengthening state identity since 2009.³³ In one of my field sites, Altay N Middle School, Kazakh and Mongolian language classes are kept but the number of classes have decreased compared to ten years ago. “The Kazakhs in North Xinjiang have always attached importance to study Chinese since 1949 and we have been cultivating our Chinese teachers,” Bek, the headmaster of Altay N Middle School said. “But promoting Chinese in the Uyghur areas in South Xinjiang is not as smooth as that in North Xinjiang. A long-standing problem is that Uyghurs do not have sufficient Chinese teachers, and many of their Chinese teachers from *neidi* almost do not understand Uyghur.” Bek’s words indirectly supported some research’s findings on the Uyghurs’ passive attitude and poor outcome on bilingual education (Schluessel 2007; Chen 2008; Tsung and Cruickshank 2009). The second issue is the ob-

³³ Bilingual education system has been existing in Xinjiang since the 1950s as a guarantee to keep the equal social and political rights of all ethnic groups. The system seeks to implement full equality among ethnic groups, uphold and improve regional ethnic autonomy, accelerate the economic and social development of ethnic minorities and minority areas, protect and develop ethnic minority cultures, and foster cadres and talented people from ethnic minorities. However, bilingualism in practice has not resulted a commitment to national identity, but caused Xinjiang’s “Bifurcated Educational System”, that is “likely to strengthen ethnic rather than national identification to the detriment of a single, shared sense of national belonging or civic being” (Simayi 2014).

vious phenomenon that Han Chinese and Uyghur residents inclined to live segregatedly in towns and cities. After the July 2009 Urumqi riot, the government was more sensitive on religion, while some notions such as “national liberation”, “overthrow the Chinese colonial government” or “establish the East Turkestan Republic” had been spread among some Uyghurs (Jin 2013). As ethnic distrusts and suspicions deepen, ethnic sentiment of both Han Chinese and Uyghurs increases and ethnic boundaries in daily life become even more clear: both Han and Uyghur residents started to sell houses and moved to their own ethnic concentrating areas, like what happened in Urumqi after 2009 and what the beginning of this chapter presents at Maralbexi, and Han and Uyghur ordinary residents communicated with each other less than before. The third issue is on the football realm, where ethnic identity turns to be magnified above and beyond state identity. This issue will be discussed with ethnographic details in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4.

2.1.5 State’s Remediation and “Football for Stability”

The July 2009 Urumqi riots have been the turning point for Xinjiang ethnic relation in the past two decades. It made the state aware of the seriousness of the problems of eco-social issue and stability of XUAR. As a part of subsequent policies after this riot, the central government designates total nineteen provinces and municipal cities as partners of prefectures in XUAR to support local economic growth according to the “Reconstruction Model after Disaster” (Table 2-3).³⁴ This project is called the “Province-to-prefecture Aid Program to Xinjiang” (P2P Aid, 對口援疆計畫), which was initiated in 2010. A party’s authoritative media suggested that the P2P Aid Program be a long-term national strategy (Qiushi Theory 2015). This program “requires nineteen provinces and municipal cities to establish effective mechanisms for assisting Xinjiang by providing human resources, technologies, management experience and funds”, and the primary issue to solve is creating jobs for all ethnic groups, improving conditions of education and housing, and supporting the local “characteristic industries”, including agriculture, animal husbandry, ethnic handicraft industry and tourism, etc. The state outlines of the program as “indus-

³⁴ Except the capital Urumqi City, every prefecture of XUAR was aided by at least one province or municipal city.

tries promoting employment, education promoting stability, and talents promoting development” (Qiushi Theory 2015).³⁵

Table 2-3: General Relation from Province to Prefecture in Aid Program

Provinces and Cities Providing Aids	Target Aid Prefectures in Xinjiang	Target Aid Prefectures Location in Xinjiang
Beijing City	Hotan Prefecture	South
Guangdong Province	Kashgar Prefecture; Tumuxuk City	South
Shenzhen City, Guangdong Province	Kashgar City; Taxkorgan Tajik Autonomous County, Kashgar Prefecture	South
Jiangsu Province	Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture; Ili Kazakh Autonomous Prefecture	South; North
Shanghai City	Kashgar Prefecture (including Maralbexi County)	South
Shandong Province	Kashgar Prefecture	South
Zhejiang Province	Aksu Prefecture; Aral City	South
Liaoning Province	Tarbaghatay Prefecture	North
Henan Province	Hami Prefecture	South
Hebei Province	Bayangol Mongol Autonomous Prefecture	South
Shanxi Province	Wujiachu City; Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture	North
Fujian Province	Changji Hui Autonomous Prefecture	North
Hunan Province	Turpan Prefecture	South
Hubei Province	Bortala Mongol Autonomous Prefecture	North
Anhui Province	Hotan Prefecture	South
Tianjin City	Hotan Prefecture	South
Heilongjiang Province	Altay Prefecture	North
Jiangxi Province	Kizilsu Kyrgyz Autonomous Prefecture	South
Jilin Province	Altay Prefecture (including Altay City)	North

Source: People (人民網). 2011. 各地對口支援新疆情況一覽 (Chart: Relation from Province to Province in Aid Program). At <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64093/95111/11606355.html> 31 May 2017.³⁶

³⁵ The outline is in *Chinese chanye cu jiuye, jiaoyu cu wending rencai cu fazhan*, “產業促就業, 教育促穩定, 人才促發展”.

³⁶ Two regions that I conducted fieldwork for this research, Altay City and Maralbexi County, are highlighted. In Chapter 4, readers will note how this designated province-to-prefecture partner arrangement influences ethnic minority people's awareness on inequality.

It is crucial to note that this P2P Aid Program was initiated in 2010, one year after July 2009 Urumqi riots. The year 2010 was also important for this thesis because, as I will illustrate in following chapters, many policies and practices on Xinjiang football could be traced back to this year. As evidences in following chapters illustrate, these policies were systematically implemented from the regional government to the grassroots level, cooperated with long-lasting and delicate propaganda techniques. By utilizing football as an attraction, the regional government expected to eliminate instable factors: let restless, unstable, impressionable teenagers and youths return to schools to be educated. In this thesis, I regard this “Football for Stability” governance launched in 2010 as a part of the various subsequent projects implemented after 2009 to deal with ethnic tension.

However, without proper management, as the 1997 Ghulja incident shows, football could be a fuel for heating ethnic tension rather than a bond of ethnic unity. In terms of the phenomenon of “the rise of Xinjiang youth football”, the government’s measures seem to have some positive effects on the macro level at present. But in microscopic everyday life, it is questionable whether these measures have healed cracks between ethnic groups. Ethnographic data in following chapters will show that practice of Xinjiang local government in the football realm has temporarily succeeded in achieving social stability. Yet, inter-ethnic stereotypes have also been strengthened due to two discourses, so-called “Uyghur football tradition” and “Xinjiang footballer physical superiority”. Popularized as the “rise of Xinjiang youth football”, these discourses and the associated inter-ethnic stereotypes could lead to new ethnic rifts in the future. Furthermore, there exist structural inequalities of power relation in China’s football realm among the state, the market and players. In these imbalanced relations, young players are in the weakest position. Even though Xinjiang local government plans to make youth as the key factors for stability, it could hardly change the long-lasting unfair power relations on its own. The next section will examine this structural issue in China’s football realm.

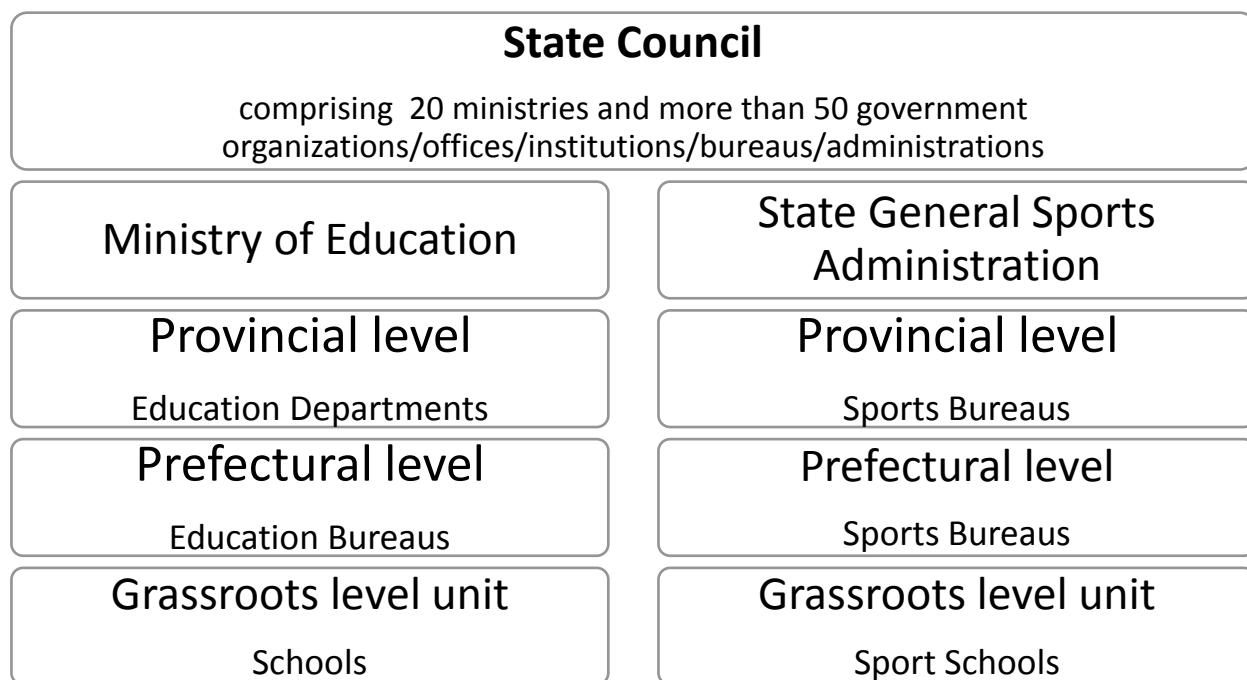
2.2 The Institution of PRC Football: State, Market and in-between Debates

The general situation of sports in the PRC is that both elite sports and school sports (physical education) is strictly controlled by the party-state. Sports in most of the PRC contexts are managed by two institutional systems, namely the State General Administration of Sports (GAS) and the Ministry of Education (MoE).

2.2.1 Sport Youth Cultivation in the PRC

GAS and MoE are two institutions at the same administrative level under the State Council. They have corresponding subordinate administrative units in provinces, prefectures and counties (Figure 2-6). To make it simple, MoE system takes charge of physical education (P.E.) from primary schools to middle schools till colleges, while GAS takes charge of raising elite athletes via its grassroots level units, “sports schools”, in Chinese abbreviation *tixiao* (體校) (Jones 1999; Whitby 1999).³⁷

Figure 2-6: General Administrative Structure of sport and education institutions in the PRC³⁸



³⁷ In the context of the PRC, elite athletes are usually called *gao shuiping zhuanye yundongyuan* (高水平專業運動員), which are not equal to professional athletes, in Chinese *zhiye yundongyuan* (職業運動員). There are two major differences; first, professional athletes might not always come from sports schools, some of them may come from universities; second, elite athletes are usually paid by the state, while professional athletes play in a club/team in a professional league and it is the club/team's responsibility to pay them.

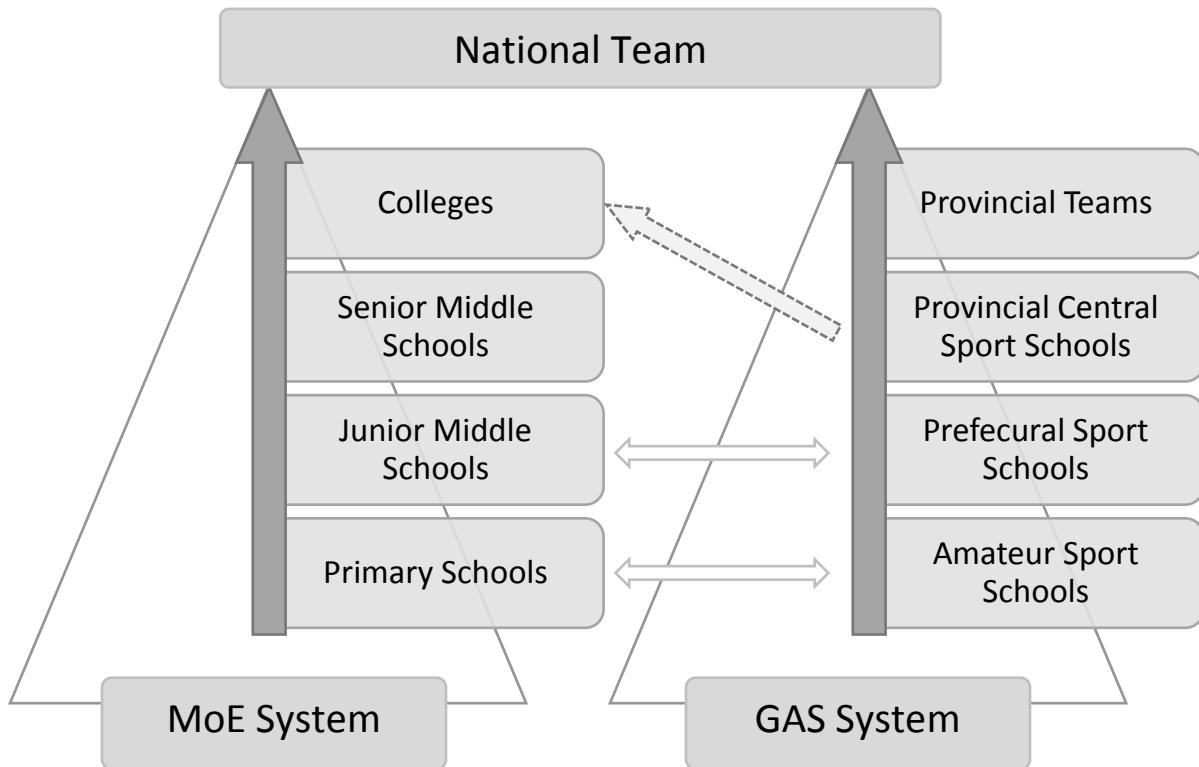
³⁸ At the provincial level, the administrative unit charging in education is *Ting* (廳), or Department in English, and the administrative unit in charge of sport is *Ju* (局), or Bureau in English. At the prefectural level, both units are *Ju*.

Source: The information on the constitution of State Council may be found at its official website <http://english.gov.cn>.

In the 1950s, the CCP established the Elite Sports System based on the Soviet model (Brownell 1995: 58). Now it is known as the “Whole-nation System” (舉國體制) (Li et. al. 2003). Sports schools are the core channels for transmitting young sports talents in this system. Most of the professional coaches of different sport disciplines work in sports schools, while common P.E. teachers work in schools. In general, if a child at primary school stage is interested in systematic training of a sport, parents may take them to “amateur sports schools” in spare time outside of school study. When entering teenage stage, youth may enter middle-school level sports schools where in principle their time is divided to half study and half training. There are not many such middle-school level sports schools. Usually, in a province there might be a few such sports schools, while in prefecture there might be only one. The goal of running regional sports school is to train and “transfer” young talents to the upper-level regional team.³⁹ Students at senior-middle-school level sports schools can participate in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (NCEE). But in reality, students spent most of time on training at the expense of academic performance, it is quite difficult for them to pass NCEE to enter a prestigious college (Figure 2-7).

³⁹ “Transfer” refers to the jargon *shusong* “輸送” in Chinese sport system,.

Figure 2-7: General Flow Chart: Young Athlete Development Process and Distinction between MoE and GAS systems in the PRC⁴⁰



Source: Combined with Brownell (1995) and Jones (1999) with ethnographic data of this research.

In China, provincial sports teams are the outcome of the special sports schools and constitute a regular form of paid employment for those who rise through the ranks of competitive sport. The best of these pre-elite athletes can enter national level teams or training camps. It does not only mean that now they are elite, but also means that they can receive more salaries, better housing condition, better food, better medicine, and better sports clothing from the state or sponsors, in return for a full-time commitment to sports training and performance (Jones 1999: 185). After retiring from national teams or provincial teams, the state will usually provide athletes a job. Based on athletic achievement in their career, some enter prestige college as undergraduate

⁴⁰ A few athletes may enter national teams from colleges with sport training teams. More commonly, athletes who have won glory for the state, especially world champions and Olympic medallists, can be awarded the opportunity to study in colleges after they retired.

or postgraduate students, some enter state or regional Sports Bureaucracy as officials at different levels, some go back to provincial or lower level teams as coaches or managers, and some go back to local sports schools as grassroots level coaches. These are lucky retired athletes, for most of retired athletes in the grassroots have to find a job by themselves. However, due to poor educational background, they have no special advantage in the job market.

In nature, sports schools belong to the hierarchical national sport structure under the ultimate direction of the party-state. This pyramidal structure is designed to recruit talent youths at the grassroots level and move the superior ones level-by-level up through the system until they arrive at the pinnacle, the national team (Brownell 1995: 58-59). This sports school system is highly competitive and, to some extent, cruel as well.

In recent years, it has become increasingly difficult for nationwide sports schools to recruit students. The major reason is that students in sports schools, who have insufficient cultural knowledge and no exceptional skills but sports, “are not able to adapt to the job market” (Liu et. al. 2003). As a result, now students in nationwide sports schools are mostly from poor families, especially rural families or urban laid-off workers families. Middle class parents would send their children to urban sport clubs to study sports, like fencing, golf or equestrian, rather than sending their children to sports school which only provide - at least in these parents’ eyes - tough, hard and boring disciplines, like weightlifting, wrestling, gymnast or diving.

2.2.2 State-led Professionalization: Marketizing Experiment in the PRC Football

Historically speaking, Chinese professional football might be a perfect window to look through the undergoing social transformation of the PRC. Because the process of professionalizing football synchronizes the process of China’s accelerating to embrace the global market.

In sum, the Chinese professionalization of football in the past twenty years was the process of competition, negotiation and compromise between two forces, namely, variable profit-oriented capitals and the state that wants to promote Chinese nationalism. Although the two forces pursued different goals, their style on practice was highly consistent, which was, as I would argue, utilitarianism. In this process, it was the professional and pre-professional young footballers that were directly impacted. And Chinese fans were also hurt - at least emotionally - due to national team’s poor athletic performance (Xu 2008a: 217; Xu 2008b).

The Nationalist Goal and Measures

The reform of football was part of the socio-economic reform of China in the 1990s. Football was “chosen” by official sport governing body as one of the major sports to become professional because “it has huge popular appeal worldwide, an established and prestigious World Cup, significant attractions for potential sponsors and a successful club system in Europe and elsewhere to copy” (Jones 1999b: 186).⁴¹ By establishing a professional league system with a supporting youth team program, China hoped to bring about a change of fortune that could lead it forward internationally. Even if the World Cup finals remain elusive in the short term, “China will have established a sustainable homebased market for football” (Jones 1999b: 186). More specifically, the state believes that athletic improvement of national teams in different sports, including football, will help to preserve the legitimacy of this regime, and the subsequent successful hosting of the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 has strengthened the view that sports can improve the “soft power” of China (Caffery 2011).

The professionalizing process of football introduced the idea and practice of accountability, at the same time separating the government to some extent from direct control of sport (Jones 1999b: 185). Yet, in fact the state has effectively controlled the professionalizing football via the Chinese Football Association (CFA) that played the role of the agency of the state. CFA is namely a private association, but in fact, its staff are from the state football governing body called “the Manage Center of Football” (MCT), which is a branch office of GAS.⁴² CFA is also the largest shareholder in the China Super League (CSL) Company.⁴³ As a result, CFA has been able to use the shareholder system, not only to get a dividend from the league, but also to carry out the national will through the internal executive order within the CSL Company.

⁴¹ Following men’s football, men’s basketball and men’s volleyball were initiated professionalization respectively in 1995 and 1996 (Liang, Li and Tang 1999; Wu 2002).

⁴² In 2015, CFA detached from the Management Centre of Football (MCT), or 足球運動管理中心 in Chinese. And MCT under GAS existed until it was cancelled in January 2017.

⁴³ CSL Company is the actual governing body of the China Super League. When CSL Company was found in 2014, CFA’s share accounted for 36%, each of the sixteen clubs in the CSL shares 4%.

The first and foremost aim of China to professionalize football, since 1994 to the present, has been to improve the athletic performance of football national teams (Zhou 2015; National Development and Reform Commission 2016). For this aim, the state clearly understands the equal importance of establishing a professional league and reserving young talents. On youth football, CFA has established various policies to ensure that channels of cultivating and transferring youth players are always open. For instance, in the non-professional football field, the men's football program in the National Games sets up youth group that is only open to players under twenty-three (CFA 2017a). In professional football field, the Chinese Reserve League was found in 2002, and it was a compulsory youth version of the CSL that all the sixteen CSL clubs were required to send their youth team to participate in (CFA 2017b). A latest evidence is that since early 2017 CFA has implemented a strict policy to help the domestic youth by forcing the clubs to field more under-23 players on the pitch (Xinhua 2017d).

However, things go contrary to CFA's wishes. In both pre-professional and professional fields, most provincial teams and clubs are eager for immediately getting respective benefits from the market or the state. Quick and instant wins are the best solution for their goals. For young footballers, their first and foremost need is to sign a contract with a professional club for subsistence, not to play a match for the national team. For these youth, the state is a faraway existence, while local Sports Bureaus or professional clubs are the most direct institutions that might relate to them. Yet, these institutions' utilitarian practice puts youth footballers into the awkward position.

Players as Labor Force in the Global Market

Before moving to discuss young footballers' challenging situation, we would better have a broader review on a significant trend in global professional sports. As globalization accelerates in the past three decades, more sport leagues and events have been controlled by mega capitals.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Those sports include the four major professional sport leagues in North America (American football, baseball, ice hockey and basketball), stock car racing, professional wrestling, and boxing, as well as football (Wacquant 2006; Newman and Giardina 2011; Hartmann 2016; Kennedy and Kennedy 2016).

In terms of football, to win becomes the most important value, as it has already been in many other professional sports. To make events more competitive and entertaining, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) and its six continental branches, including the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) have amended their rules to ensure that footballers can move freely around the globe.⁴⁵ As a result, many poor youngsters from Latin America and Africa are able to enter European professional clubs through football, and to play in the world's highest-level leagues (Maguire and Pearton 2000; Frick 2009).⁴⁶ It also makes the European leagues the most competitive leagues and - in terms of results of matches - perhaps the most entertaining as well. And footballers who play in European leagues are also widely seen as the richest players - at least in many Xinjiang youngsters' eyes in this thesis -.

The football reform of FIFA and AFC forced CFA to establish the transfer system in China. As a result, it came true for international players to join China's clubs, and for domestic players to move among provinces and clubs (Zhao 2000). Clubs that were not so rich would prepare some funding to hire good but relatively cheap Latin America, Africa or Eastern European players, and experienced domestic players. Meanwhile, these clubs also devoted some cost for building its reserve team, and one of their specific way was to cooperate with local Sports Bureaus. Before establishing their own self-sustaining youth training model and reserve teams, these professional clubs have been purchasing most of their youth players from provincial or prefectural teams (Jones 1999b: 187). In this thesis, the only one professionally club in Xinjiang, Tianshan Leopard, adopts this way: the club cooperates with the Xinjiang Sports Bureau and purchases

⁴⁵ Readers may find many well schemed rules on players' transfers (FIFA, No Date). Commercialization and commodification have altered many football terminologies. For instance, "Until a few years ago 'pass' referred to the movement of ball from one player to another. Now it alludes more to the movement of a player from one club to another, or one country to another" (Galeano 2013: 247).

⁴⁶ The milestone case on the free movement of labour and had a profound effect on the transfers of footballers within the European Union (EU) is the Bosman ruling issued in 1995. Prior to the Bosman ruling, professional clubs in some parts of Europe could prevent players from joining a club in another country even if their contracts had expired, because many of these players had been cultivated since their youth in the reserve team of these clubs. In other word, players were seen as property of a club (Simmons 1997; Frick 2007).

excellent young talents for forming its own reserve team from Song Qingling Football School that is run by the Xinjiang Sports Bureau.⁴⁷

Utilitarian Football: Local Sports Officials' Evaluation Index

The football reform has not brought professional clubs to each province or city. In places with no professional clubs, provincial sports governors are concerned about the quadrennial National Games, while prefectural sports governors are concerned about the quadrennial Regional/Provincial Games. As shown in chapter 5, the athletic performance of a sport team on the regional championship is the most important “key performance indicator” for grassroots sports officials. And it would be even better if these local Sports Bureaus could transfer some young players to professional clubs and increase the income of their own department, in the name of “cultivating fees” (*peiyangfei*, 培養費 in Chinese). But after all, selling talents is not the core concern for local sports officials.

The football reform has brought changes to players' identity, at least for adult players. It is not hard to understand that players who used to be “state amateurs” in provincial teams then altered to become paid staff who work for a club (Jones 1996b: 185). But before signing a contract with a professional club, most of young players in a provincial or prefectural team were attached to the local Sports Bureau. Controlled under state power, these voiceless youth footballers could not easily enter the market as free men, even if they and a professional club both intended to sign an agreement.⁴⁸

Sometimes, utilitarian interference from the local sports administrations might lead many youths' career prematurely come to the end. For instance, there widely exist cheatings in youth

⁴⁷ Song Qingling Football School (S. Q. Football School) is run by Xinjiang Football Association (XFA). It is a traditional sports school under the control of provincial level Sports Bureau. It differs from the football school run by a professional football club, like the Football School in Guangdong Province.

⁴⁸ According to Article 5 “the Transfer of Domestic Amateur Players” in CFA's transferring rule, an amateur footballer, who is in fact equal to a young player in the context of China, also signs a “training agreement” with the original training unit that mostly refers to a regional Sports Bureau. This “training agreement” legitimizes the control over young footballers (CFA 2009).

football, and the most typical one is age fraud. This prohibited cheating by giving false information of youngsters is popular and easy to do in the grassroots youth football. As a result, elder players who might be taller and stronger compete against younger teenagers, or a teenager player compete against a child. It is obvious that such match will not be a fair play. Chapter 4 will present that once this cheating has been caught, the punishment and practical impact on teenage players is far greater than that on local sports institutions. Local sporting bodies would be fined at most, while those young players would be suspended for several years. That would be a deadly penalty for these youths' career plan.

Utilitarian Football: Market-oriented Clubs as Mercenaries

The first and foremost concern of market-oriented professional clubs is profits. Three major income sources include tickets sale, broadcast right sale and market sponsorship. The first two rights are completely controlled by CSL company and a club must share bonus with CSL company. Only market sponsorship is partly controlled by a club, and the amount of market sponsorship is directly proportional to the team's athletic performance. In the understanding of football professionalism, clubs are more sensitive to the market than the local Sports Bureau. Clubs know the importance of continually owning excellent players for the clubs' success. There are two solutions: being patient to cultivate own young players, but it will take time; or, directly purchasing experienced players.

Not until around 2013 with the end of an extensive anti-corruption campaign, many well-funded private enterprises had entered Chinese football and infected huge funds (Guardian 2013).⁴⁹ Mega capitals entered Chinese professional football and changed the training mode of young footballers. Although newly-found or small professional clubs still recruit players from

⁴⁹ At the beginning of the football reform in the 1990s, owners of the earliest clubs in the league were half private enterprises and half powerful state-owned enterprises, which had grown up in the economic reform initiated in the early 1980s. In season 2017, eleven of the sixteen CSL clubs' owners were private enterprises, and twelve of the sixteen CL1 clubs' owners were private enterprises (Table 2-4 and Table 2-5). Querying along the open information, it is easy to note that most of the Chinese professional football clubs' owners, whether private or state-owned, were involved in real estate business, which generated huge profits in the past twenty years in China. It is also noted that most professional teams were concentrated in the more economically developed eastern coastal provinces (Figure 2-8; Figure 2-9).

Table 2-4: Chinese Super League Clubs and Owners in 2017 Season

Club	Chinese name	Home City	Owners	Owners Categories
Beijing Sinobo Guoan	北京中赫國安	Beijing	Sinobo Group (64%); CITIC Group (36%)	Private-State Mixed
Changchun Yatai	長春亞泰	Changchun	Chanchun Jisheng Investment	State-onwer
Chongqing Dangdai Lifan	重慶當代力帆	Chongqing	Desports (90%); Lifan Group (10%)	Private
Guangzhou Evergrande Taobao	廣州恒大淘寶	Guangzhou	Evergrande Group (60%); Alibaba Group (40%)	Private
Guangzhou R&F	廣州富力	Guangzhou	Guangzhou R&F Properties Co., Ltd.	Private
Guizhou Hengfeng Zhicheng	貴州恒豐智誠	Guiyang	Guizhou Zhicheng Group; Hengfeng Group	Private
Hebei CFFC	河北華夏幸福	Qinghuangdao	China Fortune Land Development Co., Ltd	Private
Henan Jianye	河南建業	Zhengzhou	Henan Haolin Investment (95.7%)	Private
Jiangsu Suning	江蘇蘇寧	Nanjing	Suning Appliance Group	Private
Liaoning Whowin	遼寧宏運	Shenyang	Liaoning Whowin Group (80%)	Private
Shandong Luneng Taishan	山東魯能泰山	Jinan	Luneng Group	State-onwer
Shanghai Greenland Shenhua	上海綠地申花	Shanghai	Greenland Group	State-onwer
Shanghai SIPG	上海上港	Shanghai	Shanghai International Port Group	State-onwer
Tianjin Quanjian	天津權健	Tianjin	Quanjian Natural Medical Group	Private
Tianjin Teda	天津泰達	Tianjin	TEDA Investment Holding Co., Ltd. (85.4%)	State-onwer
Yanbian Funde	延邊富德	Yanjin	Funde Sino Life (70%); Yanbian SMC (30%)	Private

Source: (1) Wikipedia. “2017 Chinese Super League.” At https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Chinese_Super_League accessed 29 May 2017; (2) State Administration for Industry and Commerce of the People's Republic of China (SAIC). “National Enterprise Credit Information Publicity System”. At <http://www.gsxt.gov.cn/index.html> accessed 29 May 2017.

Table 2-5: China League One Clubs and Owners in 2017 Season

Club	Chinese name	Home City	Owners	Owners Categories
Hangzhou Greentown	杭州綠城	Hangzhou	Greentown China Holdings Co., Ltd.	Private
Shijiazhuang Ever Bright	石家莊永昌	Shijiazhuang	Yongchang Real Estate (70%)	Private
Qingdao Huanghai	青島黃海	Qingdao	Qingdao Huanghai Pharmaceutical Co., Ltd.	Private
Beijing Renhe	北京人和	Beijing	Renhe Commercial Holding Co.,Ltd	Private
Dalian Yifang	大連一方	Dalian	Dalian Yifang Group Co. Ltd.	Private
Wuhan Zall	武漢卓爾	Wuhan	Zall Group	Private
Nei Mongol Zhongyou	內蒙古中優	Hohhot	Hohhot Sports Bureau; Shanghai Zhongyou Real Estate Co., Ltd.	State/Private Mixed
Beijing Enterprises Group	北京北控燕京	Beijing	Conglomerate Beijing Enterprises Holdings Limited	State-own
Shenzhen FC	深圳佳兆業	Shenzhen	Kaisa Group	Private
Shanghai Shenxin	上海申鑫	Shanghai	Shanghai Hengyuan Enterprise Development Co, Ltd; Urumqi Juntai Real Estate Co., Ltd (66.67%); Shanghai Changhua Baorui Investment Co., Ltd (33.33%)	Private
Xinjiang Tianshan Leopard	新疆天山雪豹	Urumqi		Private
Meizhou Hakka	梅州客家	Wuhua	Guangdong New Jinwei Real Estate Development Co., Ltd.	Private
Zhejiang Yiteng	浙江毅騰	Shaoxing	Yiteng Group	Private
Dalian Transcendence	大連超越	Dalian	Dalian State-owned Assets Investment & Management (Group) Co., Ltd	State-own
Yunnan Lijiang	麗江飛虎	Lijiang	Kunming Minjian Mechanical & Electrical Equipment Co., Ltd.; Lijiang Gucheng District Zhuchun Demolition Co., Ltd	Private
Baoding Yingli Yitong	保定容大	Baoding	Baoding City Real Estate Group Co., Ltd	State-own

Source: (1) Wikipedia. "2017 Chinese League One." At https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_China_League_One accessed 29 May 2017; (2) SAIC. "National Enterprise Credit Information Publicity System." At <http://www.gsxt.gov.cn/index.html> accessed 29 May 2017.

Figure 2-8: Location of Teams in 2017 Chinese Super League



Source: Wikipedia. “2017 Chinese Super League.” At https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_Chinese_Super_League accessed 29 May 2017.

Figure 2-9: Location of Teams in 2017 Chinese League One



Source: Wikipedia. “2017 Chinese League One.” At https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2017_China_League_One accessed 29 May 2017.

local provincial or prefectural teams, one recent trend is that rich and big clubs would rather establish their own football schools (Table 2-6).⁵⁰ In these club-run football schools, the best young players will be given priority to sign up with the owner club of this school, while the less best ones will likely be sold to other clubs. In this sense, the relationship between a state-run sports school and a long-existing club is like the relationship between a raw material supplier and a processing trader, while a club-run football school is like a complete commercial body with the

⁵⁰ Very few college students successfully sign a contract with a professional club. For comprehensible reasons, they have much more career choices than their peers who come from sports schools.

function of self-production and self-marketing. The only unchanged is that young footballers are commodities. Compared to the traditional provincial/prefectural team mode or the state-run sports school “training agreement” mode, there will be some costs in the short term for the self-production and self-marketing mode of club-run football schools, but its long-term economic and social benefits are still considerable.

Table 2-6: General Difference between Sports Schools and Football Schools

Categories	Sport Schools	Football Schools
Affiliation	Local sport bureaus	Professional clubs
Ownership	State-own	Private
Source of students	Surrounding area	Nationwide
Education Program	Provide 3-year junior middle school program and 3-year senior middle school program	Provide 9-year compulsory education, covering 6-year primary schools and 3-year junior middle school; some also provide 3-year senior middle school program
Coaches	Basic; Chinese	Very professional; Chinese; some are international
Source of coaches	Sport school graduates; retired players from provincial team	College graduates; retired professional players
Fee	Fair and affordable for most families	Highly cost
Career development after graduation	Provincial team; open	Reserve teams of professional clubs; college by taking national entrance examination

Mega capitals have created another approach for youth training and, to some extent, is helpful for increasing the number of young footballers, but that does not necessarily lead to increase in young footballers’ playing time on the pitches. Along with China’s accelerated marketization, China’s professional football clubs have also in recent years increased capital investments for winning games, more market sponsorship and more fans attention (the latter two are closely associated with the athletic performance). More Chinese football clubs have not been satisfied with

the result of cultivating their own young players or buying intermediate Latin American or African players. On the contrary, they choose to pay a huge sum of salary - sometimes even more than what best European clubs could afford - to attract international super stars to join (Guardian 2017a). As a result, young players' chances of playing on the pitch are furtherly reduced.

“Principle of Football”: Debates between State, Market and Fans

Clubs “burning money” for pursuing international super stars instead of fielding youth players is no doubt a violation of the country’s goal of using professional league to promote Chinese young players and in the end lead to the national team’s better athletic outcome. For how to achieve this national goal, the state, the market and fans have plunged into a long-lasting debate.

