

Bachelor thesis

# Place attachment and adjustment of Chinese students

In a Dutch context

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## Summary

This thesis is about place attachment and adjustment within a university context. Adjusting to a new environment can be challenging for international students. In particular, this is challenging for students with a different cultural background. Therefore, this thesis will analyse the place attachment and adjustment of Chinese students.

From the literature it appears that in order for international students to adjust to the new environment it is important to create an attachment to places. Students that do not create connections to places in the new environment are more likely to experience homesickness. The culture of the host community and the academic environment might be different. This means that students have to adjust to both the host community and the academic environment.

This thesis examines the influence of place attachment on adjustment of Chinese students within a university context. The following research question is formulated: 'In what way is the process of place attachment important to the adjustment of Chinese students to the local university community in Groningen?' A qualitative data collection instrument is used to examine this question. In-depth interviews are conducted with Chinese students from different faculties studying at the University of Groningen.

It appeared that the Chinese students feel satisfied with their life and the academic environment in Groningen. Several of the Chinese students do not feel like a foreigner anymore and have developed an attachment to places within their everyday space. Chinese students who created connections to places in Groningen feel more comfortable and safe. However, an absence of place attachment is related to homesickness and a lack of social interaction with members of the local university community. Although several Chinese students do not feel like an outsider, they are still in the process of adjustment. The social networks of the Chinese students and language difficulties determine their level of adjustment. Besides, the Chinese students face several challenges such as celebration of different holidays, language difficulties, different education system and different culture that can determine their level of adjustment.

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

International student migration is one of the major forms of international migration (Findlay *et al.*, 2012). Findlay *et al.* (2012) describe that students prefer to study at a world class university, because of the high value that is attached to a degree from a world class university. The University of Groningen is ranked in the top 100 of several world ranking lists (QS World Universities Ranking, 2015; Shanghai Ranking, 2015; Times Higher Education, 2016). There are 28.353 students registered as students at the University of Groningen. Moreover, there are 4.284 international students and 247 Chinese students studying at the University of Groningen (Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2016).

According to Rienties and Tempelaar (2013) adjustment depends on the cultural distance between the country of origin and the host country. Students with different norms and values than the host country will experience more difficulties adjusting compared with students who share the same norms and values of the host country. Wang and Hannes (2014) suggest that Asian students have a collectivistic worldview while students from Western countries have an individualistic worldview, which results in different norms and values. Furthermore, Wang and Hannes (2014) describe how Asian students adjust to a different level to the host community and experience more difficulties compared with students from Western countries. Moreover, Terrazas-Carrillo *et al.* (2014) argue that attachment to the new environment is important in order to adjust to the host community. Students that did not make connections to the new community or did not develop a sense of belonging, experienced more emotional distress and homesickness compared with other international students. Chow and Healey (2008) describe that students who move away from home can experience forms of disruption and dislocation. Terrazas-Carrillo *et al.* (2014) argue that this effect might even be stronger for international students, because their homes are not easily accessible. It would be interesting to examine how a particular group of international students with a different cultural background adjust to the local student community of Groningen and what the influence of place attachment is.

## 1.2 Research problem

The aim of this thesis is to examine the adjustment of Chinese students to the local university community in Groningen and the role of place attachment. In order to examine this, the following research question is formulated: 'In what way is the process of place attachment important to the adjustment of Chinese students to the local university community in Groningen?'

The following sub questions will help to answer the research question:

- What is the influence of dislocation on place attachment?
- What are the key contributors to place attachment?
- How can adjustment be defined in a university context?
- How do Chinese students experience place attachment in a university context?
- How do Chinese students adjust to the local university community?

## 1.3 Structure

Following the brief introduction, the theoretical framework is presented, which consists of the relevant existing theories and a discussion of the key concepts for this research. The conceptual model in the theoretical framework gives an overview of the main concepts that are important in this research and ties the concepts together. In the methodology section the choice of method and the details of how the research is conducted are explained. In the results section the data from the interviews are discussed and analysed in a broader context.

The last part of this thesis is the conclusion where all the findings of this research in combination with the existing literature are presented and also a recommendation for future research is given.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Introduction

In the introduction the sub questions are addressed. This section provides a literature review on the existing literature about place attachment and adjustment. Section 4 will critically analyse the literature in combination with the results from the in-depth interviews.

