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Chinese 'Enormous Hospitality' versus Finnish 'Meeting among Friends:'

Guest-Host Positioning in China Finland Delegation Visits

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Abstract

The importance of co-operation with China has been growing in Finland lately in view of interest to attract Chinese investments and the increasing importance of China on a global scale. Finland has established governmental agencies to aid Chinese investment and ensured the co-operation of regional and local governments in the framework activities, such as town twinning. An important part of investment facilitation and wider co-operation comprises delegation visits by both interested nations to the other country. These involve enterprise interest matchmaking events, meetings with officials, company visits, etc. Based on interview and observation data, this paper elaborates on how the phenomena related to power, positioning, and accommodation between Finnish and Chinese side are manifested during delegation visits. This study was guided by the Positioning Theory by Harré (1991) which involves the need to attend to local moral orders and centers on the view that local distribution of rights and duties determine different kinds of acts and the way episodes unfold. As potential investors, recently Chinese partners yield a different kind of power, which also affects communication between sides. However, in some contexts the discourse of China as a developing country is present as well. Local hosting traditions and being in a role of a guest or host adds some additional variety and layering to communication dynamics. The presence of various discursive positioning elements is analyzed in such aspects as preconceived attitudes, initial visiting impressions, self-presentation, reception style, and the provision of food.

Keywords: China, Finland, guest, host, positioning, power, communication

Chinese ‘Enormous Hospitality’ versus Finnish ‘Meeting among Friends:’

Guest-Host Positioning in China Finland Delegation Visits

Introduction

After the global financial crisis the state-related investment promotion agencies (IPAs) in Europe particularly wanted to attract foreign investments, including those from emerging economies such as China (Schüler-Zhou *et al.*, 2012). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland released China Action Plan in 2010 which recognizes the growing role of China on the international scene and states priority areas for co-operation. A government platform called the China Finland Golden Bridge has been established to facilitate investment, and other agencies, including regional and local governments, are actively involved through town twinning, for instance. Delegation visits by Chinese to Finland and Finns to China are an important part of investment facilitation and co-operation in general and involve such activities as enterprise interest matchmaking events, meetings with officials, company visits, etc. This is a productive context for studying power and positioning, because this kind of communication is new in many ways. Finns are more often taking the position of the seller, offering investment targets to Chinese or trying to gain a foothold in the Chinese market. Finland and the Baltic Sea Region as a whole so far has not been a major destination of Chinese investments. However, there has been rise in Chinese interest in the region during recent years, and also more awareness in Finland regarding the growing importance of China and the possibilities related to Chinese investment (Kaartemo, 2007). The Chinese coming to Finland are interested also in technology transfer and learning from Finnish experience.

There is considerable research and literature concerning Chinese-American and Chinese-British negotiation (Gao & Ting-Toomey, 1998; Spencer-Oatey & Xing, 2003). Although Finnish – Chinese partnerships have also been addressed in previous research, for instance, by Wang (2007), there is lack of research focusing on power aspects of communication in this context, especially

regarding newly emerging dynamics of investment attraction. The case of Finland can offer interesting and different repercussions when compared to bigger industrialized countries of Europe.

The aim of this study is to explore the power dynamics in communication between the Finnish and Chinese representatives by exploring situated discursive meanings manifested in these work life situations. In particular, the paper considers how the phenomena related to power, positioning, and accommodation between Finnish and Chinese side are manifested during delegation visits. The insights provided in this paper can be relevant for other developed countries with relatively small populations when co-operating with China.

Theoretical Framework

This study has been guided by Positioning Theory by Davies and Harré (1991) that will be used for exploring power aspects in communication between Chinese and Finnish representatives. The Positioning Theory involves the possibility of the actor to position oneself in response to unfolding narrative and to change and adjust one's position. In all human interaction there are asymmetries in the resources for social action that are available to each individual in concrete circumstances. A cluster of short-term disputable rights, obligations and duties is called a position (Harré, 2012, p. 192-194). While using Positioning theory to analyze Kissinger's papers, Harré and Moghaddam (2003, p. 138) conclude that many important interactions between nation states take place in the form of small-scale interactions between very few representatives. The individual can be cast into certain positions by the dominant speaker, but positions can also be challenged or revised. The positions can be internally inconsistent and externally contested (Louis, 2008, p. 23). Positioning theory is suitable for addressing the dynamic context of Finnish-Chinese negotiations, where power relations are being actively negotiated. The theory will be used to develop an analytical framework to guide the data analysis. Data analysis will trace the main dimensions

along which power positioning occurs, revealing the complexities of the negotiation environment studied. Discourse is an important frame for positioning, and the study adopts the idea that

language is much more than a mere mirror of the world and phenomena “out there” and discourse is of central importance in constructing the ideas, social processes, and phenomena that make up our social world” (Nikander, 2008, p. 413)

