

INTERCULTURAL FRIENDSHIP DEVELOPMENT BETWEEN FINNISH  
AND INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

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Fei Peng

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**UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ**

Faculty <b>HUMANITIES</b>	Department Department of Communication
Author Fei Peng	
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<p>Abstract</p> <p>Intercultural friendship is believed to greatly enhance the satisfactory living and academic success of overseas students and facilitate cultural understanding of both international and local students. However, there is little research literature on intercultural friendship development, especially in the Finnish context.</p> <p>This thesis is based on studies of relationship development, friendship development and intercultural friendship development, with the aim of understanding the development process of intercultural friendship and identifying factors involved in intercultural friendship development. This study was conducted by means of qualitative research through interviews of a sample of eight students who have experience in intercultural friendship and through a comparison between intracultural friendship among Finns and intercultural friendship between Finnish and international students.</p> <p>The investigated model on intercultural friendship development in the research included an initial stage and a development stage. Motivation, friendship choice and initial contact were studied in the initial stage. The changing of stages of friendship development and relational identity formation were studied in the development stage. This research helps in understanding the nature of intercultural friendship development and in identifying factors involved in the intercultural friendship development process.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Finnish society has undergone continuing demographic changes due to the annually increasing amount of foreigners coming to Finland. According to a review of Finnish population structure by Tilastokeskus (Statistics Finland), from 1990 to 2009, the number of foreign native speakers in Finland has grown faster than ever with its peak in 2009 at more than 200,000, accounting to more than three percent of the whole population (Tilastokeskus, 2010). Among all the foreign native speakers, the Russians form the largest foreign community in Finland, representing one quarter of the foreign citizens in Finland in 2009 followed by Estonia, Sweden, Somalia and China (Tilastokeskus, 2010). As revealed in the statistics, Finland no longer seems to be a monocultural country if it ever was. Instead, the Finnish society is more like a global village. Finnish people have more opportunities to interact with international people in all kinds of different settings such as university. “The likelihood for individuals to form relationships across cultural or national boundaries is increasing as an outcome of globalization” (Lee, 2008: 51).

Pursuing a professional education abroad is one of the reasons why foreigners come to Finland. Globally, the growing trend of educational exchange is a prominent feature for the Post-World War II era (Bochner, 1977). “International students continue to grow in number worldwide” (Hendrickson, 2010:1).

The sight of international students in the campus area or in the company of Finnish students in classes is not uncommon. Take University of Jyväskylä as an example. From January to December 2009, there were “over 1000 international students from 88 countries, including 410 visiting students, 470 graduate students and 180 doctoral students” (University of Jyväskylä, webpage, 2011). Finnish students can choose to study in programs in which the language of instruction is English if they want to and all the classes in English are open to both international students and Finnish ones as long as they have the study right. Therefore, Finnish students have more chances to meet international students in multicultural classrooms where all students are

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encouraged to talk and work with anyone nearby who might come from other countries. They might start to form an intercultural friendship relationship with their foreign classmates.

There is a lot of concern about the wellbeing of international students, prompting researchers to study the problems international students encounter and provide solutions. International students are vulnerable (Sherry, Thomas & Chui, 2010) and deserve extra attention from the society to ensure their satisfactory living and professional achievement during their stay in a foreign country. Their lives abroad are full of challenges (Russell, Rosenthal & Thomson, 2010). They not only have to deal with adjustment problems universal to students (Zhou, Jindal-Snape, Topping & Todman, 2008), but also have to cope with a novel educational system, social lives and host nationals (people who are residents in the country where foreign students pursue studies) and culture in general (Sam, 2000). Even those basic elements of life such as food, weather, accommodation and local language may be problematic for them (Mahmud, Amat, Rahman & Ishak, 2010). Because of these challenges, they may have psychological problems such as cultural shock (Chapdelaine & Alexitch, 2004), stress or homesickness (Kegel, 2009). For instance, Pitts has identified four sources of stresses international students have, namely academic/language expectations, social expectations, cultural/value expectations, and travel/cultural experience expectations (Pitts, 2006).

The functions of their contacts with host nationals formed in the country of study are widely discussed and generally believed to be supportive in international students' academic and social adjustments in the host country (Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Zimmermann, 1995 according to Hendrickson, 2010). Relations with host nationals in general are "important factors of acculturation, satisfaction, contentment, social support, and success for international students studying in foreign universities" (Hendrickson, 2010:2). In Campbell's study on American students who had been abroad in exchange, most of the American students reported that the quality of international

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students' lives was determined by the number and quality of their interpersonal relationships (Campbell, 1980 according to Nicotera, 1993). These relationships can include acquaintances, classmates, friendship, close friendship and romantic relationships. Among all the relationships with host nationals, friendship is one of the most important. Firstly, friendship in general is an extremely important component of individuals' lives to satisfy deep personal and emotional needs (Hendrickson, 2010). Secondly, it is believed that forming friendship especially close or best friend relationships with host nationals can largely reduce difficulties of adjustment for international students in a host country (Ying, 2002). Klineberg & Hull found out that international students who established relationships with host nationals during their stays perceived more general satisfaction with their international study experience (Klineberg & Hull, 1979). Kim proposed that with strong ties with host nationals, international students are more likely to be advanced in the adaptation process (Kim, 2001). Through relationships with host nationals, international students are given opportunities to participate in daily activities with natives, to learn the culture and communication system in the host country (Kim, 2001) as well as to develop social skills (Li, 2010). Besides, contact or friendship with locals is said to ease psychological problems, providing emotional benefits or support for international students (Ward, Bochner & Fumham, 2001). International students who had more contacts or friendships with host nationals reported "higher levels of satisfaction, less homesickness, and less loneliness in their study abroad experience" (Church, 1982 according to Hendrickson, 2010: 3).

Intercultural friendship development is vital for the Finnish host nationals as well, as Finland is more and more international, as interaction with internationals becomes more common and unavoidable. Thus knowledge about relationship development and intercultural friendship development would be interesting to Finnish host nationals if they want to succeed in making foreign friends. Besides, from foreign friends, Finnish host nationals could learn more about other cultures, deepening cultural understanding.

However our knowledge about intercultural friendship development is quite

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scant. Researchers found that existing literature rarely emphasized intercultural relationships across national contexts (Lee, 2008). Therefore, a lot of effort is needed to understand the nature of intercultural friendship development. For example, the process of how one selects or sustains intercultural friendship would be one interesting topic to look at because the answer to it is far from clear (Nicotera, 1993).

### **A comparison of intracultural friendship and intercultural friendship**

Two main research genres under cultural studies on communication are cross-cultural studies and intercultural studies. “Most cross-cultural studies tend to be comparative” and “focus on communication within one culture” from an emic point of view whereas “researches on intercultural communication generally focus on communication between people from different cultures” (Gudykunst, 2003:vii).

Friendship study has had its existence in many different disciplines for many decades. Researches have been conducted from either a cross-cultural or an intercultural perspective. Research is still lacking for the comparison of intracultural and intercultural friendship despite the apparent importance of understanding intracultural friendship because of its positive relation with intercultural friendship.

The answers to questions such as whether and why (or why not) intercultural friendship could go as far as intracultural friendship and whether the standard of closeness is the same in intracultural friendship and intercultural friendship would help us explore deeper in the intercultural friendship development. Levinger and Raush proposed that the closeness of a relationship could contain at least 5 elements: 1) frequent interaction; 2) between spatially near partners; 3) who share significant common goals; 4) exchange personal disclosures; 5) care deeply about one another (Levinger & Raush, 1977: 138). One categorization of a close relationship could include friendship, kinship, parents and a romantic relationship (Levinger & Raush, 1977). However, Honeycut and Bryan raised questions on the universalism of this categorization, claiming that individuals can define and judge closeness of a relationship by their own perception.



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“Some people consider their casual relationships to be friendship whereas others reserve the term friend for a close relationship” (Honeycut & Bryan, 2011: 300). Here in the present thesis a close relationship only refers to close friendship because of my focus on friendship. Furthermore, the judgment of closeness of a relation may also be influenced by culture. Cross-culturally speaking, some cultures may regard close friends closer than the other cultures. For instance, close friendship in China has a higher intimacy than in western culture. (Gummerum & Keller, 2008) However, it is uncertain whether a person will judge the degree of closeness of a relationship with co-nationals and host nationals by the same standard because no academic efforts have been made to compare this dimension of intracultural friendship and the same dimension of intercultural friendship. But the answer to that question is important because it may reflect a gap of understanding of the friendship development process if empirical data could prove that individuals evaluate the closeness of relationships with co-nationals and that of the relationships with host-nationals by different standards.

Intracultural relationship studies produce rich cultural data on norms and values which is not the main focus in intercultural relationship studies. Bennett once commented that studies of intercultural communication by its nature do not generate comprehensive descriptions of one specific culture (Bennett, 2007). “Most of intercultural theories were developed or explained specific aspects of intercultural communication” (Gudykunst, 2003: viii) such as adaptation (Kim, 2001), intercultural competence (Deardoff, 2009) and conflicts (Gudykunst, 2005). Intracultural approach compensates intercultural approach by producing comprehensive cultural-specific data within one country (Asante, Miike & Jing, 2008).

Such cultural knowledge could be a great help to the development of an intercultural friendship. Intracultural knowledge or cultural-specific knowledge seems to be important in intercultural interaction for a variety of reasons. For example, in Byram & Nichols’ intercultural competence model, knowledge is included as a necessary component besides attitude and skills, indicating the importance of knowledge in appropriate intercultural interaction (Byram &

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Nichols, 2001). Deardorff commented on Ting-Toomey's conflict negotiation competence model that knowledge, among all the components, is the most important one to manage conflict situations competently (Deardorff, 2009). Without cultural-specific knowledge, people cannot realize their "ethnocentric lenses" which are used to evaluate behaviors in an intercultural conflict situation. "Knowledge enhances self-awareness and other-awareness" (Deardorff, 2009: 104). With cultural knowledge of the host nation, people are able to be aware of the possible cultural explanation of the other's behavior which is seemingly problematic in people's own cultural frame of reference and therefore may avoid misunderstanding or even conflict (Deardorff, 2009).

International students must acquire cultural-specific knowledge (knowledge of intracultural communication) about different linguistic or non-linguistic codes of the host culture in order to understand and respond properly to different social interactions with the host nationals (Kim, 2001). Furthermore, without a deep understanding of the host culture including knowledge of norms, beliefs and values in a certain context (Kim, 2001), people are consciously incompetent (Jolles, 2005) in intercultural interaction. As Kim illustrated in her intercultural theories, knowledge of verbal codes and non-verbal codes alongside a deep understanding of local culture including values, beliefs (Kim, 2001) and contextual norms are crucial to be fully competent.

Collectively, a comparison between intracultural friendship development among Finns and intercultural friendship development between Finnish and international students may contribute to the understanding of the development of intercultural friendship. The inquiry of Finnish perceptions of intracultural friendship development may provide cultural-specific knowledge of Finnish culture, vital for international students to competently interact with Finnish students. Despite the importance of such comparison and inquiry, however, few empirical studies on intercultural friendship have been done through a comparative perspective on intracultural friendship and intercultural friendship. Meanwhile, few studies on Finnish intracultural friendship are available in English.

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In order to conduct a valid research, I started searching relevant literature on friendship and intercultural friendship development to know what has been studied on the topic and prepare myself with knowledge necessary for the research. After the literature review, I posed some research questions for my research based on what I learned from the previous studies on the same field.

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## 2 CONCEPTUALIZING INTERCULTURAL FRIENDSHIP

### 2.1 Friendship

Friendship is a voluntary relationship between individuals who choose which individuals come to know on purpose (Wright, 1991). In friendship, each other treats the other as a unique, genius and irreplaceable person rather than a simple role occupant, driven by external constraints (Wright, 1991). It is unlike in working environment or in family where roles are imposed upon individuals who are obligatory to bond with the others in the same work place or family.

In Wright's definition, individuals in a friendship relationship have responsibilities to be emotionally supportive, proactively provide assistance, keep up the confidence of the other and back up for each other (Wright, 1991).

Like most definitions of friendship which were drawn from western experience because friendship studies have traditionally focused on western countries (Keller), Wright's definition roots in western society. The universality of his concept is unclear because he did not examine many variables such as age, gender, region, and cultural background which Adams, Blieszner & de Vries believed to have impact on understanding of friendship concept (Adams, Blieszner & de Vries, 2000).

Indeed many researchers found that the effect of culture on perception of friendship cannot be neglected. Every culture in the world acknowledges and encourages friendship (Nicotera, 1993). In Li's master's thesis on intercultural friendship between Chinese and American people, she mentioned that the function, form and character of the friendship are determined and differed by cultures (Li, 2010). In her study, she reviewed the research findings on American friendship and Chinese friendship and found similarities and differences in between. Chinese friendship pattern seems to be characterized by strong social obligation, commitment and practical help whereas Americans tend to regard friends as "socializing, activity-sharing and fun seeking" (Li, 2010:14). Similarly, rules of friendships may not be penetrating all over the world. Argyle & Henderson designed a study to test the assumption that

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different cultures show a similar set of informal rules for friendship. In their study, participants from Hong Kong, Italy, Japan and UK filled in the survey where lists of common rules in friendship were evaluated and scaled by the degree to which those rules are applicable to the participants' home countries. The result of the study indicated significant cultural differences on perceived rules in friendship. (Argyle & Henderson, 1984)

Friendship is rewarding in diverse ways (Hruschka, 2010). The rewards of making a friend commonly include "companionship in leisure activities, emotional and social support and actual help" (Argyle & Henderson, 1984: 231) . However, like any communal relationships, friendship is more than a relationship where people exchange utilitarian benefits. Rather it is affection that is in exchange between friends. Furthermore, friendship provides a great deal of satisfaction (Argyle & Henderson, 1984).

## **2.2 Intercultural friendship**

Although the topic of friendship has been studied since the late 1970s (Duck & Perlman, 1985 according to Lee, 2008), the publications have examined friendship primarily from an intracultural and noncomparative perspective. The focus has mostly been on middleclass Europeans and Americans' friendships, and on the differences occurring during the developmental friendship stages of a lifetime (Lee, 2008). Chen (2005) suggested that friendship research, as it intersects with other cultural contexts, has still remained "in its infancy" (Chen, 2005:241).

Attempts to define culture are enormous. Some definitions focused on the structure of culture while the others delineated process or functions of culture (Baldwin, 2006). However, no one definition could explain the entirety of culture but only its elements, because culture is multi-dimensional and complex (West & Turner, 2009). For the purpose of my research, I adapted the structural concept of culture used by West and Turner in their research on interpersonal communication in my thesis as "Culture is a shared, personal and learned life experiences of a group of individuals in one nation from where they inherited values, beliefs and norms by socialization." Values or value

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assumptions are the core beliefs that we seldom or never doubt (Mayfield, 2009). Norms are rules for proper behavior in particular circumstances (Hanson, 2004). Cultural beliefs, values and norms are shared by a group of individuals who could make sense of each other. Culture is not biologically inherited but learned by socialization (Haviland, Prins, Walrath & McBride, 2007).