### 2.2 Place attachment and place identity

According to Scannell and Gifford (2014), it is important for people who moved to make connections to new places in the new environment to develop a *sense of place*. This is in particular important for adjustment and wellbeing. Indeed, students who fail to create attachment to their new environment and who do not have social ties with students in the new community are more likely to experience homesickness (Scannell & Gifford, 2014). A sense of place can be explained through the assumption that places consists of meanings ascribed by individuals and that places do not have inherent meanings. A sense of place creates a sense of belonging to a place and it creates a feeling of comfort (Easthope, 2004). *Place attachment* is the positive connection that people have with a certain place. This is often a place where people feel safe and comfortable (Cross, 2015). Emotional distress, satisfaction, cultural background and social interaction can influence place attachment (Terrazas-Carrillo *et al.*, 2014).

Scannell and Gifford (2014) argue that people can have multiple place attachments and that international students prefer to have places in the new environment that are similar to home. This argument is supported by Chow and Healey (2008) who argue that the meaning of places and the attachment to places can change when someone decides to move. The disruption of home can influence the process of place attachment. Chow and Healey's (2008) argument is further supported by research by Terrazas-Carrillo *et al.* (2014) who note that during the adjusting process international students are aware that they are dislocated from their home and that they lost connections with places in their home country. *Dislocation* refers to "an event that violates shared constructions of place and the forms of located subjectivity they help to maintain" (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004, p. 456). Additionally, Dixon and Durrheim (2004) argue that dislocation is related to place identity and that a loss of place involves a loss of self. *Place identity* can be defined as a concept that involves the developing of a sense of belonging to a specific place by an individual (Cross, 2015). With that said, Chow and Healey (2008) describe that new place identities can be formed through moving, because new relations with places and people are created.

To address different dimensions of place attachment the research will critically review relevant aspects of the three-dimensional framework of Scannell and Gifford (2010). The person dimension involves individual place attachment which is the personal bonding someone has with a place. Place attachment is created by giving meaning to a particular place which is often done through individual experiences. Scannell and Gifford (2010) describe that the psychological process dimension involves the way people connect to a place and the interactions with a place. Emotional connections to place are important to create an attachment and a sense of belonging to a place. Cognition in relation to place attachment refers to the memories, meaning, beliefs and knowledge that are related to places. The meaning of a place, the construction of place and connecting to a place are related to cognition (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). This point is supported by Terrazas-Carrillo *et al.* (2014) who note that through cognition students assign meanings to places in the new community and that this is a part of adjusting. Through social interaction, meanings are ascribed to places in the new environment. Additionally, Scannell and Gifford (2010) describe that the place dimension of place attachment is divided in physical and social attachment. Physical attachment involves aspects that are related to the built- and the natural environment.

Social attachment to a place involves social networks, familiarity and a sense of belonging to a community (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). To this point it is discussed how place attachment can be defined and what the main contributors to place attachment are. Clearly at this point it is important to briefly define what is meant by community in the context of this research. This will help to clarify whether the Chinese students will develop positive connections to places within the university community.

### 2.3 University community

Pretty *et al.* (2003) argue that there are several ways to define what a community is. For instance a community can be a geographical area where people live together and form a community. On the other hand a community can also be defined as a group of people who share common norms, values and interests. Pretty *et al.* (2003) suggest that individuals can be attached to a community through the experience of close connections with people in the local area and a connection to the place where the social interaction takes place. Social relations between individuals are created within daily activities and these daily activities are part of everyday life (Burkitt, 2004). According to Downey (1996) a university as a community can be immense. A university consists of a lot of buildings and provides many services such as social, recreational and educational services. Moreover, a university community is diverse because it consists of many members who all have different interests (Downey, 1996). For the reasons stated above the University of Groningen can be defined as a community. For this thesis the focus is on the university as a community, because it is here that the everyday life of the Chinese students takes place. This thesis will focus on the adjustment of Chinese students to the social space within the local university community.

### 2.4 Adjustment

With this thesis being focused on the adjustment of Chinese students in the university community of Groningen, it is also important to discuss and define what is meant by adjustment. According to Wang and Hannes (2014) *adjustment* means the adaptation to a new environment. The challenges that are faced by international students determine the level of adjustment. Additionally, Terrazas-Carrillo *et al.* (2014) describe adjustment as the familiarization with the traditions, norms and values, places and the interaction with the new environment.

