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Something for everyone? Changes and choices in the ethno-party scene in urban nightlife

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Chapter 6 The Asian Party Scene

Asian party, Friday night, winter 2007

At round midnight, my friend and I arrive at Club Escape in Amsterdam, where we stand in line to enter an Asian party. The atmosphere in the queue is tense. The bouncer in front of the door is horrendous and is constantly shouting that people have to show their ID to get in. If someone does not have ID, they are crudely waved away. We see many well dressed young Chinese women leaving the queue. We feel uncomfortable because we are not used to this sort of aggressive behaviour and realize that we stand out from the crowd, being the only non Asians and clearly much older than everyone else. After half an hour, we reach the door and the bouncer lets us in without giving us a hard time. He didn't ask us for ID, and he didn't shout at us; he's friendly, and even warns us that we are about to go into an Asian party.

Once inside the club, the awkward feeling of standing out from the crowd hits us again. We feel like schoolteachers chaperoning their students at a night out. Not only is the crowd much younger and smaller than us, but they are also dressed differently. Some people look in our direction as if they are wondering what these two old (native Dutch) women are doing at their party. The atmosphere inside the club is also not very relaxed; it feels like everybody is watching each other and showing off their outfits and dance moves. When we enter the dance floor and observe the crowd, we can't help thinking that lots of them are using this space as their own personal stage. Many of the people dancing in front of us give a perfect display of the dance moves of the pop icons of the day: Justin Timberlake (the guys) or Beyonce (the girls). They are not letting themselves go to the rhythm of the music, and nor are they casually chatting with friends while dancing. No, they are instead giving a demonstration of their latest well-studied and practiced dance moves. When I discuss my observations with my friend and typify the situation on the dance floor as being totally different from regular parties, she immediately puts me back in the position of being an oldie by saying:

'There is nothing extraordinary about this crowd except for us two. This is how kids nowadays dance and dress in clubs. Face it dear, we are from a whole different generation and our clubbing experience is different from theirs'.

She is right. Our first clubbing experiences were more than 10 years ago, and at that time we were dressed in second hand clothing and danced to Nirvana and Rage against the Machine. We probably looked freaky in the eyes of the older generation too. Keeping this at the back of my mind, I continue my fieldwork. I decide to change strategy and play the role that this clubbing crowd can relate to, that of the academic researcher studying a completely new field.

6.1 Introduction

The first Asian party in the Netherlands took place in the mid 1980s, but they really became popular in the early 1990s. Before then, many young people of Asian origin in the country did not participate in regular nightlife. According to DJ Irwan, one of the most popular DJs in the Asian party scene, a lot of young people were not allowed by their parents to go dancing in mainstream clubs. Instead, most of them hung out at Chinese bars and restaurants. By the early 1990s, however, many young Asians were getting involved in the Asian party scene because it was viewed as a safe place to meet other Asians (Kartosen 2004). From its first party onwards, the Asian party scene has undergone some interesting developments and changes. What follows is an overview of this and a description of what the current scene looks like, with the focus on its size, organization and popularity. In the third paragraph I will focus on the strategies employed by the Asian party organizations to attract consumers, while in the fourth paragraph the opinions and choices made by the clubbers are centralized. In the last paragraph, I will tie the strategies of the producers and the experiences of the consumers together by analyzing the choices of party *within* the Asian party scene that young Asians make.

6.2 The creation of an Asian party scene

The Asian party scene in the Netherlands was set up following the example of the Asian underground scene in the United Kingdom. These parties first received media attention in the 1980s, with reports on bhangra music, which originates from the region of Punjab in India, as a dance style. By 1997, bhangra music had been joined by a new concept, 'Asian underground' (Huq 2006: 68). This is an umbrella category which largely referred to a DJ-centered dance music scene exemplified by the alternative circuit in London, where bhangra music is alternated with indie-rock and hip-hop. This form of underground music, and the UK usage of the term 'Asian', which effectively reduces the largest continent in the world to ex-British India, principally Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, is directly linked to the country's colonial past. It is, therefore, important to bear in mind that the Dutch use of the term refers to a completely different Asian population.

Although those who originate from the entire Asian continent are included, in the Dutch party scene the term is mainly used to refer to second generation Chinese, Taiwanese and Indo-Europeans. Moreover, the great majority of audiences consist of young people with a Chinese background. Nevertheless, all of the organizers use the term Asian to promote their parties because of its global and trendy image. In contrast to the Asian underground scene in the UK, no 'Asian' music is actually played at an Asian party in the Netherlands. According to the party organizers, their crowds are too diverse to program, for instance, Chinese pop music and, they believe, the majority does not enjoy dancing to this type of music. Instead, DJs predominantly play hip-hop and RnB, which means that musically the parties resemble any other RnB event in the mainstream nightlife scene.