Concerning the concept of power, the approach of ‘power as described’ (Jensen, 2006) will be utilized. This approach treats power as a description of how people define their own actions in relation to power, which makes it suitable for analyzing interview statements. Power will also be understood as being produced in interaction and within structures, where people are placed in different power positions and accordingly make communication choices (Isotalus, 2006).

Methodology and Materials

This paper is ethnographic in nature. Its main focus is on observing and analyzing communication and the meanings of its participants. Ethnographic research consists of noticing, discovering, and recording communication practices of those being studied (Carbaugh, 2005). Study proceeded from an inductive and qualitative approach in order to gain more nuanced understanding about power positioning in the context of Finnish-Chinese co-operation.

The main methodological approach of the study was interviewing Finnish representatives on regional or local and state level who work with Chinese investment, co-operation and trade facilitation. Some participant observation in meetings was also conducted to give access to naturally occurring communication, and to provide a fuller sense of the context. Nine interviews were done in cities of Helsinki, Turku, and Lahti (Finland) in the autumn of 2013. Access to interviewees was gained through an internship at the state investment facilitation agency in Helsinki and through observation project in Turku, obtaining further contacts from people interviewed. Helsinki was obvious choice of research as the capital of Finland and location of the investment facilitation

agency. Turku is the former capital of Finland and the third biggest city in Finland. Lahti is a smaller city, which however is growing as one of the main economic hubs of Finland. Interviewing representatives of Turku and Lahti offered opportunity of integrating local or regional perspective in the study. Observations were also conducted for six days altogether during a Chinese delegation visit from Tianjin (major port city in northeastern China) to Turku in October 2013, and a Finnish delegation visit from Oulu (most populous city in Northern Finland) to Suzhou (city close to Shanghai) in May 2014.

The ages of interviewees were from their mid-20s to 60s and they had experience in Chinese co-operation of between 4 and 20 years. Four were representatives of local or regional governments, three were team members of state investment attraction agency, and two were interpreters of Chinese origin working for the Finnish side. The interviews were coded IV 1-9 according the sequence in which they were conducted, and information about the interviewees is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview codes and basic data

Interviewee code	Gender	Country of origin	Title
IV1	female	Japan	Business Development Officer
IV2	male	China	Interpreter
IV3	male	Finland	Development Manager
IV4	female	China	Interpreter
IV5	male	Finland	Senior Advisor
IV6	male	Finland	Head of International Affairs
IV7	male	China	Business Development Manager
IV8	female	Finland	Customer Operations Director
IV9	male	Finland	General Manager

The interviews consisted of open-ended questions, broadly addressing the experiences of working with the Chinese. The purpose of the interviews was inductively to discover themes

regarding communication in the setting of Chinese investment, co-operation and trade facilitation and to encourage interviewees to offer their own definitions of particular activities (Silverman, 2006; Briggs, 1986). Interviewees were also asked how they develop meaning to their activities and problems. The interviews were conducted in English, recorded and transcribed, and the interview quotations used in this paper are direct citations. Five interviews were conducted in the workplaces of interviewees, two in a cafeteria, and the remaining two by Skype.

Regarding observation, field notes were taken during meetings organized for visiting delegations, which were later developed into more detailed accounts based on memory (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995). The delegation visit from Tianjin to Turku was in the framework of town twinning and involved meetings at a local university and with the local government. The delegation visit from Oulu to Suzhou was with a purpose to promote a Finnish company in China and involved meetings with local education institutions, local government, and a business consultant.

In the process of data analysis, the guest-host positioning related to delegation visits emerged as one of the main themes in data corpus, connecting together several dimensions along which positioning occurs. The findings presented in this paper include reflections on the differences within these dimensions whether one is guest or host, attributes associated with them, and discovered contrasts among them (Spradley, 1980). At least two of these dimensions are discursive in nature, so data were also seen as discourse materials in the framework of this study (Alasuutari, 1995). Four main identified dimensions along which power positioning and accommodation takes place will be explored in the following sections in detail, making references to specific interviewees' statements and extracts from observation field notes.