“Given the influence of cultural variability” (Chen, 2005: 133), the development of intercultural friendship is much more difficult than in intracultural settings. According to Li, intercultural friendship not only encounters challenges which exist in intracultural friendship context but also problems emerging from cultural differences and possible language barriers (Li, 2010). Although intercultural friends likely share some similarities such as musical taste, opinions, etc., they also most likely have to communicate these similarities across cultural differences (Sias et al, 2008), which once again exemplifies the unique function of communication in intercultural friendship development. Empirical studies found that many international students have difficulties at different level with respect of formulating friendship with host nationals. In Furnham & Alibahai’s review, they mentioned that many studies indicated a lack of contact and relationship development between international and host national students (Furnham & Alibahai, 1985 according to Li, 2010). Similarly, it is reported that host nationals are most unlikely to be best friends with overseas students (e.g. Bochner, McLeod & Lin, 1977). Several studies showed that, for those international students whose majority of friendships were with co-nationals, it was not that they did not want to develop friendship with host nationals, rather they usually desired more contact with host nationals (Hayes & Lin, 1994), or more friendships with host nationals (Church, 1982). However they could not and were disappointed and discouraged (Klineberg & Hull, 1979).

Many studies have found what makes the intercultural friendship development difficult. Zhang & Rentz’s study on friendship development between East Asian students and American students discovered factors that hinder the friendship development process, such as inadequate language skills,

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communication skills, academic concerns, cultural differences, social isolation, differences in educational systems and a lack of understanding of American culture and society (Zhang & Rentz, 1996). Small came up with a long list of reasons for failure of intercultural friendship development, namely, “ethnocentrism, existing social class structure, language difficulties, lack of common social interests, return migration intentions, or other mobility-limiting conditions related to the host culture which create social distance from host nationals” (Small, 1995 according to Smith, 1999: 648).

Intercultural friendship is a special kind of friendship between individuals with different national cultures, which is voluntary and rewarding as normal friendship in the same cultural context. However, the formation of intercultural friendship seems to be much more challenging than intracultural friendship because of a variety of reasons such as cultural differences and language.

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### **3 DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL FRIENDSHIP**

#### **3.1 Some Models of Relationship Development, Friendship and Intercultural Friendship Development**

In the following paragraphs, I critically presented some models of relationship development theorized by Berger, Devito, Knapp and Parks. The models of relationship development which aimed at describing the common features of relational development in all types of relationships shed some light, if not all, in understanding the process of intercultural friendship development which is comparatively a newer phenomenon. However, relationship development does not completely equal to intercultural friendship development because relationship development is such a broad term that it could include not only intercultural friendship development, but all the other kinds of relationship development such as workmate relationship or kinship development. Another reason is that studies on intercultural friendship development are “in its infant stage” (Chen, 2005: 241). Models of intercultural friendship development from Wright, Duck and Parks were then introduced for similar reasons. Lastly, the models by Cupach and Lee on intercultural friendship development and social network perspective on friendship development came.

##### **Relationship Development Models**

The first introduced point of view on relationship development was from Berger and Calabrese (1975). They found that communication transaction distincts three phases of development in a relationship. In the entry level phase, people communicate in a structural way, following social norms. In this phase, people begin to solicit more personal information and the relationship may develop from strangers to acquaintances. In addition, a need to further develop their relationship is discussed. In doing so, they enter the personal stage where information on themes such as personal problems, liking and disliking, and central attitudinal and personality issues are exchanged, whereas communication becomes more spontaneous, informal and less guided by social norms. (Berger & Calabrese, 1975 according to Chen, 2005) The focus of this model seems to be how communication changes in different phases of



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relationship development.

Then there is Devito's model which includes the contact phase when people pay attention to others' physical appearance and other personal information, the involvement stage when people testify their judgment made about the others in the first phase and intensify their interactions, and then the intimacy stage when they show commitment to each other and their relationship becomes closer. (Chen, 2005) This model emphasized the social penetration aspect of relationship development and is consistent with the social penetration theory of Altman and Taylor, who suggested that a relationship develops from an exchange of superficial information such as physical appearance, to an exchange of more intimate personal information and intensified interaction (Altman & Taylor, 1973 according to Gudykunst, 1987).

In Knapp and Vangelisti's model, the coming together part of relationship development reflects the upward process of relationship development. The stages of friendship development are in the following order: the initiating stage (judging each other's' overall ability), the experiment stage (emphasis on exchanging a wide range of topics and ambiguity reduction), the intensifying stage (more shared information and intensification of interaction by "creating more informal codes and the topic is deeper") and the integrating stage (development of physical and social closeness) and the bonding stage (commitment) (Chen, 2005). In this model, not only the social penetration theory is manifested but also the uncertainty reduction theory which refers to the idea that people are motivated to interact with others by the need of reducing uncertainty (Chen, 2005).

Furthermore, the development of friendship was conceptualized by placing different types of friendship relationships in order. One commonly cited division of friendship level comes from Parks, (1977) whose categories are based on American data. These include acquaintance, casual acquaintance, casual friend, just friend, good friend, close friend, very good friend, and best friend intimate friend (Parks, 1977 according to Nicotera, 1993).

In brief, the first three models above revealed the importance of

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communication, self-disclosure and social penetration in relationship development. But to develop a close relationship, closeness and commitment were considered equally influential as well. The last model conveyed that friendship developed into different levels.

### Friendship Development Models

Although it is believed that the stages of relationship development are more or less the same in all relational contexts (Chen, 2005), friendship development, including intercultural friendship development as more specific and more complex phenomenon, may have their own unique features in how they are developed.

In Wright's model, three features of the process of friendship development were discussed. Voluntary interdependence is considered as the base of friendship; then there is a stage when individuals experience difficulties in relationship maintenance; the third part of his model is the rewarding (Wright, 1991). The actual process of friendship development is not mentioned clearly in the model which reduces the practical value for those who seek insight on the stages of friendship development.

Duck presented a model of friendship development consisting of three processes: systematic gathering of information about a partner's personality, construction, and modification; reconstruction of a model of a partner's likely personality; and assessment of the degree of support for one's own personality based upon similarities between one's own personality and that of the partner. (Duke, 1975) The Duck's model emphasizes what happened during friendship development but does not explain the connection among the three stages.

Unlike Wright's and Duck's models, some scholars found that relational identity is the core for intercultural friendship (Wood, 1982 according to Lee, 2008). Relational identity is a privately negotiated system of understanding of values, rules and the friendship process shared by dyads in intercultural friendship (Lee, 2008), which is similar to the "third culture" concept by Casmir and Shuter (1993). In the third culture model, it is advocated that

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participants should and can negotiate their cultural differences and adapt different cultural values in order to create a third culture. Alongside the relationship identity, face needs and cultural identities are negotiated throughout the stages of a relationship (Sias et al, 2008).

From such a perspective, Cupach & Imahori (Cupach & Imahori, 1993) developed a model consisting of three stages of intercultural friendship development: "trial", "enmeshment", and "renegotiation." They delineated the nature and supportive strategies in each stage. The trial phase represents the initial encounter of intercultural relationships. In the trial stage, mutual support and confirmation of cultural identities are important because the understanding of each other's culture might be inaccurate at this stage. It is possible for dyads to violate norms or rules of the other's culture (Lee, 2008). In the enmeshment stage, "members in an intercultural relationship bring their cultural identities to their encounters, and then integrate their cultural identities in order to develop a mutually acceptable relational identity by which their relationship can grow and evolve" (Lee, 2008: 200). The shared relational identity is based on the similarities identified in phase one. During this phase, rules or roles guiding the behaviors of interactions between interlocutors would emerge. The personal aspect of shared meanings may be emphasized more than the cultural aspect by a relational dyad if the relationship evolves based on the personal similarities (Cupach & Imahori, 1993). Then in the renegotiation stage, a relational identity formed between two friends is fully negotiated. It is possible for individuals to renegotiate their separate cultural identities in this phase because they have established certain interdependent rules and are more likely to evaluate the different cultural identities positively (Cupach & Imahori, 1993).

In light of the of Cupach & Imahori's model, Lee put forward a modified model of intercultural friendship formation following of the same line of thought on relationship identity, which includes stages of initial encounter, interaction, involvement and two transitional phases --- needs and turning point. Lee explained that intercultural people meet each other for the first time in the initial encounter stage where they start "exploring each other's culture and clarifying some cultural misunderstandings" (Lee, 2008: 60). Then comes the

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first transition phase when needs or interests are evaluated to determine whether more efforts are worthwhile in investing in the relationship to move it forward. Following the first transitional period when intercultural friends are motivated to continue their interaction, they enter into the second interaction stage where they engage in frequent contact and negotiated roles, rules and rituals in their relationship which become part of their relational identity. Information about each other's personality and life flows in and the participants start to bond with each other. In this stage, personal traits such as patience and being positive are discovered to support the interaction among each other because the differences between the dyads are further recognized and difficulties are born to exist in their interaction. When it comes to a point when their mutual understanding and familiarity reach a certain level, their friendship stage would advance by a turning point or a particular incident that happens confirming shared intimacy and a need to develop and sustain the relationship. Then in the involvement of the third stage of friendship, rules and roles are much better accepted and the participants know much better what is appropriate or inappropriate to do (Lee, 2008).

This model is much more informative in telling what happens in the different stages of intercultural friendship formation and how the friendship can proceed to a new stage. However, this model does not address how the transitions from stage to stage are agreed or recognized through communication by each participants in the relation so that they assure the mutual understanding of where their friendship lies. Besides, there are not enough empirical studies to prove the validity of the model either due to the lack of research interest in intercultural friendship formation in general or due to the lack of the interest in the model. Furthermore, another issue which has not discussed is the distinction of relational identity and friendship formation. At the very beginning of the illustration of Lee's model, relational identity has been argued as an important factor in determining the success of intercultural friendship. But later on, she seems to interchange the development of relational identity and the process of intercultural friendship development. However, there is insufficient justification about the relation between the two processes either shown in the study or proved by other scholars. Although, it is likely that

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relational identity formation is positively related to intercultural friendship development, which is implied by the author. It is uncertain whether the involvement stage in relational identity development is the final stage of intercultural friendship development and whether the assumption that the role of relational identity is significantly influencing the process of friendship development is empirically solid or not.

### Social Network Perspective on Friendship Development

From the social network perspective, friendship is one kind of strong relationship ties in the network. A strong tie can be detected by three characteristics (Wellman, 1998: 564): 1) “ a sense of the relationship being intimate and special, with a voluntary investment in the tie and a desire for companionship with the tie partner; 2) an interest in being together as much as possible through interactions in multiple social contexts over a long period; and 3) a sense of mutuality in the relationship, with the partner’s needs known and supported.” The stronger the tie is, the higher level of friendship the individual perceives to have with the other.

A friendship network reflects simultaneously all the current levels of friendship international students have including acquaintances and friendship ties with different national groups such as locals, internationals or co-nationals because social network as by its definition is an “existing” (Smith, 1999) set of relationships around the nodes (individuals or companies) (Hendrickson, 2010). Different friendship stages with others could be manifested as different levels of tie strength or position of the person in the network. The strength of the ties and proximity reveal the degree of closeness and intimacy representing the level of relationship between the ego (the individual) and the alters (others connected with the ego) (Chen, 2005).

Some researchers studying social networks of international students concluded different functions of friendship networks with co-nationals and internationals. Bochner (1977) developed a functional model to explain how international students formulate their friendship with others in the host country. In his model, there are three friendship networks which function differently around the

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international students: co-nationals—affirming their original cultural identity; host nationals—facilitating the international students to adapt to the academic and professional world in the host country; multinationals---having fun together (Bochner, McLeod & Lin, 1977). These co-national friendships give students an opportunity to enhance their understanding of the new culture through discussions, social interaction, and intellectual exchange with other students who are experiencing the same emotions (Woolf, 2007). Also, co-national networks may serve to attenuate the stress that students often experience when crossing cultures (Kim, 2001).

However, the size of co-national networks in the host environment may inhibit internationals to form friendships with the host people because they feel more satisfied with the co-nationals (Hendrickson, 2010). Many studies have found that international students have strong preference to firstly establish friendship with co-nationals (Bochner, Hutnik & Furnham, 1985). Thus, social enclaves with co-nationals may reduce sojourner's need or desire to form ties with host nationals (Kim, 2001). Furthermore, there may be pressure from the co-national's network on not formulating friendships with host nationals because interacting with host nationals may be considered as a threat to lose one's national identity (Kim, 2001).

Similarly, the reasons behind the missing of certain host national ties in a close position to the ego (international student) may indicate answer to an interesting question, why the intercultural friendship with host nationals cannot go even further. Also, the existing social networks of the host nationals can influence the possibility of forming intercultural friendship ties with foreigners. It is illustrated by Hendrickson that host nationals usually have already established and formed friendship networks and associations with other host nationals before encountering international students. Consequently, they are believed to be less open to new friendships with foreigners (Hendrickson, 2010). For example, Japanese students studying in Australia were found to have difficulties in spending time with Australians whose time schedules were usually filled in by their family and other activities with friends they had (Kudo & Simkin, 2003).

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Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that properties of social networks of international students may have an impact on intercultural friendship development. Among all properties (size, density, cliques, clustering, centrality, multiplexity, strength, multidimensionality, link reciprocity and heterogeneity (Smith, 1999) of social network, the size (the amount of certain ties), the centrality (the degree of closeness the ego has with a clique), the strength (the degree of intimacy or closeness with a tie) and the heterogeneity (the presents of other cultural groups) indicate valuable information about the practice of intercultural friendship development of international students.

Friendship researchers generally agreed that friendship progresses in phases (Nicotera, 1993) and in levels (Parks, 1977 according to Nicotera, 1993). All the presented models which described the process of friendship development in phases divided the process in to the initiative stage and following stages, using different headings and explained how one or more dimension of friendship development progressed in the different phases. For example, the relational identity model consisted of "trial", "enmeshment", "renegotiation" stages, explaining how relational identities are formed through all the stages (Cupach & Imahori, 1993).

To initiate a friendship, researchers believed that there should be motivations (McEwan & Guerrero, 2010). It is self-evident that action is barely taken without motivation. It is also the same with forming intercultural friendship, especially in the initial interaction stage since it would not be possible to develop a relationship without a start.