The state and market-oriented club owners often critique each other for knowing nothing about the “Principle of Football”, while either cannot define the term clearly.⁵¹ The state insists that “Principle of Football” is not equal to clubs’ crazy investments in recruiting international football super stars that leads to compressing opportunities for Chinese players, especially the youth, to play a game (Beijing Times 2015). On the other hand, clubs claim that the “Principle of Football” is de-administration, thus the governing body of the professional league should be completely detached from the state (Xinhua 2017b).⁵² What embarrassing is that both argue that the key solution is to “let the professionals do the professional job”; yet, neither can identify who are the professionals (Xinhua 2017a).⁵³

Twenty-year professionalization of China football has created a large group of paradoxical fans who highly value the result of winning/losing. They are passionate nationalists who critique CFA without hesitation when national teams lose again and again. From fans’ point of view, they

⁵¹ “Principle of Football”, a jargon in China football circle, is a literal translation of “足球規律” in Chinese.

⁵² Some intellectuals also agree that the root of the problem of China football “is the political system that controls sports” (Xu 2008a:271).

⁵³ A widely shared opinion is that “the professional” are ones who know youth training, club management and marketing. In recent years, the public critique has concentrated on CFA and its actual leader, the CFA Chairman Cai Zhenhua. Many believed that Mr. Cai, as the former table tennis world champion and Olympic gold medallist, undoubtedly knew pretty much on table tennis; but in the realm of football he is not a professional.

do have sufficient evidence to blame Chinese footballers. As they argue that there are so many training-hard and low-income athletes in other sports wining honour for the China, while what those high-salary Chinese footballers have brought are nothing but subsequent failures. Ironically, when CFA as the delegation of the state introduces policies that aim at improving domestic young players opportunities for playing on the pitches, fans almost always stand besides club-owners and sponsors of the league, and blame those policies harming the entertainment of the league.⁵⁴

In general, fans emotionally affiliate with club they support, and the club owner also applies a series of business methods to strengthen fans bond, eventually forming a club-fan community. Thus, every time when CFA issues any new policy that seems to be against the “Principle of Football”, fans often support and sympathize professional clubs, which are sometimes described as doing selfless job for china football.⁵⁵ Kennedy and Kennedy (2016) critique what is going on in European professional football, arguing that mega capitals control the public debate and fans’ value by media. Paradoxically, the state-led marketization for China’s football has failed to successfully control public opinion through the media.

Such public opinion is very unfavourable for China’s young players, who are in general less competent than international and domestic experienced players. Few young players are considered in head coaches’ line-up plan. If a coach is bold enough to field a young man, both the coach and the young man must be prepared to withstand intense stresses of public opinion from fans.

A remarkable fact is that it is rare for clubs to offend the state by openly critiquing CFA via media. As a case suggested in Chapter 6, some clubs further restrict players to make comments

⁵⁴ There are two typical CFA’s policies seen in the public as against the “Principle of Football”. In both seasons of 2001 and 2002, CFA suspended the principle of promotion and relegation within its league, in the name of providing condition for the national team to qualify 2002 FIFA World Cup. In 2017, CFA released a U23 policy to limit on foreign players within CSL, in the name of providing more opportunities for Chinese young players (Xinhua 2017d).

⁵⁵ One recent example is that Guangzhou Evergrande FC, the most successful Chinese club in CSL, was believed to defray the huge amount of salary to the new national team manager, Italian legendary coach Marcello Lippi. Details on Lippi’s salary was not announced in official press, yet Chinese football circle had confirmed the crucial role of Guangzhou Evergrade’s owner, Xu Jiayin, a Chinese real estate tycoon, in this deal between Lippi and CFA.

against CFA on either mass or social media. Young footballers' voices are missing, or "muted", if they still want to have opportunity to play on the pitch.

Voiceless Young Footballers with Burdens

In the tumult of public debate, it is footballers, especially the ordinary footballers in inferior leagues, the injured ones who have to abort their career, and young pre-professional players that are absent. Regardless of income, they are somehow vulnerable to the control from both the state and capitals. To grassroot level football youth, they have to survive at least two burdens.

One is the burden to deal with the risk of being abandoned by the state. As illustrated in the section above, before entering a professional club, best young footballers in a province belong to the provincial Sports Bureau. After the football reform, the primary task of a provincial team is to participate in the National Games every four years, while the primary task of a prefectural team to play in the Regional Games every four years. After the Games, the team's mission is over. At that time, if young footballers fail to sign a contract with a professional club, it means the end of their football career. Then, they must make a living in the labor market as other young people do. But due to their low educational background and poor family economic conditions, such players have limited career choice.

Another is the burden to deal with the risk of being abandoned by the market. Although competent young footballers can sign a contract with a professional club, the recent trend is that most clubs would prefer investing funding on introducing international or high-level domestic players to cultivating youth players. In front-line teams, many renowned adult footballers - some are international super stars - squeeze young capable players out of the game. In the name of the fans, clubs often justify such practices, because most of the fans want to see their teams' victories as soon as possible, and most of the fans believe that adult players are more experienced than their young teammates. If young footballers could not have a chance to play in the front-line team for a long time, regardless of the decline of athletic state, the better possibility for them is to be transferred to inferior league, while the worst result is to lose job.

In this research, readers will note that Xinjiang ethnic minority youth footballers who come to *neidi*, especially those pre-professionals, bear other burdens in addition to the two suggested above. These burdens are cultural adaptation (language barriers, eating habits, homesick and in-

terpersonal relationships), and the challenge to deal with - inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic - implicit discrimination and explicit misunderstanding.

Readers will also note that most of the Xinjiang youth players have suspended football training for various reasons before entering the pre-professional stage, though many of them, with a beautiful vision for their future, were inspired by their ethnic fellows' "success" stories in the beginning.

2.3 Conclusion: "Football for Stability"?

This chapter examines two contextual issues on Xinjiang youth football. The first issue is the development of ethnic tension in Xinjiang within the past two decades. Xinjiang has been presented as a complex region by many existing bodies of literature from historic, geopolitical, and anthropological perspectives. From ordinary people, to the academic circles, to the policy makers and executioners, many think of Xinjiang as an "issue" due to the strategical importance of Xinjiang for China's national security (Starr 2004; Finley 2013; Nathan and Scobell 2015). Yet, it is important to note that Xinjiang was not an "issue", at least in a long-time historic period of the PRC until the late-socialist era. In the socialist era, the state's ideological strategy was to build "cross-ethnic" classes as workers, peasants, soldiers and intellectuals, instead of emphasizing different ethnic groups (Clarke 2007). However, in the late-socialist era since the 1980s, as China has become integrated into global capitalism, development policies have been gradually geared towards economic growth, and the state's socialist ideology that based on moving toward equality had been replaced by Chinese Nationalism and market economy (Meisner 1999: 525; Wang 2004; Zhang 2014a). In this broad background, youth football turned out to be a part of various state's projects to secure stability in Xinjiang, and football participants' daily practices reflected the complexity of local ethnic relation. However, as Finley (2013) and Yee (2003) suggest that the state's projects and policies were "bad", "dated" and "ill-advised", for these policies failed to solve equality issue in Xinjiang, thus, ethnic tension developed into conflicts in the past twenty years. For this thesis, would "Football for Stability" fail or succeed in the future?

Next, this chapter examines the long-lasting structural inequality of power relation among the state, the market and footballers. This chapter illustrates that youth from poor families longing to pursue a career in football for improving domestic economic condition, but in the late-socialist era, the state can no longer provide stable benefits like those in the socialist period.

Moreover, young footballers must bear the pressure from the state, the market and the public. Their career future in football is full of uncertainties and challenges.

For Xinjiang ethnic minority football youth, the local government's wishful "Football for Security" strategy cannot change the existing structural inequality of power relation, and young players will still be at the weak position in such imbalanced power relation. As what next four chapters will discuss, Xinjiang football youth must solve many hardship, like stigmatization due to ethnic tension, shortage of necessities, language barrier, adjustment to new living environment and training style, etc. When they are coping with these challenges, the local government via "political brokers" (local coaches, teachers, sports cadres etc.) is implementing relevant policies and propagandas but has failed to provide substantial assistance.

Chapter 3 Tradition and Myth: Art of Forming Consent

Rahman was born in 1999 and when I interviewed him in early 2017, he had been a member of the G Football Club's reserve team. It made him no doubt an outstanding role model among his Xinjiang youth football peers. As a kid, Rahman learned football from his father who had also been a known footballer in their hometown Artush. Rahman told me,

Usually, my father doesn't mention football at home, but he still loves football, I know it. He was against me when I started to learn football. Because he... had experienced, he said that our ethnic group could't find a way out by playing football. But, I don't understand if there is no prospect for our ethnic group to play football, like what my father said, why so many people in my hometown are still playing. A coach in my hometown told me and my teammates, "You have excellent physical conditions. You are like good minerals. You must wait for someone to dig you out." So, I kept playing and training, waiting for the coach that could dig me out. And then, the scout of the G Football School came to see me. I was dug out.

As Rahman says, football does not suddenly turn popular in Xinjiang. Rahman's father used to be a footballer and now there are many youths playing and training football in his hometown at South Xinjiang. Many Uyghurs regard football as an ethnic "tradition" and believe that Uyghurs have some forms of physical and genetic talent on football. With the "rise of Xinjiang youth football", discourses on such "tradition" and "physical superiority" have frequently appeared on the media. Many government officials in Xinjiang, who used to be silent about football since the 1997 Ghulja incident, have instead started to endorse the Xinjiang football "tradition" and "Xinjiang Footballers' Physical Superiority".

Based on text and discourse analysis, this chapter will focus on two issues: the invention of "Uyghur football Tradition" and the construction of the social myth of "Xinjiang ethnic minorities' physical superiority". Blending description and analysis on cases, this chapter argues that by systematically promoting the two discourses, the state tries to produce the ethnic minority citizen best suited to the government's "Football for Stability" policies. I argue that organized governing projects in the football realm might be China's new governmentality in Xinjiang under the late-socialist era. But these projects might be ill-advised. Because they ostensibly create a friendly environment for ethnic minority youth to participate in football and reinforce the transethnic notion of "*Xinjianger*" as a regional identity, but in fact they strengthen ethnic boundaries and solidify ethnic categories between the Han and ethnic minorities, particularly Uyghurs.

The first section will examine the origin and representation of the Xinjiang football “tradition”, and how it is interpreted by local people in daily life. The second section will illustrate the “Xinjiang physical superiority” by comparing opinions of peripheral participants (young footballers’ parents and school teachers, fans, sports officials and media practitioners) and central participants (young footballers and their coaches). Their different opinions will be examined under the background of the imagination on the body in modern China. Thus, this chapter will also discuss how state-nationalism and ethno-nationalism influence Chinese concepts of the body, and how these concepts respectively reflect social anxieties of the Han and Xinjiang ethnic minorities.

3.1 Xinjiang Football “Tradition”

In this research, I note that from the grassroots to the state, many Xinjiang people’s expression on the Xinjiang football “tradition” are highly similar but unclear. In fieldwork, I asked almost all the young footballers the same question: why participated in football. Their answers were diverse, yet, one was always the same: “All kids in my hometown play football”, or “We play football since we are kids”. Sometimes parents or school teachers mentioned, “Our Xinjiang has the tradition of playing football”. In addition, official documents acknowledged that Xinjiang people had “the tradition to participate in sports” (XUAR Sports Bureau and XUAR Department of Education 2011) and claimed that Xinjiang “has a long historic record of playing football” (XUAR Government 2011).⁵⁶ How could football as a sport born just 150 years ago in England became a “tradition” in Xinjiang?

3.1.1 The “Invention” and the “Re-emergence” of Tradition

As reviewed in Chapter 1, in many parts of the world, the history of a local “tradition” is only about one hundred years long, and some of these traditions are not even rooted in that place but introduced from outside. For discussing this phenomenon, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983)

⁵⁶ The term “Xinjiang people” (*Xinjiangren*, 新疆人 in Chinese) in these officials’ discourses are an ambiguous label. Literally, it is used by those Han or Uyghur cadres to refer to all ethnic groups living in Xinjiang. But, if we carefully examine the context of this term, it is notable that these cadres in fact use this term to refer to some particular ethnic minorities, especially Uyghurs, instead of all people in Xinjiang. This is a subtle linguistic technique.

proposes the conception of “the Invention of Tradition”. Does the so-called Xinjiang football “tradition” belong to this kind of “invented tradition”? A reckless response to this question might be “yes”, because, after all, a widely shared fact is that modern football originated in England in the nineteenth century. In addition, Hobsbawm (1983:1) himself regards the appearance and development of the practices associated with the Cup Final in British Association Football as an “invented tradition”.⁵⁷

However, Hobsbawm’s concept of “invented tradition” is not just to discriminate the historic facts, but also to analyse the process and influence of the emergence of such conception in a certain place. For this thesis, I do not intend to discuss whether the Xinjiang football “tradition” is, or is not, an “invented tradition”. It is true that the concept of “the invention of tradition” could be worth to this research, because it is, as Hobsbawm (1983:1) notes, “taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past.” In this sense, I consider the primary task of this research is to examine what values and norms of behaviours in Xinjiang have been inculcated via reiterating “football tradition” (by this way, we might also find how these values and norms of behaviour imply continuity with the past).

In this thesis, I see practices and discourses on Xinjiang football “tradition” as a “tradition” that was constructed by ethnic minority groups, particularly ethnic minority elites. Drawing on Stevan Harrell’s (1994:27) idea on the development of ethnicity, I consider this “tradition” as *something that has already existed*, and as a part of *developing ethnic consciousness*, rather than something that was made up out of nothing. Thus, what we should concentrate on is to examine the context, in which the Xinjiang football “tradition” was “sharpened, focused, perhaps intensified by the interaction with the center” (Harrell 1994:27). In this sense, I illustrate Xinjiang football “tradition”, which has been accompanied by the “rise of Xinjiang youth football”, as a “re-

⁵⁷ As Hobsbawm (1983:1) suggests, the appearance and development of the practices associated with the Cup Final in British Association Football is an example of “tradition” that emerged in a less easily traceable manner within a brief and dateable period, and this kind of “tradition” is included in the category of “invented tradition”.

emerging tradition”. Then, before its “re-emergence”, in what historical context did Xinjiang football originate in the beginning?

3.1.2 The Yiksak Legend

In this research, I find that the origin of Xinjiang football is related to a village called Yiksak. As a young footballer whose hometown is in Artush told me, “There is a village in my hometown, and the villagers have been playing football since one hundred years ago.”

According to the official publication *Xinjiang Chronicle: Sport* (XUAR Chronicle Compilation and Editing Committee 2002: 230), the Yiksak village school of Artush in South Xinjiang hired foreign teachers in the early twentieth century. It was the foreign teachers who introduced and initiated football in the area. The initial conditions were rough, and the football was made of white sheep hats, rags and cotton, while the pitch was on the side of the road. This material shows that the history of the introduction of football to Xinjiang is not very old, only about a hundred years.

Another significant event mentioned by several historic materials was a football match held in the early twentieth century. To some extent, it was this match that gave rise to a series of discourses on Xinjiang football “tradition”. As *Xinjiang Chronicle: Sports* recorded, “In May of the sixteenth Republic Year (1927), Yiksak County organized a football team to have a match with the team of the British Consulate in Kashgar. In the end, Yiksak won the match by the score two to one” (XUAR Chronicle Compilation and Editing Committee 2002: 230). It is hard to know more details about this match now, even the description of this match in official documents is very simple. In recent years, some news reports have cited memories of older people who had watched that match, trying to restore the scene. Some reports said that after the victory over British, Yiksak team had another match with the team of Swedish Consulate in Kashgar, and the Uyghur team won again by the score seven to zero (Telegraph 2016; China Daily 2016a). Thus, the two victories “are destined to be a brilliant mark of the history of Xinjiang football” (Daily Sunshine 2013). The “Yiksak Legend” gave the public a sketchy impression that Uyghur had triumphed over the undefeated Westerners in football, thus “football is not just a game in Yiksak but is also a tradition” (Telegraph 2016).

To some extent, football has gradually become a part of Yiksak villagers' daily life. A Uyghur film director went to Yiksak village for collecting materials for his film and he was surprised, as he said,

Since then, they have passed the spirit of defeating the British to younger generations. When we were there, the most touching thing was that kids never called each other by their real names. They called, "Hey, Maradona, come over, they want to interview you." "Ronaldo, come over." It surprised me that they used those big names of international football super stars as nicknames. When I went to their home, on the wall were all photos of international football stars. I was not familiar with some of those football stars, then old men and old women came to tell me who those stars were. They knew quite a lot on football games and stars all over the world. This is particularly interesting to us, it is different from other villages in Xinjiang... Another feature of that village is that women also like to play football. When girls are in their seventeen and eighteen, they prefer to express their love to men who play football well. Girls will marry whoever play football well. This is different from other places. (Xirzat et. al. 2008: 24-25)

But what does "the spirit of defeating the British" mean? Miradil, a Uyghur football coach working in G Football School of Guangdong province, told me that, "Many Uyghur children, especially those in the countryside of South Xinjiang, play football barefoot beside the desert since they were kids. For no special purpose, they just like playing football. Their parents also play football when they were younger. They just feel that playing football is a happy thing." Miradil's hometown Kashgar is only twenty kilometres from Yiksak village. "We know that we had a history of defeating European by football," he said. "For many Uyghur children, even though they might have no special talent for football, but they don't accept failure, they have some... spirit, they dare to play to win."

Zulyar, a Uyghur footballer in his seventeen years of age I interviewed in the early 2017, was one of Miradil's team members. Zulyar's hometown is Artush. Though he could not name that legendary village, he said that he also knew the story on Uyghurs defeating Europeans and that this history deeply affected local youth. Below are excerpts of my interview with Zulyar:

Zulyar: Every kid in my hometown plays football. We play football is like ... we eat naans.

Author: "We"? You mean...

Zulyar: Kids around. Elder kids, little kids, sometimes girls play football with us, too.

Author: For those kids that you play with... do you know what their parents do?

Zulyar: I know some of my friends live in the city. Like my parents, some of their parents are teachers, some are cadres, and some do business. For those who I am not familiar with, some of their parents run a chop house, some come to the urban from the countryside to sell fruits, and sometimes those kids play football barefoot. But we still played together, we didn't see any problems. Just for joy.

Author: So, do you prefer to play with your friends in Artush, or in this football school?

Zulyar: Artush! Honestly, sometimes I do miss those days when playing football on the street. No pressure.

It is important to explore the meaning of the “Yiksak Legend” from what the locals have expressed. For a long time, football is more like a way for local people to present their live attitude of optimism, freedom and equality, rather than a pragmatic vehicle to change their daily condition, as chapter 6 will illustrate. At the same time, football acts as an imagined channel for local Uyghurs who live in the heart of the Eurasian continent to bridge their living environment to the world. Yet, we still need go back to the beginning question of this section: why was a kind of local knowledge and experience somehow shaped into an ethnic and a regional “tradition”?

3.1.3 *Maimaiti’s 2008*: A Textual Case

As Hobsbawm (1983:3) proposes, “Such networks of convention and routine are not ‘invented Traditions’ since their functions, and therefore their justifications, are technical rather than ideological (in Marxian terms they belong to ‘base’ rather than ‘superstructure’).” His words remind us that it is important to examine the function of ideological apparatus when examining a constructed “tradition”. Following Althusser’s (2009) classic conception, here we need to examine aspects of “Ideological State Apparatuses” (ISA), which include religious facilities (the system of the different churches), laws, communications (press, radio and television, etc.) and cultures (literature, the arts, sports, etc.). Let me present an example that can help us understand the construction of the Xinjiang football “tradition”.

The “Yiksak Legend” has inspired not only many football participants in Xinjiang, but also artists. In 2008, based on the story of Yiksak village, Uyghur film director Xirzat Yahup and Han Chinese writer Zhang Bing produced a fictional movie *Maimaiti’s 2008* (Figure 3-1). Before filming, as the director confessed, he as a Uyghur did not know either that there had existed such a legendary village with such an enthusiastic group of people (Xirzat et. al. 2008).

Figure 3-1: A Scenario of the Film *Maimaiti's 2008* with Its Crew List



Source: 西日紮提 等(Xirzat et. al.). 2008. 新作評議: 買買提的 2008 (Discussion on New Movie: *Maimaiti's 2008*).
當代電影 (Contemporary Cinema) 6: 24-32.

The content of this movie apparently has nothing to do with Yiksak village. The plot is about a white lie. A group of Uyghur kids in a village called Shawei, on the edge of the Taklimakan desert, are fond of playing football. A makeshift football coach Maimaiti (Mehmet) promises these kids that should they win the county football tournament, they would all be eligible to travel to Beijing and participate in the opening ceremony of the 2008 Olympic Games (Xirzat 2008).

It is worth to mention that this low-budget movie was released nationwide shortly before the Beijing Olympics on May 2008 and did not lead to heated public debate.⁵⁸ Some audiences in *neidi* even thought that the movie was completely fictional, “it is nothing but another politically correct gift movie to Beijing Olympics” (Xirzat et. al. 2008). Yet, in the following year this mov-

⁵⁸ Maitmati's 2008 was released on May 2008, the same month with the Wenchuan Earthquake. The national focus then was completely on that disaster, instead of this a low-budget movie.

ie was awarded the thirteenth Huabiao Film Awards the best Children Film.⁵⁹ Then, more people in Xinjiang knew that this movie had been inspired by a legendary village in their homeland.

This fictional art product, produced by the state and ethnic elites, has strengthened some ordinary Xinjiang people's impression of football as a "tradition". Most of my informants are too young to watch this movie. But many coaches, school teachers and some elder players have watched and shared their positive comments on this movie with me. Although few of them could remember all the plots, many of them, especially Uyghur informants, said that children's enthusiasm and optimism for football illustrated in the movie were completely the same in the reality. Kazakh coaches also expressed their love for this movie, but they are not sure whether this movie could represent Xinjiang youth football.⁶⁰

It is necessary to note that the image of ethnic minority youth in *Maimaiti's 2008* are still passively *presented* and *expressed*. For instance, a key role in the movie, the real coach who trains those youth footballers is not the Uyghur man Maimaiti, but a young Uyghur lady who graduated from the regional normal university. As an informant commented, "How many professional female football coaches can you find in Xinjiang, especially in South Xinjiang?"⁶¹ The female role, as the Uyghur football coach in the movie, is somehow a typical "internal orientalist" representation (Schein 2000) by the Han Chinese writer for the purpose to cater to audience's expectation. Interpreting, however, a fiction is not the focus of this thesis; we need to return to reality and analyse the discourse of "tradition" in daily practice.

⁵⁹ The Huabiao Film Awards is an annual awards ceremony for Chinese cinema and the highest government honour in the PRC film industry.

⁶⁰ For instance, Kazakh coaches often emphasize how the natural difference between North and South impact daily football training. One informant in Altay said, "It is not easy for Uyghur in South Xinjiang to play football in the summer. Think of the temperature there in the summer. But they are luckier in the winter. For us, it would be impossible to train once it snows." Another example is that when I ask Kazakh informants whether football is a Kazakh tradition, several of them responded negatively, as one said, "Football might be a Uyghur tradition. Our tradition is skiing and riding horse."

⁶¹ It is true that there are few female football coaches in Xinjiang. In the regional youth football championship, I check the name list in the event brochure, and note that even in the Girls' Football group, coaches of all participant teams are almost all male.

3.1.4 Re-emerging “Tradition”: Timing, Controversies and Significance

In 2013, a monument was built in Yiksak. Words in both Chinese and Uyghur were carved on this monument, meaning “The Birthplace of Modern Football on the Silk Road”. We may consider the building of this monument as a sign. It marks that the state has legitimatized the sacred status of Yiksak in the history of the Xinjiang football (Figure 3-2).

Figure 3-2: The Monument in Yiksak⁶²



Source: Li, Hu (李虎). 2017. 古絲路上的現代足球發源地——依克薩克小學 (Yiksak Primary School: The Birthplace of Modern Football on Silk Road). At <http://www.xjzhzl.com/wap/wap.php?action=article&id=268> accessed 29 April 2017.

The most fascinating feature on Yiksak is not how those related stories, legends and daily speeches have proved the authenticity and history of the Xinjiang football “tradition”, but what these related discourses have presented. What have been presented via football, as I argue and will analyse, is the “modernity” constructed by ethnic minority and the state. The core to understand this “modernity” is the two games in 1927.

⁶² Uyghur transcripts on this monument are “The Birthplace/Hometown of Football on the Silk Road”, while Chinese transcripts may produce minor ambiguity. Chinese version may refer to “the Birthplace of Modern Football (on) the Silk Road”, or “The Silk Road (is) the Birthplace of Modern Football”. Carved at the end of all scripts are the date “31 December 2013” and “Xinjiang, China”.

I will try to analyse the symbolic significance of the Uyghur victory via setting the two games in the frame of China nation/minority ethnicity. The time of the two games was in the beginning of the twentieth century. At that time, the industrialized West represented the modernized side - at least in the Chinese nationalists' narrative within the twentieth century - and many places within China, including Xinjiang, were still in the agricultural society, representing the backward side. In the public imagination from the grassroots to the state, as I will review in the next section, the two defeated opponents were European whom were considered to have superior physical quality, and one of them were British, who had "invented" the sport called football. Besides, local footballers were peasants, while the two European opponents were male diplomats, whose socio-economic status were seen to be much higher. However, it was these Uyghur peasants who had defeated those opponents, who were physically, orthodoxy, socio-economically superior, in that historic background via football invented by the opponents (Figure 3-3).

Figure 3-3: A Mural in Yiksak Commemorates the Famous 1927 Game between Villagers and Westerners.⁶³ Photo: Cui Jia, China Daily



Source: Telegraph. 2016. "The village with a dream of football glory." At <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world/china-watch/sport/chinese-village-dreams-of-football-glory/> accessed 1 June 2017.

⁶³ In this mural, Uyghur footballers dressed as how they looked like in ordinary live. The obvious contrast was that their opponents were wearing football shoes, long stockings, shorts and T-shirts.

Here, in exploring the significance of Yiksak, I try to employ Stevan Harrell's (1994) conception of the "asymmetrical dialogues between the centre and the periphery". As Harrell (1994:7-27) suggests, ethnic groups in China are seen living in the periphery, and in the national narrative, three metaphorical images are forced on those ethnic groups,

Ethnic minorities as women – Han Chinese as men;

Ethnic minorities as uneducated children – Han Chinese as educated adults;

Ethnic minorities as uncivilized ancients – Han Chinese as civilized moderns.

The fact is that "modernized" Han Chinese are weak in the case of football – they cannot even break through Asia, let alone defeat the West opponents. However, what Han Chinese fail had been done by Uyghurs a century ago. The scenario was that a group of Uyghur men defeated another "modernized" men (European male diplomats) in a "modernized" way (football). The Yiksak Legend has hence provided convenience for shaping Uyghur modernity, for the two victories symbolize Uyghur great voices in "asymmetrical dialogues between the centre and the periphery".

One consequence of this construction of ethnicity might be a strengthened ethnic identity within some of the Uyghurs, presented as the "ethnizing football" in Chapter 4. At the same time, as Chapter 4 will also examine, the state must keep its control to ensure that this ethnic consciousness is not in conflict with national consciousness. Here, it explains why the scripts on the monument of Yiksak does not emphasize "Uyghur", but "the Silk Road". Because the latter conception blurs the ethnic boundary and concentrates on an extended idea in space and history, to which the Uyghurs are also involved and contributed, but not monopolized. And the script also implies that the football "tradition" is not an exclusive Uyghur "tradition" but belongs to all people in the region that is even broader than Xinjiang (the Silk Road covers more than Xinjiang).

And it also explains why the monuments has not been built until 2013 though the Yiksak Legend has existed for almost a century. In 2011, XUAR Government (2011) issued *The Guiding Opinions on Strengthening Regional Youth Football* and defined developing youth football as "a crucial means for promoting regional leaping development and social stability". And the twenty-third guiding opinion suggests,

To strengthen the propaganda of the Project of Popularizing Youth Football, and to create a positive consensus environment. The guided consensus and social environment are crucial for the Project of Popularizing Youth Football. It is necessary to utilize modern media, including news-

paper, radio, television, and the internet. It is necessary to vigorously carry out propaganda and education, and to build a good social environment for developing youth football. (XUAR Government 2011)

The building of the Yiksak monument may be considered as a part of the project “to create a positive consensus environment”. It explains why football as a “tradition” would re-emerge in the past few years.

3.2 “Xinjiang Footballers’ Physical Superiority”

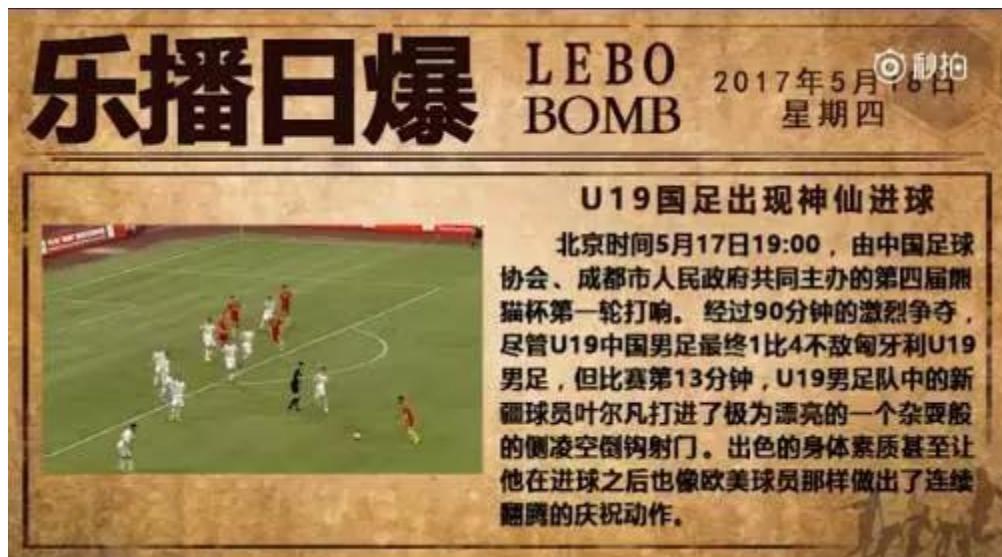
It is noted that another discourse emerges with the “rise of Xinjiang Football” is “Xinjiang footballers’ Physical Superiority”. This discourse claims that Xinjiang people have physical and genetic advantages so that they are more suitable for playing football. This discourse is more popular than the discourse of Xinjiang football “tradition”, because it is not only discussed within Xinjiang, but also over the country.

One latest example is from Erpan Ezimjan, the Uyghur footballer in the under-nineteen national team, who has been mentioned in the beginning of this thesis. In a recent game, Erpan scored a goal by kicking an impressive barb, and he celebrated this goal by successive somersaults like a gymnast. This flamboyant gesture is rare to see among other Chinese footballers. A sport institution from Beijing comments via its social media account, “With excellent physical quality, he made a continuous somersault, like European and American footballers, to celebrate this goal” (Figure 3-4).

As reviewed in Chapter 1, this discussion based on racial concepts is meaningless for explaining athletic performance.⁶⁴ Yet, this racial argument makes sense for us to understand why ethnic minority would involve in sports. In this section, I use “body myth” to refer to the “Xinjiang Physical Superiority”, at least in the realm of football. In this research, based on the degree of involvement in football, I found that four periphery groups are major supporters of the myth: football fans (ethnic minority fans in Xinjiang and some Han fans in other provinces),

⁶⁴ A recent sports physiological research shows that there is no significant difference between Uyghur, Han Chinese and Kazakh teenagers by examining Urumqi middle school students’ capability in running, jumping and throwing (Wang and Wu 2008).

Figure 3-4: Social Media's Comment on Xinjiang Footballer Erpan Ezimjan's Celebrating Motion.



Source: Screenshot from the social media Sina Weibo. Lebo (樂播足球). 18 May 2017. At

<http://www.weibo.com/5944465923/> accessed 18 May 2017.

government cadres (in sports, education and propaganda departments), media (mass and social media), and footballers' parents. Two groups that are against the myth include: some other Han Chinese football fans, and Xinjiang football coaches (ethnic minorities and the Han). And there is one group who is neither for nor against the body myth - the core participants, the young footballers.

The primary task of this section is not to have a thick description on how diverse groups support or oppose the body myth. This section concentrates on analysing discourses of these subjects by situating these discourses in the background of Xinjiang/the State, ethnicity/nationalism, and the late-socialist era. By this way, this section will explore the social-cultural significance of the “Xinjiang Footballers’ Physical Superiority”.

3.2.1 “Western Bodies” Made in China: Masculinity, Sport and Anxiety of Nationalism

The “body myth” has been a long-standing phenomenon in Chinese modern history, and it reflects the anxiety of Chinese nationalism (Xu 2008a; Brownell 1995; Zhang 2014a). However, the cause for this anxiety differs in contexts of the early twentieth century and the contemporary context. In the early twentieth century, it was cultural-nationalism that aimed to solve the national crisis by westernization that totally replaced Chinese culture or that kept Chinese cultures the

essence while adopting western culture for its functionality, as proposed by the cultural elite in those days (Duara 1993; Chow 2001; Karl 2002). Now, in the early twenty-first century, it is state-nationalism that has mixed ethno-cultural narratives and employed marketization, aiming to normalizing the party-state's legitimacy (Xu 2008a; Zhang 2014a).⁶⁵

Although scholars in social science and humanities have diverse interpretations on Chinese masculinity in premodern era, none of the literatures on China's modern sports deny the influence of Western racial and biological conceptions on Chinese intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century (Xu 2008a; Brownell 1995; Morris 2000).⁶⁶ At that time, West sports that emphasized biological manhood were introduced to China through Western-run schools, and the Western bias against women in sports was reflected in the limited participation of Chinese women (Brownell 1995:222-225). Although this gender bias in sports has become blurred in the PRC era, Chinese hierarchical idea of physique and gene influenced by the Western racial stereotype still exist in Chinese society, which is often presented in culture and art (Brownell 1995: 51-56; 225-228).⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Nationalism has different strains depending on it emphases during 20th century in China (Duara 1993; Chow 2001; Karl 2002). “State-nationalism” emphasizes the leadership of the state in formulating and promoting nationalism for cultivating the central authority and legitimacy of the state. In late-Socialist China, the party-state tend to control the narratives and people's behaviour of nationalism for the party-state's authority and legitimacy. The strain of “ethno-nationalism” at the early 20th century was tricky, as the anti-Qing revolution developed with Han ethno-nationalism, but after the success of founding the new Chinese nation-state, political elites tried to promote the concept of “Chinese Nation” (中華民族) to replace Han ethno-nationalism. The positioning of different non-Han minority groups varied, and how the Uyghur and other Muslim groups in Xinjiang positioned themselves at that time in terms of “Chinese nationalism” or “ethno-nationalism” is a complex history to discuss and beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁶⁶ For instance, Song (2004:2) argues that Chinese masculinity in premodern era is characterized by a culturally valued soft, literary style of manhood. This argument might be negotiable if we consider that in the grassroots, people also value heroic men with physical strength and determined bravery, like many male characters in some fictional works, including *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Water Margin*.

⁶⁷ For instance, some scholars note the closed relationship between Chinese (including the PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan and oversea Chinese communities) fever on martial arts and nationalism (Chan 2001; Prashad 2003).