The ethnically diverse audience makes it difficult to classify this scene under the umbrella term of ethno-parties. In this study, the term ethno-party has been defined as an event organized by and for a single group. However, because a party is targeted at a specific group of ethnic consumers by appealing to a shared ethnic identification, such as Asians, labelling this scene as an ethno-party is justified. The Asian party scene was the first professional ethno-party scene organized in the Netherlands. One of the most popular

parties in the early 1990s was arranged in Beesd, a small city close to Utrecht, which mainly attracted young people with a Chinese background and some Vietnamese youngsters. People came from all over the Netherlands to the parties in Beesd because of its central location. Very soon, other party organizations then followed up on this success and started arranging Asian parties as well.

In these early years, two sub-scenes developed under the umbrella term of the Asian party scene. One of these predominantly attracted young people with a Chinese background and the events were labelled Asian parties, while the other was aimed at those with Indonesian ancestry and the parties were initially promoted under the term Indo. This term is an abbreviation of Indo-European, and is a nickname used to refer to the offspring of relationships between white men and native women in the East Indies during Dutch colonial times. Nowadays, the term is freely used by youngsters of mixed Indonesian and European descent.

After only a few years, the Indo parties started to lose their appeal and became less popular; a lot of their early fans started to join in with the mainstream clubbing scene as they were getting bored of seeing the same faces every time. Furthermore, many of these initial visitors had grown out of the party scene altogether and were now at a different stage of life, which didn't involve clubbing (Kartosen 2004), while many of the subsequent clubbing generation moved straight into the regular clubbing scene. In order to appeal to a larger group of consumers, some of the Indo party organizations stopped using the word Indo, while others adopted the term Asian party to expand their target group.

Size and popularity

In the heyday of the Asian party scene, which was around the year 2000, the parties were attracting more than a thousand visitors per event. Since 2004, however, there has been something of a slump, with both the numbers of people attending these events and the number of Asian party organizations falling significantly. There are several factors behind this decreasing popularity. First of all, there were too many Asian party organizations arranging the same kinds of parties. Secondly, the crowds were getting bored because the organizers of these events were not really changing their concepts.

Moreover, the new generation of young Asians is, according to some of the organizers, much more accustomed to clubbing in general and visiting mainstream parties.

At the moment, two new types of Asian party organizations can be distinguished. The first arranges parties for second generation Asians. These predominantly attract Asian youngsters of Chinese origin. The second type largely organizes parties for non-Dutch speaking Chinese. According to many, these events are for Chinese restaurant personnel who are much older (between 25 and 40) than the Asians in the other scene. What is more, most of these parties are so-called underground events and are not part of mainstream nightlife and nor do they take place in regular clubs. In order to make the scene studied herein comparable to the others I will be examining, only the first type of Asian parties is taken into account in this research.

Asian party organizations in the Netherlands

In this study, I have included the three biggest and most popular Asian party organizations operating in this scene at the time of my research, namely: *AJIN/Asian Escape*, *HuMan Entertainment* and *Santai*. As mentioned above, many other Asian party planners dropped out of this circuit, meaning that the Asian party scene in the Netherlands is now largely comprised of the three companies mentioned above.

AJIN/Asian Escape began to organize parties for the Chinese party scene in the 1990s. It is located in Amsterdam and arranged its first events in a club called 'Roxy'. This extremely popular venue burned down in 1999, after which *AJIN/Asian Escape* changed the location of their parties to another popular club in Amsterdam, *Escape*. *Asian Escape* always organizes its parties on the Tuesdays of the school holidays and, according to an employee, on average they attract between 600-700 people.

HuMan Entertainment was set up in 2000 with the aim of organizing 'something' for young people from the Asian community. The main purpose of this was to create a space where second and third generation young Asians could come together, make new friends, or meet future partners. These parties are organized on the first Friday of the month in a club in Bunnik, a

small but central town in the Netherlands. Every *HuMan Entertainment* event attracts more than a thousand people. The venue in Bunnik (named Brothers) is a very large club with several separate rooms. As well as the main hall, where the majority of the crowd dances to urban music, there is also a smaller room where another DJ predominantly plays trance (house). Although karaoke is regarded as a typical Asian activity, *HuMan Entertainment* is the only organization that has included it in its party concept.

Santai, the third and final Asian party business considered herein, is located in Rotterdam, and began life as an Indo-party organization. The organizers, a group of five close friends, were students when they started. As well as the cultural motivation of providing young Indos with a space where they could party together, the group also had an economic goal. As one of the organizers said, ‘organizing an Indo party seemed a nice way to make money at that time’. In its heyday as an Indo party organization, the company attracted more than a thousand young Indos to its events. A *Santai* party was seen as being very hip and cool, largely due to the trend setting image of its clients. After a few years, however, the number of people attending these parties dropped significantly. In order to combat this slump, *Santai* changed its strategy and started to promote the parties as Asian events. Nowadays, the majority of visitors are of Asian descent, with Chinese youngsters predominating. *Santai* organizes a party every two months and now attracts about 600-700 people per event.