Studies have been trying to identify individual motivation for individuals to formulate friendship. McEwan and Guerrero articulated that freshmen students are motivated by the discrepancy between resources on information, affection and enjoyment that they already have and resources that they still need to seek out new friends who would provide those wanted sources (McEwan et al, 2010). This line of thinking followed the social exchange theory which stresses the utilitarian purpose in relationship formation (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959, according to McEwan et al, 2010). Similarly, Lee stated four resources the

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intercultural friend may be able and expected to provide: “a good source of advice (e.g., help to survive in academia)”, (“a fun companion to hang out with”), affection (a reliable and interesting person to talk with and an understanding person to relate to or identify with) (Lee, 2008: 60).

Other than that, friend selection also determined with whom one would make further contact. “Friendship is selective” (Edwards, 2007: 65) because people cannot be friends with everyone. Cushman and Cahn told that man could only have several close friends and a certain amount of friends during the whole life even though there are tens of thousands of people one meets in a life time (Cushman & Cahn, 1985). The root of friendship is attraction which determines the preferential nature of friendship. While someone is attractive, there are others which are not so attractive (Wadell, 2002).

Some studies exemplified situations on how the initiative contact happens. According to Pavel, the initiative interaction has the tendency to happen in the classroom, student organizations, etc. where members from both cultures are imposed to interact with each other rather than because of the active try by either parties in the intercultural friendship relation (Pavel, 2006). The language barrier could be what make initializing contact difficult for international students (Ying, 2002).

The investigated model of friendship development in my research was designed on the basis of the above assumption that friendship develops in stages and in levels and was divided into the initial stage and the developing stage. The themes under discussion include motivation, friend selection and initial contact in the initial stage and relational identity or cultural negotiation in the developing stage with an aim to understand how intercultural friendship develops from acquaintanceship, friendship to close friendship and how different factors impact on the transition among stages. In addition, the connection of social network features and intercultural friendship development was further explored based on the relevant findings. The following section presented those factors which were found influential in the development of friendship in general or intercultural friendship in particular. .



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### 3.2 Factors in friendship development

Previous research identified several important factors that affect friendship development such as personal liking or attraction, culture, communication, similarities, personal attributes, and situational factors.

#### Personal liking and similarities

Personal liking or personal attraction is one of the most important roots for the start of a friendship (Rubin, Lynch, Coplan, Rose-Krasnon & Booth, 1994). Research has identified different factors to increase personal liking such as similarities on a variety of behaviors and attitudes (Vaisey & Lizardo, 2010), similarities in personality (Mehra, Kildufl & Brass, 2001), physical attractiveness, proximity and demographic features in the area where the participants live.

#### Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure or feeling free to express intimate information was identified in La Gaipa's study on 150 high school and college students about their perception of friendship development (La Gaipa, 1977 according to Nicotera, 1993). It is coherent with the social penetration theory that the width and the depth of the information are high in intimate friendship by Taylor and Altman (Altman & Taylor, 1973). In Sias's research on intercultural friendship development, she also found self-disclosure, which is composed of spoken English skills and openness of communication, was reported as an important factor in intercultural friendship development context (Sias et al, 2008).

#### Similarities

Similarities was found to be one important theme in intercultural friendship development by Gudykunst (Gudykunst, 2003), in consistence with the same findings in Gareis's qualitative studies on international student's intercultural friendship formation in 1995 (Gareis, 1995) and in 1999 with another sample of foreign students in the US (Gareis, 1999). The similar results were revealed

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in Sias's research on intercultural friendship development where students mentioned similarity of personal characteristics and age were important factors for them to select friends (Sias et al, 2008). It is an old belief that "Birds of a Feather: similarity breeds connection" (McPherson & Smith-Vlovin according to Gareis, 1995). Many obstacles in intercultural relationship development seem to be created by cultural differences. There was concern that conflicting or contradictory perceptions of friendship in different cultures may inhibit the formation of intercultural friendship (Descharmes, Heuser, Kruger & Loy, 2011). For example, influential components in a relationship such as value systems, social structure, sex roles, and status are culturally defined (Gareis, 1995). However, Sias and her colleagues found in their interviews with students who have intercultural friendship experiences that cultural similarities and cultural differences can both positively contribute to the initiation of intercultural friendship (Sias et al., 2008). Some researchers argued that perceived cultural similarities facilitate interaction because people have a tendency to positively relate to those who have similar values or culture and therefore develop attraction which increases the likelihood of social contact (Reisinger & Turner, 2004). However, Reisinger and Turner believed that similarities in values only play a significant role in relationship development when it comes to a closer level. When the interaction is shallow and brief, differences are not manifested and therefore dissimilarities do not matter or even attract people (Reisinger & Turner, 2004). Rokeach and his colleagues suggested that perceived cultural similarities do not support friendship development because similarities in interests and attitudes which are personal attributes are required (Rokeach et al., 1960 according to Reisinger et al., 2004).

### Conflict

Friendship naturally involves conflicts as every relationship has conflicts (Breakstone, Dreiblatt, M & Dreiblatt, K, 2009). However, the effects of conflict on relationship development can be either destructive or beneficial (Nicotera, 1993). Nicotera further explained that the watershed here is that whether the conflicts violate the key attributes of a friendship such as attitude.

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For example, if two friends have a serious and intensive debate on one topic where they have different stances, the incident could be regarded as a conflict but it does not hamper the relationship unless the attitudes of a person in the confrontation are too bad. (Nicotera, 1993) Furthermore, confrontation may strengthen friendship if two debated persons show that they are caring about the relationship even when they are fighting (Breakstone et al, 2009).

### Communication

Like any other relationship, intercultural friendship development is a communicative process (Sias et al, 2008). Communication formulates, maintains and alters relationships (Sigman, 1995) among individuals in an intercultural setting like in other relationships. In order to advance a relationship, information disclosed to the other partner has to reach a higher level of depth and width (Altman & Taylor, 1973) through effective communication (Nicotera, 1993). Previous research indicated that a key to maintaining an intercultural friendship lies in effective communication between members (Lee, 2008). However, communication may function differently in the context of intercultural friendship development than in an intracultural context.

On the one hand, when two participants in a relationship are from different cultural backgrounds, communication between them is more complex (Chen, 2005). “As the cultural variables and differences increase, the number of communication misunderstanding also increases” (Moran T., Harris & Moran V. 2007: 47). Conceptualizations of friendship (Gareis, 2000) as well as ways of non-verbal communication (Chen, 2005) are culturally defined. “Behavior that makes no sense to them might make perfect sense to others as well as the opposite” (Spinthourakis, 2006: 8). However, people tend to wear cultural lenses to judge other’s behavior in an intercultural context (Fong & Chuang, 2004), especially when they are not culturally sensitive enough (London & Sessa, 1999). For example, people may misunderstand other’s behavior as being rude or impolite, if the same behavior means rude or impolite in the culture where the people come from. And it takes time to learn other cultures.

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Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that misunderstandings happen often inevitably in relational communication. Even though as mentioned before, the success of intercultural friendship development relies on effective communication, it is more challenging to learn how to communicate effectively in an intercultural context (Slavik, 2004). Culture may influence people's perception on how to communicate appropriately and effectively in an intercultural relationship (Kim 2001). Effective communication may mean different things in different cultures. Furthermore, different perceptions of the friendship stage may cause communication problems. Conceptualization of friendship is culturally defined (Gareis, 2000). Partners who may not have same perception of the levels of friendship because of the biased cultural definition of friendship stages (Gummerum & Keller, 2008), are likely to communicate with others in a way which is also culturally defined according to the friendship stage (Sias et al, 2008) and not properly in the other's culture. Besides, different cultures are often grounded in different languages (Kim, 2001), and these language differences can provide barriers to broad and intimate communication and shared understandings that characterize friendship.

In addition, the features of communication differ from stage to stage in a friendship. Sias and Cahill (1998), for example, found that communication between friends became increasingly broad, frequent, and intimate, and decreasingly cautious, as the friendships grew closer (Cahill, 1998 according to Sias et al, 2008). This is consistent with models of relationship development that emphasize increased communication depth and breadth as relationships developed (Altman & Taylor, 1973; Knapp, 1978).

#### Individual attributes

It was pointed out that individual characteristics may interweave in the picture of intercultural friendship besides the cultural elements (Lee, 2008). In Ying's study on friendship development between Chinese and US students, she discovered that extroverted personality is reported to be important (Ying, 2002). Besides, positive and open-minded attitudes to formulate intercultural

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friendship with the host facilitate the interaction between international students and Americans in the U.S. (Pavel, 2006).

Cushman and Cahn (1985) concluded from the literature three underlying dimensions of the friend relationship: trust, helping behavior, and self-concept support. Trust refers to authenticity in a relationship (Cushman & Cahn, 1985). La Gaipa also found that authenticity or openness and honesty were valued by high school and college students in the U.S. as important personal traits in a friend (La Gaipa, 1977 according to Lee, 2008). Self-concept support refers to respect for the social and psychological self for both participants in a relationship. Helping behavior refers to “reciprocal assistance in time of need” (Cushman & Cahn, 1985: 51) in a relationship. As these variables increase in their intensity, the friend relationship increases in intimacy. In addition, friends have to fulfill the need for two types of roles: confidant (providing evaluation to support self-concept) and companion (showing support for self-concept by behavior) (Cushman & Cahn, 1985).

Furthermore, age may influence on the preference of being with similar persons or dissimilar persons. As Duck argued, individuals in their early and late phases of life are most likely to prefer more similarities with others whereas during middle age, individuals tend to like others who are different or in some way complementary to their characteristics to befriend (Duck, 1975).

In addition, Sias and her colleagues identified prior intercultural experience as important to intercultural friendship development. Such experience tends to increase the respondents’ willingness and in some cases eagerness to develop a friendship with someone from another culture. She also claimed that previous intercultural experience influences the development of close friend relationships. However, she did not illustrate her claim in her paper. (Sias et al, 2008)

Knutson, Komolsevin, Chatiketun and Smith claimed that intercultural communication competence encourages relationship development (Knutson, Komolsevin, Chatiketun & Smith, 2003). For example, as a commonly believed component in intercultural communication competence, knowledge on the host

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culture enhances the confidence of foreigners to approach host nationals (Ying, 2002) and understanding of the subjective culture in the new environment (Bennett, 2007) which reduces the potential for intercultural misunderstanding (Ying, 2002). However, as intercultural communication models have usually more than one element, knowledge alone is not sufficient to develop a successful relationship (Deardoff, 2009) nor language alone may be sufficient although it may be a necessity in competently dealing with interpersonal relationships (Deardoff, 2009). An individual must acquire a combination of elements in intercultural communication competence model, who, therefore, can competently and successfully develop intercultural friendship.

### Situational factors

The social environment seems to have influence on intercultural friendship development. The availability of international people with whom members could interact together is a pre-requirement for interaction to happen. No interaction would happen without the presence of actors except for the online friendship formation situation because friendship usually happens under one necessary condition that the person has to be frequently exposed to the others (Mueller, 2006). Also, the opportunities of exposure to social settings such as the classroom, where interaction is imposed from external pressure, may be beneficial to the development of intercultural friendship (Pavel, 2006). Mueller noted that “the greater opportunities for people to meet, the greater likelihood relationships form” (Mueller, 2006: 53). Pavel gave an alternative explanation of the importance of these opportunities that international students tend to wait for situational factors to help with initiating contacts with locals or other international students because they may be afraid of being rejected (Pavel, 2006). Besides, in Ying’s study, social environment was referred to the degree to which co-nationals present in an individual’s social network. The need for intercultural friendships may decrease when there are more co-nationals around because it may be easier to communicate with co-nationals who may understand international students better since they share the same culture (Ying, 2002). Kim added that the intergroup attitude of host nationals also construct part of the social environment (Kim, 2001). It is discovered that the intergroup

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attitudes to cultural differences may influence the willingness of the host nationals to build up relationships with international students. When “the values, beliefs, and cultural norms of ethno linguistic groups are greatly dissimilar” (Spencer-Rodgers & McGovern, 2002: 614), the intergroup attitude may impact on the possibility of friendship development in the intercultural context. For example, as much as valuable international students could be in terms of bringing all those cultural and intellectual resources to the university or to the local hosts, they are likely to be disliked if they express opinions challenging the worldview system in the host country or there are social prejudices or strong negative attitudes on their country’s social, religious and political systems. Feeling of threat may impact the favorability of the dissimilar group to the other. In the worst case, there could be a bias or dislike to the dissimilar group who will not be considered as a good choice for friends (Spencer-Rodgers et al, 2002).

#### Activities

In the investigation of intercultural friendship development, Lee revealed seven types of activities that influence the development of relationship identity in intercultural friendship: “(1) providing assistance (i.e., providing help, doing favors, and providing support and advice); (2) rituals, activities, rules, and roles (i.e., engaging in joint activities where rules and roles emerge); (3) self-disclosure (i.e., sharing personal information); (4) networking (i.e., meeting significant others); (5) exploring cultures and languages (i.e., learning each other’s cultural beliefs, values, and languages); (6) emphasizing similarities and exploring differences (i.e., stressing shared values while respecting different points of view); and (7) conflict/conflict management (i.e., experiencing conflicts and employing conflict management strategies)” (Lee, 2008: 6).

In summary, a variety of factors have been suggested and discussed in the process of friendship development. Some of them have a complex relationship among each other. (e.g. cultural differences and personal liking) and some of them are dependent on the others (e.g. personal liking and similarities or

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personalities). However, whether these factors apply to intercultural friendship and how their impact and manifestation in the development of intercultural friendship are far from clear.



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## 4 RESEARCH METHODS

### 4.1. Aims and Research questions

The aim of this study is to investigate the nature of friendship formation between Finns and international university students by comparing their intracultural and intercultural friendship experiences and to understand the factors that function in different stages of the friendship process. Additionally, this study exemplifies the usage of social network analysis in an intercultural research context. Its applied goal is to provide knowledge for the readers, especially international students, on intercultural friendship development with Finnish students in a Finnish context, helping international students to be more competent in making friends with Finns and therefore having a more satisfactory stay in Finland. The cultural knowledge revealed from the research about Finnish communication may give some insights into Finnish communication in general and could be a reference for the understanding of Finnish interaction to some extent.

The research questions to which this study attempts to answer are as following:

RQ 1 How do Finns and international students conceptualize friendship in general and international friendship in particular?

- How are the levels of friendship categorized?
- What kinds of criteria are there for varying levels of friendship?
- Are there any differences with respect to perception of friendship levels among Finns and international students?

RQ2 How has intercultural friendship been experienced by Finnish and international students?

- What is the process of intercultural friendship development like? What are the similarities and differences between intercultural friendship development and intracultural friendship development?

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- What strategies are used to deal with possible cultural differences in the process of intercultural friendship formation?
  - What kind of factors are seen as supportive or hampering the formation of relationships? How do these factors manifest in different stages of relationships?
  - What kinds of similarities or differences exist between the formation of intracultural friendship and intercultural friendship?

The purpose of the first research question is to find out whether there is a cultural influence on the perception of friendship in the intracultural friendship and the intercultural friendship context. The assumption that culture has an influence on perception of friendship will be tested by answering this research question.