Big Superpower versus a Small Country

According to interviewees and observation data, one of the positioning narratives between the Chinese and Finnish representatives when visiting each other is that of China as a big superpower in

relation to which Finland is comparatively small and in a way, less significant country. In the setting of Finns visiting China, several interviewees recognized that when being in China, they or their Finnish counterparts were in a new way faced with the fact that China is a large country with overwhelming speed of development. Reflecting on her visiting experience in China, IV1 said:

I think that the first visit to China is always impressive (...) (It is) beautiful in China, the scale of China, and how fast things happen in China - you just have to be there, otherwise you don't believe it, it is totally different from the way it is here in Finland.

Being in China, one may be forced to change his/her positioning, as it often happens in interaction with something or someone new. Regarding her trips to China with first time visitors from Finland, IV8 shared following observation:

Without exception, everyone from Finland is positively educated when they go to China for their first time. They might have had a kind of old-fashioned thinking (about China) (...), but when they come back, they are always like – “Wow! It was so amazing and different!” They see how fast the country is growing.

At the same time, Finnish participants reflected on the need to face the reality that Finland is a comparatively small country, which may not be recognized by many Chinese. The views encountered in China about Finland IV5 summarized as follows:

First of all, in China (people) don't know what is Finland, and they don't actively know the (Finnish expertise) areas. We have been doing business all the time, but it is quite small compared to business between China and the bigger European countries, such as Germany. So in China, if they know what Finland is, then they know that it is far away in the North and it is small.

This was also obvious during participant observation activities in China on numerous occasions. One instance was during a visit at the university for promoting a Finnish company and getting feedback from one of target audiences –university students:

At first, the professor asks students if they know where Finland is. One of them answers: “Europe!” Another one says: “Nothern Europe!” “Good, very good!” – the professor praises them. Then there are a few jokes about the cold in Finland –the Finnish representatives says that there is still plenty of snow in Rovaniemi right now (in May) and that Oulu from where Finnish representatives come is about 3 hours away from Santa Claus.

So the starting point of the discussion was making sure that the audience knows where is Finland, and then turning to the cold and Santa Claus. On one occasion, the host met in China knew so little about Finland that he confused it with the Netherlands. It was later explained by a Chinese delegation member that sometimes this mistake is made, possibly because the Chinese characters for names of both countries are similar. In addition, the host was shocked about the small number of Finnish population:

As the director of education institution arranges the technical equipment for the presentation, he suddenly asks: “Is the product very popular in the Netherlands?” CEO of the Finnish company corrects: “In the Northern Finland, yes.” Director then asks: “How many people use your product in Finland?” CEO answers: “There are currently 700 users and 2000-3000 people have tried it. Finland is a small country - 5 million.” The director is shocked: “Only 5 million? That’s incredible!”

During the visit in China, an investor was met who had some connection to Finland and therefore knew more. He revealed that his wife has been working and his son has been studying in Finland. His son thought that Oulu is ‘the smallest city in the world.’ Oulu, however, is the most populous city in Northern Finland and the fifth most populous city in Finland. So even this person was more familiar with Finland, his perception was nevertheless strongly colored by comparison with the size of China.

In a situation when the Chinese visit Finland, couple of interviewees feel that sometimes the preconceived Chinese attitude is not for serious business:

They may consider that it is not a serious thing, but more like a leisure trip. Then they plan two hours of official visit, because they themselves don't plan to have some real co-operation. I think Finland is not important business in those people's mind. (IV2)

I guess Chinese companies, when they go abroad they are looking for the "big fish". There are not many investments, and I guess there is a problem of scale. (IV6)

According to IV2, "from the government side, they usually want to know the sizes of organizations, and after they compared with the Finnish side they are very proud of their numbers." When visiting Finland, the size comparison can also be communicated through jokes: "They make jokes on size of their organizations, and the size of China" (IV6). Sometimes Finns may be aware of this and try to make justification for small numbers. For instance, during the observation activity of Chinese delegation in Finland, the local host was showing the testing site at the university. Before going, he warned Chinese not to be surprised that there are not many people today in the site, because it is a holiday week.

