

# The role of urban nightlife in perceived social integration: Perspectives of international students in Nanjing

## Abstract

This paper intends to bridge the gap between work on social integration, nightlife and students, bringing education studies and sociology together through geography and qualitative analysis of nightlife experiences and perceived social integration of international students in Nanjing. The variation in socio-spatial practices among domestic and international students in different nightlife venues is revealed with the help of mapping, and interview data on nightlife, social network and satisfaction of living in the Chinese context is analysed transcribed verbatim and coded. The nightlife offers a space where encounters with, or even being around, different people can create a sense of satisfaction across people from different backgrounds or co-ethnic community. While most nightlife doesn't enable international students to interact and make friends with domestic students for a lack of educational or entertainment purpose in those nightlife activities. Besides, sticking with co-ethnic fellows in nightlife leads to more separation. Finally, the analysis suggests that further studies should consider perceived social integration more as a dynamic process and evaluate from longitudinal perspective.

**Key words:** Urban nightlife, Perceived social integration, Social network, International students, Nanjing

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## Introduction:

There are roughly 400 thousands international students enrolled in higher education in China, a number that is expected to grow substantially. The growing number of international students contributes to attracting skilled immigrants to China and building mutual trust and understanding between different culture. Besides, there is a notion that it is difficult for international students to integrate domestic students and society, the importance of which have been investigated in several studies in terms of academic performance and social satisfaction (Ward et al., 2009; Rienties et al., 2012; Thomas, 1998; Rui, 2008), but there appears to be a lack of concern on the special spatiotemporal context of integration and interdisciplinary concepts and understanding.

In a study of communication networks of students, Thomas (1998) found that students with larger communication networks reported higher levels of academic and social satisfaction, higher probability re-enrolling. Those students with a greater proportion of ties outside of their group of peers tend to perform better academically (Thomas, 1998). In a more recent and extensive study focused specifically on international students - in Dutch business schools – Rienties et al. found a negative link between higher social integration and academic performance (Rienties et al., 2012: 697). Both studies however overlook the perceived

importance to well-being (*why*) of social integration to students, and moreover the spatiotemporal context (*where* and *when*) of integration. In terms of *why*, the importance of social integration and its positive effects on well-being have been stressed in sociology. Social contacts are of importance in understanding behaviour, social ties are diverse in nature and intensity, and the more ties and higher intensity of interaction the lower the likelihood of negative wellbeing, behaviours and psychological consequences (Booth, Edwards and Johnson, 1991).

Research and policy has focused on integrating international students through university programs (Ward et al., 2009) – but social interaction is not limited to the campus area and to the daytime. In terms of *where and when*, one can argue that for students, chances for social interaction exist within the urban nightlife settings. Bars, restaurants, cafes, and other nightlife establishments, functioned as the 'third place', provides pleasant place for informal social activities among strangers and friends (Oldenburg, 1989). Considered to be more relaxed and leisure, nightlife offers students an opportunity to put away the academic work and enjoy the music, alcohol, talks and dancing especially during the weekends. Indeed, students are a growing and principal group in nightlife areas of some inner cities (Liempt, van Aalst and Schwanen, 2015). But, as Liempt et al. (2015: 407) argue, 'academic research tends to overlook what happens when night falls.' In terms of *who*, it matters for who you are and who do you interact during the night as the structural change of youth as an extended phase of life is an important societal transformation which has caused nightlife entertainment to become very important in the construction of young people's identity (Cattan and Vanola, 2013; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Hollands, 1996). Besides, nightlife helps students to extend their communication network (Thomas, 1998), since the bonding and bridging social capitals behind nightlife are also strongly related to the nightlife experience (Grazian, 2009).

Research on inclusion and exclusion in urban nightlife has focused primarily on gender and specific ethnicities (Boogaarts-de Bruin, 2011, Kosnick, 2014, Hadfield, 2014; Schwanen et al., 2012), and specifically citizens, residents, or ethnic immigrants. Since international students in China, as 'visitors' and 'strangers' (Simmel, 1950), become the minority group to the mainstream Chinese society, it is interesting to know whether these 'visitors' can integrate domestic students/society through nightlife experiences. This paper will compare western students (mainly from EU and US) and Korean students on their nightlife experiences and level of perceived integration, from which cultural differences could be distinguished.

This study of international students in Nanjing intends to bridge the gap between work on social integration, nightlife and students, bringing education studies and sociology together through geography. The overarching question will therefore be:

*What is the role of urban nightlife play on international students' perceived social integration in the Chinese context?*

Qualitative methods of interviews and observations are used to investigate this. The following sections would be presented as: Section 2 outlines the theoretical background;

Section 3 provides an overview of the methods used; Section 4 contains the results of the analysis; while The final section highlights the most important findings, conclusions, policy implications and reflection.

## **Literature review**

### **Urban nightlife studies and international students**

Previous literature on urban nightlife defines this field of study as consumption practices and social activities during the night in certain nightlife establishments, including bars, restaurants, and nightclubs which function as a third place (Brands, Schwanen and Aalst, 2014; Chatterton and Hollands, 2002), where people can enjoy the pleasures of informal public life among strangers and friends (Grazian, 2009). In the Chinese context, nightlife also happens in at least two additional places, KTV (short for Karaoke-television) and cafe bar (or tea pub). KTV refers to the use of relatively private rooms in large clubs, where popular music can be played on televisions upon the request of participants. KTV has become a common nightlife place due to the economic boom in China (Farrer, 2008; Zhou, 2008; Guohua, 2009). At the same time, cafe bar (or tea pub) is considered more as a place for non-alcohol and moderate nightlife activities.

Urban nightlife is important in the political and commercial benefits of cities. The expansion of nightlife entertainment is a common strategy for stimulating the local economy (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Pratt, 2009; Roberts and Eldridge, 2009), and promoting global cities as destinations for tourism and investment (Hibbard, 2007; Ren 2008; Farrer, 2008). Nanjing, as a sub-centre city in Yangtze River Delta Region near Shanghai, has brought itself a cosmopolitan phase through nightclub district and internationalized street to show its modernity and openness to global culture.

However, what happens in nightlife is more than just economy, urban nightlife is also of sociological importance. Nightlife is about meeting others, creating identities and having fun (Liempt et al., 2015), as well as seeking out intercultural, interracial and cross-gender sociability in global nightscapes (Farrer, 2008). Oldenburg (1989), Jacobs (1961), and Putnam (2001) claim that the nightlife economy offers much social benefit, for example through democratic involvement, bonding social capital, and inclusiveness. Urban nightlife has the potential to allow people to figure out meaningful lifestyles and new identity through new social experiences (Anderson, 2009; Bennett and Peterson, 2004; Epstein, 1998; Irwin, 1977).