Some scholar argues that Chinese racial conception is not only introduced from the West, but also combined with its existing imagination to other “race” of people. It leads to China's own version of racial stereotypes that is not the same as the West racial conception (Dikötter 1994). This thesis does not intend to examine whether there exists the “Western-impact Chinese-

Chinese fetish for the “Western body” and Western masculinity in modern era is a paradox that mixed fear and admiration to Westerners.⁶⁸ It roots in the construction of Chinese nationalist discourse. Chinese nationalism rose in response to incidences of foreign imperialist aggression in the turn of the twentieth century. As many literatures suggest, there exists a kind of analogy on body/nation in the construction of the Chinese nationalist discourses (Xu 2008a; Brownell 1995). Brownell (1995: 44-45) notes that many Chinese intellectuals in the early twentieth century, like Yan Fu, Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, actively proposed social Darwinism and “frequently used the body as a metaphor” in their works that introduced Western social ideologies. One of the core conceptions among that generation of Chinese intellectuals was that physical education could function as a way of linking individual bodies to the welfare of the nation: as one of the disciplinary techniques, physical education could develop with the rise of the nation-state. This conception of linking body develop with nation and anxiety on national glory penetrated the whole modern Chinese history. Brownell (1995: 22) summarises it as “somatization”, which refers to “the way in which social tensions are often expressed in a bodily idiom, so that calls for their resolution often center on healing and strengthening the body.”

One outcome of “somatization” is that Chinese are concerned about the athletic performance of all national sports teams. As we have reviewed in Chapter 2, in the PRC the state established well-developed sport and P.E. institutions for cultivating elite athletes to compete on international stages. Deeply influenced by the Western racial conception, many sport governing bodies believe that Chinese physical characteristic is “small, swift, agile”, specific sports hence were believed to be more adapted for Chinese small torsos and had been strongly supported by the state, including table tennis, badminton, gymnast, diving, and long-distance running, etc. (Hoberman 1997: 137; Lü and Han 2004:101; GAS 2005: 264). It was in these sports that Chi-

response” consequence on racial stereotypes in contemporary China sports, yet, as many evidences in this section present, many athletes, sports officials and fans in China have been involved in the reproduction of racial conceptions.

⁶⁸ Chinese conception of “Westerners” is ambiguous at least in the sports realm. In Chinese daily discourses on sports, “Westerners” are more a racial concept rather than a cultural concept so that it may refer to Anglo-Saxon in Europe and North America, Latino in Europe and Latin America, White people in former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and African American. In Chinese football discourse, some people consider Arabian, Turkish and Iranian with white skin in the Mid-East are somehow “Westerners”.

nese athletes firstly won world championships and Olympic gold medals in the 1980s and the 1990s. However, sport governor's conception on "small, swift, agile" is controversial: first, its preconception is that all Chinese share the same physical quality. And it considers that Chinese physique is inborn different from "Westerners", for "small, swift, agile" is opposite to "big, steady, strong". In sum, this national sport strategy has reflected and normalized the Chinese fetish for "Western bodies".

Around the new millennium, the anxieties of the Chinese regarding national pride has subtly altered, and this transformation has also influenced public focus on the body and sports. As Xu (2008: 264) noted, "The Chinese, who have lived in an ideological and religious vacuum and are searching for moral values after the collapse of Communism, may well find international competition on the playing field the best valve for their frustrations". In the sports realm, sports governors reinforced the "Whole-nation System". This system, on the one hand, expanded the range of recruiting best young talents (not certain provinces, but nationwide); on the other hand, it arranged the best recourses all over the country (coaches, training partners, equipment, game opportunities, etc.) to support the elite athletes in national teams. As a result, since the 2000s Chinese athletes have also made remarkable breakthroughs in sports that "Western" athletes had dominated.⁶⁹ The Chinese hurdler Liu Xiang is a perfect case. As Zhang Charlie Yi (2014a:32) notes, both the Chinese media and Liu Xiang himself emphasized Liu's success "as the accumulated result of stringent daily self-regimentation, scientific training, and hurdle techniques, rather than as racially innate - as is suggested in the case of black athletes." However, both the Chinese media and Liu's narrative were suspicious. First, this narrative considers Chinese athletes' breakthroughs in "Westerners" dominated sports as an amazing achievement, it makes itself as a typical "reverse discrimination" (Hoberman 1997:134-140; Frase and Kick 2000). In addition, as this

⁶⁹ These athletes who break the long-time monopoly of European and American competitors, as the official expressed, may include: Yao Ming, a retired Chinese professional basketball player who played for the Houston Rockets of the National Basketball Association (NBA); Liu Xiang, a retired Chinese 110 meter hurdler, who was the first Olympic gold medallist and World Champion in a men's track and field event for China; Li Na, a retired Chinese professional tennis player, who was the first Chinese player to win two Grand Slam singles titles at the 2011 French Open and 2014 Australian Open; Sun Yang, a Chinese Olympic and world-record-holding competitive swimmer, who was the first Chinese man to win an Olympic gold medal in swimming; and Ding Junhui, a Chinese professional snooker player and the most successful Asian player in the history of the sport.

narrative emphasizes, it is the “meritocracy” that promotes Liu Xiang’s athletic performance and gives him a “hypermasculine” like his Western competitors, distinguishing him from many of other Chinese athletes (Zhang 2014a; 2014b).

In this sense, the current discourse on Chinese athletes’ breakthroughs in “Westerners” dominated sports is essentially based on and reproducing Western racial ideologies of phenotypical/genotypical differences (Zhang 2014a:31). By this logic, Chinese could make more “Western bodies” by “scientific training”, like Liu Xiang. This discourse perfectly reflects the latest anxiety of many Chinese, to “surpass the UK and US” in the twenty-first century via many sports (the more, the better).⁷⁰ Surely, those sports include football.

Then, how does this fascination with the “Western bodies” relate to the “Xinjiang Footballer Physical Superiority” that we are going to discuss? It is necessary to return to the Xinjiang context to examine how different ethnic groups consider their own bodies.

3.2.2 Peripheral Participants: Parents, Teachers and Fans

If Liu Xiang’s body is a “Western body” made in China, the body of many Xinjiang people, referring to Uyghur and Kazakh footballers in this thesis, is seen by many Chinese as the inborn “Western body”. Here, “Chinese” include Han Chinese, Uyghurs and Kazakhs.

Yet, as I will illustrate, the process and significance for different ethnic groups to reach this conclusion are distinct. Let me put cadres, coaches and footballers aside, and firstly concentrate on parents, teachers and fans. By illustrating their daily discourses - the verbally expressed, the unexpressed, and the inexpressible - readers might note how different ethnic people have normalized their “body myth” on Xinjiang footballers.

Ethnic Minorities

For Uyghur and Kazakh informants, those who believe the own ethnic group have physical superiorities on football include footballers’ parents, school teachers, fans and media. Their expressions on this idea are highly similar and repeated. The central words are “good physical qual-

⁷⁰ On “超英趕美” during the Great Leap Forward Campaign in the late 1950s.

ity”, sometimes with definitive “we Kazakh”, or “we Uyghur”, or “we ethnic minority”, or “we Xinajingers”.⁷¹ And it is notable that only a few informants would use a comparative expression, as “Our ethnic physical quality is better than that of Han Chinese.”

Yet, what dose “physical quality” refer to? Ethnic informants give diverse definitions: some said, “good stamina”; some said, “run fast”; some said, “being strong”, and so on. When answering this question, several informants in fact conclude at non-physical factors. For instance, a Uyghur organizer of the local football fan association also gave me similar definitions like above, yet, he went on, “The key is that Xinjiang children have a kind of strength, as Han said, *renjing*... and they are not afraid of hardship. So, they are particularly willing to run. How can you play football if you don’t even want to run?”⁷²

Why ethnic minority children would have these “physical quality”? Many informants also provided concrete answers. A Kazakh chef in the middle school said, “We grow up by eating beef and lamb, and drinking cow milk, goat milk, and camel milk.”⁷³ A Kazakh father said, “We are different from Han parents. Han parents control their children... too strictly. We are not so strict. If our children want to play football, just let them play. And, we Kazakhs love to participate in sports.” Emphasizing acquired factors, this father’s answer connects physical quality with educational attitude and ethnic tradition. A Kazakh school teacher’s answer is also very representative, as he said, “In history, we Kazakh was the ethnic group on horseback. The nomads were more likely to move. In the past, many of us had not moved to the urban district but live in meadows. We rode horse all the year, skied in the winter. So, we have a better physical quality.”

In fact, few Uyghur and Kazakh parents and teachers express that their ethnic “physical quality” are inborn. The only exception is a fan whom I interviewed in the Urumqi Ergong Stadium (readers will meet this stadium again in the next chapter). When watching Xinjiang Leop-

⁷¹ “Good physical quality” are, in informants’ original words in Chinese, “身體素質好”. “We Xinjianger”, in informants original words, “我們新疆人”.

⁷² “*Renjing*” in his original words, “韌勁”.

⁷³ His unexpressed words are that Han Chinese eat pork. Based on my fieldwork experience, some Islamic ethnic groups in Xinjiang insist pork as an inferior meat. This conception on meat is a kind of inexpressible discourse when many Xinjiang Islamic ethnic minorities associate with non-Islamic groups in their daily life.

ard game, he told me excitedly, “Xinjiang footballers’ physical qualities are as good as those footballers in European top five leagues! We are half European!”

Han Chinese

On the other hand, some Han parents and teachers also agree that ethnic minority footballers have physical superiority; yet, their acknowledgements are not completely positive.

In Altay N Middle School, a Han mother was unable to dissuade her son who insisted on participating in football training. On the first day when the mother sent her son to the under-thirteen team for the trial, I interviewed her besides the pitch. She said, “Look at those Kazakh kids, how strong they are! And look at my son.” Her son was going to be in grade five of a local primary school in September 2016. The boy was in the same grade with his Kazakh teammates. Although taller than those Kazakh boys, he looked much thinner and wore a pair of glasses in training. His mother looked quite concerning, as she said, “They told me, many of these ethnic boys had come from countryside, and they barely studied at school but played football … I worry that my son could not catch up with those ethnic boys.” When she was saying this, her son was running around the pitch with his teammates. The boy led in the first 200 meters, but gradually slowed down and was out of breath after the first circle. Watching her son anxiously, his mother said, “Actually, I am afraid that my son would be kicked to injured by those boys.”

Another Han informant is a college teacher. He is also a football fan and concerns himself with Xinjiang football, especially Leopard. As he said,

Many of Xinjiang ethnic minority footballers do have excellent physical qualities! Look at how they tackle and obstruct, they are really like European footballers. But talking about beating an opponent, ball handling and shooting, their skills are still poor. If you note their team combination, and the outcome of a game, they are still Chinese footballers… An individual footballer’s skill is good. But you know what? European footballers do not only have excellent physical qualities, they also have excellent football “sense”. So, Xinjiang footballers must learn more.⁷⁴

The two Han informants’ opinions are representative. Although they admitted that ethnic minority footballers had “physical superiority”, this conclusion is still based on the stereotype

⁷⁴ Tackle, *lanjie* “攔截”; obstruct, *qiangduan* “搶斷”; beat an opponent, *daiqiu guoren* “帶球過人”; ball handling, *yunqiu* “運球”; shooting, *shemen* “射門”; team combination, *zhengti peihe* “整體配合”.

about ethnic minority group, which considers ethnic minority as “body-hard, but simply-minded”. The college teacher’s comment, to some extent, reflects Harrell’s (1994) idea on the relationship between the state and ethnic minority in the civilizing project: it is because ethnic groups are childlike and ancient that they need to be educated to adapt to a modern state.

In addition, there are Han Chinese who live in other provinces and do not know much about Xinjiang, but also believe in “Xinjiang footballers’ physical superiority”. For this research, they are not the objective I focus on. However, their involvement in this body myth, as presented in the beginning of this section, is still worth to be noted. In my interpretation, it is a typical reflexion of their nationalist anxiety, and they simply overlook the complexity of ethnicity and unify their body myth with their nationalist narrative.

3.2.3 Peripheral Participants: Officials and Media

In this research, I find that it is state powers, specifically government cadres and the media that boldly unify Xinjiang footballers’ physiques with the “Western bodies”. It is notable that though there exist various imagined notions of body on ethnic minorities in Chinese society, it is rare to see the state directly involves in the practice of popularizing a body myth. In the case of Xinjiang youth football, the state has made an exception.

In a TV talk show of 2013, the Chinese top football commentator Liu Jianhong, who then worked in the state television broadcast CCTV, said that he must admit that the bodies of minorities in Xinjiang - he knew there were other groups besides the Uyghur, but was not quite sure who they were - are “relatively good.” “It is in their genes,” he said. “They like bodily contacts, they like confrontational sports; we Han people, we train our kids to walk, not run. They (minorities) probably don’t have this in their culture... Two kids can just run out and wrestle. This is a true expression of natural masculinity” (Byler 2013).⁷⁵ In the later part of this talk show, Liu urged that the state and the market could provide more tangible aids for Xinjiang to support the development of local football.

⁷⁵ The clip of this talk show, “A Discussion of Xinjiang Soccer”, is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8-WMEIEOBQc>. Liu Jianhong’s comment on Xinjiang footballers’ “genes” starts at 9-minute mark in the video.

Almost in the same period, more officials' speeches, from the central government to XUAR, were published via media. And many of them mentioned the "wildness of Uyghur bodies" as a common-sense in daily discourses. Asked why Xinjiang would be the hope for China football, the former director of the League Department of CFA Lang Xiaonong concluded, "Xinjiang football has good mass foundation and strong physical conditions" (Urban Morning 2013). Then Anniwaer, the head of the Division of Physical Education, Health and Art of XUAR Education Department, said in an interview in 2013,

Playing football in Xinjiang is also a cultural phenomenon, just like Xinjiang as the land of dancing and song... Ethnic minority youth, especially Uyghur, Kazakh and Mongol, most of their genetic qualities, including maximal oxygen intake, anaerobic capacity, haemoglobin, and reaction time, are closed to that of European and American peers, and are the same as that of the Mid-east and Central Asian regions and countries. (Xinhua 2015a)

This cadre implied that people in Europe, America, the Mid-east and Central Asia had inborn physical difference. Then the Vice Director of XUAR Sports Bureau Liu Yi said in an interview in the same year,

Wherever you go in Xinjiang, you see children happily playing soccer on all types of surfaces, such as dirt patches and grassland. They even play in their bare feet. They just love it. (China Daily 2013)

In an interview two years later, Director Liu gave a straighter comment on Xinjiang footballers, as he said,

This place, Xinjiang, never lacks interests nor passions. Besides, talking about physiques, Uyghur and Kazakh youth share similar anaerobic capacity with European, just like Black basketball players in U.S. (Xinhua 2015a)

This cadre's racialist expression sounds confused and illogical, still, he highly praised the physical superiority of Xinjiang ethnic minority youth.

If these interviews and talk shows just present informal version of daily discourse within the grassroots, two governmental documents issued in 2011 are rather formal and worthy to note, because they remarkably justify the "body myth". Thus, the "myth" is not a myth any more but turns to be a "fact". *The Guiding Opinions on Strengthening Regional Youth Football* issued in 2011, said,

Our region has a long football history and some basic conditions for developing football. There are a group of youth who love football and have been participating in football for long time. They have good endurance, physique, and potentials. (XUAR Government 2011)

Another official document *The Project of Popularizing Xinjiang Youth Football*, which is issued in the same year, introduced the current situation of Xinjiang youth football,

Ethnic groups in Xinjiang are optimistic, passionate and bold. The tradition of involving in sports and unique diets have shaped ethnic youths' tall, strong, brave and rough physiques. (XUAR Sports Bureau and XUAR Department of Education 2011)

These discourses above have unified the Xinjiang football "tradition" and footballers' "physical superiority".

3.2.4 Core Participants: Footballers and Coaches

As I observed, it is those peripheral participants who are preaching the "Xinjiang footballers' physical superiority". However, it is core participants, namely youth footballers and their coaches who reserve their views on the "body myth".

I asked many ethnic minority youth footballers the same question, whether they thought they had a superior physical quality compared to Han footballers. An impressive scenario was that a player answered, "Yes", then he would be questioned right away by his teammates beside, as they asked, "How do you know since you have not played with them?". A more typical scenario was shaking his head with an unanswerable silence. This reaction is more truthful. Because in Xinjiang there are very few Han youth footballers, especially boys, meanwhile most of ethnic minority youth footballers have few opportunities to go to *neidi* provinces for training or playing with their Han peers.

In G Football School I interviewed two Uyghur young footballers Zulyar and Rahman, who were in the under-17 reserve team of G Football Club. It is Xinjiang front-line coaches who have clear attitudes against the "body myth". All these coaches, including Uyghurs, Kazakhs and Han Chinese, insist that the "body myth" is harmful for footballers, for this conception hinders these youngsters to know the reality about their competitors and themselves. In addition, the "body myth" cannot help these coaches to solve a fundamental problem: how to extend youth footballers' athletic performance to their adult period.

Compared to other informants, front-line coaches' understanding on "Xinjiang footballer physical superiority" is far more pragmatic. First, as they explain, there are historic reasons for the emergence of this misleading conception. Keran, the Kazakh football coach who have been working in the grassroots level for more than twenty years, shares his accusation against unfairness in Xinjiang football circle. As he states, the practice of age falsification, to a significant extent, produces the impression that Xinjiang youth footballers have excellent physical quality. "The truth is that the elder play with the younger," he said.

Think about this. You modify teenagers' age in their fourteen or fifteen, modify two years younger, then they go to play with children in their twelve or thirteen. In adult stage, it would not be notable to see the difference. But at youth stage, if a footballer, who is in fact two years older than his opponents, plays in the field, he might probably be much taller and stronger than others. Once there is only one such player, the game will be unbalanced. And in fact, there are more than one age-falsified players in the team... this problem has been in Xinjiang for many years [...] Modify your players' ages, you win, then you get rewards. There are too many this kind of coaches. But this way does not work at adult stage. Your team will be eliminated anyway. It is just regrettable for those age-fixed footballers. Many of them cannot continue to play football in the future.

Keran also pointed out that many young players in teams, representing Xinjiang to participate in national or international tournaments, had modified ages. "Otherwise how can a youth team win a game with double-digit scores in football by fifteen to zero? You think you are playing basketball or table tennis?" he asked me in reply. "Xinjiang send those problematic school teams to participate in national tournaments. Naturally, many people would think that all Xinjiang footballers have unique physiques."

In another interview at G Football School, Uyghur coach Miradil confirmed the issues of age falsification. But from his suggestion, the "body myth" is not mainly caused by age falsification but also dated training methods. As he suggested, an Urumqi primary school football team that has been advertised as a "role model" nationwide, "is in fact very problematic." "But the biggest problem is not because of age-fixing," he said. "It is because of their training method that gives the public the impression that Xinjiang footballers have superior physique." In Miradil's opinion, it is highly risky to modify a teenager's age and most Xinjiang coach are not willing to take the risk. He explained what training methods has led to the "body myth",

Xinjiang Football Association have been promoting the Soviet training method for many years. This method focuses on training footballers' strength but neglects the training of football skills and team tactics. For example, a ninety-minute training course is usually divided into sessions, thirty-minute running for endurance, twenty-minute squat lifting for concentrating on the power of lower limbs, twenty-minute training for explosive power of whole-body muscle, and training

with running ball in the time left. You see, footballers do not have much time in the end to play a “guided football game”. Under this training method, the endurance, strength and speed of footballers should be better than their peers in other provinces... there are too few coaches in Xinjiang who really understand football. Many of them are retired athletic or wrestling coaches. They just bring their training methods to football.

As Miradil suggested, many football teams in Xinjiang gradually realized that “this old training method was far behind the international advanced training method, and more coaches have abandoned this old method.”⁷⁶ “XFA might feel ashamed of this method,” Miradil said. “Now there are more Xinjiang football professionals come to *neidi* or even go abroad to learn what the advanced method is. So, few people in Xinjiang football circle are willing to mention they used to worship the dated and ill-advised training method.” This Uyghur coach frankly points out a reason for “Xinjiang footballer physical superiority”. His confession also reflects a practical issue, the shortage of coaches.

Kazakh coach Beglan, who then were Miradil’s colleague in G Football School, concerns himself with how this “body myth” would impact Xinjiang youth footballers. He suggests that Xinjiang youth footballers, especially those who have come to *neidi* and train with Han peers, have no physical superiority. In contrast, when those Xinjiang youth that used to believe in their physical superiority eventually have bodily contacts with their Han peers, they will find that their physiques might be less competent. At this point, those Xinjiang footballers’ self-confidence would be shook, and if they fail to adjust themselves, it will then negatively affect their further development. “You need use your brain,” Beglan said. “In our school, those Spanish coaches’ favourite Xinjiang footballers are not those who are strong, speedy, or tall, but those who know

⁷⁶ Historically speaking, the former Soviet Union is not as a traditional super power of football as other countries, like Brazil, Argentina, Italy, Germany, UK, France, Spain and the Netherlands. Besides, it is not clear whether reinforced power training represents the whole training system of the former Soviet Union football. In recent two decades, although there exist different football styles in Latin America and Western Europe, as I observed in football events for many years, a widely shared conception on current football trend among those best teams is the same: emphasizing the unity of the whole team and fast transformation between striking and defence.

to observe, to run properly, to pass, and combine with their mates. In a word, best footballers need read the game and carry out the coach's tactics, not only use their wildness.”⁷⁷

In fact, almost all the elder Xinjiang footballers (at their sixteen or seventeen) that I interviewed agreed with an idea that the real shortage of Xinjiang football was not enthusiastic youth, but the grassroots coaches who master scientific training methods. Because, as they suggested, a scientific training method could guide a youth footballer to learn good habits and to inspire their potentials in the future. Beglan quotes one of his Spanish colleagues' words, “The height of Argentinean Messi is 1.69 metre; the height of Cameroonian Eto'o is 1.80; the height of Portuguese Cristiano Ronaldo is 1.85 metre; the height of Swedish Muslim Ibrahimović is 1.96 meters. What is their similarity? They are all the best footballers on the earth. They are all disciplined.”

For some Chinese, their obsession with “Xinjiang footballers’ physical superiority” reflected their nationalist anxiety, while some Xinjiang ethnic minorities’ debates on this “body myth”, as I consider, reflected their ethnic anxiety.⁷⁸ The core of this ethnic anxiety is how to shape their ethnic representation via football in contemporary China; and this representation should remain in the stereotypical image of “wildness”, but should catch up with the trend. This trend, in China, is represented by hurdler Liu Xiang, basketballer Yao Ming, tennis player Li Na, Swimmer Sun Yang, etc. They are not “Westerners”, but they have the “Western body” and can break through the dominance of “Westerners”. This trend, in the international football, is represented by Messi, Eto'o, Cristiano Ronaldo, Ibrahimović, etc. Many of them came from grassroots poor families all over the world, in different skin colours, physical conditions, and ethnicity. Yet, they play in top professional clubs, and they were trained by the “scientific methods” that have inspired their potentials. This trend, as Zhang (2014a:32) argues and Chapter 6 will discuss, is the idea of meritocracy, which employs “scientific training and management” to ensure that young football talents could completely convert their physical qualities to football athletic performance, and then become the best-of-best professional footballers.

⁷⁷ Pass, in Chinese *chuanqiu* “传球”; combine or combination, *peihe*, “配合”. “Read the game”, in his original words, *du-dong bisai* “读懂比赛”.

⁷⁸ Chapter 6 will give examples on how ethnic minorities’ young footballers respond such anxiety in daily football training.

Miradil gives a comment after Beglan quoted their Spanish colleague, “There are many youths who have football talents in Xinjiang. It is like that there are many jades in Hotan. But for a better price, all the jades need to be polished.”

3.3 Conclusion: Governmentality in Xinjiang Football

In researching the “rise of Xinjiang youth football”, I note that the two discourses on Xinjiang football, namely, “Xinjiang football as a tradition” and “Xinjiang footballers’ physical superiority”, often intertwine. This chapter first discusses the “tradition”. In the current discourses on Xinjiang sports, the emphasized tradition is not any of those sports, like wrestling, skiing, Buzkashi, or Darwaz, with historical evidences based on daily lives, nor any of those sports, like basketball or boxing, in which Xinjiang has already achieved remarkable athletic glories.⁷⁹ It is football that stands out from many other sports and is given special meaning by state agencies. In this chapter, it is noted that the construction of Xinjiang football “tradition” was not invented from nothing. At the core of this “tradition” is the “Yiksak Legend”. First, it provides a historical legitimacy for the existence of Xinjiang football; second, it provides an ideal image of moral order - optimism, equality, and freedom - for the Uyghurs; then, for the Uyghur who defeated modernized European via a modern sport, it provides an ethnic superiority in football and strengthens its ethnic power in the “asymmetrical dialogues between the centre and the periphery”; last, it provides an opportunity for the state to unify the ethnic narrative and the regional narrative (transfer Uyghur “tradition” to Xinjiang “tradition”), and in the end, to serve the national narrative that promotes regional development and social stability via football.

Then, this chapter discusses the “body myth”. “Xinjiang footballers’ physical superiority” illustrates a more complex social image, for participants in this discourse exist nationwide. (1) It is notable that many Han Chinese fan in *neidi* provinces overlook the complexity of Xinjiang and simply unify their concerns and state-nationalist narrative. (2) Many Xinjiang local parents, teachers, cadres, fans and media participated in constructing this “body myth”, and directly re-

⁷⁹ Darwaz is tightrope walking skill that is popular in Xinjiang, and in 1953 it has been the performance event in the National Games of Ethnic Minorities. Buzkashi is the Central Asian sport in which horse-mounted players attempt to place a goat or calf carcass in a goal, and it is also an official event in the National Games of Ethnic Minorities. Chapter 4 will explain the significance of Xinjiang basketball.

produced the Western racial physical/genetic conception. The practice and daily discourse of both previous two groups reflected the anxiety of state-nationalism. (3) It is front-line coaches who are against the “body myth”. Yet, ironically, their conceptions of “scientific training method” also reproduce the Western body notion, which emphasized to manufacture a “Western body”. These ethnic coaches’ practice is a “somatization” that emerged in Xinjiang and reflected ethnic minorities’ anxiety of catching up with national modernization. (4) And it is notable that different ethnic groups’ interpretations on the “body myth”, to some extent, have strengthened inter-ethnic stereotypes and solidified ethnic categories.

A broader significance of this chapter is to reveal the new practice of China’s governmentality in Xinjiang via football during the late-socialist era. State agencies have clearly involved in popularizing discourses on “tradition” and “body myth”. Although the two discourses have probably been existing for a long time, for the sake of easing ethnic tension and seeking the social stability within Xinjiang, the party state skilfully appropriated the two discourses by propaganda, policy making and grassroots cadres. As cases presented in this chapter, state power has adopted subtle verbal tactics to blur the ethnic boundary by emphasizing “Xinjiang” instead of “Uyghur”, such as endorsing “Xinjiang football tradition” and “Xinjiang people’s physical superiority”, and naming Yiksak as “the birthplace of football on the Silk Road”. With the help of media, these verbal tactics let different ethnic groups get what they want. Thus, ethnic minorities, especially the Uyghurs, believe that playing football are suitable for their own ethnic group.

To some extent, this outcome has its positive impact on “Football for Stability”. As Zulyar, the young Uyghur footballer from Artush in his seventeen interviewed in early of 2017, told me, “Anyhow, people start to pay attention to our Xinjiang football. I am not sure about the future, but we are opening a way for the people behind us. If we played well, more people would recognize us, and more younger brothers could go out of Xinjiang in the future.”

Yet, state power’s specific practices on endorsing “tradition” and the “body myth” might still be ill-advised. As three ethnic minority coaches suggested, discourses on “tradition” and “body myth” gave both self-confidence and stress to youth footballers and could limit ethnic groups career choices for youths consider football as their best prospect. Moreover, state power’s “Football for Stability” might be against the reality. The next chapter will focus on the paradox: when the state wishfully uses football to reinforce the transethnic notion of “*Xinjianger*” as a re-

gional identity, the complex ethnic tensions in the past two decades make football as the field of identity, where ethnic boundaries and categories got solidified.

Chapter 4 One Football, One Dream? The Arena for Identities

Let me initiate this chapter via the sport, basketball.

On the night of seventh April 2017, Abduqeyyum published a very short message on his social media via WeChat, “Finally I’ve witnessed Flying Tigers’s champion in my life! I would be satisfied should Leopard enter CSL and win a championship!” On the same night, Xinjiang Flying Tigers, the professional basketball team based in Urumqi, won its first champion in the Chinese Basketball Association League (CBA) (Xinhua 2017c).⁸⁰ For XUAR, it was its historically first national championship win in a professional sport league in China. Abduqeyyum, the leader of a football fan organization in Urumqi, felt excited and proud. He wished that someday the same triumph could go to the realm of Xinjiang football: the only current one professional football club, Xinjiang Tianshan Leopard, would also win the champion in the first-tier professional men’s football league in China.

Abduqeyyum was not the only one that had shared their joy via social media on that night. In fact, my WeChat account was full of my Xinjiang friends’ celebration messages and pictures. They belonged to different ethnic groups (Uyghur, Kazakh, Han, Tartar, Hui, Mongols), and they lived in separate places (South Xinjiang, North Xinjiang, *neidi* provinces, Hong Kong, Turkey, Kazakhstan, and North America), and they were in various professionals, including many of my informants in this research. Because of basketball, the night of the seventh April belonged to many Xinjiang people all over the worlds.

The significance of the Flying Tigers’ triumph was not just within the realm of sports. Just one day later, the whole team was invited by the XUAR government and meet the Communist Party Secretary and the Chairman of XUAR. On state-run media, the state was also glad to embrace this basketball team’s victory, because it signified an outcome of “Ethnic Unity”. As the current Communist Party Secretary of XUAR Chen Quanguo said on this meeting:

All ethnic groups in this team unite together and compete hand in hand. The whole region should learn from Flying Tigers to always hold high the flag of ethnic unity, to care for ethnic unity like

⁸⁰ The Chinese Basketball Association, often abbreviated as CBA, is the first-tier professional men’s basketball league in China. Xinjiang Flying Tigers is a multi-ethnic team, in which Chinese players and coaches include Han, Uyghur, Hui, Mongol and Kirgiz (Global Times 2016b; Flying Tigers 2017; AKI Press 2017).

caring for own eyes, to cherish ethnic unity like cherishing own life. All ethnic groups should tightly embrace together like pomegranate seeds. (Tianshan 2017)

At this time, Flying Tigers's champion perfectly reflected one commonly shared academic conclusion, as reviewed in chapter 1, that sports are uniquely effective in defining national (or ethnic) identity and the sense of belonging (Hobsbawm 1990:143). But it is important to be exact here, and to ask, whose nation (or ethnicity)? Whose belonging? And during what time-period? (Jarvie and Walker 1994).

In the case of Flying Tigers, basketball had become the glue for joining regional and even national identity. Yet, it is important to note that no sport will naturally be a positive force for promoting an identity. In other words, when a sport relates to an identity or a value, we need examine least two points: firstly, sports as vehicle for shaping identities and values; second, sports as the process of the game of identities and values. In the previous chapter, readers have noted that, by the mass media, state agencies have been producing the ethnic minority citizen best suited to those governments' "Football for Stability" policies. If the previous chapter is an approach to discuss "sports as vehicle for shaping identities and value", this chapter will concentrate on the second point that how sports reflect the negotiation of identities and values. Let's return to football.

In this chapter, the first section will examine the trend of "ethnicizing football" along with the "rise of Xinjiang youth football" and how Han Chinese and ethnic minorities strengthen negative stereotypes of each other via football in daily interaction. The second section will discuss intra-ethnic divergences and reconciliation on ethno-nationalism and state-nationalism among Uyghurs. The third section will discuss the inter-ethnic competition and controversy concerning football between Uyghurs and Kazakhs. More specifically, the third section will illustrate how Kazakh football participants place themselves in opposition to Uyghurs, by behaving as good citizens and respecting sportsmanship to seize the moral high ground for winning other ethnic groups' sympathy and the state's support under the current background of anti-terrorism and socio-economic imbalance in Xinjiang. In the conclusive section, I will analyse the significance of this chapter from a comparative perspective. By illustrating cases, this chapter will provide a chance for readers to explore a complex and hybrid scene of identity in current Xinjiang.

4.1 Inter-Ethnic Distinction via Football: Ethnic Minorities and Han

The previous chapter explores that ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, especially Uyghurs and Kazakhs, have actively involved in football, and obtained wide support from the state and media which have been prompting the “Xinjiang Football tradition” and “Footballers’ Physical Superiority” on purpose. In the current prosperity of youth football, the two discourses discussed in the previous chapter have promoted a sense of ethnic pride by making seemingly positive stereotypes. While this section will discuss how football strengthens inter-ethnic negative stereotypes and solidifies ethnic boundaries and misunderstandings.

4.1.1 Ethnicizing Football

I consider the strengthening of inter-ethnic stereotypes as a part of “ethnicizing football”, which is producing ethnic distinction in the daily practice of the grassroots football. One is embodied in the inter-ethnic imbalance of football participants: major young footballers are ethnic minorities, not Han Chinese. Another is embodied as the distinction of attitudes: when a Han wants to join in, the ethnic minority prefer to play with the same ethnic group and vice versa.

For instance, I ask a Han mother why Han parents rarely send their children to participate in football training like other ethnic minority parents do. “Those ethnic minority children are so tough that I worry about accidents,” she said. “I heard when playing football ethnic minority only injure Han boys. I am not willing to bring my son here. But, he insists. We will see how long he would keep training.” As this Han mother described, ethnic minorities are all wild and their “wildness”, as she implies, is targeted towards Han Chinese. Yet, as I have observed, this mother’s concerning was a delusion with basis. Supposing those Altay ethnic footballers, mostly Kazakhs, were truly as wild as this Han mother described, there should have been many injured footballers in the team. The truth was that a few of them were injured in daily training, and their injuries were caused by faulty equipment, like broken shoes, or by they themselves, like using improper skills in body contacts that led to the sprain of ankles. No one was injured by their team mates in purpose. As I have observed, when facing opponents, they were not “wild”, but to some extent, very “civilized”. In the later annual regional youth football championship, the Altay dele-

gation even won the title, “Fair Play Award”, which was rewarded to teams with least red and yellow cards.⁸¹

This Han mother did not only worry the possibility that her son got injured by his ethnic minority teammates, but also was afraid that her son could not catch up with the training due to his weak physical condition. Her son, a tall but thin boy in his twelve years of age, just participated in training less than a week. I observed two impressive scenarios. One was that this boy was unable to run on the field due to his poor endurance. Another was that only a few substitute boys came to chat with this Han boy, and this shy Han boy was not willing to communicate with others, including the author. During training classes of match play, this boy usually kicked his own ball with the wall or the guardrail of playground. Keran, the coach of Altay, told me that it was impossible to bring that Han boy to participate in the regional championship, for his current physical condition was weak and his skills was untrained. Yet, Keran did not oppose that this Han boys continued training, as long as the boy was willing to do so, as Keran said, “Our training is always open for all students.”

The Han boy left the team one week later and never appeared again. It was difficult to know more details on why this Han boys did not continue to train. But, the linguistic aspect might be excluded, for almost all coaches and footballers in two Altay teams could speak fluent Chinese. Keran told me that he did not persuade this boy to quit, he said, “Perhaps it is because of his parents.” In an interview conducted in July 2016, I asked Keran why there was no Han footballer in his team, he gave his explanations:

Author: Has Altay always been like this? I mean that I have not seen any Han footballer in your team.

Keran: Not always. Indeed, players are mostly Kazakhs in our team, but we used to have Han players before. Not too many, and not every year.

Author: Almost half population in Altay are Han Chinese, but why they barely play football?

Keran: (He laughs) I don’t know either. Maybe you could help me to analyse.