6.3 Targeting the Asian audience: strategies of the producers

The Asian party scene has past its heyday. In the year 2000, when it was flourishing, there were many more Asian party organizations in existence. Some of these disappeared, while others changed their concepts in order to remain popular. Indeed, all three of the organizations included in this research have made such changes and implemented new strategies to attract consumers. There is a sense of competition between the three companies since their target group has become smaller and younger than was the case a couple of years ago.

Promoting your party as Asian

To a great extent, the background of the organizers, and the ways in which a party is advertised, determines its audience. *Santai* was set up in 2001, when the organizers were still students. Their goal was to arrange parties for Asians. As most of them were of Indo-European descent, their adherents were predominantly those with the same background. Furthermore, the name of the organization, *Santai*, means relaxed in Indonesian, which in itself provides a clue as to its target group. In Rotterdam in particular, this organization was very popular, and required little effort to promote an event as its popularity was passed on by word of mouth.

When many young Indos stopped going to Asian or Indo parties, *Santai* had to come up with a new plan. According to one of the organizers, they started to advertise more intensively in 2006. Not only did they use the internet more frequently, but they also started to hand out flyers in the streets and bars where many young Asian people gathered. Furthermore, several theme parties were aimed at attracting other Asian groups. In 2006, for example, *Santai* added the theme Vietnam to its events in order to draw more Vietnamese visitors. Although it still attracts Indo-Europeans, *Santai* now has a very mixed audience, though young people of Chinese origin predominate. Recently, the company has altered its course. Instead of promoting its parties as Asian, the English translation of the organization's name appears on its website. The emphasis is on a 'relaxed' party and distancing itself from other companies in the Asian party scene.

Ajin/Asian Escape was also established by a couple of students. The organizers were all of Chinese origin and, as a result, so were most of their audiences. The goal, when the company was set up in 2003, was to arrange parties for young Chinese clubbers. After a few years, however, the organization decided that it wanted more diverse crowds and expanded its target audience to include Asians. According to one of the organizers, the most important change was promoting their parties as Asian instead of Chinese on the flyers. As a consequence, the crowds at *Ajin/Asian Escape* are now more mixed, although Chinese visitors still predominate.

HuMan Entertainment began to arrange parties for an Asian audience in 2000. In contrast to the other Asian party organizations,

those behind *HuMan Entertainment* were not students but businessmen, who saw an opening in a fast growing market. Due to its professionalism, and the promotion and central location of its parties, *HuMan Entertainment's* events were a tremendous success right from the start. According to the organizers, they have not experienced any drop in numbers over the past couple of years. Certainly, the decreasing popularity of the Asian party scene did not seem to affect this organization. As a result, it has not changed anything in either its strategy or its business plan. One of the organizers attributes this popularity to its central location and its young, predominantly Chinese, audience. Young people still want to go to Asian parties because they see them as a safe environment in which they can familiarize themselves with the nightlife scene.

Advertising a party

All three of the party organizations use the internet to promote their events, and they all have their own website upon which forthcoming parties are announced. Another important section on these sites is the photo gallery, where pictures of visitors to previous parties can be found. These images play an important role when it comes to advertising a party because viewers can see online what kinds of people attend these events. Indeed, you are certainly able to get a clear idea of the likely crowds by studying these photos and checking out the styles of clothing and the ethnic make-up of the people in the images. As well as the photo gallery, the websites also contain a brief description of the organizations' history, goals and image. All of these elements provide online viewers with an idea about who the parties are being organized for and whether they would fit in with the target audience.

All three of the organizations also promote their events on several Asian websites. In particular, the youth organization, ASN, is an important promotion tool⁵. On its online agenda, ASN lists all of the events organized for young Asians, such as parties, festivals and workshops. This website is visited by many of the party companies' target group, and is therefore very important when it comes to promoting what they do. These events are also highlighted

⁵ See the website <http://www.asn-online.nl> for more information

on other forums and internet communities such as Hyves⁶, Hi5⁷ and MSN⁸.

As well as the online advertisements that are predominantly focused on the target audience of Asians, the distribution of flyers is also aimed at this group. All of the party organizations distribute their flyers at locations where many young Asians come together, such as restaurants, bars and clothing stores.

Location

The location of a party is an important factor in whether or not it is a success. All three of the organizations had different motives for their choice of club. *Santai*'s parties always take place in Rotterdam, with the organizers, as well as a large section of their audiences, being based in the city. *Santai* tries to change the venue in Rotterdam every year as it does not want its fans to get bored with the club. Accordingly, in discussion with its audience, a venue is carefully chosen. Occasionally, an internet poll on the company's website is used to ask for visitors' opinions about the music and premises. Furthermore, the organization works with a number of 'public agents' who constantly report back on the opinions of the consumers on the location and other aspects of the parties.