To summarize, when visiting China, Finns may feel overwhelmed by the speed of development in China, and in a new way come to terms with the fact that it is a superpower growing in importance. At the same time, they may be faced with the fact Finland is not very recognizable and its population is seen very small in China. The positioning of the Chinese in some situations also leans towards the same discourse of big and booming versus small and insignificant. This may of course not be unique to the case of China and Finland only; China is big in comparison to most countries and likewise also in some other countries there may be very little knowledge about Finland. China has invested heavily also in some countries that are even less populated than Finland (Tonga, Pacific islands, and some small countries in Africa, for instance), so small population alone does not mean that co-operation or investment is not possible. However, the positioning arising from the stark contrasts of size and population numbers does imply a power imbalance.

Advanced Developed Country versus Developing Country

However, as indicated by interviewees and observed in delegation visits, also discourse of Finland as a developed country in opposition to China as a developing country exists in some situations. For instance, according to a Finn who has been joining in trips with the representatives of Finnish companies, occasionally they can have a superiority attitude when visiting China:

The worst scenario that I have sometimes evidenced for the Finnish person going there is feeling superior towards the Chinese. I am really focusing on the word humble, so I say - you can be a little bit proud of your product and what you are offering, but should also learn to be humble in a way that let's collaborate (IV8).

However, superior attitudes tend to change when being in China: "In their first time in China, it's like – wow! There are big cities there! I think they just thought that it is a developing country."(IV8) Some experiences on spot, however, may also reinforce the developing country impression:

What is pretty remarkable is how big problems they have in their environment. First time when I visited Shanghai, I could not see the sun because so much pollution is preventing it. I think that this has been the biggest shock, and they really have to think of that problem, because it can't be good for the health of the people there. (IV3)

If I go through Turku, I see buildings from 17th, 18th, 19th century in the city, but in some parts of big cities of China, you only see the buildings that have been built during the last 10 years. Almost no history left – maybe they should preserve more something which was built in 30s, 50s, and so on. (IV6)

Thus, regarding some problems evidenced, Finnish interviewees imply that they know a better way of doing things and raise the problems that they feel need to be addressed in China as a developing country.

Turning to the context of Chinese visiting Finland, occasionally, the discourse of China as a developing country is present in situations where Finns act as hosts:

I guess in Finland still today the tendency is a bit worry that China is something a bit strange, awkward. People don't know China, so if somebody comes and says I want to invest here, they might somehow get afraid or worried. There was a case in Kouvola (a town in Finland) some years ago with the China center, in which at first, the city was very much interested, but it turned out to be a mess then. And I guess Finnish still remember that there was something wrong with that Chinese initiative. (IV6)

Before it was quite challenging even to get Finnish companies to meet Chinese companies, they had fears of copying for instance, but now it is changing, because it is more in the media, it is more kind of inevitable that China is becoming the number one. (IV8)

When the Chinese visit Finland, within the narrative of Finland as advanced developed country, Chinese guests can be motivated to learn from and look up to Finnish experience, as shared by a Chinese interpreter:

I could see different Finnish high-tech industries, their advantages and what kind of strategies (there are) from the government to such businesses. I think it actually explains a lot of good stuff to the Chinese, because China is developing country still, and the (development) mode in China is unstable. When the Chinese heard about the Finnish social welfare system, they had a very positive attitude and praised that much, also taxation policies, and the Finnish environment protection. For instance, energy efficiency in Finland is above 90%, and in China it is only maybe less than 40%. During the development, many new problems pop out and China needs solutions. (IV2)

Referring to the quote above, the Finnish high-tech advancement is a prospective area of co-operation and learning where Finnish superiority and advancement is being recognized by the Chinese.

During observation of Tianjin delegation to Turku, Chinese eagerness to learn from Finnish experience was also observed:

At the start, the senior member of China delegation informs: “The government strongly supports co-operation with foreign countries and that technology transfer is currently a burning and worrying issue. We would like to see technology transfer with the involvement of experts and scholars in these fields, so that successful practices can be further replicated also elsewhere in similar co-operation.” (...) A member of Chinese delegation asks: “Is a teacher at the university in the area of high technology allowed also to have own company?” One of Finnish hosts answers: “Yes, but there are some hourly limits and calculations, and also strong regulations regarding who owns the innovation at the university.” (...) One of Chinese asks: “Is it true that in Finland, the amount of 100 000€ is available for startup companies?” Representative of the Finnish side answers: “Maybe not exactly that amount, but there is some assistance so that one can buy computers and start up the business; it is normally for the time period of 6 months.”