By inquiring the second research question, I am hoping to acquire insight on the nature of intercultural friendship development from the narratives of the life experiences of the Finns and international students, examining in this new context the validity of the previous findings about factors that have been proved to be important in friendship formation in an intraethnic context or some intercultural context and discovering new factors. Special focus has been given to cultural differences and communication, given their importance in friendship development, by proposing many questions on them in the interview. In order to research on the network features of intercultural friendship and environmental factors, the mapping of social networks were employed to collect data on components such as heterogeneity, sizes, tie strength and the centralization of different network ties (co-national ties, international ties, etc.). And questions will be posted on spot to each participant according to the features of those social networks in order to find out the meanings of the structure of the social network they have. Here are the example questions: Based on which criteria do you judge the distance of the person to you? Do nationalities matter? Why do you have more co-nationals at this position than Finnish nationals? Tell me about your experience of building up the friendship with such international person from the very beginning and please indicate the

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stages of friendship development if there is any.

## **4.2 Data collection**

### **4.2.1 Qualitative Research Means: Interview and Social Network Mapping**

“Qualitative researchers excelled the humanistic virtues of their subjective, interpretive approach to the study of human group life ...and attempt to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them” (Flick, 2002: 226-227).

Qualitative research means were chosen as the best choice for collecting data for this research because it serves the best for the purpose of this current study which is to understand the intercultural friendship formation phenomena between Finns and internationals who lived through the experience. Qualitative research methods are commonly used to discover how people construct the meaning of something (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000) and to “understand how they live with those shared meanings in their relationships” (Lee 2008: 57). It is “especially effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviors and social contexts of particular populations” (Mack & Woodson & MacQueen & Namey, 2005:1). “Qualitative methods lend themselves particularly well to understanding the subjective experience and how it is shaped by personal and cultural factors” (Sias et al, 2008:1). The beauty of using qualitative research is that it can produce “culturally specific and contextually rich data” and be “flexible” and easy to engage participants to share their opinions more (Mack & Woodson, 2005).

#### Means: Interview and Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis is employed in this study for three reasons. Social network perspective is suitable for examining intercultural friendship development. Social network perspective is “truly a relational perspective” (Smith, 1999: 634). Different ties indicate different levels of relations with a certain person. The map of social networks includes all the ties one individual has, revealing the current existing stages of relationship development between

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the ego and the alters. With the map of a social network of one individual, researchers could pose questions such as how the relationship with certain ties are developed which resemble the goal of this research about intercultural friendship development. However, social network mapping shows more than one relationship one has with the others, enabling reflection on the validity of the accounts of one individual on intercultural friendship development with one person by comparing with other similar relationship developments in the map. Furthermore, social network analysis may reveal new variables that are crucial for intercultural friendship development which were not shown in interviews. As shown in the previous research, the environment has an impact on intercultural friendship development. Social analysis seems to be a good tool for studying the social environment of friendship tie development because it is believed in social network theories that relationship development is connected to the whole feature of the network. Therefore, studies of properties of network such as heterogeneity, centralization, size of ties or missing ties may discover their impacts on intercultural friendship development. Thirdly, it serves as the second double-checking method in the triangulation method to improve the validity of the research finding.

However, social network theories alone cannot explain the whole process of intercultural friendship development. The social network presents a current and existing collection of relationships around the ego. However, in reality “individuals are constantly dropping old ties and adding new ones, processes of contact selection and relationship formation are continually in progress” (Vaisey et al, 2010: 1611). Social network theories may be able to investigate the meanings of the position of certain friendship ties which generate answers to questions how these relationships developed to this stage. Nevertheless, it cannot “account for how actors select among possible candidates for entry into their intimate circle of relationships” (Vaisey et al, 2010: 1611).

Applying social network analysis to this research

Firstly, “ego centered” social network analysis which is “the study of social relations among a set of actors” (Hendrickson, 2010: 3) was employed to

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gather information on the social network structure of each participants via social network mapping.

Secondly, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant according to the mapping of the social network and the research questions. On the one hand, network analysis cannot reflect “the continual progress in relationship formation” (Vaisey & Lizardo, 2010:1611) and current network theory alone cannot explain “how actors select among possible candidates for entry into their intimate circle of relationships” (Vaisey et al, 2010:1611). On the other hand, in-depth interviews are usually conducted to understand people’s life experiences (Frey et al, 2000) and it is “useful for learning about the perspectives of individuals” and “effective for getting people to talk about their personal feelings, opinions and experiences”, providing chances to “gain insight into how people interpret and order the world by being attentive to the causal explanations participants provide for what they have experienced and believe and by actively probing them about the connections and relationships they see between particular events, phenomena and beliefs” (Mack & Woodson, 2005: 30).

#### **4.2.2 Participant recruitment**

Most qualitative researchers select a purposive sample, intentionally choosing the people on the basis of theoretical and/or experientially informed judgments, who are likely to be the most willing and able to shed light on what the researcher is studying (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 2000).

The sampling is purposive. Eight interview participants, half Finns and half internationals were preselected according to criteria relevant to the purpose of the research which is to understand the intercultural friendship experience between Finnish students and international students. The amount of the interviewees was decided by the resources and time available when the research was conducted (Mack & Woodson, 2005). The purpose of having both Finnish and international students is to do a comparison analysis to the collected data later on. By comparison, it may generate more useful information that is easily neglected when concentrating on only one category

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of data.

All the participants were selected based on the following criteria: 1) Studies in University of Jyvaskyla or JAMK; 2) Have experience of interacting with international students; 3) Interviewees from the group of international students should have at least more than one year living experience in a foreign country and do not have the same nationality as the other interviewees; 4) the sample was expected to capture as much diversity as possible in gender, study field etc. to represent the general features of the population in question which in this case is Finnish students and international university students. However, because of the lack of enough male participants for practical reasons, the specific impact of gender and study field is not examined in the study.

#### **4.2.3 Description of the participants**

The interviewees were found based on my social network and based on my knowledge of their intercultural experience.

The average age of the participants is 22. Both female and male interviewees were found although gender is not a main issue discussed in the thesis. All of them are university students either in University of Jyvaskyla or JAMK with a wide range of study fields from IT to humanities.

All the participants have intercultural friendship experience which has lasted for more than one year. The length range of intercultural experiences the participants have is from three years to five years. For Finnish participants, they all have student exchange experience abroad. Some of them have working experience outside Finland. For international students, they have stayed in Finland at least for nearly two years.

#### **4.2.4 Social network mapping procedures (Appendix 2)**

The social network mapping was designed to gather information on the relationship stages each participant has with different groups. For international students, there are three groups in question: co-nationals, internationals and

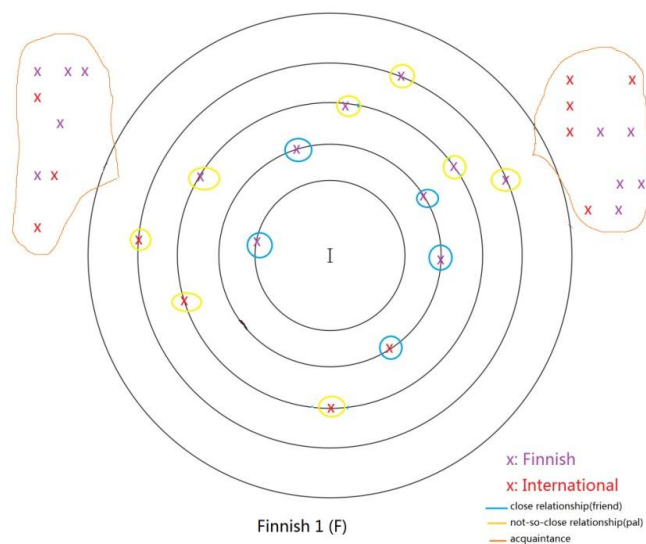
Finns or locals that they met in Jyvaskyla. For Finnish students, there are two: internationals and co-nationals.

Firstly, each participant was requested to recall all the relationships they have with people they met in Jyvaskyla on a piece of blank white paper.

Then, I placed the symbol of participants in the center of the paper and drew different layers of circles around the center to help distinguish the degree of closeness the participant felt about the persons they placed in the social network.

Thirdly, each participant was given time to recall people they met in Jyvaskyla and place them in accordance with the degree of closeness the participant felt for the person.

Fourthly, each participant chose pencils with different colors to mark down the relationship type they think they have with the person they put in the social network.



## Appendix 2 : Sample of social network mapping

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Due to the concern about the possibilities that one interviewee may have more amounts of certain ties than those that they can remember clearly and pinpoint, participants are allowed to draw a few representatives of certain ties in a certain position on the map and explain the real size of the network to the researcher.

#### **4.2.5 Interview procedures**

Most of the interviews I conducted were face-to-face except for one case where the participant could not find time to meet me and preferred answering the interview questions by exchanging emails and talking via Skype.

I met with each interviewee at places of their preference which were private or quiet places where they felt comfortable and that no one could overhear our conversation. Prior to the interview, I wrote each of them an email explaining the context and purpose of my thesis, the general topics of the interview questions, the estimated length of the interview and my expectations of the sharing of their opinions and experiences as detailed as possible.

On spot at the interview, I first asked their oral consent to tape record during the whole interview, to transcribe it and to use some of their answers in writing the thesis. I got all of their approval, making sure that they understand their rights in the interview and the confidentiality of all the information they give.

Then the interview began with general questions about their personal information such as gender, age and nationality and their previous intercultural experience. The purpose was to build up rapport with the interviewees and create comfortable and friendly relationships with them by asking easy and personal questions. Also, previous intercultural experience was chosen as a topic because it is assumed to be relative to the development of the intercultural friendship.

Then the interviewees were required to provide their own categories of relationships with people in general, explain the concepts of different relationships and identify the types of relationships they have with people in



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Finland, possibly explaining the missing of certain types of relationships, if there is any.

The interview process continued with their drawing of the social network with international, co-national and Finns (host national) in Jyvaskyla and the posing questions related to the mapping came later. In short, during the interview, I engaged with participants by posing mostly open-ended questions, listened attentively to their responses and asked follow-up questions.

The language of the interview was mostly English because that is the only common language I have with the interviewees except for one case with a Chinese girl where we spoke Chinese during the interview. For validity purposes, although she can speak English, we both thought it is better to conduct the interview in Chinese so that we can avoid certain misunderstandings resulted from our language knowledge of English.

The topics and some questions were designed beforehand under the guidance of the research questions and I posed follow-up questions on a case by case basis to ask for an explanation, clarification and justification for certain points from the participants during the interview. This procedure followed the tradition that “Most naturalistic researchers conduct semi structured interviews by outlining questions in advance and improving probing questions on the spot” (Frey et al, 2000: 277).

### **4.3 Data analysis**

The collected data was reviewed for two themes. The first one was their perception on friendship and their interaction with co-national friends. The other theme was their experience and perception of intercultural friendship. Data collected from both interviews and social network mapping covered both themes.

The collected data came in two parts. The first part was the recording of the interviews and notes made during the interview and the other was the social network mapping.

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Because of the issues of confidentiality and clarity for later analysis, all the materials were coded by different labels. Participants' real names were replaced by fake names and a series of symbols identifying their nationality, gender and the position in the interview group in field notes from their interviews and their social network maps.

- 1) All of the interviewees were grouped in to and labeled as either "Finnish" or "International".
- 2) For the "International" group participants, their nationalities were used to differentiate each of them.
- 3) The gender of the participant was labeled by "F" which stands for female and "M" meaning male.
- 4) Then each of the participants within the same group was marked by a number (1-4) to indicate their position in the group.
- 5) In writing the research report, random pseudonyms were given to each participant for confidential concerns. Therefore all the participants were renamed as: Mikko (Finnish guy), Tuomas (Finnish guy), Hannele (Finnish girl), Kaisa (Finnish girl), Lihn (Vietnamese girl), Marie (French girl), Qing (Chinese girl) and Julie (Russian girl).

For example, if the participant was a Chinese girl who was the third interviewee in the international group, the materials from her was marked as "International 3(F) Chinese". However, when quotes of the participants were used to explain the point of view I had made, the participants were referred to by the fake names I assigned them. So for instance, the same Chinese participant was addressed as Qing in this paper.

Later on, when analyzing the social network mapping of each participant, colors for symbolizing different items were standardized. For instance, all the international ties in the network were marked by the color red.

Starting the analysis, I transformed all the drafts of individual social network

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mapping in to the computer by using the painting software in Windows. Then I listened to the recording of the interviews one by one and transcribed parts of the response that are relevant to the interview questions. Then the transcriptions were further analyzed in steps suggested by Kvale (1996): structuring, condensing and theme identifying. I gathered excerpts from the interview responses and placed them under each research question according to their relevance to the research questions and then I subcategorized them in to smaller groups under the theme which was later on summarized from the content. According to the research questions, data was presented in three themes: 1) Perception of friendship and its influence on intercultural friendship development 2) Process of intercultural friendship development 3) Factors in intercultural friendship development. Within each theme, there could be data from social network mapping or from interview questions including the ones regarding the social network maps. Following my pre-structured investigating model of intercultural friendship development framework, the theme on the process of intercultural friendship development was divided in to two phases under the headings of “Initiate stage” and “Development”. Three aspects, namely “Motivation”, “Selecting potential friends” and “Initialing Contact” were discussed in the “Initial stage”. Then, factors “Communication”, “Attitude to Differences in intercultural friendship”, “Time”, “Mutuality”, “Topics”, “Conflicts”, “Social activities or Social settings”, “Differences of life styles”, “Stereotypes”, “Language”, “Values and beliefs”, “Cultural Knowledge”, “Environment” “Behavior for ensuring” were named as smaller headings in the theme of factors in intercultural friendship development.

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## 5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 5.1 Perception of friendship

All participants mentioned similar general stages of the development of friendship in intercultural context from acquaintance, friend to close friend. However, words such as “acquaintance”, “friend” and “close friend” have slightly different connotations in their meanings for each participants. Take “acquaintance” as an example. According to Table 1, most participants perceived that knowing little about the person is one characteristic of acquaintanceship. However, some participants mentioned the frequency of conversation as a criterion to define whether the person was their acquaintance whereas others did not. Furthermore, some believed that they did not talk with acquaintances but some did.

Several measurable indicators for different friendship levels were identified. They include “time spent together”, “contact”, “sharing”, “similarities, shared interests or common topics”, “hang out” and “liking”. All the participants had their own conceptualization on what these indicators meant to them and prioritized the importance of these indicators differently. For example, “support” and “caring” were mentioned as criteria for friendship level by all participants. However, for Kaisa, support and caring is not the main criteria for normal friends but “having fun” is. And she only seeks support or caring from her close friends. But for Qing, she judges different levels of friends by the degree of caring they show her. In her case, “caring” and “support” matters for all levels of friends. But for Marie, she categorizes her friends on “How many times they call you to do something. If you have to go away for a while, how many times do you send emails, how many conversations are they willing to have with you” These actions reflect caring to her. However, there were similarities in definition of close friends. All the participants described a close friend similarly to what was remarked by Marie, “ Even if we (she and her

close friends) did not contact or see for half a year, the next time we meet, it is just like we met two days ago.”