There are several domains of adjustment and this thesis will examine the socio-cultural adjustment and the psychological adjustment. Socio-cultural adjustment is defined by Ward and Kennedy (1999, p. 660) as *"the ability to "fit in," to acquire culturally appropriate skills and to negotiate interactive aspects of the host environment"*. Rienties and Tempelaar (2013) argue that socio-cultural adjustment is more difficult for students from Asia compared with other international students and that the Asian students face more challenges regarding adjustment. Wang and Hannes (2014) explain that social ties with members of the host community, social support, language skills, involvement in activities and longer residence in the host community can influence socio-cultural adjustment. According to Hendrickson *et al.* (2011) social networks with members of the host community are important, because these social networks have a positive effect on satisfaction, homesickness, adaptation to host culture and communication. Social networks between individuals can be referred to as *social capital* which consists of reciprocity and trust (Putnam, 2007). Social capital can be divided in 'bonding' social capital and 'bridging' social capital. The first one refers to the social connections between individuals who are similar to each other based on ethnicity, gender, age and occupation. Whereas, bridging social capital can be referred to as social ties between individuals who are not similar to each other (Putnam, 2007). It is difficult for international students to establish social networks with members of the host community, due to language barriers, discrimination and already established friendships of local students with other local students (Hendrickson *et al.*, 2011).

Furthermore, Brown (2009) explains that co-national friendships can be established, because of the shared national culture, shared language and as a reminder of home. However, international students who only have social networks with co-national students are having less intercultural interaction which might influence their foreign language skills (Brown, 2009).

Psychological adjustment “refers to psychological well being or satisfaction” (Ward & Kennedy, 1999, p.660). Ward and Kennedy (1999) discuss that psychological adjustment is influenced by personality, social support, changes in life and coping styles. Zhang and Goodson (2011) build on this by agreeing that the receiving of social support is important for international students, because international students who do not receive support are more likely to experience stress and psychological problems. Thus in order to examine adjustment of Chinese students to the local university community in Groningen it is important to understand the Chinese culture and education system.

## 2.5 Chinese culture and education system

Cheung *et al.* (2005) argue that the Chinese culture differs from the Western culture which may lead to misunderstandings between Chinese and Western people. In particular, Cheung *et al.* (2005) describe that the way of communication is different and is rooted in cultural background. The Confucian principles such as harmony and peace influence the behaviour of Chinese people. Chinese people are more passive and less independent compared to Western people and tend to avoid disagreements with experts even if the expert is considered wrong. This point is supported by Hu *et al.* (2016) who describe how, within Chinese society there is considerable respect for authority. However, in the Netherlands the communication between professors and students is informal. Hu *et al.* (2016) mention that misunderstandings can occur within the classroom as a result of different cultural backgrounds. In addition, in China there is a high competition between students and it is important for students to have high grades (Hu *et al.*, 2016). In this regard, Asian students suffer more from academic stress than students in Western countries (Jiangdong *et al.*, 2011). Together, the biggest stress factors for Chinese students are said to be low learning efficiency, competition with fellow students, academic ranking and low grades (Hong *et al.*, 2005).

## 2.6 Conceptual model

Figure 2.6 represents the conceptual model which based on the discussion above and further used to examine the role of place attachment on the adjustment of Chinese students to the local university community in Groningen. Chow and Healey (2008) explain that dislocation shape the attachment to places and place identity. The concepts of place attachment and place identity are closely related to each other and these concepts often occur at the same time (Cross, 2015). Social networks influence the ability to attach to a certain place and students who do not develop social relations in the new environment experience more difficulties attaching to the new environment. Other contributors to place attachment are emotional distress, satisfaction and cultural background (Terrazas- Carrillo *et al.*, 2014). Students who do not have social networks are facing more challenges regarding adjustment compared with students who have a social network (Hendrickson *et al.*, 2011). Scannell and Gifford (2014) suggest that place attachment can have an influence on adjustment to the new environment. With this in mind the conceptual model is developed in a way that emphasises these expected relations. The next section details the methods and data used to answer the sub questions addressed in section 1.2.