As this excerpt from observation field notes demonstrates, the Chinese are interested in policies regarding high technology development, want to verify some facts they have heard and get more details.

To summarize, based on the data of this study the discourse of China as a developing country is still present when Finns visit China, especially for the first timers for whom this impression has remained from older days and has not been properly updated. It is also possible that some Finns initially hold on to the remains of Western colonial ideology when getting involved with China. However, that may change during the visit. At the same time, some experiences of problems on spot may also reinforce the developing country image. The image of China as a

developing country can manifest also when hosting Chinese guests in Finland as cautiousness and distrust. When the visiting Chinese get to know the Finnish innovations and hear of good policies and arrangements, the image of Finland as developed country is strengthened. In general, those Chinese coming to visit Finland normally know more about it and have possibility to learn more than some hosts randomly met in China. If the Chinese have come with the purpose of learning from Finnish experience, they also tend to look up to it as an advanced country.

‘Overwhelming Hospitality’ versus ‘Meeting among Friends’

Another dimension of guest-host positioning repeatedly evidenced in data was related to the styles of hosting in China and Finland. The essential differences in positioning of hosts, referring to the interviewees, are best captured as Chinese ‘overwhelming hospitality’ versus Finnish ‘meeting among friends.’ Reflecting on his experience, IV6 compared the hosting styles of town twinning meetings in China and Finland:

When in China, you are invited to a big hall. There will be our delegation, (and from Chinese side) there will be a lot of people there, there is the leader (...), some assisting (persons), and then lots of people who I don't know why are there. Their rooms are big, and usually, they have the banderoles there – ‘Welcome the Mayor and the delegation’. We feel that it is a waste of money – doing this in such a big way. Why don't you do it in a more cozy way? Like meeting among friends – it is not a festival. I guess that is something about what we are sometimes amazed. We are just coming to meet friends and they have everything here. It's too big. (IV6)

Thus, referring to the quote above, the degree of hospitality and the grandeur of welcoming guests in China can be almost uncomfortable for a Finnish person. IV8, however, saw Chinese style of hospitality as positive and constructive for joint work:

I think that in China things are always going very smoothly. They are very service-oriented people, and I always somehow count on them and trust them, because they are result-oriented and they have this 'face' using ethics.

The 'generous hospitality' in China can be a pleasant experience when learning about Chinese traditions and special meanings through food, for instance:

When they order food, it is not just getting something on the table, but there are meanings - you have to have something salty, something sweet, you have to have meat and vegetables, so you have a kind of balance. These are beautiful moments and experiences; you notice that someone has been carefully planning this according to the old tradition. (IV6)

When talking about the style of hosting, some Chinese participants of the study used the occasion to explain the local traditions and took certain pride in them. For instance, during delegation meeting, as we returned to the table and to the green tea served, Chinese business development manager turned our attention to Chinese customs: "You see – I am firstly pouring tea to the hosts, then to you and lastly, to myself – that is the Chinese way." A Chinese interviewee explained the philosophy behind seating in Chinese culture when the matter was brought up:

It is about feng shui; everything is bonded in Chinese culture, so in those conditions the host and the least important person is closest to the door. You have to think of convenience for the host and the guest, so you give more peaceful, convenient seat for the guest. (IV4)

To summarize, both interview and observation data indicate that generous hospitality is seen as distinct feature of Chinese traditions, and at the same time on some occasions it can also be a subtle form of soft power to impress or even demonstration of grandeur to an uncomfortable degree.

According to several interviewees, the style of hosting in Finland is remarkably simpler:

The scale is different. If an important (Chinese) delegation comes to Turku, we go to our City Hall. There we have beautiful rooms for a delegation of seven to eight persons and from

our side, we also have seven or eight persons. It is a small nice meeting room and we sit down there with our mayor and discuss the agenda, and I we feel it is small and cozy. (IV6)

In Finland, we host mostly as Finns do. Of course we are polite, but we don't have this kind of overwhelming hospitality as in China, so sometimes the meetings are quite practical. (IV8)

Provision of food for Chinese in Finland is one area presenting various options of approach.