Finnish 1	<b>Acquaintances:</b> someone I know somehow
Finnish 2	<b>Acquaintance:</b> someone I said hi and how are you to but we do not know well
Finnish 3	<b>Hello friend:</b> I don't stop to talk unless they are with someone I know better; <b>Old acquaintances:</b> I used to spend time with them but I don't recall what we did; <b>Student association people:</b> We worked together and I respect them but I don't usually say hi to them; <b>Party friends:</b> we go to parties together
Finnish 4	<b>Acquaintances:</b> someone I say hello to but I don't know them that well
International 1	<b>Acquaintances:</b> We keep in touch, we don't talk so often
International 2	<b>Acquaintances:</b> someone I know a bit but do not talk
International 3	<b>Acquaintances:</b> we know each other but we don't talk that much
International 4	<b>Acquaintance:</b> we know each other but we don't talk much

Table 1: slightly different criteria for acquaintances

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Participants' social network maps revealed that each participant had fewer ties in the inner circle than in the more distant circle. The number of ties in one circle increased as the circle was further away from the ego. Most participants had both close friendship ties with both co-nationals and internationals in their networks except for one case where the Finnish participant had neither close friendship with Finns or internationals. Furthermore, most participants had more co-national friendship ties in the closest circle than international friendship ties.

As explained by the participants, they employed the same standard of closeness in both intercultural friendship and intracultural friendship when they did the social network mapping. All of them placed ties in the network by how close they felt with those people and how frequently they met. The higher stage of friendship the participants has with someone, the closer the tie with that person was. So acquaintances or classmates were usually in the furthest spaces of the network of each participant. The number of co-nationals in the social network does not contribute to the smaller number of the international ties as explained by the participants.

When asked why there were more co-national ties in their inner circle than Finnish ties, the Finnish participants mentioned it was as a result of time factor. "I usually meet with Finnish people regularly because we have known each other longer and they live in Finland. However, international people come and go quickly." noted Hannele. Tuomas said: "I have known the people in the inner circle longer." whereas international participants noted that communication, understanding and time spent together are influential reasons. Julie said: "It is easier to stay with Russian people. We speak the same language. They understand me better." Lihn said: "We share the same culture so they understand me better." She continued, "Those Finnish friends would have come even closer to me if we would have more time together, more

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sharing and more communicating. However we just did not find that much time together.” Besides, they have fewer international classmates than Finnish ones in class. So this is one of the main reasons why they have more Finnish ties than international ones in same positions in their friendship networks. In other words, they have more opportunities to work with Finns, spend more time with them and have more chances to find the right type of person for friends. Some Finnish participants mentioned that different life styles between them and the international students hinder the development of close friendship. From their perspective, they thought that exchange students are outside Finland during summer and winter vacations when Finns are most likely free to hang out. Thus they have to hang out with the Finnish friends they have.

## **5.2 Process of intercultural friendship developments**

### **5.2.1 Initial stage**

#### **Motivation**

International students' perspective: Motivation to make friends with Finns

Most of the respondents (N=3) stated that their motivation to mingle with the Finns at the beginning was their interest in Finnish culture. “ Curiosity about the culture. You are going to bond with Finns because the culture is attractive and it is the only way to know the culture. ”said Marie. But above all, all of them mentioned Finns were not their only targets for friends but also other nationalities.

Concerns of living in Finland motivated some participants to make international friends. Lihn said: “When I came here, I just know some Vietnamese people. I was going to live here like two years. I cannot only live with some Vietnamese people I know. I have the mindset that I have to go out and make friends it is good to know international and Finnish people, what's

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the point if you go abroad, you don't have foreign friend. I get closer to the culture."Qing said: "I was actively interacting with people because I want to adapt to Finnish society." On the other hand, one participant mentioned that she was discouraged to actively make Finnish friends because she knew she would not be in Finland for long.

However, companionship needs also drove participants to make friends with someone from whichever culture they are. Qing said: "I don't want to be alone and want some companion. Also if I am unhappy, I want friends to listen to me. I think that is what I need from friends."

Also learning from the person is one motivation for some international students to interact with those they think to be excellent in some area regardless of nationalities. Lihn said that "I want to be useful from my learning studies, I can help them. In case two people don't have anything in common with me, go for someone who I can learn something from." However, the same participants added that they would not consider those people to whom they approached only for practical reasons as close friends. Julie said "They are friends but not close friends."

#### Finnish perspective: Motivations to make friends with internationals

Three Finnish interviewees mentioned that interests in culture motivated them to befriend international students. Tuomas said: "Well, probably the biggest motivation for me to initiate interaction with international students is my interest in foreign cultures and countries. I like to think, that communicating with international students and making friends with foreigners will widen my horizons in various aspects of life." Other than cultural differences, most Finnish interviewees (N=3) did not have more motivation to be friend with international students than with Finnish students. Mostly the encounters with international students happened by accident. One Finn's response is that,



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“When talking about international friends I have met with in Jyvaskyla, it is pure coincidence when meeting them, since if you happen to be in a same course and work in pairs, then it’s easy to start talking and ask about the experiences of living in Finland. Mostly in Jyvaskyla I have got to know international people in the university in courses that are taught in English.” Further, interest in meeting new people and knowing people could be motivation itself to make friends with internationals. “I’d like to know a lot of people and meet new people from different parts of the world.” Mikko continued, “I know the Finnish way of interaction but there is always new things to learn from internationals.”

### **Selecting potential friends**

All of the interview participants expressed a similar point that they are selective of those with whom they want to spend time and make effort to develop a relationship.

Also, they mentioned that people have to meet with certain criteria in order to be considered as worthwhile for efforts made for further contact. Personal liking was noted as a very important criterion for friend selection by all participants. “At the first sight of the person, I have the instinct to know whether I like the person or not and I will set up another meeting with the person if I like him or her,” Qing said. “If I don’t like the person, I won’t be actively trying to chat anymore,” commented Mikko. Furthermore, all the participants regarded perceived similarity as one good source of personal liking. But generally what is perceived similar alters from participant to participant. Similar style of clothes or appearance, same interests in certain topics, and similar personalities were mentioned by participants as what could be considered as perceived similarities. Tuomas noted: “Even if the international students are interested in Finnish culture which is not foreign for me, I still consider we have a similar interest in foreign culture because it is foreign for

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them.” Also, cultural similarities were mentioned. In this study, some Finnish participants mentioned that they felt more at home with Japanese people whose culture was seen as similar to Finnish culture. Tuomas said, “I get along with Japanese people so well. There are the stereotypes about Finns that we are quiet and don’t talk much...I am not that outspoken person. To some extent, it is quite similar to Japanese culture. ” Besides the perceived similarity, there was no consensus among the participants on where the liking comes from.

Other than personal liking, several criteria were mentioned by participants. Three participants mentioned “a sense of humor”; three participants thought “open and willing to communicate with others” was important. Two believed that “pleasant communication” is one way of generating liking. “There should be pleasure in communication,” said Julie. Besides, two participants mentioned “the willingness to know the others” is important in the person. Mikko states, “They should be active in trying to know me and not passively waiting for me to go always.” Three participants mentioned “behavior” or “how they treat people or friends”. Julie told me, “I don’t like rude or aggressive people. They should be polite and have a good way to communicate.”

However, dissimilarities in cultures are not necessarily considered decreasing people’s willingness to bond with other people from different cultures. Kaisa said, “I found it harder to find similarities with international people. But I think it is the person, not the country that matters.” Julie said: “Usually depends on the individual.” “Differences of moral issues in culture for instance usually do not matter unless the gap between the culture is so huge. For example, if the person is from a jungle culture that would be a different case,” said Tuomas. Lihn mentioned that, “If we have nothing in common but the person is still willing to learn and understand me, it is fine with me to befriend him or her.” For Mikko, “cultural differences are fascinating.”

Observation and talking were mentioned as two important strategies for

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selecting potential friends. But it seems that people may have different opinions of how to use these two strategies in practice. “Usually in a party, I tried to talk to everyone. After a small chat, I get to know whether I like the person or not,” said Mikko. On the other hand, some participants said that they would observe the behavior of other persons first before taking any action. Also, Kaisa said that she would talk with the person after observing the appearance of the person. “After five minutes (of talking), I can tell whether he is the same type of person and whether we can be friends,” she said.

### **Initial Contact**

Three out of four Finnish participants mentioned that they usually do not make the initiative to start the conversation with someone they do not know. Tuomas said: “I am usually passive with persons I do not know.” However Mikko said that “With Europeans, I try to find those who appeal to me. With Asians, I make initiative because they are often quite shy. It is my responsibility to keep in touch with them.” For internationals, Lihn mentioned that “If it is Finns who I want to get to know, I will make the initiative because Finns are quite shy but for other nationalities, I usually wait. But at the same time, others will approach me as well.” Marie said: “I wait for others to approach me and talk with me.”

It depends on where the encounter of Finns and internationals takes place. If it is in class, especially where pair or group work is required, interaction or communication happens naturally. “You might appear in one group work with this person talking about studies and other things, it just happened that you like communication.” said Julie.

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### 5.2.2 Development

The friendship development process is quite similar in intercultural context and intracultural context according to the participants. All participants expressed similar ideas about the process of intercultural friendship development. As more time is spent together, the understanding between each other grows and the friendship develops. Participants mentioned that they would like to have more information on personalities, similar interests and cultures of their friends in order to understand their behaviors and mentalities. In so doing, participants have to spend time communicating or hanging out with their friends and negotiate cultures constantly along the path of friendship development.

However, one unique feature in intercultural friendship development is cultural negotiation which includes communication on cultural differences or ensuring behaviors such as asking questions about things that sound weird in the culture of one party that both parties in intercultural friendship relation would not do with their co-nationals. "Usually it has been just "Excuse me, I didn't understand what you meant?" kind of situation, but sometimes even more definition was needed. For example when talking about relationships between people, first have to define what the non-Finnish person think about this topic, what is her/his opinion and is it common in their country to get on the same level." Kaisa said. However, rather than having a stage where there is intensive cultural negotiation between the partners, cultural negotiation is believed by the participants to continue during the whole friendship.

Further, some Finns felt that it is easier to start a relationship with an international student because "they are more open than Finns at the beginning." said Hannele. But it may depend on where the international students are from. "I felt that Asian people are less open than Finns but I don't mind because I know that is their culture." said Kaisa.

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One interesting point on friendship development was brought up by Mikko saying that “Friendship development with exchange students has become faster now than before. Because both of us know that quite soon we are going to separate so we have to share more and get to know each other faster before we separate.”

In summary, interests in different cultures seem to motivate both international students and Finnish students to approach each other if there is chance. Concerns of living in Finland also urge international students to establish connection with Finnish students. However, intercultural friendship could happen not because of special target socialization with people of certain nationality or cultures but because of academic or emotional needs. In fact, in order to move the relationship into friendship, personal traits such as academic success, personalities, perceived similarities and pleasure of communication are considered as important as nationalities if not more important when participants are selecting friends. Some Finnish students make initiatives to talk with international students but in general Finnish students seem to be passive with making the first move. Some international students try to be the ones who break the ice when they want to know Finnish students because they are considered shy and reserved. Then the longer time spent together and the better the dyads know each other, their friendships proceed forward. During the development process, cultural negotiation and ensuring behaviors happen constantly. They are two unique features in intercultural friendship process.

### **5.3 Factors in intercultural friendship development**

#### **Communication**

Communication differences have been identified on various levels by the participants. Finnish way of communication in general is more direct than that of many other cultures. Qing said: “They are more direct when they talk. When

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my Finnish good friend expressed her feelings, she used strong words like “I hate you” in a playful way.” However some of the participants, especially the Finnish ones, mentioned that Finns are not always as direct as others may think. The degree of directness, especially in confrontational situations, seems to decrease as the level of friendship goes down. Tuomas explained that “I will not tell my negative feeling to the persons directly if they are not my close friends. With close friends, it is easier to share negative feelings but in general, the directness of my speech correlates positively with the closeness of friendship but not with the nationalities.” Additionally, all the participants agreed that Finns rarely engage in small talk and employ limited non-verbal communication. Mikko said: “There are differences in non-verbal communication. I noticed that in Japan or Taiwan, people noted a lot when others were talking. And a lot of hands are used by the Southern European when they communicate. However Finns usually express themselves with words rather than gestures.” Furthermore, all the Finnish participants felt that the communication process is slower with Finns than with internationals. “If you start sharing a lot of personal information, Finns feel that you are noisy and that you are trying too much to make friends with them”

However, most of them thought that the differences in communication did not obstruct the development of intercultural friendships because they expected and prepared for differences in communication and behavior. Lihn said: “I did not expect Finns to communicate in the same way as I do.” Julie commented: “As long as you like the person, you will find the way to communicate.” Further, all participants mentioned that they tried to understand and adapt to the communication ways of others who came from another culture. Mikko said: “I started to adapt to the non-verbal communication way when I am with different international friends without noticing it. Only when someone point out that I do this and that, I realize that I change my communication way.” Tuomas stated: “With English, you could talk about the things easily.” Kaisa said: “I learn the

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different gestures if they are nice ones.”

Furthermore, nearly all the Finnish participants mentioned that they communicate differently with intercultural friends than with their compatriot friends in terms of openness.

Some of the Finns felt more open with international students. Mikko said: “it is easier to be more open with exchange students, maybe the thing is that when there is exchange students, we both know they are only here for a limited time. We have to know each other as well as possible. If we don’t get along, they will leave soon. I have to be very open.” However, also differing opinions were found. Kaisa said: “I never thought that there will be any differences in communicating with Finns or Internationals. I may talk differently with my close friends but not because they are Finns or Internationals.”

As for expressing negative feelings, most of them felt that they do not usually have negative feelings towards the intercultural friends but if they do, they usually leave it unsaid unless it is a serious problem. “Usually we are quite polite to each other so we communicate well and do not have negative feelings.” said Hannele. “I will not say anything if it is a small conflict. But I will make it clear to the person if it is an intolerant situation. The same with Finns and internationals.” said Tuomas. Further one Finnish participant felt that he took into consideration the cultural differences in expressing negative feelings. “I usually do not show if I am annoyed with international friends because they may come from a country where expressing negative feeling is not so common. Even with close friends, I will not express my negative feeling as that strong as with Finns.” Mikko said.