Author: Because our Kazakh players are too tough?

⁸¹ In football, red and yellow cards are used as a means of warning, reprimanding or penalising a player, coach or team official.

Keran: (He laughs again) I know what you mean. It should have no relation to ethnic groups. Parents in any ethnic group would not like to see their children get injured. Every time I go to country sides for selecting footballers, I always tell those parents, mostly Kazakhs, that don't be afraid if their son gets injured in training. We are training football, not fighting. Their sons will benefit from today's training [...] as to ethnic relation, as you see, the relation between Kazakhs and Han Chinese in Altay is good, isn't it? Kazakhs in Altay originate from seven tribes, but we always say that there is the eighth Kazakh tribe. And the eighth is exactly the Han Chinese living here. In Altay, you didn't see any sentry of police on the street, for this place is peaceful. But you have been to Urumqi, and you will go with us to South Xinjiang. Then you will see how many armed police are patrolling on the street [...] why few Han boys play football? I think it is because of their parents. Many Han parents consider playing football as wasting time. Those parents think it is much more important for their children to stay at home to finish assignment works [...] Han parents, sometimes, overly emphasize "studying". But, participating in sports is also a study.

This Kazakh coach did not attribute the rare involvement in football of Han Chinese to ethnic aspect, as the Han mother suggested, but emphasized distinct educational conceptions. Keran is right in terms of this observation on social harmony in Altay. According to my observation in both North and South Xinjiang in 2015 and 2016, compared to Urumqi City and Maralbexi County of Kashgar Prefecture, the city of Altay gave visitors a peaceful and less nervous impression. Even so, that Han mother still put Kazakh boys on the opposite side of her own son, consider those Kazakh boys as "wild", "rude" and "uncivilized". It is pity for me to hear this prejudice towards ethnic minorities from the Han mother's words.

4.1.2 Whose National Teams: Uyghur's Imagined Community and Han's Phobia

If that Han mother's prejudice makes ethnic minorities feel uncomfortable, the following cases are likely to bring many Han people uneasiness, which is about Uyghur and Han Chinese negative stereotypes towards each other. Li is a Han football trainer of Xinjiang Football Association (XFA) to provide training program for Xinjiang grassroots coaches. Wang is a Han college lecturer teaching courses on communication. Both informants agreed that since the 1990s inter-ethnic tensions in daily life within Xinjiang had emerged in the realm of football. Their conclusions reflect the new trend of Han-Uyghur ethnic relation since the 1990s. As Finley (2013:235) observed, a series of non-violent symbolic resistance among the Uyghurs rose during the 1990s, and was expressed through three main vehicles: negative stereotyping of the Han (and positive counter-stereotyping of the in-group), symbolic, spatial and social segregation from the Han, and

alternative representations presented through the medium of “new folk”.⁸² The summit of this non-violent symbolic resistance was the Ghulja incident of February 1997, in which “the military suppression and the ensuing state crackdowns represented a turning point in Uyghur national politics: simultaneously an ethno-political climax and anti-climax, which ushered in an era of silence” (Finley 2013:235). The silence, to some extent, still exist today in the realm of football. Although many rumours, as some of my informants claimed and literatures in Chapter 5 will present, identified that it was the government’s suppression on a local youth football tournament that caused the Ghulja incident, many of my informants were not willing to talk too much about this disturbance. As coach Li said, “That riot has passed for many years. All I know about it is what I heard from my former teammates at Ghulja.” “We’d better not to talk too much about politics,” he said. “But there is one thing I can confirm. Since 1997, it has been rare to see Uyghurs and Han Chinese play football together, no matter in prefectural teams, or in schools.”

The college teacher Wang gave his observation on the campus of a renowned Urumqi university. “Playgrounds and stadiums on campus might be good spaces to observe ethnic relation in Xinjiang,” he said. “When ethnic relation is good, you will see there are many male students from different ethnic groups play football together in the pitch. While there is ethnic tension, like around 1997 and 2009, it would be rare to see the same scene.” Wang had his undergraduate program during 2001 and 2005 at the same university where he currently works and had his master program in a multiple ethnic college in Beijing during 2005 and 2008. One significant distinction in the two colleges, as he observed during his student days, was how ethnic minorities understand the relation between their ethnicity and patriotism. “It is very common that same ethnic students participate in a sport, like football, together in both universities at Urumqi and Beijing,” he said. “But one distinction I’ve found is that when there is a Chinese national team’s game, in Beijing, all ethnic classmates will cheer for the national team together. Yet, in Xinjiang, many Uyghur college students seem not to recognize the national team as their national team.”

The Uyghur-Han ethnic tension in the early 2000s, as Wang suggested, was “really obvious.” He shared with me a classic example. That was in the year 2002. The China men’s national foot-

⁸² The term “new folk” in the 1990s Xinjiang refers to an alternative form of popular songs that were used as the means to unite Uyghurs against the Han for projecting a Uyghur national consciousness (Finley 2013:184).

ball entered the final stage of FIFA World Cup for the historically first time. In that year, China was drawn into the group with Brazil, Costa Rica, and Turkey, and China's last game in the group was to play with Turkey. "In that afternoon, the college gave all teaching units a break for the first time so that students and teachers might watch the broadcast," he said. After many years, Wang still remembered the scenario in that afternoon:

But the atmosphere in the campus was weird [...] and embarrassing. The Hans and other ethnic groups all supported China, while the Uyghur actually supported Turkey! In the end, China was defeated by the score zero to three. Many of us could accept the result of the game, for there was indeed an obvious athletic performance gap between China and Turkey. Especially, if we could know Turkey eventually won the third place in that year of FIFA World Cup. But, what many of us couldn't accept was Uyghur students' reactions: many of them then paraded and cheered in the campus for the triumph of Turkey. It was not like their national teams had lost a game, but like their truly own national team had won.

Wang's experience in 2002 was not a sole case, and the similar case has also been verified in other studies. In another anthropological research on Uyghur identity, two Uyghur students interviewed in the year 2014 shared their perspectives:

During the last World Cup, it happened one time that China had to play Turkey. We were watching it in the big hall at school and, of course, China lost! It was really funny; every time Turkey began to do well, we cheered them, and our Han classmates looked askance at us and got really irritated! (Finley 2013:387)

The scenario in Wang's recollection is special. The significance is that this scenario differs from others. Sometimes, China national football team might play a game with Kazakhstan or Korea in international events, and Chinese Kazakh or Chinese Korean might also support Kazakhstan or Korea, for their ethnic consciousness seeing those two countries as their ethnic nation. However, in history, Turkey has never been an ethnic nation of Uyghur. Yet, some Uyghur, especially intellectuals, receive the conception of Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism and imagine Turkey as their ethnic motherland (Shichor 2005; Wang 2013). And in daily life, as Finley (2013:387-388) observes, some Uyghur educated youth express their cultural, religious and political affinities with Pan-Turkism and Pan-Islamism through the consumption of international sport. "I didn't actually understand why so many Uyghur were fond of Turkey instead of China, until I entered the college and studied some history," Wang said. "Even so, many of my classmates, Hans, Kazakhs, Mongols, and Huis, considered those cheerful Uyghur college students went too far."

As Wang observed, the case of 2002 World Cup is an extraordinary case that reflects the tension in the early the 2000s between Uyghurs and Hans “in such a direct way”. “Then gradually it turned to be better,” he said. “Sometimes you may see Han and Uyghur students play together during 2001 and 2005 when I was studying here, until the July 2009 Urumqi Riots.” For many residents, 2009 was another turning point of ethnic relation in Xinjiang. Wang shared his latest observations:

I came back here in 2008 as a lecturer. After 2009, I can tell you what I have seen besides football pitches on the campus since 2009. When Uyghur students play together, they are quite normal and friendly to each other. While some Han students join in, those Uyghur students turn to be very aggressive. Their motions are too risky, even you are not a fan, you can tell that those Uyghur students’ motions are aiming to their opponents, not to the ball [...] Those Han students are probably newcomers from *neidi*, they might not be familiar with ethnic tensions in Xinjiang. Because many of Xinjiang Han students usually won’t play football with Uyghurs. For quite a long time on this campus, Uyghur and Han students has chosen to play football separately on campus.

Wang’s memories, to some extent, are quite disappointing for those who consider ethnic tensions only exists among grassroots uneducated people. Yet, at the end of my interview, Wang also admitted that the ethnic relation in recent years “has seemed to be better again”. “The government and media have started to care for Xinjiang football,” he said. “And we have had our own professional football club. Sometimes I also go to Ergong Stadium to watch Tianshan Leopard’s games with my students and colleagues of all ethnic groups. In my opinions, this is the correct way. You must create opportunities for Uyghurs to truly participate in professional football so that they could contact other provinces.”

Coach Li in his forties years of age, who has been working in the football industry, also agreed that football reflected Uyghur-Han ethnic relations. Yet, as “an insider of Xinjiang football”, he did not agree that the state had not “created opportunities” for Uyghurs. “The truth is that the training opportunities and games of XFA are all controlled by Uyghurs,” he said. “Han staff are mostly in positions that carry on XFA’s policies. And Kazakhs have even less power in the realm of Xinjiang football.” As coach Li suggested, there exists certain ethnic segregation in Xinjiang, even in the football realm, “but it is mainly caused by Uyghurs themselves.” In an interview in August 2016, coach Li shared his personal interpretation on his Uyghur colleagues and footballers,

To be honest, although I have been working in XFA and dealing with Uyghurs for almost twenty years, I have no Uyghur friends. And I don’t intend to make friends with them, either. Unlike Ka-

zakhs who are more gentle and cooperative, Uyghurs are too arrogant and too intractable. Many Uyghur football practitioners have a poor educational background... they are not willing to communicate with other ethnic groups... I don't mean they can't speak Chinese. Those older than forties might speak poor Chinese, but those younger generations can speak fluent Chinese. Even so, they don't really accept what I want to share with them, they can only be convinced by outcomes. For example, when I train grassroots coaches from all prefectures of Xinjiang, I told them that their training method need to be improved. But many South Xinjiang Uyghur coaches insisted on their old methods, for their methods would be easier to bring victories at youth stage. And they thought that I was just a theorist, but not a practitioner!

As coach Li observed, short-sightedness that only sees current outcome and self-conceit that denies communication with other groups, are two primary problems of Uyghur football participants. "Uyghur boys are too fond of the individual limelight," he said. "Each single one is talented and likes to show off his skills, but it's hard to combine all of them together on the field. Their poor educational background and psychological condition also prevent them to play a good game when falling behind." Besides, coach Li also responded to my confusion on whether there existed unfair plays within Uyghur football teams, as accused by many other of my informants, like age-fixing and match-fixing:

Author: Why these unfair plays repeatedly emerge in Xinjiang?

Coach Li: In Xinjiang, football is like a Uyghurs' own game. The football governors, judges, and players are mostly Uyghurs. They can't break out the ethnic boundary. I don't blame those Uyghur youth for they are too young to understand this. But I do disagree with those Uyghur adults. Their short-sightedness will sooner or later limit their ethnic development.

Perhaps, it was the frustration of not being respected and recognized as a professional that made coach Li present his reluctance to make friends with his Uyghur colleagues. Considering coach Li's professional background in his field, his remarks at least reflect some Han Chinese professionals' negative perceptions on their Uyghur peers. Even so, coach Li's words are still deplorable and disappointing for us to understand a real ethnic situation in Xinjiang. Because not all the Uyghurs are as stubborn and conservative as coach Li says and, as the following section shows, there are different voices within Uyghurs.

At the end of my interview with coach Li, he also gave his positive judgement on current trends on the "rise of Xinjiang youth football." "At least, the state has started to value Xinjiang and Xinjiang football," he said. "In fact, the period when the athletic performance of Xinjiang football is good synchronises with the period when the ethnic relation is good." At the night when Flying Tigers won the league champion, coach Li expressed his opinion in message on his

social media account in both explicit and implicit words, “Xinjiang football now should learn from Xinjiang basketball to truly break down the boundary. If Flying Tigers has flied, can Leopard be far behind?”

4.2 Intra-Ethnic Identity Negotiation

Coach Li proposed to “truly break the boundary”, yet, he did not mention the word “ethnic” before “boundary”. This is a typical example I observed in fieldwork: when talking about any issues related to ethnic relation in Xinjiang, no matter on social media or in daily discourses, many people would carefully choose their expression. This reminds us to note the different forms of discourses, the verbally expressed, the unexpressed, and the inexpressible (Brownell 1995:24). In fact, as I have observed, many tensions of ethnic relation in Xinjiang are not only presented by discourses, but also by actions of diverse subjects. This section will examine how both discourses and actions are presented on Uyghur internal identity negotiation between state-nationalism and ethno-nationalism. These negotiations will reflect a complex ethno-nationalist movement, as MacClancy (1996a:9-10) argues in his classic research on Basque football and Basque Nationalism, in which participants of the movement have “in fact stressed simultaneously both the distinctively traditional and the distinctively modern aspects of their culture”.

As MacClancy (1996b:190) observes, Athletic Bilbao, the leading Basque team in Spanish football league, in the construction of a nationalist community, insisted on a distinctive style of play (fieriness and long passes). This simple, effective but distinctive style required footballers a quick, strong and hard physique. The Basque nationalists, including footballers, fans, and local journalists, considered the Basque style football as a mark for distinguishing Athletic Bilbao from other clubs in the Spanish league, which were said to represent their respective local ways of life, so that Catalonia was thought to be “colder” and “more technical”, Andalusia “more reckless and pyrotechnical” (MacClancy 1996b:190-191). Besides insisting on a distinctive style, other distinctive action in Basque was that Athletic Bilbao did not spend a sizeable part of its income on purchasing stars from other teams but on the whole spent its money by investing it in the youth of its region: in the Bilbao suburb (MacClancy 1996b:183). This characteristic of emphasizing the ethnic purity never changed until the early 1990s when the club was privatized by entrepreneurs and many local footballers left for pursuing better salaries. Even so, many Basque

fans and media still urged club owner to raise more local ethnic youth instead of signing footballers from outside world (Spain, Europe, and overseas) (MacClancy 1996b:194-195).

MacClancy's research on Basque football reminds us to note that the "invented tradition" and "invented modernity" might be equally important to be examined when a sport encounters an ethno-nationalist movement. In fact, Basque and Xinjiang share some similarities: first, in both places, football was introduced from outside world - in Basque football was introduced in the early 1890s by British sailors (MacClancy 1996b:182), while in Xinjiang it was introduced in the early twentieth century (as reviewed in chapter 3) - in other words, football does not have a history too long in either Basque and Xinjiang; second, in both places, some local people insisted that there exist something distinctive in their football for serving ethnic purposes. But there is still some difference, as I will illustrate with examples in this section: the Basque community, at least till the 1990s, as MacClancy presented, still shared a highly common ethnicity, or ethno-nationalism. Whereas in Xinjiang among Uyghurs, especially in urban areas, ethnic or ethno-nationalist identity between generations are highly hybrid (Finley 2013:349). This hybridity is also represented via football.

4.2.1 One Club, Two Supporters

On a Saturday of July 2015, I went to Ergong Stadium in the north part of Urumqi city for watching a China League One (CL1) game between Xinjiang Tianshan Leopard and a Shenzhen football club. The attendance on that day in the stadium was about 30% and fans were mostly seated in the south stand. Something caught my eye as soon as I entered the stadium: audience on the south stand were clearly divided into two groups, one was mostly in green t-shirts at the southwest corner, while another was mostly in light blue t-shirts. The green t-shirt was in fact the team t-shirt of Leopard, thus, I presumed that the green should undoubtedly be Leopard supporters. Those green fans were well organized by their leader Abduqeyyum, a passionate Uyghur man in his forties, drumming with a measured tempo and shouting in one sound, "Urra!" (Figure 4-1; Figure 4-2).⁸³

⁸³ When watching a sport game many Xinjiang Uyghur football fans use "Urra" as a slogan, amount to *jiayou* (加油) in many other places in China.

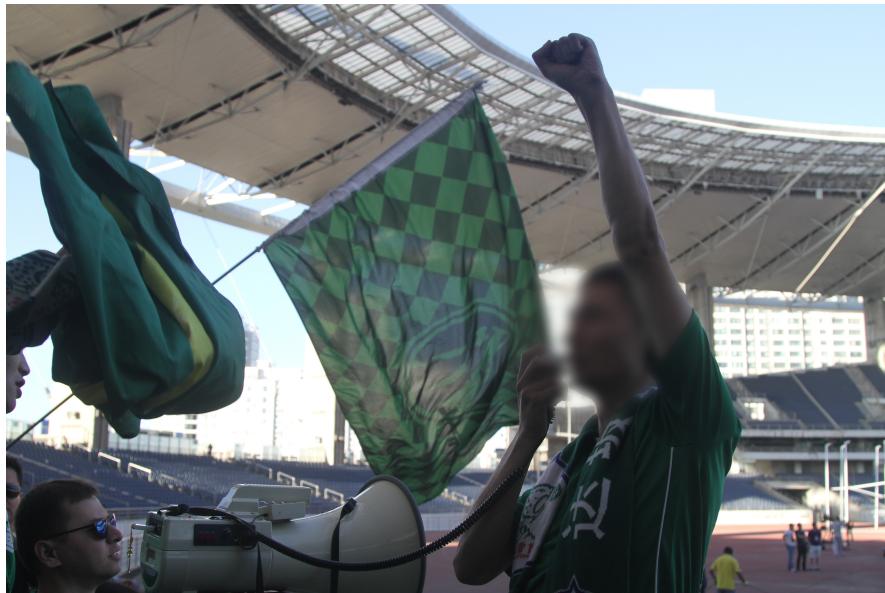
When I went into the green crowds, I noted that fans on this side were mostly young people, with different “ethnic faces”. This detail could let me conclude that they were probably not the same ethnic group. Indeed, as soon as I followed their slogan “urra”, a young man came to chat with me. Then I knew some facts: this friendly young man was a Uyghur university freshman;

Figure 4-1: The “Green Football Fans” were Well Organized in Ergong Stadium, Urumqi



Source: Shot by author. July 2015. Urumqi, XUAR.

Figure 4-2: Abduqeyym, the Leader of “Green Football Fans”



Source: Shot by author. July 2015. Urumqi, XUAR.

many fans in green, like him, were mostly educated urban youth. The leader's name was Abduqeyyum, who used to study in Russia; and fans in this organization were from different ethnic backgrounds. As I was hearing this young man's introduction, I noted somethings else interesting: the leader Abduqeyyum was talking to all "green" fans in Chinese by his trumpet, while in front of Abduqeyyum, "green fans" also talked to each other in Chinese; besides shouting "urra", they also shouted together to judges in dirty words in Chinese, just like what fans do in other *neidi* cities. On their flags, there were two languages: English and Chinese, no Uyghur (Figure 4-3). This group of fans were so active, loud, passionate, and energetic that the rest of audience, who were mostly in light blue t-shirts and occupied most seats in the south stand, looked like fans of the guest team.

Figure 4-3: A "Green Football Fan" Hold a Flag in Home Stadium of Leopard



Source: Shot by author. July 2015. Ergong Stadium, Urumqi City, XUAR. English scripts on the flag are "This is Xinjiang". Complete Chinese scripts on the flag are "Zheli shi Xinjiang, women de zhuchang" (這裡是新疆, 我們的主場), literally the same to English version with an extra half behind, "our home". More specifically, there is no Uyghur characters on the flag.

However, “the blue” fans in fact were also supporters of Tianshan Leopard.⁸⁴ Observing them in distance from the centre of “the green”, I found that those fans were “quieter” and less well-organized than “the green”. Except on shouting the same slogan “urra”, it was hard to hear anything else from them. Besides, they were not holding huge flags or fans’ towels like what “the green” did. They seemed to be, at least from my eyes, somehow outsiders of this game. In an interview with Abduqeyyum later, this vigorous man never stinted his appreciation to me for my support to Tianshan Leopard. He shared many detailed information on Leopard footballers, their skill characteristics, personal training backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, etc. However, every time I tried to ask him something about “the blue”, he always replied, “we have distinct conceptions on football,” or “they are not true football fans.” Then he would change the topic of conversation with more details on footballers of Leopard.

From my side, it is rare to see any supporters of the home team in a home stadium would be spatially divided and have distinctive behaviours on watching a game. Besides, two groups of fans had no communication with each through the whole game. But I could tell that “the blue” fans are indeed Xinjiang ethnic minority people by observing their appearance. After watching that game, I followed social media of both fans’ organizations, “the green” and “the blue”. I realize that “the blue” should also be a football fans’ organization, for this account also retweets many Xinjiang football information, but always in Uyghur.

My questions on the two groups of fans had not been answered by Abduqeyyum, until the Han college teacher Wang in Urumqi and the Uyghur football coach Miradil in Guangdong gave their explanations respectively. Wang, who usually stood with “the green” when he went to Ergong Stadium, suggested that the core distinction between the two fans’ groups was, “‘the blue’ are mostly conservative Uyghurs, while ‘the green’ are much open and multicultural.” Below is an excerpt from an interview in 2016 with Wang who had a master’s degree in communication:

“The blue” propose that the Leopard should become more local. They see Leopard as a Uyghur team and blame the head coach Li Jun, a Han Chinese, has not sent enough Uyghur footballers in-

⁸⁴ Two fan organizations have their own names. Considering anonymity, I use “the green” and “the blue” in my own narrative to refer the two organizations. As I have mentioned, “the green” fans wear the same green suits of Leopard, while “the blue” might be ambiguous. Although no informants mentioned, I then realised that the light blue is almost the same colour of the flag of Uyghur independence (Bovingdon 2010:102; Szadziewski 2014).

to the first eleven on the field [...] And the funny thing is that those fans don't object the club to sign *waiyuan* and *neiyuan*, if *neiyuan* are Xinjiang Uyghur footballers.⁸⁵ But, the problem is that currently there have not been sufficient Xinjiang Uyghur footballers who are capable to play in China League One and China Super League [...] There are many other fans, like "The green" and myself, who are much practical and open on ethnic issues. Because we believe that it is more important to have good athletic outcomes rather than to discuss ethnic issues [...] After all, football is firstly a competitive sport, not a political or an ethnic tool. And the truth is, as local Uyghur and Kazakh youth footballers grow up, Xinjiang footballers have more opportunities to play on the field [...] it is good to see that the management of Leopard didn't yield to those conservative Uyghur fans' pressure.

Historically speaking, Leopard was not a "born-in-Xinjiang" club. In early 2014, the predecessor of Leopard was a CL1 professional club based in Wuhan City, Hubei Province. For some reasons, the former owner decided not to continue investing on football and tended to sell this club. At that time, Xinjiang in fact had a team named Xinjiang Ticai playing in China League Two (CL2), whose majority footballers and coaches were Uyghurs. And Ticai had failed to promote into CL1 for two consecutive years.⁸⁶ As Wang told me, "the blue" were mainly those fans who had been supporting Xinjiang Ticai. Noticing this opportunity from Hubei Province, XFA with the support from a local real estate entrepreneur took over that Hubei club. Some former footballers - mostly Hans - chose to leave for other clubs in *neidi*, while the rest and their coach Li Jun chose to come to the new base, Urumqi. For making a complete club, XFA selected some young talent footballers from its own sports school (the Song Qingling Football School) into the new team. Yet, at least in the year 2015, those young Xinjiang local footballers could not get too many opportunities to play on the field.⁸⁷ This is where Leopard came from and, as Wang suggested, why "the blue" fans urged to "localize" and "ethnicitize" Leopard. In this sense, "the blue" is somehow like those ethnonationalist Basque fans who propose to keep an ethnic "purity" in the football team.

⁸⁵ *Waiyuan*, in Chinese “外援”, refers to international footballers. *Neiyuan*, in Chinese “内援”, refers to domestic footballers. Both are hired by a club.

⁸⁶ China League Two (CL2), as in Chinese “中國足球乙級聯賽”, is the Chinese Football Association Division Two League.

⁸⁷ In the season 2017, there were twenty-seven footballers in the first team of Tianshan Leopard. Among them, three were international, eight were from Hubei Province, one in each was from Beijing City, Anhui Province, and Liaoning Province, and the rest thirteen players were mostly Uyghurs from Xinjiang (Sina Sport 2017).

Yet, as Miradil argued, the true proposal of “the blue” was not just asking for more Uyghur footballers on the field, but “they want Leopard to play like Uyghurs.”

4.2.2 “Uyghur Football” vs. Universal Football

The same as Abduqeyyum, Miradil suggested that “the blue” were not true football fans, but the one who were making use of football, “indeed, there are many of such people in my ethnic group.” “They always emphasize that ‘something need to be Uyghur’,” he said. “But as I see, not everything has to be Uyghur... and the question is how you can convince me what need to be Uyghur... and you can tell me when you are talking about Uyghur, what Uyghur you are talking about. They claim that they are doing this for a better future of our ethnic group. But I don’t agree at all.”

Miradil often read Xinjiang football fans’ speeches on social media, including articles published on the homepage of “the blue”, and those articles were written in Uyghur so that many *neidi* fans might not understand. As he shared, many Uyghur fans claimed that Tianshan Leopard, as a Xinjiang football club, “should naturally use local Xinjiang footballers as many as possible”. Besides, as those fans proposed, Tianshan Leopard should establish its own “tactical system” and style. “Sometimes I doubt those people who call themselves football fans,” this Uyghur young coach said. “How much do they really know about football? They always emphasize that Xinjiang footballers have superior physical qualities so that Tianshan Leopard should play ‘long-pass’, and learn from European teams, especially England, or Sweden, or Germany, or Turkey. But the truth is that none of these national teams still play ‘long-pass’!”⁸⁸

Miradil received bilingual education (Uyghur-Chinese) in his middle school stage and completed his college undergraduate program major in Physical Education in a normal college at Urumqi. Different from many of his parental generation in his hometown Kashgar, as he suggested, he embraced secularism. “It is hard to say that ‘the blue’ are all in the same kind of Uyghurs,” Miradil said. “But what I know is that ‘the blue’ are mostly older generation, like my

⁸⁸ In football tactics, long-pass, or long ball, is an attempt to move the ball a long distance down the field via a cross, without the intention to pass it to the feet of the receiving player. This technique can be especially effective for a team with either fast or tall strikers.

parents' generation or even older." Here, his observation corresponds Coach Li's argument that it is some elder-generation Uyghurs who are controlling Xinjiang Football and making policy, and to some extent, influencing daily discourses on football in Uyghur communities. Another typical case might present this older-generation. It is notable to read a quote from Zunun Qeyyum, the present Director of XUAR Sports Bureau, from an interview by a state-running media in the year 2015:

Since 2007, we have been learning from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia that are located west to us. Because they are geographically and culturally close to Xinjiang, their football style and tactic is more suitable for Xinjiang football. (Xinhua 2015b)

Here, we find the similar logic to "Basque football": due to "ethnic and cultural characteristics", an ethnic group should play its distinctive style of football. When this idea was spoken out from the head governor of Xinjiang sport, it seemed more rational for some people. Yet, for some others, this idea was totally unprofessional. As Miradil suggested, none of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Russia presented the highest-level football in the current world, "you might list many stronger nations within Asia and Europe than those Central Asian nations." "Football has no boundary," Miradil said. "But those officials who takes charge of Xinjiang football have their own interests [...] don't mention politics, if we just talk about football, these old ideas can't help Xinjiang to get integrated into the world. What Xinjiang football really need are scientific training methods and managements."

As Miradil's colleague and roommate then, Beglan, the Kazakh coach in G Football School, could not agree more with Miradil's critiques against the conservative trend in Xinjiang football. In fact, in my interview with him, Beglan's critiques went further, "It is nothing but manipulating ethnic controversies via football."

Beglan belonged to the earliest group of students in the "Xinjiang Class in *neidi* senior high school", then he passed NCEE and entered a famous university in Jiangsu Province, studied Spanish. It was his educational background, as he admitted, that made him able to think issues in broader perspectives, and practically, to be capable to do the present job, as the assistant coach and the interpreter for Spanish coaches hired by the school. Since G Football School was found in 2011, this school has been recruiting Xinjiang local talent football youths. It was also in the year 2011, G Football School employed several Xinjiang ethnic minority staff, including coaches and catering service staff running a *halal* restaurant in its campus. As one of the earliest employ-

ers, Beglan came to this school in 2011. At that time, Beglan used to have a Uyghur colleague that was, as Beglan suggested, “a conservative Uyghur nationalist.” Beglan shared with me a case,

It was in the year 2014, that Uyghur coach proposed a suggestion to the School. In fact, both of us were in the first group of employed staff from Xinjiang, and we used to be friends, at least in my opinion [...] Perhaps, he was inspired by athletic performances of Xinjiang football youth in recent years - I hope so - he argued that all Xinjiang youth shouldn't be divided into separate teaching and training units but should be formed as one teaching and training unit in the school. And he also applied to be the manager of this “Xinjiang Class”. The leadership of the School took this Uyghur coach's suggestion seriously. Then the management organized a special meeting with all Xinjiang coaches to discuss this issue...For I had the experience in “Xinjiang Class in *neidi* senior high school”, I know advantages and disadvantages of such “Xinjiang Class”. So, I argued in that meeting: the aim for the school to recruit Xinjiang ethnic minority children and divide them into separate units is to assist them to adapt a multicultural environment, and to promote their communication ability. Once we change the current educational aim and separate them from other children from all over the nation, it would not be helpful to these Xinjiang children. Because in the future, they will play football, not only in Xinjiang, but also in the whole China, even overseas...The management denied that Uyghur coach's proposal in the end. Then, that coach started to hate me and caused troubles in my daily life.

As Beglan told me, this former Uyghur colleague was ten years older than him, and in fact had more coaching experience in Xinjiang. Since they had different opinions openly on how to manage and train Xinjiang ethnic minority students, this Uyghur coach started to make verbal attack on Beglan within Xinjiang coaches circle in the school. “He criticized me not to observe Islam and to have *non-halal* diet,” Beglan said. “You have your free choice to have your own religion and diet that I have never intervened. Right? But why you come to intervene mine? It is good to know he is in fact such person. The earlier, the better.” Not too later, that Uyghur coach resigned and went back Xinjiang. And no Xinjiang coaches propose to form a distinctive “Xinjiang Class” any more, “because most of us, no matter Uyghurs or Kazakhs, from Xinjiang are not as conservative as that leaving Uyghur coach.” “There is no so-called ‘Uyghur football’,” Beglan said. “Nor ‘Kazakh football’. There is only one football. That is the football people all over the world are playing every day.”

Thus, opinions of Miradil, Beglan, and “the green” reflect my argument above: although there are some similarities, the current Xinjiang society is not equal to the Basque society, in MacClancy's research, where local people are mostly ethno-nationalists. Meanwhile, I do not intend to interpret Xinjiang football participants' distinct opinions on Tianshan Leopard and “Xinjiang football style” as a new intra-ethnic dichotomy, between the urban and the rural, or

between the educated and the uneducated, or between the younger and the elder. Though these dualistic conceptions might be criteria for us to explore the complex ethnic relations in Xinjiang, each single of them could not be comprehensive to describe the identity hybridity, like the Uyghur intra-ethnic identity situation.

4.3 “Fair Play”: A Kazakh-Uyghur Inter-Ethnic Case

Talking about Xinjiang football, it is common to see inter-ethnic discussion between Han Chinese and Uyghurs. Yet, few discussions note the inter-ethnic relation between Uyghurs and other ethnic minorities, like Kazakhs. This section will present the subtle and sensitive ethnic relation between Uyghurs and Kazakhs that is full of competitions, co-operations and compromises under the current Xinjiang’s social background full of ethnic tensions and stresses of anti-terrorism.

4.3.1 Forgotten Football in North Xinjiang

Until drafting this thesis, I still remember the first message that the grassroots Kazakh football coach Keran had sent me, “Welcome to Altay! Our voices truly need to be heard.” As Keran suggested, it was all ethnic participants’ efforts for many years that has brought the remarkable outcome of Xinjiang youth football in recent years. Yet, too many praises and attentions have been emphasized on the Uyghurs in South Xinjiang, while contributions and issues of the Kazakhs in North Xinjiang have been neglected. The most crucial issue, as Keran suggested, is the inequality in the realm of Xinjiang football.

Some of the inequalities came by nature that Keran and his Kazakh fellows must accept since they are born. As reviewed in Chapter 2, there is distinctive ecological difference between South and North Xinjiang. Due to more snowfall in North Xinjiang, half of a year (October to next March) is not suitable for footballers to train outdoors. In other words, North Xinjiang footballers have half less outdoor training time than their peers in South Xinjiang. Even if North Xinjiang football team could persist in training in the snowy winter, no matter outdoor or in indoor stadium, they need a great deal of funding for preparing food, training equipment and sometimes renting a venue for winter. If they plan to move to other warmer *neidi* provinces, like Guangdong or Guangxi, they must prepare extra funding for transportation.

Yet, a common challenge for many Xinjiang youth football teams is the financial shortage. As Keran said,

In Altay, we also have many talent youth, but we lack the financial support. The annual financial input from the Autonomous Region Government to Altay Prefecture is one of the least in all prefectures. The input we could use on football is even less. One thing I am concerning about is no enough games for us to participate in. Last year, Altay had an Ice and Snow Tourism Festival, I wanted to organize a football game by this chance. But the local government had no budget. Thanks to my friends who engaged in China-Kazakh border trade, they helped me to raise 80,000 RMB for this game. But in the end of the day, you can't always count on your friends' money.

For promoting the economic development and social stability in XUAR, as reviewed in chapter 2, the state has initiated the “Province-to-prefecture Aid Program to Xinjiang” (P2P Aid) since 2010. “But the state assigned the best provinces to South Xinjiang,” Keran said. “And left the worst province Jilin to Altay.” According to the state program, Hotan and Kashgar, the two major prefectures in South Xinjiang, were aided by several richest coastal provinces and municipal cities, including Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shandong, Shanghai, Tianjin, and the capital Beijing. Whereas, Altay was aided by the declining northeast province, Jilin (Table 2-3).⁸⁹ Keran expressed his regret, meanwhile he accepted this state arrangement, “We Kazakhs do understand and accept this national arrangement.” “After all, we know the current social condition in Xinjiang,” he said. “Those Uyghur regions in South Xinjiang have more social problems. But, what we can't accept is preferential policies of the autonomous region, especially those of the XUAR Sports Bureau and XFA. It is not fair!”

What Keran critiqued were two “obvious unfair” practices in the realm of Xinjiang football. As he suggested, one was the trend in recent years that quota for recruiting young footballers and training opportunities for grassroots coaches had been inclined to South Xinjiang. “Cutting the chances for talents promotions is more harmful than cutting funding,” Keran said. “Since 1995,

⁸⁹ Jilin Province is not the “worst” aid provider on economic scale. Yet, as one of the oldest industrial provinces in China, Jilin has been suffering series of eco-social problems (talent drain, environment pollution and low economic growth) since the late 1990s due to the reform of state-owned enterprise. It has ranked as the bottom five of China's thirty-one provinces for GDP growth in recent years (Economist 2014; Wall Street Journal 2015; China Daily 2016b). And according to national data in 2015, the gross regional production of Jilin was the poorest among all nineteen aiding Xinjiang provinces and municipal cities. On contrary, three major aiders of South Xinjiang (Guangdong, Jiangsu, and Shandong provinces) are the top five economically strongest (National Bureaus of Statistics of China n.d.)