Despite of the potential social benefits of urban nightlife, there is also a growing concern about the social exclusion of specific social groups in urban nightlife. Research on social exclusion in urban nightlife has focused primarily on spatiotemporal difference of class (Bromley et al., 2003; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003) and race/ethnicity (Boogaarts-de Bruin, 2011; Kosnick, 2014; Grazian, 2009, Hadfield, 2014; Schwanen et al., 2012) divisions, gender inequities (Bromley et al., 2003; Grazian, 2009; Schwanen et al., 2012), and other social status (Brands, Schwanen and Aalst, 2014) have also been highlighted. Grazian (2009)

claims that the nightlife scene has more exclusivity and exploitation as the racial and class barriers, gender differences and lack of inclusiveness surrounding local nightlife in urban neighbourhood communities. Grazian (2009) thus argues that nightlife scenes function more efficiently as generators of bonding rather than bridging social capital. Chatterton and Hollands (2003) mention that mainstream social groups such as students and young urban professionals occupy the UK city centres and gentrifying suburbs (Measham and Hadfield, 2009), left those lower-class, non-white and non-mainstream population spatiotemporally excluded from mainstream nightlife scene. The exclusion of ethnic minorities from mainstream nightlife can also be explained by the entry requirements and discrimination by club and door staff, drink and entry fees, the use of online registration and members-only strategies, and the programming of 'white' music (see Schwanen et al., 2012; Measham and Hadfield, 2009; Boogaarts, 2011; Hadfield, 2014). A Dutch research also indicate that Dutch-Turkish young girls are only allowed to 'go out' under relatives' supervision (Boogaarts, 2008).

Some studies have explored alternative nightlife with bars and clubs oriented to non-mainstream youth cultures in UK cities and Dutch cities (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Boogaarts, 2011; Gallan, 2015). According to Boogaarts (2011), due to the difference between cultures and values, the choices made by young ethnic minorities to participate in the ethno-party scene in the Dutch context are based on complex considerations. Some groups of ethnic young people are more restricted in their nightlife choices (Boogaarts, 2011). For the Asian group, with vast majority of Chinese, partying with friends and co-ethnics is an important reason to go to an Asian party, because they feel more comfortable with their peers and less out of place than in a club with mostly non-Asians. An important notion is that such minority ethnic groups can gain a strong presence in nightlife activities, such as some British Asian students have become serious stakeholders in nightlife economy and feel less excluded from the white (Kosnick, 2014). Asian students in western context can either be less involved in nightlife space because of culture difference, or become adapted to western nightlife and be accepted by locals.

By comparing Oldenburg (1989), Jacobs (1961), and Putnam (2000)'s claims about the social benefits offered by urban nightlife and Grazian (2009)'s opposite idea that urban nightlife offers more exclusivity and exploitation, Anderson (2009) argues that nightlife economy offers degree of both bright side and dark side, rather than homogenizing urban nightlife into idyllic or gloomy, scholars should focus on how, when, and why the cultural consumption and production happens in nightlife scene.

For students and young people, nightlife entertainment is about meeting others, relaxing and having fun beyond the darkness (Liempt et al., 2015). Students are a growing and principal group in nightlife areas of some inner cities in the western context (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Liempt, van Aalst and Schwanen, 2015). The structural change of youth and students as an extended phase of life is an important societal transformation that has caused nightlife entertainment to become also very important in the construction of young people's identity (Cattan and Vanola, 2013; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Hollands, 1996). Indeed, nightlife spaces and activities are important for adolescents and young adults to experiencing the city

and culture, expanding communication network, and build their identity and explore a lifestyle (Thomas, 2000; Cattani and Vanola, 2014; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Hollands, 1996; Liempt, van Aalst and Schwanen, 2015).

### **Social integration studies and international students**

The concept of social integration first appeared in Durkheim's (1897/1951) seminal book: *Suicide*, he put forward that a higher level of social integration, which indicates individuals have a close relation with others or the community, could protect one from suicidal tendencies deriving from social causes. Following his idea, scholars did several empirical studies and policy researches in which the concept of social integration or named as social cohesion has been widely used. However, the definition of this concept is still quite fuzzy, contradictory and difficult to operate (Jenson, 2010; Bollen and Hoyle, 1990; Friedkin, 2004; Moody and White, 2003). It can be seen as a dynamic and structured process that be used in different level of groups, social units and associations on different research subjects.

Succeeding scholars then have discussed the domains of social integration and cohesion. Bollen and Hoyle (1990) put perceived cohesion (integration) as an important aspect of the concept of social cohesion (integration), in which a sense of belonging and other emotions of membership for certain group has been emphasized. Kearns and Forrest (2000) proposed five dimensions of social integration, of which social capital and social network were included. Moody and White (2004) also argue that the social network mode is an important dimension of cohesion (integration) besides the subjective experiences and feelings. Based on social network method, Moody and White proposed the concept of structural cohesion, which believes the social network structure has important impact on social cohesion. In general, social integration deals with the issue of the individuals' or collective actors' social connections and the range (breadth), frequency (intensity) and effect (quality, such as identity) of interactions in a social unit (Smelser and Baltes, 2001).

In recent years, increasing scholars realize the importance of the international students and the social integration between domestic and international students. International students can be seen as 'stranger' (Simmel, 1950) to the domestic society, whose behaviours are free but constrained by the embedded social network (Granovetter, 1973). Zhou and Zhang (2014) highlight challenges that first year international students face revealing a comprehensive picture of their social integration patterns: socialization with domestic students was quite limited, and many would communicate with their family via the internet every week, reflecting their loneliness on Canadian campus. Other studies uncovered the effects of cultural or ethnic background on international students' social integration. Rienties et al. (2012) found international students with a western ethnic background to be more socially integrated than non-westerners.

International students' social integration is strongly affected by the social life outside the academic environment. Having enough friends from the same cultural background as well as host-culture (Bochner et al. 1977; Furnham and Alibhai, 1985), whether living alone or sharing houses with other (international or domestic) students (Ward et al. 1998), being a member of a study association, student organization or joining a sports club can influence

international students' social integration and may finally affect their academic performance (Bok 2003; Ozga and Sukhnandan 1998; Russell et al. 2010; Severiens and Wolff, 2008). Individuals gain social resources through social network by constantly exchanging 'information' and altering mutual relationships. Thus, one's social network can be considered as a social support network that helps solving daily problems and maintaining functional daily life (Stokes, 1983). A good social support network also helps easing stress and pressure and increasing a sense of happiness (Bochner et al. 1977; Furnham and Alibhai 1985; He, 2001).