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### **Attitude to cultural differences**

All of the participants were quite tolerant of differences especially with internationals. They did not expect those with a different cultural background to understand them or their cultures the way their compatriots do. “You should not expect they behave the same, it is not bad, people are different according to their background. If you like the person, you want to communicate and you will find the way.” Julie said. “We are tolerant about each other.” Qing said when talking about her Finnish friend.

When foreign friends violated the norms of participants’ cultures, all of them told that they were tolerant at first. But if it was a serious conflict, they sought to clarify the issue. Kaisa explained that “If they are not mean to me, I do not care. But if I think they are mean, I will ask them directly. It would be good if I realized it is a misunderstanding.” However, none of the participants would ask their compatriots for an explanation if norms were violated but would judge immediately. Marie said: “If the same thing happened in France, I would have not thought that it may be culture and would have not talked with someone who may know the culture but thought that she was rude or mean to me.”

### **Time**

All of the participants confirmed that frequent contact contributes positively to the advancement of a relationship, not only because it takes time to know each other but also because spending time together is a part of the friendship routine. In other words, the frequency of being in contact was considered by all participants as a measure for the progress of a friendship. Lihn said: “It is logical because if I want to befriend someone, I will try to set up meetings to meet more.”

Another aspect of time which is important for friendship formation seemed to



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be the length of the time for which the dyads have known each other. All the participants noted that it is impossible bond quickly with Finns. Marie said: “It takes time, a lot of time.” Finnish participants gave similar explanations about this phenomenon. Mikko mentioned: “Finns usually do not want to know that much about the others at once and do not share that much either. It is just uncomfortable to share that much.” Additionally, that international students stay in Finland for a relatively short time limits the level of friendship that can be achieved. Hannele said: “Sometimes, it is so pity that you know some international students who are very nice and you want to know them better, but they have to leave Finland soon. So there is no chance to develop a deep friendship with them.”

However, all Finnish participants mentioned that their friendship development with internationals is quicker than with Finns. One reason is that some international students share more in the beginning of interaction. Hannele said: “Sometimes with international students from a more open culture, interaction is easier and quicker.” Another reason is that how much communication there is between the Finn and international matters more than how long they have known each other. Kaisa said: “Someone who shared a lot of similarities with me and we talked and spent time together a lot during his or her stay here, I also considered him or her as a close friend although we haven’t known each other for 10 years. But anyway at least I should know them one year.” One Finnish participant also mentioned that knowing the fact that exchange students come and leave soon results in trying to share more in a shorter time so that they can develop a good relationship. “We both know that either we know better now and build up a good relationship or we will never be able to do so. That somehow quickens the phase of friendship development with international students.” Mikko said.

However, all the participants noted that the frequency of contact does not

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matter in a close friendship. Hannele said: “Even if it was a long time before my close friends and I met again, everything seemed the same and I felt the same for them.”

### **Mutuality**

All the participants mentioned the importance of mutuality between them and their friends but they emphasized different aspects of mutuality. All of them noted that sharing an equal amount of information is important for friendship development. Marie said: “They have to seem open and share same amount of information on one topic if they want to be friends with me.” Two participants mentioned that they care about whether others make the same efforts to build up the relationship as they do. Mikko said: “It is important that they also keep in touch with me not just that I always call them. It has to be mutual.” Furthermore, Tuomas said that there should be mutual support in a friendship. “I would expect my friends to help me when I am in need but mutual support would not drive a relationship forward. It is more like something which has to be there. If it is not, the relationship would be ruined.”

### **Topics**

All the participants mentioned that they share less personal matters or discuss less abstract topics with people who are not so close. “I cannot talk a lot about my life to someone not trustful.” Lihn said when talking about trusting only close friends. “With good friends I can talk about everything: love profiles, religious view, family having arguments. With less good friends, topics drop out. I cannot talk about family or religion. For example, very personal things I will not talk about. Uncomfortable.” said Mikko. “Usually it starts when you talk about less personal things.” said Marie. When asked what private things meant for her, she mentioned, “boyfriend and family are private topics.” “I may talk about family or boyfriend to someone less familiar but I will touch other

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aspect of the topic.”

Some participants mentioned that they avoid topics that require a deep understanding of their culture to discuss with their intercultural friends. They are aware that the foreign partners are unlikely to understand their thoughts. For example, jokes are mentioned by Julie as a topic she avoids talking about when she was with her Finnish friends. Julie: “I just realized that they could not understand Russian humor. So I did not talk about those Russian jokes with them.” Qing: “If I talk about those most common Chinese jokes with my Finnish friends, they won’t understand what the funny point is.”

### **Conflicts**

No one of the Finnish participants could recall any conflict they had with internationals either because they did not show negative feelings easily and they were more tolerant or because both of them and their international friends were very polite.

Not showing negative feeling was considered as one of the reasons why there were no big conflicts between participants and their intercultural friends. Mikko mentioned: “I don’t show disappointment or annoyance as easily as to Finns. I may scare them since they may come from a culture where these feelings are not openly shown. With Finns, I will express myself very clearly. It does not mean that as a person I don’t like them, but at the moment I am annoyed.” Tuomas commented: “I did not remember I had any conflicts with international people before. Usually if it is a small thing, I will not say anything or show negative feelings. But if something intolerable happens I will make it clear with the other person.” Another factor for not having any conflict with international students given by one Finnish participant was that international students were polite.

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However, many international participants had some conflict experience with international friends but not that many with Finnish friends. One participant reported that her relationships with Finns are not close enough to have conflict. Lihn explained: “If we are closer and we start sharing things, we may find out a lot of differences in opinion on different issues which may lead to a conflict. But with not so close friends, I do not share that much.”

But there was one international participant who had many conflicts with his/her Finnish friends due to Finnish directness for confrontation. Marie shared her experience with Finnish friends with me, saying that “If I did something wrong, she would catch it and say straight to my face that I did something bad or I should have helped her etc. It was hardly unbearable for me. I was crying and kept apologizing and promised her that I would never do it again. But I felt unfair somehow because in France you never said negative things to others on their face no matter how close you are with the person.”

### **Social activities or Social settings**

All participants mentioned that they do not think different cultural preferences of social activities would be a problem in their intercultural friendship development although they identified some cultural activities or traditions or rituals that are not easily understood or enjoyed by their friends from other cultures. Usually they could find out and do social activities that interest both of them and their friends from another culture because common interest comes at first place. For those activities which are unique in some cultures, some of the participants avoid talking about them, some of them invited their co-nationals to enjoy the activities with them and some of them tried to introduce the activities to the others. Julie said: “There are some activities I would only do with Russian because they (Finns) do not know the culture.” Only when “I like that activity a lot, I would not get so close to the intercultural person who cannot enjoy the activity, because I cannot share my fun time with

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the person.” said Kaisa. Furthermore, this rule applies to intracultural friendship context as well because they usually arrange different activities with different friends depending on their common interest and wants rather than where the other is from. Responding to one question about “what if international students from a certain cultural background where alcohol is forbidden do not enjoy beer as much as Finns do”, Mikko said: “Although I go to bar, I also have Finnish friends who do not drink alcohol and we do other activities.”

One participant recognized that the social meaning of doing the activities may be different culturally. Marie said: “I was once invited by a Finn to go running with her which I would never have done with a French in that level of friendship. It should have been closer friends. And also it seems that running is not the point of the activity but chatting and talking while doing sports. It is also something strange to me because in France if someone asks to go running with her, I keep running and not talking.”

### **Differences in life style**

A difference in life style was identified by two participants as a factor that hinders the development of intercultural friendship. It seems to them that international students and Finnish students have different life styles, which hinders their bonding. Lihn said: “Nearly every weekend and holiday, my Finnish classmates or friends go home, but usually I am alone and need friends around. But somehow they cannot be around me because they have their own life style, which is so different from mine. So we cannot communicate that often”. Mikko commenting on his exchange student friends confirms this argument; “I am usually quite busy during the semester and free during the vacation. However, it seems that most of the international students are travelling or going back home during vacation. So we cannot spend that much time together and I have to hang out with Finns.”

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## **Stereotypes**

All of the participants are positive about the usefulness of the stereotypes about other countries or cultures although they are not always right. Mikko said: “Usually I have learned some stereotypes of the people from certain cultures and there is some truth in them usually. They are helpful because you know what you can expect from the person from another culture.” Lihn said: “The stereotypes about Finns are quite true. They are shy and quiet.” However, negative stereotypes could hinder the motivation of initiating relationship with international students. Mikko continued, “Sometimes it is a barrier. I have a strong barrier to talk with Americans, sometimes they are loud and arrogant. I don’t want to get to know them. But then I met an American who does not fit into the stereotype and I became friends with her.” Kaisa said: “It might be also then sometime difficult to know the person, they don’t act the way you expect them to.” But in general, participants mentioned that they do not have negative stereotypes about other countries.

## **Language**

The opinion on the impact of language on intercultural friendship development is two- folded. On one hand, some participants thought that it is a barrier for them to befriend Finnish people; on the other hand, some thought that the language problem can be overcome by desire to know each other or other means.

In a foreign language, some participants felt that they could not express themselves clearly and felt the stress when communicating with others. “I know something I want to share with them, but I cannot express myself fully. We always miss something in between in the classroom. If my English or Finnish is better, I would have more people come here.” as Lihn explained why there were not so many Finnish people in the closer circle in her social network

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mapping.

But they believed that language barrier does not completely blow up opportunities of intercultural friendship development because they do not choose friends only based on how well others speak English. Mikko said: “Sometimes, I notice that it is more about them not being able to express themselves in English I take it into account it is not about not wanting to communicate with me. And very often, if they want to express something, even they are not able to express it in English, they found a way to do it maybe with gestures or something like that.” Lihn mentioned that “In some cases when I encountered someone who is very willing to know me, I speak with her, even more naturally. When you are close enough, you can speak naturally. Even my English is not that good. But it is rare case.”

### **Values and beliefs**

All the participants confirmed the role of shared values and beliefs in relationship development especially in close friendship. “It is important to share similar values in order to be close friends. Even if I can have fun with one person, but he or she does not have the same value with me, I will not consider them as close friends.” said Kaisa. Regarding possible differences of values and beliefs between cultures, most participants thought it is normal to have different values or beliefs among individuals even those from the same culture but there should be some shared values or beliefs between friends. Kaisa said: “If culture is that different, I don’t think we can be close friend anyway.” Tuomas said: “With one of my closest friends, we have different values and beliefs in religion, but we are still quite close. Of course, it is a lot easier for communication and understanding if we share the similar values or beliefs. But if we can find other similarities, it does not matter whether we share the similar values or not.”

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When participants and their foreign friends had different values or beliefs on certain issues, the participants thought that those differences may have an influence on relationship development. Many participants named similarity in values as one criterion for selecting friends and some at least thought that similar values help build up understanding between their friends and them. However there were different opinions on whether these different values or beliefs could influence close friendship formation. Tuomas said: “It is always better to have similar values and beliefs between friends and me so that we could communicate or understand each other better. I would not think that I can get along with someone who has completely different values and beliefs than I do. However, all of my close friends who are foreigners or Finns have different values or beliefs than mine to some extent and we are still close friends. So I think it is fine to have some different values or beliefs.” Furthermore, Kaisa said: “If one does not share the same value or belief as I do, they won’t be my close friends but for other friends, I hope they can share the same value but if not, it does not matter that much.” Besides, they mentioned that respect and willingness to learn are the keys to overcome possible conflict from value or belief differences. Qing told me an example about different beliefs she and her Finnish friends have on one child policy, saying “Once we talk about one-child policy in China and we shared our opinions. For me it was reasonable because lowering the population is one solution for many problems such as shortage of resources in China. However for my Finnish friend, she could not understand me and thought that it was not right because kids would be so lonely because they don’t have siblings. And we kind of know that there are cultural differences here because she herself has several brothers and sisters. But we both respect each other’s opinion and do not try to convince the other.”

### **Cultural knowledge**

All the participants thought positively on how cultural knowledge from



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previous intercultural experiences or training helps them in their intercultural friendship development. Tuomas commented that his previous exchange experience is helpful for him to develop intercultural friendship later on because “I’m quite sure that previous international experiences have had an impact on me in many ways, and those experiences are bound to affect also on the way how I form relationships with international students. The exact impacts are, however, a bit difficult to notice. I would like to think, that my previous international experiences have made me more open towards foreign cultures and people, and also given me some knowledge on foreign cultures, their history, values, norms and such, which are definitely helpful in understanding other people and therefore also in creating relationships with them.” Another Finnish guy noted the importance of the intercultural training he had during his exchange in another country as well as his changes of attitude to intercultural friendship after his exchange abroad. “I got training on how to read the signs or gestures in many different cultures so now I know how to behave or what to expect when I interact with international people. Also the exchange changed my concept of friendship. I used to think that I have to know a person for a long time in order to be friends or close friends, however, I had a lot of international friends from my exchange and I realized that how long time we know each other is not a problem anymore for establishing friendship.” “Through my working experience abroad, I felt that I am more open and understand more of my culture.” said Marie.

### **Environment**

All participants, especially international students, have met their intercultural friends mostly in class or parties. Some of the intercultural friends or acquaintances participants have are from international student organizations such as AIESEC or regular special group meeting such as Japanese learner meeting or previous traveling or classmate experiences.

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When comparing intracultural and intercultural friendship development context, some of the Finnish participants mentioned that where they met international students were sometimes different from where they met Finns. Tuomas said: “The media is different for knowing international students and Finns. I do not have that many international classmates but a lot of Finnish ones. Usually I meet international students in some cultural meetings or international organization where there are not so many Finns.” “Library cafeteria and parties are good places to know international people and if they are exchange students, they usually hang out with a group of exchange student and introduce you to other exchange students. That’s how I got to know them.” said Mikko. “I got to know them in class accidentally.” Hennele commented.

In sum, intercultural friendship between Finns and internationals seems to take place in classrooms or parties. Sometimes, it could blossom in library, cultural meeting or international student organizations which are rare places for Finns to make intracultural friends.

### **Behaviors for ensuring**

Usually all the participants did not confirm their perception of friendship stage with their friends directly but they judged whether their friends had the same understanding on their friendship stage by doing some testing or reading signs from other’s behaviors or words. For instance, Kaisa said: “I would not confirm my feelings of where we are with international friends. But I think I ask whether I can sleep in your place and ask the person to watch my wallet and if he or she steals my money, I know that they are not trustworthy.” Mikko said: “I will bring up a private topic but not share anything personal yet and wait for them to see whether the topic is ok. If they are fine with the topic and start sharing, I share too.” Qing said: “My Finnish friend once said to me, you are my best friend.”

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Besides, all the participants felt that they tried to ensure whether there was a misunderstanding when they communicated with intercultural friends if they felt the person somehow violated the norms in their cultures which would not happen in intracultural friendship development. The French girl said: "In France, I would have not even asked or talked about the incidence with others, I would have judged that the person is just rude or mean to me if the same incident happened. Since it is intercultural friendship, I find it easy to blame on culture and talked about it with the person." "If they are Finnish, I may not ask but assume that they know the way and if they do not act properly, I just think that they are mean or not friendly." Kaisa said.