Altay prefecture has been sending potential players to Xinjiang University and Xinjiang Normal University, five or six students per year. But last year, both universities reduced quota for North Xinjiang and increased quota for South Xinjiang.” Keran himself was also impacted by some this trend. In an interview in the early of 2016, he said:

Last summer, I took my team to South Xinjiang to play the annual regional youth football championship. A local Uyghur coach told me that he had been selected by the autonomous region to Kazakhstan for exchange. I was astonishing. Because I also work in the local sport system, I know how the selection and training procedure works. At least, any regional organized selection must be open. But no one from XFA, nor the Regional Sports Bureau, nor the Regional Educational Department, had informed Altay that there was such an opportunity [...] if coaches have no chance to be trained well, how could they train their students? In the end, Uyghurs would be more arrogant. Then they would say, it is only Uyghurs that are good at playing football in Xinjiang.

Another major issue, as Keran accused, was frequent match-fixing and age-fixing issues in regional games. “XFA is a self-interest association,” he said. “And most of their staff are Uyghurs from South Xinjiang. In a regional event, judges are mostly Uyghurs. But it was not like this before. It was about a decade ago that plenty of Uyghurs started to take some crucial positions in XFA.” Thus, as Keran doubted, unspoken rules emerged:

In 2007, Altay and Kashgar competed in the final of the regional youth football championship. That was the first time for a Kazakh team to reach the champion. But, many players in Kashgar team had changed their ages. I have been a coach for many years, how can’t I tell their difference? They were much taller and stronger than our players, some of them even had moustache! And all the three judges and the game commissioner were all from South Xinjiang. In the whole ninety-minute game, penalties of the three judges benefited Kashgar. And in the end, we lost by the score zero to two. And one of their goals was a penalty shot! All these biases just happened in front of regional officials’ eyes. They pretended that they had not seen any of this farce.

The defeat in 2007 almost let Keran make the decision to end his football coach career. But many of his students, both the Prefectural Sports Bureau and Altay N Middle School persuaded him to continue being the coach. Regarding to the current social situation in South Xinjiang, Keran said that he could understand why the state and regional preferential policies would be more beneficial for Uyghurs, “but matching-fixing and age-falsifying are beyond the principle of fair play.” “In the realm of football, people always say that the ball is round,” he said. “That’s correct. No one can expect what will happen on the field. But, the precondition is everyone shall follow the principle of fair play. In all formal football games, footballers march into the field with the FIFA fair play anthem.”

4.3.2 A Moral Triumph

In my fieldwork in Altay N Middle School, I met with Keren every day, including weekend. In my interviews, Keren usually would not talk too much about ethnic relation, especially inter-ethnic issues between Kazakh and Uyghur. And he never spoke negative words on Uyghur young players in his two teams. Until we were preparing to depart for Maralbexi County to participate in the annual regional youth football championship, he started to have more discussion with me on Uyghurs. In most cases, when his comments were against Uyghurs, he would not directly say out the word “Uyghur”, but used other words, like “South Xinjiang” or “some ethnic group”. Sometimes, for understanding his true meanings, I must try to ask him politely what exactly his words refer to. As this excerpt from an interview in the end of July 2016 shows:

Keran: When I was in the regional youth team, all ethnic groups played together. It was not like today.

Author: You mean then it was much more harmonious in Xinjiang than now?

Keran: Yes. We Kazakhs are peaceful and get along well with all ethnic groups. Not like some arrogant ethnic group. In their eyes, Kazakhs are wild horsemen and only know how to herd sheep. They think Kazakhs are poor at sports, no mention playing football. They think only their ethnic group are born to play football.

Author: Some ethnic group... you refer to...?

Keran: Uyghur!

Author: Yes, I remember that you shared some of your experiences before.

Keran: You need to remember that Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region is a *Uyghur autonomous region* (he stressed on Uyghur). We Kazakhs might have a try to insist. But you see, there are Tajiks, Kirgiz, Russian, and Tartars. How can they resist?

Author: Resist? How to do that?

Keran: Hold your bottom line, and don't be a trouble maker (a silence for seconds). Take football as an example. I insist the rule, no recruiting any footballer with age problems and I never fix age like many South Xinjiang coaches do. Every year, they would use some age-fixing players. Let's see how it will be in Maralbexi County.

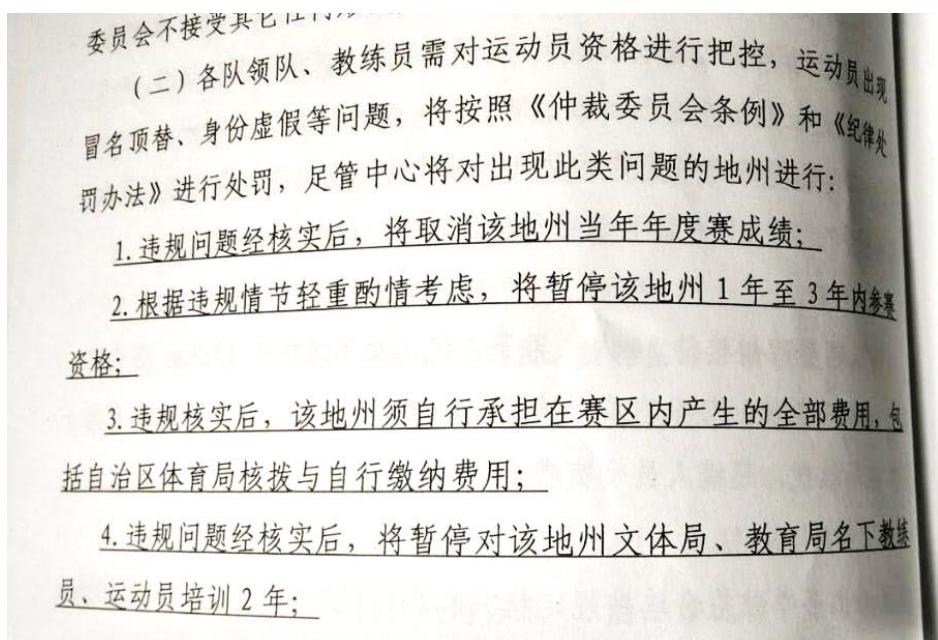
Would all South Xinjiang football teams, as what Keran said, have no sportsmanship? With doubts about Keran's words, I departed with Altay U13 and U16 teams for Maralbexi County at the dawn of the first August 2016. In the first part of this journey, it took eight hours by bus from Altay to Urumqi. Then we went to the train station to take one-night train from Urumqi to Maralbexi County in South Xinjiang, at the northwest of the Teklimakan Desert. That was not a smooth journey. It was in the mid-summer, a railway bridge on the way was destroyed by snow-melt flood from Tianshan Mountain. And Altay and another team from North Xinjiang,

Tarbaghatay, were unlucky to encounter this accident. In the end, we arrived at Maralbexi County on the day when the organization committee planned to have the pre-event technical meeting.

Coaches of all delegations participated in this meeting. It was before the meetings that I had the technical manual. Reading through the little booklet, I found that participants of this event, including organizers, judges, coaches and footballers, were mostly Uyghurs. Besides, there were clear articles on penalizing age-fixing. According to these rules, coaches and managers of all teams must strictly check footballers' ages and identities. If any age-fixing and masquerading case was found, XFA would penalize the prefecture as follow articles (Figure 4-4):

1. After confirming the violation, cancel the result of that prefecture delegation in this annual championship;
2. In terms of the seriousness of the violation, suspend one to three years of qualification of that prefecture for participating in the annual championship;
3. After confirming the violation, that prefecture should pay off all fees during this event, including returning the subsidy from the Regional Sports Bureau;
4. After confirming the violation, suspend all coaches and footballers training opportunities in the involved Prefectural Sports Bureau and Educational Bureau for two years;
5. In severe case, XFA will consider calling the police and deliver involved personnel into judicial procedure.

Figure 4-4: Excerpt from the Technical Manual on Penalty to Age-fixing and Masquerading



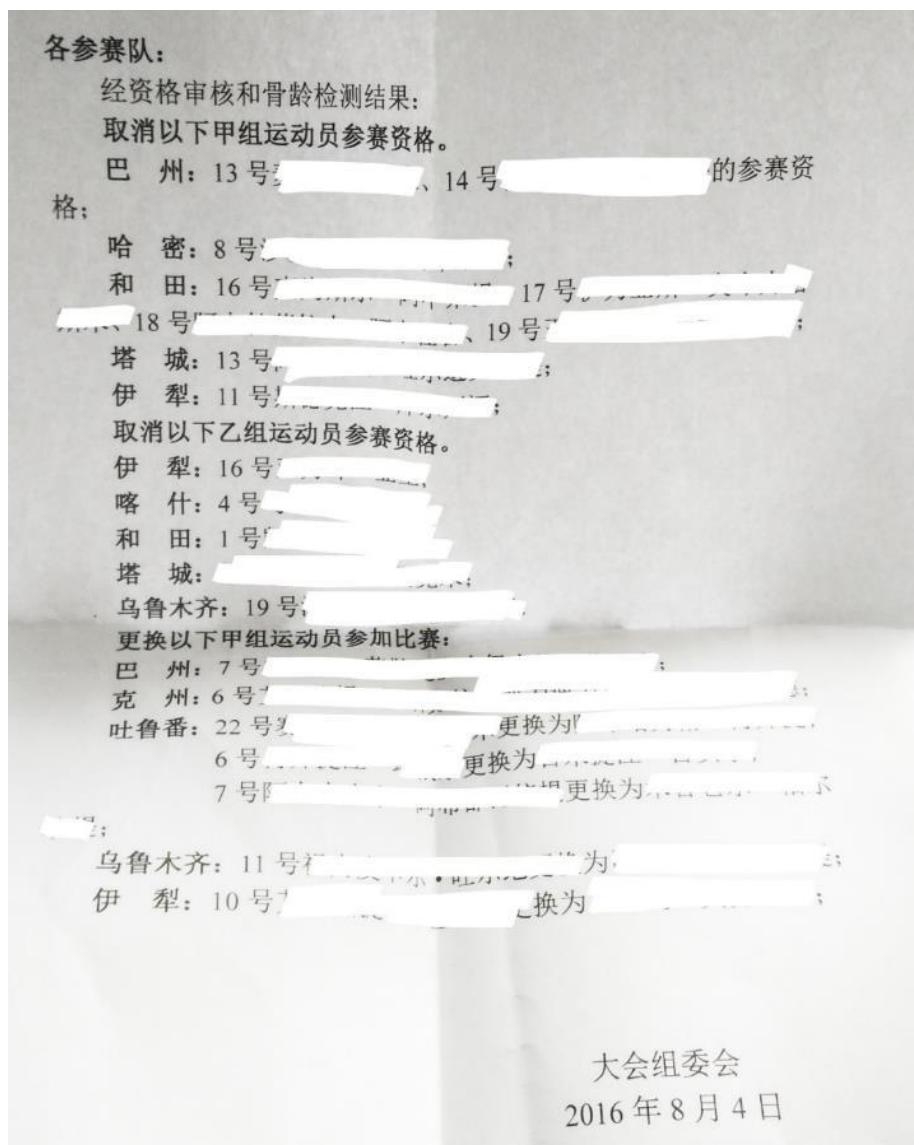
Source: Shot by arthur. August, 2016. Maralbexi County, Kashgar Prefecture, XUAR.

From my rough view, those articles looked quite serious.

On Beijing time nine o'clock in the evening when the sun set down, all delegations gradually got together in the gymnasium of Maralbexi County. Many Uyghur coaches seemed to be very familiar and started to chat with each other. As I observed, Keran and other three assistant coaches of Altay had few communications with other coaches, except with the head coach of Tarbaghatay. That coach was also a Kazakh, but his team members were all Uyghurs.

The XFA chairman, a fat Uyghur man in his fifties initiated the meeting with a short prologue in Uyghur. Then he started to speak Chinese, "since there are many ethnic groups of leaders, cadres, colleagues, coaches and team managers in this room, I will speak in Chinese." He started to give his speech. The content was routine about praising the effort of the local organization, encouraging all delegations to follow sportsmanship, etc. Then cadres in respective governmental departments in Maralbexi County started to introduce some service information about this event. Some meeting participants obviously were not paying attention to presenters' speeches, and they were chatting with each other in their seats, or watching their mobile phones. But the Altay delegation were quiet and listening carefully through the whole meeting. The tedious meeting went on until the technical director of this event, a Uyghur judge in his thirties went onto the stage, said, "Now I will announce the qualification checking result." "All delegations please turn your technical manual to the page of delegation name lists," he said in a serious tone. "Please listen carefully and take a note. I will announce disqualified footballers' name. During this event, if you find any footballers that I announced play on the field, please report to the judge committee." When this judge was going to announce, Keran immediately became cautious and asked every assistant, including me, to help taking note. Then, that judge started to announce. In the end, seven delegations had age-fixing cases and five delegations had identity masquerading cases. Most of cases were from South Xinjiang teams, and all disqualified cases were boys, not girls (Figure 4-5). It was notable that no coaches and managers had expressed objections or protested in the room after the announcement. It seemed that those disqualified prefectoral delegations had already known the results and were not afraid of penalties. All footballers in the Altay delegation were clean. I turned to look at Keran. He proudly got his head up and calmly gazed those coaches in other delegations around him.

Figure 4-5: Disqualified Footballer Name List in 2016 XUAR Regional Youth Football Championship⁹⁰



Source: Shot by arthur. 4th August, 2016. Maralbexi County, Kashgar Prefecture, XUAR. In this announcement, fourteen footballers have been directly disqualified due to age-fixing, and seven more footballers have been replaced due to identity masquerading.

After this meeting, I said to Keran outside the room, “indeed, age-fixing cases are mostly from South Xinjiang teams.” I originally wanted to say, “Uyghur teams”. Because another two teams from North Xinjiang, Ili Kazakh Autonomous Region and Tarbaghatay Prefecture, are ge-

⁹⁰ I have hidden involved footballers' names to protect their identity.

ographically and culturally Kazakh regions, yet, in this event, their footballers were almost Uyghurs, including those who had been disqualified. And I asked Keran whether the result of those troubled teams would be cancelled in this year championship. Keran smiled bitterly, did not say any word, but kept on walking ahead, confidently and calmly. Later I got to know that Keran would have to face the same scenario every year: announcing disqualification staged every year; Altay footballers were clean, while some footballers in those “Uyghur teams” would always be found problematic on ages; but in the end, no team would be penalized. Ten days later, two of the troubled teams, Kashgar U13 and Ili U16, won the champion in respective groups. Altay U13 won the forth, and Altay U16 stood the sixth that was anyway better than the eighth of 2015. In addition, the Altay delegation won a special title, the “Fair Play Award”, which was awarded to a prefecture with least red and yellow cards during the event. Despite feeling dissatisfied on the performance of U16 team, Keran and his coaches still looked happy on the medal ceremony (Figure 4-6). As I see, that was a moral triumph rather than an athletic victory.

Figure 4-6: Altay Delegation on the Medal Ceremony of 2016 XUAR Regional Youth Football Championship



Source: Shot by author. The twelfth August 2016. Maralbexi County, Kashgar Prefecture, XUAR.⁹¹

⁹¹ Keran was the man with a pair of sun glasses in the front middle in a green T-shirt.

4.4 Conclusion: Solidified Ethnic Boundaries and Hybrid Identities

Historically speaking, no sole ethnic identity has ever dominated in the region that is now named as Xinjiang. During the process of the central government of China strengthening its control to Xinjiang from Qing dynasty (1644-1911) via the Republic era (1911-1949) to the PRC era (1949 - now), there had always been inter-ethnic identity games among Han, Uyghur, Kazakh, Hui, and other ethnic groups. Even if within Uyghurs, there have been diverse identities shaped by geographic, cultural, and historic interactions with China and surrounding civilizations since the seventh century (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004). In the early twenty-first century, Finley (2013:2-7) notes that a trend of hybrid identity has been emerging within Uyghurs. In this trend, the traditional dualistic approach to analyse Uyghur identity, as Islam/secularism, urban/rural, and ethno/state-nationalism, were turning to be incomplete and weaker. In this sense, Finley (2013:349-350; 402-407) anticipates that a more complex hybridity of identity influenced by globalization might emerge, especially within urban youth, in future Uyghur society.

This chapter with illustrated examples is responding to Finley's anticipation via the perspective of football. By presenting discourses and practice of diverse subjects involving in football, we have examined three ethnic relations, including two inter-ethnic relation (Uyghur-Han and Uyghur-Kazakh) and one intra-ethnic relation (Uyghur). In this way, it is notable that football in Xinjiang has not naturally become the almighty ideological state apparatuses, as the state plans, to acculturate ethnic minority (especially Uyghurs) and promote the ethnic unity, nor has it been the vehicle, as some "conservative Uyghur ethno-nationalists" expect, to unify all the Uyghurs. In this sense, football in this chapter has been examined more as the process of the game of identities and values, rather than as the tool of shaping identities and values.

The remarkable background for all the discussions in this chapter is the deepening ethnic tensions in Xinjiang over the past two decades. To some extent, as presented in this chapter, it is frustrating that there exist serious identity divergences in the field of football among different ethnic groups. This is in stark contrast to the coverage in the official media after the Xinjiang Flying Tigers Basketball Club won the championship mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. However, we have to face such a reality and conclude a reasonable inference: the more propaganda the officials strengthen on sports bring ethnic unity, the reality is more likely to be contrary to the official's prospect.

There still exist boundary, stereotypes and tensions among ethnic groups. And these inter-ethnic stereotypes and tensions have also been represented within the realm of football in both invisible and visible ways. As the first section discussed, when Xinjiang local government strenuously utilized mass media to promote youth football, football has not yet directly brought the outcome that different ethnic groups really understand each other. On the contrary, inter-ethnic negative stereotypes has been deepening. In turn, some Uyghurs magnify ethno-nationalism in the realm of football and directly withstand the Chinese nationalism, leading to further conflicts between their ethnic groups and Han Chinese.

In the official ill-advised process of promoting ethnic harmony by football, some Uyghur football participants that suffered from negative stereotypes have been actively seeking to rescue themselves. In the second section, they were more likely to accept market-orient football concepts, such as the scientific training and management methods and holistic in-game tactics, rather than insist on so-called “Uyghur football style” based on ethno-nationalist imagination; In individual life, they did not want to be hijacked by ethno-nationalism and lose the freedom of choice; At the same time, they hoped that other ethnic groups could have a more objective and positive understanding on the diversity of Uyghurs. Despite these efforts, these Uyghur football participants must face challenges from their conservative fellows.

Moreover, this chapter also shows some founding that few existing literatures have discussed: the daily interaction between ethnic minorities among Kazakhs and Uyghurs under the background of “maintaining stability” and anti-terrorism. Taking everyday football trainings and a regional championship as examples, the third section presents how a Kazakh football team placed its own ethnic group in the opposite to Uyghurs, by insisting on sportsmanship and emphasizing Uyghurs’ unfair competitions to seize the moral high ground for winning other ethnic groups’ sympathy and understanding, and more specifically, the state’s relief, endorsement and preferential policy support . Under the context of anti-terrorism and ethnic tensions, as this thesis presents, a Kazakh coach uttering stigmatization on his Uyghur peers reflects Kazakhs’ anxiety: Kazakhs longed for cutting off the relationship with “troublemakers” Uyghurs. Such intentions are understandable, but such deed solidified ethnic boundaries between Uyghurs and Kazakhs in turn.

For this chapter, let us focus on reviewing how football reflects and contributes the public debate on ethnic relation in Xinjiang. This chapter have illustrated that the existence of ethnic boundary in Xinjiang is a reality. However, how to break the ethnic boundary requires all involved ethnic groups, including Han Chinese, Uyghurs and Kazakhs. For truly break the ethnic boundary, the state and community are both indispensable. The next chapter will return to discuss the role of state and beyond in the “rise of Xinjiang youth football”.

Chapter 5 “Combining Sport and Education”: The Role of State and Beyond

During almost one week in the end of July 2016, I had been acting as a team manager of the Altay U13 football team, because the head coach Keran was busy applying for funding for participating in the regional championship from the local Sports Bureau and could not do his coaching jobs as usual. For several days, I took the team with almost twenty boys to another middle school in Altay City to have training matches with a local amateur football team, whose footballers were all primary school students attending a summer football workshop (Figure 5-1). My team’s opponents were less competent but their coach, a Kazakh school P.E. teacher, seemed not to be angry at his boys’ poor performance. In interviews to him, this P.E. teacher shared why he could keep calm, as he said:

Our team is different to Keran’s team. That team needs to participate in the regional championship, but our team plays for fun. For me, the first task might not be to teach boys how to win a game, but to teach them how to have good manners on and off the pitch. To be a good footballer firstly means to be a good man who must respect their coaches, teammates, the audience and their opponents.

Figure 5-1: Both Teams Present Their Greetings to the Audience



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. A middle school in Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR. That was a very ordinary training match during the week I acted as the temporary manager of the Altay U13 team. The audience beside the pitch consisted of only a few people, including substitute players of both sides, two footballers’ parents and me.

It is difficult to discount the existence of state power in this research. Chapter 3 approaches to reveal the function of football as the new governmentality to produce beneficial discourses for Xinjiang youth football. In the process, state power presented via mass media, art works and policy documents. However, for many ordinary people, state power in those channels is more indirect to be felt.

For most of core football participants in this research, those young footballers, the most direct way to feel state power was in the process of contacting coaches and teachers in schools. In this chapter, the first section will start from a macro level to briefly review the development of policies related to the football in XUAR. Then, the second section will turn to a micro level (a middle school in Altay City) to concentrate on local coaches, teachers, and cadres at the grassroots level, who act as “political brokers”. Drawing on Siu’s (1989) notion, I use “political brokers” to refer to agencies of state power at the local level to mediate unequal relationship between grassroots ethnic minority footballers and state institutions. By examining their daily discourses and practices in football training and schooling, this chapter uses this approach to present a dynamic scene in the grassroots level beyond state power, where state power overlaps with social spaces, and ethnic minority agencies are also adjusting themselves with the state in response to changing ethics and values during the social transformation under the late-socialist era.

5.1 Shifted Tones on Football: Then and Now

As Chapter 3 argued, state agencies have strategically used football to produce the ethnic minority citizen best suited to those governments’ “Football for Stability” policies. Yet, accepting this argument does not mean that “we have at the same time to concur with the stark, and rather simple-minded view that these strategies usually succeed in a blanket fashion. The processes involved are more complex” (MacClancy 1996a:11). MacClancy (1996a:11) reminds us, “Where sport is already a vital part of popular culture and hence harbours the potential of being an integral component of the undercurrents which fuel discord, it becomes for the forces of the state neither easy to penetrate nor to manipulate... Sport can divide as much as it may unite.”⁹²

⁹² A classic case is from Stuart’s study (1996) on football in Zimbabwe. Stuart demonstrates this divisive potential of sport in his analysis of a strike by African footballers against their colonial would-be controllers. As he noted in Zimbabwe, white set-

5.1.1 Inexplicit Football in Ghulja 1997

In terms of the divisive potential of football, it is a good point to explore the relationship between football and the 1997 Ghulja Incident, which seems to be unforgettable and ineffable experience accompanying the Xinjiang football circle in the past two decades. Several informants in this research implied that there existed a certain correlation between football and that riot. At the same time, many of their assertions were too vague for me to understand the correlation. One of my impression from their unspoken attitudes was that football used to be a kind of taboo in Xinjiang after the 1997 disturbance. And since 2011, circumstances have changed that many people in Xinjiang have become eager to talk about and participate in football.

Few official documents reveal the process how football has influenced (and in return been influenced by) the Ghulja incident in 1997. One piece of text produced by the authorities in 2009 reviewed the rise of Uyghur separatism in the 1990s, in which football was suggested as a means to propagate Uyghur separatism:

Separatism via recreation and art activities also emerges. Since the 1990s, “Flood Troupe” and “Grey Wolf Youth Art Troupe” became popular in South Xinjiang, and they had propagated separatist ideas in their shows. In Ili Prefecture, separatists used other vehicles, including *masrap*, *chay*, *tablighi* (preach), playing football, etc. to propagate and instigate separatism.⁹³ (Chen 2009:94)

While another source from a scholar described an incident, the “August 14 illegal march”, in 1995. More details were provided:

tlers had promoted football as a way to occupy what they regarded as the indolent young males who had moved into town. But football became an arena for political contest between the colonizers and the colonized. By successfully striking against the white controllers of their football league, the players established an autonomous space in urban life for themselves and other indigenes. Instead of hindering progress, the creation and running of football clubs provided black townspeople with a stable focal point within the otherwise rapidly evolving city.

⁹³ *Masrap* is an out an out-door mass gathering held during the summer months, at which men and women feast, play dutar, sing, dance, tell stories and jokes, and play games (Finley 2013:160).

Chay, literally “tea,” meaning “tea party”, is a regular gathering for Uyghur women (Xu, Li and Jaschok 2009).

Tablighi is an Islamic missionary movement that focuses on urging Muslims to return to primary Sunni Islam, and particularly in matters of ritual, dress, and personal behaviour (Rabasa et. al. 2004:15; 447-448).

In July and August, Abdulhelil and other leaders organized a youth soccer league in Ghulja, and many youngsters joined. On August 12, several days before the tournament was to begin, military officials occupied the playing field, parked several tanks there, and announced that it would henceforth be needed for military exercises. Officials also reportedly removed the goalposts from the fields at all schools in the area to ensure that the tournament could not take place. On August 13 Abdulhelil was again taken in for questioning. The following day, hundreds of men marched peacefully through the streets and then dispersed, an event that officials later referred to as the “August 14 illegal march.” Remarkably, though there was no hint of violent intent in the march, by noon that day snipers stood conspicuously on the roofs of buildings in the center of town, and the People’s Armed Police (PAP) controlled the main intersections with barbed-wire barriers (Amnesty International 1999; Dautcher 1999:325-27; 2004:285-87; Roberts 1998a:686). Abdulhelil and others, angry at the government’s heavy-handed action to squelch a very successful social organization, went on to plan and lead the protest in 1997. Chinese sources claim that Abdulhelil and others joined the Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party of Allah (ETIPA) and that its leader, Payzulla, had begun infiltrating Ghulja in early 1996, planning for the demonstration in January 1997 (Xu Yuqi 1999:177-78). No Chinese source I have seen explains the “August 14 illegal march,” and not one connects the Ghulja demonstration with the crackdown on masrap. (Bovington 2010:126)

According to this source, a suppressed youth football tournament in Ghulja was somehow a blasting fuse to trigger for the Ghulja Incident in 1997. Even though, many historic details were still missing. From the state perspective, the leader Abdulhelil as a Uyghur separatist wanted to use recreation and sports activities, including masrap and football, to instigate separatism (Chen 2009). While, in the overseas observer’s view, what the party most feared about Abdulhelil’s groups was that they were organizations that “it did not initiate, supervise, [or] control” (Dautcher 1999:326).

It was unclear how long the “August 14 illegal march” and the Ghulja Incident impacted the realm of Xinjiang football. What this research can confirm is, as several informants have suggested in Chapter 4, that some of football participants in Xinjiang still have lingering fears when talking about this past incident in Ghulja, and there also exists a certain segregation between Han Chinese and Uyghurs in the realm of football. Yet, on the contrary, many of these informants have expressed their support for the current shifted tone of the state, as coach Li, the Han footballer coach trainer in XFA, said, “It is correct to guide them [Uyghurs] to play football since they really like playing.” Additionally, many of informants approved of the Xinjiang youth football project that was initiated in 2011, and many of them attributed the current prosperity to the former XUAR party secretary Zhang Chunxian, the first leader of XUAR.

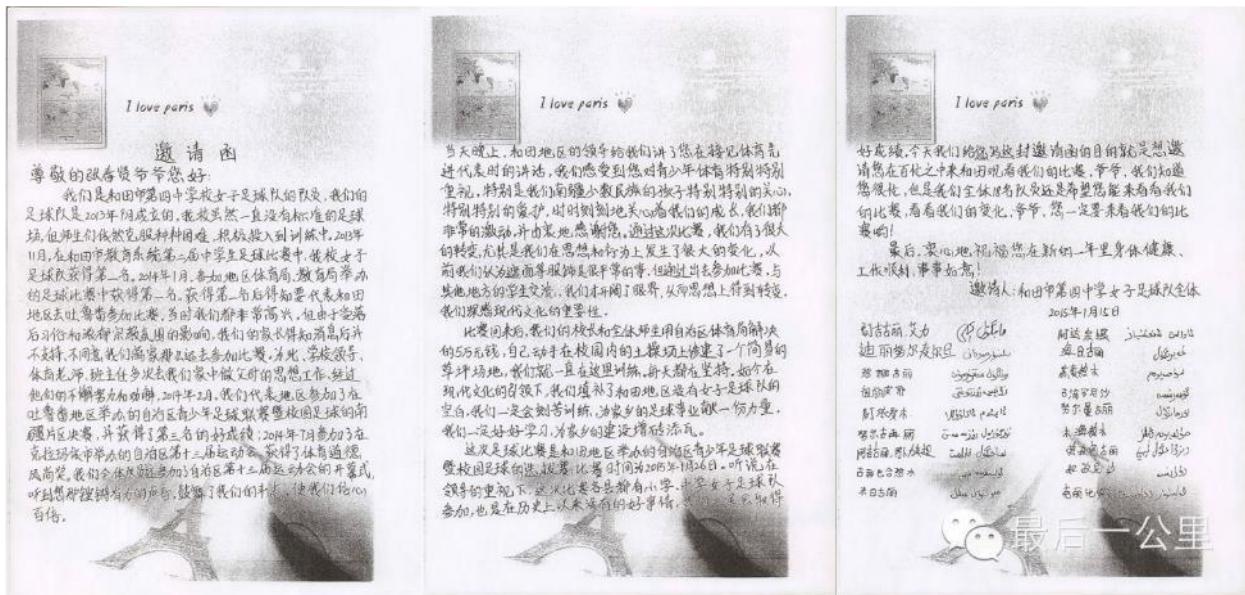
5.1.2 School Football Campaign (from 2011 to Now)

“Thanks to Secretary Zhang,” coach Li said. “Xinjiang had been promoting the School Football Campaign since 2011, even earlier than the rest *neidi* provinces.” Another Han informant who was the coach of a prefectural girls’ football team, expressed his praise to Zhang Chunxian, “Without his support, it would be really difficult for us to develop girls’ football in Xinjiang.”

The Vision

In fact, there were not too many materials released showing that the former party secretary Zhang Chunxian was a big fan of football, or that he himself had been directly involved in any policy making on football. Still, many informants had mentioned a case, which made them believe that Zhang cared for football. In the early of 2015, many informants noted a photo from an official social media account. That was a screenshot of a letter written in both Uyghur and Chinese, from the girls’ football team of Hotan No.4 Middle School. As this letter said, these girls belonged to the first female football team in Hotan that was founded in 2013; they had overcome many economic, socio-cultural and religious obstacles in their hometown and insisted on football training; supported by Prefectural Sports Bureau and Educational Bureaus, they eventually could participate in the regional championship; thanks to the regional policy to support football, they wanted to invite Sectary Zhang to watch their games (Figure 5-2). Soon after this letter, Zhang replied to those football girls in South Xinjiang, saying: “Football has opened your vision … it is a positive attitude. It is a precious right for everyone to pursue of progress and to chase their dreams. It is difficult and even more precious for girls to do so. I am very pleased to see that you have bravely initiated your pursuit” (Figure 5-3) (Tianshan 2015b). In the same letter, Zhang encouraged those football girls, “Bravely to be the leader, disseminator and practitioner of the modern culture… to resist the extremism and to preserve ethnic unity, and to influence people around… to build a better Xinjiang” (Tianshan 2015b).

Figure 5-2: The Letter from Hotan No.4 Middle School Girls' Football Team to Zhang Chunxian

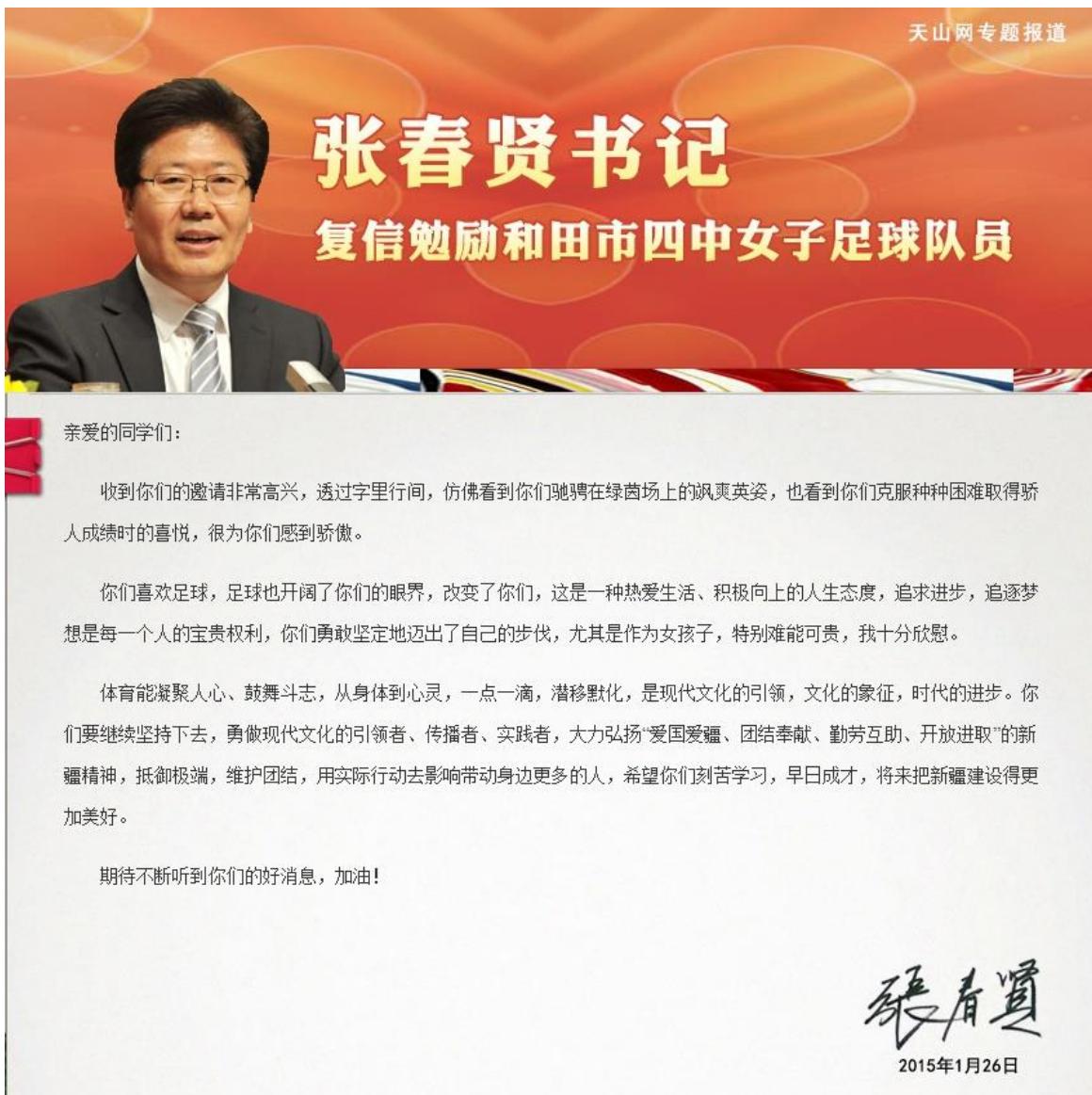


Source: Tianshan (天山網). 2015c. 張春賢覆信勉勵和田首支女足隊員 (Zhang Chunxian Replies and Encourages Footballers of the First Girls' Football Team in Hotan). At http://www.ts.cn/homepage/content/2015-01/27/content_10963214.htm accessed 29 August 2016.