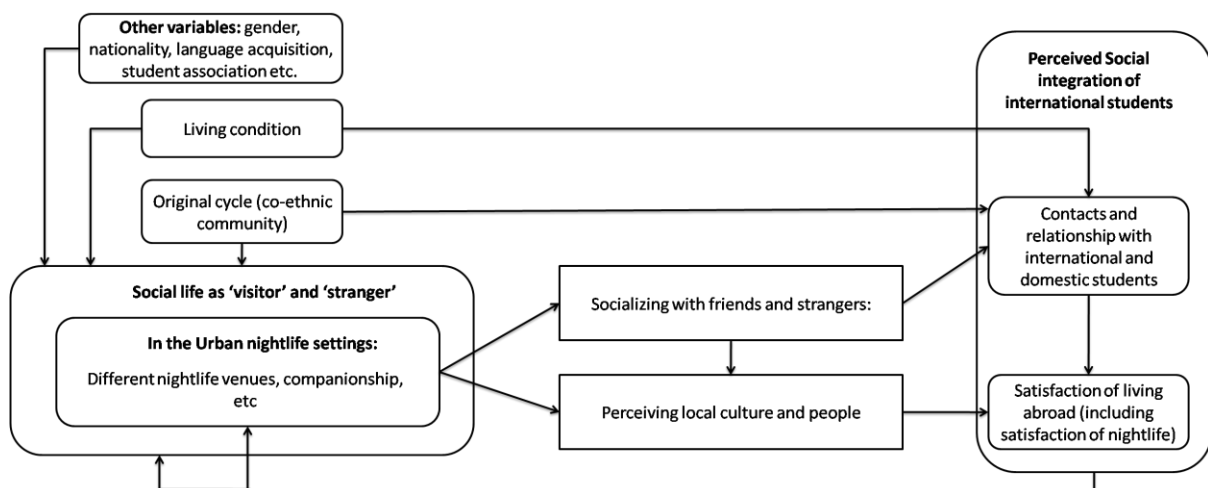
Furnham and Alibhai (1985) defines international students' social network with a three-level model: single culture cycle with co-ethnic fellows that provides emotional support; double culture cycle with native students and staffs that provides educational and occupational support; multi-culture cycle with other international students that provides entertainment and leisure support. Social support from co-ethnic fellows could have both positive and negative effects on the adaptation and integration to the local society. On the one hand, staying with old co-ethnic fellows helps to release 'culture shock', to understand local culture and regulations, and to receive emotional support (Adelman, 1988; Hullett and Witte, 2001; Lin, 2006). On the other hand, stick too much with co-ethnic fellows can hinder the chance of social interactions with local society (Kim, 2001). Locals provide international students stable information source, revise their inappropriate behaviours according to the local culture and tell them how to explore the local life. Social relationships with locals have an impact on the satisfaction of both educational and non-educational life, and thus social integration (Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Ward and Rana-Deuba, 2000). Previous researches show that international students tend to seek help and support from co-ethnic fellows rather than from other international students and local students (Kim, 2001), especially for eastern Asian students (Trice and Elliott, 1993; Rui, 2008)

In this paper, I examine the role of urban nightlife in international students' social integration in Nanjing, where many studies have demonstrated the social life outside the academic environment has a strong influence on international students' social integration (Bochner et al. 1977; Furnham and Alibhai 1985; Ward et al., 1999; Bok, 2009; Ozga and Sukhnandan 1998; Russell et al. 2010), few studies have examined the role urban nightlife experiences play on social integration outcomes. Therefore, this research aims to investigate the link between international students' urban nightlife experiences and their social integration. In doing so, I am appreciative of Georg Simmel's (1950) idea of 'stranger'. As 'stranger', international students may have both opportunities and constrains in choosing their social life, especially in the nightlife settings. Nightlife is considered as the main part of international students' social life, and it is about meeting others, creating identities and having fun (Liempt et al., 2015), as well as experiencing the city and culture (Thomas, 2000; Cattan and Vanola, 2014). It is thus assumed that nightlife patterns and the inclusion and exclusion of nightlife have an impact on the construction of international students' new social network and their satisfaction of living in the Chinese context, and the perceived social integration.

Based on previous theories, the conceptual framework is illustrated as fig.2.1 Social integration has various dimensions as highlighted in the previous section, also in relation to

socializing in the nightlife settings. Different type of urban nightlife activities and experiences may exert an influence on international students' perceived social integration through two possible forms: through socializing with friends and strangers (extending social network) and increasing the understanding about domestic culture and people and satisfaction of living in the Chinese context. Going out is mainly for socializing, fitting this in a dimension of extending social networks and social capital. Moreover, going out can enrich the image of local culture and life and a sense of satisfaction. Therefore, the perceived social integration would be measured in two aspects, that is, perceived contacts and relationship with Chinese and internationals (co-ethnics) as particular focused indicator and satisfaction for living in Nanjing (Chinese culture). Besides, Living condition and original cycle are fundamental to one's social network (contacts) and social life, and indicators such as nationality, gender, language acquisition and students association are considered to have an impact on international students' social life and integration to the domestic students, thereby incorporated in the framework. As highlighted in the model, some links are recursive, as perceived integration influence future choices and social interactions in the nightlife settings.

**Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework.**



## Research Design

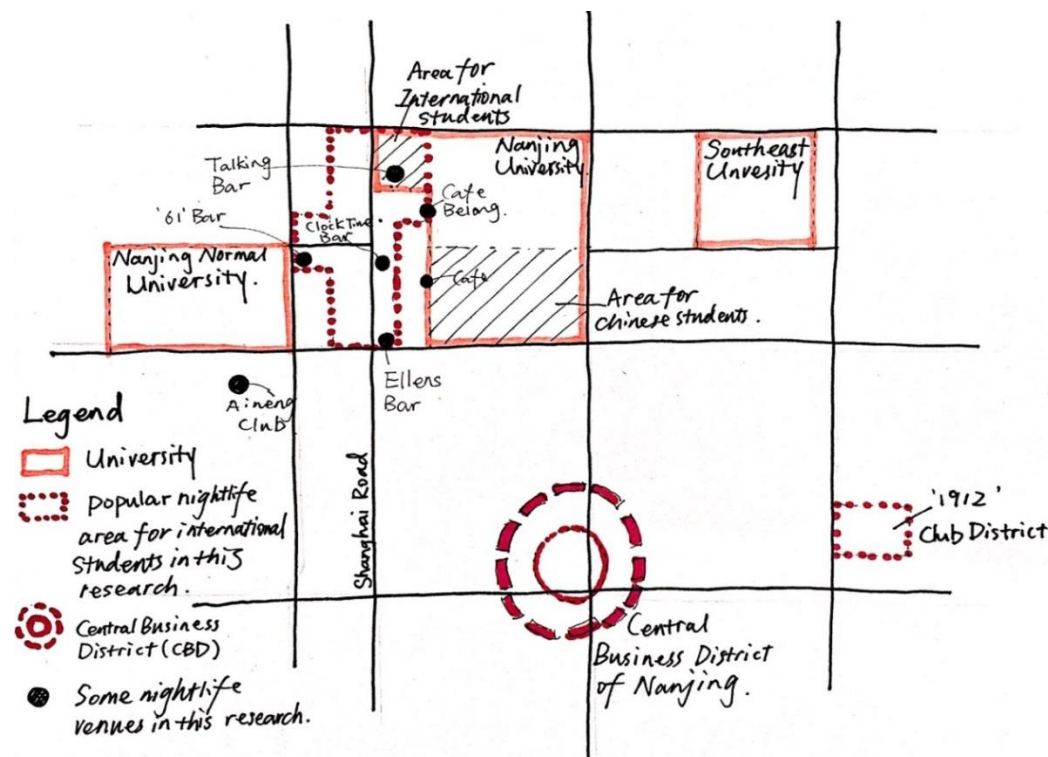
### Geographical context

The research took place in the city of Nanjing, China. Nanjing is the capital city of Jiangsu Province and the provincial political and cultural centre. Nanjing is also a sub-central city of the Yangtze Delta Region near Shanghai in eastern China. The city boasts many of the province's top universities and colleges, such as Nanjing University and Southeast University. Visitors will be impressed by the Nanjing's well-preserved traditional architecture and historical sight, but also its abundant nightlife.