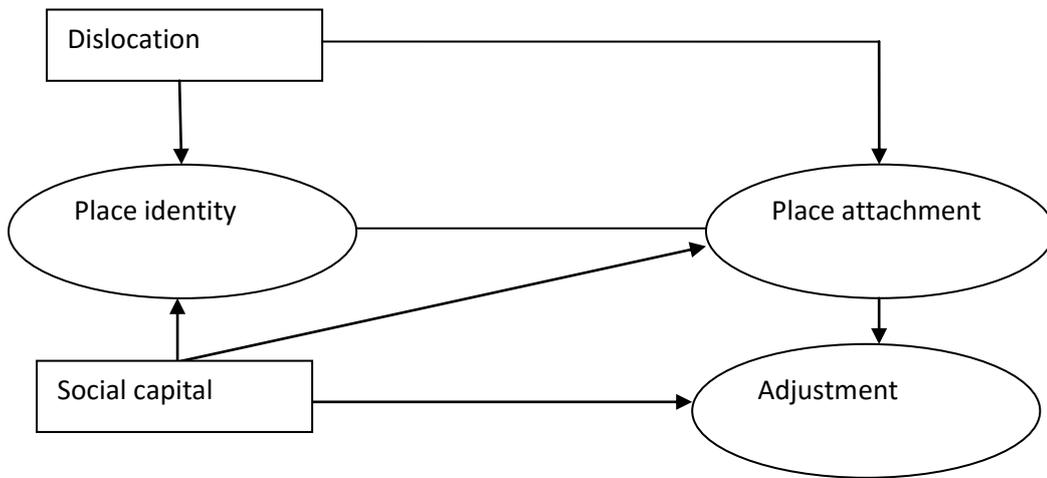


Figure 2.6: The conceptual model

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

Given theories discussed in section 2 it would be appropriate to use a qualitative research method. Hay (2010) explains that there is a distinction between quantitative and qualitative research methods within Human Geography. Quantitative methods can be used for generalisation, explanation and prediction (Kitchin & Tate, 2000). On the contrary, qualitative research methods study social structures, experiences of individuals and search for meaning (Hay, 2010). Subsequently, in order to examine the experience of place attachment and adjustment of Chinese students, a qualitative research method is used.

### 3.2 Data collection

Interviews are conducted with eight Chinese students studying at the University of Groningen. Hay (2010) explains that there is a distinction between three types of qualitative research methods: oral techniques, textual analysis and observations. The oral methods are based on interaction with participants through a conversation. Oral methods consist of biography, interviews and survey methods. The biography and interview method are more concerned with individual experiences. Whereas, surveys are concerned with social structures, consist of a larger sample and seek to generalise. The textual method is concerned with examining underlying structures and discourses through specific objects. In contrast to the oral and textual methods the observational method consists of observing participants (Hay, 2010). In this research experiences of individuals are central and it is important for the researcher to hear the stories of the participants. Therefore, the oral method of interviews is used. Hay (2010) claims that interviews are a good method to obtain opinions and experiences of individuals. Interviews enable participants to raise issues that were not thought of by the researcher and therefore more insight is gained (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005).

There are three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews (Clifford *et al.*, 2010). Structured interviews follow an already set question list and do not allow space for new questions and improvising. On the contrary, unstructured interviews do not follow a list of questions and the participant determines the direction of the interview. Semi-structured interviews do follow a list of questions that make comparison between participants possible, but there is flexibility (Clifford *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, a semi-structured interview is used for this thesis. When conducting an interview the researcher should be aware of his/her position, power relations and how the researcher's identity can influence the interaction with participants (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005).

### 3.3 Recruiting participants

Hay (2010) describes that qualitative data is about meanings and experiences of individuals and that the sample is not representative for the whole population. The sample size depends on the knowledge that is necessary, the resources that are available and on the purpose of the study (Hay, 2010). The decision to conduct interviews with eight participants is based on the fact that enough knowledge can be gained and that there is not enough time available.

For recruiting the participants the snowballing method is used. The snowballing method uses one contact to help the researcher find another contact and so on (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). An advantage of this method is that it helps researchers to gain trust of the participants. Moreover, this approach enables researchers to find participants with specific experiences and backgrounds. Nevertheless, the researcher should have more than one initial contact person to avoid a sample whereby the participants will be from the same group (Flowerdew & Martin, 2005). This thesis is about specific experiences and the participants have a particular background and therefore the snowballing method is used. Moreover, it is important to gain the trust of the participants and to establish rapport based on shared interests (Kitchin & Tate, 2000).