Although some informants (coaches) questioned the truth of the letter from those South Xinjiang football girls and complained that XUAR put too many resources into South Xinjiang, no informants (coaches and fans) had denied the necessity and importance of Zhang's letter. This letter released in the early of 2015 was not only a periodic summary for the Project of Popularizing Xinjiang Youth Football (PPXYF) initiated in 2011, but also a manifesto for the future to keep carrying forward this systematic regional project. As coach Li said, "Zhang's letter is better than no letter."

To some extent, the Project of Popularizing Xinjiang Youth Football (PPXYF) (XUAR Sports Bureau and XUAR Department of Education 2011) was a pre-released version of the national School Football Campaign (MoE 2015b) initiated in 2015. In the guideline document of the PPXYF, four major aims were included: (1) Popularize football in a few years, ensure that football will be introduced to schools, communities, and counties all over XUAR; (2) Cultivate football talents; (3) Establish scientific training and managing systems within youth football; (4) Combine education and sport, further promote "suzhi jiaoyu" (素質教育, quality education), ensure that young people grow up healthily (XUAR Sports Bureau and XUAR Department of Education 2011).

Figure 5-3: Zhang Chunxian, Then XUAR Party Secretary, Encouraged to A Girls' Football Team in Hotan



Source: Tianshan (天山網). 2015b. 張春賢覆信勉勵和田市四中女子足球隊員: 勇做現代文化的引領者傳播者實踐者 (Zhang Chunxian Replies and Encourages Footballers of Hotan No. 4 Middle School Girls' Football Team: Bravely to Be the Leader, Disseminator and Practitioner of the Modern Culture). At http://news.ts.cn/content/2015-01/26/content_10960609_all.htm accessed 29 August 2016.

Measures

For achieving the four aims, the guideline document proposed ten measures, including (1) to strengthen guarantees (*jiaqiang gexiang baozhang*, 加強各項保障), (2) to build echelons of teams according to ages, (3) to build the regional youth football league, (4) to establish the talent

pool, (5) to strengthen the training for coaches and teachers, (6) to increase exchanges with other provinces and regions, (7) to reinforce theoretical study and academic organization, (8) to strengthen ties with other governmental administrations, (9) to make propaganda, and (10) to establish the system of assessment (XUAR Sports Bureau and XUAR Department of Education 2011).

For many grassroots coaches, the most practical measures are “to strengthen guarantees” and “to strengthen the training for coaches and teachers”. It is easy to understand the latter one, for it is directly related to coaches themselves. As to the former one, in the context of the bureaucratic system of the PRC, “to strengthen guarantees” usually means “something must do”, which is equal to a political commitment. One crucial measure of these guarantees is the “organization guarantee” (*zuzhi baozhang*, 組織保障), which requests the actual leader (*yibashou*, 一把手) of all prefectures and counties to act as the leader of the local “work group of the PPXYF” (*zuqiu puji gongcheng lingdao xiaozu*, 足球普及工程領導小組). Another crucial measure of these “guarantees” is the “financial guarantee” (*jingfei baozhang*, 經費保障), in which XUAR prepares a special annual funding for PPXYF in each prefecture.⁹⁴

After declaring what “resources” the government would provide, the policy guideline has also defined who would carry out these measures. It is Sports Bureaus and Educational Bureaus that would jointly boost specific works. And the central conception is “combining sport and education” (*ti jiao jiehe*, 體教結合). The basic logic of “combining sport and education” is that sports institutions provide professional coaches, training equipment, and funding for daily training and participating in events, while educational institutions provide promising students who would like to play football and have fair academic performance. As I have reviewed in Chapter 2, most of professional coaches work in sports schools under the control of local Sports Bureaus, and the academic performance of students in sports schools is usually quite poor and it has been difficult for these students to find a job after graduation. This also results in the decrease of the number of students in sports schools. Thus, from the view of Sports Bureaus, “combining sport

⁹⁴ Yet, the “financial guarantee” has also confirmed that South Xinjiang would get more budgets from XUAR (XUAR Sports Bureau and XUAR Department of Education 2011).

and education” is a practical method for them to recruit more young footballers in current conditions.

Effects

Like many other state projects, as coach Li said, “The project is comprehensive with good intentions, but in practice, there are many problems at the grassroots.” Keran, the Kazakh coach in Altay also suggested that “many policies have been changed at the grassroots.”

One reason, as Keran said, was that “different governmental intuitions have different understandings of this project.” In theory, two institutions, the Sports Bureau and the Educational Bureau, need to cooperate with each other when involving in this project. Yet, in fact, the two often work at their own pace. Many officials in Educational Bureaus still view football as nothing but a specific P.E. course. It is an assigned work for them to coordinate with their “colleagues” in the “brother institutions” (*xiongdi danwei*, 兄弟單位), as Keran said, “It is the enrolment rate that the Education Bureau truly cares about.” This attitude of the Educational Bureaus often leads to the incompatibility with football activities. For instance, students in regular schools must compete in an official competition to earn extra points for the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) or the Senior High School Entrance Examination (SHSEE), while such competition is usually organized by Sports Bureaus. When some events take place during a semester, students in regular schools must take a leave to participate in them. In this case, regular schools often choose to reject students’ requests, and claim that it might disturb the regular teaching schedule. As Keran explained, “Simply speaking, many teachers are not willing to provide a make-up class for those students who plan to go outside of school for a football event. Because, for some teachers, providing make-up classes means overtime works without overtime salaries”. In this case, students might choose to skip school with the risk of poor academic performance or choose to give up the event due to parents’ and teachers’ pressure. Another instance, as Keran shared, ironically showed the incompatibility of some educational bureaus:

Once I was asked by a County Educational Bureau of Altay Prefecture to act as a judge in one of its local football events. I thought it should be a football game. I was wrong. It was a football game, but a juggling football game.⁹⁵ There were over twenty delegations, each one had more

⁹⁵ Juggling, in Chinese *dianqiu* “颠球”, refers to using any legal part of body to keep a ball not to fall.

than ten students. They went onto the stage of a hall, to juggle. It was ridiculous. Juggling is not equal to football but is more like acrobatics. Even if some leader of that Educational Bureau told me that juggling was a football skill, in my opinion, any such “skill” without body contact was useless.

Educational institutions are not the only one to be blamed, as Keran suggested, “Sports Bureaus overemphasize the outcome of competitions.” “They think of themselves as the core of School Football,” Keran said. “While they think that educational bureaus are assistants.” He gave more details:

In addition, some leaders in the Sports Bureau have no professional sport background at all. Even so, they often tie the outcome in this year with their support in the next year. Until you could win at least the fourth place in the regional championship, they won’t consider arranging funding for you. Why we don’t have a girls’ team, you know? It is because the outcome of Altay Prefecture in the past few years was not good enough according to the criteria of the Sports Bureau’s leaders.

As Keran argued, many officials in the Sports Bureau considered the outcome of a sport team as the criteria for evaluating their own bureaucratic performance. It has resulted in inconsistent support for school football, and the situation would be worse in some poor regions. Keran had his own judgement to the policy of school football:

School football is good, because it shows that the state begins to value football. With long-term policy support, it would bring ethnic unity in Xinjiang. “Combining sport and education” is good as well. Because, after all, football is an education [...] the task of a P.E. teacher is not to lead students to compete for a winning, but to encourage more students to go outsides, to expand their vision through sport [...] Take football as an example, it is a collective sport that more students may be involved in. Though not everyone can become a professional footballer, this sport can help them to strengthen their wills and characters, to learn how to coordinate with others. For those from poor families, they can earn extra points in the *gaokao* and *zhongkao* via competing in football tournaments. Then it will help those poor boys to enter colleges. That is far better than entering the society to find a job after graduating from senior middle schools [...] but, it is too difficult to implement these policies. All policies have changed in the grassroots all over Xinjiang. We are worse, because more funding goes to South Xinjiang.⁹⁶

Keran’s judgement drew forth another crucial problem on current school football campaign in Xinjiang that many “guarantees” have not worked at the grassroots.

⁹⁶ *Gaokao*, as in Chinese “高考”, refers to NCEE; *zhongkao*, as in Chinese “中考”, refers to SHSEE.

5.2 Moral Resistance and Ethical Discipline in Schooling

Among all unenforced “guarantees”, the most negative issue is the shortage of funding. According to the PPXYF, financial support should mostly go to Sports Bureaus. Yet, such funding has not directly reached to grassroots coaches. Thus, individual grassroots coaches have their own solution, which somehow reflects the ethical dilemma of these grassroots football participants when facing the current social transformation.

5.2.1 Four Jobs with Two Incomes: A Grassroots Coach’s Devotion

Keran has multiple career roles. He is a P.E. teacher in a local middle school, and a low-ranking cadre and an experienced football coach in the local Sports Bureau. He himself has crossed two bureaucratic institutions, sports and education. Due to his long-time devotion to schooling and football training, Keran is a very well-respected man in Altay. The first time I met Keran was in January 2016. At that time, he drove his grey Hyundai car to pick me up to bring me to his office. That was an unusual situation in my experience. For as far as I knew, it would be hard for a teacher in a regular school to own a private car based on their salary.

Soon after, I discovered Keran’s another career, an e-commerce businessman. Most of his income was from selling football products online in Altay. These products, including football stocks, balls, shoes, T-shirts, etc., were purchased from Guangdong or Fujian provinces. Keran explained his reason for engaging in this side business as follows:

My job has been only tied with Altay N. Middle School until 2004. In that year, the original team manager from the local Sports Bureau pocketed public money for the Altay delegation. As a result, many footballers didn’t even have enough food to eat. In the next year, I applied to serve for the Sports Bureau. But my own job was still in the school. In other words, I still had one income. In most cases, I would apply funding for the football team’s training, but the Sports Bureau often delayed approval. In the end, I had to pay in advance and expected that the Bureau would pay me back later [...] For daily trainings, basic needs are food and equipment. There are no factories in Xinjiang producing sports equipment, but there are a lot of such factories in Guangdong and Fujian. And I have contacts with those factories. Back then, the salary from the school couldn’t sustain my expenditure on football teams. So, I made the decision to purchase more and sell in Altay, for there were few such products in local shops.

Keran’s wife, who is a Chinese teacher who works in the same middle school, opposes her husband’s practice of paying bills for the local team. “She asked me ‘is this your family’s football team?’” Keran recalled. “Her opposition is always oral. Without her support, I could never insist.” In fact, besides his wife, Keran’s elder son Heren has been supporting his father by participating

in annual trainings for several years. When I conducted my fieldwork, Heran was in the U16 team. Even so, Heran had not received any special treatment from his father. Then, I learnt from other informants, who were all Keran's colleagues in Altay N. Middle School, that in recent years Keran had paid for many others that should have been paid for by the local Sports Bureau, including footballers' caterings and medical insurances. The chef in the canteen of Altay N. Middle School showed me the weekly diet plan. It was a very simple menu: everyday breakfast was the same with milk tea and deep-fried cakes; lunch was fried rice or dumplings; dinner was noodles with lamb, potatoes and green peppers; in the afternoon, the canteen would prepare green bean soup and water melons (Figure 5-4). From a nutritional perspective, that diet was not suitable for a young footballer due to shortage of vitamins and protein. Yet, the chef had tried his best to ensure all footballers could have enough food to eat. Indeed, no footballers I interviewed had complained to me about food in the canteen.

Figure 5-4: An Ordinary Lunch for Altay's Young Footballers



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N. Middle School, Altay City, Alay Prefecture, XUAR. The chef was filling a bowl with fried noodles for footballers

In my fieldwork, no one had criticized Keran for his second income.⁹⁷ People in-outside the school, including students, teachers, and the schoolmaster, all honored Keran. In several cases, when Keran drove me home or had a dinner with me in a small street restaurant within Altay City, some of his former students would come over and present their greetings to Keran.

Bek, the schoolmaster of Altay N. Middle School who would act the manager of U16 team in the regional championship, sometimes came to the pitch to watch the training of the two teams. “It’s difficult for Keran,” Bek said. “Without his insistence, Altay Prefecture won’t have so many footballers. In addition, many countryside students from poor families might not have opportunities to enter senior middle schools or colleges.” I asked Bek implicitly whether the school had any regulations regarding teacher’s second job. Bek understood that I was asking about Keran. “There’s no regulation that a teacher can’t do a second job, as long as the job does not affect their teaching,” Bek said. “We all understand why Keran sells clothes… He has made too many efforts. What’s more, compare to other coaches, Keran’s practice has no ethical problems at all.”

5.2.2 Abay’s Proverbs: Local Knowledge and Ethnic Experience

I was curious of other coaches’ practice. This excerpt from an interview to the schoolmaster Bek might provide some details:

Bek: I have been the manager for several times with Keran in recent years, so, I knew some cases in other prefectures. Some coaches, especially in South Xinjiang, are too utilitarian and have forgotten their own responsibility as an education professional. In recent years, youth football in Xinjiang has made some advancements, and some clubs and schools from *neidi* provinces come to Xinjiang to select young talents. So, local football coaches become middlemen between those outside clubs and local footballers. As middlemen, those coaches could earn a lot of money.

Author: It is quite normal for a middleman to earn in the middle, isn’t it?

Bek: Yes, those coaches are like scouts. After all, I am not a professional in football, so, I don’t master details on how much those coaches would earn as scouts or middlemen. But, the problem is that some of them value money too much and ignore footballers’ actual conditions. Most of students are not suitable to play professional football. It is because of their own athletic ability; on the other hand, it is because of their family’s economic condition. I hear that it costs forty or fifty thousand RMB on average per year to send a child to those schools or clubs. Most of Xinjiang families can’t afford this bill. If a coach doesn’t consider these factors but insist on persuading a

⁹⁷ It is not illegal but still controversial for a school teacher in China to run a business outside school (Pan 2005:202).

family to send their child to *neidi*, it would be irresponsible and immoral. For those families, it would be a highly risky investment.

Author: You mentioned that these cases are from South Xinjiang. So, what ethnic groups do those coaches belong to?

Bek: All cases I know are Uyghur coaches.

Bek was one of few informants in my fieldwork whose career had little relation to football. In his words, I unexpectedly noted that his critiques to another ethnic group. I wonder what information on ethnic relation or anything else I might get from this educational professional. Bek was in his forties years of age interviewed in 2016. He was quite tall, speaking standard Putonghua like many other Kazakh teachers in Altay. While his slow flow of speech and humble attitude made him quite approachable. In subsequent interviews, I tried to ask him some questions related to my research. For instance, when I arrived at the school in the early of July, it was the end of Ramadan. So, I thought that all these Kazakh players living in the school, as Muslim, would practice fast. Bek gave me a confirmative answer, “No, they won’t. In Xinjiang, any religion is prohibited to enter the campus. Schools won’t encourage students to practice fast. And during Ramadan, these footballers have three meals like in ordinary days.” Indeed, the first time I came to Altay N. Middle School, I had noted the eye-catching posters and slogans on bulletin boards in the campus. Some of these posters (on religion and ethnic unity) could been seen in many other places in Xinjiang (figure 5-5; 5-6). While some others, as I have noted, were Kazakh proverbs (Figure 5-7). When I asked Bek about the Kazakh proverbs I noted, he said with a proud smile on his face, “We Kazakhs have many oral traditions. Some of what you have seen in the campus are folk proverbs, while some are poems written by Abay.” This was my first time to hear Abay’s name. Bek said proudly, “The significance of Abay for Kazakhs is like the significance of Confucius for Han Chinese.”

Figure 5-5: Poster in Altay N. Middle School: Religion is Prohibited from Entering the Campus⁹⁸



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

Figure 5-6: Poster in Altay N. Middle School: Ethnic Unity⁹⁹



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

⁹⁸ The detailed content in this poster was “six prohibitions” on religion, including activities, behaviours, speeches, dressing, thoughts and faith of religion. All these were prohibited from penetrating the campus.

⁹⁹ Scripts in this poster was “Han cannot leave ethnic minorities; ethnic minorities cannot leave Han; ethnic minorities cannot leave each other”.

Figure 5-7: Poster in Altay N. Middle School: Anti-corruption ¹⁰⁰



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

So, who is Abay? With the full name, Abay Qunanbayuli was a Kazakh poet, philosopher and educationist. In both Kazakhstan and China, Abay is widely seen as the enlightenment thinker of Kazakh nationalism. Many educated Kazakhs, like Bek, view Abay as the source of ethnic moral standards and values. One of Abay's significant contributions for Kazakhs was that he encouraged his own ethnic group to abandon the narrow ethno-nationalism, instead he proposed that Kazakhs must promote education and science (Habai 1995:7-8). In some literatures on Xinjiang, scholars have noted that the Kazakhs were more well-educated compared to Uyghurs (Rudelson and Jankowiak 2004:305). In this sense, could Abay's respectful attitudes to knowledge explain these scholars' finding? As the schoolmaster, Bek did not give me a black-and-white answer for my questions that regarding ethnic relations in Xinjiang. "Both the Kazakhs and the Uyghurs in North Xinjiang are more well educated than the Uyghurs in South Xinjiang," Bek said. "There are many reasons, like economic factors. For Kazakhs, Abay's thoughts are definitely very influential." Yet, he expressed his view on Uyghurs with a sense of humor:

Abay's poems concentrate on family ethics and personal morality. These ethics are universal and profound. And in history, Kazakhs have been an ethnic group of herdsmen. We love the nature.

¹⁰⁰ The poster on the right is a Kazakh proverb, literally means "officials won't be fat without accepting bribe; dogs won't be fat without eating scabs; people won't talk, once people talk they are always correct".

Our characteristics are that we are optimistic and easygoing. We are not like some ethnic group, narrow-minded and aggressive. They overly emphasize their own ethnic group. If they have any achievement, they always emphasize how powerful they are. They look down upon others. They view us as wild barbarians for we are herdsmen, while they are more civilized peasants. Why would they think of us like this? Perhaps they are right somehow. We used to fight in too many wars. In the World War Two, the soldier who raised the flag over the Reichstag in Berlin was a Kazakh, and many Kazakhs fought and died in Siege of Leningrad. But now we don't fight any more. We love peace.

Similar to Keren, Bek did not say what ethnic group refers to when he used “some ethnic group” (*youde minzu*, 有的民族), until I asked, at which point he replied, “Uyghurs”.

5.2.3 Where Have All the Coaches Gone?

Keran was surprised and delighted to know that I had started to study Abay's proverbs with Bek, “Many families own at least one book of Abay. Our tradition of valuing education comes from Abay.” “You know why there are so many *heihu* in South Xinjiang?”¹⁰¹ When talking about Abay, Keren started to compare Kazakhs with Uyghurs. “It is because many of families there don't care for education. They only care for making babies. But, the more children they have, the poorer their family will be. Then it will be more difficult to afford for their children to go to school. This results in a vicious cycle. Ill-educated parents don't register their new babies, those kids become *heihu*. And this gives some coaches the chance to falsify young footballers' age and identity.” Yet, similar to usual, Keran did not talk too much about other ethnic groups and ethnic relation. While I was learning knowledge about Abay with Bek in the last ten days of July, Keren was very busy like a bee.

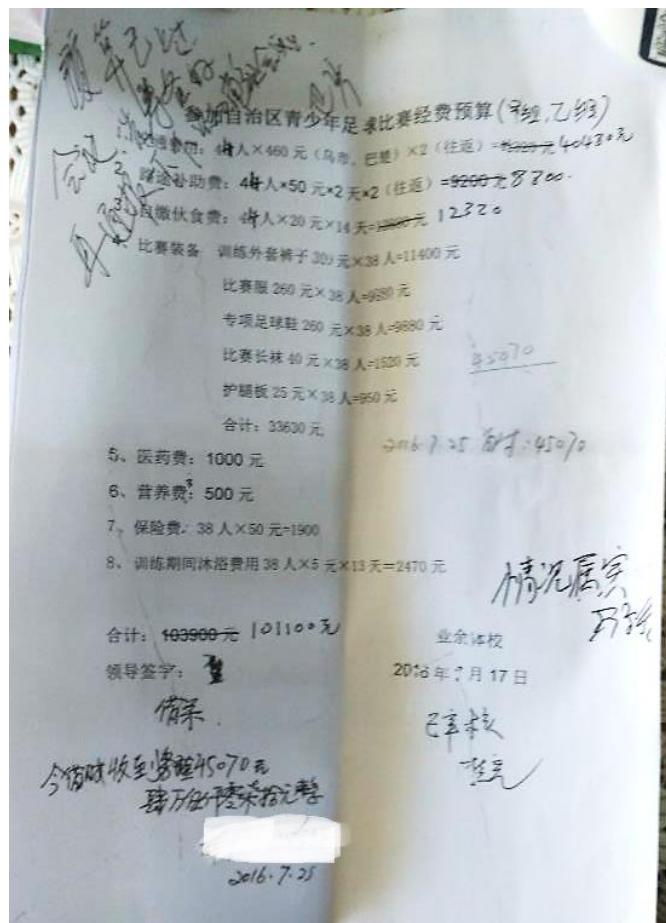
Keran the Bee

The reason made Keran so busy was that there were not sufficient coaches in the two teams. According to the team registration form for the regional youth football championship, each team had one head coach, one assistant coach, one goalkeeper coach, and one manager, four coaching staffs in total. Yet, before the twenty-second of July, there were only two coaches, Keran and his assistant coach Ashar. I had seen one another coach for several times. As a retired wrestler, that

¹⁰¹ *Heihu*, as in Chinese “黑戶”, refers to those who have never registered their identity in local Civil Affairs Bureaus so that can hardly have many rights as normal citizens.

coach barely gave players any training class, but directly played football with those young footballers. Usually, the task of a head coach is to arrange tactics and to direct players in a game, while an assistant coach takes charge of daily training. Yet, during that period, Keran was in fact doing all these jobs. As it was getting closed to the first of August, when two teams were supposed to depart for Maralbexi County, the prefectural Sports Bureau had not yet allocated the funding (Figure 5-8). As a result, all players in the two teams still wore their own t-shirts and shoes. That made them look not like one team. In addition, they could not purchase train tickets without funding, which made the foreshadowing for their late arrival in Maralbexi County later.

Figure 5-8: Photocopy of the Funding Item List of Altay Delegation for Participating in the Regional Championship



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR. According to the photocopy, total funding was cut to RMB 10,110 yuan, in which the largest part was round-trip transportation that had been cut to RMB 4,048 yuan. Other item included training subsidy (forty-four persons), daily meals, equipment, medicines, nutrition subsidy, assurance, and shower fee during training. The funding had been officially approved in the seventeenth of July, yet no money had been allocated. Until the twenty-fifth of July, the financial department “lent” (as the scripts in the photocopy shows) Keren (his real name has been erased by the author) RMB 4,5070 yuan.

The summer training started on the tenth of July. In other words, two team only had about twenty days for preparing the regional championship. Their training was very tight, and they must train six and half days every week. The only rest was in the afternoon of the Sunday. For each team, there were two training classes, each lasted two hours: U13 from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m. and 16 p.m. to 18 p.m., while U16 followed U13 behind (12 p.m. to 14 p.m. and 18 p.m. to 20 p.m.).

Since the mid of July, Keran had been busy in contacting coaches, applying funding, purchasing equipment and arranging daily training. I could only see him for half a day every day for a period. I wondered why other coaches could not attend training. “Coaches in the summer training have no salary, but a little subsidy,” Keran said. “This work is volunteer-based. There are not too many football coaches in Altay Prefecture. Young coaches are too busy earning money during summer break. Few would like to come to the city from counties for a work with no salary.” According to the original registry form. Except Keran, five other coaches are from different counties of Altay Prefecture. As the Sports Bureau planned, during the summer training, if those coaches could come to Altay City, they would be housed in the manager’s office of the student hall in Altay N. Middle School. The office room was simple. Without any air-conditioning or computer connected the internet. There were only two beds, one telephone, one TV without any signal, and one monitor screen (Figure 5-9). “I also have only one salary from the school,” Keran complained to those coaches. “I thought it was a point of pride to be selected from twenty candidates in the grassroots to be the coach of the prefectoral delegation. But young people nowadays don’t agree with me... I must prop the two teams up. If I quit, is there any young man willing to take over?”

Figure 5-9: Keran and One of His Assistant Coach, Ashar.



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Hall manager's office, Altay N Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

Murat the Big Boss

One day, I noted a new face on the pitch. A bold man in his thirties years of age was training three goalkeepers of the two teams. The man's voice was so loud that when he was yelling to young goalkeepers that I could hear him from outside the pitch. If the young goalkeepers did well, the man also applauded and praised them loudly. After the training class, I went over the side of the goal and chatted with him.

He said his name was Murat, and he used to be the goalkeeper in Keran's team ten years ago. He heard that the former goalkeeper coach had not yet attended training, so he came here and wanted to help Keran. He lit a cigarette while he was introducing himself. He shared some experience when he was playing in Keran's team, but the information he provided was all trivial details of past games. His words showed his respect to Keran. "I was unlucky to play football in the sports school," Murat said. "I didn't study well in the sports school but made a lot of troubles for Keran. This time I want to help Keran, but he refused. I am a straightforward man, don't mind ... Coach Keran is sometimes too inflexible." When he mentioned that he used to make

troubles, he pointed his left arm. Then, I noted that there were some scars on the arm. I asked him whether I could take a picture of these scars, Murat said no problem, and he emphasized, “They are cut by knives after I graduated from the sports school” (Figure 5-10).

Figure 5-10: Murat “the Big Brother” Shows Scars on His Arms



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

Soon, Murat had to start the next training class. I came back to the side of the pitch and prepared to take notes. Then, a group of young footballers in the U13 team got around me, asked me with surprise, “Tanger, what has Murat the big brother talked to you?”¹⁰² It seemed that those boys have already knew Murat, and called him “the big boss”, which sounded like to call a honorific. Murat attended training for two days, and then he never came back.

A few days later, I met Keran beside the pitch and asked him about Murat. “He is a mafioso,” Keran said. “He hurt others with knives and had been hurt in return. Many young men in

¹⁰² “Tanger” is my name given by Altay’s footballers. It sounds like *Tan ger* in Chinese, meaning “elder brother Tan”, meanwhile it is also how they pronounce an ordinary Kazakh male’s name *Tanghal* in Chinese.

Altay City know that.” As Keran shared, Murat was indeed one of the best goalkeepers in his team ten years ago. Yet, then young Murat was often involved in fighting. Keran used to try to persuade him to “walk on the right path”, but Murat did not listen. After graduating from the sports school, Murat “walked too closely with those local bullies”, in the end, he was hurt by knives in an incident. This excerpt from an interview with Keran presented why Keran refused this “warm hearted helper”:

Keran: Murat was a typical student in the sports school, which did not concentrate on culture studies and courses. It is easy for students in the sports school to learn bad things. If their athletic performance is not good enough, they can’t enter the regional team. After graduation, they must find a job. But, which unit would like to employ a bad guy like Murat?

Author: This time he is willing to be the goalkeeper on his own. Is it not ok?

Keran: On his own? He said he wished to be one of the coach team members to go to Maralbexi County. But he also asked me for salaries. All coaches in the summer training won’t have any salary from the Sports Bureau. Murat blamed me for being stingy. I did refuse him, not for money, but for other reasons. He can never be a coach. I can’t let someone like him to teach boys how to be a mafioso.

Ermek the Handsome

Not long after Murat’s disappearance, I noted another new coach. This coach looked young, in his twenties. Every day on the pitch, this young man wore his black Nike hat. The first time I saw him, he was teaching all footballers of the two teams how to play football as a whole team. Everyone was listening carefully. Later, I found that this young coach would prepare well for each course, and each course started to have a clear training goal. In the end of raining classes in the morning, I went up to greet him. He held out his right hand and shook hands with me, introducing him politely in standard Putonghua, “Nice to meet you, I am Ermek.”

Arriving at Altay N. Middle School, Ermek acted as the head coach of both teams. His devotion towards training refreshed most footballers. Then, I gradually learnt his experience. Before entering a normal university in Urumqi, Ermek was a member of the Altay football team coached by Keran. In college major in P.E., he considered joining in professional football clubs. Like many other cases, he failed in the end; yet, his educational background and trial training experience in many *neidi* provinces have enriched his football knowledge. Passing the national teachers’ qualification examination, Ermek got a job as P.E. teacher in a primary school at his hometown, Jeminay County, which was under the administration of Altay Prefecture. He was one of the twenty candidate coaches recommended to Altay Sports Bureau. Yet, the leader of

local Sports Bureau thought he was too young and might not have enough “coaching experience”, until the recent “coach crisis” emerged. Ermek felt excited to do this job and came to Altay City as soon as he received the notice from the prefectural Sports Bureau. During the week when Keran could barely attend training, I acted as the team manager of U13 team. For several days, I took U13 team to another middle school to have practice games with a local amateur football team, in which footballers were all primary school students attending a summer football workshop. Although opponents were quite weak, Ermek would send me his well-prepared line-up. During games, he would keep up information with me via mobile phones, and by this way, he could remotely direct all the U13 players.

In the later regional championship, Ermek acted as the head coach of Altay U13 team, while Ashar acted as Ermek’s assistant. Ashar was irritable, and sometimes, very rude to footballers. For instance, in the last game of regional championship, Altay U13 team lost the game in penalty shots. Although young footballers, especially the young goalkeeper, had tried their best, Ashar struck the goalkeeper’s head with water bottle and blamed this boy for failing to save a penalty. The goalkeeper could not help crying. In the end, Keran and Ermek went over to stop Ashar. Keran then told me that a coach should restrain his own temper, “Sometimes you need to critique footballers, but physically striking them should not happen.” Compared to Ashar, young footballers admired Ermek, who was the youngest of three coaches in the Altay delegation. Unlike Ashar who was irritable, Ermek was gentle, kind and responsible to footballers (Figure 5-11; 5-12). As one young footballer said, “I think coach Ermek knows far more than Ashar.” In front, footballers called their coaches “Ke jiao”, “A jiao”, and “Ye jiao” for respect, while in behind, footballers called their “Ye jiao” - and only called this young man – “Ermek the Handsome”.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ *Jiao* refers to the Chinese word “*jiaolian*” (教练), meaning coach. In daily training, this is how these Kazakh boys call their coaches, combining the first syllable of coaches’ Kazakh name with the first syllable of Chinese word “*jiaolian*”. “Ermek the Handsome”, as in Chinese “*Ye Shuai*” (葉帥).

Figure 5-11: “Ermek the Handsome” Carried Out an Injured player during the Regional Championship



Source: Shot by author. August 2016. Maralbexi County, Kashgar Prefecture, XUAR.

Figure 5-12: “Ermek the Handsome” Directed his Players of the U13 Team during the Regional Championship



Source: Shot by author. August 2016. Maralbexi County, Kashgar Prefecture, XUAR.

From Keran's view, not only Altay Prefecture but also the whole Xinjiang need more young coaches like Ermek, because "In essence, football coaches are teachers." "Football coaches in schools must tie football and education," Keran said. "They need to master football knowledges, management and educational psychology. They need learn grassroots circumstances, state policies, and trends in the outside world. The most important is that they must have virtues and be willing to stay in primary levels, to be the role model for the younger generation."

5.2.4 Role Models Players and Negative Examples

As many informants criticized, the worship of competition had influenced many grassroots football participants. Some leaders in Sports Bureaus care for the short-term athletic outcome, and some grassroots coaches send young footballers to other provinces without considering realistic conditions (as examples illustrated in this chapter), and some parents are also trying to get their kids to go professional path (as example illustrated in the next chapter). However, Keran interprets competition in his own way, as he said, "We shouldn't compete unscrupulously."

In daily training, Keran had not emphasized the consciousness of competition, even in teaching body contact skills. What Keran emphasized was how to properly (instead of "recklessly") use bodies and skills. From Keran's point of view, only a few of students were able and suitable to go to the professional path. In daily practice, he concentrated on the educational significance of football rather than the function of football as a career to earn big money. "Football can't only shape wills and characters, but also improve one's internal cultivation," Keran said. "I am not only teaching them how to play the ball, but also teaching them how to be a good man." Following were three cases that presented how Keran combined football with ethical discipline.

Team Capitals

In the mid of July before Ermek attended training, Keran often left the training contents to footballers in both teams. Boys in the U13 team well followed Keran's assignment, while elder boys in the U16 did not follow their coach's order. During training classes, what the U16 team did was having a counter game within themselves. One day, Keran found this misbehavior of the U16 team, the angry coach punished the whole team to run five circles along the pitch, then he seriously criticized three captains of the U16 team (Figure 5-13). Until then, I realized that there were team captains in the undisciplined U16 team.

Figure 5-13: Keran Was Criticizing Three Team Captains in the U16 Team



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR. Closed to readers were the three team captains. From the left to the right were Nurbek, Adil, and Serik.

The team captain in football is a team member chosen to be the on-pitch leader of the team. It is often one of the older or more experienced members of the squad, or a player that can heavily influence a game. I wondered how the three team captains had been selected. Keran suggested that he made this selection via careful consideration.

According to priority in the line-up, the first team captain was Nurbek, who was the shortest and thinnest one among the three. “But this boy is an excellent student with good academic performance,” Keran said. “His academic grade ranks in the top ten in this school. And he is a smart boy and gets along well with teammates. When playing football, he knows to observe on the pitch. So, I put him in the midfield to organize striking and defense... But he has his weakness that he is too gentle on the pitch. He needs more aggressiveness to lead his teammate.”

The second team captain was the tallest player in the team, Serik. His position in the team was in the center back which usually asked for a tall play. “Serik is a new comer this year,” Keran said. “What I appreciate is this boy’s physical condition. He is tall and strong among all the players. The Center Back is the last defense except the goalkeeper, and it needs a very re-

sponsible player to guard this position. Serik is an obedient boy on the pitch. I think he has the potential to be a captain.”