The research investigated nightlife practices in Nanjing for two main reasons. First, Nanjing is under transformation from industrialized city to post-industrialized city with a growing need for the creation of a leisure-oriented cluster of lifestyle-based nightlife entertainment in city centres (Chatterton and Hollands, 2003, p.22; Brands et al., 2014), which makes research

on nightlife life entertainment essential. Second, Nanjing is a student city with more than 800 thousands university students and more than 20 thousands international students (half degree students and half short-term exchange students) and nightlife is important for young people's social life (Liempt, van Aalst and Schwanen, 2015), which makes it necessary to investigate students' nightlife in Nanjing. The majority of international students in Nanjing come from Europe, US, and Korea and study in Nanjing university, Nanjing Normal university and Southeast university. Besides, Nanjing contains two internationalized areas. One is on Shanghai road that between Nanjing university and Nanjing Normal university, where many international styled restaurants, bars and other nightlife entertainments are located. Another is the '1912' club district, which is close to Southeast university. A simple sketch of the locations are displayed as Graph 3.1.

**Graph 3.1 Simple sketch of research area in Nanjing.**



### Participant Recruitment

The study considers international students from western society (European countries, US, Australia, Canada. Etc.) and Korean students studying at Nanjing University and Nanjing Normal University, who participate in urban nightlife activities at least twice a month. The typical international students who regularly go clubbing or not go clubbing, and who go language exchange event are being included on purpose. Participants were recruited mainly through a combination of formal network and gatekeepers of international student associations. These gatekeepers were selected also as they already have a good friendship and rapport with the researcher, hold a prominent position and recognised role in the associations and have knowledge about the characteristics of international student members. The researcher also became members of these associations to build rapport with the study community, establishing a relationship of mutual trust. Participants were double-checked for



eligibility, provided more detailed information and once consent was confirmed, interviews were scheduled.

### **Interviews**

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were chosen because the study sought individual, personal urban nightlife experiences and reflections on social integration. It is imperative to note that in-depth interviewing is a co-construction of knowledge, 'a meaning making partnership' which can be understood as a 'special kind of knowledge-producing conversation' (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006: 128). The purpose was to delve into detail and uncover the emic perspective, which was achieved through using an interview guide informed by the topic list, establishing rapport, asking open questions in an empathic way and employing probes to motivate interviewees to tell their story. The interviews focused on international students' nightlife experiences in Nanjing, their social network and satisfaction of living in the Chinese context.

### **Observations**

Observational data were sought on the socio-spatial practices that international students engage in during their different nightlife activities. Observation is a valuable addition to interview data to get a sense of if what participants say, aligned with what participants do (O'Grady, 2013). This research method was selected as observing and recording of people's behaviours, actions, and interactions is useful for obtaining detailed description of the social setting of interest, nightlife venues, and the events that occur here in order to situate the behaviours discussed in interviews within the socio-cultural context. One typical Friday night in 'Talking' bar were selected since 'Talking' bar is a common venue for international students considered as the starting point for party and more than half of the interview participants used to attend nightlife there. Observations were also conducted in language exchange event and one Halloween Party held by one student association (Language Exchange Nanjing, LE). The Halloween Party was an event which both international and Chinese students were invited to, and therefore a number of the interview participants attended. The observation plan contained both average night and night with special event, both scheduled observations and occasional observations, to be prepared for any unexpected situations and details. For instance, '1912' club district was too crowded and complex to have scheduled observation.

The observation helps to understand and describe an example of urban nightlife space, and the social setting it holds and international students' actions and interactions in this context, attentive also to the silent norms and values particular to the setting, which provided a contextual understanding of the findings from the interviews. The synergy between observation and interview data enabled to zoom in on individual experiences and perspectives and zoom out to consider the wider context and general practices.

### **Analysis**

The analysis of the data proceeded in two steps. First, observation notes were collated, maps constructed and a narrative of events occurring at different nightlife practices attended was made (Low, 2010). Given concerns in the literature about social exclusion in night time economy, I focused on if there exists spatial and social separation between different groups of

people. The second step used interview case study. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and then coded. Codes were developed both deductively from the interview guide and previous research as well as inductively through noticing repetitive themes, ideas and issues raised by participants.

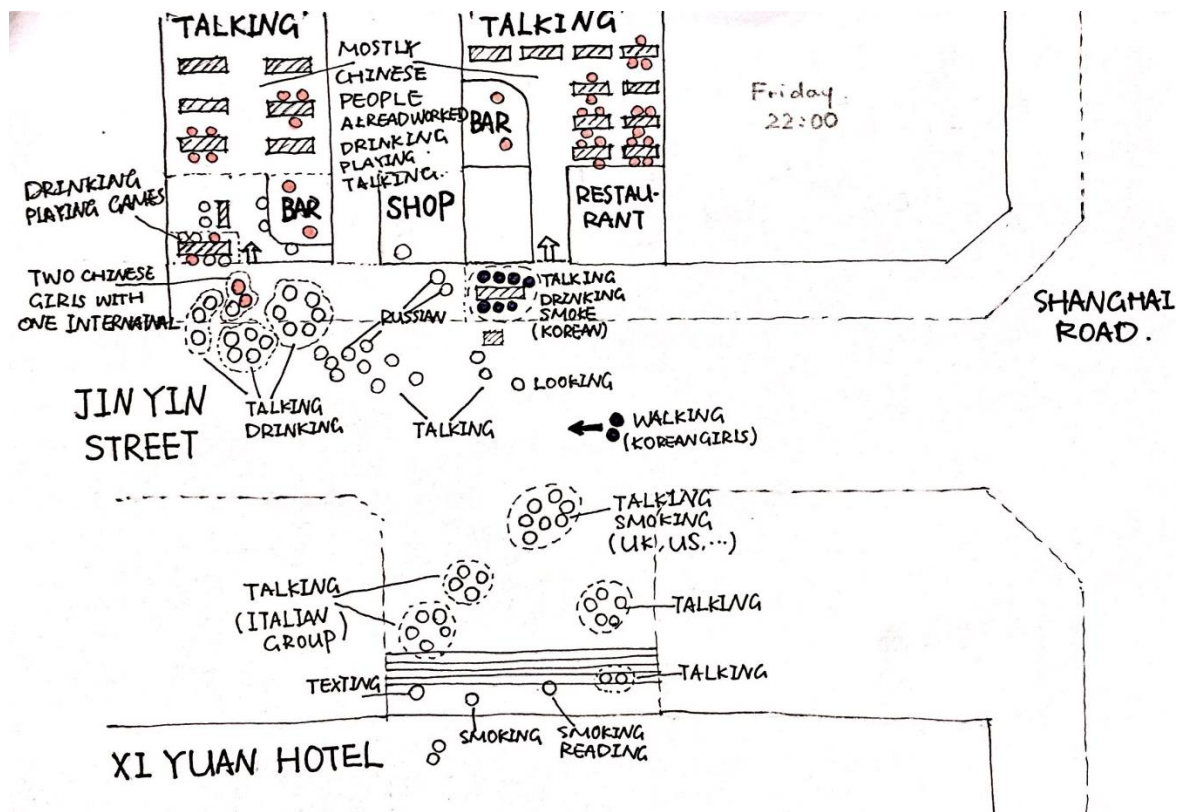
## Empirical results

In this section the results of analysis will be presented from three aspects: nightlife scenes of international students in three nightlife venues, nightlife and social network, nightlife and satisfaction of living in the Chinese context.