To have a varied sample bachelor, master and PhD students are recruited from different faculties. The researcher aims to have a balance between male and female students.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

The in-depth interviews will be transcribed and the transcripts will be analysed. Coding is a method that can be used for evaluating and organizing qualitative data in order to analyse the meaning. Different categories and patterns can be identified and new connections can be made through coding (Clifford *et al.*, 2010). The software Atlas.ti is used to code and analyse the transcripts. This software enables the researcher to use different codes for the same text. Furthermore different codes can be divided into main themes by grouping the codes into families. The software allows the researcher to compare multiple transcripts (Friese, 2015). The code families that are used to analyse the data are academic environment, adjustment, cultural differences, dislocation, future plans, migration, place attachment, place identity, sense of place and social capital. The code families are based on themes that are central to the research and with these codes relations between different concepts can be examined.

### **3.5 Ethical considerations**

There are several ethical issues that need to be considered. All the participants gave their consent for recording the interviews and were assured that the interviews are confidential. In the data analyses no names will be used to keep the participants anonymous. Information of the interview will only be used for this thesis and will not be distributed to other parties. The participants are participating voluntarily and have the right to withdraw from the research (Clifford *et al.*, 2010). The researcher should be aware of the differences in worldview and cultural background and should not judge different opinions. Furthermore, the researcher should not interpret the answers given by the participants and should be objective.

### **3.6 Reflection of the quality of the data**

The interview guide attached in the appendix consists of questions based on the main concepts of the conceptual model discussed in section 2.6. The interviews were approximately 30 to 60 minutes. It might have been better to conduct more interviews with bachelor students in order to have an interdisciplinary balance. The researcher allowed the participants to tell their stories and therefore the interview guide was not followed in a structural way. A language barrier and the difference in cultural background resulted in some misunderstandings regarding the questions and in these cases the researcher tried to rephrase the questions. To this point the theories and methods are described and in this position the results from the in-depth interviews can be analysed.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Introduction

In this section the data obtained from the in-depth interviews will be presented and analysed. Figure 4.1 illustrates all the participants in this research. The quotations that belong to the codes are grouped into specific families based on the main concepts. The output of these families will be discussed in this section. The results section consists of two subsections that are based on the main concepts of this thesis: place attachment and adjustment. Within each subsection the data from the interviews will be discussed in combination with the arguments put forward from section 2.

Participant	Sex	Age	Study	Length of residence in Groningen (months)
1	Male	26	PhD: Faculty of Arts	8
2	Female	26	PhD: Faculty of Law	4
3	Female	24	Master: Faculty of Arts	14
4	Male	25	PhD: Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences	7
5	Male	20	Bachelor: Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences	9
6	Female	26	PhD: Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences	6
7	Female	26	PhD: Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences	7
8	Female	24	Mater: Faculty of Economics and Business	8

Figure 4.1: Participants in- depth interviews

### 4.2 Place attachment

The literature in section 2.2 suggests that international students can feel dislocated from their home which might influence the process of place attachment. However, it appears from the interviews that dislocation is not an issue. All the participants have contact with family and friends in China. Indeed, Participant 3 illustrates the importance of staying in contact with family in China: *"Yeah I think it's really important, because otherwise you feel cut off"* (Participant 3). Moreover, the participants refer to the town they grew up in as their hometown and the participants could describe a place in China that is important for them. This implies that the participants still have a connection with places in China. For instance, for Participant 4 the house of his grandfather is a symbol of family and is therefore an important place. The connections that the participants have with places in China are based on social networks, familiarity and a sense of belonging. Scannell and Gifford (2010) define this type of connection as social place attachment.

Section 2.3 discusses how a university community can be defined. From the interviews it appears that the daily life activities and social networks of the participants take place within the physical and social space of the local university community in Groningen. The literature in section 2.2 addresses the importance of creating connections to places in the new environment. Six participants have a positive connection with places in Groningen. Figure 4.2 is a map that illustrates the special places of the participants in Groningen. Some participants mentioned that their house is a special place and to protect the anonymity of the participants these places are not illustrated on the map. The places that are illustrated on the map are important for the participants, because they feel relaxed and comfortable in these places. The participants have an individual and physical attachment to these

places. The Vismarkt is a special place for Participant 8, because it reminds her of China. Every day her mother and grandmother visit the morning market in China and in the summer participant 8 joins them. The Vismarkt reminds her of the morning market in China and her life in China. According to Scannell and Gifford (2014) places in the new environment that are similar to home are favoured by international students. The literature in section 2.2 suggests that students can create new place identities through moving (Chow & Healey, 2008). However, it appears from the interviews that the participants did not develop a sense of belonging to places in Groningen. This might change over time.