Ajin/Asian Escape parties take place in the popular club, *Escape*, in Amsterdam. For its organizers, the image of the venue is very important in their choice. Due to its central location, *Escape* is easily accessible by public transport and, as a result, attracts a lot of visitors from within the city. Since finding a parking space in Amsterdam is a horrendous experience, very few people come by car, unlike the clients of the other two organizations.

For *HuMan Entertainment*, its central location in the Netherlands is one of the key aspects of its success. Furthermore, the club it uses is next to a highway and has a large car-park. As a result, it attracts people from all over the Netherlands, who sometimes drive for more than an hour and a half to dance at this event.

⁶ See the website <http://www.hyves.nl> for more information

⁷ See the website <http://www.hi5.com> for more information

⁸ See the website <http://www.MSN.com> for more information

Door policy

In general, an Asian party starts at 11pm and gets busy round midnight, just like any other event in the mainstream clubbing scene. *HuMan Entertainment*, however, found a formula with which to attract a crowd right from the start, namely letting young women in for free between 11 and 11.30pm. According to one of the organizers, approximately 200 girls come into the club in this first half hour. A ticket normally costs 15 Euros, which makes turning up at the party early especially attractive for the younger crowd.

The bouncers who control the door are employed by the club. According to all three organizations, they can inform the bouncers about their preferred audience, but it is ultimately the doormen who decide who is allowed to enter and who is not.

As became clear at the beginning of this chapter, the bouncers at Club *Escape* are strict when it comes to the age of the clubbers and, therefore, ask for ID. At *Santai* and *HuMan Entertainment*, the ID checks are less frequent. *Santai* generally attracts students who are older than 18. *HuMan Entertainment*, on the other hand, attracts a much younger audience. According to its organizers, the majority of their crowds are over 18, although on the basis of my own observations and the opinions of the respondents in this research, the event is attended by many 16 year olds or those who are even younger.

At all three of the organizations' parties, those with a non-Asian background are allowed entry. However, all of the organizers said that they want to preserve the Asian character of the events. In general, they do not have a problem with non-Asian visitors as long as Asians predominate. According to one of the organizers of *Ajin*, many Asian people have native Dutch friends, who they occasionally bring to an Asian party. Non-Asians without Asian friends are allowed in, but are warned by the bouncers about the nature of the event they are about to attend.

Making it Asian?

Apart from the ethnic make-up of the dance crowd, most of the Asian parties do not differ from regular RnB events. For example, the party organizers rarely make any changes to the décor of the clubs to give them an Asian feel, apparently because it does not add

any value since the audience is not sensitive to any additional Asian elements. Indeed, according to the organizers of *Ajin/Asian Escape*, the only thing the crowd is interested in is good (urban) music and a nice location where they can get together and dance.

Santai is the only organization which occasionally does something to give a party an Asian flavour, sometimes handing out Asian snacks and small Asian gadgets like fans, which correspond to the theme of an event. It also works with visual media and occasionally displays Asian images on big screens in the club. One of the key respondents herein claimed to have stopped organizing Asian parties as he no longer wanted to be associated with what he sees as the shallow image of this scene. According to him, most organizers are just in it for the money and do not arrange proper cultural parties where young Asians can learn more about their roots. The other organizers, however, are all of the opinion that the dance crowd is not interested in any Asian elements; they just want to hang out together and dance to their favourite music.

Music

In general, (western) urban eclectic, which is a mix of RnB, hip-hop and other popular/commercial songs of the time, is the main style of music played at Asian parties. According to one of the organizers of *Ajin/Asian Escape*, they have tried to play Asian music at their events but the audience did not respond well to this. This opinion is shared by the other companies, which all agreed that their crowds are very focused on popular music and are not easy to satisfy because of their different opinions and musical interests:

‘The Asian crowd is a very difficult crowd. A large element do not want any changes, they just want a space where they can meet and mingle with their (Asian) friends, while the others complain that Asian parties always stay the same and do not follow innovative party trends.’

Many of the DJs involved in the Asian party scene have an Asian background. Moreover, almost all of the organizers of Asian parties have a huge network of Asian friends. This network is necessary to attract the appropriate audience. Most of the organizers are also

friends with DJs (some of whom are more professional than others), which makes the decision to hire an Asian DJ more straightforward. Some of the DJs I spoke to began their careers in the Asian party scene. As they improved their skills, many of them developed the desire to work at mainstream club nights. DJ Skilaz and DJ Mikey, for instance, said they got bored with the small Asian party scene and had moved into regular clubbing. Likewise, DJ Irwan, the resident DJ at *Santai*, is now a very popular RnB DJ outside the Asian party circuit. In contrast to the other two DJs mentioned, Irwan always makes time to play at a *Santai* party, even though he has a very busy schedule and is booked to perform at popular events both in and outside the Netherlands.