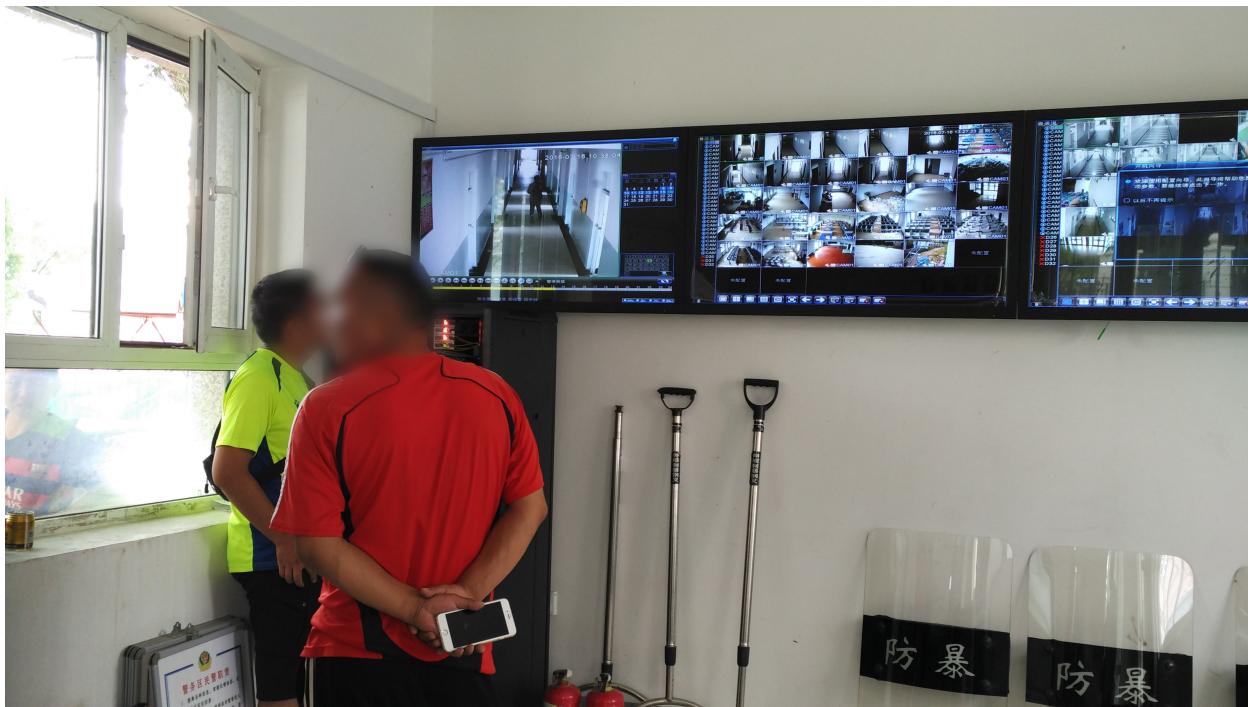
The third captain Adil was the only Uyghur footballer in the Altay delegation. As Keran said, “He is a boy from a poor family”. Adil’s father had died soon after Adil’s birth, and he grew up with his herdswoman mother in the countryside. As the second tallest footballer in the team, Adil was strong and fast, which made him an ideal player as the striker. In most case, this boy did not talk too much. Every time I chatted with him, this shy boy became talkative, and I could feel that he wished to have more communication with others. “Adil has helped his mother in doing domestic work and pasture since he was a little boy,” Keran said. “Footballers from pastoralist or peasant families are usually more mature, because they must take responsibility since they are a little boy. Compare to urban boys, those poor boys are more dedicated on playing football, won’t easily be distracted. But they have a common weakness, which is poor communication ability. Therefore, I arrange Adil to be the team captain. I want to give him a trial to practice his communication skills.”

According to this case, it was noted that the several important criteria of Keran on evaluating footballers included morality, academic performance, responsibility, devotion, and communication skills. Instead, for Keran, football skill and physical factor was not the most important criteria.

Unknown Theft

One day in the early July, when I came to the pitch, I had not seen Keran for the whole training class. Footballers told me that coach Keran was “watching video” in the guard room. I went to the guard room, and Keran with another teacher was watching the video of monitor in the student hall (Figure 5-14). Noted that I came in, Keran shook his head and sighed, “Someone stole two footballers’ money.”

Figure 5-14: Keran Was Watching the Video for Finding the Thief



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Guard room, Altay N Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

In the morning on that day, two boys in the U13 team run to tell Keran that their money given by their parent had gone missing. Each boy lost a few dozen *yuan*, which might not be a large amount of money for others, yet, for them, that was all their pocket money for the whole of July. Keran thought the money was probably stolen by someone in the two teams, because during the summer training there were no other students, except the forty boys and one coach who were living in the campus. “It is a shame!” Keran said. “It has rarely happened before. Stealing is dishonored. The two boys come from poor families in the countryside. How can someone have such a cold heart to steal from two poor boys who are their teammates?” Before I went into the guard room, Keran had been carefully watching the monitor video for one hour. He chose to replay the video in normal speed and did not want to miss any clue.

Keran was depressed. In the next two days, I also helped to watch the video. While we were watching the video, Keran commented the show-off trend among some of youth footballers in recent years, “Present boys have been influenced by adults.” “U13 boys are still innocent,” Keran said. “While some U16 boys don’t concentrate on playing football but have learnt to compare and show off their dressing, hair style, and mobile phones. Some of these boys, whose parents might be officials in the government, are boastful of their parents every day. Some other

boys from countryside have no parents with official background, then they begin to boast of their friends. Each side is lying.”

In the end, we failed to find anything useful. And Keran never publicly talked about any progress on this “case” within the two teams. After all, we have not found any direct clue to prove that it was some team member stealing the money. Later, when I interviewed footballers, I asked the two boys in the U13 team if their money have been found. They told me no, “But Coach Keran gave us each fifty *yuan*... and ask us to hide money carefully.”

An Ethical Class: Two Chunghwa Cigarette Stubs

In the end of July, I become a helper on managing the U13 team. After lunches, I would go to the student hall to have an inspection and ensured all players had a nap. One day, in a room full of U16 footballers, I smelled the smoke of cigarettes and mentioned this to Keran in the afternoon. He was very angry to know some team member might smoke in the hall. After finishing two training classes, Keran went to that room with me and soon later we found several fresh stubs on the balcony and under two beds. Some cigarettes were burnt only half, and it was obvious that someone had stubbed the cigarette not long ago. Keran picked up a stub, had a smell and looked at the brand, “It seems that someone know how to enjoy. They smoke Chunghwa!”¹⁰⁴

Keran asked all footballers to get together in this room. Soon after, the small room was full of young boys with confused expression. No one spoke. Everyone could feel the sweltering air and the tense atmosphere. Keran asked the owner of one bed, under which we found fresh stubs. This player was a substitute in the U16 team. When Keran asked him if he knew where these stubs came from, he replied, “No.” He did not raise his head, instead, he was blindly touching his mobile phone with his fingers. “Do you know the basic etiquette?” Keran was provoked and asked this boy. “Show your respect! No footballer dares to talk to me like you! I have told all of you on the first day you joined in training that it is prohibited for an athlete to smoke cigarette and drink alcohol. You smoke, and you can even smoke Chunghwa? Do you know what I have been busy on during these days? Every day I go to the Sports Bureau to ask the leader for funding and equipment but look at yourself! What are you doing here?” Then Keran turned to speak

¹⁰⁴ Chunghwa is a premium brand of Chinese cigarettes produced in Shanghai.

Kazakh and asked other players if they knew who smoked in the hall. Then he turned back speaking Chinese, talked about his experience as a footballer and the history of the Altay Delegation. He was delivering an ethical lesson to all these boys. “Respect everyone!” Keran said. “No matter they are the old, the young, the rich, or the poor. All of them that you have shown your respect will someday return to help you. When you come to attend football, the first thing is to learn how to behave yourself, then how to respect others, and then you start to learn football skill.” Then he started to take his son Heran as an example and talked about how to be independent, “Don’t boast of your parents every day. You all see Heran, my son.” As Keran was talking about Heran, this boy was also listening in the corner of this room. Keran pointed his son, and continued, “You have all seen that he goes home by himself every day after training, I barely drive him. If he boasted of his father every day like some of you, could he become a man?”

The player who was playing his phone just now bowed to apologize and confessed it was him that smoked in the hall. Keran accepted this boy’s apology and turned to another suspect, who had his hair dyed to golden yellow. Before Keran asking, that boy said in an innocent tone, “That stub was used to roast meat!” Keran could not help to laugh. So did others. “You should use your brain when you lie. If you truly used the stub to roast meat, why you didn’t invite your teammates, since we do not have enough meat to eat during your training... Use your brain to speak and use your brain to play football!” Then, Keran began to review the training class in the afternoon, he gave a demonstration right in the crowded room and reminded footballers to note details of those skills. He also mentioned me and encouraged footballers to ask me questions “about the outside world”.

Unknowingly, two hours had passed, the chef also entered the room. Seeing the chef, Keran realized it was almost Beijing time 10 p.m., and footballers should have had dinner on 8 p.m. He kidded in the end, “I wish someday our team could have roast meat for every meal.” An ethical class ended with boys’ laughter. Standing beside the door of the room, Ermek said to me, “When I was the footballer in Keran’s team ten years ago, there was no student hall. During the summer training, we all slept on the cement floor in the teaching building. For us, resting in such hall was like resting in the heaven. These boys now ask much more. They smoke, and even smoke Chunghwa!”

5.3 Conclusion: Sensing State in Pitch

One year later after the ethical class, the two footballers who smoked in the hall were “fired” by Keran - when forming the new edition Altay Delegation for the 2017 regional youth football championship, Keran decided not to recruit the two boys. I got this information during my revisit to Alay in April 2017. Besides, I received good news from Keran.

Keran would study in the UK in the summer 2017. In March 2017, Keran had successfully passed a national selection with the aim to send one hundred of grassroots coaches nationwide to the UK and France to receive high-level football coach trainings. In XUAR, only three, including Keran, have passed this selection. In the final arrangement of MoE, Keran had been assigned to go to the UK, more specifically, Manchester. Keran said, “I have never expected that someday I could go to the city of Manchester United and Manchester City.”¹⁰⁵ Keran’s colleagues were also proud for him. The schoolmaster Bek told me, “Keran is the first Kazakh football coach in Xinjiang studies in the UK. It is not only his own honor, but also the honor of Altay and Kazakhs. The state eventually acknowledges Keran’s devotion in the past years.” Yet, when I met Keran, he was still worried about the summer training a few months later. For his absence, Ermek would act the head coach of the Altay delegation in 2017 regional youth football championship. What made Keran anxious was a new situation that was beyond his ability to solve.

August 2016, XUAR had its new party secretary Chen Quanguo. One policy from the new governor of Xinjiang was strengthening maintaining stability in all prefectures in XUAR (Guardian 2017b). As a result, even in Altay City that had been peaceful for many years, security in all governmental units, including schools, had been fortified. Teachers were required to take turns twenty-four hours on duty, while male teachers were required to wear their bulletproof suits and helmets, and patrol in the campus. In April 2017, I met Keran “the armed” in Altay N. Middle School (Figure 5-15). Not mentioning too much about the current strengthened public security, Keran expressed his concerning on coaches in the coming summer, “Now all school teachers are required to be twenty-four hours on duty,” he said. “Coaches in the summer won’t have extra salary. If coming here means to be coach with no salary and to be twenty-four hours on duty, I

¹⁰⁵ Manchester United and Manchester City are two of the most renowned professional football clubs in the world.

am afraid that no coach would be willing to come here this summer. It would be a tough task for Ermek to coach the two teams.”

Figure 5-15: The “Armed” Keran Patrols in the Campus



Source: Shot by author. April 2017. Altay N. Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

In this chapter, it is notable that state power might be both distant and close for grassroots football participants. And the impact of state power to football might emerge both in a macro dimension that influences ethnic relation and social order, and in a micro dimension that influences ordinary people’s daily life and values.

Examples in this chapter concentrating on Xinjiang youth football, from the macro level to the micro level, has illustrated that state power of China is not a monolithic whole. On the one hand, the sport football, as one of the “Ideological State Apparatuses” (Althusser 2009), has not

naturally functioned for uniting wider sections of the population and transcending differences of ethnicities in Xinjiang, like how it had functioned in the USSR (Riordan 1977:8; 397-398). Football might bring social unity, like how it emerges now, but also might lead to separatism, like how it used to be in the 1990s. On the other hand, coaches, teachers, and cadres in different state intuitions in the grassroots act as “political brokers”, agencies of state power. Their daily practice in the realm of football has presented the diversity of subjects, at the same time, has enriched the image of state power. Some of them choose to embrace a more utilitarian value that emphasizes competitions and outcomes, while some others choose to insist a less utilitarian value that emphasizes moral orders and equality. The specific case on how some Kazakhs value their own ethnic moral tradition has presented a diverse scene of values in the grassroots Xinjiang.

It is crucial to note how the state has defines the potential function and role of football. As how it was presented in this chapter from a regional governor’s public manifesto, football might function beyond as a tool for strengthening ethnic unity, it has also been a symbol for “modern culture” (Tianshan 2015b). In this sense, one aspect for further research might has emerged: how to interpret the diverse practice of state agencies in the grassroots? Are they a kind of resistance or an embracement to the current social transformation that greatly impacted by accelerating marketization? Or both?

To answer these questions, it need tie both discussions in this chapter and in the next chapter, which will concentrate on examining how social mobility and marketization of football are related to China’s changing value in the late-socialist era.

Chapter 6 “Kick the Ball with your Brain!” The Dream of Upwards Social Mobility and Its Challenge

Zulyar, who was then only eleven years old, left Xinjiang for the first time in the late of August 2011. His father accompanied with him on the train. From Artush to Urumqi, their journey took one night and one day; from Urumqi to Guangzhou, it took three days and two nights. Before that, this Uyghur boy had been admitted by G Football School. Zulyar’s mother sold out her gold rings and borrowed money from relatives. By this way, this family raised 35,000 *yuan* for their son’s tuition fees and living expenses for the first year. Zulyar had not let his family down. In the past seven years, he studied diligently, worked hard and trained carefully to avoid injuries. Finally, in 2016, this Uyghur boy had successfully been selected into the reserve team of G Football Club, which was one of the best professional clubs in China. This made Zulyar as a role model for his Xinjiang youth football peers. When I interviewed him in the early of 2017, he kept thanking his family for their support, and he said:

When I came home last winter, my younger sister told me, “Elder brother, during days you were at home, the family prepared really good food for meals. As soon as you left and went to Guangdong, our meals turned to be simple.” My younger sister was in junior grade two. As I heard her words, I felt truly sorry and sad [...] In fact, I felt stressed and used to think of giving up. But I cannot mention that to my family. My parents never said something like, “Son, you have to be Messi someday.” No, they never said so. They just said, “Try your best and train hard. If you really could not make it, we would support you for college.” My family is not well off and they have paid a lot so that I cannot let them down [...] Later, I got the studentship from the football school every year, and it has always been the first-class. And now I have been in the reserve team and had salary 3,000 *yuan* a month. My family are so proud of me. But, I still need to avoid injury and illness. If I was injured, it would affect my training. I cannot let them know that I am not good.

The previous three chapters have discussed one center participants (coaches) and several peripheral participants (the state, fans, media, teachers, cadres, and parents) of the “rise of Xinjiang youth football”. This chapter concentrates on the core participant of this research, the youths, who include amateur footballers in regular primary schools and middle schools, and pre-professional footballers in club-run football schools.

To initiate our discussion of this chapter, we need return to the basic question: Why do these youths participate in football? It is noted that youths in this research, as many examples illustrated in previous chapters, refer to those ethnic minority boys in Xinjiang, and most of them are Uyghurs or Kazakhs from ordinary peasant or pastoralist families. Here, the conception of

“football” must be clearly defined when we plan to discuss those youth’s involvement in this sport. What kind of football do they participate in? It is crucial to note that we are not discussing the street football after school when youths play for simple joy and fun, but the systemically organized pre-professional football, which most of Xinjiang youths play as a preparation for their professional football career in the future.

In reality, upward social mobility through a professional sport remains mainly in the realm of myth, but such is the power of this myth that aspirants will go to great lengths to succeed (Spaaij 2011:1). The riskiness to play professional football could be made into a lengthy list, including the high economic barrier for entry, the poor academic background, the high rate for injury, the short career period, limited re-career options, the unstable income, etc. Still, all these negative factors have not stopped ethnic minority youths involve in their football dreams.

This chapter will focus on two groups of boys. One group were playing in a regular middle school in Altay City of XUAR, while another group were playing in a club-run football school in Guangdong Province. They were all with Uyghur or Kazakh backgrounds, and most of them attempted to start their careers in professional football and considered their chances of becoming more socially mobile. Bourdieu’s (1986) concepts will be used to analyse whether these players have their football skills acknowledged and converted into fundamental forms of cultural, social and economic capitals that altogether enhance their social recognition.

6.1 Daily Lives of Football Youth

To better understand of those football youths, it is necessary to provide a description of their daily lives in schools.

6.1.1 Regular School Life

My fieldwork was mainly carried out in winter and summer vacations, but through interviews, I still obtained basic information about the school life of these football youths. Students of the Altay U13 team were then in grade three or grade four of primary schools. Their weekly main courses were Kazakh, Chinese and mathematics. Other courses included art, music, P.E. and science. Students of the U16 team were then in junior grade three or senior grade one of middle schools, and their courses were more abundant (Table 6-1). In every week, they had two 40-minute P.E. classes that included athletics, football and basketball. In principle, three kinds of

P.E. contents would be evenly distributed in a semester. Yet, in recent years, due to the Project of Popularizing Xinjiang Youth Football, football classes had increased in the proportion of teaching in primary and middle schools in Xinjiang. As Nurbek, one of the Altay U16 team captains, said, “Half of P.E. classes in a semester are football.” In addition, one day in a week, after the last class in the afternoon, there was a special class not included in the curriculum with the name of “Sunshine Sports”.¹⁰⁶ The content of “Sunshine Sports” classes was basically for students to freely participate in physical training activities. Most of Altay students chose playing football, and others chose playing basketball or table tennis. In winter, many students chose to ski. Football was the most popular class in both regular P.E. classes and “Sunshine Sport” classes. Nurbek said, “All classmates play football in school during a semester. Boys and girls, not just classmates that participate in coach Keran’s training. It is unlike our summer training that we play for the regional championship. During the regular semester, we form a team freely with our classmates, and we play football for fun.”

Table 6-1: A Timetable of a Class in Senior Grade One in Altay N. Middle School

Local Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
8:00-8:40	Mathematics	Physics	Mathematics	Kazakh	Chinese
8:50-9:30	Chemistry	Mathematics	Chemistry	Mathematics	Mathematics
9:40-10:20	History	Kazakh	Physics	Geography	Physics
10:30-11:10	Metal Health	Chinese	Kazakh	History	Kazakh
11:30-12:10	I.T.	Chinese	P.E.		English
14:00-14:40	Geography	English	History	Chemistry	I.T.
14:50-15:30	Kazakh	Politics	School-based Curriculum	Chinese	Politics
15:40-16:20	P.E.	Music	Chinese	Art	Class Meeting
16:30-17:10	Self Study	Self Study	Self Study	Self Study	

Source: Field data.

Since 2011, the government of XUAR has promoted the school football and increased the proportion of football in P.E. classes, yet, for school managers, culture courses are still the core

¹⁰⁶ “Sunshine Sport” (*yangguang tiyu*, 陽光體育) has been carried out in the PRC as a national educational project since 2007 to aim at attracting more young people nationwide to participate in physical training activities (Song and Liu 2007).

educational task, and the rate of graduation and passing entrance examination is still the most important assessment index (Figure 6-1). Correspondingly, the concept of valuing cultural study also deeply influences the decisions of the parents. As Altay head coach Keran said:

Most of the parents in our school, especially those in cities and counties, think that the most crucial task for their children is to study cultural courses and to pass the entrance examination. Some urban parents send their children to participate in winter and summer football training programs for cultivating their children's interests or shaping their children's characters [...] This group of parents are mostly civil servants. Some of them are P.E. teachers. And some of fathers are football fans. But more trainees are from the countryside. Their parents know little about football. Some of their parents want their children to have a try on football, hoping that someday their children could become a professional footballer to improve domestic income. But more are persuaded by me. Although I cannot ensure that their children would be able to start a career via football, I can train their children to win extra points for entrance examinations by participating the regional championship so that these children from poor families might have more chances of having better education.

Figure 6-1: A “Honor Roll” with the Name List Who Were Admitted to Colleges



Source: Shot by author. August 2016. Maralbexi County, Kashgar Prefecture, XUAR. I took this photo in front of the school where all delegations lived during the regional youth football championship.

6.1.2 Material Poverty

In terms of the youth who participated the school football training program in Altay City, what I have observed was their daily lives during the summer training in 2016. As an observer

who had been living in urban metropolitans for many years, from my perspective, those boys' daily lives were rather simple. First and the most apparent fact was the material poverty. For instance, most of footballers only had the basic equipment, including a pair of football shoes with soft nails, two football suits (t-shirts and shorts), and two pair of stockings. Not everyone had a pair of leg guards and a water bottle, which might not be compulsory but still important for players to have a safe and better athletic performance. All equipment for trainings and formal games should have been provided by the local Sports Bureau (Figure 6-2). Yet, in fact it was footballers' families that had provided all the basic training equipment, which in practice only met the basic requirement (Figure 6-3). Their living condition was poor. Although as their coach Ermek said in Chapter 5, the current living condition in the student hall was far better than that in the past, the inside of a room was mess and dirty. In the hall, there were only very basic facilities: only bunk beds in all rooms, no air-conditioners or fans. In the summer, it was not comfortable to sleep inside the room, and this might be a reason why many footballers did not have a nap during the noon (Figure 6-4). Some boys had good habits on maintaining personal hygiene, and they washed their clothes under limited sanitary condition in the hall (Figure 6-5; 6-6). On diet, as the example illustrated in Chapter 5, meals provided in school canteen could only ensure all boys to "eat to full" but were far less nutritious by the standard for athletes. As Figure 5-8 in the previous chapter showed, the local Sports Bureau had funding as the "nutrition subsidy", yet as I observed during the regional championship, most of footballers had used this subsidy to purchase ice-creams and snacks instead of food with rich vitamins and proteins.

Figure 6-2: Joyful Footballers in Altay When Received New Equipment



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N. Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR. The equipment from local Sports Bureau was distributed two days before the delegation departed for the regional championship.

Figure 6-3: A Wore-out Football Shoe of a Footballer in Altay



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N. Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

Figure 6-4: A Glimpse into a Room of the Student Hall in Altay



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N. Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

Figure 6-5: A Glimpse into a Laundry Room of the Student Hall in Altay



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N. Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR.

Figure 6-6: Altay Young Footballers Were Washing Clothes during the Region Championship



Source: Shot by author. August 2016. Maralbexi County, Kashgar Prefecture, XUAR.

6.1.3 Mental Poverty

Their absent consciousness on nutrition somehow reflected the second issue, the mental poverty. Several footballers had friended with me via their social media so that I could observe what interests those boys cared for. Most contents in their social media were about football. However, most of these contents were football celebrities' photos, only a few of boys shared clips or articles on football skills or tactics. And more notable contents on their social media were their vignettes and snapshots when having a party or a decent meal with boy fellows or girl-friends. This was typical among teenagers in the U16 team with an urban background. Reading their social media, one of my impression was that most of them, like adults, cared for consumptions, goods, beautiful girls, and football celebrities, but not the knowledge that teenagers need to learn. As presented in Chapter 5, during the whole summer training, these boys trained four hours every day in six-half days every week. Besides training, as I observed, what boys liked to do was lying down on their beds. Boys who had smart phones usually played games or listened to Kazakh pop music, while boys that did not have smart phones stayed in the canteen to watch the television. I had seen no one had brought out a book to read. I used to ask them if they would feel this life after training might be boring and tedium. Most of urban boys admitted that it was

boring after training. While most of boys from countryside felt that they had more fun in this summer compared to past summers when they almost did the same things alone at home. Adil, as one of the team captains, said, “In past summers, I helped my mother to do herding work. That was really boring.”

For Xinjiang youths in G Football School, their living condition was much better than their Altay peers. Located in a quiet suburban area of a city within Guangdong Province that is one of the richest provinces of the PRC, and found by a real estate tycoon, facilities in the campus of G Football School are even better than many *neidi* province regular school. As Zulyar, a Uyghur footballer in his seventeen years of age interviewed in the early 2017, said, “The first time my parents took me here, we were all surprised,” he said. “The buildings in this school are like European buildings that I watch on TV.” Yet, as I observed, meals in G Football School were quite like that in Altay. Their main food was rich of carbohydrate and fat, including fried noodles, fried rice, and naans, while in lunch and dinner students had yogurts and fruits, which made their meals slightly more notorious by the athletes’ standard.

The school was far from the urban area and strict regulations asked all students to stay in the campus in weekdays. So, some Xinjiang youths, like many of their classmates from all over the country, sometimes felt boring to be caged in the campus. Yet, the major mental challenge was not from the tediousness but the pressure of studying and training. G Football School had a very detailed daily routine for both students and employees (Figure 6-7). For students, in weekdays they got up in the morning on 6:30 a.m., had a 90-minute football training class in the morning, and had culture classes, like in regular schools, in the rest of time in working hours. Naps after lunch and self-studies after dinner were compulsory. And all students were required to sleep in 10:30 p.m.

Figure 6-7: Student Daily Routine of G Football School, Summer and Autumn 2016

足球学校 2016 年夏秋季作息时间表
 (此表从 2016 年 8 月 1 日起执行)

一、小学部作息时间表

时间	内容	训练时间 (不含周三)
6:30—7:00	起床	
7:00—7:30	早餐	
7:35—7:55	早读	8:10—9:40 (二/三/四/五/六年级)
8:05—8:45	第一节	
8:55—9:35	第二节	
9:35—9:55	卫生整理、课间餐	
10:10—10:50	第三节	10:20—11:50 (小学精英队)
11:00—11:40	第四节	
11:40—12:30	午餐	
12:30—13:55	午休	
13:55—14:15	起床	
14:20—15:00	第五节	
15:10—15:50	第六节	
15:50—16:10	卫生整理、大课间	
16:10—16:50	第七节	
17:00—17:40	第八节	
17:45—19:00	晚餐/生活课	
19:00—19:20	时事课堂 (生活老师负责)	
19:20—20:00	维修一	
20:05—20:45	维修二	
21:20	熄灯、睡觉	

二、中学部作息时间表

时间	内容	训练时间 (不含周三)
6:30—6:50	起床	
6:50—7:30	早餐	
7:40—8:20	第一节	
8:30—9:10	第二节	
9:20—10:00	第三节	
10:00—10:20	卫生整理、课间餐	10:20—11:50 (七年级/中学精英队)
10:20—11:00	第四节	
11:10—11:50	第五节	
11:50—12:45	午餐	
12:45—13:50	午休	
13:50—14:10	起床	
14:20—15:00	第六节	
15:10—15:50	第七节	
15:50—16:10	大课间	15:50—17:40 (八/九年级/高二/高三)
16:10—16:50	第八节	
17:00—17:40	第九节	
17:40—19:10	晚餐	
19:20—20:05	维修一	
20:15—21:00	维修二	
21:30	熄灯、睡觉	

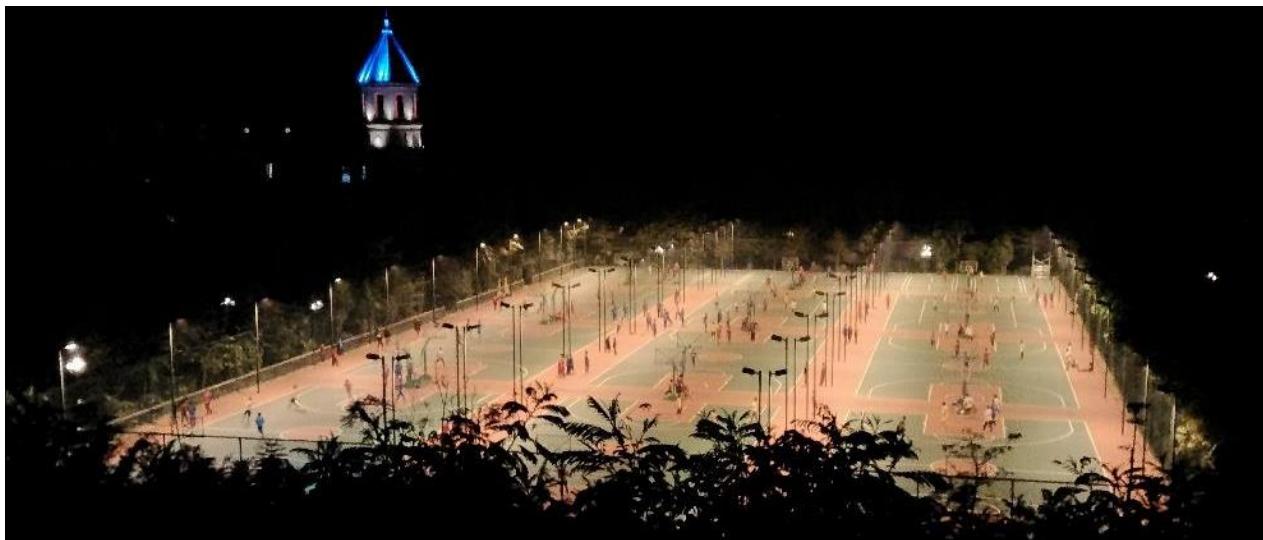
备注: 每周一 7:20 举行升旗仪式, 如遇雨天等特殊情况, 以临时通知为准。

Source: Shot by author. January 2017. G Football School, Guangdong Province. The real name of G Football School has been erased by author for protecting informants' identity.

According to this tight daily routine, students were requested to spend most of their time on studying. Zulyar's friend, Rahman, another Uyghur boy in his seventeen years of age, said, "It is study not football training that makes me feel exhausted." Most of students in G Football School came from different provinces of China for the same goal, to be a professional footballer. Although the school highly emphasized the importance of regular studying, most of boys, including those from Xinjiang, would rather make use of any free time, like the time between dinner and self-studying in the evening, to play football than study (Figure 6-8). "No one wants to be left behind," Rahman said. This was, to some extent, how these youths firstly realized the thing called "peer pressure".

Viewing the two groups of Xinjiang youth, I felt that although their material lives might be different, yet, they were probably experiencing the same life that differed them from other peers. Here, one thing makes me confused: do they really feel happy when playing football?

Figure 6-8: Students in G Football School Playing Football in the Evening on the Basketball Pitch



Source: Shot by author. January 2017. G Football School, Guangdong Province.

6.2 “Why Do I Play Football?”

In my fieldwork, I asked all young footballers, who joined the school football training program, a same question: why do you play football? Everyone answers in the same, “I like playing football”. Such answer might be meaningless for me, until I changed my question as: “Since you like playing football, is there any specific goal for you?” Or “what do you want to do in the future by playing football?”

Younger footballers in the Altay U13 team in their eleven or twelve years of age interviewed in 2016, almost replied in the same way, “I want to be a football star!”, and some of them might mention specific names, “Like Messi!” or “Like Cristiano Ronaldo!” These boys might be too young to give a rational answer. While elder footballers in the Altay U16 team in their fifteen or sixteen years of age interviewed in 2016 were more “mature” than their younger brothers, and some of them did think about this question seriously. Some of them, especially those whose parents were urban civil servants, did not consider football as their future career, like one boy said:

I play football for fun. Thanks to my parents, they didn’t intervene this hobby of mine. I know I am not a football talent who could someday enter a professional club. But I will insist playing. It would be better if we could enter the first four of the regional championship so that we would be rewarded extra points when participating in *gaokao* three years later.

Some of these elder boys, like their younger peers, believed that it was possible for them to be a professional footballer sometime in the future as long as they insisted playing. While most of

Altay U16 team players were confused for their future. On the one hand, they had visions of being a professional that was somehow influenced by the social discourse, as one said, “There have been Xinjiang footballers in national teams. I think it’s possible for me to do the same. Of course, my goal is firstly going to Xinjiang regional team.” On the other hand, many of them also felt unconfident, as one said, “Go ahead and we’ll see” (*bian zou bian kan ba*, “邊走邊看吧”).

While in G Football School, all informants I interviewed gave me the same and firmed answer, “Enter a professional team!” Thus, here comes a question: if I assume that most of boys play football for becoming a “professional”, then what does it mean to be a “professional”?

6.2.1 Clear Goal with Vague Paths

In both Altay and G Football School, I made a survey that asked these Xinjiang young footballers to nominate Xinjiang football “role models”, or ideals, or any Xinjiang football celebrity that they admired or wanted to be. The list contained far more names than I expected. Although on the top were those few Xinjiang players who had entered national teams, most of nominees were professional footballers who was playing in CSL, CL1 and CL2. The result was clear that anyone who could enter a professional team would be the role model of these Xinjiang football youths.

I asked those youth, what did it mean to be a “professional”? All of them had mentioned “earning more money”. Some elder boys in Altay mentioned detailed usage of “earning more money”, as “to buy a car”, “to have my own real estate”, or as a boy said, “to have a prettier girl-friend”. Two impressive answers from footballers in G Football School specifically mentioned something else. One, as Zulyar said, “I just want to approve to them that what they can do, I, a Uyghur can do better.” Another one, as Rahman said, “My parents have used up almost all their savings to support me training here. I must play professional football as soon as possible to support my families.”

The two Uyghur boys in their seventeen years of age interviewed in January 2017 had already entered the reverse team of G Football Club. Their interpretation on “being a professional” might be the most rational answer. From their responses to my question, it was notable that for many Xinjiang football youth playing football was a quest for upwards social mobility. And this upward social mobility contained two dimensions: the explicit one was seeking more incomes;

the implicit one was to gain a cultural acknowledgement, which was almost equal to destigmatize their ethnic identity under the background of ethnic tension in Xinjiang.

In this sense, discussing the “rise of Xinjiang youth football” calls for the analytical approach of examining social mobility. The situation is that many footballers have a clear goal but do not know how to make the goal. This reminds me not only to illustrate the practice and discourse when Xinjiang youths seek social mobility by football, but also to explore the challenges that these youths have to face. For this purpose, I will choose to apply Bourdieu’s classical social theory of concepts of field, habitus and capital.

6.2.2 Capitals for Upward Social Mobility

In his work, Bourdieu drew an analogy between a social field and a game (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:98). From his perspective, the two things differ only by the fact that unlike a sports game, the social field is not created deliberately, and the rules are often not explicit. In both situations there is, however, intense competition between individuals or groups, and in both instances the aim is to win. Thus, in a Bourdieusian approach, gaining social mobility is concerned with an individual’s advancement through accumulating capital and, equally importantly, having that capital acknowledged by peers in a specific social field (Agergaard and Sørensen 2010:73).

For analysing those Xinjiang youth footballers, the first question is what capitals they have? Bourdieu (1986) has defined three fundamental forms of capital; namely economic, social and cultural capital. Economic capital is money and property rights; social capital in short is the social network; while the complicated is cultural capital that can exist in three forms, including embodied, as long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; objectified, in the form of goods such as books, pictures, etc.; and institutionalized, for instance as academic qualifications. Specifically, for this thesis, the embodied form of cultural capital that must be accumulated personally and over time it can eventually become what Bourdieu calls culture. Since Xinjiang ethnic minorities youth tend to achieve social mobility by football, their capability on football might be considered as, based on Bourdieu’s definition on three fundamental capitals, the embodied capital.

Still, for better approaching the analysis, I will apply Shilling's (1991) conception, "physical capital", to describe the existing capital that these Xinjiang youths already have. As Shilling defined:

The production of physical capital refers to the social formation of bodies by individuals through sporting, leisure and other activities in ways which express a class location and which are accorded symbolic value. (Shilling 1991:654)

Physical capital is a form of capital that is presented via some bodily capability, like power, speed and agility. Combining Bourdieu's three capitals with Schilling's physical capitals, what this chapter plans to examine is whether Xinjiang youth footballers' physical capital is acknowledged in the field of football and converted to the fundamental forms of cultural, economic and social capital. In a Bourdieusian approach, this chapter will consider both the composition and the sum of capital that determine an individual's chances of social mobility, which will explain why not every Xinjiang youth footballer has an equal chance of achieving upward social mobility.

6.3 Challenges of Converting Capitals

It is important to note the current social context of China football before examining the process of Xinjiang youth footballers to convert their capitals. As reviewed in Chapter 2, marketization in contemporary China has strengthened the logic of competition, which underpins many sports, including football.

The logic of competition is expressed in the fact that football players are generally divided into teams and levels with possible promotion or relegation. This has been reinforced in recent two decades following the professionalization of football in China since 1994. Media coverage and commercialization have also reinforced the logic of competition among football clubs and coaches, who must produce outcomes to sustain the interest of media and the support from sponsors. Meanwhile, it is also via media that many clubs have successfully shaped the "fidelity" of fans, who have also accepted the logic of competition. In a recent instance, CFA released the strongest policy to curb clubs' splashy spending on inviting international big players. By this forced way, CFA wanted clubs spending more funds on cultivating young Chinese footballers (Xinhua 2017d). However, nation-wide fans on social media criticized CFA's new policy, because they believed this policy would degrade the entertainment of China's professional football

league (Lesport 2017). In other words, what those fans care of is the outcome of the club that they support, instead of youth footballers' chances.