Several participants feel comfortable in Groningen, because of the compact way of life. Participant 3 illustrates why she feels comfortable in Groningen:

*"I really loved immediately this very small and compact way of life. That you feel attached to the place very closely and you feel physically attached to the place instead of rushing from spot to spot. This is a continuous connection that I mean... I think it gives you a sense of safety. That you actually you know the city and you can experience it."* (Participant 3)

This quote illustrates that Participant 3 feels attached to Groningen and feels safe in the city; because Groningen is a compact city she can form connections with and understandings of the city. This point ties in with the argument of Cross (2015) who discusses that people feel attached to a place where they feel comfortable and safe.

Several participants feel at home in Groningen and think that Groningen can become a second hometown. However, Participant 6 still feels like she is living in a foreign country. Besides, Participant 6 often feels homesick and she thinks this might influence her opinion of life here. Students are more likely to experience homesickness when they are not attached to places in the new environment (Scannell & Gifford, 2014). Participant 6 does not know many places in Groningen, because her everyday space consists of home, university and the city centre. However, Participant 5 also does not feel connected to Groningen, but homesickness is not an issue for him. As is discussed in section 2.2 satisfaction, emotional distress, social interaction and cultural background are the contributors to place attachment (Terrazas-Carrillo *et al.*, 2014). Participant 5 does not have many social ties with students in the local university community and this might explain the absence of place attachment. Moreover, the literature in section 2.2 suggests that individuals can create an attachment to places through cognition (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). Participant 5 feels that he has not yet formed memories in Groningen, because he has only lived in the city for nine months. To this point the place attachment of the participants is analysed. The next subsection will discuss the adjustment of the participants to the local university community.

## Special places of the participants in Groningen



### Legend

- Buildings University of Groningen
- Terrain for retail business and hotels, restaurants and bars
- Terrain for socio-cultural facilities
- Parks and gardens
- Special places

0 0,125 0,25 0,5 Kilometers

Figure 4.2: Map special places of the participants in Groningen

### 4.3 Adjustment

Several participants mention that it is difficult for Chinese students to adjust, because of the different culture and language. For several participants the process of adjustment involves getting familiar with places in the new environment. For instance, some of the participants got used to the environment by cycling through the city or by walking around their neighbourhood. Participants who have migrated to Europe before adapted easier to the new environment, because they were familiar with the European culture.

The literature in section 2.4 suggests that challenges can influence the level of adjustment. All the participants face challenges while adjusting to the local university community. For example, Participants 1 and 3 mention that Chinese holidays are not celebrated in the Netherlands and that they have to celebrate these holidays in a different way. Moreover, Participant 3 illustrates how she feels about celebrating Dutch holidays:

*“These festivals national festivals like these big holidays. There you feel a bit like you are not really belonging here, because for example Koningsdag I can go to the party but still it does not make sense to me. I guess that’s natural kind of culture shock.”* (Participant 3)

This quote illustrates that during national holidays Participant 3 feels like she does not belong in the Netherlands, due to the different meaning of holidays. Several Participants mention that Dutch people speak in a direct way which is perceived as offensive. The literature in section 2.4 suggests that friendships with members of the host community can help international students to adapt to the host culture (Hendrickson *et al.*, 2011). Indeed, talking to students from the host community helped Participant 2 to understand certain Dutch behaviours. It took Participant 3 a few months to realize that some theories in the lectures are common knowledge for European students but not for Chinese students. This might cause misunderstandings within the classroom as is discussed in section 2.5. Additionally, some participants mention the difference in food culture and that they cannot get used to the Dutch food culture.