6.4 Choosing the Asian party scene

After setting out in detail the strategies that the three Asian party organizations use to attract consumers, it is now time to learn more about how young Asians make choices about which parties to attend. In this third section I will, therefore, shed light on the personal factors that played a role in these decisions. In paragraph 6.4.1 I will examine the social mechanisms of the processes of identification and differentiation, with the focus being on the importance of friends, feelings of belonging and social rules. The second aspect of personal factors, which are the cultural elements, is then analyzed in paragraph 6.4.2. Finally, in paragraph 6.4.3, the personal restrictions which determine choices negatively are unravelled.

6.4.1 The social dimension

During the interviews, most respondents said that they do not go to clubbing very often, with the majority claiming to go once a month or even less. Other favoured activities during the weekend were visiting bars or restaurants, or hanging out at home with friends. They claimed to be too busy with work and school to go clubbing more often.

Friends

Most of the respondents liked to visit Asian parties to catch up with friends. A small minority could be defined as frequent clubbers who

go clubbing almost every week. This group not only visited Asian parties, but were also regular attendees at mainstream club nights. A difference was that the young people who do go clubbing occasionally only do so with their Asian friends. On the other hand, the respondents who claimed to go out more often said that they have several groups of friends who they hang out with at different times; they went to Asian parties with their Asian friends and to regular club nights in a so-called mixed group.

For all of the respondents, going to Asian parties was seen as a way to catch up with friends, as one of the participants explains:

‘Asian Parties are actually for Asians and other parties are for other friends as well’.

Most of the respondents with a mixed group of friends said they never bring non-Asian acquaintances to an Asian party because it is ‘more of an Asian thing’ or ‘not for non-Asians because they do not know anybody’. As one respondent clearly explains:

‘I would never go to an Asian party if I was not Asian myself and I did not know many people there. Therefore, I do not bring my non-Asian friends with me to an Asian party; it is not fun at all’.

Feelings of belonging

According to Captain (2003: 268), Indos have created their own language, which contains a mix of Dutch and Indonesian words, to communicate with each other in person and on the internet. The creation of a specific language was also mentioned by the respondents herein. Likewise, the young people with a Chinese background named their mixed language as an important factor in their contact with their friends. Some said that ‘we understand each other better’, or that they ‘feel more connected’ through their specific choice of words. As they have all been born and raised in the Netherlands, the respondents can speak Dutch. In fact, for most of them, Dutch is their mother tongue and their ethnic language is their secondary form of communication. In the case of many Indos, most of them only spoke and understood some Indonesian words.

However, this shared language connected them as having Indo-European roots and was used to differentiate themselves from their native Dutch peers.

As well as language, many of the Asian respondents also *felt* different to their native Dutch counterparts. Some said that they shared a sort of lifestyle which differs from that of the native Dutch, as one of the male respondents explained:

‘I think it is just nicer to have Asian friends. You do the same things, watch the same Chinese soap series, you eat the same food and your family situation is comparable. It is just a feeling of being the same’.

When I asked for an explanation of this feeling, most of the respondents stated that they come from different families where ‘people respect their parents and the elderly’ and ‘family members are very close.’ They also mentioned that in their family ‘everybody is always welcome’ and ‘everybody is very hospitable’. They characterized their family as warm, respectful and close, which they contrasted to Dutch family units.

Furthermore, as well as these so-called ‘we’ feelings, the respondents also mentioned negative encounters with ‘others’ as a reason to go to an Asian party. Almost all of the subjects said that it was nice and comfortable to party with other Asians. Moreover, they also felt more comfortable meeting their friends at an Asian event. One of the main factors mentioned was that they would not attract attention at an Asian party since they were just ‘like the others [there]’ because they looked the same and did not differ ‘from the rest’. The respondents predominantly experienced these feelings when they wanted to go out in large groups. As a young female clubber explains:

‘I would never go to a Dutch bar with my large group of Chinese friends, because people will stare at us’.

The young women in particular cited the frequent remarks from a Dutch crowd as a reason to feel more comfortable at Asian parties:

‘Remarks like ‘you are so small’ or people saying ‘nihao’ to me irritates me. I mean what do they think, that we Asians all speak the same language? Or that we all look the same? I find that very rude!’

Several young (Chinese) women complained about these kinds of rude comments made by (predominantly) young Dutch men. These experiences affected their nightlife choices.