Several interviewees would bring Chinese to Finnish restaurants, feeling they should adjust and try something local:

I don't bring Chinese delegation to Chinese restaurants; I usually bring them to some Finnish restaurant. I can observe that they see some Asian side, but ... once you are in Finland, you should try some Finnish food. I suppose they do ok. (IV1)

Some Finnish interviewees, however, felt that in some occasions Chinese restaurants are still a better choice. IV3 has concluded the following from his own hosting experience:

The guys who don't speak any English have not been abroad would like to have Chinese food.

Also we give them to drink warm water, hot water is pretty enough to keep them satisfied. (IV3)

Due to the presence of Chinese population in Finland, the Chinese have the option of visiting Chinese restaurants and this preference was also sometimes catered to by the Finnish side. Several Chinese interviewees who have been involved in hosting visits said that the Finnish food arrangements can seem too simple to the visiting Chinese or not suited to their taste, especially when Finnish or more generic Western food is being served:

Some Finnish coordinators couldn't understand oriental manners when they arrange the food. For instance, they ordered some Hesburger (largest hamburger restaurant chain in Finland) food to the hotel as dinner, but for the Chinese, it is too simple. And some kind of main dish, it is not enough portions for the Chinese, they are not satisfied, and it's not enough for fill up their hunger. But if they could understand Chinese manners, they try to get as much as possible to satisfy the Chinese visitors. (IV2)

In China, we really have a huge food selection, so when they come to Finland, I think at first, they like salmon fish. But if someone from a spicy food county comes, then they would feel that the Finnish food is tasteless, like nothing - did chef forgot to put anything there? (IV4)

Thus, in positioning of hosting there are differences which can be traced back to the representation of hosting traditions. Interviewee's statements suggest that the Chinese way of hosting oftentimes involves overwhelming and generous arrangements based on their traditions. Chinese generous hospitality implies showing power and ability to host well. Results of the study also suggest that Finnish, in contrast, position themselves more simply with the guests. Different Finnish hosts report having different approach regarding food – some expect Chinese to adjust and offer them local food, some try to accommodate the Chinese by providing them food at local Chinese restaurants.

Power of the Host versus Awkwardness of the Visitor

Finally, one dimension in data regarding positioning deals with the possible awkwardness in a role of guest as opposed to control and power that the host possesses. It was observed in visiting situations both in China and Finland and also found in the statements of interviewees. As a guest, one can feel in a lower position of power due to lack of familiarity with the situation and perceived local norms, which is especially true of the first-timers:

It depends a lot on the Finnish counterpart, do they have some experience in China or not.

With the very first timers you can expect certain kinds of situations in China; they don't have a clue how to address the attention of Chinese counterparts. (IV8)

The more you start to understand the mentality, how people speak to each other and discuss with each other, how they have to consider who is higher in the organization, who gets orders from whom and what are the cultural backgrounds for some of behaviors, the more relaxed you are and can enjoy the situation more. But if you don't understand some things, you wonder - why are they acting like that? Why are they are discussing like that? (IV6)

Thus, experience can give more leverage with the other side, which is of course not only true in this context, but in various interactions in general. The gradual adjustment and learning process of Finnish representatives while visiting China IV8 characterized the following way: “They are always positively surprised, and then they learn, they learn how to communicate, every time – better and better.” Even if Finns learn about China ahead of the visit, there can be some unexpected situations, referring to observation experience:

The Finnish CEO gives to Chinese director her business card by holding it with both hands and slightly bowing: “I learned you have to use both hands when giving your card.” To this, the Chinese host answers abruptly: “I don’t have my business card!”

Thus, there may be an overrepresentation of what a Finn ‘should’ do in China, and most of the time, Chinese counterparts easily understand that their interlocutors may have different habits.

Turning to the situation when Chinese visit Finland, they also may display some initial awkwardness, as an interpreter of a Chinese origin has observed:

There should be more preparation before they come to this trip - some investigation or some material they can read from the websites, so they can ask more professional questions, because Finns don’t like very obvious questions. Chinese who haven’t been to Finland or any European country, they ask me if I have been in Finland for business or study and about my personal things or my personal opinions about certain things. It is acceptable, but not so relevant during meetings of the visit when focus is expected to be on co-operation and topics presented by Finnish hosts. (IV2)

According to IV4, Chinese tend to be hesitant about the local norms when abroad, so one way of approaching situation is to watch and see what the host will do:

There is no certain rule, especially when Chinese are the guest; you follow the host’s rules. Then they usually will observe - if the Finns are like that, we can sit wherever. (IV4)

There can be moments of confusion as well, as evidenced during delegation visit observation. When passing through the door mixed with Finnish hosts, several times there was confusion among Chinese regarding who should go first (male/female, junior/senior members of delegation, Finn or Chinese), who should hold the door, and the sequence of passing through. With little delay, however, by encouraging each other, everyone was passing through in the end.