The literature in section 2.4 suggests that language skills influence socio-cultural adjustment (Wang & Hannes, 2014). According to the participants Dutch people speak English and therefore they do not experience a language barrier. However, some of the participants perceive that their English proficiency is not good enough for a comprehensive conversation. This might influence how well the participants can express themselves and communicate with members of the local university community. In addition, it is also suggested by the literature in section 2.4 that social capital has influence on adjustment. Some of the participants feel more comfortable with their Chinese friends, because they share a native language, often a shared culture, and memories of home, and it is also considered easier to ask for help. This corresponds with what is discussed about co-national friendships in section 2.4. Aside from Participants 2, 5 and 8, most participants perceived co-national friendships as an advantage. While, Participant 2 has Chinese friends, she would rather spend time with international friends because she wants to improve her English:

*“But like if you only do small gatherings with Chinese you will never speak English well. Because they always talk to you in Chinese. And you have to like find some opportunities for yourself to practice. And the whole thing about learning English the main point about learning English is practice right.”* (Participant 2)

This attempt to hang out with her international friends and engage herself in an English environment ties in with what Hu *et al.* (2016) discuss about Chinese students wanting to acquire skills and high grades.

Almost all the participants have international friends that they met at either the university or their student house. Almost all the participants engage with Dutch students in the university, only a few participants have Dutch friends. Participant 8 describes why she does not have Dutch friends:

*“Actually I don't have any Dutch friends. First because I don't know how to speak Dutch and second I think Dutch people little bit want to... stay in their own circles and don't allow it's not don't allow just I am not very willing to join them and they are not willing to invite me.”* (Participant 8)

This quote illustrates that it is difficult for Chinese students to develop friendships with members of the host society. This corresponds with the argument of Hendrickson *et al.* (2011) in section 2.4. Socio-cultural adjustment might be difficult for the participants, because of the language difficulties and challenges they face. This corresponds with Rienties and Tempelaar (2013) who argue that socio-cultural adjustment is more difficult for Asian students compared with international students.

The literature in section 2.4 discusses that psychological adjustment is influenced by social support and coping styles (Ward & Kennedy, 1999). Participant 3 and 8 suffered from emotional distress and reached out for support. However, Participant 3 did not receive the support she needed, because her problem was related to the Chinese culture and therefore not recognized by the psychologist. Participant 3 feels a bit disappointed about this and wishes that the university could reach out more to help Chinese students. Some of the participants changed their coping styles to adjust to the academic environment. For example, Participant 1 adopted an active attitude towards learning in Groningen. Similarly, Participant 3 realized that she can have and share her own opinions. Indeed, Participant 8 mentions that Chinese students experience a lot of pressure and that there is a high competition between students. She was surprised by the academic atmosphere in Groningen and noticed that students like to work hard but also enjoy their lives. In this regard, Participant 8 feels more comfortable in the academic environment in Groningen. This reflects what Jiandong *et al.* (2011) discuss about the academic pressure of Asian students compared with students from Western countries.

## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to gain insight about the role of place attachment on the adjustment of Chinese students in the local university community in Groningen. The conclusions can be drawn based on sections 2 and 4. This section will present the conclusions as well as a recommendation for future research.

### 5.2 Conclusions

The literature in section 2.2 discussed the influence of dislocation on place attachment. However, it appeared in the analysis that dislocation was not an issue. The participants have regular contact with their family and friends in China through video chat and still feel connected with their friends and family. Moreover, several participants feel attached to places in China and refer to the town they grew up in as their hometown. This indicates that the participants still have connections to places in China. Additionally, it is discussed in section 2.2 that social networks, satisfaction, emotional distress, social interaction and cultural background are the main contributors to place attachment (Terrazas-Carrillo *et al.*, 2014). It appeared in the analysis that several participants have a positive connection with places and feel comfortable and safe in Groningen. However, a few participants did not develop an attachment to places in Groningen. Homesickness and a lack of social interaction with members of the local university community might explain the absence of place attachment. Another reason for the absence of place attachment could be that the participants do not know many places in the new environment. In contrast with the literature in section 2.2, it appeared from the interviews that the participants did not form new place identities. Section 2.2 explains the three-dimensional framework of Scannell and Gifford (2010). It appeared from the analysis that the participants have a social attachment with places in China based on social networks, familiarity and a sense of belonging to a community. Moreover, the participants created an individual and physical place attachment in Groningen. Through the process of place attachment some of the participants feel more safe and comfortable in Groningen. This might influence the ability of the participants to adjust to the new environment.