Many of the male respondents, however, named safety as an important reason for going to Asian parties. According to them, the atmosphere is less aggressive. As one of the male respondents said:

‘It is nice because at an Asian party you will never see fights, while other parties are far more aggressive. That’s why I prefer Asian parties over other RnB parties, you know’.

He continues his argument by saying that the Chinese are shorter than their native Dutch counterparts, so if there is a fight at an Asian party he can defend himself better than during a fight at a regular event. He, therefore, feels safer at an Asian party.

Social rules and flirting

Being well dressed and in a good and relaxed mood are all perfect ingredients for flirting.

Although almost no-one explicitly admitted that they went to Asian parties to find a date, or to meet attractive new people, by the atmosphere in the clubs it was obvious that everyone was eyeing up the others there and doing their best to show themselves off.

During the interviews, it was difficult to get the respondents to talk about their flirting experiences or ideas about finding someone special at an Asian party. Almost all of them told me that they predominantly went out to catch up with friends, and that meeting new and interesting people was not on their mind during a night out.

As one young Chinese woman told me:

‘I don’t see my friends very often; everybody is busy or lives far away. When we come together at an Asian party we stay together, to talk and have fun’.

Others replied in similar ways by emphasizing the importance of catching up and partying with their friends. The young women in particular were very determined to deny any flirting. Some of the men, however, told me that they mainly went to Asian parties to try to meet Asian girls. They said they were attracted to the women and saw the parties as places to meet them. These outspoken statements were, however, directly followed by the comment that it was very hard to approach interesting young women at an Asian party:

‘It is difficult you know, to approach a good looking girl when she is surrounded by six or ten friends. I mean I cannot talk to her, because everybody will look at me. You have to find a way to talk to her alone’.

Isolating a girl from her friends was not an easy thing to do, and when I asked him about his tactics, he told me he would try to dance closer to the girl and attract her attention by catching her eye, hoping that at some point she would move away from her friends. These tactics were mentioned by several of the men I spoke to. None of the male respondents said that they approach young women directly at an Asian party. In fact, many of them told me that they wait until the women make the first move. However, none of the young women who were interviewed confirmed this flirting technique. Nevertheless, it is likely that they did not want to share this information with either me or my colleague.

During the interviews, we also explicitly asked whether family members or friends prevented interactions with interesting others. The young women explained that although they went to a party with a brother or other male family member, they never felt like they were being watched. As they explained: ‘everybody minds his own business’ or ‘we have different groups of friends we hang out with’. Furthermore, many of the young women told me

that although people constantly look at each other, the actual contact mostly takes place at home, in front of the computer, when they look one another up on one of the many internet community sites, such as Hi5, MSN, or Hyves.

6.4.2 The cultural dimension

The majority of the Asian respondents said they preferred RnB and hip-hop, the music that is predominantly played at Asian parties. Furthermore, they shared the opinion that at most mainstream club nights, trance and house music dominate. Almost all of them said that they do not like this type of music, preferring what is played at Asian events. It is true that in the diverse programming of urban nightlife in the Netherlands, the parties where trance and house music is played predominate, but other styles of club nights can also be found. Hip-hop and RnB events are organized frequently, for example. Apparently, most of the Asian respondents are, therefore, not well informed about programming, do not like the hip-hop & RnB played at regular club nights, or use the musical style at Asian parties as a justification of the choices they make. During the interviews, why the respondents (incorrectly) claimed that RnB music was not played at normal club nights was never made clear. Musical taste, style of dress, and dance are very closely related in contemporary nightlife. Accordingly, it is in this cultural dimension that the way in which these factors are played out in the Asian party scene is explained.

Music

It was evident that most of the respondents were not really involved in musical programming, with the majority not talking passionately or enthusiastically about the music played at Asian parties. What almost all of them agreed upon was that unfamiliar or trance music, which does not have many lyrics, was difficult to dance to. Most of the respondents named Justin Timberlake and Beyonce, the pop icons of 2006, as their favourite artists. More specifically, they liked how these performers sang, danced and looked. Only a small minority claimed to prefer Asian music at an Asian party.

As a female visitor explains:

‘I would like it (if they play Asian music); I mean I sometimes listen to Japanese or Korean music. Last Santai party they played Indonesian music and I recognized it and that is funny, they should do that more often’.

Or, as another female visitor said:

‘Actually when you organize an Asian party, you should play Asian music but they don’t do that (...) why do they call it an Asian party where only Asian people come but no Asian music is played?’

During the interviews, it was predominantly the Indo youngsters who complained about the lack of Asian (or Indonesian) music. On the other hand, most of the Chinese respondents did not express any need to listen and dance to Asian or Chinese music.

Dance

Different types of music require different styles of dancing, and the ways in which pop artists dance in video clips are often copied. The dancing styles of young Asians do not, therefore, differ from those of the crowds at RnB parties, where the sexy dance moves of the RnB artists are often imitated on the dance floor.