Chinese also may feel a bit anxious when presenting themselves in Finland, as observed during the visit from Tianjin to Turku:

Chinese delegation leader did the self-introduction the following way: “We are happy for the meetings and lunch organized and we have come based on the twinning relations between Turku and Tianjin, so we feel just like visiting a relative. I thank you for allowing us to come to visit and hope that it is possible to feel relaxed while talking about the work. Our university is a very important university in China.”

The base of twinning ties was further referred to in his speech several times later on. From this way of self-presentation it appeared that he felt need to justify their being here, and observing his non-verbal communication suggested feeling a bit insecure.

To summarize, the first-time awkwardness and powerlessness in some ways were present in both sets of data – regarding Finns visiting China and also Chinese visiting Finland. With more experience, however, local norms and conditions tend to become more familiar, which allows one to start to feel more comfortable. While there is no fixed local norm in most situations perhaps, and the hosts may feel awkward too, they are still more familiar with the places and arrange routines of the visit, which enhances the feeling of being in control and therefore having power.

Discussion

This study was mainly guided by the Positioning Theory by Harre (1991), exploring the subtleties of positioning and factors affecting it in the context of Finnish-Chinese co-operation visits. It can be concluded that the power positioning in the context of mutual delegation visits between China and Finland is mainly affected by such factors as preconceived discourses regarding power positioning between both countries, location of the visit and visiting impressions, the hosting traditions of the country, and being in the role of host or guest. The variety of the guest-host power positioning scenarios could be traced along following main dimensions – China as big superpower versus Finland as small country, Finland as advanced developed country versus China as developing country, Chinese ‘overwhelming hospitality’ versus Finnish ‘meeting among friends,’ and the power of the host versus the awkwardness of the visitor. The preconceived power positioning can shift even in the course of one visit, as in the example of a Finn going to imagined old-fashioned developing country China and then being overwhelmed by the big cities and speed of the development there.

Thus, such discourses as rising superpower versus small country or advanced developed country versus developing country are the positioning resources that coexist and are both present, taking turns and getting manifested in different situations. It appears that when visiting Finland, Chinese are more faced with the reality that Finland is a developed country, and Finns in a new way face the reality that China is big, rising superpower when being in China. Thus, the location of the visit tends to shift the power dynamics more to the favor of the hosting country. It can also be claimed that it depends on the roles of the delegation members and purpose with which the delegation has come. If Chinese come as investors to Finland, the discourse of China as a rising superpower will be very present, and the same way also when Finns go to China with a purpose to sell their products and promote their companies. According to Isotalus (2006), a seller tends to be in a lower power position than the buyer. However, if the Chinese delegation has come with the

purpose to learn from the Finnish side and are interested in technology transfer, the dominating discourse will be that of Finland as developed and China as developing country. In those cases, Finland as an advanced developed country is in the power position as a country people look at, having a well established influence. Occasionally, some problems evidenced on spot in China, such as pollution and the loss of historical heritage can strengthen the image of it as developing country in the eyes of Finnish representatives.

The role of guest or host adds more layering to the power dynamics between sides. According to Isotalus (2006), host tends to be in a more powerful position. Also according to data of this study, hosting side in most occasions appears more powerful, and the arrangements of hosting that the guest normally follows depend on it. Guest is in a less powerful position, possibly feeling awkward at first due to unfamiliarity with the perceived local norms. This, of course, is not unique to the situation when interlocutors come from different countries. While the position of the host is a service position to the guest, it also exerts much power on what is happening and on the norms of communication, in regard to dictum to “when in Rome, do as Romans do.” While not all Romans do the same, but still, at least on the level of perception the idea of local ways of doing things tends to affect the visitors. Duties of host include the visit arrangements and provision of food which is a way to communicate local customs. If that results in positive experiences, then the local traditions can be a form of soft power, elevating the power position of the host country in the eyes of the guest. Finnish participants of the study occasionally mentioned the importance of feeling relaxed when hosting, making arrangements simple and friendly. Chinese, on the other hand, while oftentimes showing overwhelming generosity and hospitality, also may make it a power display in a sense. Thus, for the Finnish side the generosity of welcoming in China can feel almost uncomfortable, while the arrangements in Finland may seem too simple for the Chinese.