### Mapping different socio-spatial practices among students in nightlife venues

As mentioned in former sections, scheduled observations were conducted at 'Talking' bar, language exchange event in cafe and a Halloween party in 'Clock time' bar. Inspired by the anthropological work of Low (2010) on mapping people in space, visitors of these nightlife scene were mapped in the different areas at different points in time, and the most typical scene of each night were displayed.

Map 1-Normal night at 'Talking' bar (at 22:00)



(1) Normal Friday night in 'Talking' bar:

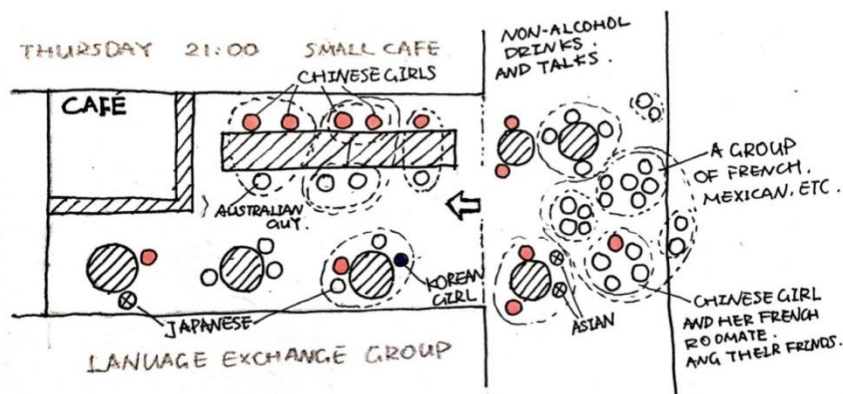
From 21:00 to 23:00, the number of international students kept increasing with high mobility, which means rather than sitting around a table, most international students would like to

move around the open area outside the building. Chinese people (mostly not students), on the country, occupied the inner part. Friday night seemed to have more excitement than those during the weekdays, as international students were less settle down and more prepared to have further activities in other places. International students were divided as groups, with usually these groups were not very strong. As shown from the map 1, two Italian cycle were sticking together and speaking Italian, but still, anyone who want to join in them were quite welcomed. However, the Korean group sitting around the table, always played with their own group and little interactions happened between them and other international students. Also the two Korean girls walking through the street had no interaction with any international students. The fluidity in the open area provided opportunities for groups to divide, move and mix. Chinese students with fluent English can also integrate in this context, talking, drinking and playing games. At around 23:00-23:30, every groups had decided to stay or explore further in other nightlife establishments, which made the street and bar less crowded.

(2)Language exchange event in cafe:

Language exchange events usually start at 20:00 and end at 23:00. As shown from the map 2 , about half of the participants were Chinese and another half were internationals, more particularly, two Japanese, one Korean, two south Asian and other international students mostly from Europe and America. It can be seen that most Chinese and Asian students would like to sit around the table and to have deep conversation with few people, while western students seemed to prefer more mobile circumstance. There still exist many chances for Chinese to join the western group. Therefore, generally language exchange events provide opportunities for international students to meet Chinese, and possibly have conversations and make friends.

**Map 2-Language exchange even in cafe (at 21:00)**

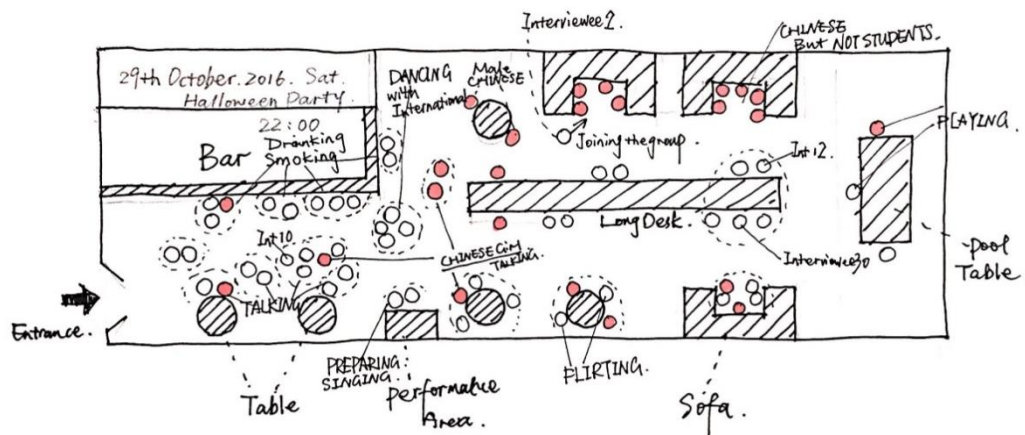


(3)Halloween party in 'Clock time' bar:

Observation of this Halloween party started at 21:00 and ended at 23:00. Most participants were international students especially western students and Chinese students, but no Korean students. Two Korean girls came at around 23:00, but left in 5 minutes. Some interviewees were recognized in this observation. Map 3 depicts the nightlife image at 22:00. There are two striking findings from this map. First, there still existed a bit separation between Chinese and international students, but it was more mixed than normal situation at bar. A few

Chinese, especially female and who speak English affluently, mixed with international students. In general, male Chinese were not confident enough as their female fellows. Second, some internationals approach Chinese first, while some would tend to stay with their 'in-group' friends.

**Map 3-Halloween party in 'Clock time' bar (at 22:00)**



In general, western students are more 'fluid' while Korean and Chinese students are more 'stable', which makes a certain level of separation between these groups (not exclusion). Most western students would move around frequently and talk with different internationals and sometimes Chinese, while Koreans and Chinese are mostly sitting around a table and having long conversations with less spatial movement, as in line with Boogaarts's (2011) findings on the culture difference in nightlife. Moreover, Korean students can be regarded as separated groups in most nightlife venues for sticking together and lacking interactions with other groups, which can be considered as self-excluded as in line with Kim (2001) and Rui (2008). Besides, there are also little interactions between international and Chinese students in general nightlife venues, like bar, café, club and etc. A purpose (an event) is needed to make international and Chinese students more mixed in the nightlife settings, such as language exchange group that providing chances for educational but entertainment talks and Halloween parties that attracting interests from both internationals (mostly western students) and Chinese.