As I have discussed in the previous sections, most Asians go to parties in large groups. Accordingly, on the dance floors of these events, you will see several groups of young people dancing together and forming a sort of circle so that they do not have their back to their friends. As well as dancing, people also like to talk and joke on the dance floor. So, instead of totally throwing themselves into the music and letting themselves go, much of the crowd at these parties interacts with each other and dances at the same time.

Dress Code

The majority of those who go to Asian parties follow the current trend of young people who go out wearing expensive, branded clothes. Most of the young women wore a tight top with a skirt or tight jeans. Most of the men wore baggy trousers with a T-shirt or shirt and trainers. Both the men and women wore eye-catching accessories. What was very popular were leather bracelets and silver coloured chains draped around the clubbers' pants/jeans. What was somewhat different was the hair of many of the Asian men. Some of the respondents used the term *Dragon Ball Z* to characterize these hairstyles. *Dragon Ball Z* is a Japanese cartoon action figure who has so-called spiky hair. According to many of the participants, a lot of young men in Hong Kong and Japan wear their hair like that.

Of course, there are as many styles of dress as there are people. The majority of the respondents did not display any specific interest in clothes, other than being aware of the need to dress trendily or casually. Some of the participants, however, were very involved in dressing up and showing themselves off. Neither the dress code nor the music played and the style of dancing were a reason to choose the Asian party scene. Those who participated in both mainstream and Asian club nights said they dressed the same at each type of event. The young Asians who only took part in the Asian party scene thought that the way they were dressed did not differ much to the crowds in regular clubs.

6.4.3 Restrictions

Social factors did play an important part in the respondents' identification with the Asian party scene and its crowds. The audiences seek out environments where they feel comfortable and where the social rules coincide with their desires and expectations. The opportunity to find a party that suits your tastes is, therefore, limited by the restrictions experienced. Some young people have limited access to money to pay the entry fee, do not have access to transportation, have had negative experiences with the door policy, or might not even be allowed by their parents to go out. These issues of accessibility have an impact on both their choice of nightlife, as well as on their nightlife experiences.

Door policy

The strategies that the producers employ when it comes to door policies affect the choices that consumers make. All of the respondents agreed that they did not have any difficulties in getting into a mainstream club night. None of them felt discriminated against and nor did they expect that any Asian would ever be refused entry at the door of a club. Indeed, the respondents only expected to have problems getting into a regular venue if they were in large groups. Accordingly, the door policies of ordinary clubs were not a reason to choose to engage with the Asian party scene.

The regulatory role of parents

According to the organizers of Asian parties, in the 1990s many young Asian women were not allowed by their parents to go mainstream club nights. At that time, a lot of Asian families were unfamiliar with clubbing. Many parents had a negative image of Dutch nightlife and did not want their daughters to come into contact with intoxicated (native-Dutch) young men. Accordingly, they only allowed their children to go to Asian parties, which were regarded as a safe and familiar alternative. These days, however, many parents have a less negative attitude towards Dutch nightlife.

One of the reasons for the reduction in the popularity of the Asian party is that, according to the organizers, most young women are now allowed by their parents to attend mainstream club nights. These days, most young Asian women start their clubbing in the Asian party scene and leave it within a year or two. A lot of them liked the presence of friends and their familiarity with the Asian party scene in the beginning, but got bored with the never changing concept as they got more experienced at going out.

Economic resources

In considering this book's first type of party, I have divided the issue of economic resources into the location and the costs thereof. The Asian parties all take place in ordinary clubs. Accordingly, particularly for the young Asians living in or near Amsterdam, Rotterdam, or Utrecht, the location of the venues where these events are held does not play a role in their choice of nightlife. Some of the Asian youngsters I spoke to at a *HuMan Entertainment* party

revealed that they drive all the way from the south of the Netherlands to attend. When I spoke to them during the event, all of them explained that they did not get involved very often in the Asian party scene because of the large distances they are required to travel. Most of them went clubbing in their own city more frequently, and only occasionally went to Asian parties. For these visitors, the lack of Asian club nights in their own area prevented them from participating in these events more often.

Asian party organizations charge an entry fee of approximately 15 Euros. This corresponds to the cost of getting into mainstream parties. Accordingly, the size of this fee has no impact on the choice between the Asian and the other party scenes.

6.5 Distinctions within the scene: the importance of social characteristics

Most of the respondents who participated in the Asian party scene displayed a preference for a specific party. Consequently, in this section I will focus on the choices young people make *within* this Asian party circuit. During the interviews, the young Asians I spoke to were very keen to draw distinctions between the social characteristics of the crowds at the various Asian events. Age and ethnic background were considered to be particularly important, and location was also regarded as a major contributory factor in the choice of event within the Asian party scene.