While the study could trace some patterns of what tends to happen in visiting situations, the variety of scenarios depending on each individual is also apparent. Referring to Davies and Harré (1990, p. 53),

the illocutionary forces of each speaker's contributions on concrete occasions of conversing can be expected to have the same multiplicity as that of the culturally available stereotypes as they are individually understood by *each* speaker.

One example of that were different individual approaches concerning whether to provide Chinese in Finland food at a Finnish restaurant, making them to adjust, or rather to accommodate them by bringing them to a Chinese restaurant.

The duty of the guest is self-introduction whereby one may experience anxiety and various perceptions putting one into vulnerable position. Especially first timers may feel more awkward and therefore somewhat powerless when visiting the other country. For instance, the fact Chinese in China may not be familiar with Finland and may see numbers associated with its population or businesses very small may feel uncomfortable for Finns. The Chinese, from the other hand, may feel some insecurity, for instance, regarding the perceptions of their purposes of coming.

The discourse of China as big, powerful country on the world stage is visible in several aspects in guest-host positioning. Posing a question – where is China or what is China in Finland would be very strange, as necessity of that knowledge is self-evident. However, when Finns go to China, a very basic explanation regarding what is Finland can be very relevant and necessary. Likewise, Chinese normally would not consider offering Finns Finnish food when visiting; there also may not be Finnish restaurants in the area at all. The possibility of bringing guests to a Western food restaurant in China cannot be ruled out, but was not found from data of this study. However, when Chinese visit Finland, offering them food at a Chinese restaurant is a viable alternative alongside possibility of offering the food at a Finnish restaurant.

To conclude, the guest-host positioning is influenced by discourses of participants, the location of the visit, the traditional styles of hosting, and the roles participants take in a particular situation.

According to Davies and Harré (1990, p. 57-58),

persons as speakers acquire beliefs about themselves which do not necessarily form a unified coherent whole. They shift from one to another way of thinking about themselves as the discourse shifts and as their positions within varying story lines are taken up.

The positioning is a subjective matter, so it is not possible to evaluate how “correct” are these perceptions, but simply recognize that they exist and have affect on interactions. The complex layering of various discourses present, the roles and purposes of those involved, the location and situational context all contribute to how the power relations between Chinese and Finnish representatives unfold. Most of these factors would not be unique to this situation only, and certainly this is not exhaustive list of what may affect the positioning and accommodation. While the most generally applicable positioning dimension is that of guest and host, the two power discourses - big vs. small and developed vs. developing could be topical also for some other developed countries of comparatively small populations. It appears that the most specific dimension coming out of this study is the one chosen as the title of this paper - “overwhelming hospitality” vs. “meeting among friends.”

The perspective and the positioning of the Finnish side could be analyzed in more detail, as interviews were done in Finland; however, observation and some recounted situations to some degree made it possible to infer also about the positioning of the Chinese side. In addition, among interviewees in Finland, there were three Chinese and one Japanese, which enabled some integration of a Chinese or Asian perspective. The Chinese delegations tend to share some information and concerns with them which they shared when giving interviews.

Concerning the limitations of this study, it is a small scale situated study partly based on interviews. People's answers in the interview at times do not have a stable relationship with how they would behave in naturally occurring situations (Silverman, 2006). However, as the aim of the study was get to know the meanings participants in China Finland co-operation facilitation attribute to this context, the results certainly have provided relevant information on their perceptions. The purpose of this paper was to reveal the fascinating every-day reality of people doing the job of co-operation, trade, and investment between China and Finland. In many instances, the observation activities supported points shared in the interviews, which allowed making a stronger argument about a certain pattern in guest-host positioning.

Although the study is small scale, its results may be relevant also in wider contexts, as similar trends may be observed regarding other developed countries of comparatively small populations when co-operating with China. The views and perceptions of the visiting Chinese regarding the power positioning in visiting situations would be important to consider in more detail in the further research.

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