### **Nightlife, meeting friends and strangers**

The social circles of most participants consisted mainly of international friends. They are their neighbours or flatmates and classmates or co-ethnic fellows. Participants mentioned the living environment has impacted their circle of friends, which is in line with earlier findings (Alwin et al., 1985; Dorvil, 2005). Most participants lived in the international student dormitory and have classes geographically separated from most Chinese university students. The university administration considers the internationalized districts can help international students to ease 'culture shock' and reduce interferences that international students would possibly bring to Chinese students, such as late nightlife in clubs and bars. Therefore, for international students who live in the campus, the homogeneity of dormitory distribution can largely affect the formation of their new friend cycle in Nanjing. Besides living condition, co-

ethnic community especially former (co-ethnic) friends before coming to Nanjing are served as another important foundation to make friends. Having strong co-ethnic community along with the language barrier can be constraints for social interactions between different groups of people in certain spatiotemporal context, especially in the nightlife settings. For westerner students, It is quite commonly accepted and with no difficulties to communicate with English, which served as their native or second language. For Korean students, especially exchange students for language program, language barriers exist on both sides. Their unprofessional Chinese and English, as well as their generally introverted characteristic, leaves them very limited options to choose friends and nightlife.

The main avenues through which participants met their friends included university (courses), student associations (e.g. Language Exchange Nanjing) and other co-curricular activities such as the gym. A couple of participants noted introductory and orientation events were significant for making their initial connections here in Nanjing, but at the same time, those events never included local students. A few students thus expected more introductory and orientation events with the participation of local students. Other avenues included social media (wechat group), through volunteer work and friends of friends. Usually, going out at night was not an unsolicited answer, however directly asking whether friends were made through going out gleaned mixed responses ranging from 'Yes, but not in KTV, because we all go with our friends to bar or coffee' (Male, one-year MBA student, French) to 'Not really. For Koreans, it is also not common to meet new people in bar or club. Maybe because Korean guys are a little bit shy, our Chinese or English is not good. Speaking other language makes us uncomfortable, especially in night clubs or bars.' (Male, six-months exchange student, Korean). Anyway, as mentioned by one participant, going out at night helped to break the scheduled lives and create sort of chances to talk and enjoy the very moment:

"The most problem is many people live in a very scheduled lives... But if you are going to a club and you are having a drink or just going to a cafeteria, all sudden they are breaking this rule, for this one very particular moment, they are just talking with you. This make it different because you happen to know the person more, even though they go back to the stable live, nevertheless, you maintain the contact. Okay, from this and that, I have time, let's eat together and that is fine."(Male, 2nd-year PhD student, Polish)

There were three key findings that stood out from the response to this question. Firstly, that most participants go out with their friends or new acquaintances, so rather than making new friends, nightlife experiences strengthen their existing relationships, which is in line with Grazian's (2009) findings.

"Definitely yes, I think it is very important to strengthen your relationship with people you already know. It does not has to be like going out at evening to strengthen the relationship, but that is just one way. That is important, because having close friends is important just in case you need have, you can have some people to rely on in this new circumstance. Those who I see in night (new people) are not important, how you get in touch is different. If I am in a cafe study, maybe I can talk to someone else and know each other, you already have link in a different way, but if you meet someone in nightlife it is just a short meet. Meeting people in nightlife will not develop strong ties among stranger if you don't get often to meet them."(Male, one-year exchange student, Swiss)

Secondly, some participants did make friends through their nightlife experiences. These friendships range from being quite shallow as described by one participant:

"Yes it helped me meet other international students, but still it's a shallow connection. you know, during the day you have more important conversations and discussions. but bars and clubs, is not really a chance to get to know those things... it is not a kind of important friendship. Chinese people I usually meet through common interest and different activities, so we have a shake connections, if it's meeting them at club or bars, it's just..., I don't know, they have different values and goals of party."(Male, one-year exchange student, Australian)

To more meaningful friendships as described by another couple of participants who would then go out again with their new found friends, catch up for coffee or attend other events together. One can see that making new friends when going out is highly depending on where to go. Particularly, events held by Language exchange group seem to be a good way to start meaningful friendships as it provides good opportunities for participants to talk and exchange culture and thoughts. A couple of participants mentioned that go to cafe very frequently or language exchange help to start friendship step by step, however in club or bar, it is difficult to have a deep conversation and to know new friends, especially Chinese (students).

"Go to cafe help me extend my social network, while club or bar do not...Chinese students seldom go club or bar, It is not a good place to really know someone. On the other hand, I usually spend my leisure time in cafe, many students would go there, both internationals and Chinese, sometimes you meet people you have seen before, you then have a short conversation, the next time you may have a deeper conversation. I also learn a lot through these conversations, they become my friends."(Male, 4th-year bachelor student, Korean)

"Language exchange or study in a cafe, I would talk to my neighbour, that is the way I meet my Chinese friends. but when we are in bar or in club, I mean, every group is already on their own, so you don't want to bother them, and I think it's even harder for someone to go to the Chinese group of people and meet them, maybe that is something you do in the west, but I don't think that is something you do in China, you don't go other people and bother them."(Male, two-year language student, French)

Thirdly, when considering this question, almost all participants raised the topic of meeting and interacting with strangers. Although these interactions were typically fleeting and did not turn into friendships, this is a valued part of international students' nightlife experiences. The background of these strangers did not seem to matter, participants engaged with Chinese or other internationals alike. For one participant such encounters were particularly valuable as it was a space she could have more lively conversation with both Chinese and internationals.

"we will start talking, some of them asked my 'wechat', but I will not write with them much. I don't like always being on my phone, I like more real conversations."(Female, six-months exchange student, German)

Even though most participants did not care about the background of strangers, a few participants would initiatively avoid connections with strangers for diverse reasons, of which the particular concern of safety. For instance, many Korean girls feel Chinese males are

hunting them thus they need Korean male friends' protection and stick together. Also describe by one Italian participant, sticking together made them feeling safer, which might also hinder the communication with strangers:

"We tend to be all together, stay all together and have fun all together, also because safer I think...Maybe if you are alone, it is easier to start communicating, but if you are with a group, it is almost impossible to join them and start talking."(Male, six-months exchange student, Italian)

The choices of international students' social life (including nightlife) are largely depending on their recent cycle of friends which is highly based on living condition, co-ethnic community and language acquisition, as in line with earlier findings (Simmel, 1950; Ward et al., 1998; Lin, 2006; Kim, 2001; Rui, 2008). These choices of social life (nightlife) can further influence the construction of their social network. In general, nightlife strengthens existing relationship, including existing friendship with local students, as in line with Grazian (2009). Nightlife also provides opportunities to make new friends and interact with strangers, which is highly depending on the visiting nightlife venues and companionship, as more in line with Oldenburg (1989), Jacobs (1961), and Putnam (2001).