The literature in section 2.2 suggests that international students assign meanings to places in the new environment through cognition and this is part of the adjusting process (Terrazas-Carrillo *et al.*, 2014). From the interviews it appeared that some participants ascribe meanings to places in Groningen through cognition. Moreover, several participants feel that they are not a foreigner anymore and are getting used to the life in Groningen. Section 4.3 discusses socio-cultural and psychological adjustment within the local university community. It appeared from the analysis that socio-cultural adjustment is difficult for Chinese students, because of the language difficulties and the challenges they face. As much as some of the participants desire it, they often do not achieve to establish friendships with Dutch students. Other participants are happy to have solely Chinese friends, though the extended networks tend to include international students through course participation. The social networks of the participants might influence their socio-cultural adjustment. A few participants adopted behaviours of the host culture such as outspokenness, critical thinking and started to behave more active in lectures. Overall the participants are satisfied with their lives in Groningen and feel they will adjust to life here. Almost all the participants will stay for a few years in Groningen. Over the years the participants might be more adjusted and have created more connections to places within the local university community.

### 5.3 Recommendations

A weakness of this study is the limited number of participants. For future research it would be better to conduct interviews with more participants from different interdisciplinary levels. The average length of residence of the participants was shorter than a year and this could have implications for the research. Further research could examine the influence of the length of residence on place attachment and adjustment. It would be interesting whether the Chinese students have established social networks with members of the host society and whether they developed more positive connections to places. Further research could examine the effect of dislocation on place attachment over time. More research should be done about how the University of Groningen can offer help to Chinese students.

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## Appendix

### *Data collection instrument: In- depth interview*

#### Questions:

1. Opening questions
  - What is your age?
  - What are you studying? (year)
  - How long do you live in Groningen?
  - What is your main motivation for studying at the University of Groningen?
  - Have you lived abroad before moving to Groningen? (if yes: Where?)
  
2. Place attachment and place identity
  - Where did you grow up in China?
    - o Can you tell me something about your town?
  - Can you describe your feelings about your town/ neighbourhood in China?
  - What are special places for you in your neighbourhood in China?
    - o What is your memory of this place?
    - o With whom did you visit this place?
  - How do you feel about the university community in Groningen?
    - o What do you think about the University of Groningen?
    - o What do you think of the students studying in Groningen?
    - o In what way are you involved in activities organized by the university or other societies?
    - o In what way do you feel connected to the university community in Groningen?
  - What are special places for you in Groningen?
    - o What makes these places special for you?
    - o With whom do you visit these places?
    - o Can you tell me something about what you have experienced in this place?
  - Where do you spend most of your time?
    - o What kind of activities are you undertaking in this place?
    - o How often do you visit this place?
    - o What do you think about this place?
  - How important is it for you that you have a connection with certain places in the new environment? (Why?)
  
3. Dislocation
  - How do you feel about your move from China to the Netherlands?
  - In what way do you experience a loss of connection with home?
  - How often do you have contact with your family?
    - o To what extent is it important for you to have contact with your family?
  - How often do you have contact with your friends from home?
    - o To what extent is it important for you to have contact with your friends from home?
  
4. Social capital
  - How did you develop social networks in Groningen?
  - What are the nationalities of your friends?
    - o How do you feel about having friends from China?
      - What are the advantages and disadvantages?
    - o How do you feel about having other international friends?
      - What are the advantages and disadvantages?

- How do you feel about having Dutch friends?  
What are the advantages and disadvantages?
- How often do you meet with your friends?
  - What kind of activities are you undertaking with your friends?
- What is your experience with Dutch students?  
How often do you have contact with Dutch students?
- In what way is it important for you that you have established social networks in Groningen?
  - What difficulties would you have/ are you having if you did not have friends in Groningen?
  
- 5. Adjustment
  - How did you get used to the new environment?
    - How did you get familiar with the Dutch culture?
    - What are the cultural differences that you have experienced?
  - What are the difficulties that you have experienced?
    - Do you receive support from the university?  
Are you satisfied with this support?
    - Do you receive support from your friends and family?
  - In what way is the language barrier creating difficulties in daily life?
    - Can you give me an example of the difficulties that you have experienced in daily life?
  - When do you experience homesickness?
    - How do you believe that homesickness influences your life in Groningen?
  
- 6. Closing
  - Would you like to add something that we did not discuss?
  - What are your plans for the future?