To summarize, a variety of factors in the development of intercultural friendship were identified and participants shared their opinions on how these factors impacted on their friendship development with co-nationals and internationals. Comparatively, differences in communication, topics, values or beliefs and life styles were found in intercultural context between Finnish students and international students. Also it seems that Finnish participants had shorter time requirement to consider international students as close friends than to consider co-nationals. Other than that, factors such as mutuality exert same effects in intracultural friendship as in intercultural friendship. Positive and tolerant attitudes, behaviors for ensuring and stereotypes are likely to support the development of intercultural friendship whereas lack of sufficient language proficiency and conflicts sometimes hamper the growth of intercultural friendship.

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## 6 DISCUSSION

This section intended to provide answers to the research questions proposed in the beginning of the research with the help of data gathered in the study. Then, the implication of the findings was discussed by reflecting the research findings and theoretical background.

### 6.1 Perception of friendship

RQ 1 How do Finnish students and international students conceptualize friendship in general and international friendship in particular?

- How are the levels of friendship categorized?
- What kinds of criteria are there for varying levels of friendship?
- Are there any differences with respect to perception of friendship levels among Finnish students and international students?

All of the participants categorized levels of friendship in general as acquaintances, friends and close friends, which was similar to Parks' categories of friendship types which include acquaintance, friend, close friend or best friend, romantic relationships (Parks, 1977). Starting from acquaintances, intercultural friendship developed in to higher stages as friendship or close friendship. This result indicated that intercultural friendship develops through stages and through levels like friendship in general (Nicotea, 1993) and that cultural influence on the definition of friendship types was not found. Furthermore, not only participants' perceptions of friendship levels but also their criterion of each friendship level had similarities and differences. On the one hand, it is in consistent with Honeycutt and Bryan's idea that definition of friendship types is usually subjective (Honeycutt & Bryan, 2011). On the other hand, it may indicate that the concepts of friendship are not significantly different among cultures. Although, as much as researchers such as Li (2010)

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and Argyle and Henderson (1984) claimed that culture has effects on the perception of friendship, the result of this study did not find significant differences in the perceptions of friendship across different cultures and individuals. Similarly, it is unclear whether the differences of criteria for different levels of friends were resulted from personal or cultural factors. To test whether such differences in the criterion of friendship types resulted from individual factors or cultural factors and whether these differences would have an impact on intercultural friendship development, other types of research design were required.

Several measurable indicators for different friendship levels which were identified as “time spent together”, “contact”, “sharing”, “similarities, shared interests or common topics”, “hang out” and “liking” were also found in previous research on friendship formation. For example, Rubin et al. came to the same conclusion that personal liking may initiate a friendship (Rubin et al, 2008). However, correlations among these indicators and standards of weighing these indicators were not all clear because participants found it hard to tell in a clear manner how these indicators work in different friendship levels and their correlations. For instance, Rubin et al. found that similarities could generate personal liking (Rubin et al., 2008) meaning that personal liking and similarities are not completely excluded from each other. Personal liking may be a result from similarities and sharing. Also, the frequency of contact may positively relate to the deepness of sharing and the degree of liking. In other words, personal liking, similarities, contact, and sharing may have equal importance in judging friendship levels.

Furthermore, participants reported that they used the same indicators and criterion to judge friendship levels in both an intracultural friendship context and an intercultural friendship context, indicating that the degree of closeness of certain types of friendship have no differences in intracultural friendship and intercultural friendship. Therefore, concerns that different standards of closeness in intracultural friendship and intercultural friendship would make us

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blind to see some features of intercultural friendship development or that intercultural friendship could not go as far because intracultural friendship could be lifted out.

RQ2 How has intercultural friendship been experienced by Finnish students and international students?

- What is the process of intercultural friendship development like? What are the similarities and differences between intercultural friendship development and intracultural friendship development?
- What strategies are used to deal with possible cultural differences in the process of intercultural friendship formation?
- What kind of factors are seen as supportive or hampering the formation of the relationship? How do these factors manifest in different stages of the relationship?
- What kinds of similarities or differences exist between the formation of intracultural friendship and intercultural friendship?

## **6.2 Process of intercultural friendship development**

### Motivation

In the initiative stage, all of the participants mentioned that they choose whom they want to initiate conversations with by personal liking and perceived similarities. It is consistent with the notion of friendship by Wright that friendship is voluntary (Wright, 1991). The interest in cultures was also identified as a motive for the formulation of intercultural friendship for both international and Finnish students which were also shown in Sias and her colleagues' research findings (Sias et al, 2008).

### Initial Contact

Situational opportunities seem to contribute positively to the initiative of

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intercultural friendship. On the one hand, research findings showed that participants usually met their intercultural friends by chance in classes or through social events such as parties or conferences of certain student organizations. The more social activities one is involved in, the more chances he or she gets to know international people, increasing the pool of availability of international people who one likes to select for approaching (Cushman & Cahn, 1985). On the other hand, classes or social events with Finns and internationals where interaction is desired help to create chances for both parties to break the ice. Most participants did not take action to actively seek intercultural friendship, although all of them mentioned that they were positive and open for intercultural friendship. This is especially prevalent in the Finnish social context where it seems in this culture that Finns usually do not initiate talks with strangers without a fine reason. Finns may be quite passive with making the initiative efforts to contact international students.

Furthermore, research findings did not find support for the claim that the language barrier restricts the attempts for initial contact with culturally different people (Pavel, 2006). In Pavel's paper, he suggested that the reason for the importance of situational factors for initial contact in intercultural friendship lies in the fear of being rejected because of language incompetency (Pavel, 2006). However, all the participants did not seem to be afraid of the language barrier because they did communicate with culturally different students whenever there was a chance. One international participant even mentioned that she thought her English was not good enough but she still took initiative to approach Finns.

In an intercultural context, people may adjust themselves to new norms on whether to take initiative to contact others because of their knowledge of other cultures. Cultural knowledge which was usually acquired by previous cultural experiences enhances the understanding of possible problems and possible solutions in an intercultural context (Haghirian, 2011). Some Finnish participants told that they would initiate conversations with Asian students when the situation was good for conversation because they knew that Asians were more reserved and shy if Finns followed their own norms. If they did not

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take any initiative to approach those Asian students, they would never get to know those Asians. On the other hand, international students also made the same comments about Finns who were considered so shy that international participants were more active in initiating conversation with them than students of other nationalities. Furthermore in this case, cultural knowledge such as knowledge of stereotypes was considered to have a positive role in intercultural friendship development because all participants found some truth in those stereotypes based on their observation. This made them prepared in a way with knowledge of those stereotypes for differences in interacting with culturally different people. Stereotypes can be positive and helpful at the very beginning of the interaction in that they allow people to understand and act properly in a new situation (Brunsch, 2005).

#### Cultural negotiation and ensuring behavior in the development of intercultural friendship

This research found that participants tried to understand the other's culture and negotiated rituals with their intercultural friends. However, it is unclear whether such negotiation was triggered by perceptions of culturally different rituals.

Lee suggested in her relational identity model that in the trial stage, cultural dyads tried to understand each other's culture. Afterwards came the enmeshment stage where members created roles and rules in their interaction. (Lee, 2008) The participants mentioned that they tried to find similar topics and activities enjoyed by both their friends through communication and understanding of others, which went through similar processes as the one in Lee's model. Furthermore, both international students and Finnish students could invite each other to do cultural activities, which was consistent with the description of the enmeshment stage by Lee. However, they did not think that perception of cultural differences motivated them to act in that way with their intercultural friends as they commented that they also tried to understand and create shared rituals with their co-nationals friends. Instead, they considered such negotiation as a normal process in friendship development in general.



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Furthermore, relational identity may not be the core of intercultural friendship development as Cushman and his colleague believed (Cushman et al, 1985). As identified by the participants, factors that moved the intercultural friendship forward from the lower stage to the higher stage included personal liking and similarities but not shared relational identity nor did participants place it as one criterion of the closeness of a friendship. Personal liking and perceived similarities are two crucial factors for friendship development (L'Abate, 2007).

On the other hand, cultural negotiation, meaning efforts to clarify different cultural meanings were identified by the participants as an on-going process in intercultural friendship development but not in the particular stage as Lee believed (Lee, 2008). Whenever confrontation happened or if they had unpleasant feelings about foreigners' behaviors or words, participants tried to confirm the reasons for those happening by conducting ensuring behaviors such as talking with the foreigner or someone who may know the culture the foreigner comes from instead of making quick negative judgments about the foreigner. These ensuring behaviors are unique in the intercultural friendship context. With co-nationals, they did not have such ensuring behavior because cultural norms, beliefs and values are shared within a group of people (West et al, 2009). Co-nationals have the same national culture who therefore are supposed to know about the norms in the country and receive less tolerance when they violate the norms. Furthermore, these ensuring behaviors are important to the development of intercultural friendship because people should not make quick judgment which is usually negative to different behaviors in certain contexts, even though the behaviors may break the norms in one's culture.

### **6.3 Different functions of factors in different stages of intercultural friendship development**

In this part, I presented factors found relative to development of intercultural friendship, pointing out their relation with the identified factors in previous friendship studies. Then I discussed several particular factors such as personal attributes, time, culture, conflict, communication and mutuality. After that, I

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concluded the similarities and differences found between intracultural friendship among Finns and intercultural friendship of Finns and internationals and discussed the meaning of such a comparison.

My research results found those identified factors such as “personal liking”, “similarities”, “self-disclosure”, “communication”, “culture”, “availability of international people”, “personal attributes: prior cultural experiences, personalities, attitudes, trustworthiness” and “conflicts” influenced the process of intercultural friendship development in this new context. Besides, new influential factors in intercultural friendship development such as “different life styles”, “mutuality” were discovered. Furthermore, new insights were found on understanding of some factor’s impact on intercultural friendship development.

#### Time

The results suggest that the longer the time two friends have known each other, it is more likely the closer relationship they can have. It confirms the claim that “It takes time to develop a friendship; it takes time spent together for closeness to grow” by Minirth and Meier (2007: 140). As mentioned by the Finnish participants, the closest friends they have are the other Finns because they are usually known for a longer time than the international friends. However, time that people know each other may not be the real attribute to the development of the relationship. The myth is that frequency of contact and understanding or sharing together could increase as time goes by. If two people do not interact but they know each other for a long time, apparently they could not consider the other a close friend or even a friend.

Participants all thought that friends are those whom they contact regularly. It can be inferred from this study that the more contact with a person, the closer relationship the participants have with that person except for the close relationship. The frequency of contact does not impact any more when friends have become close friends in this case. This finding supports the illustration of correlation of time with friendship development by Guerrero, Andersen and Afifi. According to them, initial interactions need “get-to-know time” (Guerrero, Andersen & Afifi, 2011:121) whose quantity rather than the quality

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of communication and time spent together matters. But for a relationship to advance, quality communication is needed (Guerrero et al., 2011). Meanwhile, it does not mean that frequency of contact does not have an influence on close friendship at all. Hannele mentioned that it is not enough to keep a friendship without one party being present in the other's real life. The close friendship will eventually die down if the two parties do not see each other or communicate with each other anymore.

Furthermore, due to the fact that international students are usually temporarily staying in Finland, there is not enough time to develop a close friendship with the others as mentioned by both by Finnish students and international students. Most Finns and internationals expressed their willingness to know their international friends better and positively assumed that some of the Finnish or international students who are present in the close circle but not the closest would have moved to the closest places if there would have been enough time spent together and chances to know each other better. But their relative short stays in Finland did not discourage them to establish intercultural friendship with host nationals.

### Topics

All the participants agreed that they talked about more personal things, their private lives or abstract topics with closer friends in both an intracultural and intercultural context. But once they know the person better, they share more and feel more comfortable to talk about these private topics. This finding shows what social penetration theories illustrate about a higher level of depth and width of information in a close relationship (Chen, 2005).

However, culture may have a role in differentiating what are personal or private topics for different cultures (Kaya, 2003). As for the Finnish participants, they consider money, problems within the family and problems in general, personal religion and political stance as private topics that they do not share with acquaintances or less close friends. However, on the international students' side, each participant seemed to have their own concept on what is private or personal. The Russian seems to think sharing private life stories with

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not so close friends is normal while the French girl has a similar or even stricter circle of private topics as the Finns do. For the Chinese, politics and religion are not private but family problems and personal life may be viewed as private topics. Also, the Finnish participants mentioned that they usually shared problems or asked help from their close friends except for school work but the Chinese seemed to expect all level of friends to be helpful. But again, as much as culture may influence on how people think about proper topics for conversation with intercultural friends, personal interests and knowledge about certain topics are taken into consideration. And as mentioned by the participants, they found surprisingly a lot of similar topics that interest both of them and their intercultural friends.

### Conflict

The likelihood of conflict may positively relate to the degree of closeness of a relationship. "Conflict is most likely to occur in the context of close relationships" (Guerrero et al, 2011:333). As said by the participants, conflicts usually only happened with close friends and it seems hard for the participants to recognize any conflicts with their intercultural friends partly because their relationship with the intercultural friends is not close enough to have conflicts. It is consistent with some researchers' ideas that more conflicts happen in close friendship than casual relationship (Jensen-Campbell & Graziano, 2000). However, the Finns may not be a group of people who are so aggressive and expressive to ignite a conflict with others. Therefore, friendship with Finns may not involve as many conflicts as friendship with other nationalities which appreciate aggressiveness and self-expression.

Furthermore, it is indicated that being polite, careful and tolerant is a good way of avoiding conflicts. Another reason for not having any conflicts with most of their current intercultural friends is that participants carefully avoided conflicts and did not tell their friends when they were actually not so happy about something. Besides, some of the conflicts which were identified by previous researchers because of differences in interaction may not be taken as serious now as before as a result of an increase of intercultural sensitivity of people.

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For instance, the differences of non-verbal communication are not considered as a cause for conflict any more for the participants.

### Culture

Both perceived cultural similarities and cultural differences could facilitate the initiating of intercultural friendship (Sias et al, 2008). The findings showed that some participants were motivated to approach people who shared a similar cultural background whereas some were also motivated to approach people whose culture was perceived dissimilar if these participants had a strong interest in culture. Similarities could generate personal liking (Zanna, Olson & Herman, 1987). Cultural similarities is one kind of similarities. Besides, the perception that culturally different people were likely to have interests in cultures was also contributing to intercultural friendship development because some participants perceived this possible same interest in culture as one similarity with the culturally different people. However, cultural similarities and cultural differences may not be the only reasons why culturally different people choose to befriend each other. Different aspects of similarities were identified as influential in initiating intercultural friendship in previous studies. Sias et al. believed that similarities in personalities and age support people with different cultural backgrounds to start a friendship (Sias et al, 2008). Additionally, it was amazed by the fact that the participants could find a lot of similarities with their intercultural friends even if they are from a different cultural background which contrasts with what Bennett argued; that intercultural relationship is difference-based (Bennet, 2007).