In fact, the logic of competition also underlies many of the strategies pertaining to pre-professional level football since the aim is to optimise talent development, the education of coaches, facilities etc., so that the competitiveness of grassroots football has also been reinforced. One result was, as examples presented in Chapter 3 and 4, some coaches or regional sports institutions applied unfair play practice to win, like falsifying young footballers' ages, and in the end, it was young footballers that became sacrifices (CFA 2017c; 2017d). In this chapter, it is notable that the logic of competition has existed in the club-run football school via the detailed assessment system (Figure 6-9). As following examples will present, these institutions have also produced more challenges for youth players.

Figure 6-9: A Part of the Content in the G Football School Employee Training Manual and Assessment Rule

学校劳动纪律管理制度	20
学校员工考评管理制度	20
学校部门月度量化考核细则.....	20
学校中层管理人员考核细则.....	21
球学校教师（小学部）绩效量化考核细则.....	22
球学校教师（中学部）绩效量化考核细则.....	23
球学校中方教练员（竞训管理中心）绩效量化考核细则.....	23
球学校综合岗位（招生办）绩效量化考核细则.....	24
球学校综合岗位（医疗康复处）绩效量化考核细则.....	25
球学校综合岗位（测评科研处）绩效量化考核细则.....	25
球学校综合岗位（小学部）绩效量化考核细则.....	26
球学校综合岗位（中学部）绩效量化考核细则.....	26
球学校综合岗位（信息技术处）绩效量化考核细则.....	26
球学校综合岗位（教育教学管理中心）绩效量化考核细则.....	26
球学校综合岗位（竞训管理中心）绩效量化考核细则.....	26
球学校综合岗位（国际事务处）绩效量化考核细则.....	26
足球学校西班牙分校绩效量化考核细则	26
足球学校综合岗位（后勤处）绩效量化考核细则.....	26
足球学校综合岗位（品牌处）绩效量化考核细则.....	27
足球学校综合岗位（办公室）绩效量化考核细则.....	28
足球学校综合岗位（国际联赛基地）绩效量化考核细则.....	28
求学校工作作风自查自纠实施细则	29

Source: Shot by author. January 2017. G Football School, Guangdong Province.

In addition, most of sport organizations in current China are still under the control of the state. As Chapter 2 reviewed, many young footballers in the system of local state-run sports schools are seen as commodities of local Sports Bureaus. In those regions that have not established professional football system yet, like Xinjiang before the year 2014, many local elite young footballers could not freely leave for other *neidi* provinces. As a result, it impeded these footballers to successfully convert their capitals.

In sum, youth players between pre-professional and professional football are underpinned by the logic of competition, but they are also governed by the state hierarchical sport institutions. The two factors together create a stratification system that affects the evaluation of the capital of the ones who enter the field. Then, tie examples in Altay and G Football Schools, this section will examine the process and outcome of Xinjiang youth converting their capitals

6.3.1 Physical and cultural capital

The starting point for this analysis is ethnic minority players' physical capital. The assumption is that Xinjiang youth had already obtained this physical capital. Yet, as many cases illustrated in Chapter 3, Xinjiang youth do not have the so-called "physical superiority". Aside the social discourse on the "body myth", I asked some parents in Altay how they evaluated their sons' physical condition. Parents were mostly confident on their sons' physical condition, and four mostly mentioned physical qualities included speed, agility, height (tall), and strength. While the coach Keran often opposed those parents' overly confidence, as he said, "Those physical qualities must be used in games with a ball, with body contacts, with team combination tactics. Otherwise, those qualities are useless for a footballer." An example was that a father wanted to send his son, one of the best players in that team, to Song Qingling Football School in Urumqi, and he claimed that coaches in that school had already acknowledged his son's ability, so, he came to ask Keran's suggestion (Figure 6-10). To this father's surprise, Keran did not support to send away the boy. The reason was, as Keran said, "As far as I know, that school doesn't emphasize culture study and their training method is still the old school that just concentrates on developing strength." Keran's suggestion for that father was to send the boy after graduating from primary schools.

Figure 6-10: A Kazakh Young footballer and His Father



Source: Shot by author. July 2016. Altay N. Middle School, Altay City, Altay Prefecture, XUAR. This boy was one of the best players in Altay U13 team. His father insisted that the boy should go the professional path as soon as possible. While the boy's coach Keran persuaded the boy's father to reconsider the riskiness of playing professional football, especially when the boy had expressed his learning-weariness in school.

Miradil, the Uyghur coach in G Football School, told me when many scouts went to Xinjiang for picking up potential students for the School, many of scouts would be firstly impressed by Xinjiang ethnic young players' physical qualities, like strength and speed. "But these physical qualities are not inborn as many other Uyghurs claim," he said. "Those qualities come from the training method that learns the former Soviet Union to concentrate on developing lower limbs strength." Besides pointing out the physical qualities of speed and strength, Miradil also mentioned qualities that Xinjiang young footballers lacked:

After those boys came to the School and started to train with Spanish coaches, they must learn to play the team football, instead of the individualist football. The center of the team football is tactical understanding of the game and coordination [...] you must kick the ball with your brain! Not your low limbs! But many Xinjiang youths think that football is a sport only related to feet!

Here, the coach pointed out an issue that many Xinjiang footballers had a self-centered trend. "I am also a Uyghur," Miradil said. "So, I know that our ethnic group is not really an individualistic

ethnic group. But, those Xinjiang boys sometimes overly rely on their bodies, they are over confident so that it makes others think we Uyghurs or Xinjiangers are all self-centered.” In addition, Miradil suggested, what he mentioned “self-centered” was not a characteristic problem but a playing style, which often occurred on those boys from peasant families. “One reason for those boys to play individualist football is that they are not good at communicating with others,” he said. “We Xinjiang coaches often teach them to change this style. Some of them will change and soon truly become a member of the team, while some of them are very stubborn. In the end, Spanish coaches will probably dislike such suborn players and it will be harder for them to upgrade into the elite team.”

Here, Miradil gave detailed information: those players who in the end had changed their self-centered styles were mostly younger boys that were studying in primary school level. To understand his observation, it is important to remember that Bourdieu’s embodied capital is a form of cultural capital, which takes time to accumulate. In other words, the physical capital that many Xinjiang young footballers possess from training in the “Soviet old school” method cannot automatically be converted into the cultural capital that is considered as appropriate in professional football. The contrasted case in Altay was that boys in U13 team had a better outcome (4th) in the regional championship compared to the U16 team (6th). And as I observed, those younger footballers had much better sense of team football when playing a game than their elder peers. One key point to interpret Miradil’s observation on those stubborn elder Xinjiang footballers is that their insistence on “individualistic football” might probably lead to a strengthening ethnic stereotype from Han Chinese to Xinjiang ethnic minority. And in return, this stereotype will prevent Xinjiang footballers convert their physical capital to cultural capital.

In this sense, the key point is that people might consider ethnic minority players’ physical capital is not complete: even though some of their physical qualities and football skills are highlighted by people like scouts, those Xinjiang youth still need to be re-educated by a more scientific professional training. This “scientific” training is based on the logic of competition. For instance, from the athletic physiological view, re-hydration is a basic skill and consciousness for an athlete. As I observed in Altay, few footballers had their own water bottles, even those boys from urban areas did not have a bottle. Since a water bottle is not a luxury, which only costs less than twenty *yuan*, it should not be economic factors but an absence of the consciousness that has made footballers do not know re-hydration. A similar case was shared by Beglan, the Kazakh

coach then was working in G Football School. He noted that Xinjiang youths had no habit, like other Han peers, to buy extra fruits and milk as nutritious supplements. As Beglan interpreted, it was because some of Xinjiang youth from rural areas did not have the formal education.

There is little direct evidence from my fieldwork showing that Xinjiang ethnic minority youths have poor academic performance. Yet, one case shared by Beglan would present the difficulty for Xinjiang ethnic minority to convert their cultural capital:

Every year, some Xinjiang students choose to leave the School. One day, a Uyghur student knocked my office and cried. He said he would leave the School. I was surprised, because he was actually an excellent footballer in his grade, and Spanish coaches liked him. So, I asked him why. He told us, his Chinese teacher persuaded him to leave, because his Chinese grade was far behind the class average. Hearing this, I was angry, this was discrimination and immoral. How could a teacher say such words? I and another Xinjiang teacher tried to check the truth but failed in the end. For the school regulation, we cannot talk about this issue publicly. This boy did not leave, but this teacher was still working in the School. We do not know whether there are other Xinjiang youths who have left the school for the same reason.

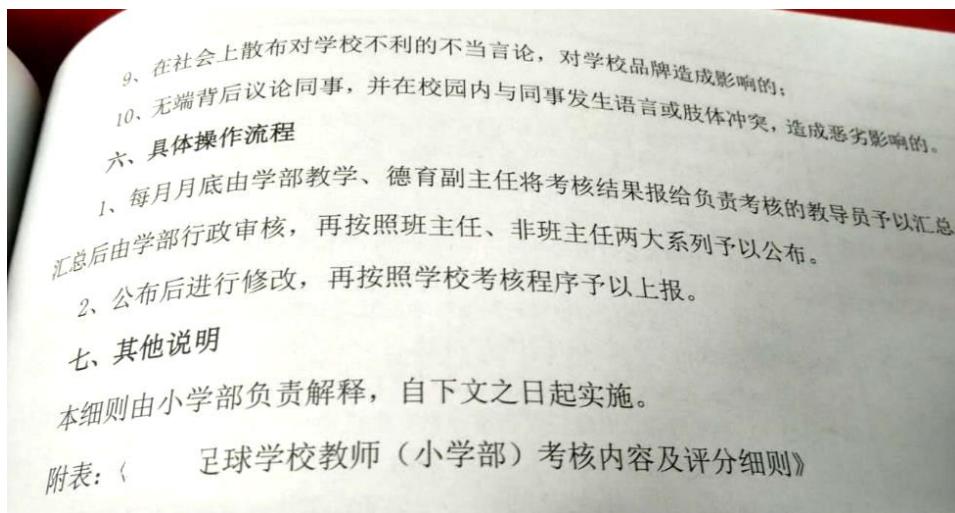
In this case, that Chinese teacher's practice was immoral. Yet, it is crucial to examine why he or she does so. G Football School is famous for its enterprise-style management and various assessment regulations that apply for all employees and students. In other words, teachers are also facing the pressure of competition: poor academic performance in class means less personal income (Figure 6-11). Ironically, the School also strictly controls employee's speeches to prevent harming the enterprise's reputation and interest (Figure 6-12; 6-13). As a result, the ethnic minority students from Xinjiang, whose mother language is not Chinese, have been seen an obstacle for some teachers' economic interest: these teachers do not have patience to teach these minority youths. This case might reflect how it is difficult for some Xinjiang ethnic minority to convert their physical capital to cultural capital.

6.3.2 Social capital

Here, the question arises as to whether Xinjiang ethnic minority football youth could develop a supportive social network for their football careers. Being able to convert physical capital into social relationships with teammates, coaches, club leaders, etc. could provide the players with a chance of enhancing their social status. Yet, the challenge of converting social capitals still exists. The representative case is on teammates' relationship: teammates within the same team may have close communication for the same goal - to win - and shortly overcome ethnic

tension or hostile, yet it does not mean that teammates in the non-sports environment could also do the same. What's more, the short integration on the pitch may not last long, because competition between teammates might cut off their cooperation.

Figure 6-11: A Part of the Teacher Management (Primary School Department) Rule



Source: Shot by author. January 2017. G Football School, Guangdong Province. An excerpt from G Football School Employee Training Manual. The real name of G Football School has been erased by author for protecting informants' identity.

Figure 6-12: A “Wall of Values” in G Football School



Source: Shot by author. January 2017. G Football School, Guangdong Province. The real name of G Football School has been erased by author for protecting informants' identity. Scripts on the wall present conceptions of the school's owner. For instance, “the aim of running school” (*banxue mudi*, 辦學目的) is “prospering China football and cultivating football stars” (*zhenxing zhongguo zuqiu peiyang zuqiu mingxing*, “振興中國足球 培養足球明星”). And one of “the Campus Cultures” (*xiaoyuan wenhua*, “校園文化”) is “building a pure land for aspirants” (*wei shangjinzhe dazao yi pian jingtu*, “為上進者打造一片淨土”).

Figure 6-13: A Part of The Teacher (Primary School Department) Assessment Detailed Rule

(二) 季度工作结果考核细则			
内容	扣分	加分	考核部门
学生稳定	学生因对学科教师教学成绩不满意、班主任工作不满意，因而提出退学。每退学一名学生，扣相关责任人2分。	家长因对学校其它部门工作不满意，要求退学，班主任或者相关教师跟进做好稳定工作，每稳定1名学生，加1分。最多得10分。	德育
教学成绩或者成果展示	语数英三科成绩相对于摸底考试、期中考试成绩，平均成绩增幅出现连续两次下滑现象，每下滑1个名次予以2分的扣减。教学两个班级或者三个班级的，每科按二分之一或者三分之二的分数予以扣减。	1、语数英三科成绩相对于摸底考试、期中考试成绩，平均成绩增幅在年级第1、2、3名的分别予以5、4、3分的奖励。 2、语数英三科成绩，排名在年级1、2、3名的分别予以3、2、1分的奖励，教学两个班级或者三个班级的，每科按二分之一或者三分之二的分数予以奖励。 3、兴趣活动小组老师在学部组织的期末兴趣成果展示中获得一、二、三等奖，可分别获得5、4、3分的奖励。 4、在学部德育、教务确定的困难、学困学生中，每转化一名学生加3分。 5、完成学部制定的教学目标加3分，超过10%加5分，超过20%加10分。 6、公开课：市级一、二、三等奖，分别奖励5、4、3分，省级8、6、4分，国家级10、8、6分。 7、基本功比赛：市级一、二、三等奖，分别奖励5、4、3分，省级8、6、4分，国家级10、8、6分。 8、指导学生外出参加团体比赛：市级一、二、三等奖，分别奖励5、4、3分，省级8、6、4分，国家级10、8、6分。 9、指导学生外出参加比赛（学生个人奖）：市级一、二、三等奖，分别奖励2、1、0.5分（最多不超过5分）；省级3、2、1分（最多不超过7分）；国家级4、3、2分（最多不超过10分）。	教务
参赛成绩或成果展示		10、论文（案例等均可以）获奖：市级一、二、三等奖，分别奖励3、2、1分，省级4、3、2分，国家级5、4、3分。 11、为学校培养青年教师，所指导的青年教师在学部组织的青年教师教学比赛（或者基本功比赛）中获得一、二、三等奖，可分别予以4、3、2分的奖励。 12、备注：以上比赛须是教育主管部门组织或者认可的比赛等。	教务 德育

Source: Shot by author. January 2017. G Football School, Guangdong Province. An excerpt from G Football School Employee Training Manual.

In my informants, three Uyghur boys in their seventeen years of age had successfully entered the reserve team of G Football Club and were acquainted with some of their teammates and had quickly become part of the social network surrounding their football team. Although in the beginning, some of their teammates would “ask strange questions”, yet since training and playing games for more than two years, three Uyghur boys said, “We now have Han brothers!” For some of Han boys who are living in *neidi*, their “strange questions” are in fact a stereotype due to an absence of common sense rather than discrimination. As Rahman suggested:

In the beginning, many of them asked us if all Xinjiangers carried AK-47, or if we rode horses to go to schools. We were angry to hear this kind of questions. But, then we found our Han teammates were just innocent and curious, and we were also tired of responding such questions. So, every time we heard these questions, we would reply, “Yes! Yes! We do not only carry AK-47, but also ride tanks to go to school.” Then, they will laugh. They know we are kidding.

But for some of other Han boys, sometimes they did show hostility towards their Xinjiang teammates. As Rahman said:

But there are also some Han teammates do believe that we Xinjiangers carry AK-47 all day. It only proves that their brains have problems. We don't want to explain to them anymore, it's useless. Also, we don't get along with them well on the pitch. During training and games, they speak Cantonese with each other. Now I have learnt a few of Cantonese dirty words. Sometimes, I knew they are using dirty words on us. But we use Uyghur dirty words to fight back, they don't understand at all.

On how to deal with some teammates' hostility, another Uyghur footballer, Zulyar shared his views by thanking this Catalan coach:

Our head coach is a Catalan from Spain.¹⁰⁷ He used to play in Madrid, where some of his Spanish teammates didn't like him. He shared his experience with us. He was like us, who spoke a language that others didn't understand and sometimes suffered from teammates' teases or hostility. But he always enlightens us and reminds us what we should insist on [...] He also emphasizes to some of our Cantonese teammates that we are a team. In some training classes, the first warming-up section is that three or four players tackle the ball. In the beginning, we three Xinjiang players trained together, while those Cantonese teammates trained together. But the Spanish coach particularly divided us three into other groups. So that he would like to see that we could join in the team and the team could welcome us [...] In fact, in our team, there are Han teammates from Gansu Province and Hainan Province and we get along quite well. So, you think it's an ethnic problem? I don't think so. We three with Gansu and Hainan teammates were the first group of trainees in this school. And we trained together, studied together and grew up together. Instead, those Cantonese boys joined later. When those Cantonese students said harsh words on us, other teammates would help us to fight back. Oral fighting is meaningless. We will defeat them on the pitch [...] On football, we must face many frustrations. In my opinion, the best way to conquer those unfriendly boys is that we have entered and can stay in the elite team, but they cannot.

Although unfriendly incidents against students from Xinjiang occurred occasionally during daily training and study, the Uyghur coach Miradil praised the G Football School because, as he suggested, since the founding of this school, it had employed many Xinjiang footballers and teachers. Moreover, there was a *halal* restaurant in the campus, in which all the catering service team members were invited from Xinjiang (Figure 6-14). To some extent, this is a positive signal that some enterprises in *neidi* start to respect and consider ethnic minority, especially Islamic, employees' tradition. However, as I observed, there emerged another issue: though all Xinjiang students had been divided into separate teaching units studying and training with other ethnic peers, during every meal in everyday there existed space segregation. The big restaurant was lively during meals, all other students were chatting with each other, while in the *halal* restaurant

¹⁰⁷ There are many studies on Catalan and Basque nationalism and separatism movement in Spain (Balcells 1996; Mac-Clancy 1996).

Uyghur students and other Islamic ethnic minority students were quiet, and they had little communication with each other. On the one hand, the *halal* restaurant was a bond for all Xinjiang Islamic youth in that school; on the other hand, it might be a closed barrier for some Xinjiang youth, it meant if anyone chose not to have meal there, they might be seen betrayed their own group. Beglan's story, as illustrated in Chapter 4, was a perfect case. As Beglan suggests, "Halal issue is a good point to examine if the school truly wants to know ethnic group," he said. "Indeed, the School has set this *halal* restaurant for Islamic ethnic groups. But, the School could have done better... for the big restaurant, the school has employed nutritionists, while there is no nutritionist in the *halal* restaurant. Every meal is oily. The School hires Uyghur chefs from Xinjiang so that the taste of food in the *halal* restaurant is like the taste of food in our hometown. But the food is not nutritious for footballers." Here, Beglan pointed out a challenge facing Xinjiang ethnic minority in their future career: not all football schools or clubs are willing to employ Xinjiang Islamic ethnic minorities, because running a *halal* restaurant needs funding.

Figure 6-14: The Halal Restaurant in G Football School



Source: Shot by author. January 2017. G Football School, Guangdong Province.

Relevant here is Beglan's idea that Xinjiang youth's social capital can have both a positive and negative side. Here, it can contribute to the development of social relationships between minority and majority youngsters. Meanwhile, Xinjiang youth's social capital might reinforce the

identity of ethnic minority youngsters once they return to ethnic minority clubs, and it reinforces the isolation of ethnic minority talents with others.

6.3.3 Economic capital

The last part of the analysis has to do with whether the Xinjiang ethnic minorities can convert their physical capital into economic capital. The first challenge here is whether Xinjiang youth footballers can raise economic resources to develop their football career and, in the longer run, to gain a contract with a regular salary.

It reminds me to think of those boys in Altay. In this research, I could not interview many parents, because most of them were pastoralists or peasants who were working in distant country sides faraway from Altay City. The condition of local transportation was not convenient and economic for them to visit their sons in Altay City. Adil, one of the three capitals of the U16 team, told me that it had to take one and a half hours by shuttle bus from his family's pasture to the nearest county, then it took three more hours by coach bus from the nearest county to Altay City. And the total cost of round-trip transportation took 120 *yuan*. It was not a small number for an ordinary pastoralist family whose monthly income was 1,600 *yuan*. Though the other halves of parents were grassroots civil servants who worked in counties of Altay Prefecture, most of them did not visit their sons in Altay City due to time and economic limitation. Coach Keran shared his observation. When he went to the countryside to select footballers, he visited each family and persuaded parents to send their son to join in the training. "Some parents refused in the beginning," he said. "Until I told them it was free to participate in this training, and it was possible for their sons to earn extra points in *zhongkao* and *gaokao*."

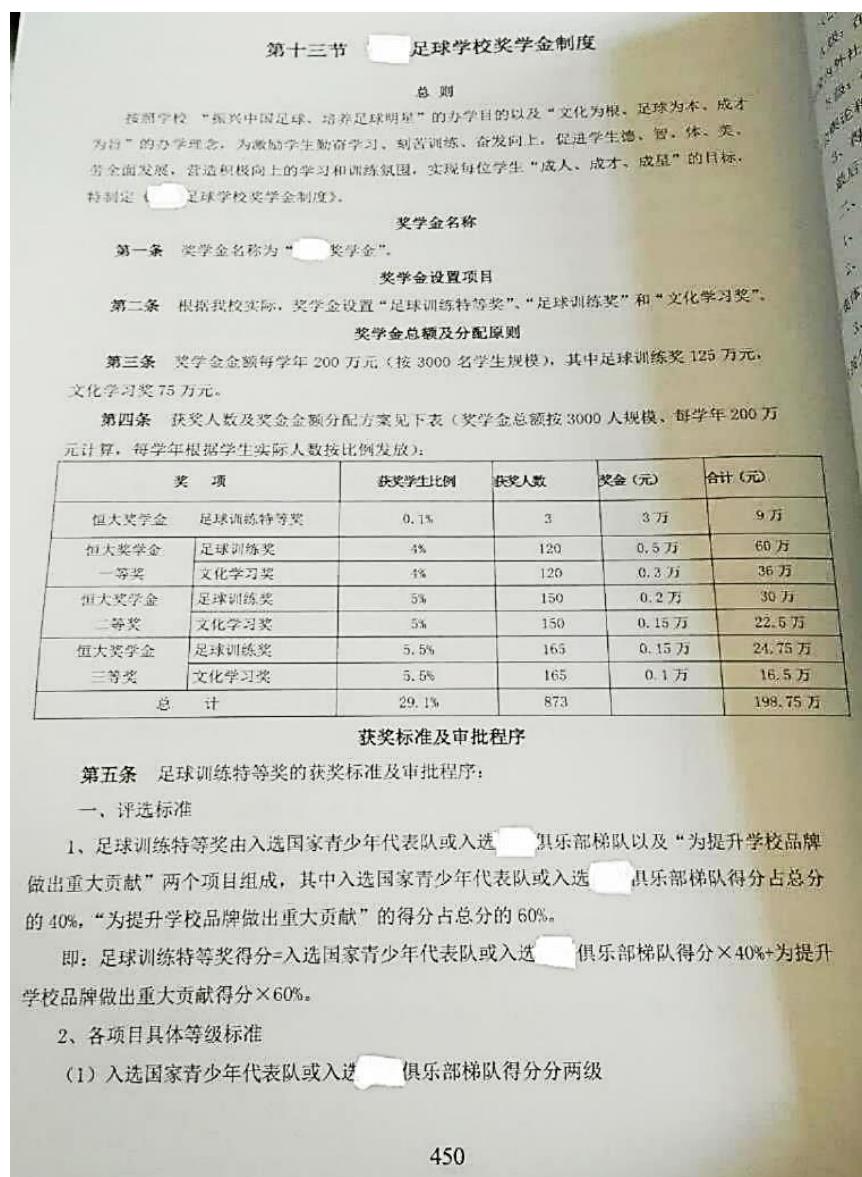
For training in a pre-professional school, there is an economic barrier for most of families. Miradil suggested that the annual fee in G Football School was 5,0000 *yuan*. While for most Xinjiang ordinary urban families, the annual domestic income is about 6,0000 *yuan*. In rural areas, the number is far less. In fact, G Football School has a rule for awarding excellent footballers (Figure 6-15). Miradil said:

When scouts have discovered gifted footballers in the grassroots, the school will apply a scholarship for them. The best will have the right to attend school for free. But the problem is that the scholarship is checked annually. That means if in the second year a student's athletic and academic performance is not good enough, his or her scholarship will be probably cancelled. It will be a

massive impact for the footballer's family. Because of this reason, many Xinjiang youths have quitted in the middle.

There were about 120 Xinjiang footballers in G Football School, most of them were Uyghurs. While, only four Uyghur young footballers had successfully entered the reverse team. Among those four, two were from civil servant families, two were from businessman families, and no one was from peasant or pastoralists families.

Figure 6-15: Scholarship Regulation of G Football School



Source: Shot by author. January 2017. G Football School, Guangdong Province. An excerpt from G Football School Employee Training Manual. The real name of G Football School has been erased by author for protecting informants' identity.

Even for the four seemingly successful Xinjiang footballers, they must face enormous economic challenges. Rahman's father is a retired middle school teacher and his mother is a retired tax official. Rahman has never forgotten how he came to G Football School:

The economic conditions in Xinjiang are not as good as those in *neidi*. At the beginning, when the scout from the football school mentioned tuition fees, my family thought it was impossible for us to afford. In 2011, the annual fee of G Football School was 35,000 *yuan* per year. Now it has been increased to 60,000 *yuan* per year. At that time, my parents were very hesitant, though they also hoped that I could come here [...] In South Xinjiang, even if my parents were civil servants, their salary was not high. My parents took out a calculator and told me that if the whole family did not eat or drink, our annual income was only 50,000 *yuan*. Knowing this fact, I was also quite helpless and sad [...] I thought I would not be able to come. Later, the School introduced me to apply for the national student aid fund and my family borrowed money from relatives. By this way, I eventually came here.

Zulyar, who showed the best athletic performance of the four Xinjiang boys, expressed his wish to go abroad for training. But, it was only a wish. Because, as he said, "It costs money to go abroad to have a trial at clubs overseas. Besides necessary travel expenses, I need the money to find scouts and to hire my agent. Some of Han peers have already hired their agent. But I don't have such money to pay for an agent."

In this sense, the most difficult capital for Xinjiang youth to convert is the economic capital. Information shared by coaches, like Keran, Miradil and Beglan, has also reflected a fact that the most motivated families, who are willing to send their children to football schools, no matter the state-run or the club-run, are those urban families, who are not rich but have better economic condition compared to those poor agro-pastoralist families.

6.4 Conclusion: Great Expectations or Bleak Expectations?

Seen from my perspective, Xinjiang ethnic minority youth with low socio-economic background do not have a good chance of promoting their social mobility through a football career. First, their physical conditions obtained from "old school" training in their hometown are seen as inadequate, since these skills have not been accumulated together with an understanding of professional football playing style, and some Han teachers in the highly competitive working unit, like G Football School, think that it would take too long to improve Xinjiang ethnic minorities' academic performance to make it worth their while. Secondly, not every Xinjiang ethnic minority player successfully has developed social relationships with teammates and coaches, who can equip them with a supportive social network and an enhanced social status in the field. Thirdly,

Xinjiang ethnic minorities mostly have few economic resources to initiate professional football training.

As this chapter has pointed out earlier, it is the composition and sum of one's capital that underpins social mobility. In the case of the Xinjiang young footballers under our discussion, players' physical capital must be combined with the relevant cultural capital (academic grade and learning ability) and the social capital (supportive social network), which altogether seem to enhance the players' persistence and chance of obtaining economic capital and thereby attaining social mobility. Considering current highly competitive career environment for all Chinese youth footballers (as Chapter 2 has reviewed), it will be harder for these Xinjiang ethnic minority young footballers to achieve upward social mobility via playing professional football.¹⁰⁸

Even if some of the Xinjiang ethnic minority talents are successful, it does not mean that the chances of social mobility are equal for their ethnic peers. In this sense, it reminds us to reconsider the "rise of Xinjiang youth football": it might have shifted the public focus from the existing inequality between ethnic groups and classes to overly emphasizing the "prosperity" of Xinjiang youth football. The great expectation via official discourses is probably a bleak expectation.

¹⁰⁸ Due to the limitation of the field data in this research, there remains at least four unclear questions that worth further researching. First, it is unclear whether there exists any difference on the prospect of social mobility between young footballers in state-run football schools (like Song Qingling Football School in Urumqi) and their peers in club-run football schools (like G.D. Football School). Second, it is unclear but worth comparing whether there exists any difference on the prospect of social mobility between Uyghurs and Kazakhs. Third, it is unclear how football scouts influence youths' social mobility in attending football school. And last, it is unclear how state institutions and enterprises affect youths' social mobility in attending football school. All the four questions ask further research.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

When I first time visited Xinjiang in the summer of 2015, I was impressed that Xinjiang youth, boys and girls, were truly enthusiastic about playing football: in the center urban, they play on the streets between concrete jungles in Urumqi; in the South, they play in the narrow alleys deep in the old town of Kashgar; in the North, they play on the top of void grassland and besides the lake like a mirror. I was familiar with that football and that joy. That was a pure football, the game that belongs to the childhood. Yet, it was not the football this thesis concentrates on.

In this thesis, football is far beyond a game: it is a tool that has empowered some ethnic minority when negotiate with the state; it is the ideological state apparatus that has united ethnic groups; it is the tool for some ethno-nationalists to strengthen ethnic boundary; it is the vehicle for many grassroots families to outlook a prosperous future, or on the contrast, entrap in more severe poverty; and it is the last line of moral defence for some grassroots people to resist the tremendous tide of changing values.

Focusing on analysing ethnic relation, state governance and social mobility, this thesis argues that the “rise of Xinjiang youth football” presents a vast complexity of Xinjiang under the current enormous social transformation in the post-socialist China: while China’s authoritarian sport officials selectively embrace logics of marketization to ease ethnic tension and to seek regional stability in Xinjiang, the popularization of football reflects and contributes to public debates on inequalities existing betwixt classes and ethnic groups.

Rome was not built in a day. Similarly, the “rise of Xinjiang youth football” did not suddenly rush out overnight as how some journalists reported. This thesis has discussed at least three conditions of the “rise of Xinjiang youth football”, including existing ethnic tensions, state power’s practice on seeking stability, and the influence of the marketization.

State power and the market have deeply involved in driving football among youths under the background of developing ethnic tensions in Xinjiang. This thesis elaborated the complex relations between diverse grassroots football participants and state power/market. The approach I employed was viewing these grassroots football participants as subjects and examining their daily practice and speeches in the grassroots level that were beyond state power, where state power

overlapped the social space and local knowledge. At the same time, at the grassroots level, logics of marketization and competition have been clearly influencing subjects' behaviours and notions.

In this dynamic scene of the grassroots, this thesis illustrated distinct motivations of diverse football participants. For instance, Chapter 3 and 4 presented different values for ethnic fans' attitudes on football: some of them saw football as a tool to empower themselves when resisting the state (like the "blue" fans), while some of them considered football as a way for their own ethnic groups to participate in the process of modernization (like Xinjiang coaches in G Football School believing in "scientific" training method and management). This thesis clearly presented that Xinjiang football was not an invention. Instead, there existed a historical soil, especially in the South Xinjiang where the Uyghurs dominated, for fostering a "football tradition". As Chapter 3 illustrated, this "football tradition" reflected and contributed Uyghur construction on its ethnic identity and situated its position during the process of modernization when negotiating with the state. With the discourse of "football tradition", constructing the discourse of "ethnic footballers' physical superiority" also contributed on establishing a positive public environment for popularizing football in Xinjiang.

Chapter 5 and 6 concentrated on two core football participants, grassroots coaches and young footballers. In chapter 5, while some grassroots coaches used football as a tool for self-economic profits, some others insisted their ethical standard and professional morality. The case in Altay City also illustrated the function of ethnic local knowledge (Abay's proverbs) when confronting the logics of marketization.

As one of the core participants, young footballers were the most silent in the public debates on Xinjiang youth football. What led to their absence in the public debate was not just their youthful age, but their low socio-economic status. As Chapter 6 presented, some of Xinjiang youths hoped to achieve social upwards mobility by participating in football training. Some families spent a great deal of money on sending their children to the risky professional football, while some families send their children to play football for earning extra points that would be helpful for these young people to pass higher level entrance examinations to obtain better educational chances. According to a Bourdieusian perspective, the two paths reflected two approaches for achieving social mobility, converting cultural capitals and converting economic capitals. Yet, the problem that Xinjiang youths must face was the same to that other youths from low socio-

economic backgrounds all over the world: it was difficult to achieve social mobility via involving in a sport.

The specific situation of Xinjiang, as this thesis has explored, is that the state has strategically utilized governmentality to produce beneficial discourses for Xinjiang youth football and the marketization of professional football has produced a prosperous illusion so that many grassroots ethnic minority youth, especially those from the lower eco-social position, seek an upward social mobility by involving in football. The two factors produce a vision that once these youths try their best they would succeed in the end, obtaining not only personal wealth but also ethnic reputation. However, the truth is that endeavour does not necessarily lead to success. Because ethnic minority youth from various backgrounds start the competition in different start lines: what causes distinctions with other competitors are not only ethnicity, but also economic and educational factors.

The “rise of Xinjiang youth football” that has not ended but still been developing. Youth football has been utilized for producing social stability in a certain period and for appealing to restless ethnic minority youths of Xinjiang to stay in the campus and giving them an illusionary prospect to follow. However, the “rise of Xinjiang youth football” has not brought better mutual understanding between Han Chinese and ethnic minorities yet. This thesis does not intend to negate the “Football for Stability” strategy. Because stability and harmony do not mean that there are no problems at all in a society, but people can rationally and inclusively consider these problems, and based on mutual respect and understanding, try to find solutions to solve these problems. In this sense, football has provided us with a good starting point, which calls for a better and broader understanding, not the “othering” view, of ethnic cultural diversity and everyday life conditions through football among the ethnic minorities in Xinjiang.

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Abbreviations

AFC	Asian Football Confederation
Altay Sport Bureau	Bureau of Culture and Sport of Altay Precure
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CFA	Chinese Football Association
CL1	Chinese Football Association China League, or China League One
CL2	Chinese Football Association China Division Two League or China League Two
CSL	Chinese Football Association Super League
ETIPA	Eastern Turkestan Islamic Party of Allah
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
GAS	General Administration of Sport of China (State General Administration of Sports)
IOC	International Olympic Committee
Leopard	Xinjiang Tianshan Leopard Football Club
MCT	The Management Centre of Football
MoE	Ministry of Education, China
NCEE	National Higher Education Entrance Examination
PAP	People's Armed Police
PPXYF	Project of Popularizing Xinjiang Youth Football
P2P Aid	Province-to-province Aid Program to Xinjiang
RMB	renminbi (Chinese currency)
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SHSEE	The Senior High School Entrance Examination
Sport School	Spare-time Amateur Sport School
S. Q. Football School	Song Qingling Football School
State Council	The State Council of the People's Republic of China
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
WDP	Western Development Project
XFA	Football Association of Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
XPCC	Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps
XUAR	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region