Age

Almost all of the respondents were aware of the age differences in the dance crowds at the diverse Asian parties. What they all agreed on was that at the *HuMan Entertainment* events, the dance crowd was very young. Those who did not go to these parties said that the female crowd was especially youthful, with many girls only being about 16. Particularly for the respondents who were older than 20, the age of the audience was a factor in which parties to attend.

As one male respondent explained:

‘You really do not want to go there. It looks more like a children’s party, full of young girls who giggle and try too hard to look cool or sexy’.

Or, as one more experienced female clubber very clearly put it:

‘How much fun is it to dance at a party where the majority isn’t even allowed to drink alcohol? These children should be playing with their dolls at home instead of trying too hard to look old and mature’

According to many of the respondents, these young girls ruin the atmosphere for the older clubbers. Those who were clearly annoyed by the young age of the dance crowd at the *HuMan Entertainment* parties preferred the Asian events organized by *Santai* or *Ajin/Asian Escape*. The young respondents, as well as those who did actually dance at *HuMan Entertainment* parties, also agreed on how young the dance crowd was, but they obviously did not complain about this.

According to the respondents, the difference in the door policy was the reason for the young age of the visitors to *HuMan Entertainment* events. The door-men didn’t ask for identification and, as a result, the venue attracted many young girls and boys. The bouncers at *Santai* only occasionally asked questions about the age of the clubbers, but never asked to see an ID card. However, the bouncers at *Escape*, who were in charge of the door policy at the *Asian Escape* parties, always asked for ID. Accordingly, for the young clubbers in particular (under the age of 18), the strictness of the age checks played a role in the choice of which party to attend.

Ethnicity

Although the audiences at Asian parties are labelled Asians, none of the respondents identified with that category. They all referred to themselves as being Chinese, Indo and Korean etc. Only a small

minority came to an Asian party with an ethnically mixed group of Asian friends; the majority predominantly parties with co-ethnics.

Almost all of the respondents pointed to the dominance of Chinese youngsters in the Asian party scene. Many of them did not want to talk about this in detail, stating that they didn't care about the ethnic background of the other clubbers because they hung out with their own circle of friends.

Only the Indos claimed to experience feelings of not belonging to the scene anymore. They felt as if 'their party was being taken over by young Chinese people' and, as a result, they did not enjoy it as much. Despite this, they still came to the parties organized by *Santai* because they were acquainted with members of the organization. All of the young men and women were very aware and proud of their Indo background. As well as visiting *Santai* parties, they all used the term Indo lifestyle to describe themselves. All of them were very active, either as participants or as organizers in other Indo (internet) organizations or communities. It is important to bear in mind that these young men and women are in a minority compared to other Indos, most of whom do not visit Asian or Indo parties and did not take part in this research. This corresponds with the findings of de Vries (1999), who conducted an extensive study of three generations of Indos in the Netherlands. She confirmed that the participation of third generation migrants in the (classic) organized and institutionalized Indo life is very low.

6.6 Summary

The Asian party scene experienced its heyday at the turn of the century. Now, almost a decade later, Asian parties are still popular, although with a smaller group of consumers. Even though this scene is described as *Asian*, implying that all young people of Asian descent are included in it, the vast majority of parties are filled with Chinese youngsters. The Indo respondents in particular felt like they were being pushed out of this scene, as if 'their' parties had been taken over by young Chinese clubbers.

The number of consumers of this scene has dropped drastically. Instead, many young Asians now participate in mainstream nightlife. In general, the dance crowd is relatively young. At one organization, a large part of the audience consisted of

young women aged between 15 and 18. As well as the young age of the visitors, another striking characteristic of this scene is that the majority of its attendees do not participate in it for long. Even after only a year or two, many of the respondents leave the Asian party scene and either stop clubbing altogether or move into the mainstream clubbing environment.

What is striking is that other than the name and promotion of the party and the ethnic make up of its visitors, the events in this scene resemble the RnB parties that can be found in regular Dutch nightlife. Cultural factors related to music, dance and dress did not play a role in the decision to choose between a regular and an Asian party; people dance to the same music, and dress like anyone else who goes to an RnB event. The majority of the visitors did not experience any restrictions when making their choice between the Asian party and the other dance scenes in mainstream nightlife.

Alternatively, the factors which make up the social dimension proved to be very important in the choice of the Asian party scene. The presence of (co-ethnic) friends and co-ethnics was frequently named as a strong, motivating factor. Many of the respondents identified strongly with their co-ethnic group of friends, and went to an Asian party to catch up with the people they know from all over the country. This strong identification made them aware of the ethnic background of 'other' clubbers and the differences in the ethnic make-up of the crowds at the different events within the Asian party circuit. As well as the issue of ethnic background, the age of a crowd was also regarded as a marker of distinction within the scene.