Although cultural differences exist and may lead to conflicts sometimes, it does not necessarily have a significantly negative impact on the development of intercultural friendship as long as they have proper attitudes to the differences or conflicts.

Cultural differences were discovered by the participants in their experiences of intercultural friendship development. It is recognized by some of the international participants that they could not do some traditions or tell the same joke to the Finnish people because the Finns do not share the same feelings

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about the traditions or know the historical background of the joke. Besides, different values and beliefs and ways of behaving among cultures are identified. Furthermore, the social meaning of certain activities is different in Finland than in other countries. Social activities or events have different levels of meanings, including both the referential meaning and the mainly culturally defined subjective meaning, which are namely the beliefs, attitudes, values, norms and motivation, etc. (Zeuner, 2003). The example here would be from the French girl who was shocked when her Finnish friend asked her out to do sports in which she would have never done with a friend who wasn't so close. The weirder thing here is that it seems chatting with her is the real purpose for going to do outdoor sports rather than the sport itself which is another difference from French culture. Some perceived cultural differences in some cases may cause problems or conflicts. For instance, the French girl was hurt by the directness of her Finnish friend on the French girl's fault.

However, unlike what the previous scholars assumed how trouble cultural differences may be in intercultural friendship development (Li, 2010), these differences did not cause damage to their intercultural friendship because participants had very positive and tolerant attitudes towards cultural differences. Pavel believed that positive and open-minded attitudes facilitated interactions in an intercultural friendship context (Pavel, 2006). Regarding cultural differences in non-verbal communication as an example, all the participants were quite tolerant for the differences and did not think it was a big deal unless the person from the different culture insisted in using the same gesture or ways of greeting which the other did not like. Some of them even learned the new gestures or used new gestures they learned from their intercultural friends. Other than that, they did not expect people from other cultures would act or think in the same way as they did.

### Communication

One aspect of communication studied in this case was the way of expressing negative feelings to the person. It seemed that the common stereotype that the Finns are straight-forward is not always true in every case. From the Finnish

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perspective, they may be more straightforward than some Asian people, but they do not usually show negative feelings that easily, especially to international friends. Comparatively, they express more directly negative feelings to Finnish people in intracultural friendship. Also, they considered that the level of friendship also matters in the degree of straightforwardness for expressing negative feelings. The closer the friendship is, regardless of being intracultural or intercultural, they are more freely expressing their negative feelings to the person. However, it seems that in some cultures, the degree of closeness would not justify the directness of expressing negative feelings to the others such as in French culture.

Concerning greetings, it is revealed in the findings that Finnish people have different ways of greeting to different levels of friends including international and Finnish friends. For acquaintances, they greet them simply by saying “Hi” but never stop to have a conversation. However, for someone closer, Finnish participants have small chats with them whenever they meet each other. But usually Finns do not ask “How are you?” if they meet the other every day and rather they say “Hello” and continue with other topics. The Finnish way of greeting seems to be different from some other cultures where asking “How are you?” is the norm whenever two people who know each other meet. And as in China, greeting and smiling with strangers is also common if two people meet each other’s eyes. These greeting differences may generate a misunderstanding if the other international party does not know the meanings behind the simple “hi” equaling “how are you” as the norm for greeting for acquaintances.

### Mutuality

Mutuality includes aspects such as mutual support, mutual sharing and mutual efforts in developing the friendship. Mutuality may be a turning point in the development of intercultural friendship. Firstly, the participants considered mutuality as a must for friendship development either in an intracultural or intercultural context. No more efforts will be made if one party does not perceive mutuality between him and his friend. As mentioned by the

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participants, different aspects of mutuality may matter in intercultural friendship development such as a mutual understanding on what their friendship stage is, mutual sharing on the same topics, and mutual assisting in solving some problems. Mutual support, mutual sharing and mutual efforts may indicate caring, interest and sincerity to each other. Similar attitudes are required in intercultural friendship development (Reisinger & Turner, 2004). Caring, interest and sincere attitude are desired in a relationship.

#### **6.4 Intracultural friendship development and intercultural friendship development**

In general, intercultural friendship development went through the same stages which are in intracultural friendship as well from acquaintances to friends and to close friends. However, cultural negotiation and ensuring behaviors are two special features of intercultural friendship development which intracultural friendship development does not have. Furthermore, nearly all of them agreed that it takes a long time to build the friendship with Finns and the friendship development is quicker with international students than with the Finns. This on the other hand, indicates that normally Finnish intracultural friendship takes a long time to build. One reason would be that Finnish self-disclosure is less at the beginning than many other different nationalities. But for Finns, they considered that the development of friendship with international students was actually quicker than among Finns. Firstly, it may be that some intercultural students are more open than Finns. Secondly, some participants mentioned that they deliberately shared more with international students in a shorter time because they know that the international students will leave Finland and they will not have any chances to develop their friendship afterwards.

Besides, the general perception of friendship including friendship types and the standards for closeness of a relationship are the same for both co-nationals and internationals as explained by the respondents. Similar factors such as personal liking, similarities, frequency of contact, personal attributes were reported by the participants to have same influence on both intracultural and intercultural friendship development. However, factors related to culture are unique in



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intercultural friendship development. Culture makes the whole process more complex although not necessarily more difficult for friendship to grow in an intercultural context.

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## 7 EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH

In this chapter I discussed transparency and trustworthiness of this research. After an extensive literature review, Meyrick concluded that transparency is one important quality criterion for qualitative research (Meyrick, 2006). Transparency means that “the reader is able to follow the researcher’s reasoning, that he is given the necessary information for accepting her interpretations or challenging them” (Stenius, Makela, Miovsky & Gabrhelik:86). In order to be transparent, qualitative researchers should describe their research steps and procedures in a detailed way and give profound justification of the method choice and theoretical background. (Stenius et al.)

Here in my thesis, research procedures were explained step by step in a clear manner. For instance in the sampling section, I introduced the selection criteria of qualified interviewees and backgrounds of the interviewees in a way, which features made them desired candidates were explained. If the sampling is representing a group, the researcher should be able to include information on how representative the sample is of the group (Stenius et al. ). The selection criteria were rational because they described the vital features of the membership of the study focus group in my research, which ensured the representativeness of the interviewees who were selected under those criteria. Reasons were then given to justify the choices of qualitative research methods. The data collection and analysis were explained as comprehensive as possible to assist the reader to judge whether the decisions made in the process of the data collection and analysis are reasonable. With the thick description of the data and research procedure, “an index of transferability” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985: 316) was provided for the interested reader to repeat the study procedure or make a transfer to testify the possibility of transferability of the current research.

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The second important criterion for good qualitative research is trustworthiness (Flick, 2009). Lincoln and Cuba suggested five activities to enhance the trustworthiness or the credibility of the research among which I have employed the technique of triangulation and member checks in my research.

Triangulation is one of the activities which are designed to increase the likelihood of reaching credible results (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985). There are different models of triangulation. For instance, one of the models of triangulation is using multiple research methods in one research (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985) which could testify validity of the measurement processes and therefore reduce the uncertainty of the interpretation from the data gathered from each measurement. In my research, I employed social network mapping as the compensatory research method for interviews. Social network mapping in itself revealed information on topics on the base of which some interview questions were designed. After the network mapping, I asked questions which had been asked in the previous part of the interview but in a different way and evaluated the consistency of the thoughts of the interviewees on certain topics such as the levels of the friendship. For example, perceptions on friendship levels were examined in both interview and social network mapping. Social mapping visualized relationships an individual has, including all the existing friendship ties of different levels. At first, that “Could you tell me your perception on friendship types and reasons for distinguishing those levels of friendship?” was asked in the interview before the social mapping. After they completed their social network maps, I inquired of the interviewees what made certain person in a closer position to them than the others in the network map, assuming that their answers implied their criteria for different level of friendship. Therefore, my interviewees had an extra chance to reconsider their reasoning on the same topic in a different way and revise their previous answers if somehow they were not complete or wrong. During the interview, I found that social network mapping was a useful tool in this comparative study

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of two kinds of friendship because many interview participants shared more ideas or revised their answers to the previous questions on friendship standards or the degree of closeness, as inspired during the social network mapping.

Member checks means that those from whom the raw data were collected are invited to test the correctness of the interpretation of the data. In doing so, the validity of conclusions which rely on the correct interpretation of data is confirmed. In the research practice, I constantly asked the interviewees to confirm my understanding of their answers on-site in the interview venue and sent interviewees follow-up questions on the areas which I was confused about when conducting data analysis. I have promised them that I will send each of them a copy of my thesis when it is ready to ask for their feedback on my interpretation of the data and conclusion of the thesis.

I would have used another technique of peer debriefing and have a larger data sample to improve the trustworthiness of my research. Peer debriefing is a process of discussing the research procedure and data findings with a disinterested peer to establish credibility (Lincoln & Cuba, 1985). If I would have invited a classmate to read through the thesis and have a discussion on their thoughts on the research, I might be able to know better whether my reasoning is sufficient and whether there could be alternative interpretation of the data. Besides, one may be skeptical on the sampling size in the interview. On the other hand, each interviewee was chosen under the belief that they are those who are most capable of talking about the insight of the research topic. The criteria for choosing interviewees strictly focused on previous intercultural experiences and intercultural friendship experiences because the more experienced one is on forming intercultural friends, the more insights they have about the process or important factors for the topic. But again, they do not represent all the international students or Finns as variables such as gender, age, region which are features of the whole population of Finnish students and

international students were lifted out and the sample is limited to those who had successful experience on intercultural friendship. Thus the findings may not be applicable to other contexts.

Also there are areas of intercultural friendship development that I did not address in the current thesis. For instance, it is unclear whether differences on perception of relationship stages (such as that one considers the other as a closer friend than the other does) between dyads could influence the further development of the relationship. Besides, like the relationship between personal liking and similarities, the correlations among factors are still unclear.

Collectively, this research enjoyed certain level of transparency and trustworthiness. The research process such as data collection, analysis and choice of research methods were described in a transparent way. Techniques of triangulation and member checks were employed to establish the trustworthiness of the research. However, the sample size could have been larger to cover more variables of the study group and peer debriefing could have been done to preview the comprehensiveness of my reasoning in interpretation of the research data. More researches are needed to explore the remaining unclear areas in the development of intercultural friendship.

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## 8 CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to investigate the nature of friendship formation between Finnish students and international university students by comparing intercultural and intracultural friendship formation in Finnish university context and to find out what factors have an impact on the development of intercultural friendship. For this purpose, perception of friendship was examined and discussions of process and factors were conducted. Findings of the research show similarities with some results from previous studies. However, new insights were drawn on some unique features of intercultural friendship development and factors for intercultural friendship development.

While theories of relational identity formation emphasize forming shared norms, values and roles in a relationship, theories of cultural negotiation and ensuring behaviors which focus more on cultural understanding in general, may better capture the unique features in intercultural friendship development than relational identity formation theories.

Factors such as “personal liking”, “similarities”, “self-disclosure”, “communication”, “culture”, “availability of international people”, “personal attributes: prior cultural experiences, personalities, attitudes, trustworthiness”, “mutuality”, “time”, “different life styles” and “conflicts” were identified as influential in the development of intercultural friendship.

In general, intercultural friendship seems to develop in similar ways to intracultural friendship. It was noted by the participants that intracultural and intercultural friendship develop from lower stage (acquaintance) to higher stages (close friend) of friendship and participants seemed to apply the same criteria of friend choice to both contexts. However, there seem to be also differences in motivation and development between these two kinds of friendship. In intercultural friendship context, cultural differences could attract people to establish intercultural friendship. The development of intercultural friendship could be quicker than intracultural friendship in Finnish context. Cultural negotiation including ensuring behaviors and adjustments can be seen as unique features of intercultural friendship development.

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However, this study did not reveal findings on whether differences on perception of relationship stages (such as that one considers the other as a closer friend than the other does) between dyads could influence the further development of relationship and the termination of intercultural friendship. Besides, the correlations among factors are still unclear (e.g. the relationship between personal liking and similarities). Furthermore, variables of group membership such as gender, age etc and their impact on intercultural friendship development were not discussed. Future researches may want to study towards these directions in order to generate new insights of the development of intercultural friendship. Also comparative studies with different sample features are needed in the future to further examine the broader application of the findings in this research.

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## APPENDIX 1 Sample Interview Questions

- 1) What is your age, study field and previous intercultural experiences? What do you think about the effect of previous intercultural experience on intercultural friendship development?
- 2) How do you perceive friendship and different levels of friends? What are the important things in friendship? Are these criteria of friend stage applicable to both intercultural and intracultural context?
- 3) How do you approach international / Finnish students? What motivates you to make intercultural or co-national friends? How do you select/ initiate interaction with international/ Finnish students?
- 4) How do you think the friendship develops in intercultural context and co-national context? Any similarities or differences?
- 5) Did you have any conflict with international/Finnish acquaintances or friends? If yes, could you give me some examples and tell me how you fixed it with the internationals. If not, what do you think is the reason?
- 6) What do you think about the role of culture in intercultural friendship development?
- 7) Have you got negative feelings or confrontation with intercultural friends? How do you deal with it?
- 8) What do you think trust, respect, understanding and reliability in friendship development in both intercultural and intracultural context?
- 9) When comparing friendship development with Finnish friends and international ones, have you recognized any similarities and differences in the process or interaction? Any examples?  
  
Do you think that cultural negotiation would be one of the stages in intercultural friendship development?
- 10) Could you tell me what topics do you have with acquaintances, friends, good friends and best friends? Will the topic differ for friends being international or Finns or Will it differ for the level of friendship (acquaintances, friends, good friends best friends) If there is differences, what are they and why?
- 11) To which kinds of friends (international or Finnish, acquaintances, friends, best friend)

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etc do you tell jokes, problems or private topics? What do you consider are private topics? Do you tell the same jokes to internationals as with Finnish?

- 12) Have you every negotiated cultural differences or different ways of communication with your international friends in Jyvaskyla? If so, tell me how you negotiated it? And did you take any action to ensure that you are understood in the right way? When interacting with international students, are you more open than with Finnish? Does it somehow fasten the pace of relationship development with international students?
- 13) How do you define close friends? What do you think that somehow block the international people out of your close friend zone? I mean very close one. As shown in your social network map, your inner circle has only Finnish people. Could you explain why? Why do you think makes the different degree of closeness to you between Finnish close friends and international close friends?
- 14) When you consider your relationship with an international friend advanced, did you take any action to confirm your feeling? How did you do that if you did? Do you do the same with your Finnish friends?