### **Nightlife and satisfaction of living in the Chinese context**

Integration would seemingly entail mixing cross-culturally with the host society, but as I found, a lot of international students especially western students had predominantly international friends and perceived themselves well fit in Nanjing and happy with their social-life, and feel a bit at home like 'Now, it's my university, it's my life, it's my city and now it's becoming my own home' (Female, six-months exchange student, German). This is unsurprising as the main avenues and most amount of time participants spent was with other international students (Korean students) - that is at university, international organisations and their living situations. This for the most part was not perceived as an issue, more just accepted and common sense, and furthermore not specific to international students, typical of Chinese students also. Besides, a few international students, especially degree students lived in suburb campus, would have most time with Chinese students, that also reflected high level of satisfaction of life in Nanjing.

To figure out how international students' nightlife relates to their satisfaction of living in the Chinese context, it is important to notice the expectations and feelings of going out in Nanjing and the perceptions on Chinese people and culture.

Main reasons and expectations for going out were socializing with friends or strangers, talking, dancing and drinking, and few for relieving loneliness of being in an unfamiliar country. Going out offers a moment to be with friends, spending time in a different and more careless environment. Few participants mentioned the potential of romantic encounters as a main reason to go out at night. Participants would also mention alcohol to be a catalyst of this environment, making socializing with friends and strangers 'different' or 'easier'. Some participants also mentioned the preference of dancing as the main purpose of clubbing,



making the night more exciting and funny. In general, the participants would describe going out as a means of distraction and providing social time:

"It's a time of getting to know people, relaxing, and being with friend. it's a way to get your mind off whatever is bothering you and talk with your friends about what was happening. It's a really good social moment. It's nice to interact with other people. You know, we are always very welcomed by those nightclubs and Chinese people are really curious about us."(Male, six-months exchange student, Italian)

Feelings about nightlife in Nanjing were quite different and mixed among participants. The majority of participants were quite satisfied with their nightlife experience in Nanjing, while there were also few things annoying. For instance, the free alcohol for westerners makes it wired when being with Chinese friends and ordering the same drinks, and thus makes them special but separated with Chinese. Besides, Korean female students are particularly caring about the safety in nightlife.

Perceptions of Chinese students in Nanjing were generally positive, described as 'nice', 'really friendly', 'polite', 'simple', 'respectful', but also 'shy' and 'conservative'. Chinese people in general were seen as poor English speakers, who are helpful, approachable and have an overall 'positive impression' on participants. While perceptions of Chinese students in Nanjing's nightlife were obscured because a lot of participants did not see many Chinese students in bars and clubs they visited or they failed to distinguish them. The majority of participants felt that Chinese students have different ways to spend the nightlife as they do and did not figure out yet. A few participants mentioned that Chinese students prefer staying in a cafe rather than go clubbing.

"I see many Chinese students in cafe, but in club there are not many Chinese students, or I cannot distinguish them. I think students from Nanjing university seldom go club, they seem to stay in dorm or cafe like us."(Female, six-months exchange student, Korean)

Chinese people in general in the nightlife scene were seen as a group of people who have different ways to have fun, which made a few participants confused about it. "They are more likely sit down, and do not dance very much." (Female, one-year exchange student, British) "In clubs, they don't dance, so I don't know why they go there, just for drinking and watching foreigners." (Female, one-year language student, Russian) It has also been confirmed in the observation results.

In terms of feelings about Chinese culture, most participants perceived it as neutral and positive, described as 'conservative' and 'inclusive', which is largely affected by the nightlife image they have visited. To Korean participants, first, Chinese culture shares more similarities than difference with Korean culture also in terms of nightlife culture; second, Chinese culture is broader than Korean culture for multiple reasons as illustrated by one participant; and third, Chinese culture is more conservative about love and sex than Korean culture, which reflects on the stigmatization of student clubbing especially for females.

"Korean as a very small country, so everywhere looks the same...This is quite different with Chinese since you have multi-level of culture. Each region or ethnic has its own



subculture. Your Chinese are more adapt to this multi-cultural circumstance, as you are familiar with it since very young. When one Korean comes to China, firstly you have to learn Chinese, however, even you have learned a lot of Chinese, you only know a little about Chinese culture. Chinese culture is so broad and vivid. Thus, Koreans would rather play with Koreans."(Male, Graduated bachelor student, Korean,)

To western participants, Chinese culture is of huge differences with their own culture, but still share many common goods in terms of good manner and some other universal values. When facing these huge differences, the majority of western students participants succeeded to settle down and adapt to their new life very soon. A few of western students felt quite surprised that they could fit in a totally different culture in few weeks, although not really integrate into the Chinese society, and partly because nightlife as a starting point enable participants to better know the city and culture as well as being satisfied of their social life in Nanjing. Generally, western participants like these culture differences, rather than feeling annoyed and confused.

"I think it's not that difficult to settle in the Chinese culture. Even though I can't understand the language well, I can understand the culture. I feel it's quite different with English culture, but at the same time there are a lot of similarities, in terms of politeness, in that sense it is not difficult to integrate with Chinese culture, you can understand it and you can appreciate it what it is. Also in the nightlife settings"(Male, one-year exchange student, British)

Particularly, connections with good Chinese friends can largely help to build connection with the city and the Chinese society. Even one Chinese friend with good relationship can enable international students to better experience the city and Chinese culture, as well as in the nightlife settings. As one participant mentioned that one good Chinese friend, with whom went out very frequently during the night to have deep conversations, had helped her know more about Chinese culture.

"I feel very happy when going out with the Chinese friend, the girl, we won't drink a lot, so we can have deep conversation and know more about each other's culture, she is quite easy-going."(Female, one-year exchange student, American)

Also confirmed by one Korean participant that Chinese students helped him fit in and get a sense of home in Nanjing: "Friends, Chinese students, they changed me a lot. I feel I already fit in the Chinese culture. " (Male, 4th-year bachelor student, Korean)

Therefore, in general, social network and socializing influence international students' perceptions of Chinese culture and Chinese people, and satisfaction of living in the Chinese context, as line with earlier findings (Anderson, 2009; Farrer, 2008; Thomas, 2000; Liempt, van Aalst and Schwanen, 2015). Choosing different social life especially in the nightlife settings can largely affect the dimensions of Chinese society one can see and interact. Thus, the more diverse social life (nightlife) international students have experienced, the more abundant perceptions and feelings about the city, people and culture they would have. Most international students perceive Chinese and Chinese students quite positive in general, but do not have much perception on Chinese students in the nightlife settings for the different

nightlife consumption practices between international and Chinese students. In fact, having some Chinese friends can help international students to have more diverse nightlife experiences as locals and to connect local society, as in line with earlier findings (Kim, 2001; Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Ward and Rona-Deuba, 2000)

## Conclusions

Considering that worldwide the amount of international students will grow dramatically (Rienties et al., 2012; Ward et al., 2009) as well as international students enrolled in higher education in China, and that it is important to integrate international students (Ward et al., 2009; Rienties et al., 2012; Thomas, 1998), this case study on international students and their nightlife experiences in Nanjing intended to bridge gaps between work on social integration, nightlife and students, bringing education studies and sociology together through geography. Through a series of interviews and several evenings of observations, evidence was gathered on the role urban nightlife experiences play in international students' social integration.

As was inductively derived from the data, the nightlife setting has many elements that fit into two dimensions of social integration, that is the perceived social network with international and domestic students and satisfaction of life in Nanjing (Bollen and Hoyle, 1990; Kearns and Forrest, 2000; Moody and White, 2004). The findings show that the role of nightlife is that it offers a space for socializing, which is different and more informal than social settings during the day. Nightlife provides a space which enables the strengthening and deepening of bonds between people and groups who go out together, as in line with Grazian (2009). Usually these people are friends, classmates, or have met before, and particularly flatmates and co-ethnic fellows, and the nightlife experiences for the most part do not lead to new deep connections. This does not discount the importance of meeting strangers, as meeting strangers is part of the thrill of going out, and participants expressed this experience or part of going out was important to them. Such fleeting encounters add to familiarization with the place where people study, moreover its people, culture and habits, as line with earlier findings (Anderson, 2009; Farrer, 2008; Thomas, 2000; Liempt, van Aalst and Schwanen, 2015). A few respondents could tell stories, descriptions or information about Chinese people but less likely specifically Chinese students, that came from a nightlife experience. Most participants mentioned the nightlife as a good aspect of the city.

It can therefore be firstly argued that the nightlife offers a space where encounters with, or even being around, different people can create a sense of satisfaction across people from different backgrounds or co-ethnic community. An added layer compared to daytime social settings is the freer and often alcohol-induced reduction of inhibitions which facilitates such encounters with strangers as well as deepening of existing relationships.

However, interactions between international and domestic students are quite rare and shallow in most nightlife venues. Perceptions on Chinese people and Chinese culture in the nightlife settings thus can be quite limited by certain nightlife they are attending. Therefore, the nightlife does play an important role in intercultural and interracial socialization between

international students, as is in line with earlier findings (Cattan and Vanola, 2013; Chatterton and Hollands, 2003; Farrer, 2008; Hollands, 1996; Liempt et al., 2015), but not much with domestic students. Particularly for Korean students, over sticking with co-ethnic fellows in the nightlife settings leads to self-exclusion to both international and Chinese students, as in line with Boogaarts (2011) and Kim (2001).

Therefore, one can then argue that international students' nightlife in Nanjing reveals multiple layers rather than homogenized scene since international students are mostly satisfied with their nightlife but separated with Chinese students. The phrase of different nightlife preference fails to bring much interactions between Chinese and international students.

As reflected in the literature review, social integration is a broad concept with various meanings, making it hard to measure with quantitative methods if researchers do not make many presumptions or distinctions. By looking at perceived social integration, and using qualitative methods, a more flexible view of social integration was found. This is important, as self-addressed happiness with social life, friendships and the place of residence seem more important indicators of successful integration than common (quantitative) indicators such as frequency of social contact and amount of social ties, as is in line with Booth et al. (1991). Few participants complained about their social life or integration for various reasons such as losing contacts, loneliness for having few friends and failing to meet expectation on making friends. It can therefore be argued that once a certain threshold of deep and floating social contact is reached, international students are generally satisfied – regardless of these contact's backgrounds or where they met them. While it is noted that having Chinese close friends, even if very few, can largely increase a sense of connection to local society and deepen understanding of Chinese culture and norms, as in line with earlier findings (Kim, 2001; Ward and Kennedy, 1993; Ward and Rona-Deuba, 2000). Besides, having a strong co-ethnic community do play a positive role in one's adaptation to local life and releasing 'culture shock' (Lin, 2006), but sticking too much with co-ethnic fellows, hinders communication as well as integration with other international students and Chinese students, especially for Korean students, as in line with Kim's (2001) finding. Indeed, western students are more integrated than Korean students in this research, as in line with Rienties et al. (2012).

Based on Furnham and Alibhai's (1985) three-level model of international students' social network and Simmel's (1950) idea of 'stranger', the trade-off between domestic students and international students can be explained as follow. For Korean students, seeking both emotional and entertainment support from co-ethnic fellows especially in the nightlife settings leads to their separation to other international students and Chinese students. High level of stress, loneliness and a sense of unsafe forces Korean students to stick together with Korean fellows to seek comfort. Therefore, socializing of Korean students in the nightlife settings faces more constrains from the belonged community (Simmel, 1950). For western students, sticking to co-ethnic community in nightlife also leads to more separation. At the same time, those without a strong group have more freedom on socializing and making friends, especially during the nightlife – do not have to sticking on certain nightlife. Besides,

students who attend language exchange group or other student organization at night perceive more integrated to domestic students, as in line with Bok (2009).

Therefore, it can be argued that more separated students are more likely to over seeking entertainment and emotional support from co-ethnic fellows in the nightlife settings, while more integrated students would seek both entertainment and educational rather than emotional support from domestic students.

From the perspective of international students, to bring internationals and Chinese together, first it is important to geographically distract the strong bonding between co-ethnic fellows, especially for Korean students, which can bring international students more freedom in socializing and making friends (Simmel, 1950). Second, a combination of entertainment and educational purposes should be found in the nightlife settings, which language exchange group and special event for cross cultural communication could provide. Merely educational purpose or entertainment purpose can hardly bring deep interactions and friendship among international and Chinese students.

A number of reflections and implication for further studies can be made. First in regards to the interviews, I found interviewing particularly participants quite challenging especially for Koreans. Perhaps participants felt like they could not express themselves fully or were not able to provide more detail or extensive answers because they were not responding in their native tongue. therefore care was taken in interpreting such results and acknowledging their agreement or disagreement but not claiming that this was an unsolicited response.

Second reflecting on the observation, the setting became a lot more chaotic when large amount of students were highly fluid, and it was harder to catch all details and keep track of the international students. Recording with video might have to catch up more detailed information and being more accurate. It was hard to talk sometimes because of the loud music and hard to move due to the large number of (intoxicated) people in some nightlife venues. I engaged in different levels of participant observation, from moderate to active. Being recognized by other international or Chinese friends, I had to participate in the international circle to behave in a socially acceptable way. This enabled the researcher to casually ask specific questions but also meant I was influencing and part of the unfolding situation and observation. I did not tell all the international students I was observing their behaviour, only those who were interviewed knew and gave consent. I did not tell the others to avoid the Hawthorne effect. Because in this circumstance I did not have time to let people get used to the fact that I was researcher and therefore act in a normal way around us. Instead I identified the cultural norms and rhythm of activity and did the best to engage in this flow as to not disturb the natural behaviour of those observed.

Third, perceived social integration is a dynamic process that can change through time, as well as international students' social network and satisfaction of living in the Chinese context. The recent conclusion is based on the status participants were in, but not a series of tracking investigation. Therefore, further studies could look into the procedure of one's integration and key indicators, for example the formation and collapse of one's social network, the changing

phrase of nightlife activities and the variation of the satisfaction of living abroad. A series of journals (dairies) and interviews can help to evaluate the variation of nightlife experiences and perceived social integration.

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